OPEN BOOK EXAMS

Open-book exams usually allow you to take text books, journal articles and notes into the exam.

However, don’t make the mistake of thinking open-book exams are easy. They can be the most difficult of all exams because examiners usually expect a very high standard of work.

Open-book exams are designed to test your understanding of your unit materials and your ability to synthesise and apply information in specified situations.

Preparing for open-book exams

- Study all the topics to be tested as thoroughly as you would for an ordinary exam.
- Ensure you know what materials you can bring into the exam room.
- Familiarise yourself with texts and their layout so you can use your exam time efficiently.
- Use colour coding and post-it notes to highlight important sections.
- Write summaries of key points on separate sheets of paper. This will help you avoid plagiarising during the exam.
- List data and formulae on separate sheets of paper.
- Write your own notes in the margins of texts.
- Find out how many questions you have to answer and plan how much time to spend on each.

In the exam

- Use your time wisely. Keep to your time allocation plan.
- Read each question carefully and allocate time for each.
- Ensure you are answering the question that is asked.
- Answer the questions you are confident about first.
- Use quotations (sparingly):
  - To illustrate your point.
  - To utilise the authority of the source.
  - Because you can’t say it any better.
  - As a discussion point.
- Don’t go over the time you have planned for each question.
- Leave time to re-read your answers to check for errors and to ensure that your argument flows logically.
Tips

Think strategically about what to bring into an open-book exam. If you don’t, you could waste a lot of time, shuffling from one book to the other trying to find the information you need.

Find out from your lecturer exactly what you are allowed to bring into the exam.

- In the exam, read the questions carefully. Don’t presume you know what they say.
- Take a few minutes to plan your answer. It will help you write a well-structured argument.
- When answering each question, follow the format used in your discipline, usually this involves writing an introduction, body and conclusion.
- Write critically about each topic, e.g. if appropriate, mention strong and weak points, compare and contrast different approaches.
- When developing your argument, provide explanations and examples.
- If you copy a sentence or two, word-for-word from a text, make sure you use quotation marks.

Ask your lecturer before the exam if you need to reference in the exam.

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