

Preparing for in-person exams: advice from Learning Development

1. What are in-person exams?

In-person exams require you to come to a specific location on campus to take an exam. The location will usually be a large exam hall. This may be a new experience for you due to the recent disruption caused by the pandemic. You may have to use new skills and you will be expected to follow a set of rules guiding behaviour and what you are permitted to bring into the room. This can feel daunting, but it is helpful to remember that this is going to be new for everyone. As with any exam or life challenge, you will need to prepare in advance, mentally and physically, and consolidate your learning.

2. How should I prepare for an in-person exam?

Here are some suggestions to help you prepare.

a. Familiarise yourself with the practicalities of in-person exams

For your exams you will be provided with a personalised exam timetable. Check this timetable for the location and times of your in-person exams. Work out how long it will take to get to each location and, on the day, make sure you arrive 20 minutes before the start time. Beforehand, check the rules for what you are expected to bring and not allowed to bring: [Examination rules for undergraduate students | Lancaster University](#). Also, check the rules for expected behaviour and prepare yourself mentally for the silence required in the room.

b. Make sure you understand the format and likely content of the exam

If available, look at [past papers](#) to find out more about the format and type of content. This can vary, so listen out for up-to-date guidance from your lecturers. Check how many questions you will have to answer and how long you will be expected to spend on each one. Work out the relative weighting of each question, i.e. how many marks are allocated. Find out if you will have a choice of questions and how the exam will be marked. Attend all your classes and listen carefully to all the advice and information communicated by your department. Ask questions if you are unsure about anything.

c. Prioritise and revise

Review your understanding of your course material and identify where you need to focus and revise content. Create a revision timetable as early as you can. Use the weekly and termly planners from our [Time Management](#) resource to organise your time and make sure you build in some relaxation time. Be sure to build flexibility into your timetable as your first plan may need adjustment.

Make sure you have a good overview of the topics you expect to come up, including key information, concepts, authors, researchers, theories, ideas and case studies. Summarise what you have learnt and make connections between the information so that you can bring it together to respond to the exam questions. If you are not sure what to focus on in your revision, check the learning outcomes for the module, organise and check your lecture notes, and talk to your tutor and other students to find out more.

One way to revise is to prepare concise notes from your course material and test yourself. You can create and personalise your notes in the way that suits you best. Consider your options for condensing information – you could use hand-written notes, digital note making tools, charts, diagrams, visuals, colour coding, spoken word or other ways that work for you. Keep condensing and testing yourself on key information. Using handwriting as part of your revision process will help you build up your handwriting speed and accuracy for the exam itself.

Look out for any revision classes offered within your department and those organised by [Learning Development](#). These can be an opportunity to ask questions and focus on strategies.

d. [Think, talk, and practise](#)

Create opportunities to think and talk about the content of your modules. This can help you clarify your knowledge and your thoughts on what you have learnt. It can be useful to focus on the areas you know best, to build confidence before tackling the harder areas. Talk with people on your course or tell your friends and family about your learning.

Build your writing skills. As with other academic contexts, your writing will need to be succinct, precise, clear, and grammatically correct. If you want to discuss how to improve your academic writing, contact your [Faculty learning developer](#) or [English language development](#) for an appointment or details of workshops.

Practise for the exam. You might find that you want to develop your fast handwriting or change your note making techniques. You might need to build up your mental and physical stamina, through further practice and preparation. Check how long it takes you to complete part of a practice paper and what sort of things you need to address before the exam itself. Practise applying your knowledge to a question and showing your thinking. It can also be useful to practise breaking down essay questions and identifying exactly what they are asking. Make sure you are familiar with the meaning of the instruction words likely to be used, such as 'explain', 'discuss' or 'critically analyse'.

e. [Look after your mental health](#)

When preparing for exams, look after yourself carefully. Eat healthily and set up a routine to help you sleep. Develop relaxation strategies throughout your revision, e.g. exercising and continuing to take part in hobbies. Reward yourself and make sure you take good breaks. Try to be as positive as possible by recognising and reducing negative thinking. Check our [Time Management](#) resource for tips on dealing with anxiety and other barriers to effective study. If your anxiety starts to feel overwhelming, seek advice or check the self-help materials available on the University's [Counselling and Mental Health Service](#) pages.