



# Preparing for open book exams: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/A9QgzTe7>

## Transcript

**Introduction:** Welcome to this tutorial on preparing for open book exams, from the University of Reading's Study Advice team. This tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace, and you can pause it at any time.

### Slide 1: What is an open book exam?

Open book exams are those where you are allowed to take texts into the exam room to consult during the exam. Types of text that may be allowed are - tables of equations - literary texts - language dictionaries. These relate to particular types of exam questions - those where you are expected to put equations to use in solving problems - those where you may need to select and closely analyse sections of literary text - those where you will be composing answers in a foreign language.

In other words, this type of exam aims to test your ability to put knowledge to work, rather than to memorise it. So you need to be as thoughtful about your preparation as you would if you were not able to take the books into the exam.

### Slide 2: Revising for open book exams

The same principles apply when revising for open book exams as for any other sort of exam.

- First look at past papers to give you an idea of the type of questions asked and how long you will have to answer them.
- Think about what you already know on the topic, and what you need to know more about.
- Then fill the gaps in your knowledge by reading through your notes and any additional reading from book lists or library searches.
- While you're reading, keep thinking about how you might use the knowledge to answer an exam question.

- Don't forget to practise this – make quick answer plans, and try writing some full answers to time. Answering exam questions is a different genre of writing to any other you are used to doing, and practising helps you to get into the habit.

### **Slide 3:** What to do with your book

The big difference in revising for an open book exam is, of course, the book.

- You will need to think about what sort of information you might want to find quickly in the exam room and make sure you know where to find it.
- Find out what you are allowed to do with your book. You may not be allowed to use the text if it has a lot of notes written on it, for instance. On the other hand, it's usually okay to mark key pages with post-it stickers to save time looking them up.
- Don't forget to take the text to the exam room! You won't be able to borrow someone else's.

### **Slide 4:** Exam room strategies for literary texts

If you're using a literary text – a novel, play or poem, for instance:

- Make sure quotes support your argument, not replace it. Note that you will only gain marks for your own arguments, not somebody else's words, so don't waste time copying long quotes.
- Try to get used to using mini-quotes of three or four words so that they occur naturally in a sentence: e.g. *the blinded Oedipus' desire to be "far from sight" (1570) reflects both his abhorrence of knowledge, and of others knowing him.*
- If you use direct quotations or paraphrases from your text, you should acknowledge them with page or line number in the body of your answer, plus the author's name and year of publication the first time the text is mentioned, just as you would in an essay. However you don't need to include a bibliography or reference list as your marker will know what texts you've been allowed to take into the exam room.
- Don't waste time looking for new information while you're in the exam room or new quotes.

**Slide 5:** If you are using referenced texts like dictionaries or tables, make sure the text you have is one that will be allowed in the exam room, right edition, version or translation for instance – the invigilator will check and if it's not correct, they may take it away.

- Try to think of the book or notes as being there for quick reference or confirming information you already know, rather than looking up new information.
- Be really clear about what kind of information you might need for an exam answer. This is where the practising beforehand comes in. The exam room isn't the best place to start working this out!

**Summary:** So, to sum up, here are our tips for success in open book exams:

- Revise as you would for any other exam.
- Make sure you know where to quickly find the information you need.
- Don't waste time searching for new information.
- Avoid using long quotes if possible – it's hard to copy accurately and quickly.

Follow these tips, and your open book exam could open the door to success!