Study Tip # 14: The Smartest Way to Work Through Past Exams

There is no doubt that the more examination papers you work through, the better your examination marks.

Examination Mark $\propto$ Number of Exam Papers Addressed

In fact, it is the process of committing information to memory and working through examination-style questions which has the biggest impact on examination marks (not writing or re-writing notes and summaries).

But how many papers do students need to work through in order to secure the higher examination scores?

Students should be aiming to complete **at least 15 exam papers per subject** between now and the end of year exams. At least 6 of these exam papers should be completed before the trial exams.

Tackling Individual Exam Papers

Phase 1 – The Learning Phase (Open Book Process)

The first batch of examination papers should be addressed in an "open book" fashion i.e. students can refer to their notes, text books and the solutions as they are working through the first 3 to 5 exam papers.

After reading a question – give it a go. If you are unable to answer a question (which is not unusual in the early stages of exam preparation), read through your notes or textbook and try to work out the answer. If you are short on time, work through each question by referring to the worked solutions.

Note:

At this stage, students are not expected to work through each entire exam paper or section in one sitting.

Rather, work through as many questions as possible in the time you have available. Importantly, **DO NOT** worry about how much time it takes to complete a question – this is not important at this early stage.

Phase 2 – The Consolidation Phase (Closed Book Process)

The next batch of examination papers should be tackled in a "closed book" fashion. Once again, students do not need to work through each entire exam paper in one sitting. If you only have 1 hour available, aim to work through two-thirds of a 1.5 hour paper. If you have 45 minutes available, aim to work through one-half of a 1.5 hour paper.

Do not be concerned if you are initially unable to complete questions within the required time, but do identify how much time you are spending on each question/section and identify why you were unable to complete these questions within the "required time".

Were you slowed down by the fact that you did not know your work well enough?

This means that you should go back to your notes/texts and polish up on the corresponding theory and/or review the learning techniques that you are using.

Did you know your work but just worked through the questions too slowly?

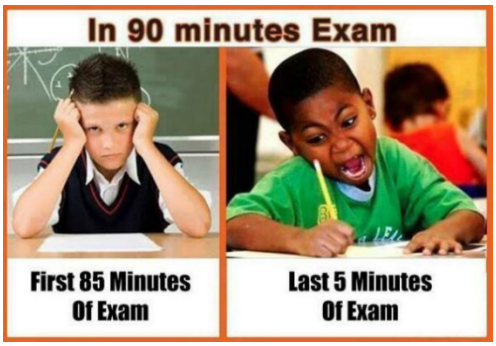
Then work faster next time!

Were you slowed down by "hand cramp" or difficulties in writing?

In this case, the muscles in your hand need strengthening! Use sticky tape to attach one or more AAA batteries to your pens/pencils, and use these tweaked utensils to write with between now and the exams.

Slowly and systematically increase the speed at which you are working through questions so that you are meeting the "required time" before your exams.

Phase 3 – The Pacing Phase (Closed Book Process)



Many students receive lower marks than otherwise possible as they could not complete examination papers in the given time. Students should therefore sit two official HSC papers under examination conditions so that they can determine how to pace themselves on the day of each exam.

After completing the first paper – analyse how much you completed and how much faster/slower you would need to work in order to complete the next exam within the "required time".

Then refine/perfect your pace by working through a second paper.

Handy Hints:

Ask your teachers which exam papers they will be working through at school and put aside two different exam papers to sit under examination conditions before each subject exam.

To obtain an unbiased reflection regarding pace, we recommend that students avoid those questions they will be sitting under examination conditions. Therefore, do not use an examination paper that you have previously been exposed to.

- Circle or highlight difficult questions, those questions you answered incorrectly, as well as those questions that address fundamental concepts that should be reviewed before the exams. Re-visit these questions in the week(s) leading up to the exams.

- Cross out those questions that have been addressed and do not need to be reviewed so that you do not waste time re-visiting questions that you do not need to.

- Skip repeat-style questions that you are confident with.

- **New Topics:**

  Apply Phase 1, 2 and then 3.

  Old Topics:

  If you have previously worked through exam questions in a particular topic, apply Phase 2 and 3.

Regards,
TSFX