

Computer Science Tripos exams: Easter 2021

Guidance on Answering Open Book questions from the Examiners.

In response to a number of requests received from students, we are issuing the following general guidance about open book examinations.

Please note that this guidance does not aim to provide comprehensive details regarding the examination process and procedure, but rest assured, this will be issued once the details have been finalised by the University.

The overall structure of the exam papers this year will be identical to that used for the traditional closed-book examinations used in previous years.

You are permitted to refer to your own course notes and revision notes, as well as offline or online resources, such as textbooks, journals, and websites. You may make use of software tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, compilers and integrated programming environments.

In general, an open book examination will rely somewhat less on remembering facts and more about how you think, interpret and use information. This gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your analytical capabilities, your ability to work things out and your ability to create solutions to problems. Thus, questions will focus on using information and solving problems. We do not expect this to significantly change the style or substance of the questions set since Tripos questions have historically been of a problem solving nature.

You should plan your revision in the same way as you would for a traditional closed-book examination. Even though you are allowed to consult texts and other materials during the exam, it is much better to revise and refresh your memory of key concepts and topics before the examination. Only use the resources as back up. Therefore, study like you would for a closed-book examination because you will not have time to look everything up on the day. Remember, looking things up wastes time that would be better spent on writing a good answer.

Bear in mind that if you simply copy text from your resources, you will be plagiarising, which is not acceptable. Even if you cite and reference your sources accurately, this will reduce the space you have available to demonstrate your analysis and your ideas. Consequently, it is better to paraphrase, explain, critique and show your thinking clearly through your own words.