

Revision

A practical guide



What is 'revision'?

Revision is:

- Reminding yourself of what you have learned
- Remembering it
- Using the skills you have developed to practice answering questions in the right way.

Exams focus on a range of different skills across a wide area of knowledge; **you cannot 'wing-it'.**

Those who do something well *repeatedly* know that ***preparation is everything.*** A good outcome is a result of good preparation. *Revision is that preparation. **Revise well – and you will do well.***

Exams are your friend – and like all good friends, they will give something back to you. Exams are the opportunity you have been working towards all these years to finally show-off the knowledge and skills you have gained over the years at school and then to get something back from them.

Revision is your 'best' friend, because it will **enable** you to show-off your knowledge and skills to your very best.



Get a *friendly* attitude towards your exams and your revision.

They are just a few exams. That's all they are, and in no time at all they will be over for you, for good. You are not the first and only person in the world to take them and neither will you be the last. **Make peace with the fact that you have a few exams coming up and that you are going to do a few simple things to prepare for them.**

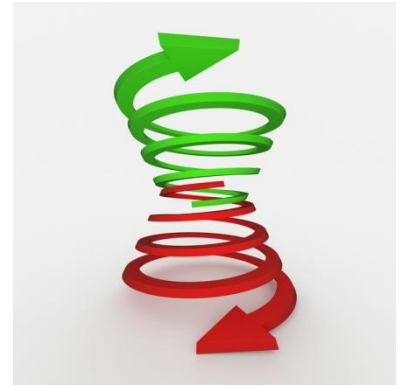
Revising well simply means being clear about what you are doing – it doesn't have to be sweat and tears at all.

When Do I start?

Starting revision in plenty of time will make you feel positive about your preparation and will make you feel more positive about doing well – *which makes it more likely that you actually will do well!*

Once you have started your revision – even just for **25 minutes** – you will feel that you are in control and this creates a '**positive spiral**', where you will feel positive about continuing revising. The worst thing to do is to put it off ... and put it off...and then put it off. The longer

you put it off, the bigger and more unpleasant the whole idea of revision becomes in your mind. If you leave it too long you will get into a 'negative spiral', where you feel that you have no control over things because you haven't left enough time to revise and so now there's no point anyway and you may as well just accept you're going to fail. This can be avoided so easily: **get-in early!**



Another benefit of starting revision in plenty of time is that you **can ask for help** with areas you discover you need help with. You may find that you are missing notes on a topic, or that you simply don't understand a particular idea. If you start your revision early enough, you have time to *ask your teacher* or go to a *revision-guide* or *website* to fix it. **Get-in early!**

How Do I start?

It doesn't matter – **just start.**

- **Make a decision about when you will start and stick to it!**
- **Set yourself a time for your first session of about 25 minutes.**
- **Be in a place where you won't be disturbed. PUT YOUR PHONE AWAY / TURN IT OFF! If you have your phone at your side you are wasting your time; you will be constantly checking and responding to your phone – and that isn't revising.**
- **Make sure you are comfortable (not hungry or thirsty, too hot or too cold).**
- **Choose a subject – gather together all your books / notes and simply look through them from the beginning, noting down the different topics you need to revise.**

Before you know it, 25 minutes will have gone-by and **you will have started your revision!** Having done that once, it will be easier, in a day or two, to do some more. Before you know it, you will be extending revision sessions quite naturally to maybe 40 minutes, without even noticing.

Be More Astronaut.

Before the first human beings walked on the Moon in 1969, the astronauts had spent hour after hour *rehearsing every single part of their mission* for months – including practising how to walk down the ladder from the spacecraft onto the surface of the Moon. Why? Because they'd never done any of it before and they wanted to get it right. **No detail was too small to plan for.**



You've probably been given a '**Revision Planner**' (if you haven't you can download a blank one). If astronauts can practice descending a ladder, follow their example, be smart and use your revision-planner. **No detail is too small.**

Some exams will be on the same day, while another exam will be the only one you have on a particular day; sometimes you might have two or three days between exams and sometimes you'll have an exam every day for a few days. **You need to know the date of each exam so that you can plan a programme of revision that makes sense.**

Writing-out which exams are happening on which days will give you a clearer idea of which exams you need to start revising for first and which ones you can leave for a while. Also, it will feed into that '*positive spiral*' by making you feel that you are on-top of your revision. **It will take 10 minutes, max.**

GCSE Revision Timetable

Don't forget to take regular breaks!



Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Time							
9am							
10am							
11am							
12noon							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							

Before you start! Get to know your exams.

Most people think revision is '*remembering what I have learned.*' **It is way more than that!**

Revising-well means doing the following **3** things:

- **Recap – remind yourself / re-learn topics covered**
- **Review – techniques to help you re-call information**
- **Apply – use what you can re-call to answer questions**

Just remembering facts alone will ***not*** prepare you for any exam. No exam in the world just asks you to write down facts for an hour and 45 minutes. Your exams will require you to use a range of different skills, such as ***identifying, summarising, explaining, evaluating, plotting-graphs, concluding.*** You will be awarded marks for showing that you know how to

do these things. Any exam will have different *types* of question which ask you to apply different skills.

So, find out what the exams in your different subjects will be asking you to do – then you can make sure that you do them.

Your first help is your teacher. If they haven't already, during the course of lessons, your teacher should be able to break-down your exam questions into a set of skills and make clear for you what you have to do for each type of question.



Find out what different types of question will be in an exam.

If a question is worth '9 marks', for example – what *are those marks awarded for?*

Ask your teacher for:

- An explanation of the ***different types of questions*** and what you have to do to answer them.
- A copy of a past-exam paper.
- A copy of the exam-board '**mark scheme**'. This can be quite detailed but it gives a description of what marks are awarded for in different types of questions. It is what your examiner will use when marking your exam.

Look on-line:

- **Find out the exam board of your subjects** (your teacher will tell you) and look at their site on-line. Exam boards will have past exam papers or 'sample questions' that show the kind of questions you can expect.
- Look at the **mark-scheme** on-line. Sometimes exam-boards will have examples of what they consider to be a good answer, called '**exemplars**.'

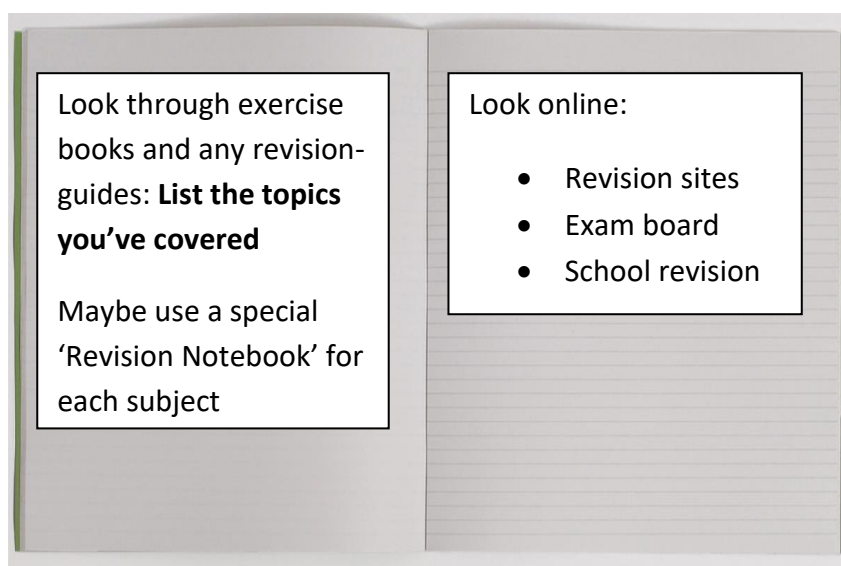
Summary

- **Revise well = do well**
- **Recognise exams as opportunities to show what you can do.**
- **Begin revising in plenty-of time; don't put it off.**
- **Write-out a revision-planner to prioritise your revision.**
- **Get to know what your exams will be asking you to do.**

Revision Activities

Here we go. The following are some suggestions that research has shown can work very well. The trick is to try different things and find-out what works for *you*. Revision can be a personal thing that fits your personality and brain-type. Try some of the techniques – play around with ideas, be creative. There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to revision – as long as you are clear what it is you are trying to do. Enjoy!

1) Recap – remind yourself / re-learn topics covered.



Make a note of:

- The topics you've covered from start to finish
- What is missing from your notes
- What you don't understand
- What you are less confident of.

Make sure you **FIND OUT WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW** – from your teachers, text-books, revision guides. **Smart revision means going to the places that scare you**, while you still have time.

The trick now is to be able to **reduce your notes down to key information** while **keeping enough detail to make sense**. You might want to use **new notebooks** bought just for that job. The very **act of re-writing and arranging your old notes into a new slimmed-down form will help you recall them:**

Key facts
Key words

Names
Evaluation points

Formulae
Diagrams

2) Review – techniques to help you re-call information.

No one is expecting you to remember this stuff for years to come – just to be able to hold it in your short-term memory for long enough to be able to use it in the exams.

Your brain is naturally programmed to spot connections, make associations, take notice of colour and shapes and recognise what it has come across before. You can take advantage of this in the following revision activities. Actively engage with your notes by creatively re-packaging them to help commit them to your short-term memory.

You may need: **new note books**; **coloured pens**; **hi-lighters**; **flash cards**; **sticky notes**.



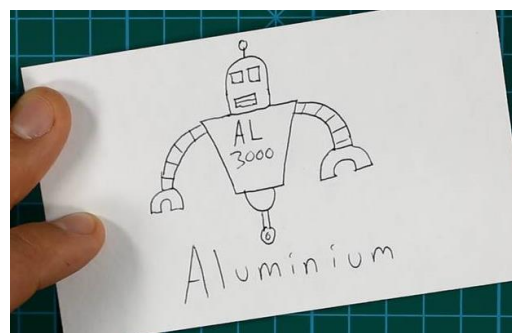
Flash Cards: Quick-look information – facts / formulae / quotes/ ideas.

Not too much ‘clutter’ per card – keep simple for the eye.

(Better to have several cards on one topic than too much Information on one card).

Flash cards can be **picked-up repeatedly and looked at quickly** to help remember information.

They are good to use creatively: Draw simple ‘**recall images**’ on them that relate to information. These are simple, but clear images that you can associate with a particular piece of information. You don’t have to be good at drawing. Flash cards are a tool to help you rehearse and remember information – only you will see them.



Be prepared to be weird and wacky. The weirder an association is the more likely you are to remember it. If you can make a connection between a formula for Physics and a re-call image of a pig on a surfboard – do it!

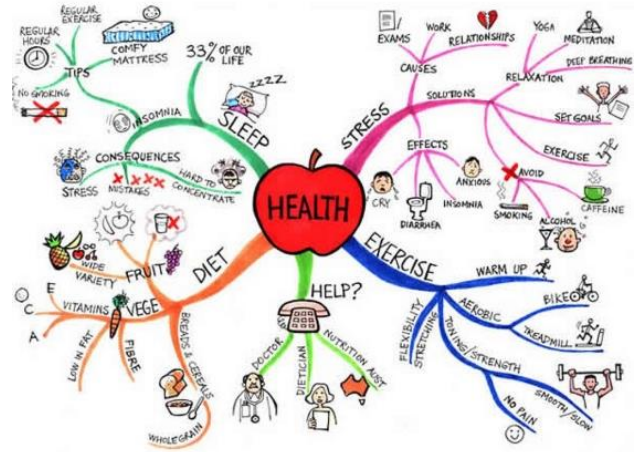
Use **different coloured pens for different topics** or different types of information; use different coloured cards for topics/ subjects.

The brain will **visualise images** and **colours** as *attachments to information* that your memory can grab on to and then recall.

See how to make good flashcards at

YouTube: [How to Study Effectively with Flash Cards – College Info Geek](#)

Mind-Maps: Several facts, key ideas, key words and connections all on one document. Mind-maps help you **survey** several aspects of a topic at once and give a 'bigger picture' than isolated facts. Mind-maps are more cluttered than flash cards, with key ideas and related information branching-off. Mind maps are **visual**, so be creative in the same way as flash-cards (**recall images; use of different coloured pens**). Keep mind maps clear, so that you can read them, and see connections. Not too much information, as this can be off-putting.

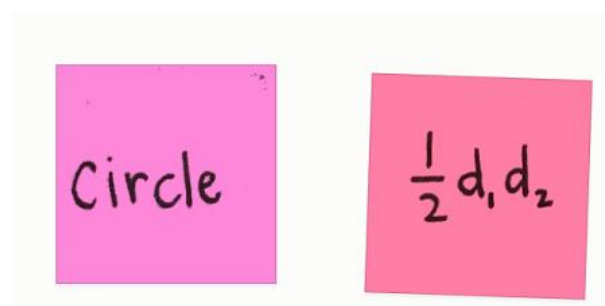


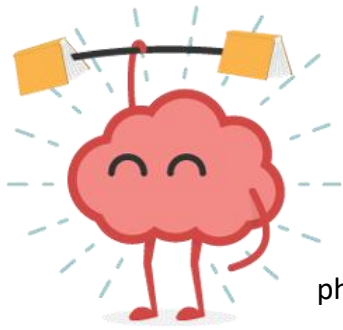
It is not a piece of display-work, it is just a tool to help you identify, make connections and remember information so don't put lots of time into making them look pretty. They just need to work for you. Begin with a key concept at the centre of the page – a title or a re-call image. It is a good idea to title your mind maps so that you know what each one is about

YouTube: [How To Mind map](#)

Sticky Notes: At a glance, **single words or simple phrases**. They can be stuck-up anywhere you will **regularly see them** (bedroom wall; wardrobe doors; kitchen-cupboards; bathroom mirror). Regularly seeing words / phrases on a daily basis will help your brain **memorise them naturally** – without effort. Write large, clear words in a thick pen to make them easily seen from a few feet away.

Remember to renew them once an exam is out of the way.





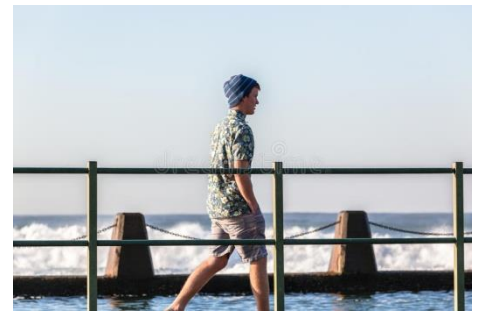
Quick Ideas

Research suggests that the brain can only take on board 9 new pieces of information at any one time. That's not very helpful for the amount needed to remember for exams. However, people can remember 11-digit phone numbers... so anything that helps is worth trying-out.

Places

You don't have to do all your revision in your room. It can help to **associate different subjects with different experiences**. So you could choose to do English in your room, History on the sofa in the living room, French at the kitchen table – *when it's quiet*.

Or, simply take a **revision-walk** from time to time.



A 10 minute walk to the shops or to nowhere in particular is a good opportunity to go over and **rehearse information** in your head while stretching your legs and getting some fresh air.

Have **sticky notes in different parts of the house** (check with others in your house first!): Science in the bathroom; Sociology on kitchen cupboards and so on.

Move it

You can **attach information to physical movements** that you create – from simple finger/hand movements to touching your shoulder, standing on one-leg or creating a routine of sequenced movements where each movement is associated with information. Say the information out loud as you make each movement. Only you will know!



Say It Out Loud

Speak out loud the information you are reviewing. This can have a more forceful impact on recall than silently reviewing. You could **record information into a phone/i-pad** to listen to whenever, or record longer **pod-casts**. Listening to this information for brief periods when you are relaxed can really help anchor information in your short-term memory.



Music

Music can be a powerful tool to anchor information to memory. You can play a particular song just **before or after a revision session**, playing the same song every time you revise that subject or topic. **Play that song on the day of the exam** and it will trigger memory associations. Select **different pieces of music for different subjects**. You can also play music while you revise, BUT it is important that it is *nothing distracting*; something you can have on in the background, probably without singing and at no more than 60-70 beats per minute (resting heartbeat).



Stories / Rhymes

We remember stories and rhymes without effort. If the information you are reviewing doesn't grab your attention, **build a story or rhyme around it**. The story/rhyme can carry the information you need so that **recalling the story/rhyme recalls the key information**. The key is to keep them simple and short. Stories are effective when you have to remember information in a sequence or chain.



Acronyms

A tried and tested way of remembering lists or rules. Arrange words in a list so that the first letters of each word spell a word. For example:

Different forms of prejudice:

Racism

Ageism

Sexism

Homophobia

Headlines

To help remember a **series of events or a central idea**, summarise them as a single-sentence newspaper headline – the more memorable the better. Then, add in the details that explain the headline. For example, to remember the key events in the story of ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ a headline could be created and written on a flash card:

Cows lose their jobs
as milk prices drop

‘Girl trespasser outrages bears!’

Girl – Goldilocks, lost in the woods, tired and hungry

Trespasser – explores all the rooms in the house of the three bears; eats porridge, sleeps in their beds.

Outrages bears! – the three bears return home and see the disturbance Goldilocks has caused.

3) Apply – use what you can re-call to answer questions

APPLYing what you can remember is **the most useful** part of revision: you only **revise** and **review** information *so that you can use it to answer questions. So, test that you can!*

Quick-Quiz Questions – use the same type of cards as you use to make flash cards to create quiz question and answer cards: Question on one side – *answer on the other* .

Name / Explain how / Why / Which do you think?

Multi-choice

True or False?

Remember to include the correct answers on one side of the card.



Walking-Talking Answers – choose some actual exam questions (or create your own based on the exam-style) and **mentally answer** the questions. **Go for a walk and mentally walk your way through what you think an answer would include.** You are just asking yourself ‘what would I say if I was asked this question?’ If you have no idea – you now know to research, find out.



Written Answers – actually sit down and **write-out full answers in exam conditions.** It’s not surprising that those who do this, even just once or twice, tend to do well in their exams. If you hand-in your written answers to be marked, teachers will be happy to quickly mark answers you’ve done as part of your revision and the **pay-off you get is in their feedback:** what you did right and what you need to do.



Ask your teacher for examples of past exam questions, whole exam papers or where you can find examples of the kind of questions you are likely to have in your exams. Tell them in advance that you are planning to write an answer and check that they are happy to mark it – *they will be, but it’s polite to ask*

Visualise – picture yourself sitting at your exam paper and doing well. Many, many successful people from sports, music and movies know this technique; they rehearse their success in their imagination by visualising themselves succeeding. Sports-people will do this in the days just before a big event. When you do this, **you make a positive connection between your revision and your exam performance.** You create faith in what you are doing and are therefore more likely to stick with it in the knowledge that it is helping you. If you tell yourself ‘I’m going to fail’, then you make the first step towards bringing that about. Visualise yourself doing well and you make a step towards doing well.



With Friends?

Some people can only revise by themselves. There are benefits to be had from revising as part of a small group if that suits your way of learning:

- Learn from others
- Share information and ideas
- Review and apply by teaching a friend
- Gain context – measure how your revision is progressing compared to others.



There are also pitfalls:

- No revision gets done and everyone socialises.
- People become competitive
- Disagreement over what to revise
- Friends share incorrect information and confuse you
- You feel intimidated by progress others appear to be making

The way around these potential pitfalls is to **agree some simple ground-rules** for group revision:

- 1) Agree beforehand what subject/topics you will focus on
- 2) Agree how long before you have a break – and stick to it.
- 3) Agree to share and discuss and teach – but not to be competitive

Group revision is perfect for **trying-out quiz-cards**. Also it is a good opportunity to **identify an area you all feel less confident** about or **an area that is open to debate** (perhaps suited to English literature, Religious Education, History or Sociology) and to **collaborate to find answers and share ideas**.

Maybe allocate roles:

- ✓ Finding past exam questions
- ✓ Creating flash cards
- ✓ Creating quiz-cards
- ✓ Information-accuracy checker
- ✓ Brainstorm different ideas on one question



Revision sessions with friends also reminds you that you're not the only person on the planet preparing for exams and it can provide a change from your normal revision environment.

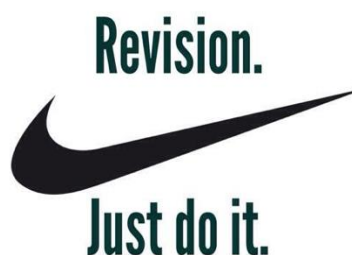
Summary

- **RECAP – REVIEW – APPLY**
- **Creatively engage with your notes – repackage them**
- **Associations, colour-code, re-call images, quiz-cards**
- **Try different techniques to find what suits you**
- **If you don't know – find out!**

Look After Yourself

Great revision is wasted if you don't look after yourself properly during your exams.

- **Get enough sleep**, generally. You can't expect your brain to respond if it's tired.
- **Eat well**. A balanced diet with regular meals. Grazing on light meals can be better for concentration than gorging on lots of food.
- **Keep hydrated**. Water is the best drink for brain-function. Sugary drinks and caffeine-drinks are 'false friends'; they may give you the impression of making you more alert but what they actually do is make your performance less effective.
- **Reward yourself**. Set-up some kind of 'reward' for completing revision of a topic or for having written an answer to an actual question. This could be a snack, watching a movie, going out, buying your self something.
- **Revise at sensible times**. If you are a 'morning person', concentration, alertness and memory are at their best around **mid-morning (11.00 am)** and slowly decline after that. If you are an evening person, then **early evening is the best time for you (around 7pm)**.
It's not a good idea for anyone to be revising after 9pm. The brain will be too tired (despite what you may tell yourself) and you may have difficulty sleeping with revision swimming around your mind.
The night before an exam you may want to have a final twenty-minute *glance* at revision notes – just to make you feel confident that you are prepared.
- **Regular Breaks**. Well-timed breaks can be as productive as actual revision sessions. No one would expect to lift weights for an entire day. Similarly, your brain needs time to rest. It's good for you to feel that you have finished a session of revision and now you are doing something completely different. Physically leave the area where you have been revising and get a change of environment. It's good to break-up revision with enjoyable downtime; see friends, play sports.
- **Communicate**. Let your parents know what you are doing during the exam period. They will be anxious that you are not revising. Telling them when you have revised, when you plan to do some more and when you plan to have breaks will keep anxious parents off your back and prevent rows, which is the last thing you need. Let them know that you can be trusted.



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