

Comments from past students: part 1

During the exam

When I took my seat in the exam I usually felt excited or nervous. If I had revised well, I knew that I could do well on the paper. If I hadn't, I felt very nervous.

I always tried to look through the paper first. I tried to think about what each question wanted. This helped me to prepare for that question, so I could get the best available marks.

When I was nearing the end of the exam I felt relieved, but sometimes I panicked. I checked through my exam paper to try and see if I had answered all the questions correctly. If I had not finished it was horrible and I couldn't catch my breath.

Sometimes I rushed through the paper just to finish it and get the most marks. I tried to spend less time on the shorter questions and more time on the longer questions that give you more marks.

Teacher's comment

It is important to try and keep calm throughout the exam and not to panic. In your revision you can help to improve this by doing practice questions in the time allowed – that way you can learn to control your time and your answers.

Don't worry about whether you have 'answered the questions right'. Often there is not a 'right' answer. That is crucial is that you remember that you are being assessed against the assessment objectives and that the skills you demonstrate represent a high proportion of the total marks.

Knowing lots of 'stuff' is of little benefit if you cannot use the knowledge appropriately. The skills of analysis, evaluation and application are, therefore, very important. Make sure you practice these skills.

After the exam

After all the exams I always felt curious and nervous. I wanted to know my results straight away to see if I had passed or failed.

When I left the exam hall and was outside with my friends all they all talked about was the exam and if they gave the same answer as you. If I did it totally differently, I felt sick in the stomach.

Teacher's comment

One of the worst things to do after the exam is talk about it to your friends. It is best to let the examiners worry about what you and your friends have written. If you discuss the exam you are only going to increase your anxiety – someone is bound to mention something you did not put down and you are likely to think that you will not do as well as a result. The reality is that even if you have forgotten to put something in it will not make that much difference and there is nothing you can do about it anyway. Your performance will be judged on all your answers and chances are, if you have prepared properly and understand the assessment objectives, that you will do OK. Best thing to do is to go and have a drink and something to eat in your school canteen or a local café and talk about fashion, football, boys, girls – anything apart from the exam.

Before an exam

Before an exam, some people may feel nervous as they do not think that they have done enough revision or don't know what kind of questions are going to be on the paper. Other people feel happy as they know that they have revised well and have a good idea of what the paper is going to be like. Some people just try to do their best, no matter how they feel.

Teacher's comment

It is perfectly normal to feel nervous before an exam – it is the body's way of preparing you for the challenge ahead. When you are nervous your heart beats faster and more blood is pumped around your body and to your brain – this makes you more alert and ready to perform the task. You can only ever do your best, so this is a good way to think. The important thing is to make sure that you have prepared properly in the weeks before the exam, that way you can be quietly confident that you can give of your best.

During the exam

During an exam some people may feel relieved when they see the questions, as they know what they have to do and are happy that they are going to pass. Other people may feel nervous or even a little sick, as they do not know what they are doing and feel that they have no chance in answering questions well.

Teacher's comment

Again, it is very normal to open the question paper and think that you will not be able to answer any of it. When you open the paper, spend a few minutes just looking through it – check the questions and make sure you know what you have to do. This will help you to calm down and regain control. Once you have calmed down then you will find that you can tackle most of the questions. Remember you do not have to get *everything* right to get a high grade.

Some people read a question and think it is more complicated than what it is, so they do too much work on one question than they need to. Sometimes they see a question that needs to be explained in a lot of detail and just write and write. They end up with work that does not make sense or they just waffle on.

Some people panic as their time runs out in an exam as they have not finished. They may rush their work to finish on time to try to get a few extra marks.

Teacher's comment

A very good point – it is vital that you allocate the right amount of time to each question. Remember that you have around 1 minute per mark so a ten mark question means you need to spend at least ten minutes on it. Using your time wisely and being aware of how many marks are awarded for each question is important to maximise the number of marks you can gain. That is why spending a few minutes at the start of the exam looking through the paper is important.

After the exam

After an exam people often feel happy that it is 'over and done with' and that they don't have to go through the pressure of doing the exam again. Some people feel upset when they have finished and think that they could have done better if they prepared themselves a little bit more. Some may think back about the questions they were stuck on and think of answers that they could have used.

People that think they have done well may be hopeful that they will get a good grade. Those that think they have done badly may think about what they could do in future exams that will help them do better.

Teacher's comment

Once the exam is over there is nothing you can really do to change anything that has gone on in the past hour or so. The best thing to do, therefore, is not to worry about it! If you have done your best no-one can ask any more of you. You will have made mistakes – but so does everyone. Remember the examiner does not 'knock off' marks for things you might have said that are wrong – marks are awarded for what you have done and the skills you have demonstrated in relation to the assessment objectives. This is called 'positive marking'.