

## Appearing for an exam? Plan for success!

MUKESH PATEL

**MOST QUESTIONS** in today's examinations are designed to test both the depth and the breadth of the candidate's knowledge. They are often phrased in such a way that the answer needs to include facts from various parts of the syllabus and to manifest a thorough understanding of the subject matter. Equally, an ability to evaluate, critically appraise, analyse and interpret information, as well to present it to a captive audience are prerequisites for success to a high standard in contemporary educational curricula.

(Mentally inter linking various facts and associating them with everyday items is a very useful aid to memory.) Equally important is the ability to organise the answer so that it flows logically from one paragraph to the next, begins with a relevant introduction and ends with a suitable concluding paragraph.

Proficiency at answering longer questions comes only with practice and a concerted effort to improve oneself, but here are some useful tips to help you acquire the skill necessary for writing high-scoring answers.

1. Read the question carefully and try to ascertain what the examiner is looking for. The examiner has a fairly rigid mark scheme and irrelevant statements will earn no marks. Many students are under the misapprehension that the more they write the higher the marks they will score. This is usually untrue and a concise, relevant one-page answer will score more marks than a wallfuladen, irrelevant two-page one.
2. Time yourself throughout the examination leaving five to ten minutes at the end for a quick perusal of all the answers. It is surprising how many errors can be spotted and corrected in these precious few minutes. For example, if you had to answer ten questions in three hours, spend no more than 16 minutes on each question. This will leave ten minutes for reading the paper at the start and ten minutes for revision at the end.
3. Spend two or three minutes making a rough plan for your answer (in pencil). This should be in point form and has two main advantages. Firstly, it forms the backbone of a smoothly flowing answer in which each paragraph follows the previous one harmoniously. Secondly, it minimizes the possibility of missing out important points. If you remember any additional facts while writing the actual answer, add these to the plan in the appropriate place before you forget them.
4. Unless the question specifically asks for an essay or a discussion, the use of subheadings to organise your answer is not only acceptable but probably superior to a text without classification. Using subheadings will also aid your memory and make it easier to utilise the rough plan outlined in point 3.
5. Discussion of a large number of points briefly scores better than a detailed account of just two or three points. Try and include as wide a variety of relevant ideas as possible; this is probably the area in which there is greatest scope for improvement for most students.
6. The introduction should occupy no more than five or six lines and its purpose is to provide a foundation for the text that follows. For instance, the introduction in reply to a question on function may briefly delineate structure.
7. The conclusion should be a summary of the body of the answer followed if pertinent by an outlook for the future.
8. When you have selected the questions you are going to answer, do your best ones first. Thus, if you run short of time, you can do the difficult ones in a shorter time at the end to muster a few extra marks. However, you must always answer as many questions as asked for. This is very important because the first few marks in a question are very easy to earn. So, if you were to spend ten minutes adding to a nearly finished answer, you would score less marks in those ten minutes than if you spent them answering an extra question.
9. Illustrate your answer with line drawings wherever these are likely to clarify or supplement the text. Diagrams should be large and clearly labelled. Only two or three minutes should be spent on any one diagram.
10. Good English devoid of grammatical errors and spelling mistakes presented in clear legible handwriting always makes a good impression on any examiner. Remember, the examiner has a thick pile of papers to mark, and the more at ease you make him/her feel, the more likely he/she is to develop a positive attitude towards your particular script, probably resulting in a better mark.

The principles outlined above should be sequentially or randomly practiced every time a test or exam question is done. Over time, the idiom 'practice makes perfect' will begin to prove itself. Best of luck!

