

It's time to Practise, Practise, Practise, and then Practise some more ...

In the second article in this series, **Liz Kemp** focuses on revision techniques in the countdown to the CILEx January 2018 examinations.



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In the first article in the series, I talked about the four Ps, ie, to plan, practise, and prepare to ensure that you pass your examinations in January (see 'Get ready to Plan, Practise, Prepare, and ... Pass your examinations', (2017) November CILExJ pp48–49). I focused on the planning stage, and what you could do to start your 'training' for the big event. Do not panic if you have not started this yet; there is still time and any work you do now will pay off when you get to your exams. So, go back and review the ideas on planning, and get those running while we turn our thoughts to PRACTISE.

In this article, I want to focus on the 'Practise' phase. This should help you develop a structured approach for the next few weeks, and the confidence that you can manage the time you have available.

I cannot over-emphasise how important it is to practise. This isn't a one-off activity, it's about returning, over and over again, to make sure that you have the understanding, and develop the best approach, to enable you to pass your exams. The more you practise, the better you will set yourself up for success.

The best ways to practise

The first thing to consider is what works for you. We all have different learning styles, and you will know which activities help you to understand and remember all that you have learned. You will also have a sense of what won't work for you. For some students, it is about breaking down the activity into bite-size pieces; for others, large chunks of revision time work better.

By now you will have encountered different areas of learning. Whether this is new knowledge, or skills which help you apply that knowledge, be

honest and identify which bits you have found more difficult than others. It will make sense to concentrate on the difficult areas, but don't forget the others.

It might be helpful to think of this phase in two parts:

- a revision phase, where there is emphasis on understanding key concepts and tackling questions around those; and
- a mock exam phase where you can practise completing exam questions and full-length exams.

The revision phase

Revising is just that - this isn't time to try to learn masses of new material - it is revisiting the work you have already done, and making sure you fully understand it. Before jumping into what you can do, it is worthwhile, for a moment, to reflect on what you have already achieved.

The benefit of knowing how far you have come is that you will then have a good idea of how far you still need to go. Consider how much you have learned, and ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you familiar with the syllabus and learning outcomes?
 - Do you know where to find this information on the website?
- How much time have you already invested in studying the content for this unit?
 - Do you want to maximise the benefit of that time?
- Are you confident in your understanding of the key concepts for the paper?
- Do you know what to expect to see in the examination paper?
 - Are you familiar with the structure and time required for separate parts within the paper?



Review the syllabus for your course, and list the main themes within this. They should, by now, all feel very familiar, but note those that caused you difficulty or which you feel you are still not sure about. This is an excellent starting point. It will confirm what you have already achieved, making you feel positive about how much you have learned and how far you have come on this course, while helping you identify those areas which you have overlooked or are not so familiar with, or have even forgotten!

Combine this with looking through any notes you have or tasks you completed as part of your course. You might find it helpful to highlight key lines, but be careful of highlighting every word: if everything on the page is shouting out at you as being really important, this can often cause anxiety.

Once you have reviewed a topic, try to condense what you have learned into a few bullet points. If you can summarise your learning in this way, it is an effective way of showing that you have understood what you have read. This, in turn, builds confidence. Some students find it helpful to put themselves in a tutor's shoes: how would you explain this to someone else who hasn't studied this subject? If you can explain a subject to a stranger, you really do know it. If you can't do so, this will identify the gaps in your understanding.

In the same way, saying things out loud reinforces your learning. If you haven't found a study buddy to practise with, (although it may sound silly) you can talk to anything! When studying for my degree, I used to find that my dog was a very good listener; she became an expert on Russian politics!

I would explain, out loud, the key concepts I had learned, and this helped me to identify stumbling blocks in my own learning. If I couldn't paraphrase what I had learned, I knew I needed to go back and read my notes again.

The mock-exam phase

In the mock-exam phase, you can test yourself to see how much of your revision has really sunk in. During this time, it is important to practise your own time management again and again. Set yourself real-time constraints to answer questions and stick to these. If you find that you have too much time left at the end, maybe you have missed out some important information and are not answering the questions fully; if you find that you do not have enough time at the end, are you really focusing on answering the questions?

It may not feel like it, but questions are set to be completed in the given time. Examiners have an expectation that to answer the questions fully will require all the available time, which should be manageable within this period.

All of this sounds obvious, but it should help you to make best use of the time given. If you write a complete answer in half the time, the chances are you are not putting down enough for a pass. If this happens, go back and look at the suggested answers.

The benefit of sitting multiple exam papers for any one exam is that you become familiar with the layout, the content and the style of questions used in the paper. Successful students say that this is one of the most useful things they do.

You can practise on single questions, but ultimately trying to sit a whole paper will give you the best platform for the real thing. Exam time management is key to success, and you will learn how to do this successfully with practice. Your best chance of success will be to answer the whole paper, and effective time management will help you do this. Better to run out of time now with exam questions, and understand why you do this, than on the day itself.

How to make your practice effective

During this practice phase, go back and look again at the plan you made, which should help you focus. You will gain satisfaction from completing tasks, and this in turn will build up your confidence.

Use your plan to break down study sessions so that a block of time is allocated to a particular activity, such as reading the Chief Examiners' Reports, creating revision notes, or practising questions. Scheduling tasks in this way makes them feel more achievable, and then they will be.

As with any plan, it may not all work out exactly as you envisaged at the start, but don't beat yourself up if you miss a session. Don't worry about this, but look at the next set of activities and reprioritise these.

That is the beauty of your plan: it will work exclusively for you.

Where you can find support resources

- A selection of past examination papers and the corresponding examiner reports are available to download at: <http://tinyurl.com/h3ayc79>
- Suggested Answers for Level 3 Units, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc9wjtttd>;
- Suggested Answers for Level 4 Units, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yahkrtd>;
- Suggested Answers for Level 6 Units, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9yxasm9>
- Chief Examiners' Reports for Level 3, Level 4 and Level 6, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8edzy5k>