

Your tutor will give you guidance and is available for ongoing support and assistance when you are...

...PREPARING FOR EXAMINATIONS

In addition to this primary support, in accordance with guidance issued by the University's Education Committee, the Department of Materials has developed this document, based on a paper by Ms L Nixon, Senior Tutor at St Hilda's, entitled Managing Finals. The aim is to provide you with a high-level summary of some useful basic steps in preparing for both Preliminary and Final examinations. The Department of Materials does not organise a 'Materials Finals Forum'; instead the Department's Tutors' Committee encourages you to discuss your preparation for exams with your tutor.

Developing a strategic approach can help you with your preparation for examinations. It can also be of value if on occasion you feel out of control, anxious and/or afraid in the run-up to the examinations.

Useful information to help you in this strategic approach includes:

- [Course Handbook](#) and [Lecture Synopses](#)
- [Examination Conventions](#)
- Assessment criteria for different degree classes (see Conventions)
- Past Examiners' reports (available on [WebLearn](#))
- Old exam papers (available online through [OXAM](#))
- Numerical answers to some past exam questions, where appropriate (also available on [WebLearn](#))
- General date of the exam period and eventually the specific schedule paper by paper
- Availability of revision tutorials
- Department-run workshops for Part I students on answering all examination questions (Week 1 TT)
- This pamphlet

Examples of strategies adopted can be found in student case studies in a book called "How I Got My First Class Degree" by Peter Tolmie, a copy of which is available in the Departmental library. Each of these students got a First and each of them devised their own strategy for doing so. Some of their methods may be useful, others not – but the point is to have a strategy.

Revision

Preparing for revision:

- HT is normally too early for students to start actual revision
- Start collecting material that you think you might need – bibliographies, solutions to problems, etc.
- Ensuring you have downloaded the notes relevant to you from WebLearn.
- Think about which papers you might need some additional help with.
- Do not focus so much on one paper that you do very badly in another – as you know from the table in your Course Handbook all the written papers are equally weighted and all count towards your final mark for the examination in question.
- Remember that for exam answers it is of value to:
 - When relevant, integrate different aspects of the course
 - When appropriate, provide examples or case studies
 - Cover in a comprehensive way the specific topic(s) addressed in a particular question
 - In mathematical problems, to show enough intermediate steps that your working and/or thinking can be understood.
- Allow a week off for a holiday at the end of HT.
Calculate the number of weeks before the start of your Finals and block out a rough schedule, which you can (and will) modify as necessary.

During the revision period:

- Do not procrastinate.
- Eat properly.
- Get exercise – research shows that people learn better if they take physical as well as mental exercise.
- Revise when you are at your best.
- Take regular breaks during revision and during these breaks reflect upon what you have learned.
- Switch topics / tasks periodically to avoid getting bored.
- If you are not making progress on a particular topic, take a break / switch topics and come back to it.
- Work away from distractions – music, television, mobile phone, etc.
- Be prepared to adjust your revision schedule – this is quite normal and you have not failed just because everything has not gone to plan!
- It may be useful to do some of your work with a revision partner – but make sure you work during these sessions...
- Don't spend time with people who may introduce any extra and unhelpful stress.

Examinations

During the exam period:

- Eat properly.
- Get exercise.

In the exam:

- Review and adhere to any regulations e.g. answer each question in a new book.
- Identify the amount of time you have for each question (5 questions in 3 hours means 36 minutes per question). Remember to allow time to select your questions and review your answers.
- You will need to produce an answer for each of the required number of questions (For example if the paper requires three questions to be attempted, answering only two questions, even perfectly, can gain no more than 66.6% - a mid 2(i) mark!). Similar reasoning applies to a question with more than one part – make best efforts to answer all parts.
- Start with an overview of the paper to identify those questions you can answer or would prefer to attempt. Eliminate any questions that you can't answer or would prefer to avoid.
- Keep an eye on the allocated time for each question.
- If time is short, remember it is always easier to gain the first few marks in a question than the last few marks. Two half-finished answers are likely to gain a few more marks than one finished answer.
- Give clear, concise and neat answers.
- Remember to complete the coversheet identifying which questions you have answered to ensure the examiners mark the question you intended.
- Address the exam question as set, not the one you had hoped for!

Valuable resources available to you include:

- **Your tutor**
- Your college

Some further helpful resources are available on the Oxford Students Website - www.ox.ac.uk/stressless and some of the self-help podcasts at www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling/self-help/podcasts.

There is also exam preparation help on one of the central [WebLearn](#) sites.

Last thought: It may seem to you now that there are no “real-world” counterparts for Prelims & Finals, but if you can learn to manage Finals you will in fact be very well prepared for future challenges!