University lecturers share 'Grade-boosting' revision tips for exams

Wednesday 20 May, 2015

New data reveal the shocking plight of UK University students failing to cope with exams. However, a no-nonsense, four-point revision strategy may well be the Holy Grail to tackle the exam blues.

Last year, nearly 83.4% of UK University students who looked for help and guidance before exams indicated that they suffered from mental stress. Inadequate preparation (55%), inability to go through an overwhelming amount of information (32%), and poor revision techniques or other personal reasons (13%) led to such stress. This data obtained from 3611 students studying in 58 Universities across the UK was shared by PhD Tutors, a global education consultancy. All students also indicated that they were unable to find adequate support and guidance to cope with the exams, and about three percent considered discontinuing their studies**.**

There is no doubt that students today face more competition and pressure than any generation before! So, the question is, how much help and support is currently available for students and how effective is it? Well, last week some Universities and Students Unions were helping students beat exam stress with inflatable assault courses, back massages and puppies 1, 2! But will these also boost grades? We don't know yet. So, broadly speaking, as students indicated, there are ample stereotypical suggestions out there, but these are often confusing or impractical.

To make revision really 'efficacious', a practical set of strategies gleaned from insights of UK university lecturers is now available for students. These may very well be the winning strategies for students preparing for their May-June exams!

1. Strategise: learn; recall; apply

Maxime Morariu-Patrichi, a PhD student at Imperial College London explained that "students always struggle with preparing for multiple exams in different areas and dealing with a high volume of lecture material and tutorials". So, for different types of exams, different strategies are needed.

Identify key topics, facts, figures and examples that can be used to answer open book exams. A sheet summarising such information can be used during the exam rather than rummaging through books. However, for closed book exams, don't spend all the time in learning the topics! Recapitulation is the secret to success – using hints, names, colours, shapes, and places to brain-tag facts and figures is unbeatable. Finally, applying the knowledge to answer questions or solve problems is indispensible to boost confidence.

2. Manage: identify; prioritise; review; be flexible

Identify relevant past papers, lectures, and hints from the lecturers and tutors that are important for the exams. Prioritise these topics; always practice and revise difficult topics first.

"Be smart and ask the lecturer to provide feedback on your mock answers from past papers. You will greatly improve how you approach the real exam questions", said Dr. Alessandro Giudici, Lecturer at Cass Business School.

Also, set a schedule and realistic milestones of progress, but understandably progress can be slower than expected. So review the performance every few days and modify schedules if needed.

3. Practice: research; engage; review

If support is needed, don't be shy about seeking guidance or just have a casual chat with people who have 'been there, done that'! Look around for the right kind of guidance; be it from friends, family, lecturers or tutors. Do this well in advance. After all, specialist guidance and practice is key. "Prepare all possible topics, full structured answers for possible questions and always include relevant real-world examples", suggested Joana Malato who lectures at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

As advised by Dr. Anthony Basel, External Examiner at Oxford University, "before you start writing, be sure you have read every question. Sometimes the next question can give insight into what they are looking for in a previous question. Prioritise. Check the value of each question. If your exam has a time

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limit be sure to do the questions that have the best return on your investment!".

4. Breathe: eat; rest; play

"Take regular breaks. Walk briskly for ten minutes. You'll come back to revision refreshed and better able to concentrate", advised Dr. Victoria Tischler, a leading Psychologist and BBC presenter.

So, don't snack to live or hibernate! Sleep well and eat small healthy meals throughout the day, at set times – this will increase productivity. Keep in touch with friends and colleagues, and briefly check social media or news updates but avoid overindulgence, for sure.

About

PhD Tutors is a global education consultancy that defines the gold standard of specialist guidance in higher education, and professional development. Services include personalised academic support and career guidance to students from Pre-University to PhD level, across all disciplines, subjects and languages. All services are provided in accordance with the ethical guidelines of UK schools, colleges and universities. PhD Tutors also works with government and private organisations on multidisciplinary projects. Established by doctorates from University College London, Oxford University, Cambridge University, and Kings College London, PhD Tutors is a growing network of over 900 lecturers, Professors and researchers from UCL, LBS, LSE, Oxford and Cambridge, and professionals from RBS, Accenture and Pfizer, to name a few.

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