

The Mid-Year Examinations

Last Monday I spoke about the joyous news that Christmas is coming. Today, I would like to talk about the not so joyous news that the Mid-Year Examinations are also coming.

I will start by telling you that there are 22 days until the first examinations take place in this Hall. Take out one day for Christmas Day and one day for Boxing Day, when you will be recovering from eating too much the day before, then there are 20 days remaining for study (including today). But do not get too excited by the fact that 20 days is almost three weeks away; and that a great deal can happen in three weeks. Form 6 will be taking the Chinese Language and Culture examination and the Use of English Section A exam in 3 days from now; Form 4 start with Music 2 in 8 days time; Form 3 with the English Listening Test in 9 days; and Form 1 and Form 2 have their English Dictation and Listening Test also in 9 days. For the Form 1 boys, their first day at St. Paul's a little over three months ago must seem a very long time ago indeed.

Of course, the students who are sitting here this morning feeling the most comfortable are Form 5 and Form 7. As I look at them, I can see smiles on their faces and their adopting a rather relaxed posture. Just remember, however, that your turn will come a lot sooner than you imagine. For Form 5 it is 97 days to your first internal examination and for Form 7 it is just 82 days (or under 12 weeks in more alarming language).

As for the teachers who are sitting close to you, the above information serves as a reminder of all the marking that they will need to be complete. Class after class; student after student; page after page of answer booklets; all require careful reading, marking and assessing.

By now, I have probably left everybody in this Hall feeling absolutely worried and depressed. So I ask the all important question: *Why do we have examinations?*

The purpose of examinations is to test our understanding of the material that has been covered in a particular class. By this time of the year, you should have a broad base of knowledge in each of the subjects you have been studying. The examinations that the teachers will set are designed to assess the breadth and depth of your knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, your teachers will be looking for you to demonstrate that knowledge and understanding by means of the particular questions that they will ask.

The Mid-Year Examination period is an important 'reality-check' for all concerned. The results will give you an indication of how much you understand about the content and the concepts that you have been studying in class and at home. For the teachers, the results will provide them with invaluable information on how their boys are progressing and allow them to modify their teaching programmes, if necessary, for the remainder of the year. For your parents, the examination results will provide confirmation that you been working hard, or not working hard, whichever might be the case.

So, how should you study over the remaining days leading up to the examinations? The following tips are based on *How to Study and Make the Most of Your Time* by Dr. Bob Kizlik (2006).

No two people study the same way, and there is little doubt that what works for one person may not work for another. Everyone is different and there is no question that for some boys, studying and being motivated to learn comes naturally. For others, studying is not so easy. Your success at SPC and then later on in life, however, is dependent on your ability to study effectively and efficiently. The results of poor study skills are often wasted time, frustration, and low or failing grades.

Unfortunately, there is not a magic formula for success in preparing for examinations, whether they are written, practical or oral. Studying any subject material requires work! Effective study skills must be practiced in order for you to improve. It is not enough to 'think about' studying; you have to actually do it.

What you must do is have I place a very clear plan, a plan that is designed to help you improve your learning and understanding, and ultimately your grades. If you don't have a plan for studying, then you will not have any way of allocating your precious time. A good plan keeps you from wandering off course, and makes every hour count. The problem of when to study is critical. As a general rule, studying should be carried out only when you are rested, alert, and have planned for it. Last minute studying just before an examination is not the way to succeed. Sticking to your plan can be hard work in itself. However, don't waste valuable time and remember that avoiding study is the easiest thing in the world to do. It is up to you to follow the plan that you prepared.

Your Form Teacher and Subject Teachers can provide you with useful tips on how to study. I would like to offer my suggestions as you prepare for the Mid-Year Examinations.

- You can study for the examinations anywhere, although some places are better than others. Above all, make sure that the place you choose to study is quiet and without distraction. Distractions build up and ultimately waste your time.
- Get an overall picture of what you're going to study before you study the topic in any detail. That is, start with the broad picture and then gradually focus in on the specifics.
- The important things to learn are usually answers to questions. Ask yourself questions (what, why, how, when, who, where) as you read. As you answer them, you will make sense of the material and remember it more easily.
- Reading is not running your eyes over a textbook. When you read, read actively. That is, read to answer questions you have asked yourself or questions your teachers have asked.

- Stop reading every so often to recall what you have read. Try to recall main headings, the important ideas and the main concepts, and attempt to connect things you have just read to things you already know. When you do this periodically, the chances are you will remember much more and be able to recall material in the examinations.
- Like reading, note-taking is a skill which must be learned and refined. Almost invariably, note taking, or the lack of it, is a constant deficiency in the study methods of many students. As you study for the examinations, write notes that are accurate and concise but also legible, so that you can read them at a later stage.
- During the remaining class time, listen carefully to the teacher and learn to focus and concentrate on the main points of the lesson. Write them down, and then later reorganise them in your own words. Once you have done this, you have set the stage for successful reviewing and revising.
- When you have finished studying a topic, carry out a review. This is a good time to go over the notes you have taken to help clarify points you may have missed or don't understand. The best time to review is when you have just finished studying a topic. Then before an examination do a final review to 'fine-tune' your knowledge and understanding of the material.

Any examination is a time of pressure and anxiety and sometimes your friends do not provide a great deal of help. You will hear fellow students say 'I study for six hours every evening and all through weekend'. This is probably not true and may simply serve to hide the fact that they are feeling guilty because they are not studying hard enough. Other fellow students will tell you that 'I have done no study thus far and don't intend doing any'. Again, this is also probably not true and more likely that they are studying feverishly behind the scenes.

Examinations are a fact of life in schools not only in Hong Kong but across the world. Thus you are not alone. Remember, however, that examinations can be tackled with confidence if you have taken the time at the very beginning to develop a plan and been determined to stick with it right through to the end.

In conclusion, the good news is that the Mid-Year examinations will be over by the 10th of January. You will then have to wait only a few days before will getting the results.

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