

Dealing With
Going Blank During Exams And Tests

*“Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared,
for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can
answer”*

— **Charles Colton**¹

As Charles Colton rightly noted, everybody experiences nerves and doubt about their ability to sit and pass exams and tests. We are all human and therefore such evaluation apprehension is a natural tendency. However, the way a person approaches exams and tests determines whether or not they will be crippled by their nerves during such crucial period of assessment. One of the most common and devastating exams experiences among students is the experience of ‘going blank’! In this article let us explore both the **prevention** and **cure** for going blank during exams and tests.

PREVENTION

Avoid poor preparation – Once you are aware of an impending exam or test, start preparing for it over time. Follow up the recommended study material and engage with all the relevant exercises and tasks. If you happen to miss any classes or lessons, do well to catch up either independently or by contacting your tutors or mates; practice on previous exam or test questions; get feedback from your mates or tutors on your performance; organize your learning material and ‘over learn’ it.

Avoid sleepless nights before exams and tests – Even if you think you have so much learning material to cover before the exam, give yourself a break and sleep adequately during the night preceding the exam. Your brain needs to regenerate and revitalize itself to give you the mental energy for exams and tests.

Avoid dehydration - Drink lots of water throughout the day always, but particularly on the exam day. The slightest dehydration in you will have a great effect on your mental concentration and energy.

Refrain from scattering your focus before an exam or test – Don’t allow your worries or burdens to over-crowd your mind before an exam. Just before you go in for the exam, allow your mind to relax; even if you don’t seem to remember anything from what you’ve read, don’t worry. Just relax and stay away from mates who would talk to increase your anxiety.

THE CURE

For the many (and probably more) reasons outlined above, a person may go blank during an exam or test. In case this happens to you, you may do the following to deal with the situation:

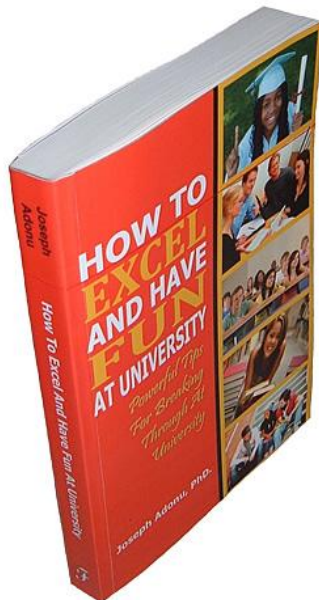
- Sit up and take in deep breaths slowly.
- Drink your water, if you have it.

¹ **Charles Caleb Colton** (1780-1832): English sportsman and writer.

- Begin to take your mind away from the exam and focus it on totally unrelated events such as a lovely family meal or a walk along some park or beach.
- Begin to silently practise some positive self-talk and recite reassuring phrases such as: “No matter how hard it is or how hard it gets, I’m going to make it.”
- When you’ve calmed down considerably, begin to read the questions again. Read the question that you most likely remember answers for.
- Plan and start answering the question slowly to restart your memory and momentum. **GOOK LUCK!**

For full information, see *Chapter 13* on ‘Tame Assignments And Exams’ in the new book: [How To Excel And Have Fun At University](#)

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Dr. Adonu has touched on the core issues that students usually battle with and provides a way forward, not just any way but a way that is practical and enjoyable. This book is very clear on how students can be on top in their academic work while having fun in the process. I can honestly say that this may just be the perfect formula one needs to get through university or similar institutions. I ‘envy’ students who will have the amazing access to this one-of-a kind resource.”

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PhD. Student, University of East London

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