

Otago Boys' High School

# EXAMINATION STUDY GUIDE

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*Strategies to improve your achievement when  
sitting Examinations*

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# Goal Setting

*Setting goals is a way of focusing on your dreams so they become a reality.*

**GOAL SETTING** – is critical to your success, you need to know in which direction you are heading. There are FIVE keys to successful goal setting: SMART goals.

*Specific* make sure your goals are specific (you get what you ask for)

*Measurable* how would you know once you have achieved your goal?

*Achievable* set attainable goals in each subject (eg number of credits or specific grades)

*Realistic* are you willing to do what it takes to achieve your goal?

*Time Frame* know when it is to be done

Write your goals down – eg what grades you want to get? Then check you are on track. Setting goals leads to an increased sense of purpose and focus.

Dreams do not come true magically, they are made step by step. When you do achieve a goal, no matter how small, celebrate.

## EXAM PREPARATION

### 1. What do I need to know?

- Ask your subject teachers to give you a list of exam topics
- Find out how many credits each topic is worth
- Find out which (if any) topics/units are prerequisite for doing the subject next year – target these
- Old exam papers are available from teachers, and the internet.

- Get exam timetable – write down your exam times – then plan study accordingly

## 2. Have a study plan:

*A well organised study plan should be:*

- Set up a 50 minutes study period with 10 minute breaks
- Each 50 minute study session must be focused on a specific topic
- Especially focus on topics/work you do not know
- Write out a study plan or weekly sheet
- Make allowances for sports training and one or two favourite activities each week (eg a TV programme) – Learn to say **NO** to distractions
- Pin study plan above your desk so you can see it

## 3. How to prepare yourself for study

### **Getting in the mood – your study environment**

**Relax** – stress and heightened emotions block the brain

**Prepare yourself** – have pencils, paper and subject material all at hand

**Remove clutter** – have desk and bedroom clear (less distractions for your mind)

**Fresh air** – the brain uses 20% of all the oxygen you take in, so make sure your room receives plenty of fresh air and that you breathe deeply

**Exercise** – sitting for long periods of time can become uncomfortable. To also help keep blood moving oxygen to your brain take time to move around and stretch

*Each person will have their own personal preferences in how they like to learn .....*

Most people prefer to study **in silence**, others like music in the background.

**Music** – listening to instrumental music that has about 60 beats a minute (slightly slower than your heartbeat) improves brain receptiveness. This type of music is called “Baroque” (eg by classical composers like Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi). Loud, fast paced music with vocals does not help study.

**Light** – if light is too bright it reflects off pages and can stress your eyes; equally low light can strain your eyes and cause headaches.

**Time of the day** – are you a morning or afternoon person? Study when you are most alert, this varies between individuals.

**Effective notes** – never just re-copy all your class work. The purpose of notes is to help you remember key words and information. Good notes should be short, to the point, well organised and easily read. The exact style is up to you and you only.

*Here are some tried and tested methods you could use:*

### *Mind-Maps*

This idea of making notes was developed by Tony Buzan in the early 1970s. You construct a mind map, stretching ideas outwards from a main point or key word. This is best done based on notes made during your class lessons. Software is available to make drawing and revising a Mind Map easy – go to:

[www.mindmapper.com](http://www.mindmapper.com)

### *Serial Notes*

This is a simple note making style. You do not write everything, just select out the most important points. Concentrate only on those points that will help you recall the lesson content. Use lots of sub-headings, numbered points, bullet points etc rather than writing in paragraphs.

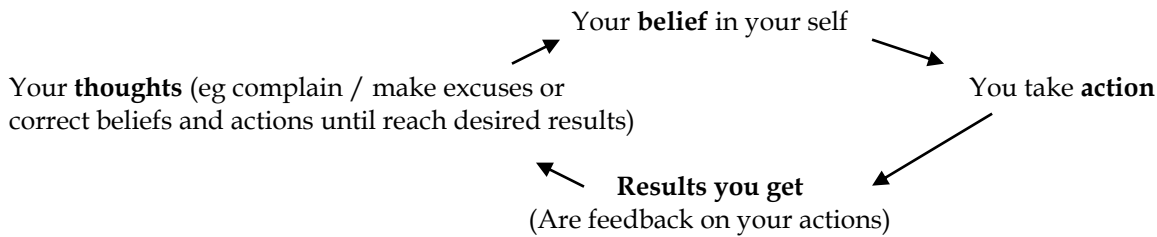
### *Clue Cards*

Use small 'clue cards' (similar to speech notes) on which you write key points of information. Use these key words to trigger your mind to recall the information, which you speak out loud as if giving a speech. Repeat this until you do not even need to refer to the key word, repeat the next day and next week.

### *Visual note taking*

Drawing pictures and diagrams is an essential part of memory. Use your own pictures, colour and key words across one side of a page to summarise and illustrate information about a topic or unit of work.

**Motivation** – is not permanent and you need to keep working hard and believing in your own ability. Creating success over and over again is as simple as following the four areas of the success cycle:



**Chunking** – our brain can not remember too many pieces of information – break it down into small chunks

**Teach** – consolidate your understanding of the material by teaching it to someone else eg explaining to a friend or your parents

**Group Work** – guidelines: keep group size to no more than four people, short time sessions are more effective, have one person act as leader to keep group on task, be prepared, have a plan on what to study/focus on, quiz each other, ask questions and discuss “why” questions to clarify understanding.

**Mnemonics** – memory prompts where a word is made from the first letters of the information/words you want to remember. For example to remember mapping conventions: SOFT K = scale, orientation, frame, title, key. To recall the colours of the spectrum ROY G BIV.

**Visuals** – pictures and diagrams can be a powerful way for your brain to remember information.

*Here are some visual guides that help you learn and remember information:*

#### *Flash Cards*

Especially useful for learning vocabulary, terminology or another language. Write key word on one side, then definition/translation on the reverse, then test yourself.

#### *Memory Flashing*

Look at the information you want to recall, turn page upside down so you can't see it. Next rewrite if from memory, check to see if you remembered it all. . Repeat several times, until you know it. It is important to review the next day and a week later to check you still can recall it.

#### *Jigsaw Cards*

A fun hand on way of learning. Write questions and answers on either end of a strip of paper or card. Cut the card in half with jigsaw cut. Practice putting piece back together, saying question and answers out loud. Time yourself, can you do it faster?

## *Flow Charts*

Draw flow charts for information with a sequence

*Simply constructing these visual items can often be excellent revision by itself.*

## **Brain Food – you are what you eat!**

*Research shows our eating habits affect your study performance. Some good things to eat are:*

- **Oily fish** (eg trout, tuna, salmon, sardines) contain omega-3 fatty acids very important for healthy brain cells.
- **Fruit, vegetables and nuts** contain vital minerals, vitamins and antioxidants. You need vitamin B and C to help remember things.
- **Wholemeal breads, cereals and pasta** provide valuable carbohydrates for energy and alertness
- **Meat, eggs and dairy products** provide protein which stimulates the brain
- **Drinking water is essential.** Not enough will lead to dehydration which causes headaches, lack of concentration and focus and tiredness. You should drink 6 to 8 glasses of water each day

## **Avoid eating the following...**

**Caffeine** – is a diuretic which dehydrates your body

**Sugar** – causes cravings for more sugar, also causes mood swings and is followed by tiredness

**Artificial sweetener (951)** a leading cause of mental fatigue

**MSG** – a flavour enhancer in food that causes mental fatigue, and research linked it to poor brain development in children

**Trans fats** – (eg fried foods) slow down the brain, and cause circulatory problems

## 4. What is the best way to study?

## **Learning to learn**

*Studying is a skill, and it is learnt. Try the following study activities:*

**Concentrate** – focus your attention on what you are doing.

**Repeat** – read, copy, hide and write again; repeat after 10 minutes, then the next day, and the next week

**Reviewing** – by re-reading your study notes the next day your recall can stay at 90%. Research has shown that sleep allows your brain to consider new things learnt that day. Use this **review technique** to help remember, especially the day before and the day of the examination.

## 5. Exam Day

### **Before the exam**

- Get up in plenty of time
- Eat a light, healthy breakfast
- Check you have everything you need for the exam
- Arrive at the exam venue with time to spare
- Take your examination admission slip

### **In the exam**

- Listen carefully to the supervisor's instructions
- Read instructions on the exam carefully
- Work out how much time you have for each question
- Don't waste time doing things that don't gain grades (eg writing out questions)
- READ the question correctly
- Always attempt all questions
- Quietly take deep breaths and stretch to keep fresh
- Keep busy – if you get stuck on a question, come back to it later
- If you make a mistake clearly cross it out and start again
- If you are running out of time, make sure you get down the main points
- At the end, if you have time, proof read your answers

## 6. Study tips for success.....

### *Key points in short.....*

1. **Get started** – that is always the most difficult
2. **Organise my material before I study**
3. **Study in good light** – prevent your eyes from getting too stressed
4. **Study in silence or to calmer music without words**
5. **Put all important information up high** – visual memory is the most powerful (just above eye level helps learning)
6. **Study the information I don't know**
7. **Study my most important information first ... and last** – I am more likely to remember this information
8. **Review my notes one day after learning them** – this is the most important tip to help remember things
9. **Make my information stand out** – use colours, make pictures, highlight, make up mnemonics etc
10. **Say affirmations daily** – positive statements to improve your attitude and self belief (eg I have a good memory)

*“What the mind can conceive and believe it will achieve”*

References (also for further information):  
Karen Boyes (2004) *Study Smart*, Spectrum Education Ltd  
Jenny Sutcliffe (2003) *Brain Boosters*, New Holland Publishers (Australia)  
John Winder (1994) *Learning Success*, ESA Publications Ltd  
NZQA, *Studying for Success: A Guide for students.*