Exam Help

Here are some hints on improving your exam preparation including:

- What to Revise
- Planning
- How to Revise
- Testing Yourself
- Lifestyle
- The Exam
- Coping with Stress

**What to Revise**

Decide how many topics you will need to learn. Consider the range of questions you may choose from. Will there be combined topics? Is there any pattern of questioning which is evident in past papers which is likely to continue? Consider the emphasis of the course, and your own relative competencies.

Understand that there will be overlap between references. First, read introductions, summaries and conclusions as these will illustrate the content of the text. If it seems that the texts contains 'nothing new' then consider whether your time may be better spent on a different text.

When selecting references consider whether there are publications which mirror the approach. Make sure you read the 'core' text but if you find a publication which is easier to use then make good use of it.

**Planning**

Decide very early on, how many days you will need to spend on each subject.

Realise there are four stages of learning: acquiring, understanding, memorising and testing knowledge. Time must be made for each of these stages.

Be realistic. Do not set targets which you have no chance of reaching. Consider the work you have to do, the time you have and how fast you know you work. If you find there is not time to go back, reconsider the amount of material which you have decided to learn.

Your plan should be flexible. You will never keep exactly to your plan and you must be prepared to alter it along the way. Include 'spare' days in your revision. These can be useful to catch up on any topic which needs more time spent on it.

Decide how and what you are going to revise during a specific day. This should then be reassessed a few days in advance- remember to keep it flexible!

Try to alternate between subjects and topics.
**How to Revise**

Make the revision process distinctive in some manner. The more distinctive, the greater probability that you will remember it at a vital time. For example, use different coloured paper and pens. These may act as ‘memory keys’ and help you recall in an exam. Alternatively, keywords will help you remember lists of information.

Group revision sessions are a good way of improving both understanding and memory.

Use ‘Spider’ diagrams so that you process the information in some form. This aids your memory and also your understanding of the material. A ‘Spider’ diagram will enable you to connect information in different ways.

**Testing Yourself**

With a large blank piece of paper, write a topic name in the centre and then build up a spider diagram around it. Add ideas by drawing in lines to show how they relate to one another. Once you have finished, cross reference your diagram with lecture notes to see if you have missed anything.

Practise questions- use past papers and think of questions which you might be asked in the exam. Make a detailed outline plan of the answer. You will need to chop and change this to help you order your thoughts.

When you have finished the plan, refer back to your texts and notes to see what you have managed to remember and what you have not. Only include that which is relevant to the specific question, i.e. not just everything that you know about the topic.

**Lifestyle**

Intersperse your revision with sport and social occasions. If you rest your brain it will have the chance to recuperate and in doing so gain strength.

In any revision day have adequate periods when you are not working.

Try not to work into the early hours of the morning and not to work too many hours in one day. If you do it is likely that your efforts will be undermined because you end up feeling tired and therefore no longer able to take in the information efficiently.

Do not go to bed straight after revision. If you do you may have difficulty sleeping as thoughts are rushing around your brain. It is a good idea to do something which distracts your attention. Sport or an evening out are good ways of doing this.

If you do something different after revision, by the time you go to bed you will probably feel very tired, more relaxed and are more likely to fall asleep.

It’s not a good idea to work right up until the exams – especially the night before a morning exam. Last minute cramming may clog up your mind and make it harder to recall other knowledge.

**The Exam**

Get to the exam room at least ten minutes before the exam begins.

Avoid conversation just before the exam which you know might agitate you.
Make sure that you have adequate writing equipment.

Read the question paper through once and then go back and read it more thoroughly, marking the questions which you feel that you could answer.

Read the questions which you have marked very carefully and decide exactly which ones you are going to answer. Decide in which order you will answer them; the strongest first, may often be a good idea. This will stop you launching off into the exam without thinking about it.

Split the remaining time left equally between questions.

Do not start writing until you have planned your answer.

Make the plan detailed, showing the content of the introduction, the main body of the answer and the conclusion. As you progress through the plan it’s easy to fit new ideas into the appropriate place within the answer.

Read through your planned answer. Is it logically argued? Are the main issues covered? Does it really answer the question? How will the marker view your approach?

If you have made a good plan you will find that you write the answer very quickly as all you have to do is put in the words to link the point-by-point plan together.

Keep within the time which you have allocated for each question. It is easier to get the first few marks of a question than it is to get the last of another. If you run out of time on a question consider leaving it unfinished and go to the next.

If you get the chance then to go back and finish the unfinished questions – even if this is in note form. An examiner may see by your rough plan that you meant to go further than you could manage and reward you accordingly.

Sometimes in an exam you cannot think straight and you are not answering the question. In situations such as these it may be useful to put into practice a quick relaxation technique in order to re-focus your attention on the matter at hand. It is not worth worrying about the time that this takes as it will pay back dividends with increased performance in the remainder of the exam.

**Coping with Stress**

Exam stress is something that we all go through to a greater or lesser extent. It is in fact healthy to be worried about your performance in an exam. If you are not concerned you are not likely to perform at your best.

However for a lot of people, exam stress is a big problem. It can cause you to do badly, not because you don’t know the subject, but because you freeze in the examination room. This section is aimed at the people who this applies to.

**A QUICK EMERGENCY RELAXATION TECHNIQUE**

1. Stop writing, put down your pen, shut your eyes and say (to yourself) ‘STOP’.
2. Breathe in and hold your breath for a moment before slowly exhaling. As you do so relax your shoulders and hands.
3. Pause for a moment then, as you breathe in slowly again, relax your facial muscles.

4. Stay quiet for a few moments, blocking out the rest of the room and get on with the exam, not hurrying things

Using the Libraries

Royal Holloway's library collections are divided between three libraries, the Bedford Library (containing material on science, social sciences and history), the Founders Library (containing material on languages, literature, cinema, theatre, and fine arts) and the Music Library situated within the department.

There are also some useful books on exam preparation and techniques which can be borrowed from the libraries.

Further Help

This leaflet is only intended to give you a few pointers to aid your exam preparation. These recommendations may not suit everyone but they are generally accepted as good common sense. It is worth considering what might happen if you become too tired or if your mental state is not affected well by an excess of caffeine. Can you afford to get ill during exam time?

The Student Counselling Service runs workshops and coaching sessions. For more information visit our website, call in to FW171 between 9-12 & 1-4 or e-mail counselling@rhul.ac.uk