

Why is this important? For the same reason that the key words are important. It tells you what you should be doing. If all the marks are for AO1 (knowledge and understanding), there is no point spending any time evaluating. And if there are 9 marks for AO3 (assessment and evaluation), then no matter how clearly you describe the theories and arguments, you cannot get a good mark for the question if you do not also evaluate them.

There is another reason this distribution of marks is important. It can help guide your revision. There are 45 marks available in total; 18 for AO1, 18 for AO2, and 9 for AO3. So you need to have a very firm grasp of the facts about ideas and arguments, and how to interpret and analyse them. However, you will find it difficult to get an 'A' or 'B' grade unless you also know how to evaluate them well.

Finally, once you've organized your notes into an outline or web-diagram, time yourself writing exam answers. Start by using your outline, relying on your memory to fill in the details. Then practise by memorizing the outline as well, and doing it as though it were an actual exam. You might be surprised at how quickly one hour goes by. You'll find that you need to be very focused – but this is what the examiners are looking for, answers that are thoughtful but to the point.

R9: Practice writing timed answers. Use your notes at first, but then practise without them.

There is one more thing important to revision that I haven't yet talked about, which is how the structure of the questions and how the marks are awarded can help you to decide what to focus on. This is what we'll look at next.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE QUESTION: GIVING THE EXAMINERS WHAT THEY WANT**

The key to doing well in an exam is understanding the question. I don't just mean understanding the *topic* of the question, like 'empiricism' or 'free will'. Of course, this is very important. But you also need to understand what the question is asking you to *do*. And this is related, in a very strict way, to the three Assessment Objectives discussed above. This section is on how exam questions 'work'.

### **Key Words**

If you look at the examples of exam questions, you will see that they start with different 'key words', such as 'explain', 'illustrate', 'outline', 'assess', 'discuss', 'consider', and 'evaluate'. Obeying these instructions is crucially important to getting a good mark. If you are asked to *explain* an argument and you argue that the argument is unpersuasive because..., then you will fail to gain marks. And the same is true if you are asked to assess a claim and you only describe and illustrate what the claim means.

In the exam, each question has two parts – the first uses one set of key words, the second uses a second set. The first set – 'explain', 'illustrate' and 'identify' – relate to AO1 (*knowledge and understanding*). You are being asked simply to say what the theories say in a way that is relevant to the question asked. All the marks available here are for AO1.

The second set – 'discuss', 'consider', 'assess' and 'evaluate' – relate to AO2 (*interpretation and analysis*) and AO3 (*assessment and evaluation*). You need to present an argument, explaining and illustrating it as you go along, which aims towards an answer to the question, showing why that particular answer is the best one.

The key to understanding what the question is asking, and so to getting a good mark, is to take notice of the key words.

### **Question Structure and Marks**

The same key words always appear in the same parts of the question. This is because the marks given for each part of the question relate to a particular AO in a very strict way. All of the 15 points for part (a) are for AO1. There are 30 points for part (b): 3 for AO1, 18 for AO2, and 9 for AO3.

second is to relate a particular argument to other arguments and viewpoints on the issue, and in particular to reflect on whether the objections to an argument undermine it. Work through the arguments so that you understand for yourself the pros and cons of each viewpoint. As a minimum, be able to argue both for and against a particular view.

R6: Think reflectively about the arguments and issues. Practise arguing for and against a particular view. Think about the place and importance of the arguments for the issue as a whole.

Finally, you need to be able to construct arguments, not just report them. This means that what you write should also take the form of premisses and conclusion. The premisses will be your judgments as you go along, in response to this view or that objection. These judgments need to add up to a conclusion. You shouldn't end your essay with a totally different point of view than your evaluations in the essay support. In other words, do the judgments you reach reflect the arguments you have presented?

This doesn't mean that you have to find one point of view on the issue and defend it. But if you can't come to a firm conclusion about which viewpoint is right, try to come to a firm conclusion about why the different points each seem right in their own way, and why it is difficult to choose. Philosophy is not about knowing the 'right answers', it is about understanding why an answer *might* be right and why it is difficult to know.

R7: Think about how your judgments on the various arguments you have studied add up. Do they lead to one conclusion, one point of view being right? Or do you think arguments for and against one position are closely balanced?

These first seven revision points relate to taking in and understanding information. There are two more points that will help you organize the information, learn it better, and prepare you for answering exam questions.

A good way of organizing your information is to create answer outlines or web-diagrams for particular issues. For example, from Unit 1.1 Reason and experience, you could create an outline or web-diagram for innate knowledge. Think about the essential points, and organize them, perhaps like this:

What is innate knowledge? Is there more than one interpretation?

Who argued against innate knowledge? What are the main arguments?

Who argued for innate knowledge? What knowledge did they say was innate? What arguments did they use?

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the claim that there is innate knowledge?

What is your conclusion on the issue, and why?

With an outline like this, you should be able to answer any question that comes up on innate knowledge.

R8: Create structured outlines or web-diagrams for particular issues. Try to cover all the main points.

what is relevant is to practise answering questions, either exam questions or questions you make up for yourself or a friend. Try to make up questions that are similar to the exam questions, using the same 'key words' (I'll talk about these in the next section). Practising answering different questions on the same topic helps keep your knowledge flexible, because you have to think of just the right bit of information that will answer the question.

R2: Practise applying your knowledge by answering questions about it. The best questions to practise with are past exam questions, but you can also make up questions for yourself.

AO2 (Interpretation and analysis) means that your knowledge needs to be developed in a particular way. In philosophy, there is no easy, straightforward answer to 'what did he mean when he said...'. So in knowing and understanding arguments and issues, you need to be able to *interpret* them and defend your interpretation.

R3: Revise those aspects of the issue that are hard to understand. Practice arguing that they *can* be understood in more than one way, and why they *should* be understood to have the meaning you give them.

One aspect of interpretation is knowing what is relevant and what is not to the view you are discussing. From this point, what point follows next? Or again, what would be a relevant example? You can either remember good examples you have read, or create your own. In either case, you should know precisely what point the example is making. An irrelevant example demonstrates that you don't really know what you are talking about.

R4: Prepare examples beforehand, rather than try to invent them in the exam. If you can use your own, that's great (you'll get extra marks if they are good). But they must be short and they must make the right point – so try them out on your friends and teachers first.

But this is only half of AO2. When interpreting someone, you also need to show how what his arguments are and how supposed to work. This means being able to *analyse* an issue, finding its main claims and main arguments, and then breaking down the arguments down into premisses and conclusions, and show how the conclusion is supposed to follow from the premisses.

R5: Spend time identifying the main claims and arguments involved in each issue you have studied, putting arguments in your own words, stating clearly what the conclusion is and what the premisses are. Point out or show how the reasoning is supposed to work.

What of AO3? How do you revise for 'assessment and evaluation'? This AO tests you on how well you can relate and compare arguments, how well you build an argument, deal with objections, and come to a supported conclusion. The best way to prepare for it is to spend time *thinking* about the arguments and issues. Thinking is quite different from knowing about. You might know Hume's arguments against rationalism, but you may never have stopped to really work out whether you think they are any good.

AO3 encourages you to do two things. One is to question what the argument actually shows – do the premisses support the conclusion or some other point of view? The

## Exam revision

To get good exam results, you need to have a good sense of what the exam will be like and what the examiners are looking for, and to revise in a way that will help you prepare to answer the questions well. This probably sounds obvious, but in fact, many students do not think about the exam itself, only about what questions might come up. There is a big difference. This chapter will provide you with some guidance on how to revise for your exams in a way that will help get you the best results you can.

### REVISING

There are lots of memory tricks for learning information for exams. This handout isn't about those. Revision isn't just about learning information, but also about learning how to use that information well in the exam. Being able to do this isn't a question of memory, but of directed revision and concentration in the exam. If you've been doing the exercises throughout this book, then you have been putting into practice the advice I give below.

It may sound obvious, but in order to know how best to answer the exam questions, you need to think about how they are marked. The examiners mark your answers according to three principles, known as 'Assessment Objectives' (AOs). They are:

- AO1: *Knowledge and understanding*: how well do you know and understand the central debates for an particular issue, the positions philosophers have defended, and the arguments they use to defend them?
- AO2: *Interpretation and analysis*: how well do you interpret and analyse relevant philosophical positions and arguments? Are you able select and apply relevant ideas, concepts, examples, and arguments to support your account of an issue? Do you understand how the argument works and what the implications of a position is?
- AO3: *Assessment and evaluation*: how well do you do assess and evaluate arguments and counter-arguments? Are you able to construct arguments in support of a particular position, and defend it against objections? Do you understand whether an argument succeeds or fails and why? How well do you compare arguments and counterarguments to weigh up what the most plausible position is?

You can use these AOs to help guide your revision. AO1 (Knowledge and understanding) leads straight to the first revision point:

R1: Learn the arguments. Who said what? What terms and concepts did they use? How did they defend their positions?

This, you may think, is challenging enough! But this isn't enough. In displaying your knowledge, you need to show what is *relevant* to the question being asked. Knowing what is relevant is a special kind of knowledge, which involves thinking carefully about what you know about the theories in relation to the question asked. The best way to learn