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Top 5 tips – practice as many questions and papers as possible between now and the real examination:

1. Learn the work (revise well during March, April and May)
2. Read the question properly (at least twice – stop and think)
3. Analyse the question – what EXACTLY am I being asked?
4. Plan your answer – read the question again
5. Don't become stuck on one question for too long – come back to it later.

Exam Technique is Like Learning to Drive

When you learn to drive a car, you don't open up a car manual or the Highway Code at page 1 and read it all with your feet up in front of the TV. Even if you've learnt all about the theory of parallel parking from a book, if you try it for the first time during your driving test, then you probably won't pass.

All exams papers are like that. You need to practice a lot before you do them. Theory alone is never enough. In order to do well, you have to first of all understand that the examiners are going to ask things that are central to the subject. Then you've got to find out what they will ask. That doesn't mean cheating, because if you go about it the right way, you can get a pretty good idea of what will come up, while doing absolutely everything above board and achieve excellent exam results.

The secret is quite simple and most people think that they know about it already. The trick is PAST EXAM PAPERS. They are the syllabus, they are the textbook, they are all you need to succeed and get great exam results. Past exam papers are **NOT** just for testing your knowledge - they're for acquiring it. From the very first day of revision, the surest road to success is to always focus exclusively and single mindedly on obtaining and doing ALL the past exam papers you can get your hands on.

Examiners just aren't that creative, and if you've answered everything that they've asked for 15 years, there's not that much else they're going to ask. That's because there probably isn't that much else of importance about the subject to be asked. In some universities, there are even patterns, whereby certain subjects come up every few years in a regular fashion on exam papers. For some exams there aren't many past papers available. In those cases, you need to find lots of books of questions of a similar level on the subjects as exam technique. Most successful candidates NEVER, EVER open a textbook at page 1 and start reading. Instead, they prepare files full of answers for essay exams and do reams of multiple choice questions for exam papers that have that format.

What About Exam Techniques and the Arts?

The main focus, up to here, is on exam technique in factual based, science subjects. But according to those who get the best exam results in arts subjects, the principles are not so distant. It seems that the trick in the arts is in attaining the attitude and writing style that the examiners want. There are sometimes students who flail about a lot during their studies, but somehow get it together in exam papers by adopting the essay tone that speaks of a spark of creativity and slightly quirky worldview that the examiners are looking for. They may never suspect that the candidate has in fact never got round to reading some of the set texts, but just has good exam technique.

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The day before the examination:

- Read through your notes to refresh your memory of the key concepts
- Go over important formulae
- Quickly note down some key theories
- Check accuracy of some graphs, e.g. Theory of the firm (Economics), Speed/distance (Physics), Product Life Cycle (Business Studies)
- Do not do past questions at this stage
- Do not labour over each syllabus section, time will pass quickly and panic can set in if you think you haven't looked at everything.
- Remember the purpose of today is to refresh and remind, revision has been done so feel confident about how much you know and understand.

The night before the examination:

- Check the length of the paper and calculate how long you should spend on each question
- Get your clothes and equipment ready
- Have a bath to relax
- Set your alarm clock, giving yourself plenty of time to get to the exam
- Go to bed at a reasonable hour

The day of the examination:

- Have breakfast/lunch before leaving home
- Pick up your equipment and examination number
- Leave in plenty of time, especially if dependent on public transport
- Check the location of the examination on your arrival
- Check the start time, be there well before hand

In the examination room:

- Lay out your equipment on the desk
- Read the instructions on the front of the paper carefully
- When told to start write down the start and finish time of each question and stick to it!
- Read each question carefully and think about what you are going to say before writing
- Take time to plan longer answers and essay questions and remember to analyse and evaluate
- Don't panic if there is a single fact or Multiple Choice question you can't answer, come back to it at the end, you will frequently recall it whilst thinking about something else
- Write as clearly and neatly as you can - it makes your script easier to mark and keeps the examiner on your side!

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Read the question - so many candidates miss out on gaining marks because they do not read the question carefully enough and think through their answer before writing it down. Mull the question over in your mind first - what AO is it targeting? What will you have to say to get the marks? What is important to put into your answer and what is important to miss out? In many cases a short, brief **plan** is an essential aid to ensuring your answer is well thought out and well structured rather than just a collection of thoughts thrown down in no particular order. Remember the importance of sound use of English language skills in your answer. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are important and, ensure that the examiner can read your writing!!!

A Glossary of the Meaning of Key Examination Words

Using examples..., explain what is meant by... A definition of a key term required plus an example - drawn from any evidence or the case study - helps to support the explanation. Know your definitions!

Explain... This command word may require a definition but will also require some development of the point or points being asked. You therefore need to give a little detail about the term or issue being questioned. Look at the remainder of the question to make a judgement about how much detail to give and where the detail needs to be focussed. If the question asks you to explain TWO factors or ONE factor make sure you do as you are asked - give two factors or one but not more than that asked for!

Discuss... This is a higher order command word. You would be expected to put both sides of a case or an issue/argument in your answer and to make some evaluative comment about the factors you are discussing. For example, you might be expected to comment on how serious a problem external costs of congestion are in city centres or how important branding is in a marketing strategy of a firm.

Assess..., To what extent..., How far... All these are evaluation command words. Here you are expected to present judgements of the factors you raise - are they significant? How important are they? Why are they important or significant? In many cases you will have to consider the **'it depends'** clause. What this means is that you need to consider that your answer may depend on a range of factors that the context might be able to give you. For example, if you are asked to consider the extent of the impact on a firm of a rise in interest rates the answer will depend on **how big** the rise in the rates are - if it is only a ¼%, then perhaps the effect will only be tiny. It might also depend on the amount of loans the company has - if it only has a gearing ratio of 10% then a rise in the interest rate may only have a minor effect, if it has a gearing ratio of 65% then the impact would be much more severe. Not enough students consider this 'it depends' factor in their answers!

Examine... Another higher order command word. You will be expected to do some analysis and to make some judgement about the points you are examining. There will be an element of analysis inherent in such an answer and also some evaluative comment. You are seeking to develop the points you raise and may be expected to offer balance in your answer. 'Examine' implies some detail, some reflection on the point or issue or some scrutiny of the matter in hand.

Describe... Tell a story. A description suggests that you convey a mental image or give an account of something. This tends to be a lower order skill. You might for example be asked to describe the trends in a graph or a piece of data. In such a case you would have to convey to the reader what is happening in the data - is the variable rising or falling or is it static? If it is rising or falling, how quickly is it rising or falling, etc.

Consider... Another higher order command word. You would be expected to offer some detail about an issue, event or whatever and to deliberate about the value of that issue/event. If you are asked to 'consider the impact of...,' then you would need to describe what the impact was and then to say what effect it had - this involves the **'it depends'** rule again. The significance of the impact will depend upon...

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Why... Offer some reasons, factors, causes as to some occurrence, action or event. Why did the managing director decide to introduce the new shift pattern? You would be expected to give the reasons for his or her decision - to improve productivity, to improve production, to meet new demand, etc.

Compare... Point out the similarities and the differences between two or more factors.

Contrast... Point out the differences only between two factors/issues, etc.

Identify..., Give... A lower order skill, this requires you to pick out some key factors and name them.

Demonstrate..., Show... To describe or illustrate how some relationship or event has occurred.

Outline... A knowledge based skill, requiring the identification of a point and some brief development as opposed to 'explain' which requires more detail.

Suggest... Make a judgement and give some support or reason for your suggestion.

Calculate... Work out a numerical question, always show how you have worked out your answer and give **appropriate formulas** in your answer. Don't take short cuts with these questions - you can miss marks as a result!

Evaluate... Again, this involves making judgements. In so doing, you might be expected to distinguish between fact and opinion. Look at the extract or evidence you are given and make some judgements about who is saying what, when, where and to who - this might make a difference to your answer. Often a useful way of helping to arrive at a judgement!

Comment... This requires you to give a judgement on an issue by considering the issues relevant to it.

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Knowledge and Understanding	Application	Analysis	Evaluation
• Define • Describe • Explain • Give • List • Identify • Outline • State • What is meant by • Name	• Apply • Calculate • Demonstrate • Examine • Give an example • Using examples • With reference to the evidence • How • Show how • Why • Which • What would be the benefits/costs of • Using • Draw on your knowledge • Using your knowledge of • Graph • What trends • Explain	• Analyse • Calculate • Compare and contrast • Discuss • Explain • Show how • Which • What factors • Examine • Identify • Organise • What	• Advise • Evaluate • Assess • Consider • Discuss • Explain why • To what extent • Assess the extent • Weigh up • Suggest • Justify • Predict • Do you think • How far • Would you agree • Why • Suggest • Evaluate the suggestion • Critically assess • Assess the relative importance

So get down to work (now) and good luck – the only thing anyone can ask of you is that you do your best.

Your examination results in August will be exactly that…… your results…… not your teachers' …… or your parents' …… but your own.