

# A LEVEL STUDY SKILLS

Strategies for exam success

What is your vision? Where do you see yourself aged 25? Think about what outcomes you want to achieve by being an active member of Bishop Luffa Sixth Form. Do you want to be the best that you can be? Research has found that students without a goal or vision hit a ceiling and under perform by about one grade. Students who don't have a clear outcome, who don't know their why? are usually the first to show decreased levels of effort when the going gets tough. So with that in mind we'd like you to:

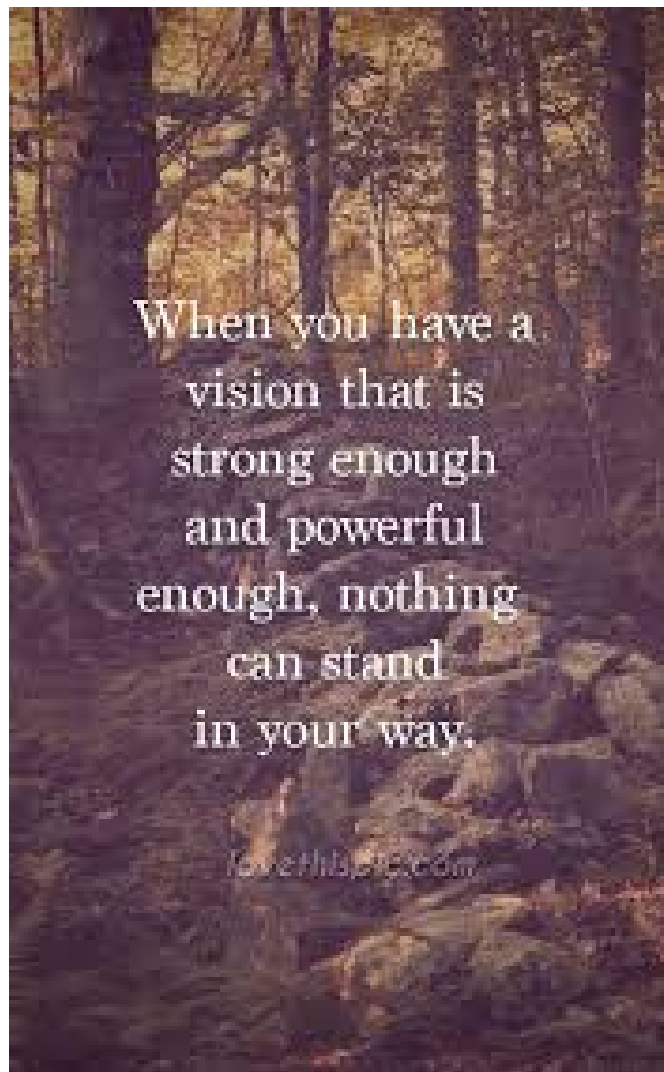
- Have a clear goal
- Make an actionable plan
- Stick to the goal despite any obstacles or difficulties that arise.

Your time at Bishop Luffa Sixth Form will go by very quickly and it will be fun but also hard work! Gritty students are good at both completing tasks they are currently working on and pursuing their goals over a long period of time. The long term stamina required to reach a directed goal will become even more important as time goes on.

Have YOU set YOUR goal? Push goals have usually been set by other people (maybe parents want their son/daughter to go to a particular university or have a particular career) but this goal is not wholly owned by the student. We have to replace push with pull goals. Pull goals are magnetised; they're the goals that will get you out of bed in the morning and keep you going. You'll hear a lot about the VESPA model whilst here at Bishop Luffa Sixth Form - it underpins a lot of what we do.

## The VESPA Model





To reach your goal you will need to figure out what effective study and revision is to you - don't leave it until Year 13!



## Homework Vs Studying

### Studying is NOT the same as doing Homework!

Each A level course is designed so that you need to spend the same amount of time in study outside the classroom as you do in it!! That could be 4 hours a week per subject, maybe 12 hours a week studying in your own time.

Be honest - how many hours a week do you spend a week!?

## Good and bad practice – can you identify it?

*It's the night before her A Level Biology exam, and Jayne has just sat down to begin to study. She takes out her highlighter pen and begins rereading her textbook, marking it up as she goes along. She rereads the sentences that she feels are the most important and stays up most of the night, just hoping to get a good enough grasp of the material to do well in the exam.*

***What examples of ineffective practice is Jayne exhibiting? Why do you think they are ineffective? Can you identify with any of these practices yourself?***

Nathan knew that to revise properly he would need a technology 'black out'. With a little help from his father, Nathan made his bedroom more like an office than a games room during his A Level revision. Each evening at seven o'clock, just after dinner, Nathan would switch off his phone and go upstairs to revise. First, he'd check his revision plan and get out what he needed before steeling himself to do some hard work. Strategy number one was always a quick flashcard challenge, mixing up his cards from his different subjects, before testing himself. Then Nathan would test himself on different topics, with past questions or simply seeing what he could recall with a blank piece of paper, before ticking them off his revision plan. Expecting his usual lull after forty-five minutes, Nathan would grab a drink and a biscuit (or three) before getting back to his revision. At the end of his revision session, he would end with the nightly ritual of returning to his revision plan to chalk up his victories and losses. He would repeat the same process every night.

***What good practice is Nathan using here? Why are they effective?***

## Effective Study Techniques – Be Active!

### Active Study - it's all about testing yourself!

Rereading your notes or a text book has been proven to NOT be of any use as a study skill. The best way your brain remembers things is through repeated testing and by doing this it aids revision and recall.

### 3R's method – Read, recite, review

1. Read a passage from a textbook or your notes then put it out of view.
2. Say out loud all that you can remember (you could even record yourself)
3. Read the text a second time - how much did you remember?

A-Levels demand more than just memorization. You need to **understand** the material and apply it effectively. We will go into these in more detail later but here are some proven techniques to boost your learning:

- **Active Recall:** Don't just passively reread notes. Test yourself frequently. Use flashcards, practice questions, or simply try to recall information without looking at your notes. This forces your brain to actively retrieve the information, strengthening memory.
- **Spaced Repetition:** Review material at increasing intervals but keep coming back to it. This helps move information from short-term to long-term memory. Apps like Anki are great for this! Also known as the 2357 or Leitner method.

- **Interleaving:** Instead of studying one subject for hours, switch between different subjects or topics. This helps you make connections between concepts and improves problem-solving skills. Although it can seem confusing at first, this 'cognitive conflict' is good for the brain and keeps you on your toes.
- **The Feynman Technique:** Explain a concept in simple terms, as if you were teaching it to someone else. This helps you identify gaps in your understanding.
- **Sample essays or model answers**
  - Use past A level questions which require a long answer (e.g with the command word 'explain') and then use your books and notes to write a model answer.
  - Then try the 3R's method to remember it.
  - Then try and rewrite it without using your books/notes.
  -



## Optimising Your Study Environment

- **Dedicated Space:**  
At home designate a specific area solely for studying.
- **Minimize Distractions:**  
Silence your phone, close unnecessary tabs, and let housemates/family members know when you need quiet time.
- **Ergonomics:**  
Ensure your chair and desk are at the correct height to prevent discomfort and maintain good posture.

Your study environment significantly impacts your concentration and productivity. A well-organised and comfortable space can make studying more enjoyable and efficient.

Experiment with different lighting to find what works best for you. Some people prefer natural light, while others prefer a bright, focused lamp.

**Remember:** A comfortable and organised space contributes greatly to learning. Invest the time to find the best environment for *you*.

# Effective Note-Taking Strategies

All the teachers at Bishop Luffa make full use of Google Classroom and so should you. There is a wealth of information there - use it! Look at the slides before you go to class so you can be prepared. Being organised and taking effective notes is crucial for understanding and retaining information. Have a dedicated folder for each subject - don't just stuff it all in one plastic wallet! It won't help when you come to revise. Here are a few techniques to try:

- **Cornell Method:** Divide your notes into three sections: notes, cues, and summary. Use the notes section for main points during lessons, the cues section for keywords or questions later, and the summary section to summarise the main ideas after the lecture. You can buy note books off Amazon that support this method so you don't have to prepare each page you write on.
- **Mind Mapping:** Visually organise information using diagrams and connections. Start with the central topic and branch out with related concepts and subtopics. This can be particularly helpful for visual learners.
- **Linear Note-Taking:** A more traditional approach where you take notes in a sequential, linear format. Use headings, subheadings, and bullet points to organize the information. Be concise and focus on key concepts/theories etc.
- **Dual Coding:** Dual coding is the process of blending both words and pictures to help you remember, or take chunks of text and turn them into mind maps or brain storms. Your brain is more likely to remember as you have made visual connections with the words or texts. This may be easier for some subjects than others.
- **Conversion:** Take information in one format and 'convert' it into a different format:
  - A flow chart into text
  - Text into a mind map
  - Text into a graph
  - A graph into a news report
  - Text into a picture
  - Diagrams into a poem/story

**Pro-Tip:** Review and rewrite your notes soon after the lesson to reinforce your understanding and highlight any areas you are unsure of. If you find there are gaps, speak to the subject teacher before the next lesson.

# The Flipped Classroom



In some lessons the teacher will use Flipped learning, also known as the flipped classroom. Instead of receiving new information in class and making notes in the lesson and practicing it through homework, students engage with learning materials, like videos or readings, before class, allowing in-class time to be used for active learning activities like discussions, problem-solving, exam practice and collaborative projects.

Key aspects of flipped learning:

- **Pre-class learning:**
  - Students engage with learning materials (videos, readings, etc.) outside of class to acquire foundational knowledge.
- **In-class application:**
  - Class time is dedicated to active learning activities, such as group work, discussions, and problem-solving, facilitated by the teacher.
- **Student-centered approach:**
  - Flipped learning shifts the focus from teacher-led instruction to student-centered learning, encouraging active engagement and deeper understanding

*If you don't do the flipped learning then you'll find the lessons impossible and you'll always be playing catch up - be kind to yourself - plan in the time.*

## Exam Preparation Best Practices





### Cramming

The first rule is: **Don't cram!**

When you have exams, time management becomes even more crucial. For A Levels you need to have a deep understanding of the work you have covered. This can only be achieved by good quality study and revision over time allowing you time to go over everything, carefully. You will retain knowledge and skills for a longer period of time if you distribute, or space out, your revision as opposed to cramming. This is the case even if you spend exactly the same amount of time using both methods. Unfortunately cramming can create the misconception that you are more familiar with the target material than is actually the case whereas distributed revision can appear slower and tougher. Do not be fooled! **There is overwhelming evidence that spacing your revision out over a long period works best.** Think of a runner training for a marathon.



### Make a plan!

*Where will you revise? What options do you have?*

- Break up your work for all your subjects into chunks - small steps rather than large daunting ones!
- The size of a chunk will be different for each person.
- You will need down time for your brain to work properly – build that in.
- You will need fun activities to stay motivated – build that in.
- Studying in the Sixth Form at Bishop Luffa is easy and you can find a space that works for you:
  - Sixth Form Library
  - Study Hub
  - Small Common Room
  - Large Common Room (where Costa coffee is!)
  - Corridor Study Area
  - Outside



- Plan your whole week and this should include:
  - **STUDY!** - 4 HOURS PER SUBJECT TO START WITH! This can be broken up into smaller 20 or 30 minute chunks. If you have an hour what will you study in that time? You can do the outside in school and at home.
  - **School social time** - we all need it, but it shouldn't be every study session, you have break and lunch time for that. The more you do at school the less you have to do at home.
  - **Work** - do you have a part time job that you need to schedule in. Are you tired after you've done your shift at Goodwood or at the local restaurant? If you are then don't plan to study after you've finished work!
  - **Are there outside school commitments?** - (Church, Chichester Youth Theatre, football, sailing)
  - **Social Life** - when do you hang out with your friends?
  - **Relaxation** - time to watch a movie, scroll your mobile phone, listen to music, spend time with your family, do gaming - but make sure you have some downtime.



- **Driving lessons** - are you lucky enough to have driving lessons!?

Plan all of these things in on a weekly basis. Plan well in advance of any assessments in class or your mocks - you'll be given plenty of warning so there's no excuse to leave it until the last minute.



<https://getrevising.co.uk/planner> - use an online planner to help you or do it the old fashioned way and get a paper planner! Either way .....

Failing to plan is planning  
to fail. Hope is not a plan.

Harrison Jones

### **Target your work**

***How do you know what you need to focus on? How do you know what you don't know?***

**You could...**

- Use checklists (which your teacher can provide for you) and RAG each point (Red - I don't know, Amber - I kind of know, Green - I know)
- Use flashcards and make 2 piles – what you know and what you don't know
- Complete some past paper questions and analyse your mistakes to see where you need to focus your revision
- Check your end of topic tests or past assessments to see which ones you did worst in
- Ask your teacher where they believe you have gaps in your knowledge, skills or understanding.



- **Past Papers:** Complete past papers under timed conditions.
- **Understand Mark Schemes:** Familiarise yourself with the mark schemes to understand what examiners are looking for. If you know what someone is looking for it's much easier to complete.
- **Identify Weak Areas:** Analyse your performance on past papers to identify areas where you need to improve.
- **Seek Feedback:** Ask your teachers for feedback on your exam technique and understanding of the material.

Effective exam preparation goes beyond simply studying the material. It involves developing strong exam technique and managing your time effectively.

**Time Management:** Allocate sufficient time for each question during the exam and stick to your plan. Teachers will give you advice on how long to spend on extended answers - listen to them, they know their stuff. If you get stuck on a question, move on and come back to it later.

**Answer Structure:** Plan your answers before you start writing. Use clear and concise language and provide relevant examples to support your points. PEEL

**Stay Calm:** Manage exam anxiety by practicing relaxation techniques and getting enough sleep before the exam.

## Study Techniques – which work for you?

### Past Papers and Mark Schemes:

Students often use past papers to plan and answer questions, BUT do they always follow up self assessment and analysis of the mark scheme? The answer is no!

You should!

Mark schemes can be used in several ways, it could be simply to assess a practice question the you've completed in exam conditions. Or you may look to mark schemes to help plan a question you are struggling with. Or you can use a mark scheme as a model, then try and create a different question and mark scheme which follows the same patterns.

Get your subject teacher to mark your practice questions or use Chat GPT to mark the question - AI is good for some things! Watch the video using the QR code below to find out how to use past papers:



## Complete a past exam paper



1. Answer all questions you are able to **without help, and on your own** in blue/black pen.
2. Use a textbook or another student to help you answer any remaining questions in purple pen.
3. Use the mark scheme to mark your paper using red pen.
  - Give yourself a score, percentage & use the grade boundaries if available to grade it.
4. Use the mark scheme & textbook to correct your paper with a green pen.
5. Relearn & use other revision techniques to help you remember anything written in Purple or Green.

Deliberate practice refers to a special type of practice that is purposeful and systematic. Whilst regular practice might include mindless repetitions, deliberate practice requires focused attention and is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance.

To gain maximum marks on a question you need to fulfil all the exam criteria often using specific keywords and subject vocabulary. This is hard when you are studying three or four A Levels and completing an EPQ and are working under extreme timed pressure in exam conditions.

One way to improve performance is to keep going over your technique so it becomes automatic, like a sports star who endlessly works on specific skills refining technique with their coach - **USE YOUR SUBJECT TEACHERS - THEY HAVE EXPERT KNOWLEDGE!**

Deliberate practice is best done in small chunks, so take an old past paper question you may have lost marks on and attempt the question. Before you try it, look at the feedback from your teacher and any specific areas to improve, then practice answering it a few times within a set time limit - this is usually around a minute a mark.

### **Supercharge your vocabulary:**

- Keywords and embedded subject vocabulary is the key to higher grades!
- Find 6-7 keywords for a subject, or an individual topic, using a glossary in your textbooks, in the index at the back or go through your exercise book to find them. If still no luck, Google it (but

don't get distracted and start doom scrolling!).

- Write down the definitions for the words you have found, then see if you can define them in your own words.
- Challenge yourself to use each word in a sentence, then check your answers afterwards.



### **Analysing Examiners Reports:**

This one is a powerful revision strategy, yet many students have never even looked at an examiner report before, or don't even know what one is.

An examiners report is written by an exam board after each exam. It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the cohort who sat it, and instructs future students what pitfalls to avoid and what skills/content got the top grades. They are available on all exam board websites and are best used after a student has attempted a practice question/paper and wishes to self assess it.



### **Model, Model, Model Answer:**

Model answers are either provided by your teachers or they can be found on the exam boards website. Wherever you find them, USE THEM by comparing them to your answers.

Apply the generic mark scheme to both answers and consider how the skills in the model answer differ to the skills shown in your own. How can you replicate these skills? Teachers will go through this in class especially for extended answers.



### Spaced repetition and retrieval practice:

- Learn a topic on day 1.
- Then, the next day, test yourself and fill in any gaps.
- Test yourself again a week later and fill in the gaps again.
- Then test yourself a few weeks after that and you should find that you remember more of the information.

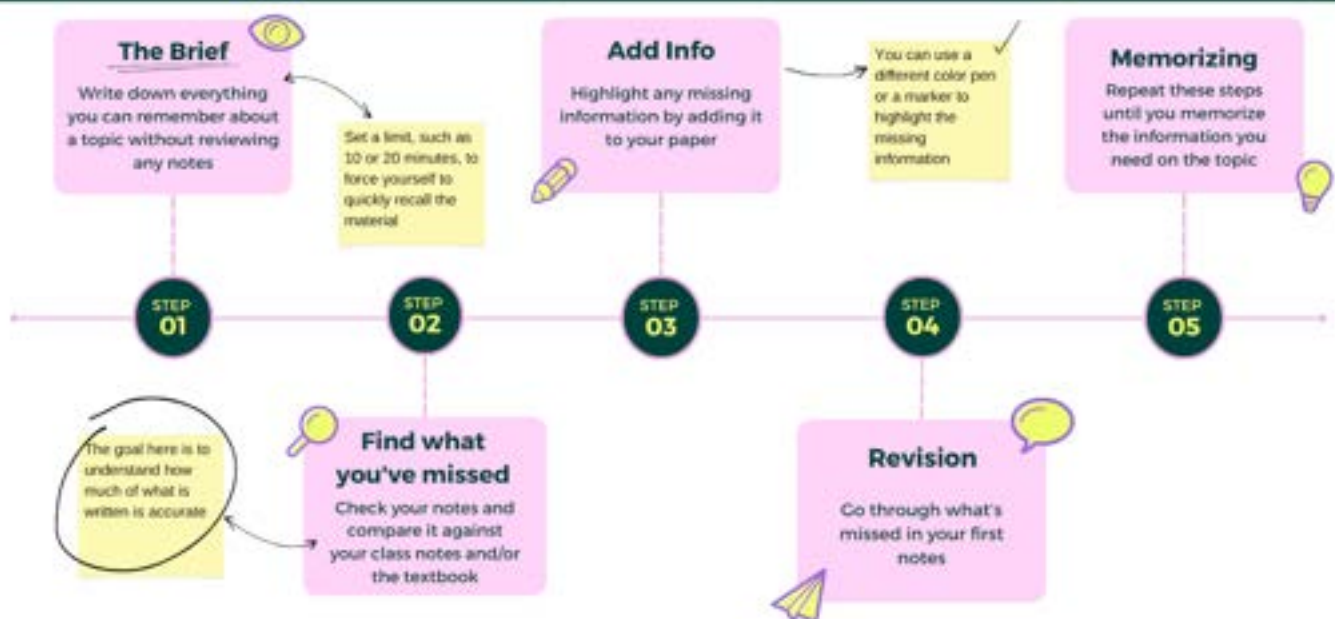
*This is also known as the 2357 technique - 🌐 Spaced repetition in learning theory*

### Blurting:

- A form of active recall.
- Choose a specific topic you would like to revise. Set yourself an amount of time. 15 minutes will do for most A-level topics.
- Take a blank piece of paper or if you want to be more sustainable a white board and write down all the information you can remember on the topic (it doesn't matter about the order)
- Then go back to your notes to find out what you've missed out or got wrong.
- Then you study the topic again, paying extra attention to the parts you didn't remember the first time and keep repeating this process until you remember everything you need to know for your exam.

The trick with this retrieval study is to then repeat the task a few days or a week later (see the Spaced Retrieval or 2357 technique) and see if you can remember more.

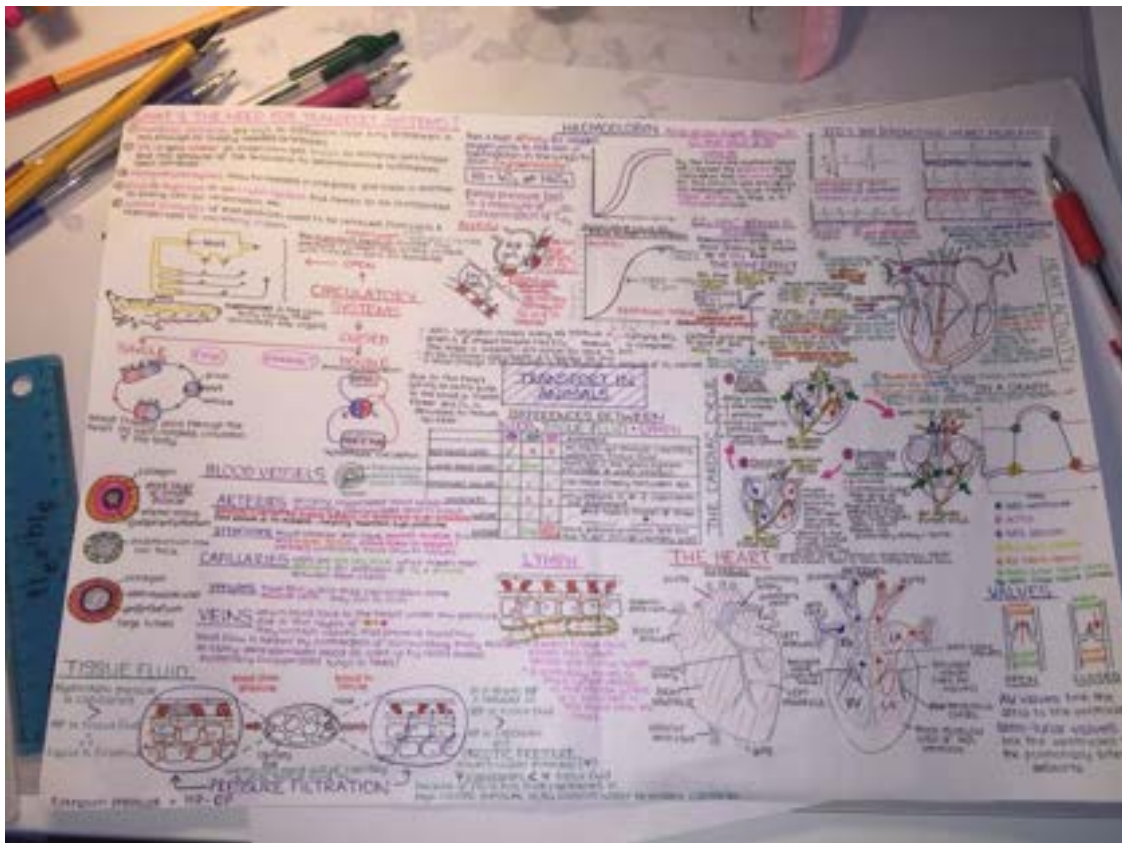
## How to use the Blurting technique?





**Mind Maps:** (See Study Resources sheet in the Study Hub for online and App resources to create or use these)

- It takes effort and practice to embed a mind map in your memory – often **at least three copies** of each mind map will need to be created for the information to become long lasting.
- Each version would normally be more complicated than the last
- *The first version* might be a simple mind map with the key words.
- *The second* might include colours you have carefully chosen with slightly more detail written with each heading.
- *The third* usually includes colours **and** pictures (to help push your brain to make more connections).
- Then the mind map is practiced on blank pieces of paper until you can accurately recall the whole mind map at least a week after you last tried to learn it.



**Revision/Flash cards:** See [Frayer flash card system \(4m35s\)](#) and [Freyer model how to \(1m17s\)](#).

Flashcards are very commonly used but how effectively do you use them? Do you spend longer making them and adding colours or highlighting than you do testing yourself? Whilst presentation and visuals are important, don't spend longer on them than necessary. The trick is to use them whenever you can and as often as you can because they are small and portable. Also, they can be used to help friends and family test you on core knowledge or facts / formulas that you need to memorise.

- One technique is to write the name of a key theory/definition/fact/event on one side and then on the other the three or four key pieces of information you should know for the exam.
- This allows you to test your own knowledge and to let someone else test your knowledge.
- The testing part is essential to making revision cards work. If you do make some revision cards, try to ensure that you use them, just making the cards will **not** lead to that much additional learning. Similarly, just looking through the cards only uses recognition and **not** recall. You really will need someone else to test you.

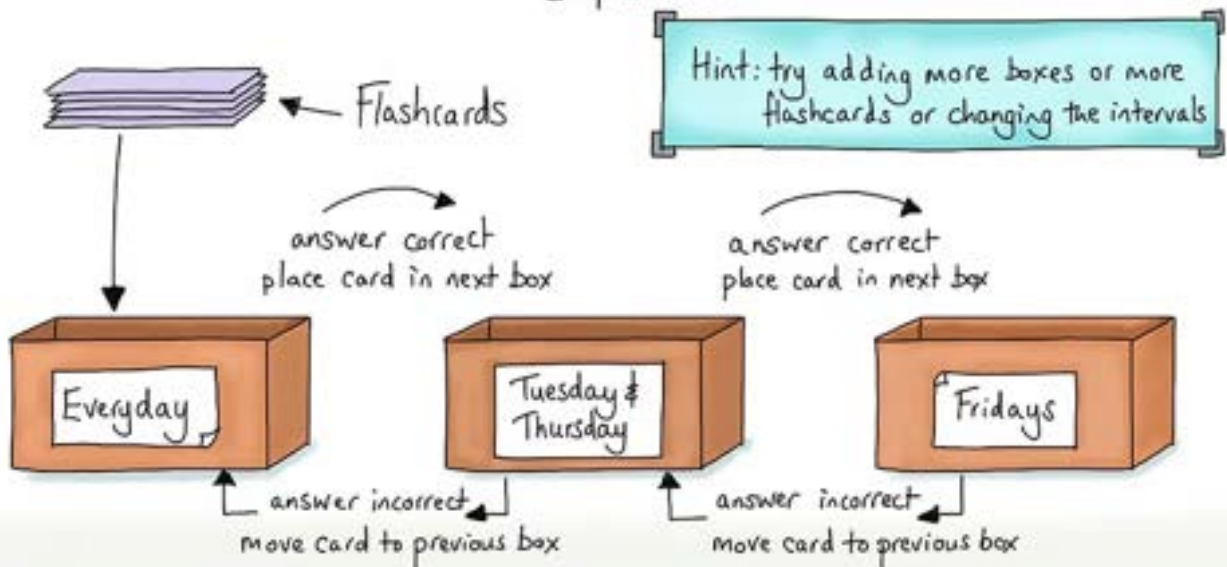


- If you want to push your brain to make stronger connections make sure you leave at least a day (a few days and up to a week would be better) between looking at the cards and testing your memory for the information.
- You could colour code your cards by subject and include diagrams/pictures this is called Dual Coding/Conversion (see separate note on this).
- (Long term strategy or the '**Leitner**' System)
  - Make 3 boxes.
  - Label them:
    - Box 1: every day
    - Box 2: every other day
    - Box 3: once a week
  - Every flash card will start in Box 1. As you answer a flashcard correctly, move the card into Box 2. If you incorrectly answer a flashcard, place the card back in Box 1.
  - Follow this method for each flashcard in Box 1. At the end of the round, you will notice that some concepts remain in Box 1 - that means that these concepts are more difficult for you and require frequent studying.
  - The cards that have graduated to Box 2, on the other hand, are concepts with which you are familiar, so you don't have to study them as frequently.
  - Each time you get a card correct, you move it to the next box. Each time you get a card wrong, you move it back to the previous box. Once you have finished studying for the day, you will see which concepts are ones that you need to study less or more frequently.
  - Follow the same method of study each time you study that topic until all your cards have been moved to the last box.

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## LEITNER Flash card method

@Impact Wales



An effective use of flashcards to prompt & recall learning using spaced practice proposed by Leitner in the 1970s. It focuses on the proficiency of recall of the learner. Information which is easily recalled has a longer time lapse before the next recall opportunity.

For this one - you need a friend! Either at school, home or virtually.

Spend 10-15 minutes writing some questions down on revision cards. You can make as many as needed but 10-15 is probably enough. Use your textbook, exercise book or class notes to make them challenging! You want to win surely?

Then quiz each other taking turns and keep a note of the score. Whoever gets the most right answers wins the battle! Make it fun. This is good for short topics and for recapping what was learnt in class. Try quizzing the day after you've learnt a new case study/theory and see how much you've both remembered.



### **Buddy up/Body doubling:**

Research has shown that if the person with you is working hard, you are likely to follow and copy their work ethic.

Find a friend who you know you can work with, and then arrange to spend some of your social time testing each other or helping each other make resources. As long as you can stay away from too many distractions (phones away) this is a perfectly acceptable way to study and revise and you can tell your parents that the research supports this. You can link this technique to 'quiz quiz teach' and test each other using flash cards you or they've created.



### **Match it up:**

- Pick a topic in a subject that has a lot to remember.
- Take 40 blank A5 revision cards; 20 of one colour, 20 of another.
- Find a specific topic and then write out 20 questions that you are not yet confident you can answer. Then write out the answers from your exercise book or text book on separate cards, keep the two piles separate and shuffle them.
- If you do it in less than 5 minutes, try it again the next day and see if you can beat your time. Or give your cards to a friend and challenge them to beat your time!

**Socratic Reading:** See [Reading difficult texts \(3m7s\)](#) and [How to read a textbook \(7m42s\)](#)

- Socratic reading is a reflective process where you read slowly and carefully analyse the information in a text to see if you understand it, if you agree with it, and to see if it fits with other knowledge that you already know. Write small questions in the text as you think of them.
- Read the text using a Socratic approach the first time and note down questions, links to other topics and sections that you do not understand in the margin.
- Then read the text a second time and this time make notes in your own words. Try to answer any of the questions that you noted during the first reading.
- If there are any sections that you are not sure about, ask your teacher in your next lesson.

**The Feynman technique** See [The Feynman technique \(5m45s\)](#)

The best way to understand something is to make yourself try to explain it to someone else. This could be a classmate, friend, someone in your family or even your pet

- First write the name of the idea you want to explain.
- Then without looking at your notes or books etc write a simple summary in plain English that is easy for anyone to understand.
- Then identify any areas you got stuck on or weren't sure of and go back to the notes/books/videos to review and check your understanding.
- Go back and make your explanation better. Include explanations for specialist terms. The idea is you are explaining to someone who doesn't know the subject!



***If you don't study (or revise) then it is highly likely you will NOT get the grades you want for the University of your choice, the Degree Apprenticeship, the job you want. Give yourself the best chance - study and revise.***

## Summary of Key Strategies

Mastering A-Levels requires a strategic approach to studying and exam preparation. By implementing effective study techniques, optimising your study environment, utilising efficient note-taking methods, and adhering to exam best practices, you can significantly enhance your learning and achieve your academic goals. Remember to actively engage with the material, seek feedback when needed, and maintain a positive attitude throughout your A-Level journey.

If you have a query or you're struggling to keep up, feeling overwhelmed then make the most of your form tutor - they are an amazing team and are there to support you. Speak to your subject teacher - they have the best knowledge to help you. Each term your subject teacher will have a VESPA chat with you about your Vision, Effort, Systems, Practice and Attitude - if you have any issues this is the time to talk about them but remember teachers are available in between lesson - you can even email them. If your tutor or subject teacher feels the need, they will seek more support from the Sixth Form team including Ms George the Sixth Form Learning Mentor.



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