

Exam Tactics

This module covers concepts such as:

- Strategies to maximise exam performance
- Techniques to address exam stress
- Understand JCU exam policies and procedures
- Use perusal time effectively



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Exam Tactics

This workshop provides you with some practical tactics and strategies that you can use in the lead-up to the exam and during the perusal and working times. Many of the tactics in this workshop are closely related to reducing the stress levels associated with exams. Of course, one of the best ways of reducing exam stress is to be as organised and prepared as possible.

Studying for exams is something that should occur throughout the semester with increased organisation and effort in the final 4 weeks. This process is described in an accompanying workshop called [Studying for Exams](#).

The JCU [Assessment, Exams and Results](#) webpage is also worth visiting to find out more about exam timetables, requirements and rules relating to things such as special consideration and deferred exams. Take some time to check out the section on [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about exams. You can also check your enrolment details and obtain a copy of your personal exam timetable at [Students Online](#).

You may also like to check out the [online version](#) of this workshop.

The Topic List

The topic list that you draw up from your lecture notes, course outline and other sources should form the basis of what you study. The list should be a living list in the sense that you will continually add points to it, indicate which topics you have studied and understood and which topics you still have to put some effort into. It should incorporate all of the "exam hints" that your lecturer has dropped during the semester. You can also use your topic list in conjunction with old exam papers to predict likely exam questions.

In the lead up to the exam you are now in a position to include on this list details in relation to:

- Exam Format - short answer, essay, multiple choice
- Time allowed - perusal, working time
- Materials Allowed - calculators, books, notes, dictionaries
- Exam Time, Date, Room

Preparation

There are different exam tactics you can employ at various stages leading up to the actual day of the exam.

3 Weeks before



On the day

24 hours before



after

3 Weeks before

Check the latest draft of the exam timetable for authorised list of materials, the date, time and room for each exam. This latest draft may be posted 2 weeks prior to the exam period.

- Students with disabilities should consult with the [AccessAbility](#) service in regards to access to special equipment or additional time. An approval letter will be sent to the student which will specify the equipment and the separate exam room.
- Students from non-English speaking backgrounds should check if a bilingual English translation dictionary is allowable.
- Students who have experienced exceptional personal circumstances which they believe will affect their exam performance should consult the [Counselling](#) service.

24 hours before

- Adequate sleep and rest is now very important.
- This is the time to consolidate all of the material you have already studied.
- This is not the time to start studying new material.
- Check that you have all the allowable materials you will need in the exam.
- In exceptional circumstances, applications for special consideration or for deferred exams can be made with the Examination Section up until the day of the exam.



On the day

- Plan the day's arrangements, including transport so that you arrive early.
- Sit up the front of the room to avoid being distracted by other students.
- Bring all allowable materials with you. You will only be permitted to bring in calculators, books, notes or dictionaries which are authorised on the exam paper or in a specific approval letter.
- You are required to bring your student ID with you and to place it on the desk so that the supervisor can verify your name and student number.
- Students are not permitted to enter or leave the exam room in the first hour. You are also not permitted to leave in the final 10 minutes.

Perusal Time

The perusal or reading time is normally 10 minutes but can vary according to the subject. This time is a bonus and you should make the

most of it by clarifying instructions, planning how you will use your time and deciding on the order in which you will answer the questions.

Instructions

- Listen carefully to the instructions of the supervisor.
- Read instructions and questions carefully and underline key words.

Time

- Plan how you will use your time.
- Confirm the time and marks allocated for the exam and work out the approximate time you should spend for each mark. For example, a 3 hour (180 minute) exam worth 100 marks means that you should spend about 1.8 minutes for each mark or 18 minutes for each 10 mark question.

Questions

- Clarify what each question is asking, paying particular attention to [task, content and limiting words](#). Read the questions and instructions a second time.
- Decide on the order you will attempt the questions.
- Plan to attempt all questions but do the easy ones first. By doing this you will help reduce that initial stress and you may even store up some extra time in the "bank".

Try Activity 1

What are some strategies that you have found useful in the past when sitting exams? And/or, what strategies do you think *will* work for you in a future exam situation?

Working Time

Obviously, once the working time commences the name of the game is to obtain as many marks as you can in the time available to you. The following tactics may help:

The Dictionary

- A dictionary may be allowed in some subjects and if this is the case it will be on a desk at the front of the room.
- Make use of it according to the supervisor's instructions. If it is urgent that you look up a word then act straight away. If you have a number of things you wish to check, you could save them up for one trip out to the dictionary.
- You are not permitted to write notes while looking at the dictionary.
- If you have received approval for a foreign language dictionary you may use this at your own desk.

Plan

- Plan your essay or short answer questions with the same structure you would normally adopt with an essay.
- In an exam it is particularly important to stick to the point and to constantly check to ensure that you are answering the question.
- Constantly check that you are sticking to your time plan, which you formulated in the perusal time.
- Don't get bogged down on difficult questions - move on and return to the question later. When you are bogged down your anxiousness may prevent clear thinking.

Stay the Distance

Exams are exhausting and you may be tempted to leave early thinking you have done all you can. You can still do a number of things which will gain you valuable marks:

- Proofread your answers and check words in the dictionary. You can always improve on that first draft.
- Even on difficult questions you can have a shot at putting down possible key points or relevant formulas.
- Again check that you have answered all questions and followed the instructions.
- Remember that you are not allowed to leave in the last 10 minutes so take it as a challenge to see if you can scrape together an extra 10 marks in this time!

In the exam room: Summary

- Listen to instructions from supervisor
- Read the instructions twice and underline key words
- Plan the order in which you will answer questions
- Plan your exam time
- Check wording of question e.g. explain, justify, discuss
- Answer the easy questions first
- Attempt every question
- Plan answers - stick to the point
- If bogged down, move on
- "Scrounge" marks - if all else fails put down relevant points, formulas
- Watch the time carefully
- Don't leave early
- Start each question on a new page

Minimising exam stress... Proper nutrition, adequate rest and regular exercise are all well-known stress-busters. Many people are also aware of relaxation techniques they can use to manage stressful situations. Have you also considered the possible benefits of revising with friends? And how about trying to avoid negative self-talk and people who are panicking, especially when waiting outside the exam room on exam day!



- The final draft of the exam timetable will indicate when results will be released.
- Enquiries about subject results should be directed in the first instance to the examiner of the subject or to the Subject Coordinator. You can ask for your final grade to be reviewed but this usually requires discussion at a school level first and then submitting an application no more than 21 days after results have been published. You should refer to the following policy for important details regarding this process:

[Review of Assessment and Student Access to Scripts and Materials](#)

Reflection and problem-solving

Exams can be stressful! But with experience – and a little reflection along the way – you can improve your performance over time.

Reflecting on what went well in an exam and what caused you difficulty can help you do better the next time around. Here are two examples:

1. Problem: My mind went blank!

Solution: Remember to start with the easiest questions first, so you can settle into the exam and gain a little confidence. You may also benefit from some relaxation techniques and specific coping strategies for when exam stress-levels are high. Why not speak with a counsellor?

2. Problem: I ran out of time!

Solution: Time-management is critical in an exam situation. Did you get as much information beforehand about the exam and make a tentative plan? Did you allocate your time effectively across questions (eg. questions with more marks often need more time). Did you use your perusal time to fine-tune your time-plan?

Did you keep an eye on the clock?! Did you get bogged down on difficult questions, instead of moving on and returning to these questions later? There are probably many ways, with a little reflection, that you can think of to help you manage your time better the next time around.

Assessment, Exams and Results

With exams, it is important to be as prepared as is humanly possible. You really should make time to check out the JCU webpage about exams – [assessment, exams and results](#).

Try Activity 2

If you do have an exam fast approaching (or can foresee one in the near future!), think about any remaining unanswered questions you may have, and where you would go to find answers to these questions.

Remember, everyone at JCU wants you to succeed with your chosen field of study, so make sure you access all the resources available to you – so that you are in the best possible position for your exams.

Good luck and have fun!



Exam Tactics Quiz

We couldn't possibly end a workshop on exams without actually giving you one! 😊

Actually, it's a quiz – on page 5 of these notes - and we hope you find it informative and fun.

Exam Tactics Quiz

You can find the answers to the following questions – and more – on the JCU webpage about exams: [assessment, exams and results](#).

1. You can leave the exam room...
 - a. 30 minutes after writing the exam has commenced
 - b. 1 hour after writing the exam has commenced
 - c. not at all. You must stay until the end.
2. You can take a drink and snacks with you into the exam room.
 - a. this statement is partly true
 - b. this statement is completely wrong
 - c. absolutely – this statement is totally true.
3. You cannot access past exam papers for any subjects whatsoever.
 - a. true
 - b. false
4. Which of the following statements is correct?
 - a. The following items **are permitted** in all JCU exams: pencils, pens, erasers, whiteout, rulers and a clear bottle of water with the label removed.
 - b. The following items **are permitted** in all JCU exams: pencils, pens, erasers, whiteout, rulers, blank paper and a clear bottle of water with the label removed.
 - c. The following items **are permitted** in all JCU exams: pencils, pens, erasers, whiteout, rulers, mum and dad, the pet dog and a clear bottle of water with copious notes scribbled all over the label.
5. You are not permitted to bring a jacket with you into the exam room.
 - a. true
 - b. false
6. Mobile phones, pagers, ipods etc **must be turned off** and balanced on top of your head during the exam.
 - a. true
 - b. false
7. You must place your photo ID (student card, driver's licence, passport etc.) facing upwards on the top right-hand corner of the desk.
 - a. true
 - b. false
8. You can't make any notes during reading time, but you can use a calculator.
 - a. true
 - b. false
9. At any time during the exam, if you have an enquiry (for example, if you require a toilet break, feel unwell or have questions about the paper), you should get up from your desk and stumble your way to the front of the room with your eyes as tightly closed as possible.
 - a. true
 - b. false
10. If you have two exams scheduled on the same day and time...
 - a. you should split yourself into two pieces and be in two places at the same time
 - b. you should just sit the exam you like best and ignore the other one
 - c. you should contact the Examinations Office immediately.