

General Tips for Answering Exam Questions

Time Management is Key!

It is important to split your time appropriately between questions;

1. Know how much time you have for the overall exam.
2. Check whether marks are allocated evenly for each question or are some questions worth more marks than others?
3. Split up your overall time for the exam in proportion to the marks given to each question.
 - E.g. 2 hour exam with 4 questions. Q1 is worth 40 marks and Q's 2-4 are worth 20 marks each. Your time should be split as follows; Q1 = 48mins, Q2 = 24mins, Q3 = 24mins and Q4 = 24mins.
 - Furthermore, distribute your time properly within each question, so that you answer all of the parts appropriately.
4. **Before starting a question:** Read the question carefully and understand what is being asked! Take note of key words like compare, discuss, outline, etc... There may be a few parts to the question. Take 2-3mins to plan your answer on a rough-work sheet. Structure your answer into paragraphs and valid points.
 - **Tip:** Clearly mark which question the rough-work is related to and hand this up with your answer booklet. It may help the examiner to understand what you want to say in your answer.
5. **At the end of your answer:** Take 2 mins to read back over your answer and ensure that you have answered what was asked. Also check your grammar and spelling.
6. **Stick to the time you have allocated to each question:** If you are not finished the question, stop writing and move on to the next question! If you have time at the end you can come back to unfinished questions. You must attempt all of the questions that you are required to do – you cannot get marks for questions that you don't attempt!

Think About What You're Writing!

When answering exam questions, think about the following;

- Did you introduce your answer by indicating how you would address the question?
- Have you defined key terms clearly and accurately?
- Are you giving your own opinion and interpretation of the topic?
- Have you supported your opinion/view with reference to literature and/or notes?
- Have you balanced your critique of a topic with supporting evidence...i.e. can you back up your argument?
- Have you used working examples in your answer and are the examples concretely linked to the theory and the topic?

Remember the phrase: "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them and tell them what you've told them!" In other words, use an introduction, give the main body of the answer and then use a conclusion.

Avoid Common Exam Faults!

Examiners often complain about the following faults...

- **Poor Layout & Presentation**
 - E.g. answering different parts of the same question in several places of the answer book. The examiner shouldn't get lost in your answer!
 - **Tip:** Structure your answer properly, for example using paragraphs, headings, etc... as appropriate. Finish each part of the question before moving on to the next part.
- **Irrelevancy**
 - E.g. using global or generalised answers when specific information is required.
 - E.g. failure to understand and answer the question asked. This could be due to wishful thinking, incorrect reading or misinterpretation of the questions.
 - **Tip:** Read the question carefully and plan your answer.
- **Lack of Time Management**
 - E.g. not leaving sufficient time to answer all of the questions. There is often a tendency to spend too much time on the first question and too little on the last.
- **Lack of Planning**
 - E.g. Failure to plan your answer before committing your thoughts to paper. Quality, not quantity is important! Clear, concise, logical thinking and good presentation will get you marks.

Avoid Specific Exam Faults!

Tips for specific disciplines...

- *Computational/Numerical Subjects:* In subjects like Financial Accounting do not spend too much time trying to balance. Stick to a planned time allocation and then move on!
- *Technical Subjects:* For practical and very technical subjects you need to have a thorough grasp of your subject and you must be able to apply the knowledge to the problems set out in the exam. Practice using past exam papers and get comfortable with problem-solving.
- *Narrative Subjects:*
 - Give specific information: A person seeking professional advice would not appreciate a general reply which did not address their particular question! Answers should be structured with this in mind. Remember...*'Very short answers often attract few marks. The examiner wants discussion, reference to cases and statutes, and evidence that the candidate has thought about the question and is giving a reasoned answer rather than regurgitation of the information.'*
 - Report-writing: Reports should have a title and a date, and should be addressed to somebody and from somebody. Reports should have paragraphs, headings, sub-headings and indentations as appropriate, and should finish with a conclusion. Calculations and tabulations should form part of the appendices. Terms of reference and summary recommendations should be given at the start

of the report. Conclusions should be logically developed and clearly stated. Examiners complain that students often write an essay when they are asked specifically for report format. It would be well worth referring to any book on report writing in business for guidance in this area.

- *Information Technology Subjects:* These types of exam will test a candidate's real understanding rather than any ability to reproduce learnt-off descriptions of some aspects of Information Technology. It is difficult to acquire this real understanding without practical hands-on experience. Candidates should therefore, seize every opportunity to acquire practical experience of using computer technology, solving problems and keeping up-to-date on developments in technology.