

Maximising Outcomes with Effective Revision - A Guide for Parents/Carers

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Introduction

There is NO evidence that people learn better in different ways.

When it comes to revision, what works is retrieval practice in a quiet, distraction free environment. This method is most effective when material is returned to after increasingly larger intervals.

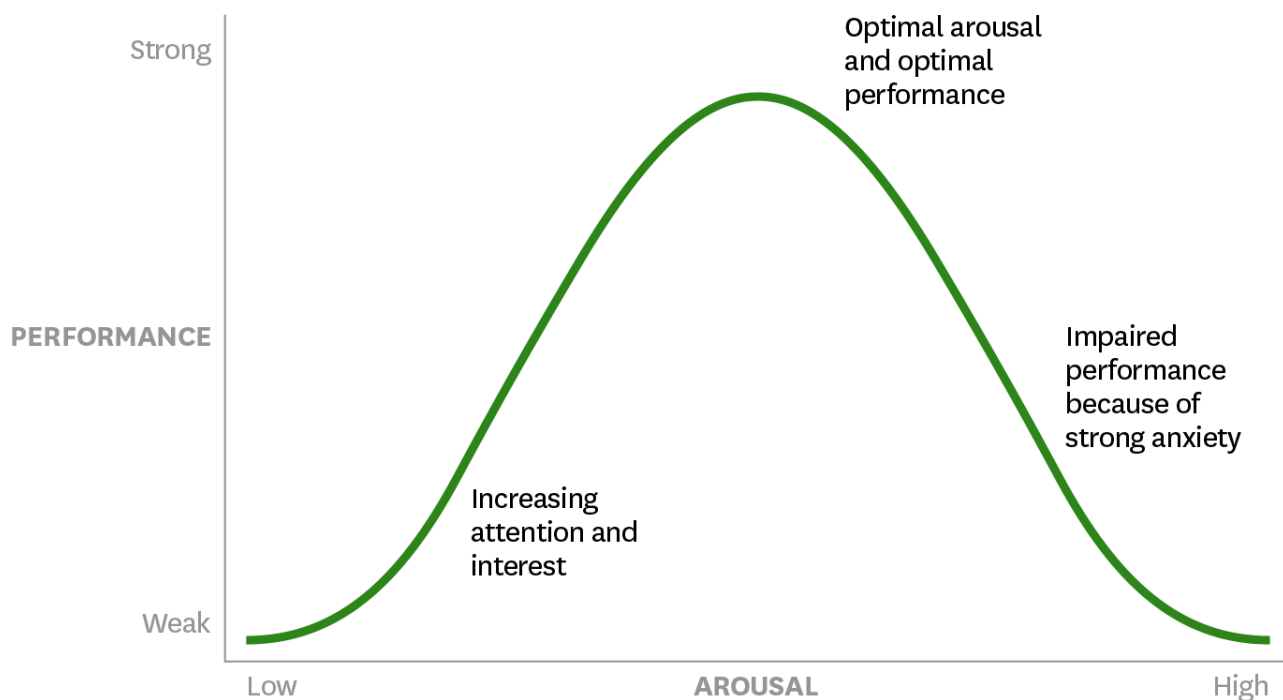
Students should use the methods that make them think the hardest because when they are thinking hard, they will remember more.

It can be hard to revise like this because your child will be repeatedly pointing out to themselves things they do not know and that can be scary – especially at the beginning – so they will need lots of support.

Feeling anxious about exams is normal and some anxiety improves performance. However, too much anxiety is a problem and if your child is using the revision techniques (pp5-12) and planning tools (pp11-15) outlined here and is not managing that anxiety, please make sure you speak to school – to their tutor in the first instance

The Yerkes-Dodson Law

How anxiety affects performance.



SOURCE ROBERT M. YERKES AND JOHN D. DODSON

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Key Principles

1. Motivation

You can learn. You have learnt so many things in your life, eg how to walk, talk and read, perhaps to ride a bike or to swim, the words to songs, the names of friends. What's critical for this is that you wanted to do it and you kept trying. Learning is not always easy but if you keep going, you will get there.

2. Attention

Attention is limited. If you split that attention, then you will learn and remember less.

Students should:

1. Find a silent space to work or one that is as quiet as possible.
2. Leave their phone in a different room; you can check it on a break.
3. Turn off the TV/music; if they really want to, they could revise with some music on but if it has words then it will compete with the material you are trying to remember so instrumental only.
4. Revising with someone else can help with motivation but sticking to revision if you are with friends is hard. Involve a family member with revision if you like the social element; see your friends when revision is over.
5. When you focus hard on something, it is tiring. You will probably be most effective if you revise for 25 minutes at a time and then take a five-minute break.

Students who space out their revision – returning to previously revised material after increasingly longer gaps - will do the best in exams.

3. Generate stuff - because memory is the residue of thought

When you read over notes or highlight key terms, it feels good because it *feels* like new information is going into your head. It is comforting because it reminds you of things you have learnt.

However, research suggests that these methods are very low impact; they do not help you remember much at all. Techniques where you have to think more have a much bigger impact on how much you remember but they sometimes feel less effective because they show you what you do not know which can be scary. Testing yourself is associated with much bigger learning gains than reading information/highlighting text but your student will need reminding of this because it will not always feel that way.

Thinking hard about the material is key for revision as memory is the residue of thought.

How can I minimise my stress?

The basics

Simply, make sure you eat, sleep and take time out!



Limit distractions



Find a nice space
to revise in



The more you put in
the more you get out!



Create and use a
revision planner



Set an alarm and
start early!



Revise, Repeat,
Remember

Effective Revision

Method 1: Cornell notes

Cornell note taking supports the student in focussing on the key information in a piece of text or video. It helps the student think hard about what they are reading/watching and organise the material in a useful way

To take Cornell notes all you need to:

1. Take a piece of paper.
2. Rule across the top and add an appropriate title.
3. Draw a line down the page to create a left-hand margin for key terms or questions.
4. This leaves a larger section for the information (which should be linked to the key term or question).
5. Rule a few lines off at the bottom of the page for a summary of the notes.

Keywords :	Notes :
	Types of Matter
Solids	I. Solids A Have a definite shape B Have a definite volume
Liquids	II. Liquids A Do not have a definite shape B Have a definite volume
Gases	III. Gases A. Do not have a definite shape B. Do not have a definite volume
Summary :	
(Insert summary of lecture after class.)	

Methods like this are really useful for students using videos at home to revise. Just watching the video is not very effective because the student is not having to think hard but summarising the information and attaching it to a key term or question means they have to think much more.

When completed, the notes can be used for self-quizzing by either covering the key terms/questions and describing what the notes say or reading the notes and generating the key term/question.

Note-taking

To increase efficiency of note taking, students might find the following abbreviations helpful:

Abbreviation/symbol	Meaning	Abbreviation/symbol	Meaning
∴	Because	*	Important
∴	Therefore	()	Less important
→	Result of/consequence	Max	Maximum
=	Same as/equal to	Min	Minimum
:	Causes	↑	Increase
1 ⁰	Primary	↓	Decrease
2 ⁰	Secondary	e.g.	For example,
3 ⁰	Tertiary	vs	Versus
Sim	Similarities	Re	Regarding
Diff	Differences	i.e.	In other words
Adv/ +	Advantages	2:3	Act 2, scene 3
Disadv/ -	Disadvantages	w/	With
W	Writer	No.	Number
R	Reader	O	Opinion
>	Greater than	F	Fact
<	Less than	v	Very
+	And	vv	Extremely
Δ	Change	Θ	Temperature

Initially, learning these abbreviations will be slower than writing words out in full but once the abbreviations are known then they will increase the efficiency of note taking. They also encourage the note taker to think hard about what they are writing and thinking hard increases the likelihood of successful recall.

Method 2: Blurting

1. Think about a topic, eg causes of the Second World War.
2. Write them down.
3. Check your notes/knowledge organiser/revision guide and add on the bits you left out in red.
Check for errors and change them. Adding on and editing in a different colour is useful because it highlights the bits you had forgotten/got wrong.

Most students will be tempted to read their notes/revise before blurting, but thinking about a topic even if you remember nothing, is associated with better remembering later on.

The correcting/adding, on phase three above, is essential because this is about the student evaluating the quality of their work and highlighting the things that they missed that time and can be focussed on next time. Students should read the new information aloud as they add it so that they are writing it, saying it and hearing it – all of which will help to consolidate the information.

Blurting is a great technique to master and can be used even if you only have a few minutes because you can just cover one small topic.

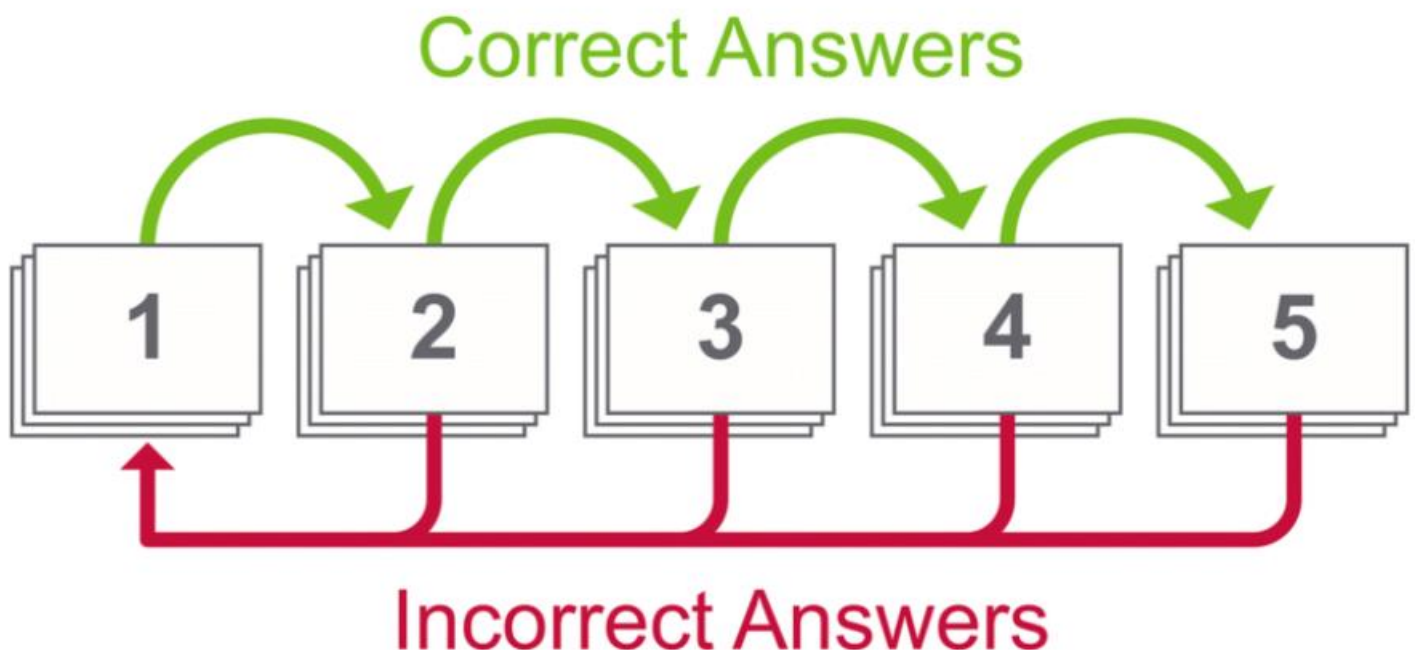
Method 3: Use revision cards to learn material

1. Make cards with a question on one side and an answer (and maybe an example) on the other. For example, write:
'What is a prime number?'
A number with two factors itself and 1. 2 is a prime number because it has 2 factors – itself and 1.
2. Read the question and think hard about the answer.
3. Say the answer out loud - because then you say and hear it as well as seeing it.
4. Put the card in one of three piles. Pile 3 - Know it perfectly and immediately. Pile 2 - Got there in the end/got very close. Pile 1 - Had no clue.
5. Come back to Pile 1 most often but do not forget Pile 2 or Pile 3 because knowing it one day does not mean you have learnt it forever.

This method works because it is forcing us to retrieve previously learned material from memory. Focussing on the things you get wrong skews exposure to the least well-known material.

A more sophisticated version of this system is the Leitner Method. For this you will have five boxes/piles of cards. You start with all cards in box one. Any card you get correct, moves to box two. Cards that are incorrect remain in box one.

With the Leitner Method revision always starts with box one. Cards from box two will be tackled less often and those that are answered correctly will move to box three. Cards from box two that are answered incorrectly will be moved back to box one and so on and so on with cards moving one space to the right if you get them correct and one space to the left if you get them wrong.



Method 4: Mind mapping

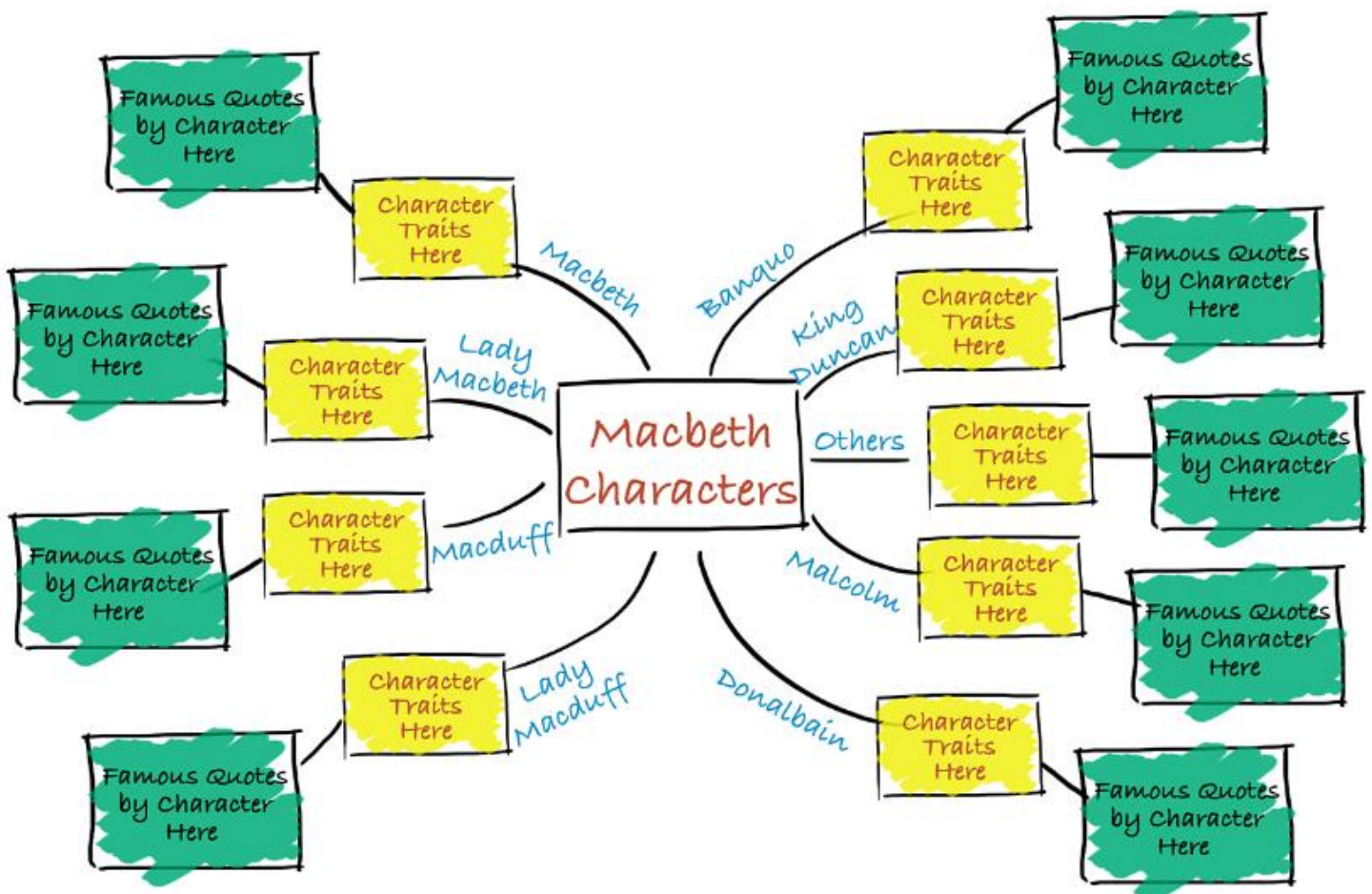
A mind map is a diagram that provides a summary of a topic or idea.

Producing a mind map can help students to organise all their knowledge on one topic onto a single sheet of paper. Images/diagrams can be used to dual code the information and improve recall.

The most effective way to mind map is to try and produce the first iteration from memory (effectively a mind map blurt). Once version one is complete, students should return to the mind map with their notes and a red pen – correcting any errors and adding any extra information that they missed the first time.

How to create a mind map

1. Put your main idea or topic (eg Macbeth characters) in the middle of a page and draw a circle around it. This will be your starting point. This could be a picture or text.
2. Draw branches and label them (with, eg the character name) to connect the central idea to the next sub-topic (eg character traits). Again, this could be done with a picture instead of, or as well as, text.
3. Add more branches as required until all the information on one topic is included.
4. Look for connections between different topics and add labelled lines between them to help remind you of similarities/differences.



Method 5: Practise using past paper questions

1. Do as many past paper questions as you can.
2. Mark them.
3. Edit your answers in red pen whenever you have got something wrong or left something out.
4. Identify repeated phrases in mark schemes – the same/similar questions are used again and again and this is your opportunity to learn what the examiner wants to see.
5. Look at the examiner's report for each past paper and check what not to do as well as what the examiner most wanted to see.

GCSE Question papers

Core:

For English past papers click [here](#)

For Maths past papers, click [here](#)

For Science Trilogy, find past papers [here](#)

For Biology, click [here](#), for Chemistry, click [here](#) and for Physics, click [here](#)

Foundation:

Languages

For French click [here](#)

For German click [here](#)

For Spanish click [here](#)

Humanities

For Geography click [here](#)

For History click [here](#)

For Philosophy and Ethics click [here](#)

Creative

For Drama click [here](#)

For DT click [here](#)

For Music click [here](#)

PE

For PE click [here](#)

Other

For Business Studies click [here](#)

For Computer Science click [here](#)

For Film Studies click [here](#)

For Sociology click [here](#)

Planning Revision

Why make a plan?

Exams can make you anxious. Whilst a bit of anxiety will help your child perform at the very best level in their exams, too much anxiety will not. A revision plan puts your child in control, it reduces stress, means they are less likely to miss things out and is more efficient – because revision time is spent revising not thinking at every session about what they should revise.

Making it manageable

Your child needs to revise everything they have been taught. This can seem overwhelming at the beginning and sometimes the magnitude of the task can put you off starting.

A good place to begin, might be to RAG specifications – putting an R next to topics that seem most unfamiliar, A next to those you remember some of and G next to things you are very confident with. Students can then focus most of the revision on the red areas. Subjects also have knowledge organisers that tend to summarise whole topics on one or two pages and seeing the information in this format might make exam preparation more achievable.

4.1.1.2 Animal and plant cells

Content

Students should be able to explain how the main sub-cellular structures, including the nucleus, cell membranes, mitochondria, chloroplasts in plant cells and plasmids in bacterial cells are related to their functions.

G

Most animal cells have the following parts:

- a nucleus
- cytoplasm
- a cell membrane
- mitochondria
- ribosomes.

G

In addition to the parts found in animal cells, plant cells often have:

- chloroplasts
- a permanent vacuole filled with cell sap.

G

Plant and algal cells also have a cell wall made of cellulose, which strengthens the cell.

Students should be able to use estimations and explain when they should be used to judge the relative size or area of sub-cellular structures.

R

Revision Timetables

1. Be realistic about what time you have. Remember, to be most effective, your child should try to revise for no longer than 25 minutes without a five-minute break.
2. Mix the subjects up – it is tempting to revise everything for one subject before starting on another, but you are more likely to remember more if you space your learning and you lower the risk of having too much time for some subjects and not enough time for others.
3. Think about the mix – revising stuff you find difficult is hard work and can be a bit demotivating. Try to put a mix of subjects you like and do not like as much every day so that you have things to look forward to.
4. Be flexible – plan some rewards and treats. If you want to go out in the evening, then plan to start work later the next day.
5. Make good use of your time. Blurting on a small topic might only take four-five minutes and then the checking against your notes another ten. This means that even with a spare 15 minutes you could do some effective learning.

School day

- Session 1 4.00pm to 4.25pm
- Session 2 4.25pm to 4.50pm
- Session 3 5.00pm to 5.25pm
- Session 4 5.30pm to 6.00pm
- Dinner break
- Session 5 7.00pm to 7.25pm
- Session 6 7.00pm to 7.55pm

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						

Non-school day

- Session 1

9.00am to 9.25am
- Session 3

10.05am to 10.30am
- Session 5

11.10am to 11.35am
- Lunch break
- Session 7

1.00pm to 1.25pm
- Session 9

2.05pm to 2.30pm
- Session 11

3.10pm to 3.35pm
- Session 2

9.30am to 9.55am
- Session 4

10.35am to 11.00am
- Session 6

11.40am to 12.05pm
- Session 8

1.30pm to 1.55pm
- Session 10

2.35pm to 3.00pm
- Session 12

3.40pm to 4.00pm

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10	Session 11	Session 12
Mon												
Tues												
Wed												
Thurs												
Fri												
Sat												
Sun												