

you don't understand something highlight it, allow more time for the section and ask for help.

#### *Take a systematic approach –*

Ideally, you should have been studying continuously throughout the semester and should already have had an opportunity to 'interact' with the study material. This builds your knowledge in a certain subject over time and you will be more confident that you know your content material. This puts less pressure on you at test/exam time and you will perform better. If you take this approach to studying you will still be able to find time to relax in your test/exam preparation time and you will reduce your stress substantially. If you haven't been working throughout the semester, all the more reason to adopt a structured and disciplined approach to your studying. You will have to invest more time and effort into catching up your work load.

#### *Practice under test/exam conditions –*

Spend time going through past papers or make your own. Practice sample questions in the same format as the test/exam. Check your answers. It does not matter if you make mistakes, now is the time to make mistakes. Study further in the areas you don't know.

### 3. Mental & Emotional Preparation

#### *Self-care*

Self-care is also an important part of test/exam preparation. University demands, especially around test/exams, will often cause students to feel stressed, anxious & nervous. Healthy levels of stress or pressure can be motivational, pushing a student to work hard, BUT if stress levels are too high they become Unhealthy and can start to interfere with a student's ability to cope.

#### Self-Care Tips during Test/Exam Time:

- Become aware of your anxiety and stress levels
- Keep self-care as a priority
- No matter how much work you have to do, ensure you allow time for rest & relaxation
- Remind yourself to stop and breathe

- Eat healthily
- Exercise
- Make time for important people in your life

#### *Keep a positive attitude –*

Instead of seeing the test/exam as a scary challenge rather see it as a chance to demonstrate your knowledge.

#### *Keep Motivated –*

Plan rewards for yourself when you have achieved your goals. Start with subjects you find more interesting or easier. Develop a study routine (time and place) – once you start, it will become easier to keep going.

#### *Keep Focused –*

Never forget why you are studying and the greater goals you want to achieve for yourself. Self-discipline and accountability is the key!

Please remember if you feel you need some help with overcoming the problem of procrastination, or would like to talk about any of your study-related or personal concerns please do not hesitate to make an appointment at the Student Counselling Centre.

#### *This is an initiative of the*

Student Counselling Centre  
Durban University of Technology  
Lower Library Complex  
Steve Biko Campus  
Tel: 031 373 2266  
[www.dut.ac.za](http://www.dut.ac.za)



Department of  
**student  
counselling  
and health**

Developed by  
Staff of Student Counselling  
Edited by  
Robyn-Leigh Smith  
Counselling Psychologist

# succeed in your tests and exams

# Succeed in your Tests and Exams

## *The secrets to successful test & exam preparation*

Preparing for approaching tests, and especially exams, can seem overwhelming even if you are up to date with your course material. A structured and organised approach to exam preparation can reduce anxiety and improve your performance.

### The 3 Dimensions of Exam Preparation:

1. Physical Preparation
2. Academic Preparation
3. Mental & Emotional Preparation

#### 1. Physical Preparation

##### *Organise your work space –*

An important part of exam preparation is thinking about where you want to work & then organising this space. Physically separate your work from your relaxation space – this will help you to focus when you need to work, and relax when it is time to relax.

##### *Ensure you have the basic study equipment –*

Writing material, course & class notes. Make sure your notes are up to date and no sections are missing.

##### *Create a Learning Environment –*

Organise your work area, for example a table, chair & computer. Do not study lying on your bed – this is an area for relaxation. Make sure your learning environment is quiet, and there are no interruptions. Move all distractions when you are studying, for example phone, TV, music.

##### *Surround yourself with positive messages –*

Studying is not easy & it is normal to feel like you need encouragement, especially if you are away from home. It helps to create a learning environment that will help you feel motivated & confident. For example you can put up pictures of family & friends; quotations that inspire you; awards and/or certificates.

#### Healthy Living –

An important part of test & exam preparation is ensuring that you are taking time to look after yourself.

##### a) *Eating –*

Healthy Eating – nourishes your brain, energises, improves alertness & will sustain you during the long exam hours. Examples of healthy food include fruit & vegetables, supplements – Omega 3 (great brain food), vitamins.

Unhealthy eating – can make you feel sluggish, jittery, or burnt out. Examples of unhealthy food include junk food, caffeine, & nicotine.

##### b) *Sleeping –*

Not having enough sleep (sleep deprivation) can negatively affect you:

- Ability to learn, accuracy, alertness + concentration
- Mood - making you feel more stressed, emotional, & unable to cope

It is vital that you give yourself enough time to sleep (at least 8 hours a night) – allowing your body & most importantly your brain to rest. Never work throughout the night!

##### c) *Exercising –*

Regular exercise is an excellent way of coping with stress.

As little as 10 to 20 minutes of exercise a day will energise your brain & body, making it easier to focus when you are studying. Examples of exercise include walking, running, cycling, gym or dancing.

#### 2. Academic Preparation

##### *Start with organising your time –*

Plan for exams well in advance. Starting early & studying on a regular basis will make learning easier & less stressful.

Draw up a study plan (read self-help pamphlet - Manage your time effectively). This is the most fundamental key to effective studying and will require you to be self-disciplined. You need to invest time in studying if you want to do well. There are no short cuts or magical solutions that will replace diligent, hard work.

#### Don't Procrastinate or Cram!

Cramming or 'cross-nighting' are the opposites of effective studying. You may need to revise the day or night before an exam to refresh your memory, but if you try to cram information that you haven't yet studied properly, you will at best only remember some of the information in the short term. Learning is a process and not instantaneous. You need to rest and get enough sleep during exams so that your brain can function optimally.

#### Draw up a weekly timetable

Step 1 - include everything you need to do, e.g.: meals, sleep, lectures, shopping, laundry, etc.

Step 2 - allocate revision time. Take regular breaks (50 min study, 10 min break).

Step 3 - Balance study with leisure – allow time in your schedule for you, e.g.: relaxation, sport, socialising & rest. Importantly, allow for flexibility – plans need to allow enough blank space to adapt to the unexpected.

Your Time is *not* wasting time:

- It will help you feel less stressed
- It will help you to work & focus better

#### Select a PRIME TIME to study/revise

Decide on what time you work best – morning, afternoon or evening. Spend time on the tasks/subjects that need more energy or concentration during this time.

#### *Manage your revision time -*

Write a list of all the topics you want to revise and decide on what order to learn them in. Then allocate an amount of time you want to spend on each topic. Allow more time for important subjects & ones you find more difficult. It is important to be realistic about what you want to achieve, your goals. Stick to the deadlines you set for yourself. Tick off as you achieve your goals to see what you have done. If