

PRACTICAL STEPS



Preparing for Exams

- Rehearsing for exams
- Revision techniques
- Managing time
- Reducing stress

Much of the material used in this booklet is based on Bolton University's Learning Support and Development booklet entitled '**Revision and Exam Techniques**' by David Rudd which is available online via the Learning Support and Development homepage or in hard copy from the library.

REVISION

Revision quite literally means 'looking at something again' and revision at degree level should really be an on-going process. The level of understanding and thought required means that 'cramming' a couple of weeks / days / hours (?) before the exam is just NOT advisable and is likely to let you down in the end.



Reviewing material on a regular basis will help you to recall it better later on when revision becomes more focused towards the exams.

Make sure that you follow up any queries about topics covered as you go along otherwise you will get 'bogged down' at a later date with trying to revise something you don't fully grasp.

Try not to use this more focused revision time for learning new concepts; it is best to concentrate on developing your skills in what you understand.

It is a good idea to start to build some exam-focused revision into your schedule a good 5 - 6 weeks before the exam. (This is just a rough guide and it will depend on how much work you have done during the module as to how much time you will need to spend revising; it also depends on your preferred style of revision.)

- Devise a realistic and workable revision timetable or set goals
- Aim to produce a good concise set of revision notes
- Do what suits YOU best - don't assume that just because someone else does something differently you must be wrong!

Which of the following methods do you think would produce the most effective revision and why?

a) Start at the beginning of your notes and read through them till you've covered everything you have done this semester / year. Then start again. You go on like that until you've got it all memorised.

b) Take a particular topic, assemble all your notes on it and try to boil them down into a more manageable form - which you then put on cards. You carry these cards around with you and try to learn them when you have a spare minute.

c) Take a particular topic and try to write down everything you know about it. Then, when you've established where the gaps in your knowledge are, you go back to your notes and concentrate on the problem areas. You then set yourself questions on the topic, and practise them.

Remember: there is no right or wrong answer - we all have individual preferences and it often depends what we are revising as to what methods suits best.

Rehearsing for exams

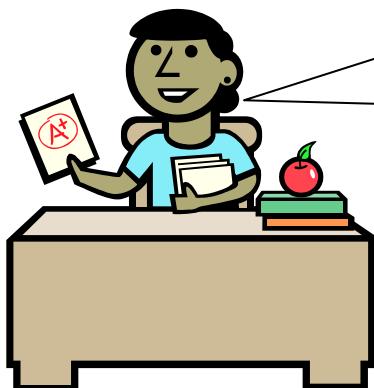
Revision needs to be active. Just passively re-reading through lecture notes is usually not enough.

An exam is an opportunity to show *how* you understand what you have learnt.

An exam is generally not just a test of how many facts and figures you can learn and remember; neither is it usually just a memory test nor just about regurgitating what you have learnt by heart.

Remember that at this level it's usually all about transforming the knowledge not just telling the knowledge!

This is a fairly typical response from an Examiner's Report:



It is quite possible that if many candidates had less information ... and more skill in presenting their knowledge and ideas, they would have received higher marks.

Revise topics by testing the existing state of your knowledge first. Not only will this boost your confidence, it will begin training your brain in the active recall techniques you will need in the exam. By doing this you will see the gaps in your knowledge more clearly and you can then focus your revision in a productive way.

ALWAYS ask questions when you are revising so that you are training your brain to work in an exam focused way.

REVISION TIPS

- Don't start by reading through your notes. Start by finding out the existing state of your knowledge.
- Do you know just a few isolated facts or can you show how these facts are interconnected, and have an awareness of what they explain?
- Try 'conceptual diagramming' or 'mind-mapping'.
- Return to your notes and attend to any areas of ignorance.
- Construct more detailed patterns / notes maybe using different coloured pens and paper to aid your visual memory.
- Try tailoring the length of your revision periods to the length of time you have to answer the question in the exam.
- Try and recall what you have learnt at frequent intervals so you feel more confident that time is being spent productively. Ask 'What have I just learnt?'
- Focus on answering questions in your revision; after all that's what exams are all about! You can make up your own questions and refer to past papers.
- Start a revision group with your peers.
- Practice writing fast and legibly in preparation for the exam.
- Avoid negative thinking! You can't possibly know everything there is to know about a topic but you can be well prepared with what you DO know.
- Refer to the LS & D booklet on Revision and Exam Technique

TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- **Eat healthily** - stock up on healthy fruit, whole grains & water
- **Sleep well** - take time to relax and do something for you before bed
- **Exercise** - go for a walk, swim, workout - get some fresh air
- **Take regular breaks** - this aids better concentration
- **Plan** your day but don't use this as a 'time-waster'!
- **ALWAYS praise yourself** for what you have done
- **DON'T 'beat yourself up'** if you haven't stuck to your plan or achieved as much as you wanted to in a given time
- **Make a list** of things you have to do before you go to bed so that you are not kept awake trying to remember things
- **Use positive self-dialogue:**
I can..., I am going to..., I will..., I choose to..., I choose not to...rather than I can't..., I'll try to...
- **Don't 'struggle'** think of it as a 'challenge' and if you do not get to grips with some aspect of your can make a decisive choice not to do it and concentrate on something you find less challenging

Any more you can think of?

MANAGING YOUR TIME

There is never enough time when you need it and on the run-up to exams time seems to just disappear.



One of the most important things when preparing for exams or, indeed, any kind of assessment is to make sure that you are as disciplined as possible about time you can spend doing what you need to do.

Do you find that housework, washing the car, room-tidying or organizing your desk suddenly become inviting tasks when you really should be revising?



It is very easy to become distracted when you are under pressure to meet deadlines; there will be people in your life or tasks that you have to see to that can become time-wasters or time-takers. If you know what they are you can develop ways of limiting the amount of time they take up.

Focus on your time-wasters and time-takers and think about strategies you could put in place to limit or eliminate the things that distract you.

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Who are your 'time takers'?

What are your 'time wasters'?

Which ones can you eliminate?

Which ones can you limit?

HOW AND WHERE DO YOU WORK BEST?

You have probably undertaken some kind of 'learning style' test at some point, perhaps when you first joined the university, and you may have a good idea of how you learn best e.g. auditory, visual etc. However, students lead such busy lives that it is likely that you learn in different ways at different times depending what is going on for you at a particular time and where you are.

This brief reflective questionnaire is designed to help you to think about when you are in your best learning frame of mind and environment.

Be as reflective as you like, it will help you discover out what's best for YOU and will help you to plan your revision better.

Where do I prefer to study?

What time of day do I study best?

How long can I concentrate before needing a break?

Do I work best in silence? If not, what kind of 'noise' do I like?

Continued

What things distract me from concentrating most?

What circumstances help me study and concentrate well?

How easy /difficult is it for me to achieve my ideal working environment?

What can I change to make things better?

It is easy to *allow* yourself to become distracted but you *can* take steps to reduce interruptions and distractions!

