

GCSE Success: The Ultimate Guide to Effective Revision

- 1) Work as 'smart' as you can, rather than just working very, very, hard; use your teachers' knowledge to best effect. Make sure you know:
 - a. The exact number/length/format of the exams you will be taking.
 - b. The marking criteria.
 - c. Exactly what **your teachers** think you should revise, not what seems like a good idea to you.
- 2) When you have a long, and very specific, list of everything you need to cover, **start to plan**. It is important to plan long term, on a series of month planners, and short term, in more detailed format, on a week planner. Use your phone to **set up reminders**. It is essential to be realistic. If you set yourself an unrealistic timetable you will fail to stick to it and then be tempted to give up. It is also VERY important not to spend so long shading-in a pretty colour-coded timetable that you don't actually get round to starting work...
- 3) Which brings us to no.3. **Don't put it off!** 'Procrastination' is the long word for it. And it means rearranging stuff on your desk, sharpening your pencils, getting a sudden, urge after 16 years, to tidy your room, etc. Sit down and GET ON WITH IT.
- 4) **Do take short breaks**. Few people can revise effectively for more than 45 minutes without a short break; the good (or bad?) news is that the break doesn't have to be long to be effective— eg.10 minutes every 30 minutes or 15 minutes every 45 minutes.
- 5) **Find the right environment to revise** - NOT in front of the TV. Sit at a proper desk or at a table if you can; don't try to revise in bed. Music can sometimes be OK, but you need to find the right kind, it's got to be something that's just there in the background, that you're not thinking about at all. Remove all obvious distractions; give your phone to your parents and remove a vital part of your Xbox/PS4 so that you are not tempted to turn it on. Only revise with a computer turned on and nearby if it is ESSENTIAL to what/how you are revising, otherwise it offers far too many easy distractions. Some students find studying in public to be more effective, making it more difficult to watch television or fiddle with other distractions found in the home.
- 6) **Rewards are essential**; they can be small, a cup of tea when you've done an hour's work – scaled up to larger ones when have achieved significant goal e.g. stuck with your revision schedule for a week and can PROVE you can recall revised material.
- 7) **Use your parents as police/motivators**. Share your plans with them and tell them how they can help. They may be able to suggest small rewards for you (your favourite meal as a treat when you have finished a session?) or act as 'police' if you tell them how **you want them to react** when they see you off task. Your parents routinely lecturing you on your bad revision habits is unlikely to be effective unless you have agreed with them in advance what you should be doing, and when, and how you WANT them to react/admonish you when you do not stick to your plans. Hearing your parents reading from a 'script' that *you* gave them, in a situation where you **asked** them to react, is a whole lot more powerful than hearing their usual rant about how hard they worked when they were young...
- 8) **Use resources/study guides suggested by your teachers** - if you find a new, different, one check it out with them before you use it, you may be learning material you don't need and that would be really daft.
- 9) What you are learning needs to be meaningful to you for it to be remembered – or to be useful to you in an exam situation – which basically means you need to REALLY **understand** the material you are learning. A list of facts that you don't truly understand is a very bad place to start. If you have material that you are not 100% sure about, **talk to your teachers before you start** to try and learn it.
- 10) **Revision needs to be ACTIVE**. Structure information, use it in some way, don't try to remember it by reading it through or by just copying it out. This is 'passive' and has been proved to be a very ineffective way of

learning. Instead, you need to reorganize or use the information in some way – e.g. translating your notes into a mind map, using your mind map to answer an exam question, explaining it to someone else...

- 11) **Mnemonics/acronyms are excellent** ways to link key facts in your brain and to make them easy to recall – you can invent your own and they can be very silly – just so long as they are memorable! Ask your teachers for their top mnemonic tips. Make up ‘silly’ pictures or word associations or sentences that link ideas together for you. Research shows these are far more likely to stick in your brain than plain facts with no link or association. Visit Memrise.com for more ideas.
- 12) **Draw or doodle freely while you study.** For a visual learner, it's important to break down information into drawings or diagrams, to make recall easier in the long run. Diagrams, mind maps, and freehand drawings can be useful ways of improving both your understanding and creating a much easier memory aid than reading the text alone. Do not be afraid to use colours in much the same way—colour in your drawing or highlight the text.
- 13) **Recall and summarize.** As you're studying, stop every few minutes to recap what you've read. Write a short summary—a few sentences—in your notes, or at the bottom of the page. Use your own words. A good way of recalling is writing your notes down from memory and then going back over them and filling in the gaps with another colour of pencil or pen. You'll know the different colour refers to information you might have trouble remembering. From time to time try and repeat the process of summary, writing down on a separate sheet of paper what you know about a given topic or subject without consulting your books or your previous notes. Compare your new notes to your old, finding what you've left out and what you still need to memorize.
- 14) **Visit and re-visit** your revision topics. It is easy to read a page of notes and think ‘oh yes I remember all of this’. Often what you are doing is ‘recognising’ it, not remembering it. You ‘remember’ that you have seen it before, this is not the same as really remembering it, i.e. being able to recall in, in full, without any aids. To ensure that you can do this you need to test yourself – initially straight after you have looked at your notes, but then again and again when you have not just looked at the ‘answers’, with increasing length of gaps. Only when you can do this successfully can you claim to have ‘learned it’ and to be able to remember it.
- 15) **Use Twitter** – sign up if you haven't already and make sure you follow all school Twitter feeds. It doesn't mean you have to tweet details of what you had for breakfast, it DOES mean school can send you really helpful advice and techniques.
- 16) If your exam involves writing an essay, you need to **practise essay-writing**. Merely memorising the material is not enough. Other research confirms that practising retrieving information is one of the best ways to ensure you remember it. **Use past papers** – it is not enough to just know facts, you have to be able to use them appropriately to score points in whatever way you will be tested, so as soon as you have learned some material, start applying it in an exam specific way. Do the practice under timed conditions.
- 17) **Use friends**, revise in a group, test each other, share Quizlet accounts, but never be panicked by what others CLAIM to have done though, not everyone tells the whole truth. Choose your ‘revision buddies’ wisely.
- 18) **Use family.** Get them to test you, explaining to others is the ultimate in ‘do you know it?’. Even if you have to explain to your cat, just take the time out to talk to someone as if the person is learning about it for the first time, and you are the teacher. It is hard to forget information once you have done this, and also forces you to clarify the information and lay it all out in the most clear and simple way possible.
- 19) **Rest and sleep** - research shows that a brief rest after learning something can help you remember it a week later. Other experiments have shown that a full night's sleep helps you learn new skills or retain information.
- 20) **Don't turn yourself into a revision zombie** — if you stop doing anything else but revision you'll make yourself ill and be a less effective learner. It's really important that you keep time to do things you enjoy and COMPLETELY forget about revision.