

INEFFICIENT AND INEFFECTIVE REVISION STRATEGIES



WHAT TO AVOID

Many people, including many schools, suggest that any old revision technique is ok. So long as a child is revising, they are doing well. This is unfair to students because we might be endorsing techniques that help them learn slowly and/or techniques that fail to make the knowledge readily recalled. Looking at the list below, you might be thinking, 'That worked for me!' and this could well be true. However, our suggestions are based on what works most effectively and most efficiently, as discovered by decades of research into the psychology and neuroscience of memory.

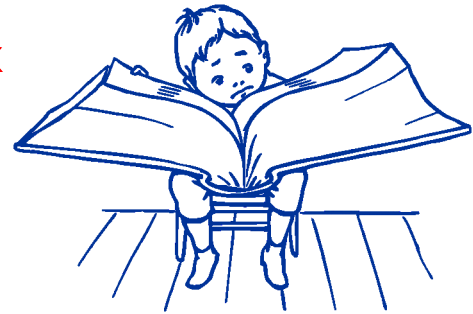
What to avoid:

⊗ **READING A TEXTBOOK, REVISION GUIDE, OR EXERCISE BOOK OVER AND OVER**

⊗ **HIGHLIGHTING TEXT FOR IMPORTANT FACTS OR IDEAS**

⊗ **WRITING A SUMMARY OF A PAGE WITH THE PAGE IN FRONT OF YOU, INCLUDING MAKING A MIND MAP**

⊗ **HAVING A PHONE OR LAPTOP TO HAND, 'SO I CAN LOOK SOMETHING UP IF I NEED TO!'**



The first three are common techniques but ineffective ones – they don't lead to durable memories and don't encourage easy recall in an exam.

The fourth point touches on an increasing burden on young people: to be connected and never offline or unavailable.

Many people suggest that they can multitask (e.g. check notifications while revising), but the very idea of multitasking is a myth – we are simply switching our attention between different tasks when supposedly multitasking, and this leads to inefficiencies.



We can only multitask when one of the activities doesn't require any attention (e.g. walking while talking).

Sadly, **checking phones or watching TV** does require attention and simply distracts from revision.

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WHAT TO DO

As teachers, we judge our lessons according to how hard we made students think – the harder the mental work required, the greater the learning. Revision strategies should be judged by the same measure. If they make your child think hard, and force them to recall knowledge, then they'll be useful techniques.



How to make yourself think hard when revising:



⊕ Instead of writing a summary while looking at a page you need to know, read it, cover it, and attempt a summary without looking. This could be verbal or written down. Better still, elaborate on the facts by thinking about connections to other areas of the subject and how the information fits with knowledge you already have.

⊕ Write questions based on the information to be remembered and test yourself using these questions. For numerous subjects, this excellent revision technique is embedded to the extent that all home study involves quizzing oneself like this. So you'll see that your child has quiz books for a few of their subjects, which they should certainly use to revise with.



Alternatively, these questions could be written on cards with the answers on the back.

How to force yourself to recall knowledge when revising:

The second of these two strategies certainly makes a student recall knowledge, and as such is great practice for the actual exam. The other benefit of quizzing oneself is that you get instant feedback about how well you know something and what you need to remember for next time.

One of the ironies of memory is that forgetting is necessary for strong recall of memories. The implication for revision is that students shouldn't attempt to keep going at a subject in one sitting (e.g. completing a quiz) until they get it all right. This doesn't lead to durable memories that are easy to recall in the exam. Instead, students should make multiple attempts to learn something and space these attempts out over time. It may feel like it is taking longer to get to a good performance, but this is a more effective way of making memories stick. This is also why 'cramming' fails – even if it feels like you've got it all in there, when it comes to the exam it is hard to recall the knowledge you need.



THESE TECHNIQUES TAKE TIME, PLENTY OF IT. HOWEVER, THEY'LL WORK BETTER THAN THE INEFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES DESCRIBED EARLIER, AND THEREFORE MAKE MORE EFFICIENT USE OF STUDENTS' REVISION TIME.



PLANNING OUT REVISION

Many students drastically underestimate the time it takes to revise effectively. With the removal of coursework in many subjects, there's more knowledge than ever needed for exam success.



Therefore, **the earlier revision starts in the academic year, the better** (starting by Easter at the latest would be advised). Students often need some help organising their time, though.

You will know their routines and commitments far better than we do, so you can really help with **producing a revision timetable with your child**.

When helping students with this, **it tends to work best when we map out together their routines** on each day, factoring in things like clubs, eating tea, chores, exercise, social time and so forth.

It is always **easy to help them see that there's plenty of time for revision** in the evenings and at weekends, even if sometimes they have to put the latest Netflix series on ice until the summer holidays!

A good revision timetable won't focus on one subject for a week. The best ones allocate fairly precise lengths of time to specific topics within each subject, so they are a detailed calendar covering the weeks running up to exams.

DURING THE EXAM PERIOD



Obviously, this is a time of high stress for students and it likely affects the whole family. Sometimes students will come home really happy with how they've done and on other days they might be down in the dumps. However, as the surprised faces on results day show, students are often quite poor judges of how well exams have gone! **The important thing is to encourage them to keep going and not lose faith**, particularly when they feel that the first paper in a subject has gone badly and there are more to come in that subject. Naturally, **sleeping well before an exam is really useful preparation, as is having a good breakfast before exams**.

Having a copy of their exam timetable handy, and ticking them off as they go, helps lots of students realise that there is an end to all this, and might help with keeping motivation up.



With your support and ours, every student at Nova has the opportunity to attain excellent exam results.

In the exam hall, it's up to them but they'll be in a better place to do well knowing we're all behind them.



BEST OF LUCK



Please email any concerns/queries to Phil Wilson (Assistant Headteacher)

P.wilson@novahreodacademy.org.uk