

Revision Tools

The simple way to exam success



How to use this book

- Every time you revise, you improve your chances of gaining a higher grade.
- There is a perfect way of revising, just for you. Your biggest challenge is finding it.
- This booklet contains different revision techniques and advice. These are not just ideas dreamed up by teachers. Every one of them has come from students who have used them to be successful in exams.
- Try out as many of them as you want. Some of them will feel strange at first. Try each technique twice. If you don't like it after two attempts, don't use it again - try something else.
- Even when you do find a technique that works, try others out. The variety will help keep you interested.
- It takes around three weeks to form a habit. A habit is something that you do without thinking about it. If you revise for three weeks, it will become a habit, one of those things you just do as a part of your routine.

What am I revising for?

- Getting yourself motivated to revise is the first, and often hardest, part of all revision.
- Some people are motivated by long-term goals. They know what they want to do in the future. Some of them know right now what job they want to do, or what university course they want to go on to. Those people will revise naturally - they know that revision now will help them achieve that goal later. If you are one of those people, congratulations!
- Some of us cannot see that far into the future or haven't decided yet. Sixth form or a career may seem too far away. If you are one of those people, you need a more immediate goal and reward.
- Each time before you start to revise, choose for yourself a reward that you will have in 20 minutes time. It can be anything: food, drink, sport, music, time with friends - something that will make you feel good.
- Say out loud what your reward will be - tell other people or write it down.
- When you have done your 20 minutes of revision, make sure you have your reward and enjoy it. You have earned it and you deserve it.

It takes three weeks to create a habit.

Giving yourself a reward, every time you revise, makes it easier to form that habit.



Have I got time to revise?

- Many parents and some teachers believe that revision has to take a long time. They are wrong.
- Revision should be done in a maximum of 20 minute chunks. Your concentration span is your age in minutes plus 2 minutes - 16 year olds can concentrate well for 18 minutes - FACT
- Once you accept that you are going to revise a subject or topic for a 20 minute period, it becomes much easier to find time to revise. Look at your busiest day - even the most hectic day probably has at least three 20-minute blocks when you could revise if you wanted to.
- Plan out when you could revise each day. When have you got 20 minutes free? Don't give up on the things you want to do and enjoy. If you miss out on your favourite TV show to revise, you will spend that time resenting the revision and achieve very little. Instead, fit revision into your day - can you revise for 20 minutes before your favourite programme?
- Your body clock works better at different times of the day. At least once, try getting up 20 minutes earlier and revising straight away. The risk is that you may hate it - but you may just find the perfect time to revise for you. One advantage of early-morning revision is that it is done and out of the way at the start of the day. The rest of the day is yours!

20 minutes is our maximum concentration time.

If you can't find 20 minutes, use 15.



The Dump Test

- Take a blank sheet of paper. Decide which subject you will revise and which precise topic, i.e. Science: Photosynthesis; English: Lennie in 'Of Mice and Men'; History - Treaty of Versailles.
- Using no books or notes, spend exactly 60 seconds dumping everything you know about the topic onto the paper. It does not need to be structured - random words or images are good.
- You are accessing prior knowledge and sending messages to the memory to retrieve the information.
- Put the Dump Test away and spend 15-16 minutes revising the topic in any way you want.
- At the end, put all books and notes away again. Pick up the Dump Test again. Take a different colour pen. Dump again for 60 seconds - You will write down on average 7-15 things which you could not write at the beginning of the session. This is progress - it visibly shows that you have just got better.

All students revise at least once. Some never revise twice. Often students give up on revision because they can't see the benefit. The Dump Test proves success.



Draw What You Know

- Take a section of notes and transform it into images, pictures or symbols.
- Ideally, draw images yourself but you could always cut and paste from Google Images.
- Try and use as few words as possible. Bad drawings are great - they are more likely to stick in the memory. If possible, show the drawings to some one else and explain what they mean.
- You are converting knowledge into understanding by personalising information.
- You can then stick the drawings up around the house. Over the course of 1 week, you will see that picture over 1,000 times - each time reinforcing the image in your memory.
- (A word of warning - if you are revising Biology- be careful what you draw when revising reproduction. Ask first!)

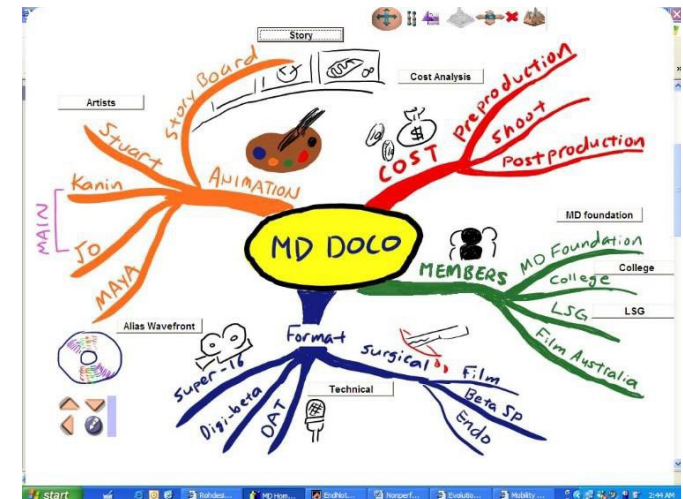
Make revision easy.
This is a way of giving you something to look at 1,000 times a week.



Mind-Maps and Revision Posters

- Some people find it incredibly difficult just to use images. Constructing mind-maps or revision posters is a good alternative.
- The basic rules for mind-maps are very simple: put the topic in the centre of the page, draw 6-7 different coloured branches - each one should be about something different; add smaller branches to each big branch giving a bit more detail - try to only write 1-2 words above each branch (this will help you select the most important words); add an image to each branch
- A revision poster can be set out in any design you like.
- Some students get into making revision posters on PowerPoint and either printing them or setting them up as screensavers and wallpapers on computer screens.

Mind-maps work in the same way as the brain: they make links between pieces of information.



Words and Links

- Write down 20 words that would have to be used when describing/explaining a particular topic - use your notes or textbook to help you with this. You could compare your 20 with other students and/or your teacher. Discuss whose words are more important and why.
- Now reduce the 20 words to 10: which ones are the most important now and why? Can you reduce them even to 7?
- Another alternative is scatter the 20 words across a sheet of A4 or A3 paper and draw arrows linking 2 words together. On the arrow write why it is linked. Draw as many arrows as you can - it encourages you to make your own links and therefore develop understanding. Ask your teacher to give you sheets with the 20 words on them - you then do the arrows and links

Memory works by linking ideas together - you don't have to remember everything. Just by focussing on a few key words, you can link into more information.



Post-it note Revision

- Spend one 20-minute revision session putting notes on a particular topic onto post-it notes. Each post-it note can have a maximum of 10 words on it - the fewer words the better though. At the end of the session, stick the post-it notes onto a door, wall or sheet of paper. They must be visible.
- Every day for the next week return to the post-it notes for 3-5 minutes and rearrange them in any way you can think of: most important, least important, chronological, alphabetical, similar/different. You will find that each day you come up with a new way to rearrange them. This activity again helps you to make links within a topic and also reinforces memory.
- An alternative could be to use fridge magnet letters to make different words on a particular subject each day - the good point about this is that hopefully other members of the family will ask what it means and you will have to explain it - easy revision.

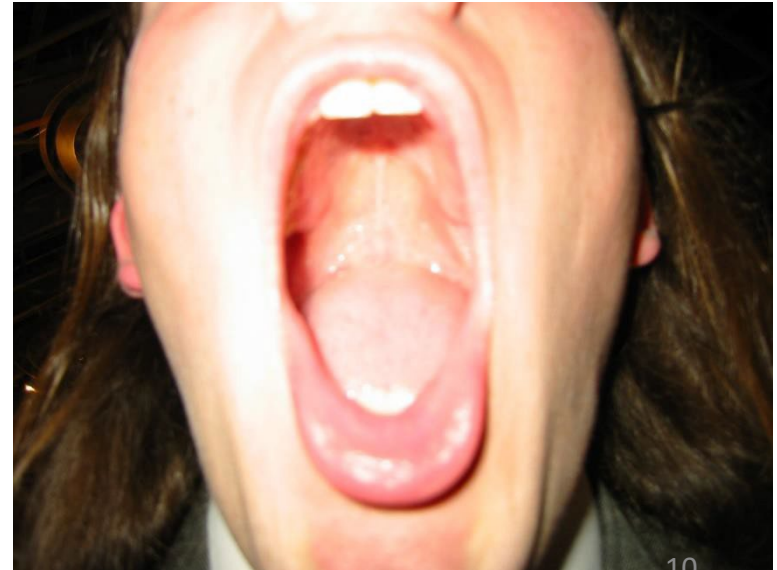
Without consciously thinking about it, part of your brain will work on revision, even when you are not aware of it.



Talk Until You Stop

- One purpose of revision should be to find the things you can't remember or don't really understand yet. This is not easy - try to tell anyone something you have forgotten! Often, we can flick through a book without reading it, convincing ourselves that we do know it.
- For this technique, select a specific topic. No books or notes are allowed. You have to talk out loud on that topic for as long as possible. If you feel self-conscious, turn the stereo up louder.
- You will talk for a period of time but will eventually stop, often in mid-sentence, because you have reached a part you don't fully understand and can't explain or have forgotten. You should make a note of either what you don't understand or what you said just before you stopped.
- You have just found the part you need to revise. It is important that you talk out loud so you notice when you stop.

Revision is not about learning anything new - it is about finding what you can't remember or don't understand yet.



Podcasts

- The vast majority of students have I-pods, MP3 players and/or mobile phones - all of which take podcasts. Some teachers have already recorded revision podcasts: you can download them from the Student section of the school website. If your teachers haven't recorded any yet, nag them!
- Even better, record yourself talking about a particular topic. **Audacity** is a really good program for this and can be downloaded for free from the internet. Limit your podcast to less than 20 minutes (the ideal time for revision).
- Some students have done all of their revision on the school bus, doing a paper round, jogging, working on a farm or shopping in ASDA. The easier you can make revision, the more likely it is that you will do it.
- Experiment with listening to podcasts last thing at night - revision in your sleep!

The best ways to revise are those that mean you can still do something else at the same time.



Where was I when...?

- Some people find it difficult to remember the content of lessons. Warm up your memory by starting revision sessions by focussing on other things to remember.
- Divide a piece of paper into 16 squares - each square represents something from a particular lesson.
- Put anything in any square which you can remember in any order you want: who you sat next to, the time, the weather outside, who the teacher was, clothes teacher wore, a word you said in the lesson, a word someone said to you, where in the room you sat, how many different activities there were in the lesson, who spoke the most, the funniest thing that happened, who got in trouble, what was the lesson about (leave this to last).
- Do this for one lesson each day for three weeks (creating a habit) and you will consciously or sub-consciously start looking for things in each lesson to remember. They will be hooks to hang other memories on.

Stress can block access to memory - the harder you try to remember something, the harder it is to find.

Warm up the memory by remembering other things.



Revising with others

- Revision does not have to be done alone. Some of the most successful students in recent years have worked with other people to revise.
- One activity is to use each revision session to make up tests and quizzes for each other.
- Pick a topic, spend 10-12 minutes making up questions on it and then test each other.
- You could be physically together (as in you are in the same room - any closer and you are enjoying revision far too much) but you could send the questions and answers to each other by email, or on Facebook or MSN or by text.

Many other students in this school and across the country are revising right now.
You are not alone!



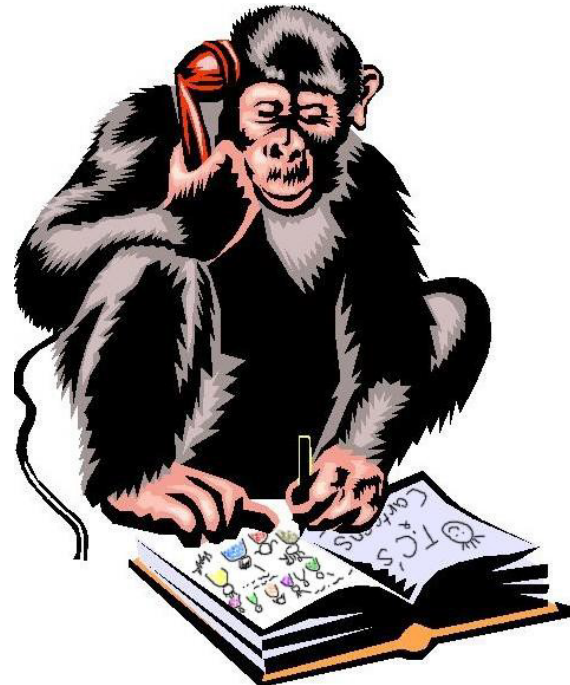
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Reading through notes

- It is the method of revision which most students will try first and which most students hate, and therefore it puts them off revision.
- Very few people read books twice - we know what will happen. Many students find reading notes that they have read before really boring - even History notes!
- Reading is a valid revision tool but should be used occasionally, rather than always.
- Do something whilst reading: highlighting key words in books, putting words on flash cards or post-it notes, drawing notes. The physical process of holding a pen, pencil or highlighter will help keep you focussed on the notes and encourage you to transform the information - helping you to understand it.

Reading needs to be an active process.
Do something whilst reading:
highlight,
underline, doodle



Flash cards

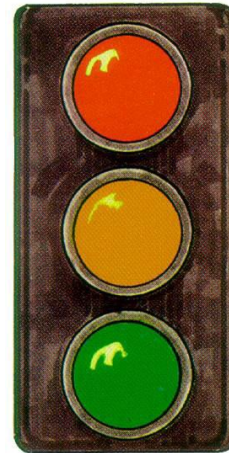
- Write key questions that are part of a particular subject on one side of a small cue card. You could take the words that you came up with on a dump test.
- Bullet point the key information that needs including on the back of the card.
- Encourage friends and family to ask you the questions and practice answering them fully, or test yourself. You will quickly get good at answering the questions and can create more cards.
- You could build up to writing exam questions on the cards.

Break down
the amount of
information
you are trying
to remember
into small
chunks

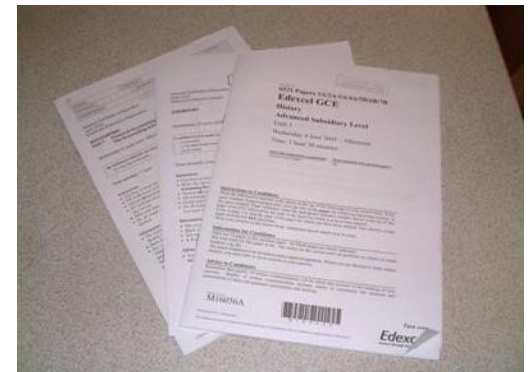


Study past exam questions

- This is the biggest single thing that students say has improved their performance in exams.
- This does not involve sitting down and completing a whole 2 hour exam paper.
- Look through past exam questions and traffic light the questions: green for those that you could do now, orange for those that you could have a stab at and red for those that you don't have a clue about. This will help prioritise where your revision needs lie.
- Another way of using past exam questions is to spend five minutes planning answers to different questions. You don't need to write full answers to practise.



Most people are afraid of the unknown. The more exam questions you look at now, the greater the chance that you will have seen your real exam in advance



Look/Cover/Write/Check

- This works well for some people: Look over revision materials for a key issue.
- Cover them up.
- Write down the key points you can remember.
- Check what you did not include.
- Then try again: you will quickly get better.
- Extend the amount you test yourself on as you get more confident and knowledgeable.

Find as many different ways as you can to test yourself.



Peer Teaching

- To teach it you must be able to understand it. In the past, students have organised themselves into small groups and met for revision sessions.
- This can include formal taught inputs, where each takes it in turns to teach one aspect of the subject they are covering. This can also involve other group activities such as using flash cards, bringing revision posters and explaining them to the group and/or taking it in turns to plan exam questions and then feeding back to the group.
- You can also play revision games like pairs (where you have a key word/person/concept/formula on one card and an explanation on the other - you then have to match up), pictionary, charades, revision cranium; the list is endless.
- Revision is more enjoyable if you have someone to talk to about the subject. Friends can help sort out things you are not sure about.

If you can explain something to someone else, you know and understand it!



Creating mini-books

- You can create your own mini-books about different topics.
- These can be presented in whatever way works for you.
- Some are books of poetry, others are mainly picture books with 5 key words on each page, while some students prefer to have a key question followed by a list of key points/evidence.
- If you fold up one sheet of A4 into pages, you can carry a book around with you and have a quick look at it when you have 5 minutes spare
- The key thing is that the books need to be mini.
- Focus on distilling notes until you have recorded the most crucial points. This is also useful to do in a group and to explain your books to other people.

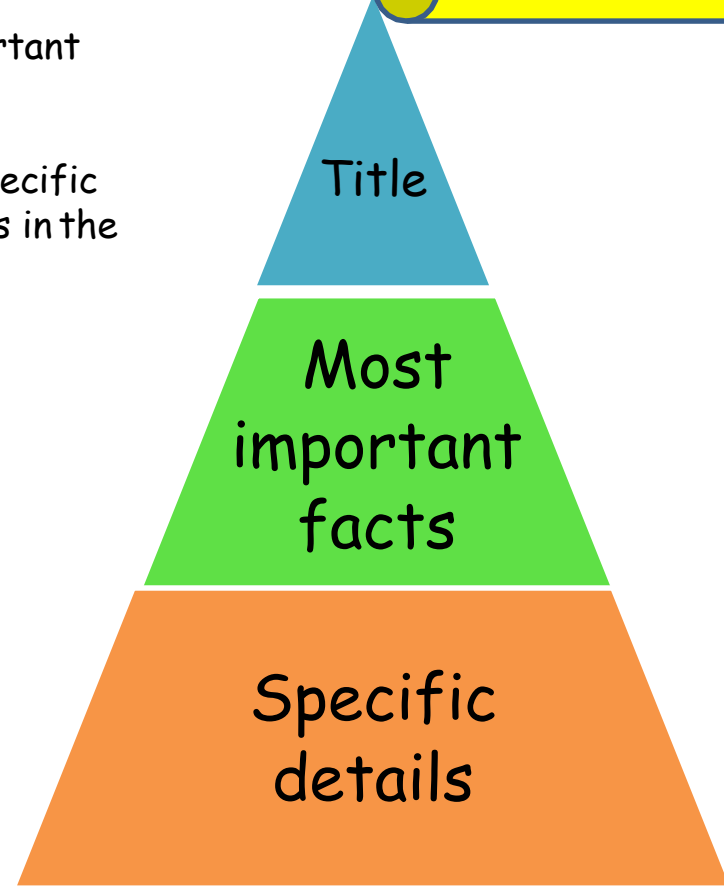
Less is more!
Focus on
breaking down
information into
the most vital
points.



Pyramids

- This is another useful technique for minimising notes.
- Have the key topic at the top of the pyramid.
- In the next layer, write down the most important facts that are relevant to the topic.
- In the bottom layer, write down all of the specific pieces of information that support the points in the layer above.

Look for different ways to display your revision.
It is proof of how well you are doing.



Build up writing speed.

- Writing in an exam is different to writing in class where you are (usually) under less pressure.
- Practice building up your writing speed by speed writing.
- Find a short question from a past exam question or make one up yourself.
- Set the alarm on your watch/phone for 5 minutes. See how much you can write in 5 minutes. You will be surprised (in a good way).
- This is not an activity that can be done in front of the TV. You need somewhere quiet so you get used to the exam environment and to really focus on your writing.
- You will quickly build up an internal clock so you will know instinctively what 5 minutes writing feels like.

Sports coaches use the phrase: "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail."



Use a KWL grid

- This is a useful way of seeing how your revision is going and which areas you still need to work on.
- Look through the topics you need to know for your exam and complete the chart.
- What I Know/Understand
- What I Want to know
- How I will Learn this.

Keep proving
to yourself
how well your
revision is
going.

<i>K</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
What I know	What I want to know	What I've learned

Apps for Revision

- There are plenty of apps available in the Apps store / GooglePlay store designed to help:
- Memrise is an app designed to help you learn key words and their definitions through games and scheduled repetition. It will send you notifications when it's time to revise again and once downloaded doesn't need an internet connection to run. It works brilliantly with languages, but there are courses on Memrise available for nearly every subject. If the one you want isn't there, you can even make your own.
- Quizlet is a flashcard game. Sets of flashcards for a range of subjects are available to search through but, again, you can make your own personalised sets too. Once you have a set, you can use them in any way you would normally use a flashcard, including matching games against the clock.
- Have trouble organising your revision? Trello is a 'To Do List' app that can help you keep on top of your schedule and keep you well organised with your revision.

New apps and digital tools for revision are constantly being invented. Use technology to help.



Quizlet

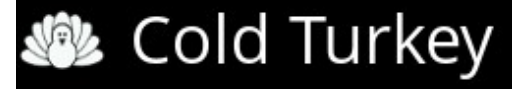


More Apps for Revision



- StudyBlue is another flashcard based app that lets you arrange your cards into subject and topic groups and collaborate and compete with others at a range of games and quizzes based on your flashcards.
- Like to talk? Audioboo lets you record short podcasts and share them. You can use it to make short revision podcasts to listen to over and over and over again.
- SimpleMind+ is an app that lets you create digital mind maps. If making mind maps to help you visualise the content in a topic helps you, this might be the app for you. It means you can keep all of your mind maps with you on your phone/tablet to revise from anywhere.
- Cold Turkey is the app for you if you find it difficult to switch off from everything while you revise. It allows you to block all social media, games and even specific websites from your phone for a set time and you can't undo it until the timer wears off! Perfect if you can't be away from snapchat for more that 2 minutes....

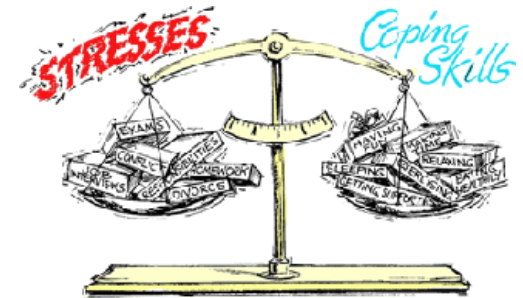
New apps and digital tools for revision are constantly being invented. Use technology to help.



Coping with your Stress

- It is natural to feel stress: Talk about it.
- Think about the people you know who will listen to you and make sure you talk to them. Your listeners can be friends, family, teachers or others.
- Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of maturity and strength to realize when you have difficulties and to feel confident enough to share those difficulties with others.
- Think positively: Try to develop a growth mindset if you don't already have one. Thinking you might fail drains your confidence, makes you worry and reduces your enthusiasm to work hard.
- Don't tell yourself things like. 'I can't do this subject!' replace this unhelpful self-talk with statements like: 'This is hard but I've dealt with hard topics before and learnt to understand them.'
- Discover additional supports. There are specific strategies you can try that help some people. Google these and give them a go:
 - If you feel tension in your muscles, try muscle relaxation exercises;
 - You can develop simple breathing techniques that help you manage extreme anxiety;
 - Mental imaging techniques, a bit like daydreaming, can also help you develop a sense of calm and control.

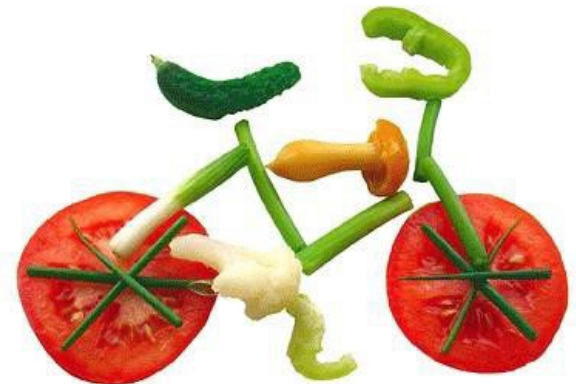
Everyone gets nervous and feels anxiety at times, but you can learn to manage this.



Staying Healthy

- Do some exercise: One of the best ways of dealing with stress is to exercise as you will find that after exercising your muscles are relaxed and calm.
- Exercise also helps to clear the mind. It provides a way of releasing a great deal of the muscle tension which stress produces.
- Eat well: Eating well reduces the overall stress on the body and can also make you feel good about yourself. Try eating a variety of foods.
- Breakfast is particularly important. Make sure you start every day eating something wholesome - not chocolate!
- Drink water: Staying hydrated is crucial for your concentration span and attention levels.
- Take time out to have fun: During the revision period, make sure you give yourself some time to do the things you enjoy. Do the things that relax you and take your mind off your studies.

Exams and your results are important but they are not everything. Look after yourself and you are likely to do better too.



The importance of sleep

- Unless there's a chance to wind down and switch off before falling asleep, it's difficult for anyone to get enough good-quality rest.
- Proper sleep is especially important when you are preparing for exams because tiredness sabotages the ability to concentrate and remember; that in turn fuels anxiety.
- The light that illuminates the screens on our electronic devices suppresses melatonin, a chemical in the brain that allows us to relax and prepare for sleep.
- Therefore, make it a rule that all screens are turned off 20 minutes before bedtime. Dimming lights in the bedroom will also help.

Getting a good night's sleep can make all the difference!

