

How do I help students prepare for exams?

Topic focus

- end of trimester revision
- managing exam requirements efficiently

Topic outcomes

- you will be able to assist students with review of unit materials
- you will be able to provide practical advice to assist students with the exam process

'I have covered all the topics in the unit. I have designed an exam which should assess how well students understand the key concepts. I want to make sure the students come to the exam as well prepared as possible. I can't 'do the exam' for them, but there must be a few ideas I can pass on to them to ease some of the stress they experience at this time of trimester.'

Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching?

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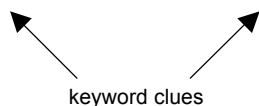
Possible solutions

1. Advise students to use each topic's learning objectives as a guide for revising the unit content.
2. Suggest that students construct flow charts to connect all elements of a topic, particularly concepts which are sequential. Many of us learn by, and can recall from, visual representations.
3. Similarly, concept maps can be created to assist students see the 'connections' between elements of a topic as well as connections between topics.
4. In the final lecture or tutorial, give students some practice questions as a means of demonstrating the types of questions that will be included in the exam.
5. In the final lecture or tutorial, distribute one or two 'model answers' and have students read and assess them. This assists students to see things from the marker's perspective.
6. Direct students to past exams available from the Library (<http://www.deakin.edu.au/library/>)
7. In the final tutorial or lecture, just giving some basic advice such as the following can be helpful:
 - a. set and adhere to a time allocation per question during the exam time
 - b. if spending too much time on one question, leave it and start another one (and return later if time)
 - c. when students ask "How much do I have to write?", explain that everyone is different, but to make sure "You write as fully as possible"
 - d. in multi-choice exams, use tactics such as – eliminate obvious unlikely answers first, look for clues in the keywords of the question to discriminate between two possible answers, better to make an intelligent guess than always choose option "C" if unsure.

Example 1: Multiple choice question

Which type of connective tissue connects two bones?

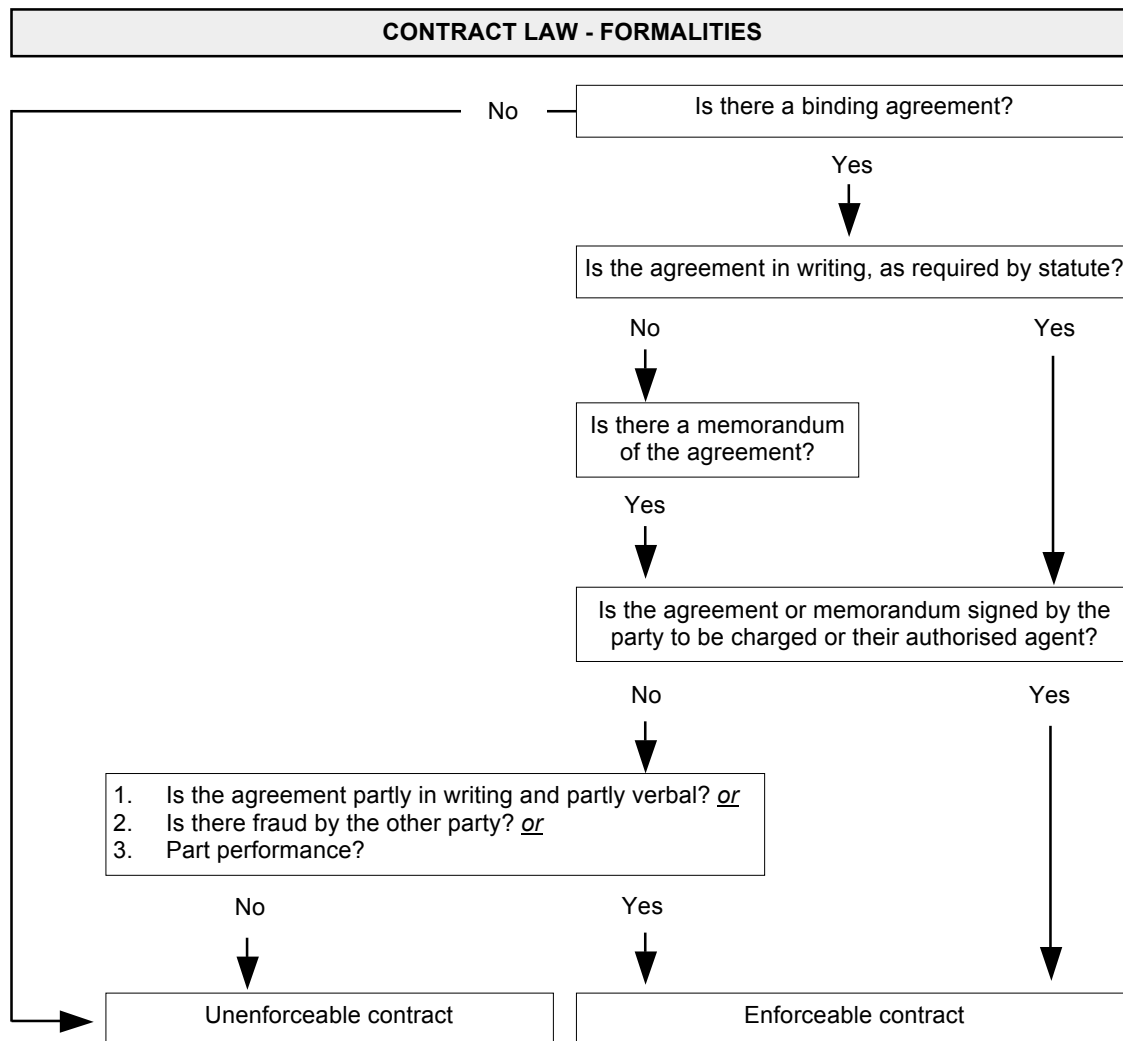
- a. spongy bone
- b. tendon
- c. sternum
- d. ligament
- e. nerve



Source: <http://www.allthetests.com/quiz25/quizpu.php?testid=1201483926&katname=Biology>

Answer: d.

Example 2: Flow chart



Source: Cusumano, S., Wiseman, L. & Christensen, S. 1999 *Contracts* 2nd edn Butterworths, Sydney p. 61.

More help

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. <https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/resources/listing/151> – some useful suggestions from the Australian National University
2. http://media.otago.ac.nz/r73SjLdJm2/FXTmMo5I/Preparing_for_Exams.pdf - useful discussion from the University of Otago
3. <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/study/exam/1.xml> - helpful discussion on exam preparation, exam strategies, interpreting exam questions and other advice, from Monash University
4. <http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/Resources/workshop-exam%20anxiety/word%20docs/Preparing%20for%20exams%20questionnaire.doc> – contains a checklist for students to rate how well prepared for exams they are, from the University of South Australia
5. www.usq.edu.au/resources/prepareexam.pdf – some quick tips for students from the University of Southern Queensland.

Related Topics

How do I use concept mapping?