



First steps

Susan Greaves provides some exam preparation tips.

TEN SECOND SUMMARY

- 1 Preparation is key to success.
- 2 Know the whole syllabus.
- 3 Plan revision and follow the plan.

What is the first step to passing exams? Deciding to pass them. It is always worth remembering the reason why this decision was taken: write it down and put it in a prominent place, it is always good to remember this goal when things get difficult or motivation is low.

Preparation

Learning is a life skill, but it must be translated into exam success. Preparation is key and, although it may sound obvious, it is best to get organised. Draw up a study plan, schedule in fixed dates and commitments, add in personal and leisure time and know your concentration threshold; colour coding can help.

Also, plan **A Timetable for Revision** as in the example and break up each area into manageable chunks. This will make your work less daunting and help you to revise more thoroughly.

The study environment is important. Avoid distractions; it is too easy to make a cup of tea, watch TV and phone a friend, and then the evening has gone. Instead of studying all evening as it may appear, the reality is that only 15 minutes of study time have taken place.

Don't feel bad if family and friends know when they can (and can't) contact you; however, don't ignore them because they will help maintain sanity.

Study

Use time wisely: studying can take place during the commute to work, or while waiting to collect the children from school. Brief reading can be doubly effective when key facts are highlighted; learning power is increased due to visual and hands-on activity.

Another helpful tool is the "5 Rs":

- **Reconnaissance:** survey the material; this stage will not take long.
- **Reflection:** identify what is already known.
- **Read:** scan the whole chapter without taking notes at this stage, then start structured reading making notes along the way.



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- **Recall:** use notes to recall; and based on this practice past exam questions.
- **Review:** this helps improve memory and avoids leaving all the revision until the end.

Use small index cards to write down key notes (or store them on a mobile device), carry these so that they can be studied in spare moments. For difficult-to-remember topics, use skills like association, rhyme, repetition, mnemonics, bullet points and diagrams to trigger the memory. Cover the whole of the syllabus; trying to guess what will come up in the exam is never a good idea. Reading around the subject to obtain a general understanding of it will help.

Make best use of a network of work colleagues, students who have already passed the exams, tutors, and fellow students – discussing various areas of the syllabus with them is an excellent way to prepare for the exams. Explaining or re-telling what has been learned is also a good tool to test knowledge and recall.

Final revision stage

Usually, in the month before the exams, it is advisable to concentrate on revision of what has been learned to date. Practise past exam questions, where possible under exam conditions.

Keep healthy – eat and exercise well and get a good night's sleep. A fresh and bright mind is going to be much better at answering exam questions than an exhausted one.

Finally, look at the IFA article on exam techniques (see *Financial Accountant*, May/June 2013, page 31). You should find that these first steps will start you along the road to success.