
Exam revision tips

How to revise before the exams

Exam preparation starts at day one of semester. But don't panic if you haven't started yet, it's never too late! What you have to think about is what **MUST** be studied, what **SHOULD** be studied and what **CAN** be ditched, especially if you are running out of time (see the flyer *Clues on catching up*). But if you are reading this pamphlet, then you are well on the way to being proactive and taking effective steps towards exam success.

Revision essentials

- Get organised. Get all your material together and organise your study space.
- Find out about your preferred learning style and match your study techniques to suit this (see the next section on *Explore your learning and temperament styles*).
- Start reviewing early: daily reviews, weekly reviews and major reviews.
- Use **active** learning techniques for revision (see the *Active learning* flyer).
- Keep a record of all the exam hints that lecturers and tutors give through the semester, especially towards the end of semester. Never miss lectures at this stage!
- Create and plan a revision topic list and study schedule (work backwards).
- Know where you stand! Find out what your cumulative marks are so far and how many marks you need to just pass the exam or get that H1, and any hurdle requirements.
- Learn about the exam type, length and format. For example, exams can consist of any combination of the following formats: essay exams, multiple choice questions, open book exams, short answer questions, problem-solving questions, take-home exams, practical exams, oral exams and so on.
- Obtain previous exam papers early in the semester so you can do relevant exam questions and obtain feedback from lecturers and tutors during the semester.
- Form study groups early in the semester and meet weekly to discuss questions and topics. Make sure you go for that coffee and socialising as a reward after you have been doing some serious study!
- Maintain a balance of mind, body and spirit. Eat well, and eat healthy foods. Continue to exercise as it has been shown to improve memory and reduce stress. Take time to relax and visualise success!
- Enlist support from friends & family. Accept all those dinner invitations or food drops from family and friends to save you time and energy. Remember you can always reciprocate after exams!

- Study difficult subjects when you are at your peak concentration and study subjects you dislike most first.
- Use course outlines to revise objectives, list of topics and brief content descriptions.
- Use the SQ4R (Survey, Question, Read, Review, Recite, Recall) method.
- Prioritise! It's better to know a few topics well than to know bits and pieces.
- As the exam gets closer find out about the location, time and transport.
- Do past exam papers under mock exam conditions. Have an exam party with your friends!

Explore your learning and temperament styles

We all learn and process information differently. There is no one way to study. It's best to find out what your learning style preferences are and use appropriate study techniques. You can find out more on learning styles and do an online test respectively at:

Learning Styles

<http://www.tsd.jcu.edu.au/netshare/learn/learningst/index.html>

Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/ILSdir/ilsweb.html>

- Think about how you learn (or remember) things
- Do you see them (visual)?
- Do you hear/talk about them (verbal/auditory)?
- Do you do them (active)?
- Do you think about them (reflective)?
- Do you learn creatively (intuitive)?
- Do you like facts and concrete examples (sensing)?
- Do you learn in detail and stepwise (sequential)?
- Do you like the big picture first (global)?

A few study and revision tips for different learning styles

Visual learners remember visual details and prefer to see what is being learnt. Study by using concept maps, creating diagrams and colour-coding. Visual memory is strongest in 3-D so spend some time constructing your own mental images of concepts.

Verbal learners enjoy oral discussion and can study by talking aloud or discussing material in study groups. You can also record your summaries onto tape and listen to these. Mnemonics based on songs may also suit you. You can also revise by explaining concepts aloud to interested people or even your friends or relatives.

Active learners like to be actively engaged with the material. You can take notes and tap a rhythm to remember information. You can work with models or create tasks for yourself such as puzzles and fill-in sheets.

Reflective learners learn best when time is allocated for thinking about and digesting new information. You can stop and periodically review new work, write summaries and think of possible questions about new information. Put aside time to consider your ideas about the concepts you are learning. Spend some effort on creating your own overviews of topics.

Sensing learners like learning facts and solving problems by well established methods. You are generally careful, practical and patient and like new knowledge to have some connection to the real world, so link information to the real world. You can also revise by substituting different examples in your old tutorial scenarios or problems, and working out what the application of the theory would mean.

Intuitive learners prefer discovering new relationships and can be innovative in their approaches to problem-solving. You tend to work faster and dislike repetition and work which involves a lot of memorisation and routine calculations. You can revise by creating your own tables, summaries and practice questions.

Sequential learners like to start from the beginning and prefer to know the detailed facts first and then build on these. You can go through a problem methodically, step-by-step. Try some other revision techniques such as fill-in sheets, or error-analysis of where your problem-solving took a wrong turn.

Global learners prefer to see the big picture first before learning the detail. You may benefit from using concept maps, diagrams and flow charts. Make connections between lectures, texts, tutorials and pracs.

Use review tools that suit you, such as study checklists, mind map summary sheets, flash cards or catalogue cards with summaries on them in alphabetical order, user friendly notes and don't forget those old exam papers!

Seek help early if you need it from your tutors, lecturers, demonstrators, faculty office, student support services such as the Learning Skills Unit, Disability Liaison Unit, Counselling, CCS & ESL, Sports Centre, Student Health, Chaplaincy.

Good Luck!

See other flyers in the LSU 'Secrets of exam success' series:
Exam day tips; Multiple choice exams; Open book exams;
Problem-solving exams; Take-home exams;
Stress Management

EXAMS



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Exam revision tips

(The secrets of exam success)



© Learning Skills Unit, a division of Equity & Learning Programs, University of Melbourne

Exam revision

How to prepare and revise for exams

There's no secret to exam success - it's all in the preparation. But how do you prepare for exams? The following tips will help you organise your time and materials to ensure you're well prepared - well before exam day.

Preparing for exams

What kinds of exams will you be sitting – multiple choice, essay, open-book, take home?

Find out in the first few weeks of the course how you will be assessed - the different types of exams can require different forms of preparation. Also, find out what areas of the course or which topics will be examined. Go over the subject handbook and objectives to gain a sense of the main issues to be covered and the types of knowledge you will be expected to demonstrate.

It is a good idea to look at old exams in a subject in the first few weeks of a course just to familiarise yourself with the scope of topics examined and the format of questions and answers. Then, as you study topics during the semester, try to recall: how has this material been examined in the past?

At the end of each unit of work it is also useful to ask: how might this be tested in the exam? Draft some possible questions that you can return to when you are revising for the exam.

You will also need to find out:

- when the exams will be
- where the exams take place
- how many exams you will have
- the duration of each exam
- whether there is a choice of task or questions
- what the exam is worth as a percentage of your final grade
- whether the department is running any exam information sessions
- where you can find old exams and even model answers

Revision planning

Set goals

How well do you want to do in this subject? How much time and effort are you prepared to put into achieving your target? Make a decision about how much time and energy



Equity and Learning Programs
The University of Melbourne

you'll commit to studying for an exam and you'll feel more in control.

Start early

Ideally, you prepare for exams throughout the semester by attending all your classes and revising work weekly if not daily. Serious exam study should then begin about four weeks before the exam date. But don't panic if you haven't started yet – it's never too late!

Find a space just for study

Take time to think about where you work most productively and plan to do your exam revision there. Do you work better at home alone in your room or at the library surrounded by others reading and working?

Find a place that you associate with study so that when you sit down you get straight to work. Remove distractions from the area – computer games, magazines, any non-study related material that may tempt you away from your work.

Organise your subject material

Make sure you have the subject guide and objectives, any information about the exam and a complete set of lecture and prac/lab notes for your subject. It's worth checking with another student or your tutor that you have all the handouts and additional materials distributed in classes. Then organise your notes in a ring binder or in computer files so that they reflect the topics in the course outline.

Prioritise your subjects

Which subjects do you want to do your best in? Which subjects do you find most difficult?

You may want to spend more time on your weaker subjects so that you achieve a certain average grade. Or you may want to aim for an H1 in a particular subject even if it means aiming only to Pass another.

Decide which subjects, if any, need more of your time than others.

Prioritise the topics within a subject

Using your subject outlines, identify which topics will be examined. Then find out whether you will have to answer questions on all these topics in the exam or whether you can select questions and thereby limit the range of topics you need to prepare. The aim is to identify what **MUST** be studied, what **SHOULD** be studied and what **CAN** be ditched.

Make a revision timetable

Plan how you will use the time leading up to your exam. It's better to plan frequent short revision sessions – around 50 minutes – as long sessions are less effective for recall. Allocate 2 to 3 hours for revision each day and you'll be amazed how much you can cover in a week.

Revision essentials

Once you have worked out which topics you will answer questions on in an exam it's time to start revising.

Note that revising means looking at again – not learning something for the first time. If you've been working effectively throughout the semester, revision should be a process of reminding yourself about the important points and consolidating your understanding of a topic.

If you are looking at material for the first time during exam preparation you will need to give yourself extra time to understand the topic and grasp the new concepts.

When revising, it's worth asking yourself two questions:

- ❑ How can I improve my knowledge and understanding of the topic?
- ❑ How can I improve my abilities to demonstrate my knowledge in the exam?

Best results will be achieved if you aim to refine both your subject knowledge and your exam performance capabilities. It is unproductive, for example, to continually extend your subject knowledge if you have difficulty applying information to solving problems or expressing your understanding in essay form.

Revision sessions should thus involve:

1. Identifying what you know and understand about the topic, what you need to know and how you can find out and/or remember additional information.
2. Preparing to demonstrate in the exam that you understand what you have learned – for example, that you can apply principles or theories to new material and situations.

Make sure you allow time in your revision timetable for both kinds of work. The following tips will help you plan what to do.

Improving subject knowledge

Do something active when reading over your notes

Your understanding and recall of information will increase if you engage actively with the material. Try this:

- make a summary in your own words at the end of each section
- draw a mind map or diagram of information you have in prose form
- draft some questions to test knowledge of the material you have just studied
- cover sections of a list or formula and see if you can supply the missing links
- try to explain the topic to a friend – if you can clearly express the concepts in your own words, you can be sure you understand the topic well
- imagine a situation from a different point of view – for example, the client's, the patient's, the plaintiff's – or imagine pictures, figures and physical structures from another perspective

- annotate your notes as you go and develop a list of key terms and concepts.

Make revision a meaningful task

You will remember more of the information you revise if you can make it meaningful to yourself in some way. Give it purpose by thinking about where and how you will apply the information; or make it personally relevant by thinking about whether and how the concepts apply to you and your friends.

Learn general rules and principles rather than masses of unrelated facts

Generally, it's better to know fewer topics in some depth than to try to remember isolated bits of information from across the subject.

Firstly, you will find it much easier to recall information that is connected and logically organised within the context of a topic.

Secondly, many exams test whether you can apply the rules or principles you have learned through the subject to new material. It is less likely that you will be asked to replicate the examples or illustrations you worked through during classes.

Match your learning strategy to the type of material

Learning by rote is good for remembering: lists; items in order; formulae; vocabulary.

To learn by rote try repetition, rhymes, melodies and peg words. Mnemonics are also useful and you can make up your own to suit the material. Many people will know:

- Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit (for the notes of the treble stave)
- Roy G Biv (for the colours of the rainbow)
- My very elderly mother just saw uncle Ned's parrot (for the planets in order from the sun)

Different strategies are needed, however, to remember concepts and theories, argumentative material and systems. Understanding the big picture, familiarising yourself with any specialised vocabulary and explaining the ideas and processes to others will develop your understanding and recall of this type of material.

Preparing to demonstrate your learning

Attempt old exam papers

Familiarise yourself with the structure and format of old exam papers in each of your subjects.

Write outline solutions or answers to the questions and then check these against your notes to see if you have omitted any important points.

Try writing fully detailed answers within the time limit to the questions on at least one previous exam paper. Then reflect:

- do you need to work faster in order to complete the paper or slow down and include more detail?
- have your answers earned the allotted number of marks? For example, if 5

marks are allocated to a question, “twice” is not likely to be a sufficient answer.

Put extra time into practising the exam tasks you least prefer

Everyone prefers certain kinds of work. Some people like writing essays and resent problem solving; some people excel at multiple choice and do poorly when asked to write extended responses. It is important that you identify and improve your performance in non-preferred exam tasks.

Ask your tutor or classmates for advice or consult a learning skills adviser about ways to improve your performance in different exam tasks.

A final note

If you need help preparing for exams, seek it early from your tutors, lecturers, demonstrators, faculty office, student support services (such as the Learning Skills Unit, Disability Liaison Unit), Counselling, CCS & ESL, Sports Centre, Student Health or Chaplaincy.



Learning Skills Unit
Equity and Learning Programs
The University of Melbourne
Phone: (03) 8344 0930

Web: www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lisu/



Learning Skills Unit

Equity and Learning Programs

The University of Melbourne

Phone: (03) 8344 0930

Web: www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lsw/