



**HOW TO STUDY FOR  
AND  
WRITE AN OPEN BOOK EXAM  
2012**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The **IMM GSM** has open book examinations (**OBE**) for subjects such as Marketing Strategy, Media Strategy, Marketing Research Application, Advanced Marketing Research: Theory 4 and Advanced Strategic Marketing: Theory and Practice 4.

The purpose of this guide is to explain

- what an open book examination is;
- how you should prepare for an open book examination; and
- how you should write an open book examination.

## 2. THE NATURE OF OPEN BOOK EXAMINATIONS

The nature, purpose and meaning of education have undergone radical changes in a dynamic society.

- It seems more and more unnecessary or unproductive to expend time and energy on committing a fixed body of knowledge to memory because
- technological progress has provided relatively quick and easy access to information, and
- there is rapid growth and accelerated obsolescence of knowledge.

In a rapidly changing age, raw recruits are unacceptable to employers. Fitness of use in the workplace demands skills that can be readily applied, e.g. knowing where to find and how to use information rather than regurgitating it.

Likewise, independent, lifelong learning is also imperative for sustained viability. Hence there is a greater need for process skills; chiefly, the ability to think and function autonomously.

The increasingly competitive global market requires greater responsiveness to demands and conditions of the market-place. With

educating for lifelong competence and success in mind, the IMM GSM aims to nurture the ideal graduate with:

***...an agile, uncluttered mind, innovative and analytical, able to adapt to changes in circumstances...well-rounded and culturally aware...***

*- Professor Lim Pin, (Sunday Times, March 9, 1997)*

An 'open book examination' is one in which you are allowed to consult your notes, textbooks, learner guide and other approved material while answering the examination questions. In so doing, the IMM GSM assesses those academic programmes where critical and creative thinking skills are required.

In order to appreciate the merits of open book examinations, it is first of all necessary to understand the nature of academic programmes in general. It is said that the central goal of learning is the 'dissemination of knowledge'. This approach to education treats the *information content* of a subject as the most important. It facilitates the transfer of information from the textbook to your mind. What you are expected to do is to understand this information, retain it, and retrieve it during the final examination.

Based on the above approach, most conventional examinations test how much information you have been able to store in your mind. In order to cope with this demand, you memorise the information in notes, learner guides and textbooks, and transfer it to answer books during the examination. In this type of examination, success depends on the quantity of information memorised, and the efficiency with which it is reproduced. An alternative view is that education should not be transferring information from the library or textbooks to your mind, but rather teaching you how to learn.

That is, teaching should

- equip you with the ability to acquire knowledge,
- modify your existing knowledge on the basis of new experience,
- equip you with the ability to build new knowledge, and

- equip you with the ability to apply available knowledge to solve problems and make intelligent decisions.

As such, education is not a matter of doing what is needed in order to get a degree, but the lifelong process of mental development that does not terminate with any degree.

This approach to education focuses on the *skills* of acquiring, modifying and creating knowledge, that is, on *processing* information, rather than on the *information content* itself. In other words, the focus shifts from rote learning to the development of certain mental faculties. The teaching function then is not summarising the information in the textbook but ensuring an environment that triggers the development of these creative and critical faculties. This can be done by activating learning through questions, exercises, projects, assignments, and so on, and sustaining and guiding it by providing comments, criticisms, and other forms of feedback.

What kind of examinations would be most appropriate for this type of educational programme? Clearly, conventional memory testing examinations must give way to examinations that test your intellectual skills. This is where open book examinations come in.

If the purpose of an examination is to test the information that you have **memorised**, open book examinations are inappropriate, since you can easily transfer the information in the textbook or lecture notes to the examination paper. On the other hand, if the examination tests the **skills of problem solving and critical thinking**, then there is no harm in you consulting your textbooks and notes. In an open book examination, it is meaningless to ask questions “Define.....”, since all that you have to do is copy the relevant information from the textbook directly into the answer book.

In a closed book examination, you first copy the information from the textbook to your memory, and then copy it into the answer book. This intermediate stage of memorisation is what open book examinations attempt to eliminate. Given the availability of textbooks in the examination room, examiners will not ask questions that require the mere transfer of information from the textbook

to the examination book. The essential difference between closed book examinations and open book examinations is therefore that the former can still be used to evaluate how much you have memorised, while the latter cannot.

### 3. THE TYPES OF OPEN BOOK EXAMINATIONS

There are two kinds of open book examinations, the ***restricted*** type and the ***unrestricted*** type. In the restricted type of open book examinations, you are permitted to bring into the examination room one or more specific approved documents. In the unrestricted type of open book examinations, you are free to bring whatever you like.

The IMM GSM uses ***unrestricted*** open book examinations. As already stated, in an unrestricted open book examination you may bring any books (with or without scribbles on the margin), lecture handouts, learner guides and your own handwritten notes. The use of such examinations presupposes certain teaching strategies and types of questions. In particular, it demands that the course focuses on a set of *intellectual skills*, rather than on the *information content*, and that no content based questions be asked in the examination.

A more important reason for using open book examinations is that they have a tremendous impact on promoting the right mental sets in both learning and teaching. Most students used to conventional examinations think of 'studying' as the mechanical memorisation of information in textbooks and class notes in order to reproduce it in examinations. Open book examinations will effect a fundamental change in this attitude. If textbooks can be consulted in the examination rooms, why bother to memorise them? Does this mean that you don't need to 'study' for examinations?

No. It implies that studying should not be equated with memorising; instead, it should be understanding concepts, and using these concepts (along with available information) to practise the skills of modifying and building knowledge, thinking critically, and solving problems. What is learnt with pleasure is learnt more effectively, and retained better. It is important to note

that the nature of open book examination questions will change. They cannot be of the form: 'Write an essay on X', 'Explain the term Y with examples', 'Define the term Z'. They are carefully and intelligently designed to test your understanding, and your skills in applying that understanding.

#### **4. OPEN BOOK EXAMINATIONS ARE INTELLECTUALLY DEMANDING**

An OBE is anything but a soft option. It will not be testing simple recall. Rather, it will test your ability to process and use information for problem solving, and to deliver well-structured and well-presented arguments and solutions. While knowledge is fundamental in the hierarchy of skills, its acquisition is a basic skill made meaningful only by other higher order skills being brought to bear on it. You need to develop and demonstrate your ability to

- understand,
- apply,
- analyse,
- synthesise, and
- evaluate your knowledge base.

You must recognise the rationale for OBE's and the priorities involved. Retention and recall of factual information will no longer carry a high premium; more sophisticated demands will be made of you. Abilities that you will be tested for will include:

- Application of knowledge
- Evidence of a 'trained mind' (e.g. conceptual grasp, critical thinking and analytical ability)
- Capacity for autonomous learning (e.g. maturity and independence of thought, potential for knowledge creation and application)
- Skills needed for functioning in employment and real-life situations (e.g. OBE's often employ case studies and scenarios).

**So, there is a paradigm shift:** Learning is not merely assimilating given information. More important is learning how to learn, i.e. moving from passive

rote-learning and replication to higher order cognitive skills (understanding, synthesising, evaluating, problem solving, and knowledge creation). Responsibility is not vested solely in the teacher-authority figure. You have to participate in, and make sense of, your own learning. Your roles as a learner include those of

- decoding,
- investigating,
- applying/adapting,
- collaborating,
- generating new knowledge.

OBE's require, among other things, that you learn for understanding rather than recall, make good notes and organise materials for speedy retrieval.

So, OBE's maximise deployment of effort by reducing memorisation of information which in real-life situations is easily accessible, thereby freeing time or energy for higher order cognitive tasks (e.g. reflection, understanding and application). By reducing the knowledge items from material to be examined more time is left for more mentally challenging items.

## **5. HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN OPEN BOOK EXAMINATION**

### **5.1 General guidelines**

It is never too early to start! The following will help you to prepare for exams from Day 1 of your studies so that you can avoid last minute panic:

- Read the unit outline and objectives at the beginning of the study session.
- Find a note-taking technique that works for you so that your notes are meaningful (**see 5.3 for some examples of note-taking techniques**).
- Keep up with the set readings and highlight, bookmark or take notes as you read.

- Take brief notes before, during and after every lecture and study session.
- Complete all learner guide and textbook activities.
- Make a habit of reading back over your notes at the end of each week to help memory recall.
- Pay attention to directions given in class and online and make a note of topics most emphasised.
- Talk to other students, both past and present, about exams and make use of mentoring programmes.
- It is important that you know what to expect in exams so that you are calm, focused and confident on the exam day. Be sure to find out what type of exam questions to expect. If possible, practice answering past exams – you can find past exams on the IMM GSM website and in the library, or make up your own.
- Things you should know before exam day:
  - The date, time, location, duration and weighting of your exam.
  - Content to cover in your revision sessions, e.g. topics, concepts.
  - The format of the exam and any special instructions.
  - How long it takes you to hand write set tasks legibly – time yourself!
  - Any special equipment or materials permitted or required, e.g. calculator, dictionary, textbooks or other permitted material (for open book exams).
- Organise study topics into manageable chunks.
- Gather all related notes, readings and other materials for each topic.
- Prioritise your study content: From essential to desirable.
- Set out a study schedule and stick to it. Use a weekly planner.
- Revise in short sessions often, rather than one long session.
- Set goals for each study session.

- Focus on learning, not just memorising.
- Read actively: Highlight key points
  - Use diagrams/maps/charts
  - Make up visual or audio cues
  - Condense notes to a set of key words
  - Test yourself and practice writing within a time frame
- Get together with others and discuss exam topics.
- Use interactive revision techniques!
  - Over-learn to improve recall: After revising, test yourself immediately and look for gaps in your knowledge, then recap the next day and review a week later.
  - Use reading strategies that enhance recall: Try the SQ3R reading strategy (see 5.3.5 for more detail on the **SQ3R-method**).
  - Chunk or cluster information to expand memory recall: Create hierarchies of information using mind maps, pyramids, flow charts, tables, etc.
  - Find creative ways to make learning meaningful: Use colours, diagrams, rhymes, analogies, etc.
  - Teach someone else: Practise explaining key points in your own words to someone else.
  - Create memory triggers: Move from notes to points to key words to mnemonics.

## 5.2 OBE guidelines

- Consult your lecturer or tutor if you are unsure of what will be required in an OBE. Find out, for instance, what is being tested, e.g. readings and research that have been done, competence in using reference sources, ability to collate and interpret data, and construct informed and cogent answers.

- To reiterate, OBE's are not meant to be easy. You need to study for

them just as for the traditional examinations. If you do not know your subject, you will not know what to look for, and you will not be able to draw on the knowledge base to address the questions. If you are not familiar with the materials, you will be spending valuable examination time searching them out.

- Keep in mind that unless it is a take-home examination, you will need to work within time constraints, and to do so efficiently it is best to have the essential facts, formulae, etc. at your fingertips. And while it would not serve to bring in prepared answers, you do need to have thought through and have in mind some general conclusions, conceptual frameworks and philosophical positions, i.e. a roadmap, so that you are not preparing answers from scratch during the examination itself.
- Make your reference materials as user-friendly as possible so that you don't lose time and composure frantically flipping pages back and forth.
- Check content pages and indices of texts to be brought into the examination to ensure that they are sufficiently comprehensive for easy search. Add supplementary entries if necessary.
- Prepare brief summaries, e.g. in margins of texts to provide a quick reference index.
- If your text(s) has chapter or section summaries, index these on the front page.
- Prepare a list of the formulae likely to be used.
- Tabulate headings or key topics and relevant page numbers of texts to facilitate search. Using index cards will enable alphabetical sequencing for quick reference.

Your lecturer or tutor will probably provide some practice but if not, ask him or her for some sample questions or a dry run to get some idea of what you might expect. You might also want to check out some past OBE's.

### 5.3 Note-taking techniques

Many times note taking is one of the most difficult things for a student to do effectively. It can be difficult for students to know what to write down, what is important or pertinent information, or how to structure their notes so they are easy to study from in the future. By taking the time to understand why we take notes, how best to do so, and how to use them, we are able to improve our ability to make them truly useful. Notes taken during reading or lectures can be one of the strongest tools a student has in his/her academic experience.

Before attempting to take notes, consider the following questions:

- What is effective note taking?
- How can I take good notes in class or from written texts? Is it different for each?
- What is the overall goal of my note taking?
- How do I study and what should I include in my notes to help this process?
- How is the class that I am taking taught and how should I take notes based on this?

Why do you take notes?

- To summarise
- To highlight important information
- Most importantly, to review and study from later.

What should be included in your notes?

- Pertinent information – what subject/chapter are you covering that day? Look on your syllabus. Any information that is presented and pertains to that area is pertinent information.
- Valid information – before including information in notes, it is important to determine if the information is accurate and based on fact.

- Questions you have – these include questions you have about things you don't understand and the topics that you need clarification on later. Perhaps they may even include questions about how the point pertains to the subject. Account for anything that will prompt your memory later when you are reviewing.
- Ideas – write down ideas that you come up with during discussions, from points read in the text, or even ideas for an upcoming paper or essay exam.
- Verbal clues – these may include clues about future exams, or future implications of the material on concepts you will study later.
- Points to study later – included can be ideas/concepts you need to review to grasp points to be covered in the exam.
- Know the source (lecturer, author, etc.) – knowing the lecturer can help pinpoint important information or highly testable material. Even if they simply repeat material from the texts, always be prepared to take notes and listen. There may be clues in the lecture about exams and assignments. Some will amplify the textbook. This is more often the case, which means careful attention and good note-taking skills will ensure success in the course. Others will present new information typically not in the text. In this case, class notes will be the most crucial tool in this mix. The lecturer is pointing out what he/she thinks is important.
- Tangents/examples – it is important to discern between examples that illustrate points of importance and tangents that will not contribute to your understanding of the course material.
- Specific order – follow the textbook or at least chapter order. This allows for a logical flow of information in your notes.
- Handouts – these are always important tools to supplement your studies. Test questions often come off handouts.

### General guidelines:

- Develop a personal form of abbreviations to allow you to take notes more quickly and allow you to include more information effectively.
- Skip lines to allow you to fill in more information later.
- Always date material to know what material each test covers.
- Leave marginal room for notes when reviewing or from reading text.
- Rewrite notes right after the lecture for better retention.
- Paraphrase! – it is easier to study from your own ideas.
- Stay ahead of reading assignments. This will help you understand lectures better and give you a better indication of what notes are important to take.
- Use labels, categories, and separate chapters/concepts to organise your notes.
- Keep notes clear. Doodling is distracting when you go back to study and is an indication of daydreaming during class.
- Use separate notebooks for each subject.
- Underline or star key points.
- Know the type of test you will be taking, if you are going to be tested on the material. This will allow you to tailor your notes to fit this style.
- Diagram relationships between information.

### Use your notes for review and study later:

The main reason we take notes is to aid our studying later. Use them appropriately. Review your notes frequently; this can be extremely useful even in short sittings. It is best to begin this process within 24 hours of first taking the notes. By doing so, retention is greatly increased. The more you use your notes, the more familiar the material will become and the more information you will retain for future use.

You have to find a note-taking method that works for you, and that may change depending on the subject you are studying. Here are some methods

that are proven to be successful. Read over each one and decide if there's one that might work for you.

These styles are described in the format you would use to take notes. You might find that a comfortable method is a combination of two or more of the ones listed here, and that's fine. Figure out what works for you and stick with it!

### **5.3.1 The Cornell method**

Page number:

Today's date:

a) Layout of your page and where to write

You physically draw a line vertically down your paper, leaving 2.5 inches on the left and 6 inches on the right. This allows you to take notes on the right-hand side of the page leaving space on the left to summarise the main point with a cue word or phrase.

b) Organisation of concepts

When you move to a new topic, skip a line. It is also a great idea to use some organisational structure to your whole page.

- Use bullets!
- Use an indented system – like outlining
- You can underline important words.

c) Filling in blanks

If you aren't able to completely write down an idea, fill it in later.

d) Reviewing and studying

Test your knowledge of course material by covering up the right side of the page, reading the cue words, and trying to remember as much information as

possible. Then check to see if you remembered correctly. Also write page and day summaries.

#### e) Advantages

This is a simple and efficient way of recording and reviewing notes – it's easy for pulling out major concepts and ideas. It's simple and efficient. It saves time and effort because you 'do-it-right-in-the-first-place'.

### 5.3.2 The Outlining method

Page number:

Today's date:

1. Topic:

I. The first level is reserved for each new topic/idea and is very general.

a. This concept must always apply to the level above it (I)

i. This concept must always apply to the level above it (a)

ii. This is a second supporting piece of information for the level above it (a) but is equal to the previous information (i)

iii. This information is a sister to (i) and (ii)

b. This concept applies to the level above it (I) and is a 'sister' to (a)

You don't have to use Roman numerals, letters, and numbers – try only indents, dashes, and bullets! Outlining requires listening and writing in points in an organisational pattern based on space indentation

2. Advantages to outlining

- It is well-organised
- It records relationships and content
- It reduces editing and is easy to review by turning the main points into questions

### 3. Disadvantages to outlining

- It requires more thought during studies/class for accurate organisation.
- It does not always show relationships by sequence.
- It doesn't work well if the lecture is moving at a quick pace.

### 5.3.3 The Charting method

Page number:

Today's date:

How?	Advantages	Disadvantages	When to use it?
Set up your paper in columns and label appropriately	Helps pull out the most relevant information.	Can be a hard system to learn to use.	If you'll be tested on facts and relationships.
The headings could be categories covered in the study material.	Also reduces the amount of writing necessary.	You need to know the content that will be covered before you begin.	If content is heavy and presented quickly.
Insert information (words, phrases, main ideas, etc.) into the appropriate category.	Provides easy review for memorising facts and studying comparisons and relationships.		If you want to get an overview of the whole course on one big paper.

### 5.3.4 The Sentence method

Page number:

Today's date:

1. Write every new thought, fact, or topic on a separate line as you progress, numbering each sentence.
2. Advantages: It's more organised than writing paragraphs and still records most of the information.
3. Disadvantages: It's hard to determine major/minor points and it's hard to edit and review with clean-up.

4. It's a good method when there's lots of information and you don't know how the ideas fit together.

### 5.3.5 The SQ3R-reading method

SQR stands for: **Survey Question Read Recite Review Reflect**. This study method may also take the name/form of SQ3R or PQ4R (Preview...), or even PQ5R. A variety of words may be used for the R's, e.g., Write, Reflect, Respond, or Record, but the primary concepts are the same. Additionally, the order in which some of the steps are presented may vary, e.g., reflect may be shown as the fourth step or the last step. This method is intended to improve reading and learning – to assist the reader with both comprehension and retention. This method was developed specifically for use with textbooks, but aspects of it can be utilised with a variety of sources, e.g., other non-fiction books, class handouts, etc.

The steps of the method are detailed below. As you read them, bear in mind that this is not a technique designed to be used to cram for an exam – it is an established technique for learning from a text over a period of time. It can be extremely beneficial to develop disciplined and well-rounded study habits, including other specific study, note-taking, and test-taking skills; time and stress management techniques; etc. Should you desire to learn more about things of this nature, the TROY Library provides free access to the full text of the book *Productive Study Techniques: Learning How to Learn*, by Dr. Lamon Small. This book is linked from the Library's (<http://uclibrary.troy.edu>) *Information and Help* page.

For the sake of simplicity, let's refer to this strategy as SQR (without any numerical designators). Take the parts of the method you need (what works for you) – those that will improve your ability to understand and retain what you are reading.

## 1. SURVEY or PREVIEW

Get the big picture.

- Textbook chapters should not be read like those of a novel (straight through). Begin the learning process by scanning the text to get an overview of the subject matter and how it is organised.
- Read the chapter title, introduction, section headings, summary, and, possibly, skim the first sentence or two of the major sections.
- Look at graphical material such as pictures, graphs, charts, tables, figures, or maps, including captions.

## 2. QUESTION

The important thing is not to stop questioning.

Questions provide purpose (goals) and motivation, and help to focus your reading.

- Answer any questions provided by the text within the introduction, sections, summary, etc.
- Create questions from the section headings and graphical material.
- Read in the context of questions presented in class lectures – ask yourself “What questions might my instructor ask me about this?”
- Prepare a list of questions you might ask the author if you were interviewing him/her about his/her work.
- Add questions that arise when you read the text itself.
- As you answer, consider Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How?

### 3. READ & RECORD

Read selectively **or** read with the primary focus on answering your questions.

- As you read, mark, record, or otherwise identify, vocabulary that is specific to the content.
- As you read, write down the answers to the questions.

Notes on marking your text: Use a highlighting pen sparingly...very sparingly. Choose a colour which is pleasing to you and not too bright as to be distracting. To avoid over-highlighting, do not permanently mark anything on the first read. Limit highlighting to key words or phrases, not entire sections or even whole sentences. Consider making notes or marks (underlining, stars, etc.) using a pencil or pen, either on the page itself, or on an adhesive note which can be removed from the page, or on index cards that correspond to each question. Suggestion: For review purposes, you might create a set of flash cards that have questions on one side and answers on the other.

### 4. RECITE & WRITE

Repeat after me.

- Recite out loud, and in your own words, the answers. This can feel silly, but verbalisation is an important memory tool.
- Work toward being able to verbalise and write down the answers without reading your notes.
- Write the answers in shorthand, i.e., using only key words, vocabulary, and concepts.
- In your own words, write a summary of the main concepts of the entire chapter.

## 5. REVIEW

Review over time, not in overtime. Cramming has no place in productive study techniques. You should be studying your textbook, course materials, and notes on a regular basis...over a period of days and weeks, not at the last minute. This is the best way to ensure long-term retention of information.

For maximum retention with reduced effort (compared to last-minute studying), review should be done both shortly after the learning process (classroom lecture or textbook reading), and again, in short sessions, over a period of time, e.g., several days or a week later.

- Review in small doses –five to ten minutes per chapter.
- Keep your flash cards handy so that you are ready to review when you **make** the time for it.
- Read, aloud when possible, your questions and answers.
- Work toward the goal of being able to write down your answers or a shorthand version (key words, vocabulary, and concepts) **from memory**.
- Think about it! Close the book (and maybe your eyes) and reflect upon what you have read.
- How does this new information fit in with what you already know about the subject matter or with your world view?
- What parts did you like or dislike? Do you agree with what you read?
- How does what you read relate to the specific class or the discipline as a whole?
- How might you (or anyone) use what you have read about in your job or everyday life?
- What assumptions does the author make, and upon what are they based?
- Discuss the material with your classmates.

Just to prove the necessity for revision, let's illustrate the point by giving another approach to summarising the steps of the SQ3R-method.

## **Survey the document before you read**

- Study the layout and note key parts of text, e.g. read the title page, scan list of contents, chapter summaries, abstract, introduction and conclusion.
- Notice reading aides such as bold print, italics, end of chapter questions, headings.
- Read captions under pictures, charts, graphs.
- Get an overview of what this piece of writing is about.
- Make a decision about the usefulness of the information. If it is not useful to you, then don't read any further!

## **Question yourself as you read**

- Ask yourself: Why am I reading this text, i.e. what's your purpose?
- What do I know about this topic?
- What do I expect to find?
- What other questions come to mind, e.g. relating to your assignment task?
- Can I turn titles and/or headings into useful questions?
- Refer to the questions to ask as you read the information guide.

## **Read actively**

- Remember to keep in mind your purpose for reading. Is it to get an overall understanding or to gather specific information for an assignment?
- Read the document with your questions in mind; look for answers to your questions.
- Read through useful sections in detail.
- Take more time for difficult passages.
- Fill in the information gaps you have identified.
- Make notes, maps, questions, critical comments.

## Recall

- Once you have read through appropriate sections go through this information in your mind.
- Recall your questions. Can you answer them from memory?
- Identify core facts and essential information.
- Make notes. Remember, simply highlighting is generally less effective than working more actively, e.g. reading and questioning and making notes.

## Review

- Fill in the gaps for what you recalled.
- Go over questions you have written and see if you can answer them and consolidate what you have learnt.
- Re-read the key areas of the document if needed.
- Go over any notes that you have written and expand on the information.
- Review can also occur through peer group discussions.
- Evaluate what you have gained from the reading and try and ensure that you have gained something useful, i.e. for your assignment/project.

## 5.4 Brainstorming and mind mapping

Two further studying methods are brainstorming and mind mapping.

### 5.4.1 The purpose of brainstorming and mind mapping

Brainstorming is a great way to take stock of all the information and knowledge you have gathered on a particular topic. It helps you to gather all your ideas onto a single page and allows you to start anywhere and to build on your initial ideas. Mind mapping is an extension of brainstorming that helps you to organise this information into related chunks and allows you to identify links and gaps in your

research. This two-step process is particularly useful as a starting point for assignment writing and exam preparation.

### **5.4.2 Brainstorming**

Take a blank sheet of paper.

- As a starting point, write the main topic anywhere on the page.
- Write down anything that comes to mind related to the topic.
- Write freely and do not worry about order, quality or style.
- Keep your ideas brief and don't be afraid to use colours, pictures and symbols. Continue writing until you run out of ideas.
- Read back over your notes and circle or highlight key points, delete any irrelevant information, draw lines to link related information and look for gaps and ideas that could be further explored or expanded on. At this point you may be ready to start the task at hand, or you may wish to extend your notes into a mind map.
- Another effective brainstorming technique is to find a partner or form a study group and share ideas, discuss issues and solve problems.

### **5.4.3 Mind mapping**

- Use your brainstorming notes as a point of reference for your mind map.
- Start your mind map on a blank sheet of paper.
- In the centre of the page, write the main topic.
- Start drawing branches out from the central topic, writing one key point on or at the end of each branch (use your brainstorming notes to guide you).
- From each key point, draw smaller branches with supporting points on

or at the end of each smaller branch (use your brainstorming notes to guide you).

- Add any minor points, examples and reference sources at the end of each branch.

Think of your mind map as a road map – the central topic is your starting point, and your key points are the main roads that you travel along on your journey. Your sub-points are the smaller roads that branch off from the main roads and they lead you to specific destinations. Along the way you will find signposts such as examples and evidence that confirm you are on the right track, and occasionally you will come to a dead end or be given a false lead (in which case you will have to backtrack a little). If you plan and follow your route well, you will have a successful journey and encounter some memorable discoveries along the way!

Remember, mind maps are a personal and individual tool – it is only important that *you* can make sense of and follow your map (it doesn't have to make sense to others). It gives you a clear and concise outline of the main topic and associated ideas and themes. It helps you to identify and follow clear pathways to tackle the task at hand. It enhances critical thinking, problem solving and interpretation. It is a visually engaging tool that helps to unlock the mind and allows ideas to start flowing.

## **6. HOW TO WRITE AN OPEN BOOK EXAMINATION**

### **6.1 General guidelines**

#### **6.1.1 Things to remember on the day of the exam:**

- Arrive early so that you have time to get settled.
- Listen carefully to instructions given by exam supervisors.
- Scan the entire paper so you can plan your response.
- Read every question carefully and at least twice.
- Underline or highlight key words.
- Calculate exactly how much time you have for each question or section.

- Decide on the order to answer questions, e.g. start with questions you are confident with.
- Attempt all questions and avoid getting stuck on difficult questions.
- Spend a few minutes planning an outline for essays and short answer questions.
- Jot down any relevant notes/prompts as soon as they come to mind.
- Get the key points down.
- Use dot points if you run out of time.

### **6.1.2 Know how to overcome common dilemmas in exam situations**

#### **1. Going blank**

- Use a relaxation technique, e.g. taking five long deep breaths.
- Think positively, e.g. "I can do this!"
- Jot down any words that relate or come to mind (this may prompt your memory).
- Don't panic. Move on to the next question if necessary and return later.

#### **2. Using exam time poorly**

- Give yourself exact time limits and keep an eye on the clock.
- Avoid writing everything you know about a topic but not answering the question.
- You need to answer the question and analyse what is being asked of you.
- Your writing needs to be organised, clear and legible.

#### **3. Avoidable mistakes that can lose you marks**

- Arriving late which can cause anxiety, misreading questions, missing sections, not complying with instructions.

#### **4. Find ways to relax and stay calm to improve performance in the exam**

Anxiety and tension can sometimes inhibit memory recall, so it is helpful to learn some relaxation techniques prior to your exams. Student Support Services on the Internet can provide useful information on services and support available to students and breathing and relaxation exercises and techniques prior to and during exams.

#### **6.1.3 Preparing for exams checklist**

##### **1. Start early**

- Read unit outline and objectives in Week 1
- Find a note-taking strategy that works for you
- Keep up with set readings and complete all set tasks and activities
- Take notes before, during and after all lectures – review these at the end of the week

##### **2. Know what to expect**

- Know the exam day, time, location, duration, weighting and special instructions
- Know the exam type – is it a multiple choice, short answer, essay or open book exam?
- On exam day, arrive early, read questions carefully, calculate exactly how much time to spend on each question, start with questions you feel confident with, get the main points down.

##### **3. Use effective study strategies (see previous discussions on this topic)**

- Organise study topics into manageable chunks and gather all relevant readings and texts.
- Set out a study schedule and stick to it.

- Revise in short sessions, often, rather than one long session.
- Set study goals and reward yourself.
- Read actively – use highlighter, write summaries, cluster information into hierarchies, maps, tables, flow charts, pyramids etc., and use diagrams and colours.
- Over-learn by revising, then test yourself soon after; recap the next day, and review a week later.
- Teach someone else everything you know about a topic.
- Move from notes to summaries to points to memory triggers.

#### 4. Know how to overcome common dilemmas

- Not complying with exam rules – arrive early and listen carefully to instructions.
- Going blank – take a few deep breaths, look for memory triggers or move on and return later.
- Using exam time poorly – allocate exact time limits to all questions and watch the clock.
- Writing everything you know about a topic but not answering the question – read the question.
- Abandoning structure – know the expected format e.g. essay, and be concise and legible.

#### 6.2 Guidelines for open book exams

- **Don't panic**

Don't be unduly nervous if you have little or no experience with OBE's; it is not very different from preparing an assignment at home, except that time is more limited and you will not be able to consult another person.

- **Don't underestimate an OBE**

An OBE is not easier. It may save you giving a wrong answer from having remembered a formula incorrectly, but merely getting the formula right will

no longer get you any credit since it is assumed to have come out of the book, and the questions will require more than merely transcribing something from the texts.

- **Don't over-answer**

With materials readily at hand, there may be the temptation to over-write. Keep in mind that more is not necessarily better. An OBE is supposed to be more challenging, but you don't have to give longer, more comprehensive answers than you would in the conventional examinations. Cramming quantities of information into long answers may not secure a better grade. Nor is it necessary to demonstrate that you have done more extensive reading or research than everyone else. Aim for concise, accurate, thoughtful answers that make accurate and discriminate use of supporting evidence.

The assumption that the more materials you bring in, the better you are likely to perform is dubious. You may end up distracting yourself by bringing too much, not to mention crowding up your table space and hampering yourself. In reality, you probably won't have much time to finger your texts or notes; they serve more as reminders and for occasional verification of details. You will find it more helpful to have your materials carefully selected, collated, summarised and organised for quick reference.

Experience suggests that while you may want to bring in with you a quantity of materials for the sense of security, you will probably work best relying on no more than a few sheets of notes. Spend time making these preparations:

- review the subject to derive a good overview,
- ascertain what is really important and likely to be useful, and
- make brief and neat notes.

In the process of making these notes you will really have to come to grips with the information: Understand, relate, integrate, prioritise, and have some ideas about how or where to use them. Summarising and writing these notes will also help you to remember them.

- **Don't spot questions**

Bringing in model answers is not likely to help. More so than in the traditional examinations they are not likely to fit, as questions will tend toward the free (multiple) response rather than the fixed (single right answer) response variety. And misfits will be less tolerated in an OBE, if only because there is no longer the argument that some credit might be given for any presentation of information, even if it is irrelevant.

- **Don't be tempted to cheat**

While it may seem more difficult to detect note-passing and copying from others, you can be sure that invigilators will be extra vigilant, and any infringement will be severely dealt with.

- **Read the questions carefully**

Understand their implications and demands. They will be more complex than the descriptive/narrative type and will require more sophisticated interpretations.

- **Make good use of time**

First, answer the questions that you are confident of and for which you will not need much time checking out the resources. Starting with questions that you are unsure of may have you stalled and you may end up with insufficient time to address the others that you can do well in.

- **Guard against copious quotations**

Start worrying if you find yourself copying copious chunks from the text. Don't waste time quoting extensively. Use the time and information to build a well constructed and substantiated answer.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a testimony of a student who wrote an open book exam:

“I just took my first open-book exam after not having taken one for a long time. I learned that if you force your mind to outline as you read your text, then it really helps your memory. I did that, and then I also made sure to have my book as backup, and it was great because all I wound up doing was using my outline and that was it. My test was essay format and I loved taking it after studying for it in the afore-mentioned fashion. However, you always have to make sure that you are using what you are permitted to use. Make sure of that before you even plan to study, it is important to follow rules like that. In this day and age, there are a lot of virtual cliff notes out there. A lecturer can tell if you are using them in an open book test really quickly because they are obvious and other students might be using them also. So, my other bit of advice is to make sure any and all study materials are written in long hand and broadcast that to your lecturer by having your handwritten notes right there on your desk or something. I took a class a while back that has all open book tests and all the students used cliff notes to the point of no return. I refrained from doing that and just had everything in long hand at all times, worked really hard, and earned an A.”

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