



Aston University  
Birmingham

# Revision and Exam Strategies

Learning Development Centre



# Aim: to develop approaches to revision and exams

## **Outcomes:**

- ▶ Identify strategies to improve approaches to revision
- ▶ Examine ways to improve memory
- ▶ Examine ways of using the exam time effectively

# How do you remember?

## Activity 1

- This activity will help you think about how you remember information.
- ▶ Make sure you have a scrap of paper & pen
- ▶ Look at the slide show



# Answers /39

Sea



circus

sneeze

PINK

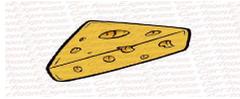
SAUCER

walnut

tutor

essay

CHEESE



Fred

table

pills

WINDY

Happy



MERRY

*maybe*

SICK

lost

log

Elvis Presley



fog

BREAD

Spain



chair

blue

dog

jog

*butter*

Lenin

green

doctor

sandwich



Cog

student

BOOK

plate

holiday



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bandage

gloom

# Get ready....

- ▶ How many exams?
- ▶ What day/time/location?
- ▶ How much time for each exam?
- ▶ How many questions for each exam?
- ▶ What types of questions can you expect?
- ▶ Consider marks and their weighting?
- ▶ Are there past papers?



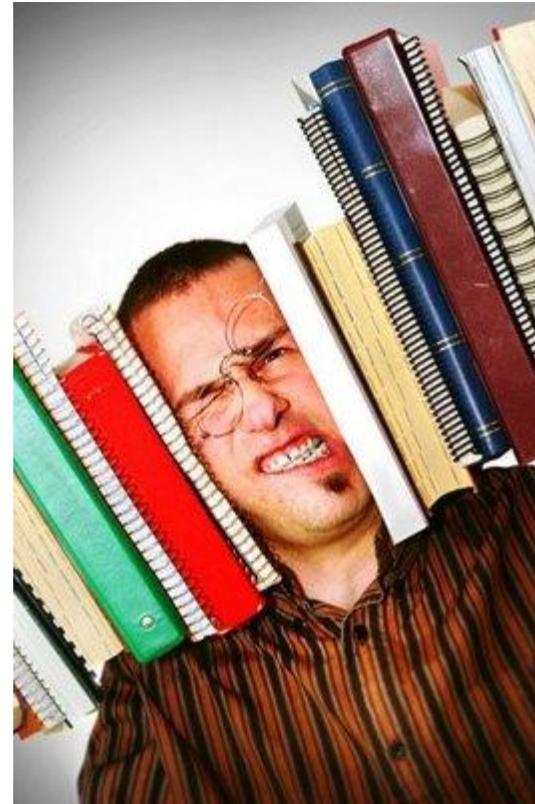
# True or false?

Learning and exam success depend on:

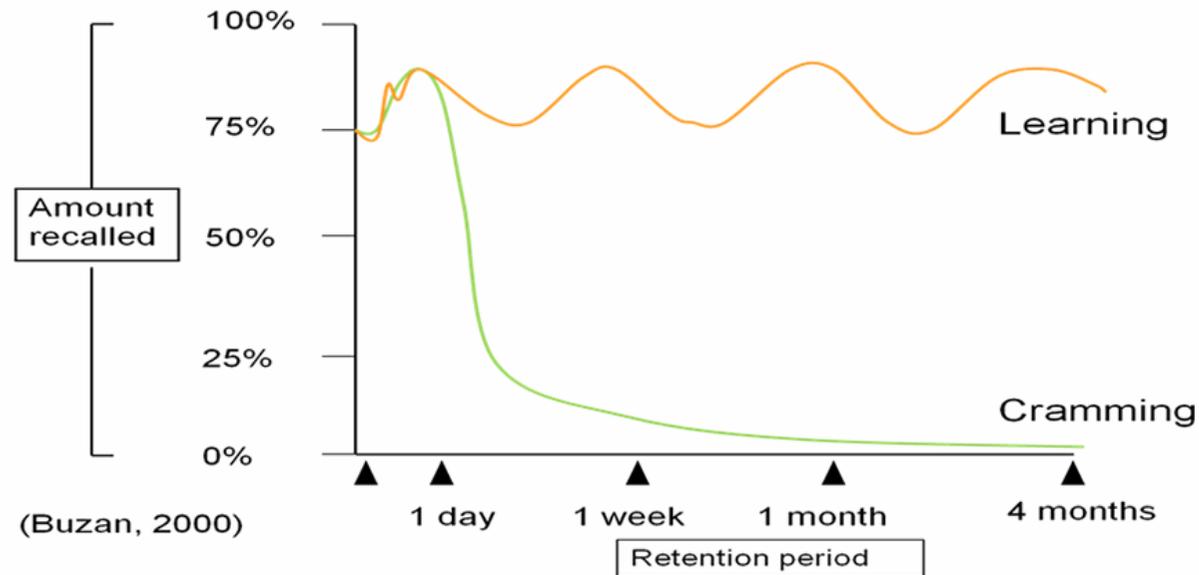
- ▶ i) how many books you read?
- ▶ ii) whether or not you check your understanding and identify weaknesses?
- ▶ iii) whether or not you address topics/areas which you find difficult?

# CRAMMING: a good thing or a bad thing?

- ▶ Imagine you only have 8 hours to revise for one exam. Is it better to revise for 8 hours in one stretch? Or is it better to spread the 8 hours over a period of days?
- ▶ Research shows that shorter periods of intense/focused revision are more effective than longer non-focused longer periods of time



# Prioritise Revision



- ▶ Exam preparation begins as soon as your course starts
- ▶ Little and often is best for learning and recall
- ▶ Prioritise topics that have been central to the course
- ▶ Focus on the ones that interest or challenge you the most
- ▶ Follow any advice given by your lecturers.

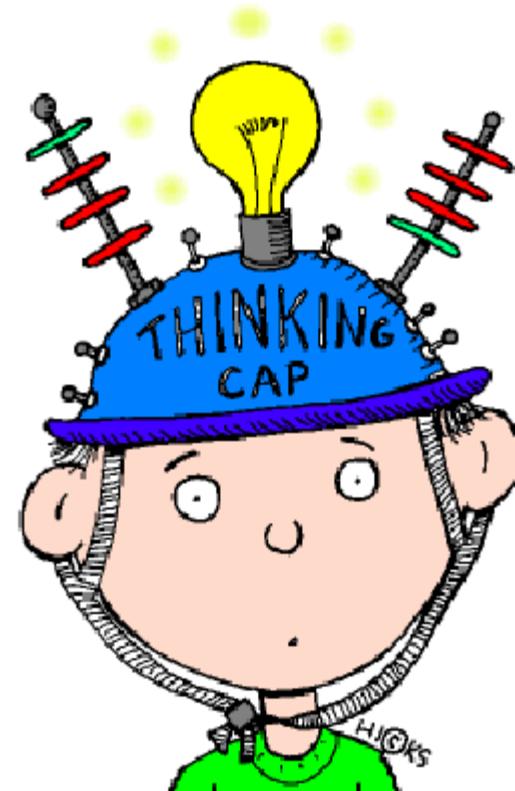
# Vary your revision techniques

- ▶ According to Flannegan (1997), people remember:
  - ▶ 20% of what we read
  - ▶ 30% of what we hear
  - ▶ 40% of what we see
  - ▶ 50% of what we say
  - ▶ 60% of what we do
  - ▶ And 90% of what we read, hear, see, say and do (cited in Cottrel, 2003, p.254).
- ▶ Memory thrives on organisation. By incorporating a range of revision techniques, such as reading, reading aloud, discussing with peers, drawing diagrams, you can enhance your memory



# How should I revise?

- ▶ Revise actively rather than passively
- ▶ Not just about reading and memorising
- ▶ Consider your learning preferences
- ▶ Have strategies in place to assist you



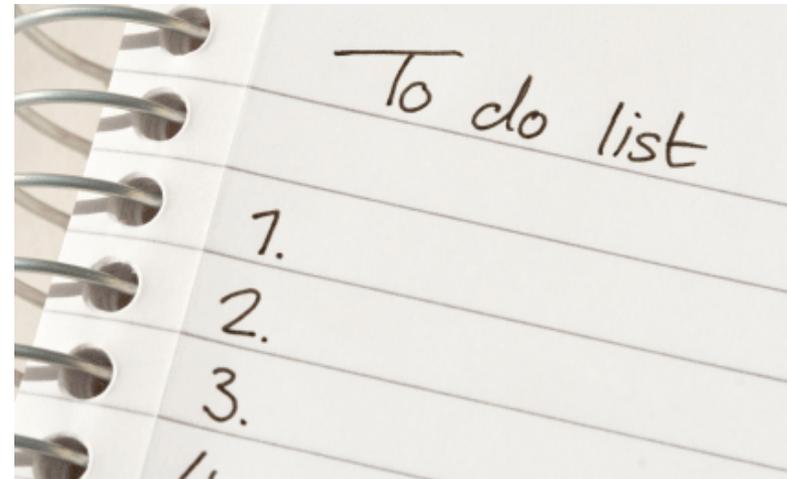
# Revision strategies

- ▶ Draw up a revision timetable – make a list of all the topics covered on your course so far.
- ▶ Use the module outcomes as a guide to identifying what you are expected to know.
- ▶ Set yourself an active target (e.g. Condense notes/identify key theories)
- ▶ Review and reflect on your revision progress:
  - ▶ Identify what did and did not work
  - ▶ Think about why something worked or did not work
  - ▶ If something did not work find an alternative



# Active revision

- ▶ An active approach to revision can help you to:
  - ▶ Focus on a particular area
  - ▶ Monitor your progress
  - ▶ Reflect on your learning and understanding
  - ▶ Avoid passive reading of notes
  - ▶ Avoid revising a topic only once – returning to the topic helps retention and improves understanding



# Sample active revision timetable

Day/Time	Subject	Topic	Target	Achieved	Reflection
Monday 10-11 am	Business Org. behaviour	Lecture notes Week 1	Outline key points re: Maslow's hierarchy of needs.	Yes	Session went well, though need to check understandin g of higher order needs.
Thursday 3-4pm	Org. behaviour	Lecture notes Week 1			

# Revision and Note-making

- ▶ Use different strategies to make your revision notes.
- ▶ This will help you to avoid simply copying out or re-working old notes.
- ▶ You might want to think about:
  - ▶ Flowcharts/mindmaps – help to create an overview/identify the most important and less important issues
  - ▶ Cue cards – help to summarise key facts/issues/theories
  - ▶ Groups (e.g. theories/theorists) – allow you to use your own words to discuss issues
  - ▶ Outline plan for essays – helps to create a structure



# Revision Strategies – Summary

- ▶ Be active
- ▶ Be involved
- ▶ Ask questions
- ▶ Revise in short, manageable chunks
- ▶ Remember the ability to explain is more important than the ability to repeat



# Useful resources

- ▶ Check out Aston University's Pre-entry Website:
- ▶ <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/current-students/academic-support/ldc/>
- ▶ There is lots of information here to help you develop your study skills ready for university, including information and tips on revising for exams

# Preparing to sit an exam:

- ▶ As exam time approaches, it is a good idea to practice in the same/similar manner in which you will be assessed, e.g.: practice answering challenging questions **WITHOUT** access to your notes (check your answers after)
- ▶ If you do not have access to past papers/practice materials, ask your classmates to set you exam questions and try to answer the questions **WITHOUT** access to your notes. This should expose weaknesses in your knowledge.
- ▶ (TIP: only do this once you are ready and have completed making your own notes)



# Timed Writing

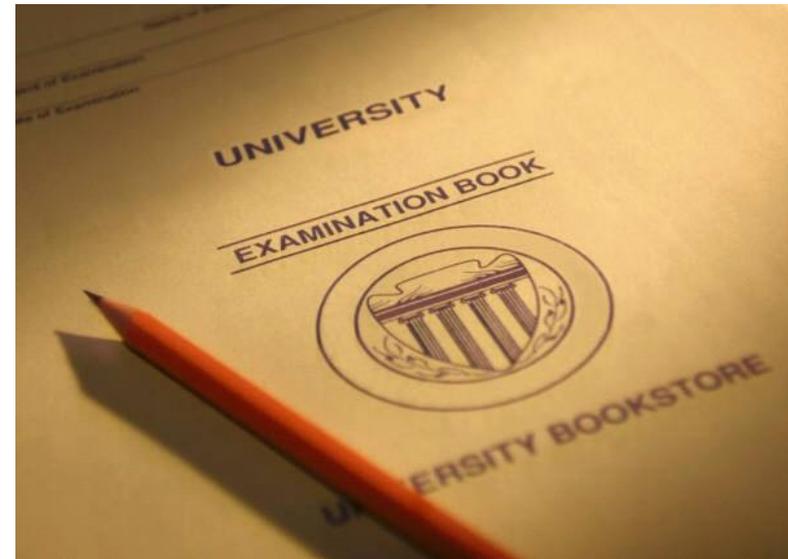
- ▶ Time spent reading the question carefully, planning your answer, and checking through, is time well spent
- ▶ Practise writing to time – it is completely different to ordinary assignment writing
- ▶ Stick to your timings and your answer plan as far as possible
- ▶ Don't waffle – marks are given for quality not quantity!  
\*Make sure that you are answering the question
- ▶ It's okay to stop and think – don't feel you have to be writing all the time

( adapted from: [www.learnhigher.ac.uk](http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk), 2009)



# A good exam answer

- ▶ Focuses on the question/title
- ▶ Focuses on the most important points/issues
- ▶ Is clear and structured (coherent/planned out)
- ▶ Uses evidence and shows analysis
- ▶ Doesn't just describe



# Writing Exam Essays

When writing an exam essay, keep it simple:

- ▶ Write a short but focused introduction
- ▶ Write about one idea/topic per paragraph
- ▶ Keep sentences clear and straightforward
- ▶ Write a short but focused conclusion
- ▶ Allow time to quickly check your essay



# Activity 2

Read through the two short exam answers.

- ▶ Which is the better of the two? Why?
- ▶ Discuss your answers with others in the group – be prepared to share your answers with the whole group.



## Question: Discuss the contribution of William Morris to book design, using as an example his edition of the works of Chaucer.

- ▶ **a.** William Morris's Chaucer was his masterpiece. It shows his interest in the Middle Ages. The type is based on medieval manuscript writing, and the decoration around the edges of the pages is like that used in medieval books. The large initial letters are typical of medieval design. Those letters were printed from woodcuts, which was the medieval way of printing. The illustrations were by Burn-Jones, one of the best artists in England at the time. Morris was able to get the most competent people to help him because he was so famous...

## Question: Discuss the contribution of William Morris to book design, using as an example his edition of the works of Chaucer.

- ▶ **b.** Morris's contribution to book design was to approach the problem as an artist or fine craftsman, rather than a mere printer who reproduced texts. He wanted to raise the standards of printing, which had fallen to a low point, by showing that truly beautiful books could be produced. His *Chaucer* was designed as a unified work of art or high craft. Since Chaucer lived in the Middle Ages, Morris decided to design a new type based on medieval script and to imitate the format of a medieval manuscript. This involved elaborate letters and large initials at the beginnings of verses, as well as wide borders of intertwined vines with leaves, fruit...

# During the exam...

- ▶ **Avoid writing straight away!**
- ▶ Check all instructions – misreading instructions will cost you marks
- ▶ Allow time for planning and understanding (You always have 5-10 mins!).
- ▶ Read through the questions 2-3 times:
  - ▶ Underline instruction words/content words
  - ▶ Brainstorm initial ideas
  - ▶ Put ideas into an order
- ▶ Divide your time according to the weighting of the questions

# Revision and Exam Summary

- ▶ It is sensible to plan your revision; how flexible your plan is is up to you. Just make sure that it provides you with sufficient time to cover all of the required work.
- ▶ Active revision is an effective form of revision. Try to assign yourself a task for each revision session.
- ▶ Try to use a range of revision methods – diagrams, reading, writing.
- ▶ When revising for a written exam, it is a very good idea to practice timed writing.
- ▶ Quality of content rather than grammar is of primary importance.

# Useful resources

- ▶ For tips on how to revise, the following websites may be useful:

University of Leeds

- ▶ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/studyskills/new/exams/active.html>

- ▶ Brunel University Revision Guide

<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/~mastmmg/./ssguide/sshome.htm>

- ▶ Buzan, T (2000) The mind map book. BBC Publications

- ▶ Cottrell, S. (2008) The study skills handbook. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Press