



Exam FAQs

Q. What am I allowed to take into the exam room?

You must bring your Marjon Library Card or another form of photographic ID, to place on your desk. You should bring some pens, a highlighter or a pencil to underline key information on the exam paper. These will be useful in planning your answers as well as writing them. You should also bring some water in a clear bottle (no labels) as staying hydrated will improve your focus. You can bring anything else that has been expressly permitted by your lecturer, the examiner or Student Support, for example a calculator or a dictionary. **Under no circumstances are you permitted to bring a mobile phone, smart watch, tablet, laptop, iPod or any other device to your desk.** You must leave these in your bag and they must be switched off.

Q. How do I get started?

Start by reading the exam paper carefully. Read through all the instructions and highlight any keywords or information you think will be helpful to you. Make sure you read through all the questions and instructions before starting to write, as you may miss something vital. As you read, you might find it helpful to jot down some of the immediate ideas that spring to mind, so you can refer to them later.

Q. Should I plan my answer to the exam question?

It is entirely your choice, but if you do benefit from creating an essay plan, then use one in your exam. Make sure you set aside some time for your plan (5 minutes per question should be more than enough) and make very brief notes on what you need to cover, and how the ideas link critically. Scrap paper should be provided for you in the exam, and this does not get marked, so use this for your rough draft.

Q. Should I spend more time on the question I know best?

In short, no. Your exam paper will indicate how many marks are available for each question, therefore you can use this as an indicator for how long to spend on each question. Your best marks will come from having an answer for all questions required, rather than attempting to regain marks from one outstanding answer.

Q. Do I need to reference in my exam essay?

You will need to refer to field evidence in your exam essay, as not only will this demonstrate your knowledge of the subject, but also encourage a critical argument throughout your writing. You are not expected to produce a reference list at the end of your exam, but you are expected to know the names and dates of some of the key studies

and theorists in your subject area. Jot names and studies down as they come to you and include them where you feel they are most relevant.

Q. Which question(s) should I answer?

Start by reading the questions carefully and tick the ones that are possible to answer. Once narrowed down, reread the question, and underline the main terms, and based on this, briefly outline several plans. You might find that as you write, more thoughts will appear for some of the questions. If you see your favourite topic, proceed with caution, as the question might have some hidden directives that could mean something completely different.

Q. What makes a good exam essay?

According to Cottrell (2012, p. 87), a good exam essay has twelve characteristics:

1. Answers the precise question
2. Has a clear argument or perspective
3. Has critical analysis throughout
4. Good structure
5. Reasoning is evidence-based
6. Clear paragraphs used for flow
7. Evaluates different perspectives
8. Refers to theories
9. Includes references
10. Information is selective
11. Written clearly and succinctly
12. Has been proofread

Q. What if I don't know how to answer the questions?

This isn't likely to occur if you have revised your subject. If you can't answer the whole of a question, break it down into subsections and answer these parts. If the questions appear to be quite difficult, then choose the topic you feel most comfortable with and take your time.

Q. What do I do if I draw a blank?

Don't panic – you won't be the only one! Move onto another question, as writing will stimulate your memory. If you can't remember anything, use your scrap paper to write freely or doodle, just to get your pen moving. Try writing down the keywords and write around them; this might encourage your memory. Take a short break between answers if this helps you focus.

Q. What should I do if I finish early?

Use this time to review your answers and proofread. In doing this, you might come across some points that require expansion, or more analysis, which can only serve to strengthen your argument.

References

Cottrell, S. (2012). *The Exam Skills Handbook: Achieving Peak Performance (2nd edition)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.