

Exam time is always considered as a hard time for all students. It is the time to answer a few questions which could determine your life and your future choices in life. So it puts a lot of stress on students. The amount of stress depends on a variety of things, your preparation, your aptitude, your confidence, your character, your friends, your studying environment, your approach and a lot of other things, including your luck! You will never eliminate stress from such circumstances but you can contain it and manage it better thus obtaining better results in due course.

Tackling exams

Exams normally come at the end of the academic year so one could easily link both together i.e. you prepare yourself throughout the year, thus relieving the pressure built up during the last weeks and days prior to the exams.

Preparing your notes during the academic year will help you better understand the topic under consideration and at the same time sorting out any difficulties which you might encounter immediately rather than allowing things to accumulate and fail to understand anything in due course. You should realise that once you miss something or fail to understand any concept, you will not be able to make up for it at a later stage. Probably, you will find it even more difficult to understand anything later one. So it is important that you compile your own notes and tackle any problems in due course.

Having your own set of notes and studying for tests carried out throughout the year will help you compare yourself with others but also grade yourself and better understand how you are faring with the input you are making in that particular subject. So you could adjust and refine your studying techniques during the year and be more prepared for exam time.

If you encounter difficulties, speak up. This could be done either by asking questions or requesting a contact hour with your lecturer in order to clarify these problems. Do not allow problems to accumulate. Once you encounter a problem the probability is that this will keep growing as more material accumulates in due course and from a simple tiny problem, it would end up becoming a problem involving a whole topic, which makes things even worse. Your main point of reference is always your lecturer. Do not try and solve your problems by getting notes from other sources, reason being that there might be mistakes because either students would have copied something wrong or misinterpreted something or for some other reason. This becomes evident when lecturers correct exam scripts because the same mistakes show up over and over again amongst students from different groups.

Corrections

Tests and assignments are a good source which provides feedback both to your tutors and also to yourselves. However, equally important is the corrections undertaken following such exercises, since these should give an insight of how questions should be answered and what was the examiner or the tutor expecting from you. Realizing your own mistakes and

understanding the pitfalls found in examination/test questions should lead to an improvement on your side; the next time round you should do better. That is good reason why you should attend Tutorials and follow class corrections.

Practice

The learning process is a two way process; you listen to information and explanations given in class, you read from textbooks, assimilate the material and then you should be in a position to explain what was said or read. The latter part is the most difficult part. Once you read or listen to someone explaining, the flow of the explanation given makes you think that you understood what was said. However, that may not always be the case. Possible reasons are:

- That the language used in class or the text being read is different from that found in a test or exam question.
- Maybe you are unable to explain what was stated in your own words.
- Maybe you have difficulty in expressing yourself in the language used in answering questions. This is a major problem faced by several students. Hence they resort to giving a short fragmented answer or a few phrases as an answer to a question thinking that the person correcting will be able to understand what they wanted to say. This is another incorrect perception students have. When you write down an answer, that is the one for which you will be getting marks, no more no less. You will not get any marks for what the examiner or marker thinks you wanted to say. You have written down an answer and that's it. Hence, it is your duty to write down clear answers.

How do you practice? Since yours is a two year course, there are various ways of practicing, one of which is working past papers throughout the whole two years. That way you are building up your knowledge and knowhow over a long period of time. Exam questions tend to repeat themselves over the years, mainly in the form of the topics examined. The format of the question might change but the answers would be very similar. You might ask: who will correct these questions? Your best bet is to ask your lecturer to correct them for you. Otherwise, you might want to discuss during tutorial sessions. You must remember that this is for your own benefit. Copying answers from other students will not get you anywhere. You are just cheating yourselves.

Exam preparation time

You should prepare yourselves for exams over a long period of time not during the last few weeks or days prior to the exam. As already stated, assignments and tests are part and parcel of the preparation. However, the real preparation should start by planning a study time table so that you would understand the way you will split your time until you get to your examination date.

Primarily it is important that you know when your exams or tests will be held. Such time tables are published months ahead of the actual date so there is plenty of time for planning. Secondly, one knows that exam time comes during certain periods of the year, that is, May – June and September. So at least you have a rough idea from day 1.

Secondly, use a calendar or year planner or design one showing all the days and weeks leading to the event. Like that you get a visual idea of the time frames involved. The first thing you need to do is to insert your time table including transit time from home to college and back. The next things you need to input are any known events which you already know about during this period. You should be aware that you normally get a number of tests prior to the end of each semester, so you need to allocate some time for these events. Then there are holidays where you should have some more time available and so you could be in a position to sort out matters and make up for any lost time. Then you might have personal events such as private lessons and extracurricular activities where you are involved, family events etc. These should all be marked in your calendar. That way you are already getting an idea of the remaining time available for you to study and work during the year. It is important that you also allocate time for yourself, that is, to go out with friends etc. You cannot allocate 24 hours a day to your studies because you would go mad by the end of the first month. Once you have allocated all these events in your time table, then you should start planning your study time in the remaining time available. There isn't much time left!

First of all, start by planning your typical week. Can you fit studying all the subjects in one week? If not then you have to study over a two week cycle. Ideally don't try to go for a three week cycle. Once you have planned your cycle over a week or two, then you need to start implementing it and note how you are progressing, that is, whether you are keeping abreast with everything at college. It is important that you utilise some, if not all the free time you have between lectures to do some studying or work in the study areas or the library. In that manner you are relieving yourself from work which would have to be done at home. Once you get to this point, then you need to fine tune your time table and extend it to the whole year until you reach the exam time.

Ideally, a couple of months prior to exam time you revisit your time table and fine tune it further because by then you would have recognised your pitfalls in certain subjects and these could easily be addressed with further adjustments. Try not to sacrifice any of the subjects studied at the expense of others. Do not be afraid of revisiting your time table over and over again during the year. That should serve you as a motivator to get things done and allocate time in a planned manner without the need to end up bent over books and notes a few days before examination time. Absenting yourself from College to stay at home studying is not on. You are just sacrificing one thing in lieu of another but you are losing at both ends. You are missing lectures, tests and all the activities at College and isolating yourself at home, thinking that you will be able to catch up at a later stage. You are just fooling yourself!

Exam period

Usually exams are spread over a number of weeks which include oral, practicals and written sessions. In some exams there would be more than one paper, whereas, in others there would be just one paper. Make sure that you are familiar with the syllabus of your particular subject and also with the type of questions found in the different papers. Make sure that you know your exam time table well and also, in case of MATSEC exams, the examination centre where the exam will be held and the time the exam will start and finish. These are things which you should be familiar with yourself and DO NOT need to ask your friends. These are all written down and available months ahead so all you need is to leave a copy of such a time table readily available for you to see.

During the exam period, you will not have enough time to go over all the topics so you need to prepare yourself before, either by having worked out past papers which you would go over during those few days or hours prior to your exam, in order to refresh your mind or else through the use of short notes or points which you might have written down during your studies. Do not try to cram everything during the last hours- you will fail and possibly panic.

Before the exam you need a good rest and a good night's sleep. You might want to go over a few points on the morning of the exam but that depends on your level of confidence. If you worked during the year then your level of confidence should be high. You will always be excited prior to an exam but that is important. Do not try any quick fix remedies which you might come across or have been recommended by your friends. These could damage your health and ruin your exam. You should depend on your own abilities and get the grade through your efforts so forget any attempts of copying or cheating. Getting caught could land you in serious trouble. You just don't need to think about doing such things.

The night before the exam

Make sure that you have all the stuff (pencils, rulers, calculators, technical drawing stuff, lab coats, safety specs etc.) you need to take with you for the exam ready. If you need to take any food and water with you make sure that everything has been bought and ready.

Exam time

On exam day make sure that you know where the examination hall is and at what time the exam starts. Take all the necessary stuff prepared the previous night with you. Make sure that you leave home early, especially if the exam is in the morning, during rush hour, so that you get there at least 30 minutes before. That will allow you time to mix with other students and have a word with people you might know. This helps in gaining some confidence. Avoid the company of people who panic because they spill over their emotions on to others. When you enter the exam hall, find your seat, settle down. Make sure that you have a bottle of water available (especially if it is summer) and possibly some snack or sweets which you

might be nimble during the exam. Make sure that the seat is comfortable and the table is stable. If not try to adjust accordingly or request that it is changed for you.

Once you are given the paper, follow the instructions shown on it or given by the invigilators. If you have an allocated reading time, then use it accordingly. Note that all students have been given the same exam paper and so having similar problems as those you are facing. That reading time could be utilised in order to better understand which questions you will tackle first. Note how many questions you have to answer and estimate how much time you should allocate for each question. Write down your answers in the appropriate language stated in the instructions. **DO NOT WASTE EXCESSIVE TIME ON A SINGLE QUESTION.** Leave it and return back at a later stage. Start with those questions where you are 100% sure of the correct answer. Once those are done, move over to those where you are so and so. Then spend the remaining time trying to answer questions which either you are not aware of the answer or don't know it. It is important to answer all the questions or the correct number of questions requested in that section.

Furthermore, when you have a question which is split into a number of sub questions, that is, a structured question, make sure that you write down the correct number/letter of the question being answered. Assume that examiners will not go over an unmarked answer seeking for the correct parts and allocating marks. If you are unable to follow simple instructions then you are not fit to get a pass mark in the exam.

Secondly, in questions where you are expected to write down the answer in the blank space provided, students are expected to use that space accordingly and not write down their answers elsewhere, for example on a given booklet. If there isn't enough space, then you can draw an asterisk or some other mark and refer the examiner to a continuation on the booklet. However, one should realise that the allotted marks and also the allocated space found with such questions are a good yardstick for students to use as to the type of answer which is being expected from their side. It's pointless writing a half a page essay for a question which has two marks and a couple of lines allotted to it!

Once you finish answering all the questions, if there is sufficient time available, ideally go over all the exam paper and make any amendments you deem necessary. Note that you have the **RIGHT** to stay in the examination hall until the end of the exam, even if you have finished and provided you keep the exam paper. Make sure that you have filled in the correct Index Number and any other details on **ALL** booklets being handed in.

Once the exam is over, forget about it. Take a rest and think about your next exam. If it is on the following day then you might need to carry out some revision in the little time left but you should have planned for that before so you should be well prepared. Don't let the outcome of one exam hinder the following one.

Good luck.