

How to Prepare for Exams

The semester has barely begun, and you are already worrying about the final exams.

The exam period can certainly be demanding, but a few habits may help you approach it with more confidence.

1. Start early when you can. In effect, attending lectures, taking notes, preparing for tutorials (see the other “How to...” guides), and talking with classmates and lecturers throughout the term are all forms of exam preparation. They can ease the pressure later. If you are starting later than you hoped, begin with the core topics; there is still value in the time you have.
2. Make a realistic study plan early in the semester and revisit topics over time. If possible, begin more focused revision about a month before exams. Your plan can change when life gets busy. Starting early makes it easier to leave room for sleep, friends, and the other things you value.
3. Find out early how you will be assessed. Look for previous exam questions and examine the format and types of questions. Your lecturers* and older students can help. Sort questions by chapter and use some to test yourself as each topic is taught. Check your answers and return to the topics you find difficult. This helps you understand the course as well as prepare for the exam.
4. Study with others. Discussing what you have read with classmates can improve understanding and concentration, and make studying more enjoyable. You could start by preparing for tutorials together. If one group does not work well, try another.
5. Studying does not require staying at home. Try the library, a café in the city centre, or a friend’s place.
6. Put your phone away. Do not suddenly decide to clean the whole flat or become a chef. Getting started takes some self-discipline, but the beginning is the hardest part. Set small, specific goals and begin.
7. Take breaks: you cannot study around the clock. Work for a period that suits your concentration, then pause. A planned break makes it easier to put Instagram aside while you study. Leave room each day for a longer break, perhaps a walk, exercise, or time with friends. Rest is not a reward you have to earn.
8. Do not panic if you cannot cover everything. It really is OK. Prioritize the core ideas and the learning objectives, and accept that some details will have to wait. No one can give every topic equal time, and your well-being matters more than a perfect study plan. If you do not pass or do not get the grade you hoped for, it is disappointing, but it does not define you. You can learn from it and try again.
9. Trust yourself. You are not the only person who finds exams difficult. Keep walking!

* In Biology I, we often discuss previous exam questions at the end of each chapter and in the corresponding tutorial.