Examination strategies

Quick study guide

Before the exam:

Focus on revision, not re-learning

• Listen for verbal clues offered in lectures and tutorials.
• Use the Unit Guide to create an overview of themes and topics.
• Prepare a pre-examination study timetable. Share your time between subjects, according to available marks.
• Identify problem areas and work on these first.
• Aim for understanding, not just memorising the material.
• Study actively - verbalise and visualise your revision. Pose questions before you start.
• Use concept maps/diagrams.
• Revise tutorial problems.
• Work in groups (be creative and challenging) and individually.
• Do past exams (under exam conditions, including handwriting) and discuss your answers with your lecturers and tutors (where possible), or use annotated sample answers.
• Take effective breaks (planned and limited) - regular exercise is good for this.

Get organised

• Get enough sleep - synchronise your body clock with exam times.
• Prepare your exam resources - pens, calculators, ID card, etc.
• Check the day/time/place for your exam.
• Check your transport and, if necessary, parking arrangements.
• Know what you are permitted to take into the examination room, especially if the exam is ‘open book’ style.

During the exam:

During reading time

• Read the entire paper thoroughly.
• Check instructions (optional/compulsory; short/long answers, etc.).
• Allocate time proportionally to the value of each question.
• Decide on the order of your answers and organise plans (mentally if writing is not permitted).

After reading time

• Tick and order the questions you plan to answer.
• Re-read the questions and underline key words and phrases.
• Write notes/brief outline answers in your exam booklet.
When answering questions
- Make sure you answer ALL questions - one excellent answer will not compensate for a missed one (= zero).
- Keep to pre-set time limits for each question.
- Find the themes, relate these to the course objectives.
- Number answers clearly and accurately.
- Write on alternate lines and leave space at the end of each question.
- Work thoroughly but rapidly.
- Answer the hardest questions first, particularly if they are worth the most marks.
- Use other questions for clues.
- Notice where words/figures are emphasised.
- Identify formulae and equations presented in words.

Multiple-choice questions
- Examine the sequence of questions. Does that give you any clues?
- Read all the alternatives before choosing the answer.
- Make certain you are choosing the ‘best’ answer to the question.
- Be aware of the wording: “always”, “never”, “mostly”, “rarely”, double negatives (e.g. “not unknown”), the passive voice.
- Remember that wrong options are often based on common misconceptions.
- Make an educated guess for unknown answers unless you are penalised for wrong answers.

Essay/short answer questions
- Keep time allocations proportional to marks.
- Provide definitions where necessary.
- Identify key concepts.
- Give examples.
- Write clearly and simply.

Problem solving questions
- Write down any formulae needed first.
- Label all working stages clearly.
- Check computational accuracy.
- Show your working unless told not to.

Before the exam finishes
- Re-attempt questions you found too difficult at first.
- Make sure the examiner can read your answers and diagrams.
- Never leave the exam early.
- Use spare time to thoroughly check your answers.
- Make sure your name and ID number are marked clearly on all papers.
- **If you are running out of time** never omit a question completely. Give the examiner an outline of how you planned to answer a question/the remainder of the question.

After the exam:
- Review your exam paper if necessary and discuss it with your lecturer.
- Consider how you could improve your exam performance. Make it a learning experience!