

# Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School



## Revision made easy

## A Guide for Parents and Pupils



# CONTENTS

Page 3 What to do before you revise

Page 4 What you should avoid.

Page 5 Strategies for effective learning

Page 6 Five Revision Techniques: 1. Flashcards

Page 7 Five Revision Techniques: 2. Mind Maps / Revision Wheels

Page 8 Five Revision Techniques: 3. Self-Quizzing

Page 9 Five Revision Techniques: 4. Speed Dating Page 9

Five Revision Techniques: 5. Past Papers Page 10

Organising Revision

Page 11 Suggested revision session timings and Good Reviser v Bad Reviser

Page 12 My Revision Notes

# WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU REVISE

- Have an exam timetable which tells you when, where and how long each exam is. From this you base your preparation on being ready for these exams.
- Make sure you have a list of topics to revise in each of your subjects.  
(Make sure you know what it is you have to know).
- Make sure you know what type of exam you are taking in each subject.  
(orals, essays, shorter questions etc.)
- Make sure you have a complete set of notes to revise from. This could be your books from class, booklets of notes provided by your teacher or purchased revision guides. If you are using your books, make sure (by checking against topics to revise) that any missing work is copied up (or photocopied).
- Put together a revision timetable. This should start well before your exams to give you enough time to cover (and revisit) all topics in all subjects.  
See **Spacing** and **Interleaving** later in this guide.

# WHAT YOU SHOULD AVOID.

## *What does research say?*

*Re-reading and highlighting are among the commonest and apparently most obvious ways to memorise or revise material. They also give a satisfying – but deceptive – feeling of fluency and familiarity with the material (Brown et al, 2014).*

As we can see from the research above, one of the most common (and easy) methods of revision is actually one of the **least effective**.

Rereading and highlighting notes can lead to very little of the read or highlighted information going in to long term memory.

There is nothing wrong with reading and highlighting, but on their own they are **very, very ineffective**.

# STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING

These 6 strategies have supporting evidence from Cognitive Psychology.



Visit [www.learningscientists.org](http://www.learningscientists.org) for more information on each strategy.

# FIVE GREAT REVISION TECHNIQUES

**In terms of actual revision techniques, we will focus on five:**

Flash Cards  
Minds Maps / Revision Wheels  
Self Quizzing  
Revision Speed Dating  
Past Papers

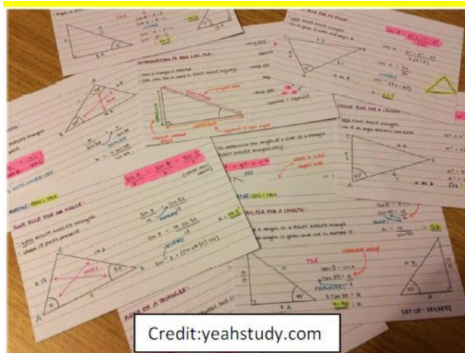
We will look at how we can include as many of the 6 strategies in each technique to ensure the revision is effective.

Have a try of each technique and see which one best works for you.



# 1. REVISION FLASHCARDS

Flashcards have a keyword or the name of a concept/topic on one side and a definition or a series of notes on the other. Probably the easiest way to make flash cards is to use your class notes to produce flash cards for each topic you need to study. On one side will go the topic title and on the reverse you need to summarise the key points. Use pictures and words (**Dual Coding**) and **Concrete Examples** (where appropriate).



If you use this technique it is important to remember that the creation of the flash cards does not represent the end point of revision for this topic. The next crucial step is to test how well you can recall the information on the flash card (Retrieval). If you are going to create flash cards then make sure they are done early so there is time to revisit the topic (Spacing) at a later date.

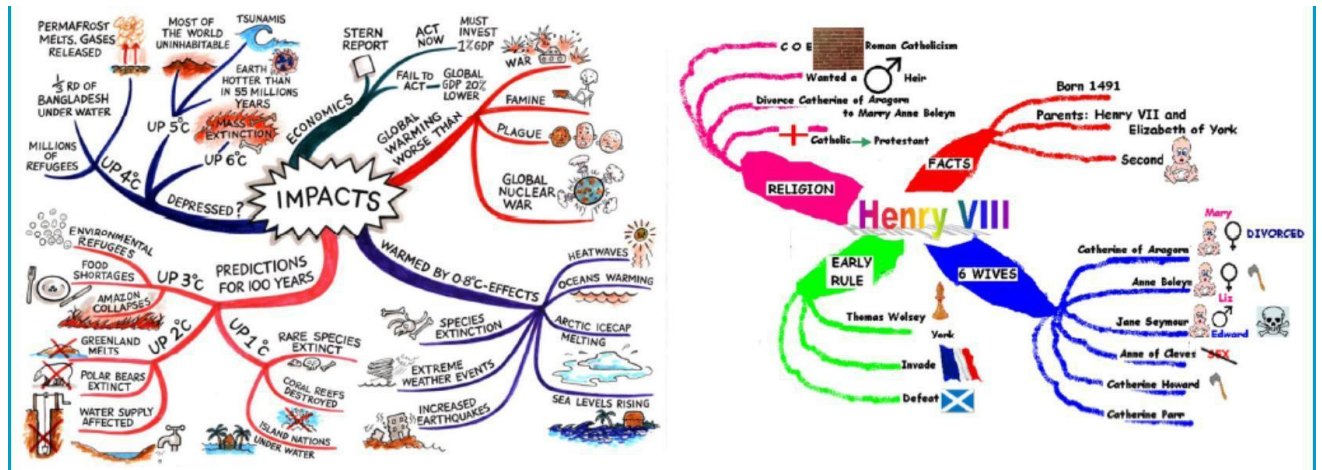


## 2. MIND MAPS

Put simply, a topic is summarised on one large sheet. Each sheet will have more information than a flash-card.

### 5 Steps to follow:

- Write the **MAIN TOPIC** in the middle of the paper and draw a ring around it.
- For each **KEY POINT** draw a branch out from the main topic.
- Write a **KEY WORD** or **PHRASE** on each branch.
- Build out further branches and add **DETAILS**.
- Use pictures and words (**Dual Coding**) rather than loads of writing copied from your notes.



This will be even more effective if your teacher provides the framework for the mind map. If you use this technique it is important to remember that the creation of the mind map does not represent the end point of revision for this topic. The next crucial step is to test how well you can recall the information on the mind map (**Retrieval**). If you are going to create mind maps then make sure they are done early so there is time to revisit the topic (**Spacing**) at a later date...So, is **Retrieval** (recall) key to effective revision?

### What does research say?

*"Students who can test themselves or try to **Retrieve** material from their memory are going to learn that material better in the long run. Start by reading the text book then make flash cards of the critical concepts and test yourself. A century of research has shown that repeated testing works."*

**Professor Dunlosky, Journal of the Association for Psychological Science**

Successful Retrieval makes this information more retrievable later (i.e. in the exam).



### 3. SELF-QUIZZING / TESTING

This can be as simple as having a blank sheet of paper in front of you and writing down (from memory) everything you know about a topic (**Retrieval**) and trying to **Elaborate** on some of the key ideas. This retrieval could be based on a mind map or flashcards. Once complete, the student then self-checks from the book/flash-card/mind map and corrects any spelling mistakes, omissions or inaccuracies.

You can also use your friends/family to test you from your flashcards/mind maps/revision guide. Parents can really help their child by testing them regularly on different topics.

**Retrieval** is hard, how can mnemonics help?

When revising topics, try to create and use mnemonics to help you with retrieval.

For instance, here is a mnemonic that is quite easy to remember and will help you answer questions on natural selection.

#### **VC BASPOG**

Variation, Competition, Best Adapted Survive and Pass On Genes

Another example of a mnemonic is: (for the 5 pillars of Islam).

#### **French People Can't Forget Paris**

Fasting, Prayer, Charity, Faith, and Pilgrimage

Another example is: (for the 7 continents).

#### **Always Eat An Apple Says Aunt Nora**

Asia, Europe, Australasia, Africa, South America, Antarctica and North America

## 4. REVISION SPEED DATING

This is effective if you have a revision partner or if you have a revision group. Firstly pick a topic. In pairs, sit opposite each other with a blank sheet of paper each. You have 5 minutes to write as much as you can about the given topic. After 5 minutes compare what each of you have written and the best response receives a point. Then swap (if you are in a group) and pick a different topic and repeat again.

See who has the most points at the end. This is an effective technique because it forces you to **Retrieve** the information from memory and by comparing responses you get to see if you have made any errors or have omitted any key information.

## 5. PAST PAPER QUESTIONS

This is a very effective method of revision because you have to **Retrieve** the information from memory. Your teacher may provide some papers and there are lots available online. However, you need to be thinking of the following points:

Make sure the past papers are from the same exam board that you are studying. Just doing the papers may not be enough.

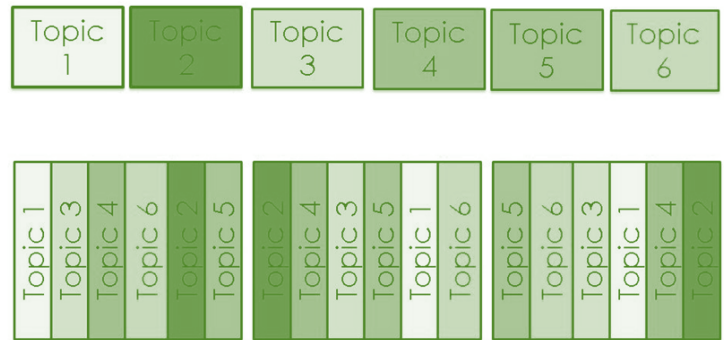
Can you get hold of mark schemes (online) or better still get a teacher to mark some of them? It is important to know if your answers are going to get you the marks that you need. It may be worth holding off past papers until you are well into the cycle of learning the material. Getting a question right might trick you into thinking you know all there is to know about a topic.

# ORGANISING REVISION

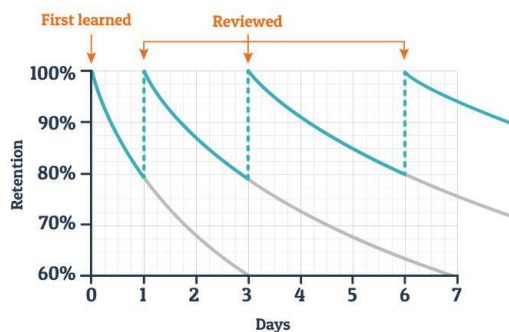
## What does research say?

*Blocking your revision-focusing on one topic for a long time then moving on to a new topic – is in-efficient. Interleaving your topics is far more effective!*

## Blocking vs interleaving



Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information



## What does research say?

*Ebbinghaus's famous forgetting curve shows that the brain naturally "forgets" information. If we revisit previously covered topics after some time has elapsed, we have a greater chance of remembering more of the information.*

The research suggests that when you plan your revision timetable, mix your topics and your subjects up (**Interleaving**). It may seem sensible to concentrate on a single topic in History for 3 straight nights, but actually you will remember more if you interleave with different subjects and topics. Remember to revisit (**Spacing**) what you are revising regularly.

# SUGGESTED REVISION TIMINGS

## Suggested revision session timings:

20 minutes on a topic

5 minutes break

20 minutes on a different topic

5 minutes break

20 minutes on a different topic

5 minutes break

20 minutes on a different topic.

This means you can revise 4 different topics in just over an hour and a half. If you want to revise for a longer period stick with the 20 minute times and do more of them (with 5 minute breaks in between).

If you are planning to revise a topic for the first time you may want to produce a mind map or make flash cards.

If you are revisiting a topic then perhaps focus on Retrieving the mind map or the flash card from memory (then checking how successfully you retrieved) or perhaps doing some past paper questions.



**Good luck - Pob lwc!**  
**Put the time in to your revision.**  
**However, make sure it is time well spent!**