

Practice

25. Practice Activity: The Revision Questionnaire

We've found there is a strong link between the kind of revision someone does and the outcomes they get. So, which student will do better in an exam?

- » Student 1 does fifteen hours' revision – all of it reading through class notes.
- » Student 2 only does ten hours' revision – two hours making mind-maps, two hours creating flash cards of key terms, three hours writing timed essays, two hours working through past papers and looking for patterns in the questions asked, and half an hour doing the hardest question they could find, followed by half an hour talking it through with their teacher. Then they spend five hours shopping with their friends and watching TV.

The second student will perform better, despite revising for fewer hours! You too can make less mean more. Try this questionnaire:

Subjects: _____

- 1 How many hours of independent work do you do on your subjects outside of class? Please state the time spent on each subject.

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- 2 What sort of activities do you do? Use the table below, ticking in the column which best describes your revision and preparation:

		Always	Sometimes	Never
Reading through class notes	C			
Using resources on the school's VLE	C			
Using course textbooks	C			
Mind-maps/diagrams	C			
Making/remaking class notes	C			
Highlighting/colour coding	C			
Flash cards	C			
Using a revision wall to display your learning	C			
Writing exam answers under timed conditions	S			
Reading model answers	S			
Using past exam questions and planning answers	S			
Marking your own work to a mark scheme	F			

		Always	Sometimes	Never
Studying mark schemes or examiners' reports	F			
Working with other students in groups/pairs	F			
Comparing model answers against your own work	F			
Creating your own exam questions	F			
Handing in extra exam work for marking	F			
One-to-one discussions with teachers/tutors	F			

3 Additional activities not mentioned above:

4 Write a brief account of what you do if you can't understand something (e.g. try again, read textbooks, check the school's VLE, see teachers, see other students).

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Now check over your answers. You will notice some activities in the table have a 'C' next to them – these are the *content* techniques. Some activities have an 'S' next to them – these are the *skills* techniques. Others have an 'F' next to them – these are the *feedback* techniques.

Notice in our example that student 1 only does content revision, while student 2 does all three stages and then takes some time off. In our experience, student 2 will pretty much always get a better grade than student 1. And they put in fewer hours.

Make sure you do some revision for each of C, S and F! Aim for three of each; nine methods in total. Make a note of your current scores here:

» C score:

» S score:

» F score:

Practice

We've found that students who get the best grades at A level practise in a wider variety of ways. Our top performers had over ten ticks in the always column, and these were evenly spread across C, S and F.

However, students who got grades D, E or U had far fewer ticks in the always column – often only four or five. They were very restricted in the way they practised, often spending hours repeating the same limited range of activities.

Aim to increase the ticks in your always column to ten.

List three activities that you currently don't do, that you could add to your repertoire:

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Final Thoughts

The following is a list of practice strategies suggested by John Dunlosky, a professor at Kent State University in the United States. Dunlosky and colleagues (2013) carried out a meta-analysis to evaluate ten popular learning techniques and their effectiveness. (We've adjusted his language to make it more accessible in the table below.)

The tasks towards the top of the table had the largest impact on learning and the tasks at the bottom had the smallest. There's a time and a place for all of them – but it's worth checking which ones you're using most of the time and which ones you're never using:

Technique	Always	Sometimes	Never
Practice tests – moving in and out of exam conditions, practising what is required in the time you're given.			
Spaced practice – scheduling practice tests and revision sessions over time – snacking instead of bingeing			
Elaborative interrogation – explaining complex concepts and ideas to others – teaching someone else the material.			
Self-explanation – writing out explanations. Explaining how new information is linked to old information. Clarifying connections between information.			
Interleaved practice – designing study that moves you from topic to topic, task to task and subject to subject rather than blocking out long sessions of the same activity.			

Technique	Always	Sometimes	Never
Summarising – writing out/recording summaries of the information that is to be learned.			
Highlighting – reading material with a highlighter, and selecting the key information as you go.			
Mnemonics – creating phrases, memorable words, visualisations or lists to recollect material.			
Text into image – attempting to turn information into images so as to better recall it.			
Re-reading – setting out all your notes and textbooks, and reading through them again.			

Now you've considered Dunlosky's insights, are there two or three activities you need to add to your practice schedule?

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