Exam Taking Strategies

Essay-Type Exams

Student Learning Development
Workshop

- How to do well
- Where marks are lost
- Planning
- Revision
- On the day
How to Do Well
Answer the Question

• Demonstrating that you understand the question

• How you structure your answer is as important as what you know

• More is not necessarily better
First of All

Understand what is being **asked** (handout)

Only answer the **QUESTION**

Do not include **irrelevant** material

Look for keywords: “Cause & Effect”
“Explain & Discuss”
“Compare & Contrast”
Step-by-Step Method

• Capture your ideas
• Do quick outline – depends on time
• This is a flexible plan
• You can adjust as you answer
• Then begin to write your answer
• The introduction is about the question – not the answer
• Restate the question in your own words
• Find and use the key words
• Show that you know what the point of the question is by defining the key words/concepts/theories etc (see handout on key verbs).
Structure for essay writing

Introduction

Main body – divided into paragraphs (make point, expand and give evidence)

Conclusion

Equal time for equal marks

Leave time at beginning (to plan) and end (to check) paper.

Question 1 40 minutes

Question 2 40 minutes

Question 3 40 minutes

Question 4 40 minutes
How to do well

1. Provide Analytical Answer (not descriptive)
2. Describe the context & situation
3. Discuss the implications (theoretical & practical)
4. Display evidence of reading/ thinking around debate
5. Cover all sides
Examples of Essay Terms

- **Analyse** – Examine (something) in detail to discover it’s meaning or essential features.
- **Assess** – Judge the worth or importance of
- **Compare** – examine in order to observe resemblances or difference
- **Discuss** – Consider something by talking it over.
- **Illustrate** - Clarify or explain by use of examples or comparisons. Source: Collins New English Dictionary (1997).
- **Further information**
  - [http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/essay-terms](http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/essay-terms) (University of Leicester)
  - [http://education.exeter.ac.uk/dll/studyskills/answering-questions](http://education.exeter.ac.uk/dll/studyskills/answering-questions)
Grading
Grading

I
Thorough, deep understanding
Critical thinking, insight, creativity
Well written
Nearly all points

II.1
Good grasp of subject
Critical & Analytical thinking
Logical Clear Presentation
Nearly all key points

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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Grading

II.11
Solid Answer
Knowledge beyond lectures
Good on facts
Writing good, some structure

III
Knowledge Facts, but little insight
Narrow/ No critical thought
Poorly written / incoherent

F
Little Factual Content & Errors
Where marks are lost
Time Wasting

• Writing out the question
• Pointless Definitions / Quotes
• Taking a long time to get to the point
• Irrelevance
• Repetition
How you lose marks

• Re-interpreting the Question
• Poor English
• Bullet Points
• Lack of structure (aka Brain Dumping)
So…

1. Present what you know
2. Get to the point
3. Add Value
4. Clear, logical structure
5. Well written
6. Legible
Answering Exam Questions

Five Tips
Planning
Planning

Organise your notes
Admin time / Study time
Check your handbook
Get the past papers

Construct a revision timetable that works for you.
Don’t be unrealistic with this, plan for what you can do.

Think Positively

Get set up with a comfortable study space where you can concentrate.

Have all your notes, past papers and stationery ready in your study space so you can stay put and revise.

web: http://student-learning.tcd.ie | email: student.learning@tcd.ie
1. Schedule Everything
2. Be Realistic
3. Mix things up
4. Make it visible
5. Include Exam Qs
6. Include Reviews
Revision timetable – week commencing:  

<table>
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Practice
Practice
Not practicing leads to..

• Poor Handwriting
• Brain Dumping
• Irrelevant Material
• Poor Structure
• Running out of time
• Anxiety
Would you sit your driving test without ever driving a car?
Practice makes perfect…
Past papers

EXAMINATIONS & ASSESSMENT

Past Examination Papers - Annual

Annual

The list of examination papers are sorted by alphabetically by module prefix. If a paper is unavailable on this website you should contact your relevant course office with your query. If you have any difficulty using this service please email askexams@tcd.ie. Note: MCQ (multiple choice question) papers are not published online.

Annual (2012/2013 onward)
Annual (1997 - 2012)

Module Prefix

- AN Anatomy
- BI Biochemistry and Immunology
- BO Botany
- BU Business Studies
- BY Biology
- CE Civil Structural and Environmental
- GE Genetics and Microbiology
- GG Geography
- GL Geology
- GR German
- HA History of Art
- HE Religions and Theology
- NU Nursing
- OT Occupational Therapy
- PG Physiology
- PH Pharmacy
- PI Philosophy
- PL Polish

web: http://student-learning.tcd.ie | email: student.learning@tcd.ie
Practice Exam Skills

• 50% how well you know your material
• 50% performance in exams
• Knowing something is not the same as being able to do it when the situation demands it.
• You need to practice in a simulated environment.
Study preparation

1. Generate a list of major topics using your notes and past exam papers.
2. Create a chart or summary sheet of the main topics and any relationship between themes.
3. Generate ideas and plan an outline for each question.
4. Follow a structure and review your essays (time spent and quality of your answers).
Revision
Revision Strategy

Get sample exam questions (past papers)

- What are they looking for?
- How would I answer this?
- How would I revise in order to be able to answer this?
- How would I practise answering this type of question
Steps to Practice

- Practice your starting procedures
- Practice analysing questions (5 mins)
- Practice generating ideas (5 mins)
- Practice developing a structure (5 mins)
- Practice writing Introduction (5 mins)
- Practice past exam questions (timed and un timed)
- Mark your own answers as critically as possibly.
Revision Strategies

Use Active Deep Processing Strategies

- Discussion
- Make it meaningful
- Visualisation
- Teaching someone/thing else
- Asking Questions
- Making associations
- Organisational aids & Chunking
Building Self Confidence

• Your objective is to do your **personal best**
• Think of exams as an opportunity for you to show what you know
• Get familiar with the examination space
• Exam outcomes are proportionate to the effort you put in
• Set learning targets and rewards for yourself
• Don’t burn out! Balance
• Compare what you know now with what you knew at the beginning of the year
How do you prepare?

1. What do you do the week before the exam?

1. What do you do in the exam?
Exam day performance

1. How do you prepare the night before?
2. What do you do in the exam?
   – Starting routine
   – Avoid common errors
3. What do you do after the exam?
Exam Writing
Exam Writing

• Not the same level as assessment
• Keep your writing simple
• Short sentences
• Few sub-clauses
• Practice writing
• Avoid unsupported value judgements
  - “World War II was really important.”
Think about your examiner
Have you ever been in a situation where you must go back and fix your mistakes? How about when you cannot sit still and must move some part of your body? Well, that’s what it feels like to have OCD and ADHD.

Sometimes it gets to the point where no matter how hard you concentrate, you still reactively fix the letters or dash the period. One time in my English class in high school I looked down and saw that my period looked like this: ●. I didn’t even realize that I had been sitting there and had been dashering the period over and over again.
• “This is the broad area, but these are the key issues because…”

• Use **signpost** words to develop your argument

• Headings
Don't Leave Early & Leave Nothing Blank

- You can't get marks for things you don't write!

Fill out your answer books

Don't hang around outside

Don't discuss the paper after

drink lots of water it helps the blood flow to the brain

bring loose layers of clothes so if you get hot you can cool down if you get cold you can wrap up

If you have any emergencies ring the SU:
01 646 8439

[On The Day]
How to Do Well in Exams

1. Planning
2. Revising
3. Practicing
4. Performing

Sources:

Exam Stress Guide, SU & Student Learning
How to Do Badly in Examinations, Dr. Frank Bannister
Thank you for your time & Good Luck

Visit our website at:
http://student-learning.tcd.ie