ROEDEAN

Revision Advice

So, major exams are just months away! Don't panic and don't pretend they'll go away - they won't! If you're organised, you'll find the exams won't be the nightmare experience that you feared - and if you go about things the right way you'll even get time for a social life over the holiday.

STARTING OFF

First of all, find a good place to work. It must be quiet and uncluttered - even if it means camping out at the library. Organise your place of work so that you have everything to hand before you start.

Draw up a revision timetable - it's crucial.

HERE'S HOW

Do plan it carefully (who wants to tackle their worst subject on a Friday night?).

Do allow yourself time off.

Do divide your time into subjects. Be realistic - you know where your strengths and weaknesses are, so allot time accordingly. Don't plan to spend all night/session on one subject. An hour per subject is fine. Don't spend hours colouring it in or creating a computer artwork - you may need to update it after a week!

…but how do I remember it all?

In order to do well in the exams you will need to know your vocabulary. This is important not just for languages but for all subjects. A good way of remembering vocabulary and terminology is through memory cards.

Here are a few suggestions for their use:

- For each topic, write up one set of index cards with the word on the front, and the definition on the back. Shuffle them and drill yourself. Take turns with a classmate testing each other.
- Categorise the words into sub-categories, then sub-sub-categories. For example, mechanisms breaks down into levers, linkages, rotary/linear motion, pulleys and gears. Linkages then break down as reverse motion, push/pull, bell crank and parallel motion.
- Memorise the words whilst listening to a particular song or album. Then, when you need to remember the words, remembering the song might help you to recall them.
- For each word, come up with a specific visual example. This will help you to see the differences between the terms, and help you to use the words correctly.
- Drill one section of your word list every day, for no more than an hour.
- Make a poster of your words, with illustrations and put in up in your bedroom, your bathroom, the kitchen, somewhere you will see it every day. (This will also impress your parents no end!)
- Remembering the words and what they mean is only part of the battle. Even if you have the proper tools, you still have to know how to use them.
- Work on past papers, which are available from your teacher and most bookstores. Compare your answers with your classmates, or even ask your teacher how he or she would answer the questions, after you've tried it yourself of course. This will give you a better understanding of how to answer the exam questions on the actual day.

- During the exam, skim through the entire paper, making small notes in the margin as answers come to you. Don't dwell on any one question. Once you've gone through the paper once, start on the questions that seem the easiest. Watch your time, and try to answer all the questions. You aren't expected to be good at all aspects of the subject, but by working to your strengths, you maximise your possible marks.

Make it fun… :)

Revision doesn't have to be all long hours sitting in front of your books. Here are some suggestions that could help you to make it a more enjoyable experience:

Sing

Rachelle suggests: "I think one of the best ways to learn something is to make a song about it with a catchy tune, so you can remember all the information more easily". If you've got a favourite song then change the words to facts that you need to remember, you should find that they stick in your mind longer if you associate them with a tune.

Draw

Lorna suggests that you draw funny, colourful cartoon pictures that show a certain phrase or word you have difficulty in remembering. Lorna says that she found this really worked for her chemistry exams.

Question cards

Katie writes: "My top revision tip, is to make up some question cards with questions on the front and answers on the back! Then make a right, an almost, and a wrong pile. Keep going through the questions till they are all in the right pile, but make this FUN!! Give yourself rewards when you get them all correct."

Don't leave it till the last minute!

"Don't leave it to the last minute" is the mantra of all revision guides. Everyone knows that you should plan your revision out in advance, follow a revision timetable and organise your time.

That's the theory anyway. The reality can be different. Speaking from experience, I know I've spent several nights keeping myself awake, desperately trying to cram information into my brain. No-one wants to be in this situation, but once you're in, it's too late for regrets. So what can you do?

Do what you can

Don't think that there's no point. You can still make a difference to whether you pass or fail. Use your last minute panic constructively, don't put it off anymore and keep at it now. You probably know more than you realise, so concentrate on the areas that you feel most confident about. Better to do a few things well rather than a lot of things badly.

Prioritise

Work out your priorities. It's now too late to learn new stuff, so you need to build on the things you do know. Look at your old essays, this should help you to identify the key points. Plug any gaps. Focus on your best answers, and make sure you get credit for what you do know.

Keep cool

Try and keep a cool head, think rationally about what you can do in the time remaining. You don't have time now to cover everything so you're going to have to take a calculated risk on what will come up in the exam. Quite often similar types of questions do come up each year, try and identify the main ones and come up with rough answers for those.

Identify key concepts and facts for each subjects rather than getting bogged down in details - you don't have time!

Use this as a learning experience

Learn from this experience. There is a reason why the revision guides all say "don't leave it to the last minute". Identify what happened this time that made you leave it too late.

EXAM STRESS

It's totally normal to feel nervous about taking exams. In fact, it can help motivate and focus you. However, too much anxiety may mean you panic and under-perform. Here are some tips to help you stay on top of exam nerves:

Before the exam

- Make a revision timetable. This will make you feel in control of your work.
- Plan you work and work out the areas you need to focus on. You may be feeling nervous because you know there are gaps in your knowledge.
- Find out what will be expected of you in the exam. Do you know exactly where your exam is and at what time? Get everything that you will need during the exam ready well in advance. Make sure you leave for the exam in plenty of time.
- Make yourself feel more positive by visualising the exams going well. Imagine you are confident and relaxed during the exam. Try to imagine the scene in as much detail as possible. If you do have negative thoughts replace them with this positive image.
- Give yourself some time to relax each day. Exercise can also be a great way of relieving stress. Look after your health during the exam period and save partying until after the exam.
- If your friends are stressed about the exams, this can rub off you. Try and avoid being around people who make you feel more anxious.
- Don't stay up all night doing last minute revision. Cramming can be counter-productive. Studies have shown that students who cram before an exam remember less.
- Even if you don't feel like eating before the exam try and eat something for breakfast, your brain needs energy to work. Avoid drinking lots of coffee or other drinks containing lots of caffeine, as this can make you feel more nervous.

During the exam

- If you start to feel nervous, breathe deeply and say to yourself “I CAN do this exam”.
- At the start of the exam, give yourself time to read through the questions thoroughly.
- Plan how you are going to answer the questions and begin with the one that looks most straightforward.
- Consciously replace any negative thoughts you have during the exams with positive, encouraging ones. Tell yourself to relax.

Who can help me?

If you have any specific worries about your exams you can talk to the following people:

Your tutor
Your subject teacher
The house staff
Your parents
The Health Centre Staff
The School Counseller
Your friends

There are many people who want to help you – so please let us know if you have any worries or concerns.

GOOD LUCK!

Mrs Heron, Head of Middle School
May 2011