



Study Tips

How to study for exams



GETTING STARTED

- ⇒ Decide how much time you can spend on study and homework each night. Alternate a study session with a homework session.
- ⇒ Make a realistic timetable for the week, mark in the homework sessions and fill in the rest of the time slots with the subject that you will study each night.
- ⇒ Allow enough time for homework, study, exercise and even a little television and social life.
- ⇒ Divide the time for study and homework into slots of 25-30 mins, allowing a five-minute break in between. For subjects with numbers, i.e maths, physics and accountancy, time slots of 40 minutes are advisable. After three study/homework sessions a 20 mins break is advisable. This will help you to concentrate better.

Remember, the key to a successful study plan is setting targets that are possible for you to meet and sticking to your timetable.

It is important to say here that the **quantity** of time that you give to study is important, you do need a realistic yet demanding weekly timetable if you are to succeed in June. But 'putting in the *time*' is no guarantee of success - you must make sure that the **quality** of work is good, that your revision is active, organised and SMART, that it is focussed on the right areas.



WHAT IS GOOD STUDY?

For best results, study must be:

- **Active** - always work with a pen and paper, look for key points, test yourself. Never just sit down and read for a set period. Focus on tasks, not time.
- **Organised** - always ask yourself at the start of a

study session, "What do I want to have completed in this session?" Have a plan for what you want to cover this week and this month. Make sure that you have covered the important areas in each subject.

- **Aimed at Understanding** - always look to make patterns and associations from the material you are learning so that it makes sense to you. Link new information with what you already know of a subject. Use drawings and pictures. When you understand something, it will be easier to remember.



Setting SMART Study Goals

S PECIFIC:

Don't have as your target, "Study geography for an hour." Do have as your target, "Revise physical geography – rivers, and sketch a model answer to the question on last year's paper."

M EASURABLE:

Measure your progress towards your goal. Use a revision checklist for each subject and tick off each topic as you study/revise it. In this way, you'll be able to see your progress.

A CTION-RELATED:

Break down your study goal into a set of particular tasks, e.g. background reading of research material, draw up essay plan, complete writing of essay. Base each study session on tasks, not time.

R EALISTIC:

Don't set goals you will not be able to achieve. Talk to teachers and guidance counsellors about what they think would be realistic goals for you. If you set goals that are unrealistic you will quickly lose heart and lose interest.

T IME-BASED:

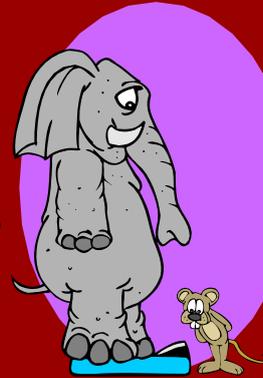
Avoid panic before a deadline. Always time your study tasks, working backwards from the deadline. If you have a test in three weeks' time, set blocks of revision work for each of the three weeks.

"Eating the Elephant" - Revision Checklists

Break up the job into smaller pieces. You'll get more done if you can do it piece by piece.

Each subject that you are studying can be broken down into smaller parts, with main sections, sub-topics, and other details. A very useful start is to list out all the main topics on the course then the sub-topics, and other details, and use this as a 'revision checklist' for the subject. For Leaving Cert students this has been done for you within the www.skool.ie website under 'Exam Centre'.

You can tick off the boxes as you cover the topics in class and as you revise them in your study sessions. This is a useful way of giving you an overview of the subject and a way of monitoring your progress in relation to the time that's left.



STUDY SKILLS

Learning involves taking in information, processing it, and storing it for re-use. It is similar in many ways to the use of files and folders on your computer. But even the most powerful computer will be of no use to you if the information and material is entered in a disorganised and chaotic way. As the old programmers' motto says, "*garbage in = garbage out!*" Here are some skills that will help:

Reading better and faster

Most students, when faced with a textbook or chapter to study, will start at the beginning, read through the book or chapter, then stop and put the book away. This is not a good way to study a textbook, it will take longer and leave you bogged down in detail, with no overall grasp of the subject matter. By taking a more *active* approach to reading, you can begin to read better and faster within a very short space of time. The **PQ2R** method has proven to be most successful in this regard. Try it and see the benefits.

P = Preview

Begin your reading task with a quick skim (2-3 minutes) of the text, trying to get an overview of the chapter or text. Look for section headings, charts and diagrams, signposts or key words. Don't start highlighting text at this point.

Q = Question

This is the key to active learning. Look for answers to the basic questions of Who? What? Where? Why? When? Try to pick out the main point of the text.

R = Read

Now read the chapter carefully, with these questions in mind. Your mind will be actively looking for answers as you read. Work with a pen and paper, make brief notes, look for 'topic sentences' that summarise the most important point in a paragraph or section and highlight them, if necessary. Change your reading speed - move quickly over lighter, less important material and slow down when you come to a difficult section.

R = Review

Always check your understanding of the material by reviewing and testing your recall before putting the text away. Look at the notes you have taken and check that they answer your questions. Write down in brief your findings from this study session.

CREATE THE RIGHT STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Find a fixed place to study (a particular desk/room at home, a spot in the library etc) that becomes firmly associated in your mind with good study time. You are trying to build a habit, to make life easier for yourself by being in productive mode when you start a session. All the equipment and materials you need should be within reach, and the room well lit and ventilated, but not too comfortable!

A tidy environment will ease your mind. Avoid background 'noise' that will add to your anxiety. If listening to music helps you, make sure it is easy listening and not high intensity.

Turn off the phone!

MAKING YOUR NOTES USEFUL

The purpose of making brief notes on a topic or section is to help with your overall understanding of material, so that you can tell the difference between what is really important information (*depth*) and what is merely supporting *detail*. Look at the main syllabus topics to help you decide what is important within each subject.



In addition, good summary notes help you to recall information quicker and easier.

Sort out your filing system

If you haven't already done so, get your subject folders and notes organised immediately. Invest in some ring-binders, dividers, plastic pockets, etc. Have a separate folder for each subject (a permanent reference point) and then keep a 'current folder' for managing notes that you are working on now.

'Less is always more'

When writing notes, remember they should be very brief, a summary, not just repeating what is in the textbook. Don't crowd the page. Stick to main headings and sub-headings. Use abbreviations or shorthand where appropriate. Try to reduce what you need to know on the topic down to one A4 sheet. Once you have an overview, it is easier to fill out the detail.

Make your notes visual

Make your notes so that they have a memorable appearance, this will help you to recall them easily. Use drawings, diagrams, graphs, colours, and boxes ('a picture is worth a thousand words'). Arrange the material in a logical way (title, sub-point, explanation, example). Ideally, you should be able to close your eyes in an exam and visualise a particular page of notes.

Beware of transcribing and highlighting!

Just re-writing the text from the book into your notes does not mean you will remember it. Try to put things in your own words and come up

with your own examples - this will make the material more meaningful. Only use the highlighter pen AFTER you have scanned and then questioned a text, so that you can identify the most important material and avoid the creation of a fluorescent textbook!

'Save' your notes carefully

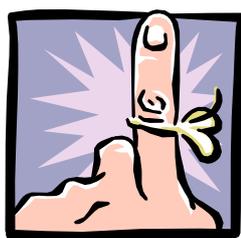
Practice following the logic of your computer files, when storing information. Think - where does this material best fit (subject, section, topic, sub-topic, etc.)? In this way, you will make sure that it is best filed and easily found both physically (during revision) and mentally (when you need it in an exam).

Improving memory

We often blame our memory for poor academic performance ("I'm no good at remembering names/dates/rules/verbs/characteristics") when really we should be looking at how we file information in our heads.

There is a big difference between short term and long term memory. If you study a topic one night and can recall most of it the next morning, don't be fooled into thinking that you will be able to remember it in two months time.

If the goal is to improve your long term memory, then the key to success is based on the 'mental filing system' we use. Not overloading your limited short term memory, and filing the information into long term storage, is best done by creating patterns and not just trying to remember 'bits' of information randomly.



'Chunking': as the average person can only hold seven 'items' in short term memory, grouping items together into 'chunks' can help you remember more. This is generally used for remembering numbers (think of how you remember phone numbers by grouping the seven digits into 2 or 3 chunks) but can also work with other listings in various subjects.

Repetition: Studies indicate that 66% of material is forgotten within seven days if it is not reviewed or recited again by the student, and 88% is gone after six weeks. Don't make life harder for yourself - build in a brief daily and weekly review of material covered. It will save you having to re-learn material from scratch!

Application and association: The best way to channel material to long term memory is to organise it into patterns that makes sense to you. Link it to existing information and topics and create colourful (and crazy!) personal examples which act as 'mental hooks' or 'cues' for recalling material in the future. In this way, new information is slotted into the bigger picture you have created and makes sense to you. If you learn a new formula/verb/rule, try to put it into practice immediately with a simple example.

Use of mnemonics: these are like word games which can act as memory aids and which allow you to personalise information. Think of *stalagmites* (come down from the ceiling) and *stalagmites* (go up from the ground); the colours of the rainbow ('Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain' to remember red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet); the seven characteristics of living organisms - Mr.Grief (Movement, Reproduction, Growth, Respiration, Irritability, Excretion, Feeding). You can come up with many more of these to help you to personalise items you need to recall.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Nourish yourself - eat a balanced diet - avoid fatty foods, too many sweets, chocolate, fizzy drinks. Always have breakfast. Take fish oil supplement to help improve concentration or multi-vitamin to boost your immune system.

Sleep - Make sure you are getting your eight hours. Ideally be in bed before 11pm (or earlier of Junior Cert Students).

Exercise - take regular exercise and relaxation

Monitor caffeine intake - no more than three cups of tea/coffee per day.

Drink lots of water - a minimum of eight glasses per day.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR EXAMS!