

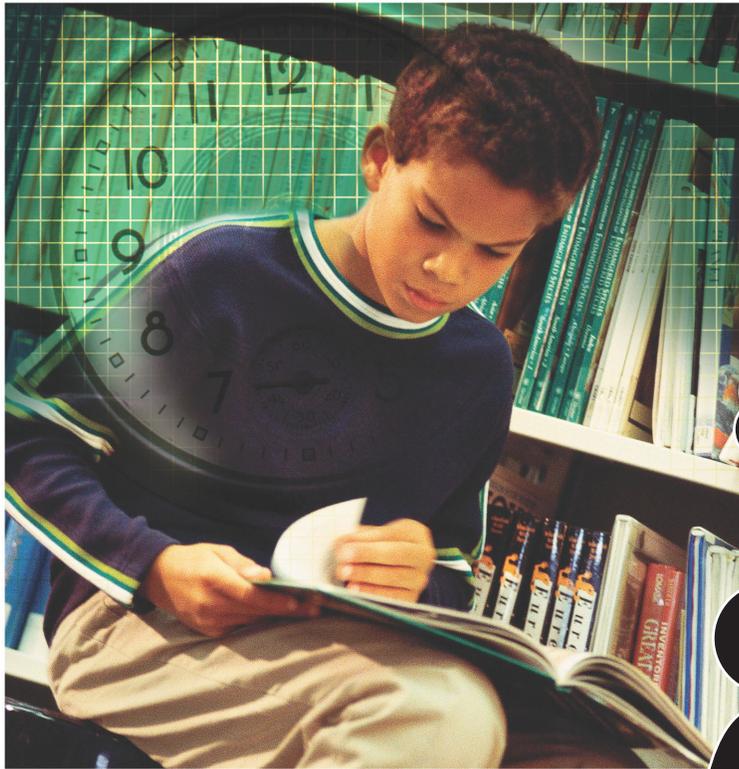
Exam Writing Skills

Pembroke's Friday Freebie

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Learning to Learn

Student activities for developing work, study and exam-writing skills



**Thought
&
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Writing exams

Keywords explained

Compare: Are the things very alike (similar) or are there important differences? Which do you think is best? Why?

Contrast: Look for differences.

Criticize: Use evidence to support your opinion on the value or merit of theories, facts, or views of others.

Define: Give the meaning.

Describe: Write in detail.

Differentiate: Explain the difference.

Discuss: Write about the important aspects of the topic, are there two sides to the question? Consider the arguments for and against.

Distinguish: Explain the difference.

Evaluate: Judge the importance or success.

Explain: Make clear.

Illustrate: Give examples which make the point clear.

Interpret: Explain the meaning in your own words, for example you may be asked to interpret a graph.

Justify: Give reasons to support an argument or action.

Outline: Choose the most important aspects of a topic. Ignore the minor detail.

Relate: Show the connection between things.

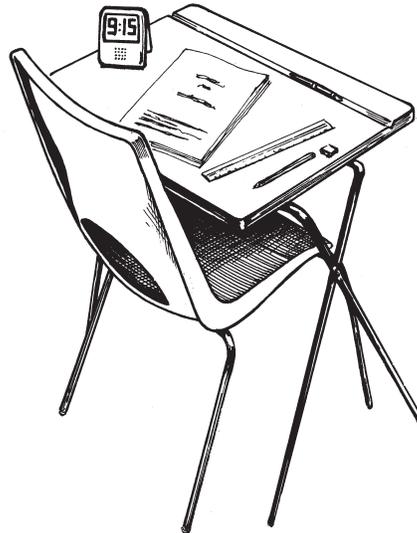
State: Write briefly the main points.

Summarize: Bring together the main points.

Trace: Show how something has developed from beginning to end.

Key stages in answering exam questions.

1. Scan all the questions.
2. Mark all the questions you could answer.
3. Read these questions carefully.
4. Choose the correct number (in each section).
5. Decide on an order: best answers first.
6. Divide up your time.
7. Underline key words in the question.
8. Plan your answer.
9. **Stick to the point of the question.**
10. Write your answer.
11. Use the plan at every stage e.g. every paragraph.
12. Check your answer against the plan. Watch for mistakes.
13. If you have time, re-read all your answers and make any necessary corrections.



Checking the exam paper

The question paper is yours. Make full use of it to:

- (a) Note down things that occur to you as you read it
- (b) Mark which questions you intend to do
- (c) Underline key words in questions
- (d) Plan answers.

Note down the times you should complete each section.
A 1:30-2:00
B 2:00-3:00
C 3:00-4:00

Friday 27 June, 1:30-4:00, 2½ hours.

Careless and untidy work will be penalized.

The total time for the three sections in this paper is 2½ hours. You should spend about half an hour on section A, about an hour on section B, and an hour on section C.

Answer all questions in section A and two in each of sections B and C.

20% of marks are awarded in section A.
 40% of marks in section B.
 40% of marks in section C.

Answer the 20 questions in section A on the grid provided. One mark is given for each correct answer. Marks are not deducted for wrong answers.

Read each section carefully, come back to any questions you find too difficult.

There are different groups of questions in this section. Instructions are given at the beginning of each group.

For each question there are five possible answers. When you have chosen the alternative which you think to be the best answer to a question, mark it on the answer sheet. Use an HB pencil to mark your answers in the same way as in the example. Rub out your answer if you change your mind. **DO NOT USE A PEN.**

Use the answer book provided to give your answers to questions in sections B and C. Do not use the answer book for rough work. Use the question sheet.

Mathematical tables are needed.

You are allowed to use calculators.

Sometimes important data is provided here, e.g. in a physics exam:
 Acceleration of free fall (due to gravity), $g = 9.81 \text{ ms}^{-2}$

Take note of the number of marks for each section. More time is needed on questions that have the most marks.

Make sure **you know** where to write your answers.

Mark them clearly. Sometimes your ideas become clearer towards the end of an exam.

These are multiple choice questions. If you do not know the right answer, eliminate any that are definitely wrong.

These are provided by your school.

You will usually have to provide your own. Even when you use a calculator the exam may require you to show the stages of your working out.

Exam dos and don'ts

Some tips for handling the stress

More and more, it seems, the future hangs on examination results and hardly anybody can now escape being judged on what can be remembered and reproduced in a few hours of writing and writhing.

The build-up to important exams is, for many, punctuated by periods of intense anxiety and stress, panic that not enough work has been done, fears that results may not be good enough to take one to the next stage — and possibly yet more exams.

Although a certain amount of keyed-upness may be necessary to bring out the best, stress and anxiety are counter-productive.

Dr. David Lewis, a clinical psychologist, who holds regular de-stressing workshops for examination candidates, says: “A great fear of examinations seems to be built into us from an early age. You have to bear in mind that there is nothing you cannot achieve, that you need only ordinary intelligence levels to pass most exams, and that if you build up confidence through adequate preparation, there is simply nothing to fear.”

It is even possible to avoid exam stress and enjoy the challenge, buzz, and sense of achievement that exams can bring, by bearing in mind these essential examination dos and don'ts:

- Remember that you can actually decide to succeed — and that everything follows from that.
- Bear in mind that stress can be catching, and can be worked up deliberately, so don't moan constantly to friends about how much work you haven't done or listen to people who tell you they can't sleep, or are sick with worry. Reassure each other instead.
- Realize that we all have a limited concentration span, and that even the world's greatest geniuses will start flagging after an hour and a half, at most. Take short breaks every hour or so for 10 minutes, then you'll start studying with renewed energy.
- Don't drink lots of strong coffee. Caffeine encourages adrenaline production, which in turn increases anxiety. One or two cups a day is enough. Otherwise drink herbal teas, fruit juice, or mineral water.
- Don't shun absolutely all delights to live laborious days. The occasional party, or social evening does no harm (so long as it's not the night before an important exam) and can even contribute to concentration the next day. Reward yourself with leisure activities and interests, particularly after a hard session of studying.
- Relax and unwind before going to bed by listening to a relaxation tape, soothing music, or by watching a relaxation video. Do not attempt to relax by watching a horror movie late at night — this will increase stress the next morning and may prevent sleep.
- If you have difficulty sleeping, practise simple yoga techniques, or place a softer pillow under your usual one. A good night's sleep wards off anxiety and reduces stress next morning.
- Although intense studying the night before the exam is a bad idea, glancing through notes just before you go to bed helps to imprint the subject on the memory.
- Do not attempt, at this late stage, to learn any facts you don't understand. You'll never be able to recall them properly.
- When writing an exam, don't worry if time runs out during essay papers. Writing notes, rather than fully rounded sentences, can clock up a surprising amount of marks. Also, remember that thoughts often flow during the writing of exams — it's not always necessary to plan every single thing before writing.
- Whatever you do, never indulge in detailed post-mortems after each exam. It's over — forget it. Post-mortems induce anxiety and achieve nothing.
- Most important of all, believe in yourself. Believe that you can do well in these exams. Don't fall prey to negative self-fulfilling prophecies, or tell yourself that you are no good at exams. They're not a test of your worth as a human being, just an indication of your current level of expertise in a subject.
- Even if you do fail, all is not lost. Most exams can be retaken these days, and the will to succeed is always more important than any perceived ability or inability in any subject. Remember that most exam failures are caused by lack of self-confidence rather than lack of intelligence or learning ability.