

Open Book Exams

An exam where students are allowed to use their notes, text books and other resources during the exam. They test your ability to find and apply information

It requires you to:

- Learn for understanding rather than just remembering
- Understand how to find information
- Make good notes and organise materials for fast reference
- Apply the information in your sources to the questions

Some students get the wrong impression of an open book exam and think:

“I don’t need to study for my exam because the information will be right there for me to look up”

Or

“All I’ll need to do in the exam is copy the answers out of the text”

This however is **NOT TRUE**

About Open Book Exams:

- You need to study for open-book exams just as you would for any exam
- The lecturer is likely to have **higher expectations** for the quality of your answers as they know you have course materials available to draw upon
- Rather than just asking you to copy information they may ask you to **compare**, contrast, **evaluate** or apply information
- If you know your subject, you'll have a knowledge base to draw on. You will also understand how and why topics are **linked**. This will make taking the exam an easier process
- Information was adapted from The Learning Centre, University of New South Wales
Simon Fraser University UNSW Sydney

How should I prepare for the Exam?

You should learn your material as thoroughly as you would for any other exam

Find out about important things like:

- **Materials** you can take into/use during the exam
- How much time you have
- **Topic** areas the exam will cover
- How long answers should be
- If you need to **reference**
- Types of questions, essays, short answers, etc.

Preparing Notes

- Review the subject to get a good **overview**
- Work out the **main topics** that may be asked
- **Break down** each main topic into sub topics
- Write a list of all the topics you want to prepare notes for and tick them off as you complete them
- Use clear headings
- Summarise **key concepts** or information (make a list of key definitions)
- Include notes or concept maps on how topics from the course are **connected**
- Write out **references/citations** if required for your exam

Organisation

- Organise your notes so you can **locate information quickly**
- Be familiar with your materials so you don't waste valuable time searching through them during the exam
- Make brief and **legible** notes
- Organise notes by topic
- **Bookmark** useful chapters or pages (e.g. post it notes)
- Number the pages of your notes so you can create a contents page
- Prepare brief summaries e.g. in margins of texts to provide a **quick reference**
- If **formulae** will be part of your exam, put these in a separate, easily accessed place

What to keep in Mind

- During the exam there may be sufficient time to quickly **refer to materials**, but not to learn something new (how a formula works, the relationships between various course concept)
- Aim for concise, **well-supported** answers
- Know the **basic answers** and, if necessary, look up an exact formula or supporting evidence for your answers
- It is unlikely you will be asked questions that just call on you to copy information
- If you have time for **review** at the end, you may check your materials