

This toolkit gives you guidance on how to prepare for your exams effectively. Use it together with your Examination Guide booklet. It includes advice and revision techniques and resources for you to try.

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The basics

Staying Motivated

- Set small targets with rewards
- Remind yourself of the end goal
- Use subject topic planners so that you can monitor your progress
- If you are worried about revising a particular subject topic, start with some easier ones first to get you going.
- Make plans for after the exams!
- Avoid wasting time
- Get rid of distractions (phone, TV, music)
- Have regular breaks
- Consider where the breaks go so you are not having to focus for huge amounts of time in one go
- Start small - this will help to actually get you started!

Plan

- This will make you more efficient
- You can account for early exams
- You will cover all topics
- You won't panic (as much)
- You know you will have enough time to cover everything

Organise

- Make sure your workbooks and notes are organised
- Keep a to-do list and cross items off when complete or add new items if required
- Prioritise what needs to be done
- Make sure you have all the right equipment to avoid wasting time

Revision Environment

- Make a space that works best for you and the type of revision/technique you are using
- Keep your revision space tidy
- Try to work in a well-lit space
- Reduce distractions and noise

Minimise stress

- A little bit of stress can be good and motivate you to do better
- Make sure you have fresh air and exercise
- Have relaxation time
- Keep doing hobbies/interests
- Eat well
- Go to bed at a reasonable time

Revision timetable

A timetable will help you to organise yourself properly to make the right use of your time. The key to an effective timetable is to stick to it. Things always get in the way, but this is a key part of your exam preparation to get right.

A solid revision schedule not only guarantees you cover everything you need to in time for the exam, but it also breaks everything down into more manageable chunks – much less scary!

Once you start getting everything out on paper or screen, you'll have a proper idea of the task ahead. The ideal revision timetable will be prepared enough in advance that you have a bit of balance and don't burn yourself out.

A basic revision timetable is essentially a calendar. But instead of holidays and birthdays, it contains topics and subjects you need to revise on specific days. Yours doesn't really have to stray far from this very simple model:

1. Divide however long you have until your exams by how many subjects you study.
2. Divide all the topics and areas you need to cover accordingly.

Your teachers will tell you what you need to revise for their subjects. This will be put on SharePoint for you to access and print pages off from if you need to.

How do I prioritise what I need to revise?

Ask yourself what subjects or particular topics within those subjects do you need to spend more time on? Perhaps your feedback has flagged areas you need to pay attention to? Or there are certain subjects where you need to achieve a certain grade, to progress into what you plan to do next? Make sure you prioritise these in your revision schedule. But remember to include those subjects that you're stronger at.

Revision timetable apps

These apps can help you structure and plan your revision schedule. They offer study timetable templates to start from, plus a whole host of other features:

- My Study Life: an app to use throughout the year, not just during your revision period. Track homework and assignments, and organise your daily and weekly schedule. Everything is stored in the Cloud for easy access on multiple devices. Available on: Play Store, iTunes
- SQA My Study Plan: created by the Scottish Qualification Authority for students, the app creates a personalised study plan based on when your exams are. Available on: Play Store, iTunes
- Timetable: Timetable is one way to manage school life across your devices. Available on: Play Store

... and if you're a bit more analogue, then a big piece of paper can do very nicely indeed.

Month: May				Weeks to go: 2	
Time:	Session 1 10 – 11	Session 2 11 – 12	Session 3 12 – 13	Session 4 14 – 15	Session 5 15 – 16
Monday	Science	English Lit.	Geography	French	Meet Friends
Tuesday	Business	Maths	English Lang.	Science	History
Wednesday	Geography	Science	Swimming	English Lit.	Maths
Thursday	New Riverdale	Business	History	Science	English Lang.
Friday	English Lit.	Gym	Science	Maths	English Lang.
Saturday	Trip to town	History	English Lang.	Business	Geography Tectonic hazards
Sunday	Science	Maths	French	Family BBQ	English Lit.

Start at a reasonable time and divide the sessions into times that work for you.

Build in time for your activities and commitments.

Include the topic area you are going to revise

Think about the time you have between school, homework, social time and everything else that gets in the way. Be realistic, but be determined to carve out time to revise effectively. Put the phone away and crack on.

Be prepared to redraw your plans if you start to fall behind. This is ok, but try very hard to stick to your plans.



Topic planners

These are a really clear list of what you are going to revise; key topics which are split into sub topics and key facts you need to know. They help you to focus on the specific knowledge that you need. A well \formed topic list will help you navigate your way through the large amounts of content you need to remember.

Subject: Science

Topic	😬	😊	😎
Atomic Structure			✓
Cells in plants and animals		✓	
Waves		✓	
Systems in the human body	✓		
Plants and photosynthesis			✓

Over time, you can rate how well you think you know a subject. Please remember, just because you think you know it, don't stop testing yourself. Perhaps less regularly, but to ensure you really have learnt something, keep testing.

The topic lists should inform your timetable. Think about how much time you need to spend on each topic, spread this out over your timetable week by week. When you get super confident, this is the time to mix it up. Mix different subjects to revise at the same time. Take your flashcards and take a bit of History, some Science and sprinkle in a bit of Spanish. By mixing it up, it will really challenge you and strengthen your memory even more.

Your teachers will provide you with information on the topics to revise for your subjects. This should help you organise your revision more effectively. Make sure you make the most of this!

Flow Charts/ Timelines

Flow charts are brilliant for organising facts and thinking into the right order. Great when you are planning out a model answer. Each stage could be a separate paragraph for an essay or long answer. Moving effortlessly from one point to the next. Timelines work in a similar way, ensuring your key facts are organised correctly.

The visual representation of information, showing how one thing leads to another is known to be highly beneficial. Consider how you can use images and diagrams to help you remember more effectively. It's a good idea to cover up each section and see if you can remember which bit comes next. Getting things in the right order are essential for many subjects, so this is a good technique to help you remember how to order your thinking. You could cut up some bits of card and put the key points for each one and then arrange them to see if you have got the order right. Even better, use blank or very basic cards- fill them in with what you remember and then place them in order. Try it and see if it works for you.



Flashcards

Flashcards are a great way of putting content into your long term memory. They are small cards with a question or prompt on one side and the answer or relating information on the other.

Useful for learning things like:

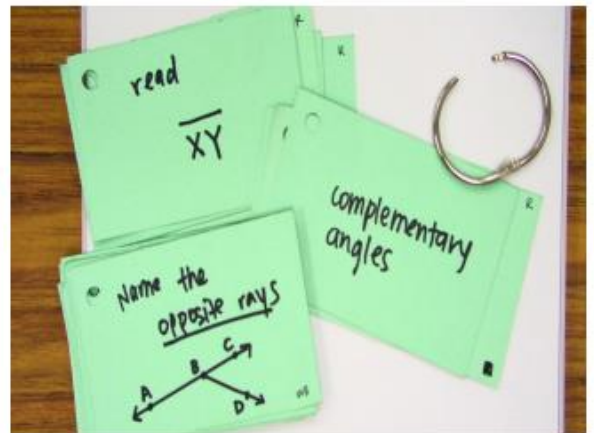
- Important events in History
- Vocabulary in MFL
- Quotes in English

1. Making them:

- **Ensure that the flashcards have a question or key term on one side and the answer or definition on the other.**

Sometimes, students will write out notes onto flash cards and end up with a tiny catalogue of summarised notes. The problem here is the flash card must work the memory, so the action of using them must force you to dredge up the information from your long-term memory before checking the answer. If flashcards only contain notes, then no retrieval practice is happening and you might as well re-read your exercise books. This would be a relatively pointless task.

- **Ensure the right questions and knowledge are on the cards.**



If you are given complete freedom on what to include you may end up testing yourself on either non-essential knowledge or worse, incorrect knowledge. You should check your knowledge with a knowledge organiser, workbooks, your teacher or a group of friends to double check their information is correct. Testing incorrect knowledge can have a particularly harmful effect as once knowledge is embedded it's hard to dislodge.

2. Using them:

- **The first and most obvious tip is to ensure that there is a thinking pause after picking one up and reading the question.**

If the card is turned too quickly then you will not go through the process of trying to remember the knowledge needed to find the answer. There is plenty of evidence that tells us that the act of trying to remember, even if unsuccessful, aids learning. Therefore a proper pause before flipping the card is essential.

- **It is important not to stop testing flash cards even after you have got the answer right without having to check.**

Recent research has found that due to the benefits of overlearning (continuing to learn something after effective recall has been achieved). You should not drop flash cards after getting the answer right. The research found that students who tended to drop flashcards after getting the answer right once would often forget the key information later on as it was not being recalled frequently.

- **By writing the definitions and answers to questions rather than just verbally or in our heads, we are better placed to remember it and use that information effectively in an exam.**

This technique, often called 'flash card plus' involves building on the classic system in order to deepen understanding. As well as retrieving the knowledge, you must also write their definition in their own words before then finding a concrete example of the information in their own lives. This is obviously more time consuming, but recent research has concluded that this is more effective than simple recall.

- **Flash Cards also allow you to easily switch between different topics and subjects, known as 'interleaving'. This is known to have a very positive effect on retention of information.**

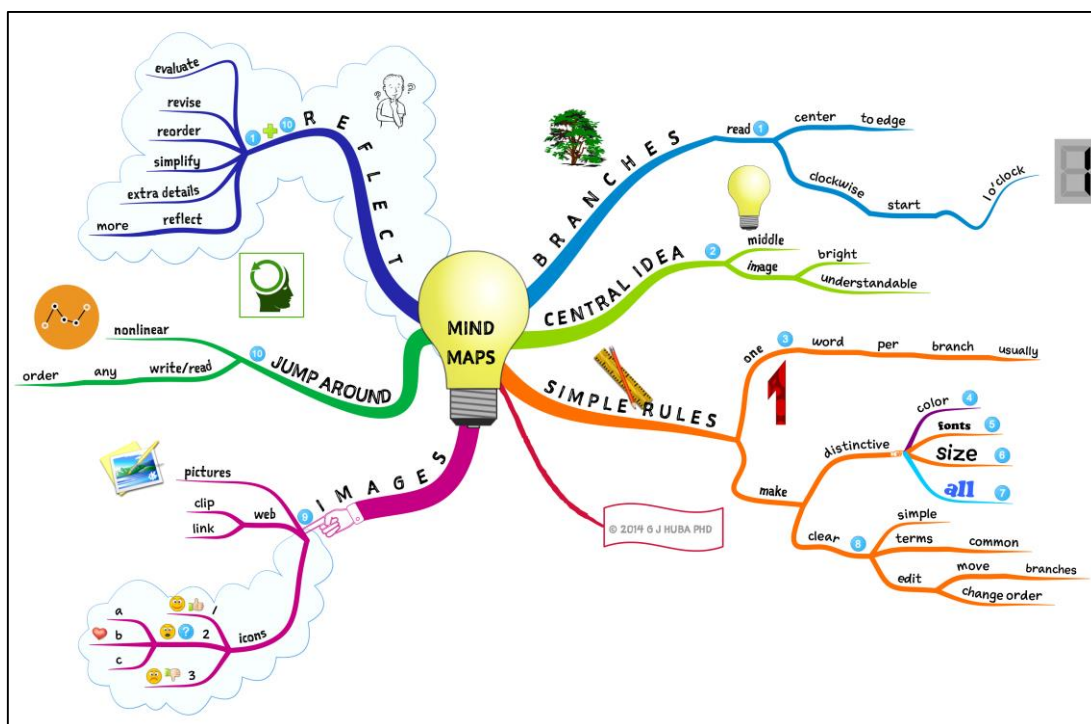
Once you have got several decks of flashcards covering several topics and subjects, you can jumble them up. By doing so you might be testing knowledge from History, French and Science, forcing you to jump between different sections of knowledge. This probably works best as an extra layer once you have developed confidence with your flash cards and would be a useful process going over the long-term.



Mindmaps

Mindmaps are a visual way to organise information, usually focussing on one topic. They can help to identify key ideas for that topic and help find links between them. They are useful when there are a lot of links between content that you are trying to remember.

The process of mind-mapping is more useful than the mind-map itself. It provides you with the opportunity to consider what you already know and how different elements of knowledge are connected and organised. This is a powerful form of self-explanation- known to be highly effective in improving the retention of knowledge.



You need to think about a key central idea (the middle of the mind map) and then how new material, builds on the existing knowledge in the middle. You should try to write as much as they can- every bit of knowledge they know connected to the central idea and how each element connects to each other. There is little point in embellishing the maps with colours or fancy fonts, but drawings which represent mental models of words or concepts can be useful.

After completing a mind-map, it's helpful to then refer to notes and textbooks to see if there is anything more to add or any misconceptions which may have been written down. At this point, to highlight any missing information can be useful when you have another go at the same mind map, to compare it next time to check if the missing knowledge has stuck next time. There is little point in re-reading the maps after you have made them as this is a very passive way of trying to revise. After making a mind map, it's a good idea to do some practice questions which relate to the concept you have been mapping.

Self-explanation

Self-explanation is a way to strengthen your understanding of content that you have committed to your long-term memory. You can do this by yourself or with someone else at home.

Self-explanation can also be really useful when you think you have understood something. Ask an adult to ask you to explain your method of how you came to your answer by writing down the steps or verbalising your thinking can again be really helpful. You will often realise small mistakes by being precise with your explanations. This can work well with maths questions.

Explaining concepts and using flash cards can be a great way to test the quality and depth of understanding. Don't just focus on the things you know you are struggling to grasp. By overlearning concepts, it's far more likely to be remembered in exam conditions.



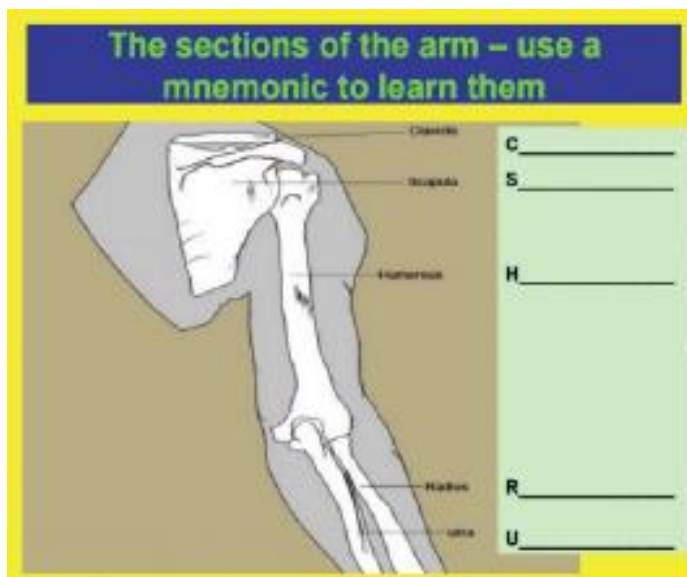
A great way to develop self-explanation is to ask whether a concept is true and then answer that with a 'Why?' question. Take the examples below:

- In science, increasing the temperature can increase the rate of a chemical reaction....why?
- In geography, the leisure industry in British seaside towns like Barry Island in South Wales has deteriorated in the last 4 decades....why?
- In history, in 1929 the American stock exchange collapsed. This supported Hitler's rise to power....why?

This technique, known as elaborate interrogation is useful because rather than just trying to learn facts or ideas by reading them over and over, you should get into the habit of asking yourself why these things are true.

Mnemonics

Mnemonics give your brain a 'hook' to hang a memory on. You will know some. Richard Of York Gave Battle in Vain. (The colours of the Rainbow) Never Eat Shredded Wheat (The points on a compass). This is a great technique for remembering key bits of information or a specific order for a calculation. You can go into an exam a whole list of them. Just make them memorable!



Use the first letter of each word you need to remember into a phrase you will remember. It's as simple as that. Then read it, write it, speak it until it sticks there forever. Think of the two I have just used above. We all still remember those from primary don't we? You see it really works! Take this example. There is SO much to remember for GCSE PE. Bones, muscle groups.... How could you remember the sections of the arm?

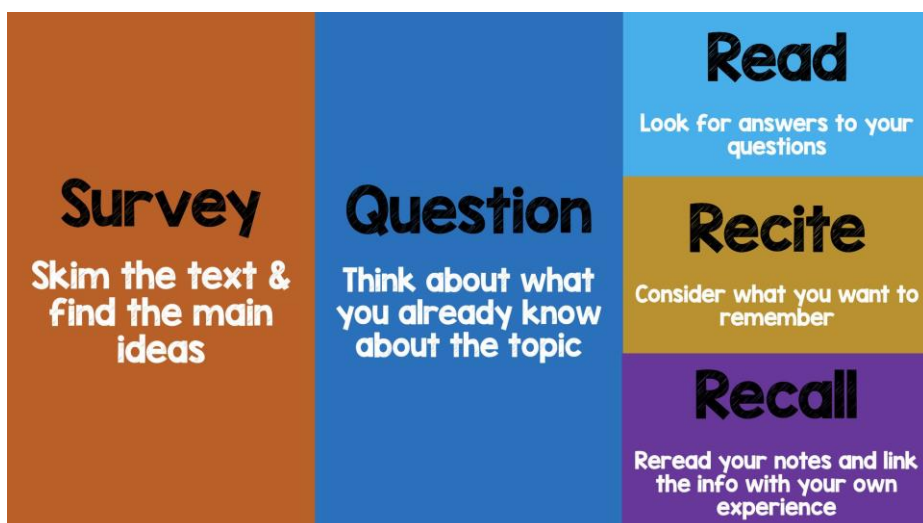
Chocolate Strawberries Have Rusty Underpants
No? How about...
Christian Smells Horrible Riding Unicorns.

Whatever you choose. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Until it's stuck there.

SQ3R

SQ3R is a great way to use your revision guides, workbooks and your notes to make sure you digest the key points effectively, see what you remember and give you the opportunity to work on the bits which you still haven't locked in.

Just reading through your workbooks and notes is not an effective revision technique. You will soon forget most of the material you read if this is your only revision technique. SQ3R is an active reading technique in which you force yourself to ask, answer and repeat and review your knowledge.



Command Words

These are words that will instruct you in your exam questions- they tell you what to do. It is very important that you understand what they mean. Command words can mean slightly different things in different subjects, so your teachers will give you a list of command words for their subjects, but this list is a good starting point for general descriptions.

Command word	Definition
Analyse	Examine something in detail to explain or interpret it
Assess	Consider different opinions/arguments/factors and weigh them to reach a conclusion
Calculate	Work out the value of something
Compare	Identify similarities and differences
Define	Give the precise meaning of a word or concept
Discuss	Set out a balanced argument and reach a conclusion
Evaluate	Consider different opinions/factors and reach a conclusion about their importance/value/worth
Examine	Consider carefully and provide a detailed account
Explain	Analyse and account for a term/concept
Identify	Point out and name from a number of possibilities
Illustrate	Refer to a specific case study or example
State	Describe or define in concise terms
Suggest	Select a reason to explain a word or concept
Summarise	Sum up the main points/arguments

