

Improving learning through effective study skills and revision

There is no great secret to revising... it is a question of being prepared before you start and using your time properly.

Get rid of temptation.

This means:

- No clutter
- No computer
- No phone
- No TV

Be prepared... and get organised...

Organise your books and notes **in an ordered way** so that you can find anything you need quickly.

Create a revision timetable... and stick to it!

You should have a revision timetable and it needs to be posted somewhere at home for all to see, so that others can help to be an *extra conscience*. Any timetable should split time into learning aims with manageable chunks of time so that you don't lose concentration.

One way of doing this is to use the following five steps:

- Decide on the task to be done
- Set a timer for 25 minutes
- Work on the task until the timer rings
- Take a short break (5 minutes)
- Repeat. After four sessions take a longer break (30-60 minutes)

What Learning Techniques Really Work?

It's really important to be using revision techniques that have actually been shown to make a difference to learning. In 2013 there was a major research paper published by Professor John Dunlosky at the University of Kent, USA that looked at what actually works in terms of learning and revision. The study showed a number of common techniques that have very little impact on learning - and so should be avoided:

Not effective:

- Highlighting texts
- Re-reading
- Summarising texts

We often use these techniques because they are low stress. They don't really challenge us, but they make us feel good, because we are doing something. The truth is though, whilst it may keep you busy and stop you feeling guilty, it doesn't really help you learn.

There is a very simple reason for this. The way we remember things is by having to think hard about something and recall it from our memory. The more we do this, the higher the chances of us remembering something.

More effective

Practice Testing

This technique is pretty straightforward – keep testing yourself (or each other) on what you have got to learn. This technique has been shown to have the highest impact in terms of supporting student learning. Some ways in which you can do this easily:

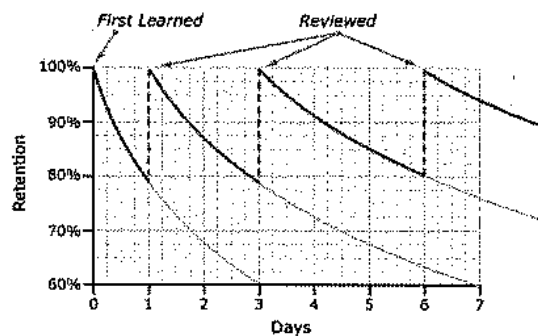
- Create some flashcards, with questions on one side and answers on the other – and keep testing yourself.

- Work through past papers – many can be acquired through exam board websites.
- Simply quiz each other (or yourself) on key bits of information.
- Create “fill the gap” exercises for you and a friend to complete.
- Create multiple choice quizzes for friends to complete.

Distributed Practice

Rather than cramming all of your revision for each subject into one block, it's better to space it out – from now, through to the exams. Why is this better? Bizarrely, because it gives you some forgetting time. This means that when you come back to it a few weeks later, you will have to think harder, which actually helps you to remember it. Furthermore, the more you come back to a topic, the better you remember it. Look at the “forgetting curve” below:

Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information

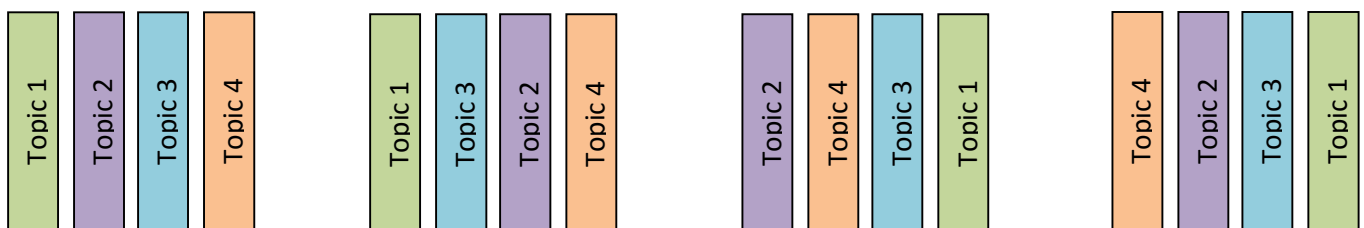


Interleaving

When you are revising a subject, the temptation is to do it in “blocks” of topics. Like below:



The problem with this is, is that it doesn't support the importance of repetition – which is so important to learning. So rather than revising in “topic blocks” it's better to chunk these topics up in your revision programme and interleave them:



This means that you keep coming back to the topics. So, instead of doing a two hour block of revision on topic 1, do 25 minutes on topic 1, 25 minutes on topic 2, then the same for topics 3 and 4.