

Online learning

Routes to revision success

Do online revision sites offer much more than traditional revision aids? We scoured the web to find out

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When books ruled the planet, most of us were happy swotting from their pages. And based on existing bookshop sales of revision guides, we still are. But now we have digital content, expectations of what revision resources ought to do have gone through the roof.

So what are we actually looking for? Is it pages with key facts? Or is it a high-speed rerun of the whole course? If what's wanted is a concise summary of all that's relevant, those pocket cards carrying key facts ought to work - were it not that students still have some understanding to do. For that little bit more help, you could take a look at BBC Bitesize, where you'll find the facts helpfully illustrated with animated pictures. Compare this approach with Skoool, where you almost run through the course. Its lessons are richly illustrated and the text is voiced all the way through. Or consider the DVD series from Camrose, where presenters talk through big chunks of course content in a few hours.

Reading, watching or listening have their place but it helps to break the flow of information. Some revision providers do this with questions throughout the material, while some offer more of a test. One provider in particular, SamLearning, simply offers wall-to-wall-questions without a key fact in sight. The conclusion to draw is that there's no one-stop shop for revision.

Alongside public and commercial services, teachers' own internet sites stand up well. Students, and indeed publishers, could learn from them. For instance, schoolhistory.co.uk shows one teacher's talent for creating fun activities to teach his subject.

Some enthusiastic school departments have set up revision aids - even for Sats - in Moodle, the open source virtual learning environment that can be used for creating courses. Others have created their own private web space on Moodle, where they upload assignments, links and resources and arrange them in the shape of their work scheme. Students log in to their Moodle space to find what work they have to do or where else to go to revise. The program lets teachers create a space stocked with a wealth of PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, worksheets and more. There's also a noticeboard and chat window to help with homework and study leave.

Moodle also has its own place to keep marks, show progress, and store a teacher's entire My Documents folder. This awesome facility costs only a little time and technical expertise to get started. Why not have a good search of the internet for "moodle revision" to see what other schools are up to.

Top 10 picks

4 RM Living Library

(from £42 ) [www.livinglibrary.co.uk](http://www.livinglibrary.co.uk)

If a library is a place to revise, RM Living Library is the ideal homepage. It has a revision section from Letts and Hodder and what it misses in exercises to do, it makes up for with school-relevant material. A search for "tectonic" gives enough diagrams, pictures and encyclopedia entries to satisfy. Doing the same on the open web would be less precise.

Your own personal tutor

AS level (£17.99) [camrosemedia.com](http://camrosemedia.com)

Having the opportunity to hear all the course material again at breakneck speed is one of the appealing features of this series. Being able to pop in a DVD and watch it on the TV is another. What strikes you immediately is the style of the presentation - the presenters themselves are so vibrant and engaging that they're quite an act to follow. Although they're actors, not teachers, and the visuals are mostly eye candy, it certainly beats reading revision texts.

BBC Bitesize

(free) [www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize)

With its cheerful presentation and amazing coverage, this free all-age service has become a revision mainstay. This raises expectations - unreasonably even - but the idea running through Bitesize is to break up the work into information bites and test bites. You might want more visuals or a guide to what's relevant to your exam but just now this is where most of the country is revising.

Schoolsnet

(free) [www.schoolsnet.com](http://www.schoolsnet.com)

While some secondary subjects are better covered than others, Schoolsnet offers a mass of GCSE revision notes. Its "bit at a time" approach, where you read and answer questions to test your progress, works well. For example, under Religious Education you choose a religion, choose beliefs, read notes and find an exercise to match "karma" and "nirvana" to their meanings. The service is free and offers another take on what there is to know.

Count on - for maths

(free) [www.counton.org](http://www.counton.org)

Even a cursory look at the diverse activities on offer here is evidence of subject specialists at work. Count On starts at Year 1, but for GCSE and above there's Attainment Tester, which is a way to make customised tests. Put aside its dated looks and let it choose you a set of questions on algebra, fractions, probability and handling data, all to do on screen. They'll take an hour, after which you can mark them. For Sats revision use the teacher's index to find your topic. A cut above the rest.

Skoool

(free) [www.skoool.co.uk](http://www.skoool.co.uk)

Skoool, from Intel, concentrates on science and maths and has the rich material needed for swotting up. There are the revision notes you are likely to find almost everywhere, but better are the lessons where a voice talks you through a topic as an animation plays on screen. If you're looking more for information delivery than exercises, this is a gift. Access to the site is a bit convoluted: you gain access through other sites such as London Grid for Learning, but click away and you will find the front door.

SamLearning

(from £100) [www.samlearning.com](http://www.samlearning.com)

The site is handy for the whole school and every subject and also offers the good balance of information and tests you would want for revision. Find your topic and you'll find a lesson that has been divided into manageable bites with wake-up questions along the way. You can follow that with the "Test yourself" option - a great section where you choose topics and work through a customised test. The subject coverage is good, too.

School history (free)

(free) [www.schoolhistory.co.uk](http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk)

This teacher's site outshines most of the commercial offerings. Someone's joy and skill in their subject is evident from its cocktail of quizzes, games and activity that need more than a superficial click to do. For example, lessons are punctuated by questions that demand answers before you're allowed to move on. For revision lessons, look out for the excellent and challenging "interactive diagrams" where you have to build a topic map for yourself.

Advanced Biology

(£50 individual) [www.exam.net](http://www.exam.net)

This subscription site provides a wide range of real exam questions to practice on, including structured questions needing short answers and multiple-choice ones with answers delivered as you go. As well as questions to do, there is a textbook's worth of information made richer with visuals, video and animation. It's slightly short of a full service to biology but more than useful if you are revising.

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