

ECSU Easter Term Exams Guide 2015

Welcome Back!

Summer term has arrived- with all the attendant delights of ducklings, tennis courts, the pool , paddock BBQs and sunshine. Oh, and then there's exams *facepalm*.



This guide is here to help-

particularly first years, but hopefully there will be some useful ideas for seasoned undergraduates too. Most of you must feel like veteran exam-takers after several consecutive years of exams. But Cambridge exams are very different to others- and not just because they are harder! The **sheer amount** of material you need to know will be greater, and there's no set syllabus. The revision period facing you is also probably longer than before. This might, understandably, seem stressful. And a little bit of stress can be a useful motivator, but too much is definitely counterproductive.



What follows are **general principles and ideas** for making this term and exams as bearable as possible. Different strategies will work for different people. After years of exams, you know how you work best. But it's **always worth trying new things** and remembering the basics that can easily get lost in the daunting prospect of Tripos exams.

What To Do

Getting started is often one of the hardest things to do with revision.

Obviously, starting early is probably useful, but not easy if you still have supervisions and lectures at the beginning of term. Still, having a look at things you know you will find hard, or studied way back in Michaelmas term might help. Also, it really is the case that late is better than never! Here are some tips...



Know the dates of your exams and come up with a more precise revision timetable, either written down or just in your head. Remember that different subjects' exams start at different times- so don't get too stressed if your friends are working at top speed if their exams start weeks before yours! All of your exam info can be found on CAMSIS

or on a yellow sheet in pigeon holes.

Look at past papers

You can usually find these on your faculty website, or in the big books on the stairs going up into the library, or ask your supervisors- and see which papers relate to which supervisions, lectures or classes. In some subjects this is simpler than in others.



One of the biggest differences between Cambridge and other exams is the amount of stuff you might want to revise. With open-ended syllabuses even knowing what to revise can be tricky. **Getting an idea of the structure of the exams is important.** It might be helpful to list all the things that you must, should and could know, and prioritizing the most necessary. If you know there is one aspect of your course that appears on multiple papers, it can be useful to work harder on that.

The amount of time you spend on different parts of revision is also important. You will have some feel for this after two and a bit terms, but revising is different from preparing for supervisions etc. Be flexible with your time, but try and identify subjects which you find harder or less interesting, know less well, or did a long time ago, as they will be likely to need more time.



If you haven't started thinking about these things yet, now's the time to start. You can use this space to make some notes if you like...

A large rectangular area enclosed by a dotted line, intended for taking notes.

Revision- A Rough Guide

How you revise is a personal thing, and you probably revise differently from anyone else. However, some things that you may not have tried before could be useful.

Subject parents are a good

resource for this (and everything else to do with exams), as they will have done the same exams as you only a year before.



Supervisors are usually more than willing to **organize revision supervisions** for you if you ask. It's really worth trying to do this for specific problems you're having, or even just general approaches as to how to answer different kinds of questions. Many supervisors will have had some kind of role in either setting or marking the exams, so they tend to know what they're talking about!

Here is a small list of **revision methods** gleaned from various sources; some you may do already, some you may think aren't for you, but some may strike you as worth a try...

flow diagrams

index cards

exam questions

working in groups

visualization

notes

coloured pens

writing down everything you remember

asking someone to test you

plans

timed tripos questions

mnemonics

*explain it to a friend;
select a question, then do
a plan without notes*

*record your notes then
play them back to yourself*

Keeping revision interesting is one of the greatest challenges. Day after day of doing more-or-less the same thing can quickly become tiresome. It may be useful to try mixing up tasks so you don't lose motivation after doing the same thing for extended periods of time.

Where you work is

important

for this, as during the lead up to exams you will spend more time in your work place than ever before.

Moving around during the day, or after a few days in the same place might be useful. Try...

Make sure you

remember

physically
how to

write if you
have gotten out
of the habit of
writing after
two and a bit terms of typing!

your room

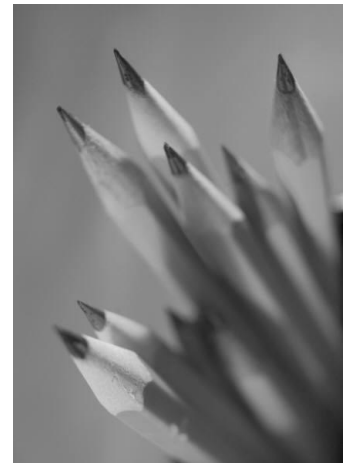
college library

faculty library

the bar

the Harrods's room in the Queen's building, the paddock

even Savino's!



Getting into a routine for revision is always helpful, particularly when lectures have stopped.

Psychological Fact #1

Most people can only work continuously for about 30-45 minutes without some kind of break. Perhaps try breaking down topics into chunks of work that take about that time. Mixing dull tasks in with more interesting ones can also help keep you working.

Procrastination

Procrastination is something we all do:

whether watching iPlayer, obsessively checking Facebook, or even tidying up. But the thief of time is particularly active in exam term. This can be for a variety of reasons:



your time is unstructured, so starting now or in 5/10/15/30 minutes doesn't seem to matter
goals can be too vague- making it hard to pin down what you want to get done
being on your own for extended periods of time
fewer social activities
even fear of failure.

However, it's crucial, in whatever way you choose, to avoid this as much as possible. Worrying about work is a particularly fruitless activity, as **doing the work takes less effort than thinking about doing the work.**

One great way to stay focused is to **set goals and rewards.**

Although you might have a vague revision timetable, mentally or otherwise, deciding what you want to get done in a day can help. Rewarding each goal with what you would normally do to procrastinate helps make you use your time more efficiently.

A potential problem with this approach is to set unrealistic goals which, if you don't achieve them, will only stress you out more. Setting aside some time at the end of the day to think about how well your time plan is working is therefore a useful piece of evaluation.

Be flexible. Things will always come up that mean you might not get as much work done as you want to. Know that these **aren't your fault** and move on. If all else fails in the quest to avoid procrastination, remove everything there is to distract you; turn off your wireless, give your network wire to someone to hide, go somewhere without people, sit somewhere without an attractive window to look out of, remove all biscuits from your fridge- whatever it takes!

Relaxation

Psychological Fact #2

If you split a week into 21 working units— morning, afternoon, evening, seven days a week—you can only work effectively for 15. So, having some proper breaks from work is really important. This isn't wasting time, and makes you work a lot more effectively the rest of the time.

It is important to **plan to have fun as much as you plan to work**. If you know there is a particular thing you want to do at the same time each week, try and plan around that so you get a chance to do it. But try to stay flexible; if something comes up at short notice that you really want to do, it is **always possible to do it and make the time up later in the week**. Whilst it might seem that a lot of things in Cambridge shut down during summer term, this isn't really the case. Emma is particularly good at organizing **stuff to do**:

welfare events

tennis and badminton courts on the paddock

croquet and rounders equipment to hire from the plodge

and the pool is open!

Getting out of the Cambridge bubble can also help to put everything in perspective. You might want to go home for a day or so, or visit a friend at another University, even just going for a walk or cycle out of the city centre could help to clear your head.

Most people will have the occasional moment of panic at some stage in the term. It's completely normal! When you feel anxious, try to tense various parts of your body before relaxing them. Have a glass of water and just breathe. Focus on deep breathing from your abdomen. Or even just see if there's someone you can talk it all out with.



Eat, Sleep, Drink, Repeat

Like many things, sleeping ,eating and being properly hydrated are important all the time, but even more so during exams.

Most people need about **7-8 hours of sleep a night**. Whilst it may seem necessary to wake up early and go to bed late to get in enough revision, this is probably counterproductive as you stop working effectively. Sometimes, particularly with the stress of exams, it can be difficult to get to sleep. Never use your laptop or phone within 30 mins before you sleep- they give out blue



Going to sleep straight after finishing work is difficult, so try stopping an hour before you want to go to sleep. Working on your bed can stop some people from being able to sleep there easily. Ann Hughes, the college counselor, is a great person to see about problems with sleep.

light that overstimulates your brain and makes sleeping nearly impossible!

Temperature can be a problem if your room is too cold or hot, so that is something you can try to change if you can't

get to sleep. **Noise** can also be a problem in close college accommodation. Try earplugs or having a word with neighbours if there's a specific problem. (If you're personally a bit of a party-animal please respect your

neighbours!) If the noise is from an outside source have a chat with the porters.

Feeling tired/faint? It could be you are not **eating and drinking** enough. Especially in summer we need more water and without sufficient food your brain stops working effectively. 25% of all our calories go to the brain! Some people say having three set meals a day is important, others that having a snack during the morning or afternoon helps. Try both and see what you prefer. Healthy food will keep you fuller for longer- go for veg, fruit smoothies , lots of protein and wholegrains (but treat yourself to your fave foods too!)

Eating is usually a **good social**

occasion in summer term, particularly when it is sunny and everyone sits outside to eat on the paddock.

Before the Exam

There are things you can do on the evening and day before an exam to make it as stress-free as possible. By this stage, it is **usually counter-productive to cram** and start learning new stuff. If you have been revising well leading up to the exam then it's probably best just to look over a few key points.

Then, obvious as it sounds, **knowing what exam you are doing, when and where** is important. No one wants to be late for an exam or miss it entirely because of a logistical problem- exams are your chance to show off what you know so don't let little things stress you out. Not all papers are in a logical order (e.g. C4 could be before C3!) so be clued up in advance.

Exam locations are scattered around Cambridge in places like Senate House, the Corn Exchange and various lecture theatres. The locations are listed on the exam timetable you will receive: definitely go to the places beforehand so you know where you have to go. On the day itself the place is usually obvious, as there'll be a group of people milling around outside, waiting to go in.

Know the format of the exam:

how many questions and how long you should take to do each etc. Maybe look over a past paper the night before to re-familiarize yourself with that.

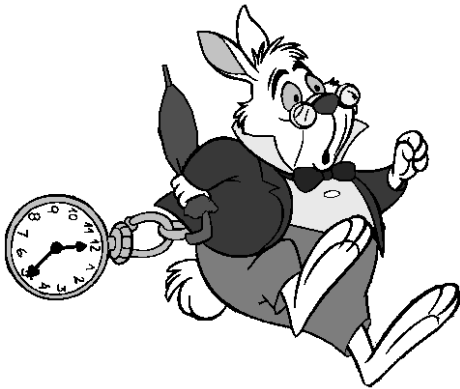
Get your stuff ready the night before so it's one less thing to do in the morning.

Things you can take are: pens, pencils, water, ruler, stationery or specialist equipment like a university approved calculator you need for that particular exam, exam list, timing device. Take your candidate number so you know where to sit.

Things you can't take: any paper apart from exam list, food, anything noisy, mobile phones. You'll be asked to leave bags outside somewhere - if it's valuable, leave it at college.

You must take your university card, so the invigilators can ID you!

Going to breakfast before a morning exam is useful so you have energy throughout your exam. As more people go to breakfast in summer term, look out for exciting variations in hall like Mexican breakfasts...



Make sure you **give yourself plenty of time to get to your exam**, but you probably won't want to be hanging around outside for ages either. If something unavoidable should happen that delays you, **you can enter the exam up to thirty minutes late**. If so, try telling someone: porters, supervisors, tutors, anyone, so they can let the exam people know.

Also, be aware that **temperature in exam rooms can vary**. Take lots of layers with you so you can take them off/put them on depending! Dress is entirely optional—**gowns are not required**.

If you find it useful to keep this info together, you can write your exam dates and times below:

During the Exam

The protocol for exams tends to be fairly relaxed. Unlike at school, it is generally assumed that you won't try to cheat, so you can usually leave your bags at the back or just outside the exam hall with phones in but turned off. If you forget to do this and your phone does go off during the exam, you are liable to be fined up to £50- so it's best to avoid this! The invigilators will then tell you what to do in case of fire etc.

When the time comes to open your exam paper, remember to do the basics you will probably have done for all the many exams you've taken. **Scan the paper** through, **choose the questions** you want to do, **allocate the right amount of time** to each and stick to it. If you think there is an error on the paper—this is entirely possible—put your hand up and tell one of the invigilators. **There should be someone from your faculty or department there at the beginning of the exam** to deal with things like that.



If you have the moment of panic where you look at a question and think you have no idea what to do, put your pen down, look back and try and relax. Panic will only stop you thinking about the question clearly and maybe seeing a way through it. Depending on the format of the paper it might be a good idea to do another question and come back to that one later. Whatever happens, it is always, always better to put something down rather than nothing.

Three hours is a long time for an exam. It can be useful to **treat yourself to a few mini-breaks** every so often, put your pen down, look away and relax for a minute. If you need to go to the toilet, or just want to stretch your legs, just ask an invigilator.

After the Exam

Once you have finished some people might want to post-mortem the exam. This can be useful to give yourself closure, but set a time to stop this at so you **don't continue worrying about it when you should be thinking about the next exam!** If you have any serious problems with the exam, you should speak to one of your supervisors, and it is always possible to appeal the exam.

Good Luck!

Hopefully this guide will have explained what Cambridge exams are like, and given some tips to get through it. Everyone works in a different way, so do the things that work for you and don't worry too much about what other people are doing.

If you have any more questions or need any help, there are lots of people to ask in college; supervisors, your tutor, subject parents, college parents, the Dean, the College Counselor, ECSU. All will be more than willing to help you, and you should ask them about the smallest thing that may be worrying you.

Above all try to keep a sense of proportion about exams. We're at university to learn things for ourselves, not for our supervisors/parents/employers. The grade you get on an exam does not define your talent, potential or passion for your subject, do remember this! Cambridge in exam term can be quite a strange place, and it is easy to lose perspective of the fact that exams don't matter quite as much as they seem. Try to have some fun as well as working in whatever way you choose.

And, if you're staying for May Week after exams, you'll have a lovely opportunity to relax in the sun in Cambridge and give yourself a well-earned rest (and maybe party!)

Useful Contacts

ECSU

Female Welfare: Sophie Buck sab218@cam.ac.uk

Male Welfare: Dan Pope dhp31@cam.ac.uk

Education Officer: Sophie Lockey saml2@cam.ac.uk

College

Senior Tutor: Dr Henderson

The Dean: Jeremy Caddick (jlc24@cam.ac.uk)

College Counsellor: Ann Hughes (ah300@cam.ac.uk)

College Nurse: Diana Lloyd (dwl25@cam.ac.uk)

College Disability Liaison Officer: Angela Elliot (ae215@cam.ac.uk)

(Advice on exam provision for students with any sort of disability)

CUSU

Welfare: Jack Wright(welfare@cusu.cam.ac.uk)

Education Officer: Rob Richardson (education@cusu.cam.ac.uk)

University Counselling Service:

www.counselling.cam.ac.uk

01223 332 865

reception@counselling.cam.ac.uk

Disabilities Resource Centre:

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability/>

01223 332 301

disability@admin.cam.ac.uk

Linkline (for confidential support about anything on your mind) :

www.linkline.org.uk

01223 744 444 or 01223 367 575 (7pm-7am)

linkline@cusu.cam.ac.uk

Useful Resources

Undergraduate Skills Directory

<http://webservices.admin.cam.ac.uk/uskills/>

Cambridge University Skills Portal

<http://www.skills.cam.ac.uk/undergrads/>

Revision Timetable

If you like, you can use this space (and the other spaces in the guide) to make a note of your revision plan. That way, all the exam info is kept together and you can carry it around with your notes. There's space inside the guide for exam dates and other notes.