



Revision Strategies

The why, what, and how of revision

You may, or may not have, revised before. The key is you **MUST** do it now. Some have worked hard at revising and already found what works for them. But there are ways to make it better. The main point is to make it work well; to revise effectively, and efficiently.

The main purposes of revision are:

- To understand the topic for which you are sitting an exam
- To commit what you have learnt and understood to memory
- To practice planning and writing answers to questions

To enable you to do this, you will need to organise your notes, essays, hand-outs etc. into a convenient and coherent set of material. This section includes advice on:

- Making a revision plan
- How to revise
- Revising all year round

Making a revision plan

As with any other aspect of your studies, you need to organise your time and plan your revision in advance. Planning is key. Here are some tips:

- **Create a revision timetable**

You might be the kind of person who likes to plan in detail, or you may like to do an intermediary plan with topics or a general plan of which subjects, when. All are OK. There are templates for all of these on Moodle. A revision timetable helps you feel in control and helps you get started.... And makes sure you give time to everything.

TIPS – plan less rather than more. It always feels better to achieve what you have planned than to have set yourself unrealistic tasks and then feel depressed that you have not achieved them. A good tip is at the end of one day's revision session to plan what you are going to do the next day.

- **Balance your subjects**

Make sure you have enough time for everything that you have to revise. Balance the time you have available between your various courses. Do not neglect courses you find particularly easy or difficult.

- **Identify key topics**

For each course, identify which topics to revise. The syllabus provides a good checklist.

- **Arrange your revision material**

You will have class notes, your own notes from books and articles, essays with your teacher's feedback, hand-outs and other photocopies and references. You will also need textbooks, past exam papers etc. Arrange to have everything you need well in advance.

How to Revise

There are three key revision methods:

1. Note-taking/note-making
2. Memorising
3. Drafting model answers



We will look at each of these in turn:

1. Note-Taking/Note-Making

Throughout the academic year you will have made lots of notes. Now that it is revision time, the main objective is to work on your notes in various ways to make them more memorable:

- Physically organise your notes so that they are clear, logically ordered, and easy to find your way around
- Then read them through, underlining key words, highlighting different themes
- Devise your own colour coding system - it may seem childish, but associating different colours with different topics or themes will help you to memorise and compartmentalise things in your mind
- Write-out more and more concise versions of your notes, whittling down the content to manageable and digestible proportions - aim to reduce each topic to an index card. At this stage, your notes are an aide memoire, not a full repository of facts and arguments. Put questions on the back of the index card so you can test yourself and then you will know if you have memorised it
- You may find Spider diagrams, Mind maps and Concept maps helpful ways of summarising a lot of information onto a single page. (They are also visually memorable, too.)

When it comes to note-making for revision purposes, less is more!

- Quiz cards are a good idea just for the facts – question on one side, answer on the other

2. Memorising

There is no way around this task. To do well in exams, you must remember your material. Ultimately, you have to work out the way of doing this that works best for you. Some of these approaches may help:

- Look at your notes for a topic on three or four occasions. This will fix them in your mind better than a once and for all approach
- Predict a page of notes in your mind or in a diagram before you look at it. What you have forgotten will bring itself to your attention as you read
- Make a summary of the page and focus on recalling information triggered by the key words/questions
- Mnemonics. Use the letters of a word, or the initial letters of a phrase, to trigger associations
- Think of a picture of the topic, create a mental picture
- Diagrammatic notes e.g. Spider diagrams, Mind maps and Concept maps are more visually stimulating and therefore more easily remembered than a list of point
- Last-minute revision of notes, now reduced to minimal levels, is generally helpful

Test yourself, or ask someone to test you, test each other. You must check you know it.

3. Drafting Model Answers

Working out model answers to anticipated questions should be central to your revision process. This technique will work on you remembering your material, developing your critical skills, and practising for the exam.

See How to Use Past Papers

- *Analyse the question* - Using past exam papers, think about the wording of questions (see the Glossary of Exam Terms for help on this). What are the problem or key words? What approach is being asked for? You could practice rephrasing the question in your own words to highlight the exact meaning
- *Generate ideas* - You are going to need at least five or six major points or arguments with which to answer most questions
- *Other angles* - Some topics are dealt with from one particular perspective. You could improve your essay and catch the examiners eye by introducing an alternative perspective, where relevant
- *Check* - Go over your outline answers looking for errors and irrelevant points and ways to improve the argument
- *Write under exam conditions* - Practice writing at speed under exam conditions



Revision all year round

Revision should not be a last-minute attempt to make up for poor study habits in the previous eight months. As one topic quickly succeeds another in each course, it is easy to forget previous work all too soon. There seems to be little time to revise. Nevertheless, throughout the academic year you should work with one eye on the revision process to come:

- Make sure your notes are easy to follow and well organised. Keep things neatly filed together with clear labelling
- Collect lists of past questions and past papers
- Note down what you have not yet had time to do, and the key issues you have not yet investigated
- Do not let work pile up
- Try to read through your notes periodically. Use them to form an overview of the course so far. Make connections between what you have studied and what is to come
- If you are particularly confused with one aspect of your course, set aside time to look at your notes, key texts, and past exams. Try to make sense of your course as a whole

Remember your teachers and learning managers are a great resource and are there to help you. Use them!