

EFFECTIVE EXAM PREPARATION

Exams are a certainty for most university students, so here are a few tips on how to prepare for them.

1. Start revising early and space out your study

Even though throughout the semester you will have plenty of reading to get through and assignments to complete, it's best to start learning the material you will need for your exams early on. Research shows that it is much more effective to split study time over multiple study sessions rather than cramming it into big blocks of time. Importantly, you should keep revisiting the same material multiple times. The more often we are exposed to a piece of information, the more likely it will be committed to long-term memory. Keep revisiting the material as it gets closer to exam time.

2. Use effective learning strategies.

Did you know that reading over your notes and highlighting are some of the least effective study strategies? Read our survival guide on **Memorising** so you can employ effective study strategies instead. Some include:

Focus on understanding the main ideas/concepts you have just studied. Ask yourself who/why/what/how **questions** and try to answer with as many details as possible. Use **mind maps or flow charts** to show links between theories/models/frameworks.

Use **concrete examples** to help you understand and remember abstract ideas. For example, if you are studying a particular theory, you may like to think about how it plays out in practice and generate two key examples. This process will help you both understand and remember the theory.

3. Test yourself regularly and practice under exam conditions

Regularly **retrieve information from your memory**. The process of calling information to mind strengthens that information in our brains. Make sure you know the difference between passive review and active recall. **Put your notes away and test what you know**. This will feel hard at first but you should slowly build up until you can recall a lot of information from memory.

You can **test yourself** at the end of every study session. Use questions provided for you or develop your own **quiz** for each topic.

Past exam papers show you the types of questions that might be in your exam. It will also be an opportunity to test your knowledge and understanding of definitions, concepts, etc. presented in your units. Furthermore, it will give you experience in answering questions in the time allotted in the exam.

You can find past exam papers for some units, but not all. Just type your unit code into OneSearch.



At the beginning of semester	Check out unit objectives, organise and prioritize materials, and make a realistic study schedule that includes multiple short study-sessions throughout semester.
During semester	Study in short blocks of time each week to learn material. Make sure you use effective study strategies (see survival guide on Memorising). Review new and old concepts. Focus on really understanding the material by asking and answering questions with many details, thinking of concrete examples, and by using mind maps and flow charts to show connections between ideas, authors, applications, etc. Regularly test your memory and understanding by putting your notes away and calling the information to mind.
Study Break and Exam Week	Practise answering possible exam questions (if there are no past exams to refer to, make up your own questions). Look after your wellbeing: make sure you exercise regularly, sleep well, stay in touch with friends and family and take some time to relax each day.

Concentrating and staying motivated:

Keep in mind that we are not actually very good at multi-tasking. In fact, often when we think we are multitasking we are actually rapidly switching between tasks. Importantly, research shows that switching like this impairs performance of both of the tasks. It is also best to minimise distractions while you are studying because they can interfere with the memory encoding process. So choose a quiet place to study, turn off your phone or leave it in the next room, close down any web browsers and focus on the task at hand.

Recognise that the study break and exam period is a stressful time for most people! Therefore, it is really important that you focus on your wellbeing. While you are studying, take regular breaks (e.g. every 40-60 minutes). Leave some time each day for enjoyable and relaxing activities e.g. spend some time outdoors, take a hot bath, meditate, play with a pet, call a close friend or family member for a chat. It is also important that you try to maintain good nutrition, sleep habits and regular exercise.

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Any suggestions?

We'd love to hear from you. Email us at study.smarter@uwa.edu.au

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If you feel anxious on the day:

- Take deep breaths (breathe in for 3 and out for 4 counts a few times) —taking deep breaths counteracts the body's stress response
- Start with the sections of the exam you feel most comfortable with.
- Say something positive and encouraging to yourself.

