

# Revision Techniques

A guide to effective revision  
using the latest research.

Exams Preparation at A-Level



## **Introduction:**

What is effective revision according to the latest research?  
How can you make best use of your revision time and maximise your results?

This booklet aims to help you understand the theory behind what works and give you lots of ideas to make your revision fun.

## **Contents:**

### **Eighteen effective ways to revise (plenty to keep you busy)**

1. **Mix and Match**
2. **Quiz, Quiz Teach**
3. **Dual coding / Conversion**
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5. **Make the most of mark schemes!**
6. **Supercharge your vocabulary**
7. **Brain dump**
8. **Analyzing examiners reports**
9. **Mind maps**
10. **Model, Model, Model Answer**
11. **Spacing**
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16. **Flashcards**
17. **Deliberate Practice / Past papers**
18. **Mnemonics**

# 1. MIX AND MATCH!

This is not a revision technique per se, but a wise way to approach revision at A level. Essentially there are three types of revision; content based, skills based, and reflective. To achieve a strong grade at A level you need to be combining all three.

Content based revision tasks focus purely on recall and consolidation of knowledge

Skills based tasks apply this knowledge to exam scenarios or skills

required within the exam, such as evaluation.

Reflective tasks focus on addressing an individual's weaknesses and acting to improve these. This is the most powerful form of revision as it prevents repeat errors.

Look out for how each revision technique is colour-coded in this booklet!

## You should do a mixture of red, blue and green

Creating revision cards  
Creating Knowledge mind maps  
Watch video summaries  
Reading over class notes  
Reading course textbook  
Making condensed notes  
Completing exam papers and self-assessing with the mark scheme  
Reading model answers  
Comparing model answers to your own  
Revising in groups and questioning each other  
Creating your own exam questions  
Handing in additional exam practise and seeking help from teacher  
Analysing examiners reports  
Completing challenging wider reading around the subject

### KEY

Red: E- Grade AO1 Content based revision without skills

Blue: C/B Grade AO2/3 Applying content to exam skills (application and evaluation)

Green: A/A\* Grade AO1/2/3/4 Reflection focussed purely on skills and 'BECOMING THE EXAMINER'

**RED** – This is what GCSE students do, at A level you should complete ALL content revision materials as you go, students who wait till the end to do this and ONLY do RED tasks do not have exam skills and fail!!!

**BLUE** – Grade C+ students do this throughout their studies, this is what enables you to make progress and is the difference between GCSE and A level study. At GCSE this was important, at A level it is impossible to succeed without it!!

**GREEN** – This is what makes an A/A\* student, students who complete green activities are reflective and recognise what they need to do to improve before a teacher nags them about it!

# 2. QUIZ , QUIZ, TEACH

For this one you need a friend to compete with! Either at home or virtually.

Spend 10-15 minutes writing some questions down on revision cards. You can make as many as needed but 10 - 15 is probably enough.

Use your textbook or exercise to make them challenging! You want to win surely?



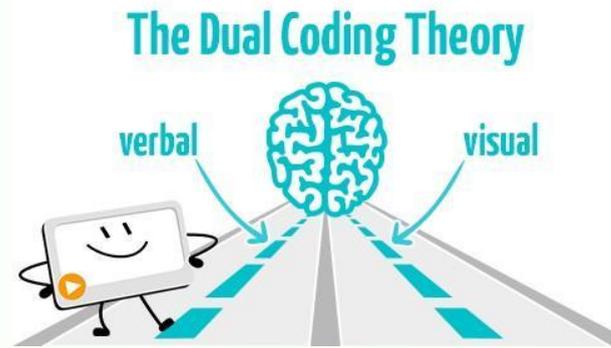
Then quiz each other taking turns and keep a note of the score. Whoever gets the most right answers wins the battle!

### 3. DUAL CODING / CONVERSION

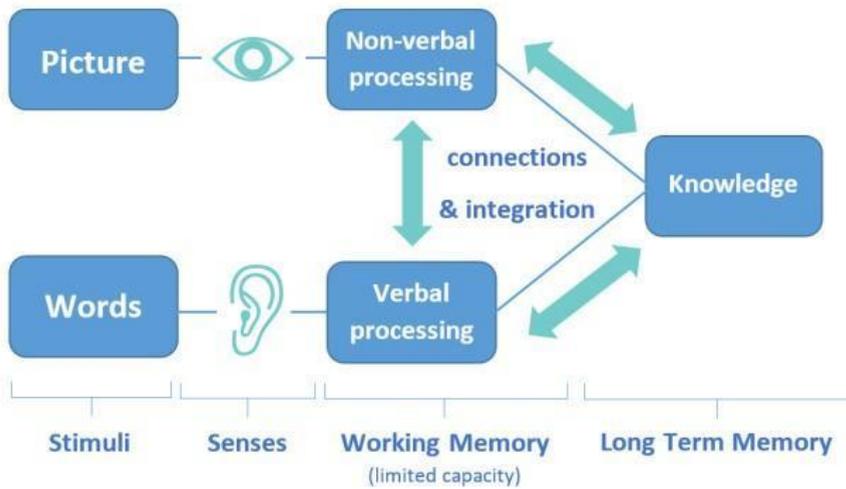
Dual coding is the process of blending both words and pictures.

Take your revision notes and add drawings / pictures to help you remember or take chunks of text and turn them into mind maps or brainstorm.

Your brain is more likely to remember as you have made visual connections with the words or text.



#### Allan Paivio's Dual-Coding Theory



You can also try Conversion:

Take information in one format and "convert" it into a different format:

- ◆ A flow chart into text
- ◆ Text into a mind map
- ◆ Text into a graph
- ◆ A graph into a news report
- ◆ Text into a picture
- ◆ Diagrams into a poem/ story

### 4. MATCH IT UP!

- 1** Pick a topic in a subject that has a lot to remember e.g Science
- 2** Take 40 blank A5 revision cards. 20 of one colour, 20 of another.
- 3** Find a specific topic and then write out 20 questions that you are not yet confident you can answer. Then write out the answers from your exercise book or textbook on separate cards, keep the two piles separate and shuffle them.
- 4** The task is to then spread them all out on the floor or a large table and give yourself 5 minutes on a timer to match them all accurately.



If you do it in less than 5 minutes, try it again the next day and see if you can beat your time. Or give your cards to a friend and challenge them to beat your time!

## 5. MAKE THE MOST OF MARK SCHEMES!

Students often use past papers to plan and answer questions, BUT, do they always follow up with self-assessment and analysis of the mark scheme? The answer is no!

Mark schemes can be used in several ways, it could be simply to assess a practice question the student complete in exam conditions. Or student may look to mark schemes to help plan a question they are struggling with. Or you can use a mark scheme as a model, then try and create a different question and mark scheme which follows the same patterns.

### Mark Scheme

Paper	Section	Mark Allocation				Total Marks	%
		Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking		
Paper 1	1	20	20	20	20	80	100
Paper 2	1	20	20	20	20	80	100
Paper 3	1	20	20	20	20	80	100
Paper 4	1	20	20	20	20	80	100

\*\*\*This mark scheme was taken from the most recent syllabus. Please note in this mark scheme Paper 1 refers to the Listening Examination and Paper 3 refers to the Oral Examination.

## 6. SUPERCHARGE YOUR VOCABULARY

Keywords and embedded subject vocabulary is the key to higher grades!

Find 6-7 keywords for a subject, or an individual topic, using a glossary in your textbooks, the index at the back or go through your exercise book to find them.

Write down the definitions for the words you have found, then see if you can define them in your own words.

Challenge yourself to use each word in a sentence, then check your answer afterwards.



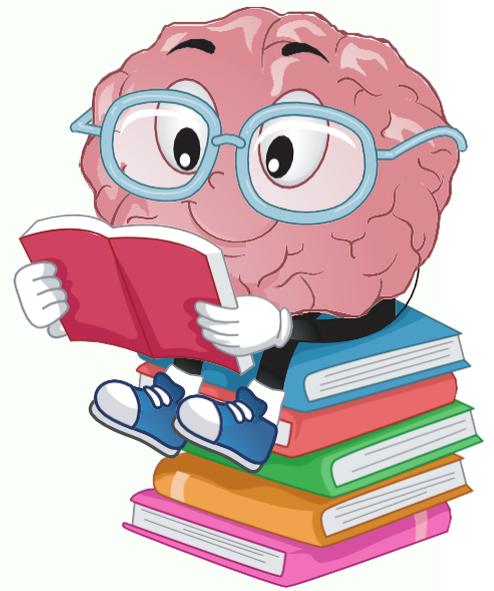
## 7. BRAIN DUMP

The act of constantly retrieving the same information will strengthen the memory.

Get a blank sheet of paper and set yourself a 5 minute timer. Then pick a topic you are fairly comfortable with but that you know you need to revise.

On the paper, write down as much as you can remember from memory without cheating, then when your time is up go back and check what you missed.

*e.g. History - you may remember many parts of the Cuban missile crisis but miss dates or key people from this event.*



Then, using a different coloured pen, add the bits you missed. These are the parts you then to revise for a few days or transfer to a flash card.

The trick with this retrieval activity is to then repeat the task a few days or a week later and see if you can remember more.

## 8. ANALYSING EXAMINERS REPORTS

This one is a very powerful revision strategy, yet many students have never even looked at an examiner reports before, or don't even know what one is.

An examiners report is written by an exam board after each exam. It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the cohort who sat it, and instructs future students what pitfalls to avoid and what skills/content got the top grades. They are available on all exam board websites and are best used after a student has attempted a practice question and wishes to self-assess it.





## 11. SPACING

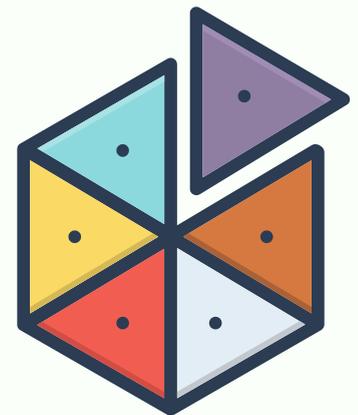
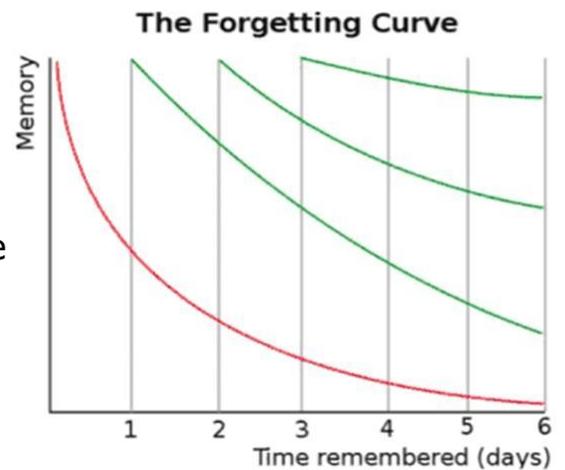
You will be able to recall more knowledge to help you, if it is in your long term memory.

In order to help the learning to stick, you need to revise small chunks, repeatedly with a gap, and then return to the same content.

This is called '**spaced practice**' because there are gaps. It is the opposite of cramming which is last minute panicking where you do an hour for a subject the night before. Not good!

Firstly, divide up the revision into small chunks of realistic and manageable time, let's say 20-30 mins a day. Then spread your subjects over the week and return to the same content at regular intervals until you can remember it!

<b>Monday</b>	Maths and History
<b>Tuesday</b>	French and Science
<b>Wednesday</b>	English and PE
<b>Thursday</b>	Food and Childcare
<b>Friday</b>	Maths and History (revisit same material)
<b>Saturday</b>	French and Science (revisit same material)
<b>Sunday</b>	English and PE (revisit same material)



## 12. INTERLEAVING



Interleaving is a process where students mix & combine multiple subjects & topics while they study, in order to improve their learning. Blocked practice on the other hand, involves studying one topic very thoroughly before moving to another.

*"Interleaving has been shown to be more effective than block practice leading to better long-term retention."*

*Kate Jones*

Similar to Spacing, the idea here is that you don't spend too long on one topic or one subject however tempting that might be.

Make a timetable which forces you to mix up topics and not necessarily go over them in order they were first learned. Although it can seem confusing at first, this 'cognitive conflict' is good for the brain and keeps you on your toes.

## 13. TEST YOURSELF

It is clear that to check you know something, you have to test yourself - but how many of us think that making notes or just rereading and highlighting is effective revision?

Research shows that you need to engage your brain in the act of trying to remember, even if it is hard, it will stick for longer eventually.

So, make sure any revision you do has an element of self testing. This is called Retrieval Practice. e.g. using flashcards is great, but only if you regularly try and remember what is on them without looking.

Use past papers or online quizzes to ensure you are regularly checking knowledge and self testing.

Remember, making mistakes is good, because if you get 10/10 every time - it's too easy. You need to know what you are forgetting, in order to work harder when revising to remember it next time.



## 14. BUDDY UP

Research has shown that if the person with you is working hard, you are likely to follow and copy their work ethic.

Find a friend who you know you can work with, and then arrange to spend some of your social time testing each other or helping each other make resources.

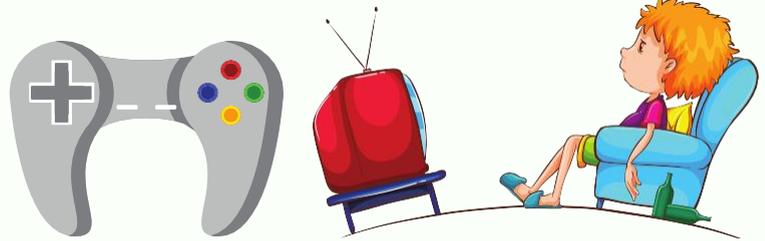
As long as you can stay away from too many distractions (phones away) this is a perfectly acceptable way to revise and you can tell your parents that the research supports this. Link this strategy to 'quiz quiz teach' (page 3) and test each other or make a board game to play against each other.



\* Disclaimer some friends are not helpful with this one...but you can still stay friends!

## 15. JUST DO IT!

No, this is not an advert for trainers, instead it's a reminder that sometimes we all love to procrastinate.



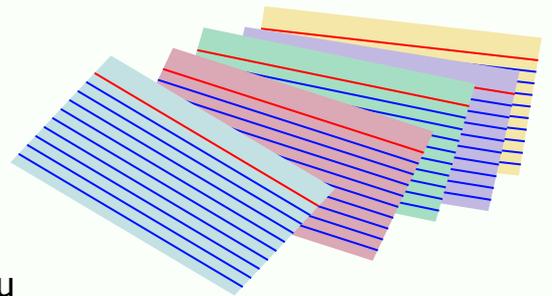
On average, 75% of students consider themselves to be procrastinators. Finding imaginative ways to avoid doing what we should be doing, or spending ages on something else to put off the inevitable are all perfectly normal things to do! Ask anyone who is trying lose weight or do more exercise!

If you put off starting your revision, you will never get engaged with it, whereas sitting down and just starting anything at all is half the battle won. So don't look for other things to do that are not urgent.

Pick one of the ideas from this booklet right now, not in 10 minutes, and get revising. You will feel better afterwards, so get started now.

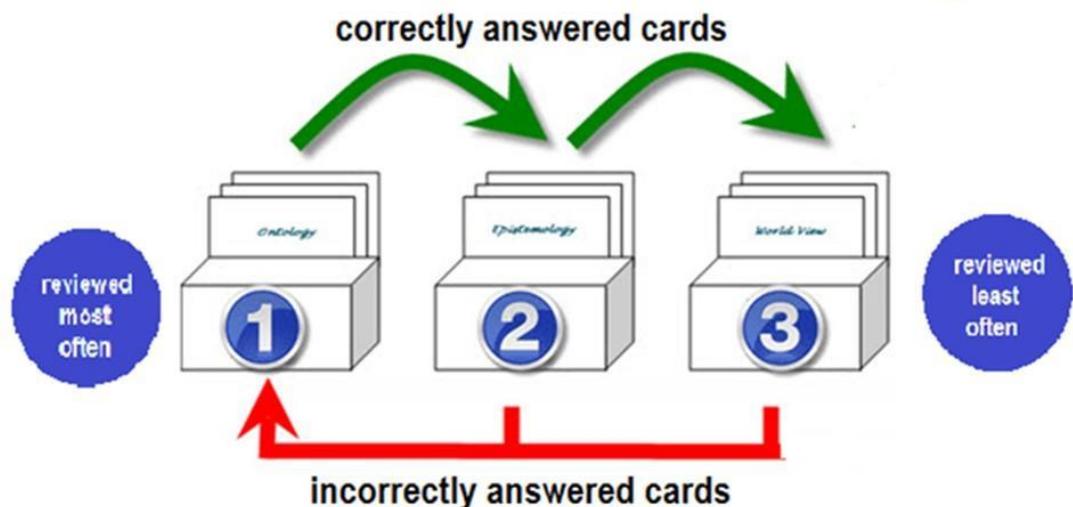
## 16. FLASH CARDS

Flashcards are very commonly used but how effectively do you use them? Do you spend longer making them and adding colours or highlighting than you do testing yourself? Whilst presentation and visuals are important, don't spend longer on them than necessary.



The trick is to use them whenever you can and as often as you can because they are small and portable. Also, they can be used to help friends and family test you on core knowledge or facts / formulas that you need to memorise.

### THE "LEITNER" SYSTEM of flash card reviewing



## HOW TO USE FLASH CARDS EFFECTIVELY

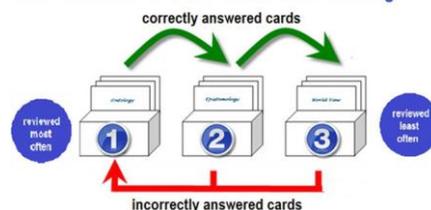
Make 3 boxes. Label them.:

**Box 1:** every day

**Box 2:** every other day

**Box 3:** once a week

THE "LEITNER" SYSTEM of flash card reviewing



Every flashcard will start in **Box 1**. As you answer a flashcard correctly, move the card into **Box 2**. If you incorrectly answer a flashcard, place the card back in **Box 1**. Follow this method for each flashcard in **Box 1**. At the end of this round, you will notice that some concepts remain in **Box 1** - that means that these concepts are more difficult for you and require frequent studying. The cards that have graduated to **Box 2**, on the other hand, are concepts with which you are more familiar, so you do not have to study them as frequently.

Each time you get a card correct, you move it to the next box. Each time you get a card wrong, you move it back to the previous box. Once you have finished studying for the day, you will see which concepts are ones that you need to study more frequently, and which concepts may only require you to study them once a week.

Follow the same method on each study day until all of your cards have been moved to the last box. If you have forgotten some concepts in **Box 3** by the time that study day rolls around, move the cards to the previous box.

## 17. DELIBERATE PRACTICE / PAST PAPERS

Deliberate practice refers to a **special type of practice that is purposeful and systematic**. While regular practice might include mindless repetitions, deliberate practice requires focused attention and is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance.

To gain maximum marks on a question you need to fulfill all the exam criteria often using specific keywords and subject vocabulary. This is hard when you are studying over 10 GCSEs and are working under extreme timed pressure in exam conditions.

One way to improve performance is to keep going over your technique so it becomes automatic, like a sports star who endlessly works on specific skills refining technique with a coach.



# DELIBERATE PRACTICE / PAST PAPERS CONTINUED...



Deliberate practice is best done in small chunks, so take an old past paper question you may have lost marks on, usually a 4 , 6 or 8 mark question is best, and then attempt a question.

Before you try it, look at the feedback from your teacher and any specific areas to improve, then practice answering it a few times within a set limit. This is usually around a minute per mark.

In some subjects, your teacher may also be able to give you the criteria to help you gain the most marks.

## 18. MNEMONICS

This technique will test your imagination, and can be very powerful if used well. There are lots that already exist but now it's time to make up your own!

There are 3 types of mnemonics : **Acronyms , Orders and Rhymes**

Create a short word to remember a process. e.g. RICE for medical injuries, which stands for Rest , Ice , Compress , Elevate

**Orders:** Make up a sentence that uses the first letter of each word you need e.g. My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Noodles for the order of the planets (MVEMJSUN)

**Rhymes:** Match words that rhyme to remember them e.g Divorced Beheaded Died, Divorced Beheaded Survived for Henry's wives

Now make some up for your subjects using things you are interested in.

