

Jim's Exam Advice

Preparing for the Exam

- 1) Start revising at the start of the course, not a week before the exam.
- 2) Revise in small 'chunks': a little bit and often. Revising for periods of over 1 hour is inefficient, as your brain is not 'taking things in' after that time.
- 3) Condense a chapter into a one-page [mind map](#). Whilst creating the mind map you are learning as your brain is processing in deciding the key ideas from the chapter you want on your mind map. Only one word in every ten is relevant to remembering so revising from a mind map takes 1/10 of the time of revising from a chapter in a book. Simply copying down key phrases does not involve processing so is not as effective. Also, if you have 15 minutes to spare you think it not worthwhile to open your book and start to read. However, you can learn a lot in 15 minutes from a mind map with pictures. Think of the scenario below.

There are two equivalent students. Student 1 sees a person for 5 seconds. Student 2 does not see the person but is given an A4 sheet of paper describing that person. It takes 10 minutes to read the description. Two weeks later, both students have to describe the person. Who will do the better job? Answer: student 1 who **saw** the person even though for only 5 seconds – point made.

- 4) Relax the night before the exam. The extra few hours' revision you gain by sitting up until the early hours are negligible compared to the total number of hours spent on the course. In addition, the problem in an exam is not seeing questions that are unfamiliar but **remembering the answers**. An aid to remembering is being relaxed after a good night's sleep.
- 5) Have everything you need for the exam ready the night before and arrive for the exam in good time. Have spare pens e.t.c.

In the Exam

- 1) Note the length of the exam and plan your time to allow for checking.

- 2) Read the whole paper through first (unbeknown to you your brain is working on all the questions in the background).
- 3) Start on your 'best' question first and answer them in order of difficulty. Having answered the first question well gives you the 'feel great' factor: your frame of mind is so important.
- 4) Remember, the examiner will not know you. All he/she has to go on is your paper. If it impresses (no silly spelling mistakes) then he/she is more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt on something that may not be clear.
- 5) If you get an answer that you know is clearly wrong (e.g. a bond length of 1cm) but have not time to re-do the calculation, just put a note saying you realise the answer is incorrect but have not time to re-do the calculation. If you know the order of magnitude for bond lengths put it in. The examiner will then know you have an appreciation for what bond lengths should be.
- 6) Read each question through carefully so you are sure you are answering what is asked.
- 7) Do not repeat yourself: it is quality, not quantity that matters.
- 8) If there are 3 marks for a question then give 3 separate points, not repeat the same point twice more.
- 9) Check through **every** page. In most exams there are always candidates who did not see the question on the back page.

Hopefully if you heed the advice above you will not need 'luck' in your exams.

Best Wishes

Mr B