How to study for and answer exam questions

TDTS04 – Computer Networks and Distributed Systems

Ulf Kargén

Division for Database and Information Techniques (ADIT)
Department of Computer and Information Science (IDA)

LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY

Exam structure

Exam on 2025-03-24, 8-12 (4 hours)

- Remember to register! (Lisam or LiU-app)
- Registration closes **2025-03-14**

Answers written by hand – try to write clearly!

3 long and 2 short questions, randomly chosen among published set

- Long questions: 10 points, 0.5 – 1 page,
- Short questions: 5 points, expected length 0.25 – 0.5.
- Answers can be written in English or Swedish.
- Only allowed aid is an English-to/from-other-language dictionary (printed, not electronic).
- Grade limits are 3: 20p; 4: 28p; 5: 35p. The maximum score is 40p.

Grading

- Grading based on the **completeness**, **correctness** and **clarity** of answers, and displayed **understanding** of the material.
- Stated answer lengths are just guidelines – grading not directly based on length
- Completeness of answers are judged w.r.t. **course material** (slides and course book)
  - The topics in the slides should be your basis for studying
  - Goal should be to *understand* all slides related to given topic
    - *Might* need to read certain sections in the course book to achieve this
  - You won't get points for displaying "extra" knowledge outside of course contents

LINKÖPING
UNIVERSITY

How to answer

> Important mindset when writing answers:
>
> Your job is to ***convince me that you know the topic being asked about***, and that you know ***why*** this is the correct answer.

Other important things to consider:

- **Structure your answer.** Think about the structure of the answer before you start writing. The reasoning in the answer should be easy to follow.
- **Write clearly.** Be as clear and precise as possible. Overly hand-wavy explanations will make question whether you know what you're talking about.
- **Don't wing it.** If you're not entirely certain that what you write is true, don't write it! Chances are I will get less convinced that you know what you're talking about if you write contradictory things…

LINKÖPING
UNIVERSITY

How to answer

Write complete answers

- Make sure to answer the entire question. Some questions ask for multiple things.

- Make sure to include all aspects of the thing being asked about

Example: "**How are certificates used to secure WWW?**" – need to explain:
- What are certificates? How do they work?
- Why and how are they used? How does this improve security?
  - Need to also explain TLS *sufficiently to make the reader understand exactly why certificates are needed*

LINKÖPING
UNIVERSITY

How to answer

How to know what details to include?

- Leave out explanations of prerequisite and "common" knowledge (assume reader is a class mate at similar stage, but who haven't taken this course)

- Assume reader knows course content not directly related to topic of question

Example: "**Describe the functioning of the HTTP protocol. Summarize different versions discussed in the course.**"
- Assume reader knows how TCP works when explaining how different HTTP versions are designed

LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY

How to answer

Very good guidelines for writing free-text exam answers by J. Löfvenberg and J. Wilander can be found here:
https://www.ida.liu.se/~TDDD17/lectures/slides/howto.pdf

The text is originally for a security course, but very relevant also for networking. Especially **Section 3** is a highly recommended read.