



ST ANDREW'S HIGH SCHOOL

STUDY SKILLS GUIDE



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Introduction

Revision? Study?

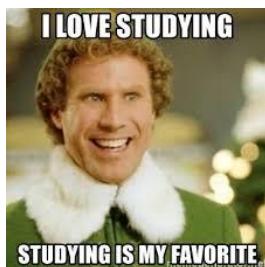
Everyone feels nervous before exams – it's normal. Some pupils instinctively know how to study and get the best out of themselves with the resources they have for revision. For most of us though, the idea of revision and study can be difficult to grasp – where do I begin? What activities help? How does everyone else do it? How do I study?

Perhaps you may know someone who has the same ability as you in class but who always does better in tests, prelims and exams. The difference may be that they were willing to put themselves through the revision process or know what works best for them.

It was hard, maybe boring, time consuming and meant they missed out on some more enjoyable activities but despite being no more intelligent than you they have ended up doing better.

Therefore, this guide hopes to provide some support for both pupils and parents. It has lots of handy tips and ideas that you can use to make revision and study work for you.

It's important to remember that an exam is a test of learning, not memory. Examiners want to see evidence that you have drawn on your knowledge, rather than just replicate course notes and textbook facts. Revision should be a process of developing and consolidating understanding rather than cramming as much information as possible before the morning of the exam.



General Tips

Here are some tips which seem obvious but are worth thinking about.

1. Time Management

Recognise that you will have to give up some things. Mostly time: time online, time on your console, time away from your friends. But remember this is only for a short time in your life. The benefits of improved results far outweigh the loss of some of your leisure time.

Don't leave revision to the last minute. We all know someone with the talent to be able to recall information without doing any work but let's face it, most of us are not in that category! You need to plan for your prelims and SQA exams.

2. Prioritise

Don't keep revising things you are already very confident about. Whilst it is nice to comfort yourself with knowing something well it is unlikely that the exam or test is only going to include exactly those things you know.

Find out what you are going to be tested on. Your teacher is the best resource – he or she should be able to give you course specifications or essential course content they've covered.

Alternatively, there are clear and easy to use revision guides at www.sqa.org.uk.

3. Environment

Find the right place to do your studying. It should be a quiet space that allows you to focus. If you're lucky that may be at home. For others the best place may be your school library which has fewer distractions, or at a friend's house where you know you'll challenge rather than distract each other. Supported study can also be an excellent place to revise - if you don't just go to be with your friends.

Make sure you have the tools – the pens, the paper, the highlighters etc. – don't waste time stopping every FIVE minutes to look for this or that.

4. De-digitalise (unless using specific websites or apps for revision)

You should switch off your phone, tablet or laptop if possible. It is simply too tempting to check up on Snapchat or Instagram instead of studying. Set aside specific break times where you are free to browse and message as much as you want.

5. Study Leave

It's called that for a reason. At Easter or during official study leave make use of the time you are given. Many pupils set themselves a timetable for each day set up like their school day with breaks and lunch hour. They give themselves the night off if they have completed a school days' worth of study. There are blank study timetables at the back of the booklet for you to use.

These are also useful to set study times during the normal school week to plan the correct balance of studying and leisure time that you need.

6. Reward Hard Graft

Reward yourself when you've made progress. Recognise that you are putting in a lot of effort to achieve your potential and when you see that you are improving give yourself a pat on the back. Of course, you shouldn't try to learn the periodic table of chemical elements while watching Netflix or the Champions League. But that doesn't mean you can't record a favourite programme and watch it as a treat, or take a trip to the cinema, have an hour on the Xbox etc.

7. Target Setting

Always have a goal for each session e.g. "By the end of this session I'll have listed the key features for physical factors in PE" or "We'll have worked through the first 3 questions of the 2015 past paper".

8. Stuck?

Get help! Your teachers are always at hand to help you out so there is no need to suffer in silence – speak to them after class, at interval, or even via SMHW. Don't forget about your parents and friends who may be able to help you out also. You might also want to see your mentor/ PSHE teacher and discuss your concerns with them when having target setting meetings.

9. Getting Started...

The SQA website is a good place to begin - www.sqa.org.uk

- Download the most recent years' past exam papers and marking instructions for every subject studied.
- The MySQA service allows you/ your child to register to receive SQA results by text or e-mail.
- MyStudyPlan (SQA App) allows you to build and personalise your own exam timetable. This app also gives an up to date exam calendar when details are released.

Making A Plan

“Failing to plan, is planning to fail!”

Being organised may not be a habit that you have had up till now, but it really can make a difference to how well your revision goes.

The top tip for successful revision is to make a plan; otherwise it is easy to waste your precious revision time. We recommend that you start your revision at least 8 weeks before your exams begin. It is helpful to look at your exam dates and work backwards to the first date you intend to start revising.

- List all your exam subjects and the amount of time you think you will need for each one. It is unlikely that the amounts will be equal. Many people find it smart to allocate more time to the subject or topics they find the most difficult
- Draw up a revision plan for each week then display this somewhere visible
- Fill in any regular commitments you have first and the dates of your exams
- Use Revision Checklists or Course Content for each subject as a starting point. Look at what you need to know and try to identify any gaps in your knowledge. (A good way of doing this is to look at the results of past papers, marked homework, or tests you have worked through)
- Revise often; try and do a little every day
- Plan in time off, including time for activities which can be done out in the fresh air. Take a 5 or 10 minute break every hour and do some exercise, go for a short walk or make a drink (example hour – study 25 minutes, chill for 5 minutes, study 25 minutes, chill for 5 minutes)
- You may find it helpful to change from one subject to another at ‘break’ time, for example doing one or two sessions of maths and then changing to geography or alternating a favourite subject with a more difficult one. It helps to build in some variety
- Adjust your timetable if necessary and try to focus on your weakest topics and subjects
- Don’t panic; think about what you can achieve, not what you can’t. Positive thinking is important!

Go Public

Make a detailed revision timetable on a large piece of paper and post it up somewhere that everyone in the house can see it. That way, everyone knows what you are meant to be studying and when. Strangely enough, letting other people know your plans lightens the load, because then it's not just down to you to motivate yourself.

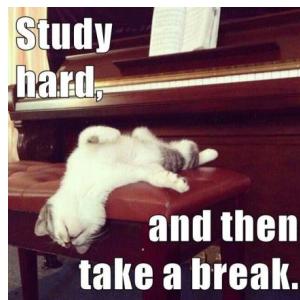
Set up a timetable in much the same way you see your school timetable. As you get closer to your exam leave, you'll need to plan for which exams come up first so that they receive more attention. Remember there are blank timetables at the back.

	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mon				School				Free	Eat!	Maths	English	TV	Free!
Tue				School				Free	Eat!	French	X-box	Tech	Free!
Wed				School				Free!	Eat!		Football		Free!
Thurs				School				Free!	Eat!	Tech	Maths	Art	Free!
Fri				School				Free!	Eat!	Geog	IT	Chem	Free!
Sat	Cycling	Free!	Art	English	Football			Eat!	Physics	TV		DVD	Free!
Sun	Free!		English	Free!	Physics	Art	Eat!		Geog			Free	

Some pupils like to create their plan on computer – try Google Calendar or a spreadsheet program.

During study leave you can be more flexible with your time in much the same way as you are at the weekend.

If you have a part time job that may have an impact on your weekend or your evenings, you must bear this in mind when planning your timetable – is the job more important than the revision which could improve your future? That will be for you and your parents to decide.



How To Use Time

Your own learning ability drops over time. It's a fact. But by organising that time effectively you can maintain your learning efficiency at the same or near to your peak.

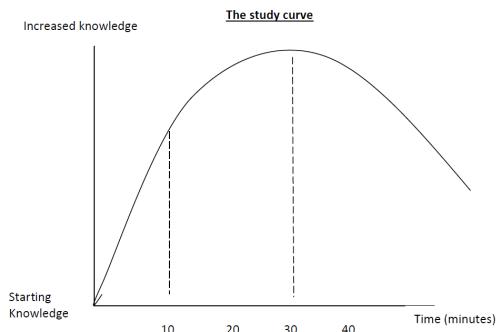
Here's how to do it. Try to keep to timings and build in **planned breaks**. For example, revise for 25 minutes; take a 5 minute break, go back for another 25 minutes etc. The break helps your learning ability.

When you have visited a subject, take 10 minutes the next day to go back over what you did and what you learned. Three or four days later give another 10 minutes to review it. Revisiting will help to keep the knowledge and understanding in your brain!

It is important that as you go through your revision programme, you stop and ask yourself how you are getting on. Are some techniques working for you and others not? Do you need to look again at your timetable? Don't be a slave to the plan if it is not working for you.

Remember, if you are struggling, seek help from your parents, friends and teachers.

Most, if not all books concerning study techniques will have a diagram showing the study curve. It should be clear from this diagram that your brain can take in new knowledge for about 30 minutes but then starts to discard some of this knowledge if you continue to study without a break. You actually unlearn some of your previous work if you continue past this optimum time.



Making Notes

Gather all your material for a topic. You need to convert notes that you have (either in your jotter or textbook) into brief, clear notes.

Begin by trying to condense the information into key facts. Some pupils use a highlighter to highlight the key words or phrases that are important to remember. You're trying to make shorter versions of your main notes. These will be easier to remember and for many pupils, the process of writing and thinking about what they are writing helps them with their understanding.

Shorter notes are more manageable and can be used in connection with other techniques for example:

- Making flash cards
- Creating a mind map
- Highlighting key words and then creating a bullet point list
- Reading notes out loud and recording them – play them back on your phone

When you are using a class textbook or revision guide try to rewrite some of the material using **your own words and in your own way** – after all, when you are in the exam, you'll be writing answers using your own words because there won't be a textbook to copy from! So, get into this habit early.

It can be a satisfying feeling knowing that you have condensed 5 or 6 pages of information into a single page or less - a single page is much more manageable and easier to study.

After simplifying a topic – test yourself

1. Cover all your notes up from a specific topic
2. On a blank piece of paper – write out as much of the topic as you can
3. Go back and use your notes – add things you missed and correct mistakes

Simply just copying out information bypasses your brain.

If it doesn't even go in to your brain it's pointless.

If you want to copy, use a photocopier.

If you want to revise, use your brain!

Flash Cards

Many students use flashcards when they have a lot of facts to remember that they want to be able to recall quickly in an exam situation. Flash cards are simple to use.

You can pick up blank Record Cards up at most stationary stores and supermarkets – WH Smith, Tesco, Asda, etc. The school also usually has a supply – just ask your year head.

The cards are blank on each side. Simply write a statement or question on one side of the card with the answer or fact on the other side.

Cities in Scotland	Glasgow	Dundee
	Edinburgh	Aberdeen
	Inverness	Perth
		Stirling

Create a pile of these cards for a subject and use them to test yourself:

- Begin by going through the cards several times, reading the question and the answer on the opposite side.
- Now take each card and read the question on the first side.
- Try to answer the question in your head.
- Check the answer on the other side – were you correct?
- If you were right, put the card on your desk – we'll call this the correct pile.
- If you were incorrect, put the card into a different pile – the incorrect pile.
- Once you have gone through all the cards, you'll have a correct pile and an incorrect pile.
- Re-read the pile of incorrect cards both front and back.
- Take a break.
- Go back to step 2 and keep repeating the process until you have no cards in the incorrect pile.

This works wonders for many pupils. Going through this process several times you will find you may get to a stage where you get every card correct.

Many pupils use the cards to write important bullet points which summarise a topic or your revision notes. Looking at them often helps to keep the important concepts and ideas fresh in your mind.

An even better use of flash cards is working with your friends to test teach other. They may have created their own set too. Using flash cards to test with your friends can be a powerful study tool.

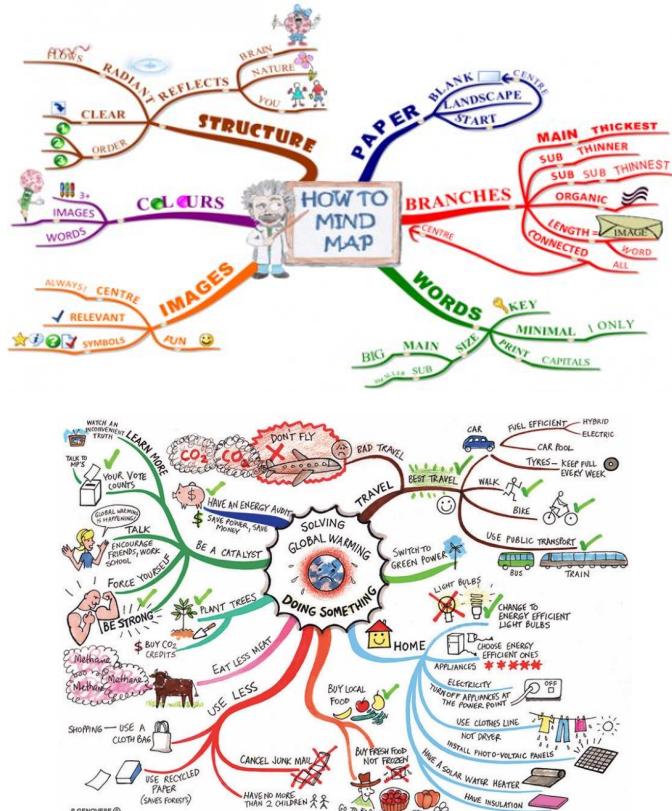
When you feel ready - try asking your parents to quiz you using the flash cards.

Mind Maps

A mind map is a graphical way of making notes by organising topics using keywords, abbreviations, lines, drawings, symbols, colours and numbers. Because it is a much more visual way of linking and organising how a topic is structured many pupils prefer it to re-writing notes.

You may want to begin by using your notes or textbook to select a topic at the centre. From there you use branches and lines to organise the information for that topic, giving each important section its own branch. From there you can keep adding branches off the main branches to further expand and categorize the knowledge.

This is active learning – being engaged in creating work which will help you understand and remember information. You can be as creative and colourful as you want.



Past Papers

Teachers will always recommend that pupils use past papers to prepare them for the format and range of questions that they are likely to meet when they go into the exam hall on the day of their exam. This is sensible advice – but how to use them? Here is the best advice.

- Papers can usually be bought from places such as Amazon, Waterstones, WHSmith, etc but the Scottish Qualifications Authority offer many question papers (with answers), usually for the last three years at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers> or on the specific subject pages on the SQA website.
- Use the practice papers against the clock, giving yourself the same time as will be available in the real exam.
- Use the marking scheme to mark your own paper – incorrect answers help you figure out where your knowledge is weak. Make a note of these areas and revise those more closely – it's easy to revise the stuff we already know!
- Work with a friend or a group of friends and answer questions together. Each of you writes their own answer and then you discuss everyone's solution before checking the marking scheme. Stay focused here – it is easy to just chat and gossip which won't help. If that is all your friends want to do, then they are the wrong people to study with.
- You can complete the same paper several times. When you do, if you have been noting your weak areas from last time and have been revising these, you'll notice your mark gets better.
- Don't forget to look and see how many marks are given for each question. The more marks available, the more points your examiners want you to make.
- Questions that begin with the words "Describe" or "Explain" mean that the examiner wants more than just one-word answers! Make sure you understand all the command words for different subjects.

Improving your vocabulary

Literacy for Learning

Your standard of English and your understanding of what words mean could make all the difference in many exams. For example, if the Modern Studies exam asked you to;

“Describe how a shop steward may infiltrate management negotiations”.

If you do not know the meaning of “Describe”, “infiltrate” or “negotiations” then, chances are, answering that question is going to be difficult.

If you are more confident about your vocabulary, you’ll feel more confident about answering questions or understanding the text you must read in an exam. The best way of improving our vocabulary is to read more.

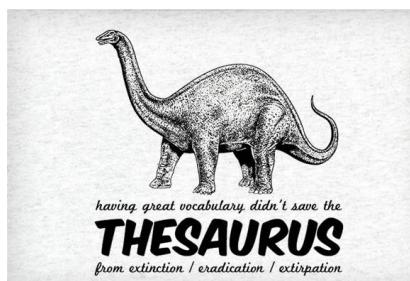
Reading Facebook or the Daily Mail Celebrity Section is unlikely to contain a range of vocabulary that will improve yours. All the words will be familiar and will not challenge you. You need to read a proper newspaper or book that will.

We advise you to ask your parents to buy you a quality newspaper – The Times, Guardian, etc at the weekend.

Read the paper or a decent book with a Thesaurus. As you read and come across an unfamiliar word, look that word up in the Thesaurus and find a word that you do understand. Re-read the sentence, with the new word in your head. Hopefully the sentence will now make more sense.

What will happen is that you will begin to learn new words and what they mean. You will also be exposed to better writing and how arguments are made. You benefit in many ways. The reports and stories you read may not always be interesting but, it is the process that is important for you – trying to improve your capabilities with English and literacy in order to benefit your potential in all your subjects.

There is an online Thesaurus at www.thesaurus.com



What Helps You Learn?

Different suggestions for different types of learner

Mnemonics

The word stands for Make Names Easily Memorable by Organising Nominated Initial Characters. This is a great way of learning key facts.

Example - A way of remembering the nine planets in order of distance from the sun

My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas

=

Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto.

If you're not the greatest fan of reading and prefer diagrams, sketches, charts and colourful information. Try to:

- Rewrite your notes as mind-maps
- Use colour to highlight important things
- Draw diagrams and sketches to help you remember points.

If you always get the best out of lessons that involve discussion, listening and talking – try to:

- Read your notes aloud
- Record yourself reading key points of your notes aloud, then listen to the recording afterwards – use your smartphone to record your notes
- Revise with other students if you can
- Teach what you know to an imaginary (mirror) or real audience

If you get a lot of understanding by reading textbooks, using websites and writing notes. Try:

- Copying out your notes
- Reading your notes silently
- Rewriting the key points using different words
- Writing down key points from memory

More Ideas Used By Other School Pupils

“Make sure you look at how many marks the question is worth in the exam – write your answer based on this e.g. don’t spend too much time on a 2 mark question then leave yourself out of time for an 8 mark question.”

“Get a friend or a family member to test your knowledge of a subject after you’ve revised it.”

“Meet with friends and make up a quiz on a topic you’ve been revising.”

“Type up or re-write notes topic by topic for each subject in your own words.”

“Time yourself to complete past paper questions – then correct them or get your teacher to correct them.”

“Try to open the revision book, look at it for 2 minutes and then close it. Jot down everything you can remember.”

“Make a PowerPoint presentation and use to teach your family about a topic.”

“Put post-it notes around the house in different places and go for a walk round the house reading them.”

“Use revision websites – BBC Bitesize, SATPE, etc.”

“Create pictures in your mind as you’re reading. Visualise what you’re learning.”

“Meet friends for a few hours to go over a past paper. Complete the past paper the night before and then discuss the answers.”

“Record yourself reading out notes and play it on a smartphone or tablet.”

“Search the internet for other people’s revision notes/ tips.”

“Make a rhyme or a new word from the topic you need to learn.”

Managing Pre-Exam Stress

Pre-exam nerves happen to everyone, in a variety of different ways, and below is a list of tips that can help to reduce this stress and help you prepare for your exams.

Stress can often be caused by feeling like you don't have control over the outcome of a situation. That's why it is important to follow the steps below, and have a study plan in place, so you are as prepared and in as much control of exam outcomes as possible – therefore reducing pre-exam stress and improving your confidence.

- Eat well. Eat a balanced diet at appropriate meal times and try to reduce caffeinated drinks and sugary snacks as these can cause spikes in energy and then severe dips. A balanced diet also helps improve concentration and memory retention.
- Sleep well. Aim to get a minimum of 8 hours sleep before night. This will help you feel more focussed when in class and studying. Do not read your phone immediately before trying to go to sleep as the glare from your screen stops your brain from 'switching off'.
- Study well. Use your study timetable and study techniques effectively to get the most out of your time and studying.
- Enjoy breaks. Make sure you have something you enjoy doing planned for each break to take your mind off studying and increase happiness.
- Exercise. Regular exercise has many benefits including helping your mind to 'switch off', relieve stress, and boost energy levels.
- Talk. If you are feeling stressed talk to a teacher, parent, mentor or friend. This will help you feel reassured and supported and will allow you to face your fears with confidence rather than avoid them and let stress build up.
- Goal Setting. Set realistic goals that are aspirational but achievable. Do not put unnecessary and unrealistic pressure on yourself.
- Breathe. Easy technique when feeling stressed is to take long deep breaths in and out for 10 seconds. This is proven to help the brain think clearer, improve calmness and reduce negative thoughts.
- Be positive. Visualise doing well in your exams. Picture yourself in the exam hall feeling confident and answering well. This will help you feel more relaxed in the build up and block out negative thoughts.
- Acceptance. Know that there are things you cannot control e.g. exact exam questions. But feel confident that if you have prepared as well as you possibly can then you will have the tools and the knowledge to answer any question given to you.
- Perspective. Remember that although exams are important, they are not a life and death situation.

Sitting an Exam

Some tips to ensure you are fully prepared to do your best in an exam.

- Make sure you know where and when it will take place
- Find out how much time is allowed
- Find out how many questions you need to answer/ how many marks it is worth
- The night before the exam go to bed at a reasonable hour. Cramming into the early hours is unlikely to get you extra marks. Feeling well rested as you sit the exam usually will. Aim for a minimum of 8 hours sleep.
- Relax – remember you have done everything in your power to prepare for the exam and today will be the day you will be able to demonstrate your knowledge and hard work.
- Nervousness is normal – the extra adrenaline helps you concentrate. Take some long, deep breathes to compose yourself.
- Make sure you have everything you need. Bring along a pen you like writing with, scientific calculator, ruler etc.
- Leave for the exam in plenty of time
- Make sure you switch off your mobile phone before entering the exam hall.
- Look at the marks available and read the questions carefully, following instructions given in the paper (e.g. to show all workings etc.).
- At the beginning of the exam you could take the opportunity to write down any formula, facts or quotes you may need.
- For longer answers, take a few minutes before you begin to produce a short plan of what you are going to include in your answer/ essay.
- Keep an eye on the clock – if you have practised past papers at home, you'll be able to manage your time better.
- Don't panic or give yourself a hard time. Think positively – even if you are finding the exam difficult remind yourself that others are probably feeling the same way.
- If a question is causing you difficulty you can move on and come back to it later.
- A few minutes from the end of the exam take a quick review through the paper and make any changes – many pupils have picked up a mark or two just by doing this.

Study Timetable

Day / Date	3pm-4pm	4pm-5pm	5pm-6pm	6pm-7pm	7pm-8pm	8pm-9pm					
Monday											
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Saturday											
Sunday											

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