

Independent Study Skills

Accelerating and extending learning



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Introduction

This year will be hugely important and not always easy. You will encounter unfamiliar situations; take on roles you may not have considered previously, and tackle work that is more advanced and demanding. The Sixth Form will provide you with many opportunities to develop your skills, self-confidence and provide you with ample chances to take responsibilities. It will provide you with many academic skills, one of which is teaching you how to become a good independent learner.

Independent study skills have become increasingly important as A level and other level 3 specifications have changed. Students will not achieve their potential if they do not put in the work outside of the lesson. Assessment frequently asks students to apply their subject knowledge to unfamiliar contexts and it is difficult, if not impossible, to do this if you have not taken the time to extend your understanding independently.

Sixth Form students spend only a certain amount of time in lessons, there are independent study periods for a reason—they are there to assist you in meeting A-Level standards and expectations.

Experience tells us that the students who achieve their potential and who gain the highest marks are those who take the greatest responsibility for their own progress. This independence of approach is an area that all students should strive to improve, building on strategies that they have started to develop for GCSE. At KS5 there is greater expectation that students develop independent skills and knowledge to underpin those learnt in class.

The key assumption that has been made when writing this guide is that the student who stays on to sixth form has an enthusiasm, enjoyment and passion for subjects they have chosen to study. This booklet is designed so that students can use ideas to improve their individual learning skills. It also encourages and aids students to assess their ability to learn independently.

Wherever your chosen career path will lead, your time at Kings Langley Sixth Form will be an extremely important step towards achieving your goals. Please don't waste this opportunity to lay the building blocks to a successful future.

Work hard, focus on your studies, go the extra mile and enjoy yourself.



Independent Learning

During your time in sixth form you will develop your skills as an independent learner.

What is an independent learner?

Independent learners are motivated to learn. They accept responsibility for their own learning and have the confidence to approach others for help if they need it. Independent learners manage their learning processes effectively. This includes:

1. identifying what they want to learn, for example, reading the learning
2. outcomes in the module handbook
3. identifying how they are going to learn, for example, individual study,
4. working with a friend, asking for help
5. managing time, stress and other commitments
6. using a wide range of learning opportunities and resources, for example,
7. adapting the learning process to make use of new opportunities

Frequently Asked Questions about Independent Learning

Is it all right to have the TV or music on when you are working?

It is up to you and many people find they work better with some background music on. But remember that television means you have something else that will distract you because you have to watch it.

I work better under pressure and leave things till the last minute. If I still get them done what's wrong with that?

If you are under pressure you will make mistakes and forget things that are important. You also leave yourself no time to put things right. You might get things done but that doesn't mean you do them as well as you could if you planned your time better.

I do lots of things outside school. How can I find time to do homework as well?

When you are busy, managing your time is really important. There is time for everything but you need to plan carefully and think in advance about what you have to do and when you are going to do it. Be aware of the times you are busy with outside commitments and work round these. Usually the busiest people are also the ones who manage to get most done.

Why does my mind go blank in exams?

Probably because you are worried and perhaps because you haven't prepared as fully as you need to. If you have planned your revision carefully and know what to expect, there is no need to worry and there should be no nasty surprises.

How can I remember important facts?

In the same way that you remember everything else; by going over them bit by bit as many times as you can. Put them on a bit of paper, photocopy them and leave them round the house. You'll be amazed what you remember without even trying.

Subject folders

Students are required to have a subject folder for every subject. These folders ensure that you organise your learning materials, store your subject resources in one place and use the folders as a learning tool both in lessons and out. These folders will serve as the perfect revision resource as well.

We recommend students having the following folders:

‘Day’ folders – these are folders that are brought to Sixth Form and lessons each day. They are used to bring requisite notes, homework, completed pre-lesson work to each lesson. Likewise they are used to file and take home any work completed each day. Students would be best advised to carry one ‘day folder’ with them for each of their subjects being studied on each day.

‘Subject’ folders – these act as a record of your complete learning in each of your subjects ‘to-date’ and will form the basis of your revision and consolidation for your subjects. Students should transfer material from their ‘day folder’ to their ‘subject folder’ at the end of each day once on arrival home. Students should have one (or more if one folder is not big enough) ‘subject folder’ for each of their subjects. Students will be required to bring in their subject folders at regular points to allow staff to support with the organisation of these.

Lockers are also available, both in the sixth form building and in the main school building. Speak to the sixth form office to arrange hiring a locker.

Students who opt for digital subject folders should ensure that this is set up on a platform which the subject teacher is able to view and that it is organised in a consistent manner to that of a physical folder.

Subject folder structure:

It is understood that different subjects will have different ways of organising student resources however, the basic structure must be included in each of the subject folders with dividers for each:

1. Exam specification
2. Lesson notes (lesson resources should be filed with these notes)
3. Assessments and associated feedback
4. Tutorial notes (if appropriate)
5. Exam papers, mark schemes and where appropriate, examiners reports
6. Additional reading list and record of wider reading

Shopping list for subject folders:

- ☐ A lever-arch folder for each subject (you may want to consider having them in different colours to help distinguish between each subject)
- ☐ A lever-arch folder for your day-folder
- ☐ Dividers
- ☐ A hole-punch
- ☐ Lined paper pads (you will be writing a lot!)

Essential Study Skills

What follows is an introduction to the essential study skills you will need in the Sixth Form. The exact study skills you will need to develop will be dependent on the subjects you are studying and your own strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult to generalise about study skills, and you will need to work with your form tutor and teachers to find your most effective approach to study. However, the section begins with ten top tips that everyone can follow!

1. **Get yourself organised** – keep your planner up to date, listing work set, work completed and work outstanding.
2. **Try and stick to a regular work rota:** do a little bit of study often, rather than leaving huge amounts of work to the eleventh hour before a deadline. Late work is invariably rushed, often incomplete, and of inferior quality, and by starting an assignment well in advance of a deadline you will get the chance to ask staff for help if you need it. Most 'A' level students need to work for a minimum of between 14 and 16 hours per week OUTSIDE of lessons. A good rule of thumb is to assume that for every taught lesson you receive, you should be completing another hour's worth of work outside of that lesson.
3. **Work in a studious environment**, not somewhere where you will be distracted. At home, work somewhere where you will not be disturbed (and where you can leave books and folders safely). If you do need to work on a computer, make sure you are not signed into any social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc) to avoid distractions.
4. **Define your work tasks.** Make sure you understand what is expected of you. Seek clarification if you are uncertain about essay titles, the parameters of note taking, etc.
5. **Don't be afraid to ask for help** when you need it! Don't suffer in silence and don't pretend you understand something when you DO NOT.
6. **Use all the available resources:** teachers; textbooks; libraries; periodicals; the Internet; newspapers; television and radio; fellow students.
7. **Motivate yourself.** Have a goal to aim for ... on a micro scale a favourite TV programme in half an hour after some revision; on a longer scale a university grade or apprenticeship offer.
8. **Work in attention span units.** Few students can work effectively for more than one hour before their concentration starts to ebb (this is particularly so with revision). Divide your working time up into attention span units (40-60 minutes) punctuated by short breaks.
9. **Get a dictionary!** Many exam boards now penalise poor spelling and grammar at 'A' level.
10. **The more you put in, the more you get out**, both in terms of **results** and **enjoyment**.



Making notes

Being able to make good notes efficiently is a key skill for studying at KS5. You will need to make notes in different situations: in lessons, workshops and sessions from visitors; when working in groups; when planning and writing essays; on field trips and placements and when revising for exams.

Putting into practice suggestions in this guide will help you to:

- Note important information for use in your academic studies including essay writing and revision;
- Keep a record of your learning and where you obtained your information from;
- Plan and organise essays, assignments and presentations;
- Focus on a specific subject and remember key facts;
- Revise effectively for your exams.

General note taking tips

- Note the date, subject and page number at the top of each page;
- If you are in a lesson, note the title and success criteria.
- If you are making notes when working in a group, note the names of your peers in the group;
- Use A4 paper. Put different headings for main subject areas on separate sheets of A4 paper. You can then file these notes straight away (or when you have made notes on these sheets you can file them straight away);
- Use the margin. You can put references in the margin, note keywords, indicate if you have handouts on the subject or add information later;
- Leave blank spaces on your page; after each note for example. The 'visual image' of notes and blank spaces may help you remember the information you have recorded. If necessary you can use the space to note information you wish to add later;
- Use a system. Number and/or label your notes with headings and subheadings. Use indentations and bullet points. The visual image you have of your notes may help you to recall the information they contain;
- Try using highlighters to pick out key words and phrases. Write main points with a coloured pen or underline them with colour. Some people draw pictures or diagrams to aid their recall;
- Link related notes by using arrows, lines, brackets, enclosing them in a rectangle or any other technique you find helpful.

Making notes from books

- 1) The key is not to copy down chunks of text from a book. Your aim is to make clear notes using a few of your own words. You may also wish to note your own ideas that have been stimulated by text you have read;
- 2) Be selective. Write down the main subject and important headings before you start, then fill in notes on these areas;
- 3) Focus on the essay title. Keep referring back to this and make sure your notes are relevant;
- 4) If you come across information you think may be useful in a different subject or essay, make a separate note of the reference and return to it later, at the appropriate time;
- 5) It is useful to read through specific chapters, handouts or other information before a lesson.
- 6) Note down obvious subject headings and leave blank spaces to fill in with your lesson or homework notes



Making notes

Organising your notes

- 1) Read through and check your notes soon after you have written them, preferably on the same day.
- 2) Follow up any points you need to; information you may have missed out or did not understand. Check references and key spellings;
- 3) File notes as you have made them;
- 4) Use colour codes: different coloured files for different subject areas, coloured file dividers for sub-sections of a subject;
- 5) File related information with your notes: handouts, photocopies of journal articles, newspaper and magazine cuttings, and references to notes from different but linked areas of study;
- 6) Develop a filing system that is easy for you to use and refer to when planning and writing essays, and revising for exams.

Working with others

Some students find it helpful to work with others and to exchange notes and discuss their subject. This is a good idea as it improves learning and enables you to exchange and share ideas.

Good notes are invaluable and they act as:

- **A form of 'external' memory**, a kind of extension to the memory capacity of your mind – enabling you to have ready access to a far wider range of knowledge.
- **A symbol of progress**: notes provide you with evidence of the work you have done and so make an important contribution to your morale.
- **A means of pulling the course together**.

Making notes on notes is an effective form of revision. The action of noting concentrates your mind in revision, and allows you to further order ideas sharpen understanding.

Filing notes in an ordered fashion is a vital skill. Too many students lose notes or are unable to access material when they need it because of chaotic or non-existent filing systems. It is an expectation that students have a subject folder for every subject they study, even the practical based subjects. A guide on organising these folders is provided for you on page

Absence: As with any subject it is vitally important that you have a comprehensive, clear set of notes. Make sure if you are absent from school that you ask someone in your class for a copy of anything you have missed. This is your responsibility, not the teacher's although of course your teacher will be more than willing to go through any problems once you have copied up missed work.



Reading

Reading is one of the core activities of studying. At A level you are faced with three particular challenges:

- The volume of reading
- The complexity of the material you will read
- trying to remember what you have read

A Reading Style

Skilled readers vary their reading speed and method to suit both the material they are reading and their purpose in reading it. You 'read' a telephone directory rather differently than a novel. There are several different approaches to reading. Here are some of the main techniques you can use:

- **Skimming:** this involves looking quickly through the book and reading only things like contents, headings, introductions and conclusions. It is a quick and efficient way of familiarising yourself with a publication and is useful if you wish to check whether a book is relevant, or for finding particular information or ideas quickly. Skimming is particularly useful for finding your way around a publication. You may skim the newspaper to find the articles you want to read, or a textbook to identify a relevant chapter.
- **Scanning:** this is a very rapid search for important points. It may be a diagram, a title or a key word. The essential thing is that you deliberately ignore everything except the one item for which you are scanning. Scanning is useful when you want to identify a particular piece of information – for example some specific chemical formulae.
- **Reading to understand:** this involves detailed study of a chapter, passage or article in order to absorb all the major facts and ideas. You may read it more than once, and take notes to summarise what you have read. Reading to understand is useful when you want to study something thoroughly.
- **Word-by-word reading:** very occasionally you actually need to read every word extremely carefully – for example, when reading an English Literature text or an exam question.

To study efficiently you must learn to vary your reading style and become proficient at each type of reading. By developing the ability to switch from one method of reading to another you will vastly increase your studying efficiency.

Language Difficulties

Reading is more difficult when the author uses technical terms or complex language. In this situation you should never guess meanings, but instead use dictionaries and subject glossaries to help you with definitions.

Responding to the Material

Reading is not a passive activity! You should be thinking about what you read...

- Do you agree with the author?
- What is the quality of the author's argument?
- Do you have a different point of view?
- What counter arguments could you use?



Wider reading

What is wider reading and why is it so important?

Wider reading is when students independently read different types of texts about certain topics that enable them to build their knowledge and extend their understanding. Reading comes from a wide range of sources including books, magazines, newspapers, periodicals, or online articles.

It is presumed that students at A-Level have selected the subjects they are studying due to their enjoyment and potential to pursue this as a pathway into a career. Wider reading on topics connected to their subjects should therefore be enjoyable and it will allow you to extend your wider understanding and awareness of a wider range of themes that maybe the curriculum doesn't cover.

Showing that you have a wider interest in your subject areas can impress admissions tutors or people who may be interviewing you for a position. It demonstrates that you have passion and dedication in your chosen subjects.

The school subscribes to The Day which provides you with KS5 specific reading material directly from the news so that you can read about current affairs and news relating to your subjects (and all other subjects). This provides you with a fantastic resource that keeps you fully informed about the world around you, developments in your subject fields, and increases your cultural learning. Your form tutor will provide you with your log in details.

In your independent study periods, you should engage with wider reading as it will support your learning and understanding. The school library has an enormous collection of books and publications suitable for KS5 study. You can access the catalogue via the following link:

[Kings Langley School \(Secondary\) \(accessit.online\)](#)

Each subject area also has recommended literature for you to extend your wider reading. Visit the library to find out more information.

If there are certain books that are not in our collection, speak to Ms Hill, our Learning Resource Manager who may be able to source these for you.

It is highly advisable to record what wider reading you undertake. This will allow you to go back to previously read items if you need to include them in research, essay writing, or to include this in NEA work.

Unifrog also provide further guidance and information on wider reading: [What does 'wider reading' mean? : Unifrog Blog](#)



Wider reading

Benefits of academic reading:

- Develops your reading skills and leads to a deeper understanding of a wider range of topics, ideas and opinions
- To help you think about how your subjects are important in today's world
- To make you stand out when you apply for university, apprenticeships and employment
- To increase your exposure to more diverse sources of information that provide you with more texture in your understanding

How academic reading differs from reading for pleasure

- Academic reading is a more active form of reading
- You are reading for a specific reason i.e., to increase understanding of a topic, to find out about alternative theories, for a deeper understanding of a concept or event, or to extend your interest in an area
- Texts are intended for an academic audience (students, scholars)
- Texts do not necessarily need to be read in their entirety, or in order

What is reading for pleasure

- Reading for pleasure, relaxation and to escape to an imaginative world that aids creativity
- Texts aimed at the general public/audience
- Tend to be designed to read from beginning to end

Where do I start?

- Ask your teachers—they will be excited to share suggested texts and sources of wider reading
- The sixth form library section—ask Ms Hill for further information
- See academic reading information for each subject area as well as visiting the school library website



Resources

Digital Devices

Increasingly the ability to use digital devices is expected in both academic and every day life. There is no doubt that you are at a disadvantage if you do not have digital literacy to at least some degree of competency. There is a wealth of information out there and the internet offers huge scope for research for projects and for general interest. However, you should consider the source of information on the web – there is little censorship or vetting of material so how reliable is the source?

Finally, despite their significant advantages, computers present two distinct pitfalls to today's student:

Plagiarism: Copying information from the internet without acknowledging it is plagiarism. You must cite your sources or reference them in a footnote, bibliography or appendix. Failure to do this may result in disqualification from individual modules or entire subjects. By all means, get information from the net but you must digest it and produce your own conclusions in your own words as well as citing your sources.

Distraction: Social media sites such as TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram etc. are a central part of many people's lives. Inevitably, they are also a distraction. It is impossible to concentrate on academic work if you have messenger 'conversations' and social media notifications popping up continuously. To avoid distraction, do not log in to these sites whilst you are studying; use them as a reward after a study session. They are enormous drains on your time!

Textbooks

Again the use of a textbook depends on the subject. In most subjects, the main use of your textbook is as a source of information and questions on specific topics. You may be asked to take notes directly from the textbook.

Homework

There is one huge misconception about homework which a surprising number of people still cling to. The misconception is this: the reason for completing my homework is so that the relevant teacher will not moan/contact my tutor/contact my parents/generally make my life unpleasant. **That is not the reason for doing homework.**

There are two main points to homework: firstly for the teacher to check that you understand the work and have grasped the relevant concepts and secondly and equally importantly for you to practise required techniques, check you understand the work and have grasped the relevant techniques.

Copying homework from someone else and passing work off as your own serves no purpose. Apart from the dishonesty of it, how can a teacher help when they are not seeing your own effort? Don't fool yourself into thinking, 'Oh yes I could probably have done that myself – I think I understand what I'm copying.' If you understand it, then do it yourself. If you don't understand, ask.

Be aware that what goes around comes around. Teachers will always be willing to help you as much as they can but bear in mind they are much more likely to go that extra mile with you if you have shown your commitment.

In the same vein, don't be afraid to ask for help with homework – **before it is due in**. There is no point on the day homework is due saying 'Oh, I couldn't do these three questions.' You should have contacted the teacher long before then. Similarly, writing the question number and no working does not constitute a reasonable attempt at a homework question.

Do not be under the misapprehension that the homework process finishes with the handing in of the piece of work. A crucially important part of the process is sorting out mistakes you have made and learning from them. you have made and learning from them.

Time management

Misuse of time is probably the most common form of sabotage that students use to undermine their attempts to study. However, planning your time makes you think about it strategically and, even if you have to alter your study plans, you will benefit from having previously defined your tasks and prioritising your activities.

Common Time Problems	Possible Solutions
Are you disorganised and frequently misplace things?	Organise your learning space. Take control of where you work and you can then control how you work. • Keep a clear desktop • Place pens, pencils etc in a desk tidy or jar • Organise your notes by using a separate ring binder for each subject • Use coloured dividers to separate lecture notes into date order • File handouts with the appropriate lecture notes
Put off doing coursework and assignments	• Use a diary or wall planner to clearly mark assignment deadlines for every module • Start tasks sooner rather than later • Be realistic about how long things will take and set appropriate time slots for specific tasks e.g. planning an essay will take longer than reading a short extract • Break tasks down into manageable parts and allow time to tackle some of it every week
Easily distracted	• Negotiate study time with friends and flatmates so that they know when you are not to be disturbed • Be aware of the times of day you can learn and concentrate • Set clear start and finish times for each study session • Take regular short breaks
Over commitment and leaving things to the last minute	• Try not to over commit your time • Plan social time into your week and mark clearly in a diary or wall planner • Prioritise tasks; do the most urgent tasks first



Key factors

Once you have created your framework for good time management you can begin to look at the individual tasks. You will now have your list of tasks for the next lesson, you will have noted them in your diary and on your wall-planner, and so you can begin to tackle each individual task. The following is a list of factors to help you in your day-to-day management of time.

- Identify each individual task.
- Manage the tasks – establish your priorities, identify when you will work on it and when it will be completed. Record this in your diary or wall planner.
- Always build in some flexibility to allow for the unexpected.
- Break down the tasks into smaller parts and think about how you will complete them.
- Identify activities that involve working with other people and those which involve accessing information resources. Be aware that you need to build in additional time to allow for materials not being available or delays in meeting up with people.

Many students find it useful to prioritise their tasks. One way of doing this is to identify the

- urgent tasks
- important tasks



This is a great strategy to use when you feel overwhelmed with work.

Action planning:

Each week or half term, it is a good idea to look over your feedback from essays, work or exams and action plan. An action plan allows you to set out your objectives/aims, how you will achieve these (actions), by when and how you will evaluate whether these have been a success. Your teachers use these all the time to improve things like teaching and learning, marking and feedback etc.

There is dedicated time in registration sessions on Friday's for you to do this and your tutor will check in with you that you know where you're up to and what you need to do next.

Group discussion

In the Sixth Form you will probably find there is more opportunity for group discussion than was the case at GCSE. Group discussion is important in:

- Helping you articulate ideas and arguments in a clear coherent fashion
- Building self confidence
- Aiding group learning, as you may have novel ideas or a new approach which add a different perspective to a topic
- Learning to appreciate the views of others and the dangers of dogma.

How to make group discussions work

1. Contribute ...throw caution to the wind and join in! Everyone has something valid to contribute and you have just as much right to take part in discussions as anyone else.
2. Contributions can be simple ... they don't have to be complex and brilliant.
3. In any discussion you may occasionally grow confused – and unsure of what exactly the discussion is about. Don't sit quietly by, but instead ask for clarification.
4. If a discussion is pre-planned, then prepare for it! Argument backed up with logic and factual content will always prevail over "hot air".
5. Show tolerance towards the views of others even if you disagree with them. Many issues are so complex that there is never just one right answer.

Essay writing

There are six key steps:

1. Think about the essay title

In particular look out for command verbs such as explain and evaluate which will set the parameters of your answer. Underline key words and ensure that all aspects of the question are being addressed. Before you begin to prepare for an essay you must have a clear idea of what the question wants, and if necessary seek clarification from your teacher.

2. Gather together material for the essay

Look back through your class notes to find out what is relevant to the question set. Find out from your teacher what extra reading you should do.

Look out for other sources (eg newspapers, Internet,) which may be relevant. Using relevant material taken from sources beyond basic textbooks impresses examiners. Without thorough research, you will not be familiar with the range of arguments and depth of supporting detail necessary to score highly.

3. Get some ideas down on paper

By writing notes for your essay, you have already begun the process of getting ideas on to paper. However, up to this point your main emphasis has been on getting hold of what other writers have to say. Once you have completed the gathering together of material, you have to switch to thinking in terms of what you are going to say. A good way to approach this is by BRAINSTORMING, jotting down a whole series of thoughts relating to the title. Brainstorming allows you to trap some of the ideas floating around in your mind.

4. Organise material and draw up an essay plan

You need to start dividing up your brainstorming ideas from (3) into some sort of order from which a logical and structured argument can be formed. This could take the form of dividing points up into for or against a particular viewpoint, or by listing points out under certain subheadings which will form the text of individual paragraphs in your answer. How you actually construct an essay does vary from one subject to another, and detailed advice is best left to subject teachers. Suffice to say most essays should:

- Have an introduction, outlining the topic to be discussed. Good introductions often impose a structure on the subsequent essay.
- Be relevant to the question set. Cut out any irrelevancy or background narrative not directly related to the essay title.
- Have a logical and developed argument.
- Have a conclusion which summarises the main points (arguments in your essay) and directly answers the question set.

5. Write the essay

This is best done in one go, as this will help the flow of your argument. Do not spend too long worrying about the detail of sentences, for while you are writing you are too close to the words to make reliable judgments about them. It is easy to waste time fiddling about with small changes when a fresh run at the piece might show a useful way of recasting a whole sentence or paragraph.

6. Review your essay

In doing so, check the following:

- i) Are your spelling, punctuation and use of English accurate?
- ii) Do the sentences work; that is, do they make sense? Even at Advanced level, many candidates produce awkward sentences which have too many sub-clauses or lack a verb!
- iii) Do the divisions into paragraphs work? Do the breaks feel as though they come at the right place when the focus of the discussion shifts, for example, as you move from one factor to another?
- iv) Have you given sufficient explanation and illustration such that your argument has credibility?
- v) Does the argument follow? Does it make sense as you move from point to point?
- vi) And the most important check of all, have you answered the question in the title?

Your answer should be relevant and structured rather than “a tell me everything you know about....” narrative.

Essential revision skills

Revision Techniques:

- **Make a revision time table** This is the first thing everyone tells you about. It is good to get in the habit of sticking to it. Make compulsory revision days. For example Sunday 4PM to 8PM with regular breaks. You could also stick the timetable in a place where everyone can see e.g. on the fridge. This way no one will bother you.
- **Posters** Using posters on your wall is a good starting point. As going over the information is beneficial, if you put the poster up on your wall and recite it, it will pay off.
- **Mind maps** When struggling to revise making mind maps will help.
- **Different coloured paper/ink** There are studies on using different colours to revise as “they access different parts of your brain”.
- **Using mnemonics** This is a great way to remember names or lists of things. Here is an example using the list of the planets in order from the sun. My – Mercury Vet – Venus Eats - Earth Mouldy - Mars Jam - Jupiter Sandwiches - Saturn Under – Uranus News – Neptune Paper – Pluto.
- **Revision Cards** It is a great idea to buy some revision cards or make your own by cutting A4 paper into 4. On these you can make notes on different topics. These can be colour coded and carried around with you for reading.
- **Make a revision booklet or revision guide** Collate all your notes into one large document or revision guide. This way it will be easier to revise as all your information will be in one place.
- **Recording your notes on an audio device** If you're sick of using your eyes to read or want to try something different this is a good one.
- **Make a website** If you are in to web design or just want to make a site without hosting this is a fun option. It will help you go over all the information whilst having a little fun.
- **Revising with your friends** If you're confident your friends won't distract you have regular revision sessions. This way it's more fun and you can help each other out on topics you're unfamiliar with.
- **Tele revising** Use mobile phones to text questions to your friends, use forums such as thestudentroom.co.uk, use instant messengers or carry out a conference call with all your friends.



Examination techniques

1. You have to make the information stick into your head. If “it’s not sticking” you’re wasting your time. Make sure you don’t fall into the habit of just reading your notes. You have to learn them off by heart.
2. Look at the information and repeat it in your head or scribble the information onto paper from memory until it sticks. This is the quickest way to revise.
3. If all else fails use the good old “Look, Cover, Write, Check” technique
4. Make sure you don’t start revising and hitting your peak too early as it takes energy to maintain this “peak”.
5. Do past papers and give them to the teachers to mark. This way you will identify your flaws and the teachers will like you.
6. Go on forums and find out intelligent techniques. For example you may want to do the last question on the paper first (if it is an essay question). As long as you write the question numbers on the side you can do them in any order.
7. Mind block – It’s not going in or help I can’t revise This happens to the best of us – do the switch – revise a different subject. If not, take a sensible break. Never overwork yourself.

A Summary

There is no miracle approach to Advanced level success or academic panacea for intellectual woes. However, it is possible to “work smarter not harder!”.

Here are a few ways of getting the most out of your revision and study.

1. Get yourself organised

- Make sufficient time for academic study outside of the classroom. You should be spending approximately four hours per subject each week.
- Don’t let study periods in school drift away without getting anything done.
- Meet all your deadlines and do not fall behind (especially for coursework and projects)
- Set up a quiet place to study (at home; the library) and avoid distractions.
- Address extra curricular dilemmas, eg part-time job versus study. As exams approach you must give academic work increased priority but occasional relaxation is vital!

2. Reading

- Read around the subject (daily newspaper; Economist; New Scientist; Internet).
- Read other people’s work ... (after you’ve done your own!).
- Ask for help if you do not understand what you read.
- Use reading as a source of technical words and jargon for your own work.
- Summarise what you read in your notes.
- Do not copy other students’ work or plagiarise.

3. Note Taking

- Clear and concise notes are best remembered.
- Highlight key ideas and terms.
- Summarise your own notes into a series of key points as part of your revision programme.
- Make sure you have a complete set of notes (Sod’s Law ... says the examination will always focus on your weak spots!).
- Keep your notes safe and well organised.

Continued on the next page



Examination techniques

4. Preparing for Exams

- Pull the whole course together (get a syllabus and do not compartmentalize information).
- Start revising early enough (ie months before the exam!)
- Try to keep a revision timetable.
- Change revision topics regularly to avoid boredom (but ensure thorough revision of all areas!)
- Revise actively by summarising notes onto cards or into diagrams; (don't stare blankly at your notes or copy out repetitively!).
- Revise in approximately 45 minute sessions (...your attention span!).
- Practise past questions and papers.
- Try to think up likely exam questions for yourself (but beware of question spotting!).
- Talk about the material you are revising (bore parents, friends, relatives, etc).

5. As Exam Day Approaches

- Ease off your revision (you need to be mentally alert for the exam, not a walking zombie!).
- Revise during the day so that your mind is used to working in examination hours. You must be at your most alert at 9am not 11.30pm!
- If anxiety sets in talk to parents/tutors. (Breathing exercises, meditation or a GP may help.)
- Check examination arrangements (twice!) – time, place, etc.

6. On the day:

- Don't attempt any last minute revision, it will only disturb your carefully stored ideas.
- Arrive in good time.
- Don't let other candidates disturb you. Remain aloof if you need to.
- Make sure you have the necessary equipment for the exam (black pen, pencil, ruler, rubber, calculator, books!)

6. In the Exam Itself

- Keep calm at all times
- Read the instructions on the front page.
- Read the questions.
- Read the instructions (again) and find the questions you have prepared for.
- As you tackle a question:
- Examine the wording carefully
- Take the time to plan your answer before you start writing - Everything you write should be relevant to the specific question asked.
- Write legibly and in a clear style using relevant terminology.
- Express complex ideas in short sentences.
- Structure essays with an introduction, a logically developed argument and a conclusion which all answer the question set.

Golden rules

To conclude, there are three general golden rules. They are obvious and yet surprisingly rarely adhered to:

1) Slow and steady wins the race – every time. By that we mean study little and often – from day one. There is nothing worse than playing catch up and, believe us, although it might have worked at GCSE the ‘I’ll do no work throughout the year and then make a huge revision effort just before the exams’ technique simply will not work at A-level. Ask past students if you don’t believe us!

2) Divide your time fairly between subjects. It is easy to become bogged down in a particular subject if there is a test/exam/project looming in that particular area. You must endeavour however to keep the other subjects going at the same time. No doubt there will be some weekly variations in the division of your time between subjects but it is vitally important to keep your head above water in all of them at the same time. All too often students get themselves into a ‘Catch-22’ situation of leaving some subjects, trying to catch up and in the process neglecting the original subject and so on. It is a thankless situation and one to be avoided at all cost. A little forward planning can go a long way.

Also, just because you have an NEA (coursework) subject, it doesn’t mean that you can either a) only complete NEA work in independent study periods or b) prioritise written exams over completing NEA. It is a balance you need to achieve.

3) Seek advice and assistance before things get out of control. We are here to help. Whether it be subject teacher, form tutor, Mrs Battaglia, Mrs Tubb or a member of the Learning Support Department – see someone. Let us know you are having difficulties and we will endeavour to help you form a strategy for sorting them out. There are very rarely problems that are insurmountable provided you are willing to work through them.