

How do I revise and prepare for exams?

All students are examined during their time at university. This can take various guises including traditional written exams as well as oral and practical ones. Many students experience anxiety surrounding revising for or undertaking examinations. This guide will outline how to organise your revision, how to revise, how to prepare for your exam and what to do on the day. Hopefully it will help you to approach your exams in the right way.

What is Revision? Why should I Revise?

Revision is a process undertaken to ensure understanding of course materials. It is an active process whereby you will revisit past learning materials to reinforce your understanding and comprehension. This knowledge and your ability to recall it will then be tested in the exam.

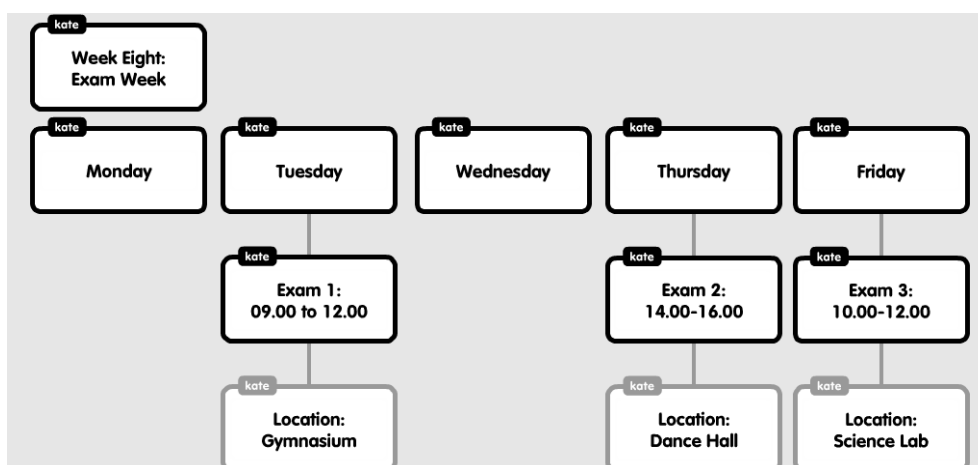
Organise Yourself

In order to revise successfully and be prepared, it is best practice to start your revision timetable six to eight weeks before the examination. Firstly, work out how many exams you have, how long they are, where they are being held and the time they start. How you organise this information is purely down to the individual. Some people prefer using online tools or apps and others will use paper diaries or planners. It doesn't matter which approach you take, but it does make it a lot easier if you keep all of the information in one, easily accessible place.

Student Hints and Tips:

"Everyone gives you the same tip when they hear you have an exam: 'Start revising early'. That's fine and a really good practice, however, with the amount of work you generally have to do, finding that extra time to fit in your exam study can be difficult. My advice would be to stay on top of your independent study. If you are constantly improving your knowledge for each module and trying to "get to grips" with the aspects you found more difficult, when the exams happen, you'll feel more prepared overall. "

Start with your exam information and work backwards. A visual example of a plan detailing exam timings over a week, is shown below:



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You can't revise all day, every day. Think about:

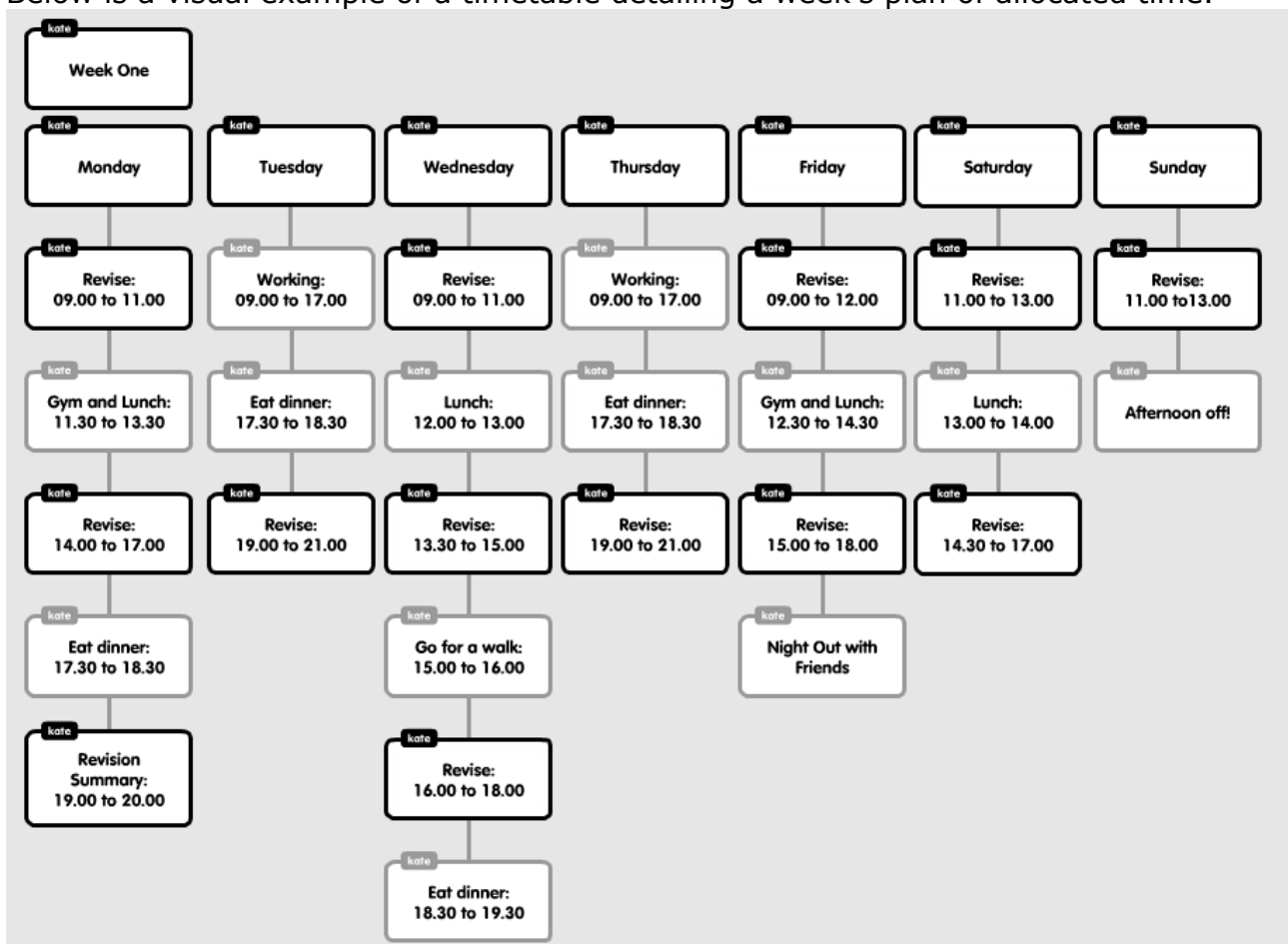
- Other commitments: paid work, family, hobbies etc., there will be other things that you need to continue doing whilst you revise.
- What time of day do you work best: early in the morning or late at night?
- How long can you concentrate for: revising for 6 hours without a break would not be very beneficial and you will need regular breaks, fresh air, food and drink and sleep to sustain you.

Student Hints and Tips:

“Make sure you tailor your revision: use your module guide as a form of revision checklist and cover all the topics in the ‘Week by Week’ timetable. If you do this, in addition to reading all of the required reading, you should be adequately prepared.”

By this point you'll have an idea of what the shape of those six to eight weeks will look like. Make sure all of your commitments are in your revision schedule. What's left is the time you have to actually revise.

Below is a visual example of a timetable detailing a week's plan of allocated time.



Be realistic! If you have paid employment you may not be able to revise on the days you work due to travel time, length of working day and the type of work you do. It's

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also okay to have some down time. You need to look after yourself so a balance of revision and other commitments is really important.

Other things to think about in preparation for effective revision:

- Where you will revise: at home; in the library; at a friend's house; at the kitchen table?
- What equipment you will need: pens, pencils, A4 sized paper, card, flash cards, sticky notes, laptop, tablet, etc.?
- Collect together all of your learning materials from your module: lecture notes, notes made from reading, assessment materials, past exam papers, course information. This will give you an outline of what you need to revise.

More Hints and Tips:

- Revise somewhere comfortable: not too hot or cold.
- Ensure you have all of your equipment close to hand.
- Take a snack and a drink to limit procrastination.
- Turn your phone alerts to silent or off so you don't get distracted.
- Revise with a friend or create a study group to encourage you, but don't waste all your time talking!

For more help in planning your time and your revision timetable, read the Time Management study guide.

How to Revise

Once you've organised your time, collected together all of the materials and equipment you might need and have selected a place to revise, what do you do next?

Student Hints and Tips:

"Revising is something wholly personal. A friend of mine could pull an "all-nighter", sit the exam and get grades they were happy with. Another would spend the week before an exam reading everything they had written or could download on the subject, skipping sleep to cram everything in. Even she doesn't advocate this as by the time the exams happened, she was so "full" of abbreviated facts, she didn't know where to begin. I, on the other hand, took everything far slower: I began to prepare for exams months in advance so I could, to the best of my ability, avoid any unnecessary stress. If you find that papering your walls in coloured mind maps, or getting your computer to read you your notes back helps, stick with what works for you."

What do you know?

There are lots of ways to revise your academic work. The examination is designed to test *what you know* so you need to revisit topics from your module. In some cases, your course tutors may provide revision topics, if not, revising the whole module is advised as a question may be asked on anything that has been taught. Make sure you attend any revision lectures or seminars as this may help you focus your revision topics.

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Student Hints and Tips:

“The classes leading up to exams can be the most important; lecturers tend to use the time for revision sessions that re-cover the module’s key topics/theories. These aren't substitutes for seminars, but they do provide great opportunities for any last-minute questions and making sure your notes are correct. It can also be useful to voice record these sessions; listening back to them as a form of revision, I found, jogged my memory quicker than reading notes from previous seminars.”

How you revise is very personal. Some people copy notes, others create mind maps and some people do all of these things and then create quizzes to test themselves. Other people rely heavily on past exam papers. In an ideal world, you need to utilise several approaches to make sure you understand the material more thoroughly and are able to apply this knowledge in the examination environment.

Different ways to revise

Taught Revisions Sessions:

Attend any sessions that have been provided by your course tutors. Not only can you learn something you may have missed previously it will also consolidate your original learning.

Resources such as VLE or Handouts:

Use the e-tivities, discussion boards and resources on the course NILE site to guide your revision and learning. Revisit those tasks to embed your understanding.

Using your notes:

A popular way to start your revision is to write down everything you know about a revision topic using your existing notes and then condense these notes down further and further. By the end you can create flash cards easily which contain the main points about the topic and you’ll be able to unpack each point with more detail.

Shorthand:

If you use the “condensing your notes” technique you’ll eventually create your own shorthand which is useful to help recall concepts and theories.

Mnemonics:

Creating mnemonics is another popular way of learning facts. Use the first letter of each word to create an easily memorable phrase or word:

For example: “**Keep Calm At All Sporting Events**” helps education students to remember Bloom’s Taxonomy: **K**nowledge, **C**omprehension, **A**pplication, **A**nalysis, **S**ynthesis, **E**valuation.

Or a way to remember the order of taxa in biology? **Dumb Kids Prefer Candy Over Fancy Green Salad** enables the following: **D**omain, **K**ingdom, **P**hyla, **C**lass, **O**rders, **F**amily, **G**enus, **S**pecies.

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Card Technique or Condensing:

This technique is very popular, it involves using your notes and rewriting them and condensing them at the same time. It may mean that you rewrite and condense your notes several times until they can be held on index cards and you can use the cards to prompt your memory of the subject under revision.

Student Hints and Tips:

"I've used the card, mind mapping, summarising and mnemonics techniques all together to help me prepare for exams. I take my notes and create a huge mind map which covers my bedroom floor and then I use that to condense the information onto index cards. And finally, I verbally explain it to myself and create mnemonics. It sounds crazy but this process has always worked for me."

Mind Mapping or Flow Charts:

This technique is a very visual way of representing your subject matter and is a good way to repeatedly handle the information to help you to memorise and be able to explain concepts during your exam. You take your written notes and create a mind map or flow chart. Visual representations often assist people in understanding abstract concepts and aids their memory.

Summarising or recording:

Being able to explain a concept verbally to yourself or someone else is really beneficial when revising. Or you can record yourself talking through the subject area and then play it back to yourself.

Student Hints and Tips:

"I was really panicking about the concept of secularisation for my Sociology exam so my friend told me to put my notes down and explain it to her verbally. She then asked me questions as I went along and I realised that I did know what I was talking about! In fact, I got an A in that exam!"

Study Groups:

Working with others is a great idea but it does involve some planning, making sure you can all get together at the right time and finding a study environment that suits you. The other things to consider are whether or not you'll be distracted by your study group. However, study groups can work really well and can encourage you to focus and concentrate.

Past Exam Papers:

When they are available, past exam papers are a good place to get an understanding of what the exam may be like. The style of questions, how the paper is set out and timings will give you a great indication of what you might expect. They can also be used for exam practice, where you put yourself under exam conditions to see how you get on.

Examinations

Exam Techniques:

Usually the structure of your exam will be similar to other forms of writing you have encountered in your course. For example, if you are required to write essays for your coursework then the chances are that your exam will involve an extended written answer. Similarly, if you have been assessed with multiple choice tests via the VLE, the actual exam for the module maybe the same.

On the day:

Make sure you are organised on the day, last minute panics need to be avoided as you need to keep calm.

- Get out of bed in plenty of time and eat a proper breakfast.
- Make sure you know exactly where the exam is.
- Arrive in plenty of time, allow for late buses or parking difficulties.
- Have your student ID with you and all of the equipment you need.
- Take a drink and a snack.
- Go to the loo before the exam starts.
- If you get nervous talking to others then you don't have to, take the time to prepare yourself mentally.

Exam Stress:

At some points all students experience some form of exam stress. The most effective way to avoid this is to ensure that you are well organised, you plan in advance and you give yourself enough time to revise. All of these things will reduce the risk of exam stress. That said, it is perfectly natural to get upset or worried, and some adrenalin can help you to focus.

Student Hints and Tips:

"Before one of my finals I was so stressed out I didn't know what to do.....I'd planned ahead and had been really organised but I just got myself in a state, I knew that the results of the exam meant a lot to my overall degree classification.....I rang my mum in a panic and whilst I was crying and ranting she just told me to 'shut up' and then told me that I could do it, I was ready and that I just had to have more confidence in myself, and it actually worked! That said, the panicky feeling is horrible so plan ahead to try and avoid it"

Summary:

All students will be examined during their educational careers, hopefully this guide will help you to organise your approach to the process and aid you in successfully completing your exams. If you require any other support then please get in touch with Learning Development.