

Effective Revision Strategies Handbook 2023

Year 11

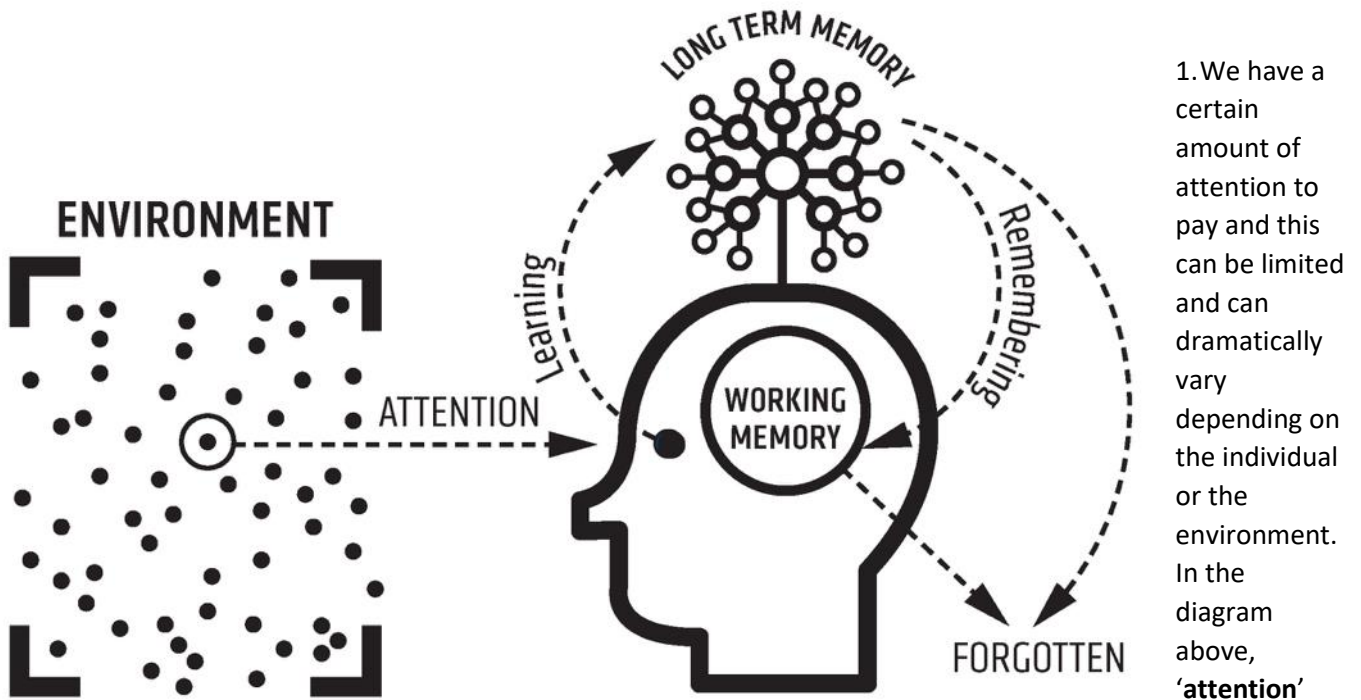
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Memory – the science of learning

In recent years, there has been lots of research around the science of learning and how we learn and retain information.

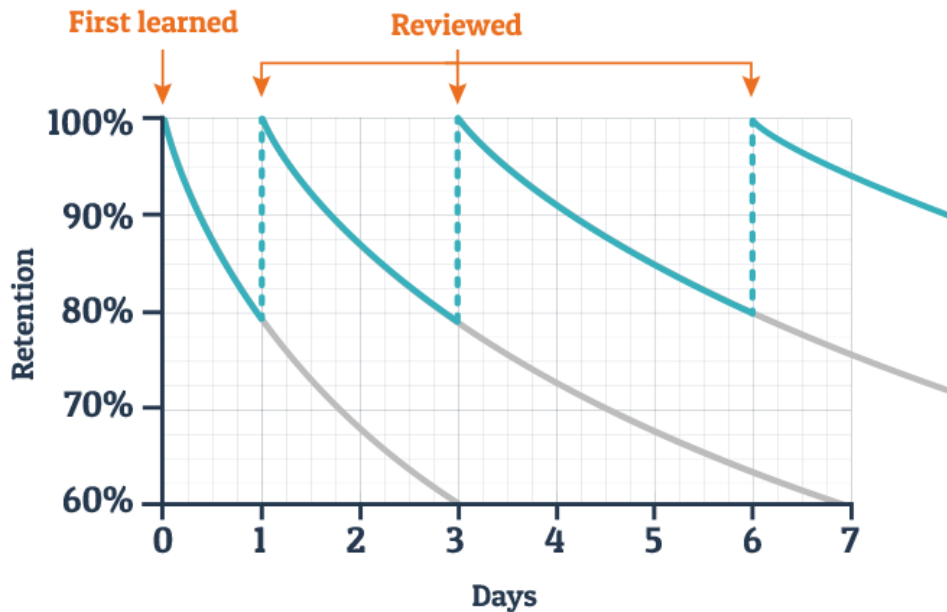
In summary, if we think of the learning process using the following diagram, it will help us have a greater awareness of the most effective revision strategies based upon the available research.



2. Our **working memory** is finite and we can only absorb a limited amount of information at a given time. This may be up to 30 seconds. *As an example, if you write down a 'long number' and try and remember it every 30 seconds, you will be surprised how difficult this is to do!*
3. Information is processed into our **long-term memory** through '**learning**'. This long-term memory is effectively unlimited, and we can retrieve information from here back into our working memory as needed in a given moment. *As an example, this might be your phone number or address. We don't walk around thinking about those two things every second of the day but it is in our long-term memory ready to be used and retrieved when needed.*
4. Information in our **long-term memory** is interconnected and linked with prior knowledge. Anything that is not connected or not successfully stored well enough in our long-term memory is forgotten and this is completely natural.
5. If students undertake enough **retrieval practice**, generating the information in our long-term memory, it increases a level of fluency within the subject. Practice makes perfect!

As stated above, forgetting is completely natural. The following diagram outlines this process and is called the **Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve** (1885).

Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information



Ebbinghaus proposed that humans start losing 'memory of knowledge' over time unless the knowledge is consciously reviewed time and time again. He conducted a series of tests on himself which included the memorization of a meaningless set of words. He tested himself consistently across a period of time to see if he could retain the information. He found that:

- **Memory retention is 100% at the time of learning any particular piece of information (in the moment). However, this drops to 60% after three days.**
- A range of factors affect the rate of forgetting including motivation, the meaningful nature of the information, the strategies for revision and also psychological factors (sleep for example).
- **If each day, repetition of learning occurs and students take time to repeat information then the effects of forgetting are decreased.** According to research, information should be repeated within the first 24 hours of learning to reduce the rate of memory loss.

In summary, what do we know about memory?

- Consistent practice and revisiting previous material strengthens memory and boosts learning.
- Information, if not revisited, is 'lost' from our memory.
- Our working memory is finite and limited and so overloading this or cramming for revision doesn't work.

The key principles of effective revision

Therefore, let's explore a number of different strategies to ensure your revision is as effective as it can be.

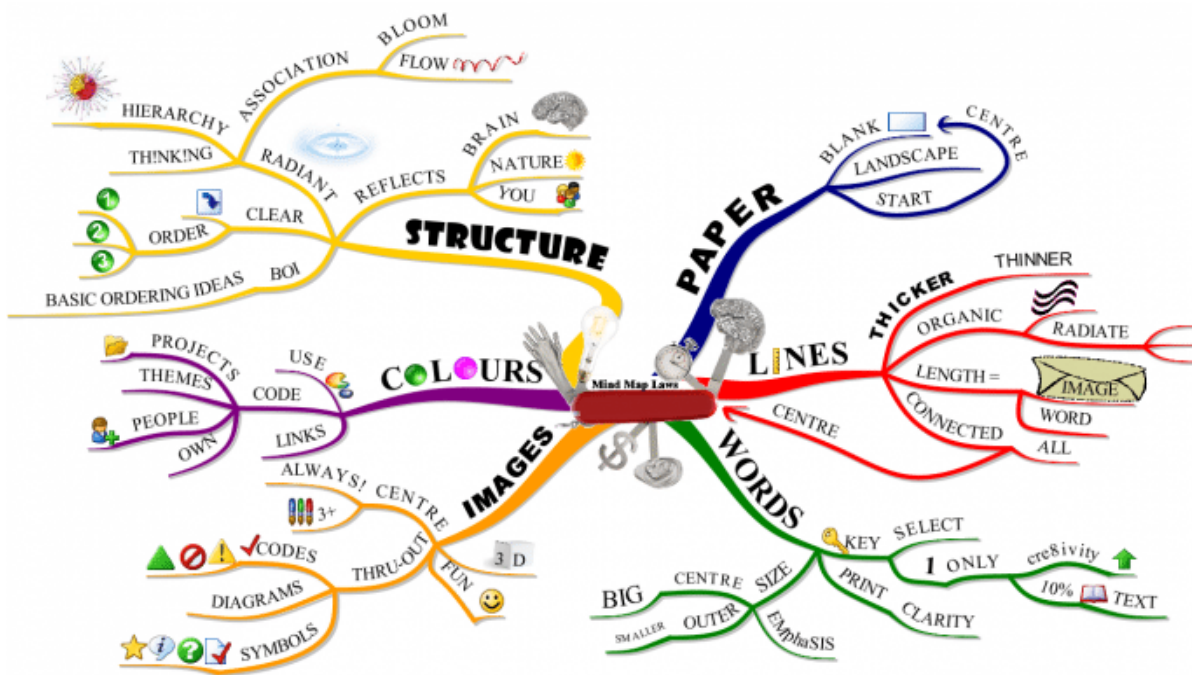
Retrieval Practice

Simply put, recalling information from memory is simple and powerful. Retrieval practice is a learning strategy which makes you think hard and brings information to mind. It is the action of actively retrieving knowledge that boosts learning and strengthens memory. **It means trying to remember previously learned information as opposed to simply re-reading it.** Examples include:

- Knowledge quizzing and low stakes testing.
- Multiple choice tests.
- Completing past paper questions or practice answers.
- Answering verbal questions asked by teacher/peers/parents.
- Creating flashcards or revision materials where you can 'test' yourself.

A very powerful revision technique is creating and then memorising information laid out in a **mindmap**. Mindmaps are powerful as they utilise the creative and logical sides of the brain, meaning that we are maximising our brain's potential to notice, understand and commit to memory related chunks of information.

The layout of a mindmap is critical. They should follow the 'rules' exemplified here:



One particularly effective strategy is the creation and use of **flashcards**. Flashcards are generally a card containing a small amount of information as an aid to learning. The use of flashcards are for low stakes testing to improve recall and to strengthen memory.

An effective flashcard may include the following (*in each subject they will be used in a different way*):

- A key term/key word with definition on the back.
- A key date with the event on the back.
- A key equation with its use in practice on the back.

- A past paper question and a model answer on the back.

ATTRITION

The action of rock fragments colliding into each other causing them to become smaller and rounder over time.

In order to use flashcards most effectively, the **Leitner System** is a desired strategy. Once

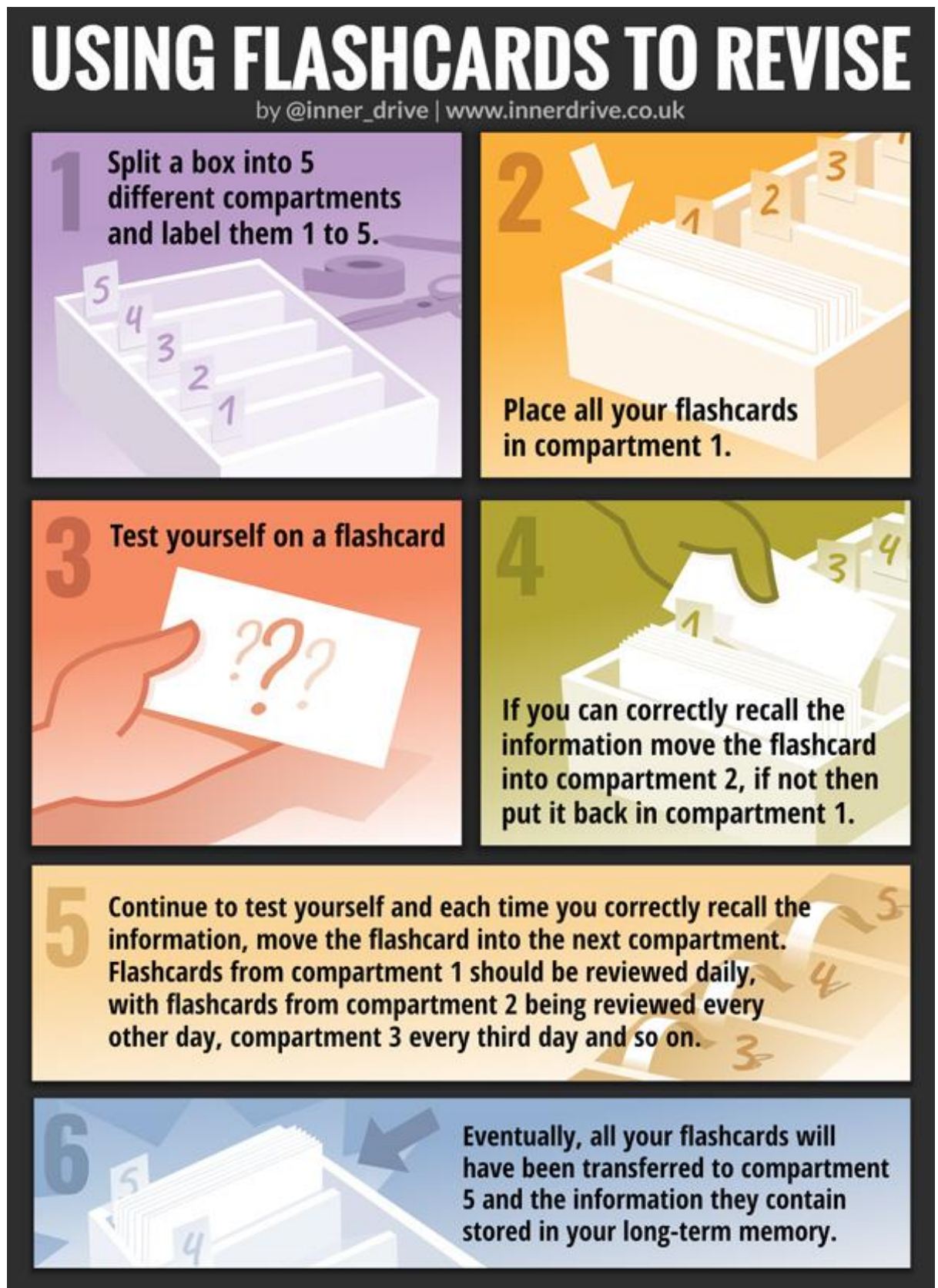
you have created a set of flashcards, create three boxes/areas marked as the following.

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| BOX 1: Every day | BOX 2: Twice a week | BOX 3: Once a week |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|

- Test yourself on the flashcards in the Box 1 pile. If you get the answer correct on the flashcard, move it to the Box 2 pile. If you get it incorrect, it stays in Box 1.
- Twice a week, test yourself on the flashcards in Box 2. If you get the answer correct on the flashcard, move it to the Box 3 pile. If you get it incorrect, it stays in Box 2. The aim is to get all of the flashcards to Box 3.

This video will help support you in using the Leitner system: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C20EvKtdJwQ>

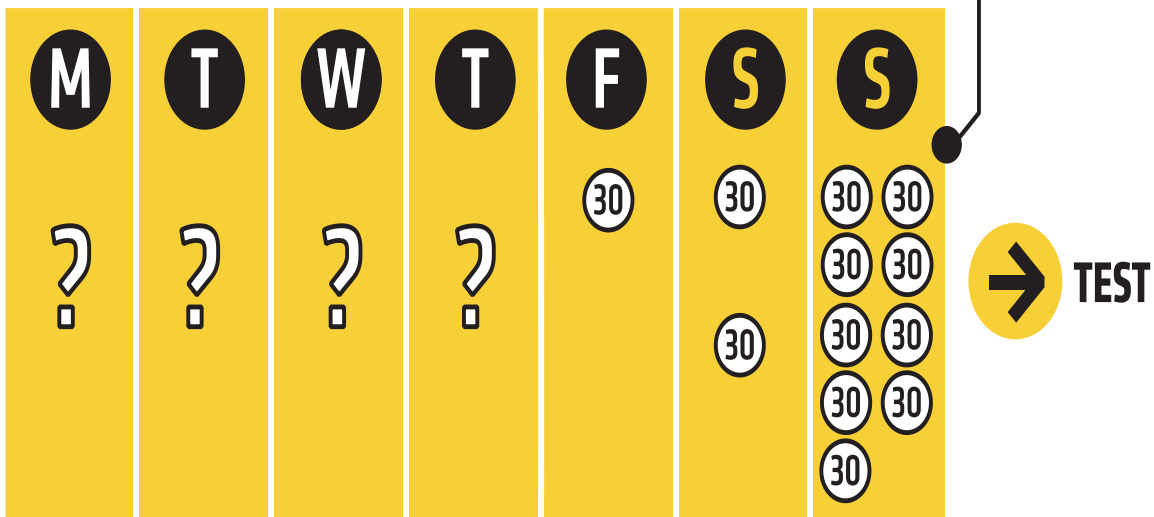
This diagram will also further support your implementation of the **Leitner System**.



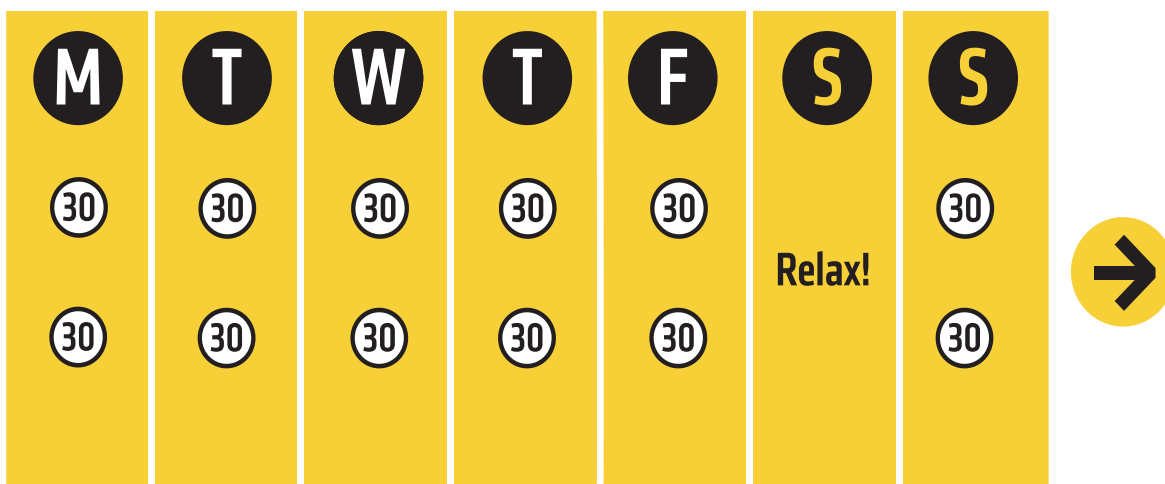
Spacing and Interleaving

Spacing out your revision into smaller chunks over a period of time helps you to remember the material better and ensures you are less stressed with your revision.

Let's say you have a test one week and you have 5 hours to prepare for it broken down into 30 minute chunks. Very often that process looks like this.



Instead of mass practice, a much more effective way of revising is to space out your revision like this:



By breaking up your revision into 30 minute chunks and spacing out the time between revision, you will consolidate what you have learned and retain the material much more effectively.

Interleaving involves switching between ideas and topics during a study session. This ensures that you are not studying one idea or topic for too long. Mixing up your revision and chunking it supports learning and strengthens your memory.

As we have seen with spaced practice, leaving gaps between studying is very effective but what if you are studying multiple topics within a subject? Interleaving means mixing it up and not studying all the material at once.

Deliberate Practice

For example, instead of organising your revision week like this: This follows a simple process to support your revision. Start by spending time reviewing a topic/unit before

| M | T | W | T | F |
|---------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| MACBETH | AN INSPECTOR CALLS | CREATIVE WRITING | UNSEEN POETRY | JEKYLL AND HYDE |
| MACBETH | AN INSPECTOR CALLS | CREATIVE WRITING | UNSEEN POETRY | JEKYLL AND HYDE |
| MACBETH | AN INSPECTOR CALLS | CREATIVE WRITING | UNSEEN POETRY | JEKYLL AND HYDE |

A much more effective way of organising your revision would be like this:

| M | T | W | T | F |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| MACBETH | UNSEEN POETRY | AN INSPECTOR CALLS | JEKYLL AND HYDE | CREATIVE WRITING |
| AN INSPECTOR CALLS | JEKYLL AND HYDE | CREATIVE WRITING | MACBETH | UNSEEN POETRY |
| CREATIVE WRITING | MACBETH | UNSEEN POETRY | AN INSPECTOR CALLS | JEKYLL AND HYDE |

quizzing/testing yourself with no notes and from your memory (this is vital for revision). Once you have finished, check your answers. This will support you in showing where your 'knowledge

gaps' are and where focus needs to be in your future revision. Revision shouldn't keep you in your comfort zone, you need to be thinking hard and identifying your own areas for development.

Studying one topic for a long time can give them impression you have mastered it but often this can be misleading.

Avoid simply revising topics you enjoy. A technique to support

deliberate practice is the **Pomodoro Technique**.

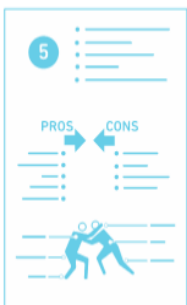
Pomodoro Technique

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|   <p>Pick a task..</p> |  <p>Set the timer (25 mins)..</p> |  <p>Get to work..</p> |
|  <p>Stop when time up..</p> |  <p>Record progress..</p> |  <p>Take a 5 minute break..</p> |
|  <p>Get back to work..</p> |  <p>After the 4th pomodoro, take a longer break..</p> |  <p>Continue until calling it a day..</p> |

Dual Coding

When reviewing something you have learnt, combining words and pictures can be powerful. Examples of this include creating a:

INFOGRAPHIC



DIAGRAM



CARTOON STRIP



GRAPHIC ORGANIZER



TIMELINE



Ineffective revision strategies

With the above in mind, it is vitally important to think about strategies that students may

employ that have a limited or no real benefit on learning or memory. These include:

- Simply writing out notes or copying from a textbook/exercise book.
- Reading and doing nothing with the information. Trying to focus on 'too much information' on a single page and cramming revision.
- Highlighting information for the sake of it.
- Not enough silent work or attention to a given task. Attempting to revise while multitasking and doing other things.
- Comfort zone revision of easy material that pupils have already mastered because it makes you 'feel good'.

The importance of Habits and Routines

Within your revision, it is vitally important to establish a strong routine. Having goals are good for setting a direction. What do you want to achieve in *this* revision session?

In order to support the forming of good revision habits, there are a number of areas to consider:

- **Start small and build up** – reduce distractions where and when you revise and get your family to encourage the creation of a revision timetable and placing it somewhere visual in your house. Ensure someone else is knowledgeable of this timetable to enable accountability and aid support.
- **Make it attractive** – collaborative focused revision is beneficial (alongside attending interventions or revision sessions) but you could also ensure there is a 'reward' at the end of a revision session. *If I complete this, I can do this.*
- **Make it satisfying** – challenge yourself, track your own revision progress and ensure you stick to your revision timetable. Small steps build success and motivation. Use PLCs or checklists to support.
- **Make it obvious** – revise in one area, leave your materials out ready to support organisation and ensure routines are stuck to. Ensure your environment is clear, uncluttered and comfortable.

1. **Make a list** - What do you need to know?



2. **Timetable a spaced schedule** - Study each topic little but often, and leave yourself enough time.



3. **Use effective study strategies** - Test yourself and keep the re-reading and highlighting to a minimum.



4. **Identify the gaps in your knowledge**
What do you need to study more?
What can you move on from?



5. **Close the gaps** - Repeat steps 3 & 4 as many times as you need until you are comfortable with everything.

