

1. REDUCING YOUR NOTES

Cue Cards

Note or cue cards are always handy for when you're out and about. List definitions and rules, you need to know. Or write key words from which you can fill in the gaps to tell the whole story.

These are also handy for learning language vocabulary. Once filled in, these cards will allow you to reclaim time that would otherwise be wasted - on the bus, in the queue at the supermarket - there's no limit.

Mind Maps/Spider Diagrams

Take a topic, and list the main topics/themes. For each theme list the main points, definitions, key words and examples. The aim is to have a single piece of paper (A3 or A4) for each topic. You will not be able to write down everything, so prioritise the key information.

Diagrams, Tables and Timelines

Some subjects allow you to display key information in a different format, especially useful when you are trying to make sense of a series of events (if displayed chronologically). You can also try this for a specific character in a story/plot, you can show their involvement, impact and influence throughout the play/text. For pictures it is said "A picture paints a thousand words" ... enough said. Tables are very useful for displaying the key information and showing possible relationships between the information.

AIM:

The aim is to reduce the sheer volume of notes you are revising from. This will allow you to save time in the precious weeks and days just before your exams.

TIPS:

- Start Early – this is not something to try and start the night before the examination.
- Be organized – you can only successfully do this if you have all the classnotes to start with.

HOW TO START:

Pick a subject and select a particular topic. Using your class notes reduce the amount of words, by using one or two of the methods listed (left).

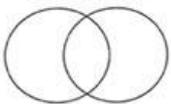
2. VISUAL ORGANISERS

Visual or Graphic Organisers

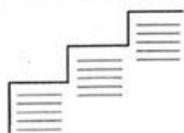
A picture paints a thousand words...well this is kind of similar. For subjects where there are processes or key events in chronological order or obvious links and relationships a graphic organiser can be a welcome break from lots of written text.

You need to reconstruct your revised topics and make the links or connections as you go. Below are a few examples, I'm sure you're familiar with one or two of them already.

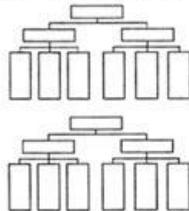
Venn Diagram



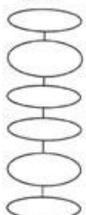
Sequential Thinking Model



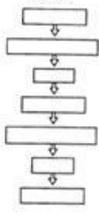
Sequential Thinking Model



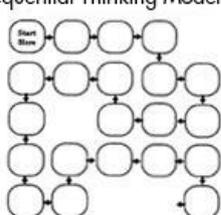
Chain



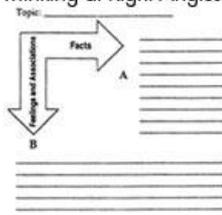
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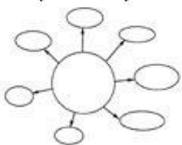
Sequential Thinking Model



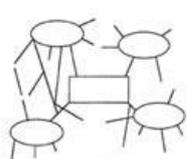
Thinking at Right Angles



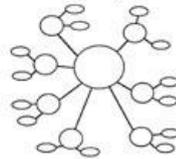
Spider Map



Web



Mind Map



AIM:

The aim is to complete some active revision, where we get away from simply reading our notes or colouring in with a highlighter.

TIPS:

- Stick to subjects and topics where there are obvious links.
- Science
- History
- English – characters/plot
- PE

HOW TO START:

Either compare and contrast using a simple Venn Diagram or try a series of events through a Chain.

You might want to use a reduced version of your class notes to get you started.

You can always add more details later in a different colour.

We remember information better when we have taken an active part in producing it, rather than it being given to us – can you do the same using one of these models?

3. REWRITING YOUR NOTES

Cornell Note Taking

This technique takes more time, but is incredibly valuable for subjects that have lots of content to learn. Divide a piece of A4 paper as shown in the diagram below. Under the notes section, rewrite the main notes from your class books but be careful to only extract the key information (thus reducing the amount of information you are trying to process). Under the cues section, add quick and simple memory joggers, such as key terms, formulas, examples and dates/places/people. Finally, in the summary section reduce the notes section even more to include a maximum of 5 key points.

The Cornell Method



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Notes

This is the section where you should take your notes during the course of the lecture. Use bullets, sentences, short-hand, etc.

Cues

Questions, main points, visual clues, and other clues that jog your memory go here. Fill this section in after class.

Summary

Most important points and main ideas go here. Fill in this section after class when you are in the reviewing process.

AIM:

The aim is to provide a robust system for making notes. This method will both condense and organise your notes.

TIPS:

Use the cues section to act as a mini test, can you answer the questions, or recite the key definitions – if not uncover the notes section and go through them again.

HOW TO START:

Pick a subject and select a particular topic. Divide a piece of paper up as shown and rewrite the main notes using the format shown – be disciplined, only write the key information.

4. QUICK RETRIEVAL

Self-Quizzing - Low Stakes Quiz

This is one of the most effective quick revision activities out there – it only takes a matter of minutes and can be done anywhere and anytime. Simply pick a subject, pick a topic and write down 10 quick retrieval (basic facts) questions. Aim to retrieve the key facts and information; such as dates, names, places, quotes, definitions, formulas and equations. On the reverse answer the questions.

Flash Cards

Not to be confused with cue cards, these have either a single word (topic/part of a topic), diagram or mnemonic on one side, and the information on the other side. These cards can be used in both directions and are great when revising with a friend or family member. Once presented with one side, you repeat from memory as much as possible from the other side.

Teach somebody in 3 minutes

A great way to learn is to teach somebody else. You simply need either a small whiteboard and pen, or a notepad and pen. Then select at random a topic or aspect of a subject to “teach” to someone else. Limit yourself to 3 minutes (set a timer). Want to assess how effective you were as a teacher? Either set the “student” a simple retrieval task (Low Stakes Quiz) or ask them to repeat it back – can you find the mistakes?

AIM:

The aim is to test your knowledge of the basic information. These essential facts must be mastered before you can build upon them and try to apply or explain them in detail.

TIPS:

- Stick to the simple facts; such as dates, names, single events of a timeline, definitions and key terms or formulas and equations.
- Make sure the answers are correct, nothing worse than revising the wrong information.

HOW TO START:

Pick a subject and select a particular topic. Using your class notes write yourself 10 simple questions and then flip the card and answer them.

5. THE MEMORY DUMP

Memory Dump

Think of it as a chance to clear your mind and allow you to focus on what you can and can't remember. You need a large sheet of paper (at least A3) and at least 3 different coloured pens. The secret to this one is to be disciplined and don't cheat.

6 Minutes: Black Pen =

All you know (empty that brain – get it all down on paper – try and add links and context as you go).

2 Minutes: Reading

Now go back to either your Cue Cards / Flash Cards for that subject and topic and read for 2 minutes (no note taking allowed) – put the cards away.

3 Minutes: Blue Pen =

Now add what you've just read but from memory.

2 Minutes: Reading

Now go back to your revision guide or class notes/ Cornell notes and read for 2 further minutes – put these away.

2 Minutes: Red Pen =

Now add the final information in your third colour.

15 Minutes done – you have a one-page knowledge organiser. You now know you need to revise the red pen parts first – repeat the memory dump again and again until the majority of your notes are in Black pen!

Aim to dump twice a day.

AIM:

The aim is to find out what has been committed to your memory and as a result of this, plan your next revision focus.

TIPS:

Have at hand everything you will need:

- Large sheet of paper
- 3 coloured pens
- Cue Cards or Flash Cards
- Class notes or revision guide
- Stop Watch or timer

HOW TO START:

To help get you started, when you pick the topic, give yourself a little structural support by creating a scaffold or framework to build upon. What are the main parts of the topic? Or main events or main characters? Use these prompts to get you started – take these away as you remember more and more.

6. PAST PAPERS

Past papers

Practice makes perfect/permanent* (*delete as you wish).

The single-handed best revision tool a student can use, provided they complete the process fully.

Part 1 – Sit the past paper (making sure it's the correct Exam board / Subject / Qualification Tier) under exam conditions (no distractions) in the specified time. Become familiar with what will happen in the summer, practice your timings, understand what the paper will look like – the more relaxed you are in the summer, the better you will perform.

Part 2 – Mark the paper using the official mark scheme – for good practice make a note of the questions you got wrong and work these into your next Low Stakes Quiz or Flash Card exercise.

You will learn as much by marking the paper, as you will by completing it.

Part 3 – If available read the examiner's report for the last paper you have just completed – this will give you an idea of the main errors and misconceptions made by previous Year 11s and it will also give you an idea of how you fared nationally.

Look out for the misconceptions and try and avoid making the same ones yourself, learn from others mistakes.

AIM:

The aim is to process, practice and refine your revision to meet the demands of the exam.

TIPS:

- Make sure you know what each of the command words really mean.
- Describe / Explain / Evaluate / Illustrate / Show / Analyse etc...
- Mark your own; using the mark scheme (usually available with the papers)
- Read the examiner's report from that paper, to see where the mistakes were made previously.

HOW TO START:

Either get online (start with the examination board / GCSE / and then the subject) or ask your class teachers for any old past papers.

7. PRACTICE ESSAY WRITING

Essay Writing/Extended Writing

Let's aim to perfect your extended writing technique – remembering that good spelling and grammar help too.

The main thing to remember is always answer the question, this seems obvious, but to do so, we must understand the command word and what it means for your response. For example, what's the difference between a Describe and an Explain question. Search "exam command words" on the internet for a definite list and their meanings.

Secondly, don't waffle or give your personal opinion (unless required) – try and avoid telling a story – "I" or "I think" are not useful outside of subjects that require a personal opinion, like RE.

Structure your writing, use an interesting introduction, 4-5 paragraphs (normal essay) and a clever conclusion – as a minimum. Try and link your paragraphs to create a flow which will ensure your response is better received by the marker.

Finally, if you have time, read the original question as you start each new paragraph, this will encourage you to stay on track and answer the question – to help this, always try and either start or finish each paragraph with a topic/question relevant sentence.

AIM:

The aim is to perfect your extended writing skills focussing on both the knowledge needed but also the structure required to access the highest possible marks.

TIPS:

- Make sure you know which subjects have extended writing questions in the examination.
- Listen to your teachers when they talk about how to structure your response – is it P,E,A or P,E,E etc

HOW TO START:

Look at the past papers and rewrite any of the extended writing questions (4 marks or more) using the recommended structure and style.