1. True. Although it is very rare for an exam essay to gain more than 80%.

2. True.

3. What constitutes ‘stylish writing’ is subjective and examiners will differ in their views, but it is worth remembering that without relevant content and structured argument, you will lose marks whatever style you adopt. Many other aspects of writing might contribute to an overall impression of ‘style’: e.g. clarity of expression; coherence; well-paced argument; appropriate, ‘non-contrived’ formal language. All of these are important alongside your actual content.

4. There are no right or wrong ‘solutions’ to exam technique dilemmas. Your approach should perhaps depend on the mark weighting for each question. If they are all equally weighted and you only answer one question, no matter how much effort you put into the question you are most confident about, you will still only get a third of the overall marks. In fact, it is arguable that you should be able to produce a good response on a topic you are confident about more quickly than the other questions. Balance the time you spend on questions according to their weighting of marks and do the best you can in that time.

5. False assumption. You are being assessed on your ability to present your answer as concisely as possible, so try to achieve this within the time available for each question. Vocabulary should be formal and appropriate to the context; using long words or inappropriate technical terms indiscriminately will not gain you any more marks.

6. False. Examiners make every effort to read your answers. If your writing is illegible, it is inevitable that the examiner will be unable to give your answer the credit it deserves. Plan to use your time effectively during the exam in order to avoid rushed responses which make your handwriting worse. You could try writing on every other line in exam essays to improve legibility. Ensure that you practice timed writing as part of your revision. Ask your supervisor if they would be willing to use some supervision time for timed writing practice.

7. False. ‘Brain-dumping’ does not demonstrate to the examiner that you are able to filter your knowledge in response to the question asked. Beware of answering the question you wish you had been asked; for example, the one from that past paper on the same topic, but which asked you to compare and contrast rather than discuss. You are being assessed on your response to a specific aspect of the topic.

8. Examiners have different views on crediting bullet points in exam essays but generally agree that they should only be used as a last resort, and then sandwiched between your (linked) introduction and conclusion. i.e. if you find you are running out of time, write the introduction and conclusion and use bullets to show the stages/topics of the main argument. This is by no means ideal and it is always preferable to use your time effectively and choose questions and plan answers carefully.

9. False. The danger in replicating a supervision essay in an exam is that it may not precisely address the question you are being asked. Remember, you are not being examined on your ability to memorise essays; you are being assessed on your ability to draw on the knowledge you have learnt and present only what is relevant to the question.

10. False. A plan is always advisable in whatever form so that you have an idea of structure and content before you start the essay. It is very easy to wander off the topic otherwise and for your essay to appear as a series of statements rather than a developing argument. The plan should take no longer than 5 mins for a 40min essay.

11. True. Click here to view the exam essay marking criteria.

12. False. You will lose marks, but how many will depend on how far you strayed from the question.