

## Exam Stress Guide

**Many of the techniques described here appear in Fred Orr's book 'How to Pass Exams' (Allen & Unwin, 1984), which is an excellent and readable guide.**

### **Start Early**

Generally, try to start studying as early as possible. Where cramming works for some people, it can be a risky strategy. It is generally better to try to pace yourself, as one of the best antidotes to exam stress is having spent the time, and feeling you know the material.

Also, get help *as soon as possible* if struggling with particular subjects. Try to approach lecturers early as they can be very busy at exam time and may be unable to see you at the last minute.

### **Study Environment**

Where possible, try to study in an environment that is quiet, is well ventilated, with good natural lighting and is distraction-free.

### **Motivation**

If motivation for study is a problem, a timetable may be helpful. Try not to make this unreasonably hard as you'll be unlikely to stick to it, could become disillusioned and may end up not doing anything. The other advantage of having a timetable is that it is a visible record of your study and it can be rewarding to tick off work completed. It can be helpful to stave off last minute nerves to look back on what you have completed over the previous weeks.

Something else that can help with motivation is building in rewards around your study. While you probably don't have lots of time to take of to socialise, taking one evening, or at least part of an evening off a week to unwind or do something with friends can help with stress, and may leave you feeling sharper for the next day's study.

### **Taking Breaks**

Take breaks when necessary. Try to be honest, and take them when you're tired, not when you're bored. Generally our concentration starts to diminish after about an hour and it may be worth taking a 5-10 minute break if it will help you feel fresher and sharper when you start again. Try to honestly review at the end of each day whether you are doing enough work.

### **Physical Health**

Don't neglect your physical health. Exam time can be stressful and it is a time you should be taking better care of yourself. Try to get enough sleep. It may be tempting to work late and that may work on the short term, but long periods of little sleep will leave you feeling tired and will effect your concentration.

Try to eat properly and not drink too much tea or coffee. Generally it is not a good idea to exceed 4 cups per day. Try to drink plenty of water instead.

Sport or exercise can be helpful. While the exam period is generally not a good time to drastically change your lifestyle, gentle exercise can help you unwind, can help concentration, assist sleep, and there is also evidence it can be helpful in combating anxiety and depression.

### **Information about the Exam**

Find out as much as you can about the exam beforehand. Knowing the time, location, length of the exam, how many questions and how much time you can devote to each question is essential.

Work out before you go to the exam how much time you have for each question and try to stick to this. It can be tempting to spend much longer on subjects you know well, but if you manage your time properly, it should allow you to at least make an attempt at the questions you are not so sure about. Always try to always write down something as no marks can be given for a blank piece of paper.

### **Read the Questions**

Take time to carefully read the questions. Although this can feel stressful at the time, especially when other people seem to be writing furiously, taking a few minutes at the start is rarely time wasted.

### **Previous Study Techniques**

**Most importantly**, remember that you have got to this stage, and have sat exams before. Don't panic or try to dramatically change your study technique to something that works for someone else. What worked for you before?

### **Language and Learning Unit**

Please remember that the Language and Learning Unit (part of Student Welfare) may be able to help, having had considerable experience in assisting students with exam techniques. They are in A Block, or can be contacted on 9351 9638 or 9351 9319

Finally:

**GOOD LUCK!**

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