



# Different types of exams

## Specific types of exams

There are a variety of exams that you may be asked to take. These include multiple choice, short answer, essay, take home, seen or open question, open book, oral and practical. Your preparation for each of these as well as how you deal with them in the exam will determine your success.

## Multiple Choice exams

These are used to present a large number of questions each of the same value. In each question you select the most appropriate response from a list of alternatives.

### Requirements

These exams require you to demonstrate knowledge and command of content. You need to be able to recall and apply knowledge quickly. Good question analysis skills are essential.

### Preparation

- use your lecture and tutorial outline to identify the main themes within the course
- ensure that your lecture and research notes are complete, thorough and well organised into key topics
- memorise 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 in your exam and check that your answers address each question fully
- practise to time

### Taking the exam

- predict the answer before reading the choices provided. Select this answer if present.
- read all of the options for each question
- do the questions that you feel confident about first. Ensure that you aren't misled by the wording of the question into making a wrong choice
- mark those you need to reconsider
- carefully read the statement or beginning of the statement that you are given. Statements that contain absolutes (words such as *all*, *every*, *never*, *no*) which restrict the possibilities are



less likely to be correct. Statements with more moderate words such as *generally*, *most*, *least* may be more likely to be correct

- eliminate the obviously incorrect options first
- watch out for extra-long or complicated options: they may be wrong
- if some of the answers contain unfamiliar words don't panic as they are probably incorrect choices
- do as many questions as you can in the time. A calculated guess for the most difficult questions is better than no response as you'll probably get some of these doubtful questions correct.

## Short Answer exams

Include a large number of questions requiring answers of up to a paragraph. The nature of the questions may vary: some questions may test memory work; others may test your ability to apply learned concepts.

### Requirements

These exams usually include a number of questions requiring answers of up to a paragraph. The kind of questions may vary: some questions may test memory work; others may test your ability to apply concepts. Analyse the questions carefully.

### Preparation

- follow the advice above for multiple choice question answers.
- practise with the variety of questions/problems that may be presented.
- check your responses, perhaps with another student, to ensure that you answer the set question completely rather than react to key words to produce an irrelevant response.

### Taking the exam

- determine where the marks are allocated so that you divide your time and energy according to the marks rather than writing a lot on some questions and nothing on others.
- if a paragraph or sentence is required then try to write in full sentences rather than notes or dot points.
- if time is an issue then make sure you cover questions in your areas of strength.
- plan to allow time for checking your answers.



## Essay exams

Present a range of questions divided into sections which reflect themes /topics covered in the course. You must write an essay type response on a certain number of topics. It is important to read and follow the instructions carefully as the marks are likely to be allocated across the various sections of the paper.

### Requirements

These exams require you to demonstrate your ability to recall and apply knowledge in specific ways. You often show how the theories have contributed to an area of knowledge.

### Preparation

- use your lecture and tutorial outlines to identify the main themes within the course.
- ensure that your lecture and research notes are complete, thorough and well organised into key topics.
- develop sets of likely questions within each topic.
- focus on your areas of strength and interest.
- identify important references for various topics and work out how and where you might use them.
- practise writing to the time limit you will have in the exam.

### Taking the exam

- consider the questions you plan to answer. Don't be too quick to discard questions: think about the topics you are best able to answer.
- analyse each question well so that you write on the topic.
- draft an essay plan for each selected question at the beginning of the exam.
- include in each plan the main points you will make in the introduction, the body and the conclusion.
- as you write your answers watch the time so that you keep to schedule.
- use any extra time to review and edit your answers.
- if you seem to be running out of time write down your ideas as notes or dot points so the marker can see that you were able to answer the question.

## Take Home exams

Have a similar format and expectations to essay exams. In a take home exam you may be expected to do the exam at home but it is only distributed a short time before the due date.

### Requirements

These exams have a similar format and expectations to essay exams except that you do the exam at home. The paper is usually distributed a short time before the date of submission e.g. within 24 - 48 hours.

### Preparation

- follow the advice above for essay exams.
- organise your reference materials and notes for easy and effective use.

### Taking the exam

- establish a good setting for doing your exam: easy access to your materials, suitable conditions.
- follow the advice for 'essay exams' that will apply here.
- edit your work to ensure the quality of your responses.

## Seen or Open Question exams

Have a similar format and expectations to essay exams They vary from the essay exam in that you have access to a broad range of questions before the exam to allow time to plan a response In the exam you may have to respond to a more restricted range of questions under exam conditions.

### Requirements

These exams require you to write a number of essays under exam conditions. Generally the questions are made available some time before the exam and you have time to prepare responses. There is usually an expectation that the quality of the essays will be better than in an unseen exam.

### Preparation

- apply the advice 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.

### **Taking the exam**

- as this is a variation on the essay exam the strategies suggested above also apply here.
- focus on writing to time and writing well.
- allow time for proof-reading and editing to ensure the quality of the essays.

## **Open Book exams**

Have a similar format and expectations to essay exams. They are different in that you are allowed to use notes and/or books in the exam room

### **Requirements**

These exams have a similar format and expectations to essay exams. They are different in that you are allowed to bring and use reference materials in the exam room. The focus of the exam includes on your use of knowledge as well as what you have learned.

### **Preparation**

- apply the relevant advice for essay exams.
- prepare your resources so you can access any references immediately without wasting time e.g. use post-it flags to refer to key pages.
- write a summary or overview sheet with the most important information or page references on it.
- re-do given exercises and problems and add comments as necessary.

### **Taking the exam**

- as this is a variation on the essay exam the strategies suggested above also apply here.
- allow time for using the resources you have brought into the exam.
- when editing, check each of your responses to ensure that you have made best use of your resources.



## Oral exams

Oral exams are used to test oral language skills. Typically they are administered individually.

### Requirements

These performance-based exams require you to demonstrate your oral language skills, often on a theme or topic, sometimes to a stranger. To do well in oral exams you also need to have good listening skills.

### Preparation

- work on developing good listening skills as part of your preparation for this exam.
- identify key skills.
- revise the vocabulary, grammar, structures and themes covered throughout the study period and practise using them appropriately.
- practise speaking aloud - if possible with another person. This will help you in the area of pronunciation and make you feel more comfortable and confident when using the vocabulary and structures.

### Taking the exam

- try to remain calm throughout the exam.
- if you do not understand what is being asked, do not be afraid to ask for the question to be repeated or reworded.
- if you forget a word, try to explain what you want to say in a different way.

## Practical exams

Test students practical skills and techniques usually in laboratory, clinical or field settings.

### Requirements

These performance-based exams require you to demonstrate your skills and knowledge in a practical or field setting. 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.

### Preparation

- identify the key procedures performed during the practical 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 your skills.
- find out as much as you can about the setting for the exam, and plan responses for possible questions or tasks.

### **Taking the exam**

- remain calm and confident that you have the necessary skills.
- 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 the method used and observations.

### **Useful links** *(all open in a new window)*

There may be resources that have been created with your lecturers, addressing assignment tasks and topics specific to your courses. Follow the links below to find out:

[Business](#)

[Education, Arts and  
Social Sciences](#)

[Health Sciences](#)

[IT, Engineering and the  
Environment](#)