**Exam Preparation**

**The Technique of Exam Writing**

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| **AIMS:** * To make students of what is expected of them in the exam
* To give advice on how to revise.
* To inform students of the structure of the exam/test.
* To display to students how they can improve their performance/do well in exams, i.e. to illustrate the skill/technique of exam writing.
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**Lecture**

Outline the six components of the lecture – Objectives of the Exam, Exam Structure, How to Fail an Exam, Getting Started, Studying, The Problem with Cramming, Exam Myths and lastly a Class exercise (past exam question/s) **– along with the overall aims of the lecture (as stated above).**

**Objectives of the Exam**

The exam covers material included in the course reader, the Vula site for this course, as well as material discussed in class .

Exams are designed to evaluate whether you:

* have done the readings
* have a clear understanding of the arguments presented in the readings
* can accurately restate those arguments in your own words
* can compare, contrast and evaluate the merits of these arguments in a manner that is critical and original
* can formulate a coherent and original argument using your knowledge of the readings and lectures

In the exam, it is important to demonstrate that you can analyse and evaluate the subject matter; do not merely repeat information from readings and lectures. The essay exam is an exercise in thinking and expressing yourself, not in memorizing and parroting. In other words, do not just define the terms you use; demonstrate your ability to use (apply) these terms. To avoid losing credit/marks make sure to write legibly, so that the marker can clearly read your response.

**Exam Structure**

**Give the specifics:**

Essay format or Multiple choice. How long will the exam take. Number of questions to be answered. Provide the Date, Time and Venue of the exam.

**Remind students of the rules of exams**: Arrive at least 20 minutes before the exam begins, no mobile phones etc; the procedure of exams – e.g. they must bring their student cards/ID; how they sit; and give practical advise – bring layers of clothing and water (perhaps a snack too). It can also be useful to tell students that, if they have a good reason (e.g. illness; death in the family etc.; or if they fall ill in the exam itself), they are eligible to apply for a deferred exam, i.e. discourage students from writing the exam if they are not in a suitable condition.

**How to Fail an Exam**

* Do no studying until the day before, forcing you to cram rather than internalise the information.
* Study with your favourite series on (“it’s more relaxing that way”), which means you were not 100% focused on your notes and thus you can’t remember some key points.
* Stay up all night studying and arrive at the exam exhausted.
* If you fall asleep during the exam, don’t worry, you can always re-do the course and write the exam again next year. (The Politics Department does not have supplementary exams – if students fail the exam, they must re-do the entire course the following year)
* Ramble and/or include as much & any information you can, without displaying the relevance of this information in answering the question. The material you include must only be there if it helps you answer the question set.

**Getting Started**

**Go over the course outline:** this will refresh your memory and give you a better idea of what you *SHOULD* have learned during the semester. What portions of the course have been given special emphasis? It is important to note that the way in which the course is organized relates directly to "what's important" and to how you will likely be tested on this material.

**Note which topics you are more or less familiar with:** this will let you know how much or little time you should spend reviewing each topic. Use your assignments (Your Grade & the Feedback from your tutor) as an indicator of which topics you have understood.

**Under each week write down key concepts or examples that you know you MUST understand:** this is like your own personal checklist that you can refer to while you are studying…to make sure you don’t forget anything really important.

**Make a Glossary of Key Terms/Concepts and Theories:** Having a solid understanding of these is essential, because they will most likely be mentioned in the exam question (If you do not fully understand the question: it’s very hard to correctly respond to it).

**Studying**

**Start studying either from the beginning of the course or where you feel weakest:** If you start from the beginning the order of the topics will build upon each other and help your understanding, but if you think you may run out of time it may be useful to start with what you are struggling with most.

**Re-read or skim each week’s readings:** read the introduction/conclusion and headings or the entire text.

**Write/ outline the main argument, concepts, and examples used in the readings:** this will help you understand the main points of the reading.

**Combine your lecture notes and your reading notes into one section on the topic:** this will ensure that you fully comprehend the topic.

**Dedicate one section in your notes for questions:** write out any questions or confusing issues you find in your notes and the readings to ask your tutors.

(This does not mean you can email your tutor at 11pm the night before your exam – you must start preparing well in advance so that you know what you need help with early enough to meet with your tutor).

**Re-read and review your new notes:** ideally you should have 11 weeks or documents worth of reading/lecture notes that you have rewritten.

**The Problem with Cramming**

* You need enough time to integrate ideas, consolidate information, to analyse these ideas, to reflect on them so as to gain a deeper understanding of how they are connected : when you cram, you do not allow yourself enough time to do this.

Cramming =

* you will struggle to hold all the terms and concepts in your memory long enough to make it to the exam room.
* The newly learned material is not well connected to the material you were familiar with before.
* Under the pressure of the exam, you may find that you forget key details, you cannot see important connections, and you can not adequately analyse and interpret the questions.

**Exam Myths**

1. ***The Myth***

A philosophy student got a first class grade for an exam question which read: “Is this a question?” by responding “Yes, if this is an answer”.

Another student, in response to the question, “What is Courage?” wrote: “This.” Although it was courageous for him/her to respond in this way, this was an example and not an explanation- which is required of you in exams.

***Reality***

* Students MUST fully answer the question. Assume that the marker has very little knowledge of the topic, you must therefore fully explain key concepts. Plan your essay at the back of the answer booklet and make sure to respond to the question by explaining all the different parts/points necessary in order to answer the question.
1. ***The Myth***

Examiners are sadistic, their sole aim is to give you hard exam questions or to trick you.

***Reality***

Examiners do not make the exam questions especially difficult. Lecturers want all students to pass the exam. The questions they give you are concerned with content covered in lectures, readings and tutorials. You are likely to know the subject matter, you are expected to interpret the question. Make sure you know the meaning of the **Key Concepts** covered in the class, and understand the commonly used **Action Words.**

1. ***The Myth***

I must write everything I know from the course.

***Reality***

Use your course reader, tutorial discussions and essay topics as an indication of what are the main themes, but also the relationship (if any) of those different topics. Examiners are more concerned with the relevance of the points you discuss rather than a demonstration that you know a lot of content from the course. Only include relevant information which helps you directly and fully answer the question.

1. ***The Myth***

I must reference in the exam in order to pass.

***Reality***

At first year level students are not expected to reference particular/ specific authors.

1. ***The Myth***

I don’t need to write neatly and coherently, as long as the answer is there I’ll pass.

***Reality***

Students must write legibly to make sure that they do not lose credit for the good points that they raise which the examiner could not read/understand. Although students are dealing with a short time period and should therefore not worry if every sentence does not read perfectly, just make sure you have all information down in a logical order and that you answer the question.

**Multiple Choice Exams**

1. Eliminate options you know are not correct.
2. Don’t skip around. This will waste valuable time when you have to go back to answer the questions that you missed.
3. If utterly stumped by a question, ask yourself if the answer you chose completely addresses the question asked.
4. If you are stuck between two potential answers, try to vividly imagine which answer you think is correct.

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| ***Class exercise***: past exam questions1. Provide examination questions – be they from previous class tests or exams, or invented afresh for the exercise.
2. Illicit responses from the class. Discuss the exam question in three ways:
	1. What is the question really asking? (deconstruct & paraphrase the question)
	2. How would/should you structure your response? (discuss the key points that should be in the outline)
	3. Students should ask themselves: how can I put together a strong and convincing argument? What is my main argument/thesis statement? (given the points discussed in the outlining phase, give an example of a good thesis statement in response to the question)
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