

Preparing for using evidence in an exam using pre-released materials

Introduction

This can be the most difficult type of exam to use evidence in because you are given time to study, use and think about the materials available to you in the exam. This means there is an in-built expectation that you will use evidence well and thoroughly to answer the questions.

Essential first steps

- **Find all guidance on how you use evidence in the particular exam that you are preparing for.** This could be in a module handbook, in a lecture, in guidance notes, in mock exams...
- **Find past papers, if they are available, ideally with mark schemes.** This is so you can see exactly what is required and particularly how the pre-released materials are to be used for maximum marks.
- **Attend any preparation workshops, lectures, seminars, labs, problem classes on the exam in particular.** Often there are hints and tips that are not shared in any other forum and this is particularly important for pre-released materials as you may be given ideas on how to explore them in advance and use them in the exam.
- **Engage fully with the learning in the whole module.** You do this by attending all sessions, doing all tasks and reading and all formative tasks. The exam is based on the module, so understanding gained through your learning is essential to being able to use the pre-released materials.

Possible specific preparation activities

- **Identify and develop a thorough understanding of each key idea, theory, method, framework, example etc in the module.** The emphasis is on being able to use and apply each element to the pre-released materials.
- **Complete past papers, paying attention to how you use evidence from the pre-released materials in the exam and use evidence to investigate the pre-released materials.** If you have mark schemes you can look for exactly how the pre-released materials should be used to gain maximum marks. This will also help you to become used to using this type of evidence as you write under time pressure.
- **For each key concept, idea or method, work with friends in the module to explore and develop a thorough understanding.** By doing this exploration you will be better prepared to apply the ideas to the pre-released materials.
- **Explain the key ideas to somebody outside of your subject area or a younger relative.** This will force you to really have to understand each idea and make it understandable to others. If no humans are available, telling a dog or cat (or horse) can serve the same purpose. By understanding the ideas really well you can more readily apply them to the pre-released materials.
- **Complete past papers under exam conditions.** This prepares you to access and use information from the pre-released materials at speed and create a coherent response to the exam questions.

- **Set exam questions for friends and vice versa, using the pre-released materials.** This works best if you then discuss the answers you create and attempt to mark the answers. Draw upon past papers. You might even manage to predict the questions that are actually asked!
- **Explore the pre-released materials using frameworks, theories, ideas and methods used in the module.** For example, if the exam was on ethics in artificial intelligence and the pre-released materials were various companies' ethical statements, you would use the ethical frameworks taught in the module to explore the materials, so you were ready to use them in the exam.
- **If you are allowed to take your own notes in.** Check if you are allowed to annotate the pre-released materials and/or take in notes. If you are, write the notes in a way that shows critical understanding of the pre-released materials. This means identifying connections between ideas, the limits of ideas, when and where they can be applied, if there is disagreement in the literature...

What type of evidence will I need to use?

As ever, this varies a great deal from one exam to another. But, the list below should help you to think through your preparation.

- **What must I know from memory and be able to show understanding of in the exam?** Even though the exam is based on pre-released materials, you are required to draw upon wider evidence and ideas to explore and explain the materials. This will usually be the theories, frameworks, main ideas, examples etc from the module.
- **What exactly can I take into the exam with me?** In some exams you can take annotated copies of the pre-released materials, in others you are given a clean copy in the exam. Sometimes you can take notes in, sometimes not... check the guidance for your exam carefully!
- **What must I recognise and be able to explain in the exam?** E.g. a framework that may be needed to answer a question, using the pre-released materials as evidence. Background understanding is essential to being able to use the information available to you in the exam room.
- **Who must I know and be able to use the ideas of in the exam?** Large scale overarching ideas are essential to exploring and explaining the pre-released materials. For example, you may need to know the ideas of three principal theorists in a genetics examination so you can use the pre-released materials to form answers.
- **What from the module is irrelevant and so will not be needed?** You may be told what is not in the exam. Check. It may be that only some ideas from the module will be examined because the other ideas have been assessed in an essay, for example.
- **What style and type of referencing is required in the exam?** This may be different to that used in the assignments in the module or programme you are studying. Check this and practise with it.
- **Are there any types of evidence you are told you must or must not use?** Check your guidance carefully; it may be that you can ONLY use the pre-released materials, or that you can refer to other sources too.

Summary

- The most important aspect of an exam based on pre-released materials is not to rely on the fact you have materials available; you still need to know the main ideas, frameworks, theories, facts etc, so you can answer the questions using the pre-released materials.

- It is essential to check exactly what is and is not expected of you in each particular exam. Don't assume it is like previous exams you have done. This can be especially true of this type of exam as you are likely to have rules on how you can and cannot use the pre-released materials.
- Check carefully how you are to cite and reference the pre-released materials and any other evidence you are allowed to use.
- Ensure you are confident with the main concepts and ideas so you are able to apply them well, using the information available to you in the exam to illustrate and show detailed understanding in the answers, as required.

What next?

- Have a look at the rest of the [exam writing page](#).