



Gaoth Dobhair, Co Donegal, can do wonders for your Gaelige

succession of intercounty Gaelic football teams, are renowned for their meticulous preparation. As far as I know, Ferguson does not speak Irish, not yet anyway, but I do know that if he was preparing for the Leaving Cert Irish exam he would treat the exam as a Champions League match and he would leave no stone unturned in his preparation and in his quest for perfection.

So it should be with you. Preparation is the key to success at any level in life. You should prepare as a general would prepare for battle.

Perseverance

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try and try again” should be the battle cry that is adopted by all students who wish to be successful in the Leaving Cert.

“Perseverance pays” must be your motto. Things may not always work out the way you expect them to. You may become tired and fed-up at times, but if you persevere, you will be successful.

Presentation

I have highlighted the dual importance of preparation and perseverance, and unfortunately both will be somewhat wasted if your presentation is not up to scratch.

Good presentation skills can be developed by continually practising good legible writing and neat, tidy work. There’s little use in having lots of information and good points but losing most of the marks through poor presentation.

Of course there is more to good presentation than good handwriting and neatness. Students should also focus on the kind of language skills that will impress examiners.

During the exam – A survival guide

It’s amazing how many students prepare very diligently and very well for examinations, yet throw it all away on the day. No matter what your ambitions are, achieving your goals will be helped by your attitude and approach and by your interpretation of questions and your presentation of information.

Past exam papers are one of your most valuable assets. You should become very familiar with the types of questions that are regularly asked and relentlessly practise answering them.

The equipment

You should ensure that you have all the pens, erasers and rulers that you may need for the exam.

The questions

Read exam questions carefully and ask yourself, what does the examiner really want you to answer? What information is the examiner really looking for?

The answers

Your answers should contain only information that is relevant to the question that was asked.

Use of information

Your use of information is critical to the success of your answers. The information that you omit from your answers can often determine whether you achieve a higher grade.

There is a belief that if you write everything you know you are sure to get a higher grade. This is a fallacy. It’s your use of information that will determine your grade.

As already stated, what you leave out can often be crucial in the quest for higher marks. Examiners regard irrelevant information as “padding” and reduce marks significantly as a result.

Presentation of information

“It’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it” is a truism that is as important in answering questions as it is in everyday life. Therefore, ensure that your answer is tastefully decorated with well-constructed, appropriate and, where possible, eye-catching Irish.

Your treasure chest of expressions

All students should build up a treasure chest of useful expressions that they can use in answering all kinds of different questions. Learn them and use them and watch your grades soar.

Always look on the bright side of life

The power of positive thinking cannot be underestimated. Always look at a question and focus on what you know. You can do nothing about what you don’t know at an exam so concentrate all of your positive mental energy on what you do know and base your answer on this.

The A1 student



Tim O’Hanrahan sat his Leaving Cert at St Macartan’s College in Monaghan

I was quite happy with the Irish exam – it went as expected, most of the questions were fair enough, and with paper two there were no real surprises. The questions weren’t easy, but if you prepared well, you could do them.

I liked the essay questions in paper one, they were nice choices, and you could show off whatever language you had – they didn’t leave you stuck. The listening was a little bit difficult in places, it was tough but fair. I enjoyed my oral – I was in the Gaeltacht during the previous summer and I like speaking it, so I did enjoy having the conversation.

I studied Irish one day a week. Basically, when I sat down to study paper two, the stories and poetry, I’d maybe take two poems at a time. I’d summarise the notes that my teacher gave me and then write out a sample answer on each one as I went along. The main focus was to make sure that I knew the notes and the different phrases and so on.

I’d also list out any specific vocabulary that might be helpful or relevant and try to learn that too. Then, for bigger things, like *An Triail*, which we did for drama, it might be a few hours at the weekend, looking at questions.

The main way I studied was by doing questions – I spent some time reading over things but preparing notes and writing out sample questions was pretty much what I did. That’s something I’d learned from the Junior Cert and it was a very good way to get it into your head – writing out notes to help put triggers in your memory, key phrases and points, things like that.

I got an A2 in the mocks. I was pretty pleased, but then my strategy was to treat them as the real thing. I think if you do that, you’ll get a proper measure of what you’re doing and what you need to do.

I really think they’re a good idea, just for the sheer fact of timing and all that. After it, certain areas that I wasn’t as good on were clear to me and the timing became more obvious, in that I had a sense of what I had to get into the time allotted and how good I was at doing it.

I don’t think there’s anything that you can do on paper one except practise loads of the questions, so that’s what I did. The best thing, if you do lots of them, you’ll never be stuck for material – also, they tend to repeat themselves, so that can make it easier as well.

As with everything, if you do even small amounts every night, that will prepare you very well – it will certainly boost your Irish. Apart from that, going to the Gaeltacht is an advantage.

It’s definitely a good idea, and practise questions are certainly more useful than just looking over notes.

