

How to Revise

As the year moves into the summer months, the whole student population begins to gear up for exam time. Dust covered books are unearthed; essays reprinted and candles burned at both ends. It's very easy to fall into the trap of trying to cram it all in just before your exam, but unfortunately the well planned and calmly executed revision strategy is the one that will serve you best when you walk into the exam room.

First think about a setting. It has been said before that music can help you revise, but it has never worked for me, rather served as a distraction when I started singing along. Silence may seem like the boring option but it is the most conducive environment for successful revision. If you live in shared accommodation then your bedroom is most probably the best place, as you are less likely to be disturbed by the television, stereo, or conversation.

Organisation is the key; gather together all the books and reading material you need before you start to revise, otherwise you will only distract yourself getting up to fumble in bookcases. Make sure you have enough space to set everything out so you're not wasting time leafing through a messy stack of papers. Collect together any stationary you may require, especially highlighters, and check all your pens are going to be working for the foreseeable future. Finally think for a minute, is there anything else you need that you may use as a distraction later on; drink? Snack? Lucky Mascot? So now that the bathroom has been cleaned, the lounge hovered, your CD's alphabetised, the dishes done: it's time to revise.

Structure is important when revising. It's no use re-reading a thousand pages of a book and covering it in highlighter if you do not know how it can be applied to the type of question you will be answering. All Universities will keep a backlog of past exam papers so make sure you gather a few together to avoid any surprises when you enter the exam room. For essay based exam papers my advice is to select at least three past questions that span the topic you are revising, and then attempt to answer them in bullet point form. Read what the question is asking of you and use these as paragraphs, it is usually split up into bullet points so this should be easy. A typical essay based exam paper will ask you to analyse key points within the topic it is covering so begin by researching these. This really is the most simplistic and effective way of revising; it serves to tailor your revision to the forthcoming exam and therefore stops you straying off course, which can be very easily done.

Once your revision has been tailored it is time to move on from the past papers. Divide the topic you are revising into sub topics, for example should I be revising Post-War American Literature, I could divide into such categories as: 'Feminism', 'Attitudes to War' and 'Economics'. Use each of these as a header and write bullet points for each one, paying very careful attention to dates and names; nothing will lose you marks quicker in an exam than getting these things wrong. I confess to one particular example where I went down a grade on a practice paper because I called William Blake, Robert Blake. Read through these sheets until you feel comfortable that you could recall them in an exam, and then condense further to create flashcards to remind you of these facts. Flashcards are a particular help on the morning of the exam to

briefly refresh your memory of your revision. A typical flashcard will look like this:

Topic: Feminism in Post War American Literature

- Key Dates
- Key Figures
- 5 Key facts

Remember to keep them simple; these are simply to jog your memory of what you have previously revised.

It can be beneficial to begin your revision as part of a group. Arrange a study group in an appropriate setting, i.e. the Library, not the Student Union Bar. This is an opportunity for you to collate all your studying, gather extra material from fellow students, and also clear up any misunderstandings you may have concerning your revision topic. I would advise against continuing to revise in this fashion after one or two meetings, because it could very easily turn into a friendly chat and gathering. That's not to say you should not socialise at all during this period, just not when you are meant to be revising!

There are many traps that people fall into whilst revising, many concerning being far too easily distracted, believe me I know this from experience. However another is doing the bare minimum of revision in order to get by. For example, say you have studied 12 books in a term, there will be 10 questions in the exam and you have to answer 3, therefore in theory you only need to study between 4 and 5 books to cover yourself in the exam. This may seem like a time saving option however it is not a guaranteed success. I will give you an example drawing on personal experience: for a History exam I revised the bare minimum thinking I would be fine come exam time. However when I read the exam paper I realised that one question covered two topics, both of which were ones I had revised so two topics were taken up by one question. This meant that I had not revised enough and as a result my mark suffered dramatically. So make sure you revise comprehensively enough so as to avoid losing marks unnecessarily.

Finally if you have left it to the last minute to revise, be it your fault or not here are a few tips to help: Do not panic, it is not the end of the world! Panicking will only serve to make you fluster and you will be less likely to absorb the information. You need to prioritise, check through last years past exam paper, it is reasonably likely that they will not cover the same topics/books in the new exam, so use this to eliminate some topics and slim your revision down. Memorise some key names and dates and try and write up some flashcards. Try and get a good night sleep too, if you are so tired you cannot concentrate in your exam then this is no good either. But remember as tempting as it is to do this, all it will do is make you feel very stressed, and of course your exam mark will suffer. Do not waste a whole year of hard work, for the sake of a few extra nights out.