St Mary's Sixth Form

Guide to Revision and Exam Preparation

As Year 13 students, preparing for your upcoming examinations is crucial.

This guide will provide you with detailed strategies for effective revision, tips on organising your revision, ways to reflect on the effectiveness of your revision, and advice on maintaining your physical and mental well-being during this demanding period.

By following the strategies outlined in this guide, you can enhance your understanding of your different subjects, improve retention of key information and knowledge, and ultimately achieve the goals you set for yourself.

Remember that everyone's revision process is unique, so find what works best for you and stay committed to your plan.

Good luck!

1. Effective Revision Strategies

a. Active Revision Techniques

Active revision involves engaging with the material in ways that enhance understanding and retention. Here are some techniques:

Summarization

After studying a concept / topic in biology, summarise the key points in your own words. Create a brief outline or bullet points to capture the main ideas and concepts.

Flashcards

For subjects like history or languages, create flashcards with questions on one side and answers on the other. Apps like Quizlet allow you to make digital flashcards that you can review anytime. For instance, if you are studying vocabulary for a Spanish exam, write the word in Spanish on one side and the translation on the other.

Mind Mapping

Use mind maps to visually organize information. For a topic like the Industrial Revolution, place the main event in the centre and branch out to causes, key figures, significant events, and consequences. This helps you see connections between different pieces of information.

Diagrams from Memory

Choose a diagram-heavy topic, such as the heart structure in Biology or the business cycle in Economics and try to draw it from memory. Compare it with your notes and correct any mistakes. Repeat the activity daily until you can reproduce the diagram perfectly without looking.

Revision Sticky Notes

Write short questions on sticky notes and place them around your room (e.g. on mirrors, doors, or your desk).

For example, if revising Physics, write What is the equation for gravitational potential energy? on one note and place it on your laptop. Every time you see a note, try to recall the answer before checking.

Do a 60-Second Quickfire Quiz with a Friend

Get a revision buddy and do a one-minute challenge where you fire questions at each other.

For example, in Chemistry, take turns asking "What are the conditions for the Haber Process?" or "What is Hess's Law?". The aim is to recall information quickly, improving speed and confidence for the exam.

b. Practice Papers and Questions

Past Papers

Download past exam papers and practice under exam conditions. This helps you get used to the format and time constraints. After completing a paper, mark it using the mark scheme to identify areas for improvement.

Self-Testing

Regularly quiz yourself on key concepts. For mathematics, solve problems without looking at the solutions first. For subjects like English literature, practice writing essays on different themes or characters.

Annotate a Mark Scheme

Download an examiner's report or mark scheme for a past question and rewrite an answer that matches the highest level of response. For example, in English Literature, take a Hamlet essay question and compare a student response with the examiner's feedback, then rewrite it to include AO1 (argument), AO2 (language analysis), and AO3 (context).

Write an Exam Answer from Memory and Compare with Notes

Pick a long-answer exam question, such as a 25-mark History essay on the causes of World War I and write a full response without looking at your notes.

Then, compare your answer to your class notes or a model answer. Highlight missing points in a different colour and rewrite a better version, incorporating those missing details.

Compile a Model Answer Booklet from Past Papers

After completing several past paper questions, write up perfect model answers using the mark scheme and examiner reports. For example, in A-Level English Literature, rewrite a high-quality essay for different themes in your set text (e.g. 'Power in Othello'). Organise these model answers into a booklet so you can quickly revise high-scoring responses before exams.

Create a 'Common Mistakes' Log from Past Papers

Go through your previous past paper attempts and note down repeated mistakes in a logbook or spreadsheet. For example, in A-Level Maths, if you keep losing marks for sign errors in differentiation, add it to your log and write a reminder for yourself. Before each new past paper attempt, review this log to avoid repeating the same errors.

Mark a Past Paper Like an Examiner

Download a completed past paper answer (or swap with a friend) and mark it using the official mark scheme. For example, in A-Level History, read an essay answer and compare it to the mark scheme criteria (e.g. argument, analysis, and evidence). Highlight strong points and areas for improvement, then rewrite weak sections in a way that would earn higher marks.

c. Spaced Repetition

Revision Schedule

Use the spaced repetition technique to revisit topics at increasing intervals. For example, review a topic after one day, then after three days, one week, two weeks, and so on. This method improves long-term memory retention of key ideas.

Use a Flashcard App with Spaced Repetition

Apps like Anki, Quizlet, or Brainscape use an algorithm to show you flashcards just before you forget them, reinforcing memory. For example, if revising Physics equations, create flashcards with "What is the equation for momentum?" and test yourself. Cards you get right appear less frequently, while harder ones are repeated more often.

Keep a 'One-Sheet Recap' and Review It at Set Intervals

Summarise each topic on a single A4 page using key definitions, equations, and diagrams. For example, in A-Level Psychology, write a one-page summary of attachment theories with key studies and evaluations. Stick these pages on your wall and schedule reviews every few days, then weekly, then monthly to reinforce learning.

Use the 'Blurting' Technique Over Time

Blurting is a technique where you write down everything you remember about a topic without looking at notes, then compare it to the textbook. For example, if revising macroeconomic policies, write everything you can recall about monetary, fiscal, and supply-side policies. Do this today, then repeat in three days, a week, and two weeks, aiming to recall more each time.

Revisit Past Paper Mistakes at Spaced Intervals

After completing a past paper, do not just correct mistakes—schedule reviews of the same tricky questions at spaced intervals. For example, if you struggled with a trigonometry identity in a Maths paper, redo that specific question after two days, then a week, then two weeks. Keeping a 'mistakes log' can help track which topics need revisiting.

d. Teach Someone Else

Study Groups

Join or form a study group where you explain topics to each other. Teaching a topic requires a deep understanding and helps reinforce your knowledge. For instance, take turns explaining different aspects of a topic in Geography.

Record Yourself Explaining a Topic and Listen to It Later

Use your phone or a voice recorder to explain a topic in your own words as if you were teaching someone else. For example, for Psychology, record yourself explaining Attachment Theories (Bowlby, Ainsworth, Learning Theory). Play the recording back while commuting or before bed to reinforce learning.

Explain a Topic to a Friend or Family Member

Pick a topic and teach it to someone who doesn't study your subject—a sibling, parent, or friend. For example, if revising A-Level Biology, explain how enzymes work to a non-science friend. If they don't understand, simplify your explanation until they do. This forces you to break down complex ideas and strengthens your own understanding.

Create a 'Mini-Lesson' with Slides or a Whiteboard

Prepare a short 5-10 minute lesson on a key topic and present it as if you were a teacher. Use PowerPoint slides, a whiteboard, or even paper notes to make it structured. For example, if revising A-Level Geography, create slides on coastal erosion processes with diagrams and definitions, then deliver your lesson to a study group or record yourself for later review.

Record a 'Podcast' Style Explanation

Record yourself explaining a topic in a clear, structured way, as if you were hosting an educational podcast. For example, if revising English Literature, record a discussion on themes in Hamlet, breaking it into character analysis, key quotes, and interpretations. Listening back to your own voice can highlight gaps in knowledge and reinforce key ideas.

e. Mnemonic Devices

Acronyms and Acrostics

Create acronyms to remember lists or sequences. For the order of taxonomic ranks in biology (Domain, Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species), use the acronym "Dear King Philip Came Over for Good Soup."

Make a Rhyming Mnemonic for Key Facts

Rhymes help make information stick by adding a rhythm to learning. For example, in A-Level Physics, use "Ohm's Law is V = IR, to find the volts, don't go too far" to recall the equation. Say the rhyme out loud or write it in the margins of your notes to reinforce memory through repetition.

Colour-Code and Associate Mnemonics with Visual Cues

Use colours and symbols to make mnemonic devices more effective. For example, in A-Level Economics, to remember factors affecting price elasticity of demand (SPLAT: Substitutes, Proportion of income, Luxury/Necessity, Addictiveness, Time period), write each letter in a different colour and draw a simple image next to each one (e.g. a clock for 'Time period'). Repeated exposure to the colours and visuals strengthens recall.

2. Organising Your Revision

a. Create a Revision Timetable

Prioritise Subjects

Assess your strengths and weaknesses by creating a RAG (red, amber, green) table. Allocate more time to subjects or topics you find challenging. For instance, if you struggle with Chemistry but excel in English Language, dedicate more hours each week to Chemistry.

Set Specific Goals

Break down your study goals into specific, manageable tasks. Instead of a general goal like "study history," specify "review the causes of World War I and complete a timeline."

Use the 'Backward Planning' Method

Start by writing down the date of each exam and work backwards to plan when to revise each topic. For example, if your A-Level Chemistry exam is in 8 weeks, divide your syllabus into weekly chunks, ensuring you cover every topic at least twice before the exam. Leave the final week for full past papers and final reviews.

Prioritise Weak Areas Using a Traffic Light System

Before making a timetable, assess your strengths and weaknesses by colour-coding topics:

Green = Confident (minimal revision needed)

Amber = Some knowledge but needs work

Red = Weak topics (needs extra focus)

For example, in A-Level Maths, if you struggle with integration, highlight it in red and schedule extra revision sessions for it, while allocating less time to differentiation if you are confident in it.

Rotate Subjects to Maximise Retention

Instead of spending an entire day on one subject, mix different subjects each day to engage different types of thinking. For example, instead of doing Physics all day, structure your revision like this:

Morning: Biology (Enzymes)

Afternoon: History (Weimar Republic)

Evening: Physics (Waves & Optics)

This method improves long-term memory by forcing your brain to switch between different problem-solving strategies.

Set Weekly Goals and Adjust Accordingly

Break your timetable into weekly goals rather than rigid daily schedules. For example, your goal for Week 1 in Economics could be:

Revise elasticity of demand and supply

Complete two past paper questions on macroeconomic policies

Summarise monetary policy effects on inflation

At the end of each week, review progress and adjust your timetable if certain topics need more attention.

b. Break Down Topics

Chunking

Divide subjects into smaller sections. For biology, you might break it down into cell biology, genetics, ecology, etc. This makes it easier to tackle large subjects without feeling overwhelmed.

Use the Specification as a Checklist

Download the official exam board specification and highlight each topic as you revise it. For example, in A-Level Psychology, if revising Memory, break it into:

Types of Memory (short-term, long-term)

The Multi-Store Model

The Working Memory Model

Forgetting Theories (interference, retrieval failure)

Each time you revise a section, tick it off to track progress and identify gaps.

Use Question-Based Breakdown

Instead of passively reading, turn topics into questions to answer. For example, in A-Level Economics, if revising Market Structures, write:

What are the key features of perfect competition?

How does monopolistic competition differ from an oligopoly?

What real-world examples illustrate these market structures?

Answering these forces active recall and improves memory retention.

Divide Topics into Core Concepts, Applications, and Exam Skills

Instead of just reading notes, split topics into three sections:

Core Knowledge – Definitions, key theories, formulas (e.g. in Chemistry, knowing the equation for enthalpy change)

Application – How it applies in exam questions (e.g. using enthalpy calculations in reaction problems)

Exam Skills – Past paper practice, marking schemes, and command words (e.g. analysing a 6-mark enthalpy question)

c. Use a Variety of Resources

Diverse Materials

Use textbooks, online courses, educational videos (such as on YouTube), and revision guides. For example, supplement your textbook reading with YouTube tutorials for difficult concepts or use an online website such as Seneca for a different explanation.

Use Revision Guides Alongside Class Notes

Instead of relying on just one source, use revision guides (e.g. CGP, Pearson, Oxford) to reinforce classroom learning. For example, in A-Level Biology, after revising photosynthesis from class notes, compare the explanation in a CGP guide to check for extra details or alternative phrasing that may improve understanding.

Use Interactive Quizzes and Online Flashcards

Websites like Seneca Learning, Quizlet, and Anki offer interactive quizzes and spaced repetition flashcards. For example, in A-Level Psychology, use Quizlet flashcards on attachment theories to test yourself on key psychologists and studies. The gamified approach keeps revision engaging and improves recall.

Supplement Learning with Podcasts and Revision Apps

Listening to subject-specific podcasts is a great way to reinforce learning passively. For example, for A-Level History, listen to 'History Extra' or 'In Our Time' while commuting to hear experts explain key historical events. Similarly, using Forest, Notion, or Google Keep to organise notes and track revision progress keeps study sessions efficient.

d. Schedule Regular Breaks

Pomodoro Technique

Use the Pomodoro Technique, which involves studying for 25 minutes followed by a 5-minute break. After four cycles, take a longer break of 15-30 minutes. This helps maintain focus and reduces fatigue.

Plan Breaks Around Natural Energy Levels

Schedule revision sessions based on your peak concentration periods. For example, if you work best in the morning, study from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, then take a long 1-hour break before an afternoon session. For a student who focuses better in the evening, schedule revision from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM, with a 15-minute break every hour.

Use Breaks for Physical Activity to Boost Focus

Use break times to go for a short walk, stretch, or do light exercise to refresh the mind. For example, after a 90-minute revision block for A-Level History, take a 15-minute walk outside or do some stretching before starting a new topic. Movement increases blood flow to the brain, improving memory and concentration.

e. Create a Study Environment

Minimise Distractions

Choose a quiet, well-lit place to study. Keep your study area organized and free from distractions. Turn off notifications on your phone or use apps like Focus@Will to stay focused and not continually check your phone.

Keep Your Study Space Organised and Clutter-Free

A tidy workspace helps maintain concentration and reduces stress. For example, if revising A-Level Biology, keep your desk clear except for your textbook, notes, flashcards, and a water bottle. Use folders, binders, or digital apps like Notion or Google Drive to organise notes by subject and topic.

Have All Study Materials Ready Before Starting

Set up everything you need before beginning a revision session to avoid unnecessary breaks. For example, if revising A-Level History, have your textbook, past papers, highlighters, and a bottle of water within reach. This prevents distractions and keeps your focus entirely on studying.

Ensure Good Lighting and Comfortable Seating

Proper lighting reduces eye strain and improves alertness. For example, use a bright desk lamp with warm light if studying in the evening, or set up your desk near a window for natural daylight. Also, sit in a comfortable but supportive chair to prevent back pain during long study sessions.

3. Reflecting on the Effectiveness of Your Revision

a. Regular Self-Assessment

Quizzes and Tests

After each study session, take a short quiz on the material covered. Online platforms like Quizlet allow you to create quizzes yourself on key information. This helps reinforce your learning and identify gaps in your knowledge.

Flexibility

If a revision technique is not working, try a different approach. For example, if reading notes is not effective, switch to making flashcards or watching instructional videos. Continuously evaluate and adapt your methods.

Keeping a Revision Journal

Maintain a revision journal where you log what you have studied, your reflections on the effectiveness of each revision period, and areas that need more attention. Regularly review your journal to identify patterns and adjust your study plan accordingly.

Retake Old Past Paper Questions After a Few Weeks

To check if revision is leading to long-term retention, revisit past paper questions you attempted weeks ago without looking at notes. For example, in A-Level Chemistry, if you previously struggled

with enthalpy change calculations, attempt a similar past paper question a few weeks later to see if you can now answer it correctly. If not, revise the topic again.

Use a 'Can I Teach It?' Test

After revising a topic, check if you can explain it clearly to someone else or write a summary from memory. For example, in A-Level Psychology, after revising attachment theories, try explaining Bowlby's Monotropic Theory to a friend without using notes. If you hesitate or forget key points, it signals the need for further revision.

Compare Test Scores Over Time

Regularly take topic-specific quizzes or past paper sections and track your scores to see improvement. For example, if revising A-Level Maths integration, take a 10-question test each week and record your score. If your results stay the same or decline, adjust your revision method (e.g., doing more practice questions or watching tutorial videos).

Identify Knowledge Gaps with a Concept Map

Draw a concept map from memory before reviewing notes to check how well you recall connections between ideas. For example, in A-Level Economics, before revising supply-side policies, try drawing a mind map listing the policies, their effects, and real-world examples. Then compare it with your textbook—if key points are missing, focus on revising those areas.

b. Seek Feedback

Teacher Assistance

Ask your teachers for help. They can provide valuable feedback and suggest areas for improvement. Bring answers to sample questions or problems to them for review and ask for specific advice.

Peer Review with Study Partners

Swap answers with a study partner and provide feedback on each other's work. For example, in A-Level English Literature, exchange a Shakespeare essay with a friend and highlight strong points, missing analysis, and alternative interpretations. Discuss the feedback together to understand different perspectives and refine responses.

Join Subject-Specific Online Forums or Study Groups

Post answers or revision questions in online study groups or forums (e.g. The Student Room, Discord study groups) for peer feedback. For example, in A-Level Maths, upload a worked solution for a differentiation problem and ask for feedback on alternative solving methods or common mistakes. Engaging with a wider community helps gain different insights.

4. Maintaining Physical and Mental Well-Being

a. Physical Health

Regular Exercise

Incorporate at least 30 minutes of physical activity into your daily routine. Activities like jogging, cycling, swimming, or even brisk walking can help reduce stress and improve concentration. Physical exercise releases endorphins, which enhance mood and energy levels.

Healthy Diet

Try to eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and proteins. Avoid excessive consumption of caffeine and sugary snacks, which can lead to energy crashes later in the day when you are trying to revise. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water throughout the day.

Adequate Sleep

Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Quality sleep is crucial for your ability to think, memory consolidation, and overall health. Develop a consistent sleep routine by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day even when on study leave.

Manage Stress Through Exercise or Relaxation Techniques

High stress can impact revision effectiveness, so incorporate stress-relief activities into your daily routine. For example, after an intense revision session for A-Level Psychology, do 10 minutes of yoga, deep breathing exercises, or listen to calming music to reset your mind and reduce anxiety.

Maintain Good Posture and Avoid Eye Strain

Poor posture and excessive screen time can cause discomfort and fatigue, so sit in a comfortable chair with back support and follow the 20-20-20 rule (look away from screens every 20 minutes for 20 seconds at something 20 feet away). For example, when revising A-Level English Literature on a laptop, adjust the screen to eye level and take regular breaks to avoid headaches and eye strain.

b. Mental Health

Stress Management

Practice stress management techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, or mindfulness. Apps like Headspace or Calm offer guided sessions that can help you relax and reduce anxiety. Speak to someone if you are feeling anxious or worried about upcoming examinations.

Taking Breaks

Use the Pomodoro Technique or similar methods to take regular breaks during study sessions. During breaks, engage in activities that relax you, such as stretching, listening to music, or spending time outdoors.

Set Realistic Study Goals to Avoid Feeling Overwhelmed

Breaking revision into manageable tasks helps prevent stress and burnout. For example, instead of trying to revise an entire A-Level Biology topic in one day, set a goal like "Revise the structure and function of the heart and complete five past paper questions". This keeps progress steady and avoids feeling unproductive.

Stay Connected with Friends and Family for Emotional Support

Social interaction prevents isolation and provides motivation during revision periods. For example, after a long day of A-Level Maths practice, schedule a video call or meet up with friends for a quick chat. Talking to others can help relieve stress and offer encouragement when revision feels overwhelming.

Avoid Perfectionism and Focus on Progress

Striving for perfection can cause unnecessary stress, so focus on steady improvement instead of perfect answers. For example, if struggling with essay writing in A-Level English Literature, accept that your first attempt may not be perfect, but refining your structure over time will lead to improvement. Celebrate small wins to stay motivated.

Take Mindful Breaks to Reset the Brain

Engaging in relaxing activities during breaks helps reduce stress and improve focus. For example, after a two-hour A-Level History revision session, take a 15-minute break to listen to calming music, meditate, or do deep breathing exercises. Mindfulness techniques can help lower anxiety and improve concentration.

Get Enough Sleep and Avoid Cramming Late at Night

Sleep is crucial for mental well-being, so prioritise rest over excessive late-night revision. For example, instead of revising A-Level Physics formulas at midnight, set a cut-off time of 9:30 PM, relax before bed, and aim for at least 7-9 hours of sleep. This helps reduce stress and improves memory retention.

Use the 'Print and Write' Method Instead of Digital Notes

Printing revision materials or writing notes by hand reduces reliance on screens. For example, instead of reading A-Level Psychology case studies on a laptop, print them out and highlight key points, or rewrite them in your own words in a notebook.

c. Balanced Lifestyle

Hobbies and Interests

Make time for activities you enjoy outside of studying. Whether it's reading, playing a musical instrument, engaging in sports, or pursuing a hobby, maintaining a balance between work and leisure is essential for overall well-being.

Limit Screen Time

Reduce time spent on social media and other non-productive screen activities on phones, laptops, and tablets. Set specific times for breaks where you can relax without screen distractions. This helps reduce eye strain and mental fatigue. It is easy to be distracted by modern technology, try to ensure it does not encroach on your revision.

Minimise Digital Distractions with Focus Apps

Use apps like Forest, Freedom, or Cold Turkey to block social media and notifications while studying. For example, when revising A-Level Maths, set a 45-minute focus session on the Forest app, which grows a virtual tree if you stay off your phone. This helps maintain concentration and reduces the temptation to check messages.

Reward Yourself with Fun Break Activities

Plan enjoyable activities for longer breaks as motivation to complete revision goals. For example, after two hours of intense Physics revision, take a 30-minute break to watch an episode of your favourite show, play an instrument, or chat with a friend. This makes revision feel less overwhelming and helps maintain motivation.

Stick to a Structured Daily Routine

Having a set daily routine helps balance revision with other activities. For example, plan your day so that 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM is for A-Level Chemistry revision, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM is for lunch and relaxation, and 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM is for another subject. This prevents revision from taking over the entire day and allows time for rest and hobbies.