

Minimise Study Time Maximise Scores



Exam/Study Tip 32: A Step-by-Step Guide to Preparing for the Exams

Examinations are a great source of stress for most students, but it doesn't need to be this way! With a little organisation, motivation and a solid study plan, students can greatly reduce stress, cut down on how much time they spend studying and greatly improve examination marks!

Formulating an Examination Plan

When formulating an examination plan, you should first identify what actions will have the greatest impact on examination marks, as well as the factors that are primarily responsible for making examinations so stressful, and then integrate these points into your overall plan.

The factors that have the greatest impact on examination results include:

- The quality of your exam revision notes.
- How well information is learned and put into practise.
- The techniques used to learn and revise materials.
- The number of times materials are revised.
- The number of examination papers you have worked through.
- The degree of exposure to quality resources.
- A knowledge of the tricks and traps that could appear in the exams.
- A strong understanding of the marking schemes that apply to each subject exam.



The factors primarily responsible for making exams so stressful include:

- The time it takes to prepare a solid set of notes.
- The time it takes to actually learn materials "off by heart".
- The lack of time available to work through past examination papers.
- Finding time to prepare for examinations while simultaneously juggling homework and SACs.

Keeping these points in mind, what's the best way of approaching the exams?

Step 1: Get Started ASAP

In order to obtain the **highest possible marks**, you need to invest between **15 and 30 hours per subject, per term**, to complete preparations for the exams. How much time is ultimately needed depends upon how often reviews have been undertaken, the difficulty of each subject and whether students have a comprehensive set of notes from which to learn. Irrespective of this, students need to start their exam preparations as soon as possible if they are wanting to reduce stress levels and workloads in the weeks leading up to the exams.

Starting exam preparations earlier will also save significant amounts of study time. During periods of high stress, our body produces a hormone known as **cortisol**, which impairs how well and how quickly information is processed in the brain. Those students who leave their studies to the last minute will not learn as effectively, and will need more time to prepare for the exams!

Step 2: Prepare a Comprehensive Set of Notes from Which to Learn

The majority of students will start their **learning sessions** by preparing a solid set of notes. They spend **countless hours** condensing information from all of the resources available to them, and as their learning progresses, spend lots of time re-writing materials to produce summaries, and even summaries of summaries!

Although it's important to have a comprehensive set of notes from which to learn, spending large amounts of time preparing such materials as part of the exam preparation process is a **detrimental waste of time**.

Writing or reading silently doesn't engage many parts of the brain which means that it's easy to think about unrelated matters – impairing the amount of information being input into the brain. The writing process is also quite time consuming, **cannibalising** how much time is available to commit information to memory and to work through past exam papers.

It's the actual learning and practising of questions that has the biggest impact on examination marks – not writing and re-writing notes and summaries.

Furthermore, leaving tasks such as writing up notes/summaries until the weeks immediately before the exams will take more time than if you had written these materials as you learned them i.e. when the knowledge was fresh in your mind. There's also the stress component to deal with – nothing ever gets done as efficiently or effectively during high stress periods. We therefore recommend that students stop producing notes at least 7 weeks before the exams.

Your textbooks contain the majority of the information you need to learn, so why not use them to prepare for the exams? Any information that you need to know that's not included in your texts will be discovered as you work through past exam papers.

Note: Students attending our exam revision lectures will receive a detailed and comprehensive set of A+ notes from which to learn – so if you're attending these lectures definitely stop writing notes!

Step 3: Design an Efficient and Effective Exam Study Timetable

A well-planned study timetable that is specifically tailored for the exams can make a great difference to workloads and exam performance. This important topic will be addressed in the next TSFX exam tip.

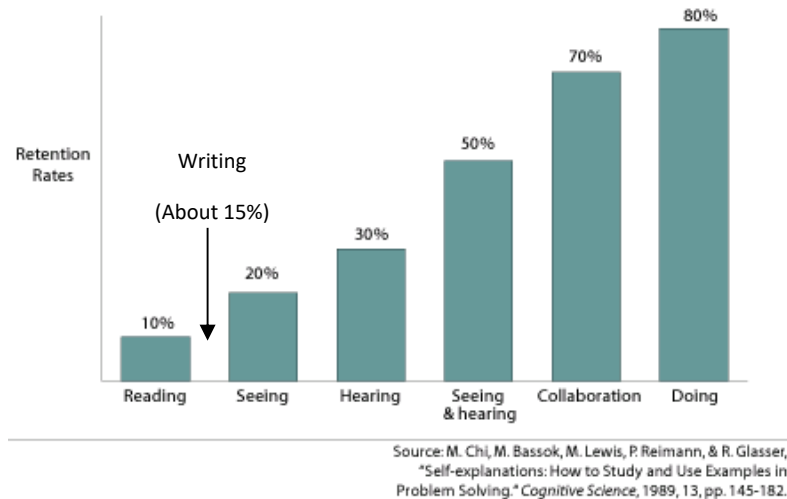


Step 4: Use Effective & Time Saving Learning Techniques

When most students prepare for tests and exams, they read or highlight their notes and text books or spend large amounts of time writing notes and/or summaries. As previously discussed, these activities are the most ineffective ways to learn and should be avoided when preparing for tests and exams.

So how do we go about learning materials in such a way that we can answer any question in the exam, improve our results and cut down on study time?

The Effectiveness of Different Learning Techniques



Irrespective of which subject you're studying, the most effective way to learn involves "doing", be that working through exam-style questions (which will provide a retention rate of 80-85%) or verbal recitation i.e. the process of explaining materials in our own words and out loud. This powerful technique has a 90-95% retention rate and is the most effective way to learn.

Learning in this manner will decrease study time up to 5-fold!
This also means that you'll learn up to 5 times more information in any set period of time!

You'll also find that this technique will improve how effectively you're able to apply and extend your knowledge; which is really important in answering analysis-style questions, as well as those questions you haven't seen before.

Learning via seeing and hearing (as in the case of **lectures** and **classroom** instruction) is also a very powerful way to commit information to memory. You'll cover and absorb at least 5 times as much information in a lecture or classroom than if you were to work through the same materials on your own.

The benefits of audio-visual instruction are, however, **greatly reduced** if students divide their attention between watching, listening and writing. Those students who just listen and watch their teacher will remember up to 50% of what they hear and see, while those students who try to watch, listen and write notes will only remember **about 5%** of what was presented!

Therefore:

- To get the greatest benefit from the time spent in the classroom, minimise the amount of time spent writing while teachers are speaking. This is quite easy to achieve if you read your text books **in advance** of covering each topic at school.
- If you're planning to **attend VCE exam revision lectures**, inspect the notes that are issued to students. **Very little benefit** will be obtained from lectures where the majority of time is spent writing notes.

Step 5: Engrain Information into Long Term Memory & Keep Learned Knowledge Alive

Revision and repetition are key elements to examination success!

The more times you revise your work, the more information you'll retain, the better your understanding of subject materials and the more effectively you'll be able to apply and extend your knowledge in the exams.

If you're wanting to achieve the **higher ATARs**, you should be aiming to work through materials at least twice before your exams. You should therefore start your exam preparations sooner rather than later – and at least 7 weeks before the first exam!

Suggestion: As you cover new information at school from this point forth, regularly revise these materials so you don't have to re-learn them "from scratch" before your exams. It will take you much less time revising than re-learning.

Step 6: Extend on and Refine Examination Skills

Work through as many past exam papers that you can get your hands on. The more exams you work through, the better your examination marks. Students studying Year 12 subjects should aim to work through at least 15 exam papers in each Unit 3 & 4 subject (across the year) if they're aiming for the higher scores.

Don't leave the task of working through past exam papers to the last minute. Students often gain access to large volumes of material in the few weeks before their exams, and rarely find the time to take full advantage of these very important resources. Furthermore, it takes time to develop the problem-solving skills that are essential if you're aiming for the higher scores.

If you haven't been working through past exam papers across the year, invest in a copy of "**Checkpoints**", a publication that groups past VCAA questions by topic. These booklets usually contain the equivalent of 8 to 9 VCAA exam papers worth of questions that can be covered as you revise each topic, leaving only 6 to 7 papers to address in the stressful weeks leading up to the exams. You can obtain a copy of Checkpoints in most subjects from our VCE bookshop at

<https://www.tsfx.edu.au/vce/vce-bookshop/>

Step 7: Seek Different Perspectives



Getting another description is always beneficial, as each new explanation offers some new learning or an understanding at a deeper level.

In many cases, hearing information from a different source could be all that it takes to understand a difficult concept or topic. At worst, having materials presented again further engrains information into long-term memory, reducing the time that will need to be spent on revision, while simultaneously improving examination marks!

Therefore, seek advice and perspectives from as many sources as possible, especially from official VCE exam markers. Exam markers have access to important information that most teachers aren't aware of, and which can make a huge difference to your VCE marks.

Step 8: Take Advantage of Every Opportunity & Every Spare Minute

By the time the school holidays arrive, most students will have had enough of the VCE, and won't do much study across the Term 3 school holidays. You should therefore use this period to gain an advantage over your state-wide peers.

Those students who are likely to struggle to commit to a strong study regime across the school holidays as well as those students seeking an edge should consider enrolling into the TSFX **"VCE Exam Revision Lectures"**. During these lectures, we will take you through the revision process in a relatively painless manner – and in a shorter time frame than what it would otherwise take you at home!

To ensure that you get every possible advantage in your exams, our **"VCE Exam Revision Lectures"** are being prepared and delivered by qualified, currently practising VCE teachers and VCE exam markers. More information is available at www.tsfx.edu.au.

Wishing you all the best with your exam preparations.

Regards,
TSFX