Feedback: Exam scenarios

These responses by no means represent the ideas of all examiners nor should they be taken as the 'official line' on exam marking practice. They represent the views of a small panel of examiners of the Biological Sciences and are intended to enable you to make more informed decisions about your own exam practice.

The best advice of all is to avoid all of these situations by preparing well in advance. Of course, the questions might still take you by surprise, but if you have thought through how you can make best use of the relatively short time and stick to it, you will hopefully avoid the last minute panics that lead to rushed work.

Wilbur

Each of the three essays is equally weighted with the overall mark being the mean of all three. If Wilbur decides not to attempt the third he automatically forfeits 33% of the possible marks. It is advisable to attempt all three, dividing time equally. You may well find that the essays you are more confident about take less time than you realise, leaving you more time to gather your thoughts on the third question.

Ethel

It is normally better practice to concentrate on a question you do understand, working hard to recall additional content if possible. Writing an essay on a relevant topic which does not answer the specific question will lose you marks. Practice responding to a variety of exam questions as you revise, making sure you understand verbs commonly used and the differences in meaning. Refer to the online Academic Writing package for a list of terms used within the Biological Sciences.

Izzet

Examiners may be more lenient in matters such as length of essays and spelling errors, but less so if a long essay is produced at the expense of another, or if they have trouble extracting those parts of an essay which relate directly to the question. Izzet should work on finding a planning method which suits him in order to minimise the chances of writing off topic and ensure his writing is concise, keeping an eye on the time to avoid rushing, which makes poor handwriting even worse.