

# Revision Tips

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Everyone feels nervous about taking exams. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your revision time and keep those nerves under control.

It's important to remember that an examination is a test of learning, not memory. Examiners want to see evidence that you have drawn on your knowledge to develop a reasoned argument, rather than replicate course notes and textbook facts. Revision should be a process of consolidating understanding rather than cramming as much information as possible before the morning of the exam.

## Contents

1. Study skills – how and where to study
2. Revision plan – the secret to exam success is planning
3. Last-minute revision tips – what can you do when time is short?
4. Dealing with exam nerves – don't let the stress get on top of you
5. Exam tips – taking the exam
6. Exam tips – after the exam

## 1. Study skills

### Where to study

Creating good conditions to study in can help you make the most of the time you spend revising. Here are some suggestions:

Find a quiet place to study and make sure you are sitting comfortably

Make sure your desk is well lit

Keep background noise to a minimum

Avoid studying in an area where there will be distractions (like television!)

Have everything you need to do your revision to hand before you start

### How to study

There is no 'right way' to revise, as long as the method you choose enables you to gain a solid grasp of key facts and consolidate your knowledge. Some students are happy to read their classroom notes from start to finish, others prefer to simplify the information as much as possible, turning everything into skeleton notes,

diagrams or mnemonics. In practice, most students find that mixing techniques suits the varied nature of the subjects being revised, and provides essential variety when studying.

Turn your notes into revision tools;

write ideas and facts on to cards to use as 'prompts'

create memory aids such as diagrams or mnemonics (e.g. initial letters to make a word you need to remember or SMART objectives: Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Realistic; Targets). These will help you remember key facts

write key facts/notes out and display these around the house where you will see them

record yourself reading notes to listen to

Study with a friend and test each other's knowledge, but remember you are meeting to revise rather than to chat!

Work through past question papers – and use a watch to time them so that you can practise timing your answers.

Choose study and revision guides sensibly. It's not hard to find help with revision – as well as established published revision guides, there are hundreds of websites offering help and advice. The problem is not how to find such help, but how to judge which is the best source for your needs. Save valuable time and get recommendations from your teachers

Remember course notes are also a valuable source of extra help

Keep yourself more alert by changing revision methods during a session. For instance, try switching from note taking to memorising; from reading to asking someone to test you

Attend any revision classes that your teachers may be running at school and get their advice on revision methods

Look after yourself – Sometimes revision can become a competition – who stayed up latest, who worked longest, who's worrying the most. But the more tired you are the less efficiently you'll work. You need to rest as well as study, eat well, drink lots of water and make sure you pace yourself. Don't rush, and equally don't over-revise by doing too much too soon

## **2. Revision plan**

The top tip for successful revision is to make a plan; otherwise it is easy to waste your precious revision time. We recommend that you start your revision at least six weeks before your exams begin. It is helpful to look at your exam dates and work backwards to the first date you intend to start revising.

List all your exam subjects and the amount of time you think you will need for each one. It is unlikely that the amounts will be equal. Many people find it advisable to allocate more time to the subject or topics they find the most difficult

Draw up a revision plan for each week

Fill in any regular commitments you have first and the dates of your examinations

Use Revision Checklists or Syllabuses for each subject as a starting point. Look at what you need to know and try to identify any gaps in your knowledge. (A good way of doing this is to look at the results of past papers or tests you have worked through)

Divide your time for each subject into topics based on the units in the revision checklist or syllabus, and make sure you allow enough time for each one

Plan your time carefully, assigning more time to subjects and topics you find difficult

Revise often; try and do a little every day

Plan in time off, including time for activities which can be done out in the fresh air. Take a 5 or 10 minute break every hour and do some stretching exercises, go for a short walk or make a drink

You may find it helpful to change from one subject to another at 'break' time, for example doing one or two sessions of maths and then changing to Geography, or alternating a favourite subject with a more difficult one. It helps to build in some variety

Write up your plan and display it somewhere visible

Adjust your timetable if necessary and try to focus on your weakest topics and subjects

Don't panic; think about what you can achieve, not what you can't. Positive thinking is important!

### **3. Last-minute revision tips**

Although time may be short, you can still make a difference to your grade. Try and prioritise; do what you can.

Use your revision tools (prompts, diagrams etc) to check final facts

Keep calm and consolidate your existing knowledge rather than trying to learn new topics

Don't stay up all night revising; being overtired will not help you to do your best

### **4. Dealing with exam nerves**

It is natural to feel nervous before an examination. The more prepared you feel, the easier it will be to conquer your fears.

Create a revision plan to help you feel in control of the process

Plan your work carefully around the topics you need to focus on. Being aware of gaps in your knowledge can create nerves, but having a plan of how you will fill these will make you feel better.

Find out what is involved in the exam:

where and when it will take place

how much time is allowed

how many questions you need to answer

Think positive

Keep the exam in context – even if you do badly, there will be other options open to you

Allow yourself some fun-time each day to relax

Eat sensibly – your brain cells need energy to function well. Make sure you drink plenty of water to avoid becoming dehydrated. Dehydration makes you tired and reduces concentration

### **5. Exam tips – sitting the exam**

Be prepared; find out what is involved in each of the examinations that you are going to sit. Organise yourself the night before and get plenty of sleep.

Check you have the correct equipment with you before you leave the house (pens pencils, ruler, scientific calculator, etc)

Do take a watch or clock so that you can time your answers

Leave for the exam in plenty of time

Look through the paper first and mark difficult questions/initial thoughts

Select the questions that will best enable you to demonstrate your knowledge to the examiner

Look at the marks available and read the questions carefully, following instructions given in the paper (e.g. to show all workings, word limits etc)

Use the information provided on the paper (the answer's often nearly all there)

Pace yourself and allow enough time to answer all the required questions

Write as neatly as possible to help the examiner to mark your work. Marking untidy writing is difficult

For longer answers, take a few minutes before you begin to produce a structured plan of what you are going to include in each section

Allow yourself ten minutes at the end to read through your answers and correct any mistakes

Cross out anything you do not want the examiner to read (e.g. an earlier answer to a question)

## **6. Exam tips – after the exam**

It is easy to fall in to the trap of wondering how well you performed and to discuss this with your fellow students. Your time would be better spent looking ahead to your next examination.

Don't panic – you won't be the only student who is anxious about their answers

Don't compare your answers with those of other students – this can create negative feelings

Have some fresh air and food and take time to relax before you start revising

Don't rush to your textbooks to check your answers – there is no point at this stage

Focus on the next exam and how you might improve your exam technique

Have a quick look at your revision plan. Do you need to adjust it?

Think positive!