

Preparing for Exams and Managing Exam Anxiety

Lack of control is the #1 cause of exam anxiety. Exam anxiety can manifest itself as headaches, nausea, feeling faint, feeling too hot or cold, crying easily, irritability, and frustration. There are many things YOU can do to help you prepare for exams, feel confident, and in control.

Take Care of Yourself!

- Get enough **sleep** - at least 7-8 hours a night
- Eat **healthy meals and snacks** - fruit, veggies and whole grains instead of junk food
- Drink lots of **water** and avoid caffeine (especially at night) - carry a water bottle with you
- **Exercise** - walk, run, stretch
- **Rest** and relax - give yourself permission to take breaks
- Use **positive self-talk** - tell yourself that you are capable and can do it!



Study!

- Find out from your teachers what **parts of the course you should focus on** and then go through your notes to make sure they are complete - the exam review helps with this
- **Break each course down into smaller sections** and decide on the time you will devote to each one - **write your study schedule down on a calendar** or in your phone and stick to it
- **Set realistic goals** - consider your strengths and weaknesses to help you identify areas you might need to spend more time on
- Find a **productive study space** that will maximize your motivation and concentration
- **Create study notes** by jotting down key ideas or creating concept maps
- **Test yourself as you study** - use old tests and the exam review to create questions
- **Avoid study marathons** by taking frequent breaks to refresh - cramming the night before can set you up for panic and "blanking"



Exam Time!

- The day before your exam **review the location and gather the materials** that you need to take - pencils, erasers, calculator, etc.
- **Get plenty of sleep** - your brain will thank you!
- **Wake up early** to give yourself enough time to eat breakfast and get to the exam early
- **Visualize success** - imagine how you would LIKE for the exam to go
- **Be positive about what you know**, not negative about what you don't - our brains function better when we aren't criticizing ourselves
- If you feel anxious, **take slow, deep belly breaths** and tell yourself that you will be OK
- Spend a few minutes going through the entire exam and **read the exam instructions carefully** - plan how you will use your time during the exam
- **Read each question carefully** and underline key words that will help you direct your answer - be sure you know what you are being asked to do
- If you are stuck on a question, **put a star beside it and come back to it** - try not to leave a question blank as **part answers will often earn you some marks**
- When you are done the exam **reward yourself and move on** - excessive worry, dread and remorse is not helpful



Essay Style Exams

1. Answer the Question and Answer as Asked. Answering the wrong question is a common mistake made by students. Make sure you understand what your teacher wants; it is highly advisable to refer back to the question throughout the answer. Ensure that you are following what the question asks you to do: Compare? Contrast? Explain? Define?

2. Set Up a Time Schedule. For example, if six questions are to be answered in forty-five minutes, allow yourself only five minutes for each. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. There will be extra time remaining in which to finish the incomplete answers. Although, if one question is worth more points you should allow more time to write it.

3. Good Introduction. In an introduction to an essay you should offer a short, concise summary of the main points to be raised. Try not to go into too much detail, the arguments should be in the main body of the text.

4. Essay Plan. A plan can help to gather your thoughts and ensure you do not forget to mention key arguments. It is an opportunity to brainstorm what you know about the topic. Use scrap paper and write key words and phrases, then organize your ideas in an outline.

5. 3 Steps of an argument.

- The first step is the basic statement and argument; it tests your knowledge.
- The second step is to explain your statement. Do not forget you need to explain in relation to the question. Also, even if the explanation is obvious, you still need to write it down.
- The third step is to look at the argument with critical distance. This is an opportunity to discuss why the basic premise may be wrong or limited. It is an opportunity to show you can think for yourself, rather than just memorize a list of points.

6. Conclusion. Weigh the different arguments and decide which are the strongest and most relevant. Try to add something new, and not just repeat previous points. For example, you can say why an argument is particularly strong and give justification.

7. How Much To Write? Write as much as you can in the allotted time but, only write what is relevant. Ensure that you have given examples to support your ideas.

8. Did you answer the Question? If time permits review your answer and ensure it answers the question asked. If you have extra time, go back and see if anything can be added and remember to look for misspelled words, grammatical errors, etc.

Analyze: Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.

Compare: Examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences.

Contrast: Show differences. Set in opposition.

Define: Give the meaning, but no details.

Describe: Give a detailed account.

Discuss: Consider and debate or argue the pros and cons of an issue, include details.

Distinguish: Show main differences between two things.

Evaluate: Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an expert. Include evidence to support the evaluation.

Explain: Give reasons for happenings or situations.

Illustrate: Give concrete examples. Explain clearly by using comparisons or examples.

Justify: Prove or give reasons.

State: List main points briefly without details.

Summarize: Organize and bring together the main points only.

Support: Back up a statement with facts and proof.

Multiple Choice Exams

Test strategies:

- Always read the directions carefully; know if you are penalized for guessing; and plan for how much time is available.
- Start by reading each question carefully and thinking of an answer; read each option, look for one that closely matches your answer; recognize if a question has one or more correct option; and eliminate options you know to be incorrect.
- Question options that do not grammatically make sense with the root of the question.
- Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you.
- If you know at least two of the options seem correct "all of the above" is a strong possibility.
- Sometimes there are 'look alike options', probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out.
- If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct.
- If two alternatives seem correct, compare them for differences, then look back to the question to find the best answer.
- If you tried several strategies and there is no penalty for guessing, try guessing a likely choice, do not leave answers blank.
- Try using hints from other questions in the test to answer questions you do not know.
- Change your first answers only when you are sure of the correction, or other clues in the test cue you to change.
- Do not change your answer because you detect a pattern, such as 4 Cs in a row. Repeated choices are not a sign that your choices are wrong.
- **Remember that you are looking for the best answer**, not only a correct one, and not one which must be true all of the time, in all cases, and without exception.