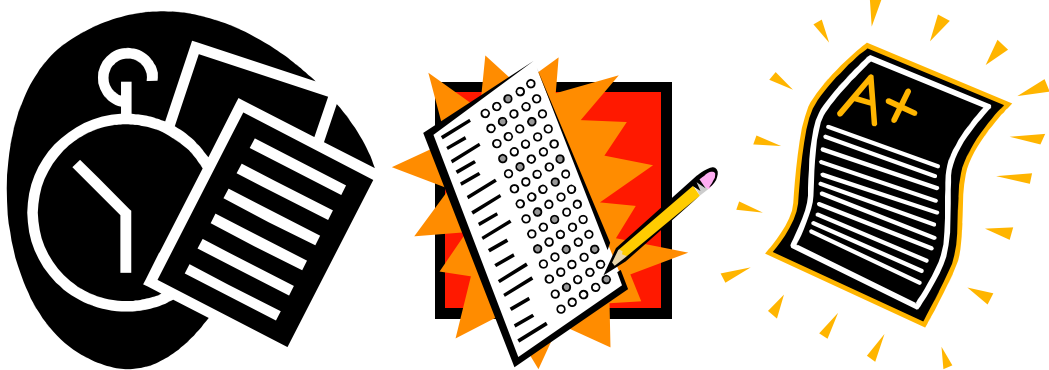


Preparing Effectively for Examinations



A guide to preparing for examinations, including some suggestions for structuring revision to make the most effective use of time





Most people feel nervous about taking exams. It is easy to feel you will be put on the spot, that you do not know what to expect, and that you may not do yourself justice. You can make the whole experience better by considering the following:

What kind of revision is best for me? (Section 1)

Have I got the right paperwork to help me? (Section 2)

How do I make notes that will help me? (Section 3)

How do I approach the actual revision? (Section 4)

What should I do as the exams get near? (Section 5)

Have you got some ideas I could try out? (Section 6)

Have you got any last minute advice? (Section 7)

Be prepared to try new approaches to preparing for your exams, particularly if you need to be more successful than you have been in the past.

REMEMBER !

**If you always do what you have always done,
You will always get what you have always got.**

Part 1 : Productive Revision

Most students have some idea about how to go about revising for exams. However, the strategies you have used in the past will not necessarily be the most effective now. Preparation is not only about drawing up a timetable and arranging your files and books on your work space! You need to reflect upon how you have tackled revision in the past; analyse what worked well (you got good results) and what didn't work well (you got disappointing results).



On the next page is a list of possible revision techniques. In certain circumstances they are all useful techniques either on their own or, more appropriately, in combination.

Tick which of them worked well for you in the past and write down any others that you have tried. Think about why certain techniques worked well for you and why others did not, and then develop your own approach.

Would some of the other techniques work for you? Try them for these exams.



A Few of the Common Revision Techniques	
1.	<i>Writing out notes again and again to remember facts and information</i>
2.	<i>Reducing information into shorter notes to remember facts and information</i>
3.	<i>Memorising essay answers</i>
4.	<i>Writing out sample essay answers under timed conditions</i>
5.	<i>Using mindmaps or diagrams to remember facts and information</i>
6.	<i>Putting important information on to CD/mp3/tape to listen to</i>
7.	<i>Revising with friends</i>
8.	<i>Using highlighters on notes to summarise key points and remember facts</i>
9.	<i>Simply sitting reading some notes</i>
10.	<i>Writing out essay plans from past questions</i>
11.	<i>Splitting revision into small sessions</i>
12.	<i>Spending long periods revising one topic</i>
13.	<i>Using memory triggers to help remember facts</i>
14.	<i>Using key words as the basis for understanding</i>

Part 2 : Getting Ready

Preparing for exams is not just about learning and memorising facts and information so that you can regurgitate them in a timed examination. It is also about:

- *Knowing what topics to learn*
- *Knowing what is expected of you in the exam*
- *Knowing the type of questions that will be asked*
- *Organising yourself to revise effectively*

Start by looking at these suggestions.

Preparation and Planning	
<p>1. Make sure you have a list of topics or a syllabus. This will help you to understand what you could be tested on in the exam.</p>	<p>2. Check that you know the format of the exam. This helps you to understand what is needed to get the best grades and marks.</p>
<p>4. Organise your class and revision notes for each subject so that they are readily available. Make sure that the past papers are also filed so that you have a point of reference when completing new papers</p>	<p>3. Have as many past papers as possible. Past papers are a useful source of information about what is expected in exams and can help you to prepare more effectively.</p>



Part 3 : Making Revision Notes

During revision you may find that the 'penny will drop' for you on some topic that you found puzzling. Making effective revision notes will help in this process and will give you an indication of what you understand and where the gaps are in your knowledge.



There are a variety of ways of producing effective notes which you may want to consider. Whatever system you choose make sure it provides you with useful notes and is an efficient use of your time and effort.

Good notes will help you to:

- *understand difficult concepts*
- *get an overview of the topic or unit*
- *remember new terminology (use highlighters for key words)*
- *group the information in a useful format for quick access when preparing for exams – use as a handy memoriser or something visual*

Some common approaches include:

- *summarising notes or handouts (key words, phrases) of no more than two sides of A4 for each possible question topic*
- *Writing the notes on cards that can incorporate colour for different layers of information and for making links*
- *Drawing charts/maps of key ideas*
- *Making a voice recording of your notes and playing them back again and again*

It is often a good idea to place your revision notes at the beginning or end of each book so that you will be aware of the content of the book and therefore save time when looking for specific information.

Part 4 : Doing the Revision

How to revise comes down to personal preference but ensure that you have thought through all the alternative ways of revising before choosing the best for you. Consider where you are going to revise and plan for it to be as suitable as possible.

Choose a place where you won't get distractions from other people

If you like background music, choose something that won't distract you

Plan your revision times to be spread throughout the day

More frequent and shorted revision sessions are often better than one long one

Revising together with a friend for part of the time can be helpful



Now you need to learn your revision notes. Some students feel that if they do the learning too soon they will have forgotten everything by the time the examinations come. Others leave it too late! However, sooner or later we have to commit it to memory for an exam. The more thoroughly we understand a topic, the more easily we can deal with unexpected and/or complex exam questions. So, don't rely totally on pure memory recall or learning chunks of information by heart.

Our long term memory is organised so that we can remember facts, episodes, knowledge and procedures. These use different aspect of our memory. In addition, how facts and knowledge are remembered (written text, diagram, mindmap etc.) could reflect your ability to recall that information. Certain subjects can be remembered effectively by drawing and labelling diagrams or using a flow chart.

You may find yourself better at remembering some types of things than others. Some of the strategies include:

- *Practicing drawing out mindmaps, diagrams and flow charts*
- *Associations – making links with the information (topic map)*
- *Writing out information in lists – re-arrange the order of the list so that the first letters of each word on the list make up something silly or amusing*
- *Using shapes and colour to help you remember certain things*
- *Saying the information quietly to yourself or even aloud*



Part 5 : Final Preparation

At this stage of the process, you will have got to grips with new knowledge and will have worked actively to remember the information needed for the examinations. Now make sure that you organise your time in such a way that you leave time to practise the skills needed in the exam.

This means that you need to be able to recognise, at speed, information that has been restructured and reformulated in an exam question. You may want to practise with friends reformulating some of the questions on earlier papers or making up your own questions for each other. Skills may include:

- *analysing exam questions*
- *planning essays*
- *writing appropriately and accurately*
- *arguing effectively, using appropriate concepts and theories*
- *close analysis of texts (verbal or visual) or other kinds of 'evidence'*
- *selecting areas of knowledge in support of an argument*
- *synthesising and reaching a conclusion*
- *deciding which type of questions you are good at answering*
- *getting your ideas down in a specified time*
- *managing your time during an exam*
- *prioritising information in an exam question*



- *prioritising questions during an exam*

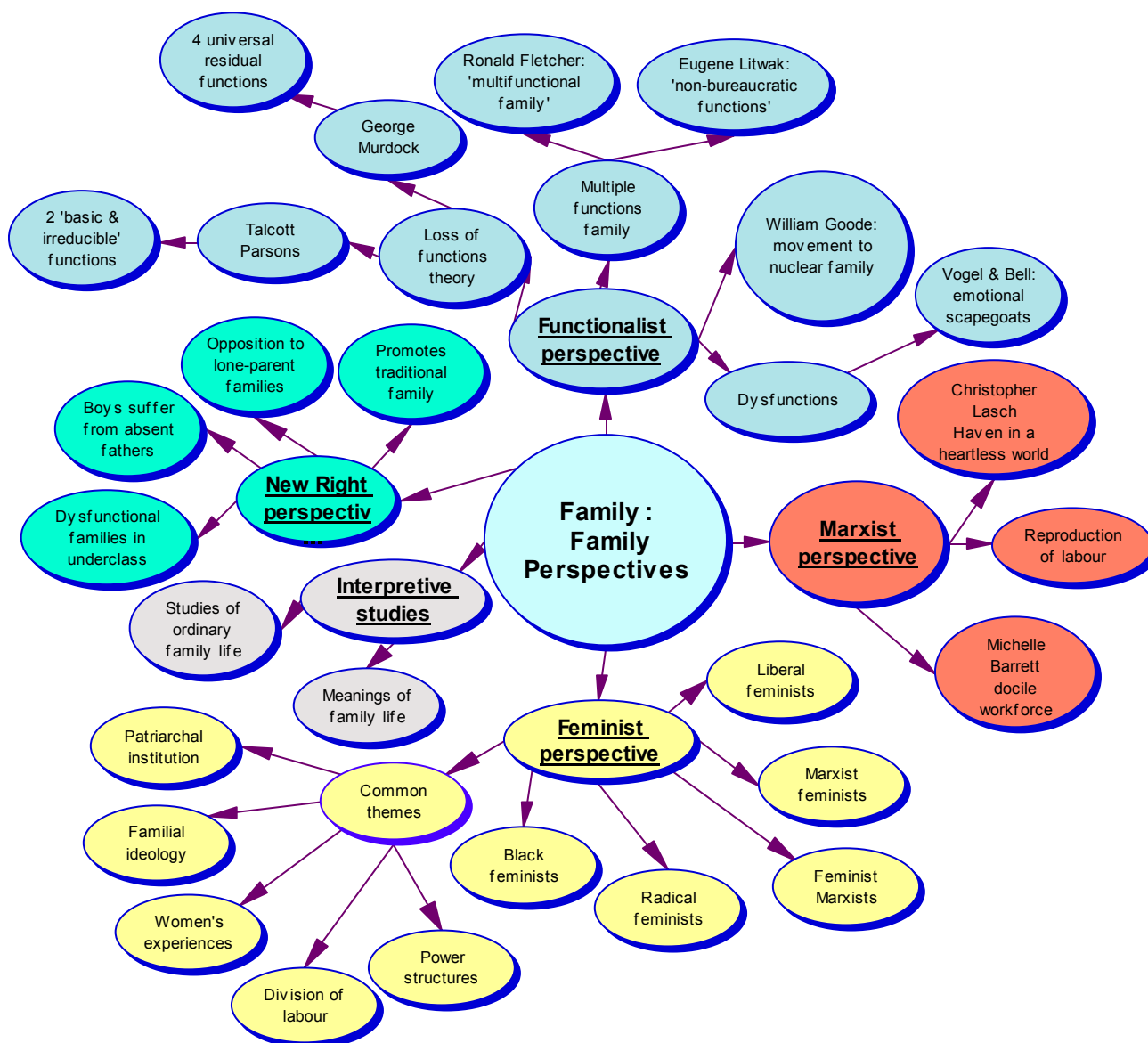
Attend any revision sessions which are provided by your teachers. These will give you an idea of what is expected, and will also show you where you have gaps in your knowledge and understanding so that you can do more concentrated learning at home.

Learn model answers to questions. It is useful to analyse what makes a good answer – not just in terms of the subject content but also in terms of how the information is presented. Remember that in many cases the wording of the question makes a difference to the way you should organise your answer.

Part 6 : Two Examples of Ways of Making Notes

These techniques may or may not be suitable for you, but they might give you ideas of what you can do for yourself.

Example 1 : Mindmap Notes on Family Perspectives





Example 2 : Branch Notes on Family Perspectives

Feminist perspective

- Black feminists
- Radical feminists
- Feminist Marxists
- Liberal feminists
- Marxist feminists
- Common themes:
 - ❖ *Patriarchal institution*
 - ❖ *Familial ideology*
 - ❖ *Power structures*
 - ❖ *Women's experiences*
 - ❖ *Division of labour*

New Right perspective

- Promotes traditional family
- Opposition to lone-parent families
- Boys suffer from absent fathers
- Dysfunctional families in underclass

Functionalist perspective

- Loss of functions theory
 - ❖ *Talcott Parsons*
 - ❖ *basic & irreducible' functions*
 - ❖ *George Murdock*
 - ❖ *universal residual functions*
- Multiple functions family
 - ❖ *Ronald Fletcher: 'multifunctional family'*
 - ❖ *Eugene Litwak: 'non-bureaucratic function'*
- William Goode: movement to nuclear family
- Dysfunctions
 - ❖ *Vogel & Bell: emotional scapegoats*

Marxist perspective

- Michelle Barrett - docile workforce
- Christopher Lasch - heaven in a heartless world
- Reproduction of labour

Interpretive studies

- Studies of ordinary family life
- Meanings of family life

How does this work?

This shows different *layers or branches of information*.

The **BOLD BLACK** is the highest level.

This is broken down into a **second layer/branch** which is in the normal text.

If you want more detail, you could have a **third layer/branch** which is in *italics*

This shows the

Main ideas

Examples/evidence of these

More detailed examples/evidence

It is useful to make your revision notes in this way so that you can make decisions about the level of detail needed when you are writing under timed conditions in an examination.



Part 7 : Just Before the Exam



If you are too tired when you go into the examination you will not perform well, so get some rest before each exam so that you are able to do your best when the time comes.



If you are revising just before an exam (the final couple of hours) stick to learning the simple ideas. Complicated notes need to be memorised days in advance.



Adrenaline is good at the right levels. But too much adrenaline can cause stress which means that you will under-perform.

So remember to balance out learning. Relaxation is a vital part of the revision process. Make sure that you have some rest periods. Frequent short breaks are best.

Breaks for physical activity, such as jogging or aerobics, are best as they can stimulate your brain into more activity when you are trying to remember all the information.



Good Luck!