

John Masefield Sixth Form

Study Skills Guide

A- Level Success Model



VESPA: The Five Elements of Success



VISION

- Do you know what you want to achieve?
- Why are you studying A Levels?
- What grades do you want to achieve in your A Levels?
- What career are you interested in?



EFFORT

- How many hours of independent study do you do?
- How do you compare to the most committed students in your year group?
- For methods to improve this, read on



SYSTEMS

- How do you organise your learning and your time?
- Do you have any study or time management methods or techniques that you use?
- If the answer was not necessarily



PRACTICE

- How do you practice to improve your study skills?
- Have you learned how to Mind Map or to use the Cornell Notes technique?
- Did you know past papers really help focus your study?
- How do you practice to improve your time management?



ATTITUDE

- How do you respond to setbacks?
- How do you respond to constructive criticism?
- How do you overcome setbacks to get back on track?

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Get your head right...

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How to get your head around learning

VESPA

- Having a **VISION**
- Commitment to the **EFFORT** needed
- Having suitable **SYSTEMS** in place
- PRACTISING** your learning and skills
- Developing a positive mental **ATTITUDE**



Over the last 15-20 years, much research into the psychology of success has been conducted and the findings are very interesting! Achieving the best grades possible in your A-levels requires more than just learning the specification content. A particular set of skills and an advanced mindset is necessary. In other words, your attitude, self-beliefs and self-awareness of your own goals are essential to being an effective and successful A-level student.

It's important to ensure that you have **all 5 elements** working together to provide an effective mindset and to achieve true success.

<p>Identify any questions from this week to discuss with peers or ask in class next lesson.</p> <p>Vision</p> 	<p>Read ahead for next class including key learning terms.</p> <p>Effort</p> 	<p>Update your file with notes, handouts, homework etc. Are you organised?</p> <p>Systems</p> 	<p>Complete a summary of the previous lesson and take to your next class. Complete an exam question.</p> <p>Practice</p> 	<p>Show a positive interest in your subject - watch or read the news and bring a story/fact to class for discussion.</p> <p>Attitude</p> 
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Get Your Head Right: YOUR ATTITUDE TO LEARNING

□ **GROWTH MINDSET** – The theory of motivation (Carol Dweck)

Answer the following questions as honestly as you can:

	Strongly agree Score 1	Agree Score 2	Mostly agree Score 3	Mostly disagree Score 4	Disagree Score 5	Strongly disagree Score 6
Your intelligence is something you are born with, and you can't do much to change it.						
You can learn new things, but you can't really change your intelligence.						

Calculate your score. It should be somewhere between 2 and 12.

SCORE:

2-4 means you are a **'Fixed IQ'** theorist

These students believe their ability is fixed, probably at birth, and there is very little if anything they can do to improve it. They believe ability comes from talent rather than from the slow development of skills through learning. Therefore, you might as well give up in the face of difficulty.

5-8 means you are undecided

9-12 means you are an **'Untapped Potential'** theorist

These students believe that ability and success are due to learning, and learning requires time and effort. In the case of difficulty, one must try harder, try another approach, or seek help.

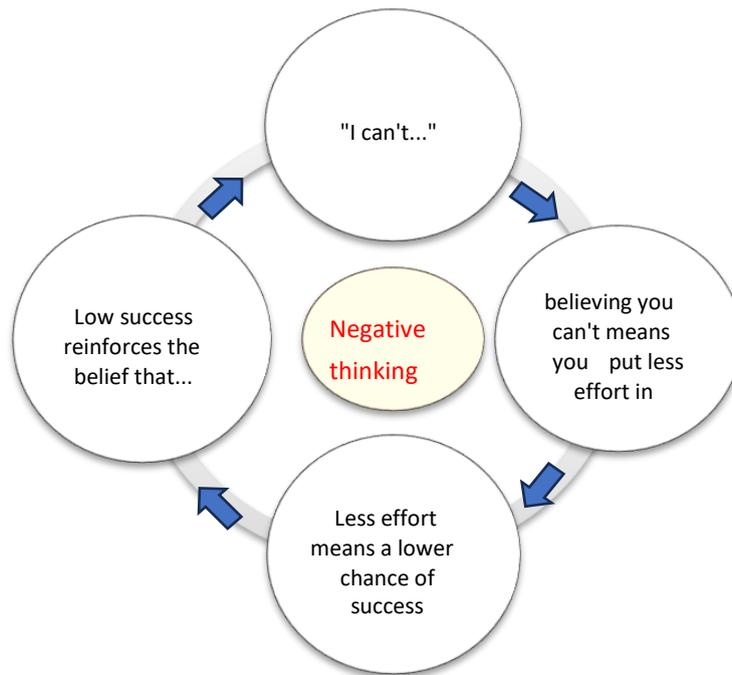
If you are a **Fixed IQ theorist**, when you are finding study difficult, try to think differently:

- Intelligence and ability can be cultivated.
- Effort grows connections in your brain which make you smarter.
- The brain is like a muscle which strengthens with exercise, and you need to 'work out' to get better.
- Avoid the defensive withdrawal of effort - don't stop trying because you feel afraid to fail!

Learning is easier when you believe you can learn, believe in your intelligence.

Get Your Head Right: THOUGHT CYCLES

The way you study, the effort you make, and your mood are influenced by your patterns of thought. These often develop over time and become habits. How to get your head around learning



Get Your Head Right: HAVING A VISION

Vision is about having a clear goal; it's about making the connection between the work you are doing and the reason for doing it. In simple terms it's about knowing the outcomes you want to achieve.

Get Your Head Right: RECOGNISING YOUR BLOCKERS

A blocker is an excuse for putting off getting started on schoolwork. It might be a way of thinking, or a habit, that stops you doing what you really ought to do.

- **I'll do it later** – the secret to getting ahead, is getting started...

Everyone feels this at some point. The feeling that they don't want to complete a piece of work, finish an essay, put a couple of hours into a tricky piece of coursework.

Don't wait until you feel like working, it'll never happen. Make the decision to start (even if that's putting an introduction together, it's still a start and may just be the kick start which lifts your confidence). That might just help you make a plan for the rest of it!

- **I don't need to feel bad about this – push yourself, no-one else is going to do it for you...**

Most people will feel guilty when they don't work, "I should be finishing that essay..."

But sometimes, we deliberately re-think the situation until we feel better about it:

- "Another student hasn't done it either, so I'm not that bad."
- "The instructions were unclear – so I've got an excuse. I don't understand what I've been asked to do."
- "I completed the work last minute last time and the grade was OK. I'll do that again."

- **Distractions – if it's important to you, you will find a way. If it's not, you will find an excuse...**

Sometimes we sub-consciously (or maybe deliberately) create opportunity for distraction, hoping for something to take us away from our work.

- We might work near others and tell ourselves this is good because we can ask for help if we need it.
- We might have our phone, laptop, games console, TV nearby, an easy distraction.



If some of these blockers feel familiar, then make a note of what you need to change below:

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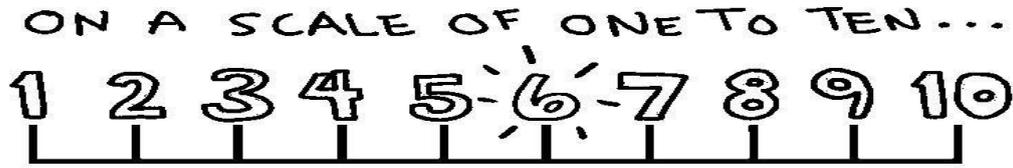
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Get Your Head Right: IDENTIFY YOUR LEVEL OF EFFORT

The 1-10 scale -Effort

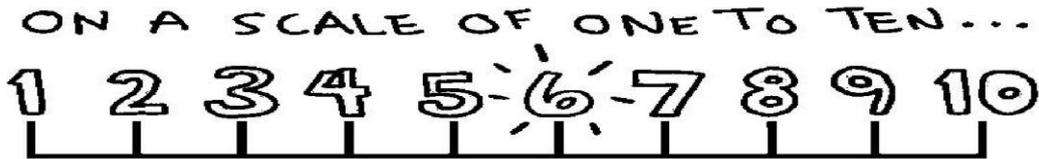


Think about the level of effort you have put into your studies so far. Use the following guideline to choose your number:

1: little or no effort **5:** some effort – you're working 'quite hard' **10:** the hardest you possibly could

Level of effort:	
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The 1-10 scale - How much work you are doing?



Think about how many hours you are working. Use the following guideline to choose your number:

1: 0-1 hours independent study a week **5:** 7 hours a week **10:** 15 hours study a week

Independent Study hours:	
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Improving your level of effort:

If you are not undertaking enough independent study, then make a plan to increase it. Identify why it is worth the effort, write down what you want to achieve:

What grades do you want to achieve?	
What do you need to give up/reduce to succeed: e.g. device time; socialising; hours of paid work	
What challenges might you face? e.g. your work environment at home or not having understood what you learnt in school	

Get organised!

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Get Organised: CREATE AN INDEPENDENT STUDY TIMETABLE

Look at your week to see when you can best do independent study whilst maintaining a work/life balance.

- How many supervised study periods do you have?
- Which 'free' periods will you use for study?
- When do you get home from school? What time is best for starting study?
- When do you see friends/family?
- How many hours do you spend at your part-time job?
- If you play sport or have a particular hobby, when does this use your time?
- Other time commitments?

Create a plan. Using your school timetable plan your independent study during the school day, in the evenings and at weekends. It is recommended that you spend **4-5 hours per week per subject**.

WEEK ONE	PERIOD 1	PERIOD 2	PERIOD 3	PERIOD 4	PERIOD 5	AFTER SCHOOL
MONDAY						
TUESDAY						
WEDNESDAY						
THURSDAY						
FRIDAY						
W/End	MORNING		AFTERNOON		EVENING	
SATURDAY						
SUNDAY						

WEEK TWO	PERIOD 1	PERIOD 2	PERIOD 3	PERIOD 4	PERIOD 5	AFTER SCHOOL
MONDAY						
TUESDAY						
WEDNESDAY						
THURSDAY						
FRIDAY						
W/End	MORNING		AFTERNOON		EVENING	
SATURDAY						
SUNDAY						

Get Organised: USE DIARIES; LISTS; AND FILES.

Identify the actions that you need to take:



ORGANISATION:	TICK IF COMPLETED	<u>ACTION TO BE TAKEN:</u>
I have a diary or planner. I will use it to record tasks and deadlines.		
I have a 'to do' list, that I keep up to date.		
I have a separate file for each subject		
My files are clearly organised and labelled		
I have my assessments and the subject specifications in my file		
I have the course textbooks and required reading books		

Get Organised: CREATE A STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Do you work best at school or at home?

If you work best at school, the study rooms are open for use until 4.30pm

- Choose the study room or study space where you have the least distraction. Be honest with yourself about where you will focus best.

When at home, create a dedicated study space. Somewhere that you can concentrate and work undisturbed, free from distractions, and turn your mobile off.

- Somewhere you can sit at a desk or table (with a computer if needed)
- Somewhere you have the space to spread out everything you need
- Somewhere with good lighting and a comfortable temperature

Get Organised: UNDERTAKE A WEEKLY REVIEW

Make a habit of undertaking an hourly review every week. This will create the opportunity to check your organisation and learning regularly.

Set aside an hour a week. Don't let anyone disturb you. Put your phone on silent, don't swap your hour for something else or skip it. Maybe choose to do it on Friday or a Sunday afternoon.

MY WEEKLY REVIEW HOUR WILL BE:

- Split the hour up evenly into 15-20 minute sections.
- For each subject, review the weeks work:
- Check your notes are clear and in order.
- Summarise your learning in a quick diagram, mind-map or a few lines of notes.
- Highlight or circle anything you've found hard. Look to work on this during independent study time or plan to discuss with the teacher.
- Go through the tasks you've been given, and the deadlines you've got. Make a prioritised list for the week ahead.

Once you've done this for each subject, you should be feeling pretty good.

You're in control. You know what needs to be done.

Making a habit of the weekly review should reduce your stress and help you feel calmer.

Get studying

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reorganize
fill in gaps
summarize
study
review
re-write
elaborate

Get Studying: INDEPENDENT STUDY

A-Level exams require you to recall information from two years of study so **you need to be reviewing and consolidating information regularly**. Independent study will help you feel positive and in control of your studies.

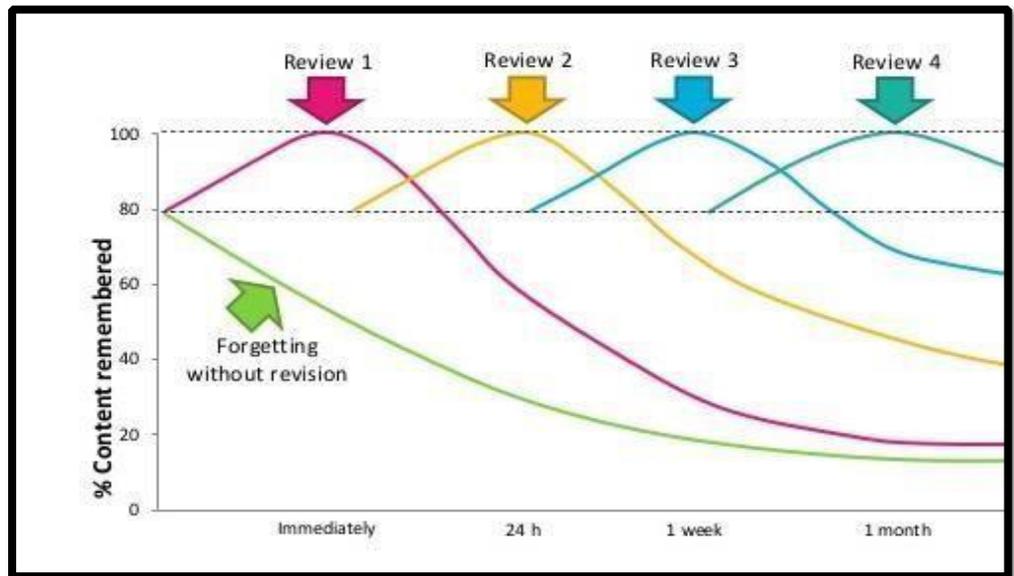
Your brain works best by reinforcing information repeatedly. Review and revise on a regular basis, not just before tests and exams.

The forgetting curve shows how much information is quickly forgotten without any revision. Reviewing work significantly reduces the amount forgotten over time.

Review each day's work every day:

It's easy to understand a concept in class when a teacher is explaining it to you, but you need to ensure you understand it for yourself.

Independent study is not just completing homework or assessments but really getting your head around your subject.



What activities do you do at the moment:	Always	Sometimes	Never
Read through class notes; re-writing class notes			
Creating mind maps; diagrams and making flashcards			
Highlighting and colour coding			
Rhymes and mnemonics			
Using course textbooks			
Completing past exam papers under timed conditions			
Reading model answers			
Marking your own work to a mark scheme			
Working with other students in groups and pairs			

One to one discussion with teachers/mentor			
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Get studying: STUDY HABITS

- Make the most of study periods
- Do an easy task first...
- But do the worst task early
- Beware interruptions and distractions
- **Reward yourself after study!**
- Tackle one task at a time.
- Set a target.
- Press on and finish.
- Build in regular short breaks.
- Become a **TOPCAT**



What are the study habits you could be working on to improve your knowledge, understanding and subject retention?

STUDY HABITS:	<u>I do this regularly yes/no</u>
TASKS – I complete work set by the teacher – homework.	
REPETITION – I go over the material from the lesson and turn it into clear notes/bullet points/graphic notes	
PROBLEMS – I circle any areas I don't understand and try to resolve the issue. If I still don't understand, I ask the teacher	
CUPPA – I remember to take a break so that you destress	
ADD – I read and take notes on additional material	
TEST – I apply my knowledge by answering exam questions	

Have a regular Revision Power Hour

1. Select one of your subjects and log on to the relevant exam board website (e.g. AQA, OCR, Edexcel etc). Select a past paper question **5 minutes**
2. Revise for **20 minutes**
3. Do the question or plan the question in **20 minutes**, depending on the time allowed in the exam
4. Log on to the exam board website and find the mark scheme **15 minutes**
5. Show your teacher for feedback on your return to school

Get studying: NOTE-TAKING

- Notes should be a simplified version of the original text. Good notes must be selective, focussing on essentials. Identifying which bits of information you will need in the future.
- Use subheadings and numbers or bullet points. Visual pattern notes can help you picture the information and recall the information to memory.
- Add your own comments or observations. The act of writing helps you remember the information.
- Quote directly where needed otherwise use your own words
- Highlighting focuses your attention on the text, makes you think about key concepts and issues. Be careful not to highlight too much.

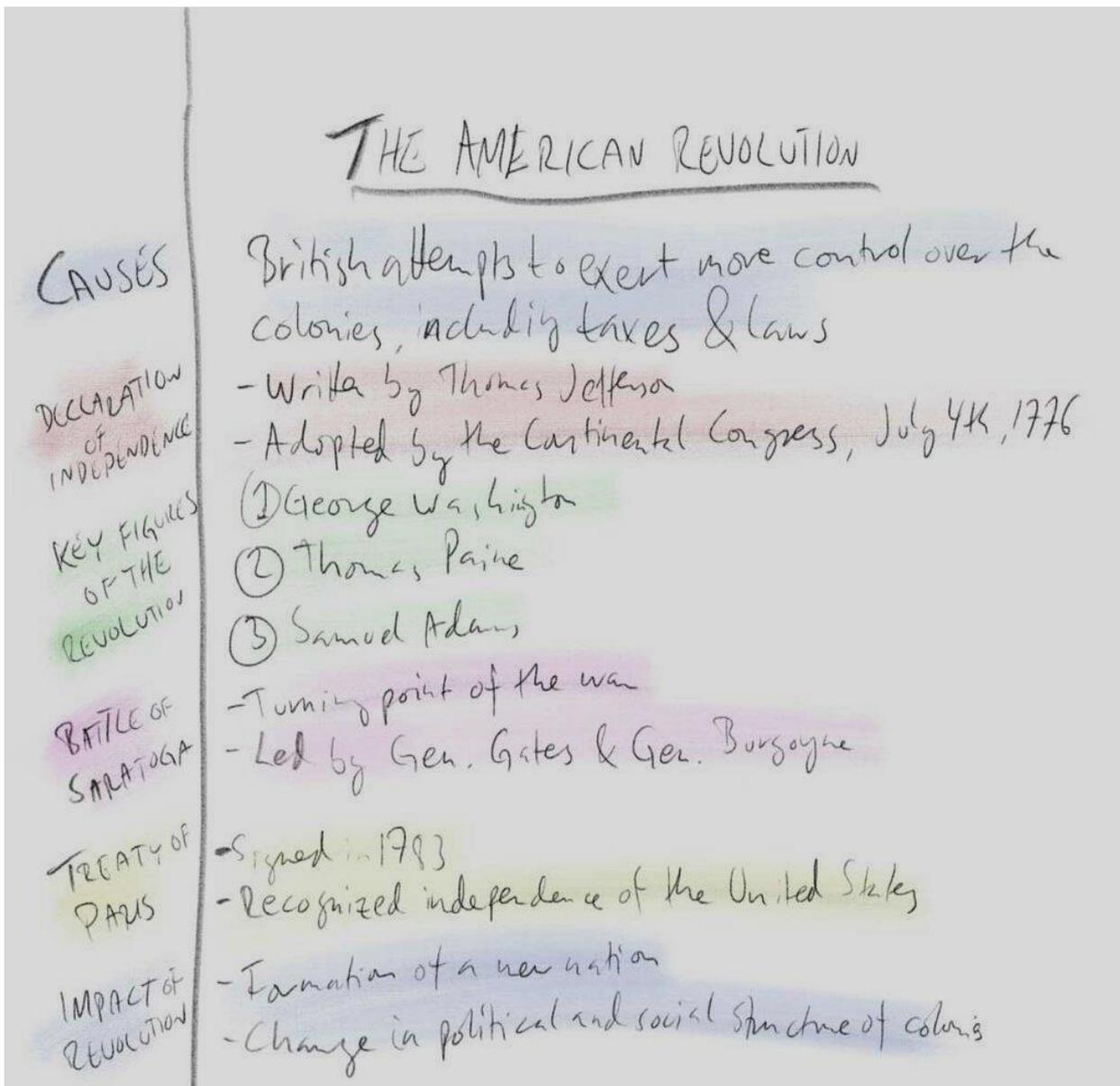
JM6's preferred method of note-taking is [the Cornell Method](#). There is also a very short [You-Tube video](#) explaining very simply how it works.

TOPIC		DATE
CUES	NOTES	
	TAKEN DURING CLASS LECTURE OR DURING TEXTBOOK READING	
WRITTEN AFTER CLASS		
MAIN IDEAS	• MAIN POINTS	
	• PARAPHRASE	
VOCABULARY	• BULLET POINTS	
	• OUTLINES	
	• CHARTS/DIAGRAMS	
QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY NOTES		
BRIEF SUMMARY OF NOTES HIGHLIGHTING MAIN IDEAS		SUMMARY WRITTEN AFTER CLASS

The five steps of taking Cornell Notes are called the "five Rs":

1. [Record your notes in columns](#)
2. [Reduce your notes](#)
3. [Recite from memory](#)
4. [Reflect on the material](#)
5. [Review your notes](#)

Another similar method is Split-page note taking. Here's an example:



Mind-mapping

Those of you who are visual learners may prefer to create MindMaps. Have a look at this [You Tube video](#). While traditional note-taking is a simple way to recap what you just learned, mind mapping can revolutionize the way you gather, summarize, and explore information.

A mind map is a visual representation of information and ideas, typically organized around a central topic, that uses branches and sub-branches to capture relationships and facilitate brainstorming, planning, and learning.

Get studying: THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE and THE TEN-MINUTE RULE

Try the **Pomodoro Time Management technique** to stay focussed:

1. Choose the task you want to complete
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes
3. Work on the task without distraction until the timer goes off
4. Take a short break of 5 minutes
5. After every 4 slots of 25 minutes take a longer break

Adjust this technique to suit you, maybe you can focus for 45 minutes or longer before a break



Try out the **'Ten Minute Rule'** when you feel like you just can't start studying, or the work just seems too hard and you don't know where or how to start.

If you recognised that you have blockers that prevent you starting work, then this technique might help you:

1. Tell yourself you are going to do 10 minutes of study. Just 10 minutes.
2. Decide what work you are going to focus on for ten minutes. Get your study space organised.
3. Start working.

You can stop after ten minutes, and if you do, you will have done 10 minutes more than you would have done otherwise. What often happens though is that ten minutes becomes twenty minutes. Sometimes even longer.

Often the thought of study is harder than the study itself.

Get revising!

Chunking and active revision

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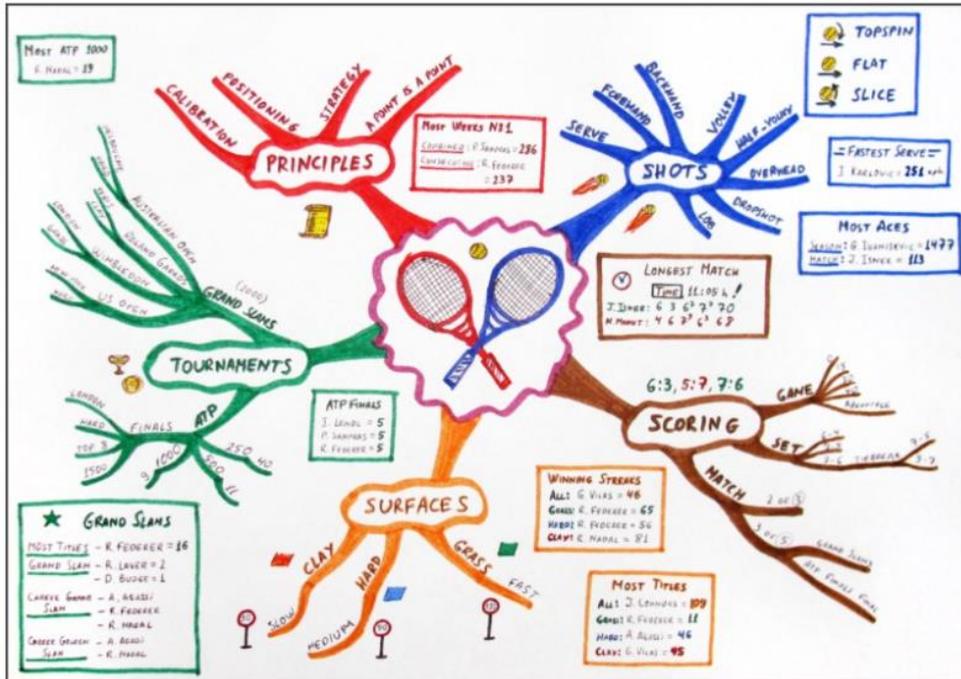
Revision Planner

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Get Revising: CHUNKING and ACTIVE REVISION

CHUNKING: Chunking is a technique which can help you to identify all the areas you need to cover. Breaking up the A Level into smaller and more manageable sections.

For example, two months before exams:



1. Use the exam board specification for each A Level to break each syllabus down into 10-12 main headings. Now create a mind-map of everything that you need to know around that heading. Leave nothing out. It doesn't have to look neat and tidy - that comes later.

2. For each subject, write the headings below on an A4 sheet of paper:

What I am going to complete in the next three weeks:
What I am going to complete in the next six weeks:
What I am going to complete in the next nine weeks:

Transfer the broken-down syllabus and mind map contents under each one of the headings, depending on their priority.

As you work your way through the list over each three-week period, you should feel more in control of your revision and therefore calmer and less stressed.

ACTIVE REVISION There's a strong link between the kind of revision someone does, and the outcomes they get:

- **Student 1** does **15 hours revision** – all of it reading through class notes.
- **Student 2** only does **10 hours revision** – two hours making mind maps, two hours creating flashcards of key terms, three hours writing timed essays, two hours reading through the past papers, and half an hour doing the hardest question they could find, followed by half an hour with their teacher talking it through. **Then they spend five hours shopping with their friends and watching TV.**

Student 2 was actively learning, making links between ideas and enabling the information to attach itself to long term memory.

Student 1 won't remember the majority of their revision - in one ear and out the other.

Get Revising: REVISION PLANNER

Prior to exams, decide when you are going to start revision in earnest and then plan out a timetable.

Put in your exam dates, use your chunking to allocate blocks of time to subjects, specify topics and tasks within subject blocks.

Easter break	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6 th April							
13 th April							
20 th April							
27 th April							
4 th May							
11 th May							
18 th May							

HALF TERM

25 th May							
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Ensure that you plan breaks into your revision schedule, be realistic about how much you can achieve.

Avoid marathon sessions.

Get it into perspective

Look after yourself

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LOVE 
yourself
accept
yourself
forgive 
yourself
& be good to
yourself
because without you
the rest of us
are without a source of
many Wonderful
 things
dr. Leonardo Buscaglia

Get it into perspective: LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Stress can be defined as a lack of fit between the perceived demands of the environment and the perceived ability to cope with those demands.

Anxiety can be defined as a fear of future events, an overactive fight or flight response, perceiving threat where there is none.

For example, some people overestimate the demands of exams and underestimate their ability to succeed. Consequently, they suffer stress and anxiety.

What can cause stress and anxiety:

- A large amount of work to do which hasn't been planned or organised
- Not looking after ourselves: lack of sleep; poor diet; alcohol or drug use; lack of exercise
- Destructive mental habits: being too much of a perfectionist; comparing ourselves to others

How to reduce stress and anxiety:

- Plan and organise your work so you feel in control
- Work regularly and steadily so you don't burn out
- Get fresh air and exercise – just 5 minutes of exercise can improve your mood
- Eat regularly and sensibly
- Get plenty of sleep, approximately 7 hours a day
- Have fun with friends and family
- Reduce or stop alcohol and drug use
- Limit gaming if you are isolating yourself from the real world
- Talk to parents, friends, teachers if things are getting you down
- Restrict social media where you may be comparing yourself with others
- Don't avoid difficult situations, face your fears and overcome them
- Be thankful for the good things in your life, appreciate the world around you
- Do something good for someone else and release happy hormones in your brain

Get academic work in perspective.

Ensure a good work and life balance.