Exam Writing Tips: Strategies for Success

Be Well Prepared

- Regular review: do a daily review of what you have learned and then a weekly review
- When you study don’t focus only on memorizing – use active study strategies that promote understanding and application of concepts, e.g. graphic organizers, talking it through with others in study groups, coming up with real world examples of what you are learning
- Answer practice questions, do practice tests under test conditions
- Be physically and mentally well by eating well, sleeping well and exercising

During the Exam

- Read directions carefully
- Quickly review the exam and begin with questions that you feel most confident about
- Read every question and answer option carefully and underline key words
  - Read the stem carefully and underline key words
  - Read all the choices thoroughly before choosing – pay attention for words like “not” or “except”
  - Avoid superstitious behaviour – “I haven’t chosen C for awhile so that must be the answer”
  - Narrow down the choices – eliminate the answers you are sure are wrong
  - Beware of absolute terms like “never”, “always”, “everyone”, “only”, “must”
- Cover up the answers while you read the question to avoid making errors
- Manage your time by jumping over questions that you are not sure about and come back to them later – you may uncover information further along in the exam that will help with these questions
- Keep a general track of time but don’t let clock-watching increase your anxiety as you write the exam

After the Exam

- If you can, take time when you get the marked exam back to review it. Checking the answers you got right will confirm the content you know well and those you got wrong will help you identify what you need to work on
- If you review the exam and there are questions you feel you should have got right but cannot understand why you chose the wrong answer, take time to carefully determine if the issue was:
  1. Misreading the question or option
  2. Not understanding because you were feeling anxious
3. Not understanding the material enough to work out which would be the right answer
   For situation 1, work on careful reading of questions and answers; for situation 2, use some of the minimizing anxiety suggestions; for situation 3, work on being more prepared for your exams.

Minimizing Anxiety
- Be well prepared for the exam
- Use positive self-talk (“I know this and can answer these questions”) and not negative self-talk (“I can’t remember anything and am going to fail”)
- Don’t think about the end of the exam and finding out your mark, just concentrate on answering one question at a time
- Don’t assume that people completing the exam and leaving while you are still working on it know the material better than you. Everyone completes exams at a different pace.