

IMPROVING EXAM MARKS

If you do well in your classwork, and your assignments, but then poorly in your tests and examinations, work through the following to identify the changes you need to make.

ISSUE:	WHAT THE PROBLEM WAS:	FUTURE ACTION
1. You found that there was just too much to learn in time for the examination.	This means you had not been organising and reducing the content as you went during the course and then you left it too late to have time to learn everything.	<i>Make your study notes as you go in future courses. Once a week go through and summarise the content into study notes. Keep asking yourself, what will I need to know or remember for the exams? Then go through all of the course material and write down what you need to learn in point form. Keep condensing the material to learn as you go.</i>
2. While you were studying you realised that there were lots of things you didn't understand and you didn't have time to work it out.	You did not address issues as they arose throughout the course.	<i>Ensure you keep up with all classwork and if there are things you don't understand you need to ask questions as you go. Do every single piece of work the teacher allocates and chase up anything you don't understand, no matter how small.</i>
3. You thought you knew it, then when you got in the exam you could not remember the content you needed for the exam. For example, you didn't know formulas, or dates, or definitions.	This means that when you were learning the content, you mainly read through the information, but you did not test yourself on the content to see if you were retaining the information. So you thought you knew it, but when you got in the exam it was all gone.	<i>You need to test yourself over and over when you are learning the content for the exam. Read a section, then see what you can say or write without looking. Then go back and review the parts you did not know. Do this over and over. Memorisation involves lots of repetition and lots of testing yourself.</i>

<p>4. In the exam, you couldn't do many of the questions, you didn't know how to do them.</p>	<p>This means you had not done enough practice to ensure you could do as many different types of questions as possible.</p>	<p><i>You need to make sure you get as many different questions as you can to practice from. You could re-do questions from your textbook, get study guides, past exam papers. The more questions you can do the better, plus you need to do the questions without looking at the answers or your notes, so you do it as a test and you can get a reality check as to what you know and don't know.</i></p>
<p>5. In the exam, you ran out of time.</p>	<p>You could not complete the questions quickly as you did not know the content well enough or know how to do the questions quickly enough.</p>	<p><i>Follow the strategies in Points 3 and 4 above to address this issue. Plus make sure you do huge amounts of practise under exam conditions – no notes or answers and time limits so you get used to completing questions in the time available.</i></p>
<p>6. The questions were completely different in the exam from those you had practised.</p>	<p>Either your teacher misled you as to what you would be tested on or you misinterpreted what you were supposed to study.</p>	<p><i>First, work out where the issue was. Show your teacher the types of questions you did as practice and find out what you should have been doing. Ask students who did well what type of study and practice they did so you can see where you went wrong and what you will do differently next time.</i></p>
<p>7. You “froze” or had a “mental blank” during the exam. Heightened anxiety can reduce the ability to recall.</p>	<p><i>Being as prepared as possible and not leaving your study until the last minute can make a big difference in reducing anxiety. When you are in the exam if you feel anxious, a good strategy is to close your eyes for a moment and take some long, deep breaths. When you open your eyes do some of the questions you find easy or feel confident about. Meanwhile your subconscious will have a chance to recall the things you are struggling to remember. Another trick is try moving your eyes to different directions, ie looking up and to the left etc. This can also sometimes prompt recall.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Seek help from a counsellor for how to manage stress. Also make sure your class teacher is aware of this issue.</i> 2. <i>Do all the other techniques listed on this page so that you feel in control.</i> 3. <i>Starting the study early and make a plan to manage time and task so that you have time to study what you need to (some high achieving, perfectionist students who don't time manage well may take too long to do little things and then run out of time).</i> 4. <i>The more practice tests you do, the more familiar you are with the test so it does not look 'scary' (connects with point above).</i>