

St Margaret's Academy



How to Revise Well

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Acknowledgement:

This guide is an adaptation of a revision guide produced by Mr D Benney, Deputy Headteacher of Penyrheol Comprehensive School. We are grateful to him for sharing his guide with us and allowing us to reproduce it.

What to do before you revise

- Have an **exam timetable** which tells you when and how long each exam is;
- List the topics you need to revise in each subject – make sure you know what it is you have to know;
- Find out what type of questions you will face in each subject – eg, multiple choice, essays, shorter questions;
- Make sure you have a complete set of notes to revise from. This could be your exercise books, booklets of notes provided by your teacher or purchased revision guides. If you are using your books, make sure (by checking against topics to revise) that any missing work is copied up or photocopied;
- Check out what electronic resources are available – things like GCSEPod, SAM Learning, Mr Bruff videos;
- Put together a **revision timetable**. This should start well before your exams to give you enough time to cover (and revisit) all topics in all subjects. See **spacing** and **interleaving** later in this guide.

Revision Techniques- what shouldn't you rely on?

What does the research say?

Re-reading and highlighting are among the commonest and apparently most obvious ways to memorise or revise material. They also give a satisfying – **but deceptive** – feeling of fluency and familiarity with the material (Brown *et al*, 2014).

As we can see from the research above, one of the most common methods of revision is actually one of the **least effective**. Rereading and highlighting notes can lead to very little of the read or highlighted information going in to long term memory. There is nothing wrong with reading and highlighting, but on their own they are **very ineffective**.



Six Strategies for Effective Learning

LEARNINGSIENTISTS.ORG

All of these strategies have supporting evidence from cognitive psychology. For each strategy, we explain how to do it, some points to consider, and where to find more information.



Content by Yana Weinstein (University of Massachusetts Lowell) & Megan Smith (Rhode Island College) | Illustrations by Oliver Caviglioli (teachinghow2s.com/cogsci) Funding provided by the APS Fund for Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science

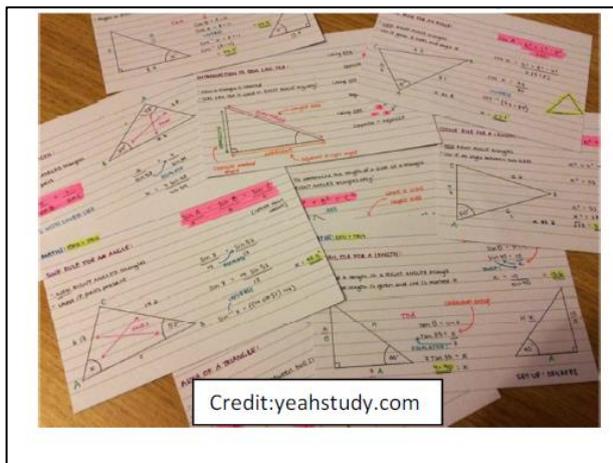
These 6 strategies have supporting evidence from Cognitive Psychology. Visit www.learningscientists.org for more information on each strategy.

In terms of actual revision techniques, we will focus on five:

1. Flash Cards
2. Minds Maps
3. Self-Quizzing
4. Revision Speed Dating
5. Past Papers

We will look at how we can include as many of the **six strategies** in each technique to ensure the revision is effective.

Technique 1- Revision Flashcards



- Flashcards have a keyword or the name of a concept/topic on one side and a definition or a series of notes on the other;
- Probably the easiest way to make them is to use your class notes to produce flash cards for each topic you need to study;
- On one side will go the topic title and on the reverse you need to summarise the key points;
- Use pictures and words (**dual coding**) and **concrete examples** where appropriate.

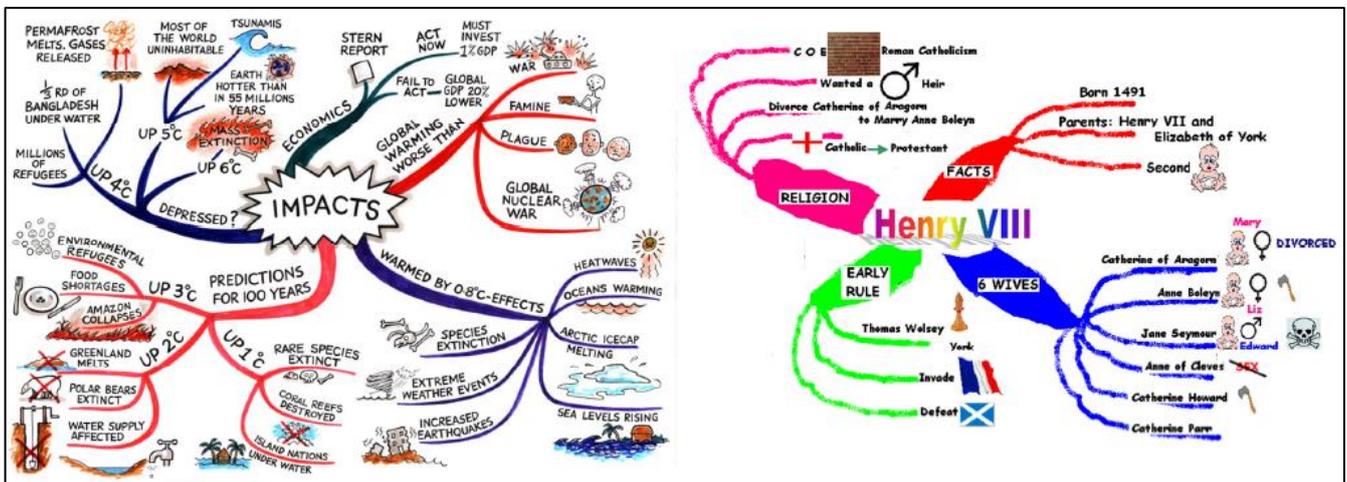
REMEMBER! The creation of the flash cards does not represent the end point of revision for this topic. The next crucial step is to test how well you can recall the information on the flash card (**retrieval**). If you are going to create flash cards then make sure they are done early so there is time to revisit the topic (**spacing**) at a later date.

Technique 2 - Mind Maps

Put simply, a topic is summarised on one large sheet. Each sheet will have more information than a flash-card.

Steps to follow:

- Write the main topic in the middle of the paper and draw a ring around it;
- For each key point draw a branch out from the main topic.
- Write a key word or phrase on each branch;
- Build out further branches and add details;
- Use pictures and words (**dual coding**) rather than loads of writing copied from your notes.



REMEMBER! The creation of a mind map **does not** represent the end point of revision for this topic. The next crucial step is to test how well you can recall the information on the mind map (**retrieval**). If you are going to create mind maps then make sure they are done early so there is time to revisit the topic (**spacing**) at a later date.

Technique 3- Self-quizzing/Testing

This can be as simple as having a blank sheet of paper in front of you and writing down (from memory) everything you know about a topic (**retrieval**) and trying to **elaborate** on some of the key ideas.

- This retrieval could be based on a mind map, flashcards or other notes;
- Once complete, check your work using your original materials;
- Correct and improve it: fill any gaps, correct any inaccuracies and don't forget spelling, punctuation and grammar!

You can also use your friends/family to test you from your flashcards/mind maps/revision guide. Parents can really help by testing you regularly on different topics.

Retrieval is hard. Mnemonics can help.

When revising topics, try to create and use mnemonics to help you with retrieval. For instance, **Please Stop Calling My Zebra In The Class** is quite easy to remember and will help you in science to learn the order of reactivity of metals as it stands for **P**otassium, **S**odium, **C**alcium, **M**agnesium, **Z**inc, **I**ron, **T**in and **C**opper.

Another example of a mnemonic is **Dr Smith – Dynamics, Rhythm, Structure, Melody, Instrumentation, Texture/Timbre and Harmony** for analysing and describing music.

Technique 4 – Revision Speed Dating

This is effective if you have a revision partner or a revision group.

- Pick a topic;
- In pairs, sit opposite each other with a blank sheet of paper each;
- You have 5 minutes to write as much as you can about the given topic;
- After 5 minutes compare what each of you has written and the best response receives a point;
- Then pick different topics and repeat the task a few times, making sure you build in breaks;
- See who has the most points at the end.

This is an effective technique because it forces you to **retrieve** the information from memory, and by comparing responses you get to see if you have made any errors or have omitted any key information.



Technique 5 - Past Paper Questions

This is a very effective method of revision because you have to **retrieve** the information from memory. Your teacher may provide some papers and there are many available online.

However, you need to think about the following:

- Make sure the past papers are for the same board and specification that you are studying;
- Just doing the papers may not be enough. Can you get hold of mark schemes (online) or better still get a teacher to mark some of them? It is important to know if your answers are going to get you the marks that you need;
- It may be worth holding off past papers until you have done most of your learning in class;
- Getting a question right might trick you into thinking you know all there is to know about a topic – so don't get complacent!

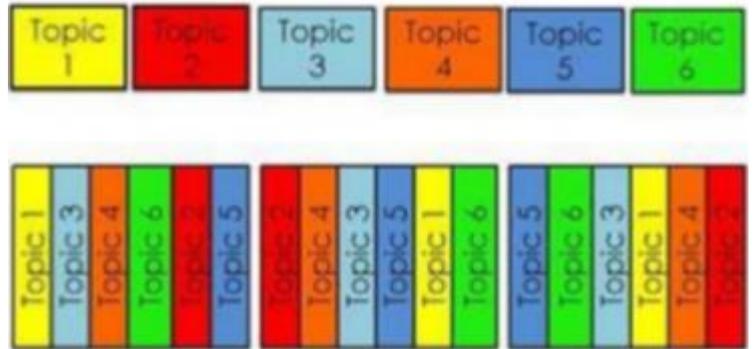


Organising Revision: Long Term

What does research say?

Blocking your revision- focusing on one topic for a long time then moving on to a new topic – is inefficient. **Interleaving** your topics is far more effective.

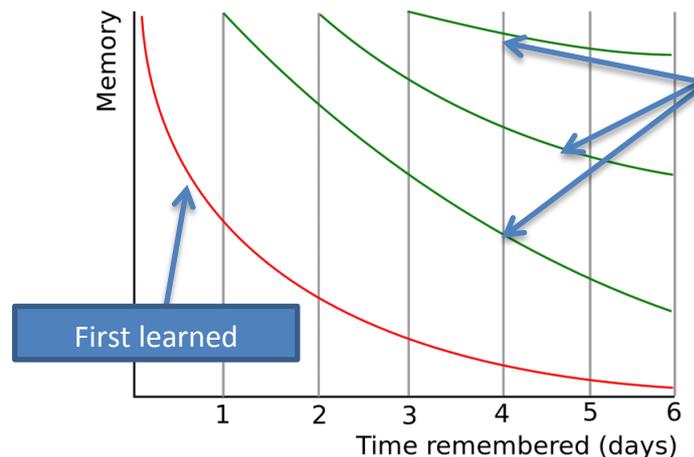
Blocking vs interleaving



What does research say?

Ebbinghaus's famous forgetting curve shows that the brain naturally "forgets" information. If we revisit previously covered topics after some time has elapsed, we have a greater chance of remembering more of the information.

The Forgetting Curve



The research suggests that when you plan your revision timetable, mix your topics and your subjects up (**interleaving**). It may *seem* sensible to concentrate on a single topic in History for 3 straight nights, but actually you will remember more if you interleave with different subjects and topics.

Remember to revisit (**spacing**) what you are revising regularly.

Organising Revision: Short Term

It won't do you any good to sit down and revise for hours on end with no breaks.

You'll find out what works best for you in terms of timings, but use this suggestion as a starting point and adapt it to suit your own needs:

- **20 minutes on a topic; 5 minute break,**
- **20 minutes on a *different* topic, 5 minute break,**
- **20 minutes on a *different* topic, 5 minute break,**
- **20 minutes on a *different* topic.**

This means you can revise **four different topics** in just over an hour and a half.

If you want to revise for a longer period either stick with the 20 minute times and do more of them (with 5 minute breaks in between) or increase the time given to each topic to 25 minutes.

If you are planning to revise a topic for the first time, you may want to produce a mind map or make flash cards.

When you revisit that topic, focus on **retrieving** the information from the mind map or the flash cards from memory. Then check how successfully you retrieved it or do some past paper questions.



GOOD REVISERS

by @Inner_Drive
www.innerdrive.co.uk

POOR REVISERS

Eat breakfast



Skip breakfast

Sleep 8-10 hours a night



Get little sleep

**Have regular
bed times**



**Have inconsistent
bed times**

Get fresh air each day



Stay indoors all day

Exercise regularly



Do no exercise

Do past papers



**Mostly revise highlighting
"key" passages**

Spread out their revision



Cram their revision

**Keep a diary to capture
negative thoughts**



**Dwell on worst
case scenarios**

**Revise in a quiet
environment**



**Revise while listening
to music or TV**

Drink water regularly



Forget to stay hydrated

**Put their phone away
during revision**



**Revise with their mobile
phone next to them**