Teaching & Learning Newsletter

Bishop Rawstorne   **April 2016**

Nine ways students can revise for exams more

Effectively

We all know that the next set of weeks leading up to the exams can be challenging for students, parents and us! In a recent article the Guardian share the science behind revision, which techniques really work and which don't.

Before you do any revision:

1.   Eat breakfast

It is estimated that around 27% of boys and 39% of girls skip breakfast some or all of the time. Breakfast is often referred as the most important meal of the day and research has found that skipping this meal significant reduces student's attention and their ability to recall information. Simply having a bowl of cereal will give students the concentration and memory boost they need.

2.   Put your phone away

Whilst this may seem like an obvious one, it is often one that isn't adhered to. We all know that phones can be distracting but they are actually linked to fomo (fear of missing out). Evidence shows that undergraduate students who spend more time texting and using social media acheive lower grades. Researchers at the university of Southern Maine found that the mere sight of a phone was enough to reduce a person's ability to focus.

During revision sessions:

3.   Start early and spread it out

Actors don't leave their rehearsals until the day before opening night. Athletes don't train the day before a match. To commit something to memory takes time. Spreading revision sessions on a particular topic (eg one-hours sessions over 10 days) is more effective than spending the same amount of time in one go (ie 10 hours in one day). This effect is known as "spacing" and helps because it allows time in between revision sessions to forget and re-learn the material. In the case study "What makes great teaching?" the strategy has been labeled as "one of the most robust across the entire history of experimental research on learning and memory".

4.   Test yourself

In the action research "Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques" researchers consider testing yourself as one of the most effective ways to improve your ability to recall information. Testing yourself also helps you check for any gaps in your knowledge. Practice papers provide a good starting point, as well as quizzing yourself at the end of your revision sessions.

5.   Teach someone

After students have tested themselves, they should teach the material to someone else. This has been found to help aid memory and recall: it is known as "the Protégé Effect". We all know that teaching some else requires you to learn and organise your knowledge in a clear and structured manner.

6.   Think twice about using highlighters

Despite being the favorite weapon of many students tackling revision, research suggest they don't work very well. People learn and recall information better if they connect it to other pieces of information. Quite often, students end up highlighting whole chunks and passages of text, which can give the appearance of having worked hard, but is of little value.

7.   Don't listen to music

According to research, students who study in a quiet environment call recall more than those who revise while listening to music.

8.   Get some fresh air and exercise

You cannot work all day, every day. Nor should you. Revision has to be about quality, as well as quantity. Going outside and getting some fresh air helps people feel refreshed and better able to focus afterwards. Furthermore, doing a little bit of exercise helps people deal better with stressful situations: it reduces anxiety and increase self-esteem.

9.   Sleep

Students should have a regular bedtime and have an uninterrupted sleeping pattern.

FACE it!

Have you been exploring ways to teach students how to revise for exams? It's something lots of students struggle with. Based on recent experience of taking students through GCSE exams this idea was devised by AHT/HoD Deb O'Connor; a simple and powerful formula to convey the essence of good learning and revision.

Neatly, it also forms an acronym with another layer of meaning: **FACE** it!

- **Facts:**

Identify the key facts that need to be known and learn them. Memorise them. Test yourself.

- **Apply** in **Context:**

Use recall of facts to solve problems in new contexts; it's not enough to learn isolated facts. Test that knowledge in different scenarios using questions in books and past papers.

- **Exam practice:**

Use past exam questions to rehearse the process of responding under time pressure, demonstrating your knowledge and understanding, taking account of the marks available.
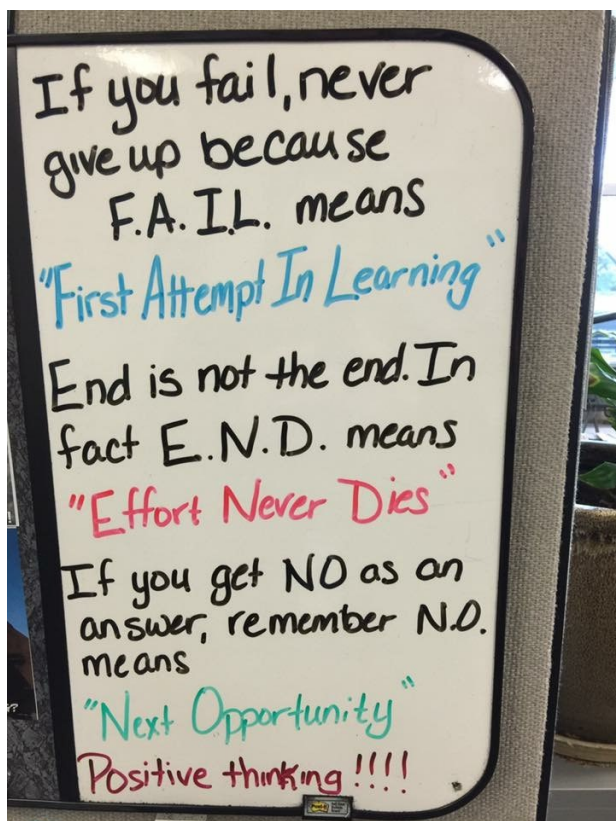
GCSE Pod

Don't forget we still have a subscription for GCSEPod!

There are a huge amount of subject specific resources available. These are perfect for your students to complete that 5 minute revision whilst they wait for the bus or during their private study.

Word of the Week!

Don't forget to stick your word of the week poster up in your room!

Maybe use the weekly word as a quick plenary idea or to follow up group discussion, asking a spokesperson to give the main points of their group's talk. Alternatively, encourage the use of the word in a written context.

Debug Duck

Rubber duck debugging is an informal term used in software engineering for a method of debugging code. In computing, students new to programming often struggle with finding the errors in their code and are quick to put their hand up asking for help.

In an attempt to increase the students problem solving abilities, the computing department have introduced the debug duck. Students are encouraged to pick up their duck and explain each line of code to their duck. As the students describe what the code is supposed to do and observing what the code is actually doing they are able to quickly evaluate their errors.