

Exam Technique

● Preparation

- before the exam
 - **study technique**
 - **know the subject**
 - have confidence
- during the exam
 - **plan strategically**
- after the exam
 - relax
 - it was only an exam!

● Study technique

- **read the literature**
- **understand the subject**
- not “just” reading
- thinking is required
- assimilate
- work through examples
- be able to explain
 - written (e.g. exams)
 - oral (presentations)

Preparation: before the exam

- **Read the literature**
 - course book (if used)
 - **course notes**
 - **terminology/definitions**
 - prepare summaries of each course topic (1 page)
- **Revise during the course**
 - **step-wise development**
 - NOT final panic !!!
- **Give definitions**
 - peer (own level)
 - less technical level
 - **in summary form**
 - **in detailed form**
- **Study previous papers**
 - **analyse question types**
 - look at the style
 - important topics ?

Exam question style

- **Descriptive** (e.g. describe... / discuss...)
- **Factual** (e.g. define... / name...)
- **Comparative** (e.g. pros and cons of...)
- **Calculations** (e.g. calculate ... (showing each step))
- **Demonstrations** (e.g. prove that ... / show that ...)
- **(Pseudo)coding** (e.g. write a function to...)
- **Thought/opinion** (e.g. what does X imply / mean ... ?)
- **Other?** (be creative - state assumptions)

Exam game plan

- Check the **total time** for the exam
- Work out **time / question** - be disciplined
- **READ ALL QUESTIONS** at the beginning of the exam
- Allow time at the end for checking / corrections
- **Order the questions by difficulty**
- **Do the easiest ones first**
- “Guesstimate” the relative importance of each topic
 - from the study plan & lecture notes
 - spend a proportional time studying each topic

Model answers to questions

- **“Grocery list”**
 - fact / definition #1
 - fact / definition #2
 - fact / definition #n
 - short discussion of items on the list
- easier to formulate an answer and helps to organise thoughts
- **Main points + details**
 - heading #1
 - heading #2
 - heading #n
 - detailed discussion of each heading on the list
- good organisation method in general - writing reports / presentations

Model answers to questions

- **Compare / contrast**
(pros/cons) (+ve/-ve)
- single topic A

A	pro	con
#1		
#2		
#n		

- discussion of points
- gives a visual framework

- Two topics, A, B

A	pro	con
#1		
#2		
#n		

B	pro	con
#1		
#2		
#n		

- discussion of points
- note +ve A might be -ve B

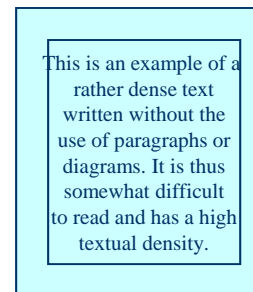
Model answers to questions

- **Proofs / demonstrations**
 - use appropriate definitions / properties
 - develop the argument stepwise
 - STATE ALL ASSUMPTIONS
- **USE PICTURES AND DIAGRAMS**
- **Conceptual models**
 - choose suitable models
 - abstract at a suitable level
- **Give concrete examples**
 - help for yourself
 - help for the examiner
- **USE PICTURES AND DIAGRAMS**

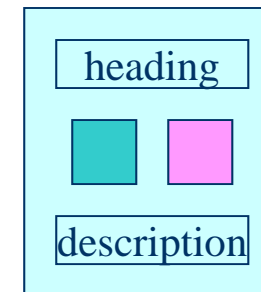
Language, pictures and text

- Use simple language (KISS)
- lists are easier to understand than long texts
- use a new paragraph for each point
- use pictures & diagrams
- (contains more information than text)
- develop the “red thread” in your argument

- Text density



This is an example of a rather dense text written without the use of paragraphs or diagrams. It is thus somewhat difficult to read and has a high textual density.



- several pages of text only are hard to read (dense)
- pictures help lighten the load on the eye and convey more information

During the exam

- **At the start**
 - **read ALL questions**
 - calculate time/question
 - be disciplined !
 - order questions by difficulty
 - **do the easy ones first**
 - leave time at the end for checking / revision
- **During the exam**
 - read the question carefully
 - check that you answered the question which was asked!
 - Take a short break after each question (3/5 minutes)
 - learn relaxation techniques
 - visualisation
 - meditation
 - breathing exercises
 - control “panic”

During the exam

- do the next question when time is up (discipline)
- leave time at the end for unfinished answers
- use 5/10 minutes to sketch your answer then write down your full answer
- use pictures & diagrams + appropriate text
- use creative guesswork ;-)
- **At the end of the exam**
 - use time for checking / corrections
 - check that all questions have been answered
 - check that all pages are signed and in order
 - mark continuation pages clearly
- **Please write clearly !**

After the exam

- Plan a celebration or party with some friends
- Accept that you did your best
- Post-mortems!
 - If the exam did not go well, identify why not
 - poor preparation? - prepare better the next time
 - exam nerves? - try learning relaxation techniques
 - “bad exam day”? - it happens - better luck next time
 - other reasons? - seek advice if necessary

My exam philosophy

- **50% “easy”**
 - know and be able to express definitions clearly
 - include basic knowledge for the subject area
- **25% “some thought required”**
 - awareness of how definitions are used and applied
 - demonstrate practical applications of theory
- **25% “more thought required”**
 - synthesise information and apply knowledge in new contexts
 - require an in-depth awareness of the topics required for the area
- “briefly” means 3/6 lines/topic
- “in-depth” means in detail (possibly 2/3 pages / topic)
 - (a half page is too little, a page is probably borderline!)