



# Preparing for exams

To succeed in exams there are activities you can plan and do:

- long before the exam
- in the final weeks before the exam
- after the exam

## **Before the exam: long term planning**

Exam preparation needs to be part of your overall planning for each study period.

- Start thinking about exams in the first week of lectures. Your lecture notes 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 in the lecture series 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.
- Check your Course Outline the Course Websites for information about exam format and any details of the exam content. 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 some time after the end of the teaching program, though occasionally exams are set at different times in the study period.

## **Useful strategies:**

- identify the most important issues in each theme from the course outline, lecture and tutorial notes, past exam papers
- 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

## **The weeks just before exams**

- confirm the practical details: date, location, starting time, overall length, number and type of questions, likely allocation of marks, exam weighting (% of study period mark)
- allocate more time for revision
- write practice answers keeping to the time that will be allowed in the exam
- check with a friend that your writing under exam conditions is clear and legible
- rearrange work or family commitments that might affect your exam performance.

Also think about some strategies for specific types of exams like multiple choice or open book exams which do require different preparation and practise.



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

- **Summaries** reduce the main ideas from lectures, chapters or readings to a number of key points that can be memorised. The key points are easier to remember and in the exam will help you recall your notes.
- **Recall cards** use 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.
- **Concept maps** 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.
- **Mnemonics** 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/concept that you need to remember.
- **Talking through concepts** to ensure that you really understand it.
- **Problem solving** applies your knowledge and understanding by solving problems (past exam questions, tutorials topics, questions from text books). Working with other students is a practical way to check solutions.

Visit the module [Getting started](#) (*opens in a new window*) for more strategies on remembering what you have learned (see Learning at Uni section).

### Before the final exam: final weeks

- it's a good idea to make time in the last weeks before the exam to fine tune your understanding of the topics and concepts. One way to do this is to 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 in the exam room.

### 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](#)