

# EFFECTIVE EXAM PREPARATION

Useful activities, hints, tips and  
techniques.  
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# Effective Exam Preparation

## Description of this Guide

Hopefully, this guide will help you to understand that revision is an on-going activity and should not be considered something that occurs two weeks before the written examination. To help you do this, this guide will look into strategies for improving your memory skills, note-taking skills and personal, academic organisational skills.

**Good luck, be honest with yourself and don't be afraid to try new techniques!**

Section 1; Introduction

Section 2; Getting in the mood

Section 3; Revision notes

Section 4; Aids to memorising

Section 5; Examination techniques

# Effective Exam Preparation section 1

**Common Difficulties :** Tick which apply to you....

	tick
1. I am often frustrated at examination times.	
2. I seem to spend a lot of time revising and not getting the good results.	
3. I am not sure if my techniques are the most efficient.	
4. I mainly leave revision until it is almost too late.	

If you have ticked to one of these then it is time to start thinking about how to improve your revision strategies.

If you ticked '1'

You have not perfected an effective and efficient system of revision. Your memory strategies may not be the most effective. You need to try out different techniques ..

If you ticked '2'

Your revision may be without a proper focus and plan of campaign. You may not know how to prepare for revision. You need to try out different techniques

If you ticked '3'

You are stuck in a rut and no-one has told you **how** to revise effectively. You need to try out different techniques .

If you ticked '4'

Your time management is in need of an overhaul!

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## **Productive revision**

### *Be prepared*

Most students go to university with some ideas about how to revise for examinations. However, the strategies you have used in the past may have been effective for the type of examinations you did then, but are not necessarily the most efficient now. Preparation is not only about drawing up a timetable and arranging your files and books on your work space! You need to reflect upon how you have tackled revision in the past; analyse what worked well (you got good results) and what didn't work well (you got bad results).

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## Productive working habits

In certain circumstances, these are all useful techniques either on their own or, more appropriately, in combination. However, you now need to consider their role and value in the context of your current level of study.

Think about why certain techniques worked well for you and why others did not, and develop your own approach.

You need an individual plan, so be honest with your answers to help put together an effective and personal revision plan.

Which of these revision techniques worked well for you and which didn't	Yes/No
1. Writing out my notes again and again helped me to remember facts and information	
2. Reducing information into shorter notes helped me to remember facts and information	
3. Memorising essay answers	
4. Writing out sample essay answers under timed conditions	
5. Using mindmaps or diagrams helped me to remember facts and information	
6. Putting important information on to audio tapes and playing this over and over again	
7. Revising with friends	

	Yes/No
8. Using colour (coloured highlighters, for example) to help me to summarise and understand key points and to remember facts and information	
9. Reading my lecture notes (without any other activity)	
10. Writing out essay plans from past questions	
11. Spending long periods revising a week before	
12. Using memory triggers to help me remember	
13. Using key words as the basis for understanding	
14. any other method you have used..	

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## Making Changes

Make a list of the '*If only...*' things from past experience. This is the first step in making changes in the way you tackle revision and the examination itself. Think what you should do to make changes;

If only.....	Making changes...
Two of the questions in an exam seemed to be about the same thing, but they weren't. If only I had read the questions properly I would have got better marks	Read up on the topic in question to improve these skills.

# Effective Exam Preparation section 2

## Getting in the mood

*In addition to learning a set of skills, you also need to establish the frame of mind you need in order to work best.*

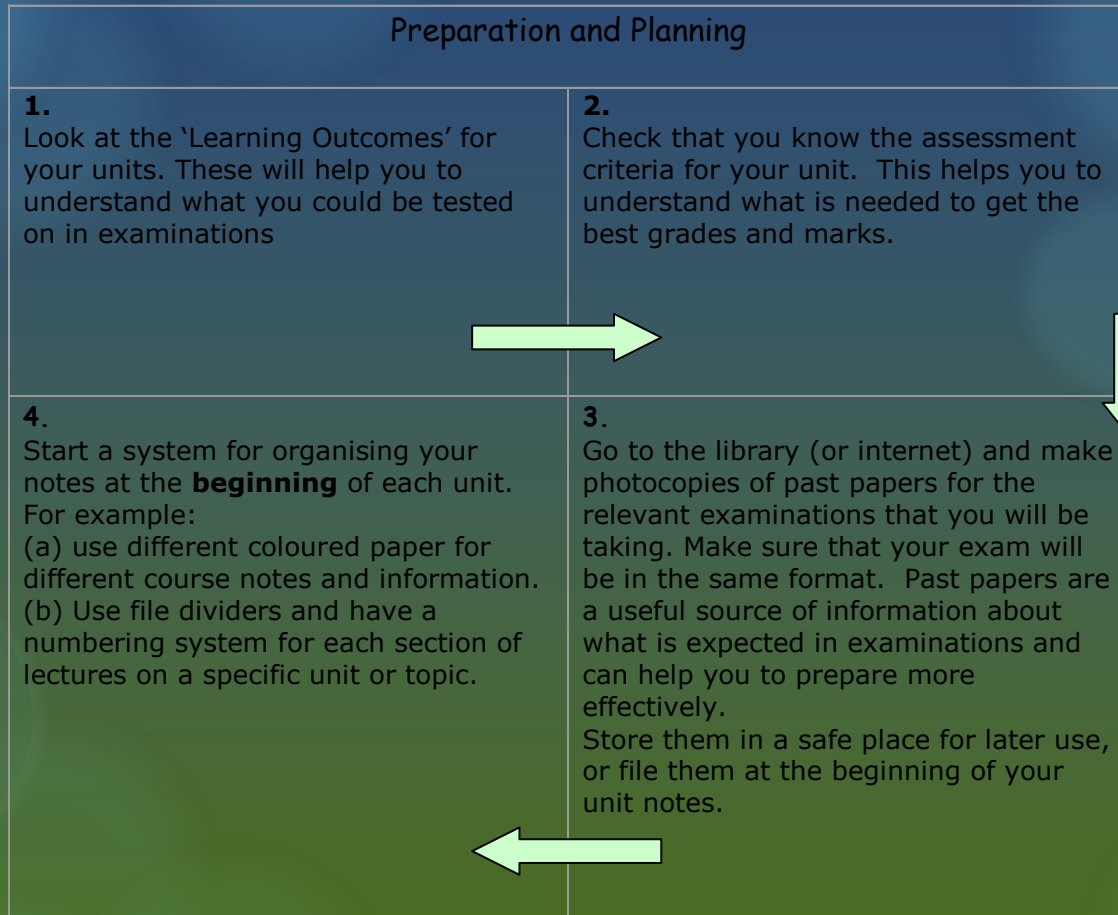
### **The right 'mind set'**

Preparing for examinations is not just about learning and memorising facts and information so that you can regurgitate them in a timed examination. It is also about:

- Knowledge of what is expected of you by your tutors
- Consideration of the assessment criteria
- *Selection* of important theories, ideas and evidence
- Realistic self-expectations
- Development of efficient note-making systems
- Development of organisational strategies
- Ability to 'crack the code' of the examination questions
- Getting a buzz from understanding your subject

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## Be Prepared





# Effective Exam Preparation **section 3**

*There are a variety of ways of producing effective notes which you may want to consider. It is vital however, that whatever system you choose it provides **you** with **useful notes** and is an **efficient** use of your time and effort.*

## **Good notes will help you to:**

- Understand new (and at times) difficult concepts
- Get an overview of the topic or unit by you changing the information which is in a linear format (i.e. written text) to one which will provide links and connections (i.e. use of diagrams and flow charts)
- Remember new terminology (use highlighters for key buzz)
- Group the information in a useful format for quick access when preparing for examinations – use as a handy memoriser or something visual.

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## About Revising

*Revision boils down to personal preference. Consider now any implication of where you revise;*

	Your answer	Ideal? Better to ...?
Where do you revise?		
Is it noisy?		
What about comfort factors?		
Do you prefer to revise alone or with friends/both?		
What is likely to distract you?		
What time of day do you prefer to revise/study?		

If you have organised your notes carefully, at the end of each topic/unit you might find it useful to make revision notes while things are fresh in your mind. It is often a good idea to place your revision notes at the beginning of the section and identify them in a different colour so that they stand out when you come to the final stages of revision in the build up to the examinations. *Many students use different coloured paper for this or a range of coloured pens or coloured fonts.*

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## Organising Key Notes

Gather together all notes relevant to the examination and organise them into sub-sections relating to different topics/examination questions. **Decide how you are going to code each section or topic.** Put the notes into different piles to start with.

Look out for **connections** between topics that could be useful, for example common theoretical or methodological **approaches** to different topics, or different theoretical or methodological approaches to the same (kind of) topic.

Select a topic you want to revise and to get an **overall sense** of your subject:

Make a list of the **key areas** of debate or conflict

Make a list of the key theories or concepts and those responsible for them

Name a theory or concept related to the chosen topic	Who supports this theory or concept?	Who opposes this theory or concept and why?

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## Revision Techniques

*It is important to find a method that suits your learning style and a particular topic. You may find you want to change your method depending on the topic you are revising. Remember to revise effectively you will need to remember facts and figures, understand concepts/theories and the critical debates of your topic.*

Some common approaches include:

1. Summarising notes or hand-outs into **'distilled' notes** (key words, phrases) of no more than two sides of A4 for each possible question topic.
2. Some people find **flash cards** useful for this. Flash cards can incorporate colour for different layers of information and for making links.
3. If you are a very *visual learner*, you could draw charts/maps/posters of key ideas using **visual symbols/shapes**, which act as a metaphor for key concepts and ways in which they relate to one another.
4. If you would rather listen, because you have a preferred style of learning which is *auditory*, you could use **a Dictaphone or recording function on your phone/electronic device** to read key notes onto, then play them back several times so that you can become more familiar with the language and key ideas/concepts relevant to the exam.
5. It can really help to **enlist the help of a friend** in any or all of these approaches, as long as you can avoid distracting each other from the task in hand. Some students enjoy working with others and can learn by **discussing** ideas and explaining concepts to each other – this helps to consolidate knowledge and picks out where gaps in understanding occur.
6. Whichever revision methods you use, work towards a situation where you can **imagine a map of the topics needed for the exam**: which are the bigger and smaller areas? How do they relate to one another? Are there themes running across different areas, like streams through a varied landscape?
7. Some people prefer to use branching notes which put information in a **hierarchy of importance** but also show links. It is often useful to use colour with this type of method of note-making so that the various levels of information clearly stand out.

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## Revision Techniques

Some more common approaches include:

8. Create your own **revision booklet** – this can be useful for each subject to help you organise your notes. This will require you to go through your notes again, which in turn will help you to remember facts.
9. Use the **internet** in a positive way – watching videos that show you procedures/methods/techniques is often a good technique, especially if you are more of a visual learner. (You tube it!)
10. Create a **game or challenge**. Use your notes to make a game which you can then use with friends to assist learning – it may help to break up the revision period but still assist your learning.
11. Find and use **past papers**. It's an obvious one really, but not one to overlook. Past papers will really help you to understand what the exam board is looking for, how they word questions and how much they are expecting to see based on the marks available.
12. Devise you're a series of **quick tests**. Good for testing facts. This can be undertaken on your own or with a buddy.
13. Assemble a **presentation**. If you have to present your work to others, you will need to understand the topic. Carefully select who you will present to. If your in required to attend lessons, ask your teacher if this can be used during your revision period.
14. **Timing** is everything! It is suggested that revision is best carried out in 45 minute blocks with 10 minutes rest. The mind is more switched on in the morning, so try to utilise this opportunity.
15. **Go off-line!** Unless you need your phone/computer to revise, switch everything off to avoid distractions.
16. **Post it!** – use post-it notes, place them around the house so you will see them regularly.
17. Keep calm and **consolidate** your existing knowledge rather than trying to cram new facts.

# Effective Exam Preparation **section 4**

## **Aides to Memorising**

*However effective we are at revising and gaining an understanding of the material, we have to commit it to memory for an exam. The more thoroughly we understand a topic, the more easily we can deal with unexpected and/or complex exam questions. So, don't rely totally on pure memory recall or rote learning. However, we need to develop strategies to help us remember.*

Our long term memory is organised so we can remember facts, episodes, knowledge and procedures. These use different aspects of our memory.

In addition, how facts and knowledge are remembered (written text, diagram, mind map etc.) could reflect your ability to recall that information.

Certain subjects can be remembered effectively by drawing and labelling diagrams, e.g. the intricacies of the blood system, but this would not be suitable for learning the causes of poverty in the last century where a flow chart may be better.

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## Aides to Memorising

You may find yourself better at remembering some types of things than others.

Can you identify your memory strengths and weaknesses?

List two topics you will be studying (select quite different types of topics)

TOPIC A \_\_\_\_\_

TOPIC B \_\_\_\_\_

Memory strategies	TOPIC A	TOPIC B
Mindmaps, diagrams and flow charts		
Associations – making links with the information (topic map)		
Writing out information		
Remembering information in lists – re-arrange the order of the list so that the first letters of each word on the list make up something silly or amusing – a memorable mnemonic.		
Using shapes and colour		
Saying the information – to yourself or out aloud		
Anything else you have found useful		

# Effective Exam Preparation **section 5**

## **Examination Techniques**

At this stage of the process, you will have got to grips with new knowledge and will have worked actively to remember the information needed for the examinations. Ensure that you organise your time in such a way that you have left a **space for practising** the skills needed in the examinations. This means that you need to be able to recognise, at speed, information that has been restructured and reformulated in an exam question. You may want to practise with friends reformulating some of the questions on earlier papers or making up your own questions for each other.



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## Examination Techniques

**Review and practise** the *skills* needed in the examination.

Skills may include:

1. Analysing exam questions
2. Planning essays
3. Writing appropriately and accurately
4. Arguing effectively, using appropriate concepts and theories
5. Close analysis of texts (verbal or visual) or other kinds of 'evidence'
6. Selecting areas of knowledge in support of an argument
7. Synthesising and reaching a conclusion
8. Deciding which type of questions you are good at answering
9. Getting your ideas down in a specified time
10. Managing your time during an exam
11. Prioritising information in an exam question
12. Prioritising questions during an exam

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## And Finally...

If you are too **tired** when you go into the examination, you will not perform well

If you are still **learning** information right up to the last few hours before the examination, you will NOT remember all of this in the examination.

**Adrenaline** is good in examinations – at the right levels.

Too much adrenaline can cause stress which means that you will under-perform on the day.

**Relaxation** is a vital part of the revision process.

**During** revision make sure that you have some **rest periods**. Short breaks are best – set treats for your self.

**Physical activity**, such as jogging or aerobics, can stimulate your brain into more activity when you are trying to remember all the information.

**Relaxation exercises**, such as yoga, are good for clearing the mind ready for the next onslaught!

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## And Finally...

Useful websites;

[www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)

[www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)

[www.edexcel.org.uk](http://www.edexcel.org.uk)

[www.getrevising.co.uk](http://www.getrevising.co.uk)

[www.revisionworld.co.uk/alevel](http://www.revisionworld.co.uk/alevel)

[www.projectalevel.co.uk](http://www.projectalevel.co.uk)

[www.youtube.co.uk](http://www.youtube.co.uk)