

# Helping your child to achieve their best results.



## **Partnership**

We all want your child to achieve the best grades that they can and this can be made possible when there is a partnership between the student, the school and parents. There are a number of simple things that you can do as parents to help students to be as prepared as possible. Studies show that high parental interest is linked with better exam results than for children whose parents show no interest. This booklet aims to tell you more about what is required to be successful in exams and how you can become involved in the revision process.

Each pupil has received a 100% book which will be used to record what revision needs to be done and by when. These books will be vital in helping pupils organise their time.

Research has shown that preparation for examinations needs to be a deliberate and carefully planned experience for pupils. Prior to exams revision will take place in school.

## **3 areas of learning**

There are 3 areas of learning that you need to be able to master to do well in your exams. They are:

1. Registering – How to take information in
2. Retaining – How to make information stick
3. Recalling – How to make sure you can recall information when you need it

## **Registering**

Three commonly used revision techniques that appear to have very little impact on learning are:

- Highlighting texts
- Re-reading
- Summarising text

The reason these are so ineffective, is that they require very little thinking...and it's thinking about things that makes us remember things. It's easy to see why they are popular with students though. They are very low demand, make the students feel as if they are 'doing revision' and for highlighting and summarising, there is a product for their efforts. They can come bounding downstairs from their bedroom and show you highlighted sheets of text of revision that they have 'done'. Gratifying? Yes. Effective? No.

So what does work?

## Skimming

When you are first looking at your revision material take time to skim through the information you are trying to learn. So for example with a book:

- Start by **reading** through the chapter headings.
- **Flick** through the pages allowing your eyes to wander over the pages.
- **Repeat** this process from the back to the front of the book.
- Stick five or six **markers** in the sections that are relevant to you.

## Slicing

The easiest way to take information in is to slice it up into pieces.

- Take a big paragraph and **rule** off and **number** it into smaller sections.
- **Group** similar sections of information together.

## Simplifying

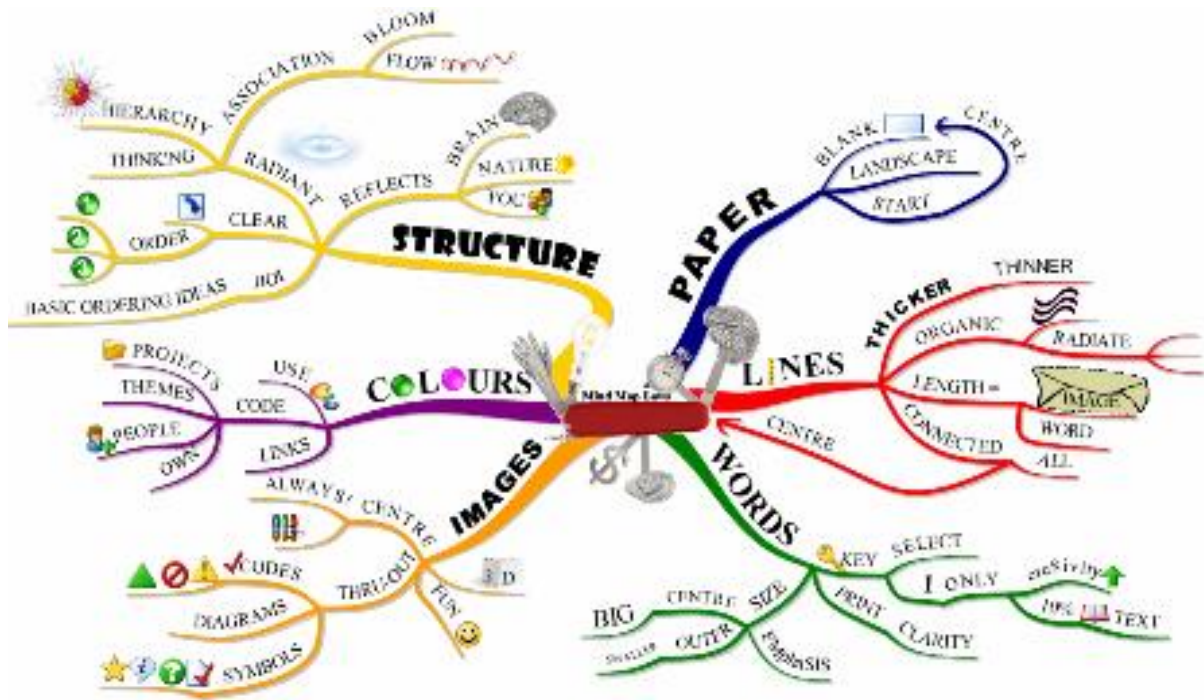
Often there are too many words for the message to get through. Simplifying allows you to deal with the problem of 'spare' words. You can:

- **Scribble them out** with a pencil
- **Rewrite** the text in your own words (use abbreviations, for example dev.t for development)
- **Highlight** the key words
- Create **bullet point lists** of key ideas

## Mind maps

Mind maps were developed by Tony Buzan and are the best known method of absorbing information. Here is how to mind map:

- Turn a large piece of blank paper landscape.
- Design an icon or logo that sums up the subject you are studying in the middle of the sheet.
- Draw a number of branches coming off that central icon to represent the different topics. Make the branches curved and write the topics along them in big bold block capital letters.
- Only write along the branches, not at the end.
- Each main branch should have smaller sub branches coming off.
- Make sure each main branch has a different colour.
- Create pictures for each piece of information that are colourful and fun.



## Retaining

### Accessing your memory

Scientists believe we remember things if we use the 7 keys to memory:

- Outstanding
- Funny
- Personal
- Emotional
- Linked to our senses
- Connected with sex
- The first and last thing we learn

When revising you need to try and use these 7 keys otherwise it is unlikely that you will remember it. So when using the registering techniques use the 7 keys. For example:

- When creating a mind map make sure it is outstanding by making it really bright and colourful.
- When repeating information back to yourself, use crazy voices and witty rhymes.
- Design actions that are imaginative and distinctive.

## **Mnemonics**

Mnemonics work by turning the first letter of a list of items into a memorable sentence or word. For example, Never Eat Shredded Wheat for the points of a compass (North, East, South and West)

We often remember mnemonics we were taught at primary school and yet we don't use them enough when we are revising for GCSE's.

Mnemonics sometimes don't work if:

- The sentence doesn't flow
- They don't involve the 7 keys to memory
- You can remember the mnemonic but not what it is supposed to tell you

Here are some ways of overcoming these:

### **Mnemonics – Stories and lists**

Create a story. For example, if you want to remember the planets picture Freddy **Mercury** walking into Planet Hollywood leading **Venus** Williams by the hand and Michael Jackson is on stage singing the **Earth** song whilst trying to eat a **Mars** bar etc etc.

### **Attach songs or lines from songs to the objects in a list**

For example, Pluto could be 'Who let the dogs out?'

### **Mnemonics - get moving!**

#### **Add movement to your mnemonic**

To spell the word 'rhythm' put your hands on your hips and chant '**Rhythm Has Your Two Hips Moving**' whilst swinging your hips from side to side.

### **The Loci system**

In its simplest form, the loci technique works by attaching images to places along a familiar real-life route you know well. The images are things you need to remember for the exam and you place them in fixed locations you know you will always encounter on that route. For example, imagine it is your route to school from home. Mentally make the walk from your house, noticing a few familiar points along the way. For example, there might be a shop or two you always pass, a zebra crossing you always use or a post-box that stands out. These are your 'loci' or locations. Then as you approach the school, make the entrance way another location. Then choose other loci as you approach different classrooms. If you are using this technique for different subjects, have different loci leading to the classroom for the subject you are revising. Alternatively use rooms in your house.

You need to mentally go over the route you are going to use and make sure you have picked out points that you are going to paste images to. Look at the list of things to remember and then begin your loci route. At each point along your journey mentally place an obvious image to your first location. Continue these until you are finished the list. When you are done, you now have in your mind a familiar journey you can take, in your imagination; at any time you wish to review your revision. The joy of this system is that if you forget one location you can just move onto the next.

## Practice Testing

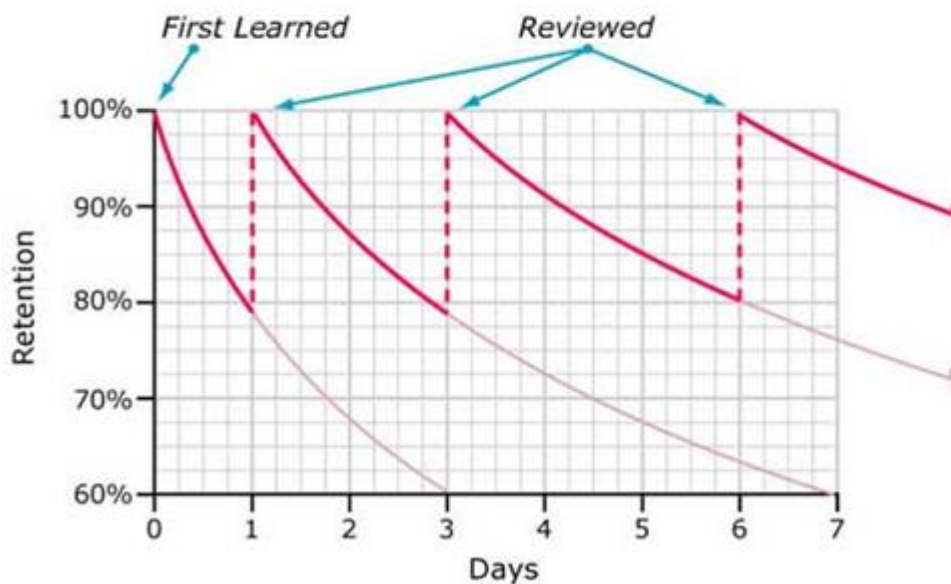
This technique is pretty straightforward – students keep testing themselves (or each other) on what they have got to learn. This technique has been shown to have the highest impact in terms of supporting student learning. Some ways in which students can do this easily:

- Create some flashcards, with questions on one side and answers on the other – and keep testing themselves.
- Work through past exam papers – many can be acquired through exam board websites and teachers will be giving them to students.
- Simply quiz them on key bits of information.
- Create ‘fill the gap’ exercises for them to complete.
- Create multiple choice quizzes for them to complete.

## Distributed Practice

Rather than cramming all of their revision for each subject into one block, it's better to space it out – from now, through to the exams. Why is this better? Bizarrely, because it gives them some forgetting time. This means that when they come back to it a few weeks later, they will have to think harder, which actually helps them to remember it. Furthermore, the more frequently you come back to a topic, the better you remember it.

### Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information



The graph above demonstrates this, by returning to a topic and reviewing it, you remember it for longer. It has been shown that you can forget up to 80% of what you have learned after 24 hours. The way to combat this is through reviewing the learning.

## Elaborate Interrogation

One of the best things that students can do (either to themselves or with a friend or parent) to support their revision is to ask why an idea or concept is true – and then answer that why question. For example;

- In science, increasing the temperature can increase the rate of a chemical reaction....why?
- In geography, the leisure industry in British seaside towns like Barry Island in South Wales has deteriorated in the last 4 decades....why?
- In history, in 1929 the American stock exchange collapsed. This supported Hitler's rise to power....why?

So, rather than just trying to learn facts or ideas by reading them over and over, students should get into the habit of asking themselves why these things are true.

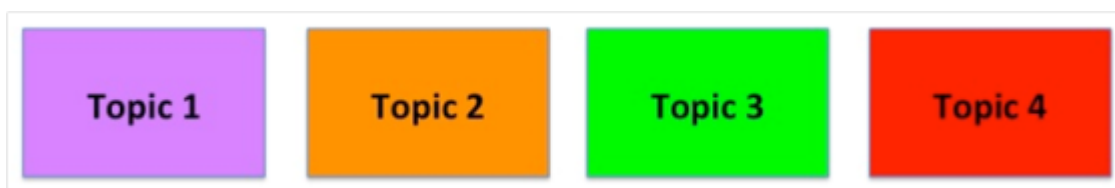
## Self Explanation

Rather than looking at different topics from a subject in isolation, students should try to think about how this new information is related to what they know already. This is where mind- maps *might* come in useful – but the process of producing the mind map, is probably more useful than the finished product. So, they should think about a key central idea (the middle of the mind map) and then how new material, builds on the existing knowledge in the middle.

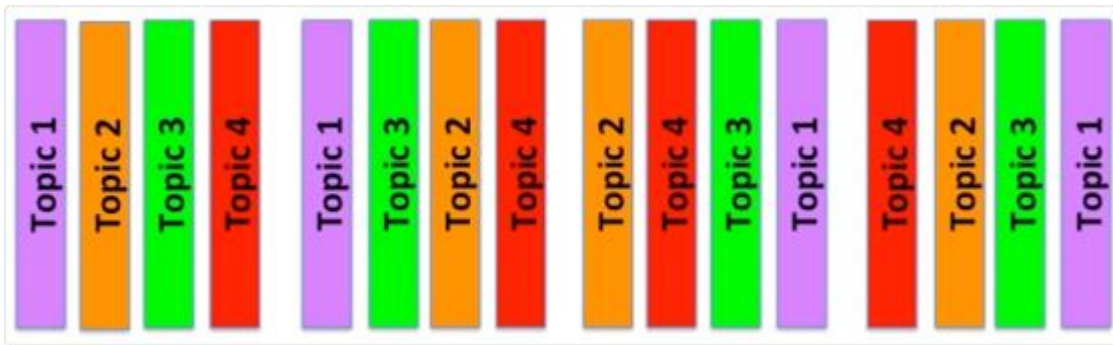
Alongside this, when they are solving a problem e.g. in maths, they should explain to someone the steps they took to solve the problem.

## Interleaved Practice

When students are revising a subject, the temptation is to do it in 'blocks' of topics. Like below:



The problem with this is, is that it doesn't support the importance of repetition – which is so important to learning. So rather than revising in 'topic blocks' it's better to chunk these topics up in their revision programme and interleave them:



The following information is what you need to know about each subject that your child is sitting an exam in.

### **Recalling**

You may find that even though you have used the registering techniques and retained the information you cannot recall the information when it comes to the exam. This is often because you are stressed. When you get stressed your brain starts to 'shut down' and the thinking part of your brain no longer works.

### **Stress-busting**

Leading up to exams there are ways you can manage your stress levels. These include:

- Sleep, diet and exercise
- Practising self-belief techniques
- Relaxation techniques
- Visualising
- Tricks of the trade
- Preparation and planning

### **Be prepared**

The best way to avoid stress is to be prepared. The best way to make sure you are adequately prepared (and believe it) is to know that you have revised effectively. Therefore, make sure you use the techniques mentioned in this booklet.

### **Structure and preparation**

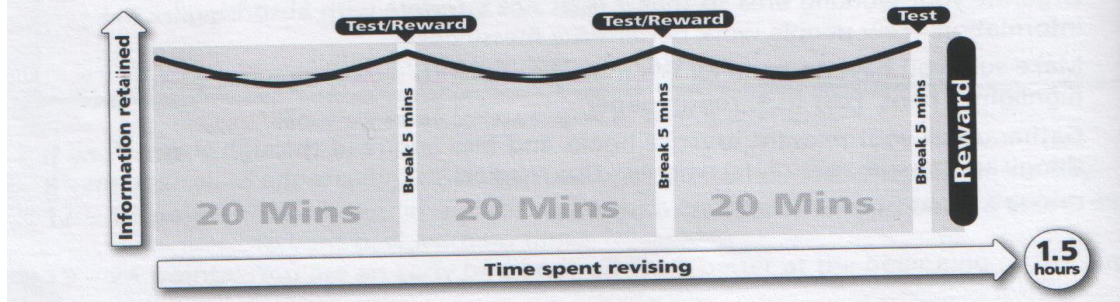
- Decorate your room with images of success to focus your mind.
- Organise your working area.
- Have all the equipment you will need handy.
- Gather up all your relevant exercise books and files and read through them. If things are missing, get replacements. Mark the main sections.
- Create a mind map of what has to be done.



## Time Plans

Now you need to **sort out a time plan**. Three things are important to remember at this stage:

1. The human brain works best for **one and a half hours at a time**.
2. You can focus in a concentrated fashion for periods of about **20 to 25 minutes**.
3. You remain much more focused if you have a reward waiting for you at the end of the work. This is called the **Test/Reward model** and is unlike the Reward/Test model used by most people, eg 'I will start my homework after I have eaten my tea'. You should be working first and then having a reward.



### Creating a time plan

- Find out the order of your exams and decide the order in which you will revise your subjects.
- Create a blank weekly time planner for each week between now and your exams. (See weekly timetable document)
- In each planner mark your preferred working times and within them any specific rewards.
- Fill in the hour and a half to two hours prior to each reward as your revision time. You can have as many as you want.
- Split each learning slot into three sessions of 30 minutes each.
- Build in spare time for things you might need more work on.

### Plan your work and work your plan!

- Revise when you say you are going to.
- Don't find excuses.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Test yourself.

### The Basics

The following things are vital for effective learning:

- Sleep
- Switching off
- Food, drink, oxygen
- Positive beliefs.



## **Sleep**

The right quantity of good quality sleep is essential to being able to learn. For most teenagers eight hours is normally enough.

## **Switching Off**

If you are going to bed at the right times but still feel tired when you wake up then you are probably stressed. Practising relaxation techniques can help, such as the 'seven eleven' breathing method. Breathe in to a count of seven and out to a count of eleven.

Give yourself time to switch off before you go to bed.

## **Food and drink**

It is important that you eat the right types of food and drink as this will vastly improve the performance of your brain.

Fruit, salads and oily fish (tuna and sardines) will help boost your brainpower more than sweet, sugary foods. Water is also better for your brain function than fizzy drinks which have the opposite effect.

## **Enough Oxygen**

Your brain requires 25% of your blood and oxygen. **Sitting for too long and your brain starts to switch off.** Simply by standing up you increase the blood flow to the brain by 15%. Exercise oxygenates the brain; therefore, try to do some exercise in between revision sessions.

## **Belief**

Henry Ford once said "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you are probably right". If you say that you can't do something often enough your brain starts to believe it. You need to have a positive frame of mind to do well in exams.

Try **visualising** pictures of yourself being successful. Famous athletes such as Johnny Wilkinson visualise themselves being successful. So Johnny visualises himself kicking the ball over the posts. They do not focus on failure.

Don't spend your life comparing yourself with other people as you will always find people who are better or worse than you. Be clear about what you want from your life, what you want to achieve and say to yourself **you can**.

## **PRACTICAL WAYS PARENTS CAN HELP**

1. Encourage your child to attend all extra revision sessions;
2. Help your child to write a revision timetable;
3. Monitor the use of the revision notebooks;
4. Provide a quiet, well lit working space;
5. Encourage your child to have a healthy lifestyle, including 8 hours sleep per night;
6. Be sensitive to the pressure and stress that your teenager may be experiencing. Encourage them to speak to you about it;
7. Make sure that time is built in for exercise and recreation;
8. Respect their growing independence. Ask them how you can best support them.

### **Finally**

All of the staff at Tanfield are here to support you and your child in this challenging year. There are:

- Revision classes;
- Revision materials;
- Learning conversations between your child and their tutor;
- Parents evenings and
- Trial examinations

in place to help your child to achieve their best.

### **Contact Us**

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact year managers, or any of your child's teachers.