

Study Skills Workshops

Rehoboth Christian College



3. Exams Workshop

Workshops Overview



1 – Study Habits Workshop

An overview of Study Techniques; Motivation; Setting Goals; Getting Organized; Time Management and Revision Techniques.

2 – Revision Workshop

Ideas for Planning your time, Putting together a Revision Timetable, Getting the most out of Revision; Simple techniques, Tips to help you Revise in a way that suits; Memory tools, Mnemonics and much, much, more.

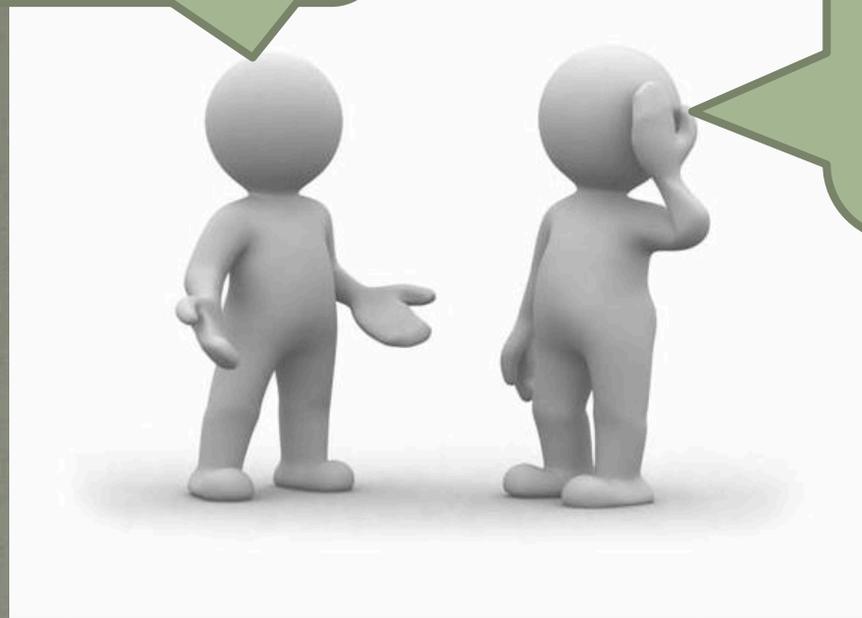


3 – Exams Workshop

This covers Understanding Exams; Instructions, Command and Keywords; Preparing for Exams; During the Exam; Managing Exam Stress; Exam Techniques and Stirling's Tips.

Understanding Exams

I'm ok with the revision it's the exams that I struggle with.



I know what you mean...

I think I've learnt all that I need to but then I get into the exam and just don't understand the exam questions.

**Understanding
Instructions
Command Words
Keywords**

What do you know about exams?



You may have done lots of them already – BUT how much do you really know about exams?

Test yourself with this true or false quiz.

ACTIVITY

	True	False
1. All exams are marked by computers		
2. It's a waste of time reading the front of an exam paper		
3. There is not enough time to read the whole exam paper before you start		
4. Students with special learning needs may be allowed extra time in some exams		
5. In the exam, if you think you have been given the wrong exam paper there is nothing you can do about it		
6. The people who are supervising the exams ('invigilators') are not allowed to help you understand the questions		
7. You must not underline or highlight words on the exam paper		
8. Some exam scripts are scanned into a computer, and answers or words written in the margins are likely to be missed by the scanner		
9. In some exams you are expected to take in your own equipment, text book or coursework		
10. It's always a waste of time to plan an answer		
11. It doesn't matter if your handwriting is almost impossible to read		
12. Some exams carry more marks (and are more important) than others		
13. Exam questions have nothing to do with the content of the specification or syllabus		
14. It is not possible to work out how much time to spend on each answer		
15. There is no point in revising for exams		

How did you do?



True: 1,2,3,5,7,10,11,13,14,15

False: 4,6,8,9,12

Understanding the Instructions ...



You're taking a driving test. The examiner gives you an instruction – and you ignore it and do something else. You would expect to fail the test.

That's why it's important to read the instructions on exam papers very carefully. These are likely to include the number of questions to answer, the amount of time available and so on.

These instructions are sometimes known as 'rubric' and if you don't follow them ***you are very likely to lose marks.***

Command Words



Command words** are the instruction words that tell you what to do such as **outline, describe, discuss, identify, assess.

You can't do very well in an exam if you don't understand what the question is asking for.

This is why it's important to have a good understanding of the words used by examiners.

It's well worth spending time looking at exam questions and working out exactly what they mean.

Can you Make The Match?

Match these command words with their correct definitions. Draw a line to connect the command word with its correct definition.

1. Justify
2. Examine
3. Summarise
4. Compare
5. Criticise
6. Discuss
7. Contrast
8. Prove
9. Describe
10. Evaluate



- a. Explain the difference between
- b. Sum up the main points
- c. Support (with facts/figures/examples)
- d. Explain the similarities and differences
- e. Debate the issue from different standpoints
- f. Give a concise statement of meaning and/or identify the main characteristics
- g. Identify problems/disadvantages
- h. Investigate closely, ask questions of
- i. Demonstrate, make certain
- j. Weigh up the strengths and weaknesses

The Key to Success – Exam Key Words



Key words are words in a question that tell you what your answer should be about.

They are often **technical words** used in the subject and often require a definition before the question can be answered effectively.

If your answer is not focused on these key words, you may well be drifting from the point.

For Example:

COMMAND

KEY WORDS

To what extent have out-of-town malls changed the behaviour of consumers?

The *command words* are: **to what extent ...**

This means I should: weigh up both sides of the argument and reach a conclusion (i.e. make a judgment).

In this question the key words are:

- **out-of-town malls**
- **behaviour of consumers**
- **changed**



It may be appropriate at the start of your answer (i.e. in the introduction) to briefly define what these **key words** mean. This benefits you because it makes clear what you need to write about, and it also allows you to set boundaries for your answer.

For example, this answer could start:

Out-of-town malls are large shopping centres which have become increasingly popular in the UK since the late 1980s. They are usually located along major roads or motorway junctions.

These two sentences define 'out-of-town malls'

Changes in consumer behaviour might include alterations in the way people travel to shops, what they buy, how they buy, when they shop and how long they spend shopping.

This sentence defines changes in consumer behaviour

Preparing for Exams

■ Timetable

You should allow plenty of time to study for your exams. Be aware of when your exams are when you are doing your weekly planning and always know what is coming up ***at least four weeks in advance. Don't leave it all to the last minute.*** A little bit of study over a long period of time is better than a lot of study in a short time.

■ Memorise

You should be memorising your executive summary leading up to the exams. This means you should have done your ***executive summary*** well before the exam. This is simply a summary of your summary notes, and only includes the main points (i.e. the key words and phrases) because they will be far easier to remember. When you are able to remember the main points in an exam, it will usually trigger the more detailed information (in your notes) that you have learned.

■ Past papers and practice essays

Past papers and practice essays are valuable in your exam preparation. Not only will they give you a good idea of the types of questions that will be asked, they also ***test your knowledge of the material and get you used to the timing.***

■ Use the marking criteria

If possible, ***get a copy of the marking criteria.*** Ask your teachers for a rough explanation of what markers expect to see.

Preparing For Exams

- Thoroughly prepare for your exam so that you feel confident about the materials
- Be test-wise and have a plan for writing the exam
- Think positively and maintain a positive attitude-you can succeed!

■ Glossary of terms

There are *many different terms used in questions, such as 'explain' or 'evaluate' and each is asking for a different response.* It is essential that you know what each one means. Ask your teachers.



■ The night before

Study the night before is very beneficial. It should be *aimed at memorising your executive summaries, not introducing new material.* Avoid introducing new material as it may well confuse you as well as add to your levels of stress.

During the Exam

Timing Issues

- Use ***ALL the available time.*** Don't daydream.

- Take advantage of every minute. You have spent all these years at school to get you here.

Don't waste a second.

- ***Stick to your finishing times*** for each question.

- If ***you run out of time, finish off the answer in point form.*** Use asterisks and sub-points if you have to.



Style Issues

- Have a clear strategy. Go into the exam knowing how you ***plan to approach it.***
- ***Attempt all questions.*** Mark the questions that you can't answer and come back to them.
- Know the ***weightings of each question.*** Don't go overtime on a question worth 10 marks at the expense of one worth 20 marks.
- Don't over-answer a question, attempting to score the last one or two marks at the expense of another question. ***The first few marks are always easier to get than the last few.***



■ **Answer the questions you are most confident about first.** You wouldn't want to be left short of time on a question you're very competent in. Doing this will also build your confidence as the exam goes on.

■ Stick to your plans.

■ **Assume the examiners know nothing** about the subject when you give your answers.

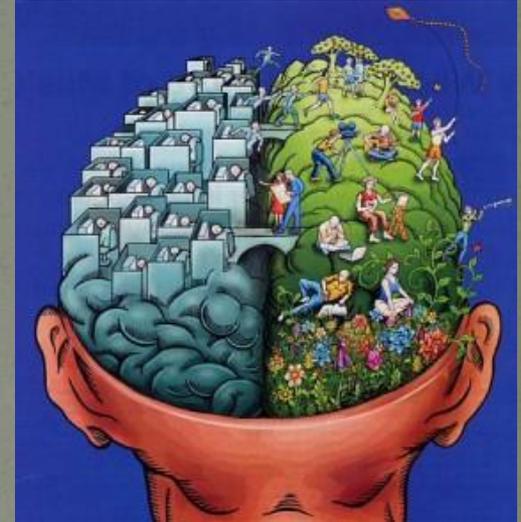
■ Don't waste time on really wordy answers. **Short, concise answers are usually best.**

■ **Take mini 30-second breaks** at the end of each section. Stretch out your writing hand. This will allow you to clear your head and rest your hand ready for the next question.



Other Issues

- Try to ***avoid making spelling mistakes***, especially with the major terms, concepts or names.
- If you get a mental block, take a couple of deep breaths and try again; move on and come back to it later.



- ***Ask yourself: who, what, how, why, when?***
- Remember that ***examiners are not trying to trick you.***

Managing Exam Stress

This kind of stress comes in the days leading up to the exam and on exam day. ***There are a number of things you can do to minimise exam stress:***

■ Light revision

Avoid introducing new or heavy material to your brain the night before or on the morning of the exam. You are likely to feel overwhelmed by new material such a short time before the exam. ***Spend the time consolidating the main topics and memorising your executive summaries.***

■ Vitamins

Look after yourself in the lead up to exams. ***Stress can lower your body's immune system making you susceptible to colds, coughs, headaches.*** Some people believe in Vitamin C supplements and fish oil tablets (often referred to in health circles as 'brain food'), or multi-vitamins. Stay warm and dry.

■ Sleep

Under no circumstances should you ever try to do an all nighter. Research indicates drastic reductions in our ability to function properly when we are fatigued.

Attempt to ***get a good eight hours sleep.*** ***It is much more effective to set the alarm early*** during your revision timetable, and study early in the morning (when you are fresh). This allows you to go through the key topics before the exam.

■ Eat a light breakfast

Light does not mean small. You definitely don't want to be hungry during an exam. ***Eating light simply means not eating greasy foods.*** Avoid takeaway breakfasts and big, heavy fried breakfasts. These are not brain foods. Have some cereal, some toast and some fresh fruit.



■ **Avoid sugar**

Avoid soft drinks and confectionary that is high in sugar.

Your sugar levels will spike and your mind will begin to race directly after your 'sugar hit, making it very difficult to concentrate. Then your sugar levels will plummet and you will feel tired – not a good way to be during an exam.

■ **Avoid pre-exam complaint sessions**

Don't join in a conversation with people who like to ***compare what little work they have done in preparation for an exam.***

Even though they pretend to be proud of it, they are really scared like everyone else.



■ Stay hydrated

Dehydration causes a massive reduction in the capability of our short-term memory, so ***have water before an exam and take in a bottle with you.*** But be careful **not to drink too much** water before the exam or you might find that you have to visit the toilet several times.

■ Breathe

Butterflies and anxiety can be overcome by ***taking in some deep breaths.*** Just stop for 30 seconds and take some deep breaths.



Exam Techniques

What should you do on the day of the exam?

- On the morning of the exam, make sure you ***eat something***, but not so much that it makes you sleepy.
- ***Wear a watch*** in case there is no clock in the exam room.
- Make sure you ***allow plenty of time*** for things like traffic jams or parking problems, but don't arrive so early that you make yourself nervous.
- Quietly ***read through your notes***. If you can, avoid talking to others about the exam. Statements such as "... there's bound to be a question on ..." or "... most people failed this exam last year ..." are all guaranteed to panic you.

What should you do during the exam?

Normally, you will be given reading time to *read the instructions* before the exam starts. ***Make sure that you know all of the following:***

- The number of questions and whether they are arranged in sections.
- How many questions in total you must answer, and how many from each section.
- Are there any compulsory questions? Clearly mark these.
- Are you asked to answer questions in any particular order?
- How many marks is each question worth?
- What types of questions are there?
- How are your answers to be recorded?

Plan your time carefully and accurately and stick to your plan

Work out how much time you should allocate to each section/question. Failure to do this can result in questions being left out or rushed through. Try to leave time at the end for checking. You will receive no marks for questions you have not attempted. ***If you do run out of time, write short notes outlining your answers.*** It will at least give the examiner some idea of your knowledge.



Carefully Read the Questions

If there is a choice of questions, choose those ***you are best able*** to answer.

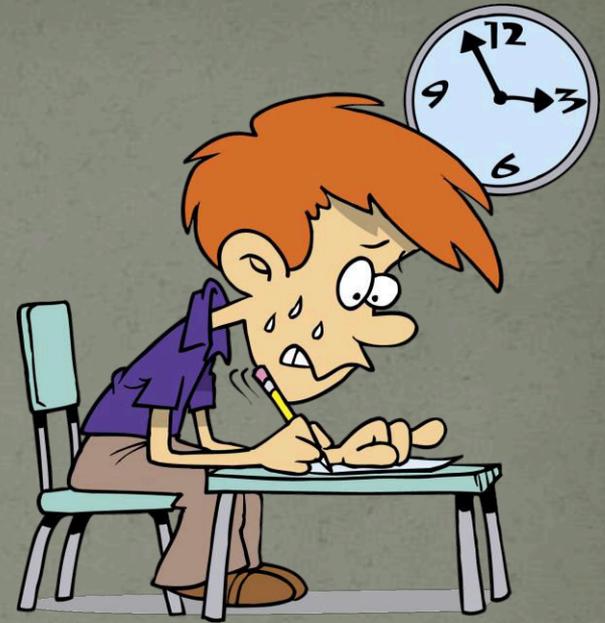
- Make your decision ***quickly***.

Tick those that you think you can do.

- Do the questions you find easiest first as this will give you confidence.

- Make sure your choice of questions ***accurately follows*** the instructions. For example: "One question from Section A and two from Section B."

- Ensure that you ***number your answers correctly***.



Answer the Questions

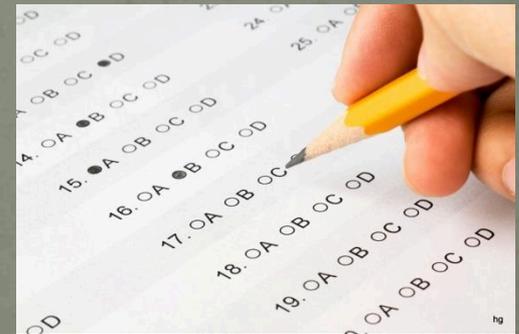
Essay/Short Answer Questions

- Analyse the question carefully.
Underline the key words etc.
- ***Make an outline*** (include the major arguments, minor points, examples etc). Before you start your answer, make sure you know how it will end.
- Write ***clearly and succinctly.***
- Take care with ***handwriting, spelling and grammar.***
- Does your answer meets the ***specified length*** (if there is one)?



Objective Questions (e.g. multiple-choice)

- Check the method of response e.g. ***tick, cross, circle the number, blacken a space***. If you fail to do this accurately in a computer marked paper you may not get credit, even if you know the answer.
- Read the question carefully. Do you have to choose the ***'best response' or the 'correct response'?***
- ***Watch out for negatives.*** For example, "Which of these is not ..." or "All of these except ..."
- Read ***ALL the alternatives***, even if you think the first one is correct. There might be a better answer further on.



- If you don't know an answer, ***eliminate the answers you think are certainly wrong***, and make a calculated guess.
- ***Answer ALL questions***, unless the instructions specify that marks will be taken off for incorrect answers (as in the Westpac Competition).
- Answer all questions as you come to them, even if you are not sure of the answer. If you leave a question you may forget it or not have time to return to it. ***If you are unsure about an answer, write the answer you think is the most likely, then note its number (put an asterix next to the number) so that you can check it later.***
- If you change your mind about an answer, alter it, but only after careful consideration. ***Your first thought is more often the right one.***

At the End of the Exam

- Never leave the exam room before your time is up. ***Continual checking/proofing can only help.***
- Make sure that you have ***attempted all the questions*** you've had to do (it is easier to get the first 5 marks for a 20 mark question than to get the last 5, i.e. to go from 15 to 20).
- Check all answers. ***Look for words that are misspelt or illegible.***
- ***Re-read your written answers*** for spelling, grammar, tense and sense.
- Avoid going through your exams afterwards. It is too late now and almost always depressing. You have ***other exams to prepare for.***

What Should you do if Things go Wrong?

Panic Attacks

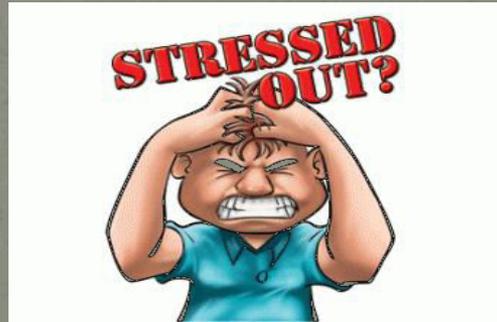
- Symptoms include accelerated heart beat, increase in breathing rate, sweating, uncontrollable shaking, and a feeling of anxiety.
- Prepare yourself so thoroughly that there is little chance of uncertainties creeping in to create panic.
- Recognise the onset of panic and know what to do. Think about breathing long, slow deep breaths. Think positive. You know you're prepared. You know you can pass. ***And pray. God says, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)***



Memory Blocks

Everyone has an occasional memory block. You know the information is in there, but you just can't recall it.

- Don't panic. Relax. ***Think back over your notes.*** Try to remember other facts associated with the point that you are trying to remember. ***If it doesn't come, leave it and return to the question later.***



- Thorough preparation is the best way to prevent memory blocks; they usually come out of last minute cramming.

Writer's Cramp

Your writing hand aches dreadfully and it feels like you can't continue to write. A common cause of writers cramp is that you are ***holding onto your pen too tightly***. Try to relax your grip and the tension in your neck and shoulders .

- ***Practising writing past exam papers*** helps in writing copious quantities quite quickly. This helps build up your hand muscles.
- During the exam, ***take frequent short breaks***, and allow your hand to dangle limply by your side.
- Mild ***shaking, and alternate contracting and relaxing*** of your hand also helps.

Physical Fatigue

If you have been working very hard in the lead up to the exams, and extending study time into sleep time, fatigue may well become a problem.



- Obtain ***adequate and regular sleep*** and pay careful attention to your diet.
- Sufficient ***daily exercise*** in the lead up to the exams is important.
- During the exam, ***occasionally stretch*** your arms, neck, back and legs.

Exam Checklist

- Do you have an exam strategy?
Have you worked out what time to spend on each part?
- Bring a blue/black pen; a pencil; ruler and eraser; the correct calculator and spares of everything (including batteries); and bottled water.
- Arrive 30 minutes before the start of each exam.
- Do you know what to do if something goes wrong?

Travelling
to your Exams

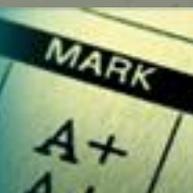
Timetable
Information

What to Bring
to your Exams

Exam
Rules

Deferred
Exams

Results



What NOT to do in Exams

- Do ***NOT re-write the question*** on the answer sheet, but DO remember to ***write the number*** of the question you are tackling ***in the margin.***
- Do ***NOT use liquid paper.*** PUT a line through your mistakes and go on.
- Do ***NOT leave the exam room early.*** Check back through multiple-choice selections and whether you have answered the question. Guess any multiple-choice answers that you don't know at the end of the exam, but try to eliminate the alternatives that are definitely wrong first. Double check the instructions. Have you answered the relevant number of questions?

Stirling's Tips

Make full use of all the available reading times in exams, reading each question TWICE.

Never spend too much time finishing one question at the expense of not starting another question. The first marks are easier to obtain than the last few.

*Don't waste time in post-mortems.
When an exam is finished, focus on the next subject.*

*Problems are best dealt with by prevention.
Start your exam preparation early – prepare and practise*

*NEVER, NEVER, NEVER leave an exam early.
There is ALWAYS something more that you can do.*

Read each question carefully, and in the second reading, go back over it and underline the key words. Many students have misinterpreted questions or overlooked things due to anxiety at the start of the exam, because they are racing through hoping to find the things they have studied.

Write your planned finishing times above all the questions, to avoid over-answering one question at the expense of another.

Remind yourself that you are well prepared; you have thoroughly revised all the relevant sections; and you know how to make sure you get everything finished.

Plan your responses – jot down the key points.

You can be satisfied if you have tried your best.