



Keep calm...

Susan Greaves shares some simple techniques to help on exam day.

Let's face it, stress is part of modern life. Whether it's at work when you are going to have to explain a tricky problem to one of your more "challenging" clients or at home and your hot water system has just packed up, stressful situations abound. Perhaps the secret is not to believe that there is a hidden nirvana (the stationery cupboard or the biscuit tin?) where stress does not exist, but to recognise potentially stressful situations and then minimise them. For example, an insurance policy for your boiler or some advance preparation for that client by breaking down the potential subjects of discussion into easily explainable elements.



TEN SECOND SUMMARY

- 1 Prepare to succeed.
- 2 Read the question carefully.
- 3 Time management is key.

Of all potentially stressful events, exams are high on the list. However, time spent on preparation will always reduce unnecessary stress on the day. Look at past exam papers for an idea of how many questions must be answered. In addition, knowing how long the exam is and which are the compulsory questions is essential. An awareness of the structure of each examination in advance means that the student will know what to expect as well as understand how the marks are awarded.

What sort of person are you? If your strength is the computational or written questions, tackle those questions (or those parts of the questions) first because this will give confidence.

Leave nothing to chance. Ensure that the location of the exam centre is known and, just as importantly, the means (and even the alternative means) of getting there. Are the required documents and any other material that may be allowed ready and waiting and strategically placed near your front door where they cannot be forgotten? Finally, do try to sleep well on the night before the exam.

Performance and pace

Effective use should be made of the 10-minute reading time that students are allocated; this allows a planned approach. Make sure that all of the pages have been checked over and that all of the questions have been seen. Don't just start at question one because it is the first question; pick a question with a topic that will get your thought processes moving along the right lines, and this will instil confidence.

Pacing yourself across the exam is important. Allocate a set time to each question or section and stick to it. Against each question write the time that you have started and are due to finish on the exam paper; this helps with time management. Knowing that a question should take 30 minutes is no help if you don't know what time you started.

Level 4

| Term | Explanation |
|----------------|--|
| Advise | Make recommendations as to what should be done, on the basis of the information provided by the examiner. |
| Calculate | Form an opinion, or compute an answer, using all the information available. |
| Comment | Use your knowledge to explain or express an opinion. |
| Compare | Bring out the similarities and differences between two or more items. This may often be written as "compare and contrast". |
| Define | Produce an accurate meaning or explanation of the term(s) specified by the examiner. |
| Draft | Produce a document or plan in a preliminary or initial state. |
| Draw | Pull information together in order to compose arguments, or figures, into a specified order. |
| Estimate | Make a judgment or preliminary calculation without having exact details. |
| Explain | Produce a full description or interpret the information provided. |
| Summarise | Provide a concise account of the key issues (often within a specified number of words). |
| To what extent | Identify any limitations or restrictions in relation to the information supplied by the examiner. |
| Which | Choose from a number of alternatives, providing the reasons for your choice. |
| Write | Produce or compose a communication in the specified format. |



Level 5

| Term | Explanation |
|-------------|--|
| Assess | Evaluate or make a judgment on the basis of the information provided by the examiner. |
| Calculate | Form an opinion, or compute an answer, using all the information available. |
| Comment | Use your knowledge to explain or express an opinion. |
| Compare | Bring out the similarities and differences between two or more items. This may often be written as “compare and contrast”. |
| Describe | Produce a detailed account to indicate what something is like. |
| Design | Draw up a document or plan for a specific purpose. |
| Determine | Resolve a problem or situation, or calculate something exactly, within the limits defined by the examiner. |
| Discuss | Debate the issues (strengths and weaknesses) and come to a conclusion. |
| Distinguish | Recognise the difference between, and make comparisons between, terms, arguments or theories. |
| Examine | Consider or review theories, procedures or definitions in order to arrive at a conclusion and/or recommendations. |
| Explore | Investigate theories, definitions or processes within the limits defined by the examiner. |
| State | Provide a clear explanation. |
| Suggest | Provide recommendations, or a solution, or advice based on the information supplied by the examiner. |
| Why | Examine the causes or reasons which inform your decision. |
| Write | Produce or compose a communication in the specified format. |

Keep checking the time allocation and make sure that enough time has been left to tackle the full number of questions.

Questions and answers

Before answering an exam question, read it carefully and make sure that what is required has been fully understood. Make some brief notes of the main points and plan the answer thoroughly. It’s easy to make the mistake of answering the question that you would have liked to have been asked rather than the one on the exam paper. Remember that marks are *not* awarded for irrelevant information.

Look at the table explaining the terms you may find in exam questions, and what they are asking you to do. Note that there are some subtle differences between the terminology used in the **Level 4** and **Level 5** examinations.

Whatever you do, always make an attempt at an answer. If there is concern that an answer cannot be completed, do what you can. Leave space and return to it later, either at the end of the paper or when the mental block has gone.

In computational questions, even where part of the answer may be wrong, if the examiner can follow through the workings some marks may still be awarded.

Don’t panic. This is a common problem and if it happens the following techniques may help.

- Leave space and move to the next question. This will give you confidence and time.
- Answer a question you feel more confident about first.
- Use a “trigger” sheet. Notes can be made in the answer booklet once the examination

has started. Jot down thoughts as they occur when the paper is read through.

Presentation

However tempting, don’t write out the question. This will use up valuable time and earns no additional marks. Do remember to number each question carefully and start each answer on a new page. Examiners can only give marks for what they can read, so write clearly and neatly. Use a good pen, paragraphs and margins. Spelling, grammar and punctuation can critically alter the meaning of a sentence, so ensure that it means what was intended.

Use a black pen only (take a spare – or two – into the exam). Do not use highlighter or correction fluid in the answer booklets – these can make the text difficult to read.

If, at the end of answering all the questions, there is still some time left, check the work. Re-read the answers and compare them to the questions. Has the question really been answered? If not, make amendments. Use the whole of the three-hour time: marks are not gained for a blank piece of paper.

Tackling nerves

“Keep calm and carry on” can sometimes seem easier said than done. Positive thinking and relaxation techniques will help a lot. To relieve a build-up of tension take deep breaths, try to stretch if possible, and think of something enjoyable for a few moments. Then go back and start looking at the easiest question first.

Good luck.



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