



وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

*"And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge." (Tā Hā 20:114)*

# Five Ways to Ace UTME

A practical study plan for JAMB candidates: what to study, how to practise and how to walk into the exam ready.

# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## Preface

All praise is for Allah, and may peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and his Companions.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of students sit the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). Many of them study hard, yet still fall short of the score their course needs. The difference is rarely intelligence. It is usually how they prepare: what they study, how they practise, and whether they are ready for a timed computer test.

This guide gathers the five habits our mentors at the Himaayah Academy see in students who do well. Each one is practical, and you can start it today. At the end you will find a 12-week plan, an error log and an exam-day checklist.

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ

**“Whoever follows a path in search of knowledge, Allah will make easy for them a path to Paradise.”**

Narrated by Muslim (2699).

### A note before you start

Exam rules and details can change from year to year. Always check the current UTME brochure, syllabus and your registration slip from JAMB ([jamb.gov.ng](http://jamb.gov.ng)), and follow them where they differ from this guide.

# Contents

|    |                                                                                           |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | <b>Know the exam</b><br>Subjects, questions, time and marks                               |
| 02 | <b>Way 1: Study from the JAMB syllabus</b><br>Not just your textbook                      |
| 03 | <b>Way 2: Use past questions to test yourself</b><br>With an error log                    |
| 04 | <b>Way 3: Master Use of English</b><br>60 of the 180 questions                            |
| 05 | <b>Way 4: Train for the CBT clock</b><br>About 40 seconds a question                      |
| 06 | <b>Way 5: Plan your weeks and look after yourself</b><br>Sleep, health, prayer and nerves |
| 07 | <b>Your 12-week plan</b>                                                                  |
| 08 | <b>Exam-day checklist</b>                                                                 |
| 09 | <b>Activities, du'ā' and references</b>                                                   |

## Start Know the exam

You cannot prepare well for a test you do not understand. These are the main facts about the UTME at the time of writing:

| What          | Details                                                                                       |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subjects      | 4 in total: <b>Use of English</b> (compulsory) and 3 subjects required for your chosen course |
| Questions     | Use of English: <b>60</b> . Each other subject: <b>40</b> . Total: <b>180</b>                 |
| Time          | <b>2 hours</b> (120 minutes) for all four subjects                                            |
| Marks         | Each subject is scored out of 100, for a total of <b>400</b>                                  |
| Mode          | Computer-based test (CBT) at an accredited centre                                             |
| Wrong answers | There is currently no deduction for a wrong answer, so never leave a question blank           |

### What this means for you

With 180 questions in 120 minutes, you have **about 40 seconds per question**. Speed and accuracy matter as much as knowledge.

Use of English is a quarter of your score and has the most questions. No student can afford to neglect it.

The cut-off mark for your course and university, not just “passing”, is your real target. Find it early and plan for a score comfortably above it.

## Way 1 Study from the JAMB syllabus, not just your textbook

الْمُؤْمِنُ الْقَوِيُّ خَيْرٌ وَأَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِ الضَّعِيفِ، وَفِي كُلِّ  
خَيْرٍ، اٰخِرُصُّ عَلَى مَا يَنْفَعُكَ، وَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْزِزْ

“The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, and there is good in both. Strive for what benefits you, seek Allah’s help, and do not give up.”

Narrated by Muslim (2664).

## Explanation

JAMB publishes a syllabus for every subject. It lists the topics questions can come from, and it is the closest thing you have to the examiner's plan. Textbooks often cover more than you need in some areas and less in others. Students who study "the whole textbook" waste time; students who study the syllabus cover what is tested.

### What to do

- 1 Get the **current syllabus** for each of your four subjects from JAMB (jamb.gov.ng) or your Academy mentor.
- 2 Turn each syllabus into a **topic checklist**: one line per topic.
- 3 Rate every topic: **Green** (I can answer questions on it), **Amber** (I partly know it), **Red** (I do not know it yet).
- 4 Plan your weeks so you turn Reds into Ambers and Ambers into Greens, starting with topics that appear often in past questions.
- 5 For Use of English, read the **recommended novel** listed for your year. Questions come from it.

#### Tip: one notebook per subject

Keep one notebook for each subject, organised in syllabus order. Write short notes, formulas and examples under each topic. In the last weeks you will revise from these notes, not from thick textbooks.

## What we learn

- |   |                                                                                                         |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The syllabus tells you what can be tested. Use it as your map.                                          |
| 2 | Rating topics Red, Amber or Green shows you exactly where to spend your time.                           |
| 3 | Striving for what benefits you, with reliance on Allah, means studying wisely, not only for long hours. |

## Way 2 Use past questions to test yourself, then fix your mistakes

## Explanation

Past questions are the most valuable resource you have, but many students use them badly: they read the question, look at the answer, and nod. That feels like learning but builds very little.

Research on memory shows that **trying to recall an answer** before checking it (the “testing effect”) strengthens learning far more than re-reading. Questions are not repeated word for word, but the same topics and question styles come back year after year.

## What to do

- 1 Answer a set of past questions **on your own first**, without looking at the answers, ideally timed.
- 2 Mark your answers honestly.
- 3 For every question you got wrong or guessed, write it in your **error log** (below): the topic, why you got it wrong, and the correct idea.
- 4 Go back to your notes or textbook and fix that topic.
- 5 Re-try the questions in your error log after **3 days**, then after **a week**. When you get one right twice, tick it off.

## Your error log

| Subject and question | Topic   | Why I got it wrong | The correct idea                        | Re-try on          |
|----------------------|---------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Maths 2019 Q14       | Indices | Forgot $a^0 = 1$   | Any non-zero number to the power 0 is 1 | Tue, then next Mon |
|                      |         |                    |                                         |                    |
|                      |         |                    |                                         |                    |
|                      |         |                    |                                         |                    |
|                      |         |                    |                                         |                    |

## What we learn

1

Past questions are for testing yourself, not for reading.

2

Your mistakes show you exactly what to study next. An error log turns them into progress.

## Way 3

## Master Use of English

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

“And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge.”

Sūrat Ṭā Hā 20:114

## Explanation

Use of English is compulsory for everyone, carries 100 marks and has 60 questions, more than any other subject. Strong students in science or arts often lose their best score here because they assume “I already speak English.” The exam tests specific skills that improve with practice.

## The main areas and how to practise them

| Area                      | What it tests                                            | Daily practice                                                         |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Comprehension and summary | Understanding passages, the writer's meaning, main ideas | One passage a day, timed; underline the key sentence of each paragraph |
| Lexis and structure       | Synonyms, antonyms, idioms, concord, sentence completion | 15 to 20 questions a day; keep a vocabulary notebook                   |
| Oral English              | Vowel and consonant sounds, stress, rhymes               | 10 questions a day; say the words aloud                                |
| The recommended novel     | Characters, events, themes and quotations                | Read a chapter, then write a five-line summary                         |

## What to do

- Read something in good English every day: a newspaper article, a well-written book, or the recommended novel.
- Write every new word, its meaning and an example sentence in your vocabulary notebook. Revise it weekly.
- In comprehension, read the questions first, then the passage, so you know what you are looking for.
- For idioms and oral English, learn the patterns. Many questions test the same small set of rules.

## What we learn

- 1 Use of English is a quarter of your score and the subject with the most questions.
- 2 It is a skill subject: short daily practice beats occasional long sessions.
- 3 Reading widely builds vocabulary and comprehension at the same time.

## Way 4 Train for the CBT clock

### Explanation

Knowing the answer is not enough if you run out of time, or if the computer screen makes you nervous. The UTME is a timed computer test, so you must practise exactly that.

### A sensible time plan for the exam

| Section                  | Questions | Aim to finish in |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Use of English           | 60        | About 40 minutes |
| Subject 2                | 40        | About 25 minutes |
| Subject 3                | 40        | About 25 minutes |
| Subject 4                | 40        | About 25 minutes |
| Review flagged questions |           | About 5 minutes  |

### What to do

- 1 From the middle of your preparation, do at least **one timed practice session a week** on a computer or CBT practice app, under exam conditions.
- 2 Use **two passes**: answer everything you know quickly, mark the hard ones, then come back to them.
- 3 Do not spend more than about a minute on any one question in the first pass.
- 4 Learn how the CBT screen works: moving between subjects and questions, and the keyboard shortcuts shown on the practice software.

- 5 Before the end, make sure **every question has an answer**. A sensible guess can score; a blank cannot.
- 6 If JAMB offers an optional mock UTME for your year, consider registering. It is the closest practice to the real centre.

#### Tip: watch the clock, not your neighbour

Check the time at the end of each subject. If you are behind, speed up on the next subject's easier questions rather than rushing English comprehension.

#### What we learn

- 1 You have about 40 seconds a question, so speed is a skill you must train.
- 2 Two passes, answering the easy questions first, protect your marks.
- 3 Practising on a computer under timed conditions removes surprises on the day.

#### Way 5 Plan your weeks and look after yourself

وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ

**“And whoever relies upon Allah, He is sufficient for them.”**

Sūrat at-Ṭalāq 65:3

#### Explanation

Long, irregular study sessions followed by exhaustion do not work. Steady weekly plans, enough sleep and calm nerves do. Reliance on Allah (tawakkul) means doing your part fully, then trusting Him with the result.

#### What to do

- **Plan by the week.** Give each subject fixed sessions every week, and mix topics within a session rather than studying one topic for days.
- **Anchor study to your prayers.** For example: one session after Fajr, one after ‘Asr, one after Maghrib. Short breaks between sessions keep you fresh.

- **Protect your sleep.** Health experts recommend 8 to 10 hours a night for teenagers. Memory is strengthened while you sleep, so late-night cramming often costs more than it gains.
- **Move and eat well.** A short walk or exercise, water and regular meals help concentration.
- **Manage your phone.** Keep it out of reach while studying; use it as a reward after a session.
- **Handle nerves.** Before the exam, make wuḍū', pray, make du'ā' and breathe slowly. Nerves are normal; preparation is what calms them.

### What we learn

|   |                                                                              |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Consistency over weeks beats last-minute cramming.                           |
| 2 | Sleep, food and movement are part of preparation, not a distraction from it. |
| 3 | Do your best and rely on Allah: effort is your duty, the result is from Him. |

A guide for the last 12 weeks before your exam. If you have longer, stretch the first phase.

| Weeks    | Focus                 | Each week                                                                                                                              |
|----------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 to 2   | Map and baseline      | Get the syllabuses, make topic checklists, rate topics Red, Amber or Green; do one untimed past paper per subject to find your level   |
| 3 to 6   | Learn and fix         | Work through Red and Amber topics in syllabus order; 20 to 30 past questions a day; keep your error log; daily Use of English practice |
| 7 to 9   | Practise and speed up | Mixed past questions by topic and year; one full timed CBT practice a week; re-try your error log                                      |
| 10 to 11 | Exam rehearsal        | Two full timed CBT practices a week; revise from your notebooks; final read of the recommended novel                                   |
| 12       | Rest and review       | Light revision of notes and error log only; sleep well; visit your centre; prepare documents                                           |

### Sample day

| Time                             | Activity                                                         |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After Fajr (45 to 60 min)        | Hardest subject: new topic or Red topic from your checklist      |
| Afternoon, after school (60 min) | Past questions for one subject, then error log                   |
| After 'Asr (30 min)              | Use of English: one comprehension passage and 15 lexis questions |
| After Maghrib (45 min)           | Second subject; revise yesterday's notes                         |
| Before sleep (10 min)            | Read over your vocabulary or formula notes                       |

### The days before

- ☐ Print and check your **exam slip**: date, time, centre and subjects.
- ☐ If possible, **visit your centre** a day or two before so you know the route and how long it takes.
- ☐ Prepare what the slip tells you to bring, and nothing that is banned (phones, watches, calculators and similar devices are not allowed in the hall).
- ☐ Stop heavy studying the night before. Read your notes lightly and sleep early.

### On the day

- ☐ Pray Fajr, eat a light breakfast and drink some water.
- ☐ Arrive **early**, well before your reporting time.
- ☐ Listen carefully to the instructions and check that your name, photo and subjects are correct on the screen.
- ☐ Follow your time plan: English first or in the order you practised, two passes, flag hard questions.
- ☐ Answer **every question** before you submit.
- ☐ Afterwards, thank Allah, whatever you feel about the paper, and rest.

## Activities

**1** What score do you need for your chosen course and university? What score will you aim for?

.....

.....

**2** List your four subjects. For each one, name two topics that are Red for you today.

.....

.....

**3** Write the first three entries in your error log from a past paper.

.....

.....

**4** Write your weekly study timetable, anchored to your prayer times.

.....

.....

## Du‘ā’ Ask Allah for help

رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي  
وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّنْ  
لِّسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

“My Lord, expand my chest for me, ease my task for me, and untie the knot from my tongue, so that they may understand my speech.”

Sūrat Ṭā Hā 20:25–28

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### Prepare with the Himaayah Academy

Live UTME, Post-UTME, O-Level and A-Level classes with a personal mentor, daily tasks, weekly mock exams, CBT practice, a reading club and a leaderboard, all online.

**Book a free class:** [himaayahschools.com/trial.html](https://himaayahschools.com/trial.html) · **More study tips:** [himaayahschools.com/articles.html](https://himaayahschools.com/articles.html)

**WhatsApp:** +234 704 722 6487

وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

“And my success is only through Allah.” (Hūd 11:88)

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# Study smarter, score higher.

This free guide from the Himaayah Academy turns what works for our UTME students into five clear habits you can start today, with a 12-week plan and an exam-day checklist.

- Study from the JAMB syllabus, not just your textbook
- Use past questions to test yourself, then fix your mistakes
- Master Use of English: 60 of the 180 questions
- Train for the CBT clock: about 40 seconds a question
- Plan your weeks and protect your sleep and health



## Try a free Academy class

Sit in on a live UTME class with our mentors, daily tasks and CBT practice. No payment, no obligation.

[himaayahschools.com/trial.html](https://himaayahschools.com/trial.html)

