

WRITING EXAMS

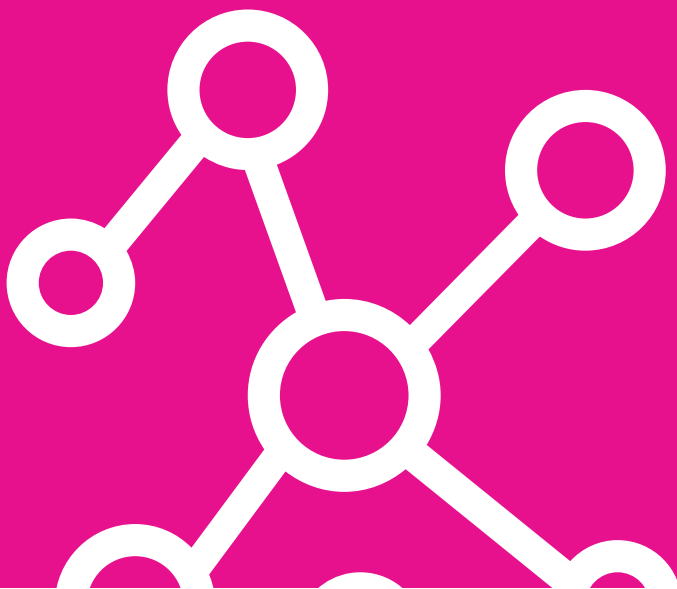


● THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXAM

- Try to relax for at least 90 minutes before you go to sleep. Listen to calming music or chat about non-exam related stuff with your friends or family.
- Have a relaxing warm bath or shower.
- If your mind feels overloaded and you struggle to fall asleep try to slowly relax each limb of your body. Concentrate on taking deep, slow breaths.
- If your mind keeps wandering back to the material that you have just studied, write out keywords on a note pad and then try going to sleep.

● THE MORNING OF YOUR EXAM

- Eat a healthy breakfast (preferably eggs or other types of brain/energy foods).
- Remember your student card, as well as stationery such as pens, highlighters and Tipp-ex. If there is no clock in the exam hall remember to take a watch so that you can keep track of time. Do not take along alarm clocks that make an audible ticking noise as this may disturb other examinees.
- Leave for the exam hall in good time. Ensure that you arrive at least half an hour before you start writing so that you can find your seat and mentally prepare yourself for the next few hours.
- Try not engaging with other students, especially if they look panicky and stressed. They may increase your own stress levels.
- Don't skim over your exam notes before you enter the hall as this may cause you to forget important information during your frantic last-minute studying.



● BEFORE WRITING YOUR EXAM

FILL IN YOUR BASIC STUDENT INFORMATION

It is best to fill in your student information on your exam paper before the exam begins. You do not want to waste time doing this during precious exam time.

TAKE NOTE OF THE INSTRUCTIONS

For some of your exams you will be given time to read through your question paper (roughly 15 minutes) before the exam starts. Take careful note of the instructions section. In cases where you are not given special time to read through the paper, allocate about 10 minutes to do so as soon as the exam starts. It is a good idea to highlight or mark on the paper which questions you are going to answer and alert yourself to the questions that you feel you will be able to answer best.

USE YOUR TIME WISELY

It is extremely important to take note of the amount of time you have available to write your questions. Look at the total exam marks and divide this into the total exam time. This will give you the amount of time you can spend per mark. For example, if the exam counts 150 marks and you are given 3 hours (180 minutes) you can spend 1 minute and 12 seconds per mark. (180 divided by 150). This means that you can spend about 24 minutes on a 20-mark question. Give yourself some time to plan longer essay-type questions before you start writing. For example, for an essay question for which you have allocated 45 minutes, use about 10 minutes for planning and 35 minutes for writing.



TIP -

There may be a compulsory question made up of multiple choice sub-questions. Generally you should spend about one minute on each multiple choice question, but this depends on the mark allocation and on the subject.

● READ THE QUESTIONS CAREFULLY

If there are options, choose them wisely. Start with the questions you feel you can answer the best. Take your time to read the question carefully and make sure you understand exactly what the question asks of you.

Make sure you that you ANSWER THE QUESTION!

When approaching a question that you believe you can answer, do not rush straight into it. Make sure that you answer what is asked, and not just write what you know about the topic. Pick out keywords that tell you exactly what is being asked of you. Examples of these keywords are: explain, discuss, give an example, apply, contrast, compare, briefly, summarise, etc.

To answer questions appropriately, make sure that you:

- Analyse the question. What exactly is it asking?
- Ask yourself what information you have learnt that could apply to this question.

ESSAY-TYPE QUESTIONS

- Remember to underline specific words that relate to your answer and that explain how you must answer the question.
- Make a note of main topics, themes or concepts.
- Pick a few arguments that could back up your answer.
- Make a plan for the layout of your essay. For example, sketch out a mind map of your essay, giving each paragraph a link to the central idea (the question being posed or your answer to the question).
- Use an introductory paragraph to briefly answer the question and explain your answer by referring to a number of reasons (evidence). You will give more details on these reasons in the rest of the essay.
- Make one point or argument per paragraph and end each paragraph with a sentence that shows how it answers the question. You must always refer back to the question.
- In your conclusion summarise the arguments and refer back to the question.

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Keep to the time allocation, keeping in mind the ratio of marks to the number of minutes available.
- When a question asks you to 'briefly comment', treat it as a mini-essay. Keep the introduction to the point and write it in two sentences only. Then select a few points to discuss with a sentence or two about each. Lastly, add a concluding sentence that sums up your overall view.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

This exam-questioning technique is used by examiners to test your overall knowledge on what you have been taught. In some cases there is no right or wrong answer but simply the most correct answer.

TRY TO USE THE TIPS BELOW TO HELP YOU WHEN ANSWERING MCQS:

- Read the instructions very carefully before you begin.
- Depending on the subject and the ratio of marks to time available, work out how much time you need for each question. For many subjects you have about a minute per question in an MCQ exam.
- When you read a question, always work out what the answer is before you look at the choice of possible answers.
- Use a ruler to make it easier to see where to enter each answer. This will help you avoid getting your answers mixed up.
- It is best to answer the questions you are sure of first. Tackle the difficult ones afterwards.
- Go over your answers if you have the time.
- Try not to leave out any questions. If you're not one hundred percent certain of the answer, it is probably better to choose the option you think is best, rather than leaving it blank. Having said this, avoid guessing if you do not know the answer at all. If negative marking is applied for an MCQ exam, you may end up worse off by guessing.

EXAM DONT'S

AVOID THE FOLLOWING WHEN WRITING AN EXAM:

- Don't try to squeeze in information that you know just because you've spent so much time revising it. If your answer does not match the question you are wasting time and losing marks.
- Don't use colloquial language and slang in your answers. Keep to academic language and be professional.
- Don't write notes to the examiners; you may end up annoying them.

