ACE YOUR EXAMS

Teacher Implementation Kit

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Overview

Elevate Education is Australia’s largest provider of study skills workshops to high school students, and works with over 700 schools and 175,000 students every year across the UK and Australia.

Founded in 2001, Elevate has spent more than 13 years benchmarking the habits of the country’s top students. This research has identified 17 areas where the habits and study processes of the top students differ from middle and lower performing students. Elevate workshops introduce students to these 17 skills and show them how to adopt them.

What makes us different

Young presenters students can relate to
Elevate uses young presenters that have recently faced and aced the final years of school themselves. By using presenters that students can relate to, schools have found the impact of the study skills message is increased. Young presenters are perceived as being credible as they have only just gone through the experience themselves.

Practical study skills students can use
Most study skills programmes fail because they are dense on theory but lack the kind of practical skills that students can use straight away. All of Elevate’s material focuses on practical study skills modelled from the top students.

Short, high impact sessions
Research shows that as the length of a study skills program increases, student implementation tends to decrease. Students are left with an overwhelming list of ‘52 skills’ which is so long that students don’t know where to begin. These short, sharp sessions maximise student retention rates and isolate a handful of skills to implement immediately, encouraging student skill adoption.

Follow-up resources
Most study skills programmes are ultimately flawed in that teachers are not provided with materials to follow-up and reinforce the skills covered in the programme. Study skills, like any skill, are developed through repetition, practice and review. This teacher implementation kit is designed to be used in conjunction with the Ace Your Exams seminar to reinforce the skills covered in the session.

How to use this document

This teacher implementation kit contains a range of modular follow-up activities for staff to run in class. The focus of this implementation kit is on getting students to use the skills while studying in a classroom subject. However, if this kit is being used in pastoral care time, the activities can still be run using work the students have done while in another class (e.g. English).
Resource Outline

This resource is built around the Ace Your Exams seminar, and is designed to reinforce the exam preparation techniques covered in the session. Unlike other seminars that contain discrete study skills, this seminar is based around an exam preparation cycle spanning a number of weeks either end of an exam. The timeline below gives you an idea as to how you may want to structure these modules around your students’ exams.

5 Weeks Before
Module 1 – Exam Checklist
Time required: 15 minutes
Teacher kit: page 2
Student pack: page 2

4 Weeks Before
Module 2 – Creating an Exam Planner
Time required: 25 minutes
Teacher kit: page 5
Student pack: page 3

EXAM
Activity 3 – Debriefing Exam Preparation
Time required: 20 minutes
Teacher kit: page 8
Student pack: page 4

1 Week After
Activity 4 – Identifying Mistakes
Time required: 20 minutes
Teacher kit: page 11
Student pack: page 5

2 Weeks After
Module 1 – Exam Checklist

Initial class time required: 10 - 15 minutes
Follow-up time: See Follow-up Lessons
Suitable subjects: Any subject
Resources required: Elevate Exam Checklist from page 2 in the Student Template Pack
When: 3-4 weeks before exams

Research Background

Most middle or lower performing students do not perform poorly in exams because they are lazy or unmotivated. In fact, one of the biggest reasons students underperform is because of a faulty assumption about what it takes to do well in an exam room.

Most students believe that the best way to prepare for exams is by spending the overwhelming proportion of their time making and/or re-writing notes. This is a very intuitive assumption for students to make, given their greatest stress typically lies in the ability to recall information inside the exam room and they do not have access to their notes or textbooks. However, this mindset disregards a number of very important processes that influence exam performance. When you look at the way high performing students approach exams, they recognise that performance is not merely a reflection of how well they memorise material.

Each year we conduct rigorous research into the skills that top-performing students use to perform well in exams, and every year we come across students using intuitive, but ineffective exam skills. For example, in the graph to the right you can see a 11 cohort which was surveyed about its use of goal-setting prior to exams. The majority of students set themselves broad, aspirational goals that seem intuitive. But the top-performing students do the opposite. They set themselves highly specific goals linked to measurable outcomes, which aid them in their performance management between exams. Unfortunately, this mismatch between trusted exam strategies and most students’ behaviour is evident in a far broader range of skills beyond goal setting. They know they can boost their performance during

1. Preparation – focusing on the most advanced preparation techniques
2. Exam room skills – which help them maximise their performance
3. Post-exam debriefing – to ensure mistakes are not repeated in subsequent exams
Lesson 1 – Fill out the exam checklist

Print off copies of the Elevate Exam Checklist and distribute to students during class time. Ensure that you have enough copies printed off so that each student has one. The purpose of the form is to encourage students to reflect upon the way they have approached exams or exam blocks in the past. You can either get the students to work through the checklist independently, or you can walk through the checklist with them, question-by-question. Ask students to tick whether or not they perform the specific activity in each question, then get them to award themselves a score based on the number of ‘yes’ answers.

When students complete the checklist, either collect the responses from the students so that you can assess them individually, or go around the room and ask which areas the students currently have the most ‘no’ responses.

Scoring Chart

The following table is designed to provide you with a broad indicator of how to assess student performance in the Elevate Exam Checklist. A student’s score is based on the number of questions to which they responded an answer of Yes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Comments / Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 10</td>
<td>Cause for Concern</td>
<td>Immediate intervention is required on an individual level for this student. It is recommended that you encourage the student to select 2 to 3 areas they will aim to improve for their next exam block. Allow the student to self-select these areas of improvement, however ensure them that they will be held accountable for making the changes through regular spot checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Most students will fall into this particular category. Encourage these students to identify the broad category (eg. exam preparation, exam room performance or post-exam debriefing) where they had the most ‘no’ responses and suggest this area as a focus for their next exam block. Provide recommendations for changes in this particular area using the relevant Elevate module recommended in the section below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 18</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Encourage the student to challenge the reasons why they are not currently engaging with any particular skill. Explain the significance of small changes in approach and the outcomes that can be achieved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-Up Lessons

The Elevate Exam Checklist is designed for you to collect a profile of your students’ current approach towards exams, and will also provide a very useful insight into which modules within this kit to emphasise as follow-up. For example, based upon the areas of weakness that students express, it is recommended that you follow up using the following modules.

- Questions 1 to 6: Module 2 Creating an Exam Planner
- Questions 7 to 14: Module 3: Debriefing Exam Preparation
- Questions 15 to 18: Module 4: Identify and Fixing Exam Mistakes
Outcome

Students often hold the mindset that their exam results are predetermined, regardless of the amount of effort they put in. The aim of this exercise is get students reflecting on exactly how they approach all phases of exam performance; how they prepared for exams, manage the exam itself, and how they debrief their results. Only when students are acutely aware of how they are currently studying and the impact this has on their results, can behavioural change be achieved and sustained.
Module 2 – Creating an Exam Planner

Initial class time required: 15 – 20 minutes
Follow-up time: 5 minutes + marking time
Suitable subjects: All
Resources required: Elevate Exam Planner template, found on page 3 of the Student Template Pack
When: 3-4 weeks before exams

Research Background

Beliefs such as “I can’t get a 90% in that exam”, “I can’t do Maths” or “I hate writing essays” are commonplace amongst students, and their effects on student performance can be extremely limiting. These beliefs often become more entrenched as a student proceeds through high school, as they continue to receive a number of exam and assessment results which give the belief further credibility. Students begin to rationalise their performance is predetermined, and is in no way a reflection of their preparation. As educators, we understand this a difficult mindset to overcome.

If a student wants to improve their exam performance, they cannot simply aim to “do better.” Encouraging students to make small, incremental changes to their exam preparation over time, allows them to draw the connection between making changes to their preparation and receiving higher exam results. Over time, this reinforces a new belief: that results are controllable for students and are a reflection of their inputs. In the graph above, taken from a sample year 11 cohort, you can see how a large percentage of students (over 30%) are unlikely or extremely unlikely to use an exam planner. These results, replicated in hundreds of similar studies, are a cause for concern: students who don’t plan are unable to make small interventions to improve their performance. This module shows students how to create a planning mindset, to ensure they are striving for constant improvements between assessments.

Lesson 1 – Create an Exam Planner

Three weeks before an exam date, distribute the Exam Planner template, found on page 3 of the Student Template Pack to the students, and fill in column 1 with their subject name.

Before students begin to write down their goal for their upcoming exam in column 2, encourage them to consider the exam/assessment marks they have received in the past for the subject. Encourage students to set their goal
for the upcoming exam approximately 3-5% higher than the marks they have been receiving in the past for that subject. This is an important step in the process, because if you were to ask students to move their marks up by 10% or more, most students would suggest this is impossible to achieve. By asking them to move their mark up by a smaller amount, a student can perceive the goal as being more achievable.

The next step is that students need to complete the third column, which identifies the tasks they are going to complete in preparation for their exam. As students are completing this section of the planner, encourage them to incorporate 1 or 2 changes to their typical exam preparation for that subject. These changes provide positive references for why they can achieve an extra 3-5% in their upcoming exam. For example, if in the past the student has not submitted any notes or practice questions for marking, this could be a high-leverage change they could include.

In column four, ensure students set deadlines for when they are going to complete each of the individual tasks. Encourage them to work backwards from the date of the exam so they provide enough time to focus on the three distinct phases of exam preparation the presenters explained within the Ace Your Exams seminar; making notes, memorising notes and applying content in practice.

Have students present their exam planner templates to you on completion. Use your experience to affirm whether the tasks the students have outlined they are going to perform are going to lead them to achieve their goal mark. Suggest changes where necessary or otherwise, sign off of the sheet.

Follow-Up Lessons

Each class following the initial activity, conduct a quick 2-minute spot check on the students to ensure they are sticking to their deadlines. This can involve each student bringing their exam planner template and work due for that particular day, or can involve a more random spot-checking system each week with a limited number of students each day. The goal is to create a high level of accountability and an incentive to get the work done.

Another way to reinforce the use of the exam planner template is to pair up students in class using a ‘buddy system,’ which involves students spot-checking one of their classmate’s notes each day/week to ensure they are on track. While less effective than direct teacher oversight (particular if a student is paired with a friend who could potentially be more lenient), the process adds an additional layer of accountability for completing work as it falls due.

Outcome

The aim of this exercise is to remove the mindset that students are predetermined to particular exam results, and to encourage students to move their marks up incrementally. Encouraging a student to make slight adjustments to their goal (3-5%) and their exam preparation may sound small, however if this performance gap is bridged once, students begin to re-evaluate past beliefs of what marks they are capable of, and start to replace that mindset with new beliefs. If this process is executed 3 times across the year, all of a sudden a student has an improvement of 10%, an improvement that they may have previously thought was impossible.
## Elevate Exam Planner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Goal Description</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS STUDIES</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>1. Notes on how changes in external environment affect Australian industries</td>
<td>6/3</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Notes on “identify the problems that arise when companies go into liquidation”</td>
<td>7/3</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Notes on global expansion of one Australian business</td>
<td>8/3</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Notes on expansion of one company into Australia</td>
<td>9/3</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Memorise notes from step 1</td>
<td>12/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Memorise notes from step 2</td>
<td>13/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Memorise notes from step 3</td>
<td>14/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Memorise notes from step 4</td>
<td>15/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. 2012 Practice Exam - Multiple choice</td>
<td>18/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. 2012 Practice Exam - Essay</td>
<td>20/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. 2013 Practice Exam - Short Answer</td>
<td>23/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12. 2013 Practice Exam - Essay</td>
<td>24/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>EXAM DAY</td>
<td>26/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Module 3 – Debriefing Exam Preparation

| Initial class time required: | 15-20 minutes |
| Follow-up time:              | 5-10 minutes  |
| Suitable subjects:          | All subjects  |
| Resources required:         | Elevate Exam Debrief Form, found on page 4 of the Student Template Pack |
| When:                       | After exams, normally when students receive their marks back |

Research Background

Many students struggle to see the connection between their study techniques and their exam results. Common responses heard from middle and lower performing students boil down to the dismay that they studied hard but still underachieved. What’s missing from this analysis is the realisation that there is a big difference being busy, and being productive. Middle and lower performing students will often misuse their time, spending far too long on tasks such as note-taking or memorisation of information. Top performing students will instead get these tasks completed as soon as possible, and then move on to high-end gains such as practice papers and revision questions.

Lesson 1 – Debrief on effectiveness of exam preparation

The Exam Debrief form should be handed out in a lesson after the students have received the results of an exam. The purpose of this form is to encourage students to reflect on which study techniques they predominantly focus on, and whether they used their time effectively.

Students should be walked through the form. First, they should fill in the relevant subject and the mark they received for the exam. They should then write a short sentence on whether or not they achieved their goal, or whether they are happy with their result.

Next, have the students tally up the number of hours spent studying, as well as the number of hours spent making notes, memorising those notes or other information, and time spent on practice papers. Students will not have exact numbers, so these will only be rough estimates. There is also a space for them to calculate the percentage of time spent on each task.

The students should then enter on the Exam Preparation Health Check the percentage of time spent on each task. An example of the profile of a peak performing student is provided. This gives students a very clear visual representation of how they designate their study time in comparison to high achievers.

Students should then fill in the number of practice papers they completed in preparation for this exam. Their target is 5 practice papers per exam, as is noted.

The next two questions offer space for student reflection. They should be encouraged to consider what areas they could have improved, both in their preparation and in the exam room itself.
Finally, have the students set themselves 3 goals or actions for immediate improvement. This gives the students a very clear road map of how they will approach the preparation for their next exam.

### Follow-up Lessons

Have the students bring their completed Exam Debrief forms to class, and spot check whether they have completed the tasks or goals that were set.

In the first follow-up lesson, have students bring a display folder (or manila folder) to class. This will serve as a repository for any extra reading they come across which might help them in assessments. Have a discussion with the students about why using extra-reading in exams and tests will give them an advantage. The presenter will have covered this in the seminar, but this p. The main point to hammer home is that if all students learn from the same course outline, test answers tend to look fairly similar. This makes it hard to stand out, unless students can bring something else to the table – namely extra information that no other students thought to access.

### Outcomes

The outcome of this exercise is to get students understanding the importance of doing the right types of work in preparation for an exam. Most lower or average-performing students will spend their time either making notes or memorising their notes, in order to rote learn that information. This is intuitive, because the greatest stress that a student is going to have about exams is concerning their ability to recall that information when they do not have access to notes or triggers. As a result, almost all their time goes into memorising notes. This may be contrasted with the top students however, who realise that an exam is not a memory test, it is test of how you use what you remember. As a result, these students spend the majority of their time on practice exams. However, this idea is very counter intuitive, which explains why so few students do it.
Elevate Exam Debrief

Subject: **Maths**  
Mark: 85%

Did I achieve my goal?  
Yes / No: Yes

Total hours spent studying: 30

Total hours spent making notes: 15  
Percentage: 50%

Total hours spent memorising notes: 9  
Percentage: 30%

Total hours on practice papers: 6  
Percentage: 20%

Exam Preparation Health Check:

Enter the amount of time you spend on each task as a percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finishing Notes</th>
<th>Memorising Notes</th>
<th>Practice Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A top performing student’s study profile will be split like this:

Number of practice papers completed: 2  
(Your target is 5 practice papers per exam.)

What could I have changed or improved in my preparation? (e.g. Were you cramming the night before? Did you do enough practice papers? Did you get feedback for all of your practice papers?)

→ Too long spent on making notes on formulas
→ Could have done more practice papers

What could you have improved in the exam room? (e.g. Did you spend enough time planning? Did you read every question carefully? Did you run out of time?)

→ Allocate time more effectively between questions
→ Move on from questions I am working on for too long and cannot answer.

The 3 things I can immediately change or improve are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action / Change</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Completed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Practice Papers</td>
<td>14th March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-do Maths Exam</td>
<td>24th February</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Exam re-marked by teacher</td>
<td>26th February</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Module 4 – Identifying and fixing exam mistakes

Initial class time required: 15 - 20 minutes
Follow-up time: 5 minutes + marking time
Suitable subjects: All
Resources required: Mistakes Finder template on page 5 of the Student Template Pack
When: After exams, normally when students receive their marks back

Research Background

Many students will, upon receiving an exam or test score, fail to adequately engage with any feedback offered. This is particularly the case if the student has done poorly or is unhappy with their results. In any sample cohort, such as that depicted to the right, there is often a large minority of students who do not know how to engage with feedback and analyse past performance. Top performing students, however, seek to maximise the utility of any feedback they receive, especially negative or constructive feedback.

Once mistakes have been identified, top performing students will follow a very clear process of seeking to understand where they lost marks, completing any incorrect questions for a second time, and then pursuing further feedback on those questions.

Lesson 1 – Identifying the mistakes (short answer and multiple choice exams)

Distribute the Mistakes Finder template, from the student template pack, at the same time as you hand back students’ graded test/exam papers.

In column 1, have the students deconstruct their paper into individual questions or parts. Next, in column 2, have the students note how many raw marks were lost in each section. For example, if a question was worth 10 marks and the student scored 7/10, they should enter 3/10 underneath ‘Marks Lost’.

In columns 3 and 4, get the students to identify which syllabus topics were addressed, and also make a note of the specific syllabus bullet point or content area. Finally, get the students to note the type of question, i.e. multiple choice, short answer or extended response.
The Mistakes Finder table gives students an accurate snapshot of the specific areas they lost marks in their exam. At this point, communicate to students the importance of taking a proactive approach to fixing areas of weakness (ie. Re-do the parts of an exam paper they lost marks). Very few students will fix mistakes of their own volition, and those who don’t invariably lose marks in similar content areas in subsequent exams. Even more pertinently, remind them that this is actually an opportunity to avoid losing marks in their final exams.

After the students have been encouraged to re-do parts of their exam paper where they lost marks, it is important that the process is followed up. There two main options of follow up based on available class time and the nature of the students.

**Option 1 – Fix the mistakes in class**

Students are given time in class to re-do the questions on which they lost marks. They should be allowed to complete these questions with the aid of their notes or the textbook if needed. This also gives students the opportunity to ask questions of the teacher, seek clarification of issues and be given immediate feedback on their work. Depending on the nature of the students, they may also be permitted to ask questions of each other. This allows them to explain the content to each other, and learn through teaching.

**Option 2 – Fix the mistakes as homework**

Where class time is limited, teachers may set students the task of re-doing incorrect questions as homework. This can then be handed in at a future date and, if resources permit, remarked by the teacher, so that students can draw the connection between a change of approach and a change of mark.

**Outcomes**

The desired outcome from this process if to get students fixing any errors in exams, and consequently learning from their mistakes so that they are not repeated. By getting students to hand in their second attempt answers for remarking, they will be able to compare their original response with a higher quality answer. As students see improvement in marks in their subsequent attempts, this provides a positive frame of reference that they are capable of achieving a higher mark, rather than being limited by their original grade.
# Elevate Mistakes Finder

**Subject:** Economics  
**Assessment:** Half-Yearly Exam  
**Mark:** 81%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Marks Lost eg. 2/5</th>
<th>Topic Covered</th>
<th>Type of Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>Role of consumers in the economy</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>Efficiency and the production process</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>Market equilibrium (Demand &amp; Supply)</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>Elasticity of demand &amp; supply</td>
<td>Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>Protection (Tariff/quotas/subsidies)</td>
<td>Short Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3/10</td>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>Short Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1/10</td>
<td>Distribution of income &amp; wealth</td>
<td>Short Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Short Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td>External stability</td>
<td>Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4/20</td>
<td>Globalisation &amp; Economic Development</td>
<td>Essay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>