# Exam techniques & strategies

## Ensure you have made a note of your exams

* Number of exams
* Exam dates and times
* Duration of exams
* Exam/coursework weighting
* Credits of modules
* Type of exams – e.g. essays/multiple choice/ problem questions/ exercises

## Ensure you have revised for your exams

Please see the guide on ‘[Revision planning and Strategies](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/effective-revision)’. It is important that you have:

* Developed an understanding of each exam topic.
* Memorised key elements needed to complete the exam.
* Given yourself some exam practice.

## The night before the exam

* Try not to cram revise unless it is unavoidable. It is important to get a good night’s sleep.
* Check exam details - location, time, any required equipment.
* Plan your route and schedule if you are having to travel to an exam location – leave plenty of time for issues with parking, buses etc. If you are sitting your exam at home, try to get the area prepared in plenty of time.
* Pack or prepare everything you need for the exam e.g. water, student ID, any medication you take, any required equipment e.g. calculators, pens etc.
* Plan your arrival. You will only be allowed to bring small items such as your phone, wallet, bottle of water in to the exam hall. If you arrive on campus with a bag, you must place this in one of the lockers available on campus. Be sure to arrive on time to organise this.
* Get a good night’s sleep.

## The day of the exam

* Avoid large quantities of caffeine or sugar, as this is likely to give you a crash in energy.
* Eat breakfast/lunch before your exam.
* Arrive in plenty of time to store your bag (if you have brought one with you: Lockers and bag drops).
* Confirm the exam venue and aim to arrive at least 15 minutes in advance of the start of the exam.
* If you are in an exam hall, ensure that you sit in the right seat and have the correct paper.
* Pay attention to any instructions given by the invigilators prior to the exam.

## Starting the exam: planning & time management

* Read the information on the exam paper very carefully, you need to ensure you follow all instructions accurately.
* Look at the weighting of questions (the exam marks given to each) if there are any, it may be worth attempting the questions with highest points first - on a scrap paper you might wish to plan your order.
* It is worth spending a few minutes dividing the exam time between the tasks/questions you have to complete, this will give you mini deadlines to follow. Ensure you allow some time at the end for reading through/checking your responses.

## Multiple choice/single answer questions in exams

## Planning

1. Divide the exam time between the number of questions you have, allowing a little extra time at the beginning for skim-reading the paper and at the end for checking your responses. This will give you a rough idea of how long you have to complete each question, so that you can keep to time.

2. Skim-read the paper and questions:

* Make a note of the question numbers that you are certain you can answer correctly straight away.
* If you think of a piece of information or point related to a question, make a very brief note of what you think of with the question number.

## Answering questions

* If there is no weighting for particular questions, start with the questions you are certain of the answers to.
* You may then wish to go onto the questions where you recorded some information for.
* You may wish to end with the questions you are not sure of.
* It is usually better to answer all questions, even if you are not sure of the answer, but check that you do not get points deducted for wrong answers.
* Try to allow time for editing/going back through answers.

## Essays in exams

## Essay prep & planning

You will usually get approximately 1 hour to complete most exam essays, this allows for: 5-10 minutes planning; 40-45 minutes writing and 5-10 minutes for editing and proof-reading.

1. Read through all the questions and select the correct number to answer. Re-read your chosen questions carefully, ensure you:

* Know what to do.
* Can answer all parts of the question.
* Understand the instructional verb (e.g. ‘discuss’, 'compare', 'analyse') so you know what you are going to do with the topic.

2. Start with the easiest question.

3. Note down any thoughts in response:

* Key points or arguments
* Theories (names/dates)
* Evidence/examples/case studies (names/dates)
* Connections to module learning outcomes

4. Make an essay plan:

* Decide on which thoughts are relevant to your exam question.
* Group these ideas, evidence and examples into themes or key points.
* Arrange them in a logical order.
* Structure your answer – introduction --> 4-5 paragraphs --> conclusion.

## Writing

1. Label your answer (you don’t need to write out the question but do keep checking it to ensure you are not going ‘off-point’).

2. Write up your answer according to your essay plan following your time plan.

* Write on every other line to allow room for corrections.
* If you get stuck, look at your essay plan and re-read your answer so far.
* If you run out of time, write up your remaining ideas in bullet points or notes, but write a short conclusion in full sentences.

## Editing & proofreading

* Allow 5-10 minutes to re-read your answer and edit/correct/amend it.
* Cross out any rough drafts or notes that you don’t want to be considered.

## Panic recovery during the exam

The following table offers guidance on different scenarios you may need to recover from.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mind goes blank** | Put pen down, read what you’ve done so far, plan next stepsNote everything you know about the topicLeave a gap and move to next question. Go back later |
| **Running out of time** | Divide remaining time between number of answers – better to put some information in each rather than leave any blank if you can help itGet main points down and any evidence, even it if is just in bullets. Go back later to fill in detail if you have time |
| **Losing focus / getting confused** | Stop writing and re-read the questionRe-look at your plan – have you gone off track? |

If you need help or advice with any issue raised in this study guide, please book an appointment with the Skills for Academic Success team (S.A.S.).

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