

The St John's Way to Revise



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UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE REVISION

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There is a common misconception that revision is something you do just before an exam. In fact, 'revision' simply means revisiting content to help remember it and use it more effectively in future. It's a good idea to get into the habit of revising regularly.

This guide contains a step-by-step approach to revision activities that are proven to work. They are known as active strategies, meaning that they require students to actively remember, write, check and prioritise what to do next, rather than passively re-reading or copying notes.

All the activities in the guide make use of one or more of the following highly effective techniques:

- **Retrieval Practice:** retrieving (remembering) knowledge from memory, without using notes.
- **Chunking & spacing:** revisiting content 'little & often' with gaps in between learning and revising.
- **Elaboration:** using 'how' and 'why' questions to explain knowledge or teach others. It helps learners go beyond 'fact-learning' to develop ideas that can be used flexibly to respond to different questions and tasks.
- **Dual-coding:** using images to help remember learning.





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Revision Planning

An effective revision plan starts early, breaks down topics into manageable tasks, and prioritises the areas you need to work on most.

WHAT TO DO:

Be realistic: Start with a light touch and plan in plenty of downtime. Ramp up over time.

Prioritise: Which subjects are most important, and which subjects need most improvement?

Break it down: List all the topics for each subject and prioritise these too.

Split time: Plan 30 minute 'chunks' with breaks in between - longer sessions decrease focus.

Populate the plan: start with priority subjects and topics, then fill in the gaps.

Keep it fresh: Switch between subjects and topics regularly. Work on a rolling 2- or 3-week cycle.

Be productive: Read through the guidance on revision strategies and plan which to use – mix them up to keep your brain alert.

Repeat: Keep returning to the same topics every few weeks. Once is not enough!

Review: Celebrate progress and adapt the plan if it's not working.

WEEKLY REVISION PLANNER								
TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	TIME	SATURDAY	SUNDAY

There are many apps and AI tools that can help to create a revision plan. You will need to input your subjects and priorities (which subjects you need to spend most time on).

Flashcards

YOU WILL NEED:

- Postcard-sized pieces of paper or card
- Different colour pens
- Your notes or revision guides

WHAT TO DO:

- On the front of each card write a single concept or question to prompt your memory.
- On the back, write the relevant information you need to recall (remember).
- Use the prompt to test yourself regularly, recalling the information before turning the card over to check.

DO

- Limit each card to 1 - 2 pieces of information
- Use dual-coding (pictures) to aid memory
- Include a mixture of simple definition cards with those requiring a longer explanation.
- Test yourself regularly - the Leitner Method (page X) is a good approach.
- Retrieve the information first, then check the back of the card.
- Focus on revisiting wrong answers.

DON'T

- Write too much on each card
- Memorise facts without understanding how to use them
- Cram all your testing into the last minute
- Ignore wrong answers or assume you will get it right next time
- Passively read the cards

The three 'R's of using flashcards:

- **Retrieve**
(remember): you must try to retrieve (remember) the information before turning the flashcard over - even if you remember it incorrectly.
- **Reorder:** you should shuffle the deck every time you use them; otherwise you will only remember the information in a certain order.
- **Repeat:** you should keep the cards in their deck until you have answered them correctly three times.

Cornell Notes

Cornell notes help you to make connections between ideas and develop these into relevant points for an exam, turning knowledge into successful answers.

YOU WILL NEED:

- A4 lined paper
- A ruler
- Different colour pens
- Your notes or revision guides

WHAT TO DO:

STEP 1: Decide on your revision topic and write the title at the top of your page. Divide the page into three sections as shown in the example.

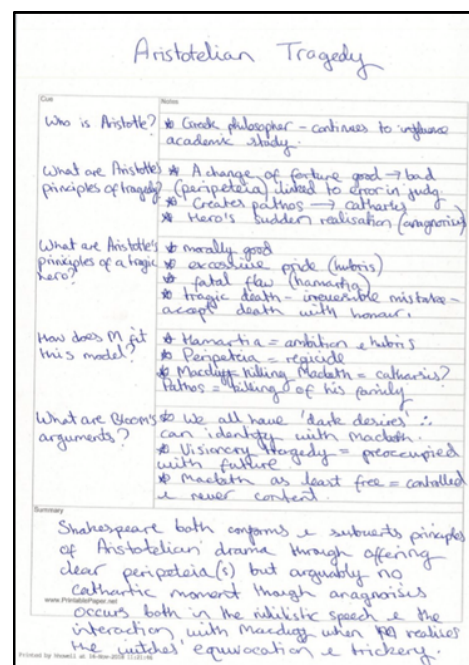
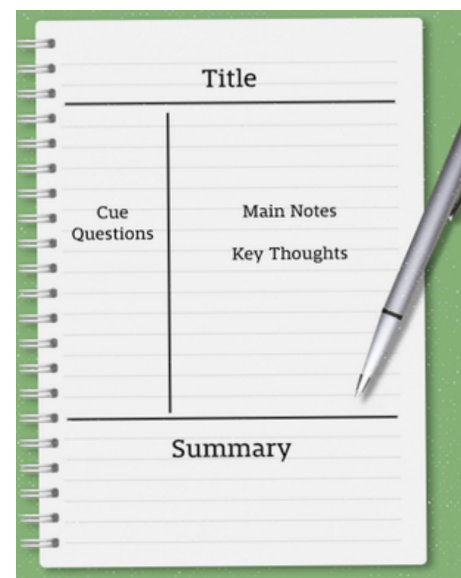
STEP 2: In the larger right-hand section, write down notes **from memory**, then check back against your lesson notes/revision guides and add anything you've missed.

Always add forgotten or incorrect content in a different coloured pen to make it stand out - this becomes the focus for your next study session.

STEP 3: On the left-hand side, write down some questions or prompts relating to your notes. Next time you revise, you can cover the full notes and use the prompt questions to test yourself (like flashcards).

STEP 4: At the bottom of the page, write up your notes in a mini-paragraph, to show that you can 'elaborate' (explain) how your notes link together. **TIP:** You could always add the summary paragraph in a later revision session to space out your revision.

Example



Brain dumps

A bit like a mind-map, a brain dump is a really simple way of testing what you can remember without first needing to look back through your notes.

YOU WILL NEED:

- A4 or A3 paper
- Different colour pens
- Your notes or revision guides

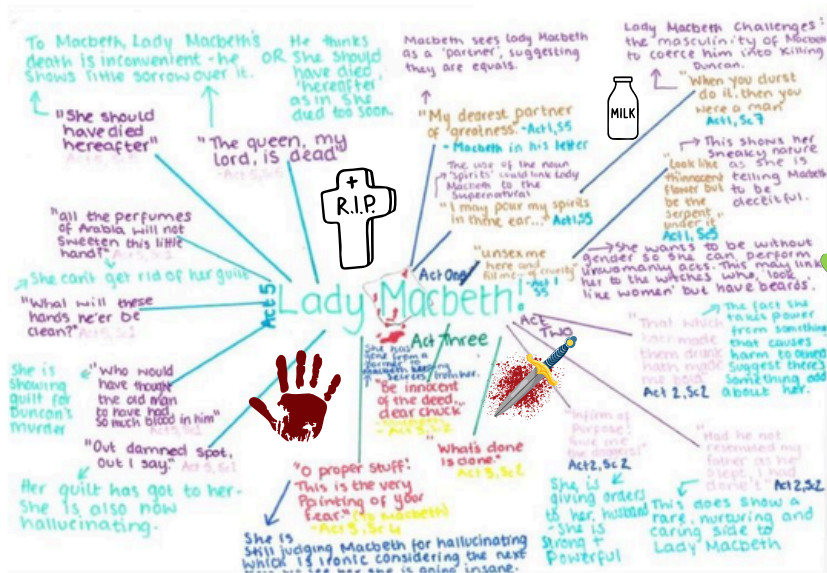
WHAT TO DO:

STEP 1: Decide what topic you're going to revise and write this in the centre of your blank page.

STEP 2: Simply ‘dump’ everything you can remember about the topic on the page from memory.

STEP 3: Check back in your lesson notes / revision guide and add in any content you have missed - **be sure to do this in a different coloured pen because this ‘forgotten content’ needs to be your area of focus for revision.**

STEP 4: Add some colours or images to remind you of the main ideas - this **dual coding** will help to trigger your memory.



Mixed Retrieval

Test yourself on different types of questions, from simple fact-based questions to ones that ask you to link ideas, describe situations or explain how things work.

YOU WILL NEED:

- A range of questions, which differ in complexity - you could get these from past exam papers, revision guides or online tools like Seneca or Educake.
- Answer keys for the questions.
- Pen and paper to make notes of areas for further study.

WHAT TO DO:

- Think about mixed retrieval like a ladder or a pyramid - at the bottom, the questions are straight-forward, but they get harder as you climb up.
- Practice answering a variety of questions, switching between simple 'knowledge' questions and more complex 'elaboration' questions.
- Choose questions which require you to work with different command words, e.g. what, how, why, describe, explain... since these all require different responses in an exam.
- Check your answers or use a tool such as Seneca or Educake to mark them for you.
- **The most important part of any retrieval practice is doing something about the answers you get wrong - look up the right answer, then make a flashcard or a set of notes to help you remember this information next time.**

'Plants and animals adapt to survive in a hostile environment.'
Explain this statement.

Describe how plants and animals adapt to arctic conditions.

What links the latitude and climate of the Arctic ecosystem?

Why might the climate of the Arctic be considered hostile?

At which latitude can the arctic ecosystem be found?

What is the average temperature and precipitation of the Arctic?

A mixed retrieval ladder, based on Geography topics.

Elaboration

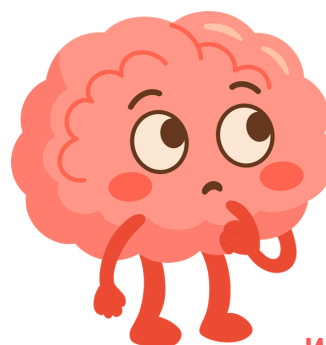
WHAT IS IT?

Elaboration means showing your understanding of a topic by answering 'how' and 'why' questions about it; e.g.

- How does X work?
- Why does X happen?
- Why does it make sense that ____?
- Why is this true?
- Why is X true and not Y?
- When did X happen?
- What caused X?
- What is the result of X?

Why might a plant die if its roots are damaged?

How does the use of fossil fuels contribute to global changes in temperature?



What is the result of Macbeth's ambition?

Why does a gymnast require higher levels of flexibility?

WHAT TO DO:

Self-explaining

You can use elaboration to "self-explain" an idea, by talking through the 'how' and 'why' to yourself. (Talking it through out loud is a really effective way to deepen your understanding.)

'Teaching' others

An even better way to elaborate information is to 'teach' it to someone else. This could be a study partner, your class teacher, or a parent/carer.

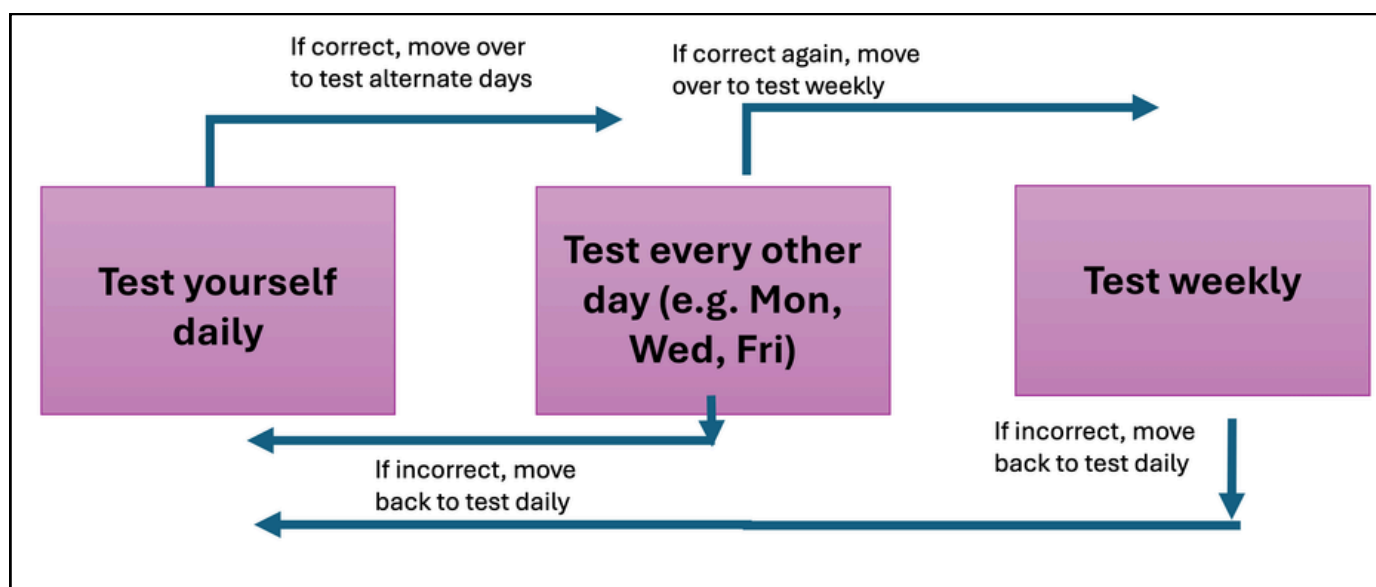
Your 'student' doesn't need to know the subject; you can give them a list of how/why questions to ask you if you need a prompt.

Chunking & Spacing

Chunking revision into short sessions and switching between topics regularly improves your knowledge.

WHAT TO DO:

Use the **Leitner Method** to space out retrieval practice. Use flashcards or notes to test yourself daily then, as you get answers right, space the testing out, firstly to every other day, then to weekly and eventually to even less frequently. **You must increase the frequency again if you get an answer wrong.**



Use **chunking and spacing** in your revision timetable to plan efficient study sessions, moving between activities and topics frequently, rather than 'cramming' one topic for too long. This example breaks down one hour of English Literature revision into several short chunks that switch between topics and texts.

Monday One hour Revise theme of power in: Macbeth, (20 mins) Ozymandias & My Last Duchess poems (20 mins) Make connections between presentation of power in above texts (20 mins)	• 5 minutes - Leitner flashcards - vocabulary and plot - theme of power in Macbeth. • 5 minutes - self-quizzing using Cornell Notes on the theme of power in Macbeth. CHECK. • 10 minutes – craft a beautiful paragraph exploring power in Macbeth. • 5 minute - Brain Dump on presentation of power in Ozymandias and My Last Duchess. CHECK. • 15 minutes - craft a beautiful paragraph comparing the poems' presentation of power. • 5 minutes - retrieve knowledge from Macbeth & poems that I struggled to remember / explain before. • 10 minutes - map connections in presentation of power in all three texts using a Venn Diagram. • 5 minutes making a note of successes and areas to develop from today's study session.
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Practice papers

Using past papers is an excellent way to master exam technique, if you use them effectively.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Past papers or sample papers for the subject and exam board you are studying
- Mark schemes or answer keys
- A timer

WHAT TO DO:

- Choose an exam question or section to complete.
- Make sure you know how many marks are awarded for the question and how long you should spend on it.
- Set your timer.
- **BUG** the question
 - Draw a **BOX** around the command word (e.g., explain, evaluate, describe, compare) to identify what the examiner wants you to do.
 - **UNDERLINE** key terms, themes, or data points in the question that trigger your core knowledge or set the topic boundaries.
 - **GLANCE** back over the question to make sure your planned response directly addresses it without going off-topic.
- Answer the question using the techniques you have learnt in class. Try to stick to the time limit and don't be tempted to use your notes.
- When completed, use a different colour pen to add any knowledge or exam technique that you missed (you can use the mark scheme or refer back to your own notes at this stage).
- Ask a teacher to check your responses, especially in essay subjects, where it can be harder to self-assess your work.

BEWARE OF PAST PAPER FATIGUE.

- Avoid completing multiple whole papers back-to-back as it's exhausting.
- Break papers down into sections (just like a marathon runner would train by completing lots of shorter runs) and occasionally complete a full paper to check your time-management.
- For essay subjects, creating an essay plan can be just as effective for revision purposes as writing the full response.

