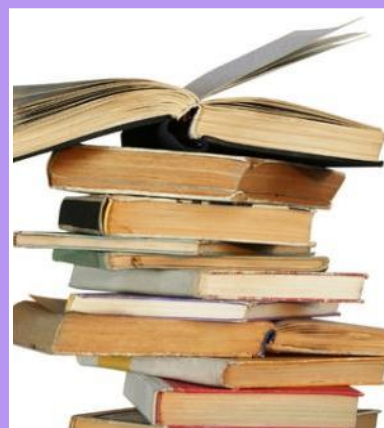


Every Child - Inspiring Learning - Every Day



Developing Effective Study Habits

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Parent / Carer

It is our continued goal to look for ways in which we can support our students' learning and progress. Research in metacognition and effective study habits have developed specific strategies for planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. The information in this book will help support parents, carers and students at all stages of their education to support effective learning routines in the classroom and at home.

The aims of this booklet are to:

- Share top tips for parent support
- Understand the stages of exam preparation
- Look at effective strategies to support revision
- Develop strategies to help students cope with exam stress

Parental support is one of a number of important factors in determining a child's academic success. The Campaign for Learning found that parental involvement in a child's education can significantly improve the outcomes at GCSE.

The good news is that parents do not need to be experts in any of the subjects your child chooses to make a real difference. Parents and students also do not need to give up other responsibilities – you just need to know how best to spend the time you have.

One of the hardest demands on students is understanding the long-term importance of doing the best they can and learning to shelve short-term fun at times in the interest of long-term benefits (not easy even for adults).

Children will also differ in the levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and motivation.

This is where parents come in. Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam period.

If you have any questions, or want share more ideas as to how parents and carers can support revision at home, please do not hesitate to contact me at tcrawford@st-ives.cornwall.sch.uk.

Yours faithfully

Mr Tom Crawford

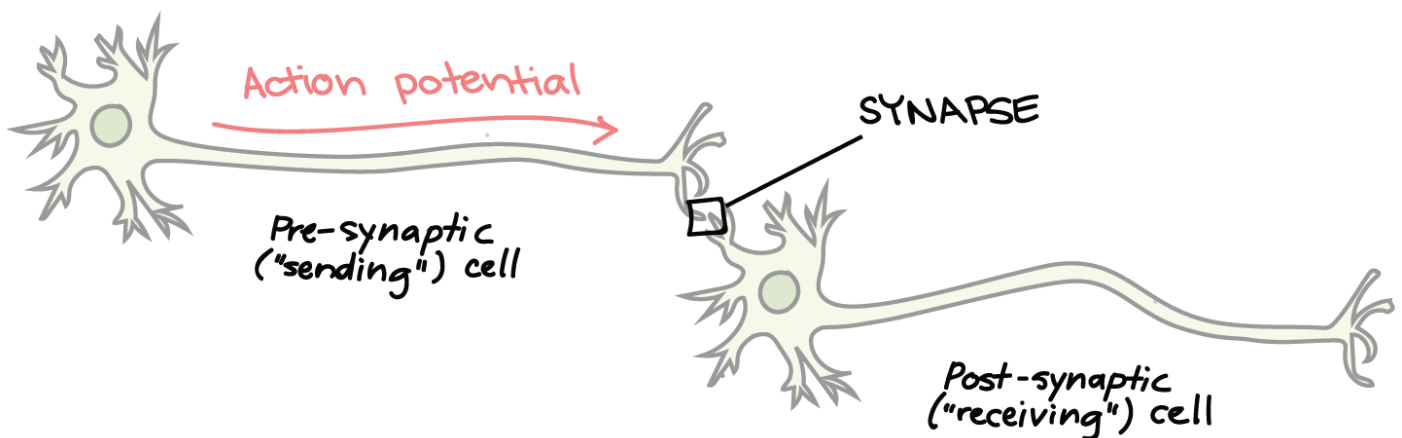
Assistant Headteacher

HOW THE BRAIN WORKS

We are often told, "Effort is the most important factor in academic success". However, if you are working as hard as you can, how can you improve? Understanding how the brain works allows us to find effective strategies to improve our understanding of topics.

The Brain

An average brain contains 100 billion neurons and has the storage capacity equivalent to 1,000,000 GB. This is the same as 3 million TV shows. Memories are made and stored in the brain and this information travels in the brain through a network of neurons. The connection between the neurons in our brain are called "synapses". These thicken with repeated use. This is important as it allows to recall information quickly.



Forget Everything...

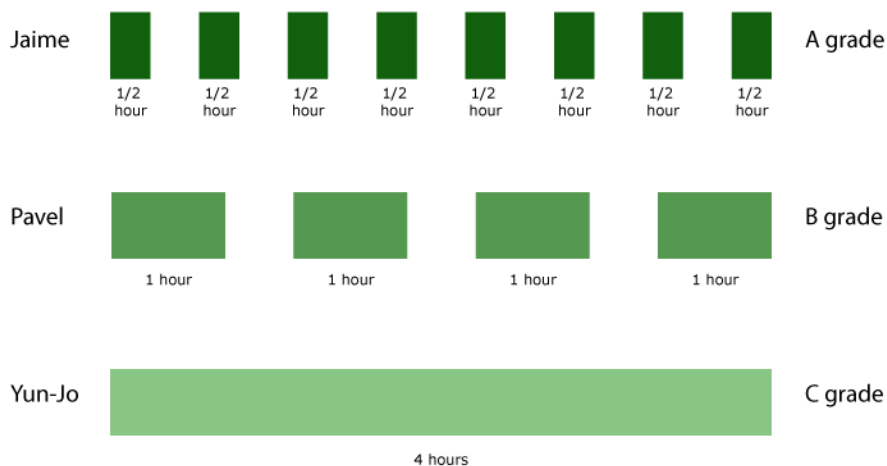
We don't forget everything, but forgetting is good and is a friend to learning. The ability to forget and then recall information enables deep learning. The harder we have to work to remember something the easier it will be the next time.

Any memory has two parts; storage and retrieval. Storage strength can increase with repeated use, for example your times tables. This means that no memory is ever lost, its retrieval strength is low. Retrieval strength can build and weaken quickly. The harder we have to work to retrieve a memory, the greater spike in retrieval and storage strength. It is therefore important that we strengthen our holds on facts. The following techniques can help support our storage and retrieval strength:

- Varying the aspects of your study environment
- Changing the layout of notes
- Changing the room you study in
- Having background music
- Stand up and sit down when revising

Distributed Learning

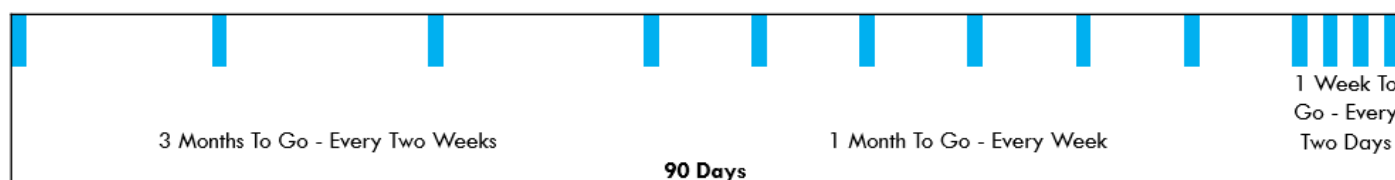
It is better to spend 10 minutes revising today and 10 minutes again tomorrow, then 20 minutes today.



What is the ideal gap to leave between revision of specific topics?

Time to Test	First Study Interval
1 Week	1-2 Days
1 Month	1 Week
3 Months	2 Weeks

For example, I want to revise the causes of the Cold War. My exam is in 3 months. This is how I would space my revision for that topic:



Remember, you need to do this for all topics in all your subjects.

Self-Testing

One of the best ways to prepare for tests is by testing. How can students self-test?

- Pretend you are expert and perform
- Read through your notes/flashcards several times and explain to someone
- Say it out loud
- Teach it to someone else
- Write it down from memory (not just from the book)

Doing this is 20-30% better than just sitting and staring at your notes.

TOP TIPS FOR PARENT SUPPORT

Role of the Parent

Your role in helping your child succeed will vary according to their needs and strengths. Your role may include some or all of the following:

- Attendance Officer – making sure your child goes to lessons and understands the importance of making the most of lesson-time.
- Partner with school and child – asking questions about how you can best help your child at home.
- Provider of the tools for homework and revision – a quiet space, a workbox of pens, paper and other necessities.
- Banker – paying for the tools, files and revision guides they need.
- Study buddy – showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (but not doing it) testing them when they ask you.
- Sounding board and adviser – helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements, seeing a positive way forward when things go badly.
- Project manager – agreeing the rule for homework or revision, helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun stuff'.
- Information provider and interpreter – finding copies of old exam papers, searching out websites, finding out about the subject, exam structures and content.

Top Ten Tips

Exams are undoubtedly nerve-racking for children and their parents. Concerned mums and dads watch over their children in the run up to the exams as well as during the exam period itself and wonder to what degree they should be helping. So, with that in mind, here are our top ten tips on how to help children to revise effectively.

1. Encourage your child to make a revision timetable – and stick to it (each student has been given an exemplar timetable).
2. Make sure your child has a quiet space to work, with no distractions (no TV, games consoles, mobile phones).
3. Help to find a method of learning and retaining information that works best for them. It could be reading and making notes, using flash cards or Post-it notes, looking at video clips, playing back recordings of their own voice, mind mapping or perhaps a mixture of these.
4. Look at the exam preparation on the school website for information about the exam specifications and links to past papers and key resources for each subject (link at the end of the document).
5. Search out revision apps and online resources – such as BBC Bitesize and Gojimo – to clarify areas your child feels less confident about. Teenagers sometimes concentrate on their best subjects and leave their weaker ones until the end but it is a good idea to tackle weak areas early on.
6. Be around as much as possible. You don't have to be at their side 24/7 but children like parents taking an interest in their revision (but not taking over).

7. Keep the kitchen cupboard stocked with a favourite treat. When the going gets tough children really appreciate a cup of tea, biscuits or their favourite treat.
8. Encourage your children to break revision into manageable chunks and to take regular breaks in between revision sessions. It's far more effective to do 30 minutes of successful revision – rather than plough on for hours on end and not get anywhere. This is backed up by research by academics at the University of Sheffield who found that learning is more effective when spread out over stretches of time.
9. Exercise, fresh air, healthy food and lots of sleep are crucial. As a guide students aged 16 need around 8-10 hours of sleep a night.
10. Most important of all, help your child to keep everything in perspective. Remind them the better they prepare and the more confident they feel in their subject knowledge, the less stressed they will feel when the exams start.

STAGES OF EXAM PREPERATION

Exam Preparation

We tend to think of our children's results being down to what happens on the day of the exam itself. Will they be in the right frame of mind? Will they be lucky and get the right questions? Will they remember what they revised? In fact, the results of exams are generally determined well before they sit the exam itself. There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success. The secret of good results in exams is about getting things right (and being aware of what can go wrong) at each stage of the process. The broad stages are:

Stage 1 – Learning the content the first time round

The process of revision assumes that the content and context of the subject has been learnt in the first place – every lesson counts.

Stage 2 – Revision

Revision can be done in many ways, some of which are more effective than others. This booklet includes ways of planning revision as well as tips for using the most effective techniques.

Stage 3 – The exam

Even with the first two stages successfully achieved, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams: knowing the subject matter, organisational skills and exam techniques.

Students Exam Preparation

Before the exam:

- Get a good night's sleep – while the temptation is to stay up all night cramming evidence suggests that this approach is counter productive
- Allow time for your brain to wake up – take a shower, eat breakfast, take water with you
- Do a final check of your timetable
- Make sure you have everything you need – take spare pens and pencils
- Get there early
- Think positively – remind yourself of the things you know well rather than dwelling on areas of weakness
- Maintain your focus – keep the balance between your focus and interacting normally with your friends

During the exam:

- Don't forget it is natural to be nervous – it actually gives your brain the extra adrenaline it needs to make the final effort
- If your mind goes blank don't worry – look at the question again and write some notes, it will get your brain ticking over again
- Don't start writing until you know and have understood the instructions
- Make and keep to a time scale for each question depending on the number of marks

- Allow a little bit of the time at the end to check through your work and make any changes
- After the exam try not to get hung up in discussing the exam – the more you talk about the exam the more confused and disheartened you are likely to become, you cannot change what has happened and can only concentrate on the present and this needs your full attention

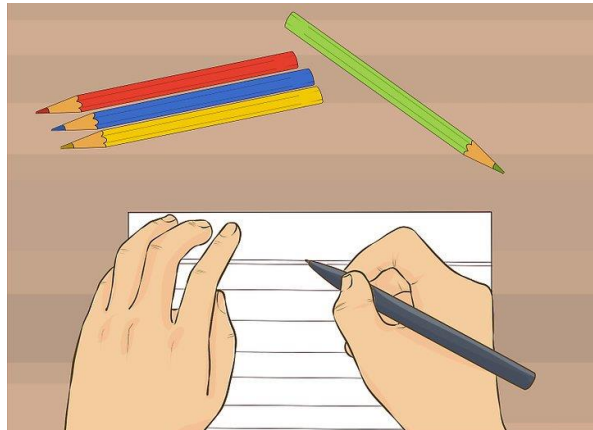
Parent Exam Preparation

- Help prepare your child for their exam – talk with them about when it starts, how long it is, what the main topics that may come up
- In the morning make sure they have had breakfast, have their equipment, have a bottle of water and leave to arrive in plenty of time

EFFECTIVE REVISION STRATEGIES

Flash Cards

Studying with flash cards is one of the most well-known ways of mastering new information. However, there is more to it than simply writing a few words down on a piece of card. To make your flash cards truly work for you it is important to carefully control the information that you put on the cards to begin with. It is also a good idea to look into apps that can help you create and share cards. Practicing good study habits with your cards will help you learn the material as well.



Keep the text brief. Stick with short phrases instead of full sentences. Use abbreviations for words when possible. You will want to review the cards quickly and condensing the text makes sure that only the most important ideas make it onto the card. The very process of choosing the card's text will kick-start the learning process.

- For example, if you are studying history you might write, "US" instead of "United States." A shortened sentence might look like, "CC-America-1492," the longer version being "Christopher Columbus arrived in America in 1492."

Take notes over a specific topic. This is probably the most commonly used flash card study method. You put a topic on one side of the card and you add your notes on that subject to the opposite side. These types of cards are also sometimes called "summary" or "concept" cards. If you are making flash cards for a multiple classes, use different colored cards or keep them in rubber-banded stacks.

- If you notice that you are putting a great deal of information on the back of one card, it may be time to split that particular subject into multiple cards.
- This system is also used quite frequently for quick memorization of specific terms. You put the term on one side and the definition or alternate translation on the other.

Create picture cards. There is no rule that flash cards must only contain text. For visual learners, drawing a quick image on a card might be the most helpful. Keep the image basic and make it easily recognizable. Label parts of the image, if that will help you study.

- For example, if you are taking a biology class you might create a rough sketch of a cell and label the parts. You can then put the “key” on the back of the card. Flipping the card back and forth will allow you to learn the material.
- A student practicing a foreign language might draw a picture of an object, such as a flower, on one side of the card with the translation on other side.
- You can also make image flash cards by photocopying an image from the textbook or slide notes and then cutting it down to notecard size. If you do this many times you will create a slideshow to match your text notes.

Add color. To fight off boredom and more fully engage your memory, try applying a color scheme to your cards. You could use write in colored pencils, highlighters, or even fine-tipped markers. Underline particularly important information with color. Or, assign specific colors to particular card themes or topics to make for easier sorting.

Have a plan when you start to use color on your cards, otherwise your cards could get cluttered and more difficult to study from.

Put word games on your cards. If you’ve come up with a quick way to remember a piece of information, put that down on a card. All types of mnemonic devices (or memory boosters) are helpful when studying. Keep it simple and put only one major piece of information on each card.

- A history student might put the question, “Who sailed the ocean blue?” on one side of a card with the answer, “Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492,” on the other side. Rhyming is a mnemonic device that helps with knowledge retention.

Carry your cards with you. In the period immediately before a test, keep your cards close to you and study them whenever possible. Look for a few minutes here or there in your everyday routine. If you are watching TV, study during the commercials. Repetition and exposure to the information will make the difference in retention. Get creative and use clips to hang your notecards around the room. This allows you to study while cleaning up. Or, punch a hole in the corner of your card set and put them on a key ring for easy carrying

Mix up the order of your cards. Your mind will become bored if you go through your cards in the same order over and over again. Shuffle your cards, throw them on a table and mix them up, or put them in a jar and pull one out at a time. The card that you see each time should be unpredictable, just as a question will be on a test.

Set aside the cards that you know. Once you feel comfortable with the information on a particular card, place it in a new stack with others like it. This will allow you to spend more

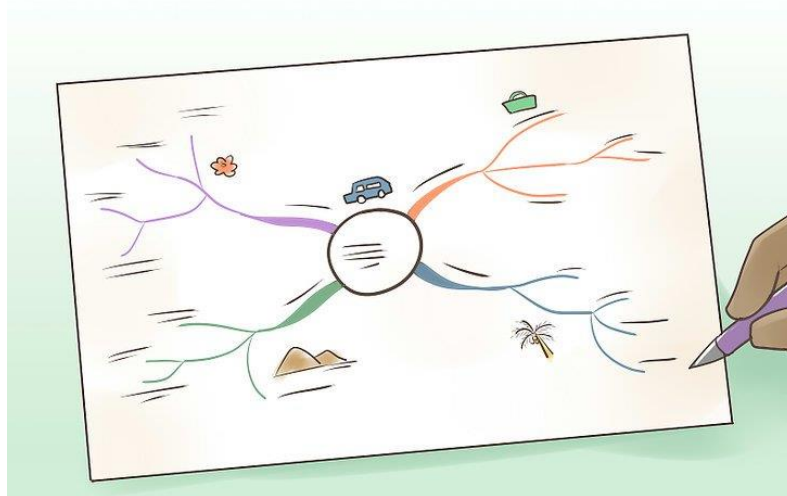
time working with the topics or terms that you've yet to master. However, don't forget this 'known' stack entirely, be sure to look it over too, just less frequently.

Work with a study group. Get together with a group of your classmates and go through your cards together. You may find that other people covered areas that you missed and vice versa. Try to teach each other the material to test your knowledge level. Quiz each other using the cards as a question bank.

Treat studying as a game. To make studying more exciting, it might help to get a bit competitive. Some apps will allow you to engage in flash card competitions against your peers or classmates. This is like having a study group that meets virtually. You can even set-up the competitions to follow a timer. Quizlet is one of the more notable apps in this category.

Mind Maps

Make mind-maps or association maps rather than taking linear notes. Mapping your notes by radiating key words out in a pattern of links from a central point will make best use of your memory. If you use colour and images on the maps, you'll be harnessing the power of both sides of your brain - creative and logical.



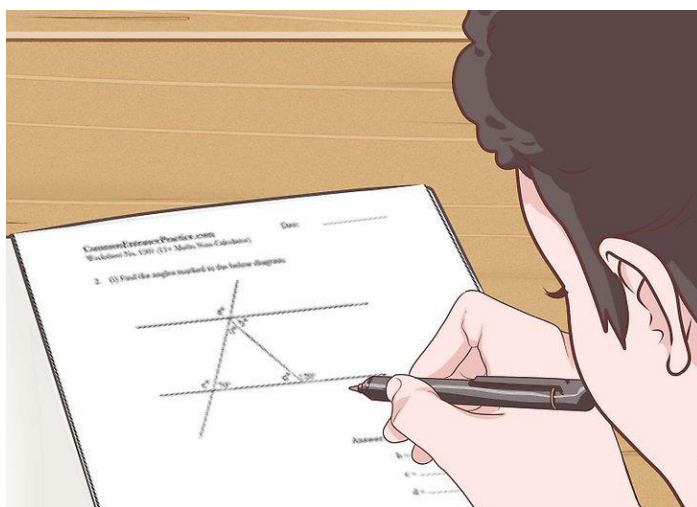
How to mind map:

1. Start with the theme in the middle of the page.
2. Then develop your main idea.
3. Each branch must relate to the branch before it.
4. Use only key words and images.
5. Key words must be written along the branches.

6. Printing your key words makes them more memorable.
7. Use highlighters and coloured markers to colour code branches.
8. Make things stand out on the page so they stand out in your mind. (This doesn't show up well on a black and white photocopied booklet! You should use a different colour for each main branch and all its sub-branches)
9. Brainstorm ideas. Be creative.
10. Design images you can relate to which will help you remember key information.

Past Papers

Practice should make perfect. These should be your constant companion in all revision tasks. For each topic you revise, consult the past questions on this subject and then attempt answers to them. Check your answers, fill in the 'knowledge gaps' where necessary, and file away the correct 'model answer' in your notes for future reference. You will also start to notice any trends in the questions asked. Look at the exam preparation on the school website for information about the exam specifications and links to past papers and key resources for each subject (link at the end of the document).



Mark Schemes. Following the marking schemes are an invaluable aid to exam preparation. You can see how the marks are allocated for each question on the paper and what quantity or style of answer is required in each case. This knowledge will greatly inform your revision work and helps to remove the mystique of the exam.

Try a dress rehearsal. Each exam paper contains its own particular structure and challenge, with varying emphasis on answering style and depth. While much of your ongoing revision will be based on individual topics and questions, it is a very useful exercise to tackle an exam paper in its totality. It forces you to consider your strategy – the issues of timing, the number of points you will need to make in each part of a question. Having performed this exercise a couple of times, your confidence levels rise as you fix on your strategy for the exam and realise that there can't be any major surprises for you in the summer.

The Examiner's View. The job of examiners is to give you marks, not to take them away, but they are powerless to help you if you fall into the most common traps. Here are the biggest pitfalls identified:

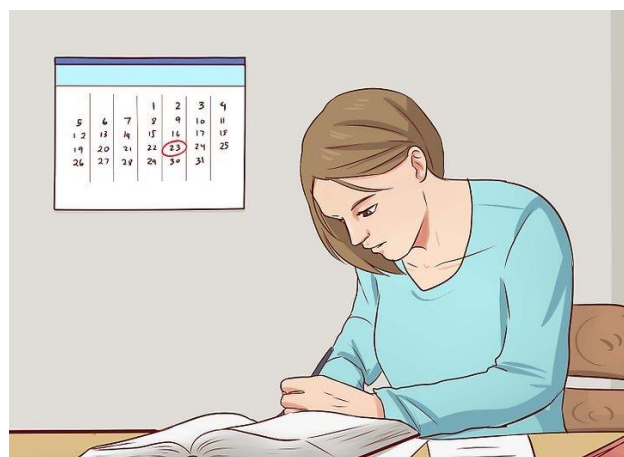
- Not reading the paper correctly.
- Not finishing the paper. Mismanaging your time within the exam can easily cost you a full grade. The biggest exam 'crime' is to leave suitable questions unattempted. Remember: it is much easier to get the first 20% of the marks for any question than the last 5%. Therefore, if you find yourself stuck for time as you struggle through your third answer out of five, do not spend your remaining time extending and perfecting that answer. Instead, move on to questions four and five, even if your attempt is sketched or in point form. If you have answered only three questions instead of five, the highest mark you can get is 60%.
- Ignoring the marking scheme. You must take the marking scheme into account when you allocate time to each question or part of a question. If the marks allotted to a question clearly indicate that a few paragraphs are sufficient, do not write an essay on the subject. Avoid the temptation of writing everything you know about a topic – just give the appropriate amount of information.
- Repetition Make the point once. There are no extra marks for restating facts.
- Missing part of a question. Sometimes, part of a question can be carried onto the next page and, in the pressure of the moment, you don't see it. Always take time to familiarise yourself with the whole paper before you start answering it.
- Planning and working out. Include your planning and working out with your exam script – you might get some credit for formulae or calculations contained therein.

SMART Goals

Timing your revision isn't always the best approach – particularly if you are inclined to keep glancing at your watch, wishing the hours away! While sticking to your revision timetable is important, try to set yourself small goals while you are working as well as time limits.

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related. For example, a SMART target for an English Literature session might be: 'By the end of this session, I will have memorised five useful quotations from Of Mice and Men.'

Achieving objectives like this will help you feel good about your revision and boost your confidence.



Other Advice

Active Revision. This doesn't mean you have to do star jumps when remembering trigonometry – but it does mean you need to 'exercise' your mind! Simply re-reading your notes is a very ineffective way to revise. According to scientists, your brain will retain less than 10% of what you read, unless you also do something active to boost your brain power.

Listen to yourself. Bizarre thought it sounds, some people swear by recording themselves reading their notes aloud and then listening back to the track on a laptop, mobile or music player.

Keep things colourful. Creating colourful A3 posters and drawing bright mind maps can be just as helpful as producing reams of text. Using bright stationary and colour-coding notes according to topics can also help to tackle the boredom you might feel with only working in black and white.

Post-It. Using Post-It notes can be a fun and powerful way to work on remembering important ideas, facts and definitions. Write single words on brightly coloured post-its and stick them around the house, placing them on everyday objects such as the kettle, the fridge door... even on top of the toilet!

Buddy Revision Independent revision can be highly effective, but combining this with revision with a friend, or as a part of a group, is the best approach. It's a great way to add variety to your routine, provided you concentrate on the task in hand.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EXAM STRESS

Watch out for exam stress and be aware of the signs. Signs of stress can include:

- Being irritable
- Sleeping poorly
- Loss of appetite
- Worrying
- Feeling negative
- Headaches and stomach aches

What can you do if you are feeling stressed?

1. Eat well – a balanced diet is vital to health and feeling well (avoid foods high in fat and sugar)
2. Get enough sleep – most teenagers need 8-10 hours a night, wind down before going to sleep and avoid late night cramming
3. Get some exercise – exercise can boost energy levels, clear the mind and improve your mood
4. Talk to someone about how you feel – this can be a parent, family member, friend or a teacher
5. Make time for rest, other activities and hobbies – this can help take your mind off the stress and help you feel refreshed
6. Ask someone to help with revision – working with a friend or asking a parent to test you can add variety to your revision

REVISION RESOURCES

Resources	Website
BBC Bitseize has information on all subjects at GCSE with quizzes and online tests	https://www.bbc.com/education/levels/z98jmp3
Memrise allows you to create online key word flashcards that you can self-test	https://www.memrise.com/
Goconqr allows you to create online mind-maps	https://www.goconqr.com/



St Ives School

Higher Tregenna

St Ives

Cornwall

TR26 2BB

<http://www.st-ives.cornwall.sch.uk>