

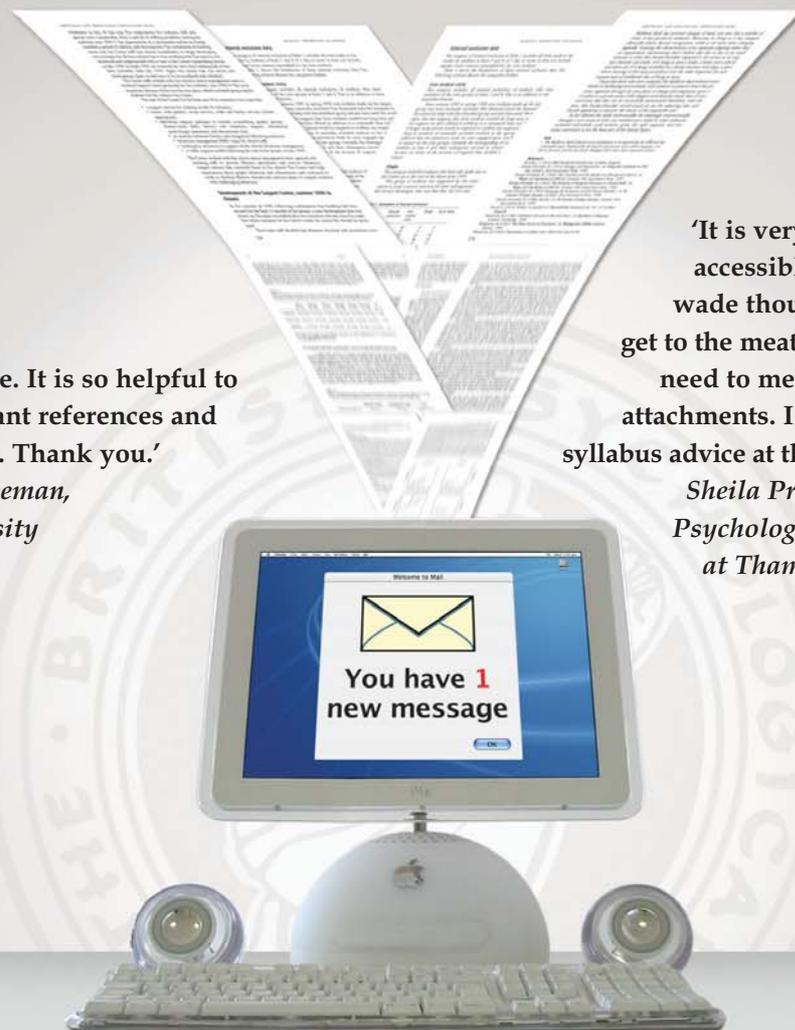
Still not signed up to the Society's Research Digest?

'Wonderful service. It is so helpful to have all the relevant references and contact points too. Thank you.'

*Professor Joan Freeman,
Middlesex University*

'It is very succinct and easily accessible; you don't need to wade through a lot of clutter to get to the meaty bits, and you don't need to mess about opening up attachments. I particularly like the syllabus advice at the end of each piece.'

*Sheila Proud, studying for the
Psychology Graduate Diploma
at Thames Valley University*



Thousands of subscribers are now receiving their free fortnightly e-mail.

In the last six months we've featured over 90 riveting experiments, dozens of useful and interactive weblinks, and mountains of handy syllabus advice.

Check out the issues you've missed at <http://lists.bps.org.uk/read/?forum=rd>, and then sign up by sending a blank e-mail to subscribe-rd@lists.bps.org.uk

Any subscription problems, questions, feedback or suggestions, then e-mail Christian Jarrett, the Digest editor, on chrber@bps.org.uk



Associate Editor: Nicola Hills

Short articles (around 600 words), news, tips, quotes, cartoons and other contributions of particular relevance to students are most welcome. Send to: Nicola Hills, c/o the Society's Leicester office. E-mail: Nicola_Hills@hotmail.com

Exams – Mark my words

BY NIGEL SHERRIFF

MANY of you will have exams looming, and you should make sure you don't waste all that revision when it comes to the big day. As a psychology examiner, I often find that whilst candidates may know their stuff, they do not always put their best foot forward in the actual exam. In a previous article I highlighted how psychological know-how can be used to help with revision (see tinyurl.com/347jg). Now let's look at some of the ways you can develop your exam technique.

Arrive with plenty of time to spare This will help you get used to your surroundings and calm down, particularly if you in a different building or area that you are not used to.

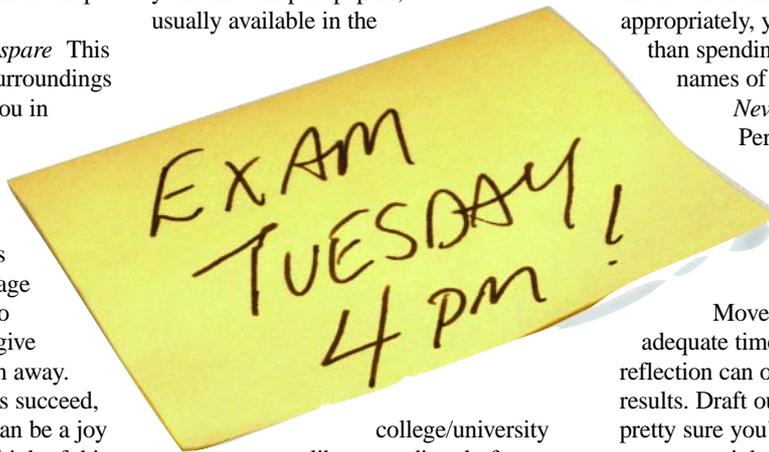
Don't panic When you enter the exam room, remember that everyone really is on your side. All examiners engage in 'positive marking': contrary to popular belief they will look to give you marks, rather than take them away. Examiners love to see candidates succeed, and a well-written exam paper can be a joy to read. You've done the work, think of this as the chance you've been waiting for to show what you can do.

Familiarise yourself with the paper structure When you start, take a good five or ten minutes to understand how the marks are allocated, and the specific topic areas. Decide which you are going to answer and start by having a go at the question you feel most comfortable with, to gain confidence.

Avoid the 'puke phenomenon' One of the most common mistakes candidates make is to 'sick up' everything they know about the general topic regardless of the question set. These answers may show candidates' detailed knowledge, but there is nothing more frustrating for an examiner than not being able to award any marks because it is all irrelevant to the question. It is very easy when under pressure to see the question you want to see, rather than what is actually there. So read the question carefully, and several times. Make sure you know what is being asked of you (for

example, what is meant by 'assess', the difference between 'describe' and 'outline', etc.) and how you are going to address it, which leads to my next point.

Plan your answers This is something that can discriminate between a good candidate and an excellent candidate. Prior to the exam, it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with past papers, usually available in the



college/university library or directly from your tutors. This can give you an invaluable insight into what the structure and style of the exam might be like. Just as importantly however, you will have a good idea of the number of marks available and the time in which you have to gain them. The 'puke phenomenon' can be greatly reduced by planning your time carefully and what you want to say in the question, before writing your answer. A few minutes preparation will not only help you to improve your overall exam performance significantly, but if you do happen to run out of time (which can happen despite meticulous planning), you might be able to gain some valuable extra marks for providing a plan for an answer that might have been!

Try to include something original Examiners have to mark a lot of papers. Try to make yours stand out by going beyond the course textbooks and including at least one bit of relevant and new research. That's why it's a good idea to

look at the odd journal when you're revising, or at least subscribe to the Society's free Research Digest service (see opposite page).

Don't get bogged down remembering names and dates of studies Demonstrating your knowledge and understanding of research is of course important, but examiners will generally not penalise you if you get the date wrong or make a spelling mistake. As long as you know the research and can discuss it appropriately, you will gain more marks than spending time obsessing over the names of the researchers.

Never leave an answer blank Perhaps obvious but nonetheless important – always write *something*. If on first glance you feel you cannot answer the question, don't panic.

Move on but make sure you leave adequate time to come back to it. Calm reflection can often bring about useful results. Draft out some ideas: even if you're pretty sure you're barking up the wrong tree, you might be mistaken and it's better than nothing.

Leave time to review your responses Silly errors are easy to make under pressure, particularly in the easier questions that you answered initially. Review the harder questions if you have the time.

Finish it and then forget it Last but by no means least, do not torture yourself after the exam by talking in detail to your friends about their responses to the questions. Some bizarre social psychological processes mean that everyone just tries to outdo each other with how awful it was and how badly they did, and if you get caught up in this it will only serve to panic you more. You may have another exam tomorrow and you will need to stay focused. Good luck!

■ *Nigel Sherriff is a psychology examiner for Edexcel and a PhD student in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.*