

# **STUDYING FOR SUCCESS**

## **A Guide for Students**

*Prepared by: The New Zealand Qualifications Authority*

WHAT  
IS THE  
SECRET  
TO  
DOING  
WELL IN  
EXAMS  
?

Ask anyone who has succeeded at exams how they did it and they'll tell you some pretty straightforward, common-sense stuff:

- work hard during the year
- prepare an effective study schedule and stick to it
- learn some basic examtaking techniques and apply them on the day.

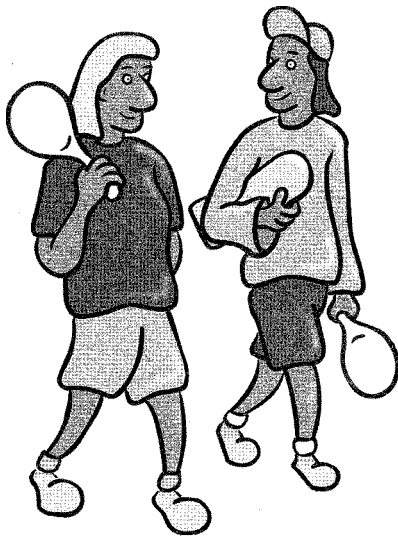
Hopefully you will have taken care of the first part yourself and put the effort in during the year. This guide will help you to make the most of what you have learned so you can turn in a good exam performance and get marks you can be proud of.

**This Guide looks at how to:**

- PLAN a study schedule
- STUDY effectively according to that schedule
- SIT your exams confidently to get a good result

Sitting exams doesn't have to be a stressful experience. Remember - exams are designed to test what you know, not to catch you out. It's up to you whether you walk out of your last exam wishing you could do it all over again or feeling satisfied that you did the best job you could.

So start now. You do have to do some solid work - be realistic about how much work you need to do to succeed and read on for tips about how to make that work really pay off.



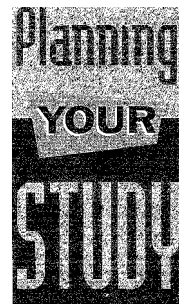
You have done a lot of work in a whole range of subjects and how exam time is looming. How are you going to organise all that learning so you can go into every exam confident that you will do well?

Well, the first step towards studying for exams is always to plan a study schedule.

Planning a good study

schedule involves answering two important questions:

- What do I need to know for the exam?
- How can I best use my time to make sure I have that knowledge?



### What do I need to know?

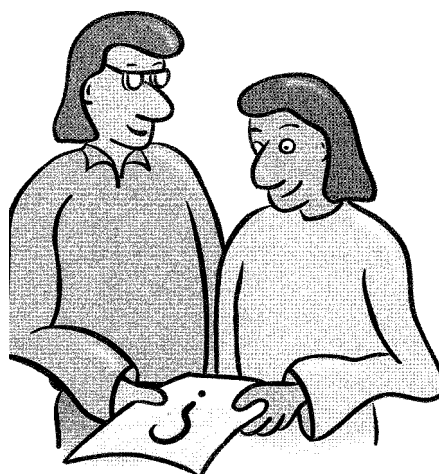
It might seem like an obvious question, but you'd be surprised how many people start studying without having a clear idea of what they want to achieve at the end of it.

Don't study just for the sake of it!

Know what you need to know, and aim towards it.

- **Read the course description for each subject carefully.** what are you required to know? What will you be examined on? What will you not be examined on?
- **Go through past exam papers.** Ask your teachers to get you copies if they haven't already.

Copies of past exam papers are available for sale from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, P O Box 160, Wellington. For some School Certificate and Bursary subjects the Qualifications Authority also sells resource booklets. These contain questions from past papers, model answers and other study hints.



If you can, take copies of old exams home with you to use when you're studying. Find out if this year's exam is going to be similar - will there be the same number of questions? Are there any major changes of format or content planned for this year? (The Qualifications Authority advises schools of significant changes.)

Your teacher also has access to reports from previous chief examiners. These have useful tips on answering exam questions

•**Write a brief list of the major topic areas you need to cover for each subject.**

Discuss with your teacher which exam questions or options you should choose to study for and how you'll decide what questions to answer in the exam. This will be useful for planning a detailed study schedule and to make sure you've covered everything you need to. Look at how you have done in your own school exams.

**How much time have I got?**

Now you have some idea of what you need to know to do well in the exams, you need to think about how you can achieve it in the time you have.

In the ideal world you will have heaps of time before the exams, enough to do all your study with time to burn. Back on Planet Earth, looking at all the stuff you need to know and the time you have to study may make you break into a cold sweat. **DON'T PANIC!** It's certainly easier to start months in advance, but having a study schedule can make things a lot easier even if you think you've left it a bit late to have enough time to do everything. A good study schedule is always helpful, no matter how much time you've got left.

**So let's begin:**

•**Draw up a chart of the time you have left before exams.**

Break the time down into weeks and days. Decide how many hours you can *reasonably study per day*. Be realistic - plan to take time off every so often to go to a movie, hang out with friends, play sport or just watch TV

**•What else have you got to do besides studying?**

Are you going away at all? Are there any days when, for whatever reason, you won't be able to get any study done? Fill in these days, so you're left with a good idea of the real amount of study time you have got.

**•How many exams do you have to study for?**

**Are some subjects harder than others?**

**Have you done more work in some subjects than others?**

Don't plan to spend exactly the same amount of time on each subject if you don't need to. Devote more time to the ones that need it. Your teacher will be able to help you make decisions about your approach to studying based on results from your school exams during the year. Keeping these things in mind, work out how you are going to divide up your study time by subject.

Now you've got a broad idea of what you need to know and how much time you've got to spend on each subject, it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty.



**•Make a detailed plan of what you are going to cover in each study session**

Be realistic about this - don't plan to do more than you can achieve. And be prepared to alter your schedule if you find you are falling behind, or if you study faster for some subjects than you anticipated.

**•Plan to vary your study schedule.**

Don't plan to go over one subject in one big chunk - you'll just get sick of it. Plan to spend maybe half a study session on one subject and then switch to another. That way you won't get bored and you'll remember things better.

**•Plan to go over material more than once.**

One of the keys to effective revision is repetition. The more times you can go over something, the better you will learn it. You want to know your material so well you couldn't forget it if you tried!

**So let's recap**

A well-planned study schedule should be:

**Detailed** - you should have a good idea of what you are going to cover every time you sit down to study.

**Realistic** - don't try to do too much (or too little!). Plan for some time off to recharge your batteries.

**Flexible** - be prepared to modify your schedule once you get a better idea of how much you can do each day, and what works best for you.

**Varied** - plan on mixing your study up to make it more interesting.

OK, you've got your plan – now there's the small matter of actually doing the study

It's important to remember that everyone studies differently. You probably already have some idea of what works for you and what doesn't. Some people need to work in the same place at the same time every day. Other people like variety. Some people put all their notes into diagram form, and others prefer to use key words. There is no magic formula - find what works for you and stick to it. But do it! Don't be one of those who are all preparation and no action.

## **Where and how should I study?**

**•Find a comfortable place to study.** If noise disturbs you, find somewhere quiet. Make sure everything you need is there - stationery, good light, fresh air.

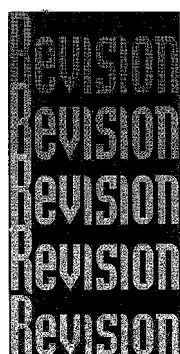
**•Plan to take regular breaks.** No-one can work effectively for hours without a break. Take five or ten minutes every hour to get some fresh air, a snack or something to drink.

- Set yourself goals for each session and tick them off as you achieve them. That way, you'll really feel like you're making progress.

### **What's the best way to take notes?**

- Writing and rewriting information down in note form is one of the best ways of learning and remembering information. After you have read a section, just ask yourself what key ideas it contained. There are all sorts of ways to take notes - use a note-taking technique that suits you.

- How do you like to take notes? By drawing diagrams? y using different coloured pens? By highlighting key words? There is no one way to take good notes – the important thing is that they make sense to YOU.



### **How many times should I go over my material?**

Go over material two, three, four times - the more the better. It's a good idea to take notes each time, getting more concise each time. Write notes in your own words.

For example, say you've taken 15 pages of notes on a topic during the year. The first time you revise you might cut that down to five pages. Then, the next time, boil it down to two pages, and the third time, to just one page. By now you will know which bits you find difficult - make more detailed notes on these. Some people like to end up with revision cards with just a few key facts on each one. By the time the exam arrives, you've been over the material numerous times so that all the vital information can be triggered by a few key words, ideas, and diagrams. In subjects where calculations and graphs are involved you will need examples to practise on.

### **How can I use old exams?**

It's a good idea to use old exams during your revision. Look at how questions are asked. Could you quickly plan out an answer for an essay question, noting all the key points you would make? Can you answer sample multiple choice or short answer questions? What format will your answers have to be in - paragraphs, a few words?

Get to know the way exam questions are written and what words like 'explain', 'discuss' and 'compare' mean in a question. Make sure your study reflects what you will be required to know in the exam and how you will be required to express that knowledge.

You may want to build into your study schedule time to practise real exam questions. Get an old paper and answer sample questions under exam conditions. Either plan what you would write or actually write whole answers. Ask your teacher to look over your answers and identify areas where you could improve. In many subjects you'll be offered options. Which options will you choose? Which order will you answer questions? Will you do the easier or harder questions first?



### **What if I'm having trouble understanding a subject?**

Studying is not always easy. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your parents and your teachers all want you to do well. What about your friends? Studying with someone else can often be helpful for both people, and it makes a nice change from working on your own - just make sure you don't get distracted from the task at hand. A 'buddy system' can also be helpful on the day, making sure you both get to the exam room in time and reminding each other to bring admission slips.

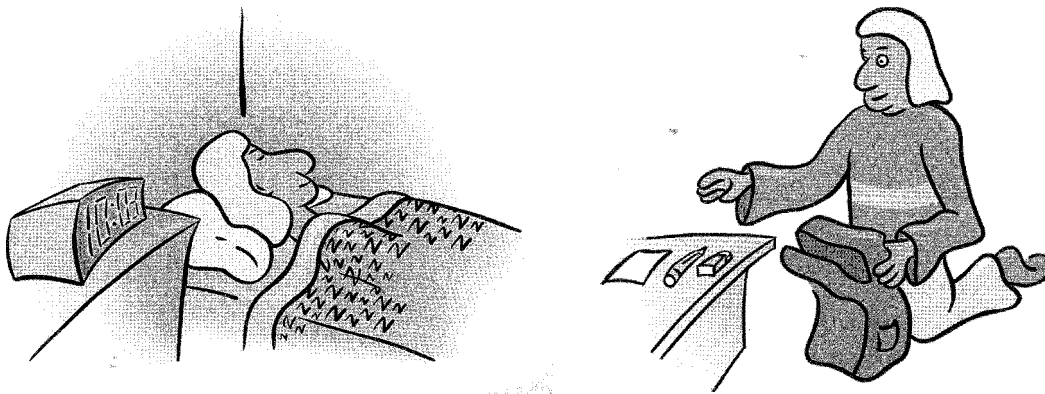
### **When should I stop studying?**

Stop trying to learn *new* information at least a week before the exam. Use the final week - or more if you have enough time - to revise one last time. Look over old papers again. Make sure you haven't missed anything, and spend more time on areas you feel less sure about.

### **What about the night before - should I cram for hours?**

You could do some final revision for a couple of hours the night before each exam. Definitely DON'T stay up all night - it will do you far more harm than good- and don't panic.

The hard work is behind you, so try to relax and look forward to doing well in the exam.



Before you go to bed, pack your bag with everything you will need for the exam - pens, pencils, a watch, and any other equipment such as calculators etc. Get a good night's sleep, and don't forget to set your alarm clock or ask someone to wake you.

**Finally, make sure you check your exam timetable and bring your admission slip!**

Remember....

You need to find study techniques which suit you

They should include:

- A comfortable work environment
- Time off to recharge your batteries
- Regular rest breaks while you study
- Taking notes which are helpful and meaningful to you
- Going over material as many times as you can
- Leaving the last week for final revision
- Trying to relax the night before.

No matter how good you were in sticking to your study plan and covering all the material, you're going to be nervous when the day of the exam finally arrives. This is perfectly normal - in fact, just like any performer, it's good to be a bit hyped up when you go in. But don't get too stressed out.



**Minimise your stress levels**

- Get up in plenty of time.
- Eat a light, healthy breakfast.
- Check you have everything you need for the exam.
- Arrive at the exam venue with time to spare.
- Wear clothes you feel comfortable in, if you have the choice.
- Take your examination admission slip.
- Team up with a buddy who can provide some friendly support

**Once you are in the exam room:**

- Listen carefully to the supervisor's instructions
- Get out everything you need
- Read the instructions on the paper carefully
- Read over the entire exam first and decide which questions you are going to answer, where you have options
- Determine your approach to the paper, based on your preparations and previous discussions with your subject teacher. Which questions will you answer first?
- Work out how much time you have for each question
- Always attempt all the required questions – any answer is better than no answer at all
- If you have to write an essay, make a brief essay plan
- Try to leave some time at the end of the exam to read over your answers.

**What If I Am Sick On The Day?**

**Compassionate Consideration of Examination Results.**

You can apply for a compassionate consideration of your exam results 'if you can't sit the examination or you think your exam performance has been seriously affected' because of illness, injury, bereavement or exceptional circumstances beyond your control close to or during an exam.

To qualify for a compassionate consideration, your injury or impairment must be serious and be validated by a doctor. If you are ill, ring your school and let them know. Don't forget to get your doctor to fill in the compassionate consideration form that you can get from the NZQA liaison teacher at your school. Do all of this immediately.

### **So there you have it**

**Some handy hints on preparing for and sitting exams. As you can see, the key to succeeding in exams is no secret.**

All you need to do is:

**Plan** Decide what you need to study, and how long you have to study it.

**Study** Follow a realistic detailed study plan, using the techniques that work best for you.

### **Sit the exam with confidence**

Keep a cool head, follow the rules, read the paper carefully, plan your answers, and make sure you answer the questions that are asked.

Hopefully, this guide will help to put you on track towards doing your best in your exams. And remember, if you need help, there are heaps of people you can ask – your teachers, your parents, your friends. They want you to do well just as much as you do!

**Good luck!**