

## **The secret to a successful learning/revision programme**

### **1. Eat breakfast.**

It is estimated that around 27% of boys and 39% of girls skip breakfast some or all of the time. It's not called the most important meal of the day for nothing! Research has found that skipping this meal significantly reduces students' attention and their ability to recall information. Simply, having a bowl of cereal will give students the concentration and memory boost they need.

### **2. Put your phone away.**

Phones can be distracting; they are linked to FOMO (fear of missing out), and evidence shows that students who spend more time texting and using social media achieve lower grades! In another study, researchers found that the mere sight of a phone was enough to reduce a person's ability to focus. The implication couldn't be clearer: out of sight really is out of mind.

### **3. Start early and spread it out.**

Actors don't leave their rehearsals until the day before opening night. Athletes do not start their training the day before a match. To learn and commit something to memory takes time. Spreading out your revision sessions on a particular topic (e.g. 30 minute sessions over 10 days) is more effective than spending the same amount of time in one go (i.e. 5 hours in one day). This effect, known as 'spacing', helps because it allows time in between revision sessions to forget and re-learn the material. This strategy has been labelled by experts in the academic field as "one of the most robust across the entire history of experimental research on learning and memory".

### **4. Time management.**

Any task can expand to fill the time available and with possibly ten subjects to revise, you cannot afford to use time poorly. One system, which has transformed my approach, is the Pomodoro technique.

### **5. Test yourself.**

Leading researchers in the field of memory consider testing yourself as one of the most effective ways to improve your ability to recall information. Testing yourself also helps you check for any gaps in your knowledge. Practice papers provide a good starting point, as well as quizzing yourself at the end of your revision session.

### **6. Teach another person.**

After you have tested yourself, teach the material to someone else. This has been found to help aid memory and recall: it is known as "the Protégé Effect". Teaching someone else requires you to learn and organise your knowledge in a clear and structured manner.

### **7. Think twice about using highlighters.**

Despite being the favourite weapon of many students tackling revision, research suggests they don't work very well. People learn and recall information better if they connect it to other pieces of information. Highlighters don't do this, they isolate single pieces of

information. Quite often, students end up highlighting whole chunks and passages of text, which can give the appearance of having worked hard, but is of little value.

### **8. Don't listen to music.**

Parents around the world rejoice: you now have a legitimate reason to insist that your child stops listening to Justin Bieber on repeat. Students who study in a quiet environment can recall more than those who revise while listening to music. Extroverts, and those with an exceptional ability to control their attention, are not negatively affected as much: but it doesn't help. At best, for these students, it just doesn't hinder them as much as everyone else.

### **9. Get some fresh air and exercise.**

You cannot work all day, every day - nor should you! Revision has to be about quality, as well as quantity. Going outside and getting some fresh air helps people feel refreshed and better able to focus afterwards. Furthermore, doing a little bit of exercise helps people deal better with stressful situations: it reduces anxiety and increases self-esteem.

### **10. Sleep.**

Students are encouraged to work hard and revise a lot before their exams, however, there comes a time when they need to stop and go to sleep. Knowing when, can be tricky. There is a link between being a perfectionist and struggling to sleep. If a child is falling asleep within five minutes of their head hitting the pillow, they should probably be going to bed earlier. Other sleep tips include: having regular times for bed; not being on your mobile phone/ipad in bed; switching off all electronic devices including a TV, quiet time at the end of the day and a hot milky drink.

A new idea is to have two alarm clocks one that wakes us up and signals that we should be getting up and a second one which does the similar task at the end of the day, indicating when we should be moving to bed.

As research into psychology continues to develop, we learn more and more about how best to help students learn.

### **Useful Resources**

There are numerous Free Apps available that give advice and allow students to create revision timetables and manage their time.

The Pomodoro technique (look for free apps to support) <http://pomodorotechnique.com/>

Exam boards all have information and past papers for example  
<http://www.aqa.org.uk/student-support/for-students/revision>

General Sites

BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/levels/z98jmp3>