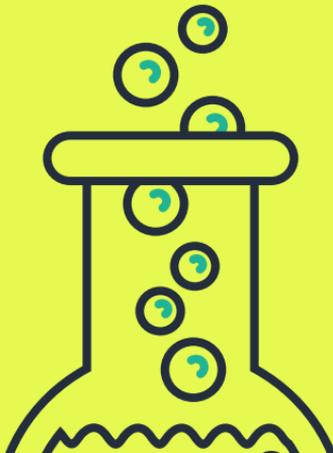
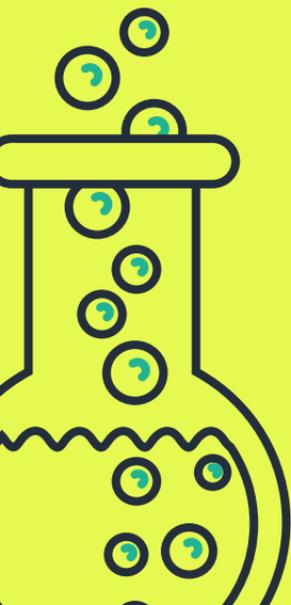


UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

BUBBLING UP: REVISION & EXAMS

Termly collection of wellbeing stories
shared by staff and students, because we
care

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ABOUT US

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We are looking for 2 student editors, so if you are interested in joining the team please express your interest by e-mailing chem.experience@warwick.ac.uk.

If you'd like to supply feedback, or submit a piece for the upcoming issue, please get in touch via a form at warwick.ac.uk/bubblingup or by emailing Dr Bo Kelestyn at bo.kelestyn@warwick.ac.uk

FROM THE EDITORS

BO KELESTYN AND ADAM ALCOCK

This issue we're looking at the topical theme of revision and exams: an age-old concern that comes around every year but never gets any easier.

It's absolutely normal to feel anxious or stressed around exam time, but it is important to recognise feelings of stress and anxiety and put strategies in place to help deal with how you're feeling, or to reach out if you feel like you need extra support. Facing multiple exams and revision can feel like you have mountain to climb, but organising yourself and working to achievable goals can help tasks feel more manageable and can also help with boost your motivation - after all, ticking something off your list feels good!

Finally, please remember to look after yourself... we're all different and we function in different ways but try and find what works best for you. You're unique, so find your own routine. Try to eat healthily and regularly, sleep enough and take regular breaks.

You're not alone and reach out if you need support: we are here for you.

Our contributors this issue have provided their take on the revision and exams theme. They've shared their experiences, tips and advice. We hope you find their stories interesting.

If you'd like to explore further resources, Warwick Wellbeing Support Services are a good place to start:
<https://warwick.ac.uk/services/wss/>

MIKE WARD

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Well - it's that time of year again, when everything seems to boil down to an arbitrary set of bizarre exercises that bear no relation to anything that you will do ever again, even if you pursue an academic chemistry career. If you ever have a problem in real life, how will you tackle it? Probably you would do the following:

- ask around to see if anyone had had then same problem and what they did about it.
- read up on it and see if you find an expert to give advice. Or your mum. Or wikipedia.
- mull it over for a while and see if it looked less bad in the morning.

What you would never do is lock yourself in a room, cut yourself off from the ability to look things up and refuse to talk to anyone about it, and put yourself under pressure by telling yourself that you have to fix this by an arbitrary deadline. Unless the problem is a ticking bomb or someone bleeding out on your floor, that is very unlikely to be true.

So, big question: how have we ended up with exams as they currently operate? Big answer: because it's organisationally easy and about the least time-consuming way of producing an ordered list of results that doesn't involve drawing lots.

So it's for our benefit, not yours :-)



A set of exam questions that might test your knowledge of a 15-CAT module can probably be answered by you in 2h and marked by academic staff in 20 - 30 minutes. Compare this with (for example) an MChem thesis on a 60-CAT module that will take at least a couple of weeks to write, and half a day for the marker to read and absorb (and that doesn't include the viva or presentations). Traditional written exams therefore allow a lot of students to be assessed - albeit in a rather artificial way that has little relevance to much else - by a much smaller number of staff in a reasonably short space of time, and given the tight turnaround we have to get things marked this process is likely to be with us for a while.

And yet - there are some alternatives. We now have more coursework exercises (e.g. in year 2) and there are forms of assessment that are more skills-based and less recall based. The 'open-book' style exams that you are doing this year, you will notice, are slanted a little more towards solving of unseen problems than regurgitating material from notes or copying out known proofs. I really like the 'video project' exercise in CH267 and have seen some impressive and witty examples. We will be undertaking a teaching / syllabus review over the next year, and finding ways to vary assessment styles a bit more - without creating a huge amount of extra work - needs to be part of that. It's important for us to take full account of the fact that different people shine in different ways and traditional exams don't suit everyone.

None of which is much comfort to you at the moment of course! I recall the invigilator of my first ever university exam who smiled broadly at us all quaking at our desks, and finished off the standard reading of the rubric with the memorable comment: 'And remember, everyone, don't take this too seriously - and have a GRRREAT time!' That worked - in that everyone had a laugh and relaxed slightly. It made us realise that nobody's life was at stake here...



We do realise that exams and exam preparation at the moment are likely to be more challenging even than usual. Please remember that we are very aware of this and will take it into account: we are, underneath, actually quite nice people who want to help. (Well, most of us are). If you have particular problems, let us know: the mitigating circumstances process is there for you. And one piece of quite specific advice, possibly too late: treat an 'open book' exam like a normal exam in terms of preparation. Don't assume that you can look everything up and just learn the page numbers - have it in your head as you would do normally.

And most of all, as the nice man said: 'Don't take this too seriously - and have a GRRREAT time!'

Good luck everyone!

JO RUSSELL

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Don't we all just love exams?! I remember revising for my GCSEs and A levels and how hard it was for me to sit down in a quiet space and focus for more than 10 minutes. Even when I did my degree more recently, I really struggled to sit in silence with my own thoughts – I am too easily distracted. I'll find any excuse to put it off (I swear I've never had a cleaner car and oven than when I sat my exams). I'm also not much of a reader. I'd rather watch the tv, listen to some music, or get my sketch book out, so I've always found revision a struggle.

Over the years I've developed strategies to help focus my mind. Making a revision timetable doesn't work for me, I don't do well with being told what to do (even if it's me telling me what to do) but I've found that if I make it into more of a creative activity than a chore, something that I can do in small amounts, I'm more likely to be able to focus and maybe even want to do it.

I tend to use visual recall to store and remember information, so I'd get coloured pens and large sheets of paper and write down and sketch notes and pointers that would help me remember sections of my notes. I'd then blue tac all of the sheets of paper to the walls of the spare bedroom so I could come in and focus on one or two subjects at a time and test myself on how much I could remember. My family thought I was mad, but it just seemed to work for me (now my post-it note obsession makes so much sense!).

People learn and remember things in different ways, so it's always good to try out different techniques. I can't sit and stare at notes in a textbook or a notepad for very long as nothing seems to go in, but put sections of it on a big brightly coloured sheet of paper and I can much more easily remember things. It's strange how the mind works.



The other side of exams and revision is the stress and worry of it all. How do I fit everything in? Will I be able to remember it all? Will the questions that I know how to answer actually be in the paper? Will all my knowledge just fall out of my head on the morning of the exam?! It's really easy to be overcome by exam stress and anxiety. It's never going to be easy to remove that entirely but there are ways to try and manage it.

Don't leave all your revision to the last minute. Obvious really, but yet we all do it! Take regular breaks and do some exercise. Eat and drink well (thinking here of Simon from The Inbetweeners and his unfortunate incident after gorging on energy drinks). Don't go through it alone - talk it through with someone else. Seek help if you're really struggling. And overall, believe in your ability. Focus on what you can do and just work to improve on what you can't.

ALLY MCCLOUGHLIN

FORMER CHEMSOC PRESIDENT AND BIOCHEM FINALIST

Exam periods are times of high stress for everyone, students and academics alike, and they can bring out a multitude of emotions that can be hard to deal with. It is hence more important than ever to know how best to take care of your mental health and how to take proper breaks from work, so I thought I would share a few tips and tricks I have learned over the years to deal with exam stress and the imposter syndrome that it may cause.

First of all, make yourself a timetable! I know that is the standard advice you receive every year, but it really does work! I find it so much easier to get up and work when I know exactly what I am supposed to be doing at that time, plus it ensures you spend appropriate amounts of time on each of your modules. Secondly, another basic piece of advice, but don't compare your work ethic to that of your peers. Everybody works differently, some may plough through work quickly, others may prefer to take their time, some work best in the morning whilst others are much more productive during the evening - just do what works best for you. You know yourself better than anyone, so trust your gut and try not to second guess yourself. Further to this, make sure you still take time for yourself. Designate a set time when you will stop working so that you can relax, whether that be going for a walk, going to the gym or playing video games, whatever helps you wind down and gives your mind a rest. Finally, be kind to yourself. The past year has been incredibly difficult, with this year's exams being no exception and so try not to be too hard on yourself if it feels like you're not working at your usual pace. Everybody is in the same boat, but just know that you're nearly at the finish line and we're all so proud of you for getting this far!

NEXT ISSUE: BLENDED LIVING

COMING IN TERM 1 2021/22

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shared by staff and students, because we
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**If you have been affected by this issue, please
find out more about the support available on
[warwick.ac.uk/bubbling up](http://warwick.ac.uk/bubbling) or by speaking to your
Personal or Senior Tutor in the department.**

