20 effective revision strategies

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Here he provides his ideas for highly effective, evidence-based revision techniques.

1

Try the Leitner method. Make 20 flashcards with key terms and definitions. Label three boxes: 'Every day', 'Tuesday and Thursday', 'Friday':

- Start your revision on Monday and read the definitions. If you recall each definition perfectly, pop it in the Tuesday and Thursday box. If not, pop it in the 'Every day' box.
- On Tuesday, take out cards from the 'Every day' box and recall the definitions. If they're perfect, pop them in the 'Tuesday and Thursday' box. If not, pop them back in the 'Every day' box.
- Then take cards out of the 'Tuesday and Thursday' box and recall the definitions. If they're right, then pop them in the 'Friday box'. If not, pop them in the 'Every day' box.
- On Wednesday and Thursday go through all of the boxes, with any you get right going into the Friday box and any that are incorrect going back into the 'Every day' box.

2

Revise like Benjamin Franklin! Benjamin Franklin, a leading figure in American history, wanted to learn write like journalists. So he wrote a *summary* description of each sentence in the articles he read and then left some 'forgetting time', before returning to the summary prompts. He then rewrote sentences based on these, and compared them to the original articles he had read. Try the same approach by summarising passages from revision guide, ensuring that you leave enough 'forgetting time'.

3

The power of three: free recall. Use free recall tests (otherwise known as 'brain dumps') as a revision strategy, by practising bringing information to mind three times. Get a revision guide and read the content on a page. Close the revision guide and write out in your own words everything you can recall. Next, open the revision guide again, take a different coloured pen, and amend or add in anything that isn't correct or missing in your notes. Put your notes away and close your guide. Then on another piece of paper, repeat, and repeat again three times.

Specification 'brain dump'. Download your exam board's specification for the subject you want to revise. Go to the subject content section, and read a prompt such as 'Natural hazards', if you are studying geography. Write down everything you can recall from memory. Compare what you have written to a revision guide's content on the same topic.

Change your surface structure. Create some more 'practice problems' by changing the 'surface structure' on past paper questions. For example, if a question asks: 'A quarter of a class wear glasses and 27 students don't wear glasses. How many students are in the class in total?', then answer it and get feedback. Next change the question to 'A quarter of a class wear glasses and 18 students don't wear glasses'. Leave some forgetting time before answering 'How many students are in the class in total?'

Explain yourself. Harness the power of self-explanation as a revision tool. As you work through a problem, or even as you read a revision guide, ask yourself questions such as 'What does this mean to me so far?' and 'What do I understand about these notes?' Trial self-explanation while you complete a problem or while you read, as well as afterwards.

Elaborative interrogation. Note down a list of factual statements from your specification subject content. Add 'Why is this true?' after each factual statement and then answer each one.

Mix it up. Interleave the same types of revision tasks with different ones. If you constantly practise one type of problem, when you come to the exam with different types of problems you won't have had the opportunity to select and practise the correct strategy to solve them. Choose one or two problems from each topic of a revision guide and practise solving one before moving on to a different type of problem.

Avoid the interference. Try to avoid revising subjects with similar target information one after the other. For example, revising maths followed by science might create confusion because of similar maths skills vocabulary.

Test your calibration. Read a past paper question. Predict how well you think you know the answer out of 10, with 10 being certain that you know the answer. Then answer the question, check the answer with the mark scheme and review your prediction.

11

Pre-test your topic. Even *before* you start revising, get a past paper and try to answer it. Then look back at your answers as you move through your revision. This approach works well with exams which include multiple-choice questions.

12

Manage the load. Try to ensure that your revision notes and diagrams make sense together. Use diagrams when your revision notes include subject content with lots of processes, instructions, objects or places.

13

Examiner reports. If you are using past papers for revision, read the examiner comments which will help you to understand any misconceptions before you complete the paper, and then write yourself exam cues. For example, an examiner might have commented that candidates had written too much in response to a question which asked them to 'identify one example'. The cue you write for yourself would be 'Don't write more than one sentence to identify the one example'. Share these cues with friends to help you to remember them.

14

Metacognitive challenge. Ask an 'expert' to complete a past paper, writing down why they answered the way that they did to model their approaches and metacognition (awareness and understanding of your own thought processes). Read the paper and their thoughts. Then leave some forgetting time before completing the same past paper *without* the comments in.

15

LIFT your approach to past papers. Get a past paper and use Gianfranco Conti's LIFT strategy, Learner Initiated Feedback Technique. Read each question on the past paper. For anything you don't understand, underline it and write a brief sentence describing what you don't understand and why you think you don't understand it.

16

Create your own past paper. Look at a past paper. Then look at the subject content on the specification and try to create your own questions, matching the style of the past paper you are working with.

17

Space it out. Avoid cramming the night before. Space things out weeks or months before the exams by breaking your revision in smaller chunks. Instead of a few two- or three-hour blocks of time on one single subject, reduce it to twenty to thirty minutes, followed by the same amount of time on a different subject. Don't return to the first subject for several days or weeks. On each return revision session, first 'brain dump' everything you can recall from the previous session.

18

Delay test your elaborative interrogations. Rewrite a passage in a revision guide, adding in content-specific elaborative interrogation prompts. For example, 'Why is it true that carbon has a higher melting point than helium?' Then revise something else before returning to the questions in the passage and answering them.

19

Self-explain an incorrect past paper. Ask somebody to incorrectly complete a past paper. Then then work through the paper, self-explaining why you think things are wrong and why. Leave some time for forgetting and then complete the paper again, without the mistakes in it this time!

20

Stand out from the crowd. Make something you want to revise seem distinctive or unusual, so that it stands out in your revision. For example, if you reach for the highlighters, then highlight only the single, most important key term/definition/quotation in the revision guide. Alternatively write out the most important sentence in red, with every other in black, or dual code only the most important key words on the page etc.