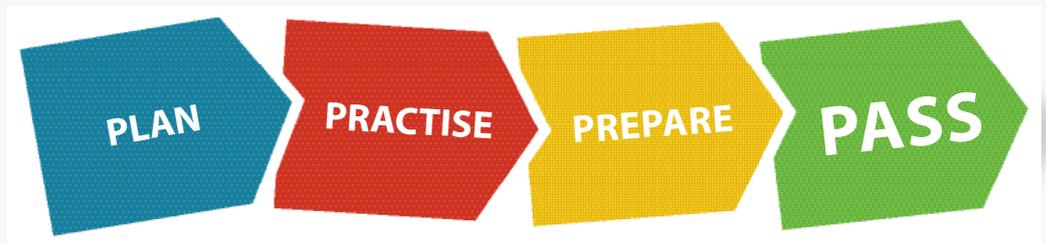


Prepare: focus on getting ... 'exam ready'

Liz Kemp focuses on revision techniques in the countdown to the CILEx January 2018 examination session. This is the third article in a series that appeared in *CILEx Journal*.*



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It's time to make those final preparations...

In 'Get ready to Plan, Practise, Prepare, and ... Pass your examinations' (2017) November CILExJ pp48 and 49, we focused on the Practise phase in the lead up to your examinations in January. Like me, you are probably wondering, where did the time go?

We started this revision journey working through the Planning and Practise phases, and now we have only six weeks left! So, the first thing



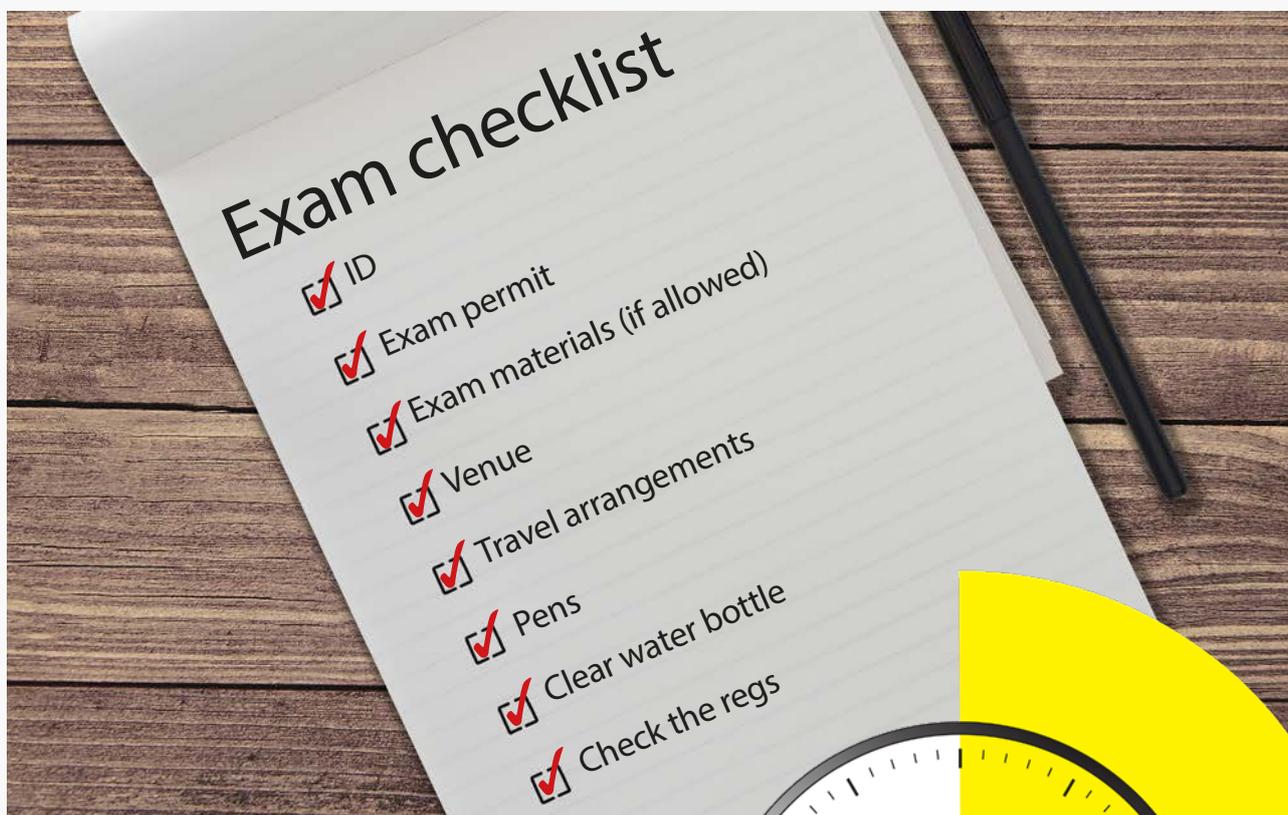
to say is: 'Don't panic!' You can still make a big difference to your performance on the day, if you put aside some time now to work through the suggested activities in the earlier articles.

In this article, we want to focus on the Prepare phase. As part of this, you should still continue practising with exam questions and trying to complete full exam papers. This will set you up for the real exam and is the most beneficial thing you can do now.

What else can you do to prepare for the exam?

Preparation for the exam is about getting yourself in the right frame of mind to put yourself in a strong, confident position so that, on the day itself,





you are calm and ready to tackle the questions. During the last few days before the exam, try to do things that relax you.

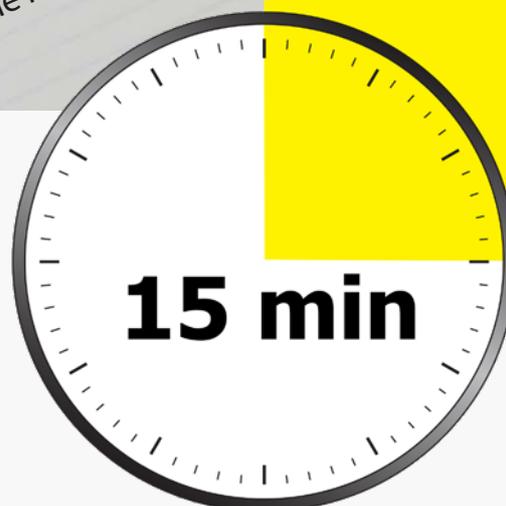
If we think about that 'big race', most runners would stop running a week or so before a marathon. You've done all the hard training, now it's about building the right mental attitude. Do take time to ensure that you have everything ready for the exam:

- Collect together your exam permit and ID. If you do not have these you will not be able to enter the exam room, so don't forget them.
- If you are allowed to bring any materials into the exam, then make sure that you have these ready.
- Check that you know the date, time and venue, and have arrangements in place to get there in plenty of time. Remember that you have worked hard to build a positive mental attitude for the exam: arriving late or feeling rushed will make you flustered, which will not help to get the exam off to a good start.
- Read through the examination regulations to see what you can and cannot take into the exam.

Now let's think about the exam itself

Reading time

If your exam gives you reading time, do use this wisely. The worst thing you can do is waste this gift of additional time. It



is there to help you orientate yourself and give you time to confirm your best strategy for the paper. Think of it as the final warm up before you run that big race. It is usually between 15–30 minutes of additional time during which you can think calmly and plan your answers. Reading the information given will give you the context and put you 'in the zone' for the paper.

Dread and anxiety before the exam is mainly due to 'not knowing' what is going to come up. Once in the exam room, with the information in front of you, that is the time you take control.

If you have a reflective learning style, you can use this time to absorb the information given and think about the different

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issues before you need to make any judgments. You might find it helpful to read the whole piece through first, and then go back and read it carefully with more attention.

If you are a more active learner, you might want to underline words or phrases that you recognise as important or useful. You might also want to write notes or prompts as you go through. Don't look around to see what others are doing: this will only make you anxious. Everyone is different, and you will have practised what is best for you. You can then follow this approach in the exam itself.

Ask yourself what gives you most confidence: is it reading and rereading the information, or is it reading and making notes as you go? For many, the physical engagement of writing helps to formulate thoughts and makes things stick in the mind. But every learner is different, so be true to yourself and do what you do best.

When practising exam questions, you should also practise how to make best use of this reading time. Does your way of working take you over the allotted time? If you find that you have spare time, ask yourself if you could take two or three minutes to go over the piece one more time.

Tackling the questions

Always tackle your best question first. This will help build confidence at the start.

But don't forget your time management. It is easy to use up too much time on your best question, and that might not necessarily gain you any extra marks. Keep an eye on the time, and move on to the next question when you have used up the allocated time.

Do complete the whole paper, if you don't answer all the questions, you will make it difficult to achieve an excellent result.

Answer the question and answer it fully. If the question asks for a discussion, then a bullet point list is unlikely to give enough

depth, insight or breadth of the issues. There is one exception to this rule: if you run out of time, a list of issues or key points that you would have explored is better than no answer at all. If you only answer part of a question then you will only get part of the marks! Try to write full, comprehensive answers.

Think about spelling and presentation in your answers. Do try to write clearly. If the examiner cannot read your writing, how can any marks be allocated to what you have said?

Our examiners work hard to make the questions clear and straightforward. If a question seems obvious, then it probably is. There are no trick questions and no hidden plots to catch you out. You are expected to apply your knowledge and skills to a particular situation (much as you might see in your professional environment) and the questions are written to give you the opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned and understood. An examiner cannot guess your meaning, so do try to make it as clear as possible.

Finally, within your time management for the exam, do leave a few minutes at the end to review what you have written. Check for small mistakes, such as spelling or calculation mistakes, and check for 'sense'.

When you read it back to yourself, is the answer clearly written so that the examiner can see what you are trying to say? You can, through a final reading, pick up on a number of points which could, in turn, make a difference to your marks. You have planned, practised and prepared for the examination. We wish you every success with your exams and look forward to seeing you PASS!

**See also: 'Get ready to Plan, Practise, Prepare, and ... Pass your examinations' and 'It's time to Practise, Practise, Practise, and then Practise some more ...' (2017) November and December CILExJ pp48 and 49 respectively, and available at: [^ links]*

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/yahkrtrtd>;
- Suggested Answers for Level 6 Units, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9yxasm9>
- Liz Kemp, head of qualifications at CILEx Chief Examiners' Reports for Level 3, Level 4 and Level 6, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8edzy5k>