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# STUDYING SUCCESSFULLY

self-discipline persistence context

remembering INDEPENDENCE CRITICAL THINKING

flexible thinking EFFECTIVENESS

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## How do you take an exam?

**When sitting an exam, you can show that you have a good command of the study material. Starting in time and keeping up with the material helps you look forward to the exam with a sense of confidence. During the exam itself you can suffer from exam stress. A little bit of stress is healthy; it helps you stay alert. In this article about exam questions, you will get some tips about how to deal with various types of exam questions. This can help you keep exam stress at a healthy level.**

### Preparation

Begin studying in time. This helps you to rise above the study material and see the larger interrelationships. If you start too late, you will drown in the amount of text.

Try to find out what is expected of you in the exam. Will concrete knowledge be tested, or insight, analysis, application etc. To clarify this, it is useful to find out in advance if you can find an example of the type of exam questions asked. It will give you an indication of what you can expect.

### Type of exams

Here you will be given some general tips about the approach to various types of exams. Of course, different types of emphases, practices and applications will apply per academic discipline. The information here will sketch in broad outlines how you can deal with exam questions. One general rule that applies overall is to practise these tips before your exam and don't do this for the first time during the exam.

### Read the question

It sounds obvious, but reading the questions is the foundation of every good exam. Calmly read through the question a few times and mark the essential words.

You should also try to estimate how much time you have per question and how you can best divide your time between the questions.

### Multiple Choice

This is a fine way for some students to test their knowledge, while it is actually a large stumbling block for others. And doubt is the largest stumbling block of all. How can you learn to deal with it?

You can lay down a sheet of paper over the answers so you don't get confused by them. Think first about

what kind of answer you would give to the question and then look to see if that is also one of the possible answers.

You can also work using the system of rounds. In this case, you first answer the questions that you find easy, then those which are slightly more difficult and in the last round those questions which are more of a struggle.

When choosing the answers you can, with a little reflection, often cross off one possible answer, the second one also, but then you're left with the last two... You doubt which of the answers is actually 'true'. It can be helpful to think: which is most 'true'? State the extent to which you think it's 'true' as a percentage and then choose that answer that has the highest percentage

However, the most important multiple-choice rule is in fact: only improve your answer if you have a new insight, otherwise leave the answer alone. Many mistakes in multiple choice arise from 'improving' good answers. Your first feeling is often correct.

### Open questions and essay question

Firstly, read through the question properly again and mark the most important words. What is the key question and what do you know about this subject?

Step 1: Make a brainstorm of what you know and visualise that in the form of a mind map on your scrap paper. This only has to take a few minutes. Place your keyword in the middle, associate and reproduce everything that comes into your mind. This could be anything, but always show the key word. See the example on page 2.

Everything that you know about this subject is now represented in keywords (shown as x's) in your mind map. Because you are working in a brainstorming way, you can also reach pieces of information that are stored further away in your brain.

A frequently occurring problem with exams is that students want to write down everything they know. However, your lecturer only wants one answer to the question. For that reason, you should now go to the following step.

Step 2: Read through the question again. Make a selection of only those keywords that answer the question. You should also specify the order in which you

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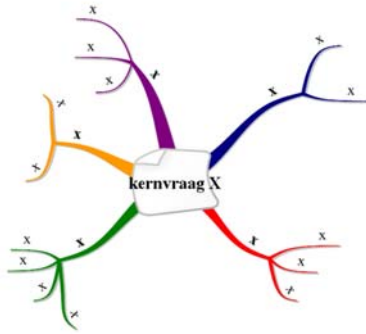
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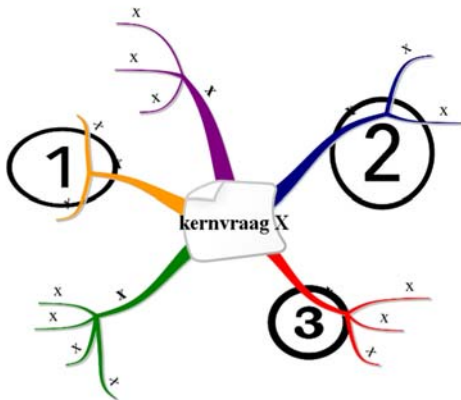


Example 1: brainstorm of keywords

want to give the answer.

See the following example:

**Step 3:** Go to the answer sheet. Begin with a general introductory sentence and then deal with the different keywords in the right order. It is also useful to



Example 2: selection of keywords that are relevant for answering the question

elaborate on a keyword per paragraph. Finish off everything with a general conclusion.

The advantage of this method is that a well-organised answer arises in this way. The lecturer will be able to follow your argument. It prevents you from suddenly coming up with something new while you are writing that you try to force in, with all the crossing out that this entails.

In summary, you create a calm feeling with this method. First of all, you have given yourself the chance to formulate everything you know in keywords. You have subsequently made a conscious choice based on your knowledge of the subject, which enables you to answer the question. Finally, you have given a well-organised answer.

It is useful to master this method before your real exam. Try practising with old exams.

## Most important points

- Preparation of exam questions is important. Know what is expected of you
- Read the questions is the foundation of a good exam.
- There are techniques for open and essay questions that can help you write a clear argument.
- You can learn to answer multiple choice questions.

## Training courses/workshops

*De stapel te lijf* (Tackling the pile)

## Questions?

Do you still have questions? Send an email to the student counsellor Ans Rekers: [a.m.rekers@uva.nl](mailto:a.m.rekers@uva.nl).

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