

How to Revise Successfully

Revising for tests, exams, or any other form of assessment can be stressful or even anxiety-producing. However, with a few changes to how you go about revising, you might just find yourself swapping anxiety for anticipation.

Find somewhere suitable to study. Any revision place needs to be comfortable (but not too cozy that you fall asleep), quiet and free of distractions. Some people like to choose one place only, while others enjoy moving between the almost distraction-free environment of home to the slightly more alive atmosphere of the library. Choose whatever works most for you and isn't going to be interrupted by anyone else wanting to use the same space.

- Ensure that your chair is ergonomically correct, your desk height is comfortable for you and the computer is level with your eyes. Check if the lighting is adequate and the room isn't too hot or cold.

Draw up a plan or timetable for your revision and be prepared to stick to it. Working to a revision timetable helps you to make clear goals of attainment for each revision session and reassures you that you've checked off what needs to be covered during revision. Revision plans have been shown time and again to reduce revision anxiety to those who follow them because there is always something for you to turn to and a reassurance that you're doing everything in good time.

- It is recommended that you write the revision plan by hand. You can print out its background form but write by hand. The connection between the brain and the hand is a way of helping you to stay in control and to memorize what needs to be done with more depth than simply typing and printing.
- Set reasonable targets that you know you can reach. You could revise throughout the year by spending 15 minutes each day making notes. By doing it in short stretches you will remember more and feel less stressed. So a month before your exam you will have finished all your notes so you can spend a few hours a day reviewing notes and doing timed writing practice. Make sure to check them off as you accomplish them. It may even be a good idea to reward yourself with a treat on the completion of a target to help you get there. It is a good motivation to never consider giving up as an option.
- Include times for meals, breaks and anything unrelated to studies. And don't forget to sleep!
- Leave spare time in case something happens, such as a short illness or a family emergency. If you don't need this time, turn it into re-revising time. (See below.)
- Know or guesstimate how much time is needed for revising each topic—that way, you can allot plenty of time in the timetable.
- Leave space for final re-revision just prior to the test or exam. This isn't about going over each topic in detail—it's simply added time for one last going over the material and reassuring yourself that it's all ordered in your mind.
- Social arrangements are an important escape from revision but make sure they do not take up too much of your time.

Revise actively. Rather than simply reading, break out the other possible ways for getting information to stick in your mind. It's hard to stay focused on the same topic using the same learning method all the time. By turning your revision into active revision, you can liven it up a bit and help your memory work more effectively. Active revision includes:

- Mind mapping. This is a fun and concise and effective way of making revision notes.
- Read the information you need to learn. But don't stop there. Actively think about what you've just read. Ask yourself questions and think about the consequences should certain elements of it be changed or should certain features occur differently. Whether it's science or history, small changes can make big differences and your thinking process is the important part.
- Draw freely. Many people find breaking down information into drawings helpful to better understand what they are dealing with. Diagrams, mind maps, freehand drawings, et cetera can all be useful ways of improving both your understanding and creating a much easier memory aid than simply relying on words. Don't be afraid to use colors in much the same way—color your drawing or highlight the text.
- Find someone who knows nothing about the topic and explain to them. Even if it's explaining to the mirror or your cat, just take the time out to talk to someone as if they're learning about it for the very first time, and you're the teacher. It's very hard to forget information once you've done this.
- Do a switch on the last method and pretend you're on TV or the radio being interviewed about the topic. Ask yourself a series of questions and reply as succinctly and clearly as you can, pretending people are listening and wanting to learn all about it.
- Role play being your lecturer or the teacher. This can be rather fun!
- Write down your notes from memory and then return to your original notes and fill in the gaps with a red pen, this will help you to identify what you don't know.
- Summarize what you've learned. How many ways can you boil down the answer? What's the smallest response on the topic you can give that still makes sense and says all that needs to be said? Carry summaries with you as memory jolts to revise anywhere you are—on the bus, walking through the park or laminate cards and revise in the shower!
- It's recommended that you write or create your own revision notes. If all you do is copy them or borrow someone else's, you'll only learn what they've grasped and it may be incomplete. Even if it is complete, it won't stick in your mind the way that your own notes will; as an added bonus, you'll learn as you write and, once you've got them, you're halfway there.

Find support. Don't presume that you're alone in the revision effort. Your family supports you even where they can't actually understand what you're learning. Ask them to test you, clarify things for you, read to you and help you to stay organized. Parents and siblings who have already experienced revision will have some good ideas to help you prepare. Moreover, family and friends can be good moral support when you're feeling down or anxious about the revision; if you ask nicely, you might even be let off the usual chores.

- Actively seek out the nurturers in your family and friends. You need emotional support as much as other support and if you can trust in someone to talk to about your anxiety or worries, this can help you to offload a lot of unneeded troubles to a caring listener. Even having someone you can trust like this available online or by phone is better than no-one.

- Revise with peers or friends. One caveat—this is presented as one option of all your options—don't make it the only one or you'll risk doing lots of chatting and not a lot of revising. Moreover, don't assume that you need to revise with the usual friends; you may actually be better off revising with peers who are more suitable because they share the love of the subject or have proven to know the work well. Once you've put together a suitable group, meeting regularly in between your other revision activities is a great way to reduce anxiety levels and support one another, as well as find ways to test each other and raise any issues related to revision. And you can cyber-meet via chatrooms if you haven't time to catch up in person.
- See your teachers and professors as part of your support network. Ask for their assistance when it becomes clear you need it; knowing earlier rather than later in your revision will make it easier to approach them and get their help.
- Be good to people who help you with your revision. Tell them how much you appreciate them while you're revising; afterward, take them out for a treat or give them a small token of appreciation to express your gratitude.

Take breaks to give your concentration a boost. If you take breaks regularly, your concentration will be better and you'll find yourself retaining more information than if you try to plow on through all the time. As mentioned above, plan the breaks into your revision timetable.

Test yourself using old exam or test papers. Answering past exam or test papers in the same time limit as the real exam or test will give you an opportunity to test yourself under the same constraints. It will be a chance to see whether there are gaps in your knowledge that you need to go back over and it'll also be useful to see if you can get down all that you want to say in the time allotted. Do the practices under timed conditions by using a timer which could be on your phone or on the computer.

Spend a lot of time working on recall. Even though you have read it, seen it and heard it, most of it escapes you. This is because of how we function as human beings—we only retain that which we put in the time to go over again—and then again. When reading, stop every few minutes to recap and recall what you've just read. A good way of recalling is writing your notes down from memory and then filling in the gaps with a red pen. Use the active revising methods outlined above to help you recall better. You can also take notes while you read. For example, write down important things like setting, time periods and dates, places etc.

Stay relaxed. Spend time doing something relaxing each day, such as listening to your favorite music, going for a walk or swim, spending time with your pets or talking with a good friend. These activities will help you to feel relaxed and connected to others and the world as you keep working through the revision. You can also practice relaxation exercises, meditation or simply just lying back and chilling out now and then.

- Stress good or bad? Stress is important on the exam day as it drives you to achieve a lot, however being stressed when you revise is a bad idea as it will not make you work more efficiently and will make it harder to remember.
- Look after yourself. Eat healthily and exercise regularly.
- Although social events should be minimized, never cut them out completely. Choose quality ones that will allow you to make the most of the occasion.
- Worst case scenario. When you are feeling stressed about an exam or a timed writing piece write down the worst possible things that could happen, which will put your fears in perspective and you will feel more relaxed.