EXAM ADVICE FROM UCL STUDENT SUPPORT & WELLBEING

Most people feel tense at this point. Whatever your state of preparation, your task now is to do your best. Here are some tips to help you breeze through this exam. You’ve got this!

7 Tips for Exam Success

1. You may want to use some of the time before you begin to do some simple relaxation and breathing exercises (for example the one below) to calm your nerves and reduce tension.

2. Make sure you are sat comfortably. Place your feet firmly on the ground and relax your shoulders. Before you start, you may also want to sit with your eyes closed for a moment and take a few deep breaths. Then and only then, turn over the exam paper.

3. Don’t worry what everyone else is up to – try to block everyone out. Seeing others frantically scribbling away will only increase your stress levels. Everyone works at different paces. You are here for you.

4. Throughout the exam, try to stay hydrated and take regular 'micro-breaks', e.g. a brief pause at the end of writing a paragraph. Try putting down your pen and stopping to think for a moment to help you assume control and collect your thoughts.

5. Avoid perfectionism. Check spelling and punctuation and use sources if necessary, but no one is expecting the exact same level of writing expected in coursework.

6. If you freeze up – pause for a moment. Put your pen down and take a few deep breaths. Re-read the question and then do your best to proceed with the exam.

7. If you feel unwell, ask the invigilator if you may leave the room for a short while. Taking a few deep breaths of fresh air or a drink of water may be just what you need to calm down. Turn over for some example techniques on managing anxiety and panic attacks during exams.

Square breathing

Try to make yourself comfortable and relax your shoulders, then...

1. Breathe in through your nose for the count of 4 seconds
2. Hold your breath for the count of 4
3. Breathe out through your mouth for the count of 4
4. Then, hold your breathing again for the count of 4, before starting the cycle again

You may find it helpful to visualise each side of the square below as you complete the exercise. You can alternatively try focusing on a nearby square object (e.g. your desk) to help you ground yourself.
Below are some example techniques for managing anxiety and panic attacks during exams:

Technique 1 - Controlling your breathing: Re-breathing or ‘cupping’ your breathing

Focusing on your breathing and breathing ‘fully’ is an important and effective way of alleviating panic. If the square breathing exercise overleaf doesn’t work for you and if you are experiencing dizziness, you may want to try ‘re-breathing’.

If you’re feeling particularly dizzy during a panic attack, this may be due to a lack of carbon dioxide in your bloodstream from not breathing properly. In order to combat this...

1. Cup your hands over your mouth and nose
2. Re-breathe in the air (which is rich in carbon dioxide) for five or six breaths
3. Repeat if necessary, until the feelings of dizziness subside

Technique 2 - Confront the panic:

- Confront the situation directly and try to remind yourself that the panic attack is temporary and will pass.
- Panic is a natural response to stressful situations such as exams that can affect us all.
- Remind yourself that you have successfully completed exams before and you can do the same again. If this exam doesn’t quite go to plan, remember that it’s not the end of the world.

Technique 3 - Distracting or redirecting your thoughts:

Sometimes, temporarily focusing your attention on something else can help to minimise anxious thoughts and the likelihood of a panic attack. If you’re feeling this way, you might find the following examples helpful:

- Listing different things that you can see in the room in front of you
- Going through the alphabet backwards in your head.
- Visualise a place and time when you have felt calm and relaxed

If you are too unwell to continue with the exam....

In some rare circumstances, you may find that you are unable to continue with the exam if your mental health symptoms are too severe (for example a prolonged panic attack). If this happens:

1. Alert the invigilator that you are too unwell to continue and will be leaving.
2. Visit your GP immediately if possible or try and get an emergency appointment for the following morning to seek support and obtain a medical note detailing your symptoms.
3. Inform your department of your departure of the exam.
4. Apply for extenuating circumstances with your medical note as soon as possible.

You can contact Student Disability services for support for this.