



Revising for Exams: Tips to Help You Get it Right

With exam season looming, every student in the land is looking for a magic bullet to help them get through their exams unscathed. Sadly there is no magic to be had here other than hard work, but there are a few strategies you can employ to ensure that the time you spend revising is spent as well as possible.

Think carefully about how to prioritise time

When planning your revision timetables, you should think carefully about how your time would be best spent. This will vary from person to person but a few key questions you can ask yourself to help you prioritise are:

- What's next? What will you do after these exams and are some subjects more important than others? If, for example, a college or university offer is dependent on reaching a particular grade in a specific subject then you must ensure you're confident about attaining that grade.
- Where can you make the biggest gains? You only have a finite number of hours, how do you think these would best be spent?
- What order should you tackle your revision in, in order to be at your peak for each exam on exam day?

Tackle the tough stuff

The amount of effort it takes to get from fail to pass is often far less than the amount of effort it takes to get from pass to outstanding, so it makes sense to ensure you are relatively competent across the board before you spend many hours perfecting your knowledge in subjects you're already stronger in. It can be tempting to work on subjects you're already good at but this is often a less good investment of your time than working on a subject you're weaker in.

Revisit and revise revision timetables

Once you've written your revision timetable, expect to revisit and change it. This is not a document that's set in stone and you're unlikely to completely stick to it. As you gain a better understanding about what can be achieved within your revision slots, revisit your timetable and tweak it. Otherwise, you can risk getting further and further behind and find yourself in the classic situation of having prepared very much better for the first few exams than the last few.

Practice under exam conditions

The more you can practice under exam conditions, the better prepared you'll be for the day itself. Set yourself timed activities without access to your books – just like the real thing. You'll very rapidly get an understanding about what you don't know and you'll get used to how quickly you can work and how best to manage your time. Often, this can give you a bit of a confidence boost too as you'll realise you know more than you think you do.



Your teachers will be able to give you past exam papers or sample questions to work from and many will be happy to mark them and provide feedback too if you want them too.

Understand the mark scheme

As well as asking your teacher to mark your work, have a go yourself or work with friends to mark each others' work. Really understanding the mark scheme, especially in the context of your own practice papers can give you a really clear steer on how best to spend your time in exams in order to gain as many marks as possible.

Learn from each other

You have to be confident in your knowledge about something in order to teach someone else about it, so teaching your friends can be great revision in itself. Additionally, having our friends explain concepts we're struggling with, can often help to improve our understanding as they may have developed a slightly different way of explaining it than our teacher or text books or have found ways to overcome similar barriers to understanding.

Know where to find help

Identify sources of both emotional and academic support. Some of these will be face to face via your teachers, friends or family. Others will be online. There is some great support available and it's a good idea to know where to find it and how to access it before you need it rather than when you reach breaking point.

Create a great space for learning

It's hard to learn in a space that's noisy or cluttered so it's worth taking a bit of time to get your working space organised. Make sure you have a space to work in that is comfortable and free from distraction and that you have everything you need to hand. If you get in the habit of working in the same place, or places, then you'll soon find that your brain kicks into gear the moment you sit down to work as your body recognises this as your revision space.



Take proper breaks

Many students fail to realise the importance of breaks when revising. Proper breaks are important and we'll often find that we are suddenly able to understand a difficult concept better when we've taken a bit of time out and we revisit it afresh. We need to find a careful balance between revision and rest, but all revision and no rest will often result in burnout before exams.

Eat and sleep well

Again, many students are tempted to forfeit sleep for revision, this is rarely a good strategy. You can work better and more quickly when you've had enough sleep. Depriving yourself of sleep is not sustainable. It can work well to have set working hours and set sleeping hours (and set downtime hours). This removes the guilt sometimes associated with not working and will help to ensure that you look after your body and brain by getting enough sleep. We often eat a lot less well in the run up to exams as well as we forfeit mealtimes for revision. But snacking can never replace meals and the time we take to sit down and eat a healthier meal is often a good chance for our brain to relax a little. If you are going to snack, try to have nutritious snacks on hand rather than crisps and chocolate.

Get active

Physical exercise is another thing that tends to fall by the wayside as we enter exam season with team sports and gym sessions make way for revision. It may be that you need to do less sport than before if you were heavily involved, but you'll find that doing a little sport and exercise is a great break from your revision and helps to keep both your mind and body sharp. It can also be a great way to deal with the difficult emotions and frustrations sometimes brought about during revision which is far healthier than letting them stew whilst you continue revising.



Even small amounts of fresh air and exercise can make a big difference when you're stagnating at your desk. Small targets, like going for a short walk or getting ten minutes of fresh air a day can help you to feel better overall.

Compare yourself only to yourself

You're revising so that you can be the best you can be. Do chart your progress and set realistic goals and targets for yourself, but don't spend your whole time comparing yourself and your revision with your friends'. This can be tempting but usually makes you more aware of what you don't know and what's not going well rather than the progress you have made and what you have achieved. Watching yourself progress and walking into your exams knowing that you've tried hard can be really satisfying. You may have done twice as much or half as much work as a friend and you may be expecting better or worse grades, but the key thing is that you've done what works for you.

It's never too late to start

The final piece of advice here goes out to all those students who have given up before they've started. Who are joining the revision party too late or who realise that they've neglected some subjects in favour of others and feel unprepared. It's never too late. There's always something you can do to ensure you are better prepared for your exams.



If you feel you've left things too late and don't have enough time just be honest with yourself about how much time you actually have and which areas are most worth focusing on. Forget all the stuff you're already okay at and think instead about how you can change some fails to passes. It sounds like a mountain to climb but if you're really motivated, you can make a surprising amount of progress in a short amount of time.

Good luck and never forget that you're not in this alone. Seek help and support from your teachers, your friends and your parents. Any time it all feels a bit too hard, just pause for a moment to picture the moment when you walk out of your final exam. It will feel GOOD!