



Different types of exams

Exams are used at university to test how well you have understood key concepts, themes and topics covered in your course. Whether on campus, at an external venue or online, you may be required to do to one or a combination of the following exam types:

- Multiple choice
- Short answer
- Essay
- Seen/open question
- Open book
- Take home
- Oral
- Practical

Your success in completing an exam will depend on how well prepared you are for the type of exam you will sit, and how you approach it on the day.

Multiple Choice exams

These are used to present a large number of questions/statements, each usually being of the same value. For each question/statement you are required to select the most appropriate response or responses from a list of choices. These exams require you to demonstrate knowledge and command of content. You need to be able to recall and apply knowledge quickly, so good question analysis skills are essential.

Before the exam

- Identify the main themes within the course by looking at the Course Outline and any other information available to you on the Course site
- Ensure that your course notes are complete, thorough and well organised into key topics (e.g., from lectures and tutorials, online lectures, videos, or other online activities)
- Memorise and understand the key terms, theories, and applications well enough to respond accurately to a lot of questions in a set time
- Practise responding to the types of questions that might be in your exam and check that your answers address each question fully – practise in a time limit

During the exam

- Read each question/statement carefully
 - You may find it useful to restructure the sentence to interpret what is being asked
 - Read more than once to make sure you are not misled by certain words or make the wrong choice
 - Check for words which restrict the possible answer (e.g. absolutes such as *all, every, never, no* or moderate words such as *generally, most, least*)



During the multiple choice exam continued...

- Predict the answer before reading the choices that are provided
- If you are confident about your prediction and it is listed in the choices, select that answer
- If some of the questions contain unfamiliar words or you are not sure of the answer, do not panic – respond to questions you feel confident about first and return to those you are unsure of
- Eliminate the obviously incorrect options first
- Respond to as many question/statements as you can in the time
- A considered guess for the most difficult questions/statements is better than no response, as you may get some of these correct

Short Answer exams

This type of exam includes a lot of questions requiring answers of up to a paragraph long. The questions may vary in what they test (e.g. testing memory, testing knowledge about concepts).

Before the exam

- Follow the advice given above for multiple choice exams
- Practise with a variety of questions/problems that may be presented
 - Using a key topic from your course, think of as many different types of questions you could be asked about it, and how you would answer each of the questions
 - For maths-based exams, memorise relevant formulas and practise using any required software (e.g. Excel)
- Check your responses, perhaps with another student, to ensure that you answer the question completely rather than react to key words and produce an irrelevant response

During the exam

- Read the questions carefully and make sure you understand what you are being asked to do
- Identify how many marks are allocated to each question and divide your time and energy accordingly - spend more time responding to questions with higher marks allocated to them
- If a paragraph or sentence is required, try to use full sentences rather than notes or dot points
- For maths-based exams, if you are instructed to show your calculations, include these in full so that the assessor can see how you formulated your answer
- If time is an issue and you are permitted to go back and forth between questions, make sure you respond to questions you feel confident about first and then return to the other questions later
- Plan to allow time for checking your answers

Essay exams

This type of exam presents a range of questions divided into topic sections covered in the course. You may be expected to give an essay response on more than one topic and show how theories have contributed to the knowledge areas. Read and follow the instructions carefully as the marks may vary across the different sections of the exam.



Before the exam (Essay exams)

- Identify the main themes within the course by looking at the Course Outline and any other information available to you on your course site
- Ensure that the notes you have taken when watching online lectures or videos and doing research are complete, thorough and organised into key topics
- Develop sets of likely questions within each topic area and focus on your strengths or interests
- Identify important references for various topics and work out how and where to use them
- If you are allowed to have your notes with you, make sure they are organised in a way that is easy for you to find information when you need it
 - Use post-it notes and highlighters to colour code themes, and organise your notes in a way that is logical to you – either in themes, alphabetically, by author, or by topic
- Practise to the time limit you will have in the exam

Reading time

- In some courses you may be given the essay topic selection before the exam
- Alternatively, you will be given the essay topics at the beginning of the exam
- Once you have access to these topics, allocate yourself sufficient time to:
 - Identify the questions you plan to answer (select topics you are best able to answer)
 - Carefully analyse the wording of the topics you have chosen
 - Make sure you understand what you have to do so that your responses are relevant

During the exam

- Once you have identified and understood the questions you plan to answer, do a plan for each
- Include in each plan the main points you will make in the introduction, body and conclusion
- As you type or write your full response keep your eye on the time to stay on schedule
- Use any extra time to review and edit your answers – refer back to the question to ensure you have covered all elements in your essay
- If you seem to be running out of time do not panic - type your ideas as notes or in dot points so the marker can see that you were able to answer the question

Seen or Open Question exams

This type of exam has a similar format and expectations as an essay exam, except that you have access to a broad range of questions before the exam, allowing you time to plan a response. At the time of the exam, you will be restricted to a certain number of questions you can answer. Because you have time to review the questions and plan your response, there is usually an expectation that the quality of your essays would be better than in an essay exam situation (i.e., where you have not had an opportunity to preview the questions before sitting the exam).

Before the exam

- Follow the advice above for essay exams
- Develop detailed essay plans for a number of the given questions in each topic
- Remember that not all questions will appear in the exam

During the exam

- Follow the advice above for essay exams



Open Book exams

These also have a similar format and expectations to essay exams. They are different in that you are allowed to bring and use notes, books or other reference materials. The focus of this type of exam is to test what you have learned as well as your use of knowledge.

Before the exam

- Apply the relevant advice for essay exams
- Prepare your resources so you can access references without wasting time (e.g. use coloured highlighters and post-it notes to refer to key content and pages)
- Write a summary sheet with the most important information or page references on it
- Re-do given exercises and problems and add comments as necessary

During the exam

- Apply the relevant advice for essay exams
- Allow yourself time for using the resources you have brought with you into the exam
- When editing, check that you have made the best use of your resources

Take Home exams

This type of exam may be required of on campus students, and has a similar format and expectations to essay exams except that it is done at home. The exam is usually provided online to students shortly before the submission date (e.g., 24 – 48 hours before).

Before the exam

- Follow the advice above for essay exams
- Organise your reference materials and notes in advance for easy and effective use

During the exam

- Follow the advice above for essay exams which may apply here.
- Establish where you will do with the exam. An appropriate space will help you fully focus on the day. Some considerations include:
 - The room size, lighting and temperature
 - The position of your desk and chair, as well as levels of comfort (ergonomics)
 - If you are allowed to have notes with you, locate them in easy access
 - Avoid using a room with outside distractions such as increased noise levels or visible activity

Oral exams

Oral exams, sometimes called Vivas, can test your ability to verbally communicate key concepts, theories and ideas covered in your course.

Before the exam

- Develop active listening skills if required to interact with the assessor
- Revise and practise using the vocabulary and language around the topics
- Practise speaking aloud to feel comfortable and confident in how you communicate



Before the Oral exam continued...

- For online oral exams, practise speaking using the required software and equipment
 - If possible, have someone on the other end of the screen watching and listening to you
 - Ask for their feedback on sound and visual quality, as well as on your spoken content and any other criteria you know you will be assessed on

During the exam

- Listen actively to your assessor's questions or comments so that you can respond appropriately
- If you do not understand a question or comment, do not be afraid to ask for it to be repeated or reworded
- If you forget terminology commonly used in the course, try to explain what you want to say in your own way to show you understand the topic or concepts you are talking about

Practical exams

This type of exam tests students on practical skills and techniques required for laboratory, clinical, studio or field settings. Usually the tasks you are asked to perform are straightforward. You will perform well in a practical exam if you report your methodology and observations accurately.

Before the exam

- Identify the key procedures performed during the classes, write down summaries of the methods, and make sure you are able to repeat them
- Ensure that you understand the theory of the course and its different applications
- Rehearse doing the techniques
- Find out as much as you can about the setting for the exam, and plan responses for possible questions or tasks

During the exam

- Use the reading time to plan an efficient schedule for completing the tasks required
- Be sure to schedule some exam time to answer the questions asked, especially about the method used and observations made.

Online exams

Online exams can come in a variety of formats including multiple choice, short answer, essay and oral exams. Follow the relevant tips and strategies above when preparing for and doing your exam in an online environment. Other considerations specific to online exams include the following:

- Exam questions may be presented either all on one webpage or separately (i.e., one question or topic per webpage)
- The exam may require that you submit each answer before proceeding to the next question
- Alternatively, the exam may allow you to answer all the questions or return to previous questions before you submit your final response
- Some online exams are interactive in that you are required to communicate with your assessor
 - You may need equipment such as a webcam, microphone and headset



Exam location (Online exams)

As with take home exams, in an online exam situation you will need to be well set up. Make sure the space you choose to do your exam in is suitable and will help you focus. Consider:

- The room size, lighting and temperature
- The position of your desk and chair, as well as levels of comfort (ergonomics)
- Location of notes and materials, if you are allowed to use these
- Noise and other distractions - avoid using a room which is situated near noisy and busy environments

Check your technical equipment

Check your equipment in advance to avoid technical issues on the day:

- Make sure you have a strong internet connection and suitable equipment for the exam (e.g. microphone, webcam, speakers)
- Check that your computer and equipment are all functioning correctly
- Download the required software
- Follow any instructions provided to you about the online exam
 - Be clear about what you need to do before, during and after you have completed the exam
 - If there is a practice activity available, do this two or three times to increase your confidence in using new software and following specific exam procedures
 - If you can't find these instructions in your Course Outline, get in touch with your teaching staff who can point you in the right direction
- Know what to do if you have technical issues during the exam so that you can be prepared on the day for any unexpected problems