Skills Refresher: Preparing for and Writing an Exam.

Exams are often worth more of the course mark than any other single assignment or test, usually because they are a test of a student's knowledge and understanding of the majority of the course material. This makes it worthwhile to put somewhat more effort into preparing for them and taking more care writing them.

A full time student takes five courses at a time. If we assume a student should devote the equivalent time of a full time job to his/her studies (40 hrs/week), this is the equivalent of 8 hours per week per course on average. A course might have 2 hours of lecture and either a seminar or a 3-hour lab weekly, resulting in 3-5 hours in class per course. That leaves 3-5 hours per week per course for working on assignments and reviewing material. Plan your time accordingly and use it wisely.

Before the exam, prepare!

An exam is a test of your knowledge of the material taught in the course. The better you know that material, the better you will do in the exam.

• **Mental preparation:**
  - During the course, spend some time each week reviewing the course material covered that week (even one hour per week helps). If you don't understand something, don't be shy... ask your instructor! We're here to help.
  - Set up a study schedule, and review the material for several weeks before the exam is scheduled.
  - Once you know the exam format, try example questions from your text or (if provided) from your instructor.

• **Physical preparation:** in the days before the exam, eat well and get a good night's sleep each night

• **Emotional preparation:** Fight anxiety by being prepared and staying positive. Don't stress about it, just prepare for it!

In the Exam...

• **Read the entire exam completely first**, including the instructions, so you can organize how to approach the exam. This is not a waste of time, but in fact helps you organize and plan.

• **Figure out your time to spend per question.** Don’t take more time on one question at the expense of others, unless you can afford it.

• **Tackle the questions you know best first.** This way you are making the most of the time you have. If you run out of time, you will have answered the questions you know best, and maximize your marks. Most of the time, answers in your exam answer booklets do not have to be in any particular order.

• **Read each question carefully**, and organize your answer. A better-organized answer usually receives more marks because it is communicated better. Use blank pages in your exam booklet(s) to organize longer answers, and in writing answers use paragraphs and/or point form to organize answers. If using point form, ensure you communicate your complete idea in full sentences.

• **Answer all parts of each question completely.**
  - If the question asks for a definition, that is all that is required.
  - If a question asks you to explain something, define any key terms and provide an explanation (examples help).
  - If a question asks for 3 examples, provide three clearly distinct examples.

• **Be concise in your answer;** don’t wander off topic through the answer. Ensure your answer sticks to the point. Markers will not be looking for colourful language or long introductions, and it can be more difficult to find good answers buried in a large response with a lot of off-topic information.

• **Write legibly.** If your answers are not readable you will not get good marks regardless of your answer. Note that spelling and writing style are NOT marked on an exam.

• **Use the entire exam time.** If you finish answering the questions before the end of the exam, use the extra time to check and recheck your answers. At worst, you’ll be satisfied that you provided the best answer you could in the time allowed. At best, you’ll improve your answer.