

Revision: advice, time management and techniques

Exams force you to remember lots of information in a structured way which can be challenging if you don't know where to start. This guide outlines how to manage your time, plan your revision and introduces some simple techniques which will help to organise your revision and ace your exams!

Plan your time

Time management plays a key role in acing your exams. Not only do you need to know when you have tests, but you also need to understand how long you have to plan and revise for them. Making a calendar that runs up to your final exam can help with this, as can a list of everything you need to do before you take your exams. For example, you might decide that you want to practice with past papers, create flashcards, and draw a mind map for each topic. Once you have this list, you can plan out what you need to do each day.

From this list, try revising in small chunks. Most people have an attention span of 20-25 minutes, meaning that pushing ourselves to work beyond this period leads us to start switching off, even if we feel as though we're still working. Try to work in small bursts, and take short breaks in between.

There is a blank revision timetable in the files which you can edit to plan your own revision.

Choose the right space

Your work environment should help you focus and work productively. If you're lying down or sat back in a comfy chair, your mind is telling you to switch off, relax and go to sleep. Many students choose to study in their bedroom, where they have their own comfortable space, but there are usually tons of distractions in an environment like that.

If possible, find a space that's quiet and free from distraction. Libraries are often great places to study, and even choosing a different room in the house can help. Try and leave your phone in another room, and stay away from the TV during and in-between study sessions - you'll be far more productive. Apps such as Freedom,

Forest and StayFocused will let you block websites/apps that you know are distracting you for as long as you like.

Stay motivated

It can sometimes be hard to muster enthusiasm for revision. This lack of motivation can take many forms. You can feel overwhelmed, find yourself procrastinating, dislike the work, feel you have no reason to study or get distracted by social media.

To stay motivated, there are a few things you can do:

- **Write down your goals.** Give yourself some small and achievable targets that will eventually mount up. Perhaps you got 65% on your most recent exam. So aim for 68% next time. Then 71% after that.
- **Create a to-do list.** Break your work down into small and manageable chunks. This gives you a clear idea of what you need to do, and means you get a boost each time you tick one off.
- **Practice mindfulness.** If it's all getting a bit much, the practice of [mindfulness](#) can help calm your mind and improve your focus.
- **Study with others.** To break up the monotony of studying alone, team up with your friends to tackle particularly difficult topics. Your collective brains can work together - and teaching someone else can be a great way to test your subject knowledge.

Trigger words

Repeatedly copying out of a textbook is a common revision technique used by students during exam time, but it's often ineffective because it is a form of passive learning. Trigger words are all about extracting the most important information, and formatting it in a way that it becomes very easy to learn.

Trigger words are words that remind us of a larger amount of information, and help us learn the information more effectively. They have to be used purposefully and sparingly, so as not to make the information overwhelming. Below is an example:

The Causes of World War One

There were multiple possible causes of the First World War. The first possible cause of the First World War was the **arms race** that was going on between several countries in Europe from 1910, including **Great Britain, Germany, France, Austro-**

Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. The second possible cause of the First World War was the rise in **nationalism** that many of Europe's countries were facing during the first part of the 20th century. The third and final possible cause of the First World War was the **assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand** of Austria in Sarajevo in June 1914.

This leaves us with some concise points and trigger words:

WW1 Causes:

Arms Race (GB, Germany, France, A-H, Ottomans)

Nationalism

Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand

Useful tip: Trigger words can be easily turned into mind maps or flashcards, which we talk about below.

Mind mapping

You might already be familiar with the concept of mind mapping. Essentially, it's a visual way of laying out information about a subject. If you're a visual learner, mind maps can be an excellent way of condensing a lot of complex information about a topic into an easily-digestible format. There's a central theme, and relevant information spiders off and links to the core idea. Using different colours in your mind map can also improve your recall when it comes to exams. Here's an example:



Useful tip: *Sleep on it. Your ability to recall information becomes stronger after you sleep. Rather than pulling an all-nighter, finish your revision and get a good night's sleep. If you're getting tired during the day, a 20-minute power nap when you've finished a section or topic can revitalise you.*

Flashcards

One of the most tried and tested revision techniques is flashcards, although not everyone uses them effectively. They're useful because they force you to condense information down into a few key trigger words, serving as prompts for you to recall further details. And once you've made the flashcards, you can use them to test yourself.

On the front of the card, you should have a question or key term. On the back, you should have either the answer or the definition. You need to try and guess the correct answer before checking or have someone else test you. Here's an example of the front (blue) and back (green):



Study groups

Explaining topics to other people can often aid your own memory and understanding, revising as a group can also give you an opportunity to quiz and test each other and share example answers. These could be in person during a study period or after school or you could create a Zoom or Skype meeting.

Practice questions

You can access past papers or practice questions by asking your teacher or directly from the subject and exam board website. Working through these is a great way to test your knowledge. Practise planning the framework for your answers. Use lists to

compare points for and against a statement. Try writing plans and full answers to past exam questions with and without your revision notes. Then compare your answer with the mark scheme. Marking your work is just as useful as answering the questions, it is really important that you understand how marks are allocated by the examiner.

Voice recording notes

Some people learn better from listening rather than reading or writing, you can record your notes as audio files. Try asking questions and then leaving a pause before giving the answer.

FINALLY....Avoid passive revision

The following techniques are passive and are unlikely to help you engage with large amounts of information

- X** Typing out all your notes- unless you specifically need all your notes in an electronic format, this is a waste of time as it is not a technique that requires much brain activity and engagement.
- X** Reading your notes- simply reading is passive- you are not doing anything to store what you are reading in your mind.
- X** Copying out material- this is a time-consuming activity but is not engaging with your mind enough to help you remember the content.
- X** Highlighting- it can be very easy to mindlessly over-highlight the majority of a document, combined with annotation this method can be effective, but on its own tends to be a passive strategy.