

Learning techniques:

Good exam preparation

In the following is a list of learning techniques that can help you when preparing for exams. Depending on the discipline, it may be necessary and helpful to use different learning strategies:

Revising exam material

Reciting material

- Write down keywords relating to the exam material and try to (freely) reproduce the learning content using these.
- Reciting the learning material out loud or quietly to yourself, e.g. with the help of a list of keywords,

Tasks and questions

- Practice using sample tasks and include new assignments after repeating them a few times.
- Think about and formulate possible exam questions deriving these from the learning material and practice on the basis of these questions.

Revising with others

- Talk about your exam material to a study partner (they can be fictitious if necessary).
- Form study groups with other students to go over, discuss and look at problems associated with the learning content.

Revision using aids

- Use flash cards that you systematically check at increasing intervals.
- Write essential content on a 'cheat sheet'. This helps you memorize the content so that you won't need the cheat sheet on the day of the exam.

Text comprehension

The PQ4R technique:

- With this reading technique you can systematically tap into a text with the help of an inquiring mind:
 1. Preview = skim through the text, divide it into relevant sections and get a rough overview of the content.
 2. Question = formulate and write down simple questions about the text.
 3. Read = read the text more carefully, highlight important words and take notes.

Learning techniques (continued):

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4. **Reflect** = think about what you've read. Relate the new knowledge to what you already know and search for examples if necessary.
5. **Recite** = now it is time to reproduce the content in your own words. Answer the questions you wrote down in step 2 (Question) and read the text or your notes again if there is anything you're not sure about.
6. **Review** = finally, think about the text again as a whole and make a note of and summarize the most important aspects.

Memorizing exam content using special learning techniques

Mind-Mapping

- **Mind maps** are ideal for revealing and visualizing important connections. They can help you plan or structure notes. Sub-categories are assigned to higher-level terms in order to visualize a logical web of ideas. You can create a mind map yourself or you can use one of the many programs that are also available free of charge.

Your (own) podcast

- Record your learning material on your mobile phone and listen to your own home-made podcast when you're making your way to the tram stop, for instance.

Method of loci (journey method)

- Link terms that you need to remember in a certain sequence with memorable places from your everyday life; in this way you'll create a mnemonic in the form of a story unique to you.

If you'd like to know more, then watch the video on the website.

Further reading:

Lehner, M. (2018). Viel Stoff – schnell gelernt. Prüfungen optimal vorbereiten. UTB.

Compact Redaktion (2018). Das Buch der Lerntechniken. Circon Verlag.

Voss, R. (2015). Studi-Coach. Studieren für Anfänger. UTB.

Checklist:

Good exam preparation

Exam preparation:

- Create a study plan (don't forget to include time for breaks, leisure and sports activities).
- Inform yourself about the examination regulations, the examiner, the exact format of the exam and the relevant topics.
- Find out when you need to register.
- Find past exam questions and get all your learning materials together.
- Find a workplace where you can study comfortably (make sure there is enough space, light, etc.).
- Form a study group.
- Rehearse in exam simulation situations.
- Reward yourself even for minor breakthroughs in learning.
- Make sure you are aware of thoughts that can trigger stress and find alternative ways of thinking.
- Make sure you eat well, drink plenty of water, exercise or go for a walk (preferably in the fresh air) and get enough sleep.

The day before the exam:

- Today, if possible, you should try not to study, and plan something to do something nice instead (if this is beyond you, then you should just go over the learning material again but learn nothing new, as that might confuse you).
- Final preparations: Pack your bag with your materials and whatever else that you need for the exam (university ID card, formulas, pens, etc). Set your alarm clock so that you have enough time the next day to get to university without rushing.
- In the evening, you can do some relaxation or breathing exercises again; or use the mental training technique.

The day of the exam:

- Have a light and healthy breakfast, and try to avoid consumption of too much caffeine.
- Make sure you allow yourself plenty of time to get to university.
- Try to avoid contact with other students who could make you nervous.
- If you are anxious, do a breathing exercise, give yourself words of encouragement, listen to music that you enjoy.

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During the exam:

- In the case of an oral exam: Assume an upright and confident body posture - ask the examiner to repeat any questions you didn't fully understand.
- In the case of a written exam: Consider all the tasks first and start with the one that is easiest for you.
- If your mind goes blank, take a deep breath and encourage yourself. If this happens in an oral exam, you can ask the examiner to repeat or rephrase the question.

After the exam

- First of all: Congratulations, the exam is behind you. Well done for getting through it!
- Get involved in a form of sport to get rid of the tension of the last few hours or even days.
- Meet up with friends, read a book, watch your favorite TV series; it doesn't matter what, but you can now do whatever makes you feel good!
- Last but not least: One exam might be over, but another is usually on the horizon, so analyze what went well in your exam preparation this time and what you would like to change or improve during the next exam period.

Adapted from: Wolf, D. & Merkle, R. (2017). So überwinden Sie Prüfungsängste: Psychologische Strategien zur optimalen Vorbereitung und Bewältigung von Prüfungen. PAL.