

The pitfalls of a resit

The main reasons for not passing a test are:

1. Not studying enough
2. Not studying the right material
3. Insufficient knowledge of the characteristics of the test
4. Inaccurately reading the instructions or questions (e.g. because you're working or want to work too quickly)
5. Entering the wrong answer, e.g. due to excitement ('Ah, I've got it!')
6. Spending too much time on certain assignments (so you don't have time to answer all the questions)
7. Lack of motivation (you think the questions are boring or annoying)
8. Uncertainty and therefore changing answers without any real reason
9. Negative fear of failure (you think 'I can't do this... I'll never pass this... I'll probably fail again...')
10. A combination of reasons.

How can you turn these causes around and use them to your advantage in a test? By making a thorough and brutally honest analysis of your mistakes and by not falling into the pitfalls of a resit. In this info sheet, we discuss those pitfalls.

Resits often prove harder to pass than the first exam opportunity. And not because you've suddenly become stupid. So, why is that? It's because you have fallen into one (or more) of the pitfalls. These are the main ones:

Pitfall 1: Negative feelings

Pitfall 2: Doing the same thing you did before

Pitfall 3: Recognising the course material instead of really mastering it.

! Assignment: Read the following text. Then work out which pitfalls apply to you.

For each pitfall, think of a possible solution or tip that you will try out in the coming period.

Pitfall 1: Negative feelings

Failing a test can make you stressed. This makes it harder for you to learn, which in turn increases the chance of failing again. This is called 'magical failure'.

Frustration increases the chance of another fail, as do feelings of (increasing) insecurity. Those feelings of frustration, insecurity and other forms of stress release certain neurotransmitters – chemical substances – in your brain, which hinder the process of successful learning, remembering and reproducing. Another consequence is that negative feelings take up part of your working memory. The brain does that automatically. It's programmed to try to eliminate feelings like frustration and stress. To be able to do that, it needs working space, which it hijacks from (part of) your working memory. At that time, you can no longer use those parts of your brain to study well.

Tips for a resit:

- Pretend, as best you can, that you are studying for the exam for the first time.
- If you are not taking the resit in the same academic year, carefully check that the course material and the learning objectives are still the same.
- Swap your notes with someone else. This provides some new food for thought.
- Make your own summaries – your brain remembers those the best. If you don't have time to do

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that, watch the videos about learning to plan in four steps and setting priorities.

Pitfall 2: Doing the same thing you did before

Imagine you went to your doctor and said: 'Doctor, the pills you gave me aren't working.' You would hope that your doctor wouldn't then say: 'Just keep taking them, stick with it', but that he would ask you questions and examine you properly.

That sounds logical. And it is. And that's exactly how you should approach resits. Something went wrong the first time – the treatment didn't work – so you're going to have to find out why that was. If you don't pass an exam, there's no point in preparing for a resit in the same way as you did for the first attempt ('Just keep taking them, stick with it'). Something needs to be improved. And in order to improve something, you first need to know where things are going wrong.

- Are you making mistakes in questions that require detailed answers or just an overview?
- Are you making mistakes at the beginning or at the end of the examination (this might reveal something about your stamina during tests)?
- In which subjects?
- If you change your first answer, what percentage of those changed answers turn out to be correct?

It helps to take a step back and review the examination as though it were someone else's. Set yourself the task of telling 'the other person' what you think went wrong generally. Did you trip up on questions that require detailed answers, and so need to spend a few more hours studying? Or did you mainly struggle with questions that require insight? Or was the problem mainly inaccuracies and reading errors? Or did you run out of time? If so, why is that? Did you not know the material well enough? Did you not do enough timed practices with sums and calculations? Or is it down to something else?

When preparing for the resit, you don't have to spend a lot of time on things that you are already doing well. However, it is a good idea to keep checking whether you really still master those parts. To do that, you can use a very simple feedback loop: if you can still recount the material out loud, you still know it. If you discover that you don't know some areas well enough, you will have to pay more attention to them.

Pitfall 3: Recognising is not the same as really knowing

This is a major pitfall: thinking that you have mastered the material because you have studied it often. If your brain could speak, you'd hear it say: '*Yeah, I recognise that, yeah, I recognise that, too.*' But recognising is not the same as really knowing!

It's quite easy to check whether you have fallen/are falling into this pitfall of recognition. Whenever you think '*Yes, I recognise that*', close the book or paper or cover the page. Explain out loud what you have just read. If you can do that, you have remembered it. You know the material. If you can't, you'll have to keep at it.

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Approach the course material in a different way

There are several ways to avoid the pitfalls of a resit, some of which you have just read about. Here are a few more ideas:

- a. Use other books and materials. Look for videos on the topic.
- b. Ask a fellow student to ask you quick-fire questions on a topic.
- c. Explain the course material to your father or cousin. If you don't know the material well enough, this is a quick way to find out. Because if you don't know the material well, you won't be able to explain it to someone else. So, this is a very useful method: are you really sufficiently prepared?
- d. The tombola: collect at least two old exams. Cut out the questions and fold them up, as though they were raffle tickets. Put the folded questions in a large bowl. Keep the answers out of sight on a separate sheet.
 - Pick out a question.
 - Read the question carefully and take the time to think out loud what the answer should be.
 - Then look at the answers to see if it is indeed the right answer.
 - Was your answer correct? Take another question.
 - Was your answer incorrect? Say (out loud) *why you thought* you had the right answer. Then look at the correct answer and compare it with your answer. Try to find out where you went wrong. In other words: did you follow the wrong line of reasoning, or did you make connections between things that don't belong together? This way, you will gain an insight into the material and your own way of thinking.
 - Finish by reading the course material again.

The advantage of this way of working is that, based on the (wrong) answers, you can find out which parts of the course material you need to keep working on. But not only that. It helps you work in a more insightful way. Knowing why you didn't answer a question correctly will help you to understand what the right answer or reasoning should be.

This way of studying also has the advantage that at the end of the day you get through 'a few more questions' in a more fun way.