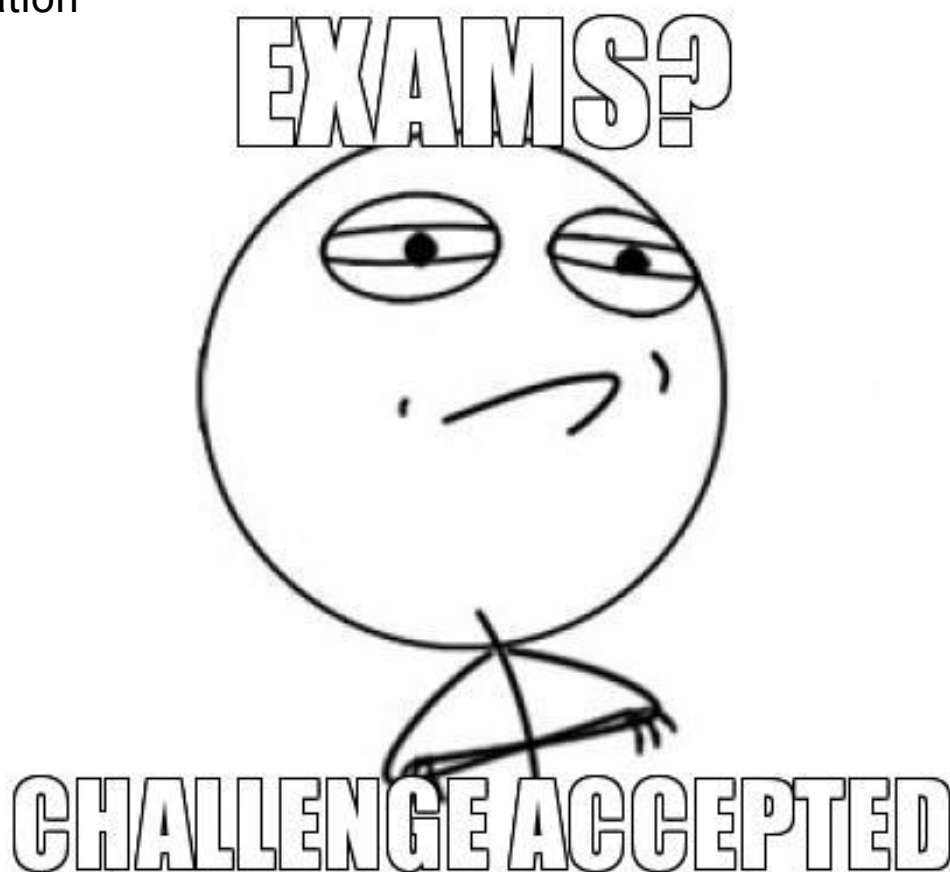


Exams and revision stress and relaxation

Free resources to help you study, keep your health and wellbeing balanced, tackle stress if it gets too much, and keep calm.

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Introduction to Revision

Revision is the word used to describe a wide range of activities and techniques designed to help you understand and remember things you have learnt over a longer period time, usually so that you can recall them successfully in an exam.

Few people genuinely enjoy exams. We all experience some level of worry or anxiety when we feel we're being assessed. If we didn't have a small level of stress we wouldn't bother revising at all!

It's important to use the energy from those feelings to help us revise more effectively.

Understanding revision, memory and exams, and knowing your own self-care and relaxation techniques can help you feel more confident about exams, and make sitting the tests themselves a less daunting experience.

This guide includes expert advice to help you to get your exam preparation sorted, with strategies for planning your revision for maximum efficiency, making sure you get the most out of the revision you do, and helping you to feel better prepared for the moment you sit down in the exam room.

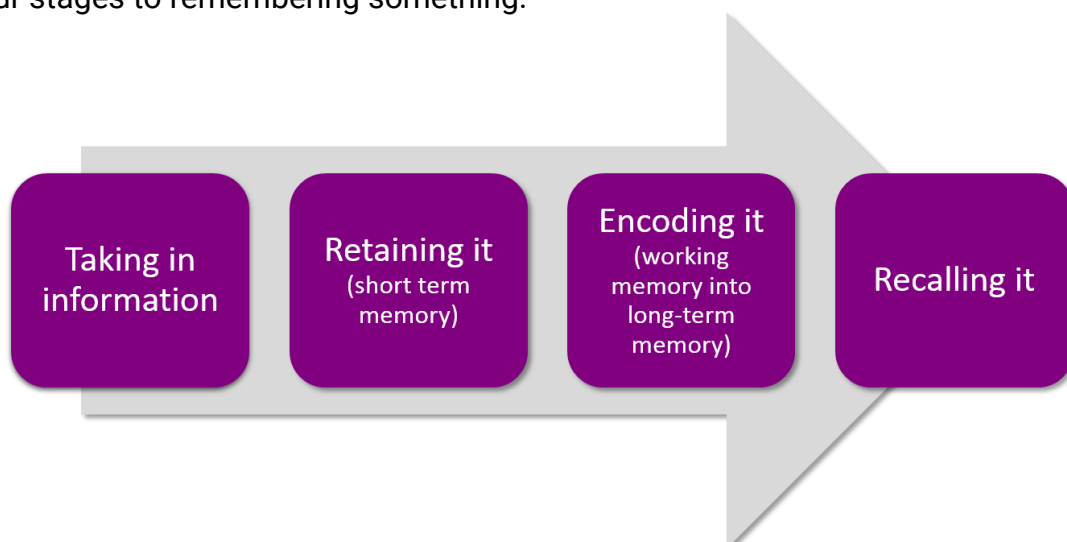
The best approach to revision is to prepare for it throughout the year by spending a short amount of time each week thinking about what you have learnt in each of your modules, and writing a page of notes including your own understanding and any questions you may have. Then you can treat these notes as the basis for more detailed revision later in the year.

However, some students don't start revising until study leave starts. With so much to cover in a short time, it's essential to think carefully about how, when and what to revise. Try not to leave starting too late, or you may find it difficult to get access to resources and advice from your teachers.

Do attend any revision classes that are offered by your department!

One thing that's never a good idea is cramming at the last minute! It may have got you through GCSEs but will not work so well at A-Level where you need to have processed your learning so that you can communicate an understanding of your subject rather than just memorising information.

There are four stages to remembering something:



Preparation for Revision

It is important to prepare your study materials, stationary, workspace and your self, to start your revision in the optimum position.

However, don't put off starting at all because you don't feel prepared enough! Advice about learning styles and working conditions are useful, but can too easily become distractions away from studying.

If your revision is going well already, you probably have a lot of this sorted. If things start to feel stale, revisit these ideas to think about quick and easy ways to change up your routine and keep your revision feeling fresh.

Start to organise your revision by selecting the topics you're going to revise for each exam paper. Choose topics that are basic to the understanding of the subject. It's also a good idea to choose topics that you enjoy or already understand well. Have a look at some past papers first if possible to see how many questions you will have to answer and make sure that the number of topics you've chosen allows enough choice of questions.

Plan your time – be realistic and don't make a schedule that's too inflexible or onerous as you're less likely to stick to it. Some people work better under pressure, but don't leave it all till the last minute. Remember, you'll probably need to allocate more time to topics you are less confident in, however tempting it is to just work on the ones you like.



Exam and revision techniques

This section has information about the different styles of revision, different tools you can use, and advice on what to do on the day of the exam.

Why do exams?

As well as a tool for assessment, revising for exams will help you to consolidate your understanding and your subject knowledge. Taking exams will give you practise in focusing and selecting as well as working to a time limit: these are valuable transferable skills. At the end of your studies the exams lead to final grades that will let universities and employers know how you did. Universities often ask for set minimum grades for entry to their courses.

What does the examiner want?

Different things for different disciplines and courses, but the basic requirements remain the same - understanding, critical thinking, communication skills.

How can I demonstrate understanding?

Read the question carefully and make sure you answer it. Keep showing how your arguments and evidence answer the question. Make connections between topics and set your answer in the context of the course as a whole (check out the syllabus or course specifications).

How can I show critical thinking?

Start from your own answer to the question, or thoughts about the topic. Use what you've learnt in your course as evidence to support or oppose your arguments. Be aware of the major issues and debates in your topic. Don't just accept the things you've read or been told – ask yourself if you agree, and if not, why not? Is there evidence to support your position?

How do I demonstrate my communication skills? - Plan how you're going to answer - a mini plan can be just a few words to remind you. Select your content carefully so it remains relevant to the question. Structure your answer clearly so your argument doesn't get lost.

How can I make my answer readable?

Practice writing by hand. As you get closer to exam time, give up writing on the computer altogether – it's a different working process. If you have time, proof read your answers - it's an easy way to avoid losing silly marks.

The top tip for getting a better mark?

Read the question carefully – the most common complaint of examiners is that the student didn't answer, or didn't understand question. Get used to the way exam questions are worded; don't just assume you know what it's about because you catch sight of a key word.

What does the examiner not want?

Everything you've ever read on the topic; an old coursework essay learnt by heart and reproduced regardless of whether it answers the question; meticulous referencing (key authors' names and titles are usually sufficient); a list of memorised dates; your opinion unsupported by argument or evidence ("I think", "in my opinion").

Taking breaks and Self-Care

Humans really struggle to learn effectively for long uninterrupted blocks of time. To keep your revision as effective as possible, you have to take breaks!

It is also important to remember throughout the exam season that you need to look after yourself. This includes eating well, sleeping properly, seeing your friends, maintaining any counselling or support groups, keeping an eye on existing medical conditions, and giving yourself time to relax.

The '**Five Ways to Wellbeing**' are simple actions you can build into your daily life, which can help you to feel better and cope with challenges. They are based on research evidence. Try to remember to include these Five Ways throughout the exam season.

Connect – Connect with the people around you. With family, friends, colleague and neighbours. At home, work, college or online. Phone a friend, chat on messenger, meet up for coffee or for a revision session. Have an in depth talk with your sibling or parent. Pop round to see a grandparent.

Take notice – Be curious. Catch sight of something beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Noticing the changing weather. Savour the moment more often, whether you are walking to college, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you, and take notice of how you are feeling, physically and emotionally. Pay more attention to your senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Try revising outdoors where you can hear birdsong.

Be active - Go for a walk or run. Step outside for a bit. Cycle. Play frisbee with friends. Garden. Dance (with others or just alone in your room). Exercise makes us feel good. It boosts our emotional and mental health, and helps us learn and memorise. Making sure you are physically active during your revision break is really important.

Give – Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Volunteer your time. Look out as well as in. Seeing yourself and your happiness linked to the wider community around you can be incredible rewarding, as well as creating more connections to others. It doesn't have to be anything huge, it could be sharing a campaign link that you're passionate about or doing the dishes without being asked to.

Keep Learning – Obviously during your exams you are busy learning plenty of important things! But learning for the sake of it also boosts our mood and keeps our brains active. Learn how to cook a new meal, or play an instrument as study breaks. Watch videos or documentaries which are related to your subjects as a 'semi-break', where you can relax and learn for fun, but not feel guilty. We learn more confidently when we learn new things frequently. Wondering what that word in your revision really means, or where it came from – note it down and on your next break look it up.



5 Ways to Wellbeing

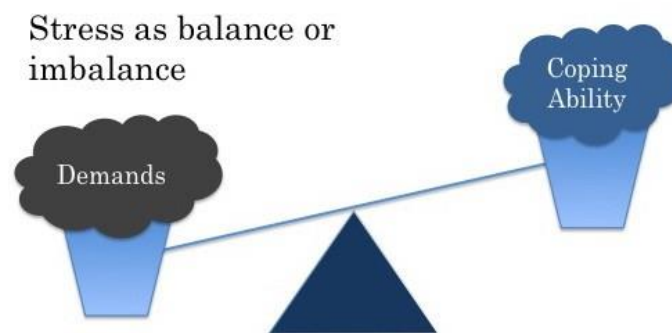
Anxiety and Stress

Stress is a natural human response to pressure when faced with challenging situations. That pressure is not only about what's happening around us, but often also about demands or expectations we place on ourselves. **Feeling a bit stressed about exams is normal and expected.**

Experiencing stress is part of being alive and some stress helps increase our alertness and energy to meet challenging situations. If stress lasts a long time or overwhelms our ability to cope, it can have a negative effect on our health, wellbeing, relationships, work and general enjoyment of life.

Stress doesn't have to control our lives. We can improve our knowledge about stress and increase our resources to become more resilient. Here are some tips about what to look for and how to help yourself or get help.

Stress becomes a problem when the things that challenge us outweigh our coping skills.



To counter this, we can either remove the demands or increase our coping ability. When the stress is exams, we might not be able to remove them, but we can certainly improve our self-care and learn new coping skills. We can also look at other demands we might be able to cut back on temporarily, like hours in a part time job or volunteering.

Warning signs of too much exam stress

Stress can manifest in many different ways, but some common signs of stress can include:

- Becoming irritable and restless, having a shorter temper than usual
- Anxiety, worrying a lot, racing thoughts, feeling scared or overwhelmed, panic attacks
- Changes in appetite, eating more or less than usual
- Becoming withdrawn and isolated, not wanting to socialise
- Insomnia and daytime tiredness, difficulty sleeping, nightmares
- Depression or feeling low and unhappy a lot
- Headaches, stomach upset, chest pain, feeling 'run down'
- Loss of concentration and focus, procrastination or neglecting responsibilities
- New or increased anxious habits such as nail biting, pacing, self-harm

Relaxation

Exploring relaxation can help you look after yourself when you're feeling stressed or worried. Have a look at these tips and ideas to see how relaxation can fit into your daily life. Don't worry if some ideas don't work for you – just enjoy the ones that do:

Take a break - Relaxation doesn't have to take up lots of your time. Just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space and distance to feel calmer.

Read a book or a magazine, even if it's only for a few minutes. Run yourself a bath, watch a film, play with a pet or try out a new recipe. Doodle or do some colouring (flip a few pages to find some colouring sheets!)

Focus on your breathing - Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out. Count as you breathe. Start by counting 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe in and 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe out. Try to work out what's comfortable for you.

Spend time in nature - Spending time outside and in green spaces can be great for your physical and mental health.

Take a walk in the countryside or through a local park, taking time to notice trees, flowers, plants and animals you see on the way.

Do a tech check - Technology can be great for helping you feel connected, but if you're using it a lot then it can contribute to making you feel busy and stressed. Taking a break (even a short one) can help you relax. Try turning your phone off for an hour (or a whole day if you're feeling brave). Step away from the TV, or have an evening where you don't check emails or social networks.

Try active relaxation - Relaxation doesn't have to mean sitting still – gentle exercise can help you relax too. Take a walk, going at your own pace. You might choose to go for a longer walk, but even a few minutes of walking can help you feel relaxed. Look for a class you'd like to try, such as yoga, Pilates or gentle stretching.

Get creative - Getting in touch with your artistic side can help you feel more calm and relaxed. Try painting, drawing, making crafts, playing a musical instrument, dancing, baking or sewing. Try not to worry too much about the finished product – just focus on enjoying yourself.

Listen to music - Music can relax you, connect you to your emotions and distract you from worrying thoughts. Listen to your favourite songs. Turn up the volume and dance or sing along, or put your headphones on and close your eyes.

Dealing with Post-Exam Stress

1. Don't think about it. Easier said than done, of course, but, try to keep in mind that once the exam is over, you can't go back and change anything about how it went. So, avoid asking your friends what they put for certain questions if you think that will just stress you out. To avoid ruminating, or getting stuck in that "broken-record loop," try the following tips:

- Let go of the things you can't control. Ask yourself, "what about my exam can I change at this point?" If it is nothing, do your best to let it go.
- View your mistakes as opportunities to learn. From this perspective, getting an exam question wrong isn't something to be worried about.
- Exercise can also help you to get your mind off of your exam after it is done.

2. Take time off. Clear your mind from thinking about the exam by doing something you enjoy; try to pick an activity that you typically get lost in. For example, if you get absorbed when you watch a movie or read a book, do that. If you get really into sports when you play them, get outside and play some sports! This can seem hard when you have exam after exam for a few weeks, and you might feel pressure to jump right back into revising. It is important to balance your social time, self-care, and exercise, so take the opportunity of the time after the exam to do something you really want to do. It's likely you will not be in the best place to revise directly after a particularly stressful exam, anyway.

3. Treat it as a learning experience. You can learn from your mistakes; remember that ultimately the goal of an exam is to assess your level of knowledge on a topic. This helps you to identify your strengths and weaknesses regarding your course content. Instead of being stressed about this, try to view it as an opportunity for an accurate assessment of your knowledge, which you can then use to improve yourself. Remember that your performance on an exam is not indicative of your worth as a person. You can do poorly on an exam and still be a good student. Regardless of how you feel about your exam, you won't really know how well you've done until the results, often a few months later.

4. Treat yourself. Eat some pizza or sushi or ice-cream or buy yourself a new shirt; whatever treat you like that makes you happy for a few moments. Exams can be very stressful but you made it through in one piece. Now relax a bit with something you enjoy, then start preparing early for your next exam!

