



# Preparing for exams

To succeed in exams there are activities you can plan for and do right at the beginning of the study period as well as closer to exam time.

## Before the exam: long term planning

Exam preparation needs to be part of your overall planning for each study period and it's a good idea to start thinking about exams in the first week of your studies.

- At the start of the study period the assessment tasks in every course on a Study Planner so that you know what is expected, the timeline, and the value (%) of each one, including exams.
- During the study period find out details about any exams you will take so that you can plan to have enough time for preparation.
- Most exams are set at the end of study period sometime after the end of the teaching program, though occasionally exams are set at different times in the study period.
- Check your Course Outline the course website for information about exam format and any details of the exam content.
- The notes you make during your course will be the basis for your ongoing learning and then be a major part of your exam revision.
- From week 1 keep your notes up to date, check over each topic as you finish it, and review the material each week.
- Find the answers to any questions you have in your textbook or from your study group so that you make sure you understand the material.

## Useful strategies:

- Identify the most important issues in each theme from the Course Outline, your notes taken for different activities (e.g., lectures and tutorials), and from past exam papers (if available).
- Develop a list of likely questions on each topic.
- Develop question analysis skills.
- Talk through the questions and topics with other students.
- Problem solve in course-based support groups.
- If doing a maths-based or online exam, practise using the required software (e.g., Excel) or equipment.

## The weeks just before exams

- Confirm the practical details: date, location (on campus, external venue or online), starting time, overall length, number and type of questions, allocation of marks, exam weighting (% of study period mark).
- Allocate more time for revision and practise doing the exam, keeping to the time allocation
- Think of strategies for the specific type of exam you will do - multiple choice or open book exams for example, require different preparation and practise techniques
- For students doing exams on campus or in an external venue, check with a friend that your writing under exam conditions is clear and legible.
- For online exams, practise your speed and accuracy particularly if you will be required to type sentences or in paragraph form.
- For online exams, make sure you have an appropriate space to sit your exam and that you have set up and are comfortable using the technical equipment and software required.
- Rearrange work or family commitments that might affect your exam performance.



### Useful strategies to remember what you have learned:

- **Summarise** the main ideas from lectures, online activities, chapters or readings to a number of key points that can be memorised - key points are easier to remember and, in the exam, will help you recall your notes.
- Use **recall cards** (a pack of small cards) to develop a glossary of terms or definitions
  - On one side write the word and write the description/definition/example/diagram on the other.
  - Cards are easy to carry around and use to memorise terms and their meanings.
- Use **concept maps** to create a visual picture of connected details.
  - Start by writing a key idea at the centre of a page, then surround it with concepts that are connected.
  - Make any links that are appropriate.
  - This is a very useful approach if you respond well to the visual display of ideas.
- Use **mnemonics** to make a connection between what you are trying to learn and something you know well (like a familiar word or picture).
  - For example, each letter of the word can be used to remind you of a key term, formula or concept that you need to remember.
- **Talk through concepts** to ensure that you really understand them.
- Apply your knowledge and understanding by **solving problems** (past exam questions, tutorials topics, questions from textbooks) by working with other students is a practical way to check solutions.

### Before the final exam: final weeks

- Make time in the last weeks before the exam to fine tune your understanding of course topics.
  - For example, develop an overview of your Course by reducing your notes to a summarised version.
- If you've started late you will need to allocate a lot more time and effort between now and the exams than if you had started earlier.
- Try to cover all the course content more than once so that you both learn and remember
  - Avoid too much intensive last-minute study, because your memory may become overloaded leading to poor recall during the exam.