



Recognising different exam formats

Introduction

Most university courses will require you to complete an exam at some point during your studies. However, the format of exams can be quite varied. This resource outlines the differences between exams that you might be set.

Time limit

An exam will have a defined time limit. The time that you are given to complete exams can vary – make sure you check your guidelines. However, when writing answers you should focus on quality rather than quantity of information.

Exam format

Exams can assume a number of different formats. The format of your exams will be detailed in your unit handbook. If you are unsure of your exam format speak to a tutor. The following outlines some common examination formats:

Seen exam

Some course will involve 'seen exam' questions. This means that you will be shown the questions that you need to answer in advance of the exam. Therefore, your revision should be more focused upon topics specific to the 'seen' question.

Think about the best way to answer the question(s) and ensure you have a set of clear ideas which you can write about from memory. You may find it useful to give catchy titles to different paragraphs in your essay plan so that you can easily remember them and follow their order in the exam. Remember: You do not need to reproduce these 'catchy' titles in the actual exam!

Unseen exam / closed book

A closed book exam means that you will not see the question(s) in advance nor will you be able to take any resources (book / notes) with you into the examination.

Open book exam

You are allowed to take material (books, notes) into an open book exam and use these to answer the questions. Exactly what you can take with you will be determined by the exam board and invigilators – check your unit handbook for details.

Contrary to belief, open book exams are not easier than other types of exam. You will still need to revise for these exams albeit differently. Key to success in open book exams is organisation – make sure that you know where information is located in resources that you take to the exam. If allowed, colour coding or section labels can help you to map out where information is located in your resources.

Rather than being tested on your recall of facts, an open book exam tests your understanding, evaluation and analytical skills. You must therefore use the resources that you take to the exam to evidence your argument.

Types of exam

There are a number of different types of examination question that you might encounter:

Short answer written exams	Exams with a short answer format tend to be used in factual based units and are a test of whether you have learnt the foundation of the course material. Depending on the question length of answer could vary from one sentence to a few paragraphs.
Essay answer exams	Essay exams are used to test knowledge of course material and the ability to present this knowledge in an organised and coherent way when under pressure. An essay will need to include an introduction, main body and a conclusion.

Multiple-choice exams	Typically, multiple-choice exams questions are about the topics that you have covered during a unit. It is therefore important that you remember and understand the main topics, models, concepts, and authors that have been explored during your course. Commonly, multiple-choice exams are computer based. Therefore, it is useful (if possible) to practise on a computer.
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Oral exams (viva voce)

These are used to not only assess your knowledge but also your communicative skills. An oral exam may involve you preparing and delivering a presentation and then answering questions. However, some vivas will require you just to answer questions about a piece of your work. Expect questions to be open-ended, i.e. they require you to elaborate on your arguments, ideas and opinions using the knowledge you have gained from reading around your topic.

If you have an oral exam remember:

- Your exam begins the moment you walk into the room; create a good impression, dress suitably, be professional and make sure your mobile phone is turned off.
- It is helpful to try to predict questions that examiners are likely to ask – think about questions that you had whilst you were completing your assessment.
- Keep focused and don't digress or ramble if you are unsure of an answer. Be direct and outline how you would go about solving the problem
- Practise - but do not over practise

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub

