

Exam Skills

Sharpen your exam technique

Nuala:

Hi, I'm Nuala O'Sullivan and you're listening to 'Exam Skills'.
OK, this is it. You've done your preparation and you've got to the exam room in plenty of time. Now you're sitting down, and your written English exam is about to begin. What next? Just start writing? No, not quite yet. As these students know, the first step is to focus fully on the exam you're about to do.

Students

I try to concentrate and not to think about the result, and not to think about the person who is sitting in front of me. I try to imagine as I'm, I'm doing it for myself. This is my way.

Try to concentrate on your own knowledge and just be aware of the fact that you've done the most for the exam. Think only about yourself and only about the exam.

Nuala:

Block out any distractions. Don't think about anyone else, don't think about other things. Concentrate on doing this particular exam.

Next, focus on time. As Examiner Mark Shea points out, a good exam technique depends on good timing

Mark Shea

During the exam itself, time management is essential. Doing an exam successfully is to a large extent a question of good time management. If you've done practice exams before, you should have a good idea of how long each part should take you, and when you have to hurry. Take a big clock into the exam room with you, but not one that ticks too loudly.

Nuala: Yes, take in a clock – not a wristwatch, but a clock. Getting your timing right is that important.

Mark Shea

Some exam rooms have large clocks on the wall, but if you haven't seen the exam room before you won't know that. My advice is to take a digital alarm clock, something with really big numbers that you can see really easily, rather than a small wristwatch which is going to take you time to actually see. And divide the exam into parts, and make sure you spend the right amount of time on each part.

Nuala: So before you even start the exam, work out how long – how many minutes – you should spend on each section. And decide the order you'll answer the questions in.

Mark Shea

Remember you don't necessarily have to do the exam in the order that is written on the paper. You might want to do the part that carries the most marks first.

Nuala: I think it's always a good idea to do the section that's worth the most marks first.
Language expert Karen Adams agrees that careful timing is crucial for exam success.

Karen Adams

Planning your time will help you get all the way through to the end of the exam paper, and to do your best in all of the questions.

Nuala: And here's another simple, but absolutely essential tip: read every question very carefully, or listen to the examiner's instructions, very carefully.

Karen Adams

One of the main problems that lots of people have in exams is that they know lots of things, but they don't actually answer the question. This means that you can't actually score very good marks. So remember, do read the question carefully.

Nuala: It doesn't matter how much you know or how hard you've worked, if you don't answer the question, you can't succeed. So, two crucial things to remember: First, good timing:

Mark Shea

Arrive early. Take a big clock. Keep an eye on the time. Do the parts that carry the most marks first, and make sure you know how much time you have for each part of the exam.

Nuala: And second, answer the question!

Karen Adams

Pay very close attention to the instructions, so that you can be sure you're really answering the question.

Nuala: And when it's all over – what then?

Karen Adams

When you leave the exam room, remember, you've done your best and it's over. There is no point in worrying about what you've actually done. So try to leave the exam behind when you leave the exam room. Don't spend lots of time with your friends comparing what you wrote, comparing what you think you said. Quite often it's difficult to remember what you actually did say. When you leave the exam room, remember, leave the exam behind.

Nuala: Good luck and good revising!