

Revision Techniques

Simple Revision

The simplest form of revision is writing up your notes from lessons: write them out again and try to summarise or bullet-point key facts, figures and concepts.

Just by doing this you are reminding yourself of what you have learnt and reconnecting with that knowledge. Eventually, you should be able to cover your notes and write out entire pages from memory. If your exam is going to be hand-written, it makes sense to carry out this process in hand-writing.

"I rarely write things by hand, so I always handwrite my revision notes to get my hands used to writing for long periods of time ready for the exam."

Reviewing what you know

You've studied the material during the module so it's in your memory. Here are some ways you can learn to retrieve what you already know.

- Try to recall what you know, don't just re-read your study material. Spend time recalling what you can. Have a go at answering a question. Go through your materials again to fill in any gaps, then try a question again.
- When you go back through your materials, don't read everything. Flick through introductions, summaries of sections, the headings on contents pages, learning outcomes, main headings. Try to recall things first, but if you find you don't remember or understand something, read in a little more depth.
- Write brief notes on topics, using examples from your study materials. Then test yourself on them.
- Test with others in a group - write questions for each other and share them.

Work your memory hard by reminding yourself regularly what you've learned. You retain more at the beginning and end of a revision session, so try using these times to review what you learned last study session or what you've just learned.

Write parts of a question

This gives you the chance to become comfortable with the types of question you'll find, the themes and focus of the exam, and how the paper is organised. You don't have to give full answers to every question when you're revising. It's also useful to

- write introductions and conclusions
- do outline planning for the whole answer
- list key points to mention, including those for short answer questions.

Make associations

Learn to link topics and ideas together. Try:

- using themes or concepts to link different case studies, arguments and topics
- visual techniques
- word association techniques
- repetition: re-drawing, re-reading, re-writing, re-listening or repeating things aloud.

Use key words and phrases

These can become prompts to your memory in the exam: ensure that you really understand what they mean and can associate some module examples with them. Also use elements of the module, such as introductions, summaries and key questions. Note whether there are alternative ways of looking at a concept that are covered in your module.

Make audio recordings

Record audio notes of key points, perhaps short quotes or unit summaries that you've made notes on, then play them when you have a chance. Some students find module concepts or facts stick in their minds if they hear rather than read them.

Use mnemonics

Mnemonics can help you remember factual material, as you'll see from these examples. Develop one or two for your own subject.

Acronyms

Useful for sequences or lists: here's an example for remembering the system of classification in biology:

- **K**ingdom, **P**hylum, **C**lass, **O**rders, **F**amily, **G**enus, **S**pecies
- **K**ids **P**refer **C**heese **O**ver **F**ried **G**reen **S**pinach.

Spelling acronyms

RHYTHM: **R**hythm **H**elps **Y**our **T**wo **H**ips **M**ove

Rhymes

30 days hath September, April, June and November

Spelling associations

stationary (not moving) - **a** as in **automobile**
stationery (papers) - **e** as in **envelope**

Define things

Make sure you know the meaning of important words or specialised terminology. Write two or three sentences to define a process, argument or theory, and then add a module example and a diagram if relevant. If your module has a glossary of terms then include that in your revision

Visual techniques

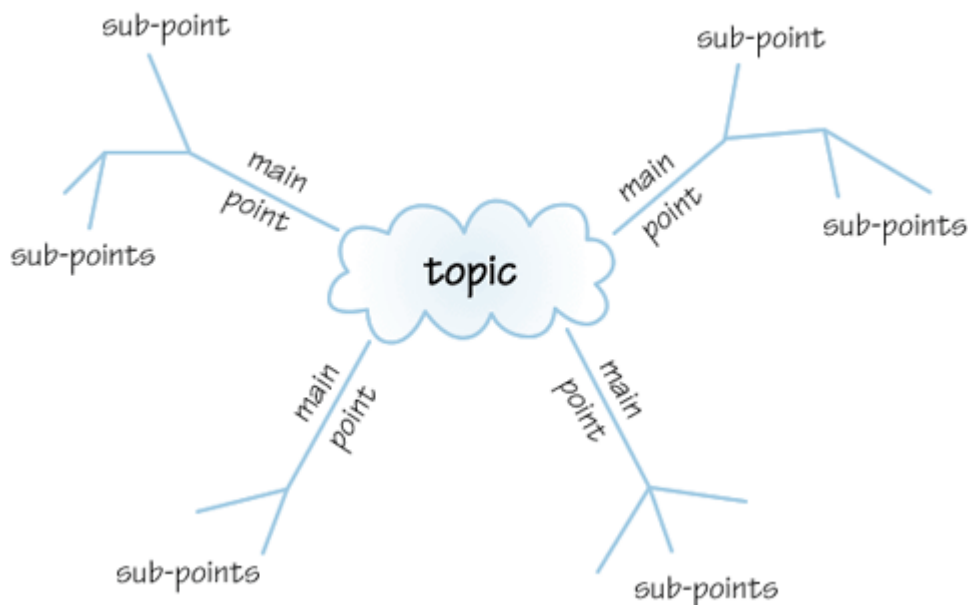
Developing visual material can help your recall and also be a quick way to show lots of information. Visualisation helps you remember (like when we try to picture where we've parked our car, and what's in our cupboards when writing a shopping list).

You can create diagrams and visual aids depicting your module materials and put them up around the house so that you are constantly reminded of your learning.

Mind maps

Mind maps help you to generate ideas and make associations. They can also act as a powerful memory aid in an examination because they are visual.

Mind maps show the relationships between component topics within an overall subject area.



The main principles are as follows.

- Note down points in a spray pattern, starting from the centre and working outwards.
- Keep your points brief – use key words, authors, theories or processes.
- Use lines to show connections between things.
- Be prepared to re-work the map until you are happy with the organisation.
- Include colour, symbols and pictures to make it more memorable.

Try searching the internet for free mind map applications for your computer or, if you'd prefer, simply draw them by hand. These animated demonstrations of visual tools in Word might help.

Learning posters

You may find that, rather than reducing notes to small summary cards, you prefer to produce large posters detailing key points on particular topics. Use flip-chart paper or stick several pieces of A4 together. Use pattern, colour, diagrams and drawings in your posters and display them in parts of your home where you might have an opportunity to gaze at them for a few minutes now and then and absorb the information. One student we know put them around the bathroom!

If you have a strong visual memory then lively posters really help the remembering process.

Summarising your work

Creating a cogent précis of your studies does two useful things: it forces you to understand the subject matter you are summarising and it creates condensed versions of the subject matter that you can then review repeatedly before you exam.

Summary tables

Use tabular summaries to gather various pieces of information. Summary tables are an effective revision technique and a great way to compare or evaluate competing theories, grammatical rules or examples of themes in different parts of your study material. You can use a table like the ones shown below. Change the number of columns or rows for your own work, but keep them fairly simple so you can remember them in the exam.

Index cards

Notes on index cards are particularly handy as you can carry them with you and review them in odd moments or for testing yourself - perhaps on a train or bus, or while waiting in a queue in the supermarket.

Summarise your topic in a few words. Using your own words means you process the information, which improves your understanding and your memory. Keep the notes brief to act as prompts.

Organise your notes in new ways on the cards - perhaps providing an overview of a topic on one, and then notes around sub-topics on others. Try using colour as an aid to memory.

Revising with others

There is a great deal to be said for working with your peer group when revising - whether with just one other student or in a group, on the phone or online. Module forums are good places to pick up tips and ideas from other students and tutors, and many modules have tutorials or day schools before the exam where you can make contact.

Study groups

Working with other students can help you keep the revision process in perspective. You can share marked assignments, revision material and plans. Listening to how other students approach their revision can expand your understanding of the topics because everyone brings their own ideas and their own ways of comprehending the topics. You may find that one person is good at devising a manageable revision timetable while another has valuable ideas about content for a tricky past exam question.

Working together to produce condensed revision notes or to brainstorm answers to questions is particularly fruitful. What one person forgets, another may remember. You are not in competition with other students taking the exam, so sharing revision is not cheating.

Teaching as a revision technique

One of the most successful ways to learn something is to teach it. To teach someone else about a process or topic you first need to understand it well, so this is an effective way of checking what you know.

More information:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/revision-techniques.php>