

Tips for Students with Extra Time in Examinations

By Brenda O'Brien

Extra time on a 3 hour A level exams is 45 minutes. If a student is unfortunate enough to have two such exams in one day (this does happen) they could be in the exam room for 7 hours 30 minutes! Even two GCSE exams of an hour and a half each in a day could mean the dyslexic student is in the exam room for 3 hours 45 minutes.

If not used properly, this extra time could make students even more tired. But used properly, it can help them to pace themselves as well as compensate for difficulties.

Make sure that the student knows whether they are starting earlier than the other students or finishing later. Make sure that the person organising the exams coordinates these times otherwise students may end up finishing later and starting earlier without a good break in between .

1.Planning your Time in an Exam

- Total the number of minutes for the whole exam including the extra time.
- Note when the exam is to start and when it is to finish including extra time
- Note how many questions need to be answered. In a science or maths exam there may be about 20 or more questions, approximate the number of minutes each answer should take.
- Practice timing yourself to answer questions in that time. (Usually it works out about 2 minutes per question)
- With longer written answers work out the number of minutes for each question and make a note of when each question should begin.

(It is important that students know when to start a question and when to finish. It is not sufficient to just know that the question should take about 25 minutes because the dyslexic student will find it difficult to approximate the passing of 25 minutes under exam conditions.)

Example History - 2 hours.

With extra time 2 hours 30 minutes (150 minutes).

Total of questions to answer - five.

Subtract 10 minutes to read paper at the start and 10 minutes to check paper at the end.

150 minutes minus 20 equals 130 divided by 5 (no of questions) equals 26 minutes per question.

Round down to 25 minutes for each question.

REST PERIODS ARE ADDITIONAL TO EXTRA TIME - Students should build these in.

- Exams Begins

- Start Question 1 - Finish 10.05
- Rest for about 2 mins before starting Question 2 - Finish 10.30
- 10.30 Rest for about 2 mins before starting Question 3 - Finish 10.55
- REST BREAK outside exam room
- 11.00 Start Question 4 - Finish 11.25
- 11.25 Rest before starting Question 5 - Finish 11.50
- 11.50 Read and Check
- 12.05 Finish

The first couple of minutes at the start of each new question should also be a time to rest, clear the mind of the previous question, have a drink, something to eat, to do some stretching and breathing.

The last couple of minutes at the end of each question should be proof reading time. Don't just leave all proof reading to the end although you should still have 10 minutes at the end to look through your paper and proof read it again

2. Planning a Written Answer

Most marks are lost because either the response does not answer the question or because the student runs out of time. Most students say they don't have time in an exam to plan their answers. We say they cannot afford NOT to plan, especially the dyslexic student. Most students should think and plan for about 30% of the total exam time and write for the remaining 70% - a dyslexic student should think and plan for not less than 40% of the time because answers have to be even more carefully thought out so that the information is presented in a succinct way. Writing an answer requires the skills of the author (ideas and information) and the secretary (spelling, syntax, grammar, sentences). The dyslexic student will find it difficult to do these two distinct operations simultaneously. Either the ideas will be compromised or the presentation and spelling will be. Therefore they need to approach each answer in stages

Generation of ideas
Sequencing the ideas
Writing

Generation of ideas

What am I being asked?

Highlight the "contract words" such as analyse, evaluate, describe, compare, outline. If the student does not know what these mean, they will not be able to answer the question correctly.

Highlight the key words or topic words. (There is a big difference in the answer to "Evaluate the process of photosynthesis" and "Analyse the process of photosynthesis") Evaluate and analyse are contract words, photosynthesis is a topic or key word.

Note your ideas in a plan. There are various different types of plans. Planning not only ensures that all the necessary information is retrieved

appropriately and sequenced in the right order but it also helps the student manage their time and rest. For example if there are 8 "boxes" or ideas to address in 24 minutes, then each will take about 6 minutes. It is even more helpful if the student can equate the number of lines they would normally write in that time – i.e. 6 minutes means approximately four lines or whatever.

The Story Board plan.

Used for descriptive or narrative answers.

Divide a sheet of paper into vertically down the middle, and horizontally across to make boxes. Each box represents a paragraph.

Note ideas in each box with the first box being the introduction and the last being the conclusion. This is very useful for the dyslexic student who may tend to work backwards from the end or generate ideas in a random order

The PMI Plan.

Used for argumentative or discursive answers.

Divide page into columns representing positive and negative views and evidence or ideas

For

Against

Evidence

Brainstorm Plans.

Put the main idea in the middle and other ideas around.

Number the ideas in sequence

Flow Plans.

Used for writing up experiments or a specific sequence of events

3. Controlling Stress, Panic and Tiredness.

1. Take as many breaks as you are allowed and you feel are useful
2. Rest between written answers
3. Drink water - a dehydrated brain will work slower and you will feel more tired
4. Ask if you are allowed to take in a banana or piece of chocolate
5. Avoid at all costs fizzy drinks before an exam as well as crisps and other types of fatty foods. (They will make you sleepy). Eat protein, cereals, fruit
6. Ask not to sit by a window - it can be hot and bright light tends to make dyslexic students more tired
7. Between questions do a few exercises such as rotating your shoulders, neck and ankles, arching your back and deep breathing. Sitting in the same position for a long time can restrict oxygen intake and make you tired. Be careful that they do not distract other students

8. Before writing anything down, close your eyes and visualise the answer. You will retrieve information more easily if you are relaxed. Try to visualise your books and notes as well as the room where you revised.
9. If you start to panic because you don't know the answer close your eyes and take yourself into an imaginary "safe place" – a beautiful beach for example. Once you have relaxed your thinking processes will start to work again. The more you force yourself to remember something, the more stressed you will become and the less you will remember. Try holding the back of your neck with one hand and massage your forehead with the other – it will help you relax
10. If you start to fall behind your time plan, go into note form or leave some space to come back to.

Don't engage in post mortems. It is not helpful - what is done is done, more on to the next exam.

Brenda O'Brien Quantum SEN