

THE ULTIMATE REVISION GUIDE



University of Essex

1. Make a plan

Make a plan and stick it up on your wall. Not only is this a great way to keep track of your progress, but it'll help kick-start your revision by making you organise and break down areas of study into manageable chunks.

Prioritise, and give yourself enough time to get to grips with anything you really struggle with. Make sure your timetable is simple and realistic. Don't kid yourself: are you honestly going to be waking up at half six on a Sunday morning to swot up on your algebra? No, we don't believe you either, and whilst ambition is great, it's important not to be too hard on yourself – you're only human, and you'll need rest in order to make the most of your time, which leads us nicely onto our next point.

2. Beware the attack of the revision zombies

A healthy body means a healthy mind. Exam period can be stressful, but it's important not to let it get the best of you – you've got to be top of your game and that means getting enough sleep, exercising and eating healthily.

Whilst you might just plan on hiding yourself away with your notes and a month's supply of Red Bull and chocolate, you run the serious risk of turning into a revision zombie. Here's how to keep yourself sane during your study leave:

- Take regular breaks – we mean every hour or so – five minutes of reading does not warrant a rest.
- Catch some z's – get as many early nights as you can. If you're working well into the night but not getting anywhere, it's far better to stop, sleep, and start again refreshed the next day.
- Move your butt – exercise is proven to help studies, so rather than slobbering around the house, go for a run – it'll clear your head, energise you and relieve any revision stress.
- Fill up on brain food – whole grains, oily fish, blueberries and broccoli are thought to be brilliant for boosting your concentration and energy levels. Why not try our signature blueberry, mackerel and broccoli smoothie?*
- Kick the energy drinks – trust us, a decent night's sleep, plenty of water and a banana will provide you all the energy and brainpower you need, without the sugar rush and caffeine shakes.

*Consume at your own risk.

3. Experiment

Let's face it, revision can be tough, so it's important to make it as fun as possible.

'Fun? Are you kidding?' we hear you scoff. Ok, so whilst we aren't going to pretend you'll want to swap your salsa classes/X Box/bird watching hobby for revision, there are ways you can inject some fun into your studies and optimise your learning.

Think about how you learn best, and try to use your different senses. You might find you remember things easier by listening, so why not record some sound bites, questions, and revision tips into a dictaphone and play them back. Even better, stick them on your iPod so you can listen to them on the go – just make sure you've removed them before your end of exams party – nothing will clear a dance floor like your recorded recital of Newton's three laws of motion.

If you're more of a visual learner, you might want to draw a very quick illustration or comic strip to help memorise a point, or cover your entire room in posters and mind maps, which will catch your eye even when you're not officially revising. Some people find working in a group really beneficial, as you can discuss ideas, quiz each other, and help with any problems. Be careful not to get distracted though, it's important you keep on track.

Whether it's through song, mnemonics, different accents, interpretive dance or just plain old notes, find a medium that works for you and go for it.

4. Make sure it's all in hand

At the risk of sounding like your grandma, the art of penmanship is rapidly becoming extinct, and that, my dear, is a great shame. She might have a point, you know.

Back in the good old days, before all these new-fangled computers and mobile phones, grandma had to write everything with a pen and paper/quill and parchment/chisel and rock, and whilst this sounds terribly long-winded and time-consuming, good handwriting is actually a pretty useful skill to have.

Because most of us now type rather than write, we're used to using different muscles in our hands. In an exam, you could be writing frantically for up to four hours, which, if you're not used to, can actually be rather difficult. If you're out of practice, you might experience hand cramp and wrist fatigue (a serious ailment during exam period), so it's definitely worth getting used to writing in timed conditions, and for longer periods of time to build up your hand stamina.

Planning becomes even more important – you can't just cut and paste paragraphs and edit and re-edit as you write like you're able to on your computer, so it's vital you get your ideas sorted before you start scribbling away. If your handwriting looks like something your cat might have scrawled, it's worth trying to neaten it up. It might not seem like an important factor, but if the examiner simply can't read your perfect answer, the chances are you won't get the marks you deserve.

5. Cram, bam, thank you ma'am

USE WITH CAUTION. If you've followed the rest of the tips on this list, then this point should, in theory, be totally irrelevant.

Pulling an all-nighter might seem like a viable option, and yes, you may have got through your mocks, bleary eyed and by the skin of your teeth by cramming the night before, but is it really worth the risk? Revising over a longer period of time means that more is engrained into your long-term memory, as well as giving you plenty of time to get to grips with anything you really don't understand. So, to summarise, only use this technique when you absolutely have to.

6. Relax

A little bit of stress isn't necessarily a bad thing – it'll give you the push you need to work hard.

However, sleeplessness, panicking, and nightmares of turning up to your exam naked, and the paper being written in an alien language, really aren't going to help. If you find yourself getting too worked up, there are plenty of ways to avoid getting the dreaded revision blues.

- Don't spend all your time studying – life goes on, so take time out to do things you enjoy.
- Avoid other stress-heads – hanging out with your friends is a great way to unwind but comparing how much revision you've done, particularly the morning before the exam, will only make you paranoid, so try and avoid all exam-related chat.
- Exercise – see point two. We really can't emphasise enough how much this will help. Release some aggression with some kickboxing or find your inner calm with a spot of yoga – you'll feel better.
- www.calmingmanatee.com – it speaks for itself really.
- Think of the light at the end of the tunnel – it's not all doom and gloom, and it won't be long until you're free to enjoy the summer. And just imagine how brilliant you'll feel when all your hard work pays off.

7. Just get on with it

Study leave does not = holiday.

Whilst you might think you've got plenty of time before your first exam, it'll creep up on you, and before you know it, you'll be sat in the exam hall with a test paper in front of you and the sinking realisation that getting that high score on Candy Crush didn't help you remember the structural features of a prokaryotic cell, and that the Loose Women surprisingly didn't discuss the failure of absolutism in Britain in the early 1600s. So rather than wasting this precious time festering in bed, watching daytime TV, and refreshing Twitter every 30 seconds, get yourself organised. Trust us, it'll be worth it!

GOOD LUCK – you don't need it, you clever thing, you.