



Top 10 tips for exam success in the Sciences

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High School Physics Explained

1. Don't leave blank responses.

You may not have studied enough. You may get to the end of the exam and get to a tough question that you just end up saying 'stuff it, 'Why other'.

DON'T!

Exam questions are not written to stuff you up, to take marks away from you. No they are designed to allow to show what you have learnt.

So, although you may not get full marks for a certain question, write down what you do know that may be related to the question. 1 or 2 marks in an 8 mark question is better than no mark at all.

2. Plan your long response questions.

You get to a long response question and once you read and understand the question, you think that writing immediately is the best course of action, especially when time is limited. But that often leads to brain dumping responses and responses that lack structure and logical progression.

Take the time to structure responses – intro, body and conclusions. Are there to be sub-sections? Quickly think through how you will structure it. Spending a minute or so on planning can making the writing much more fluid and your responses will be more cohesive as a result.

3. Take note of the verb used.

Questions usually start with a verb - identify, describe, explain, assess, justify – just to name a few.

Do you know what each means? It's important that you do.

Take for example the question

'Describe what happens to a car as it hits a wall.'

The response here would simply it slows down very quickly, or it accelerates in the opposite direction

But if I now modified the question to
'EXPLAIN what happens to a car as it hits a wall'

then my response would much longer. Since the word means 'show cause and effect', the response you would have to discuss the cause of the acceleration (force) and hence its effects as a result.

4. Set out your mathematical problems and don't forget units.

Many mathematic problems are worth more than a single mark for a reason. So don't just calculate answers on a calculator and write the answer down.

Two reasons

- You are less likely to make errors when the calculations are well set out
- If you do make a mistake you might still get some marks for showing good process.

Often marking criteria requires 'substituting into a correct formula', so you are more likely to get part marks if you substitute into a formula and make a mistake rearranging then if you rearrange first. So if you get a formula and you are required to substitute in the data, do this before you rearrange the formula.

And don't forget the correct units and significant figures.

5. Take note of plurals.

If a word in question is plural then that is important.

Take for example the phrase 'the effects on society and environment'

The response will likely require more than one effect for both society and environment.

6. Don't think you have to do thing sequentially.

Don't know and answer to a question? Don't waste time and move on. You may find a later question provides the inspiration to help you answer the missed question. But do make sure you go back and attempt it, don't leave it blank.

7. Take note of the amount of marks

Its fairly obvious that the more marks allocated to a question, the more detail that will be required. But don't fall in to the trap that an 8 mark question will necessarily need 8 points. Look at the amount of marks allocated and let that be a guide to the depth of response required.

8. Take note of the amount of space given

When the examination provides space for an answer, the usually amount of space will indicate the depth of response given. If its half a page of lines, then a single word answer will not suffice. Similarly, if you are given 5 lines, then don't think by writing three pages will enable you to get full marks. In fact, too much writing can show lack of succinct thinking, and you are more likely to write something that may contradict with something you have written previously.

If you plan your answer you should be able to use the space provided. Oh, and don't write in the margins if you do needs little more space, get some spare paper and make a note to say it's a continuation.

9. Take note of the key words used in the question

If the question is well written, then, key terms, that were taught in the course, will be mentioned. Where necessary, define them, then make sure you use them in your answer. Highlight them if that helps you. But don't paraphrase the question. The only takes up valuable time and reveals you may not know how to answer the question.

10. Read the question, more than once.

It's amazing how many times student will glance at a question, think what it is all about and then go into rote mode, scribbling down thoughts without actually addressing the question.

Make sure you read the question clearly, multiple times if you have to. **DO** you understand the question? Can you visualise it? Do you know what the examiner is looking for?

Make sure you take the time to read and understand the question.

And don't brain dump, writing everything you know about the topic and in fact fail to directly answer the question.