# Getting Exam Ready

Aimee Bell 0:06

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to our student digital champion podcast from a distance. This is Episode Two, and I'm back again with my colleagues, Theo and Xin to discuss all things exam stress, exam preparation, and how to deal with your mental health and well-being during this time as well. So, if you are interested in hearing all about this and what we have to say, stick around, and let's get into it.

Okay, great. So, we're back for episode two now with myself, Theo and Xin. And, this episode, we are here to talk about exams, the dreaded word, the dreaded time of the semester, exam season is fast approaching for many of us, and assignment deadlines as well are fast approaching, and we're in the final semester of the year. And so, a lot of us have this kind of in the back of our mind. So, it's approaching and it's coming up well and fast. So, we're here today really just to kind of talk about our experiences as students ourselves and maybe share some tips that we have for dealing with exam season, exam stress, and how to just maintain your well-being through the whole thing.

So, Theo, we'll start with you. In terms of how you would maybe prepare for exams? And what's your kind of methodology? Do you like making like, lists or plan a night like a calendar or like a revision timetable? Like how exam season is approaching and how would you best prepare yourself to be in the best shape possible for it, with all things considered as well, with this era know that we're in with, with COVID? Is there anything now with you being at home and studying? Is there anything that you would do differently? Yeah, it is quite a different era.

Theo Burton 2:27

I find for me, if I make a revision timetable, I tend not to stick to it very well. And then I didn't think I'm doing great a revision. So, for me, I kind of, you know, go with the flow in the sense of revision. And so, the methods that work for me, traditionally, kind of you know, before, the pandemic, would be kind of flashcards mind maps, I really like kind of an obscure tip, but if it works for you, it works for you. I like getting a pack of post it notes and writing a whole bunch of terms or theories or concepts onto it. And just like placing it around my room or places I'm normally in, you know, in the kitchen or something. And then I'm just associating these places with these concepts helps you visualise it, and in exams. So obviously, this year is completely different. We're all spending so much more time in front of screens. And it kind of feels like our whole world of revision and studying and learning revolves around looking at a computer screen.

So, there are a lot of ways that we can, you know, take advantage of making a disconnect from looking at our computer. I think going back to basics and using paper materials and using post it notes and using like physical flashcards can be really useful if you can get access to them. And if that's the kind of thing that appeals to you, it means that you're sorry, go ahead. No, no, I was just gonna I was just gonna chime in on that and say like, yeah, like I you know, I would love using flashcards as well like even way way back when I did my A-levels like that was something I did so that's like that would be a study technique that I'm used to as well like I'm kind of in a weird boat now with uni because I'm studying a degree that is solely coursework based so I don't have the typical exam stress that you or Xin would have to face but you know, I still do my readings and still study so I can learn and retain information, especially for when I'm doing my assignments. I need to know that information to be able to do the assignments well, and that is something I like to do. I'm really, I'm one for mind maps, and spider diagrams and

trying to use them to almost connect points within your theory. I think that's it. They're really good for that kind of purpose. But I'm just coming back to the point that you said.

Aimee Bell 5:06

your work. And that would help you remember it. And like I also do that I know this is work for everyone. But like I sometimes do that with music, like I will listen to something or like a podcast even in the background, and then I always kind of then link that whatever I'm learning to either that song or that podcast or whatever, as well. So it's a similar kind of thing. But obviously, I'm using kind of an audio sense, and you're using visual, and but it's the same kind of concept and you know, that really can help and work for a lot of people. Xin do you have any different kind of study methods on your preparation for exam time that, that you find that help you?

Xin Yi Heah 5:53

Yeah, so actually, for me, I have these take home exams that I have five days to complete. So that actually gives me a bit of leeway into like, how I want to structure or how I want to plan how I complete my assessments. So usually what I do is I tend to change my learning environments a lot, especially when it comes to assessments because I find that I cannot stay in my room with all the distractions around me.

So, for me, I tend to go to the library with no distractions, or I go to like, the living room where all my things are not around me, and I'm just left there with my materials and my laptop. So, it helps me focus better. Yeah, that's, that's so keys. And, and I think as well, and branching off of that, and, you know, changing your study environment, and can also really help and benefit your well-being, which we'll go on to talk about. But I think that's really key. Because obviously, you want to have a space in your, in your life in your house,

where it's solely for relaxation. So say your bedroom, you know, you want to go there to, you know, shut out the world, turn your laptop off, not have to think about University, or work or anything else and go there to relax and sleep, you know, if you can have a different kind of environment, or study space that is separate from that, then it can really help your well-being as well as your productivity that you're referring to then, you know, you're you want to have a space for you know, okay, this is where I shut off for the night.

And then this is where I work where I can be productive and unfocused. And I think having two separate spaces, and even if it is a matter of needing to go to the McClay, to be able to give yourself that space. And, you know, if you're living with other people, and then it's difficult to find that space, you know, I think it is important to do that. And so yeah, just differentiating the space, especially as well with, with this era of COVID when like our entire life is, is from home, you know, your social life, your work life, and your study life. Like if it's all kind of happening in the one place that can become very consuming and can really weigh on your, on your mental health and your, on your well-being. And so that, you know, leading on from that I know Xin when you were talking about that really helped them with productivity, which is so true, but I think you know, branching off of that it is key to point out that it helps with our well-being as well.

Aimee Bell

And is there anything else Xin that you would say, and you would maybe do or practice in the lead up to exams that that also help with your well-being?

Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. Like sometimes associating your rest space with your study space can actually have an adverse effect on your well-being because when you're relaxing, sometimes you may look at your table and you're like, Oh, I actually need

to get started in your assignment or anything. And that might not might actually impact your well-being adversely, which is not a good thing. And for me personally, I have. I also sometimes set personal deadlines for myself. But this is not something I stick to all the time. It is also important that you don't get stressed out by how others study, because everyone has their own study method. And I don't think you should get stressed out, because you're not studying in a way that others aren't. It's very important to go at your own pace and how you like it for the most effective exam preparation.

Aimee Bell 10:19

Yeah, that is so true. I think that key point about going at your own pace is so important to highlight. And, you know, I think we can make all the kind of like revision timetables and study plans, you know, that we want. But at the end of the day, I think it's really key to highlight as well, when it comes to your well-being like, if you have it in your agenda that Okay, I'm gonna sit down for four hours, on Wednesday afternoon on study, but then Wednesday afternoon rolls around, and you just don't feel like it, you're, you're having a bit of a slow day, maybe a bad Mental Health Day, or you're just feeling really kind of lethargic and just have no energy. I think it's really key to point out as well. It's like, give yourself a break. Like, don't worry about it, don't stress out just because you have scheduled, I need to study for four hours nigh on Wednesday. And I don't feel like it. But I have to do it because I've timetabled it, like don't worry about it, like give yourself a break. If you need time off on, you know, like Xin was saying, you know, working at your own pace, not stressing too much about what other people on your degree pathway are doing. You know, do what's right for you. And especially with this whole year, like it's been crazy for everyone, like we all need to give ourselves a bit of a break a bit of a breather and be kind to yourself to not put too much pressure. You know, I think like in the final weeks up to exam time, it's so easily done. And I think we all just need to relax

and understand and listen to our bodies and listen to our heads when we need time off just to give it to ourselves, and not beat ourselves up for it either. I think that is so key to highlight. And that would be my have to say honestly, like that would be my number one tip for maintaining your well-being for me personally. And it's just giving yourself a break and knowing what you need at that time, and not applying too much pressure 100%. And but if we even look like there are five steps to mental well-being which I've had, I've done a wee bit of research on and, and I think they will be really important to kind of bring up now, I suppose when we're talking about wellbeing. And you know, it's a, it's a conversation about well-being, you know, a lot of people we all know about it. And we all know that it's important to maintain, and but some, some of us don't really know how, and so that kind of thing could really help with that.

So, number one, it says, connecting with other people, and good relationships are important for your mental well-being. So I know that again, that's something that's been really hard for all of us this past year, you know, we're feeling that lack of connection. And because we're all we're all sat at home, but making that time, you know, at the end of the day or the weekend or something like picking up the phone and ringing your friend and just ask them, you know, how are you doing. And I think that's really, really important for us all to be doing. And number two is being physically active. So, making sure to get out for some fresh air, exercise, you know, looking after yourself in that in that way as well. And number three is learning new skills. Number four is give to others. And number five is pay attention to the present moment to practising mindfulness or meditating or something like that. And so, guys, I'm wondering if those five steps to good mental well-being? What do you think would be your number one to resort to? Would it be connecting with others? Would it be being physically active with exercise, new skills, giving to others or mindfulness paying attention to the present moment? What would

you say? would be your number one thing to do to try and maintain your well-being? And Theo we'll go with you first?

Theo Burton 14:27

Yeah, sure. So, I would not indirectly answer the question. But I would say that for most people a combo of one and five of connecting with others, and mindfulness. Connecting with others, ties in kind of to part in the exam stress, but I kind of find that when it's coming up to exam time, and this is probably more relevant than past a level years the now but I would find that I would be able to alleviate a lot of my stress by working in a group, or by helping others teaching others what I've revised and learned, because then it gives you confidence in what you know. But also, just being in a social setting with people really does help alleviate a lot of the burden of the thought that you have, no matter what it is about whether it's about exam stress, or work or anything feels the same effects as that. So, it's also important to practice mindfulness parallel to that. So those who maybe are more, you know, prefer their own company, or maybe are more apt to going out and exploring nature by themselves or getting experiences themselves, practising good mindfulness and knowing that being by yourself is okay is if, if that's what you're comfortable with. And that's what you enjoy. And knowing that when you do have, towards kind of being happier, and, and a more positive mindset. And part of that stems from kind of exams, you know, learning like for exams, you learn revision techniques, I think it's just important, just as important students learn wellbeing techniques.

And there are so many out there, and it's not a case of a one size fits all, some people may meditate and that works for them, others may not feel anything for meditating. I'm somewhere in the middle. And on that issue on that technique, yeah, there's plenty out

there. And I'd say a mix of those two, just knowing where you feel best socially, and what you can do to bring yourself back to a good medium.

Aimee Bell 16:57

Yeah, 100%. And even in pointing off that to like, in terms of mindfulness, and, and being able to kind of control where your thoughts go, and like you say, you know, bringing them back to, you know, a good medium. And something I find really helpful with that as well is like colouring in for mindfulness, which a lot of people if they don't get it, you know, might find quite funny. And you know, an adult, having a colouring book, but for me, it's like, I'm kind of the same or like sometimes I do, I enjoy meditation, I enjoy, you know, going on T shirt and finding like a guided meditation, I also enjoy used in their mindfulness up, which is the headspace app, sorry, that I'd recommend anyone to download. And it's very good practice in my breathing and stuff like that. And as much as I enjoy all that, sometimes, you know, if I'm not really in the mood, or feel like I can't, you know, my thoughts are all everywhere, I don't feel like I could concentrate enough to do to do it successfully. What I like to do to, to centre, my thoughts, again, is colour again.

And I just find you know, sometimes when you're concentrating so much on like sand inside blinds and stuff like that, you know, your mind, just kind of I don't, I kind of very well explain it, but your mind just kind of zooms out, and you just kind of forget about, about everything else that's going on for the time being that you're doing and, and I find that very peaceful and very therapeutic. So that would be my kind of recommendation for anyone. And it's the same with painting, you don't even have to have a colouring book, like I just like drawing and painting. And I am by no means any good at it. I'm not good at it at all, but I enjoy it. And I did anyway. And so yeah, that was that would be my tip for mindfulness. And I think my other one out of the kind of five steps to mental well-

being would be number two would be being physically active and going for a run going for a walk, go into the gym, like a few I know the gyms are closed at the minute but um, you know, if you have any, any kit at your house, and you know, a home gym or anything like that, you know, those are things that I like to do, and just to burn a bit of steam, and to be able to concentrate again and then come back and be like, right, I can now focus on the task ahead. And so yeah, you know, like exactly like you were saying Theo, like different things work for different people.

And it's all about finding that and I would say even if you're not into you know exercise or, or as much you know, as the next person, even just getting out for a walk you see getting fresh air about you and just feeling the sun on your face. It is so important, and I can't stress that enough and make sure you're drinking lots of water and everything. And I know as well as hard to find the time. But when you recognise that it helps your mental health and your well-being you make the time for it. You know what I mean? And because you have to what else what else are you going to do? And so yeah, it's really important to stress that and getting screen breaks taking time away from your laptop when you're studying. And it's so important to and but yeah, those would be those would be my takes on what you were kind of talking about Theo.

Theo Burton 20:12

But Sorry, just a point in there actually you mentioned Headspace a bit earlier. Um, just to let people know here listening, if you have a Spotify Premium account through the student plan, which is five pounds a month, automatically, you're entitled to free headspace. headspace by default is a paid service. But if you have a Spotify Premium, look up Spotify Premium headspace and link your Spotify account, you'll get free headspace as long as you have Spotify, it is excellent. It's got. It's not just a meditation app. It's got sleep stories, it's got like Sleep, sleep scapes, sleep sounds, which is great. If you're restless, struggling to get asleep at night, maybe you're thinking or you're too energetic, or whatever it is. And also, the also now do workouts, stress, releasing workouts, kind of mental health, resilience workouts, that kind of thing. So, I would highly recommend picking up headspace. It's free for anyone with a student Spotify Premium account.

Aimee Bell 21:14

Well, that's fabulous Theo, I didn't know about that. So that's Yeah, that's really, really good to know. And most people, I'd say, have Spotify these days. So yeah, if you're, if you're listening, and that relates to you, if you have Spotify, definitely get on that. That's, that's really good advice. Thank you, Theo., And Xin, just before we move on, do you would you have them out of those five steps or methods to maintaining your well-being? What would you say is your go to?

Xin Yi Heah 21:45

Yeah, just very briefly, because you've all covered the points on mindfulness, but by my top one was also mindfulness. Yeah,

Aimee Bell 21:54

I think it's I think it's something that's becoming a lot more popular these days. Isn't that Yeah.

Xin Yi Heah 22:00

Like, I think mental wellbeing is so important. Nowadays, it's not just the very mere physical well-being your mental. The mental aspect is also really important. Sometimes I find that when you're caught up with exams, you tend to stress about your future or what if you don't score well on this exam, will this impact my future, but one thing I think is very important is to live in the present moment. That is, if you enjoy your present moment, and you live it as it is, then only you will be able to properly figure out what you want for your future. Because sometimes, we may get very caught up by the idea of failing our exams, and then we won't be able to have like a job or any future prospects, but that is not actually always the case. So, most of the time, I think it is, for me, I think I like to live in the present moment, I like to enjoy studying, enjoy learning for exams, and then not stress out too much about passing them but of course, trying my best to pass them as well. But like, yeah, it is also very important to enjoy these moments where your present being is that rather than stressing about a future where you can actually pinpoint, like, what will be because you never know what will happen in the future. So, I think it's very important to live in the present moment and enjoy it, you know,

Aimee Bell 23:25

of course, yeah, that's it's fantastic advice Xin, you know, obviously the future and the past it, it literally doesn't exist. And I think this is a concept with mental well-being that you know, everyone is still trying to get their heads around and understand that you know, this saying you know, live in the present moment, you know, it's mentioned quite a lot but until you properly grasp that, what that means for yourself and it's difficult to do, but it is so important to try to do and try to understand you know, the past isn't existing and the future is not existing all the days is right now and you can you know all the worry in the world will not change the outcome that happens and I think realising that and forcing yourself to remember those things and can really help to manage your stress your stress and anxiety levels. And I know I'm the first person to know that that is easier said than done. And I know all too well and but it's something that I have to keep coming back I'm reminded myself as well and because it is it's just it's a tie it is it's the truth and but it's hard to remember and to maintain but for all of our well-being’s sake we have to try isn't that right so yeah, and for no thank you so much. And that was a great talk about your mental well beings and preparation for exam stress. And so, you just before we Go, I wanted to talk to you. I know, obviously I'm on a degree pathway that we don't have exams, I'm just preparing for assignments. And, Xin her exam period is she has the kind of over five-day period exams. And but Theo, you have a experience with the kind of 24 hour exam. And I know some students that that are listening will probably have experienced with that too. And I can imagine that that's tough going, like that's a lot of stress. So, and with you having be the only one that has experienced with that, would you have any light to shed on that, and maybe some tips that you have on dealing with 24-hour exams?

Theo Burton 25:39

Yeah, I do indeed. So, I've been quite fortunate this semester, in the sense that all of my assessments are, you know, coursework for extended exams, like Xin was mentioning, but last semester, and towards the tail end of my last year, I did have some 24 hour take home assessments. So, they can kind of vary, in some cases, you get an exam, that is you have a 24 hour window to complete. And within that, sorry, if 24-hour window to submit on within that you have maybe X amount of hours to complete it. Or in other cases, you have the full 24 hours. In the case that you have the full 24 hours, I would highly recommend, as much as cliche as it sounds really pacing yourself. It doesn't seem like a lot of time, especially since some of the contents and questions can seem like it's a lot for 24 hours. But pace yourself.

And if you've got 24 hours’ time, make sure you eat, make sure you build some structure and build out your time, make sure you don't spend every second every day every hour, sorry, every second of the day, on the exam because you will burn out and you will burn out in a very short period of time. You know we talk about burnout is something that happens over a course of weeks or months, in education and work. But in this case, you can be so focused on an exam period of 24 hours that you get three or four or five hours and, and your brain is fried. I've been in that position before you're just sitting staring at the word document going what the any of these words mean. So, pace yourself and take regular breaks, as Aimee mentioned are they're quiet for a walk, take a drink of water. And now when you get back, get back to it. For the cases where you have a couple of hours in that 24-hour period. in advance, I would suggest picking that window. Don't leave it up to chance, don't leave it up to when you're going to when you feel best in the mood. And if you feel like you're ready and raring to go the night before, start is as early as you can comfortably after you've had a bite of breakfast and some water and you've got your environment set up. If you feel like there's more you can learn, I would suggest leaving it to later in the afternoon, where you can spend the morning maybe reviewing some materials, then you start your you know, whatever it is three hours, and then you finish it. After you've done your allotted time.

So really, you know, plan out your time, make sure you don't feel rushed into it. If you have a limited window within a 24 hour, take home assessment and really just pace yourself, take it easy, take regular breaks, you know, historically, you can do that you can you know, you could bring some water in with you to exam, but you can get up and stretch your legs can go out for a snack to eat, you couldn't talk to your friends. But I would suggest really trying to do as much as you can normally that you would normally do in a normal day when you are maybe revising or just learning as for the lectures, structure a normal day and to your exam time in there. Because otherwise, as I said, the likelihood of burnout and the likelihood that that stress will get to you will increase. So, try and try and schedule it out. And also factor in just as we've talked about some tips for well-being try and get some mindfulness things and meditation, exercise that kind of thing. Yeah.

Aimee Bell 29:21

Great. That's perfect. Thank you so much, Theo and all that advice is so helpful. And hopefully it'll benefit somebody out there that's listening. And so yeah, that's it for today. Thank you both for joining me again, and to anyone out there that's listening please don't stress. Exam time is hard and difficult and, especially with everything else that's been going on this year. So be kind to yourself, be gentle to yourself, take time, take a breath, and you'll get there and believe in yourself. You know, as cheesy as that signs, it's so important. And you know, you have to be your number one supporter and care for yourself so that you can get through, get through the time period and the best way that you can with the best possible outcome. So yeah, thank you both so much again for joining me and, and I'll see you on the next one. Bye.

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