Preparing for different types of exams

Language and Learning Advisers
Learning and Teaching Unit
EASS Division
Overview

For the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences

Different types of exams

- Understanding the requirements of particular exam types
  - Essay exams
  - Multiple choice question exams
  - Short answer
- Preparation
- Strategies
Applying information

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- Exams assess how well you can select relevant information you have remembered, and apply it to a task.

- Revision needs to include practice at applying information – use recent past exams if available.

- Some exam tasks require you to connect or synthesise a number of ideas and apply them.

- Practise writing to time and by hand so you can keep your handwriting legible.
Types of exams

- Essay exams
- Multiple choice question exams
- Short answer question exams
- Case study
- Open book
- Take home exams
- Oral
- Practical
What’s required?
Demonstrate analytical skills, ability to recall and apply knowledge in specific ways.

How to prepare?
- Identify the main themes within the course.
- Develop sets of likely questions within each theme.
- Identify important references for various topics and work out how and where you might use them.
- Practise writing to time and under exam conditions.
- Understand structure of essays
Writing the essay

Essays have an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

• The introduction - states what aspects you are dealing with and your overall message/position

• Body - several paragraphs, each with topic sentence, followed by supporting sentences

• Brief conclusion sums up your position.

Keep to the time allocated for each question.
Analysing short answer and essay questions

Make sure you analyse questions carefully

• Identify **task** words (What are you being asked to do?)
• Identify **content** words (What is the question all about?)
• Note the **limits** (time, length, other aspects)

If question has several points to cover, make sure you address all of them. **Underline** them on the question and tick them off as you complete them. ✓
Essay exams – taking the exam

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• Plan time at beginning – give yourself a schedule
• Consider all questions - don’t discard too quickly
• Analyse each question carefully
• Draft an essay plan - what will you put in Introduction, Body and Conclusion?
• Check that you have answered all parts of the question
• Use dot points if out of time
• Keep an eye on the time - maintain your schedule & allow time to review and edit.
Multiple choice questions (MCQs)

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What’s required?

• Focus on showing that you know content.
• Need to recall and apply knowledge quickly.
• Must analyse question effectively and quickly.

How to prepare?

• Identify main themes within the course.
• Make sure notes are complete, thorough and organised into key topics.
• Memorise the key terms, theories, and applications so that you can answer a lot of questions in a set time.
• Practise the types of questions in your exam and check that your answers address each question fully.
• Practise to time.
MCQs - taking the exam

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• Read all the options for each question.
• Answer questions you are confident about first.
• Don’t be misled by the wording of the question.
• Check absolute claims e.g. ‘all’, ‘never’, etc.
• Mark those you need to reconsider.
• Carefully read the statement at the beginning of the question.
• Eliminate obviously wrong choices first.
• Do as many questions as you can.
• A calculated guess may be better than no response - check if you will be penalised for wrong answer.
Short answer questions

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What’s required?

• A number of questions with answers up to a paragraph.
• Variation as to what kind of questions - some test memory work, others test ability to apply learned concepts.
• Good question analysis skills are essential.

How to prepare?

• Follow the advice for multiple choice question answers.
• Practice with the variety of questions/problems that may be presented.
• Check your responses (perhaps with another student)
  • Make sure you answer the set question fully and rather than react to key words with an irrelevant response.
Short answer questions – taking the exam

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• Determine where the marks are allocated
  • divide your time and energy according to the marks

• If a paragraph or sentence is required try to write in full sentences rather than notes or dot points.

• If time is an issue, cover questions in areas of strength.

• Plan to allow time to check your answers.
Applying information

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- Exams assess how well you can select relevant information you have remembered, and **apply it** to a task

- Revision needs to include practice at applying information – use recent past exams if available

- Some exam tasks require you to connect or synthesise a number of ideas and apply them

- Practise writing to time *and* by hand so you can keep your handwriting legible
During the exam

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- Use reading time (10 minutes) to choose questions
- Write an exam plan – include prep time, writing time and reviewing time
- Start all questions where possible
- Never answer more questions that you are asked – extra questions are not marked
- If run out of time copy plan and/or finish in note form
- Cross out material you do not want examiner to mark.
General tips ...

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• Start with easiest questions first.

• Keep in mind marks and how they are allocated to the question you are working on.

• Skip hard questions - go to the next. Other questions may jog your memory.

• If you go blank or forget things – stop, breathe, relax and tackle something else.
Exam preparation resources

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Exam forum – where you can post questions

The $L^3$ EASS site has resources specifically dealing with exam tasks and questions.
For further information

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• Check your course homepage
• Contact the LTU for appointments with:
  - Counsellors
  - Language and Learning Advisers
  - Disability Advisers
• Access exam strategies information on the L3 EASS website.

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