



Somerville College

**KEEP CALM
AND
CARRY ON**

**Practical Advice on Surviving Exams
2023**

For most students exams will bring some degree of anxiety. The following presents some brief guidance on actions you can take that may help keep the anxiety under control.

Examination anxiety

We all experience anxiety when we feel stressed and overwhelmed. Feeling anxious is a normal part of our lives, but sometimes this feeling becomes so intense that it becomes difficult to manage.

The experience of anxiety can range from mild uneasiness and worry to severe panic. At a reasonable level, anxiety can motivate us and enhance our performance, but if it becomes too severe or chronic, it can become debilitating.

During the build up to exams, when you are trying to revise or during the examination period, please **do not suffer** in silence and let your anxiety inhibit your performance. Get help with problems before they get too big. *If talking to your friends doesn't help, then please contact one of (contact information available on page 10):*

*Your tutor and/or Welfare Officer and/or Senior Tutor
The college nurse and/or college doctor
The junior deans (7pm-7am)
Oxford University Counselling Service*

Coping with revision and examinations

The phase leading up to examinations, when you are trying to revise, as well as the period of examinations themselves, can be very stressful which could lead to anxiety and panic.

Often talking to friends, making sure you have a good exercise routine and healthy diet (remember your five-a-day) can help considerably. Maintaining some social contact is also important as it can help keep a sense of proportion.

General Exam Practicalities

If you have any kind of immediate crisis which requires action such as illness, an incorrect exam entry or a lost University card, then you should contact the Academic Office or Welfare Officer as soon as possible. Use the contact details further on in this leaflet.

Please make sure that your current phone number is listed in your Student Self-Service. If there is any problem with your exam then the Examination Schools will contact the Academic Office who in turn may need to contact you in a hurry.

In-person exams

If you are sitting an exam in-person you will need to have your University card, your candidate number and you will need to be wearing subfusc. Your candidate number is on the exam and assessment section in your Student Self Service pages at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/>. You can also check that all your exam entries and any special arrangements you may have applied for are in place on this page.

You are allowed to take still water in to the exam room with you but only if it is in a clear plastic bottle with a spill-proof cap (a sports cap).

Mobile phones and any valuables have to be left in your bag in the cloakroom area of the Exam Schools. Remember to turn your phone on silent before leaving it there.

Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if I require any special arrangements for my exams?

If you have special arrangements such as extra time or use of a PC, etc, then you should log on to your Student Self Service pages to check that these arrangements are in place. If the arrangements are not correct, or you have not already notified the College of your needs, then please contact the Welfare Officer straight away at welfare.officer@some.ox.ac.uk

What happens if something goes wrong, like an illness or accident, before my exam?

Please contact the Academic Office or the Welfare Officer as soon as possible. They will advise you about what to do next. If you are unwell on the day of an exam you may apply for an excusal from the Proctors. For open book exams, excusal can only be granted if you have not downloaded the exam paper. If you have downloaded the exam paper and then become ill you should submit what you have completed and then submit a mitigating circumstances notice.

What happens if I am ill during an exam?

You can submit a mitigating circumstances notice to your examiners. More information about how to do that can be found on the [Problems completing your assessment](#) webpage.

Results

Once your exam results are released you will receive automatic email confirmation. You can then access them by logging into your Student Self Service pages at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/>

Self-help for anxiety, panic and stress management

A panic attack is a severe experience of anxiety. People may experience intense dread, various physical symptoms or having thoughts of losing control.

Anxiety can be experienced as a range of feelings from uneasiness to severe panic. It is usually experienced in three ways:

Emotionally: feelings of fear and nervousness;

Physically: dry mouth, feeling sick or churning stomach, racing heart, sweating, shaking or breathing difficulties;

Cognitively: disturbing thoughts such as:

'I'm going to fail'

'I'll make a fool of myself'

'I can't remember anything'

The best way to slow down your breathing in a panic attack is to do the following:

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose.
2. Hold for 4 - 5 seconds.
3. Breathe out slowly through your lips like you're whistling.
4. Repeat several times

Eat a healthy diet

Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day with breakfast and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals, plus healthy snacks throughout the day.

Exercise regularly

Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.

Get enough sleep

Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

Reduce caffeine and sugar

The temporary 'highs' caffeine and sugars provide often end with a crash in mood and energy. Reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate and sugar snacks in your diet will make you feel more relaxed and you will have better sleep.

Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs

Drinking alcohol and/or taking drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Do not avoid or mask issues; deal with them with a clear mind.

Set aside relaxation time

Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach.

Connect with others

Connect with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.

Revision Tips

- Take the time to discuss and plan your revision with your tutor(s).
- Consider the examinations as a job to be done, rather than ignoring them or being over-whelmed by them.
- Be in control of your work as well as your leisure time. Use a diary to plan revision sessions between now and the examinations. Remember to plan for relaxation too.
- A few sessions of quality work per day, with breaks, is much more beneficial than very long hours of unfocused reading.
- Take regular ten-minute breaks to stretch, etc.
- Back up work regularly, especially when working on extended essays etc.

A Healthy Approach

- Always have at least one hour of doing something entirely different and relaxing between finishing studying and going to bed.
- Do not study in your room until you are so tired you fall into bed.
- Eat regular meals including breakfast. A banana is a good snack before an exam. Drink plenty of water or fruit juice. Remember you can take water into the exams with you, in a clear bottle with a sports cap.
- Practise writing by hand.
- Regular exercise will help you both to concentrate and to relax.
- Only drink alcohol in moderation – it dehydrates you and disrupts sleep.
- Do not increase use of caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, stimulant drinks).

When you are revising

If you can, please try to:

Plan a revision timetable so that the bulk of your revision is completed before the exams start

Get an **overview** of each course and then select areas for more detailed revision

Decide **how much work** you personally need to do

Find out the **best time** of day for you and plan to do your work then

Take a 10 minute **break** after every fifty minutes

Include a couple of **free evenings** each week in your timetable; and take time to go outside

Fix times to **discuss revision topics** with friends

Work at an **uncluttered desk**, without too many distractions in the way of papers and books

Tidy up after each revision session and put your books away

Eat regularly and sensibly

Establish a **regular sleeping pattern**

But try not to:

Leave it all to the **last minute**

Revise each course **in detail**

Compare the amount of work you are doing with that of your friends

Push yourself to revise at a **biological 'low'time**

Work for more than an hour **without a break**

Work **every** evening, all day, every day

Do all your work **on your own**

Work **surrounded with distractions** and unread papers and books

Leave books and notes **open** as a distraction

Live on **snack meals**, chocolate, biscuits etc

Miss out on **sleep**

During the Examination period

If you can, please try to:

Plan a revision timetable for the **whole exam period**

See the course as a whole, but concentrate on **selected detail**

Work in a **calm** uncluttered atmosphere

Concentrate on your own priorities

Put each exam behind you as soon as it is **completed**

Eat sensibly and regularly

Sleep regularly

Put most of your **effort** into writing the exam papers

But try not to:

Do **last minute** revision

Revise the **whole course**

Flit from topic to topic

Compare your revision with your friends

Discuss the exam papers with friends **after** the exam has finished

Put off eating

Stay up all night

Get so tired and panicky that you don't **do yourself justice** in the exam

In the examination

If you can, please try to:

Read the **whole paper** including the directions carefully before you start

Underline key words in the questions you select (**describe, evaluate, compare, account for** etc.)

Plan your answers

Answer the **right number** of questions and **allocate your time** evenly

Get help at once if you need it

But try not to:

Start at the first question you see **without reading the directions**

Write before thinking

Waste time by including irrelevant information

Spend **too much time on one question** at the expense of another

Suffer in silence

