

Success in Studies for Adult Students (Part 4)

By Daniel Theyagu

Preparing for the Examinations

Mention the word 'examination' and even the most prepared student will experience a spine-tingling sensation. You may break into cold sweat, your mind goes blank; your gut gets queasy; your bladder is suddenly full and you may feel exhausted as you enter the examination hall.

You fear that your pen will run dry, or that your calculator will break down. You want to escape, but you can't. If you experience any or all of these symptoms appear familiar, rest assured you are perfectly normal.

Remember that an examination is just a test of your application of the knowledge that you've gathered in the academic course you undertook. The person who set the paper probably wants to find out how well verse you are in what you've learnt. Although some questions are deliberately made to be challenging, if you've done your work and revision, you are well prepared. The important thing is you should learn to be calm and focus during your examination.

When you answer examination questions you need to ensure that the answers that you give satisfy three criteria. These can be remembered by the acronym: A.C.E. This stands for Accurate, Consistent and Effective. These are the three key aspects that most examiners are looking for in the answers.

1. Accuracy

You can achieve accuracy in your answer by identifying the key issues that the question is seeking from you. Once you've been able to identify these issues you should test them with the principles and rules that you've learnt in your course pertaining to the subject matter. This will illustrate that you are aware of the nature of the question. To show your understanding, cite relevant authorities or justifications that permeate the principles that you've mentioned in your essay and if possible give examples to substantiate your answer.

2. Consistency

To achieve this, write in a clear concise manner. Learn to underline or highlight key points that you've mentioned to bring it to the attention of the marker. Keep your paragraphs short and do not go on a wild goose chase by bringing issues or concepts that are not relevant to the question. I've got a simple method that I share with my students whenever they sit for their examination. I tell them to re-read the question after every paragraph they've written. This will ensure that you do not go out of point and that you are consistently addressing the key issues of the question.

It is possible that under examination pressure that you might misunderstand the question and end up giving an answer which may be true in substance but irrelevant to the question that is asked.

3. Effectiveness

Examination markers are looking to see whether the answer you give is effective. To achieve this you need to apply the issues you've identified with the principle and

make recommendations where possible. Also you need to pay attention to the salient points the question might entail you to answer. Examiners use words like: ‘Discuss’; ‘Explain’; ‘Critically evaluate’; ‘In your view...’ and ‘Illustrate’ to give an idea of what they are expecting from the student.

When you write your answers you have to be wary of these phrases to see whether the answer that you are giving correspond to what is anticipated by the examiner. A ‘discuss’ question usually entails a situation, statement or quote from which you are expected to rationalise what that means and back it up with examples and state your views on it. Whereas an “explain” kind of question will expect you to make sense of what the situation is and show how it works. “Critically evaluate” type of questions demand from the student their own points of view and how these can be inter-related to what the question is asking. Finally “In your view...” kind of question expects you to identify the key concepts that the question suggests and to show what you think of it.

Naturally the above applies mostly to essay type of questions. If you are sitting for accounting, statistic or mathematics paper the concept is very much the same except that you may have to apply formula and certain mathematical rules to come to the appropriate answer.

On a final note, you need to really see the examination as an enjoyable process. Enter the examination hall with a positive mindset and keep yourself calm and compose. Remember if you’ve done your work, you should not fear the examination as long as you keep with the above rules.

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