

# A User's Guide to Revision and Effective Learning

Some subjects have lots of **CONTENT** – an enormous amount of information and fact that has to be loaded into your brain.

Other subjects are more **SKILLS** based – there are fewer facts to be remembered, and effective revision means lots of practice exercises, past papers and problem solving.

## How do I revise SKILLS?

Just do as much practice as possible – and usually that means past papers. Buy them. Then USE them.

## How do I revise CONTENT and FACTS?

Follow these rules:

1. Work to a plan, so that you work through methodically, and cover all the units you need to cover – don't just dip in and do a bit at a time. Start with the things you can't do, and your weaker areas.
2. **Never** just sit and read – **always** read with a pencil in your hand, making notes of some kind. By reworking the information as you read, and writing out the main points in your own words, you rebuild the information and ideas in your own mind, in a way that suits you. **Just reading is a waste of time** – it is **reworking the information that makes you remember** it.
3. Choose the revision technique that works best for you in each subject. Some different techniques are shown below – for example, bullet points, flashcards, mindmaps, and so on. You may find one way that always works for you. Or you may find one way works well in one subject, and another method is best in another subject.
4. Whichever technique you are using, your reading and notemaking will give you a set of revision notes. **Organise** these, then use them for later revision and refreshing your memory just before the exam.
5. Best way is to have a **revision folder** for each content subject, with divider cards for each unit. For example, you might have a Chemistry revision folder, and in the Acids and Alkalis section will be sets of question and answer flashcards you have written, or a mindmap. That way, too, you will see at a glance how well you are getting on with your revision – how many units in a subject you have already made notes for, and how many empty sections are still waiting to be filled.

## What are the different techniques for reading and notemaking?

### Bullet point lists of the main points

Left brained people like lists, and work best with them. Make bullet point lists of the main points while you read. Don't just copy things out – read a paragraph or section, then write it out in your own words as far as possible.

### Mindmaps

Some people find these really helpful – by laying out the ideas on a map, and showing the links between them, you have to think hard and clearly. As well, you are making both sides of your brain work together, and that helps you remember.

### Charts and diagrams

Some right-brained people remember better from pictures, charts and diagrams – read the notes and books, and turn the information into charts, diagrams or pictures. If it works for you, do it!

### Split lists

This is a refinement of the bullet point lists: split your page in two, with a line down the middle. On the left, make notes about stuff you understand when you read about it. On the right, make notes about stuff you still don't understand, and need to ask about.

Then, when you've asked about it and understood it, you can shift it across to the left.

### 'Boiling down' lists

This is another refinement of the bullet point list. Rule a line down the middle, and make your list of points on the left. When you've finished it, boil it down again by making it into an even more summarised list on the right. Then maybe you can summarise it still further – turn the page over, and make an even more concise list of notes on the back.

It may not work out – some stuff you can't keep on 'boiling down' – but I promise you you'll remember it all much more easily if you've tried!

### Question and answer flashcards

Cut up pieces of paper into postcard size. As you read, turn the information into questions on the front of the cards, and write the answers on the back. You can then use these to test yourself, or get someone else to test you.

### Read/ Cover/ Write/ Check/ Correct

Read some pages from your notes or books, then turn them face down, and write notes of the main points. Then check back to see what you missed or got wrong, and make any corrections to your notes that you need to make.

Again, hard work, but I promise you you'll remember it all much more easily if you've tried!

### Traffic Lights

If you have Learning Outcomes (LOs) for a unit of work, traffic light them:

**Green** for "Yes, I understand that."

**Amber** for "I should check with my teacher – make sure I've got that."

**Red** for "No, haven't a clue, and I must ask my teacher to sort me out."

### Making your own Pic 'n' Mix combinations

You don't have to do one or another – combine them. Maybe get the left side of your brain to work by making a bullet point list of the main points. Then get your right side in on the act – use these main points to make a mind map.

There are probably lots more – but there are enough here for you to choose the ones that work best for you in each subject.

**Don't try to do too much** – it will make it all seem impossibly long and dreary. Give yourself a reasonable time frame: half an hour after your homework each day, and a couple of hours a day at weekends and holidays is actually a lot – if you really are working at it, and not kidding yourself.