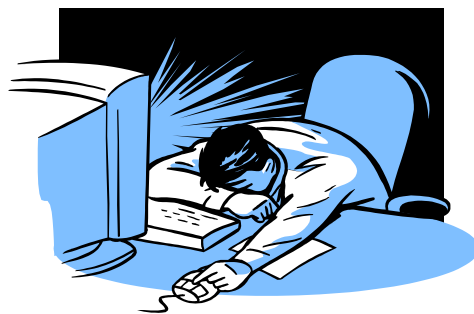


Writing Exams

Before the Exam

- Get a good night's sleep. Pulling an all-nighter is not a good idea. Studies have shown that after 19 consecutive hours or more without sleep, performance on tests is equivalent to that at a blood alcohol level of 0.1%. In other words, if you pull an all-nighter before an exam, your concentration and cognition is no better than if you showed up legally drunk!
- Get together all your supplies the night before. Putting together an 'Exam Ziplock Baggie of Fun!' (note the broad definition of the word "fun") helps to keep your pens, pencils, erasers, calculator (if needed), Kleenex, ChapStick and student card all in one place so you don't forget anything. Also, if you are permitted to bring a formula sheet make sure you have it ready before you go to bed.
- Set as many alarm clocks as you need!! If you're really worried about over sleeping organize a back up plan: call home and see if your parents or siblings can give you a 'wake up call', or ask your neighbor or roommate to make sure you're up at a certain time. Set your alarm so that you have enough time to comfortably get ready. You don't want to feel rushed or anxious about making it to your exam on time. Don't forget to factor in commute time (particularly if you are writing in a building you have never been to before).
- Eat breakfast, but nothing too big (you don't want to feel sick), or too sugary/caffeinated (you don't want to hit a sugar or coffee low in the middle of the exam either).
- Arrive at least 10-15 minutes early to the exam location. This will give you time to calm down and find a good seat (nothing worse than getting a wobbly desk or an uncomfortable chair).
- Don't bring your study notes with you to the exam. This will only increase your stress level which is detrimental to your performance. Very last minute studying doesn't work. By the time you leave for your exam you know all that you are going to, so no point stressing out now.
- Try not to chat with high strung students before the exam. This isn't when you should start your 'group studying'! Often this only shakes your confidence and increases your anxiety.



What NOT to do!

Learning Skills Services
Student Success Strategies
York University
<http://lss.info.yorku.ca>

During the Exam

- Get comfy ... you're going to be there for a while! Make sure you have your pens, student card and other supplies out of your coat or bag and on your desk.
- If you are feeling anxious or nervous take a few deep abdominal breaths to calm yourself down. Visualize your success at the end of the exam as you hand in your paper (which you've aced)!
- As soon as you start dump any information you're scared you might forget on the back of the exam paper. This could be formulas, definitions, or things to jog your memory such as acronyms or key words. This will help ease your anxiety as you will no longer have to worry about 'going blank' on this information.
- Read through **all** the instructions before you start the exam. Make sure you're not missing any pages in your exam booklet. If you have choices on which questions to answer make sure you understand the directions clearly and only answer as many questions as is necessary (if you answer them all markers are instructed to mark the first ones, not the best ones).
- Make up a rough time budget. Allot more time to questions that are worth more points. Be realistic about multiple choice – give yourself at least 1 minute per question to be safe. Also, try to allot at least 10-15 minutes to look through your paper at the end.
- If your exam is made up of multiple parts have a look through the entire thing before you start. Often answering one part of the exam will help you answer another. For example, doing the multiple choice questions may trigger your memory or provide valuable information for answering the short answer questions.
- Do the easiest questions first. This will guarantee marks and also boost your confidence and ease your nerves.
- Write neatly. Study show that students who wrote their answers neatly received higher marks than those who were sloppy, even if the information was identical!
- If you start to run out of time don't panic. Do your best to write down some information for each question, even if it's just a formula or a couple of key points. If you are writing an essay exam try to write out a rough outline before starting your answer. This will help keep you organized while you write and if you run out of time at least the marker will know where you were heading and will be more likely to award you part marks even though you didn't finish.
- Leave yourself ample time to fill out your Scantron form if you have multiple choice. Markers will not refer to the exam paper if you leave it blank. Also, check it over at least once to make sure you didn't miss a bubble or mess up the form.



After the Exam

- Relax! Even if you have to study for another exam, give yourself at least an hour to decompress and rest your brain. You won't expect your other muscles to run a marathon and then head to the gym for a work out right after, so don't expect this kind of perform from your brain.
- Don't hang around and discuss the exam afterward. This doesn't (a) help your anxiety levels (especially if you have more exams to write) or (b) change what you wrote. The exam is over – celebrate that!
- Review your exams once they are marked. You have the right to see your exam so even if they aren't handed back, ask your professor when you can come in and take a look. Analyze where you went right and where you made mistakes. This is the study skill that is most often overlooked during the exam process. Without knowing what mistakes you made how will you be able to improve for next time? As well, reflect on what study strategies you used to prepare for the exam and if they worked for you. If they did, keep them up; if they didn't, try something new next time.
- If you are not happy and feel that you deserved a better mark talk to your professor or T.A. Some instructors are happy to discuss the exam and explain why you didn't receive full marks. If you still think you deserved a high mark you can appeal your grade, first by talking to the professor and then by filing a formal appeal. This appeal will not guarantee that your mark will be changed. Keep in mind too that your exam will be remarked so you do run the risk of having your mark drop.
- Congratulate yourself on doing so well! Good job!!



What TO do!