



Exam Study Tip # 33: The Smartest Way to Work Through Past Exams

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

Examination Mark \propto Number of Exam Papers Addressed

In fact, it's the process of committing information to memory and working through exam-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 studying Unit 3 & 4 subjects should be aiming to complete **at least 15 exam papers per subject** across the year.

One of the best resources that students can invest in is "Checkpoints", a publication that groups past VCE questions by topic. These booklets usually contain the equivalent of 8 to 9 VCE examination papers worth of questions that can be addressed as each topic is completed at school, leaving only 6 to 7 papers to address in the stressful weeks leading up to the exams. Another great benefit of the Checkpoints series is the detailed and comprehensive worked solutions to every question at the back of the book (even the multiple-choice questions) – making this resource a very powerful exam preparation tool.

Important Notes:

- The Checkpoints booklets **DO NOT** include every question from the official VCE exams. Students should still print all of the available VCE exam papers that relate to the current Study Design from the VCAA website, put aside two whole exam papers per subject, then work through the questions that haven't been included in Checkpoints.
- When a VCE study undergoes significant changes, one of the biggest impediments for students is the lack of available resources from which to draw guidance and experience from. There are no/few past exam papers that can be used to guide students and teachers as to the range of questions and concepts that may be presented in the exams. In cases such as these, it's vital that students expose themselves to as many quality and up-to-date resources as possible, such as **Checkpoints** and **TSFX lectures**.

Note:

The authors of Checkpoints work through past VCE exam papers and include those questions that relate directly to each new course in their publications. And if insufficient materials are available, they supplement their booklets with unique questions (in the same style as the official exams), to produce a respectable collection of exam-style questions for students to work through.

Students who don't have a copy of Checkpoints in any of their subjects can purchase these valuable resources from our bookshop at www.tsfx.edu.au at standard retail prices.

Tackling Individual Exam Papers

Phase 1 – The Learning Phase (Open Book Process)

The first batch of exam papers should be addressed in an "open book" fashion as you're learning or relearning course materials i.e. you can refer to your notes, text-books and the solutions as you're working through the first 3 to 5 exam papers.

After reading a question – give it a go. If you're unable to answer a question (which is quite common in the early stages of exam preparation), read through your notes or textbook and try to work out the answer. If you're short on time, work through each question by referring to the worked solutions.



Note:

At this stage, you aren't expected to work through a whole exam paper or section in one sitting.

Instead, work through as many questions as possible in the time you have available.

DON'T worry about how much time it takes to complete a question – this isn't important at this early stage.

Phase 2 – The Consolidation Phase (Closed Book Process)

The next batch of exam papers should be tackled in a "closed book" fashion. Once again, you don't need to work through each entire exam paper in one sitting. If you only have an hour available, aim to work through two-thirds of a 1.5 hour paper. If you have 45 minutes available, try to work through half of a 90 minute paper.

DON'T be concerned if you're initially unable to complete questions within the required time, but do identify how much time you're spending on each question/section, and identify why you weren't able to complete these questions within the "required time".

Were you slowed down by the fact that you didn't know your work well enough?

This means that you should go back to your notes/texts and polish up on the corresponding theory. You may also need to review the learning techniques that you're using – some are much more effective than others (see Study Tip 15 for details regarding the most effective and time-saving learning technique known to man)!

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

Then work faster next time!

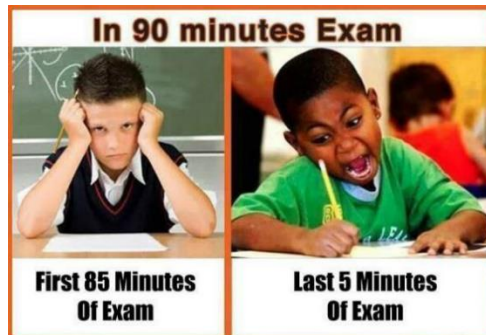
Were you slowed down by "hand cramp" or difficulties in writing?

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 instruments to write with between now and the exams.

Slowly and systematically increase the speed at which you're working through questions so that you're 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 couldn't complete exam papers in the given time. You should therefore sit three official VCE papers under exam conditions within 2 days of each subject exam so that you can determine how to pace yourself on the day of each assessment.

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

Then refine your pace by working through a second paper. Work through a third paper under exam conditions so your brain has the opportunity to engrain the pattern involved in responding to exam papers. If you work through three papers 1 or 2 days before an exam, you'll automatically fall into exam response mode when sitting the actual exam!

Handy Hints:

- Ask your teachers which exam papers they'll be working through at school and put aside three different exam papers to sit under exam conditions before each subject exam.
- Circle or highlight difficult questions, questions you answered incorrectly, as well as those questions that address fundamental concepts that should be reviewed before the exams. You'll find that you won't waste time reworking questions you understand well; giving you more time to focus on the areas you do need to cover, improving your examination marks.
- Skip repeat-style questions that you're confident with.
- If you've been working through exam questions as you covered each topic at school, skip Phase 1 when you formally start your exam preparations.

Regards,
TSFX