

EXAMS 101

I need help!

Semester one exams are beginning on Thursday the 12th June and whether this will be your frightening first wave of exams or your lucky last, one thing is for certain: you are going to procrastinate. Exam time is stressful and difficult, even more so if you are new to the game. To help you get through, Craccum brings you the ultimate exam survival guide. Based on techniques and resources that saved us in our undergrad years – this guide will prepare you for the month to come.

What is an exam?

An exam is something that is worth a heap of marks that will determine whether or not you continue towards completing your university degree. Exams are 2-3 hours long, closed book (unless specified otherwise) and are conducted under test conditions. Exams are often worth enough marks, especially in first year, that a pass in the exam may mean a pass overall – so they are very important!

When and where is my exam?

Your exam timetable will be available on your SSO page. Exam room allocations do not become available until a few days before your exam. Find them by searching on the UoA website [exam rooms].

I have my exam timetable – what next?

Start with a study plan:

- **Set some goals (you should have done this at the start of the year, but hey, better late than never)** – consider what grades you would like or need to get for certain papers. Also set realistic goals around how much study you would like to fit into each day. Do you personally max out at only four or five hours? That is totally okay as long as you start early and

organise yourself well. Better that you study less and also stress less than force yourself to study more and stop taking the knowledge in. Work with your personal limits, and make sure you spend the rest of your time keeping yourself happy and healthy (sleep, eat and exercise) and occupied with other activities.

- **Set the rules of engagement** – without these, you will procrastinate far more than you need to. Figure out how you best learn (e.g., through using flash cards, reading, watching videos, discussion etc) and be clear about the methods you are going to use for your study. For returning students, you probably already know what makes you tick from a study perspective. For new students, Google something like 'study methods' and get some ideas. If you still aren't sure about what study methods are available to you, ask your lecturers or the librarians for further resources.
- **Count the sessions and days you have left** – allocate these according to the timing and difficulty of your exams.

What do I need to know for this exam?

Knowing what will be covered in your exam is extremely important if you want to do well. If you already know which subjects and topics you will be examined on, then congratulations, you are likely to pass. If you don't know, then there are many ways for you to find out:

- **Check out your course outline** – These go a long way in dropping big hints about the key areas that your lecturers are looking to test.
- **Listen in class** – Lecturers drop big hints. Show up to class and make sure you listen – it will save you a heap of time when trying to figure out what to study! More gracious lecturers will also post further details on Cecil.
- **Reach out to your lecturer** – Although not advisable as a first port of call (there are many many other students in your courses and they will tell you to try and find the information yourself first), get in touch with your lecturer, course coordi-

nator or tutor. They can usually help with general details about what to study, or at least point you to a place where you can find out.

- **Say 'hi' in class** – Other students in your courses are a massively untapped resource if you are trying to get help. Make some friends and you might even be able to share notes, study together and have some fun preparing for exams!
- **Final lectures are key** – DO NOT miss those final lectures. You will be rewarded by knowing exactly what to study and the lecturer may even let a few of the exam questions slip. Seriously, you can pick up a grade just by attending these!

How should I study for an exam?

- **Consistency** – be consistent and focused and stick to the study plan.
- **Work from your course outline** – Flesh out your course outline (first key topics, then secondary headings, then concepts, readings and so forth) with course content. This is an easy way to organise the content, and is also likely to be similar structurally to the way in which you will be tested.
- **Be targeted** – rely extensively on what your lecturers have told you. If they have said something won't be examined, look over it but don't waste hours studying the finer details. Focus on the concepts that are important to your lecturers. Also make sure you are fully acquainted with the structure of the exam and the question / mark breakdowns. You should know exactly how much time you can afford to spend on a particular exam question (according to its mark allocation) before you walk into the examination room.
- **The daily grind** – Study hard for 1-2 hours and then get up and have a 10-20 minute break – take a walk or have a snack.
- **Rewards** – Reward yourself after completing four hours of focused study by taking an hour break to do something fun that will also refresh you for the second half of the day e.g., play a game, exercise, read a book.

- **Know yourself** – whether you study better at home or uni, with or without music, at a desk or in bed is irrelevant to everyone else except you. The important thing is that you know how you best study and do what works to get the course content into your memory.
- **Practice makes perfect** – don't ever think of going into an exam without having looked at past papers and tried one or two of them (if relevant past papers for your course exist, that is). These are available on the library website. Also be sure to reread any comments that have been made on your assignments by the marker.

Before the Exam

- Get a good sleep because a fresh brain will get you more marks than an extra hour of study.
- Pack your bag the night before so you don't forget anything e.g. pens, calculator, student ID.
- Have a wholesome breakfast that will keep you energised during the exam.
- Browse over your notes but don't do any more hard study, just load the key concepts in your mind.
- Relax and remind yourself that you have studied well – be confident!

Sitting the Exam

Students are usually given 10 minutes to read the exam before the timer officially starts. It is important to use this time to thoroughly read and understand the exam questions as well as begin planning your answer in your mind. Other tips:

- **Write your plan down** – once you've made a plan in your head, write it down (especially for essays!) as it will help keep you on track when writing your answer. You will really struggle to formulate a coherent answer without jotting down even a few key words to frame your direction first.
- **Question order** – Answer the easiest questions first as the confidence boost you will get from answering them well will keep you going through the tougher questions and help your clarity of mind.
- **NEVER leave early** – If you haven't used at least most of the time allocated for the exam, then chances are you have failed to maximise your marks.

What if I need some more help?

University isn't easy, especially your first year: you have to get acquainted with Cecil, SSO,

EC Mail; figure out where your classes and exams are; meet new people; learn self-discipline; grapple with new and difficult intellectual content; deal with part-time work; live away from home for the first time; manage illness and/or disability AND continue to engage in clubs, religion or raising a family. Not everybody turns up already knowing how to be here, I certainly didn't – but there is help out there.

Getting Help is Empowering

Everybody who has graduated has needed help at some point in time and the good news is that there is a lot of it out there. If you have failed a test this semester, someone has probably already tried to contact you through EC Mail, which we know isn't very effective. Keeping your contact details up to date through SSO though is a good idea.

If there is one truth about seeking help it is this: the process is scary and intimidating, but the people are really nice and they want you to succeed. Below are summaries of the major student support services and how to find them online. Everything offered by these resources (except medical fees) is free to the students who need them:

- **Faculty Student Centres** exist for every degree and are often the first place to go for assistance. The knowledgeable staff can introduce you to the right pathway for support. [search: uoa student centres]
- **Tuakana** is a university-wide network of mentors and tutors available to Māori and Pasifika students. Tuakana run great tutorials and workshops (sometimes with food) in every faculty as well as support services for their students. If you are enrolled as a Māori or Pacific student, check your Cecil or EC Mail to find them. [ua tuakana]
- **The Student Health Centre** in the Information Commons is where you want to go if you are being affected by an illness or accident. The doctors can assist you in obtaining extensions, compassionate consideration, or an aegrotat (as well as providing cheap healthcare). [ua student health]
- **Student Learning Services** is an excellent resource that runs free workshops

and individual tuition on a wide variety of topics, including exam study skills, literacy, numeracy, assignment writing etc. Their services can be viewed and booked online for convenience or in person at reception, located Level 3 Kate Edger. [ua student learning]

- **SciSpace Student Resource Centre**, located in the ground floor of the Chemistry Building, it is available to students in the Faculty of Science and offers many resources including workshops and tuition. The **Maths Assistance Room** in building 303 is particularly valuable for maths and first year stats students. [ua scispace]
- **Student Disability Services** exists to support students who have a range of impairments to succeed and excel within the University. Located in the Clocktower and also at Epsom and Tamaki campuses. [ua disability services]

The light at the end of the tunnel

The exam period doesn't last forever and in the two hours that we sit the exam, we will probably earn about half of our total course marks. By studying well, we can sit our exams without regret and truly relax when they are over. Exams make the whole world seem terrible (did you know break-ups and resignations peak during exam time?) but each pass brings us a big step closer to success. Completing a university degree is a huge achievement to be very proud of so: do the work, use the support services and ace the exams.

