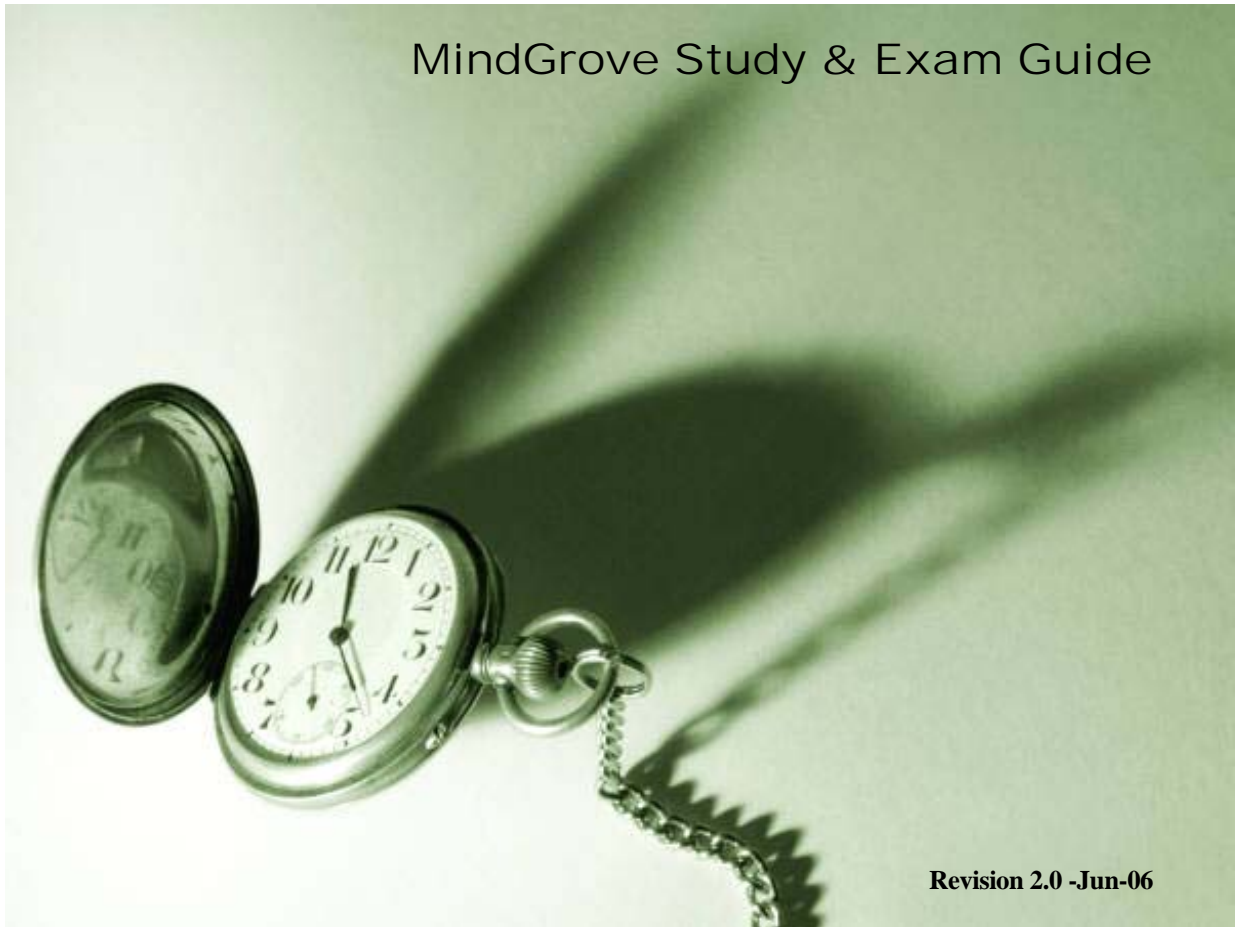


MindGrove Study & Exam Guide



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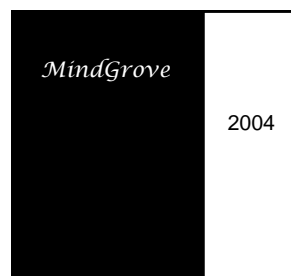
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Note: The MindGrove website has additional useful working and training materials on its resources, links and bookshop pages at www.mindgrove.co.uk

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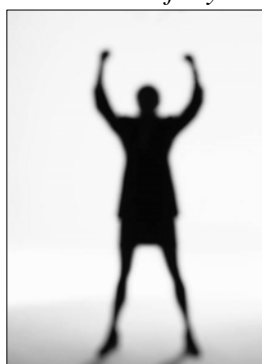
Study Guide

This guide has been compiled for you by the staff of MindGrove Ltd as a by-product of their activities in providing distance learning materials and tutor support to mature adult students sitting professional exams in the UK.

Making more out of what you've got

Following this guide won't guarantee that you will pass your exams; however, it will help you to maximise whatever potential you've got and thus significantly improve your chances of success.

Listen carefully...



The difference between passing and failing, the "just failed" zone, achieving a "Pass" grade rather than "Fail" grade, is often no more than five marks in professional exams.

So where an exam has four essay style questions, each with equal marks, then the delegate who can extract a mark and a half extra per question is the candidate who will just scrape through and pass compared to a student with identical knowledge who fails because they don't maximise their marks.

The more questions set in the exam timeframe the less *extra* you have to squeeze out of each question in order to get an overall pass mark...

No of questions in exam	No. of extra marks per question to lift you from the just-failed ¹ zone to just passed ²
1	5
2	2.5
3	2
4	1.5
5	1

¹ Assuming a zone of five marks

² Assuming that exam script markers can only award in half-marks

The examiner...

Get the point?



It's late in the day and your examiner has already marked thirty scripts. The last batch has been delayed, he is tired, it's late, he wants to go home and his eyes and brain are fatigued.

Then he finally receives and opens your script and the first words he sees are: "It i? cruc??? ?o rec?g???e? t??t the r?sk mana?er is ??y to the organis????n".

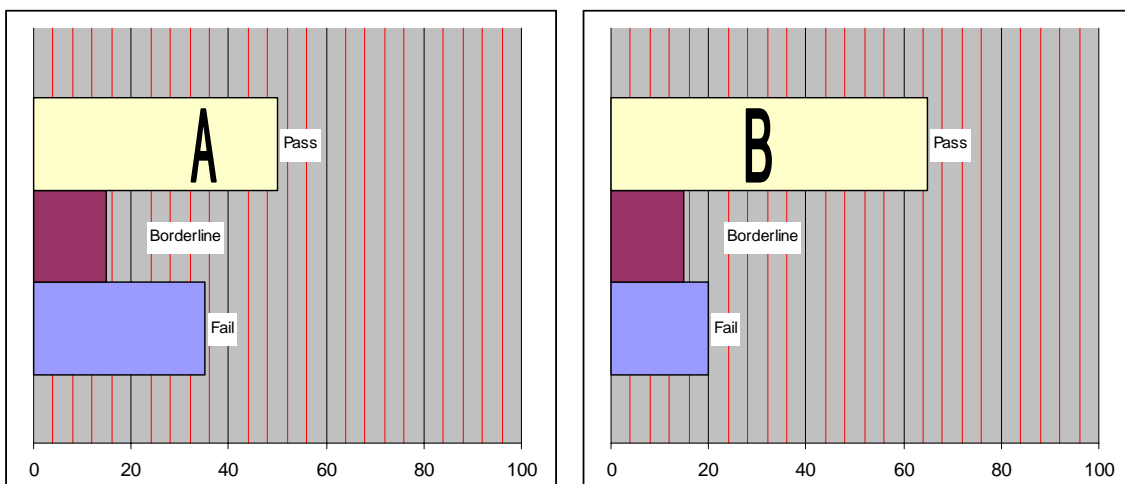
Or rather that's what he thinks he sees because *your* writing is illegible. So that's five points deducted from your answer. Now you've failed.

"Here, if you're so smart, you try reading his writing".

Pass rates...

In many professional exams the pass rates fall in the range 40-60% and "just fails" often typically account for a further 10-15% of candidates. At re-sits the ratio of passes to fails is often broadly similar. These rates are shown by the left hand graph.

The right hand graph shows what would happen if all candidates maximised their marks and those formerly in the borderline zone joined those in the pass zone.



We assume that you would rather be in group **B** that stands a better than 65% chance of passing, rather than in group **A** that stands little better than 45% chance of passing.

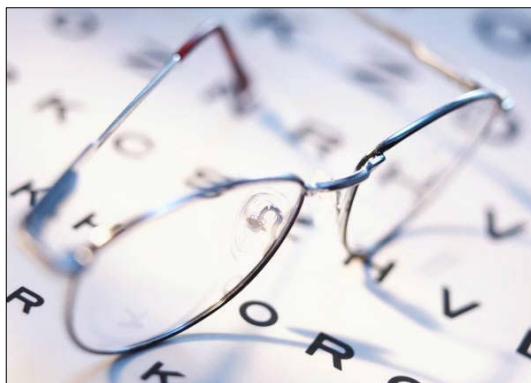
To do this means that you will have to use a strategy for maximising your marks. These guidance notes can help you do this.

Preparation

When you struggle with exam preparation, it's often because you're not clear about:

- What to revise
- How to allocate your time and which best-practice learning strategies to use

What to revise



You will find that there is always more material available than you can cover and it may not be clear what to focus on. You need a 'plan' for revision in order to concentrate your efforts on the most relevant areas.

Here are some things that you can use to make an effective plan:

- What kinds of questions will there be in the exam? What's hot and what's not? Examiners generally like to exercise the whole syllabus and normally don't repeat identical questions at adjacent exam sittings. However, some topics of study may be critical to your profession and variants on these themes might be reasonably expected in each exam³
- Questions are normally finalised about six to nine months before the date of the examination. Therefore it is unlikely that the exam will include questions set on newsworthy⁴ or topical material⁵ that occurred in the six months before an exam – but it is likely that exams may include slants on questions taken from newsworthy or topical events that occurred in the time window 12-6 months before an exam
- What areas do you know you are poor at? Would the structure of your exam allow you to drop these and focus on other areas, or, would you be better off giving heavy duty attention to these areas in order to grab some marks⁶. Areas that you find complex will often yield to repetitive efforts – just as windsurfing takes a number of attempts before you can balance on the board

You can work out the time window when questions are set

³ Pull out the last five years worth of exam papers, summarize all the questions in each syllabus area and see if you can forecast the questions which come up repeatedly within your professional domain

⁴ Think of political, economical and scientific upheavals or breakthroughs at both national and international levels

⁵ Think about: new initiatives; new regulations; new professional statements, briefing notes, advice, directives and statements of practice issued by your professional body

⁶ Generally the first part or earliest sections of questions earn the easiest marks. Often the first section of a question asks for you to do something simple like... "Describe" or "Define".

How to allocate time and use good learning strategies

Although there's no one way of time planning that will suit everyone, there are some structures that are useful. Remember, no-one manages their time perfectly and most people are poorer at time management than they are willing to admit.

Knowing this about others is valuable; accepting this about yourself is invaluable. Begin the process of working out the total amount of time you can realistically give to revision for your exam, like this:



- Map out the timeline from today through to the exam
 - Mark out all upcoming deadlines that fall on the timeline, include: personal, family, professional, work related and exam related things
 - Put in some 'slack' time for when something goes wrong – it always will
 - Allocate some "reward" time for things you find especially enjoyable and...
- ...then see what time you have left for study⁷.

Now do the reality check: if it takes you 2 hours to work through a set of notes and you have 40 sets to cover, but *only* 50 hours left to revise for the exam then...

...Use this eight-part revision optimisation strategy...

Get involved with the subject matter: it improves retention and understanding

1. Begin by blocking out some time to work with past papers. This is one of the things people often miss out, yet it is something that will make a *big* difference to your marks, even if you don't spend very long doing it. Allocate this time *close* to the date of the exam – this will not only focus your mind on what is coming up, but it will also give your brain composing practice and your wrist writing practice shortly before the event.
2. The next thing to do is work backwards from the exam to the present day and slot in the most difficult topics the longest time away from the exam. This is to ensure that you can go over these topics several times and get involved with them to give them a chance to ferment, gel and stick.
3. OK, so now go back to your deadlines and drop or re-schedule those deadlines and targets which are non-life threatening activities – you *can* repaint the shed, learn how to fly and have your legs waxed after the exam!
4. Next fill in the middle time zone with the topics which you forecast are hot and those which are critical to your profession. Rearrange "reward" times to spread them around intensive study periods connected with hot and critical topics. Having a reward for a good session of studying will help you to enjoy the studying process and associate success in study with rewards. Works for dogs, and works surprisingly well for people too.

We all fill in our time with the trivial

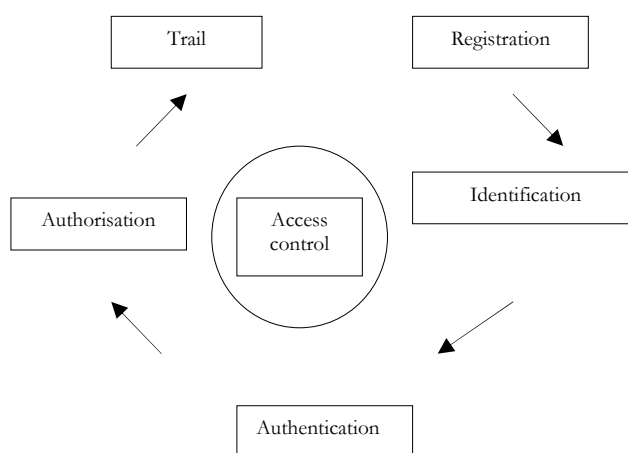
Reward yourself for getting involved with the subject matter: it makes you feel good and improves your confidence

⁷ You know it will be too little – it always is! And if only you'd started preparation in January rather than now in October, as you'd always intended, you wouldn't be in this fix now, would you?

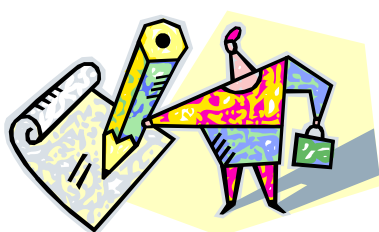
Get involved with the subject matter: active learning works

5. Each day set aside some time, say thirty minutes for diagramming, drawing, writing and listing. Use this period to summarize critical subjects and get involved in them as you draw out mind-maps, pictures or lists⁸.
6. Whilst you are diagramming and drawing play some music that you like, but is non-intrusive⁹, and have a scent in the air that you like¹⁰; both of these techniques may help recall¹¹.
7. Make your drawings simple, memorable and generically useful in as many situations as possible. Here for example is a diagram that represents any process whereby we register an entity and then subsequently to re-prove the identity and grant an authority based on that identity. This would apply to club memberships, physical security access to buildings, software based access, library schemes etc. etc.

Diagram the subject matter: it significantly improves understanding



Games make learning less of a chore



8. Finally set aside daily time for skim reading. Force yourself to read critical materials as fast as possible. *Turn this into a game.* Get a pencil and run it left to right underneath the text. At the end of each sentence, like an old fashioned typewriter, bring the pencil smartly to the beginning of the next line. Never go back to a previous line, always push forward. Force yourself to skim read the text at the same speed as you can drag the pencil. With a small amount of practice you will be able to read at about four times your normal reading speed. Do this with materials with which you are already familiar. This repetition will help to ensure that your long-term memory has stored critical facts and concepts.

⁸ Use colours, symbols, highlighter pens and other graphic devices to lift out key contexts and ideas

⁹ By this we mean the music must complement and not displace your study mood. Tests have shown that classical music and music without lyrics is generally better suited to this task.

¹⁰ Could be a baking smell such as fruit-cake, citrus, floral tints, vanilla pods, the smell of pine or cedar wood etc. You are looking for a scent that is pleasant but not dominant.

¹¹ One student squeezed a small drop of lemon on the back of his hand before going into an exam; it helped him recall those things that he had memorized in a room that smelled of lemons that he used to revise in. This is using the very familiar notion of the power of odours to evoke past memories.

Five good methods of getting deeply involved with subject matter

Active revision works wonders for maximising your marks

Revising actively¹² implies making a real effort to understand what you are learning, rather than simply memorising by rote. You are much more likely to retain detailed information if it is linked to an underlying understanding.

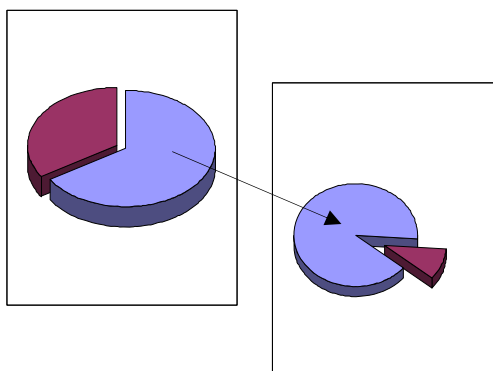
Here are some suggestions you might like to try:

Being able to quote an example in an exam is worth marks as it shows you understand the link between the subject and the real world

- Always relating what you are learning to ‘real-life’ situations. Then you will be in a position in the exam to quote an example. *For instance: “Reputational risk occurs when an organisation does something badly that exposes them to the public gaze at the same time. For example, the pension mis-selling scandals of the ‘90s badly damaged the reputations, and share value, of those organisations that were exposed as being culpable”*

Generic abstraction of ideas is a remarkably powerful way of gaining marks by making an apparently intractable question more user friendly

- Thinking how the solution to one problem may be generically adapted to help you solve others – for example, the access control diagram shown earlier
- Creating a diagram or chart to represent a powerful topic abstracted from a set of narrative text. For example: “By 2004 almost two thirds of the world’s sub-Saharan population existed below the poverty level, and the latest survey shows that of these only one in ten has access to fresh water



Many questions start out by asking for pros and cons

- Looking for similarities where the text is describing differences and looking for points against an argument where the text is providing points for. Many questions in examinations ask you for the pros and cons of a situation; get used to doing this as a matter of course. If you have a partner argue the points for with them arguing the points against (take care, don’t get too heated up!).

Learn by looking and absorbing – put your magazines and journals in easy to spot places as a visual reinforcement

- Improving the learning and storing process by comparing what you are learning with the media: TV, the press, professional magazines and journal articles. Check out learning programmes such as the BBC’s learning zone (runs between 2am and 6am on BBC2) and record relevant topics for playback while you eat your evening meal the following night. Different viewpoints will add variety and richness to your learning and improve your exam responses.

¹² Many studies have shown that active involvement as described throughout these sections of these notes vastly improves recall and understanding

Procrastination

You've got the study plan and method but can't get going?

Procrastination is a problem for everyone from time to time. But if you find you're putting things off a lot and that it's really affecting your life, then it's time to do something about it. Start by taking this test...

Factor	It's me (☹) it's not me (☺). Tick the correct answer	
Problems with time management	☹	☺
Feeling overwhelmed	☹	☺
Worry about failure to meet your preferred standard of success	☹	☺
All or nothing anxious thinking – any setback is felt as a catastrophe	☹	☺
Being bored or disliking subjects that begin to feel irrelevant	☹	☺
Avoiding things which are intellectually difficult	☹	☺

...if you've recorded more than two ☹s, then congratulations you're like the rest of us; and, like the rest of us, you need to take corrective action ...

Top suggestions for dealing with procrastination:

Its more difficult to put off work if you have a plan

- Use the time management scheme described earlier to get a better grip on time and learning – remember it has built in rewards, and a good chance of success
- Accept you will have to do the task; and tell as many other people as possible that you are doing it¹³

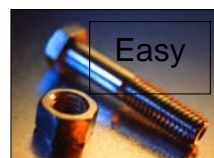
¹³ Publically committing to taking action is a very powerful inducement to doing it!

If you change the way you think it is more likely that you will change the way you behave – transforming thoughts

- Change the everyday language you use in conversation to describe the task of studying. Change your terminology from “I have to study” to “I’ve decided to study” and from “I can’t study” to “I’ve decided not to pass”

That’s the truth of it. You will also feel better choosing to study of your own free adult will, than being forced (have) to study like a child

- Break down tasks into manageable bits – a small part of a large complex task doesn’t seem so bad and most students tend to take on too much at a time



Set small goals, *and* have regular breaks.

Put limits on a task, decide it’s *only* going to take a certain amount of time, or you’re only going to cover a fraction of the material.

Treats are a necessary part of study

Give yourself treats as you go along; eat cake if necessary, you can always lose calories after the event. Do something to reward yourself, even if it’s small

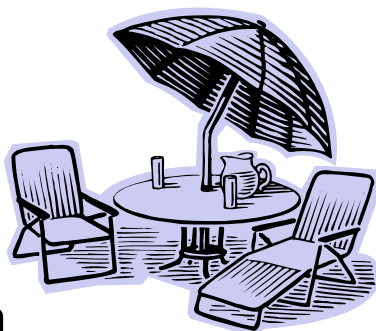
- Procrastination is often connected to anxieties about the quality of the work. Producing nothing in the exam guarantees failure; producing something and maximizing your marks may get you through. Once you are through you can get on with your life
- Take mini-breaks every few page of study: this allows short term memory to be organised into longer term memory and linkages between facts to be created¹⁴ refreshing your mind and aiding concentration. It’s easier to contemplate working when you know you’ll have regular interruptions
- Anxiety is often the reason why you start daydreaming when you sit down to study. So set aside some time to “professionally worry” about the matter. This will help to relieve immediate tension as you will *know* that you have set aside a proper period to actively deal with the problem
- Some people are morning people and some are afternoon people — do tasks that need most concentration when you are at your most able mentally and physically. Ensure your environment is comfortable without too many distractions. Put objects related to your study, such as diagrams, around your study area and around your home. You can then benefit from “accidental” revision every time you pass a familiar object.

Your mind needs breaks to consolidate and organise facts

Problems must be dealt with so set aside time to deal with them

Work on your studies when your mind is most alert

¹⁴ Studies show that we can remember only about seven facts in any one sitting, as the eighth fact comes in the oldest (1st fact) gets displaced. Taking a break maximises the possibility of storage of knowledge taking place before any vital data gets displaced from short term memory.



Relaxation

If even the thought of beginning work makes you anxious, try this relaxation exercise sitting in your chair before starting.

A simple but effective relaxation exercise in your chair

Sit with your feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed, your arms comfortably supported on your lap. Let your shoulders drop and move apart. Allow yourself to sense then receive the support of the chair and the floor.

Close your eyes. Listen to the sounds you can hear outside the room, and to sounds inside the room. Listen to your breath moving in and out. Without forcing, take a deeper breath so that your stomach fills out like a balloon. Exhale slowly and completely. Repeat gently six times, and then return to normal breathing.

Again listen to the sounds you can hear in the room and sounds from outside the room. Start to gently move finger and toes, do any other moving and stretching that feels good and when you feel ready, open your eyes.

Done discretely this might also help you within the exam room to reduce stress and assist concentration.

Going out is good for relaxation too

Find time to take moderate exercise such as:

- Brisk walking or jogging
- Taking a dog to a park
- Swimming
- Playing with your children
- Cycling
- Going to a gym

You need the combination of getting out of your surroundings *and* taking exercise – it will help you feel less cooped up and you will sleep better.

Exercise and diet can also make a contribution

Consider also your intake of substances such as alcohol, nicotine and caffeine; a slight reduction in any of these might result in more rewarding sleep patterns without creating a craving.

Consider also in the run up to the exam eating less in the evening than you would normally do. For most people going to bed slightly hungry generally results in a better night's sleep.

Rumination



Do you have any repeating thoughts or disabling thoughts or beliefs? At times of stress, such as exams, we often increase our anxiety state through rumination, e.g. “Other people always do better than me”. These thoughts can create a vicious circle of increasing anxiety and damage our potential for study, or even worse, ruin our exam day.

You may recognise some of the following thoughts and /or have others of your own to add:

- It will be catastrophic if I don't do well in my exam
- Everyone else seems better organised
- It's all too late, there's nothing I can do about it now.

Challenging disabling beliefs

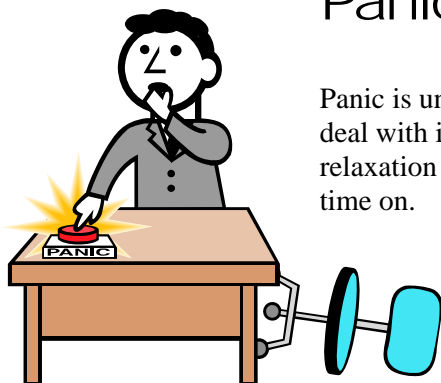
Support yourself during times of stress and anxiety by using our time management ideas, by relaxation and by talking to yourself in an affirming and positive way.

The following ideas may be useful to help you to create your own supportive statements:

- I find exams stressful and I would be rather odd if I didn't
- Being a bit anxious is natural and is OK because it is helping me to stay alert and get on with my revision
- There are practical ways I can deal with anxiety through relaxation, reward and a structured programme of activities
- I'll do better in the exam if I give myself proper breaks and allow my mind to refresh and re-order data and linkages
- My partner, friends and colleagues say I'm good enough and they are a better judge of my character than me at this time

There is good evidence that repeated re-affirmation of positive statements can help significantly reduce your chances of dwelling on negative thoughts. Try it for yourself at the beginning of each day.

Panic



Panic is unpleasant, frightening and interferes with effective work. The ideal way to deal with it involves preparation well in advance. Exercise, learning to use relaxation and eating sensibly all help and are worth spending some of your precious time on.

At some time or other most people experience panic and when this happens we notice the change, we experience symptoms like:

- We feel sick
- Hands are sweaty and we tremble
- We are breathing quickly and shallowly
- Our memory has been “wiped”

Reasonable anxiety and stress

Good stress helps us to concentrate and focus

We need a *certain* amount of stress to make us embark on tasks like studying in order to perform well. Most people get a “buzz” from the anticipation of tackling difficult goals. But, that alert, excited feeling disappears and is replaced by anxiety, panic or depression if the task feels overwhelming or if we can’t see the point of what we are doing.

Too much stress makes us unproductive

Ideally, we should explore ideas for avoiding and dealing with anxiety before we get into an impossibly tense situation¹⁵. However, despite our best intentions, we often don’t prepare well and end up in an elevated stress state. Try these ideas to help deal with stressful feelings if they occur:

- First acknowledge that you are stressed and that through this recognition you are now going to choose a solution that reduces your tension
- If you think panic is starting, allow yourself a few minutes to deal with it. You probably feel tense, so try out our breathing technique to calm down. You won’t be throwing away time by doing this as you won’t be able to work effectively if you are too stressed

¹⁵ And one sensible stress reducing idea would be to take the day off before the exam to do some drawing, diagramming and skim reading only (no new materials) and take a trip out that involves exercise. Better still just take the trip out and summarize and organize things in your mind.

- Try to locate the locus of anxiety. Is there a different way of approaching the problem? If you are completely stuck, in a study area it might be worthwhile leaving that area and going into a fresh area deferring to planning out later how extra assistance might be brought to bear on the difficult area¹⁶. Alternatively if you have colleagues or student friends who are studying in the same area at the same time as you pick up the phone and talk through the area with them
- If you are still tense then get into some lightweight clothing and exercise vigorously for ten to fifteen minutes¹⁷. You must do this to the point where you get out of breath and your heart races. In doing so you will be burning up some of the adrenaline that accompanies stress allowing you to fall back to a more normal state
- If the tension is to do with a non-study matter then set a time, now before you go any further, to deal with the matter so that you know it is going to be dealt with properly

If the tension is to do with no preparation so far, then go back to our planning notes and set up a plan, now.

A plan of any kind is better than panic. Even if you only have one week left before the exam, you still have time to focus on past exam papers and to concentrate on a few key things that seem most likely to come up.

¹⁶ For example: making a trip to a public library, doing research on the internet, calling a friend or colleague.

¹⁷ Subject of course to the fact that you are in otherwise normal health!!!

Sitting the exam

A surprisingly high number of students lose marks through poor exam technique, rather than what they know. These suggestions will improve most examinees performances.

Rule 0: Do quality assurance throughout the sitting

1. Start off the exam by taking time to settle down and look through the paper carefully – practice your relaxation technique whilst doing so
2. Taking care to read questions right through before you choose; perhaps the second part of the question asks for something you don't know about and you'd be better off making another choice
- Boost your confidence* 3. Start with the easiest question to settle you down¹⁸, or, getting the hardest question out of the way first if you want a sense of achievement
4. Take care to answer the right number of questions and to share out your time effectively between them, according to the number of marks they are worth.
- This is important* 5. Remember that it's almost always easier to get the first 50% of the marks for each question than to get the remaining 50%. *This means it's usually a bad idea to overplay one question in the hope that your marks on this will be so high that they pull the average for your other questions up*
6. Leave some time at the end of the exam so that you can check your answers over. Checking for obvious errors will save you marks

Rule 1: Don't throw away marks through poor technique. No matter how tolerant your script marker; if your script is illegible or ineptly written you will irritate your examiner and throw away part of your potential.

1. Ensure that you spell correctly and be certain that you can spell correctly the key words that are used in your discipline. A script marker will be less than impressed if you cannot spell the words that should have become second nature to you, as part of your professional studies.
2. Ensure that your use of grammar is reasonably correct and avoid:
 - a. The unnecessary capitalisation of words – use internal auditor rather than Internal Auditor;
 - b. The use of inappropriate construction – a risk is better described as 'significant' rather than 'bad';
 - c. The overuse of 'management speak' – phrases like 'buy-in', 'sea-change' and 'brain-dump' – can create an impression of triviality;

¹⁸ This works well for the majority of candidates

- d. The wrong usage of frequently used words such as: ‘affect’ and ‘effect’; ‘insure, assure and ensure’.
 - e. Badly punctuated or non-punctuated sentences. Make sure you know the correct usage of key punctuation marks such as quotes, apostrophes, commas, colons and semi-colons;
3. Ensure that you write legibly; not only at the beginning of the examination but throughout all your submitted scripts.

Rule 2: Do Contextual analysis. Many exam candidates write great answers but unfortunately not to the question asked. This is how to score zero marks on the question.

1. Read through all the questions in the paper and make a first selection from those questions that seem most familiar to you then,
2. Read candidate selected questions twice¹⁹ before attempting an answer and ask yourself these questions:
 - a. Can I underline the words in the question that stress the core context of the question – e.g. write a **report** to **management** that **describes** the **risks** that arise in **contracts** in the **construction industry**.
 - b. Can the question be answered in more than one way according to how I interpret the words? If so:
 - i. what is the most likely answer – which possibility seems closest to that I have been reading about in my studies
 - ii. is there a key word, phrase or statement earlier in the question that sets the correct context and eliminates one of the possibilities
 - iii. is there a prior part to the question that sets the context for this part of the question: e.g. Part A asks you to define the meaning of risk management Part B asks you to analyse a situation for inherent risk and to propose solutions for dealing with the risk. It should be clear to you that your Part B answer needs to be set in the framework of risk management and not an arbitrary structure.

¹⁹ This is to help ensure that you don’t mis-read the question

3. If now certain about your questions create an answer plan for your selected questions, spend two or three minutes doing this for each²⁰. Use them to frame your answer and as a quality check list to ensure that all parts of the answer have been brought into play.
 - a. Label the plan as an answer plan and include it at the end of your answer. If the examiner sees it and you have run out of time then you may be given the benefit of the doubt in marginal situations.
4. With multi-part questions always start each part on a new answer sheet, that way you will have some space left in which to put additional information
5. Ensure that you format your response in the manner asked, for example:
 - a. If you are asked to compare the advantages and disadvantages then make sure that you cite both advantages and disadvantages
 - b. If you are asked to draft a report then make sure that your answer reads like a report
 - c. If you are asked to summarize a situation then make sure that your answer is concise and precise
 - d. If you are asked to analyse a situation and make a recommendation then make sure that your analysis cogently and accurately leads and links to your proposed solution
6. Ensure that you understand the distribution of marks between the parts of multipart questions and apportion your time and energy appropriately:
 - a. For example: Part A: “define blah, blah, blah...” (5 marks); Part B: “describe appropriate actions blah, blah, blah...” (20 marks). Here approximately four fifths of your effort should be devoted to Part B, and one fifth of your effort to Part A. The maximum marks you can get for Part A is 5, and even if you write an award winning essay about Part A you can still only receive 5 marks for it.
7. Many multi-part questions have linked parts and it would be wise and appropriate to ensure that your answers reflect this linkage:
 - a. E.g. Part A: “What are the advantages and disadvantages of packaged software compared to custom software”; Part B: “How would you advise management to go about selecting an appropriate software accounting system”. In this question it is important to bring forward the knowledge demonstrated in the first part of the question to the solution proposed to the second part of the question.

Rule 3: Do Understand the Psychology of good Presentation. Given two scripts with the same overall script content it is generally true to say that the best presentation of that content yields the higher mark.

²⁰ Most people do answer plans in-line with answering the questions rather than doing them all upfront before beginning their answers

Look at this display of information. It is very dense and it makes for difficult reading. Imagine as a script marker that you have to read it.

As a pilot scheme, PART has been watched by a variety of organisations, including the Treasury. If our success continues at this rate, we will be seen as an ideal model for other lending schemes throughout the U K. Already we have had enquiries from London and Quadrant, which recently opened its offices; we have had calls from Scotland, Liverpool, Plymouth, and Reading. All over Britain! As a pilot scheme, PART has been watched by a variety of organisations, including the Treasury. If our success continues at this rate, we will be seen as an ideal model for other lending schemes throughout the U K. Already we have had enquiries from London and Quadrant, which recently opened its offices; we have had calls from Scotland, Liverpool, Plymouth, and Reading. All over Britain! As a pilot scheme, PART has been watched by a variety of organisations, including the Treasury. If our success continues at this rate, we will be seen as an ideal model for other lending schemes throughout the U K. Already we have had enquiries from London and Quadrant, which recently opened its offices; we have had calls from Scotland, Liverpool, Plymouth, and Reading. All over Britain!

Now look at this second example; although it is exactly the same text and contains the same content the layout is more relaxing to read, and therefore conveys a better impression.

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Rule 4: Follow the rules set by your professional institution or exam board

Remember these next six points, they create an impression of you and will get you into trouble if you don't deal with them:

1. All reports like all stories need conclusions – don't leave your script marker hanging over the outcome!
2. Don't write words if you are asked to "diagram" – the examiner will conclude that you cannot even follow simple instructions
3. Make sure you respond to contextual words as intended... here is a list of the commonest...

Account for.....	Give the reason for something or give evidence to support a statement. Do not confuse with 'give an account of' which is really asking for description.
Analyse.....	Examine and explain the relationships between various parts of a topic.
Argue.....	Use evidence to prove or disprove a point of view. Set it out logically and try to disprove other points of view.
Assess.....	Use evidence to estimate the value or importance of something
Comment on.....	A very commonly used 'coverall' phrase which is rather vague. The person who sets the question probably really wants you to analyse or assess.
Compare.....	Concentrate on those aspects which two or more things have in common although it would be wise to deal with any differences as well.
Contrast.....	Concentrate on the differences - but do mention any similarities.
Criticise.....	Try to find fault with the value of something or the truth of a statement. You must state the evidence upon which you base your judgement.
Define.....	State precisely the meaning of something
Describe.....	Relate what something looks (or sounds, feels, smells) like, how a sequence of events happened or what are the main characteristics of a topic.
Discuss.....	Another word open to various interpretations - similar to 'comment on' but you are usually expected to write a logical argument about the subject.

Evaluate.....	This is similar to 'assess' but, in this case, you should be weighing up the performance of something which has already happened.
Explain.....	Relate how things work, how something happened or give reasons for certain actions.
How far . . . To what extent.	These phrases invite you to assess a situation or the truth of statement.
Identify.....	Single out the main features of something.
Illustrate.....	You are required to give examples, statistics, diagrams, sketches, etc. to support your statements.
Indicate.....	Point out the main features of something (may be used instead of 'identify').
Justify.....	State valid evidence for accepting a statement or conclusion (similar to 'argue').
List.....	An item-by-item record of relevant items. This would normally be in note form without any need to describe - but do check if you are unsure.
Outline.....	Point out the main features of a topic or sequence of events.
Prove.....	Establish the truth of something by offering indisputable evidence or a logical sequence of steps or statements that establishes the truth.
Relate.....	Depending upon the working of the question, this means either give an account of how things happened or compare and contrast.
Review.....	Look back on or survey a topic and estimate its value (may be used instead of 'evaluate').
State.....	Write down the main points of something.
Summarize.....	Give the main points of an idea or argument, leaving out all the unnecessary detail.

4. Make sure you've read the guide to examinations provided by your examination board, and follow its requirements to the letter
5. Remember that your exam script may be broken up into parts to be marked by different markers – so treat each complete question as a separate exam paper
6. Ensure that your candidate number (and name only **if** asked for) should be clearly marked on all pages of your submission

Post exam

Now give yourself a break and get back your life. Don't ruminate or compare notes excessively with other candidates. What's done is done and as long as you've given the exam your best shot – by maximising what you knew – then no-one can complain.

One last thing

From all of us at MindGrove we wish you all, whoever you are – wherever you are, good fortune and the best of good luck.

And if you have any suggestions or tips to add, please let us know. We will include them at the next revision of this document, and of course, acknowledge your contribution.

The Directors of MindGrove Limited – October 2004.

