



Preparing for examinations

Motivating yourself to revise is one of the toughest things you have to do at school. To make it worse, there is no immediate benefit: You have to sit there for hours on end, going through endless notes for an exam that is still some time away, and to get results that won't matter until months after you have sat the exam.

The fact is, though, that the exams **do** matter. The results **do** matter. Revision **does** matter. Now, we don't want to scare you (as one of the best ways to revise is to **relax**), but at least if you really put your mind to the revision, and then don't do as well as you expected, at least you will know you have **given it your best**.

Remember also that everyone is on your side. If you need help, ask a teacher, ask your friends or your parents. It is also good to go to the **revision session or clinics** at school, even if you think you know it already.

1. Plan ahead

Before you do any work, sit down and **plan** what you are going to do between now and the exams. Make sure you have filled any gaps in your notes. You should start revising several weeks before your exams are due to start. It is often a good idea to revise the areas you find most difficult first - get them out of the way and build your confidence in the subject. Creating a timetable is always useful. You should have done this with your tutor before leaving but if not... Try this: <http://revisionworld.co.uk/create-revision-timetable>

2. Make summary notes

For each course, identify the topics you need to revise. Use the programmes of study for each subject (found at the front in your files, or on the Digital Archway) which will give you a list of topics. Gather all your material for the topic area and reduce them into **brief, clear notes**. **Do not highlight everything!** Then summarise those, and then again and again until you only need a few **keywords** to remind you of the whole topic! You can then carry around a sheet with all the keywords wherever you go.

An effective way to make sure you remember certain things is to invent mnemonics:

For example, **Most Kids Hate Learning GCSE Energy Names** to recall the different types of energy – **M**agnetic, **K**inetic, **H**eat, **L**ight, **C**hemical, **S**ounds Electrical, **E**lastic, **N**uclear and **G**ravitational potential.

3. Understand how your memory works

Some of us are better at remembering things than others. However, here is a trick that should help...

If you learn something new, in general it will already start fading in your mind after a few hours (unless it is particularly exciting). However, if you revise it again in the next four hours, it will take about 24 hours before it starts to fade. Revise it in the 24 hour period and it will last for four days, then one and a half weeks, then one month, and so on. By setting out your revision schedule to make the most of this (learn something, revise it again after a few hours, revise it again in the next couple of days, and so on) you will be using the way your **memory works to your advantage**.

4. Put aside specific hours in the day for revision

If you set aside the hours in the day you are going to revise, and let everyone else know what these are, you can make sure you are not disturbed. You can then get into a '**revision pattern**' - where your mind expects to be revising and is therefore more receptive to the material. During non-school days, some students choose to follow the normal pattern of the school day which means you will easily achieve around six hours per day – LOTS!

5. Try not to revise more than two/three subjects a day

Do not feel that you need to revise a whole topic in one go. Balance the time you have available between your various courses. As well as keeping a fresh head, going back the next day to finish revising the topic will renew your knowledge and hopefully help you **retain the information** for longer. Do not neglect courses you find particularly easy or difficult.

6. Eat and drink properly

While you are using up energy revising it is important to eat properly so that your body and your mind are fit and ready for the exams. Fish, eggs and milk are high in **protein** which is used by your brain. But you will need **energy** as well. Nuts and bananas are good sources for this (chocolate is another good source of energy, but the effects of eating a bar of chocolate last far less than eating, for instance, a banana). Avoid immediate, short term energy drinks, but make sure you drink plenty of **water**. Dehydration causes you to lose concentration quickly.

7. Take lots of breaks

Your mind will only be able to concentrate well for short periods of time - the first 15 minutes of revision are thought to be the best. Make sure you **stop for a few minutes every 30 minutes** or so. During your break, a good thing to do is to sit back for a few minutes, close your eyes, **relax**, and just think about the things you have just learnt.

8. Use diagrams

Visual stimulus is very important when trying to stay focused on your study. **Colourful pictures and writing** will help you stay motivated to learn and also keep the material in your head for longer. You may find Spider diagrams/Mind maps, Concept maps, flow charts, revision flashcards are helpful ways of summarising a lot of information onto a single page.

9. Memorise it!

Sadly, there is no way around this task - to do well in exams, you have to remember your material. Ultimately, you have to work out the way of doing this that works best for you. Try these:

- Learn your notes for a topic on **three or four occasions**. This will fix them in your mind better than a once and for all approach.
- Predict a page of notes in your mind before you look at it. What you have forgotten will bring itself to your attention as you read.
- Mnemonics. Use the letters of a word, or the initial letters of a phrase, to trigger associations.
 - For example, the key elements in the topic 'Hitler's Rise to Power' could be remembered by the word 'VIEW', which stands for:

V = Versailles (the treaty signed at the end of World War I)

I = Individual personality of Hitler

E = Economic collapse

W = Weimar

- Think of a picture of the topic.
 - To continue our previous example, a mental picture of one of Hitler's rallies might suggest Crowds, Regimentation, Technology, Scapegoats, etc...

10. Test yourself

Or, get someone else to! Ask them if they can flick through your notes and ask you some **questions**. If you cannot answer any of their selection, note the topic down so you can **re-learn** it after.

11. Revise for "you"

You will probably hear your friends boasting about "how little revision they did last night" or what they revised. In fact, however, your friends are probably working just as hard as you. In any case, you know how much you need to revise so just do it, and don't worry about what the people around you are doing.

12. Get hold of some past exam papers

Your teacher will provide you with revision information and past paper questions in class to hone your exam technique and check your knowledge against. If you want more, then let him/her know. Study the papers and **familiarise yourself** with its layout and the types of questions asked. The Digital Archway will also have a wealth of material and highly useful resources on there.

13. Get into the habit of planning your answers in rough

When you read the questions, underline and circle the key words to **help your understanding** of it. Then draw a quick (but detailed) spider diagram, listing all the important stuff to include in your answer. Finally, stop avoiding that awkward first paragraph! Focus and get on with it, writing as quickly as you can without it becoming illegible.

14. Try to sleep well

It can be very difficult to sleep in the periods leading up to the exams. The trick here is not to worry about it and get into a routine. Don't go to bed too early if you are worried about getting to sleep - it does not help. Instead **relax before going to bed** (a good trick is to have a cup of **camomile tea or hot milk** which is a natural way of making you relax). Meditation and mindfulness CDs are also useful to help your mind relax.

15. Don't do any work the evening before your exams

If you really cannot resist then carry around some summary notes (see point 1) and glance at them now and then just to keep your confidence high. If you have given the max until now then you will not learn anything you do not already know in the last evening. The extra marks you will get through having a **relaxed mind** will more than offset those few extra marks you get from the tiny extra amount you can learn in one night.

15. Do your best... that is all anyone can ask of you.