

What to expect from exams in the UK

Tutor: So Ayako, you've been studying at a university in the UK for quite a long time now, haven't you?

Ayako: Yeah.

Tutor: How long's it been?

Ayako: It's...like...about nine months now.

Tutor: Really? You must have experienced a lot of things.

Ayako: Yeah.

Tutor: Have you taken any exams?

Ayako: Yes. It was very different from what I expected.

Tutor: Really? What are exams in Japan like then?

Ayako: Exams in my country...it's very different because teachers mainly tested if students could remember key words and important facts, so they weren't so worried about my opinions. So in Japan we had to do a lot of memorising and also the question style was different because in Japan we have more multiple choice questions.

Tutor: In Japan did you always get assessed by exam or did you also have course work?

Ayako: Yeah. Usually we're assessed by exams so we didn't have so much course work...or something.

Tutor: Oh really? And in the UK what have you found?

Ayako: In the UK we have to do exams and also course work like essay(s) or a report. And in the UK, in the exam, teachers test whether you really understand the information, not just know the details. Also, you have to show your own opinion, so you have to write a lot more, and in an exam you are given a whole answer booklet that you have to write your answers in. In Japan, we usually just wrote our answers on one sheet of paper because we didn't have to write so much.

Tutor: Oh right. That's interesting.

Ayako: Another thing I was really surprised (about) is that I had to use a pen because in Japan we use a pencil in exams. In my first exam in the UK, the examiner came over to me and said, "What are you doing? Why are you using a pencil?" I was really surprised. In the end, the examiner gave me his pen!

Tutor: Really? That's a really funny story. What advice would you give to other students coming to study in the UK?

Ayako: First I should say, please bring your pen and use your pen! Also past papers (are) really helpful, because they give you a good idea what the questions are like and also help you to plan how much time you should spend on each question and maybe you can plan, and you can organise. When you are revising your materials...your stuff...it's also important to not just learn the facts, but also think about your opinion on the key topics, so...yeah...critical thinking is very important.

Tutor: Ah. Okay then, and what would you say about stress? Do people get stressed about exams?

Ayako: Yeah. I think most people feel nervous because we (have) never experience(d) before what the exams (are) like in the UK, but in Japan also before the exams we feel nervous so...yeah...it's the same.

Tutor: So what would you normally do to help you relax?

Ayako: Maybe talk to your friends and talk to your personal tutor. Maybe they will give you really good, helpful information or suggestions. You can talk about how you should revise or how you should study...something like that.

Tutor: Okay, and how long would you suggest starting revising before an exam?

Ayako: I think if it's longer it's really better so...at least you need two weeks definitely.

Tutor: Thank you very much Ayako. That's really, really interesting, thank you.

Ayako: You're welcome.