

EXAM TERM 2008

# THE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Emmanuel College Student Union



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**Academic and Welfare Officers**

Many thanks are due to ECSU's very own Aisling O'Dwyer for providing the excellent template for this booklet, which we've pretty much just stolen.  
(Please don't tell a soul.)

# Hello!

Welcome to the **ECSU Exam Term Survival Guide 2008**. As Academic and Welfare Officers, it's our job and great pleasure to make everything as stress-free and fun as possible over the next month or two. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at any time if you fancy a chat and some lovely cups of tea.

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Read this guide for some great tips. Keep it under your pillow. The most important thing is to try to enjoy what you're doing and to remember that you are not defined by your results. If you're becoming unhappy through over-work, is it really worth the extra marks? Enjoy it as much as possible: it really is your chance to show off what you've learnt, and to cheekily get away with what you haven't.

**Good Luck!**

# Preparation

Everyone's learning style is different. To optimise the efficacy of your revision, you could try using an online questionnaire to discover what learning styles would best suit you.

Why not try:

<http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>.  
<http://www.learning-styles-online.com> or just search!

Here's some revision ideas. It's best to mix them up to stimulate both the logical and the creative sides of the brain:

- Draw big diagrams, flow charts or mind maps of your work.
- Hold discussion groups with people from your subject to share ideas and reinforce concepts. Learn through explanation.
- Record your notes on a tape and play them back to yourself. You can even try playing them while you sleep.
- Mnemonics work: the dirtier the better.
- Colour-code your notes. There is a hierarchy of memorability: green and black inks are supposed to be the most effective.
- Take time out from reading and making notes to reflect on the material and develop your own ideas.

**Choose Your Space:** Where you revise can also greatly affect how much work you get done. If you find there are too

many distractions in your own room, you could try to go to the library, or the Harrods room in the Queen's Building which has also been set aside for revision. It's a good idea to separate sleep and work areas: getting out of your room can be a very good idea.

# Revising Effectively

Studies show most people can only properly concentrate for about **20 - 45 minutes** at a time, a period which varies greatly from person to person. Taking **regular breaks** can help you digest the information, and improve your concentration. Make your revision as interesting as possible!

- Make notes of important points as you read. The action of writing information down makes it more memorable.
- Mix up difficult topics with easier, more interesting ones
- Test yourself as you go along as a way of breaking up your reading
- Wherever you choose to work make sure that there aren't any distractions to take you away from your work.
- Make sure to quickly recap what you've learnt at the end of a session. Memory expert Tony Buzan suggests repeating this quick recap one hour, one day, and one week after the initial session for maximum memorisation.

Try to **target your revision** to your exams. Find out exactly what your exams consist of, how long they are, and look at the format and content of past papers (available in Emma library.)

- Do practice papers under exam conditions. Exam essays get easier with practice!
- It is essential to train your hand for writing. Make sure to eschew the keyboard as soon as possible to give your hand and arm muscles some time to hench up. The exams are

very physical affairs – you'll be glad of extra-buff fingers to get you through a six hour exam day. Equally, make sure you choose a pen which suits you.

# What to Revise

**Let's face facts** - you've not a hope of learning everything, so focus on revising key areas: topics you've covered in detail in supervisions, written essays on, and things you enjoy.

- **Be realistic about your schedule.** As a guide try dividing your week into 21 units (one per morning, afternoon and evening). You should aim to work no more than 15 units per week; any more and you will not work effectively.
- **Leave time for relaxation and socialising.** There's good news: rest and relaxation help you to work more effectively, making you feel less stressed and more likely to stick to your timetable.
- **Be flexible.** Most revision plans break down because they are not flexible enough. Make sure you leave plenty of space for emergencies, work taking longer than expected, or just impromptu trips home.
- **Take regular breaks.** Short breaks (to have a cup of tea, to listen to a great song, to stretch your legs) at regular intervals will improve your concentration, as you concentrate best at the beginning and the end of a session. It makes sense to work in lots of short bursts than in a very few marathons!
- **Know yourself.** Get to know when you work best and study the most difficult topics at this time. Use times when you don't work as well for relaxing or sport.
- **Set goals.** Set specific goals for each revision session and tick them off so you can see what you have achieved. Lovely.

# Procrastination

Procrastination is deadly. Entirely fatal. Sometimes it even feels like there's a physical barrier pulling you away from work. Absolutely anything else is preferable. Tidying becomes a legitimately exciting pastime.

We sympathise. Here's some anti-procrastination (oh dear) tips:

- Getting started is often the hardest thing. Force yourself to sit down to work for just five minutes. If you still don't want to work it at the end of the time, then do something else. More often than not, you'll find you've really got stuck into it and will just carry on!
- **GET AWAY FROM THE INTERNET!** Leave your laptop behind and go somewhere with no computer access. The de-tagging can wait til later. It really is oh-so-tempting and a huge time-stealer.
- Set yourself achievable goals. Make them realistic so that you don't become discouraged.
- For the rampant perfectionists amongst you: it's much better to do some less-than top-notch work than to do no work at all.
- Motivate yourself with rewards when you finish a section.
- Constantly remind yourself of your strengths.
- Put the exams in perspective – focus on why you are taking them and what will they help you to achieve.

- If you get really stuck on a topic don't just give up; try different revision methods, or get a friend to explain it to you.

# Final Preparation

## Before the exam:

- **Check** your timetable for the date, time and room. Also **make sure you know your candidate number**
- If you have a disability, talk to your tutor **as early as possible** to make appropriate arrangements. The Disabilities Resource Centre is also a great source of support.
- Deal with your stress. Everyone gets nervous at exam time and a little bit of stress is often useful. If it becomes more severe though you must seek help, either from you tutor, DoS or the University Counselling Service.
- Practise under exam conditions

## The night before:

- Set yourself priorities; focus on the most important topics.
- Prepare your exam kit (now including your photo ID) for tomorrow so that you don't have to sort it out in the morning.
- Get a good night's sleep. If you stay up all night cramming then you won't be able to do yourself justice in the morning.

## The big day:

- Have a healthy meal to start the day – preferably a protein based meal rather than a carbohydrate one, so you don't get sluggish halfway through the exam.
- Take plenty of water with you into the exam
- Arrive in good time

- Don't discuss topics with others as this can confuse you and make you feel more nervous.
- If you're feeling stressed, use relaxation techniques to calm you down and regulate your breathing

## **During the exam:**

- **Read the instructions very carefully**
- Get an overview of the entire paper
- Calculate the time available for each question relative to the marks.
- Decide on the order of question response. Start on comfort-zone questions and leave less obvious questions until later
- Analyse each question carefully – think about what it is asking and what information you have available.
- Keep a close eye on the clock to see how much time you have left.
- If you do run out of time, jot down bullet points – they may still earn you some marks.

## **After the exam:**

- Avoid post-mortems
- Give yourself plenty of time to unwind.
- Even if you think the exam went badly, move on and focus on your next exam
- Remind yourself that there is more to life than exams. You are definitely, without a doubt, worth more than your mark.
- Love or loathe it, the results are posted outside Senate house on a class list and on the internet. Don't stress, and make sure you have people to talk to if it didn't go quite to plan.

# Sleep

Sleep is good! Even if all your revision is going to plan you may still experience sleep problems. One bad night's sleep will not significantly affect your work quality, but it can be beneficial to have a good routine that will allow you to get to sleep easily every night.

## **First you need to create the right environment:**

- A warm, dark room is best for sleeping.
- Temperature is often a cause for poor sleep. Try opening a window or turning off the radiator if you're having trouble sleeping.
- Completely close the curtains to cut out any stray light or try wearing an eye shade (Superdrug and Boots have some good ones.)
- Deal with noise either by using earplugs, or having a civil word with your neighbours. They will have exams too so they should be understanding
- If your bed is too saggy ask maintenance for a hard board to put under your mattress.

## **Routine can help you sleep:**

- Aim to keep regular sleep/waking times.
- Try to get about 7-8 hours sleep a night, although listen to your body if it's telling you it needs more ... or less.
- Try to stay awake until your normal bed-time, even if you feel tired earlier. This will help prevent you from waking up in the middle of the night
- Don't work right up until bed-time, but try to wind down for at least an hour before bed. Go to the bar, go for a walk, have a bath, anything that will relax you and stop you thinking about work. Bright lights and computer screens wake you up.
- If you are lying in bed and can't sleep, get up and only go back to bed when you are really tired

- Never use your bed for working, eating, watching TV etc, as then you will associate it with these daytime activities and will find it much harder to go to sleep.

**If you're tired but you can't get to sleep because your mind won't switch off, try a few of these tricks:**

- Spell long words or sentences backwards
- Recall in great detail a painting, piece of music or place that you like, and let your mind wander from that starting point
- Starting at your toes, slowly go through naming each part of your body and telling it to relax. By the time you get to the head you will be asleep. Or just very bored.
- Imagine a storm raging outside your room and that you are warm and safe in bed
- Squeeze your hands together as tight as possible for five seconds, then relax. Then squeeze your arm muscles for five seconds, let go and relax, and so on around the body. This is a very effective relaxation technique
- Make your mind a complete blank, then imagine a colour, but prevent it from taking a form
- Tune the radio to no station so there's just fuzzy white noise. This puts some people to sleep instantly. Is any one else tempted to see what would happen if you tried this one in a lecture?

If you really can't sleep and are considering sleeping pills go and talk to your doctor, or the college counsellor (Ann Hughes, [ah300@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ah300@cam.ac.uk)) or the college nurse (Diana Lloyd), as sleeping pills are strong drugs and are a mixed blessing.

# Food for Thought

The brain, we are told, uses more than 20% of your daily energy intake. Nutrients and minerals help the brain function optimally.

- Make sure you eat breakfast every day. This is the most important meal of the day, and will help to kick start your metabolism in the morning.
- Don't skip meals to revise more – you'll end up achieving less as your efficiency will be reduced if you are hungry.
- Eat little and often. Try to have lots of small meals so that your blood sugar levels don't fluctuate too much. A big meal at lunchtime can leave you feeling tired and heavily food-baby peggery mid-afternoon.
- Take an hour off at lunch. Don't eat at your desk, go and sit out in the sunshine in Chapman's Garden and have a break
- Drink lots of water. You should have at least 2 litres a day. Dehydration severely impairs concentration and can also lead to headaches
- Eat lots of fresh fruit. The vitamins and antioxidants will boost your immune system. Treat yourself to exotic fruit like strawberries or mangoes, or blend them together for a smoothie
- Bananas are a great snack food. They contain both simple sugars and complex carbohydrates, as well as lots of nutrients like potassium
- Oily fish is also really good for you and helps to keep your brain working to its full potential. Like your granny always told you: fish for brains.
- Turkey, cottage cheese, milk and tuna all contain the amino acid tryptophan, which promotes sleep.

Things to avoid:

- **Chinese food, microwave meals** and **junk food** like crisps. They might seem quick and easy but they contain a

flavour enhancer called MSG which induces an agitated state of mind, making it difficult to sleep.

- **Caffeine.** A stimulant which will interrupt your sleeping patterns. Avoid drinks like tea, coffee, coke or red bull in the evenings.
- **Alcohol.** Even though this is a depressant, sleep after alcohol can be shallow and restless. Alcohol also dehydrates you, making concentrating the next day very difficult. Cut down on alcohol and try having alcohol free nights. If you do drink, try and do so early in the evening so that circulating alcohol has had time to clear before you go to bed. Drink plenty of water as spacers and afterwards.

# Sports

It's very important, not only after your exams have finished, but also whilst you are revising, to take time out to relax and enjoy yourself. Exercise helps relieve built up stress, boosts the immune system and releases endorphins. Yay! There are loads of different sports to choose from, both in Emma and around Cambridge, and also plenty of possibilities for you to do something on your own. Here are just a few ideas:

- **Punting.** ECSU has an agreement with Scudamore's to provide discounted punts to Emma students. Just present your college ID.
- **Courts.** The college has its very own squash and summer tennis courts – make sure you find them!
- **Sports Equipment.** Tennis, squash, football and baseball equipment is available to sign out from the plodge - you don't even have to leave college!

- **Swimming** is a great relaxing exercise and with our very own outdoor swimming pool (open 4 pm-7pm) there's no excuse for not taking a dip. If you prefer a slightly warmer swim, Kelsey Kerridge is just across the road and has a great flume!
- **Jogging** - With so much lovely countryside in and around Cambridge (well, Midsummer Common) you can get away from hectic college life by going for a nice jog. Even just walking down by the river can be very relaxing, and the fresh air will help you to sleep better too.
- **Fenners university gym** (Gresham Road) is only £30 for a year's membership and is a great way to get fit and take your mind off work.
- If sport really isn't your thing then you can still take time out by going along to the **Time Out Art Group** at Kettle's Yard. It runs every Thursday from 1.30 – 3.30 and is absolutely free. You don't have to have any artistic ability whatsoever, but can just turn up and make use of the materials there to be creative, imaginative or just plain messy.

# Some Final Words of Wisdom

- **Don't Panic!**
- Think positively.
- Try to get out of college now and then to remind yourself that there is another world out there
- If one exam goes badly, move on and focus on the next one.
- Don't talk about revision when you go out with your friends.
- Try to ignore people who stress you out
- Do things your way; don't be swayed by what other people are doing.

**Good Luck  
and Enjoy!**

# Further Support and Information

If you are having any problems at all the most important thing is **not to struggle on your own**. There are loads of support services available, from internet sites which help you revise to trained counsellors. The two most important sources of help are your **TUTOR** and your **DIRECTOR OF STUDIES**. These are your first contacts in any problem. Below is a list of some other useful contacts.

## ***College staff:***

- College Counsellor, Anne Hughes, [ah300@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ah300@cam.ac.uk)
- The Dean, Jeremy Caddick, [jlc24@cam.ac.uk](mailto:jlc24@cam.ac.uk)
- Senior Tutor, Dr Barnes, [rjb4@cam.ac.uk](mailto:rjb4@cam.ac.uk)
- College nurse, Diana Lloyd. Drop-in times in Plodge.

## ***Other useful contacts:***

- More study skills, :  
<http://www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/academic/exams/>
- University Counselling Service, 13/14 Trumpington Street. 01223 332865. [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk) or e-mail [reception@counselling.cam.ac.uk](mailto:reception@counselling.cam.ac.uk)
- The Disabilities Resource Centre, Keynes House, Old Addenbrookes Site, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1QA, Tel: 01223 322301 or [www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/disability/about.html](http://www.cam.ac.uk/cambuniv/disability/about.html)
- Linkline, For non-judgemental support drop in to 8 St Edwards Passage, Cambridge, or Tel : 01223 367575 (7pm-8am every night in full term), or visit [www.linkline.org](http://www.linkline.org)
- CambsMentalHealth, <http://www.cambsmentalhealth.info/>