



Focus on Exams and Revision

Pre-exam checks

There are some preliminary checks which need to be made. If you do this in good time you can enter the exams in a more relaxed frame of mind. If you have special requirements (e.g. physical or learning disabilities, or medical conditions) contact the disability team, disability@dmu.ac.uk, in plenty of time to discuss what arrangements can be put in place.

The exam timetable

As the exam period approaches, look for your exam timetable on myDMU. Consult the timetable as soon as possible.

- make sure it is the **latest published version** as there are often amendments to the schedule
- make a note of your exam **dates** and **rooms**
- make a note of the start and finish times of each exam
- check for **clashes**
- check for exams scheduled outside '**normal**' time-tabled hours – e.g. days you might not normally attend classes, evenings, Saturdays, Tuesdays after Bank Holidays.

The exam location

- try to visit the **exact location** beforehand – the room, building or campus might be unfamiliar to you
- check **travel** arrangements – e.g. bus routes/times; car or bicycle parking
- decide if you'll need **extra time** to get there on the day.

Timing

- find out what time you need to **arrive** before the exam, it is usually 15 minutes before
- check whether you are allowed **reading time** before starting, at DMU all papers have 5 minutes
- be aware of any **rules** for those who **arrive late**, wish to **leave early**, or **leave temporarily**
- students are **not allowed** to enter the exam venue **later than 15 minutes after the start of the exam**
- make any necessary **personal arrangements** – e.g. time off work, travel, child care
- find out when and how will you be given the **exam results**.

What should you take with you?

- **personal identification** – e.g. student ID card; signed reassessment forms, if re-sitting without attendance
- **your own equipment**, including **spares** – e.g. pens, pencils, ruler, sharpener and drawing instruments, in a transparent bag or pencil case. Neither invigilators nor other students can loan you equipment
- **do not take any unauthorised materials** into the exam – e.g. notes, texts, certain types of calculator, rough paper or mobile phones
- **possession of unauthorised material** in an exam is regarded as cheating and constitutes an academic offence
- you can find **DMU exam regulations** in full at <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/dmu-students/the-student-gateway/academic-services/sitting-and-resitting-dmu-exams.pdf>.

Examination formats and marking schemes

Consult tutors and handbooks for details of the format, question type and marking scheme for each exam. ExamNet has a selection of DMU exam papers from the past three years. Use these with care: formats, question types, etc. may change. Access at <http://www.library.dmu.ac.uk/Resources/ExamNet/>

Exam formats and question types vary:

As well as the traditional unseen exams, you might sit open book, seen, or take away papers. Some different kinds of question are:

- essay
- problem
- short answer
- multiple choice
- report style.

Find out

- how many **papers** you have **per subject**
- how many **sections** and **questions** per paper
- what **topics** the sections cover
- how many **questions** you must answer **from each section**
- if any of the sections are **compulsory**
- what **types of questions** they are
- how much **time** will be allowed per paper
- whether the paper is **available beforehand** – e.g. seen exams
- if there are **restrictions on what material you can use in your answers** – e.g. some exams require you to avoid using a substantial amount of material that you have already presented in an assessment
- the definitions of **typical exam key words** – e.g. *analyse*, *assess*, *criticise*, etc.

Marking schemes

You need to know:

- **how many marks** are allocated **per question**
- how the component marks are formulated to give an **over all result**
- if marks could be deducted for anything – e.g. poor handwriting, poor English language or grammar; wrong answers in multiple choice
- if the marks are **weighted** – if so, what scheme is used?
- what the **pass mark** is.

Effective Revision*

Planning

Start early in the term and try to learn things as you go along. Even if you don't recall a topic well at first you will find it easier to learn the next time. At least review your notes regularly. Towards the end of the term apply the successful time management strategies that you use for study:

- break down your subjects into revision topics
- prioritise
- make a written plan
- review your plan daily
- allow yourself some variety
- know your concentration span
- know your best time of day for concentrating
- use time between lectures.

Sources

Read your syllabus and identify its central themes and important topics.

Check your module handbook for notes on the exam (there may be restrictions on writing essay assignments and exam answers on the same topics)

Your notes

Keep all your notes. Make sure they are filed and well organised. Use subject dividers and coloured pens: highlight important parts.

Review notes regularly, preferably soon after you make them. Fill in gaps. Add headings. You may want to rewrite them for revision, or you might find your original notes easier to recall. If the latter applies you can supplement them with cards summarising the main points.

Past papers

Many are available on the DMU web pages

<http://www.library.dmu.ac.uk/Resources/ExamNet/>

Analyse them to see what the examiner is likely to expect of you. (Your understanding of underlying concepts? Your ability to make a convincing argument, to analyse/criticise information, or to apply your knowledge to a given case? Your clarity of expression? All of these things? Other things?)

Set texts/recommended reading list/handout material

Identify the parts of your texts that relate to your syllabus topics. Make sure you understand the main concepts. Make condensed notes using active revision techniques.

Active revision techniques

Active revision techniques work better than passive ones. Just reading through your notes is much less productive than doing something with the information. You can try different techniques to help you remember things:

- **active learning** (e.g. not just reading but writing and making diagrams, testing yourself, discussing)
- **using associations** (e.g. making diagrammatic summaries, which show the relationship between ideas)
- **repetition** (e.g. going over difficult concepts again, ideally the following day: using flash cards).

* Based on 'Revising for Exams', by the former Academic Guidance Dept. (Humanities), De Montfort University.

Timed practice answers

Try working through some questions from past papers – writing by hand and timing yourself. If you usually word process this will help you practice writing speedily and legibly, and thinking clearly under pressure. Check your answers to make sure you have not missed important points.

You can do the same with outline plans rather than full answers. Keep them with your revision notes or make them into summary cards.

Posters/summary cards/flash cards

These are some formats in which you can summarise your topics, once you have identified the central themes. Many of us have visual memories and find it easier to remember information presented in pictorial or diagrammatic form. Research suggests that it is easier to recall pieces of information if they have been grouped or linked in a meaningful way.

A poster allows you to digest information subconsciously. Use colours and a large font and show the links between aspects of your topic.

Make A4 (or smaller) summary cards and keep them with you. You can look at them at any time.

Flash cards are useful for testing yourself on factual points (e.g. vocabulary).

Write the question on one side and the answer on the other.

Revision study groups

Try revising with a friend or in a small group. A discussion helps you to remember your ideas, and it also gives you new ideas. For instance, you could each prepare a short outline plan for a sample question and then compare notes, discussing all aspects that would need to be covered. You should be able to remember these aspects better than something that you have read on your own.

Audio recording

Recording your main points (maybe on your mobile phone) and listening to them offers a three stage revision process

- making the recording allows you to go over the topic
- speaking it aloud helps you to remember
- listening helps to fix it in your mind.

Anxiety about examinations

Your examiners are likely to be your course tutors. They are not aiming to catch you out, but to bring out the best in you. The key to dealing with exam anxiety is good preparation, but there are measures you can take to reduce anxiety on the day of the exam.

Prepare thoroughly

- start early in the course and ideally devote at least two hours a week to revision topics from the start
- avoid last minute 'cramming' which can make you feel more unprepared
- later in the academic year make a detailed revision plan and stick to it
- you could form a revision study group with other students.

If you feel anxious on the day

- think about the things you do know, instead of worrying about what you haven't revised
- keep all materials and equipment together so that you are not searching at the last moment
- set off in good time
- avoid pre-exam discussions with others.

When you go into the exam

- take two or three deep breaths
- read the questions carefully – it is easy to misread if you are nervous
- you might spend a few minutes at the start writing plans for your chosen answers, so that you don't miss out important ideas – cross out the plans if you don't want the examiner to read them
- you might start with the question you feel the most confident with, to calm yourself down.

When you come out of the exam

- avoid post-exam discussions with others
- forget about the exam paper until you receive the result
- read carefully any feedback you might get
- aim to learn from the experience by deciding what you will do differently next time.

You can find more practical tips at <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/student-services/counselling/stressed-about-exams.pdf>

Writing examination answers

You can increase your marks by applying good technique.

Choosing your questions

- make sure you **understand the instructions**
- **read all the questions** first and look for topics you have prepared
- make sure you **understand the questions**
- underline **key words in the question** to remind you to stick to the point
- you could **roughly sketch out answer plans**, to help you decide which questions to answer, and/or to check that you have not left anything out
- **allocate your time** in blocks, to avoid spending too much time on earlier questions and not enough on later ones
- whilst time planning, check the **marks allocations per question**
- you might note down **start and finish times** against your chosen questions
- remember you'll need a few minutes at the end of the exam for **checking through**
- **don't be put off** by others who might start writing immediately.

Writing your answers

- **start** with a question with which you feel **confident**
- write the **question number** clearly in the margin
- keep handwriting **legible** – there may be penalties if you don't, even failure
- **use a clear written style** – short sentences are preferable
- pay attention to **layout** and **paragraphing**
- **leave a few lines** between answers – for clarity, or for any last-minute additions
- **keep the question in mind** as you write
- **be careful** not to spend so long on the first questions that you can't do justice to later ones, which might be more challenging
- **re-read** the question when you have finished your answer, to check for relevance
- go for **quality over quantity** of words – you need to give your ideas without waffling
- be aware of whether (and how) you must show your **rough work**
- cross out anything you don't wish the examiner to read
- **don't miss out** part of a multi-part question.

Towards the end of the exam

- if possible, **re-read** your answers and clarify where necessary
- incorporate any **new ideas** if appropriate
- make sure answers are **correctly numbered**
- **put right** any mistakes
- have a strategy to use **if you run out of time** (e.g. finish the question you're on in a more concise style, and move on; or – sketch out a draft for an answer you haven't started to try and gain some marks)
- **stay to the end** – if you leave early you will think of something you could have added.

Remember cheating in an exam is an academic offence which the University takes seriously. All incidences are recorded and reported to the faculty and may lead to exclusion from the University.

