

**EXAMINATIONS
COURSE REVISION AND EXAMINATION TECHNIQUE**

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Introduction

The purpose of this class is simply to review some of the key ideas that should be taken into account in preparing for final examinations and sitting the examinations themselves. We are principally then concerned with examination structure, examination revision and examination technique.

COURSE REVISION

Double Purpose

The double purpose of all of the classes has been to ensure that candidates have a full professional command of all of the subjects covered and that they are capable of passing their final examinations well. For this purpose, it is necessary to focus on the core areas that will be examined in the final assessment. It is impossible to cover the whole subject area in the final examinations.

Examination Content

The overall subject matter is determined by the University syllabus. This is then developed through the course outlines and summaries provided. Within this, students should attempt to identify the core subject area that will be covered in the final examinations. Lecturers will assist with this.

Past examination papers should always be reviewed. These provide a useful review of past areas of focus and of the general scope of the subject matter covered. Students must be familiar with the general content and style, although they must never rely on these as a guarantee of future questions or formats. Lecturers should assist insofar as they are able.

Examination Structure

Most of the examinations use a three hour paper format, with ten to fifteen minute preparation time being provided at the beginning. Students will then either have to answer three or four questions within the time permitted. The question options may be further restricted, with a minimum number being completed from each part of the examination. This does not happen in all cases.

Students must familiarise themselves with the structure of the exam by referring to past papers and confirming any uncertain points with the relevant lecturer or university official. Candidates must confirm the permitted materials that they are allowed to take into the examination.

Candidates must complete the examination in the time permitted. For this purpose, they must divide the allocated time up into either three or four sections and stay within these limits insofar as possible. Students must always answer all parts of the question and all sections of the examination.

Examination Revision

Students should prepare for the examinations in a structured manner. They should initially prepare an outline of the overall subject matter to be revised for examination purposes. This may be considerably narrower than the full subject matter covered in the course (above). Students should prepare a short outline which summarises all of the main subjects to be covered with sub-outlines being prepared for each. Numbers should be used insofar as possible as these are easy to remember.

Students should prepare their revision notes in terms of what they will need for the examination rather than the structures or preferences used by lecturers or text book writers. Students must use their revision period to convert previous class outlines or text book content lists into useable structured summaries for examination purposes.

Students should generally aim to provide a structured discussion of each main subject area covered. This will essentially involve providing the examiner with an introduction, a development section and a set of final conclusions.

Course Revision and Examination Technique

(1) Introduction

The introduction may be very short in an examination situation. If this may cause the student difficulty or concern, this should simply be avoided. Where this can be used, the introduction should briefly explain the subject matter and structure of the answer to follow. This may refer to the main themes or sub-themes involved, although not necessarily.

(2) Development

If the question is problem based, the development section can be used to restate the main facts (in a structured manner), identify and explain the relevant law and then apply the law to the fact pattern given. It does not matter whether the facts or law are explained first, provided that this is included within the answer.

For essay questions, slightly more complicated structures can be used. The importance of the subject may be reviewed either in the introduction or at the beginning of the development section. Some background historical or more theoretical information may be provided in a short opening section. The issues raised and relevant law will then be explained in further detail. Relevant arguments should then be raised. This can simply be learned in terms of the advantages and disadvantages, or positive and negative aspects of each issue or possible solution. Students should, insofar as possible, be looking for solutions or reconciliations, although it may be that no final perfect answer is available. Students should not be afraid to state this if that is the case.

(3) Conclusions

The solutions arrived at in a problem question can be restated at the end, although this is not necessary. A closing section may, nevertheless, still be used to refer to possible other areas of enquiry, concern or future development. This will clearly depend on the particular questions set.

The best essay answers will pull of this together in a final set of conclusions and closing comments.

EXAMINATION TECHNIQUE

It is not possible to provide any fixed or absolute examination technique rules, although some general points of principle may be made.

(1) Structured Preparation and Answer

The key to good examination answers is structured revision and preparation pre-examination. As noted above, students should clearly identify the total subject area to be covered and then prepare structured outlines for all of the key subjects and sub-subjects concerned. Students should use this material to prepare detailed structured answers for all of the possible subject areas that may arise.

The best examination answers are essentially structured essays that students have prepared in advance and then cut and revised to deal with the particular question set in the examination. The objective is then not to learn substantial amounts of detailed text but to have structured summary arguments and outlines that can be used and revised during examination conditions. Effective preparation is one of the key elements in successful examination results.

(2) Relevant Detail

The key to a high mark is to include as much relevant detail as possible in answering the specific questions set. Whether this is a problem or essay question, the objective should be to include as much substantive detail and discussion that is possible within the limits of the specific question set.

(3) Full Authorities

It is not necessary at all colleges or in all examinations to include non-primary authorities. Students should include all primary material in their answers, with as much detail as possible. This will include statutes and other secondary legislation, as well as administrative rules and guidance, as well as relevant case law. As much detail again should be provided as possible, although this can be stated in a summary form.

One technique that some students use is to prepare extended essay outlines and then summarise the text by cutting out all additional language to create a succinct re-statement of all of the core law in the particular area. Numbers may be used and short form references (such as s for section, sch for schedule, para for paragraph and abbreviations for statutes

Course Revision and Examination Technique

(FSMA, BA87, CA85)). The objective is to include as much relevant material and detail in as short a space as possible. The best marks will often use this technique.

Where examiners like to see non-primary material, especially in more theoretical or philosophical subject areas, as much of this should, again, be provided as possible. Reference should be made to all of the main secondary text books as well as principal journal articles or other discussions or commentaries. This may also include research papers or other official or private discussion documents on the internet. Again as much relevant detail as possible should be provided.

(4) Original Analysis

Students should attempt to include as much original analysis as possible. Answers will clearly include a substantial amount of core descriptive material. This is necessary to explain the basic law that is being discussed and applied. Large parts of the answer will simply involve setting out the relevant law and re-stating the facts raised for application purposes. Where possible, students should still try to include as much original material as possible.

Originality can be developed in the structure or treatment, themes or sub-themes identified, explanation of the law used, application and analysis and final conclusions. Much of this can again be prepared in advance during the revision and preparation stages. Students should attempt to form opinions on the key issues raised. They should, in particular, be looking for problems, debates and conflicts and develop their own analysis in terms of relevant advantage and disadvantage or positive and negative aspects of the issues raised or solutions offered.

It is an important part of an effective revision process to try to develop original observations and opinions on the specific material covered as well as more general issues raised across the subject matter dealt with. Where appropriate, these should then be included into examination answers. This may be relevant in dealing with particular problems or essays, as well as in closing statements in more general questions where students can comment on larger issues.

(5) Completion

Students must answer all questions and parts of questions in the examination. Large marks can be lost for omitting particular parts of questions. Candidates must accordingly structure their allocated time carefully and stay within the time limits set for each question.

Non-English speakers must prepare draft question answers in advance under examination type conditions. It is essential that they are aware how much they can write within the permitted periods (such as 40 minutes or 1 hour). They should aim to ensure that they write as much as possible within the time available. They should not either write too much or too little.

Where students find that they are able to answer questions in shorter periods than permitted, they should leave space to come back and develop the answer later. After they have finished their full examination, they may then wish to return to earlier questions and develop their answers further.

In terms of style, headings and sub-headings are useful, although not absolutely necessary. Well structured revision notes will nevertheless use headings and sub-headings which can be easily transferred into the examination situation. Students can underline, possibly statutes or cases, although again this is not necessary. Students should generally avoid underlining other key words which may simply distract the examiner. Use of coloured pens in examinations is not recommended unless this is something that the student has developed a preference for and would feel uncomfortable not using in the final examinations.

CLOSING COMMENT

The key objective is to answer all questions in the time available. In so doing, as much relevant detail should be provided. Structured revision and examination preparation is essential.

Students should familiarise themselves with past papers and be aware of what might and might not come up in the specific examination. The objective of effective preparation is not to be surprised when the student turns over the paper. If the student has prepared all of the core subject areas properly and has followed the coursework they will have no difficulty with the final examination.

At the end, the objective is to remain calm and positive. Whatever happens, the candidate must complete their final examinations. In so doing, the objective should be to show off how much the candidate has learned. The best answers are produced when the candidate is confident and anxious to demonstrate their command over the subject matter as a whole. The very best of luck.

EXAMINATIONS

COURSE REVISION AND EXAMINATION TECHNIQUE

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Introduction

COURSE REVISION

Double Purpose Course

Examination Content

Examination Structure

Examination Revision

- (1) Introduction**
- (2) Development**
- (3) Conclusions**

EXAMINATION TECHNIQUE

- (1) Structured Preparation and Answer**
- (2) Relevant Detail**
- (3) Full Authorities**
- (4) Original Analysis**
- (5) Completion**

CLOSING COMMENT

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