

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome to the Student Hub Live. This is an exam-focused session. My name's Karen Foley, and I'm going to be presenting these four sessions, where we're going to take a look at what some of the things that we know at the Open University can tell us about exams. So I've invited some of the guests from some of our key faculties, and we've got people from the Faculty of Business and Law at the Open University Business School, and they're going to be telling us about how important it is to make a plan and give us some great advice along the way.

We're also going to take a look at what psychology tells us about memory, and Heather Fields is going to come and give us a very interesting talk about that. Stress is something that is synonymous with exams, and so Duncan Banks is going to tell us a little bit about why some stress is good and how our stress responses can actually help us in an exam situation. And finally, because it's Student Hub Live, and because we love eating, we're going to be talking about diet, sleep, and nutrition, and specifically what you can eat in the exam and before it to make sure that you're as fit and healthy as possible.

So this is a live, interactive event, OK? If you're watching in real time, we hope that you can join in. You can talk to other students, and you can talk to Mychelle and Peter, who are manning our hot desk. Welcome, Mychelle and Peter.

MYCHELLE: Hello, Karen. We're really excited to be here. We've got a lot of interesting people this afternoon who can help with the exam stress. Students are already starting to talk about how much stress they have even going into the nice bank holiday weekend.

KAREN FOLEY: And Peter, it's your first time behind the desk. Normally, you're a guest here, and you work in the assessment centre. Are you getting a lot of calls from students who are worried about exams at the minute?

PETER: None at the moment, but we've got some great tips coming up, I think in the next-- in this session and the next one, which will help students to put their mind at rest and help them to focus in-- focus on what's important.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, those of you who are new, let me just explain how it all works. So there's a chat box. You can type anything you want in there.

You can talk about what you had for lunch. You can share your exam tips. You can tell people how you're feeling about your exams, and you can ask questions.

Anything we don't specifically cover or that I can't put to my guests now, I'll email you back afterwards. So if there was something that you'd rather take offline, then the email is studenthub@open.ac.uk. You can also send us tweets, and the hashtag is #StudentHubLive18, and the handle is @StudentHubLive. So do get in touch with us in a number of different ways.

Now, we also have some anonymous voting tools. These are lots of fun. We've got some widgets, and we'd like to know why you're here. So you can choose from one of the following options-- because I have an exam, I have an EMA, I'm really interested in exams, and I'm here to support students who do have an exam.

So what you do with these interactive voting tools is just click on the thing that applies to you, press return to submit, and you can also see what other people have said as well. You can let us know where you are in the UK, and you can let us know what faculty you're studying with. In good old OU terms, we've got our lovely abbreviations.

We've got STEM-- science, technology, engineering, and maths. We've got FASS-- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. We've got the Faculty of Business and Law, and Other. So just broadly let us know which thing you're in, and you can also write in the chat box what module you're studying at the minute.

We've also got our continuum. So this is another type of interactive voting tool. My main feeling towards the exam-- and you can get anywhere from "Extreme terror" to "An excellent chance to show my knowledge." So let us know where you feel on that scale. You can also change your mind as you go through. Hopefully it will decrease over the session.

And your plan at the moment. So what is your plan? Do you mainly have a plan? Do you have a colour-coded plan? Have you dreamt of a plan, or are you not sure that a plan will help you? So again, let us know what you think about that.

Right, let's crack on with our first session. We have Robs-- Rob Moore and Rob Tumilty.

Thank you for coming along. So Rob, this is a great T-shirt. Why have you chosen to wear this today?

ROB MOORE: OK, so for this session and to stop you getting confused, I'm going to be Pete-- Pointless Pete. So Pointless Pete is a fictitious character, but it's a person that's based on real strategies that students take. So from our experience of exam marking and teaching, we've seen students follow these strategies. So Pointless Pete is following strategies that actually aren't going to get him the most marks. And then my colleague, Super Tutor Rob, is going to put me straight on why those strategies aren't quite the best ones.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. All right, lovely. So you're going to be Pete, and you're going to be Rob for this session. All right. But we know that students who come to Student Hub Live sessions tend to be quite conscientious, and the fact that they're here already and the fact that they're thinking about this means hopefully they're not going to be as bad as Pointless Pete.

Right. So I'm going to ask you first, then, how are you structuring your exam, Pete?

ROB MOORE: OK, well, first of all, it's the revision. Now, I know there's lots of revision to be done, so I've got my books. I read them. So I read book one on Monday, book two on Tuesday, book three on Wednesday, had a day off on Thursday, then I started again, and I've read the books over again, and I'll read them all again next week before the exam. So I reckon I've have got it all in by the time the exam comes along.

KAREN FOLEY: All right. So what do you think of that, then, Rob? Is that a good strategy?

ROB: Well, you're certainly working hard. It's not-- Yeah, it's not a pointless strategy completely, but I'm not sure how helpful that's going to be longer term. I guess what you're doing there, Pete, is amassing lots of information in your brain and maybe lots of things to remember, but when you get to the exam, is that just going to go blah as sort of a brain dump on the paper.

What you really want to be doing is trying to practise towards answering questions, and we'll hopefully talk a bit more about that in a bit. But yeah, to think, what is the purpose of this knowledge? And the things that you're learning, to try and play with them a bit.

Think, well, what could-- what do other theories say about that bit that I've just read? How do they interact with each other? Do they oppose each other? What are the strengths and weaknesses? All that kind of stuff. So you're trying to think beyond it, rather than just reading, which might be a bit dull, I would have thought. [CHUCKLING]

ROB MOORE: OK.

- KAREN FOLEY:** So how do you recommend you get that focus, then? Do you use some of these specimen exam papers or like, past papers and stuff?
- ROB:** Yeah, that's a great idea, yeah. And you can certainly see those on the module website, and your teacher will be able to help you with that. The more you use specimen, past papers-- or past papers or yeah, specimen paper-- the more you get an idea of what those questions really look like.
- KAREN FOLEY:** And Pete, would you be using those, then?
- ROB MOORE:** Well, I haven't, because if they're in the past papers, they're not going to come up again, so you don't need to practise that bit, surely. But so you're saying that-- Yeah, I suppose if I was to use them, I'd see what it looks like and perhaps how-- what's expected. Yeah. I suppose I'd better get some air.
- KAREN FOLEY:** So why would you say-- you briefly talked about why they're good. But what are the advantages, then, of using those papers?
- ROB TUMILTY:** Well, I guess it's some of the things you just mentioned there, actually, that you get to see what questions look like before, get an idea of the structure. So if you know that you had to answer four questions, then you'll know what that looks like. You can maybe start think about how long it's going to take to do that, to answer those questions, how much time you're apportioning.
- KAREN FOLEY:** And what about, like-- do they tell you how many marks are associated? I know you get the guidance and stuff. But on the specimen exam papers, do they show you how many marks are associated with each thing?
- ROB TUMILTY:** They do, yeah. Yeah, exactly that. So you'll know you don't spend too long on one that's only a couple of marks. But something that's got 20 marks attached to it, that's going to take a lot more. Yeah. So it's knowing-- you know what you're going to see. It takes a lot of the stress out of the exam because you know what it's going to be like, even if not the specific questions.
- KAREN FOLEY:** And it's that familiarity, isn't it, being aware of the type of thing that's going to land on your desk. Let's take a quick trip over to Mychelle and Peter. I see that people have been voting on our continuum. And the extreme terror, I think, is alleviated a little bit. How is everyone at home, Mychelle?

MYCHELLE: Well, I said to Alison, it sounds like they're talking to you right now, because Rob and Pointless Pete were bringing up some of the things that she was concerned about. And she came back and said, absolutely. So the key there is that you're not ever alone if you're feeling these things. We've got a lot of students in here giving each other great advice. They're talking about mnemonics, they're talking about mindfulness, they're talking about how to relax their brain, empty their brain, different techniques. And Peter, you had a technique you suggested.

PETER: Yeah. We were having a bit of a conversation about associating places with facts. So if you're a kinesthetic learner, making you trip around your house and assigning different facts or information to different places around the house, and then walking that path and the association helps trigger those facts again. And we also talked about flashcards and possible use of flashcards as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And we're going to come up with that in our next session when Heather is going to tell us some things about memory. Mychelle, I see you've got an interesting t-shirt on there.

MYCHELLE: I am very excited about my t-shirt. This is my lucky t-shirt, my lucky exam t-shirt. The key, of course, is being well prepared. But I am very superstitious so I will wear this t-shirt to my next exam.

KAREN FOLEY: But you don't have an exam, so I see you've got that it also works for EMAs and TMA.

MYCHELLE: This weekend, I have to put my hands up. This weekend I'll be spending every day doing my TMA, despite my best plan of what questions I was going to answer on what weekend. I had a few family emergencies come up, so that slowed me down. It's OK. But I'm going to be in this t-shirt all weekend writing my TMA.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well, I hope it works. We have 40 shirts to give away. So for the best tips that come up in the chat, we're going to select four of those tips and you can win one of our Student Hub Live lucky t-shirts, which is guaranteed to work as long as you've done all the preparation. And I think we've got some terms and conditions with it.

[LAUGHTER]

MYCHELLE: We just had Jane talk about mind mapping. And I think that a lot of our students do find mind mapping useful. It's a different type of plan, a different type of map.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Excellent advice there. I don't know what you're worried about. Right, day of the

exam, how are you going to prepare?

ROB MOORE: Well, first of all, we know where the exam is. You get the address come through, so I have a quick look at the address. I assume I know where it's going to be. It's in the town. I'll find it. So on the day of the exam, just give myself a couple of hours to get there. No problem whatsoever.

KAREN FOLEY: And what are going to be taking?

ROB MOORE: Oh, well, you've got to take the essentials. You've got your water-- got to take your water-- and your sweets. You've got to have sweets in your exam. My lucky fountain pen, got to use that. And my lucky mascot. He sits on all my exam desks.

[LAUGHTER]

I travel quite light, but those are the essentials to take to the exam with me.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Well, I must admit I'm not sure we could argue with that. What do you reckon?

ROB TUMILTY: Yeah, well, I'll argue with all of it. Some of it is good.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm glad you got your water. And the sweets sound a bit rattly. You might want to think about other students that are in the exam room or anything with wrappers on.

But I'm just a little bit worried when you say you're kind of winging it on the day and find out where it is. I would have thought-- for me, it takes the stress out of anything if I know where I'm going beforehand. So the more you know, not on the day but before, planning. And think about, maybe, the road conditions as well as far as you're able to, what time of day you're going to be travelling. So knowing where are you going to go, if you get there early on the day, then brilliant. You might even get to see the room and see where that is.

What else have you got there? So you've got your lucky pen. It's a beautiful pen. I can see that. Again, just wondering if that pen runs out or the ink starts splatting or something, maybe you want to think about a selection of pens. There's kind of various size pens there. Show them around.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, we've been talking a lot about having comfy pens because we reckon that some pens

are comfier than others and allow you to write. And you can only know that by writing for approximately three hours to test it out.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, my mate uses different thicknesses of pens so your hand moves in and out. And I might try that.

KAREN FOLEY: Pete's missing a really critical thing. He hasn't got any identification apart from his t-shirt, which I don't think would get you in.

ROB MOORE: After this, they'll all know me.

KAREN FOLEY: What ID do you need?

ROB TUMILTY: Anything that proves who you are. A driving licence is probably the best thing. So have you found your driving licence?

ROB MOORE: Oh, it's in me pocket. I'll be all right, yeah.

ROB TUMILTY: Right. So maybe just check in that before, perhaps the day before, just knowing you've got your driving licence or a passport or something that definitely proves it's you. Because you might not be able to even enter the exam to sit it if you don't have evidence who you are, so really important.

ROB MOORE: OK.

KAREN FOLEY: All right.

ROB MOORE: More important than the sweets.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: So assume you get in--

ROB MOORE: I'll put my driving licence in the sweets.

KAREN FOLEY: Assume you get it in and everything. How are you then going to go about answering the exam questions and dealing with that paper?

ROB MOORE: OK. Well, I know on this exam there are four questions to answer. I've got three hours, 45 minutes a question. So to make sure I maximise my time on each question, I'll quickly read through them. I'll have a look. And if anything jumps out, I'll start on that one. I'll go straight for

the ones that I recognised the topics for and then straight in, 45 minutes as much as I can, bang it out, no problem.

KAREN FOLEY: I don't think that sounds terrible.

ROB TUMILTY: It's not bad. You'll get some marks, definitely, won't you? Yeah, again, not quite pointless. I know you're trying hard to get no points--

[LAUGHTER]

ROB MOORE: I don't want to got no points.

ROB TUMILTY: You'll have to try harder, then.

KAREN FOLEY: But it is a common thing, isn't it? I mean, to be fair, I know that we're having a bit of fun about it, but a lot of students will divide the time up like that. And they might go for something-- I mean, I actually often encourage students to start with them, and they feel confident in. So there are some truths in that. But what is a better strategy? And is there a way that you can actually try to maximise your potential?

ROB TUMILTY: Yeah. I would definitely say read all the questions first and make your choice, rather than just launch straight into one. We talked about the practise papers before. So if you know that, rather than sitting and trying to do the calculation in your head, work out the maths of how long you've got for each one, you should already go in knowing I've got 45 minutes for each one. And try and be as strict with that as you possibly can.

Yeah, even if you've got more you could say, leave yourself a good bit of gap on the paper. You can always go back to it and add more at the end. But yeah, give yourself the best chance, really, to try and give a decent answer for each of the questions.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. So in there, assuming you're not going to just dump everything, that you're going to think about it, how are you going to go about planning your answers in the exam environment?

ROB MOORE: Well, the last exam, the first question I knew loads on it. So four questions, and I thought, if I get everything on this question, I'm half way there. So I actually spent the first 90 minutes on that one question because then I only needed a few from the rest. Didn't quite finish the last one, but I spent most of my time on that first question. And I reckon I got nearly all the marks on that.

- KAREN FOLEY:** OK. So this is an interesting point. Can you get-- is that a good strategy? I mean, can you get a brilliant 100% if there are four questions? Did Rob do the right thing there?
- ROB TUMILTY:** Well, you might have written a really brilliant answer, so you might get all the 25 marks for that one question. But then you still got the other 75 to worry about. So yeah, I would still really encourage you to try and spread your time evenly. And you can always go back to it and add more.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Because it's probably one of those sorts of lovely curves, isn't it, where it's easier to get sort of a pass by answering the question than it is to get 100% and spend more time. So I guess it's best to at least do a good enough job on each of those aspects, so at least you can try and pass them as best you can, isn't it?
- ROB TUMILTY:** And it kind of worries me slightly that it might be almost that brain dump that you mentioned earlier, that I know loads about this question, so I'm going to write everything I know and all those theorists that I learned and you're just going to--
- ROB MOORE:** That's what I did because if I write everything I know, some of it's bound to stick. I'm bound to get some marks. So if I just apply lots of the theoretical models and show that I understand it, surely the examiner's going to give me some marks for it.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah, Rob, but when you're marking these exams, you just sit there and you go, this student hasn't understood the question because they just told me everything that they've remembered. They haven't addressed the question.
- ROB TUMILTY:** But you did say a really important word in there, "apply" those theories. And I think that's really quite important. It's not just giving the theories, but how do they actually relate to the question. How do they relate to your own practise? They're looking for some critical thought in there and some reflective skills.
- KAREN FOLEY:** OK. So before we go on to after the exam, let's take a trip to Mychelle and Peter and see what everyone is saying at home, remembering, of course, that these t-shirts are up for grabs for the best tips. So Mychelle's going to need to figure out a way of sorting that out. And you're going to then need to send us in your email to StudentHub@Open.ac.uk. What advice has everyone got at home?
- PETER:** Yeah, Karen, we've had a really interesting one about assigning information and facts to

music. So "The 12 Days of Christmas," for example, rattling off fact after fact or making a rap or things like that for the more creative people among us. And we've also had an interesting one about making post-it notes and sticking them on your dog and then trying to chase your dog around the house, to which I replied, that's fine, I suppose, if your dog is a short-haired one. Bit more complicated if it's got long hair. But yeah, so some good suggestions there.

MYCHELLE: And we've had suggestions also about not just studying, but getting a good night's sleep, taking exercise, getting the blood flowing, oxygen to the brain, combination about diet, your carbohydrates, your bananas, fruit, and then nuts. And Jane said, have you tried walnuts? Walnuts are good for you. And I just wanted to know, Jane, is that because they look like a brain?

KAREN FOLEY: Ah, that's a good point. We can ask Ben. Ben is coming in and he knows everything about this. He's from sport science. So he's going to-- I've got a whole group of foods, actually, I'm going to ask him to sort into good and bad piles a bit later. But yeah, he'll be one to know about that as well. That's grand. Yeah, nuts are brilliant.

OK. So we've focused on in the exam. After the exam, then, what is your strategy, Pete?

ROB MOORE: Oh, well, you've got to go and sit down with your mates and pull apart all the questions. So we go and sit down and we try and remember all the questions and what we said, and we try and work out what marks we get. So it's probably spend a couple of hours doing that. Don't normally get it right, but it's-- we do this every exam.

KAREN FOLEY: But how do you know?

ROB MOORE: Well, you know what mark get at the end. The examiner's almost-- I always get a bad examiner because it's always about 10 or 15 marks lower than I think I should have got.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. What about you, Rob? What do you think in terms of post-mortems?

ROB TUMILTY: Well, I think it's almost inevitable. Everyone does that, don't they? You go and pull it apart and you talk to other people. What did you put for number six or whatever. If you can, would try and avoid doing it too much. You get into that navel gazing where you just start trying to second guess. And rarely do people get it exactly right. People usually either completely think they've done awfully or they're overestimate how they've done.

I could talk about personal experience. I have to say my oldest two children are doing their

GTSEs and A Levels at the moment. And so we constantly sit around the dinner table doing this kind of post-mortem, and it's not massively helpful. But I get people sometimes need to put some of that stuff out.

What I would say is try and build in a celebration. That seems a lot more fun, really, to celebrate the fact you've got through it, celebrate with the people who've supported you along the way. If you can remember to, maybe thank your tutor as well because they've supported you and lived some of that journey with you. Go back and thank them for all the support they've given you. But yeah, try and be kind to yourself is what I would say. Don't beat yourself up afterwards.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. We've had a question as well and they're are some practicalities. So anything that you'd like to know, let us try and answer it. Are you allowed to go to the loo in an exam?

ROB MOORE: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. But they do often have times at the first and the last bits, so they try and protect those spaces for people. So often the first half an hour and last half an hour are sort of no go movement areas. But on the Student Hub Live website, we've had some sessions on dealing with exams. So you can watch the catch-up on that, which has got loads and loads of hints and tips on there, as well as the information, advice, and guidance that you can get.

So do download that booklet. It gives you all the things that you need to be able to remember. We don't have time to do that in the session, but it is an important piece of information that you can access from student homes. So make sure that you do read through all of that.

OK. So we looked at post-mortems. And let's think out of the five P's because we like our Petes and we like our sort of key areas and summing up, et cetera. And then we're going to have some time to talk to the Hot Desk. OK. What are the five P's?

ROB MOORE: So I've stopped being Pete for a minute now, back to being the tutor.

ROB TUMILTY: Welcome back.

ROB MOORE: Back to being Rob. So what we want you to take away from this session are some things that are practical that you can actually use. Of all the examples that I've spoken about actually happened to me, to people I studied with, or to students. So none of them were completely fictitious.

But to help you avoid being like Pointless Pete, the five P's are prepare-- make sure you've done effective revision. Think about the good way, what works for you. Think about the sort of question you're going to answer and revise appropriately. Make sure you know where the centre is. Make sure you know what you need to take with you.

Then we've got the plan. When you go into the exam, make sure you've read all the questions carefully. Pick your questions based on the ones that you can answer, not just the ones that look most attractive. And we really advise you to write a plan for each question. Don't just launch into it. Spend two or three minutes structuring your argument, getting the key points down. You'll find it a lot easier to write a concise, informative answer if you do that.

Then we've got precision. Stick to the question. Identify the action words. What is the question asking you to do? And if it asks you to include two or three examples, include them. If you don't follow the instructions, you won't pass the question.

Then there's the pace. Don't get hung up on one question. Be quite rigid with yourself about the timings. Use the specimen exam papers to prepare your timings before you go in. You don't need to do that when you sat there. You can do that well in advance. And be ruthless. When it gets to the end of your time, stop. You can always go back.

And finally, after the exam, celebrate. Find a way to do something that perhaps you've given up while you've been studying, while you've been revising. Make it a real point at the end. You won't be able to, but try and avoid doing the post-mortem. They're not helpful and they're likely to make you more stressed. So those are our five P's.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you very much, Rob and Rob. That's been a really informative and useful session. Daven, you can't take a statue of Buddha in the exam as an ID, even if it does look like you. Right. I think that's that.

We're going to show you a video now. Oh, now Mychelle's got a question.

MYCHELLE: We have two quick questions if we have time. One was, how strict are the examiners? And the second is, is it the same if you're taking the exam on your own because of a disability?

KAREN FOLEY: Now these are very, very good questions and there is an awful lot of information on your Student Hub page. Right. how strict are the examiners?

ROB MOORE: We follow the guidelines. But your specimen exam paper shows you the sorts of answers we're expecting. So use it, and the advice is all there. We don't go beyond that and we don't expect you, for example, referencing-- we don't expect full Harvard referencing on an exam paper. But if you remember a theory's name, we would quite like to see that. That's worth a mark or two. But don't stress over getting a full Harvard reference.

And the one for disability is if you have a registered disability, it is well worth talking to the student support team because for certain conditions there are some accommodations that we make. Too many for me to try and cover here, but if you've got a registered disability, talk to your student support team. And you probably need to do it now so they can make arrangements for the exam.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. So there's two things here in terms of that sort of strictness that I just wanted to unpack very, very quickly. One is the invigilators, and so they are very, very strict. They're not going to let you have all sorts of nonsense in there. And they're going to confiscate things if they're not appropriate.

But in terms of the examiners, the people marking the exam, there is a massive guidance and criteria. There is huge standardisation processes. I know you say, in your Pointless Pete role, that you have bad examiners. But actually, the process is so standardised and cross marked, and everything is considered so, so very carefully that you do get the mark that you deserve for that. So they're very, very strict in terms of that.

And really, what they want is here to answer the question that is set and not one that you would have preferred to answer instead. And the examiners-- I've done a home exam before, a long time ago, and they were absolutely amazing, the invigilators. So they'll make it really nice for you. And your student support team can answer any questions that you've got about any of that, so do make sure you connect with them on that note. I think Pete was far from pointless, Robert.

ROB MOORE: Thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you very much. It has been a really, really useful session. We'll be back for more after this short video with Lawrence now. And then we're going to take a look at what psychology tells us about memory. See you in a few minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

