



King's High
School

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE REVISION

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EFFECTIVE REVISION (A DEFINITION)



TO BE EFFECTIVE, REVISION MUST BE:

ACTIVE

Take notes, look for key points, test yourself. Never just sit down and read for a set period. Focus on tasks, not time. If you just read notes, you'll only retain about 10% of the information.

ORGANISED

Always ask yourself at the start of a study session, "what do I want to have completed in this session?" Have a plan for what you want to cover this week and this month. Have an overview of the priority areas in each subject.

GETTING STARTED



WHERE?

Find a fixed place to study that becomes firmly associated in your mind with productive work. All the equipment and materials you need should be within reach. Turn your room into a positive learning environment.

WHEN?

Try to schedule your study for times when you are more mentally alert. Most people find their ability to focus deteriorates towards the end of the day. Getting revision done earlier in the day aids efficiency and also offers the reward of having time to relax after the work is done.

WHAT?

Remember that it's all about being active and focused on tasks, not time! Know at the start of a session what you want to have completed by the end of the period. Make the revision tasks specific and realistic, not vague and large.

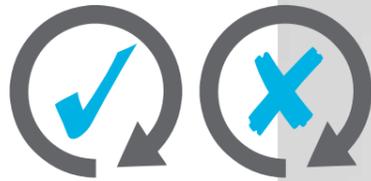
WHY?

Test your progress at the end of a study session. Ask yourself "what have I just learned?" Review the material covered in your revision session. Merely recognising material isn't enough – you must be able to reproduce it without the aid of the book or notes.

HOW?

Getting started is often the most difficult bit, so start by 'doing'. Take notes. It usually helps to begin with a subject you like, move on to other less favoured areas, and then finish up with a favoured topic to maintain the interest.

DO'S AND DON'TS



DO

Make a list of all the topics you need to revise

Each subject that you are studying can be broken down into its smaller parts, with main sections, sub-topics and supporting details. A very useful start is to list out all the topics on the course according to this hierarchy and use this as a 'revision checklist' for the subject. Tick topics off as you've learnt them.

Create a realistic schedule

Block the waking part of each day into three portions. Allow yourself one portion a day off and allocate subjects and topics to the remaining two. Put the schedule on display so that your family can see when you are available. It will also reassure your parents that you are in control.

Plan ahead by working backwards

By using revision checklists in your various subjects, you should know what quantity of material has to be covered over the coming months. Start from the final date (end of May) and divide your revision up week by week, allowing some flexibility for unforeseen delays. Surprise yourself by being ready in time! Use the timetables and other sheets you have been given.

DON'T

Just keep going!

The body and the mind need regular 'time-outs'. When you're tired, concentration is more difficult, you get distracted easily and learning and memorisation is less effective. There comes a point in an evening study session when it is counter-productive to stay at the desk – nothing is going in and you are only tiring yourself further. Use breaks effectively, particularly after completing a task.

MAKING YOUR NOTES USEFUL



The purpose of making summary notes on a topic or subject is to aid your overall understanding of material, to help you distinguish between what is really important information (depth) and what is merely supporting detail.

In addition, good summary notes make retrieval of information quicker and easier.

Sort out your filing system

Make sure your exercise books, folders and notes are well organised. Invest in some ring binders, dividers, plastic pockets, etc. Have a separate folder for each subject (a permanent reference point) and then keep a 'current folder' for managing notes in progress.

Less is always more

When writing notes, remember they should contain a summary, not an extensive repetition of what is in the textbook. Don't crowd the page. Stick to main headings and sub-headings. Use abbreviations where appropriate. Try to reduce what you need to know on the topic down to one A4 sheet. Once you have an overview, it is easier to fill out the detail.

Make your notes visual

Ensure your notes have a memorable appearance so that you can recall them easily. Use illustrations, diagrams, graphs, colours, and boxes ('a picture is worth a thousand words'). Arrange the material in a logical order or hierarchy (title, sub-point, explanation, example). Ideally, you should be able to close your eyes in an exam and visualise a particular page of notes.

Beware of transcribing and highlighting!

Merely re-writing the text from the book into your notes does not ensure retention. Try to put things in your own words and devise your own examples – this will make the material more meaningful. Only use the highlighter pen AFTER you have previewed and questioned a text, thus ensuring you identify the most important material and you avoid the creation of a fluorescent textbook!

'Save' your notes carefully

Try to follow the logic of your computer files, when storing information. Think – "Where does this material best fit (subject, section, topic, sub-topic, etc.)?" In this way, you will ensure that it is efficiently processed and easily retrieved both physically (during revision) and mentally (when you need it in an exam).

IMPROVING MEMORY



If you study a topic one night and can recall most of it the next morning, don't be fooled into thinking that you will be able to remember it accurately in two months' time.

If the goal is to improve your long-term memory, then the key to success is based on the efficiency of input (the 'mental filing system' we employ). Reducing the burden on the limited short-term memory, and channelling information into long-term storage, is based on the creation of patterns and the avoidance of randomness.

'Chunking': as the average person can only hold seven 'items' in short-term memory, grouping items together into 'chunks' can increase capacity. This is generally used for remembering numbers (think of how you remember phone numbers by grouping the seven digits into two or three chunks). This can be applied to other listings in various subjects.

Repetition: Studies indicate that 66% of material is forgotten within seven days if it is not reviewed or recited again by the student, and 88% is gone after six weeks. Don't make life harder for yourself – build in a brief daily and weekly review of material covered. It will save you having to re-learn material from scratch!

Application and association: The best way to channel material to long-term memory is to organise it into meaningful associations. Link it to existing information and topics and create vivid personal examples which act as 'mental hooks' or 'cues' for recalling material in the future. Thus, new items are put in context. If you learn a new formula/verb/rule, try to put it into practice immediately with a relevant example.

Use of mnemonics: these are various word games which can act as memory aids and which allow personalisation and creativity. Think of stalagmites (come down from the ceiling) and stalagmites (go up from the ground); the colours of the rainbow – **Roy G. Biv** ('Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain' to remember red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet); the seven characteristics of living organisms – **Mr. Grief** (Movement, Reproduction, Growth, Respiration, Irritability, Excretion, Feeding). You can devise many more of these to aid your personalised recall of items in your subjects.

TOP TIPS ON EXAM STRATEGY



Success in exams involves two ingredients – having a thorough knowledge of the subject matter AND making the most of your knowledge in the exam through effective answering technique. Two students with identical knowledge and attainment levels can sit the same exam and their final grades can differ by as much as 25%. The difference is down to having an effective strategy and exam technique. Here are four golden rules to apply to all your exam papers:

1. Allow time to read the paper carefully

The importance of reading the paper carefully and choosing your questions wisely cannot be emphasised enough. It's natural to want to start writing immediately and launch into a favoured topic. Resist the urge. Take your time. Be smart and size-up the paper before answering.

2. Stick to your game plan

An overall strategy should have emerged from your revision and exam preparation in each subject. This covers the areas you will tackle, the topics you will avoid if they appear on the paper, the sequence in which you will tackle the various sections, the style of answering you will employ in each subject, the amount of time you will allocate to answering each section. In some cases, this plan will work like a dream but there will always be surprises to deal with in some papers. Don't get flustered. Stick to your game plan, trust your judgement, and move on.

3. Sweep up any mistakes

In the pressure of the exam hall, it is easy to make basic errors. These will sometimes have the potential to lose you a lot of valuable marks. Misreading the instruction on a question can render an entire answer invalid. You might have known the correct answer, but you didn't put it down. A simple miscalculation can lose you valuable time as you try to figure out the balancing item. Be disciplined with your time. Always leave a few minutes at the end to tidy-up errors.

4. Attempt all questions

It is amazing how many exam scripts are handed up unfinished. Every year, capable students who just didn't get time to finish the paper lose easy marks. Don't fall into this trap. Work on the basis that you will get an answer written for the required number of questions. Remember that it is much easier to get the first 20% of the marks for any question than the final 5%. You can always polish an answer further but, if there is no attempt made at part of a question, you can't get any marks. But if the instructions on the front of the paper tell you to answer a certain number of questions – stick to this – don't answer too many!

TOP TIPS FOR REVISION



1. Quality over quantity

Shorter, more focused revision is most effective: divide your revision allocation into 45 minute chunks with a 15 minute break after each session. It is important to revisit your learning regularly and this can be done more easily via shorter revision blocks.

2. Focus on the hard topics first

It's easy to stay in your comfort zone and review and revise topics that you feel most comfortable with; it's more of a challenge – but really important – that you identify and address any gaps in your knowledge and understanding and tackle this directly. Traffic light core topics or spec points and start working back from the areas you have indicated as red or amber (rather than the green topics).

3. Teaching a topic

One of the best ways to learn is through 'direct instruction'; this, quite simply, means teaching a topic to another person. If you are trying to learn, for example, the process of photosynthesis, then the best way to check your understanding is to put away your notes and flashcards away and try to teach a friend or family member (or even film yourself teaching). Once you've done this, go back to your notes to check details and teach again, elaborating on key concepts as you go.

4. Graphic organisers

It's important that you're not just re-reading notes and highlighting key words. Graphic organisers can be a very effective vehicle to reconstruct revision topics in a meaningful and structured way. This enables you to make original and meaningful links and connections between topics too.

5. Just a Minute

A very effective revision technique to test knowledge and confidence. Quite simply talk for a minute without pause or hesitation on a key revision topic. As you do this, try to elaborate on your ideas in addition to explaining key facts and information.

6. Study buddies and revision partners

Revision used to be quite a solitary affair, but now there are lots of opportunities to collaborate and work with a 'study buddy'. You can work remotely using Shared Documents on the same topic, send each other a quiz or a test, then do a timed practice on an exam-style question and share this and mark each other's work before feeding back.

7. Collaborative revision notes

Some students tend to spend a disproportionate amount of time creating detailed flashcards listing the information and knowledge that needs to be learned. The time spent doing this can be reduced significantly by working in a group, using online collaborative documents, assigning topics to each member of the group, and each producing and sharing the revision materials produced.

8. Ditch the highlighters

Many students try to learn or revise by re-reading or highlighting notes; this is not an effective method of work. It's far more effective to create revision flashcards on key topics and then put the flashcards away and test yourself or teach another person the topic.

9. Create an effective learning environment

Lots of students feel that they learn better whilst listening to music. Unfortunately, the research on this topic suggests otherwise. The brain is able to absorb much more information when the learning environment is silent. Similarly, it goes without saying that effective learning and effective revision comes without any distractions. Checking phones and devices can really impact on the concentration levels needed for effective revision.

10. Revision schedules

Create a revision schedule so that you know how much revision time you have ahead of you and plan carefully the topics and practice tests you want to cover within that schedule. Make sure you know how much revision time you have for each subject and what topics you will cover in that time. There are lots of helpful online calendars and timetables to help plan your time carefully.

11. Set a specific goal for each revision session

Your revision is likely to be far more effective if you have a clear sense of what you want to achieve at the end of each revision slot. Instead of putting 'Macbeth' as the title of a revision session, specify how much you will do, and precisely what you will do. 'Lady Macbeth in Act 1 and 2' might be a better approach – more manageable and achievable and therefore motivational.

12. Know your exam timings and exam structure

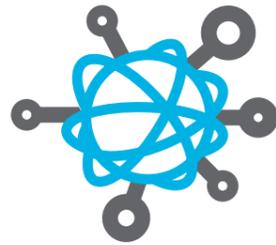
Remember to revise and review exam practice and exam technique in addition to subject content and skills. Make sure that you know how much time you have to spend on each question / section of the exam paper and which specific requirements and assessment objectives are being assessed. This is especially important if you have extra-time in exams.

13. Lots of timed practice

Practise under timed conditions; go to the exam board website for past papers and mark schemes.



SIX HIGHLY EFFECTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES



1. Spaced practice

For more effective and deeper learning, study has to take place in smaller chunks over a longer period of time (as opposed to 'blocked practice' which involves cramming in as much learning and revision as possible in a shorter block of time).

2. Retrieval practice

When students leave some time in between learning topics, the brain forgets some information. However, the effort involved in retrieving the forgotten learning helps embed information more securely in the long-term memory. It may seem counter-intuitive but it is an extremely effective learning technique.

3. Interleaved practice

A more traditional way to learn is to practice a skill over and over again, repeating until mastery has been achieved. Whilst repetition is extremely important, the most effective learning and revision involves mixing our practice with other skills. This means rather than completing 5 essays on characters in Macbeth, write one essay, then focus on a Physics problem, do some History, a quiz on Geography, before returning to Macbeth.

4. Self testing

Lots of low stakes testing and self testing is a very effective learning and revision strategy. Quizzes, vocab tests, technical terminology reviews, tests on assessments objectives and exam requirements can be very helpful for this. Team up with a 'study buddy' and quiz each other on a shared revision topic.

5. Elaboration

Some learning involves the simple recall of facts and information; however, to achieve the highest grades students need to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills by asking open-ended questions and making connections between topics, adding specific details and evidence as they do so. This can be best achieved when explaining a topic to someone else.

6. Dual coding

This is the process of combining verbal and visual materials by using techniques such as timelines, infographics, diagrams, graphic organiser or even cartoon strips. When reviewing your prior learning, find visuals that support and illustrate the written information.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND INFORMATION



Alex Quigley's Top Ten Revision Strategies

<https://www.theconfidentteacher.com/2018/01/top-10-revision-strategies/>

The Science of Revision: Nine Ways Pupils can revise for exams more effectively

<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/apr/19/students-revise-exams-revision-science>

Five Proven Hacks to help students tackle revision

<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2017/apr/12/five-proven-hacks-to-help-students-tackle-revision>

Revision Techniques: the good, the OK and the useless

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22565912>

TES: Revision Techniques

<https://www.tes.com/revision-tips>

Making final revision lesson count!

<http://dartoncollege.co.uk/blog/making-final-revision-lessons-count/>





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