

## Ideas for afterwards

- Try not to engage in post-mortems.
- Shift your focus from the exam you have finished to those that may be coming up.
- Review your stress management/relaxation techniques to see if they were effective in helping you to cope. Seek help if needed.
- Give yourself a treat or reward yourself in some way.

## If you don't pass

Don't beat yourself up mentally - try to focus on what's best for you next year. Consider the following questions:

- Did you have any interest in your subject? Is there another more interesting topic that would lead you towards your final goal?
- Did you under-estimate the study time you needed to pass?
- Had you over-committed yourself? We all have different work levels. Less papers or subjects may be the answer.
- Do you need assistance to help resolve personal or financial pressures that affected you this year?

## Some other thoughts:

- If you study for the same topic next year, you may pass more easily due to extra familiarity with the subject.
- You may need "time out" from study. If so, many students find vocational assessment and assistance useful in exploring alternative options.

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# COPING WITH EXAMS



Most students notice some anxiety and tension at the thought of sitting exams. Some students, however, will experience a degree of stress and anxiety that is quite defeating. Their fears can affect them physically, e.g. difficulty sleeping, headaches or stomach upsets, and mentally, e.g. lack of concentration, irritability and gloomy feelings.

It then becomes important to take steps to minimise and reduce these feelings.

## How to cope

1. Learning to relax can provide considerable relief. Use ways you find most helpful (exclude those that can create further problems, e.g. certain drugs). If your methods aren't helping, consider learning relaxation techniques from a trained person or from library books on stress and relaxation.
2. It may help to pay increased attention to:
  - having the right balance between exercise and rest
  - eating three balanced meals per day
  - having a set number of sleeping hours, e.g. 8 per night
  - monitoring drug intake (coffee, alcohol, etc)
3. You may be "awful-ising" (imagining the worst scenario). In that case, aim for a more realistic "positive" outlook by trying the following. When thinking a negative "awful-ising" thought, e.g. "I'm a failure anyway, what's the point?"
  - Tell yourself gently to stop.
  - Substitute a more realistic thought, e.g. "I might fail, but it's worth giving it my best shot. I could even pass!"
  - Try not to argue with the substitute thought. The idea is to accept that it might be possible.
4. Most schools, universities and polytechnics etc... have teachers, counsellors or nurses who are trained to help students with all aspects of exam stresses and in gaining that more realistic outlook. It may be worthwhile contacting them if you feel that your work is being affected. They can often help at very short notice.

## Ideas for planning and studying

### The term before exams...

- Organise and set a study timetable preferably well before the exams. You will probably need short breaks but be aware of diversions, e.g. a sudden desire to clean your room, etc, rather than study.
- Review your notes by reading actively - concentrate on what you are reading.
- Concentrate on learning what you don't know. If you give yourself a small test, you will find out your "weak" areas.
- Think of questions that may be asked. Practise on old exam papers.
- Try question and answer sessions with others - you may need to limit chat times or competition with other students in these sessions.
- Use rhymes or mnemonics as memory aids, e.g. In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, or ROY G BIV (for the colours of the rainbow). I suggest using these aids sparingly - it can be just as difficult to remember the rhyme or letters as the information.
- Put things into your own words. This helps you to know if you have actually understood the information.
- Let family and friends know that your increased time spent studying does not mean disregard for them and ask for their cooperation in your timetable. If you can, delay other major decisions and relationship changes until exam pressures have gone.
- Know the dates and times of exams you will be sitting.

### Just before the exam...

- Check the date and time - you may feel calmer if you arrive slightly early.
- Check that you have the equipment you will need.
- It is usually better to avoid last minute discussions and arguments on what is likely to be examined.

### During the exam...

- Read right through the exam paper, marking easier questions with a tick and difficult questions with a cross.
- Allow time per question according to the marks they are worth.
- Plan your answers.
- Answer the easiest questions first, then try the others. Attempt all questions if you can. It is often easier to get a few marks for each question than a lot of marks for one fully answered one.
- Stay until the time is up, checking your answers for spelling, grammar, legibility, etc...