IB Study Skills Seminar

Written: Adapted :

Oliver Vikbladh **Matthew Marson**

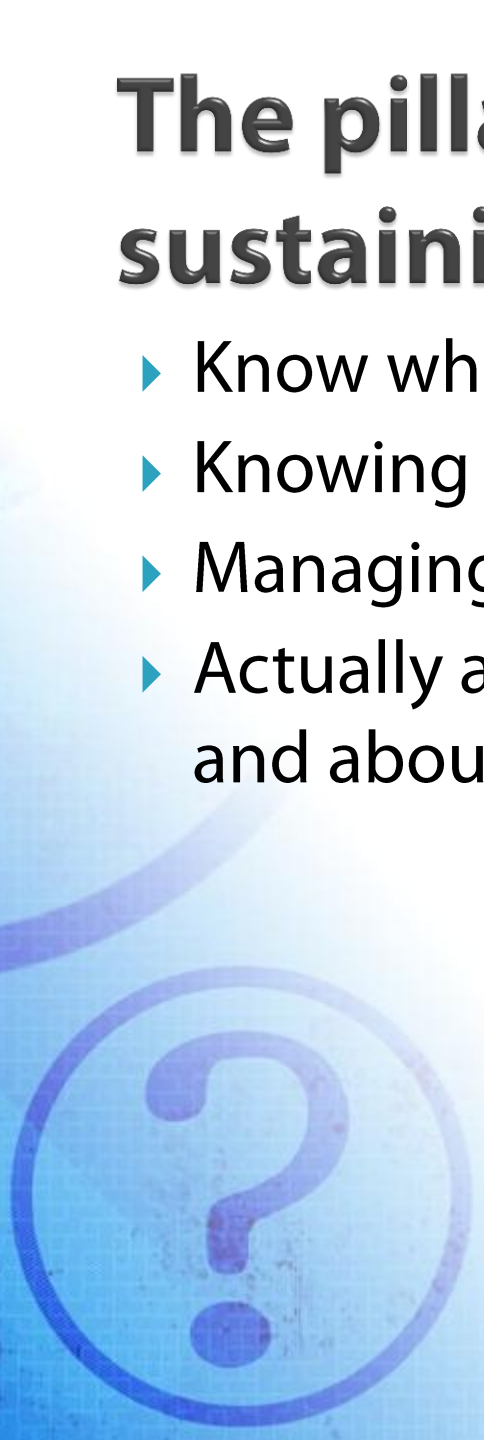
Lanterna IB Courses CTC Kingshurst

Three important most points

1. **You have to want it**
   - It's all about you understanding that it's all about *your life*…
2. **Thinking holistically**
   - Being aware of yourself in your context with regards who you are, how you got here and where you are going.
3. **Ownership and Responsibility**
   - You are in charge of your life and only you have the power to make any real changes. *You have to sit the exams, not your teachers, not your parents*…

The pillars of obtaining and sustaining study-skills

- Know what you need to know
- Knowing what you don't know and find out
- Managing your time
- Actually applying what you learn about study-skills and about how *you work* as a student



What are study skills?

What is the IB?

- **Structure:** Rigid but if you know the system, you can work it. Don't let it overwhelm you. Know the syllabus. Know how the exams work.
- **Knowledge:** but not ALL knowledge.
- **Hard work:** one of the themes of this seminar is the importance of self-dedication and personal responsibility. There is no such thing as luck in an exam setting.

What ARE the exams?

- All about knowing the form; not to get surprised. There are patterns to what questions are asked and how they should be answered.
- Ownership & Responsibility – You, as a student, need to OWN the information. It is yours! Once it is, it will be easier to 'give' it to the examiners in the way they want to see it. This is your responsibility!
- In technical terms
- In preparatory terms
- In a long-term perspective

IB Studying – The basic "How To"

Why?

- Find motivation to studying
  - long term purpose
  - what are your goals?
- Enthusiasm and enjoyment are key to motivation. Try to make studying fun. Reward good efforts with things you like.
- A group of friends can do this together. Publicly stated goals always trump privately stated goals!
- Read more of what you like and enjoy (there is nothing wrong in indulging in a subject you particularly like). Find *your subject,* use this as a drive, a motivation, to learn and study other not so fun things.
- Alternate between stuff you do know, and what you don't know. (Answering questions correctly is a form of reward.)
- Keeping perspective, remember your goals.

When?

- Study when you are not tired.
- Think in terms of number of efficient hours, rather the number of hours
- Do NOT procrastinate
- Do mind-maps/checklists for each subject/topic and make sure you know what you have left to study.
- make a time schedule from start of year 13 to mocks. Fill in all the deadlines for IA, ToK, EE, group 4 etc. Plan around this. Make personal (or group, remember public commitment) deadlines for drafts. After mocks make a new plan for your exam revision.
- Make sure you see and know what you don't know. This helps you manage your time tremendously.
- Prioritise; for year 13:

  ToK, EE, internals> knowing your subjects > preparing for mocks > regular tests during term. After mocks, exams should be your sole focus (and finishing up whatever internals you have left)

Where?

- Work in a quiet place!
- Avoid distraction – computer, TV, telephone and family and friends
- Don't ever study in bed or in your relaxing-space! This creates strong associations to work and concentration in a space you are supposed to associate to rest.
- Leave the space when taking a break

How?

- Organise your life and get straight down to work in each study session.
- Do check list of other things you must do – what can wait.

www.tadalist.com

Health

Another key to motivation and enjoyment, that is often overlooked is Health.

- Sleep (tired minds don't work well)
- Eat (hungry minds don't work well at all)
- Drink water (thirsty minds don't work at all) (it might be an idea to cut down on coffee, so as to maximise the effect whenever that inevitable late night cramming and essay writing session comes)
- Exercise (oxygen to the brain takes your mind off the academic, hobbies work as well for the latter point)
- Relax (learn to shut out college when you are not studying. Have a day off when you don't do or think about anything related to exams or internal assessments)
- Stress management (stress is a highly personal thing. Each person will have different stressors and different coping mechanisms. Being realistic! (unrealistic goals will lead to negative stress!))

Structure and Organisation

- Work in sessions. 30-40 minutes, and then have a break. This is the most efficient way for your brain to absorb information and actually contain it.
- Structure your studying. Pay attention to the syllabus. Pay attention to the task at hand (studying for what paper, essay or test)
- Be efficient, don't try to cram all the detail first thing you do.
- Repetition is the mother of all knowledge. But make sure repetition is done intelligently. Much more will stick if you use a more creative approach to studying.

Know yourself

- Be aware of your own weaknesses and don't let them fool you.
- The best way of getting something done is just doing it! Procrastination never did any good. The start is always the most reluctant, convince yourself to give it 15 mins, and most of the times after that period of tie you are well into your work and it's not as hard to motivate continuing.
- Bad concentration? Left and Right brain: left is the orderly part, but if the right brain (creative) isn't involved, it will do something else; so keep it working as well.

Ways to Revise

See It?

- Mind-maps
- Matrices
- Colour-coding & neatly written
- Write out and consolidate information, use pictures and diagrams

Hear It/Say It?

- Listen to others, discuss and attend lessons
- Have it retold
- Quiz with someone else
- Teach it! Explaining something is a great immediate reflection of what you really know. This is the method of recalling rather than recognising which is the method of reading.

Write It/Draw It?

- Rewrite with different focuses; rewrite the information in the form of all the people involved, all the dates, only concepts etc.
- Use trigger-words and word with powerful associations.
- Make it yours in terms of style.

Critical and Creative Approach

Combine methods! Stimulate the brain!

Critical and Creative Approach

- Don't take the writer's approach for granted (of your textbook)
- Identify where they "want" you to go wrong. Where are the obvious "traps"?
- Think critically at every question, and assume you know more than you might think in a stressed situation.
- Make associations. It's a good way to awaken knowledge, and will broaden your perspective.
- Use acronyms to memorise tricky things

- Construct or find narratives. Stories you can tell. (While this might be obvious in humanities/social sciences it can work surprisingly well in sciences as well. Make a story about the little gene or the electron to learn the boring details about it)

- Make a mind-map over something you have not fully understood yet. Make it big, detailed and personal to how you like to view it. Look it over actively every night for a week and see what happens.

What?

- Read the syllabus!
- Look at old exams!

- www.kingshurst.ac.uk/ibpastpapers

Subject group specific advice

Group 1 – Language A1

- Read the books on time!
- Discuss them with your friends
- Re-read the book: make notes on themes, characters, events, noteworthy uses of language, analogies etc. Use this as a basis for further studying.
- Use SparkNotes for an opinion
- Be able to connect the themes in the works you study to each other and to world around you.
- Practice writing essays and analysis of texts all the time!
- Practice your vocabulary! Learn difficult words, they are always impressive in future endevours.

Group 2 – Language B/Ab Initio

- Practice, practice, practice
- Use the language with friends and other learners. Have themed conversations
- Read children's books, plays (dialogue is easier to follow) or world newspapers. www.kingshurst.ac.uk/ic/worldnews
- Keep vocabulary notes (little cards with word on front and definition on back) with you all the time

Group 3 – Individuals & Society

- Proper notes are essential. Focus on main points, be structured, neat and organised.

- Work through your notes. Rewrite, discuss, colour-code or reshape them into a timeline for instance.

Reading Technique;

1. Read a chapter in 30 sec to get an overview
2. Read a second time, focus only on diagrams and headlines
3. Read again. Skim & get the bigger picture
4. Finally, read it through, highlight and look up vocabulary

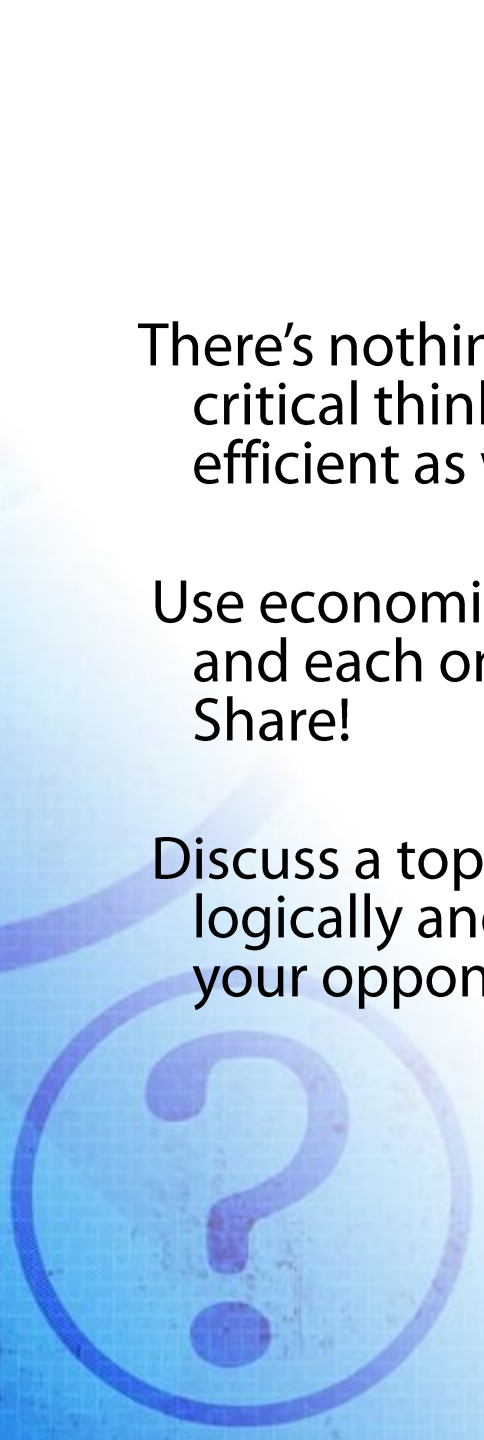
- Review! Read highlighted material over and over and recall/retell the contexts

- Create Note-pac*kages*. Copy textbook pages and diagrams, and compile with relevant notes, exercises and other information to create your very own booklets on each chapter (for example).

There's nothing like a discussion group! It is difficult to develop critical thinking and interpretation-skills alone. Very time-efficient as well!

Use economies of scale! Divide up the syllabus among yourself and each one makes really, really good notes on that topic. Share!

Discuss a topic or title. Choose a position for which you argue logically and coherently, and pay attention to the opinions of your opponent.



- Read actively!
- Make terminology guides
- And above all…

Group 4 – Experimental Sciences

- Know your Data Booklet!
- Always read ahead. Be aware of what is coming up, and having read ahead makes it possible for you to understand the lesson better, ask appropriate questions and not waste time getting stuck on a vocabulary word (i.e.) you don't know the meaning of.
- REVIEW! Never more important than in mathematics and sciences is the art of actually reviewing, looking over the information frequently! Read your notes again the next week. This enables both your short-term memory and long-term to mobilise and keep the information. Repeat this until you KNOW it.
- Do homework! You will need help to solve the problems…
- Look up words you don't know, create vocabulary lists/terminology guides were you write definitions, explanations in your own words and describe context.
- Images and diagrams are important. Use and draw labelled diagrams.
- Its all about doing old exams! Practise makes perfect.

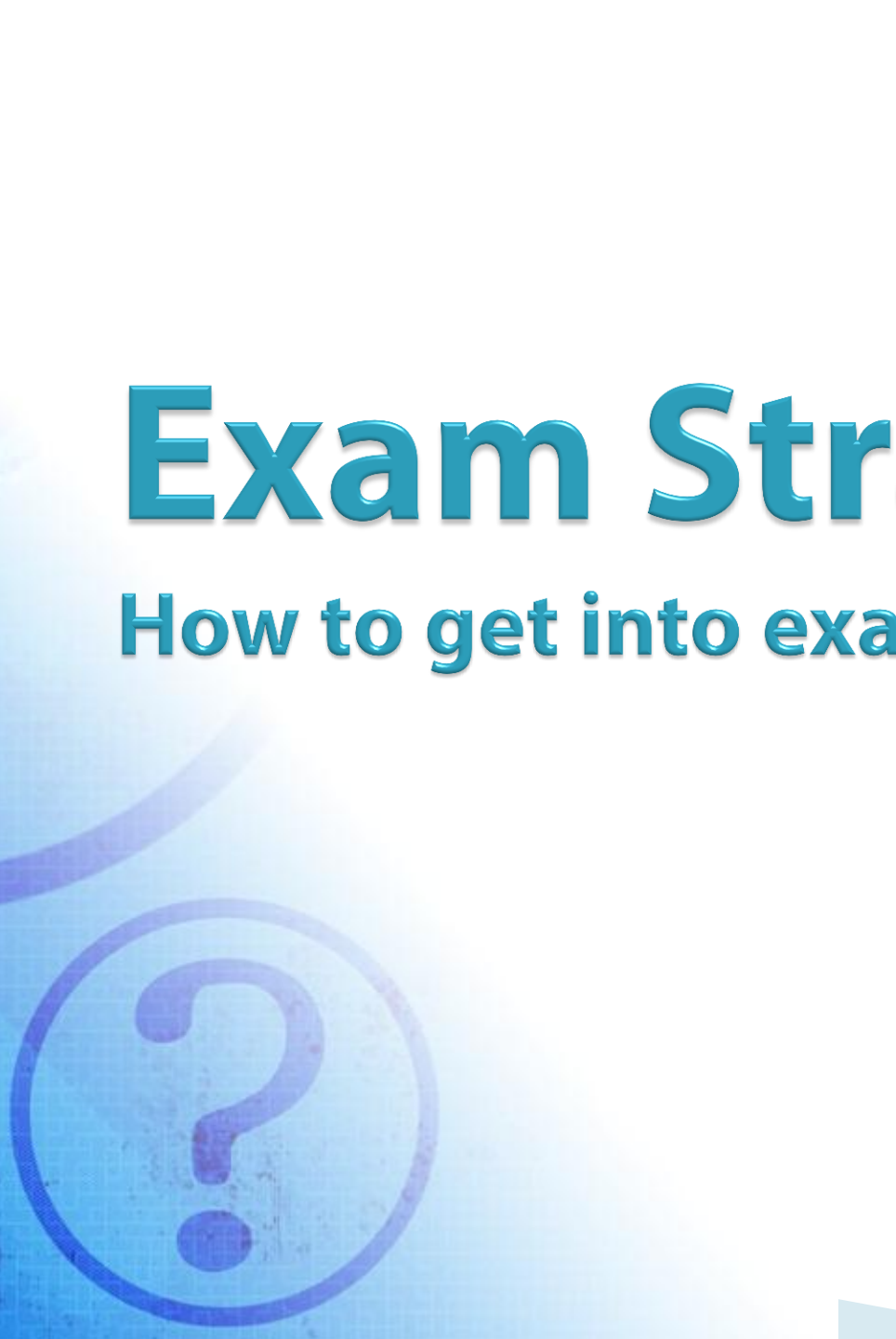
Group 5 – Mathematics

- Know your formula sheet!
- Know your calculator!
- Patience is a virtue!
- Repetition is of the essence! Mathematics is a process. It is not possible to cram maths, it's as simple as that.

- Organise the way you think about maths. Be structured in your method. Divide your method and therefore the way you comprehend the problem into steps; “Solving a differential equation requires x number of steps; these are divided into 3 main groups and total 10 steps”.

Exam Strategies

How to get into exam mode?

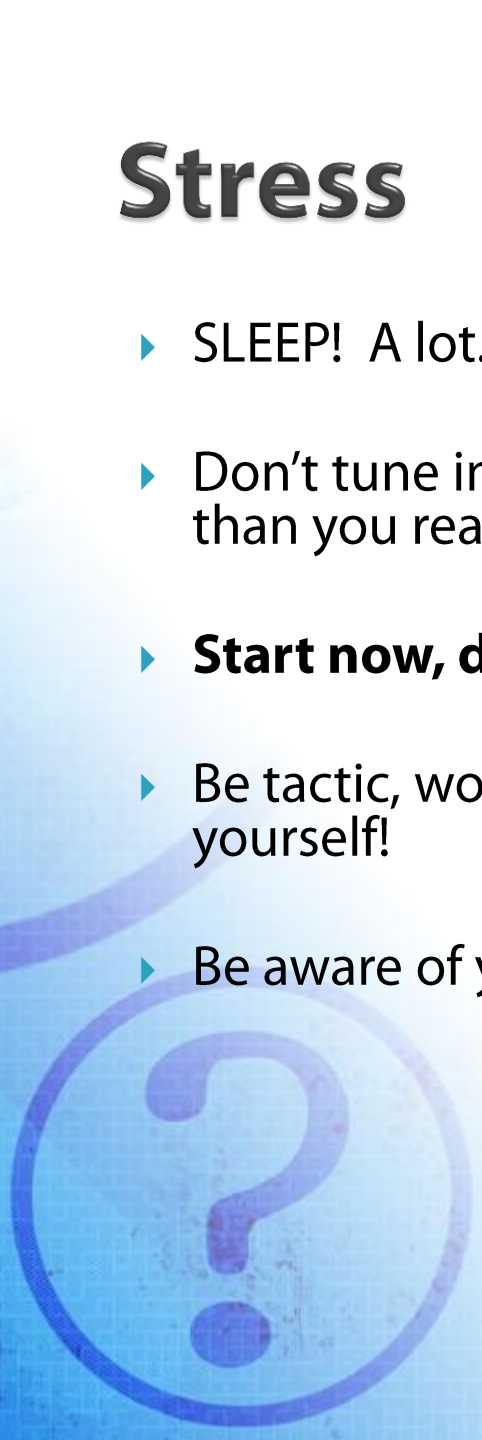


The obvious

Sleep, eat, exercise and be healthy in the weeks before the exam.

Stress

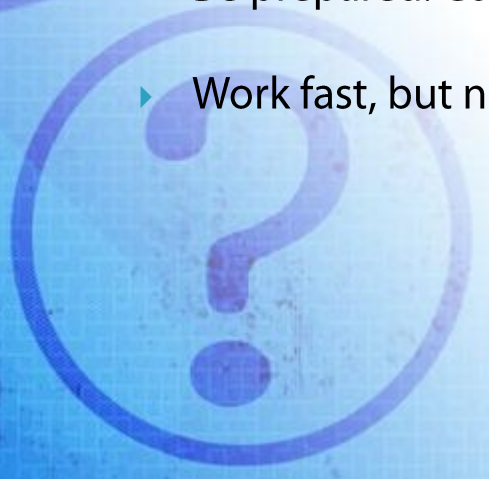
- SLEEP! A lot. Quantity as well as quality.
- Don’t tune in to other peoples stress-energy. You are more receptive than you realise.
- **Start now, don’t procrastinate.**
- Be tactic, work with strategy. Be a smart student and work ahead of yourself!
- Be aware of your *weaknesses and work on them actively!*



- Use what you have learnt in terms of study techniques!
- Who are you? What do you need? – Do you need to teach it, read it, see it, hear it.. .
- Practice old exams! Don’t learn unnecessary things, close to exams!

The Exam

- The night before, only brief review, do something nice instead. Exercise is recommended!
- Arrive a few minutes early, go to the bathroom, make sure you bring water. Focus. Deep breath. Relax.
- Look through the exam the first thing you do, and wherever you get an association, and don't let it slip. You are the most fresh in the first couple of minutes, use that to your advantage.
- Keep track of time-limitations. Reserve time for relaxation and go over work again.
- Be prepared. Come prepared with materials and be in good time for the exam.
- Work fast, but not stressed and sloppy!



Multiple choice:

- Read and think
- If hard eliminate the wrong answers
- Leave difficult ones and return later

Structured Q:

- Look at number of marks since they give an indication of where to allocate time
- Be very clear about the data – thorough reading of the information
- If calculations, then show them! Always write units.

Free response:

- Read whole Q before choosing
- Plan your answer on scrap paper!

- Go over the exam once you are finished. Check your working/writing. Correct mistakes and neaten any unclarities.