

## PASSING EXAMS

Exams in the ADF can be a source of major stress for many trainees. Trainees can feel worried about exams for a number of reasons. Some feel worried, as passing the exam and staying in the ADF are really important to them. Others have bad memories of exams at school and lack confidence in their ability to pass. For some, it has been years since they were at school and had to work out of books, while others never studied at school and now they have to learn how to do so very quickly. Other trainees feel pressure from family members to do well in the navy or to follow in the footsteps of another family member who has been in the Defence Force. Some have a family to support and have the pressure of knowing that loved ones are relying on them. Still others know they haven't done enough preparation or even any study for the exam. No matter how worried you feel, there are a number of things that you can do to help pass exams.

### **Before the Exam**

The most important thing you can do is to prepare and start studying early for the exam. Sometimes it is hard to do this when you only have a day or two before the exam but for much of the time exams are days or weeks later. Some trainees cram for exams by studying only a few hours before an exam. Often this makes them confused and anxious and can lead to failing the exam.

Make sure you study effectively by going over your notes many times and testing yourself in different ways without looking at your notes. You need to be able to understand the work and remember it. If you don't understand the work, ask someone for help and ask before you get into difficulties. Lots of trainees find they need to ask their instructor or mates for help at some stage during their course. Many trainees are studying work that is new to them and the pace of training means that they have little time to learn it. You need to understand it not only to pass the exams but to do well.

Listen to what your instructor says will be in the exam and write this down. Make sure you know this but don't forget to cover other parts that could be in the exam too.

It is also important to keep a balanced lifestyle when you are studying so that the pressure does not get too much and affect your results.

### **In the Exam**

1. Read the instructions carefully so you know what you have to do. Ask if you are unsure.
2. Read through the exam paper during reading time, working out the best order to answer the questions in. Generally do the easy questions first to build up your confidence before you move on to the harder questions.
3. Do not miss answering questions that are worth lots of marks.
4. Read the questions carefully, underlining the key words such as "not", "never", "only" etc.
5. Don't spend too long on any one question or section if you don't understand it.
6. As soon as you can begin writing, write out any important information you are worried about forgetting.

7. Read all the options for multi-choice questions. If there is no penalty for guessing, then guess intelligently, ruling out the answers that are obviously wrong.
8. If you cannot decide on an answer, write down the answer that was your gut reaction, which is normally your first response when reading the question.
9. Don't rush through the exam as this often leads to making silly mistakes.
10. If the exam has a time limit, look at the time now and then so that you do not run out of time and end up panicking.
11. Before you leave the exam room check that you haven't missed any questions or sections, check that you have put the answers in the correct answer boxes and most importantly, check over your paper for silly mistakes that could cost you the exam.

### **How to Deal with Exam Anxiety**

It is quite common to get nervous before and during an exam. Some 'nerves' help to keep you alert and focused. It becomes a problem only when you are so worried that you cannot think clearly but there are ways to control how nervous you feel.

#### **What to do to control exam anxiety:**

- prepare well so that you are confident and ready
- think of past exams when you have done well
- mentally rehearse the exam and see yourself passing it
- have realistic expectations. Expecting to get 100% is usually unrealistic and can make you feel more anxious. Work to the best of your ability and circumstances.
- do something physical before the exam eg. push-ups, a 5 minute run, to reduce adrenalin and to help you feel more relaxed
- take a few long, deep breaths and say 'relax' to yourself
- avoid others who are panicking or who make you feel more worried
- don't panic if you can't think of the answer immediately as many tests have hard questions to test out how much trainees know

If you get a mental block in the exam, stay calm. Move on to another question that you know the answer to and then come back to the question later. If you still can't remember the answer try "brainstorming". Write down all you know about the question topic to try to jog your memory. You can also try to think of something else that is calming for you and unrelated to the exam. When you focus back on the exam you should be calmer and able to think more clearly.

### **Further Resources**

Your local library and the Defence Library Network are good places to search for additional general information on study techniques. An internet search under relevant key terms (such as "study tips") produces a number of potentially useful sites. The institution you are studying with will also have a range of resources for students. Contact the institution's Student Services Department for more information. Alternatively, to address more specific study concerns, you may prefer to consult your regional Psychology Support Section or DCO.