

Revision When Typical Methods Don't Work

I always found revision quite difficult, because a lot of revision methods just did not work well for me.

This was never because I was not trying hard enough, I tried to make flashcards, mind maps, mini-quizzes, etc. work, but they never really did for me. Independent revision was never really great for me; it felt like a never-ending task (which, in fairness, it kind of is) where I was never really digesting anything unless I was very interested in the topic or have a core memory/understanding tied to it. It put me under so much pressure and stress, and I sometimes felt like I was not trying hard enough.

So, how do you overcome this barrier?

First and foremost, you have to recognise what kind of learner you are. Some people are very visual learners where images are the key to their brains, while others may be into reading or writing. Some people may be into kinesthetic learning, which is all about moving around and having a form of experience of what they are learning, while others may be into auditory learning, which is hearing what the material is in a podcast or a musical form. Information is not going to go into your brain if you are not optimising the information for your brain.

Additionally, if you're like me and very passion/interest driven, it may be helpful to think of any current interest you have. It doesn't have to be linked to education and academics, it could be a game, book, sport, movie, hobby, etc.. This can be a very good way of ingesting information.

The next thing is that you have to understand what revision environment works for you. For some people, they may like a completely quiet space where no one is around, others like body doubles. Some people prefer revising at home, while others may need to get out of the house and have a change of scenery. Some people like silence, others may like music or taking in the background. Contrary to popular belief, a revision timetable is not necessary either. Some people thrive with one, while others struggle a lot with it. I personally prefer working towards a goal of hours revised per day with no specific schedule, and that goal will change depending on how burnt out, stressed or tired I am, or if I have any vital exams. Again, the environment must be optimised to your liking, the only right answer is the one that you find the best to work with.

It may also be good to understand if you prefer revising multiple subjects in one day or just one. I do better focusing on just one a day.

Now that you understand your optimal learning style and environment, it is time to get to work. The first thing you want to do is note what topics you are struggling with. The order you want to revise is completely up to you. Some people may start with an easy topic for a confidence boost, while others may want to get a harder topic out of the way. Again, you want this process to be optimised for your brain.

With these harder topics, you want to first consolidate core understanding. Break down the topic into the very basics. You might do it with images, rhymes, music, analogies, real-life modelling, etc.. What I liked to do is find a link between the topic and any games I play or music that I listen to. It makes the topic very fun for me and makes revision feel less like a chore. Knowledge and understanding goes hand-in-hand. When understanding is addressed, the recall is easier. Consolidate as much understanding as possible, and then things become a lot easier from there.

Now that we have core memories attached, revision is easier. You can blurt and when thinking of a topic, that connection would appear in your mind and you can dump that information out easily. You can make flashcards and make that connection, analogy, or part of your memory a hint. Some people even turn their revision into games. Again, it's whatever works best for you.

Now that you've got your basic revision down, you now have to master two arts. Yes, I believe in optimisation of your revision, but these are the things that you can never get away from. The first is being able to explain what you're talking about to someone else, and the next is being able to answer past paper questions and mark them using the mark scheme. You know you are doing well when you can do these two things.

To avoid burn-out, take breaks after a block of revision. Sometimes I would make the mistake of spending hours straight revising, which would lead me being completely burnt out the next day. It is okay to take breaks and it is okay to reward yourself after a block of revision.

And most importantly, don't be hard on yourself. It may be easier said than done, but being hard on yourself only gives you less motivation to revise and work hard. Be kind to yourself whether you are revising or not and don't be afraid to try something else if a certain method doesn't work for you.