

Written Examinations

PURPOSE

The purpose of written examinations is to encourage you to review all the learning you have achieved in a module, so that you have formed and retained a broad understanding of the module subject area. In addition, examinations assess your ability to encounter and respond appropriately to new or unexpected questions, using the knowledge and understanding you have acquired in your study and revision.

Most often, the examination questions or tasks resemble those of essays or other written assignments (though they may also include multiple-choice or short answer questions). Thus examinations are likely to require you to draw upon the reading and study that you have done for the module to respond to a particular question or task. You will need to know how to summarise, synthesise, analyse and evaluate your knowledge and understanding. Naturally, examinations test your ability to communicate well in writing under time pressure – a skill that will be useful in a range of vocational and professional contexts.

CONTENT

Written exams usually occur at the end of a module and take place under timed conditions. They may be 'seen', where the student is aware in advance of the question(s) they are expected to answer, or 'unseen', where the questions are only revealed 'on the day'. In an 'open-book' exam, you are allowed to use a selection of reference materials during the assessment.

Exams are designed to give you an opportunity to write about what you have learned: they are not designed to “catch you out”. There may be a range of past papers that you can use for practice. However, it's good to remember that the most significant and important part of an examination is the revision and learning that you will have done in preparation for it, not the examination itself.

WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

First and foremost, we are looking to see whether you have answered examination questions or addressed the task(s) set in the examination. We are also looking to see whether you have demonstrated that you have met the relevant learning outcomes of the Module Outline. The style and content of examinations may vary considerably, depending on the subject matter and the tutor. However, we are likely to be looking for similar attributes to written assignments, recognising that the timed conditions of an examination mean that the level of detail that you can offer will be limited. In a written examination we will be looking for you to

1. demonstrate that you have read and understood an appropriate and relevant range of texts
...by interacting with what you have read in your responses to the examination questions.

2. demonstrate understanding
... by showing that you have understood the examination question or task in the context of the learning of the module and different authors' approaches to it.
3. critically evaluate material that is relevant to the topic
...by analysing and evaluating relevant texts and their interpretation, historical events and/or the contributions of scholars in relation to the task / question of the exam.
4. construct an argument
...in response to the exam question or task, making use of the learning that you have done through your reading and revision.
5. write clearly, concisely, fluently and legibly
...making your exam easy to read and follow; this will involve having a clear structure and paying attention to grammar and spelling.

TECHNICAL MATTERS

For the tutor:

- Examinations are particularly appropriate when students need to demonstrate a grasp of the breadth of material covered in a module. Helping students prepare for examinations can help allay the fears often associated with exams, especially among mature students.
- You need to make sure that the examination will test the relevant module learning outcomes. Short answer or multiple choice questions need to be particularly well designed if they are to test higher-level skills, not just factual knowledge. Some learning outcomes will not be able to be assessed by (some kinds of) examination.
- It is essential to ask colleagues (and/or external examiners) to check examination questions before they are set.
- It is important to ensure in advance that students are clear on the format of the examination they will be taking.
- It is important to encourage students to write practice answers and give them feedback on them.
- It is recommended to offer revision sessions: to go over exam technique and give practice in analysing questions.

For the student:

- Begin the process of preparation at the very beginning of the module by keeping up with the required reading, making good, concise summary notes as you go along, and by ensuring you have not just memorized but understood the material.
- You are not required to reference specific works in a written examination, in the way that you would for an essay.
- Practice handwriting plans and, occasionally, whole essays under timed conditions – especially if you are not used to handwriting!

MARKING CRITERIA

The questions that your marker will be considering when assessing your work are as follows:

1. How does your examination script demonstrate that you have acquired the knowledge, understanding and skills of the module's learning outcomes?
2. Does your work answer the question(s) or address the task(s) set by the examination?
3. To what standard have you fulfilled these? These standards – by which your work will be graded – are described in the **Assessment Criteria for Essays and Other Written Assignments** for the level of your module when you are being asked for essay-like answers. The criteria against which your work will be marked fall into five categories:

Knowledge and understanding: Does your work demonstrate a thorough and accurate understanding of the relevant subject matter?

Use of sources and evidence: Have you used your knowledge of the topic effectively as evidence for your argument and reasoning?

Have you referred to historical events / texts / scholars where appropriate in your work?

Critical thinking, reasoning and analysis: Does your work show your ability to identify issues and think critically about them?

Are you able to make relevant connections between different points or aspects of the questions?

Argument: Is your response to the question(s) / task(s) and your case for the points you make well argued?

Are the structures of your answers clear and do they mirror the structure of your analysis and argument?

Presentation: Is your writing clear, using appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar and spelling?

