

# Exam Support Handbook



This handbook has information and resources to help you feel prepared and in control leading up to your exams.

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## What to expect on the day of your exam?

- ✓ Ensure you arrive at least 15 minutes early prior to the start time of your exam and get into line by subject – there will be staff who can help you find where you need to wait.
- ✓ Ensure you are wearing your student ID lanyard around your neck; you must be clearly wearing this when you enter your exam.
- ✓ You will then be briefed by a member of staff who will explain the procedures of the exam. Please make sure you remain silent during the briefing and listen carefully to the instructions.
- ✓ Ensure you have emptied your pockets making sure that you have: no phones, no vapes, no keys, no gum, no air pods, no coins, no apple watches etc. Hats and hoods must be also be taken off, religious head coverings are allowed.
- ✓ You can take in a clear water bottle with the label removed. You can take in only the equipment you need for your exam – black ballpoint pens, pencils, rubber, calculator. Any calculator lids must be taken off and placed in your bag.
- ✓ All students will be scanned before entering the exam room with a handheld metal detector to pick up any remaining items in pockets. This is solely for your protection – if you're found with any items in the room you will be automatically disqualified. You will be asked again to put any items away in your bag. If you don't have a bag, please hand them to a member of staff.
- ✓ After being scanned you will then enter the sports hall in silence where you'll be directed into the store room to drop off your bag. Make sure your phone is turned OFF – not just on silent - and in your bag.
- ✓ After your bag is stored away, find your desk in silence and wait for more instructions.

## How to prepare for your exams – Study Tips

- ✓ **Establish a study routine** - creating a routine—such as studying for an hour after dinner, or for a half hour each morning—will encourage consistency. When getting started, create a study schedule and set reminders on your phone to help build the habit. Your routine should also include time for self-care and time away from studying
- ✓ **Create a dedicated study area.** Choose an area that is free of distractions where you can set up your study materials and leave them between sessions. When it's time to study, you won't spend time searching for something you need. Just sit down, and you're ready to go.
- ✓ **Focus on the quality of studying, not the quantity.** It's more effective to space out many short study sessions, rather than having one marathon session. Try studying in half-hour to hour-long blocks, with breaks in between. This way, you can stay alert and focused the whole time.
- ✓ **Make studying a priority.** When it's time to study, take it as seriously as you would take a job. Don't skip study sessions, start on time, and give the task 100% of your attention.
- ✓ **Set specific study goals.** Goals give direction to a study session and provide a sense of accomplishment when completed. Create goals that can realistically be completed in a single study session, such as: Learn the terms in chapter 1, pass the chapter 2 practice quiz, take notes on chapter 4, or review class notes for 30 minutes.
- ✓ **Don't stop at reading—write down what you learn.** By typing or hand-writing information, you will engage in active learning, which can improve retention and understanding. Try making flashcards, writing chapter summaries, or creating an outline of the material. As a bonus, you can refer back to what you've written to quickly review the material.
- ✓ **Quiz yourself to make information “stick”.** Look for practice tests or discussion questions after each chapter you read. Another way to “quiz” yourself is to teach something you've studied to a friend, a pet, or even an inanimate object, without looking at the material.
- ✓ **A change of scenery can improve information retention.** If you're feeling unfocused, unmotivated, or just plain bored, try studying somewhere new. Libraries, parks and coffee shops are great alternatives for breaking out of your routine.
- ✓ **Take care of your mind and body.** Healthy sleep habits, exercise, and a balanced diet will boost memory and brain function. Studying is most effective when it's balanced with good habits

## Strategies to manage anxiety and stress leading up to exams

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is usually a natural response to pressure, feeling afraid or threatened, which can show up in how we feel physically, mentally, and in how we behave.

It's common to describe anxiety as a feeling of dread, fear or unease, which can range from mild to severe.

Anxiety can become a problem if we start worrying a lot about small stuff or relatively harmless situations.

It's usually when our anxiety feels really intense or overwhelming that it starts to interfere with our daily life or affect our relationships.

### Self-Help CBT Strategies

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of talking therapy that aims to change the way we think (cognition) and act (behaviour) in order to help cope with and manage problems we may face in our lives.

It is based on the idea that our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are closely linked and influence each other.

If we have unhelpful thoughts and feelings, this can lead to unhelpful behaviour, which can turn into a vicious cycle of further negative thoughts and so on.

CBT aims to help us learn to recognise these unhelpful patterns, and break down and approach problems in a different way to improve how we feel.

Please scan the QR code find CBT-inspired self-help strategies, techniques and guidance you can try.



## Circle of Control

Anxiety is often related to feeling out of control, especially during exams. It can be helpful to remind yourself of aspects of your life which you can and can't control.

It is okay to worry about situations or things you can't change, but it is important that they are not your responsibility to solve or fix. It can be beneficial to refocus your energy towards aspects of your life that you can control to help you manage your anxiety.

Using this worksheet, identify what you can and cannot control about your exams.

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Things I cannot control about my exam



Things I can control about my exams

## Thought Challenging – Identifying Unhelpful Thought Processes

It can be a helpful strategy to recognise when we are having unhelpful thoughts and seeing if we can change these into more rational and realistic thoughts. Using the ‘unhelpful thinking styles’ below, please complete the thought challenging table on the next page and practice changing these unhelpful thoughts into more realistic, rational thoughts.

<p><b>All or nothing thinking</b></p>  <p>Sometimes called ‘black and white thinking’</p> <p><i>If I’m not perfect I have failed</i></p> <p><i>Either I do it right or not at all</i></p>	<p><b>Over-generalising</b></p>  <p>Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw</p>
<p><b>Mental filter</b></p>  <p>Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.</p> <p><i>Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes</i></p>	<p><b>Disqualifying the positive</b></p>  <p>Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another</p> <p><i>That doesn’t count</i></p>
<p><b>Jumping to conclusions</b></p>  <p>There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mind reading</b> (imagining we know what others are thinking)</li> <li>• <b>Fortune telling</b> (predicting the future)</li> </ul> <p><math>2 + 2 = 5</math></p>	<p><b>Magnification (catastrophising) &amp; minimisation</b></p>  <p>Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important</p>
<p><b>Emotional reasoning</b></p>  <p>Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.</p> <p><i>I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot</i></p>	<p><b>should must</b></p> <p>Using critical words like ‘should’, ‘must’, or ‘ought’ can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed</p> <p>If we apply ‘shoulds’ to other people the result is often frustration</p>
<p><b>Labelling</b></p>  <p>Assigning labels to ourselves or other people</p> <p><i>I’m a loser</i> <i>I’m completely useless</i> <i>They’re such an idiot</i></p>	<p><b>Personalisation</b></p> <p><b>“this is my fault”</b></p> <p>Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn’t completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.</p>

## Thought Challenging – Identifying Unhelpful Thought Processes

Here is an example of thought challenging around exam stress:

Prompt	Thought Challenging - Example
Situation – what happened?	I failed my mock exam.
My feelings – how this made me feel at first	I feel like a failure. I feel stupid, what's the point, I should give up. There is no way I am going to pass my actual exam.
Unhelpful thoughts I had	Catastrophising – thinking I should give up. Labelling myself as stupid and a failure.
Evidence to support my unhelpful thoughts	I failed a mock that is really important to me, this means I could fail my actual exam.
Evidence against my unhelpful thoughts	I didn't do as much revision as I could have. I felt pretty unprepared. There was a question I spent too much time on.
Alternative neutral or more realistic and rational thoughts	I know what I need to focus my revision on now moving forward. I am going to prepare myself on topics I found difficult in the mock. I am going to get myself organised and create a plan moving forward.
How I feel now – after completing my thought record	I am ready to give this another go and feel less defeated. I know I am not a failure and what I need to do to try again.

## Thought Challenging – Identifying Unhelpful Thought Processes

Here is a blank worksheet for you to try thought challenging:

Prompt	Thought Challenging Record
Situation – what happened?	
My feelings – how this made me feel at first	
Unhelpful thoughts I had	
Evidence to support my unhelpful thoughts	
Evidence against my unhelpful thoughts	
Alternative neutral or more realistic and rational thoughts	
How I feel now – after completing my thought record	

## Getting Organised – Keeping a Routine

It can be helpful to get yourself in a routine where you have your week planned ahead, including when you will be revising, which subject you will be focusing on, how long you will spend doing this etc. Your revision time should be in small and manageable chunks with frequent rest breaks.

Below is a blank weekly planner, you can use this or alternatively get loads of free weekly planners online. Plan your weeks ahead to get yourself organised, your weekly planner should also include time to spend with friends and family, regular exercise and self-care activities!

### Week Overview

W/c  /  /

To-do	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

## Breathing Retraining Activity

# Breathing Retraining

Everyone knows that breathing is an essential part of life, but did you know that breathing plays an essential role in anxiety? This information sheet will briefly discuss the role of breathing in anxiety and guide you through a simple breathing retraining technique that uses breathing patterns to help deal with anxiety.

Breathing is a powerful determinant of physical state. When our breathing rate becomes elevated, a number of physiological changes begin to occur. Perhaps you've noticed this yourself when you've had a fright; you might suddenly gasp, feel a little breathless and a little light-headed, as well as feeling some tingling sensations around your body. Believe it or not, the way we breathe is a major factor in producing these and other sensations that are noticeable when we are anxious.

### Anxious breathing

You probably already know that we breathe in to obtain oxygen and we breathe out to expel carbon dioxide. The body naturally maintains optimal levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide, and this balance is in part maintained through how fast and how deeply we breathe. When we exercise, for example, we breathe faster and more deeply in order to replace the oxygen being used and expel the extra carbon dioxide produced by metabolic changes.

Anxiety causes an increase in our breathing rate, as part of the physical fight or flight response to a perceived threat. However, when our breathing rate increases without any physical exertion, we breathe out too much carbon dioxide. If the body cannot quickly return carbon dioxide levels to the optimal range, we experience further symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, headache, weakness and tingling in the extremities and muscle stiffness.

The normal rate of breathing is 10-14 breaths per minute – what's your breathing rate?

### Breathing Retraining

While temporary overbreathing and hyperventilation are not specifically dangerous (it's even used in medical testing!), continued overbreathing can leave you feeling exhausted or "on edge" so that you're more likely to respond to stressful situations with intense anxiety and panic.

Gaining control over your breathing involves both slowing your rate of breathing and changing your breathing style. Use the following steps to be well on your way to developing a better breathing habit.

- 1 Ensure that you are sitting on a comfortable chair or laying on a bed
- 2 Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through the nose if possible)
- 3 Hold the breath for 2 seconds
- 4 Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through the nose if possible), then pause slightly before breathing in again.
- 5 Practise, practise, practise!

### Breathing tips

- When you first begin changing your breathing, it may be difficult to slow your breathing down to this rate. You may wish to try using a 3-in, 1-hold, 4-out breathing rate to start off with.
- When you are doing your breathing exercises, make sure that you are using a stomach breathing style rather than a chest breathing style. You can check this by placing one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. The hand on your stomach should rise when you breathe in.
- Try to practise at least once or twice a day at a time when you can relax, relatively free from distraction. This will help to develop a more relaxed breathing habit. The key to progress really is practise, so try to set aside some time each day.

*By using breathing retraining you can slow your breathing down and reduce your general level anxiety. With enough practice, it can even help to better cope with anxiety when you are in an anxious situation.*

## Accepting Uncertainty Activity

# Accepting Uncertainty



Demanding certainty and predictability is a part of what keeps worry going. You can use the principles of acceptance and letting go to reduce intolerance of uncertainty and worry less. Note down some observations or reminders for each of the steps below to help yourself become more accepting of uncertainty.

### Be Aware

*Acknowledge the presence of worries about being uncertain. What do you notice yourself thinking, feeling and doing when you are needing certainty?*

### Let Go

*Don't engage with your worries or try to control them, just observe them with interest and describe your experience to yourself. Let your worries just float by like clouds in the sky, rather than try to push them away. Remind yourself that they are just thoughts. What can you tell yourself to help you let go of your need for certainty?*

### Be Non-Judgemental

*What can you tell yourself to help when your mind wanders back to needing certainty? Congratulate yourself for noticing it when your mind has wandered, and then gently bring your focus back to the present. What can you tell yourself to help you be more present-focussed? Perhaps stay focussed on your breathing.*

## Useful websites, external support and helplines

- **Anxiety UK** - Offer an extensive range of support services designed to help control anxiety rather than letting it control you. Website: <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/> Helpline: 03444 775 774 / Text support: 07537 416 905 (open Mon-Fri 10:30-16:30)
- **No Panic** – No Panic specialises in self-help recovery and our services include providing people with the skills they need to manage their condition and work towards recovery, enabling them to lead more fulfilled lives. Website: <https://nopanic.org.uk/> Tel: 0300 772 9844 (open 10am-10pm 365 days of the year)
- **Off The Record (Bristol and S Glos)** - Young person's support service, counselling, groups, advice Services. Call: 0808 808 9120 SMS Text: 0789 688 0011 Young People's Email: [confidential@otrbristol.org.uk](mailto:confidential@otrbristol.org.uk) Website: <https://www.otrbristol.org.uk/what-we-do/hubs/>
- **The Mix** - UK's leading support service for young people. The Mix can help you take on any challenge you're facing – contact via our online community, on social, through our free, confidential helpline or our counselling service. Call **0808 808 4994** Website: <https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support>
- **Young Minds** - Provide young people with tools to look after their mental health. Our website is full of advice and information on what to do if you're struggling with how you feel. Shout can provide 24/7 text support. Text SHOUT to 85258. Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/>
- **HappyMaps** - An award-winning charity developed by healthcare professionals with help from parents and young people. We've pooled some of the best mental health resources for parents, carers, and young people, all in one place. Website: <https://happymaps.co.uk/self-help-for-children-and-young-people>

Here are some helpful links for guidance and advice on how to cope with exam stress:

- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/help-for-teenagers-young-adults-and-students/tips-on-preparing-for-exams/>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/feelings-and-experiences/exam-stress/>
- For Parents and Carers: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/help-your-child-beat-exam-stress/>

## *Support Available to you in college*

### **Student Welfare and Engagement Assistants (SWEAs)**

- Carla Cheetham, Jess Jutton and Jess Cook
- Available for welfare drop ins in B25.

### **Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Advisors (Safeguarding Officers)**

- Elisha Flanagan and Sarah Oliver
- 1:1 appointments & drop-in support during break times in B221

### **College Nurse (Safeguarding Officer)**

- Zoe Watson
- Drop-in support & appointments as required in B5

### **Designated Safeguarding Lead**

- Laura Howe-Haysom – B3A

### **Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead**

- Clare McLaughlin – B2B, Café Max

### **College Chaplain**

- Marek Czapiga – B209
- Available for drop-in support

### **Progress Tutor Managers (Safeguarding Officers)**

- Michelle Densley and Katy Philips – C5
- Drop-in Support and 1:1 appointments

### **Progress Tutors**

- The Progress Tutors are Mental Health First Aid Trained and available for drop-in support and 1:1 appointments – C5