

Preparing for Practice and External Exams – by Karen Boyes

As the year rolls by and exams get closer, there are a few important tips to consider and implement to ensure you can boost your efficiency when studying, which will lead to better exam results.

1. Treat your Practice/Mock exams seriously

In fact your practice exams maybe the most important exams you sit all year. They are a great guide to how well you are tracking in a subject, will let you know which subjects you need to focus on more (the ones with lower results) and most importantly ensure you study and learn what you don't know. Before your practice exams, you will be learning and revising all the information your teacher has covered over the year. After your practice exam, focus on what you don't know. Revising what you know every day, may make you feel smart, but it will not get you better marks. Going over the questions you got wrong is the key. This is sometimes challenging, however it is worth it.

2. Ask for help and clarity

This is the time of year to ask for help from your teachers, peers or tutor. If you do not understand – ask. Look for websites and videos online, teachers teaching the same information and courses. Download summary notes and learn those. While the notes and videos might not be the exact same course you are taking, the information will be close. A film study, anatomy test or quadratic equation will be the same no matter which country it is taught in. For a great FREE Maths & Science site check out LearnCoach.com or for book and film notes go to sparknotes.com.

3. Learn and Repeat

Once you know what you don't know, now is the time to learn it. You might write the information on small cards and test yourself. If it is a language, say Spanish, write the English word on one side and the Spanish word on the reverse. If you are taking Maths or Science, write the process on one side of the card and the name of the process on the other. In English, it might be the sequence of the story plot, so write each event on a card and the number of the sequence on the reverse. Now simply mix them up and test yourself, or ask a friend to test you, to find out which ones you know and don't. Make a pile of don't knows and practice these each day – for 1-2 minutes. Over time, your don't know pile will get smaller. Once a week, mix the two piles together to check how much you have learned.

4. Practice old exam papers

Not only does this allow you to find out which questions you know and don't know, it also will give you a sense of how the paper is structured so you become familiar with the language and way questions are asked. Old exam papers can be found in your library, from your teacher or accessed online. The advantage of having the old papers also means you can practice the paper over several days, without the time pressure of a real exam. Once you have finished a section, ask your teacher to mark it and give feedback, or check online for the answers. Again focus your study time on the questions you got wrong.

5. Study in short bursts

Research shows studying in small short bursts can be very effective, especially if you are lacking motivation or the information is challenging. The iStudyAlarm, downloadable from iTunes or Google Play, times you to study for 20 minutes and gives you a 5 minute break. It also has 27 study tips, 12 exam tips and 12 break ideas.

6. Planning is key

With the end of the year looming, planning your study time is important. Use your diary or calendar to schedule which subjects you will focus on each day. It is more effective to do 1 hour of study a day, than to attempt to cram it in the night before.

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Karen Boyes is an expert in effective teaching and learning, study skills, motivation and positive thinking. She was awarded the NSANZ Educator of the Year 2014 award and works in schools throughout Australasia teaching students how to Study Smart and teachers how to raise achievement.