



mind mapping classes

FOCUS perseverance

LECTURES AMBITION

TIME MANAGEMENT peer coaching

self-knowledge CHALLENGE

# STUDYING SUCCESSFULLY

self-discipline persistence context

remembering INDEPENDENCE CRITICAL THINKING

flexible thinking EFFECTIVENESS

learning styles repetitions

making connections exams

## How do you deal with exam stress?

**Stress is part of taking exams, just as it is part of all difficult things that you need to do in life.**

**Everyone who has an exam coming up will, therefore, also feel tense. A little bit of stress is also necessary to be able to perform as well as possible. However, if the tension rises too high, it will hinder you,**

### Recognising stress

How do you know now if you are only experiencing 'healthy tension', or is you are stressed? There are a number of symptoms that people under too much stress can suffer from: tiredness, anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, concentration problems, blackouts and physical complaints, such as headaches and stomach aches. Not a pleasant list! Fortunately, you can largely prevent all of these things. Below, we will give a number of tips to limit stress before, during and after your exam.

### Before the exam

It is important to be properly informed about the *requirements* that you need to fulfil. You will then know where you need to work towards. These can mostly be found in the study guide. Ask your lecturer, mentor or study adviser for clarification when something is unclear to you.

Prepare yourself well for the exam. You can't do that in one week or one day, but during the entire lecture cycle. You should, therefore, make a realistic *study plan* and keep to that as much as possible. Don't forget to include breaks in your planning. These enable you to replenish your energy. You should also plan in some reserve time. You will not always succeed in studying as intended. Good preparation also includes ensuring there is sufficient relaxation. A relaxed feeling ensures that you will be able to

take in more material and with greater efficiency .

**Good preparation helps greatly in combating exam stress. Know which requirements you need to fulfil and plan in enough time to learn for the exam.**

Sometimes, people don't dare to start studying, because they strongly believe that it's not going to be successful. Such thoughts lead to procrastination, as a result of which you will indeed not succeed. That person can then say in retrospect: "I didn't pass, but I didn't actually do that much". That is a form of self-protection that works in the short-term, but will not work out well in the long-term. Try not to let such thoughts influence your behaviour. Instead, say to yourself: "I am scared that it will not be successful, but I'm going to do my best anyway".

Set *priorities*: what do I need to do today and what can you possible put off until later? Try not to complete an assignment in one go. Keep in mind that every assignment has various phases. Plan working on the assignment analogous to these phases. Give yourself the time to learn. Nobody knows the material after reading it once. Lots of repetition is necessary for that. Don't be a perfectionist. It doesn't have to be perfect. Go for 'good enough' wherever possible. You also don't need to know everything to pass an exam.

### Student Services

Student Psychologists' Office - Student Careers Centre - Student Counsellors  
Student Service Desk - Office of International Student Affairs

[www.uva.nl/studyingsuccessfully](http://www.uva.nl/studyingsuccessfully)



mind mapping classes

FOCUS perseverance

LECTURES AMBITION

TIME MANAGEMENT peer coaching

self-knowledge CHALLENGE

# STUDYING SUCCESSFULLY

self-discipline persistence context

remembering INDEPENDENCE CRITICAL THINKING

flexible thinking EFFECTIVENESS

learning styles repetitions

making connections exams

## Shortly before the exam

Make sure you register in time and that you know what you need to bring. Don't study through the night. Then you will turn up to the exam exhausted, while you actually need lots of energy. Do something fun instead the night before, something which makes you feel relaxed. That will enable you to perform better. Consider a marathon runner, who also doesn't run a marathon the day before the race. Make sure you know where you have to be and that you leave home with lots of time to spare. Avoid contact with fellow students who are nervous.

## During the exam

Organise your table so that it gives a feeling of calm. Take a few deep breaths and open the exam paper. First, take the opportunity to read all the questions and decide per question how much time you think that you need approximately. Begin with the questions which you feel most confident about. Leave time at the end to check your answers. Take a break now and again, and relax a minute. Pay as little attention as possible to obstructive thoughts like "I can't do it" or "I'm not going to make it". Because you will then be focusing on yourself instead of the exam, while the latter is the task at hand. It sometimes helps to put those thoughts down on paper and to say to yourself: "Now, back to the exam".

A blackout is nothing more than being temporarily unable to access your knowledge. You have probably experienced that you are unable to remember a name sometimes. The harder and more frenetically you search, the less you remember. When you are actually no longer thinking about it, it comes to you all of a sudden. This is how you can best react to a blackout: do something else for a minute, look around you briefly, drink something quickly, take a few deep breaths and think of something else. Forget about the question and go to the next one. Go back to the question again and

consider what you know without focusing on everything you don't know. Give your thinking process enough time.

**A blackout is nothing more than being temporarily unable to access your knowledge. Stay calm, think of something else briefly. There's a big chance that the answer will come to you all of a sudden!**

## After the exam

Take the time to rest after your efforts. The marathon runner also doesn't run a marathon the day after the race. Learn from your experience. If you failed, analyse what went wrong. Go to the subsequent discussion and ask questions. Determine what you could do better or differently the following time.

### Most important points

- A bit of stress (healthy tension!) is normal, but too much stress can hinder you.
- Proper and timely preparation helps combat stress.
- Are you having a blackout during the exam? Breathe calmly, look around you briefly and come back to the question later.

### Training courses/workshops

- *Studiestressgroep* (Study stress group)
- *Tentamenvrees* (Fear of exams)
- *Plan je Studie* (Plan your study)
- *De stapel te lijf* (Tackling the pile)
- *Studie op de Rails* (Study on track)

### Questions?

If you still have questions about exam stress, please contact the Student Psychologists' Office: 020-525 2599.

## Student Services

Student Psychologists' Office - Student Careers Centre - Student Counsellors  
Student Service Desk - Office of International Student Affairs

[www.uva.nl/studyingsuccessfully](http://www.uva.nl/studyingsuccessfully)