

INTERNATIONAL COFFEE ORGANIZATION

POSITIVELY COFFEE PROGRAMME

GOOD THINKING WITH COFFEE- STAYING AHEAD

We all hate exams. We hate preparing for them and we hate actually doing them. Life would also be more fun if we did not have to wait, sometimes for weeks or months to find out whether we have passed or failed.

In fact, life without exams would be a lot more fun altogether. But unfortunately they are here to stay and for most of us, they are one of the hurdles we have to jump in order to get where we want in life.

There is no secret formula to passing exams – it is very simple – equal parts of hard work and making the most of resources available to you.

But you may only have a limited time for studying so it is important to use that time as effectively as possible. Let the tips begin!

1. Plan Ahead

Sit down and plan what studying and revision you are going to do between now and your exams. Your timetable needs to be comprehensive and you must stick to it, so make sure it is realistic from the start. Make allowances for other regular activities such as sport or part time jobs and don't forget to make time just to relax with family and friends!

Allocate some time every day for revision as well as studying and revise first those areas you find most difficult, as it will help build your confidence in that subject.

2. Using YOUR time

Although it is good to set aside specific time for studying and revision, think about other occasions when you are doing nothing worthwhile and see where you can get extra time for revision e.g. do you travel by train or bus for more than half an hour a day or do you baby sit regularly? Using these opportunities for additional studying will free up time elsewhere.

3. Focus on Quality Study

Do you recognise this timetable - Is this you?

Sort out desk, sharpen pencils	5 minutes
Decide on what to revise	5 minutes
Arrange books and paper	5 minutes
Look out of window, daydream	10 minutes
Flick through books, do some problems	15 minutes
Send a text message	5 minutes
Look up a new website for information	10 minutes
Pack up equipment, tidy up	5 minutes

1 HOUR!



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Not very effective use of time! You spent less than half of it actually studying - it is more important to study productively.

Learning is the acquisition and storage of information, so maximise your study time with work you need to learn, commit yourself to it and go for it - good marks do not result from just sitting at a desk!

4. Understand Your Memory

Remembering a great deal of information is essential for success in exams so understanding the processes by which you learn and remember will be helpful.

Memory can be divided in Short Term Memory (STM), working memory (the part that is actively using information) and Long Term Memory (LTM). Here is an example to show the difference.

Your phone number will be stored in your long-term memory but what you had to eat for dinner two weeks ago on Thursday, unless it was a special occasion, would have been stored in your short-term memory and forgotten after a few hours or days.

The best place for information needed to survive exams is in your long-term memory and based on work repeatedly done over a long period. However, the results of the intensive period of studying and revision around exam time would be stored in your Short-Term Memory.

Set out your revision timetable to optimise this (learn something, revise it again after a few hours, revise it again in the next couple of days etc) and you will be taking advantage of the way your own memory works.

5. Eat Properly

Students rarely eat a good diet. Even those with facilities and experience to cook often lack the time and energy or even inclination to organise healthy eating. However eating well during this stressful period is important as a good diet contributes to a strong nervous system, immunity against disease, restful sleep and clear thinking.

You do not need to become a health freak but a varied diet including plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables (the fresher, the more nutritious they are) will provide the nutrients and energy to help combat stress and boost mental performance.

If you eat a healthy diet then supplements are not necessary, but if your diet becomes a little erratic during this period, vitamin and mineral supplements may provide you with a useful insurance policy.

Remember the conditions in which you eat are also important – take time to eat and enjoy food – gulping down food in front of your computer will only make it harder to digest.



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6. Take Exercise

Exercise not only provides an outlet for pent-up emotions, but also plays a vital part in counterbalancing our responses to stress when coping with deadlines and schedules around examination time. Take regular breaks also when you are revising – walk around and do some stretching exercises at least every 30 minutes. Simple exercises help produce a sense of well-being and promotes relaxation.

7. Revise Using Past Papers

Study past papers and familiarise yourself with the layout and types of questions. Make sure you understand the vocabulary commonly used in examination questions e.g. do you know the difference between “criticise” and “discuss” in questions? *(see end)

The next stage is to answer the questions at exam pace and mark them after a revision session. Do not panic if your first attempt is poor. Analyse constructively what you have done; identify weaknesses, improve your pace and understanding and develop confidence. Then top up your learning where necessary and ask your tutor to explain anything you do not understand – most tutors will be delighted that you share their interest and enthusiasm!

8. Prepare and Use Summaries

Student notes are often long winded and include much explanatory material that will not be required at a later stage. Working through these can be both frustrating and time consuming so it is worthwhile preparing a neat, concise set of summarised notes for each topic. It should not be necessary for such notes to include explanations.

Limit your summary to key points only and include any relevant diagrams and charts. To help reinforce your Short Term Memory, write out the summary a few more times on scrap paper. When you feel you really know the subject well, test yourself from a question selected for an examinations paper.

9. Try to Sleep Well

Finding it hard to sleep even when you are tired is a sure sign of stress. Relax! The extra marks you might gain from studying on the night before will be more than offset by having a relaxed mind.

The benefits of sleep are hugely underrated yet there are numerous studies to show that sleep deprivation impairs mental performance. It affects Short Term Memory performance as well as flexible thinking so do try to sleep well in the period leading up to exams.

Learn some simple relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises and relax whenever you can. It simply is not possible to work flat out all of the time so be realistic.



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10. Include Drinking Coffee as Part of Your Study Plan

Coffee helps to improve alertness, attention and wakefulness and by that means it facilitates relevant learning. When the study is tedious, boring and not motivating, coffee helps to give you the energy to study and to make the best of it. The caffeine in your cup of coffee helps you process the information from your study books and the lessons you follow.

Coffee also helps with Short Term Memory so a valuable adjunct during revision periods.

Drinking coffee will also help to focus your attention to the main task, when there are many things around needing your attention. It draws attention to what you need to learn and leads to less distraction although doing different things at the same time may in itself be stimulating enough.

If your concentration fades, take a break with coffee and this change of mind may help you to concentrate again. However, drinking more will result in over- stimulation and that may impair your learning and attention and may keep you awake on that night before that important exam when you need a good nights rest.

Finally, there is a lot of scientific evidence to show that to drink up to 4 cups of coffee a day may have some positive health benefits and don't overlook the benefit of drinking coffee as a social pleasure!

END

***So, what do they mean in examination terms?*

“Criticism”. *This question is asking you to assess the relative truth of particular facts or theories, and supporting your judgement by discussing the evidence*

“Discuss”. *This question is asking you to give an explanation of the topic but from different points of view, for and against supporting your reasons with examples*

