

Examinations : How to Pass Them

BEING CONCENTRATED AND VALUABLE ADVICE TO ALL EXAMINEES.

As you would expect, the first observation is that you require to know sufficient about the subject in which you are being examined. In that case, you should not fail; but if you do not know enough about the subject, you may merely be lucky enough to pass.

Is it possible to fail in an examination if you have a good knowledge of your work? The student who, at school, sometimes gets over fifty and sometimes under fifty per cent. is in the class that is "lucky to pass"; he might, by meeting a paper that was not the paper he would set himself, quite easily get down in the thirties, or he might be so upset (he would call himself a "bad examinee") that he does even worse than that. Again, he might be lucky, and the examiner and he have seen (metaphorically) eye to eye in setting the paper.

What about the boy who ordinarily gets "round about seventy" in a school test? He does not fail in the general public test unless he is actually so ill that he should not be allowed to attend the examination.

We meet many cases of the "my mind became a blank" type of students, but, whilst sympathetic, know that the partial mental vacuum existed before the examination and that the student merely recognised the fact when locked up with an examination paper: and so blamed the paper. Our records of the student's work throughout the year, his disclosed knowledge in practical classes, and his attitude to his work, show us that we can "tip" his final examination mark fairly accurately before he sits for the paper: examinations enable us to sort out borderline cases and to grade our pass and distinction students. It is admitted that a grading of Jones as 10th and Brown as 11th because one gets 82% and the other 81% may not give the correct "Jones: Brown" intellectual ratio—but neither will fail, though perhaps either might have done 10% better (or worse), given a different paper on a different day. (I have seen the same thing in competitors at athletic meetings.) How, then, should you pass the subject?

(1) Know the subject, and aim at having the 10% to spare; do not feel aggrieved if your best is only up to pass standard and you are failed. The world tends to judge you on your average, or even your obvious worse, rather than your best. The more nearly you might, with luck, get into the higher grade above, the safer you are in the lower grade of pass.

(2) Take a rational interest in your health, mental and physical. Whilst many geniuses have been very poor physical specimens, frequently ailing, that has always handicapped them in competition. Even towards the end, when the examinations press upon you and you know that you have not qualified under clause (1) above, watch your health. Take plenty of rational exercise (skipping for five minutes every hour between reading is good, if the family will stand it), and make a point of "loafing" deliberately for some short period each day. An irritable person is a "bad examinee," if you like.

(3) During examination periods, do not do anything to make you uncomfortable. I have known parents who ordinarily gave their boys sixpence a day to get their lunch present them with half-a-crown a day during the examinations, so that they could "get a good feed" during the period of trial. Some actually spent the half-crown on lunch, filling their stomachs with a mixture of strange and unusual quality and nature. Most people find light, but sufficient, meals of good plain food best during periods of nervous excitement. It should not be necessary to caution you to be careful of "medicines", and of heavy consumption of liquid before going in to an examination: you are going to be locked up for periods up to three hours, and many children are too embarrassed to let the supervisor know their difficulties in this regard. Do not be an idiot: the supervisor is there to help you as well as to see that no one cheats.

(4) Read through your paper carefully; don't flurry; time spent in "settling down" is well spent. After an inspection of the whole paper, see what is compulsory and what optional; make sure that you know how many questions are to be attempted, and whether there is any restriction on your choice. Then look for favourites, and read through again those questions that you think you will tackle. Divide the time left to you by the number of questions, and thus find how long you should devote, as an upper limit, to a single question. Note the time. Now take your first chosen question and read it through again carefully, seeing exactly what you are required to do. Outline points and headings of a reply, if required in words, in your mind; then, relaxing your body and refusing to be excited, answer the question. When your allotted time has expired, close off that question: you can come back to it and do some more if you wish to and have, later, time to spare. Proceed this way through the paper; then, if you have time left, go back and complete any incompleting question that you think you can improve, and lastly, if time, read through your whole paper.

(5) If, to your horror, you find in one of your final readings that you have made some silly or terrible mistake, and but a short time (too short, generally) remains to do anything about it, don't panic: you are more likely to mess up the whole question than to correct it. Star (*) the spot where you have erred, and add a note saying what you should have done, and that you yourself see the error, and indicate what the subsequent treatment should be; you will be given the credit for it. If, on the other hand, you have plenty of time, re-write the question correctly.

(6) *Lastly, know your subject; practise expressing yourself clearly and concisely in English; don't panic.*
