

Types of exams

There are a number of different exam types you will come across during your studies at ANU. You will be given information about the exam in advance and this information is vital in helping you to prepare.

Exam type Distinctive features

<i>Closed-book</i>	You are not able to take any reference materials into the exam (except maybe dictionaries and certain calculators).
<i>Open-book</i>	You can take in certain materials (e.g. notes, books). These materials will only be useful if thoroughly worked on before the exam so that you are totally familiar with the content.
<i>Take-home</i>	The paper is provided for you to complete in a given time (usually over a weekend). Often 'essay' type questions. The focus is less on your memory recall and more on your understanding of the course content.
<i>Pre-seen</i>	A preview of the exam is provided for you to prepare your answers. You may be required to write on all or some of the questions but not told which ones. Again, a higher standard will be expected because of insights into exam questions.
<i>Online</i>	Some courses have online exams or quizzes that can include a number of question types. These are often completed through the course eLearning site.
<i>Oral</i>	Used in some disciplines to particularly focus on your knowledge and understanding of discipline specific terms and concepts and in particular your ability to verbally express your knowledge and ideas.
<i>Practical or clinical</i>	Depends on the discipline but usually involves observation of your individual performance in a task in the laboratory, clinical or field setting. Practical exams are designed to test your ability to practically apply concepts to a given situation.

Types of exam questions

Within the different types of exams, there are several different types of exam questions that may be used. Some exams may include more than one type. Different types of questions focus on different skills. It is important to find out as much as possible about the exam beforehand so that you can adopt the best study and revision approach for the exam and match the studying techniques to the style of exam and question types.

Question type	Skills being tested	Strategies for revision
Essay	Essay questions test your knowledge of the course generally, but also your capacity to analyse the course content and apply concepts. Some essays will require you to show your knowledge through accurate description and explanation of terms and concepts, others will require more interpretation, but you be expected to demonstrate your critical analysis through a well-reasoned and supported argument.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice writing essay plans/outlines. • Practise writing whole essays or essay parts that can be used in more than one essay. • Practise summarising theories, research and other specific evidence that you can use in your paragraphs to support your points. • Find possible essay questions to practice.
Short and long answer	Short answer exams test your understanding of concepts or issues, your knowledge of terms, and your ability to solve problems and apply knowledge. Answers can be as short as one sentence, a paragraph or up to a page.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise and memorise key terms, theories and concepts from the course. • Practise writing definitions and explanations. • Practise questions that involving applying the revised concepts.
Multiple choice	Multiple choice questions test your ability to make fine distinctions in terms of definitions and understanding of concepts, theories or ideas. Students are expected to nominate an answer for all questions. Usually students are not penalised for incorrect responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise and memorise key terms, theories and concepts from the course. • Study with a friend or study group testing each other's knowledge and recall of key terms, theories and concepts.
Problem solving	Some exams present a problem that you may need to solve over more than one question. These are common in mathematical based courses but may also appear in other courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise formulae • Develop a glossary of key terms, ideas or formulae • Practise questions without looking for hints in the course material to mimic exam conditions and help you deal with difficult questions that might appear • Practice difficult questions beyond the examples used in lectures and tutorials.

Once you're in the exam

Question type Some suggested approaches

<i>General advice for all question types</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the questions very carefully to make sure you fully understand what you are being asked to do. • If you have choice – choose the question where you can best display your knowledge and critical analysis. • Decide on the order you will answer the questions and allocate time for each one. Then stick to that time. Don't get stuck on one question. • A good technique is to answer the “easier” questions first as you may then gain extra time to allocate to the “harder” ones. Plus it will improve your confidence, help reduce your stress and maximise your marks. • If you have a mixture of question types, sometimes it is better to do the shorter questions first. Again, you may be able to gain extra time and doing multiple choice and short answer can often jog your memory and help you answer the longer questions. • Remember – do not get stuck on one question at the expense of other questions in the exam. • Answer every question.
<i>Essay</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essays in exams take the same format as any other essay: they have an introduction, body and conclusion. Because they are short, usually the introduction and conclusions are quite brief. You should have an argument. Paragraphs should be structured with topic sentences and supporting evidence. Ideas should flow logically to support your main argument. • Take a few minutes to write out a basic essay plan on the blank page of the exam booklet. This will help you write the essay, but also if you don't get to complete, the examiner can see your overall logic/main ideas. • Make sure you acknowledge other people's ideas – in closed book exams you will not usually be expected to do full citations, but you should include as much information as you can recall.
<i>Short or long answer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First think back through your course topics and identify what ideas, concept or theory that the question is testing. • Answer in whole sentences • Don't waste time repeating the question in your answer. • Even if you don't know the answer, attempt it anyway.
<i>Multiple Choice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First go through the questions one by one quickly answering all the questions you are confident about, mark the ones you are unsure of with a question mark and the ones you don't know with an “x”. Try to think of the answer before looking at the choices then find the choice that most closely matches your response • Go through the questions a second time looking only at the ones with a question mark. Often you will be able to answer them now after having gone once through. Use a process on elimination to narrow down the choices. Often some choices are obviously incorrect. Any you still can't answer, mark with an “x”. • Finally go back through all the ones with an “x”. If you still don't know the answer, if there is no penalty for incorrect answer, guess.
<i>Problem-solving</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain storm all the ideas, concepts or formulae that might apply to the problem – you could do a quick mind map on the blank sheet in your booklet • List out any formulae you plan to use • Write your steps clearly and put as much information as you can even if you are unsure of the answer.

Sample exam plan

The following is a sample plan for a 3 hour exam. Actual times allocated would depend on what you find once you get into the exam – this is a rough plan of action to tackle the exam in the most efficient way possible and avoid non completion of questions. Having such a plan also can be beneficial in reducing anxiety.

Question type	Value	Total time	Approx. Time per question
30 multiple choice	30%	54 mins	1½ mins
10 short answer	30%	54 mins	5 mins
1 essay	40%	72 mins	