

Stress Management: In the weeks leading up to your exam



- Organisation and Preparation – if you are well prepared you are less likely to be as stressed
 - Set up a plan of what you need to revise for each subject and what will be the best method (e.g., flash cards, re-writing, re-reading, mind maps, listening to videos about the content, discussing concepts with a friend/family, making mnemonics).
 - Try to get into a regular routine of time, place, and what you study. It is also important to include breaks during study periods to effectively concentrate.
 - Complete practice exams – also try to do these in exam conditions if possible.
- Address things that are stressing you by solving the problem if you can, or if you can't solve the problem, make some time in your day to express how you are feeling about the issue, then refocus on your study.
- Consult with teachers or other sources for help with concepts that you don't feel like you understand well.
- Focus on getting into a good routine with sleep, eating, and exercise. Sleep especially is important as it consolidates the things you have been learning into long term memory. So actually sleeping well is much better than pulling an "all nighter" trying to learn concepts.

The day before the exam

- Try to get a decent night's sleep by:
 - Trying to think about something that is neutral and doesn't evoke a lot of emotions e.g., picture what will happen in the next episode of something you are watching on TV. , think about something you would like to buy/do, plan redecorating your room etc.
 - Use your normal night routine e.g., washing face, brushing teeth etc.
 - Avoid caffeine use or intense exercise late in the day/night, this will likely impact your sleep.
 - Try to turn off your devices about 30 mins before preparing to get into bed
- Set an alarm if you have a morning exam and pack the things you will need for tomorrow the night before so that you don't forget anything. Plan how and when you will arrive at the venue, be early enough that you can combat minor setbacks e.g., bad traffic.
- Accept the fact that you are likely going to feel a bit nervous, this is normal. Remember that you worry because you care about the outcome, but then move your thinking into something else more helpful (e.g., spending time with family, talking to friends (not about the exam), playing with a pet, going for a walk.
- Today the best use of your study time will be around consolidating the material you have already learnt and trying to clarify anything you are still unsure of concept wise. It is not the best time to be learning lots of totally new content as it will be a lot harder for you to remember.
- Try planning coping ahead when you get stressed or when things go wrong. This involves imagining yourself coping well in the exam, picture every detail like opening the exam and seeing a question you know well and completing the exam feeling good. You can also use this skill to imagine how well you can cope if something goes wrong e.g., picture yourself calmly working through an answer you don't know and giving it your best attempt.

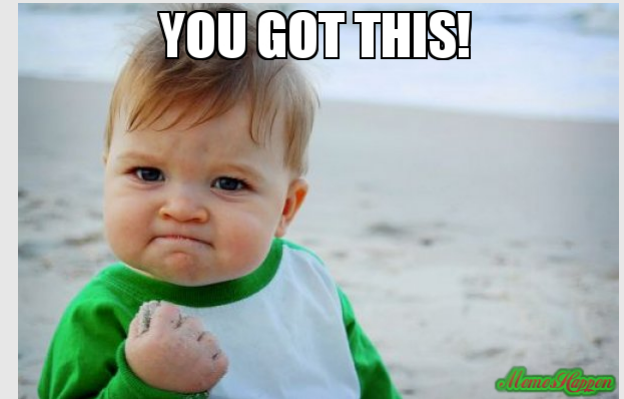
The day of the exam

- Make sure to follow a normal morning routine which hopefully involves breakfast to give your brain some fuel for the concentrating it is about to do.
- Try not to study the content for this exam at least this morning, remember for long term memory consolidation we need to sleep and hopefully you won't be napping at/before the exam.
- If you are feeling anxious continue to use strategies:
 - "coping ahead" (picturing yourself coping well)
 - distraction (engaging your brain in another activity)
 - calming strategies like pacing your breathing or tensing and releasing your muscles
 - or reassurance (you have done exams before and this one is going to be OK, if something goes wrong you can work it out).
- Think about whether you want to talk to your friends before the exam or not. Sometimes people like to talk about the content before an exam and often they might mention things that haven't been the centre of your study which might freak you out. If you decide you don't want to talk to people beforehand maybe go for a walk around the grounds of the venue or bring music and headphones so you can focus on something else.



During the exam

- If there is a question you don't know, try not to panic and do the following:
 - Skip it and come back to it later and focus on questions you do know to build confidence
 - If it is a multiple choice question try to eliminate the wrong answers, then have your best guess at the one you think is most correct
 - If the question really freaks you out:
 - take a deep breath and try to focus on another object for a minute e.g., your pen or your drink bottle and notice every component of that object (this is what we call grounding)
 - clench your fists or hold your pen tightly and then release, this slows your blood pressure to combat panic
 - Remember that the exam is set up to differentiate between students across the whole spectrum of ability levels, some questions are going to be really hard and it is OK if you do not know all the answers, just do your best.
- Use your reading time effectively. This may include:
 - Read the instructions
 - Read through the paper
 - Plan your approach and selection of questions
 - Plan your time
 - Pause and reflect – remember you can do this
 - Mentally start the first question if you have time
- Try to keep track of your time remaining so that you can hopefully complete the exam. If you realise that you will not be able to complete the exam in time, try your best to settle that initial panic because getting as much as you can done is the aim, rather than freaking out and missing a lot more questions. Look at the available marks and decide which questions are the best ones to complete before the end of the exam.



Afterwards

- Do something fun for yourself, at least for a couple of hours, before studying again. If you have 2 exams on the same day, try to eat and drink something and do an activity that helps you to relax before your next one.
- Again think about whether it is best to talk to your friends about the exam at this point. Some people like to debrief about the questions and if you are a bit of an anxious person, their comments may make you really worried you have answered the questions all wrong.
- Take some time to celebrate the fact that regardless of the outcome, you have completed an exam and that is a big accomplishment.



Useful links

- Exam preparation tips and also tips around how to answer different kinds of questions: <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/study-resources/learning/achieve/exam-prep>
- Tips for a healthy headspace: <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/tips-for-a-healthy-headspace/>
- Exam stress tips: <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-reduce-stress-and-prepare-for-exams/>
- <https://this.deakin.edu.au/study/how-to-beat-exam-stress-and-anxiety>

