

# Practical tips for students taking examinations

## Examination anxiety

During the build up to exams when you are trying to revise, or during the examination period, please **do not suffer** in silence and let your anxiety inhibit your performance. Get help with problems before they get too big: if talking to your friends doesn't help, then please contact one of:

- Your tutor and/or Senior Tutor
- The College Nurse and/or College Doctor
- The Dean and/or Junior Deans
- Oxford University counselling service

## Coping with revision and examinations

The phase leading up to examinations, when you are trying to revise, as well as the period of examinations themselves, can be very stressful which could lead to anxiety and panic.

Often talking to friends, making sure you have a good exercise routine and healthy diet (remember your five-a-day) can help considerably. Maintaining a reasonable social life is also important as it can help keep a sense of proportion.

For most students' exams will bring some degree of anxiety. The following presents some brief guidance on actions you can take that may help keep the anxiety under control, and help prevent this anxiety spiralling into panic:

## When you are revising

<b>If you can please try to:</b>	<b>But try not to:</b>
<b>Plan</b> a revision timetable so that the bulk of your revision is completed before the exams start	Leave it all to the last minute

Get an <b>overview</b> of each course and then select areas for more detailed revision	Revise each course in detail
<b>Decide</b> how much work you personally need to do	Compare the amount of work you are doing with that of your friends
Find out the <b>best time</b> of day for you and plan to do your work then	Push yourself to revise at a biological 'low' time
Take a 10-minute <b>break</b> after every fifty minutes	Work for more than an hour without a break
Include a couple of <b>free evenings</b> each week in your timetable	Work every evening
<b>Take a day</b> completely away from revision from time to time and go outside, away from the working atmosphere	Work all day, every day
Fix times to discuss revision topics with friends	Do all your work on your own
Work at an uncluttered desk, without too many distractions in the way of papers and posters	Work surrounded with distractions and unread papers and books
Tidy up after each revision session and put your books away	Leave books and notes open as a distraction
<b>Eat regularly and sensibly</b>	Live on snack meals, chocolate, biscuits, etc
Establish a <b>regular sleeping pattern</b>	Miss out on sleep

## During the examination period

<b>If you can please try to:</b>	<b>But try not to:</b>
<b>Plan</b> a revision timetable for the <b>whole examination period</b>	Do last minute revision
See the course as a whole, but concentrate on <b>selected detail</b>	Revise the whole course
Work in a <b>calm</b> uncluttered atmosphere	Flit from topic to topic
<b>Concentrate</b> on your own priorities	Compare your revision with your friends
Put each exam behind you as soon as it is <b>completed</b>	Discuss the exam papers with friends after the exam has finished
<b>Eat sensibly and regularly</b>	Put off eating

<b>Sleep regularly</b>	Stay up all night
Put most of your <b>effort</b> into writing the exam papers	Get so tired and panicky that you don't do yourself justice in the exam

## In the examination

<b>If you can please try to:</b>	<b>But try not to:</b>
Read the <b>whole paper</b> including the directions carefully before you start	Start at the first question you see without reading the directions
Underline key words in the questions you select ( <b>describe, evaluate, compare, account for, etc</b> )	Write before thinking
<b>Plan</b> your answers	Waste time by including irrelevant information
Answer the right number of questions and <b>allocate your time</b> evenly	Spend too much time on one question at the expense of another
<b>Get help at once if you need it</b>	Suffer in silence

## Experiencing anxiety and panic

Anxiety can be experienced as a range of feelings from uneasiness to severe panic. It is usually experienced in three ways:

Emotionally: feelings of fear and nervousness;

Physically: dry mouth, feeling sick or churning stomach, racing heart, sweating, shaking or breathing difficulties;

Cognitively: disturbing thoughts such as: •'I'm going to fail'  
•'I'll make a fool of myself' •'I can't remember anything'

We all experience anxiety, when we feel stressed and overwhelmed. Feeling anxious is a normal part of our lives, but sometimes this feeling becomes so intense that it becomes difficult to manage.

The experience of anxiety can range from mild uneasiness and worry to severe panic. At a reasonable level, anxiety can motivate us and enhance our performance, but if it becomes too severe or chronic, it can become debilitating. A panic attack is a severe experience of anxiety. People may experience intense dread, various physical symptoms, or having thoughts of losing control.

## Self-help anxiety / stress management

### Eat a healthy diet

Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals, plus healthy snacks throughout the day.

### Exercise regularly

Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.

### Get enough sleep

Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

### Reduce caffeine and sugar

The temporary 'highs' caffeine and sugars provide often end with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, will make you feel more relaxed and you will have better sleep.

### Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs

Drinking alcohol and/or taking drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Do not avoid or mask issues; deal with them with a clear mind.

### Set aside relaxation time

Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach.

### Connect with others

Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.