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Sitting Theory Examinations – Some Tips

Some of you reading this page may be sitting theory examinations in the foreseeable future. If you are preparing to sit examinations the following tips are offered on how to approach and sit examinations to improve your chances of a success.

Preparation

To give you the best possible chance for a pass mark in an examination you need to study any training material relevant to the examination. If the examination is only multi-choice questions you need to practice on sample questions. If the examination includes short answer or essay type answers again you need to practice writing out answers to sample questions. If the exam is open book and includes answers to questions from nominated references you must be familiar with the reference material.

Attending the Examination

Arrive in plenty of time. Your best chance is to be relaxed before the exam. Take with you pencils, pens and a ruler. If the examination may include answers requiring neat sketches, take with you drawing aids that will help you answer these types of questions. If answers may need calculations have a calculator with you (remember programmable calculators may not be permitted). Mobile phones are generally not permitted in examinations.

Take a light snack such as a chocolate bar or similar energy food.

Understand the examination requirements and using the reading time.

The examiner should give details and explain the requirements before the examinations starts. If you do not understand the instructions ask the examiner to explain before starting the exam. **Do not** use your examination time trying to figure out what is required. During the allocated reading time, read the exam instructions, and then read them again. Be sure you understand which sections of the paper are compulsory, which are optional, and how many questions are to be answered. If there are optional sections or questions, use the reading time to make a decision on which sections or questions you will answer. It may be helpful with questions requiring written answers to allocate an answering order to the questions at this stage, with the “easy” questions (the ones you are most confident with) to be answered first.

Use the examination time allocated

Depending on what is being examined the time allocated will vary. Be aware of how much time is being allocated to answer a question e.g. if there are 40 multi choice questions to be answered in 1 hour you have 1 minute 30 seconds to answer each question. If you have 2 hours then the time would be 3 minutes per question. The same logic applies to answering short answer questions; allocate your time against the marks allocated for the question. **Never get behind the clock in your answering** (Typically, candidates get 80% of their marks in the first 50% of the time answering each question). If the exam is an open book you should know where to look in the reference material to find the answer - **do not** waste excessive time searching for the correct part of the reference.

Answering the Questions

For each question read and understand the question first. Then read it again, trying to recognize what is being asked. (It can be quite upsetting to realize that you have not given the correct answer because you did not read the question correctly, especially when you have failed by just a couple of marks).

If you are confident about the answer then mark or tick the correct answer on the answer sheet. If you are not sure make a light mark on the paper so you can go back to it later. Sometimes subsequent questions will remind you of the correct answer or may eliminate the answer you thought was correct

Consider that in the exam some words and phrases carry high importance and must be read carefully to read the question correctly. Such words are shall, should, might, must... Important phrases include most correct, most suitable....

For multiple choice exams, for each question try to eliminate the unlikely answers, and choose from the remainder.

In short answer questions, try to be brief, and stress the answers to the key points of the question. Use the correct format for the answer – list, define and explain all mean different things!

In essay style questions, more is not necessarily better. Again, the key points asked for in the question are vital. Breaking the answer into short sections could help to ensure nothing is left out of the answer. Some sections may be better answered with a list of key points, rather than a wordy monologue.

When you have worked your way through the whole paper, go back to the beginning to answer the questions you have labeled because you have not yet answered them, or you were unsure of the answer.

For multi-choice questions - if you still are not sure of the correct answer, guess! For written answer questions, spend a small amount of time writing down what you do know about the subject of the question, even if you don't have the full answer.

Don't get stressed!

Try not to be intimidated by someone who finishes his or her question paper early and leaves the exam room. Such persons may be brilliant or cannot answer the questions and have given up. Remember you are not in competition with others in the room - **you** are sitting **your** exam and every correct answer increases your chance of success in the examination. Generally the pass mark is 70% in theory examinations.

Remember that a 70% pass mark means that only 30% can be answered wrongly or omitted and still achieve the required pass mark. If you do not even attempt to answer 10% of the paper then your effective pass threshold is 70/90 or 78% of what you do. If you leave 20% it gets worse as you need to get 70/80 or 88.5% of what you have completed to achieve a pass mark. Skipping small difficult parts of the examination paper is understandable providing you do the remaining well and achieve the marks, but the more you skip the greater the chance of not achieving the pass mark of 70%.

Every unanswered question decreases your chances of passing!

HAPPY EXAMS!