

## Preparing for an Exam with Confidence

Exams can be a stressful and nerve wrecking experience for most students. One may feel unhappy with results obtained in past exams and feel that these grades can not be improved. Do not despair because this can all be changed by consistently applying key strategies in exam preparation.

Time management skills are crucial when preparing for exams and when mastered, will result in high achievement. Students who wait until a week or so before exams to study for a term or a year's work will rarely earn the high grades desired. Cramming is a definite no-no and will only result in increased anxiety on the day of exam. It will most likely fail because there is just too much information to be assimilated and integrated by the brain and too little time. Do not cram! Instead, manage your time throughout your school term or semester so that study becomes a part of the daily routine.

Make a schedule that include homework, study and recreational activities and stick to it. Sports, hobbies or reading are beneficial to your overall well being but ensure that these activities don't take up too much time. One may choose to watch TV for an hour after school and this is acceptable as it helps in unwinding and relaxing.

Exam preparation always begins on day 1. If students keep abreast of their notes consistently, then closer to exam, there should be few, if any issues. This is where the study schedule becomes important. My personal preference is for students to spend at least 30-45 minutes each morning, before school or at school (before classes) reviewing material. The brain is rested in the early morning and is much better equipped to process and remember material. Do not try to study for more than 45 minutes at a time. It is difficult for your brain to concentrate and assimilate material for longer than this period. So, take breaks while studying.

Note taking is an important strategy for exam success. Even if notes are given at school, choose to write your own notes at home. Paraphrase the teacher's notes. Use as many sources as possible so that notes written are comprehensive. Choose to hand write these notes as hand writing will help in memory more than typing. When reviewing material have a notepad close by so that you can jot down any questions you may have and then ensure that these questions are answered.

Review past assignments and tests. Highlight areas of weaknesses and spend extra time on those areas. Students that are studying the sciences where many drawings are involved, must allocate time to practice these drawings. This will build skill and confidence if a drawing is required in an exam.

Check and recheck your course syllabi. Many times teachers may be unable to cover every aspect of the syllabus but this should not be used as an excuse for poor performance. If a topic

has not been taught, use the systems available to you such as textbooks, libraries, online resources to learn those topics.

Mnemonic devices are useful to many students. Mnemonic devices refer to techniques that aid in recall of information. They may include abbreviations, acronyms, rhymes etc. For example, in chemistry “OIL RIG” is often used to help students remember “oxidation is loss and reduction is gain”. Make up your own devices to help in those areas you have difficulty remembering.

I shouldn't need to say this, but I will for emphasis. Students, do not miss your classes unless this is totally unavoidable due to illness or major crisis. When in class, listen to your teacher keenly. Do not be afraid to ask questions.

The biggest mistake students make during the period of examinations is that they do not sleep. Sleeping is NOT a waste of your time. It is an important time for refueling your brain. Please sleep at least 6 hours per night, 8 hours is ideal especially the week before your exam. Eat well. This means avoiding those well loved junk food. You need to feed your brain, so choose a healthy diet which include lots of fruits and vegetables.

Anxiety is a natural human emotion and can and should be expected on the day of your exam. Know that this is normal and practice techniques which can help you to be calmer. Breathing exercises may help you to relax. This is the practice of taking slow and deep breaths. This can be done before or even during an exam. Walking before an exam can also assist in relaxation.

The above tips can only be useful with commitment. Exams are a normal part of life and if these guidelines are followed you will confidently be able to enter your exam knowing that high grades will be achieved.