

## In the Exam

Here are some tried and tested remedies to the 'I can't answer anything' feeling and other worrying thoughts about exams.

When you get into the exam room and sit down, the following approach can help settle your nerves:

- Take a deep breath in and a long breath out
- Breathe in again and straighten your back - as if someone were pulling a lever between your shoulder blades
- Look straight ahead at something inanimate (the wall, a picture, the clock...) and focus your mind on the positive thought 'I CAN DO this exam' as you breathe out.
- Take another deep breath in and a long breath out. Then breathe normally.

You have 10 minutes to read the paper, so do so thoroughly. If you begin to feel panicky again, repeat the focusing exercise. Panicking will stop you reading carefully, so it is important to keep yourself focused and positive. Read the whole paper once, then read it again and mark the questions you think you can answer. Then read those questions carefully - make sure you understand what is required - and select the ones you are going to answer. If you are allowed to do so, underline key words or phrases in the questions.

Decide on the order in which you'll answer the questions. It is usually best to begin with the one you feel most confident about. Think about how you will plan your time, and stick to your plan. You can divide your time equally between them - or according to the marking scheme if questions have different weighting. With essay questions, you will get more marks overall by doing three (say) average answers, than by doing two brilliant ones but leaving the third question undone!

Plan out your answer for each question as you go. If you find that thoughts or ideas about other questions come into your head, jot them down on a separate piece of paper - don't spend time thinking about them now.

Some people write out essay plans to all the questions they need to answer at the beginning, so they can add things as they occur to them while working on other answers; others take each question in order. Which method works best for you, or is

most appropriate to the format of your exams? After doing your plan, look back at the question and check you are answering the question asked - you do not get credit for a brilliant answer to a question you were not asked!

Take regular 'micro-breaks': whenever you pause at the end of writing a paragraph or stop to think for a moment, put your pen down and sit back, even if just for a moment.

If your concentration wanders or you begin to feel panicky, you could try the focusing exercise again, or use one of the following techniques to help you overcome anxious thoughts. If you are worried that you haven't got time to spare on this, remember that taking 5 or 10 minutes NOW may save you spending the rest of the exam in a state of panic.