

Guide 1

**Revision
Strategies
That Work**



**Revise
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Introduction

This guide is all about revision strategies that work.

Tried and tested techniques you can use to maximise the impact of your revision. All ten of the techniques below have been used by learners and teachers across the country for many years. And the positive impact has been clear for all to see.

Read on and discover ten of the best strategies you can use as part of your revision. See which ones you think will work for you, then try them out and make them part of your revision.

1. Spaced Practice and Practice Testing

There is lots of research to show that practice testing and spaced practice are two of the best revision strategies anyone can use, no matter who they are.

Practice testing

Practice testing is when you practice recalling information in a similar way to what you'll do in your final exams. **Flashcards** are a great way to do practice testing, for more on which, see below.

Another example of practice testing is taking past papers or completing mock questions. You can also write quizzes and then answer these. Or swap quizzes with a partner and try to answer each other's.

If you get things wrong, don't worry. That is why we practice.

When you check your answers, identify what you are getting right and what you are getting wrong. This is useful information. It tells you where you need to focus your efforts next – on the things you aren't getting right yet. You can go back and do more revision of these areas, helping you to become better at them.

Spaced practice

Spaced practice is where you space out practice over time.

The key rule is that it is better to keep coming back to a revision topic, rather than trying to do everything at once.

Scientists don't know exactly why this is true, but it may be connected to how we lay down memories and then reinforce them in our minds.

A revision timetable will help you to use spaced practice.

Put simply, all it means is planning to do revision of different topics repeatedly, over a period of time.

For example, you might do forty minutes of maths revision, four times a week, for ten weeks.

This method is better than trying to do ten hours of maths revision over two days, the week before your exam.

We can sum all this up in a few sentences:

“ Practice testing is a powerful revision tool. It's when you practice testing yourself on the things you'll need to recall in your exams. ”

“ Spaced practice is also powerful. It’s when you space practice out over time, meaning you keep coming back to the topics you need to revise. ”

2. Flashcards and How To Use Them

Flashcards are one of the most effective revision tools you can use. Flashcards let you do practice testing. This is when you practice recalling information in a similar way to what you’ll need to do in your final exams.

When you have a set of flashcards, you can use these to test yourself. Or you can ask someone else to test you, using the flashcards. This could be a parent, carer, friend, sibling or other relative.

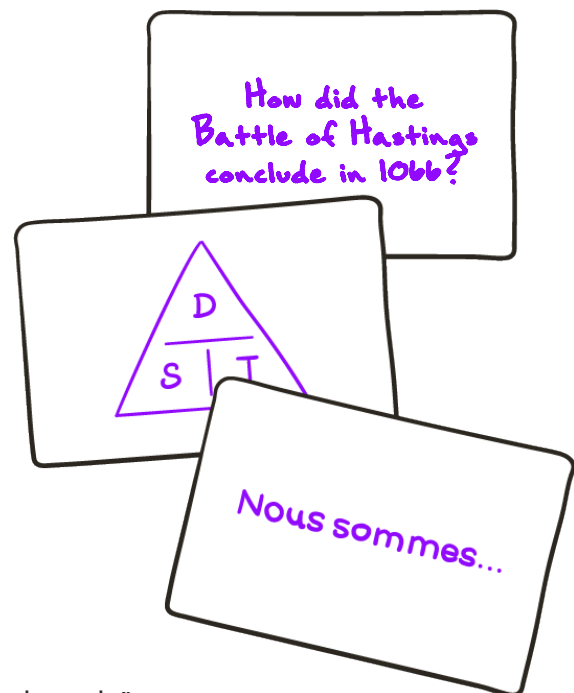
Making flashcards is simple. All you need is a set of index cards. You can find these in most stationary shops. And you can buy them on Amazon for £2-£3 (they’re sometimes called ‘record cards’).

The best option is to create a set of flashcards for a topic or subject you want to revise.

On one side of an index card, you write a keyword, phrase, question or piece of information. On the other side, you write the definition, answer or explanation. This can include images and diagrams as well as words.

Once you have a full set of flashcards, you can use them to test yourself. Or you can get someone else to test you.

Here are a few examples of how you can do the testing:



- 1** Go through your stack of flashcards, one by one, testing yourself on all aspects of the topic.
- 2** Divide your stack of flashcards into three piles: easy, medium and hard. Or: confident, fairly confident, not so confident. Spend longer testing yourself on the hard pile, or the 'not so confident' pile.
- 3** Give your stack of flashcards to someone else and ask them to test you. Every time you correctly recall a definition, explanation or answer, remove that card from the stack. Keep going until you've done every flashcard correctly.
- 4** Lay all your flashcards down on a flat surface. The kitchen table is perfect for this. Lay the cards so you can see the keywords, phrases, questions or pieces of information. Your goal is to turn all the flashcards over. You may only turn a flashcard over when you have correctly recalled the definition, answer or explanation that is on the other side. Keep going until you have them all correct.

3. Why Revision Timetables Work

Imagine if your school didn't have a timetable.

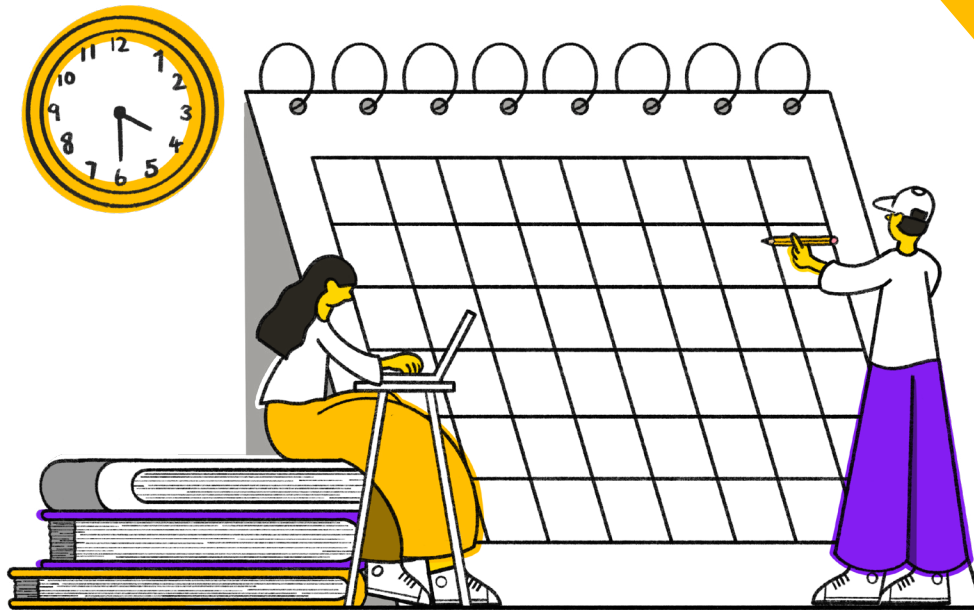
Each day would be chaotic. Your teachers would struggle to plan their lessons. And they'd have no idea of who was likely to turn up to a lesson. No one would know how many lessons of each subject you'd attended over a week, a month or a year.

Learning would be difficult. You might turn up to one lesson, only to find you'd missed the previous two, even though you didn't know when they took place.

The school timetable provides structure. It connects everything together. It makes learning easier. It makes teaching easier. And it makes it possible to plan for the future.

A revision timetable is exactly the same.

A revision timetable is your friend. Whatever you are revising for, you should make one.



Revision timetables help you take control of the future. They let you plan ahead. They give you confidence that you have the time to revise everything you need to revise. And they help you to connect the dots.

What does it mean, connecting the dots?

One of the trickiest aspects of revision is maintaining motivation. Exams can feel a long way off. It can sometimes seem like a little bit of revision today won't have much impact eight or ten weeks down the line.

But it will. And a revision timetable can help you to see it.

When you have a revision timetable, you can connect together all the small pieces of effort you make over a week, two weeks, a month, two months. And you can connect these to your final goal: taking and passing your exams.

A revision timetable gives you a way of connecting the here and now to the future. And then, when the future comes, you can look back and see all the revision you have done. All those little bits of effort. The whole thing comes together, and when you sit down to take your exams, you feel ready and well prepared.

If you're not sure what your revision timetable needs to look like...

... speak to a teacher.

If you're not sure whether you need a revision timetable...

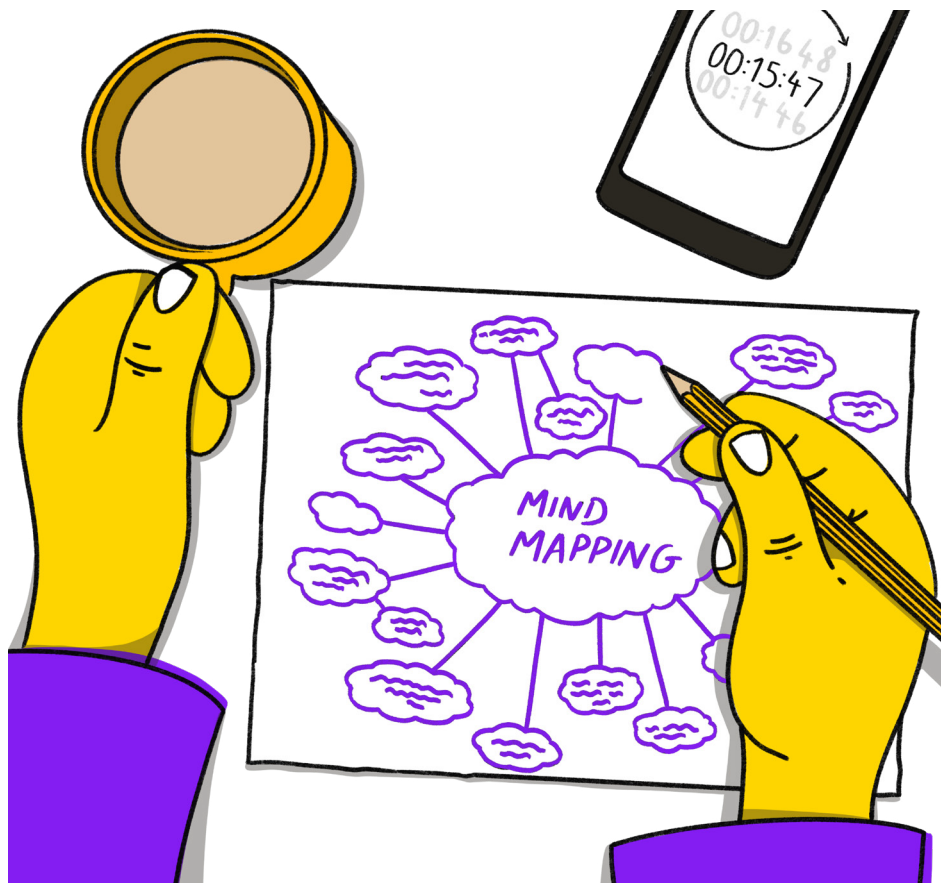
... trust me, it will help you out.

If you're not sure when to put together a revision timetable...

... the sooner the better.

4. Making it Visual

Making revision visual can help you to organise and process information. It can also make it easier to remember. Many people like having a visual element to their revision. And there are many different ways you can organise your revision visually.



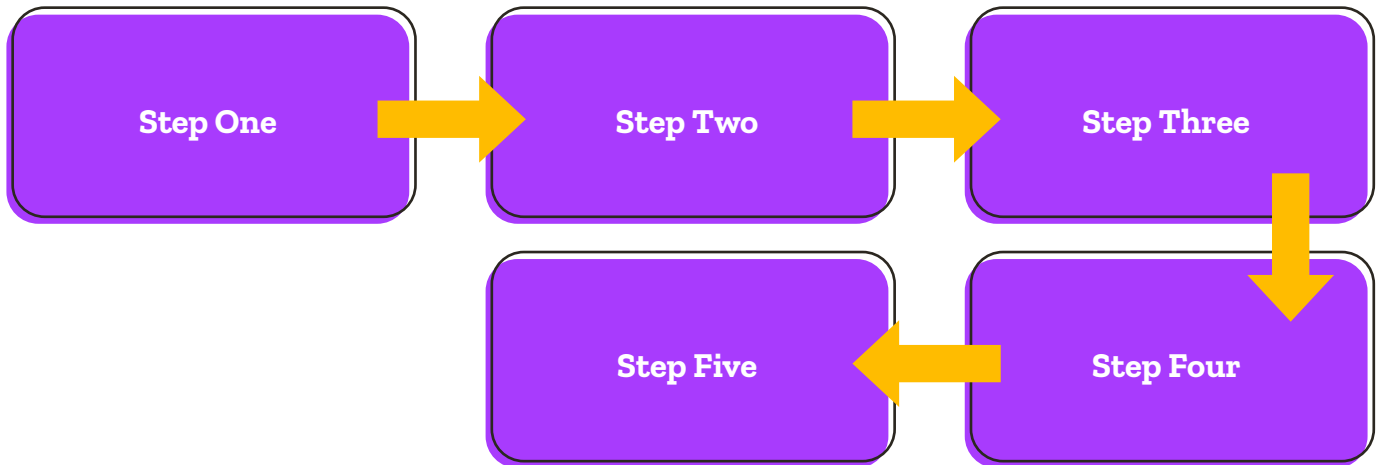
One of the most popular are **mindmaps**. This is where you write the topic at the centre of a piece of paper, and then draw branches and lines radiating away. Each branch or line has a keyword or phrase on it, with further branches or lines coming off these, containing other key pieces of information.

You can include pictures, diagrams and colour on mindmaps, to make them more memorable.

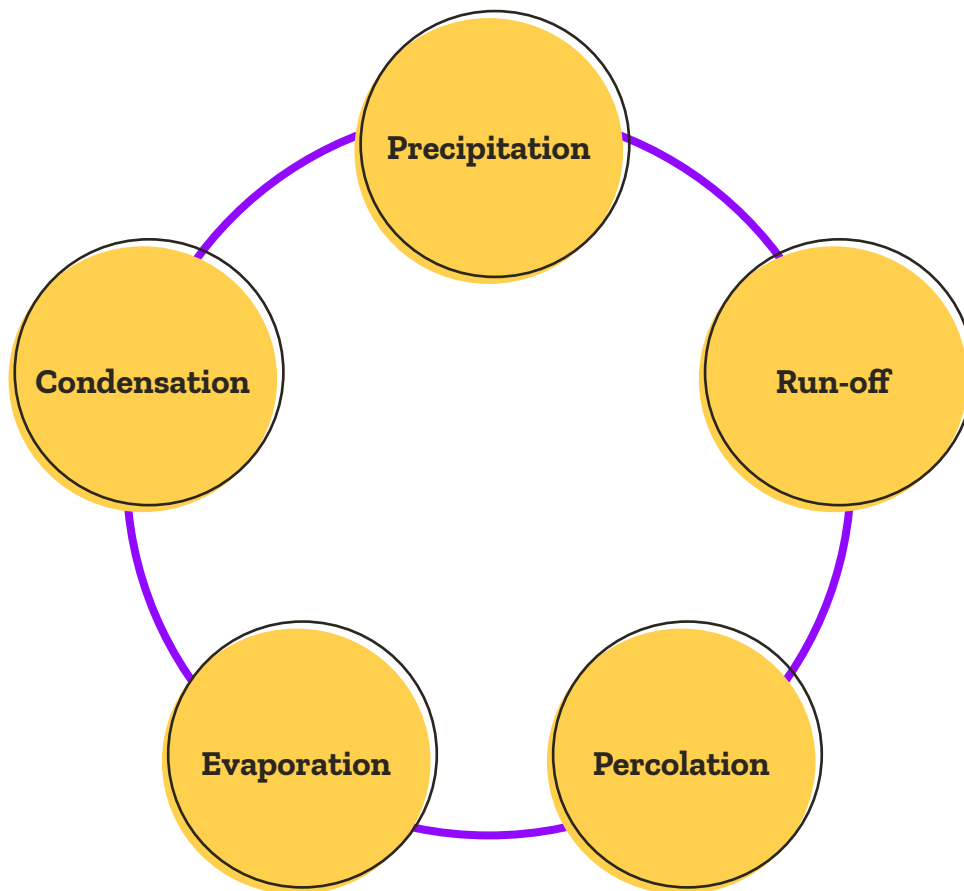
When making a mindmap, or any visual revision tool, not only are you revising the information you need to remember, but you are also creating a tool you can go back to throughout your revision. So, there is a double benefit.

Here are some other visual tools you can use in your revision:

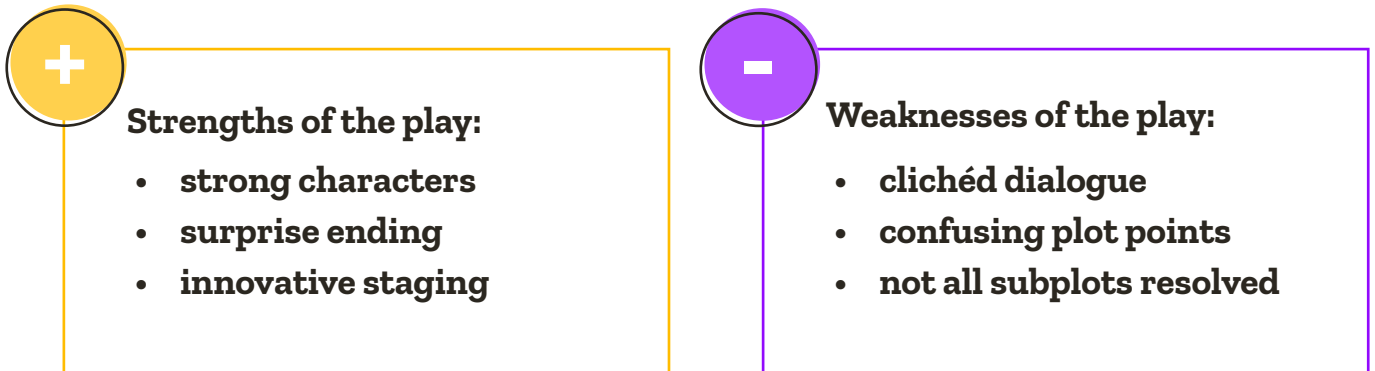
1. Flow chart



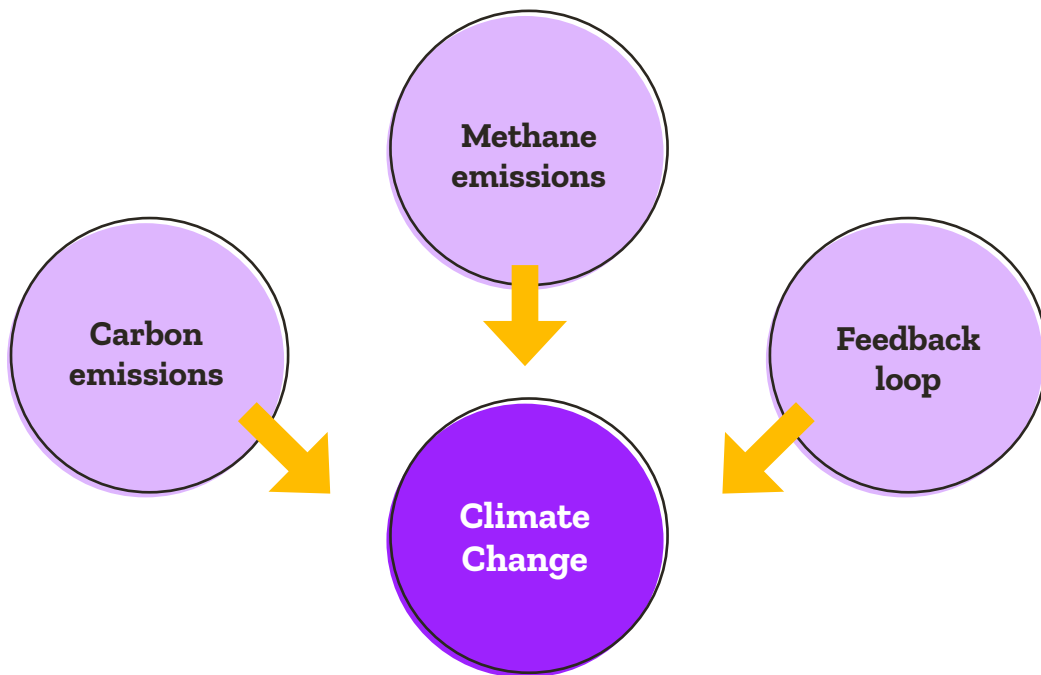
2. Process chart



3. Strengths and weaknesses table



4. Effects diagram



5. Spider diagram



5. Classic Games To Revise With

There are lots of games you can include as part of your revision schedule. These are fun and offer variation, helping you to stay motivated.

Here are four examples:

1. Pictionary:

With a partner, choose a topic you both want to revise. Take it in turns to draw different keywords, phrases or ideas. The other person has to guess what has been drawn. In the process, you'll both be thinking carefully about the topic you're revising. This will help you to reinforce your memory of the topic.

2. Hangman:

With a partner, take it in turns to play hangman. One person chooses a keyword or phrase from a topic you both want to revise. The other person has

to work out what the keyword or phrase is, before they run out of time. Keep swapping over until you have exhausted keywords and phrases from the topic.

3. **Guess The Word or Phrase:**

Decide what topic you and your partner want to revise. Between you, create a set of slips of paper. Each slip of paper should contain a keyword or phrase from the topic. Lay these face down on the table. Take it in turns to select a slip of paper. The person who chooses must then describe the word or phrase to the other person, without saying what it is. The other person must work out what the word or phrase is, based on the description. Take it in turns until you have done all the slips of paper.

4. **A-Z:**

Either on your own or with a partner, write down the letters A-Z. Next, select a topic to revise. Your goal is to recall a keyword, phrase or piece of information for each letter of the alphabet. You can do this against the clock, or without time pressure, whichever works best for you. Increase the challenge by trying to recall multiple phrases, keywords or pieces of information for different letters. (You might want to give yourself some leeway over the letters J, K, Q, X, Y and Z, as these are generally the hardest to do.)



6. Teaching Others

Teaching others is a great way to practice recalling information. When you teach someone else, you must think carefully about what you have learned. You then must work out how you will explain it to the other person. And then you must do the explanation, speaking the information out loud so the other person can understand it.

All of this is active practice. That's when you practice doing something and actively think about it along the way.

Including teaching others in your revision schedule will help you to learn information from any subject. It will also help you to remember that information better.

For example, you could teach a parent, a carer, a friend, a sibling or another family member.

You can develop the strategy by getting the person you are teaching to ask you questions. Answering the questions will help you to think more deeply about the topic. This, in turn, will further support your revision of the topic. And your ability to recall information in the future.

There are lots of different ways you can teach others as part of your revision.

- 1 One option is to pick a subject and to then write down the different topics you need to revise on a sheet of paper. Hand this paper over to the person you will teach (for example, your parent). Ask them to select topics at random. You must then teach them about whichever topics they select. You might even want to have a time limit. For example, you could have three minutes to teach your brother or sister about a topic they choose at random from the ones you've written down.

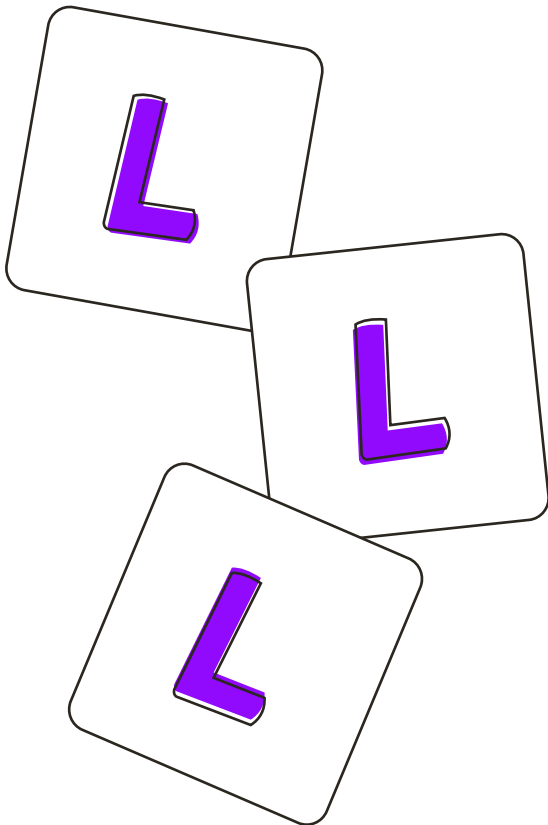


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Another option is to write down different topics on slips of paper, scrunch these up and put them in a receptacle like a jam jar or a hat.

You can then invite a friend to pull out a slip of paper at random. Whatever they pull out, you must teach them about. If you are both revising the same topics, turn it into a game by taking it in turns to pull slips of paper out and then teaching each other.

7. Past Papers and Practice Questions



How does someone prepare for a driving test?

They practice all the things they will need to do in their driving test.

This includes things like three-point turns, parallel parking and emergency stops.

How does someone revise for an exam?

One way is to practice what they will need to do in the exam.

This includes things like answering questions, managing their time and checking their answers.

It's easy to overlook this part of revision. But it's really important. And the easiest way to include it as part of your revision is to use past papers and practice questions.

Sitting down and completing a past paper, in the same amount of time as you'll have in the final exam, is exactly like doing a practice test with your driving instructor before the real test.

There are two huge benefits.

First, you get to practice what you'll need to do when you sit the exam for real.

It's like a rehearsal. And it means that when you sit down in the exam hall and open the question paper, you do so knowing you've already done a similar thing many times before.

Second, taking past papers and answering practice questions gives you a great opportunity to assess where your strengths and weaknesses lie.

You can use this information to plan the next stage of your revision. For example, if you take a past paper in maths and see that your understanding of algebra is not as good as you hoped, you can focus on this in the next part of your revision.

Taking past papers and answering practice questions is like being in the theatre. It's you rehearsing. Getting ready for the real thing.

Actors make all their mistakes before the audience arrives. They improve their performance well before opening night.

Past papers and practice questions help you do the same.

They let you rehearse, so that when the real thing comes around, you're well prepared. And they help you improve your performance, so that when it comes to the final exam, you're in the best position possible.

When including past papers and practice questions in your revision, you can always ask your teacher for guidance on where to get these and which ones to use.



8. Tap Into The Teacher's Expertise

Your teacher is an expert. They're an expert in the subject they teach. But they're also an expert in exams. How to sit them. How to pass them. How to do well in them. Your teacher has a huge range of expertise locked up in their mind. It's part of who they are, and it's one of the reasons they're a teacher – so they can share that expertise with you.

Tapping into your teacher's expertise is when you access all that knowledge and understanding your teacher has in their mind. The knowledge and understanding they've accumulated over the years.

One of the easiest ways to do this is to ask your teacher for **feedback**.

Feedback is when your teacher looks at what you have done, tells you what is good about it and also tells you what you can do to improve. To do this, your teacher makes a judgement. They look at your work and compare it to their expert knowledge and understanding. Then, they give you feedback, based on the judgement they've made.

For example, if you are struggling with one area of your revision, you can share with your teacher what you have done so far and ask them for feedback. Ask them what you are getting right, and what you can do to improve.

The feedback your teacher gives you comes from their expertise. And you can use this to improve your revision. It's like you are



tapping into your teacher's knowledge and understanding and making a little bit of their expertise your own.

Another good way to tap into your teacher's expertise is to ask them to share with you how to think about exams.

Your teacher is an expert in sitting and passing exams, as well as the subjects they teach you.

So, for example, you might ask them what tips, tricks and strategies they have for taking exams. Or you might ask them to talk you through a past paper. You could ask them to show you how they analyse questions, how they manage their time, and how they keep their answers focussed and relevant. All of this is powerful information you can use as part of your own revision, as well as when you are sitting your actual exams.

9. Revision Strategies for Two

Revising on your own is good. It allows you to concentrate and focus your mind, without distractions. Sometimes, though, revising with someone else can be good as well. The two of you can support and help each other, as you work towards the same goal.

Here are three strategies you can use with a partner:

1 Flashcard Testing.

Take a pack of flashcards that you or your friend have created. Take it in turns to use these flashcards to test each other. One option is to pick flashcards out at random, show your friend the keyword, phrase or question and ask them to give you the definition, explanation or answer written on the back. Another option is to lay all the cards out on a flat surface and to see if the two of you can successfully recall what is on the back of every card. When you get one right, turn it over – and keep going until you have done them all.

2 Answer Planning.

You and your friend can look at some practice questions or past exam papers and plan how you would answer some of the longer questions. This is particularly useful with longer-answer questions and essay questions, both of which require some careful thought. The two of you could even get hold of all the past papers for a subject you are studying, pull together all the longer-answer or essay questions, and then plan out answers for each one, creating a mini revision booklet in the process.

3 Traffic Lights.

Knowing where your strengths and weaknesses lie is a good starting point for targeting your revision effectively. You and your friend will need three coloured highlighters – a red, an orange and a green – as well as two copies of the syllabus you are revising. If you don't have this, make your own by writing out all the different topics you need to revise. You each need to go through the syllabus and use the highlighters to traffic light the different topics. Green = Feeling Confident; Orange = Feeling OK; Red = Feeling Unconfident. When you've done this, compare and discuss your results. You'll both now have a clear sense of where your strengths and weaknesses lie and what you should focus on in your future revision.

10. Time, Space and Place



Our minds are prone to distractions. But they are also capable of focussing intently for extended periods of time.

Some scientists argue we are prone to distractions because our prehistoric ancestors needed to be able to respond quickly to predators.

The modern world is very different from the prehistoric one. We don't have predators that might eat us for dinner living in our environment.

But we do have smartphones, computers, televisions and friends.

All these can distract us. All these can pull our minds away from what we are trying to do.

When you're revising, the best approach is to minimise distractions. This is because distractions interrupt the processes we use to recall and remember information. If you're revising and you keep getting distracted, then your revision has less impact. This means you're working hard, but not getting the benefits you could be getting – because of distractions.

'Time, Space, Place' is a useful phrase to keep in mind:

Time

What time is it? How much time am I going to revise for? When will I give myself a break and for how long?

Space

What is around me? What distractions might pull me away from my revision? How can I minimise distractions?

Place

What is the best place for me to revise? Where can I be quiet and focussed? Where do I feel comfortable and at ease?

Finding the right place to revise means finding somewhere you are comfortable and somewhere that you can focus. This could be at home, but it could be at school as well.

Removing distractions from the space around you means giving yourself the best chance possible of being able to concentrate. Your smartphone is designed to get your attention. App developers employ teams of psychologists whose job it is to ensure the apps on your phone distract you enough to make you interact with them. So put your phone out of sight.

Often, forty minutes is a good length of time to revise for, before taking a break. And you do need little breaks. These help you to stay refreshed which, in turn, makes it easier to maintain concentration. While it can be tempting to revise for very long periods, the benefits of taking breaks are well established. Just make sure they don't go on for too long.