

EXAM
STUDY SKILLS
for
DYSLEXIC
STUDENTS

Chapter 1: Inspiration

Chapter 2: Goals

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1. INSPIRATION

**“Not in our stars
But in ourselves”**

Interviewer: You were pretty lucky out there today, weren't you?

Johnnie Wilkinson: It's a funny old thing, you know. The more I practise, the luckier I get.

Perfect practice makes perfect.

Proper preparation prevents poor performance.

2. GOALS

It is important to stop for a moment and consider: "Why I am working so hard?"

Only by doing so will I actually motivate myself to do the extra work required to succeed.

What's in it for me??

Tick any of the following that motivate you and add any others to your list:

- Getting a job
- Getting career qualifications
- Feeling more self-confident
- I enjoy working and revising
- Going on to further study
- Trying to please family
- Or a friend / your friends
- Proving somebody wrong
- Earning a reward
-
-
-

**You do not need the whole of your career planned out in front of you
in order to be motivated.
But you **MUST** have some sort of focus.**

Strategies to help with goals.

Make a personal contract with yourself e.g. I will do 5 hours revision this weekend.

If you achieve your contract, give yourself a break or a little reward.

When you train for a sport, the aim is to make the training hard so that the match / race / activity itself seems easy in comparison. The same applies with revision – do it properly, in a well motivated way, and the exams will be much easier.

Remember that success starts with **YOURSELF**. You cannot blame teachers, parents, mates or whatever – take responsibility for achieving well yourself.

“Perfect practice makes perfect.” In other words, you will perform in your exams as you have revised for them. Revise in a professional, serious and well motivated way and that is how you perform on the big day. If your revision is sloppy, your exam script will be too.

Sustained hard work always pays off.

The importance of positive thinking cannot be overestimated.

You have identified why you want to work hard.

Now go for it.

Believe in yourself.

3. FIRST THINGS FIRST

You are not Superman or Wonder Woman – you cannot do everything perfectly, and to set your sights too high is self-destructive.

You need to prioritise your subjects.

What factors might come into this?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Now write down all of your subjects, including paper 1 and paper 2 if relevant.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Now put them into the appropriate blocks of priority:

HIGH:

.....

MEDIUM:

.....

LOW:

.....

DANGERS!!!

Having said that you must prioritise, you must also

GIVE EVERY SUBJECT A CHANCE.

It is easy to start by doing this, but as time goes the “content-rich” subjects like history and biology can take over your revision.

It may be that English and maths do not get a look in any more.

But remember: subjects like maths and English are:

- i. Very important
- ii. Need perhaps less time on pure revision, but need far more time on PRACTISING SKILLS. Do not forget this!

4. GET ORGANISED

We are trying not to revise but to revise EFFECTIVELY.

Off-the-cuff revision, leaving it to chance, is not effective.

Systematic revision is effective – that means, revision that is planned over a long period of time so it is properly organised.

1. Plan back from your last exam.
2. Make good use of holidays and weekends.
3. Think about your priorities list – give more time to your high priority subjects.

Using a diary, wall poster or whatever, draw up a revision plan: see separate sheet.

e.g. Sunday	am	2 hours	biology geography
	eve	1 hour	business studies
Monday	am	2 hours	chemistry PE
	pm	2 hours	biology food and nutrition
Tuesday	am	2 hours	maths English paper 2
Wednesday	am	2 hours	geography physics
	eve	1 hour	business studies

NOTE: There's plenty of free time – it's realistic and not impossible to achieve.

I like working in the morning, so I've put most of my revision then – what about you?

MY REVISION TIMETABLE.

	<i>MARCH/ APRIL</i>	APRIL	APRIL	APRIL	APRIL	MAY	MAY	
<i>SUN</i>	28 th	4 th	11 th	18 th	25 th	2 nd	9 th	
MON	29 th	5 th	12 th	19 th SCHOOL→	26 th	3 rd	10 th	
TUES	30 th	6 th	13 th	20 th	27 th	4 th	11 th	
WED	31 st	7 th	14 th	21 st	28 th	5 th	12 th	
THUR	1 st	8 th	15 th	22 nd	29 th	6 th	13 th	
FRI	2 nd	9 th	16 th	23 rd	30 th	7 th	14 th	
SAT	3 rd	10 th	17 th	24 th	1 st	8 th	15 th	

5 Looking after Yourself

The conditions in which you do the majority of your revision are vitally important.

They are also individual to you.

Circle the environment which suits YOU best:

Silence; music in the background; headphones; very noisy.

Bright light; medium light; low light.

At your desk; on the bed; lying on the floor.

Early morning; afternoon; evening; late at night.

Still; moving around.

And now describe the ideal conditions for you revising:

.....
.....
.....

What are most likely distractions and how are you going to cope with them?

Distraction

Counter-strategy

.....
.....
.....
.....

6 HOW TO REVISE

What follows is a series of hints and strategies which may or may not be useful.

Do NOT use every method described here – this is like the Pick 'n' Mix in Woolworths: try what you think will work for you.

Active Revision

Practice does not make perfect – perfect practice makes perfect.
Face facts – browsing through your notes does not imprint vital facts into memory.

- X you are not using your brain
- X it's boring and sleepy
- X it doesn't fix things in your brain
- X after, you don't know whether you've learnt anything

Instead, REVISE ACTIVELY.

For example:

- *** have lots of scrap paper handy, ¼ size
- *** study a topic eg how aerobic respiration works
- *** try to memorise the crucial points
- *** cover your notes
- *** from memory, jot down those crucial points
- *** look back at your notes – did you get it right?
- *** go over anything that's wrong

There are lots of other ways of doing this – some of them are covered in this section.

Positive thinking

Do not go into a revision session in a gloomy frame of mind.

Be exuberant!

Be light hearted!

Revise Your Revision

Do not learn a topic and then leave it.

Go back to it. Revisit it.

It's like that rugby/basketball/surfing/whatever skill – you need to OVERLEARN.

When I was at school we didn't have videos, but instead we had tape loops.

The thing would go around and then start again, and keep going until it was stopped. That's how your revision should be. Go back over areas, especially tough ones.

The Best Way To Learn

*Apparently,
you
remember*



- 20% of what you read
- 30% of what you hear
- 40% of what you see
- 50% of what you say
- 60% of what you do

- 90% of what you read, hear, see, say and do.

Use lots of different approaches to reinforce your learning.

Bare Necessities

Get real!! You are not going to be able to learn all of your notes.

Reduce your notes to the key facts – memorise only them – these key facts will then trigger trains of thought.

As Baloo sang in ‘Jungle Book’ – “The bare necessities of life will see you through”.

Look at the next two sections to see how you might do this.

Making Notes Of Your Notes

You transfer your tons of notes from exercise books on to post card sized slips of paper, using one slip of paper for each topic.

You can buy revision cards from WH Smith if you prefer.

You use the principle in the last box – bare necessities.

And then use active revision to learn them.

Use colour, highlighting and underlining when going over your notes.

Type your notes out – can be tedious, but also very effective.

Making Pictures Of Your Notes

As Telly Savalas once memorably sang: “A picture paints a thousand words.”

The alternative to making notes of your notes is to convert your notes into diagrams, spider plans, mind maps, sketches, call them what you will.

There is considerable research to show that people do recall information more effectively when it is in this format.

Other things you can do is use wall charts and posters **stuck up all over your room**. These can all be added to as you go along.

Multi-Sensory Techniques

I said earlier about how we best remember when we combine saying, reading, hearing, doing etc.

The greater use you can make of your senses as you revise the better the recall, so here are some ideas:

- Make use of colour coding as much as possible – a set of highlighters are a must.
- RECORD YOUR NOTES ON TO TAPE AND PLAY THEM BACK – AN EXCELLENT IDEA.
- Watch dvd and tv programmes linked to your subjects.
- When you are revising, read the stuff OUT ALOUD.
- Walk around during revision – don't sit still.
- Even PERFORM your notes, as in a play – anything which makes them stand out in your memory. Go over-the-top with it.
- Teach the material to someone as a lesson – or do it to yourself – but do it **aloud**.
- Prepare a powerpoint presentation on the material.
- Get someone to test you.
- You test them as well – thinking of questions is a good way to revise!
- Play different types of music for different topics or subjects. When you get stuck in an exam, relax and think of the music for the topic, and that might trigger your memory.
- If you struggle to recall the important parts of a particular topic, don't batter your memory – caress it, stroke it, encourage the information out.

To summarise:

Do not bore yourself to death.

Be ACTIVE in your revision.

Make your own rules – if it works for you, then it works

7 TIME

It is of absolute importance that you remain completely focused on your revision for a particular session – if not, it's a waste of time.

The most that you can stay focused for is 45 minutes – therefore, do NOT do any longer than this.

Revise for whatever is the best-sized chunk for you – it may be as little as 20 minutes or as long as 45 minutes. It may get longer the more you actually practise.

At the end of that chunk, do something different – move around, get away from your desk but only for 5 to 10 minutes and don't cheat on this break.

Return to another topic for revision.

After 2 hours take a much longer break, for coffee, lunch, watch a programme, go for a run, whatever.

Watch out for signs of tiredness → break, do something different for a while.

Time is precious. Often making use of small periods such as a 15 minute gap in your schedule can be hugely beneficial –

- those 20 minutes between tea and when Neighbours start;
- the quarter of an hour left waiting until CSI comes on;
- a revision tape played on a car journey or coach trip to a game;
- those 10 minutes sitting on the loo

8. HAVE FUN

You probably think this just sounds very much like Andy Lane giving you another lot of old bull, but I really do think it is so important – possibly the MOST important aspect.

**IT'S VITAL THAT YOU ARE POSITIVE IN YOUR MIND ABOUT REVISION.
AND IF YOU ARE NEGATIVE, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO STAY LIKE THAT.
YOU CAN TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO BE MORE POSITIVE BY TELLING IT
SO!**

Some hints:

- i. "It's great to be revising because it's a break from school routine."
- ii. "It's great to be revising because I'm in charge and not the teacher."
- iii. Think of your overall goals and how this revision will help you achieve them.
- iv. Revise in constant bursts – have a break [have a Kit-Kat].
- v. Use active revision not passive [sleepy] revision.
- vi. Revise in an environment which suits your learning - lying down, dim light, the Beatles playing quietly in the background.
- vii. Revise with a friend – test each other – form a study group but don't let it become a social.
- viii. Set achievable goals for each day.
Feel good about achieving your goals – congratulate yourself.
Be successful over a few days and feel really good about yourself.
Reward yourself.
Better still, get your parents to reward you.
Buy that Tamla Motown 60's compilation CD you've wanted for ages
or get your parents to buy it for you.

Believe it or not, revision can be fun.

9 LEARNING FROM YOUR MOCKS.

Questions to ask yourselves about the trial exams which may suggest areas to work at:

- Did you finish?
- Did you make the right choices in optional questions?
- Did you misunderstand questions?
- Did you plan your answers?
- Did you include too much detail?
- Or too little detail?
- Did you do enough revision?
- Did you make careless errors?
- Did you panic under pressure?
- Did you read the instructions properly?
- Were you happy with specialist vocabulary – contrast, define, demonstrate, illustrate etc.?

10 STRESS

What are we talking about?

Revising for and actually doing GCSE's or A-levels puts everyone under pressure.

You must expect to feel some degree of stress – that is absolutely normal.

In fact, it helps us to perform at our best.

It only becomes a problem when stress becomes distress

But you can do a lot to stop it happening

And to get rid of it if you do begin to suffer.

Morale.

Your attitude to what you are doing is very important.

Positive thinking can help enormously.

Thinking that you are going to revise well and perform well works!

You can actually work on your positive thinking

By talking to yourself in positive ways.

Do not let negative thoughts enter your head.

Scream at them out aloud – “Buzz off. I am not going to think like that. I am going to do well.”

Feel good about things you achieve – “Well done, Andy. That was a spare half an hour which I was going to waste but I used it well. Good work!”

Take action!

If things do start to get on top of you during revision or in an examination –
TAKE ACTION!

Do not let the problem drown you. Stop feeling sorry for yourself! Don't blame someone else.

Get off your backside and do something about!

Analyse the problem and come up with a strategy for overcoming it.

Talk to someone about the problem – don't bottle it up inside.

A healthy body.

You will be taxing your brain considerably over the next few months but it is vital you keep your body in good condition too – then the brain works at its best.

- a. Exercise: You should try to exercise gently throughout the revision and exam period. It's now well known that the release of hormones during exercise stimulates the brain. Also, it gets rid of your frustrations. After a tough exam, go for a gentle jog and at some stage scream at the top of your voice – it helps! On the other hand, your exercise should not be flat out during the exam period. That will add to your stress rather than easing it.
- b. Diet: Try to eat healthily, especially fruit, vegetables and good carbohydrate foods such as bread, pasta, rice. Try to avoid junk food as much as you can. And do not go on an actual diet during the exams – leave that until afterwards.
- c. Sleep: Make sure you are getting 7-8 hours of sleep so that your body has time to recover. Rest is as important as work. Also, you cannot work all the time – relax as well!

Helping Concentration.

A lot of people find it difficult to concentrate during revision and even during a long exam. Try this to help train your concentration.

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Breathe steadily.

Concentrate on one thing in the room or wherever you happen to be eg. a light bulb.

Concentrate on that item for one minute – don't let your attention wander.

If you can't do this, do it for say 20 seconds and as you get better, increase the time.

Then pull the focus of your concentration out on to the room as a whole for one minute and don't let any other thoughts come in.

After one minute, again refocus on the one thing in particular.

As you get better, you can try it in more distracting circumstances, such as with the tv on, or in a crowded room etc.

It does work!

## Exam Panic

This can happen in an exam, either because of general pressure or something more specific, such as not knowing the answer, not being able to remember even though you know the answer or because you can't concentrate.

There are things you can do to stop it, but the vital thing is TO DO SOMETHING – don't just give in to it.

Here are some ideas – they are also helpful in relaxing you at the start of an exam.

- i. Do something very basic – write your name and address, names of your family etc. This should help you steady your nerves so that you can get on.
- ii. Try to encourage and caress the answer out of your memory, rather than getting angry with yourself.
- iii. Think of your classroom or the music you played during revision – that may trigger a memory.
- iv. Try a burst of concentration focus, as explained above.
- v. This works really well in any stressful situation – I've tried it and it works. It's used by top class athletes before they perform to steady themselves. All you have to do is breathe deeply, but do NOT allow your shoulders to lift up as you breathe in. Try 5 deep breaths.
- vi. Visualisation. Close your eyes and visualise something that gives you good feelings. Ideas are:
  - picture yourself being very calm
  - picture yourself being successful, for example walking out of the exam hall having done well
  - picture a quiet, peaceful place which relaxes you.

You do need to practise these a little before the exams – find out which works for you.

# **11 ON THE DAY.**

1. Do a good stint of solid revision the night before ....
2. But don't overdo it.
3. Make sure the night before that you are properly equipped – pens, calculator etc.
4. GET A GOOD NIGHT OF SLEEP.
5. Eat a good breakfast or lunch – don't starve or your blood sugars will drop and this could cause concentration and stamina problems.
6. Go to the toilet!
7. Get to the exam hall in plenty of time – not too early but definitely not so that you have to rush. It's vital that the only thing you have to worry about is the exam itself. Don't give yourself extra nervous tension.
8. Try not to talk about the exam beforehand.
9. Don't post mortem the exam with your mates afterwards – move your thoughts on to the next one.

# **12 ANSWERING**

**A. Research by the examining boards show that there are basically two types of candidate:**

- **the rusher**
- **the planner**

**B. and that the planner is far more successful in examinations.**

**C.**

**D. Go about the examination in an organised, orderly and systematic way.**

**E.**

1. Write down essential reminders as soon as you get in the exam hall. For example, in English you will write somewhere in a prominent place – **FULL STOPS; PARAGRAPHS.**
2. Read the instructions and double check them, even triple check them.
3. If it is the sort of paper with just a few questions, each one taking some time to answer, e.g. English, MAKE A TIMEPLAN. This means work out roughly what time you should finish each essay, leaving time at the end for checking. This is vital.
4. Relax, take a couple of deep breaths, stretch and only then proceed.
5. Read questions very carefully – you cannot afford to do this too quickly and make careless errors. You have many strengths but one of your weaknesses is likely to be slight misreading of words. I repeat, **READ QUESTIONS VERY CAREFULLY.** Do not jump to conclusions – read right through. For example, in geography there is a world of difference between a developing country and a developed country – read carefully!!!
6. If you have options, read all the questions carefully. Go about it systematically. Put an x next to any which are definitely out. Put an 0 next to possible choices. Give a tick to certain questions. Gradually bring your choices down to the ones which are best for you.



7. For longer answers – essays or short essays – such as you will meet in English and some other subjects, the vital thing is what happens before you actually write the essay:
- brainstorm the essay.
  - WRITE down everything you brainstorm – don't leave it in your brain!!!
  - Plan your answer.
  - Using a spider plan / mind map can shorten this process.
  - In a 40 minute essay, 5 or even 10 minutes doing this will ALWAYS pay big dividends.

**PLANNING WORKS!!!**

8. Always check your work at the end – spelling is important, but in English use of full stops and paragraphs is even more important.
9. Always use all of the time available. Do not waste it.

In my view, lack of ability is not the main reason why students do not do as well as they hoped in an examination. The 2 main causes of underachieving are:

- i. **misreading of the questions .....**
- ii. **poor use of time .....**

**..... so take time to read the questions carefully**

**..... and make a time plan.**

**..... AND PLAN YOUR ESSAY ANSWERS**

## **13 AND FINALLY.**

**DO NOT PUT IT OFF.**

**DO NOT POSTPONE.**

**DO NOT THINK IT WILL GO AWAY.**

**DO NOT LEAVE IT TO THE LAST  
MOMENT.**

**\*\*\***

**DO GET OFF YOUR BACKSIDE!**

**DO GET STARTED EARLY.**

**DO GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME.**

**DO BE ACTIVE**

**DO TRY TO ENJOY IT**

**~~GOOD LUCK!~~**

**LUCK HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.**