

# Doing Well on EXAMS

## Before the Exam

Be sure you know when and where the exam will be held

Final exams are not always held in the same time slot or room as your class. Double check the exam schedule, and write the date, time, and location on your calendar.

Get organized the night before

Gather your materials the night before the exam. Be sure to bring extra pens and pencils, and extra batteries for your calculator. Bring your watch, in case you can't see the clock in the room.

Have an emergency alarm as a backup

Ask a friend or family member to give you a wake up call, or set a second alarm for good measure.

Get a good sleep, and eat a good breakfast

Your memory and concentration skills will be sharper if you are relaxed, and have a full stomach. Remember that too much caffeine can make you nervous and jittery!

Don't be late!

You will be flustered if you arrive late for your exam, and you'll lose precious time regaining your composure. You might also miss important information about the exam, such as "students should ignore question 7".



Don't talk about the exam

Don't discuss the exam with other students while waiting for the test to begin. You may become unnerved or confused by listening to others talk about how much they studied, or what they think will be on the test.

Sit front and center

Make sure you can see the board and hear the instructor from where you are sitting. There are less distractions at the front of the room, and you are more likely to catch the instructor's eye if you have a question.

## During the Exam

### Listen to instructions

It may be tempting to dive right into the exam, but be sure to listen to any last minute instructions or corrections that are given before the exam begins.

### Read all directions

Many students have wasted valuable time by not reading directions, such as "Answer only two of the following three essay questions".

### Scan the entire test before beginning

Notice the overall length of the exam, the types of questions, and how many marks each question is worth. You don't want to turn to the last page with five minutes remaining, only to see a 40 mark essay question.

### Plan your time

Budget your time according to the way marks are allocated. For example, if there are multiple choice questions worth 20% of the exam, and two essay questions each worth 40%, don't spend too long on the multiple choice questions. Allow time at the end of the exam for a brief review, or to return to questions that you missed.

### Jot down memory aids, formulas, and outlines in the margins

Do this while skimming the exam, while the information is still fresh in your mind.

### Answer the easiest and shortest questions first

This will give you confidence, and will ensure that you are making

optimum use of your time.

Struggling for half an hour on an essay question that you are not prepared for is unproductive, especially if you run out of time to answer those questions that you know well.

### If you get stuck, move on

Don't waste time on questions that have you stumped. Make a notation next to questions that you have skipped, so you can easily go back to them later if you have time.

Answering questions that you know may jog your memory, and help you recall facts related to more difficult questions.

### Ask questions

If you need clarification on any of the questions on the exam, ask the instructor for help.

### Answering essay questions

Read essay questions carefully. Most essay questions have three parts: one is the general topic that is being addressed, the second is the specific task that you have been asked to undertake, and the third is the way in which your answer should be limited. Consider the following essay question: "Compare and contrast rites of passage rituals in African and Australian societies." The topic is "rites of passage rituals", the task is to "compare and contrast", and the limiting factor is "African and Australian societies".

### Be concise and clear in your answers

Before answering an essay question, write a short outline of the main points that you plan to make. Be sure your answer is organized and logical. Say what you have to

say in as few words as possible, without sacrificing clarity.

If you run out of time

If you will not be able to complete an essay question before the exam ends, jot down your outline, and a few key points. You may get partial credit.

Answering multiple choice questions

Cover up the alternatives, and carefully read the question. Come up with an answer before looking at the options, and select the option that is closest. Read each alternative before making your final selection, in case there is a better answer.

If there are combination choices

Sometimes, the options for a multiple choice question include “combination” answers, such as “both a and b”, or “all of the above”, etc. Consider the following example:

*An apple is:*

- a) a fruit
- b) round
- c) a vegetable
- d) red
- e) both a and b
- f) a, b and d

To process this question, treat each option as a true or false statement:

*An apple is:*

- a) a fruit **TRUE**
- b) round **TRUE**
- c) a vegetable
- d) red **TRUE**
- e) both a and b
- f) a, b and d

Choose the answer that encompasses all of the “True” statements. In this case, option f) a, b, and d is the correct answer.

Inclusive options

Students sometimes get confused when their options include “all of the above”, and “none of the above”. Remember that if even one option is wrong, “all of the above” cannot be the correct answer. If even one option is right, then you can eliminate “none of the above” as a viable answer.

Be wary of familiar phrases and jargon

Students sometimes assume that familiar phrases from their textbook or class notes must be the correct answer. Think through each question on the exam, and don’t rely on “recognition” to come up with the right answer.

## After the Exam

Reflect on your performance

Think about what went well, and what improvements you could have made. Did you study the right content? Could you have been better prepared? Did you budget your time appropriately in the exam?

Talk to your instructor

If possible, go over your exam with your instructor when you receive your results. Ask how you could have done better, and use this information when you prepare for future tests and exams.