Exam Techniques

Revising for exams

Here are nine tips on revising for exams:

a. Make use of your learning style when you revise

Tips for visual learners:
- Rewrite your notes as mind-maps
- Use colour to highlight important things
- Draw diagrams and sketches to help you remember points

Tips for auditory learners
- Read your notes aloud
- Record yourself reading key points of your notes aloud, then listen to the recording afterwards
- Revise with other students if you can
- Sing the main points. Linking them with a tune may help you remember them

Tips for learners who are readers and writers
- Copy out your notes
- Read your notes silently
- Rewrite the key points using different words
- Write down key points from memory

Tips for active learners
- Move around the room
- Record your notes and revise while at the gym or doing other physical activity
- Mentally review what you’ve been revising while you’re swimming or jogging
b. Plan in good time

Timetable: How much time have you got? What do you need to do?

A week in hand: aim to have your revision completed by a week before your exams. This gives you:

- flexibility in case of illness
- a chance to spend longer on something that proves difficult
- a break before you sit your exams.

Be selective: What topics do you need to revise? How much time do they need?

Targets: be realistic about the targets you set yourself, how much time you will need.

Balance: aim for a balance between subjects you’re strong in and those which you’re less confident about.

c. Active revision

It’s not enough just to re-read notes, make your revision active! Here’s how:

Paper: have plenty of paper and a pen handy.

Memorise: study a section of your notes, and memorise the essential points.

Write: put your notes out of sight, and write down from memory the essential things you learned.

Check: check with your notes.

Learn: note any points you omitted or got wrong, and learn them.

Cards:

- Reduce notes to essential points, either by highlighting or underlining.
- Use these points to make memory aids on index cards or similar-sized pieces of paper.
- Use a separate card for each topic.
- Write down important points to remember about each topic.
- Carry these cards with you wherever you go. Review them in your spare moments.
d. Old exam papers

Look through old exam papers: make outline plans for the answers and note carefully the slight differences in how questions are asked from year to year.

e. Pace yourself

Use your time well. Don’t try to do too much at once. Take a break from time to time in each study period.

f. You’re not alone

Revise with other people sometimes; if you don’t feel that you’ve entirely grasped a topic, or don’t have any ‘new’ ideas on it, discussing it with other students can be helpful. This is especially useful for auditory learners.

g. Reward yourself

Recognise the targets you have achieved. Mark your progress on your revision plan so that you can see what you are achieving.

h. Trust

Trust your memory. Once you know a subject thoroughly, move on to the next. Don’t keep checking your memory to see if it’s doing its job. It’s like a filing system, and it will produce what is required at the appropriate time.

i. Look after yourself

Diet: Try and eat a healthy diet, not just chips and burgers! Take time out for meals; don’t try to work while you’re eating dinner.

Caffeine: too much tea and coffee can increase your anxiety levels and induce insomnia. Caffeine tablets have the same effect.
Exercise: Get some exercise! You don't have to go mad. 20 minutes exercise 2-3 times a week will give you more stamina, help reduce stress and help you to sleep.

Rest: Don’t try to work through the night before an exam. Go to bed in good time and get as much sleep as you can.