

Exam techniques

A key element to exam success is getting the techniques right.

Students can possess all the necessary knowledge and yet fail an exam because they have run out of time, not applied their knowledge to the scenario or answered the question they wish had been asked instead of the one on the paper. Tuition providers have a real opportunity to help students maximise their chances of passing by ensuring that they understand the key skills. Making sure these skills are second nature will ensure that students do not forget them when they are actually in the exam.

Below are some key messages about exam techniques for tuition providers to pass on to their students.

Pay attention to instructions

Make sure your students know where they should be for their exam and what time they should be there. Once in the exam, they should read the instructions carefully; how many questions are to be attempted and how long do they have? Remind them to read the requirements for each question carefully, underlining key words and remembering to look for the verb in the requirement.

Manage your time properly

Students should allocate the correct time to each question and requirement – the 'magic' number is 1.8. They should attempt all parts of the question, and stick to the time allocation.

All 3 hour papers now have an additional 15 mins reading and planning time. During this time, students may write or make notes on the question paper but not the answer paper. To use this additional 15 minutes most effectively, remind your students to:

- read and understand all question requirements carefully to make sure they are able to make the best attempt at answering. For the professional papers, this will also allow them to make an informed choice about which optional questions to attempt where applicable;
- read through and highlight relevant information and financial data, noting why it is included;
- take note of the marks awarded for each question and the allocation of marks between different requirements within a question;
- start to plan their answers, particularly for discursive questions;

- think about the order in which to attempt questions;
- make preliminary calculations.

Present answers well

Students should plan their answers, laying them out clearly to make life as easy as possible for the marker. Using headings, sentences, paragraphs and bullet points are all useful techniques. Remind your students to use black ink and to leave enough white space, not cramming too much text on to one page. Good presentation can gain professional marks where appropriate.

Make answers relevant

It is important that students answer the question they have been asked, not the one they would have liked to answer. They should read the requirement at least twice to make they understand it. Students should not be tempted to write down everything they know about a topic – this will not get them more marks and may result in fewer being awarded if they spend too long on a question and then miss out on others.

Gain easy marks

Students should have a plan of attack, and go for the easier marks first. Remember, students can still earn easy discursive marks even when they have struggled with the calculations or suspect their numbers are flawed.

Don't panic

Remind your students that they should focus on the parts of the exam they can do, not what they can't do. Even if they feel an exam is going badly, they should keep going, moving on from question to question and answering as much as they can.