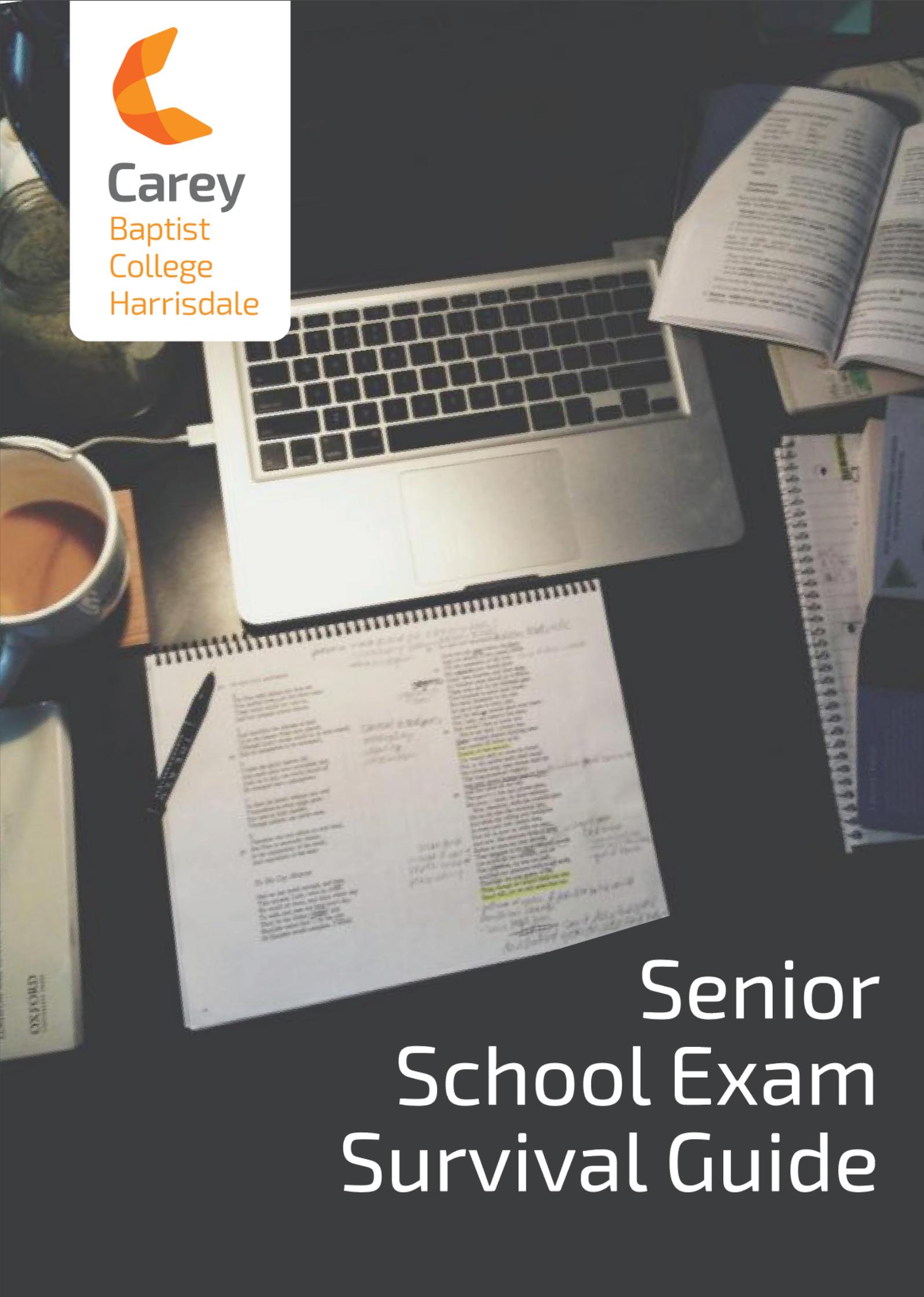




Carey
Baptist
College
Harrisdale



Senior
School Exam
Survival Guide

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Introduction

Let's not begin by sugar-coating things. Exams are tough and they are a major challenge that you will face. Preparing for exams will require time, hard work and determination. The good news is that **you can influence how well you do in exams**. Much of success in exams is the result of adopting the right state of mind, combined with good preparation, recent practice and the application of realistic strategies. These are matters that you can control.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the sudden increase in pressure and the higher expected standard of marking in Year 11 and 12. It is quite common for student's exam results in first semester and their ATAR predictions to be less than they hoped for. The key is to **learn from experience and not to give up**. The most important thing is **self-belief**. Self-belief in your own ability is critical to achieving the best you can. Hard work and letting some poor results become your motivation to improve, can lead students to achieve amazing improvements, even over one term.

It is not unreasonable to question the validity of exams as a way of measuring understanding. However, you are more likely to do well if you focus on having a **positive mind-set about revision and exams**, rather than thinking about past disappointments or worrying about what might happen. Exams ARE important because the ATAR exam represents the quickest and most direct pathway into the University course of your choice, but it is not just about what you are specifically learning. It's about learning how to learn, and developing the thought processes which are transferable to many fields of endeavour.

The **key factors that affect exam success** are:

Subject knowledge – background reading (this will be evident in the examples and details you will refer to in your answers) and taking notes.

Your exam history – familiarity with working under exam conditions.

Exam preparation – putting aside time to focus on the subject in an active and strategic way.

Exam practice – practicing in conditions as near to the real event as possible.

Experience of the subject – reading the course material to build your comprehension, looking up words you don't know and making sense of unfamiliar language and concepts.

Writing skills – exam success is affected by style, vocabulary, composition and clear expression. This is enhanced by using correct grammar, punctuation and accurate spelling.

Use of time – managing the time available to you to have more time for revision and study.

Attitude – the mental ability to think clearly, to remain motivated and to persevere.

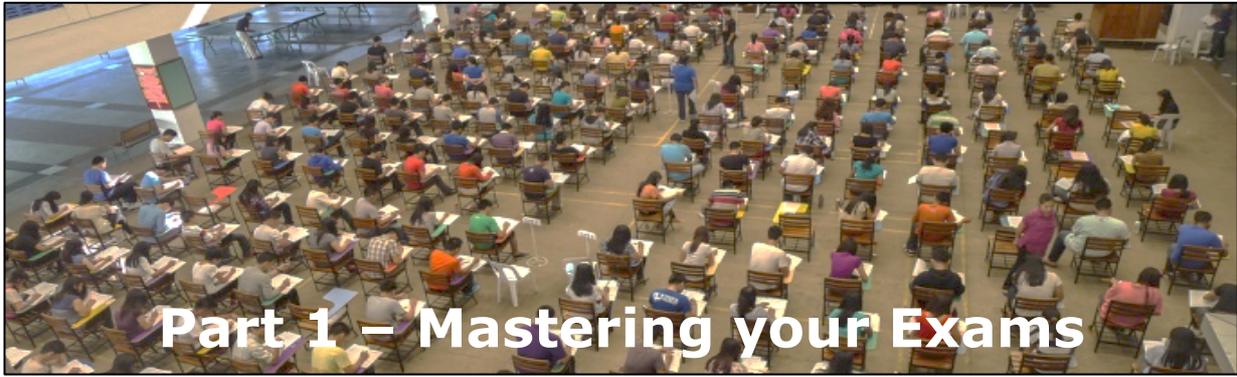
There are a number of strategies that you can adopt to perform at your best under exam conditions. It is important that you practice and experiment with different strategies so that you can learn from experience which is the most effective for you and which work best for the subject you are studying. **The key thing is to start revising early, get into a good routine, and stick to it. Revision is a vital component of study.**

This handbook focuses on a methodical approach to preparing for Year 12 ATAR exams, but this is just as relevant in Year 11 ATAR exams. Year 11 is the year where you can work out what works best for you, so that in Year 12 you can maximise your exam performance. **Your performance in the Year 12 final exams is the largest component of your final ATAR score.**

There is one more thing that is very important to remember. Exams only measure one skill-set, often being more about your mathematical ability and comprehension skills. They don't measure your decision-making ability, your ability to manage a business, or to help other people. **Your exam results are not the ONLY measure of ability or potential; they are just ONE measure.**

Mr R. Stirling
Assistant Principal Curriculum

Mrs K. Lacey
Dean of Curriculum



Part 1 – Mastering your Exams

Getting the results you deserve

Achieving your potential and achieving your best results depends on:

- Study, Work and Effort.
- Exam Techniques.
- Performance in the exam itself.

You need to develop a **repertoire of skills** so that during the exams you can deal with exam stress; be as productive as possible, feel confident and achieve success.

Exam strategies that work

Exams and tests cannot be left to chance. They require:

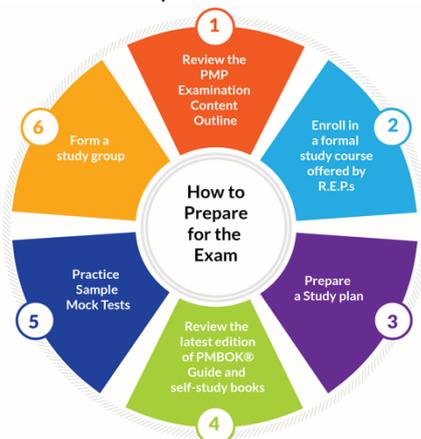
1. **Organisation.**
2. **Preparation and Practice** – Revision, Building Memory, Study Skills and Knowledge Architectures.
3. **Exam Skills** – You need to apply a methodical approach to the actual exam itself.

Organisation

- Organisation is probably the most crucial exam strategy.
- Unplanned and unstructured exam preparation is often not productive and is rarely effective.
- A sound study routine is important as it helps you develop your long-term memory so that you can recall material easily and rapidly.

Prioritise

1. **Balance**
While preparing for exams, you still need to strike a balance in your life.
2. **Commitments**
You may need to reduce some of your commitments in order to achieve your goals.
3. **Breaks and Rewards**
Prioritise what is important to you. Factor in breaks and rewards, and stick to them.
4. **Motivation**
Avoid impulse decisions and distractions to maintain your level of motivation.



Managing your time in the lead up to Exams

- Allocate each subject, topic and subtopic to your **REVISION STUDY TIMETABLE**.
- Display your study timetable where you can see it and where others can see it.
- If the timetable is in view, it will help you keep 'on track' and accountable to yourself and to others.
- It is all too easy to procrastinate or to ignore your timetable, if it is NOT in view. This is why Carey has introduced the Study Planner this year. It is a very good tool – make sure you use it!

Activity 1 – Plan for Success

The following **five point plan for success** identifies actions you can take towards getting into the 'zone' for peak performance. **No matter how well you do in exams now, this plan is likely to improve your performance**

Point	Action	What I will do and when, where and with whom
1. Want it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take charge of your attitude. • Develop your self-awareness (monitoring my performance; knowing what I do right in exams and revision; knowing what I do wrong in exams and revision; knowing what I need to do to stay motivated). • Maintain a balanced perspective. • Find the interest and enjoyment. 	
2. Live it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest, nourishment, water and exercise. • Create the environment. • Gain support from others. • Make the time. • Manage stress. 	
3. Know it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand exams and what examiners look for. • Understand your subject inside out. • Select what you really need. • Apply your material to specific questions. • Identify which memory strategies work best for you. 	
4. See it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify what exam success means for you. • Be clear about the process. • Envisage your success and the rewards. 	
5. Do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply revision strategies. • Learn material in an active way. • Practice answering exam questions. • Use a timer. • Use revision time effectively. • Use exam time effectively. 	

The five point plan is flexible – there are no absolutes or right answers. What goes into each aspect depends on where your current expertise lies, what you are willing and able to put into the plan, and whether planning in this way suits your style of working.

Revision

Revision is a process of revisiting course material in order to:

- Refresh your memory, reminding yourself of what you know so far.
- Check your understanding and fill in gaps in your knowledge and understanding.
- Reinterpret material in the light of other topics covered.
- Reorganise material to make it useful for recalling it in exams.
- Test your recall of each topic, making use of your learning under exam conditions.

Revision can be either interesting or extremely dull, depending on how you approach it. All five key aspects of the **five point plan for success** (Activity 1) apply to revision. Part of your revision strategy should consist of identifying ways for bringing interest, enjoyment, challenge and variety to each session.



Activity 2 – Common Mistakes in Revision Strategies

The table below lists poor revision strategies. Use the column on the right to identify which are true about your revision strategies by ticking the box ✓ that best describes you.

Common Mistakes	My Revision		
	Occasionally	Often	A lot
• Leaving all revision until the last minute.			
• Finding there is always something more important to do than revise.			
• Spending too much time planning revision and too little time revising.			
• Working alone too much.			
• Meeting other people to revise but spending the time doing other things.			
• Avoiding revision because it's too boring.			
• Reading, revision or making notes for some time and not being able to remember much about it.			
• Spending a long time on the same subject without feeling like you are making progress.			
• Revising too few subjects or topics.			
• Not being able to identify the really key points about each topic.			
• Revising too much information.			

Common Mistakes	Action to Take
1. Leaving all revision until the last minute.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the beginning of your program, set a date to start your revision. • Put this date into all diaries, planners and organisers. Also enter several reminders both before and after the date. • Ask someone you trust to prompt you to get started. • Decide (well in advance) three things that you will do in your first revision session. Write these into your diary or revision planner. • Use a structured revision session to get started.
2. Finding there is always something more important to do than revise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set yourself short revision sessions, leaving yourself the option to study for longer if you become engaged in the topic. • Timetable 10 minute slots at regular intervals into your diary in order to browse quickly through past exam papers, your notes and the syllabus. In that 10 minutes, jot down a quick list of what you will do in your next revision session. • Put time aside in your diary to do the distracting things at times either before or after your revision. • Start each session by reminding yourself of your motivation for taking your program of study.
3. Spending too much time planning revision and too little time actually revising.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on a rough outline for your plan, focusing on when you will study and the general subject area. Write any details in pencil only – or produce it electronically so that you can more easily update it. • If you tend to redesign your revision timetable several times, set yourself a maximum of three versions. After that, work with whatever you have got, adapting it rather than starting it from scratch.
4. Working alone too much.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is fine to revise alone if you know this suits you best. Many people prefer this. However, if you feel you are spending too much time alone, consider working occasionally in a Library, or set up a revision plan with a study 'buddy' where you can test each other. This is good for variety and can be motivational.
5. Meeting other people to revise but spending the time doing other things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before you meet, agree on the start and finish times, and decide on the area, topics or chapters you will revise. • Avoid mixing study with meals and social times. • Consider the number and people you are studying with. One study 'buddy' is usually best. Set ground rules that are agreed to. If it is not working, then it needs to be changed.
6. Avoiding revision because it's too boring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision doesn't have to be boring, so consider how you can make it more engaging. • Generally, varying what you do from one session to the next will add interest. • Setting specific tasks within a given timescale adds more challenge.

Common Mistakes	Action to Take
7. Reading, revision or making notes for some time and not being able to remember much about it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually a sign that you are not sufficiently involved with the task, because its repetitive, routine or not challenging. • Break your revision sessions into smaller sessions, with specific tasks to be achieved by the end of each session. • Check back at the end of the session to see what you've learnt. • At regular intervals, spend three minutes jotting down what you have been learning. Check this against your main notes. • Avoid simply reading through your notes. • Do something that actively involves you in thinking about the information, such as devising a mnemonic.
8. Spending a long time on the same subject without feeling like you are making progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a 'little and often' method – rather than trying to cover the subject in one session. • Start with an overview and return to the details in a future session. • Look for ways of engaging your attention as you study, making your revision more interesting. • Set specific goals for a session or a group of sessions, so that you can measure your progress. • Use the methods listed in point 7 (above).
9. Revising too few subjects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you know this is a mistake, then you have almost solved the problem. Plan your time so that you are able to revise more topics. • Aim to give yourself the opportunity of some choice of questions in the exam.
10. Not being able to identify the really key points about each topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is often a sign of not understanding the subject sufficiently well. If you are unable to detect what is significant in relation to other material in the subject, ask your teacher. • Take note of the topics that you received extra hand-outs on. • Read more about your subject. Browse through several general books on the subject to gain an overview of the headings, topics and names that appear most often. • Look at the index at the back of books and see which items are referred to most frequently. This often indicates the most important topics. • Note which items are referred to across several different areas of your subject. • Find out whose work is regarded as 'seminal' – i.e. work regarded as classic (or the leading authority) for the subject or area.
11. Revising too much information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can be useful if it gives a good sense of the subject. • It is worth spending time before the exam filtering out the details that might have been useful for the coursework, but which you won't have time to refer to in the exam.

Getting started

You should allow plenty of time to study for exams. Be aware when your exams are and when you are doing your weekly planning, **always know what is coming up at least 4 weeks in advance**. Don't leave it all to the last minute. Study can't be crammed if you want it to be effective.



When should you start revising for exams?

As soon as you have finished your first unit of work, chapter, or section.



How much time is advised?

Memory retention data suggests that 20-30 minutes per day in each content based subject increases memory retention dramatically. Try getting up early and putting in this time before school.



What do I do if I have left it too late to get started?

It is never too late to get started. Don't try to cover everything. Pick out the most important topics and focus on learning these thoroughly.

A lesson from the farmer's approach

A good farmer will plant at the right time, taking time to get the soil right, planting seeds deliberately at the right depth and the right distance apart. The plants are watered and fertilised regularly, using small amounts for many months. The pests are controlled and kept out. At harvest time, this farmer can expect a great harvest. Another farmer spends time going out with friends and plays video games. A week before harvest they spring into action dumping all their seed into the ground, taking no notice of depth or distance between seeds, and not preparing the soil. Even though all the seed, fertiliser and water has been dumped into the ground, the harvest will be a failure. **The moral to the story is that you can't cram your way to success and take short-cuts. Success comes from sustained hard work!**

Long-term Revision

Revising over time allows you to use a **structured program** to develop your knowledge and exam strategies; and it enables you to identify more difficult topics that you can return to over a longer period of time. Revision that builds the fundamentals over time is usually much more successful than starting shortly before the exams. Revising material from earlier in the course means:

- You are more likely to relaxed when learning, taking in information more easily and remembering it.
- You recognise material more easily as you have been over it already.
- There is less panic / stress, so your preparation feels more manageable.
- Going over material several times helps you to recall it.
- You are more likely to see the links between different topics.
- You increase your ability to understand the material you found difficult the first time around.
- You develop a broader-based approach which helps to build your knowledge base and develops good memory strategies.



If you need help in organising your time and preparing for exams, there are some good tips in the youtube video 'How to Prepare for Exams in Short Time'. (Study Smart, 11:15)

Simple steps to follow

Draw up a plan of what you intend to revise and when you will revise each major area.

1. Plan each individual session and your strategies. Planning out revision sessions:
 - Provides a natural starting point.
 - Helps focus the mind quickly right from the start.
 - Avoids wasting time in sessions through distractions and daydreaming.
 - Ensures the session is of real value.
2. Without planning, it is easy to fall into a dull, predictable, unproductive routine:
 - Reading through notes in an unfocused way.
 - Doing the same thing every session and becoming bored and easily distracted.
 - Daydreaming and finding excuses for doing something else.
3. Organise your notes so you can find what you need easily and quickly.
4. Organise your environment so it suits your revision style.
5. Monitor how you might be wasting time – such as through endless cups of coffee? Making phone calls? Consider how you will avoid this (perhaps use that cup of coffee as a reward after you have completed 30 minutes or a particular section).
6. Consider how you might sabotage your own revision success – and have a plan to counteract this.

Suggestions for getting started on revision if you are having trouble

- Start anywhere rather than worrying where to start. For example, simply open any file and jot down an essay outline from memory – anything that starts to focus your attention on your exams. Your mind is then more likely to be inspired about what you can do next.
- Choose something easy for your first session so that you can get an early taste of success.
- Pick your favourite topic. Quickly write down as much as you can recall about it without stopping or checking.
- Write for 5 minutes on one topic that you vaguely recall. See whether more information returns to you as you write. Then, compare what you have written with the material in your notes.
- If you haven't got a copy of the syllabus, acquire one as soon as you can. Read it through several times, comparing what it says with what you have covered in class. **Test yourself on each of the content dot points. Syllabus outlines are often used in the construction of exams.**
- Copy past papers from www.scsa.wa.edu.au/publications/past-atar-course-exams. Compare the questions that appear in these with the subjects listed in the syllabus.

Step 1 – Have a plan of attack

When you get your exam timetable check your exam times and place these into your study timetable. Start by filling in exam dates and other commitments such as work, classes, soccer, your best friend's birthday party, etc.

Keeping up extra-curricular activities and social commitments during revision time will help keep you motivated and sane. **An unrealistic timetable will fail within the first few days.** Work out which subject(s) need the most work. This will depend on how close the exam is, your current level of understanding, and how much the exam is worth as a percentage of your overall subject mark.

Working back from the exam dates, allocate time to study for each subject every day. Like a high school class timetable, you should be covering multiple subjects each day. The closer it gets to an exam, the more time you should spend studying for that particular subject.

Cramming for your exams in a few days is not very effective. It is theoretically possible to study one subject for 18 hours non-stop a day, but how much are you going to take in? By doing little bits each day, you'll avoid information overload and make the most of both your short-term and long-term memories. Plus, studying one subject for long periods gets boring. Having different subjects to work through means that when you get sick of one, you can switch to another. It gives your brain a change of scenery while still getting work done.

Instead of simply allocating a few hours to 'study' each day, specify what you want to achieve: be specific. **Set goals for each session.** This will help to ensure that you have time to thoroughly study for each subject.

Step 2 – Putting the plan into action

Regular breaks will help you to stay focused and motivated. Depending on how dense the material is, take a short break every 20-45 minutes. Unlike meal breaks, don't schedule these breaks into your timetable, simply take them as needed; whenever you feel your focus declining. You'll only need a short break from your work – long enough to make yourself a cup of coffee, go sit outside for a few minutes or play a round of solitaire, etc. **Don't forget to tick items off your study timetable as you finish them** – it'll make you feel confident.

Step 3 – Identify the essentials

For each subject you decide to revise, find out:

- How the subject breaks down into key themes or topics.
- The main points of view on each topic.
- The key debates in the topic over time.
- Which point of view you find the most convincing and why.

Step 4 – Summarise the essential information:

- As headings and key points, to structure the information.
- In several paragraphs, as the basis of an essay or extended answer.
- In one paragraph, as a theme within an essay or for a short response question.
- In one sentence, in case you need to make only a brief reference to it.
- Learn key definitions and diagrams by heart (the '**look, cover, write, check**' method works well in these cases).

Increasing your Chance of Success

- Two questions on the same subject could call for very different information or a different approach. Don't aim to write everything you know on the subject. How would the information for each differ, depending on the wording of the question?
- Spend time identifying the information that is really key to answering the specific questions that could be set for each revision topic.
- **Revise at least twice as many topics as the number of extended answers / essays** that you need to answer.
- Consider the obvious questions that could be set which would require you to compare or contrast or link answers across the course. Prepare outline answers for such questions.
- Read around the subject. Don't just rely on your notes. In some subjects, there are interesting **videos clips and documentaries** you can watch which are a really good idea for students that enjoy visual learning, particularly in subjects like Modern History.

Tips to make revision interesting

- **Revise with others**
 - Enables you to hear different perspectives on the subject.
 - Can assist you to express yourself clearly and logically.
 - Can show any misunderstandings you may have. You can test each other.
 - Discussing topics makes them easier to recall.
 - Helps you by identifying that others are having the same struggles as you.
 - Explaining concepts to another person is a way to ensure that you understand them.
- **Be creative**

Use colour, doodle and highlight your notes to remember key points. Then make sure you hang your artwork around the room to help refresh your memory.
- **Vary the time**

Vary the amount of time you spend on each topic, so that in longer sessions you have some shorter activities and some with a deeper focus. Spend several short spells on

topics you find difficult, rather than trying to absorb it in one session. **Try getting up earlier in the morning to use this time for revision sessions.** Hint: this works best when you get up, have a shower, get dressed and have breakfast ... and then start revising.

- **Reward yourself**
- **Invent likely questions**
Look up past exam questions on this or a similar subject. Invent similar questions of your own, based on the material you have covered. Thinking through likely questions helps to remember the material.
- **Find the links**
Look for connections between different parts of the subject. This may be of practical value in the exam if you are set questions that cut across several topics.
- **Chart it out**
Make a drawing that illustrates all the key points. A type of chart you could use is a **concept map** (also called a mind map). This shows concepts, ideas and the relationships among them. You create a concept map by writing key words (sometimes enclosed in shapes such as circles, boxes, triangles, etc.) and then draw arrows between the ideas that are related. This works well if you are a more visual learner.



If you haven't tried using a concept map before, check out the youtube video, 'How to Make a Concept Map'. (Lucidchart, 8:30)

- **Read / investigate something new**
Browse through new material if you are growing stale. What on-line resources are available? In History, there are a large amount of documentaries on most topics. **In Maths, have you checked out Wootube (Eddie Woo) or Khan Academy?**
- **Take sides**
Don't just learn the different viewpoints; decide which you think is the most convincing and why.
- **Change locations**
Go for a walk to refresh your mind. Revise outdoors.
- **Set personal challenges**
Complete 3 essay plans on urbanisation (or whatever topic you are studying) by a certain time. Devise 3 mnemonics a day. Write an essay plan in 3 minutes.

Activity 3 – Planning your Revision Timetable

- **Use pencil** – for paper-based timetables, plan in pencil and adapt your plan as you go.
- **Do it electronically** – this enables you to create a table you can easily adapt.
- **Use your diary** – map your revision goals into your diary or planner, so you are reminded of the next subject and topic you will be revising every time you look at it.
- **Broad blocking** – identify broad subjects to look at over a longer time span.
- **Use variety** – plan to use several themes or subjects in longer revision sessions.
- **Use starter activities** – plan activities at the start of the session as this helps to focus the mind.
- **Alternate your topics** – build in a balance of those topics you like with those you don't; **avoid leaving the most difficult till last.**
- **Use realism** – you will be more likely to stick to your plan if it is manageable and you build in time to complete other essential tasks.

Which of these suggestions do you feel would be the most beneficial to you and why?

Structured Revision Sessions

Pre-exam practice is invaluable in improving exam performance. You can identify what you really know and how you perform. You can develop your ability to work at speed and get used to the different sections and timing used in particular subjects. It is likely that the questions you practice in advance will help with those you ultimately select in the exam. You can get used to the types of questions asked. **ATAR exam papers (2016-19), marking keys and exam reports** can be downloaded from www.scsa.wa.edu.au/publications/past-atar-course-exams.

There is no set length for a revision session. You may find it easier to break one down into several shorter ones, or to continue after a short break, building on the one topic.

Revision Session 1 – Structure of the Exam Paper

The aim of this session is to develop your knowledge of what you can reasonably expect in the exam. Knowing what is expected will make it easier to plan out future sessions effectively. The more familiar you are with the questions, the easier it is to spot the information you need when you go through your notes. The more familiar you are with the way the questions are set, the more you feel you are in known territory, and there is less likelihood of unpleasant surprises in the exam room.

Instructions and information

Obtain a previous year's exam paper and read through all the material, other than the specific questions. Take note of what is covered, such as:

- The name of the exam subject.
- The date.
- The length of the exam.
- Where you write your name or number you have been given.
- How many questions you need to answer in each section.
- The time allocated to each section.
- Whether you are allowed to use a calculator or other equipment.
- Whether you are required to work in pencil (as in some multiple-choice sections) or pen.
- Any other instructions and information about the exam.

Compare these details with what was written in previous years (if you are able). You may find that the content of the information does not differ much from year to year, but the appearance may vary.

Timing

One of the **most important aspects of exams is timing**. Many students fail to complete exams, leading to poor results. You always need to tackle ALL questions in a paper, because the first few marks are usually easier to achieve than the last few. Therefore, it makes sense to stop writing an answer, even if you haven't finished it, and start the next question. You can always go back at the end, if you have time left over. As you look at the exam paper:

- Note the length of the exam.
- Note how many questions you are required to answer, and whether these are essays, short answers, multiple-choice, etc.
- Work out how long you have for each section.
- Work out how long you have for each question.

Exams (like the ATAR) will often have suggested times indicated for each section. If not, divide the total exam time between the number of questions you have to answer, giving equal time to questions that carry the same marks. For example:

- If 80% of the exams is essays, then 80% of the time should be spent in essays.
- If there are 4 essays to write in 3 hours, then spend 45 minutes on each essay.

Before you go into an exam, you should know how much you can write in the time available. This will enable you to know how much or how little you can write for each main point.

Activity 4 – Writing Speed

Try checking your writing speed by:

- Choosing any topic you are interested in.
- Setting an alarm for 15 minutes.
- Seeing how much you can write non-stop, as quickly as you can, until the alarm goes off.
- Counting the number of words you have written.
- Multiplying this by 4 to work out how many words you can write in an hour.

As a revision exercise, try this again, but write on a topic that you have been revising. Just like any training exercise, the more you do this, the faster you will become.

Revision Session 2 – Sort the Material

Information gathered throughout the semester or year is not usually organised in a way that best suits your exam preparation. Organising a better system can assist you to become more acquainted with the material, recall it, and make your course material more manageable for exam purposes.

Focus

Using previous exam papers, quickly read through the exam questions that were set on one topic over the past few years. Jot down a quick list of the main variations. Add other variations of your own to these questions if you think they are realistic. Examiners may ask questions on the major important topics regularly, but ask them in a different way. This will help to organise your thinking and help you to make decisions about the information you really need.

Gather

Bring together your paper and electronic notes on the subject, and any books or handouts where you may have written notes around the text or highlighted information.

Sift

- Go through your notes and texts, bearing in mind the likely questions you listed above.
- Select those items, from your various sources, that are most useful to those questions.
- Put aside any notes that duplicate information and allocate time later to reduce these down to one overall summary of notes without duplication.
- Ask yourself such questions as:
 - Am I really ready to use this?
 - In which questions would I use this information?
 - How much of this material would I be able to include, given the word limits.
 - What are the essential points?

Revision Session 3 – Condense and Organise

Having too many or disorganised notes wastes your time in searching through unnecessary material and learning things you won't use. Revising the essential is a lot easier if it is clearly laid out and organised. Set yourself challenges, such as:

- Reducing your notes down to a much smaller number of pages (an executive summary).
- Allowing yourself a maximum number of pages or index (flash) cards per topic.
- Setting time limits for organising a certain number of pages.

Reduce

Decide on the method you will use to cut down the information to only that material you are likely to use in the exam. This is much less than for coursework. Condense your notes using one or more of the following methods:

1. Rewrite different sets of notes into one shorter set of key points and headings.
2. Incorporate the material you have underlined or highlighted in your text and handouts into your notes.

- Set yourself a limited total amount of pages or notes per topic (e.g. 1 page) and stick to this (**don't just write a lot smaller so that you can fit more in – use normal writing**).
- Write your notes as a series of key headings, with few key points under each.
- Write out your notes again as answers to likely exam questions, choosing only information that is relevant to each question.
- Produce a series of index (flash) cards (see Revision Session 4), each bearing the key information on one topic.
- Draw a chart or diagram of the key information for each topic.

Organise

As you cut down material into one set of notes, organise it so that it is easy to use when you go through it next time. For example:

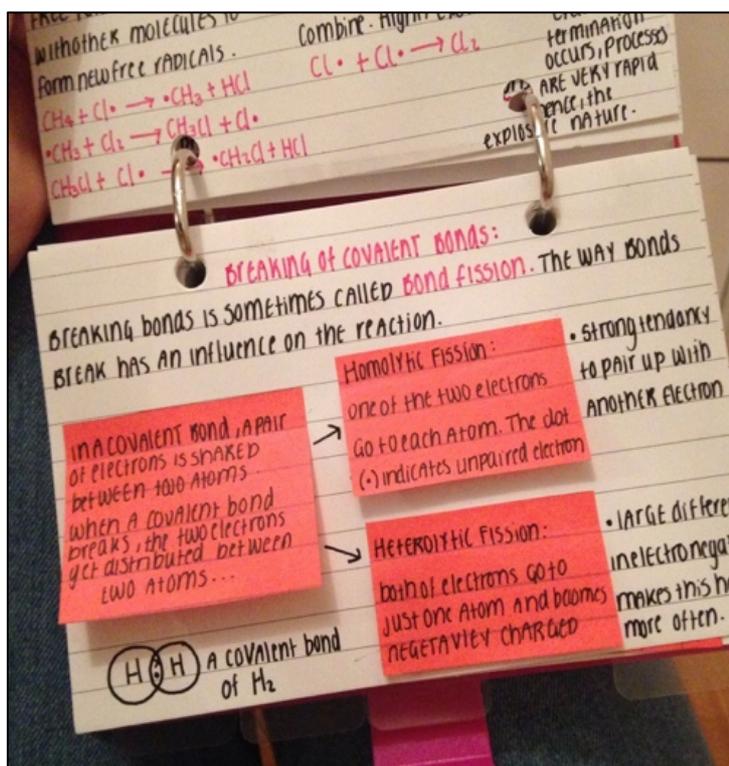
- Is it easy to read?
- Is it well labelled?
- Do the headings relate to the likely topics for paragraphs for exam questions?
- Can you use colour to make the key points, words and terms stand out better or link to different topics?
- Are the points clearly numbered?

Tips

- It is generally easier to remember information that is organised as a series of headings, with key information listed as numbered bullet points beneath these.
- As you reduce your notes, monitor whether you are including more detail than you might use in an exam, and if so, either remove that information, or rule a line through it so that you have a visual reminder of the less important material.

Fill the gaps

As you reduce your course material, note any gaps in your notes or understanding. Make a point of hunting out this information in the next few days, while the revised topic is still fresh in your mind.



Revision Session 4 – Prepare one Exam Question

Preparing one exam question gives you practice in organising material and helps you identify material you already have for a typical exam question and to spot any gaps. You will need 12 index cards (like the above example); several past exam papers; and your reduced notes on the topic. The question you work on may be very similar to one that comes up in the exam.

Focus

- Choose one topic for the session.
- Read at least twice through several past exam questions, noting the questions that relate to the topic you have chosen.
- Note whether any types of questions appear on more than one paper.
- Select one question and use it as the focus for this revision session.
- Read the question carefully, looking at how it is framed, and consider what kind of answer is required (see 'How exam questions are framed' and 'Interpreting exam questions').

Index card 1

- On the first index card, write out the question, so that you can easily see the focus of this set of cards.
- Consider what your overall answer will be and sum this up in 2-3 lines beneath the title on the first card (you can always improve your summary later).
- On the back of card 1, jot down a list of up to 9 possible paragraph topics, and add 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' to your list.

Check for relevance

Reread the question. Check that your list of proposed paragraphs are all relevant to the question selected. If not, then review these.

Look for gaps

Quickly scan your set of reduced notes and see if you have missed any key reasons that are relevant to your argument / answer. If so, add these to your list.

Hunt for additional information

If you are not sure that you have covered all the essential areas, you may wish to look back at your original notes, or refer back to the textbook. You may wish to amend your list of proposed paragraphs at this point. Check that all the points are still relevant to the question.

Note the key points for each paragraph

At the top of the 9 remaining cards, write a heading that sums up the focus of each potential paragraph. On each card, under the heading, jot down a legible list of the main points you would like to include in that paragraph, including essential data, terms, examples and significance, if relevant.

Be succinct

In the exam, you won't be able to write very much for each paragraph. This is why using a small index card is useful. Avoid:

- Adding in additional cards.
- Using very large cards.
- Using tiny writing so that you can include more.

If there is a lot to say, consider how to reduce this to the **most essential** aspects. This will:

- Help you recall the most important information later.
- Give you valuable practice in editing.
- Save you time in thinking through what to leave out of this question if it, or a similar one, comes up in the exam.

Introductions and conclusions

Use the two final cards for the main points you will include in your introduction and conclusion.

A good introduction varies between different subjects, but avoid vague, long or rambling introductions. The purpose of an introduction is to tell the reader what your essay is going to be about. Good introductions **usually include a short and concise sentence on most of the following:**

- It explains the question in your own words, defining any terms used, and provides a general background (very brief) or context of the topic, clarifying any key concepts.
- It introduces your main argument (often called the thesis).
- It states the purpose of the essay; this statement ties the aim/purpose of the essay to the essay question.
- It previews the stages through which the essay will develop.

Introductions go wrong when students go into too much detail, and then repeat their arguments in the main body of the text. Generally speaking, it is advisable to start off with short sentences, rather than complex sentences.

A good conclusion includes a brief summary of the paper's main points (just like a lawyer summing up of a case to the jury). Restate your main argument, but use different words. Weigh up the different arguments and decide which are stronger, if relevant. A conclusion should try to add something new, and not just repeat previous points. You can say why an argument is particularly strong and give justification, or you can refer to the significance of the topic. Connect your closing statement back to the question or to your opening statements. Reread the question and then the conclusion. **The conclusion should answer the question.**

Revision Session 5 – Prepare Multiple Answers

This session builds on developing skills in identifying the requirements of each question and applying information differently depending on what is asked. This will help you prepare a topic from several different angles, which helps your understanding and recall of the material overall, increasing your ability to answer any exam question on a topic.

Choose alternative exam questions

Choose up to five different exam questions from exam papers, all closely related to the topic you prepared in the previous revision session. Add your own variations by applying different key words that were used for other topics on past exam papers (like substituting 'Evaluate' for 'Describe'). Choose an alternative version of the question to the one from session 4. Read the essay question carefully, noting the exact wording of the question. Make a brief list of the ways the answer would be similar and different to that of the previous essay you prepared.

Index card 1

- On the first index card, write out the question, just like you did in session 4.
- Consider what your overall answer will be and sum this up in 2-3 lines beneath the title on the first card (you can always improve your summary later).
- On the back of card 1, jot down a list of up to 9 possible paragraph topics, and add 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' to your list.

Compare your list

Compare your list of paragraph headings with the one you produced in session 4. How do they differ? How far does this reflect differences in the way that the questions are worded?

Recycling

- Carefully consider how you can use any of the cards you already prepared previously.
- If some of the material you used in session 4 is relevant to the question you are now preparing, copy the material to the new cards you are working on. To save time, you could simply write a reference to these on the new cards, noting any differences you might want to make.
- If the material you need for this essay is not identical to that used for the previous essay, then write new cards for this essay, containing only relevant information.
- Check for any additional information you might need to answer this particular question.
- Continue to fill out a full set of the index cards for your paragraphs, as for session 4.
- Beware of repeating information from the previously prepared essay if it is not necessary to answer the particular question set.

Repeat the activity

- Choose another alternative question to this topic.
- Go through the above activity once more, noting the similarities and differences between the questions, and seeing what material applies to more than one question.
- Note the differences between the three essays as well as the similarities.
- Consider which cards, or details on specific cards, would be suitable for one question but not another.

Once you have considered several questions on the same or related topics, it is likely that you will be able to better understand how that topic is examined and work more flexibly with the material relevant to that topic without repeating the same information for every question.

Revision Session 6 – Mock / Trial Exams

Although doing practice papers may never feel exactly like doing the real thing, there is still a great deal to be gained by doing them. You will gain:

- More awareness of how you perform under time pressures.
- Time to reflect on your performance and identify areas for improvement.
- The ability to work on your exam technique in advance of the exam, which should boost your confidence for the real thing.

Arrange your exam space

Set aside a space for your mock or trial exam that is as similar to the exam conditions as possible:

- Use a table cleared of everything except the exam paper, writing materials, and water.
- Where you can easily see the time (watches are NOT allowed in exams).
- Where you won't be interrupted.
- Where you won't be tempted to go and look up anything that you had forgotten.
- With no distractions such as TV or music.

Practice questions and mocks

When you have revised a topic, it can be useful to put aside an hour to practise one question:

- Choose a topic you have prepared.
- Set the alarm so that it matches the time you would have in the exam.
- Read the question and prepare a quick outline plan to structure your answer.
- Write out your answer in full, without abbreviations and with an introduction and conclusion.
- Work as quickly as you can, leaving a couple of minutes to check your answer.
- Stop as soon as the alarm sounds. Do NOT let yourself go over time.
- If you have been granted **approved special considerations** (such as extra time, breaks or use of a computer) THEN PRACTISE UNDER THESE CONDITIONS. See Mrs Ong if you think you are entitled to these special considerations (and fill out the required form).
You need to practise the way you 'intend to play'.

If you are not used to exams (if this is your first major exam), then you might find it helpful, AT FIRST, to **work with your reduced notes** in front of you. If you really can't remember something, then you can check your notes. Looking up material takes more time, so give yourself a little extra time equivalent to the time you spent searching for the information. This is the 'trainer wheels' phase.

Aim to practise writing out answers to exam questions **without referring to any notes or sources**. The advantages are:

- You will have more motivation to learn all the material.
- You will get a better sense of the material you will need to remember.
- You will be able to write more quickly and continuously in the exam, making better use of the time available.
- You will feel more confident that you can keep going in the exam without the support of written prompts.

Full mock exams

Once you have practised answers for several different topics or sections, it is worth sitting a full 'mock' exam, in conditions as near as possible to the real thing. Consider doing your mock exam in a place you do not usually work in and is unfamiliar to you. **This will assist you to gain experience of writing under exam conditions.** Choose a place where you will not be disturbed for the full length of the exam.

Keep going

Even if you struggle to answer some questions, keep going for the full equivalent exam time. If you get stuck, still make effective use of all the time available:

- Visualise your reduced notes.
- Use your mnemonics.
- Think about anything that comes to mind about the topic.
- Check your answers for errors.
- List the things you wish you could remember.
- Consider starting a different question.
- If you have a **memory block**, where you can't recall the information, don't panic. Relax. Think back over your notes. Try to remember other facts associated with the point that you are trying to remember. If it doesn't come, leave it and return to the question later. Thorough preparation is the best way to prevent memory blocks

Practice sessions and mock exams vary greatly in how useful they feel at the time. It is important to keep them in perspective. Consider the practical lessons that can be drawn from them to build on your strengths and address areas for improvement (see Activity 5).

Revision Strategies to Improve Memory Retention

- **Peer-to-peer explanations**
When students explain what they've learned to peers, memories are reactivated, strengthened, and consolidated. This strategy not only increases retention but also encourages active learning.
- **The spacing effect**
Instead of covering a topic and then moving on, revisit key ideas throughout the school year. Research shows that students perform better academically when given multiple opportunities to review learned material. This is why teachers often incorporate a brief review of what was covered several weeks earlier, or use homework to re-expose students to previous concepts.
- **Frequent practice tests**
Similar to regularly reviewing material, giving frequent practice tests can boost long-term retention and helps protect against stress, which often impairs memory performance. Practice tests can be informal and ungraded, such as a quick quiz. Breaking down one large formal test into smaller tests over several months is an effective approach.
- **Mixing it up**
Instead of grouping similar problems together, mix them up. Solving problems involves identifying the correct strategy to use and then executing the strategy. When similar problems are grouped together, you don't have to think about what strategies to use – you will usually automatically apply the same solution over and over. Mixing the order of concepts or events up forces you to think more deeply.
- **Combine text with images**
It is often easier to remember information that's been presented in different ways, especially if visual aids can help organise the information. For example, pairing a list of countries occupied by German forces during World War II with a map of German military expansion can reinforce that lesson. It's easier to remember what's been read and seen, instead of either one alone.

The 'time paradox'

Even if you are used to exam revision, it can be rather daunting to know that there are hours of unstructured revision time ahead, all devoted to one large subject. It can feel as though there is not enough time to cover everything and at the same time that there is too much time until the exam (or between exams).

This apparent contradiction can make it difficult to settle down to revision. Planning individual sessions can help you to manage your time by providing short-term goals and outcomes.

Activity 5 – Learning from Practice

Complete the following questionnaire soon after you have finished the practice paper or mock exam in Revision Session 6:

- Are you better at some question types than others?
- Which memory strategies worked best for you?
- Did you choose the right questions?
- Did you answer the questions in the best order for you?
- Can you tell how good your paper is?
- Did you time the practice session well?
- How was your writing speed?
- Read through your practice answers. Is your line of reasoning clear?
- Did you write an essay plan and stick to it?
- Did your answers contain some or all of the items in the section 'Ten characteristics of good exam essays'?
- Did you struggle to write the introduction and conclusion?
- Did you proofread your work? Is your work legible and free from careless errors?



Part 2 – Building Memory

Remembering what you have learnt so that you can use the material flexibly and at speed is an important aspect of exams. You need to be able to use material flexibly, much more than you need to repeat course information by rote. **Your capacity for recalling information under exam conditions is assisted by working with material, organising it, reducing it down, and applying it.** Success in exams is not just about memory retention. The question that you have to answer is seldom exactly what you have prepared, and you need to decide what to put in, and what to leave out. **However, success starts with a knowledge and understanding of the course content.**

Our ability to recall under exam conditions depends on how effective we are at encoding information into memory in the first place. The **effort we take to make information memorable is often more relevant to our remembering it** than whether we were born with ‘good memories’ or not. You can train your memory to work more effectively.

People who are successful at exams generally leave little to chance. They revise intensely, building knowledge over the longer term, and make use of many different memory strategies in the lead-up to the exam. This means that they have much greater control over what they can remember at a given time.

Layered approaches

Our understanding of new material and our recall of it can be built up in layers. This is especially useful for difficult and complex material. First, look for the easiest and simplest text or version. Use this to provide a basic foundation before moving on to more difficult material.

The first time you cover the information, you may only get a vague sense of the topic. The second time, you will start to recognise some of the information as familiar. By the third time, you are likely to be looking actively for what is familiar, as well as noticing variations. You should start to look consciously for details such as names or terms, and see if you can remember them without looking.

Each time you cover the material from a different angle, your brain will build up a richer memory impression of the material, making it easier to recall in the future. Even if you can't remember some fine layers from the higher layers, such as Layer 5 in the table below, you are more likely to remember the foundation information in Layers 1-3, and this may prompt the memory for details from the higher layers.

Layer 1 – Rough outline and some basic facts.

Layer 2 – Less basic, more detailed reading.

Layer 3 – A more thorough approach to understanding the core information and some unusual features.

Layer 4 – Reading around the subject to understand issues, unusual applications, controversies, related material.

Layer 5 – Specialist and wider reading; more focused approach to remembering specific details.

Repetition

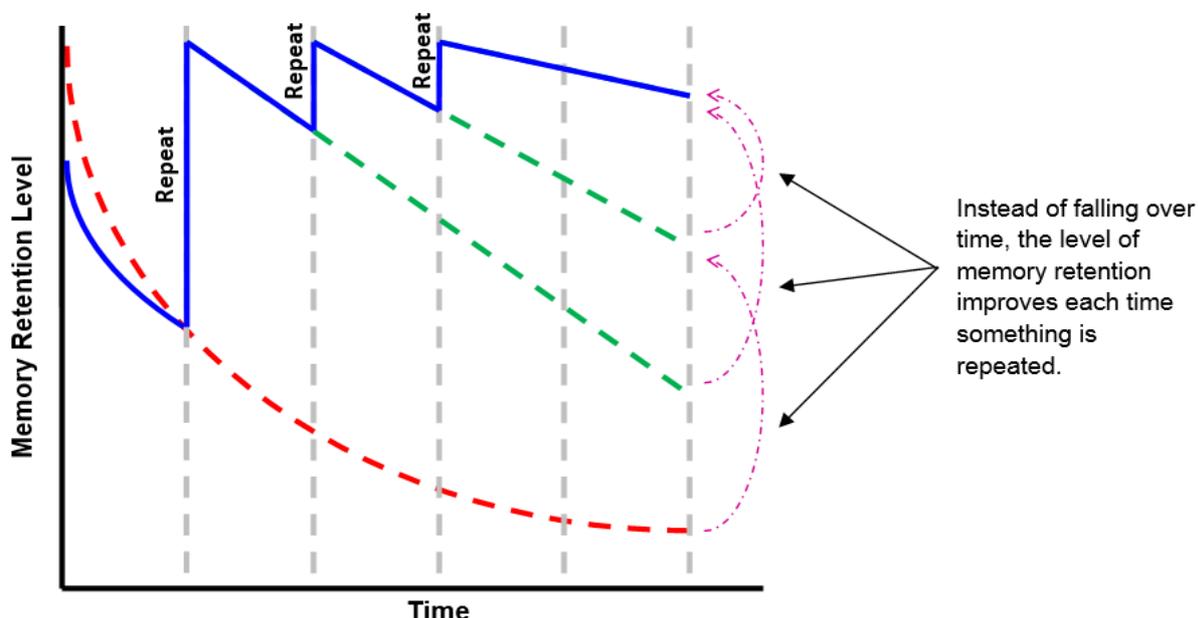
We build up a more exact memory if we are exposed to the same material from several different perspectives. This builds up an internal picture of what we are trying to recall. We are more likely to build up a sophisticated picture if we combine information taken from a variety of different sources (books, direct experience, reflection, our own notes, discussion and videos).

Different authors write about a different subject in slightly different way, with individual emphases, alternative references, or their own explanations. Reading several accounts means that we are more likely to find a version that fits the way we take in the information and will make the most sense to us.

The more times we encounter something, the more likely we are to recall it. When revising, **covering similar ground several times for shorter periods is more likely to be effective than spending a long time on the same material on only one occasion.**

Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve

Graph 1: Change in Memory Retention over Time involving Repetition



Conclusions

- ✓ We forget more than 1/2 of what we learn within 1 hour.
- ✓ We forget 2/3 within 1 day.
- ✓ After 5 repetitions we can retain ~ 95% of what we learn.

We often think of memories as books in a library, filed away and accessed when needed. But they're actually more like spiderwebs, strands of recollection distributed across millions of connected neurons. When we learn something new, the material is encoded across these neural networks, converting the experience into a memory.

The way that memory works is that when we learn a new piece of information, we make new synaptic connections. Two scientifically based ways that students can retain learning **is by making as many connections as possible** – typically to other concepts, thus widening the 'spiderweb' of neural connections – but also by **accessing the memory repeatedly** over time.

Experiments have shown that **without any reinforcement or connections to prior knowledge, information is quickly forgotten – roughly 56% in one hour, 66% after a day, and 75% after six days.** Repeatedly accessing a stored but fading memory – like a rule of geometry or a crucial historical fact – rekindles the neural network that contains the memory and encodes it more deeply.

What I need to remember

Although exams are not just about memory, it certainly helps if we can remember the material we have covered. This also makes us feel more confident in exams if we feel that we have a good grasp of the content.



Preparing for exam essays

Exam essays are usually shorter than those you produced in your coursework. You need to remember:

- The amount of suggested time each essay is assigned and be ruthless about sticking to this – every minute you go over is one less minute on another question.
- Material for at least twice the number of topics as the number of questions you are required to answer, in order to have a reasonable choice of questions.
- The key points for each specific question, listed as headings, with details organised in level of importance beneath these headings.
- Less detail about each key point than you would need for a coursework essay.
- The key names, terms and dates that you need to refer to support each point that you might wish to make.
- Background information that helps you to make sense of the subject in your own mind, but only include minimal background details in your answers.
- To answer **THE** question, the **WHOLE** question and **NOTHING** but the question.

Preparing for short-answer and multiple-choice sections

- Timing is critical in short-answers. It is easy to go over time on one answer. Make sure you are aware of exactly how much each question is worth, and divide up the time by the number of marks allocated. **Stick to your intended timing ruthlessly.** You can always come back later if you finish early.
- For short-answer and multiple-choice questions, there is really no substitute for learning as many aspects of your course as you can. A broad knowledge is required for these sections.
- Short answers do not require depth; one or two sentences per point is usually sufficient. **Try to include as many points as there are marks allocated.**
- You need to know the key points, definitions, diagrams and terms, under headings or questions for all aspects of your program.
- As you revise, consider whether the information you are learning lends itself to a short answer or multiple-choice question. If so, jot the information down onto a card, and carry the cards around with you to test your recall in spare moments.

Preparing for technical subjects

You will need to learn:

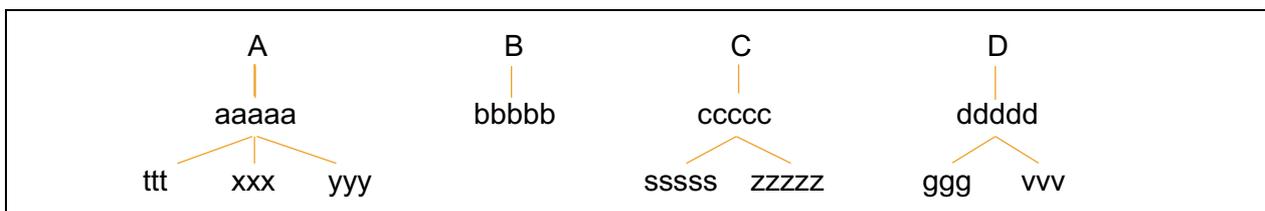
- Typical problems, theories and the procedures you need to apply to solve them.
- Each step of the problem-solving procedures, in the correct order.
- Very precise information, exactly as it was given to you, as well as a general understanding of the concepts.
- Mathematical formulae and how to apply them.



Memory Triggers 1 – Group and Label

Around 5 things

It is easier to remember information if you break it into around five groups or 'chunks'. It is harder to remember six chunks or more. If this still leaves you with more 'chunks' to remember, group these further, until you have several layers of 3-5 chunks.



Labels matter

Giving a descriptive name to each group helps you remember it.

Like with like

Group similar material together. It will feel as though there is less to remember, and will reinforce your recall of related material.

More can be easier than less

It isn't how much we have to remember that really matters, but how well we organise this information in the memory. It can be easier to remember more information than remembering less, if it is well organised. 10 items can be easier to remember than 7 IF you:

1. Break the 10 items into 3 sets of 3-4 items. It is worth looking first for logical groups.
2. Find an association between the 3 items.
3. Actively consider a way of recalling the information later.

Activity 6 – List of 10 Items

Time yourself learning this list of items:

- (1) Oranges, (2) Bridge, (3) Arteries, (4) Sun, (5) Chocolate, (6) Veins, (7) Limes
(8) Horse, (9) Capillaries, (10) Lemons.

Six of the items belong to two categories, **blood vessels** and **citrus fruit**. Labelling these makes it easier to remember those 6 items, even though the total number of items (including labels) is greater.

Blood vessels: arteries, veins, capillaries

Citrus fruits: oranges, lemons, limes

Memory Triggers 2 – Association

The **basis of almost all memory training is exploring the power of association. Memory works by making links between new material and what the brain has already learnt.**

If something stands out as odd, bizarre or unexpected in any way, the surprise of this can help to log the information in the memory. You can create this effect by simple devices such as the way that you lay out the information out on a page. Use colour to help you remember a page of information, or applying the material to an unexpected context. For example, to remember blood vessels, imagine them running on the outside of the body with labels or flagpoles bearing their names. The **more unusual, strange or shocking the association you can make, the stronger impression on your memory.** This sounds strange, but it works.

Another way this can work is by associating information with real people. You can create this effect by linking people and characters relevant to you with the material that you have to learn. For example, imagine your favourite musicians, pop stars, TV characters, football players or heroes explaining your subject. Hear the details in their voices. How would the material impact upon their lives?

In Activity 4, four items, (2) Bridge, (4) Sun, (5) Chocolate and (8) Horse, were not logically linked. These can be linked by making a creative association. For example,

- **Tell a story** – imagine the four items in a scene or story that immediately links them.
- **Picture** – visualise the 4 items in an unusual association.

Whichever method you use, it is important to find the version that captures your imagination. Example: the *sun* melting a *horse* made of *chocolate*, which pours away under a *bridge*.

Most of the material you will need to remember for exams will be logically linked, but the logic may not be immediately apparent. This may be because you don't yet know the material well enough to know the link. Names and technical terms or words in other languages can also lack an immediate logical link.

Memory Triggers 3 – Make the Material Meaningful

It will be much harder to remember material that doesn't make sense to you.

1. Check initial understanding

Check whether you understand the material as you read it through. If it doesn't make sense, stop and work out what it means. Check another source which may explain it in a different way.

2. Write it out

Jot down an outline of the material without checking your notes. If you need to keep checking, this might indicate that you haven't fully understood it.

3. Apply it

Can you recall the information easily, in your own words; when answering past exam papers; or questions you set yourself?

4. Explain it to someone else

Can you explain the material to someone else without either of you becoming confused? If you can't explain something clearly in words, you will not be able to write it clearly. Encourage them to ask you questions, and see whether you can answer these.

If the material doesn't make much sense to you:

- Go over it again, to get the main idea.
- Reread it, focusing on difficult areas. Different versions may be easier to understand.
- Discuss it with someone else who knows the subject.
- Write out the material in your own words.
- Draw a chart or diagram to connect the different aspects.

It may be easier to remember information if it can be connected to material that has a personal significance to you, such as: significant numbers in your life (such as birthdays or house numbers); people you know, or have read about or seen on TV; how you or people you know could be affected by an issue, or respond in a given situation.

Memory Triggers 4 – Organise the Information

The **brain finds it much easier to remember well-organised information**.

1. It can find information more quickly and easily if you organise it logically.
2. It organises it in its own way if you don't organise it in the way you want to recall it.
3. When you organise course material, you are working with it in an interactive way, which helps you to remember it in the future.

Break it into sections

It is easier to remember material if it is **sub-divided into key areas**. You can then recall how many sections there are, either as a number or as a visual memory of blocks of material. This also makes it easier to select and manipulate the material to meet the requirements of specific questions.

Label it

Give each section a short, clear label which sums up what the section is about. This could be written as a question followed by an answer.

Number it

It is easier to remember a list if you know how many items there are on it, so:

- Number your items.
- Mentally state the numbers when you go over the list.
- Test yourself. How many items are there on the list? Which item is associated with which number?

List it

Lists are the easiest structure to draw up. They can be carried around and checked in your spare moments.

Structure it

It is easier to recall information if it is structured well. This means:

- Identifying the most significant points.
- Ordering points in order of importance.
- Breaking each key area down into sections.
- Identifying the sub-points for each section.
- Organising all of this into a diagram, chart or physical shape. This makes it easier to see how one piece of information relates to all of the rest.

Memory Triggers 5 – Use your Senses

Memory is 'sense sensitive'. It can work more efficiently and effectively depending on:

- How many of our senses: sight, sound, touch, we use when we are learning the material.
- Whether we have used our preferred senses when learning the material. We tend to have personal preferences for one or more sense and it helps to use these when learning material.
- **Active use of our preferred senses** when we are trying to recall the material in the exam. Many students find that using several of these strategies is helpful.

Visual memory

You may have a sense of where on the page, or in your notes, material was recorded, which helps prompt the mind to remember. If you can '**see**' where something is on the page when you try to recall it, this suggests a good visual memory. If so, developing your visual memory further can assist you.

Build your visual memory by:

- Presenting your material in visually distinct ways, such as diagrams, charts, pictures and cartoons.
- Making each page look different by the way that you lay out the information and use shape and colour.
- Checking actively to see where information appears on a page.
- Using colour and shape to highlight themes throughout a book, or to show where information can be found in a diagram or on the page.

Tactile and motor memory

You may find it easier to remember material through practical activities – **doing and feeling** (often called kinaesthetic). The act of making a diagram or writing out information may be what helps you to remember material, rather than 'seeing' it. If this sounds like you, the following strategies may work best:

- If you find something hard to remember, write it out as a text message to yourself.
- You may find that writing or typing something out several times helps you to recall it.
- Use your fingers to track information down columns, or to link information on a diagram.

First-letter invented words

Many people were taught to remember the colours of the rainbow by remembering an invented word that included the first letter of all seven colours: **ROYGBIV**. The first letter triggers the colour that it represents in the correct order: **R**ed, **O**range, **Y**ellow, **G**reen, **B**lue, **I**ndigo and **V**iolet. This is the most common form of mnemonic.

First-letter rhymes

Another way to remember the rainbow colours is by associating the first letter of each colour in a simple made up rhyme: **R**ichard **O**f **Y**ork **G**ave **B**attle **I**n **V**ain.

The planets in the solar systems can be remembered by the sentence:

My **V**ery **E**xcited **M**um **J**ust **S**erved **U**s **N**oodles.

M = Mercury, **V** = Venus, **E** = Earth, **M** = Mars, **J** = Jupiter, **S** = Saturn, **U** = Uranus, **N** = Neptune.

Narratives to aid recall

Some people find it difficult to remember whether port or starboard is left or right. A simple way to remember this is that both port and left have four letters, therefore port = left. An alternative method is by remembering the question – Is there any **port left** in the glass?

The narrative below relates to the bile pigment bilirubin, which is yellow in colour. Bilirubin is an antioxidant, which protects cells against the effects of free radicals in the body.

Billy Rubin always wore a yellow T-Shirt. He worked at the local prison where he protected the cells from attacks by a local gang, 'The Free Radicals'.

Dates and numbers

Dates and numbers can be the hardest to remember as they are very specific, however remembering dates is not as important as it once was (especially in essays). To recall these, you can:

- Repeat them to a beat.
- Break them down into smaller numbers.
- Link them to personal numbers, such as birthdays, house numbers or months of the year.
- Give each number a colour.
- Associate each number with an object that it looks like, such as a swan for the number 2 and build up a visual picture of the items.
- Associate each number with an object that it sounds like, such as 2 with 'gru', 4 with 'door', and a sound sequence to help you recall the numbers: gru at the door = 24.

Definitions and formulae

These are usually learnt best through repetition and practical use. Recite them as a rap or sing them, visualise them, apply them several times, write them out until you can do so without looking. Use the method: **Look, Cover, Write, Check**.

Fact-and-figure stories

If you need to remember many different pieces of information, link these together into one longer narrative or story. The story doesn't need to make sense – in fact nonsense or fabulous stories makes them easier to remember.

Fill the story with events that lead you to the information you need, in the order you are likely to use it. Visualise the characters and scene and give it atmosphere to help you remember it.



If you want to learn more about the subject of memory in greater detail, watch the youtube LBCC video lecture series, 'How to Remember for Tests' (LBCC Study Skills, 44:34); 'How to Improve your Memory' (LBCC Study Skills, 48:06); 'More Memory Tricks' (LBCC Study Skills, 46:17).

Knowledge Architectures

The methods described on the previous pages for improving exam recall can be built up over time, but are usually employed over the last few weeks of revisions. The strategies for recalling information are useful for being able to work at speed in:

- Recalling information.
- Quickly seeing how information links to other material.
- Being able to select the most relevant information easily.
- Planning answers based on key information.
- Recalling details.

Memory approaches are largely information based. Such approaches have advantages for speedy and organised recall. However, they can mean that other aspects, such as **relative significance and subject understanding can be neglected**. Without a good understanding of the subject, it can be harder to answer the unexpected questions or to make good choices about what to include and what to leave out. This can result in exam answers that:

- Are cluttered with unnecessary detail.
- Have too little focus and direction, so that your argument or point of view is unclear.
- Make insufficient analysis of the material.
- Demonstrate a weak understanding of what the question is looking for.



Students who do well in exams tend to know their subject very well. Sometimes you can produce good answers by drawing on the depth of your background understanding, and the information you have absorbed over time. This provides the **versatility** that enables you to answer a broad range of questions with confidence. A student who can combine good knowledge architectures with good memory strategies can feel more confident in exams. Information about a subject becomes really useful when it becomes part of your internal knowledge systems. This means working with the material in the following ways:

- **Focusing**
Identifying the specific topics, themes and exam questions that you need to know about.
- **Gathering**
Bringing together the relevant information from your notes, class, books and other sources into one set of notes.
- **Sifting**
Selecting relevant material to work with further, and putting other material aside.
- **Reducing**
Condensing remaining material down to the essentials, and retain only the material you have a realistic chance of using in the exam.
- **Organising**
Setting out material in ways that help you to find it, use it, recall it quickly and apply it easily. This can be done by putting material into numbered lists, index (or flash) cards, clear and well-organised charts, colourful diagrams, etc.
- **Hunting**
Identifying any remaining gaps in the information and hunting these down. The content objectives in the syllabus documents are a very useful starting point for this.
- **Manipulating**
Considering which details are the most relevant to a particular question.

Tips

- Work quickly – set yourself time limits.
- Work on several related exam questions at the same time, considering the differences between them.
- Set yourself limits for the amount of cards or pages you will use for each theme. This helps you to cut out material that you are not likely to need.
- Write out information in your own words to assist visual, auditory and motor memory.
- Write out information step by step to draw attention to each stage of the process.

A knowledge architecture can be considered as a more elaborate set of connections within the brain. Those who know the subject well tend to take in new information about that subject more quickly and see where it 'fits in'. Knowledge structures are normally developed over time; they are not usually features of last-minute revision. We build these structures by:

- Continued exposure.
- Interacting with the material.
- Questioning and reflecting.

There is **no real substitute for a genuine interest** in the subject. If this is the case, then you usually want to find out more. This means you are more likely to spend more time reading around the subject, actively thinking and seeking answers to the questions you may have. If you are not interested in the subject, you can work around this by:

- Actively look for a point of interest; the more we know about a subject, the easier it is to generate an interest.
- Set specific questions to guide your search for answers.
- Find a personal connection to the subject. Where might this material be relevant to a situation you may find yourself in?

Gain an overview

Aim to build up a good overview of each topic. This will help you answer a broader range of questions and see how details and new material fit into the bigger picture.

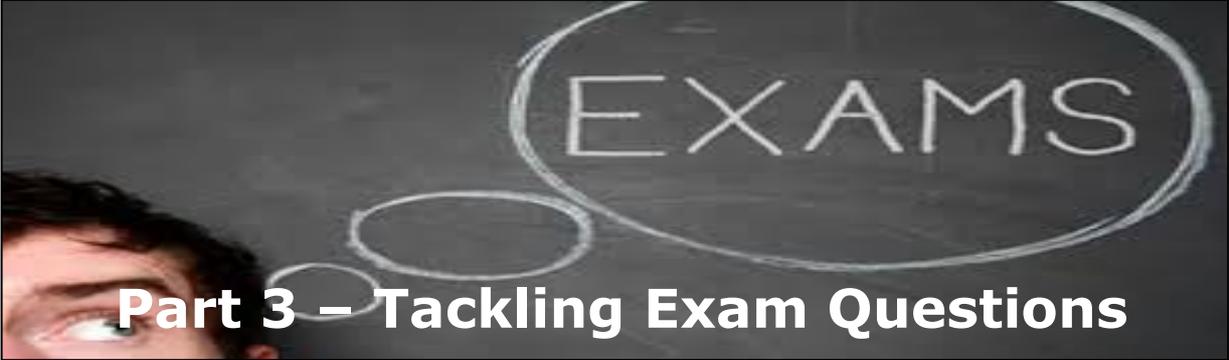


Interact

Revision is improved the more you interact with the material. **Long hours spent in reading through notes leads to boredom with the material.** Students that struggle often find that they don't know what examiners are looking for, or aren't sure what to include and what to leave out. You need to look for ways of making the subject more your own, such as recognising the significance.

One good way of interacting with the material is to **identify questions that you want answered**, and then set about answering them. Set alternative assessment, test or exam questions yourself, and the practise by answering them. By doing this, you will encounter a range of material that provides interest, context, background, knowledge and a better sense of the subject.

You may vary in whether you prefer to gain an overview first, and then add the detail, or whether you prefer to build from the details towards the bigger picture. Either way, it is important to keep referring backwards and forwards between the big picture and the detail.



Part 3 – Tackling Exam Questions

In the lead up to exams, **it is important to think about what exam markers are looking for.** You can feel more confident about your exam preparation if you have a sense of what exam markers do and the ways they are likely to approach the marking of your work. It is also **useful to know the features that characterise good answers.** This is a great question to ask your teachers, and the answer will vary from subject to subject. See if you can get an example of a good answer to look at. Check if your own answers demonstrate these features,

How Examiners' Mark	Implications for your Exam Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed Examiners mark quickly, usually having a lot of papers to mark. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your important points are clearly signposted so the examiner doesn't miss any. In essay-based exams, clarify your position / approach in the introduction and sum up in your conclusion. Make sure the first line of each paragraph clearly introduces its main point.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marking criteria Examiners will normally use a marking key where they allocate marks for specific points and characteristics of answers. They may allocate marks for relevant examples, use of diagrams (referred to in the text) or quotes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give thought to which key points the examiner is likely to expect. Most of these will be fairly obvious from the main textbook, your notes, and the way that the topic is normally broken down into sections. Organise these in a way that you can remember (see the section on 'Building Memory').
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marking range Examiners do not always mark out of 100. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different subjects use different marking scales.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks per question Examiners have maximum marks they can award for each question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have to write three essays, a maximum of one-third of the marks is usually given for each. If you only write two answers, you cannot gain more than two-thirds of the marks. Higher marks are gained from three reasonably good answers rather than two outstanding ones. In short answer questions, you won't gain additional marks for long answers. Mark allocations are normally stated at the end of each question.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks per point Examiners have maximum marks they can award for each point or for each of the various criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if you making great points, you should make them succinctly and move on to the next one (especially in short answers, where one point often equals one mark). You are unlikely to gain extra marks by going into great detail on the same point.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected characteristics of the answer Examiners will award marks depending on how far your answers meet the expected characteristics (see 'Ten characteristics of good exam essays'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practising exam answers and analysing your answers can assist you to develop the skills of writing good answers at speed.

How Examiners' Mark	Implications for your Exam Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer the question <p>Examiners are looking for answers to the specific questions you have selected in the manner it is asked.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the question twice in the reading time. Once at the start and then a second time more slowly, noting the key words and directions. A 'discuss' question is structured differently than an 'outline question'. Make sure you answer the whole question and leave out irrelevant points.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers to specific questions <p>Examiners are looking for answers to the specific questions you have selected. They are not interested in the answers you may have learnt off by heart.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid learning practice questions off by heart. Your answers are likely to address the exam question more exactly if you work from an essay plan which draws on the material you know.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marks are given for what is written <p>Examiners can only mark what you have written on the paper, not what you might have meant to say or include. They don't give marks for effort.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to check your work carefully to make sure you have expressed yourself clearly. If your answer is unclear or you missed out essential words or details, examiners can't guess your intentions. Including an example may help you to clarify the point you are making.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't read your mind <p>Examiners only mark what you present.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You receive marks for answering the set questions correctly. You don't need to know everything that is in the course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectively <p>Examiners often mark papers question by question, and therefore the marks should reflect the quality of the answer, rather than who might have written it. In external exams, student numbers are often used to remove all possibilities of bias.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your rapport with the teacher or reputation as a student shouldn't affect your marks, and major exams like the ATAR are set externally and marked externally.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparability <p>Some or all exam papers are marked either externally or by a second marker to check for marking consistency. If marked by teachers, different sections are often marked by different teachers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can generally be assured that the mark you receive is fair, even if it was unexpected, as the examiners marking will have been checked.

What examiners look for

Although you can't directly influence the examiners, you can make an effort to ensure that your exam paper:

- Creates a positive impression.
- Minimises anything that might irritate the examiner.
- Encourages the examiner to judge in your favour, and give you 'the benefit of the doubt'.

You can create a favourable impression by:

- Keeping your exam papers clean, tidy and well organised.
- Numbering your answers correctly.
- Organising and structuring your answers to respond to the questions that you have selected.
- Including only material that is **relevant to the question**. **Don't go off on tangents**.
- Not trying to prove how much you know.
- Avoiding pouring out everything you know without selection or organisation. **Think quality rather than quantity**.
- Avoiding regurgitating the exact answers you have produced in your assessments (unless the question is exactly the same).
- Trying to spell the major terms or names of major people correctly (practise these).

- **Proofreading** your answers.
- Not assuming the examiner will spend time trying to decipher your writing. Make any illegible words legible. It **doesn't have to be neat, but it must be legible**.
- **Never writing notes to the examiner** – e.g. “I ran out of time to finish this answer”.

As examiners have only a short time to see whether your answers meet the criteria, it is not in your interest to waste that time. Try to avoid:

- Exam answers or parts of answers that are wrongly numbered / labelled.
- Lack of clarity about which question you are responding to.
- Handwriting that is hard to read.
- Important information lost amongst irrelevant information.
- Answers written in abbreviations or ‘txt’ notes.
- Rambling answers that lack a clear structure.
- Lots of rough notes that have not had a line drawn through them (and are labelled ‘working’) that may or may not be part of the answer.

Presentation Tips

- Don't write out the exam question – this just wastes time.
- Make your key points stand out through the quality of the points you make, rather than using colour, CAPITALS, underlining or exclamations marks!
- Rule a line through any rough notes, essay plans and working out (unless you are specifically told not to do this).
- Make sure that it is clear where one question ends and the next question begins.
- Start each question on a new sheet. This leaves space in case you want to add some other points if you have time at the end.
- Leave a line between each paragraph. This makes your writing easier to read.
- Avoid messy scribble and blots (especially in crossing out) that make the pages unpleasant to look at (a single ruled line through a mistake is best).
- Legibility is important, but it is more important to work quickly than to write beautifully.

Good Exam Answers

What makes a good exam answer will vary to some extent depending on the subject and kind of exam. However, some principles apply widely to all good exam answers. These principles are:

1. It answers the set question

This is the **most important feature of any good exam answer**. Although this seems obvious, **exam answers often fail to do this**. They appear to answer completely different questions, go off on a tangent, omit sections or parts of the question, or take the question as an invitation to write down anything known on the topic.

Students often interpret exam questions too broadly, rather than attending to the exact wording and what it really means. Examiners tend to phrase questions carefully so that you have to apply just a selection of your potential knowledge to a particular problem or issue. When you are making an argument or case, it is more important to select those issues, facts or evidence which best demonstrates the point of view you are expressing in your answer.

2. It includes all the expected basic points

Examiners will read your exam answer **looking for an expected set of points** that apply to that question. A good answer will cover these as a basic minimum, but this doesn't make for a high scoring answer.

3. It includes only relevant material

All the material you include in your answers should be relevant to the set question. This means sticking to the point and omitting extraneous material. **Planning your answers is crucial to this.**

4. It is examiner / marker (audience) aware

This means that the answer:

- Presents information in a way that what is being said and why is clear to the marker.
- Is well structured, so that the marker can take in the information quickly and easily.
- Is interesting; using a different approach or a range of examples, quotes, or details.

5. It shows a good grasp of the subject

If you engage with your subject by reading and thinking about it, you can develop a feel for that subject which makes it easier to:

- Recognise when exam questions refer to recent issues, events or debates.
- Recognise which material is significant and deserve the most emphasis in your answer.
- Anticipate which exam questions will be set, and the standard of answer that is expected.

6. It shows a sound understanding of the concepts

Good exam answers do more than simply provide lists of well-learned facts. They draw out such things as the nature and significance of the relationships between different sets of information.

7. It shows a unexpected 'spark'

The best answers contain a spark that sets them out from the rest by showing a really good grasp of the material and its relevance. They incorporate examples, quotes, evidence or drawing conclusions that come from other sources beyond the main textbook.

Activity 7 – Self-Evaluation	
Circle Yes or No to each question.	
Answer the set question	
I read the question several times, checking that I have interpreted it correctly.	Yes / No
I pause to work out exactly what is being asked by each part of the question	Yes / No
I have a good understanding of the terminology used in exam questions.	Yes / No
I think through how the question differs from similar questions I undertook in assessments or in practice.	Yes / No
Basic points	
I jot down a list of all the points that must be included for the set question, and then check each off as I cover it in my answer.	Yes / No
Relevance	
I take care to include only such information as is relevant to the set question.	Yes / No
Examiner / marker awareness	
I always provide an introduction, outlining my argument (the point of view) and stating why the issues related to the question are significant.	Yes / No
I organise my material by grouping related points together.	Yes / No
I link each point to the next so that there is a logical flow in my answer, and refer them back to the question.	Yes / No
Grasp of the subject	
I read a lot of background material and spend time thinking about the subject.	Yes / No
Understand the concepts	
I spend time thinking through the significance of what I am learning and how this can be applied to other areas.	Yes / No
Spark	
I try to go beyond what is written in my notes or the textbook, and look at other sources.	Yes / No
If you answered <i>No</i> to any of these questions, consider what you could do differently next time.	

Ten characteristics of good exam essays

A good exam essay:

1. **Answers the precise exam question set**, rather than presenting information that is broadly relevant to the topic; and answers the whole question. If a question asks 'How and why' it is asking two different things in the same question. Give a balanced answer to both parts, with a similar number of points on each.
2. **Has a clear argument or perspective**, so that the examiner knows from the outset what you intend to say, and they can trace the development of your point of view throughout the essay.
3. **Is critical and analytical**, explaining why the issues raised are significant, rather than just describing the facts. It evaluates different perspectives by weighing up the significance of any different points of view.
4. **Is structured**. It includes an introduction; short paragraphs each dedicated to one key aspect of your answer; and a conclusion all structured around the main argument.
5. **Provides reasons, based on sound evidence** to support the point of view or main argument you have taken.
6. **Has good paragraphing**. The main point of each paragraph is stated clearly, then explained in more detail, examples are used, and its significance is explained. These paragraphs (no more than 4 or 5 sentences long) should follow logically from each other.
7. **Uses sentences where only one point is expressed in a sentence**. Avoid using long sentences with several commas. Shorter sentences are much more effective than longer ones, which can become clumsy and poorly expressed.
8. **Is selective**. It includes just the information and detail that is most relevant to answering the question.
9. **Is written clearly and to the point**, without waffle, repetition, grand generalisations, pompous language, unnecessary jargon, slang, colloquial phrases or personal anecdotes.
10. **Has been proofread** to make sure it makes sense, and says what you intended to say, removing minor errors and making sure all words are legible.

Activity 8 – Assessing your Exam Essays

Read through 2-3 essays you have completed as assessments or practice exam essays, and evaluate them according to the ten characteristics of a good essay.

Characteristics	Evaluation of my essays
1. My answers are highly focused on answering the questions exactly as set.	
2. My answers present clear arguments.	
3. My answers include critical analysis explaining the significance of the issues.	
4. My answers are well structured.	
5. My answers provide reasons to support the argument / answer.	
6. My answers have paragraphs with one main point and a clear topic sentence.	
7. My sentence are short and to the point, not long with several commas.	
8. My answers are selective, containing material relevant to the question.	
9. My answers are written clearly and to the point, without repetition.	
10. My answers have been proofread and don't have spelling errors, omissions, etc.	

How Exam Questions are Framed

The key words given at the beginning of each question mean different things, and indicate the approach or style expected for the piece of writing. The following are the most common:

Key words	What you need to do
Account for	Account for: state reasons for, report on. Give an account of; narrate a series of events or transactions.
Analyse	Identify components and the relationship between them; draw out and relate the implications.
Assess	Make a judgement of value, quality, outcomes, results or size. There will probably be cases to be made both for and against.
Comment on	Identify and write about the main issues and evidence. Make reference to and expand upon, avoiding personal opinion.
Compare	Show how two or more things are similar and different. Indicate the relevance or consequences of these similarities or differences.
Contrast	Show how two or more items or arguments are in opposition so as to draw out their differences.
Critically evaluate	Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing the strength of the evidence on both sides. Add a degree or level of accuracy depth, knowledge and understanding, logic, questioning, reflection and quality to analyse / evaluate.
Debate	Develop a logical (sometimes persuasive) argument, giving differing views in response to a topic.
Define	State meaning and identify the essential qualities.
Describe	Provide the main characteristics or features, or outline the main events.
Discuss	Identify the most important aspects of; provide points for and against; consider the implications. Points should be in greater depth.
Distinguish	Recognise or note / indicate as being distinct or different from; note differences between.
Evaluate	Assess the worth, importance or usefulness, using evidence. Make a judgement based on criteria; determine the value of.
Examine	Put the topic under the microscope, looking at it in detail.
Explain	Relate cause and effect; make the relationships between things evident; provide why and / or how.
Illustrate	Similar to 'explain', but requires the quoting of specific examples or statistics or possibly the drawing of maps, graphs, sketches, etc.
Interpret	Give the meaning or relevance of data or other material presented.
Justify	Support an argument or conclusion; give reasons for your statements or comments.
Narrate	Concentrate on saying what happened, telling it as a story.
Outline	Give only the main features (less detail is needed), showing the main structure.
Relate	Show similarities and connections between two or more things.
State	Express the main points of an idea or topic. Give its main features (less detail is needed) very clearly and accurately.
Summarise	Express, concisely, the relevant details or main points.
To what extent	Consider whether something is true or contributes to some outcome. Also consider ways it is not true. The answer is usually in between.
Trace	Follow the order of different stages in an event or process.

Exam Stress

Dealing with exam stress

Stress is a normal experience when we face a challenging event. We can experience stress when learning something new, starting a new job or being in a race. Our experience of 'stress' is actually our body getting us ready to take on the challenge. A stress response is helpful as it can increase oxygen to the brain and improve attention, focus, energy and determination. The runner in a race needs to be 'stressed' to compete successfully. The student sitting in an exam room needs it too.

Most performers claim that they feel anxious before they go on stage. There is a moment when they fear that they may not be able to face the public, or that they will forget their lines or be unable to move or sing. However, after many performances, they know that a certain level of nervous energy is useful. It adds the edge to their performance. Similarly, when you need to perform well in exams, it helps if you can acknowledge your nerves or butterflies as useful friends. The adrenalin release can:

- Provide the energy that enables you to do the extra work needed.
- Make you more alert so that you can take in more information.
- Keep you focused for longer.

Studies show people who are clear about their feelings are more likely to thrive on anxiety and stress and possibly use these to achieve their goals and find satisfaction at work. But they become bad when we evaluate events as a threat rather than a challenge and when we believe we don't have enough resources to cope.

Exams are often treated as a threat because there is potential harm or loss related to our self-worth, identity, commitments, goals and dreams. If we fail, we think we are a failure and think we may never get the future we had hoped for. We feel as if our whole life is at stake. To put it simply, stress can be good if we believe it's good. It'll work for us if we develop a mindset that stress can help our performance, health and well-being.



Four ways to make stress work for you

1. Read your body differently

Start to read your stress response as being there to help you prepare for the challenge. Instead of seeing it as a threat, try to see it as a coping tool. When you are experiencing stress, you can say to yourself:

"I am feeling a little uncomfortable; my heart is beating faster, but my body is getting me ready to compete".

2. Reframe the meaning of the event

Rather than framing exams as a threat, try to frame them as a challenge. Part of the reason they are seen as a threat is because your whole future, identity and worth appear to be at stake. This is not true. **Exams are one very small part of your life that does not decide your whole future. There are always other options, different pathways and opportunities.** Vera Wang failed to get into the Olympic ice-skating team and instead became a world famous dress designer. Sometimes the path we imagine looks a little different. Not all journeys are straight, and the best ones can have diversions.

3. Accept stress as a natural and helpful response

Some common ways people approach stress is to try to relax, ignore stress and try to reduce it. These approaches actually reinforce that stress is 'bad' rather than accepting it. It is better to accept it and then try to use to your advantage. You can say to yourself:

"I feel this way because this goal is important to me. My body is responding this way because it is getting me ready to perform".

4. Add to your resources

Clearly, changing your mindset is only helpful if you have the resources to cope. It would be like an athlete who is about to compete, but has not trained. Put time into study, study in different ways and give yourself time to practise these ideas.

Unhelpful levels of stress

Although some stress can be useful, and stress is a typical aspect of the student experience, too much stress is unhealthy and undermines our performance. Too much stress includes:

- **Too much at once**

To reduce the stress, you have to **reduce the number of things you are working on** at present, or devote time to the managing the stress, or reduce your other commitments.

- **Too long**

The short-term response suitable for a 'state of emergency' can become a way of life. The mind and body may need to be trained out of this response.



The impact of high stress

- If a 'state of emergency' continues for a long time, then our systems start to be overwhelmed by the chemicals released, and our functioning starts to deteriorate.
- If stress levels are too high, it is hard to maintain concentration, our attention wanders, and we find it hard to settle down to study. Memory can be affected, and at times we may not be able to recall even information we know really well. It becomes harder to plan and to find solutions to problems.
- Over time, high levels of the chemicals associated with stress can cause damage. Even grinding our teeth can give us jaw pain or headaches. Our immune systems can be affected, making us prone to illness.
- If stress levels are maintained for long periods, we can start to lose our ability to function properly. Sleep is affected, which impairs performance and perception of the world around us. The results can be panic attacks, depression or helplessness.
- Stress can make it difficult for us to be around other people. They can seem irritating or deliberately obstructive. We can also become irritable or quickly emotional.

Take Action to Manage Stress

If you have identified signs of stress, and acknowledge that you are feeling unwanted levels of stress, then the next stage is to **identify the causes and do something to change these**. For example, you may feel that exams in general are to blame, whereas it is more likely to be something specific in the way you think about exams and your approach to them that generates unnecessary stress.

Unrealistic goals

Unrealistic goals are a frequent cause of exam stress. For example, you may be so determined to achieve a certain grade that you are neglecting other things that you value. **You are more likely to achieve your own peak performance if you set yourself a goal that is challenging, but realistic for your circumstances.** You may need to discuss realistic subject goals with your teacher, or realistic ATAR goals with Mr Stirling.

Consider whether you are setting yourself realistic aims, given:

- The time that you have at your disposal.
- What you have achieved in the past.
- The skills and knowledge you have already gained in this subject compared with those you have still to acquire.

Are you feeding your anxiety by letting yourself dwell on problems? **If so, come up with a plan of how to get ahead, and stick to it. Taking action is a great way of shifting the focus off the problem and start focusing on the solution.**

- If you notice a change in your health, talk to a doctor.
- Use exercises and activities to manage your stress levels.
- Take care of your health: eating (don't miss meals) and sleeping well. Avoid excess coffee, tea, sugar and red food dyes. You may have food sensitivities that can contribute to feeling stressed and irritable. Eat healthy foods (stay away from too much fatty takeaway food) and try multi-vitamins.
- If you worry about time pressures, speak to the teacher of your subject. They are likely to be able to give you some study strategies that will help.

Work off the adrenalin

Physical activity can help work off the excess adrenalin, making it easier to feel calm again. If you are not used to exercise, go for a brisk walk for about 20-30 minutes. Look up rather than down, taking note of the world around you rather than stewing over your worries.

Seek out positive companions

Are the people around you really helping you to feel more relaxed, confident, healthy, encouraged and in control of your study? If not, seek out positive friends and family who make you feel calm and relaxed. Speak to people who are likely to be reassuring and supportive. Avoid those who are likely to make you feel anxious about the exam, talk 'gloom and doom' or how much they have done, or try to persuade you not to revise.

The voice of reason

Talk through your worries. Ask yourself the following questions of reason:

- Am I keeping things in proportion?
- Most people pass exams, so if I work steadily and keep my head, isn't it likely that I will too?
- What practical things can I do to reduce my worry and resolve problems?
- Who can I talk to who will make me feel good about myself and about life? Why not arrange to meet with them soon?
- Who can I speak to who will give me good advice? Why not arrange this right now?
- If the worst-case scenario happens, what practical options would still be open to me. There are ALWAYS other options, and who is to say that your first choice was the best one.
- It is satisfying to get great results, but in the long run, won't a reasonable pass open many doors for me?
- Do I need a break?



Exam Countdown

As the exam approaches, some students will be making final preparations, while others will be trying to make up for lost time. At whatever stage your preparation is up to, continue to build on the strategies you have been developing in order to be able to achieve peak performance. **Don't give up.**



As you become more anxious as the day approaches, it is easy to forget the basic everyday details that you would normally remember. The following planning checklist may help to keep you on track.

Planning Checklist 1: Now

Action	Comments	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enter all exam dates and deadlines into your diary and planner. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enter when you will start your revision into your diary and planner. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange for time off work (if necessary) in the lead up to your exams and during the exams. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for special examination conditions (if applicable). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain up-to-date program material, such as the syllabus, program outline etc. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check whether sample exam answers, copies of examiner's reports, marking keys or examiner's comments are available. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain copies of past papers (SCSA website). 		

Planning Checklist 2: As soon as you can

Action	Comments	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw up your exam timetable, identifying broad times for studying each subject. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify if there is a study buddy you could work with as part of your revision strategy. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make arrangements for any sessions you will study with your study buddy and note in your diary. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce and organise your material (see Structured Revision). 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare as many questions as you can (see Structured Revision). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work actively with the material to build sets of associations (see Building Memory). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise mnemonics for lists, names, events (see Building Memory). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise as many past exam questions as you can, under exam conditions (see Structured Revision). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the exam venue, and plan your travel arrangements and time of arrival (if not at Carey). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check whether you need to wear your uniform for the exams. 		

Planning Checklist 3: The week before exams		
Action	Comments	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat nutritious foods; drink plenty of water; sleep well (avoid building up a sleep deficit); don't do 'all-nighters'. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If necessary, reduce your notes down further. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your ability to reproduce your mnemonics. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure all your necessary equipment is in order (including spare batteries, etc.). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recheck your exam venue and travel arrangements. Know how long the journey will take (factor in peak traffic times). 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the exam is at a different location, take a trip there to find the best route, and locate the building where the exam will occur. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you have a bag, water bottle and a clear plastic bag that has all your requirements AND a spare of everything. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure you have a pen you are used to, not a new one that may not be comfortable. 		

Planning Checklist 4: The day before exams		
Action	Comments	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat meals with slow releasing carbohydrates, protein, fruit or vegetables. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you stay properly hydrated; drink plenty of water. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk off restless energy and anxiety through exercise. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build in some time for enjoyment if this will help you relax. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you pack your exam timetable and identification and bring these to each exam. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recheck that any equipment you need is in working order and that you have the right equipment for the exam. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep well – avoid revision and stressful tasks and thoughts before going to bed. Create as relaxing an atmosphere as possible. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set more than one alarm to ensure you get up early on the morning of the exam and eat a healthy breakfast. 		

Planning Checklist 5: The day of the exam

Action	Comments	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat light meals with slow releasing carbohydrates, protein, fruit or vegetables. Heavy meals can make you sluggish. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take water with you to the exam, but watch how much you drink or you will need multiple toilet breaks. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take additional jumpers / jackets in case you feel cold. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go through your notes and mnemonics and last minute details again prior to leaving for the exam – this helps focus your mind. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are not allowed to take a watch into the exam with you as many new watches are programmable. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take action to maintain a sense of calm. Take notes that you can read through before the exam; find a quiet place if that suits you. Avoid talking about the exam while you are waiting. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that you leave all valuables, phones etc., locked in your locker. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that you have your exam timetable and student identification with you. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure you have all the right pens, pencils, calculators and equipment with you. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you have a bag with you so that you can leave any notes or other items in the foyer of the exam area. 		

Last-Minute Revision

It may be the case that you do not have as much time left as you would like. However, it is likely that you have time to do something, so focus on using your available time as effectively as possible. **Whatever you do is better than wasting it in worry and doing nothing at all. The one topic that you prepare could be the one that comes up in the exam.**

Check whether you really need to revise every topic. For some types of exams including mostly multiple-choice and short-answer questions, you do benefit from a broad overview of the whole syllabus. However, many exams with extended answers give you a choice of questions, so you can perform well without having to revise everything. Leaving out topics does involve a risk, so **aim to cover a minimum of twice as many extended answer topics** as you think you will need.

You are more likely to benefit from revising several topics in less depth than one or two in great detail. It is generally easier to gather sufficient marks to pass if you answer the required number of questions, than if you produce high standard answers to too few questions.

If time is really short, use techniques that force you to work at speed:

- Give yourself only 5 minutes to jot down a quick list of key topics you need to revise.
- Give yourself a maximum of 5 minutes to put these in rough order of importance and the likelihood they will come up in the exam.
- Circle the 2-3 that you feel you know best, or that are the least difficult for you. Start revising these to build confidence. If you think you know them well enough, then move on to the next topic on your list.



Emergency revision measures

Gain an overview by reading quickly through your notes or a summary of the topic in your textbook, if necessary. The aim isn't to memorise the details, but to get an understanding of the main idea(s) of the topic. Concentrate on the key information by:

- Identifying **2-3 key pieces of information** for each topic.
- Noting **the main facts, events, details of the topic**. Picture these written down and / or repeat them three times each to help you remember them.
- Noting the order of these pieces of information. Were they linked? Did one lead to the other?
- Considering why these points were significant. **State this out loud so that you can hear yourself** stating the significance.
- Repeating this 3 times to help reinforce the information in your memory. Repeat this for several topics. This will give you something concrete you can refer to for several topics.
- Going back and learn a bit more about each topic, starting with the most important, if you have time.
- Linking new information you are revising with that material you learnt earlier, to assist you to organise it mentally.
- Keeping course information close to you so that you can glance over it while you are doing other things, like having breakfast, getting dressed or waiting for the bus.
- **Composing answers in your head while you are travelling**, checking for any missing details as soon as possible afterwards.

Fine-tuning

As the exam gets closer, you should bring your preparation to its peak. Much of this will be repeating and fine-tuning areas you have already covered. Some fine-tuning activities include:

Paragraph sorting

- Go through your condensed revision notes.
- If you haven't divided your revision notes into key themes, make a quick list of these for each topic.
- Consider whether these themes form paragraphs in their own right, or should be grouped into a single paragraph. This may vary depending on the exact wording of each question.
- Be clear what material is the most significant, and which details either must be included or could be omitted. This can save you time in the exam.
- Consider which general paragraphs you are likely to use for different kinds of exam questions on each topic.

Reminder list

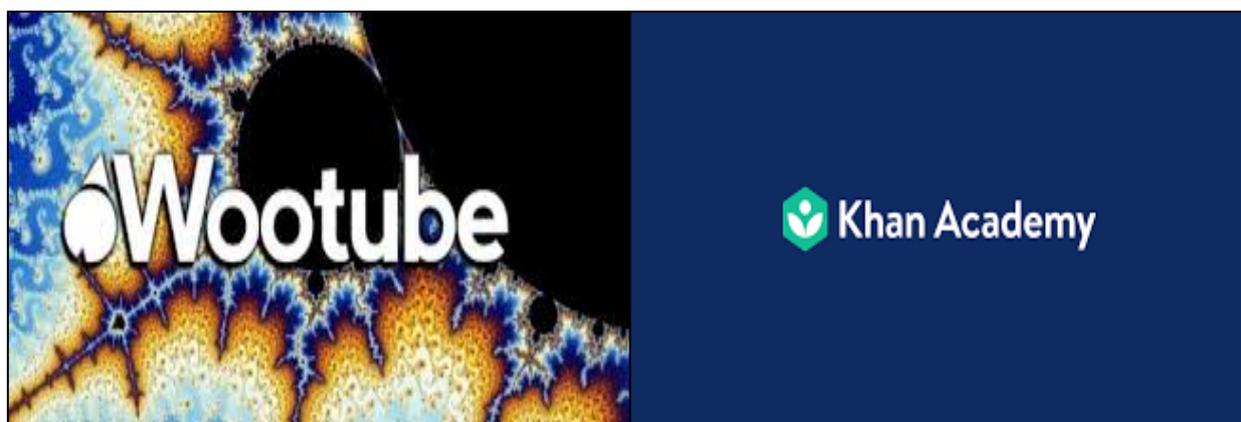
- **Identify a keyword** to aid recall on each topic or paragraph.
- Produce these as a list.
- Learn the keywords by visualising them, repeating them aloud and writing them out.
- Put the words into a song or story to help you to remember them.

Make a single-word mnemonic

- Take the first letter of each keyword.
- Organise the letters in the order that makes them easiest to remember. Either a real or nonsense word will do, as long as you can remember what the letters stand for.

Refresh your brain

- If you find yourself getting bored or find your brain numbed, browse through information on the topic that you haven't used before.
- **Try googling the topic or do a youtube search to see if there are any videos or websites that cover that topic.**
- You may pick up new and interesting details or get a different perspective. Renewing your interest can assist you to recall the overall topic.



*Check out **Wootube** (Aust) and **Khan Academy** (US), both excellent Maths revision sites*

Leading up to the Exam

To ensure that you have all the bases covered, **use the checklist on the previous pages** to assist you with a methodical way of what to do and when it should be done:

- Now.
- As soon as you can.
- The week before the exam.
- The day before the exam.
- The day of the exam.



Part 4 – The Exam

The Exam 1 – Effective Use of Time

- Remain calm – speed doesn't mean panic.
- Aim to work quickly and efficiently. Be businesslike about the exam.
- Advance practice can help you to develop faster working strategies.
- **Plan out (before the exam) how you will allocate your time. Once in the exam room, jot down the times you will start each section and question, and stick to this.**
- **Work out the order in which you will tackle the exam.** If there is multiple choice, perhaps leave this until the middle part to give your writing hand a chance to recover. Be flexible enough to be willing to change this if you decide to during reading time, BUT adjust the times you allocate accordingly.
- **Start by writing your strongest answers first.** This not only gives you confidence, but if you run out of time at the end, it will be on answers that are the weakest (and this will cost less marks).
- Plan how you are going to use your reading time, and identify the best questions for you (if there is a choice of extended answers).
- Plan to leave time to plan your answers to each question.

Planning your extended answers

- Keep essay plans brief.
- Jot down the main points only.
- Jot down any mnemonics or pieces of information that you think you might forget as they occur to you and cross them out as you use them.
- Don't worry about neatness – plans are not marked (unless you are told otherwise).
- **Start writing as quickly as possible**, even if your plans are not complete. If you can plan mentally, write down only what you find helpful.
- Clearly **label the planning page as PLANNING** and rule a diagonal line through it so that the marker is in no doubt that this is not part of your answer.

Focus on the key points

- Bear in mind that marks are usually allocated for covering a number of essential items in a brief, succinct way – aim to include as many of these as you can (not spending too long on each).
- Avoid being side-tracked by less important points.
- Your personal style of writing will shine through, but if you have a wordy or complex style, aim to write in a more straightforward style so that you can cover the material required by using shorter sentences.

Avoid false economies

- Make sure that you organise your answers, with **short and clear introductions and conclusions** and a well-structured answer (see 'Good Introductions' and 'Good Conclusions' in Revision Session 4).
- Don't save time by writing down everything you know on the topic.
- Depending on the subject, marks are allocated for critical analysis, argument, examples, data, evidence, argument and evaluation.

The Exam 2 – Selecting Exam Questions

- Check how many exam questions you need to answer for each section.
- Read each question slowly and carefully, considering what is being asked.
- Check whether there are further questions at the back of the paper, or somewhere else in the paper that you might have missed.
- Mark all the questions in the exam paper that seem possible to choose, carefully checking each part to ensure you can answer all of these.
- Check the exact wording of each question.
- You may find it helpful to scribble down quick notes of relevant material that could be included in each answer. If you have mnemonics for certain topics, you may find it reassuring to note these as well as they come to mind.

Prepared topics

- If your preferred topics are there, this can build your confidence straight away. However, double check that the questions are really ones that you can answer. It might be a topic you have prepared, but the question is a really difficult one.
- If your prepared topic doesn't seem to be on the exam paper, check whether it is hidden within a different question. There may be genuine opportunities to use material from that topic as an example in another question.

What do you do when you can't answer any of the questions (if there is a choice)?

This isn't likely if you have revised a number of topics. **Don't give up.** If you can't answer the whole of each question, then look for questions where you can give a reasonable answer to one or more parts of the main question. **Your aim should be to get as close to passing that question as you can, and making up the marks somewhere else.**

If the questions seem really difficult, choose subjects that you know most about and don't rush your answers. Jot down a list of possible material to use. You may remember more than you expected or know more than you realise. **Choose the most general question that you can, that requires less specific details in the answer.**

What do you do if you are not sure which question to answer?

Jot down a very quick outline plan or some points to several questions. Often, even before you finish doing this, you realise you have made your mind up about which answer is stronger and which is weaker. **If you still have several possibilities at the point where you need to start writing, just choose one and get going on it, and stick with it. DON'T CHANGE YOUR MIND halfway.** You haven't got the time, and this will impact your other sections.

The Exam 3 – Answering Exam Questions

Answer the question – plan your answers in brief, using keywords. Keep an eye on the clock, so that you don't spend too long on any point. Check, as you write, that you are sticking to the question and to your plan.

Write to impress – write an answer that draws the examiner's attention. Take an unusual approach, use great evidence and examples. Demonstrate a deep understanding, using a good style, language and vocabulary in your writing.

Think different – most answers have the same basic points. What can you do differently?

Think clarity – examiners want to identify quickly and easily that your answers meet the marking criteria, and are expressed in a clear and well organised writing style.

Avoid gimmicks – such as trying to be funny, irrelevant quotations, lists of questions, underlining points, etc.

Avoid waffle and repetition – saying the same thing in a long-winded and repetitious way takes away from your answer. You don't get marks for making the same point twice. However, using an example to illustrate your point may well gain you an extra mark.

Check your answers – plan your answer so that you have time at the end to read back and ensure your answer is clear and make sense, and your writing is legible. If you have added a section, label where this belongs AND also number the question that the addition refers to.

The Exam 4 – Multiple-Choice Sections

Multiple-choice questions use a more ‘closed’ style, and **you need to choose the best answer**. At ATAR level, multiple-choice questions can be more demanding than essay-based questions, as some of the options may be partially correct, and much less time per question is allocated. Multiple-choice questions can be repeated in different years, as they are often chosen from item banks. Sometimes the question or the choices are slightly altered. Practising multiple-choice questions gets you used to the way in which these questions are framed.

Revising for multiple-choice

- Focus your reading to sharpen recall – multiple-choice tests knowledge in precise ways.
- Plan to manage breadth – in multiple-choice you generally need to revise everything.
- Write your own multiple-choice questions – design these in the style of past papers.

Read carefully and clarify the task

In multiple-choice questions the most common reason for losing marks is misreading the question. If there seem to be too many correct choices, it is likely that you need to read the question with more precision and take note of the exact wording used.

Read the question and work out the answer before you look at the possible options. Often there will be an answer similar to the one you are looking for and it will stand out when you look at the alternatives. This way there is less likelihood of choosing an incorrect response.

Find the stem

Each question generally contains words that can be converted into a stem statement. If you can isolate this, it can make it easier to identify what is being asked. For example, in the question, “Which of the following **is not a capital city?**” The stem **is highlighted**. **Apply the stem separately** for each choice, and it is often easier to identify the correct answer, e.g. (a) London ... is not a capital city ... and so on (obviously this is an incorrect response).

Rephrase the questions

- Rephrase complicated questions so that it is clearer what is being asked. Put them into your own words so that they make sense.
- Negatives (*not, never, neither, etc.*) are easy to overlook and more difficult to interpret. Rephrase negative questions so they read as positives.
- Rephrase the stem and answer each answer as a true / false statement. This can help you spot correct and incorrect choices.

Check for qualifiers

These are words that narrow or define your choices. Common types of qualifiers are:

- Words defining time: *never, always, during, prior to*.
- Superlatives: *the most, the least, the highest*.
- Specific circumstances: *whenever X occurs ..., if X is the case ..., assuming X ...*

Eliminate unlikely answers

Try to **eliminate answers that are obviously wrong**. Then if you are guessing, there are less responses to choose from. Put a line through the ones that are incorrect. Put down your thoughts next to each question. This will make it easier to check your answers and remember your reasoning if you come back to the ones you are not sure of at the end of the exam.

Best Guess

In ATAR exams (as in most others) there is NO penalty for an incorrect guess, so NEVER leave a question blank.

- Try to make the decision between the two most likely choices.
- If you are guessing and there are two possible **opposite** answers, choose one of these.
- If you have no idea about which is the correct alternative, pick the longest answer.
- Be cautious at changing answers unless you are certain. **Usually your first impression is the most reliable** and you chose this for a reason.

Activity 9 – Multiple-Choice Strategies

For each of the strategies below, consider whether you already use the listed strategy effectively after you have done a practice section of multiple-choice questions. Indicate your answer with a tick ✓ in the column that most often describes your approach.

1. Self-evaluation of multiple-choice strategy	I do this	Could do this in future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply all the strategies listed on the previous page. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best order – first work through all the questions where you know the answer or can work them out easily. If there are difficult questions that take up too much time, you can leave these to the end (and guess if you need to). You must ensure that you don't miss out on marks for questions you could have answered later in the paper. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep track of completed answers – lightly circle any questions that you will return to later. Erase each circle when you complete the answer. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trouble-shoot – mark any questions likely to consume your time. Decide how you will deal with them, depending on the proportion of the marks they carry. If they carry few marks, leave them to the end. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and track your time – once you complete the questions that were easiest, count how many questions remain. Divide your remaining time between these. Keep track of how you are using your time. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight key words in the questions such as negatives (<i>no, not, never</i>) and words or qualifiers that describe extent (<i>ever, always, whenever, if</i>), definitions, events, names, special circumstances. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise personal strategies – use your practice of 'mock' papers to identify personal strategies that suit you and fit the style of the multiple-choice sections in your different subjects. 		

Q. Where do you currently lose marks in paper based multiple-choice sections?

Q. What strategies would give you the most benefit in improving your multiple-choice exam practice?

Avoiding Risky Strategies

2. Decide whether each of the following is a sound strategy by putting a tick beside those you consider would work	Sound strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I haven't used option (D) yet, so I'd better use it for one of the next few answers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have used the third choice for several answers in a row, so it must be time for a different choice. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The examiner has provided much more information in this choice than the other choices, so it is more likely that this is the correct answer. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the choices is 'All of the above'. Two of the three statements are correct, so 'All of the above' is most likely to be the right choice. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of my choices is 'None of the above'. I know that one of the choices is correct, which means that, 'None of the above' can't be right. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examiners are more likely to set questions where the answer is a positive statement than a negative one. I am not sure of the answer, so I'll choose the positive one. 	

The Exam 5 – Short-Answer Sections

- Short-answer sections typically require much shorter answers than those typical of extended answers, such as essays. Questions can vary from explanations of a few sentences through to paragraph answers.
- A guide to the suggested length of the answer can often be found in the number of lines or space which has been allocated in the answer book, or below the question.
- The number of marks the question is allocated is often a good guide to the number of distinct points that are required.
- Answers are often factually based, unlike essays, which tend to be more analytical and creative.
- In some subjects they should be little more than dot points, written out in sentence format.
- Typically, you are asked to write out a definition, perform a calculation, explain an aspect of a source or graph or a table of data. You may be asked to comment on why the source or data is significant, or explain the context of the issue or source.

What are examiners looking for?

Exams include short answer sections to:

- Check the depth of your knowledge base in the subject, as the questions tend to require detailed factual knowledge of a particular area.
- Check your ability to interpret or analyse a particular source or piece of data and demonstrate its significance, context or application.
- Check your ability to correctly label or explain a diagram, or to demonstrate a skill.
- Check the breadth of your knowledge. Several short-answers mean that more aspects of the course can be tested.

Types of short-answer questions

These sections vary considerably from subject to subject, so the best place to begin is to look closely at past papers. Typically short answer sections are used when the answer involves one or more of the following:

- Lists of items – such as the functions of organs of the body.
- The main aspects of a particular theory, definition or concept.
- Providing a diagram or details of an experiment, which wouldn't be sufficient to form the basis of an extended answer.
- Details of specific procedures, such as producing a chemical reaction under certain conditions.
- The main similarities or differences between two groups.

Preparing for short-answer sections

Unlike essay-based sections where you can choose between alternatives, and revise a smaller number of topics, short-answer sections are compulsory and you need to know all your course material.

- Summarise program material into questions, followed by key points.
- Make a checklist of key definitions, terms and significant facts, revising the list systematically.
- Write out and learn succinct and precise definitions of the key terms.
- Find ways to further condense your summary notes.
- Identify examples that best illustrate concepts and themes.
- Write out significant short quotes to illustrate points you wish to make.

Use index (or flash) cards

- Write out your questions and answers onto index cards. Use one card per question.
- Make numbered lists of the key issues for each question.
- Write out formulae, definitions or quotations.
- Write a few succinct sentences that sum up and join the information.
- Carry your cards with you so that you can refer to them in a 'little and often' approach.
- Make good use of spare moments to revise.

Count out the points

There are usually a specific and countable number of points to make in short answers. When revising:

- Identify what specific items would be for each question you are revising.
- Write that number next to the question as a reminder of how many items to recall.
- Set out your revision material so that each item is visibly distinct.
- Number each item.
- As you revise it, associate the point with its number, either in your head or aloud.

Practise and Edit

- Invent as many realistic questions as you can, based on past papers.
- Answer these questions under exam conditions.
- Note whether you include any irrelevant material or write in a wordy way, just so that you have something down on the page.
- Check your answers against your notes to see how well you remembered the information.
- Go back to the section on Memory Triggers, and develop these to help you recall what you need under exam conditions.
- Put a line through any material that is irrelevant – be strict with yourself.
- Note how much material you crossed out – **this is time you could have spent on another question.**
- Note whether your answers are as succinct as they could be. If not, practise rewriting your answers so they are as brief, condensed and to the point.



In the exam

Check the marks given to each short answers and divide up the time for that section according to the marks allocated to each question.

- Work quickly – short answers are to the point and usually don't require planning.
- Note how many parts there are to the question, crossing off each when completed.
- Follow directions closely (*analyse, define, explain*), doing what is asked and no more.
- Note the key terms. Which specific areas of the topic are included?
- Remain focused on what is being asked – avoid adding unnecessary material.
- Be concise and avoid waffle – avoid padding out answers with irrelevant material. These don't earn any marks and wastes time that could have been used elsewhere.

Structure your answers (for 'longer' short-answers)

If the short answer is worth several marks, then structure this answer in the following way;

- An introductory sentence (defining the terms or issue).
- No more than 2-3 sentences per paragraph on each point (you can still include a brief example).
- A concluding sentence.

Make each point stand out

- Ensure that you have covered all your 'countable' items for each question.
- State each point so that it stands out distinctly. **Start a different sentence for each**, rather than combining two or more points within a single sentence. This makes it more likely that the marker will identify each point and allocate the marks accordingly.
- Read your answer to check that any good points are not lost on complex or overly condensed sentences.

The Exam 6 – Answering Technical Questions

Technical questions vary a great deal depending on the subject, such as Maths, Science or Economics. Typically, they require you to apply set procedures or mathematical formulae to resolve given problems. You are required to demonstrate that you can recognise the kind of problem being asked, and select the appropriate method for resolving it. Accurate working and attention to sequence and detail are essential. There is usually a set, correct answer. If you know your material well, you can often get a clear idea of how well you have performed, particularly if the problem resolves neatly.

Revising for technical exams

- Make sure you are aware of each specific step in calculations or procedures, and that you can reproduce these from memory.
- Devise mnemonics for remembering the various stages in sequences.
- Practise answering past questions as well as questions you invent yourself, so you are familiar with producing answers at speed, and show your working out.

Identify what is being asked

- Read carefully through the information you have been given, analysing it to identify the problem that needs to be resolved so that you can decide on the process you are going to apply.
- It is important to give sufficient time to elaborating the question accurately, as this will help you identify the right solution. Don't rush this stage.
- Think calmly and logically through the examples and formulae you have used in class, and consider which of these are likely to apply.
- Pay attention to the details, such as the units of measurement required (*grams, kilograms, ounces, seconds, volts*) and make sure these are clearly identified in your answer and in all diagrams.
- If you are required to use a diagram, use sharp pencils and proper measuring tools. Make sure that all diagrams are easy to follow, with a clear heading, clear labels and are legible.

Organise your answer

- Accurately write out the data you have been given.
- Write out what it is you have to find or solve, along with a brief analysis of any data. Demonstrate that you understand what the problem is.
- Identify your approach – what formulae, equations, graphs, diagrams etc., you are going to apply and write these out. This will assist you to focus on the answer.

Elaborate the solution

- Use the data you have been given to apply the process or formulae.
- Write down each stage of your worked answer as you go, building upon each line.
- If you get stuck, think through the procedures you have worked on in the past, and decide which of these might apply at this point.
- As you go along, identify the procedures you are using, so that the marker knows what you are trying to do at each stage.
- Continue until the problem is resolved.

What do I do if I can't work out the answer?

- Make sure you have provided clear evidence of the method you are using and your working out, as these usually gain marks even if the final answer isn't correct.
- If you have run out of the time you have allocated for this question, then leave it and go on to the next question.
- If you have time, check your working out. An incorrect answer could just come down to a simple computational error that you have made.
- Check back over the original data. Did you miss any information that you were given in the question?
- Reconsider the problem. Did you misinterpret the nature of the problem?

The Exam 7 – After the Exam

It isn't unusual for students to feel that they have failed. Normally you do better in an exam than you expect, but sometimes you think you have done well, and you haven't done as well as you expected. The moral of the story is that feelings are not a great indicator of your results. You can find a paper really difficult, but if this is the case, it may well be a hard paper and everyone else feels the same way. This is why it is critical NOT to give up and leave early.

Why didn't I ...?

It is very common to realise all the things you could have done better as soon as you leave the exam. It is rare for anyone to write a perfect answer or to cover everything they might have liked to include. In exams, you rarely have the time for this ... but everyone is in the same position. Don't beat yourself up. Note down anything you could do differently next time.



Never indulge in post-mortems

Avoid discussing your exams with others afterwards. If they found it easy, and you didn't, it is better that you don't know. If they came up with different answers than you, it just builds up your anxiety. You can't usually tell what the final result will be in any case. What is done is done and agonising over it is futile and will not change your results. You have **other exams to prepare for and that needs to be your priority, so harness your energy for the next exam.** Leave the area as soon as you can, go do something physical, have a break, and then work on preparing for your next exam.

I was ill

You should report illness at the time, before the exam if you miss it, or during the exam if you need to leave early, or if something impaired your performance. If that is the case, you need to fill out a sickness and misadventure form (in SEQTA or from SCSA) and get a doctor's certificate to verify any illness or condition. A medical certificate is normally required if alternative arrangements can be made, but this is not possible in the Year 12 ATAR exams.

It's over, so why don't I feel happy?

In the lead up to exams, we assume that everything will feel much better once the exams are over and we can enjoy the things we put aside while preparing. However, more often than not, the end of the exams can be **anti-climactic**, and there seems to be nothing else so important to do any more. For many, **relief** is a very common emotional response. It can be hard waiting for the results. Allow yourself time to recover from exams in your own way. Some may prefer to go out and celebrate, but many others prefer some quiet time.

What could I do better?

It is worth jotting down some **notes about the lessons learnt** from the current set of exams, to assist you to prepare for your next set of exams. Consider such questions as:

- How well did you manage your time and your revision in the lead-up to the exam?
- What will you do differently next time?
- In retrospect, would you have benefited from revising more with other students?
- What did you wish you had done differently once you were in the exam room?
- What have you learnt about the methods you need to use to remember information under exam conditions?
- How did you feel after the exam? Is this what you expected? What environment suits you best after the exam?

The Exam 8 – Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ

Should I plan out essays at the beginning, or before each question?

The best approach for you will be learnt through experience. If you haven't done major exams before, try this out by doing 'mock' exams. For most students, it is worth spending a few minutes at the start of the exam jotting down a few key points for each essay answer.

FAQ

Should I write my best answer first?

The advantage of this is that you feel more confident by getting your best question finished when you are fresh. If time becomes a problem you don't want to run out of time on your best answer.

FAQ

Should I spend more of my time on my best question?

This is not usually a good idea. Aim to spend around the same amount of time on each question that earns the same amount of marks. ATAR papers will normally have suggested times allocated to each section. Talk about this with your teacher if you plan to have a different approach.

FAQ

Should I take breaks?

Some students find that it refreshes them to have planned breaks of a couple of minutes between sections of the paper. However, planning the next answer can also serve as a sufficient break. Avoid breaks if stopping makes you feel anxious about wasting time.

FAQ

What do I do if I get writer's cramp?

Writer's cramp normally comes when you tense up and hold the pen too tightly, so consciously loosen your grip on the pen. You can usually work faster if you do this. At regular intervals, pause and shake your hands. Try to release the tension in your shoulders, writing arm and hand – this helps prevent writer's cramp in the first place.

FAQ

What if I go blank in the exam?

This is common, so don't worry about being the only person this happens to. Remain calm – panic makes it harder to think clearly.

Move on to another point rather than trying to force the memory.

If you are really stuck, write rough notes on a piece of paper and the ideas may start to flow again.

Reread the question and jot down keywords, which may stimulate your ideas.

If you can't remember something, it isn't worth worrying about it, and the details may pop into your head before the end of the exam.

FAQ

What if I finish early?

Use the time to review your answers and check whether you have missed any important points. Proofread your answer. Once you leave the exam, you lose the opportunity of adding anything. At Carey, students **MUST** stay for the duration of the exam. However in ATAR exams you can leave after 1 hour, but not in the last 15 minutes. **NEVER LEAVE AN EXAM EARLY. There is ALWAYS something more you can do.** If you see others leaving early, don't follow. If you need to leave temporarily, you'll be accompanied by a supervisor.



What time should I arrive for my WACE exam?

For written exams, you should arrive at the exam centre 30 minutes before the scheduled start time.

For practical exams, you should arrive 20 minutes early.



What if the bus, car or train I'm in breaks down and I'm late for an exam?

You will not be admitted after the first 30 minutes of an exam. But you should report to the exam centre no matter how late you are and ask the exam supervisor to note the time of your arrival. If you were too late to be admitted to the exam or if you think your lateness affected your exam performance, submit a **sickness / misadventure form to SCSA** (available on the SCSA website) with supporting evidence from the transport company.



What happens if I misread the exam timetable and miss an exam?

If you miss an exam because you misread your examination timetable, you are **not entitled to special consideration**. Make a copy of your personal exam timetable and stick it on the fridge. Put the dates into your phone calendar with reminders. Check it with your friends and then get someone else (such as your parents) to check it again.



What happens if I break my arm a few days before the exams start?

If you suffer an illness or disability just before the exams, you should phone SCSA to see if special arrangements can be made for you to sit your exams. If you injure your writing arm, for example, you could be provided with a scribe.

You should not miss an exam session merely because you do not feel able to do your best. If you do not attend an examination session and your sickness / misadventure application is unsuccessful, you will not receive a mark. This will result in a **non-genuine attempt** classification for that exam and this could affect your achievement of the WACE.



How should I read the exam paper and plan my responses?

If the exam paper has a choice of questions to answer, **always read the whole paper** before you begin making decisions about which questions to attempt. **It often helps to get started with the response you feel most confident about.**



What should I take into an exam?

Mobile phones, MP3/iPods/iPads/Laptops and **watches should not be taken into the exam room**. You **must take your signed personalised examination timetable** and pens (black and blue), pencils, ruler and eraser. **Water is allowed but must be in a clear bottle** no bigger than 1500ml.



Can I eat during an exam?

Generally, eating is not permitted during an examination. If there are special circumstances, such as a diabetic condition, you may apply to the SCSA to eat food during an examination.

Part 5 – Study Tips / Exam Strategies in Specific Subjects

Make a point of asking all your ATAR teachers for their Study tips as they will vary from subject to subject and teacher to teacher.



- Ensure that you have an understanding of the key syllabus objectives. Check out the list at the start of each topic. The separate bullet points in the syllabus can be easily converted into useful revision questions.
- Focus your revision on topics you like and those that have not been in examinations for some time. While the examiners might call your bluff and set a similar question two years in a row, it is **more likely that the questions will focus on different aspects of the topic.**
- Write exam answers in short, logically ordered paragraphs. One key point a paragraph is enough. To fully make a point, use the following approach:
 - State the point.
 - Explain the point.
 - Give an example.
 - Explain the significance.
- The markers will have some **key economic words or phrases** in the back of their minds when they are reading your answers. Try to build these into your answers.
- **Data Interpretation questions** are related to stimulus material with some or all of the questions based around this information. You will be expected to combine this information with your subject knowledge and demonstrate your exam skills.
- In each part, try to make as many points as there are marks available and **be sure to link your answer back to the data.**
- In **Extended Answer questions**, there may be two or three main themes which can be broken into a few key points. Each point should be made clearly backed up with a short example if needed and probably in its own separate paragraph of three or four lines.
- Research shows that most candidates have forgotten the title of the essay they are writing by the time they finish the first page. Discipline yourself to **refer to the question regularly.**
- Every paragraph should be making a new point that is relevant to the question. It should therefore be geared to earning 1, 2 or 3 marks depending on the marking scheme. Check that you are earning marks for every sentence you write.
- If a question is in two parts, keep the two parts clearly separate and clearly numbered. Avoid mixing the two parts together.
- Using graphs or diagrams is an accepted technique and you will be **expected to use relevant diagrams** at some stage in your answers. Make these diagrams a sensible size and label them carefully. It is quite acceptable to add extra arrows or notes to your diagram to highlight the point you are trying to make
- A simple, very short conclusion tidies the whole thing up - but there is no point repeating information that you have already covered.

A banner for the English course featuring a wooden desk with a quill pen, an inkwell, a lit candle, and an open book.

English

- Re-read your copy of the English course and syllabus documents.
- Focus on the **course outcomes and content** so you know exactly what aspects you will be expected to demonstrate.
- Highlight significant words and make sure you know what they mean. Study the **course glossary of terms**. Which significant words appear in the syllabus document?
- Set your own questions from each section of the essential content of the course. Ask your teacher to comment on your practice writing.
- Maintain a journal. You can write in it one night, glue an article or review another night and return to those pages to annotate, amend and develop your thinking.
- Note down your teacher's ideas and input. List key points made in class discussions.
- Create **mind and concept maps** of language concepts, adding to them as lesson series develop. There are many internet sites with good advice on mind maps.
- Keep a **log of your daily reading and viewing**. Make room in your logs for comments about how the language in each text is suited to the audience, purpose and context.
- Remember that texts you read and view are the vehicles through which you learn to apply course skills and concepts. Texts are not ends in themselves.
- For more detailed instructions and activities, read the English Teachers Association of W.A. publication called '**Good Answers English**'.
- For students with poor handwriting, try writing bigger and forming letters clearly. Poor handwriting reduces the clarity of your expression and fluency of your essay answers.
- Practise by studying and writing answers to past WACE exam questions.
- Record and memorise a list of significant quotes and examples from responding texts.

A banner for the Geography course featuring a compass and an old map.

Geography

- Make summaries of summaries with your notes.
- Do not try to cover too many sections just before your exams.
- Ensure you **practice** mapping exercises and **past exam paper questions**.
- Good examination techniques go hand in hand with knowing the course content.
- Each year examiners highlight the marks lost where students fail to:
 - **Answer the question.**
 - Use appropriate geographical terminology. e.g. the top of Australia = X, the northern part of Australia = ✓
 - Refer specifically to source documents when answering questions i.e. maps, diagrams, tables etc.
 - **Use examples and diagrams** to support / illustrate your answers.
- Give each part of the question appropriate emphasis, i.e. for a 10 mark question with two parts, balance the amount written on both parts equally.
- **Identify key directional words** that are commonly used and know what each word means, i.e. describe verses discuss, account verses compare and contrast, etc.
- **Highlight key and action words** by examining the phrasing for each question and decide what is expected by the marker.
- **Manage exam time well** by ensuring you work quickly through the multiple choice and short answer sections in order to give yourself ample time to devote to the extended writing sections.
- Check that you have answered **all 20 multiple choice questions** on the answer sheet.
- Ensure you are familiar with the **layout of the exam paper** before the exam.

- Make sure that you have all your **equipment ready the night before the exam**, i.e. non programmable calculator, pens, pencils, string, eraser, highlighters, sharpener, correction fluid, clear plastic water bottle and ruler.



- The **key to Mathematics is practice, then some more practice**. The first step is to fully understand the concepts and theory. It is no use doing lots of hard questions when you haven't fully grasped the topic. After this comes lots of hard work and practice, first with exercises, and then lots of timed past papers as you approach the exam.
- Prepare notes for the exams. The sheets you use for tests and the Semester 2 exams can be easily updated on a computer. Organise your pages into sections for different topics and include examples from past ATAR papers or test questions.
- Complete the last five year's exam papers because **examiners often use similar questions**. Mark each paper honestly and learn from your mistakes. Search past papers for common questions and patterns of questions. Revise work from first semester, updating your exam notes as you go.
- SCSA publishes the **examiner's reports on each exam paper**. You can access these at www.scsa.wa.edu.au. These reports list common errors made by candidates.
- Practice your exam technique. Work out the amount of time for each section and work out how much time each mark is worth so you spend the right time on each question. Do not exceed this allocation or you will run out of time (a common feature of Maths exams).
- Learn to use your **calculator** efficiently. Good knowledge of calculator functions can add additional marks, plus you gain valuable working time. Keep extra batteries on hand.
- During reading time, **identify the easiest questions and attempt these first**. Read and understand the questions, don't skim them. Each word is important. Break it down – write out the information that is given in the question and determine what you need to do. Draw a diagram, state any formulae required and set your work out neatly and logically. Examiners and markers want to see how much you know.
- **Don't leave questions blank**. Jot down something that at least shows you know a bit about the question.
- You must **show your working** out in order to get full marks for any question – the answer alone is not sufficient. Make sure you round your answer to the required level.



- Start studying well before your exam. There are a lot of details to study and you will be very busy leading up to the exam. Construct **timelines** to consolidate the order of events.
- Revise the content / narrative. You need to know the detailed interconnections between people, events and ideas. Memorise quotes.
- **Make event and definition flash cards**. This can be done by hand, using quizlet, or on a google doc using a table.
- **Define the key words** and answer the key understandings in your SEQTA program.
- **Make mind maps** on people, events and ideas. This visual structuring and emphasising of connections helps to revise things you won't necessarily read in your notes or texts.
- **Practise writing essays**. Pick a topic (idea, event, a person's leadership) and form a statement to evaluate. The textbook also has suggested WACE style essay questions.
- **Practise writing source analyses**. This can be done using sources found in your texts, online, or in past assessments.
- In the source analyses, **use quotes directly from the source**. The more directly you refer to the source, the better. Bring in outside information, when relevant. If you know any quotes, use these. The source analyses requires students to consider the following:

- **Perspective** – What is the tone? What type of source is this? Are they writing in the period? Are they a historian? If so, how might this influence their writing?
- **Reliability** – Are the date and authorship details provided? What bias might there be (and potential reasons)? Are there clear anti-ethnic sentiments? Would the author benefit from 'stretching the truth' in the source? Who are they talking to in the source? Try to bring in some outside statistics, quotes or knowledge.
- **Usefulness** – Is the source useful for the reason specified in the question? How does reliability and perspective inform usefulness? Something with clear bias/propaganda etc., can still be very useful. How is usefulness limited?
- Spend time understanding and memorising the source analyses how to guide and answer formulas. The explanations in the guide given to you are very helpful at identifying the purpose of the questions and the formulas direct you in writing the appropriate length and detail in your answers.
- A common assessment verb, **evaluate = make a judgement. You must decide and argue how true a statement is.** Statements or sources are often both true and untrue in different ways and levels. You need to carefully consider exactly *how* true it is.
- Research and read **other historian's / writer's perspectives.** Consider the different perspectives and this will translate into depth and understanding in your answers.



- Maintain a **study plan** and dedicate more of your time to the hardest topics. Start with a week-by-week plan and then plan each day of the next week. Include the exam weeks.
- **Study with a buddy.** Recite out loud what you understand about the concepts and listen to what your study partner says. The process of saying it out loud clarifies your thoughts, and having someone else to listen to you ensures that your understanding is correct.
- **Use your calculator to the maximum**, but make sure you **write down your own notes.** Do not copy someone else's work because you won't know what is in there and you won't know that it is correct.
- Study from the **syllabus**, as the exam can cover only the content in the syllabus. Be prepared to see questions wrapped up in contexts with which you will not be familiar. When revising, try to determine the type of question you are doing and generalise the strategies for solving them.



- The key to Physics and Chemistry is to fully understand all of the concepts and theories.
- Make your own **notes based on the syllabus dot** points. Writing your own notes allows you to revise the topics as you write them as well as identifying gaps in your knowledge. It is important to ask your teacher to explain any concepts you aren't sure of, as well as doing your own research.
- Near exam time, it is essential to **practice past papers** in order to learn how to answer questions. The use of different verbs such as List, Explain, Analyse and Evaluate requires different levels of responses.
- Many students fall into the habit of cramming study notes while neglecting past papers. Those students may not achieve the marks they deserve with their extensive knowledge as they answer the questions poorly.
- After completing the past paper, **mark your own paper using the answers and marking guidelines provided on the SCSA website.** This is very useful as you can make sure to identify the criteria guidelines that have to be met in order to gain the marks for each different type of paper. With practice, by the time the ATAR exam comes around, the question types and method to meet the marking criteria should be familiar.