



LYMMM

HIGH SCHOOL



12

REVISION TIPS
How the science of sport
can boost exam revision



The Easter holidays are crunch time for GCSE and A Level revision. Applying sports psychology can help pupils focus and make the most of your time



Before you even start planning your revision, you need to be aware of three key factors in the performance of your brain: **sleep, diet and exercise**. And the greatest of these three is sleep. Britain's cycling trailblazers Team Sky value it so highly that they employ a sleep scientist during the Tour de France. So for the next few nights, rank your sleep quality out of ten each morning, as well as recording what time you went to bed and woke up. If you're getting less than nine hours a night, try staying away from electronic screens for an hour before bedtime.

The next stage is to **set some goals**. Use the four column principle: write down each subject, the grade you got in your mocks, how much effort you are currently putting in (out of 100), and finally the grade you're aiming for. Don't make it easy: stretch yourself. Put the grid somewhere you can see it: on the fridge or in front of your desk.

Exam Goals: Reflection and Planning

Subject	Mock Grade	Current Effort (out of 100%)	My Target Grade
Maths	C	50%	A
English Language			
English Literature			
Biology			
Chemistry			
Physics			

Why do I want to achieve my target grades?

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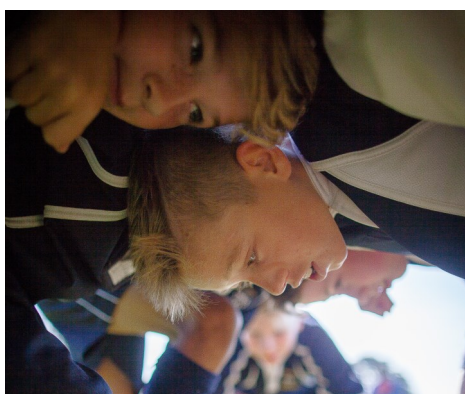


Now write a brief **revision plan** for the next three days. Most people want to work on the subjects they like, but this can mean you'll get polarised results: As and Ds, for instance. The better you are at a subject, the harder it is to improve, so spend more time on the weaker ones.



Follow the **20:20 rule**. You'll improve quicker if you spend 20 minutes on one subject, and then move on to the next. Aim to fit around 20x20-minute sessions into a day; that's about the equivalent of being at school. But do put some "Break sessions in, because most people fare better when they don't abandon their work-life balance completely. Some might want to reward themselves with 20 minutes on the Xbox, others will prefer to meet friends. Also include a few 'flexible' entries, because some subjects will probably require more attention than you expected.

Your 20 minute sessions should be like interval training, in that your confidence grows in time



Our next piece of sports science is called **functional equivalence**. When revising, try to simulate the conditions you'll be tested in. So don't revise with loud music banging away, or with your parent helping you, or by reading all day and not writing at all. Yes in your 20 minute slot, you'll need to look at your notes—especially in essay subjects—but then close your book or your folder and write out some answers, as if giving yourself a 10-minute mini exam. You could even go so far as to wear the same clothes you will wear in the exam; every little helps!

Repeat to remember; remember to repeat. It's estimated that you need to go over facts four or five times, at spaced-out intervals, to achieve long-term recall. But as with weight training, you don't do it all at once; you build up your muscles over a sequence of days and weeks. One practical option here is to use the Leitner System: a card-index approach in which you rank topics according to how confident you are with them, and then organise them so that the trickier ones come up more often.



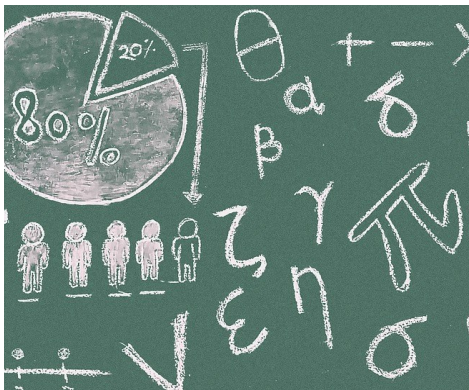


Don't expect revision to be fun! It's important to remember that we are not well evolved for schoolwork. We still have the same basic cognitive framework as our prehistoric ancestors, who generally lived for 20 to 35 years, and so were designed to seek short-term rewards rather than building skills that might help them over the long term. Your inner caveman is probably going to get frustrated at the lack of instant satisfaction in this process. He is going to look for distractions, so lock that mobile phone in another room, and turn off your internet connection if you're using a computer. It's better to work with pen and paper anyway, because of point No. 6



Build your confidence. At the end of each 20-minute session, identify three things you have learned or done well in that time. Because your caveman is designed for survival, he is always on the look-out for threats and negative thoughts - the voice in the back of your head that says "You will never be able to do this; it's boring and you're wasting your time." A little upbeat checklist should help you gain a small sense of short-term satisfaction and so keep negativity at bay. Once you have done that, select one thing you can improve on when you return to that topic next time.

While regularly checking your progress helps, putting your phone away will allow you to really focus



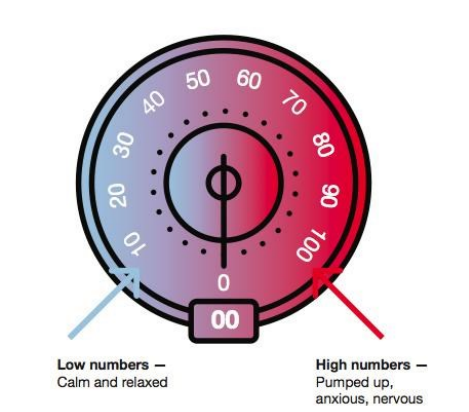
Assess yourself at the end of the day in a **closing ceremony**, an expanded version of what you did at the end of each session. How well did you follow the plan? Which sessions were most effective? Was there a pattern to times of the day when you achieved more? It probably feels like the last thing you want to do after a hard day at your desk, but this is actually where the greatest benefits are to be found. Athletes make good role models here because they track every detail of their lives, and use the data to optimise their performance levels.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Your basic unit of study doesn't have to be exactly 20 minutes—it could be 15 or 30 if that suits you better. Likewise, if your textbook is not helping you understand a certain topic, try searching on YouTube for a video that might present it from a different angle. Or if you suddenly hit a mental block, leave your desk and go for a walk before coming back later. Whatever changes you make, they need to be assessed during your closing ceremony. If they're working for you, you might want to incorporate them into your routine.



One key variable that we haven't talked about is "**activation**" - otherwise described as your energy levels. Most people find that their basic activation levels are too low, and therefore benefit from pumping themselves up when they come to study. They might want to do some jogging on the spot or push-ups before they sit down at their desk, but there are others who are happier to be calm. To optimise your productivity, you need to work out where you stand on that spectrum.

Try giving yourself an activation score out of 100 before each 20 minute session, and then at the end of the day look back and see how effective your revision was; a pattern should soon emerge that reveals your optimum score



Once you have found a formula that works, **make it a routine.** Every professional golfer follows a precise sequence of steps before hitting the ball - both physically and mentally. What makes these people successful, even more than hand-eye coordination, is the ability to control their thoughts when the going gets tough.

Try to master the same single-mindedness in your revision: there is no more valuable skill, at school or in the rest of your life, than self-discipline.