

# Using memory aids in exams

## The purpose of memory aids

An open book exam is not designed to make things easier for you!

Unlike closed book exams, which require you to recall and memorise information, an **open book exam** requires you to ***understand, apply, analyse and evaluate*** information you have learnt throughout the course.

According to Bloom's taxonomy, these are *higher order* thinking skills, and it is these skills that make open book exams a worthwhile form of assessment in your university studies.



(based on Armstrong, 2016)

## Exam preparation

Don't assume the exam will be easier, just because you can have notes with you. You should follow the same, detailed exam preparation you would for any exam, and then go one step further by creating a "memory aid" to take into the exam room. The guidance on preparing a tip sheet on the next page explains the various steps involved in exam preparation, and lists various tips and tricks you might find useful. Don't forget, Academic Learning Support also holds workshops on how to prepare for, and sit different types of exams. Information about upcoming workshops can be found on the 'Study Skills' page of the University's website.

## Preparing your memory aid

- Find out what topics will be on the exam.
- Summarise important information – lecture notes will be handy for this.
- Familiarise yourself with the main ideas of the subject.
- Organise notes under specific headings, according to topics and sub-topics.
- Keep information on your memory aid general – it should act as a prompt for detailed analysis/evaluation based on the question, and it should not form the whole of your response.
- Colour code your “memory aid” the same way you did whilst studying for your exam so that you can quickly and easily locate information on a given topic.
- Keep your notes as simple and concise as possible.
- Find out if you need to reference/cite in your examination as this will determine how much/what type of information you should include in your “memory aid”.
- Don't copy information word for word. Putting it in your own words will help you to gain a better understanding of course content, which you will need to demonstrate higher order thinking skills in the exam.
- Ensure your notes are well organised and legible!

## During the exam

- Ensure you understand the question in full. What is the focus of the question and what is the question asking you to do?
- Instead of rushing to answer, take a few minutes to consider how you could use the information at hand to best address the question and demonstrate your ability to understand, analyse and evaluate course content.

Armstrong, P. (2016). Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching: Bloom's Taxonomy. Retrieved from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>