

Open Book Exams: *The Essential Ingredients: Planning and Time Management.*

There is no substitute for good planning and preparation. And start preparing early!

A common misconception is that "*I won't have to study for an open book exam because I will have all my notes during the exam*". That would be a serious mistake!

In any exam, expect to be under time pressure. To use your time effectively in an exam, you will have to study your notes and books and know where each important note is located so that you find it quickly during the exam.

Most marks will be given for your **demonstration of a personal understanding of the subject**, your **ability to analyse information and data, develop clear logical arguments**, or to **perform calculations**.

There are no marks for how fast you can copy quotes (possible plagiarism). You can use different documents and resources, but you must bring them together using your own words to form a coherent argument or solution.

Preparing for an Open Book Exam

Your approach should be like that used for any other exam type.

Have a study plan that addresses each subject and the various topics contained each. Allocate study time accordingly. Heavy weight exams will need more attention than less weighted ones.

Be mindful of those areas where you have struggled in the past – ignoring them won't make them easier!

Use your lecture notes for the module to provide you with additional material relevant to possible topics in the exam and to point you towards other texts that you can incorporate into your revision. Lecture notes alone will not suffice in many higher-level exams – you need to go beyond the notes and read relevant papers, chapters etc.

Know in advance how many questions are on the exam paper, what format each has e.g. short answer versus essay type questions.

Revise as you would for any other exam making a note of which parts of your course notes / book you could use for answering different kinds of questions.

Look at past exam papers and be familiar with the format of the paper.

Develop frameworks for answering each kind of question and addressing the topics that come up often. Frameworks are more useful than rote answers because they can be adapted to suit variation in questions.

Caution: be wary of rote learning answers for 'expected' questions; often the question asked may be similar but with a twist. A rote-learned answer may not address the specifics of the actual question being asked; the most common reason a long answer fails to get good marks!

Doing the exam:

Have a plan!

Find out in advance from your lecturer what you are allowed to do with your notes / books etc. e.g. are you allowed to bookmark certain pages to help you find certain parts of text during the exam?

Sometimes open book means that students may access their own home drive where they may store lecture notes, and other course materials. Normally, open book does **not** include Internet access or access to Moodle or Brightspace; the use of messaging systems and external storage devices is strictly forbidden.

Unauthorized collaboration during the open book exam may result in concerns over plagiarism. The best marks will be awarded for demonstrating your own understanding of the topic and your ability to construct an organised argument **NOT** your ability to copy quotes from lecture notes, books, internet, etc.(plagiarism).

Know in advance how many questions are on the exam paper, what format each has e.g. short answer versus essay type questions.

Know how many questions you must answer in the exam and the number of marks for each. Allocate your time accordingly.

Start with your best question! A good start will build your confidence and avoid you getting panicked unnecessarily.

Open book exams are not so much a test of memory; they are looking for you to demonstrate your understanding of the topic and your ability to construct an argument to answer the question(s) you've been given.