



**STUDENT  
DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE**

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**SKILLS  
EMPLOYABILITY**

# SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

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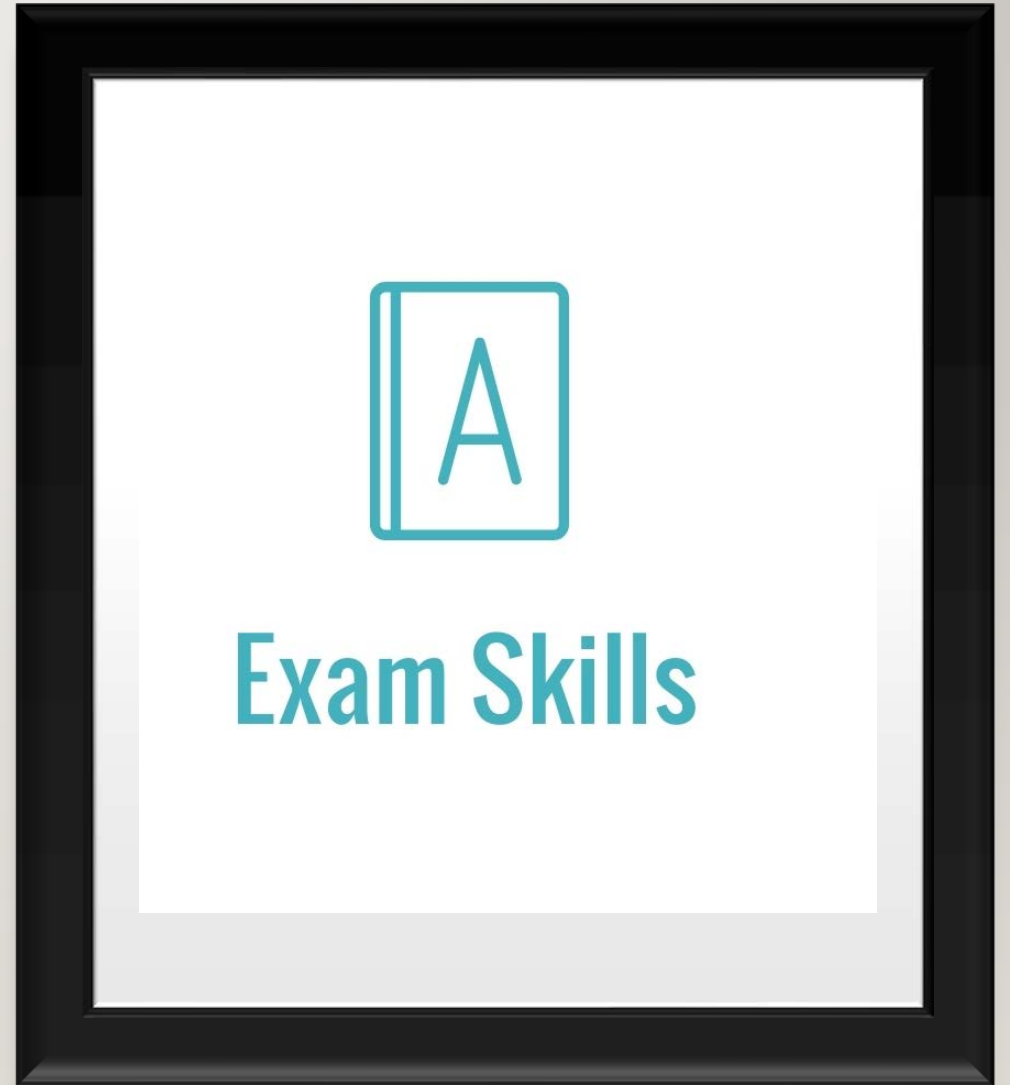
# EXAM SKILLS



# WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

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1. Understand exam requirements and marking criteria
2. Identify strategies for strategic and effective exam revision
3. Be able to plan and write a focused exam answer



# WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

## Before the Exam

- Why do we have exams?
- Practical reminders
- Revision time management
- Strategic revision
- Advanced revision: critical thinking
- Writing a good exam essay

## During the Exam

- Managing time during exams
- Using past papers
- Practice exercise
- Strategic revision

## Summary

- 'Joyful' exam revision
- Questions & Answers

# WHY DO WE HAVE EXAMS?

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- Revise course material for a **better understanding of the main theories, concepts, controversies and links** between different topics
- Demonstrate ability to **provide concise, critical analysis** of key course themes
- **Course assessment:** Exams typically account for 50-60% of the overall course grade.  
Check your handbook for course-specific information

# PRACTICAL REMINDERS

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- **Spring examination period:** 26 April to 23 May 2021
- **Notification:** Dates, times and venues of examinations have been posted on the University website last week: <https://exams.is.ed.ac.uk>
- **Re-sits:** Late August

# COVID-19 CHANGES

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- **Structure:** 24 hour take-home exams, usually from 1pm to 1pm the following day
- **Location:** Posted on the course page on Learn
- **Check your Learn page or ask your course organizer for COVID-19 related changes**

# TIME MANAGEMENT AND WELLBEING

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- **Active engagement during the semester** pays off
  - Structure and organize your notes from lectures and tutorials along the way
  - Engage with advanced reading during the semester
  - *When should you **start revision?***
- Manage stress and take care of your **wellbeing**: seek support when you need it.
  - Student Support Officers
  - Personal Tutors
  - Disability Service
  - Students' Association Advice Place

# STRATEGIC REVISION

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- *What is revision for? Why is it important?*
- Start early - make a revision timetable
- Analyse the **handbook**: what is required? which topics will be covered?
- **Don't just read through your notes** over and over again. **Interact** with the material and other students!
  - Identify the **key points, examples and evidence** for each topic
  - Answer questions from **past papers**
  - Prepare for questions that combine different topics



# ADVANCED REVISION: DEMONSTRATING CRITICAL THINKING

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- **Critically analyse main theories and arguments** – do not just describe
  - What are their strengths and limitations?
  - Which counter-arguments and further criticism can be found in the literature?
- **Go beyond the core readings**
  - Engage with advanced reading from the handbook. What are other theories and arguments?
  - Independently research further examples and evidence
  - Build on tutorial discussions: interesting examples, questions or ideas
- **Discuss** past exam questions and answers with your peers
  - Where do you agree and disagree?
  - What are alternative examples?

# WRITING A VERY GOOD EXAM ESSAY

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- **Directly** addresses the exam question
- Develops a **logical, focused and well-structured argument** in relation to the question – includes an introduction, main body and conclusion
- Demonstrates and applies **knowledge of the key themes** covered in the course
- Both describes **AND critically analyses** the topic
- Provides **evidence** for the argument and **references** published sources: references the author's name (but page numbers and a bibliography aren't needed)
- Shows an ability to **manage time**
  
- Make sure it is **legible!**

# MARKING CRITERIA

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## A3 (70-79%)

- A **sharply-focused answer** of high intellectual quality, which adopts a **comprehensive approach to the question** and maintains a sophisticated level of analysis throughout. It should show a willingness to **engage critically with the literature and move beyond it**, using the sources creatively to arrive at its own **independent conclusions**.

## B (60-69%)

- A very good answer that shows qualities beyond the merely routine or acceptable. The question and the sources should be addressed directly and fully. The work of other authors should be presented critically. **Effective use should be made of the whole range of the literature. There should be no significant errors of fact or interpretation.** The answer should proceed coherently to a convincing conclusion. The quality of the writing and presentation (especially referencing) should be without major blemish.

## C (50-59%)

- A satisfactory answer with elements of the routine and predictable. It should be generally accurate and **firmly based in the reading**. It may draw upon a restricted range of sources but **should not just re-state one particular source**. Other authors should be presented accurately, if rather descriptively. The materials included should be relevant, and there should be **evidence of basic understanding of the topic in question**.

[Full details of the SPS Marking Descriptors available here](#)

# MANAGING TIME DURING THE EXAM

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- Key difference between exam essays and other essays? **Time-factor!**
- **Step 1:** Read through all the instructions and questions thoroughly and choose the required number. Decide which question to answer first.
- **Step 2:** Draft an **essay plan** to help you structure your response
  - **Answer the question directly**
  - Identify and focus on key arguments
  - Structure your response

# MANAGING TIME DURING THE EXAM

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- **Brief introduction:** What will you argue? What is the structure of the essay?
  - **Main body:** Key argument(s), examples, evidence and counter-arguments
  - **Conclusion:** Summarise your argument
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- **Step 3:** Write your first essay.
  - **Next steps:** Repeat planning and writing until you have answered the required number of questions (usually 2-3)
  - **Final step:** Proof-read and edit your answers. Use Word spell check! Also go back and check that your introduction states your argument.

# REVISING WITH PAST EXAM PAPERS

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- Search ‘Edinburgh past exam papers’ or go to <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/exam-papers>
- **Purpose?**
  - Understand better **what is expected** from students
  - Analyse **types of questions and common themes**
  - **Revise more strategically** and effectively!
- **What to look for?**
  - **Structure** of the exam – check course handbook too
    - **Key words** used in questions: what *exactly* are they asking you to do?
    - **Examples of combination questions**: such as applying theory to an example or comparing theories

# ACTIVITY: 5-MINUTE ESSAY PLAN

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- **Choose one example from these past exam questions:**
  - *Sociology*: How might we explain the fact that modern capitalism developed first in the 'West'?
  - *Social Policy*: 'Any work is always better than no work at all'. Critically discuss this assertion using policy examples to inform your answer.
  - *Social Anthropology*: Is marriage a universal social institution?
  - *Politics and IR*: Has globalization diminished the role of the state? Discuss.
  - *Sustainable Development*: Why is it important to take a social science perspective on sustainable development?
  - *Social Work*: Identify and discuss two major challenges for today's local authority (the statutory sector) children and family social workers.
- Underline **keywords: What exactly is the question asking?** Focus!
- Take **5 minutes to make a very brief outline**: introduction, main body and conclusion. What could your main arguments be? What evidence could you give? Even if you don't know about the topic what general structure can you map out?
- Once completed, compare with the person next to you

# FURTHER SUPPORT: PLANNING EXAM ANSWERS

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- **Look at the question carefully**, to make sure you have grasped all its implications
- Make a **six-point list of the key points** you want to make
- Work this list up into a **full plan**
- Add **any extra details** that come to you once the plan is complete – **dates, quotes, names, extra facts or theories**
- Finally – **go back to the question and check**: do you think you have answered it fully enough?

*Adapted from: Becker, L., 2018; 14 Days to Exam Success;  
Palgrave Macmillan*



# JOYFUL EXAM REVISION

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- **Make it meaningful:** choose topics and issues that interest you the most. Take time to delve deeper into those areas.
- **Collaborate:** Study in groups if it suits you
  - Form study groups with tutorial classmates and friends to compare notes and answers to past exam questions. Ask your tutor if they can set up a time and date, or organise it yourselves
- Take part in **structured exam revision sessions** run by Peer Assisted Learning (PALS). Keep an eye out for more info via email, lectures and LEARN.
- **Take breaks** and **reward your progress!**

# SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

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Questions?



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Remember to sign up for our other skills sessions!

