



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## What it takes to get into DU A unit

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MASHIYAT NAWAR SAMIHA

Seeing my older brother go through the university admission journey almost five years before me gave me a sneak peek into the rigorosity of the process. As someone who belongs to a batch of students who had lost about a year to Covid-19, stepping into the realm of admission tests was an overwhelming experience, maybe more so than for anyone else.

Dhaka University's A unit admission test is the path that leads to studying engineering, pure science, life science, and other science-related subjects. The test has two major sections: 60 multiple-choice questions in 45 minutes and another 45 minutes for the written part. In the test, students must answer questions on the main subjects they had in their HSC, and then they get to choose between English, Bangla, and their fourth subject. Since I was determined to pursue something related to Biology in my undergrad, I went for Biology. For students who don't want to study Biology related subjects, and have a good command of English, choosing to answer the English section is a good idea. This way, the chance to study engineering and other science subjects remains open.

As I advanced with my preparation, the trickiest part of the test for me was to solve the mathematical problems without a calculator. As I was taking preparation for the engineering admission test alongside DU A unit prep, knowing how to use the calculator efficiently was a crucial skill to adapt. What helped me to get better at doing complex calculations without a calculator was sitting for practice tests every day for a month or so before the actual exam. Getting used to doing calculations in my head or relying on the elimination method for answering multiple choice questions helped me to be more

efficient at solving problems.

For both Chemistry and Physics, it is important to have a clear understanding of basic concepts and accuracy in descriptive writing since the written part has recently been added to the test. Chemistry in the multiple-choice section mostly tests a student's theoretical knowledge, so reading the textbook contents intensively can help them ace it. As I did not have to sit for Biology in my HSC, I had to put extra effort into maintaining a regular revision routine to carry out preparation in Biology alongside the other subjects. Making flashcards of the content that I was struggling to remember and going through them regularly helped me a lot.

**Analysing previous years' questions**

This applies to almost every admission test you're going to sit for. Analysing the questions from the previous ten years or so gives a rough idea about the actual test. Since the written section is a comparatively newer addition to the test, it's safer to develop equal expertise on both the theoretical and mathematical problems.

**Stress management**

The enormous pressure a candidate feels during this season is to be expected. I had friends who were stellar performers in the mocks but panicked at the last moment and could not give their best in the real test. Knowing how to manage stress in the exam hall plays a vital role while you're trying to give your very best. To handle the overwhelming feelings, it is a must to attend as many mocks as possible and to give them equal importance as to that of the actual test. Simulating the exam hall environment at the test centre or even at home when giving mocks will help to identify exactly what part of the exam a student is losing concentration or getting perplexed.

**Time management**

Admission tests generally have a tendency to go in unpredictable directions. So, it comes in handy if students have a preferable sequence of subjects to approach each section. Starting with the subject one is most confident with will give them an early boost in the examination hall. Some subjects require more time to answer than others. Mapping that out in the head beforehand and having a backup plan will reduce some stress.

**Knowing how to skip**

This is the skill I undermined the most at the beginning of my admission journey. The test is about how accurately students can answer the questions in a very limited time. It is important to accept that one might have to skip a question midway to prevent wasting too much time on one single problem. This will also help in not getting overwhelmed if a question is too difficult to solve on the first try.

**Tracking error**

The main objective of mock tests is to help students identify their weaknesses and strengths. Keeping track of all the errors made in the practice tests and analysing them is definitely a game changer to utilising the mocks to their best.

Although the rationality of judging one's capability by a ninety-minute-long examination remains questionable, a good deal of luck with hard work is what can get you through this. The end result of success in the DU A unit exam is the opportunity to study some exciting topics with some of the top minds in the country, so putting in the hard work may well be worth it.

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## How you can use ChatGPT for studying

KOUSHIN UNBER

AI development is progressing at an exponential rate. Whether it's art generators or language models, AI is being used everywhere these days. Amongst all the AI-powered tools available to the public today, the one that's been making the most headlines is OpenAI's chatbot ChatGPT.

From generating YouTube scripts to writing blog posts, ChatGPT can do it all. Amongst its innumerable uses, ChatGPT has also proven to be extremely useful as a supplement to studying. Here's how.

**Ask ChatGPT to act as someone**

To keep your learning session from getting monotonous, you can ask ChatGPT to imitate a role, profession, or even a fictional character to suit your learning needs. One of my favourite ways to comprehend a topic that seems too difficult is by asking ChatGPT to explain said topic to me as if I am a five-year-old.

This creates some interesting analogies and metaphors for a topic that you might be studying. For example, when asked to simplify nucleophilic substitution, it compared the atoms to players in a game of tag.

**Test yourself**

You can customise tests to recall crucial bits of a topic you're studying. By running a prompt that specifies what topic you want to test yourself on, the question format, number of options given to you (for multiple choice questions), and the difficulty of those questions, you can devise the AI to test your progress as you go about learning difficult topics.



DESIGN: FAISAL BIN IQBAL

**Ask for step-by-step instructions**

ChatGPT is modelled to summarise answers by default. Oftentimes you may come across a Physics or Maths problem that you need a thorough explanation for.

Inputting a prompt that starts with something like "give me step by step solutions for..." will generate responses with detailed instructions on how to solve a problem.

The best thing about using AI tools for studying is that they provide very specific solutions, something that your typical Google search fails to do.

**Make mnemonics or songs to memorise better**  
ChatGPT can easily come up with catchy songs, poems, jokes, or verses to help you remember lists or formulae that would otherwise be hard to recall.

You will find that the best decision is to use ChatGPT as an appendage to your core learning instead of depending on it solely for learning new information. The language model has some significant limitations when it comes to providing accurate information, so you might have to cross check some facts through a quick Google search or your textbooks.

It can be dangerous to blindly trust the AI model at all times, so use it as a tool to approach your studies and help understand topics in ways that are unique to you and are not readily available in the real world.

Koushin currently keeps 3 screens turned on in front of her to prevent the chance of a thought occurring. Replenish her fugitive attention span at koushinunber27@gmail.com

## Preparing for O levels without attending COACHING CLASSES

AZNEEF CHOWDHURY

If you've been a student in the last ten years or so, chances are you've probably invested a significant amount of time chasing ruthless coaching schedules. Coaching culture is nothing new in Bangladesh, but the cult-like reverence it has gained certainly is. In the eyes of many parents and students, preparing for your board exams without after-school help is the same as not preparing at all.

Despite this, I've had the rare opportunity to prepare for my O levels without attending coaching classes at all.

Whilst the mere idea of having to study without after-school help might seem daunting to some, my experience has been painless and straightforward. Granted, I've had to put a reasonable amount of attention into my school classes, but apart from that, the internet and books are all I've needed to keep up my grades. For O and A levels, online resources are widespread and publicly available for everyone to access, and arguably a better experience than external



coaching, partly because you can pace yourself accordingly instead of following a pedagogy crafted for a more diverse demographic.

A major advantage of not attending coaching classes is the amount of liberty it has offered me. Instead of spending hours stuck in traffic and rushing

everywhere to attend coaching classes, I've been able to find time to indulge in activities that interest me and develop my extracurriculars. The liberty of studying on my own has skyrocketed my productivity and made studying less stressful than it is for my peers.

Of course, not attending coaching classes has its drawbacks too. For many, the initial stages of self-studying are akin to the effects of withdrawal one gets by quitting an addiction. Untethering yourself from the coaching culture seems unfathomably difficult in the early days, as you struggle to settle in and find a track in your curriculum. Thankfully, this subsides quickly as you get adjusted to your new lifestyle and discover what suits you best.

One problem that persists in my experience is distraction. A rough day, a stressful exam, or even just a foul mood can sometimes result in my pace dwindling and cause lethargy to overwhelm my motivation, which can become particularly detrimental considering the limited time students get to prepare for their exams.

Another side-effect of not going to coaching classes is the loneliness it often harbours within people. These classes are not just for studying. They're also hubs for socialising. Many of my peers credit their coaching for the people they share bonds with today. Not going to coaching classes often mean missing out on such things.

Study leaves at school become boring and frustrating, and social media simply serves as proof of your isolation, bringing out the worst of your mental health and making you feel miserable. Fortunately, all of this only lasts for an incredibly short time, and spending free time with your friends instantly recharges your battery.

Not going to coaching classes isn't for everyone, but if it works for you, having the freedom and liberty of not relying on external help may well be the greatest privilege you'll have in your academic career.

Azneef keeps switching from one incomplete task to another. Remind him to finish his work at itsazneefchowdhury@gmail.com