PERSONAL REVISION PLANS

In the next few sections we will be looking at PERSONAL REVISION PLANS. It's great to have a packed revision timetable, but what happens if the sessions you allocate your time to are not filled with anything substantial?

The next few items are plans for individual exam sessions and can be tailored to suit your needs.

For many of these activities you will require PAST EXAM PAPERS. Students can access the past examinations database via the "my.exams" tab in www.my.bham.ac.uk . If you cannot access these, please see your tutor or subject advisor.

a) Assess your speed

b) Exam details

c) Gauging your exam paper

d) Becoming familiar with key question language

e) Sorting out your material

f) Condensing your notes

g) Preparing an outline to an exam question

h) Preparing answers from different angles

i) Complete a full answer

j) Complete a full, timed mock paper

k) Swap questions with others on your course and quiz each other

a.) Assess your speed

You will need:

- A pen and a few extra sheets of paper.

Instructions

1. Choose a topic you are very comfortable and familiar with. This could be a book, computer game or a person you know well. Write your topic below:

2. Set an alarm on your watch or phone for 15 minutes.

3. Now write solidly for 15 minutes on the topic you have chosen in the space below, then take a word-count and write the number into **box A**, below.

(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

A	/15 mins

4. Now multiply the number in **box A** by 4 and record this in **box B** below. This is roughly how many words you might be able to write in one hour during your exam.

A x 4 =

B	/hour

5. Divide your hourly word count (**B**) by 10 (roughly the number of paragraphs you will write). This should be the number of paragraphs you would write in a 10 paragraph essay. Record this in **box C** below.

B ÷ 10 =	**C**	/paragraph

6. Look at how many words you wrote in 15 minutes (**A**). Count the number of words that you have calculated are available to you for each paragraph (**C**), then draw a line under the text at this point with a highlighter or different coloured pen.

   The writing above this line is the number, and visual representation of, words you should be using to make each main point.

> In your exam, you should use this amount of text to make each of the key points in your essay, ensuring you are writing efficiently and covering everything you need to say.

Number of words written in 15 minutes (A)	
Number of words written in 1 hour (B)	
Number of words per paragraph (C)	

b.) Exam details

Subject area

Exam title

Date of exam

Location

Equipment needed

Other notes

c.) Gauging your exam paper

You will need:

- A past paper.

Instructions

1. This activity will raise your awareness of the exams you will take. You will note how long you have to complete each paper, and how many answers are required. This will give you an indication of how much time you should devote to each question.

2. Consider the style of answer you are required to give. An essay style answer will clearly necessitate more of the allotted time than a multiple choice answer, so be sure to differentiate.

How long do you have to complete the paper?

How many questions are you required to answer?

How many questions require the following category of answer?

Essay style answer	
Short answer	
Multiple choice answer	
Other	

d.) Becoming familiar with key question language

You will need:

- A selection of past papers for the exam you are revising.

Instructions

1. Read through all of the questions that have come up in the past papers so far and take note of the way in which they are worded. Becoming familiar with the language used to interrogate a topic will help you to feel more prepared for the kind of questions that will come up in the exam.

2. Very often, the same topic and style of question is used in the same place each year. Compare the same questions across a range of past papers for this topic. How are the exam questions worded? Note down any significant language that shapes the structure of the questions.

3. Make a note of any patterns in the wording of questions - are there any particularly prevalent verbs that occur time and time again? What are they? Do the questions require you to describe, compare, contrast, summarise, analyse, discuss etc.? Think what each of these verbs is actually asking you to do.

4. Now that you have familiarised yourself with the wording of the exam questions, try to create your own questions to practice during revision sessions. For example, if many of the questions in your topic begin 'compare and contrast', think about what other questions might be set using the same structure.

QUESTION 1

QUESTION 2

QUESTION 3

QUESTION 4

e.) Sorting out your material

You will need:

- Past papers for the exam you are revising.
- Your notes, hand-outs and research from the subject area.

Instructions

1. Read quickly through questions from past exam papers for the past several years.

2. Do many variations occur in these questions over the successive years? What are these?

3. Add some realistic variations to these questions as possible alternatives to the actual questions posed. This will help you to organise your thoughts so you can make decisions about which materials are really necessary.

4. Get hold of all paper and electronic notes you have on the subject, including any highlighted texts, photocopies, prints and lecture hand-outs.

5. Go through the piles of notes, texts and hand-outs, keeping in mind the likely exam questions you noted (above).

6. Choose items from your resources that best fit or are most useful to the questions.

7. Lay other, less useful resources to one side for later reduction to one set of unduplicated notes.

8. When sifting, ask yourself the following:

    - Will I ever use this?
    - For which question(s) is this information most useful?
    - Given the word limits, how much of this information would I realistically be able to use?
    - Which points are most essential?

f.) Condensing your notes

You will need:

- Your notes, hand-outs and research from the topic area you wish to revise.

Instructions

Condensing your notes is a great way to make your material more manageable

There are several methods you can use to do this:

1. Rewrite various notes around one topic to one shorter set of key points and headings.

2. Include in your reduced notes any material that you have highlighted in books, journals or websites.

3. Decide on a limited number of pages for each topic and stick to your decision.

4. Present your notes as a set of key headings with a few key points under each.

5. Rewrite your notes as answers to likely exam questions, only selecting information that is really relevant to the task.

6. Make a series of index or post cards, each of which displays information on one topic.

7. Draw a chart or diagram of pertinent information for each topic.

As you start to cut down your material into reduced notes, organise it so that it is simple to pick up and use next time:

- Can you read it easily?
- Are labels clear and accurate?
- Do your headings relate to possible topics for paragraphs in exam questions?
- Would colour-coding help to either pick out specific points or link between topics?
- Are your points numbered clearly?

As you condense and reduce all of your notes, make a list of any gaps in your knowledge - what is missing that should be there? If you can, go out of your way to find this information and add it to your notes, adding to their overall coherence.

g.) Preparing an outline to an exam question

You will need:

- 12 index or post cards per topic.
- Several past papers per topic.
- Your condensed notes as prepared in activity 5.

Instructions

1. Read a few times through past exam questions, noting which questions best match the topic you have chosen.

2. Note whether any types of question appear on more than one past paper.

3. Choose one question and use that as your focus for the session.

4. Read the essay title and consider very carefully what kind of answer you are required to write.

5. On the first index card, write the question – this will help you to see the focus for the rest of the exercise.

6. Think about what your overall answer will be and sum this up in 2-3 lines beneath your title.

7. On the back of index card 1, write a list of 9 possible paragraph topics, and add 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' to your list (see overleaf).

As you prepare your answer, return to these key points and add the main research references you will need for the exam

Index card 1: front

<u>Exam question</u>

To what extent was X successful in achieving Y?

<u>Summary of argument</u>

X was largely successful at A, B and C, and partially successful in attaining D. These successes meant that the first stage of Y was achieved. However, X failed to achieve E and F. As E and F were the most significant points of Y, overall X was unsuccessful in achieving Y.

Index card 1: back

<u>Proposed list of paragraphs, with references</u>

1. Introduction
2. Why X wanted to achieve Y
3. Key stages and aspects of Y
4. Reasons why X can be considered to have achieved A (Fenton, 1993)
5. Reasons why X can be considered to have achieved B and C (Shea, 2001)
6. Why D can be considered a partial achievement of Y (Lawson, 2005)
7. Reasons why X can be considered not to have achieved E and F (Ward, 2000)
8. Reasons why some people did argue X did not achieve E (Wagstaff, 2002)
9. Reasons why their arguments are not convincing (Schweisfurth, 2010)
10. Reasons why E and F are the most significant aspects of Y
11. Other important considerations
12. Conclusion

1. IS IT RELEVANT?	2. ARE THERE GAPS?
Reread the question and check that your list of proposed paragraphs is ALL relevant to the question selected. If not, then review these.	Look quickly through your set of reduced notes to check you haven't missed any key reasons that are relevant to your argument. If so, add these to your list.
3. HUNT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	**4. AMEND THE PARAGRAPHS LIST**
If you're unsure whether you've covered all essential angles, you should look back to your full set of notes. If you still require further information, check text books, using the index to quickly locate information.	As you gather more information, you should amend your list of proposed paragraphs and check that they are all still relevant to the question you have chosen.

Once you feel happy with your list of probable paragraphs, it's time to fill in the detail. On the top of 9 of the remaining 11 cards, write a heading that sums up the focus of each potential paragraph. On each card, under the heading, jot down a list of the main points you would include in that paragraph, including relevant details like names, dates etc.

When you are in the exam, you won't be able to write a lot for each paragraph, which is why it is useful to have only one small card for the key information.

You would do well to avoid:

- adding in additional cards
- using very large cards
- using very tiny writing so you can squeeze more into the space

If you have a lot to say about a topic, consider how to pare this down to more essential aspects. This will:

- help you to recall the information later
- give you valuable practice in editing
- save time thinking of what to cut out if this question, or one very similar, comes up in the exam

Use the two final cards to draw up the main points you will include in your introduction and conclusion.

h.) Preparing answers from different angles

You will need:

- Your index cards as prepared in activity 6.

Instructions

1. Read through your index cards from activity 6.

2. Choose up to five exam questions from past papers for each of your topics, all closely related to the essay you prepared for in activity 5.

3. Add your own variations and adaptations to the questions by:

    - Applying question words that reflect those used in past papers.
    - Covering interesting and/or up-to-date information around your topic, i.e. from journals, websites etc.

4. Look at the title and think carefully about the kind of answer that is required. Pay particular attention to the exact wording used. How would the answer to this be similar to that given in the previous activity? How might they differ?

i.) Complete a full answer

You will need:

- A question from a past paper, or one that you have adapted or concocted yourself.
- Your index card answer plans from activity 6.

Instructions

1. Using an appropriate index card from activity 6, write out an answer in full.

2. Try to stay within the time limit you would be subject to in the exam itself.

3. Repeat for a number of different questions. Don't be afraid to adapt your answer from the index card plan to best fit the question you're attempting.

j.) Complete a full, timed mock paper

You will need:

- A past paper for each module you are revising, preferably ones that are unfamiliar.

Instructions

1. Spend a little time revising the main points on your index cards and reviewing your answers from activity 8.

2. Complete a full mock paper in the appropriate time allowed. DO NOT use your index cards or any other reference materials, but try to answer questions based on the index card preparation you prepared earlier.

3. When you have finished, refer to your index cards and previously prepared answers and review your performance in the mock. Try to be brutally honest in your appraisal of your answers. Are they appropriate in length and scope? Are they fully-formed and finished? Do they adequately answer the question? Do they reflect you planned answers? Have you left any gaps? If so, where are they and how can you address this? Do you need to plan new answers based on the questions asked?

4. If possible, swap answers with a friend and comment on each other's work.

k.) Swap questions with others on your course and quiz each other

You will need:

- Practice questions you have written yourself.
- Some friends with the same.

Instructions

1. It will benefit you to answer as many different exam-style questions as possible in preparation for the real thing. If your course-mates are revising in the same way, it may be worth swapping questions with them and trying to answer a wider variety.

2. If these new questions are significantly different from the ones you have already answered, try to plan on index cards from scratch before you begin. This will give you a much greater range of options from which to draw upon in your exam.

3. Look over each other's index cards and answers. Critique each other's methods and take what you can from each other's examples. Discuss good practice in terms of answering questions for this exam.