A Parents’ Guide to Independent Learning Skills
Introduction

Independent Learning Skills is a way to help pupils learn more about how to learn independently, both becoming more active in lessons and how to study outside of lesson time.

The partnership between school and home is critical to ensure pupils achieve their potential. This Parents' Guide to Independent Learning Skills booklet contains advice about a variety of topics that we hope you will find helpful as you support your child through their study at home. As ever, you can always contact school if you have any concerns. The Head of House will be the first point of contact.

Advice in this booklet has been drawn from a variety of educational and health sources.

Advice covers:
- a) Revision Techniques;
- b) Healthy Revision;
- c) Coping with exam stress;
- d) Essential exam information;
- e) Useful resources

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The whole process of revision is daunting for some students. Others see it as less important than it really is. So…

**Facts**
- Students who know more do better in exams
- Students who revise know more than those who don’t
- Students who know how to revise do it more effectively

And…

**Fiction**
- No-one else has started revising yet
- It’s too early to start
- It’s too late to start
- You can’t revise for….
- I can revise and watch TV at the same time
- Revision timetables don’t work

We provide revision materials and lessons are built around ensuring pupils cover the relevant topics for their exams. Pupils complete regular assessments and after school interventions are available for pupils. However, if pupils also use independent learning skills to revise in addition to this they will achieve even more.
The Science of Learning

There have been enormous developments in recent years in the understanding of how our brains work and how memory is structured. This knowledge can be put to great use during revision time.

Information is transmitted by neurons (brain cells). When we learn something for the first time, new connections are formed and the brain stores the new pattern. We store these patterns daily, and this is excellent for revision. But if the brain is overworked, retrieving those patterns might not work as well as it should.

**Repetition**
Pathways between neurons can be strengthened over time. Simple repetition – practising retrieving a memory over and over – is the best way of doing this.

**And again...and again...and again...and again**
The ideal time to revise what we’ve learned is just before we’re about to forget it! Due to the fact memories get stronger the more we retrieve them, waiting longer each time (a few minutes, hours, then a day, then a few days – a technique known as ‘spaced repetition’) is effective.

**Take regular breaks**
Breaks are important to minimise interference. When the brain is forced to store many new (and often similar) patterns in a short space of time, it can get them jumbled up.

**Avoid distractions**
Attention is the key to memorising. By choosing to focus on something, it is given a personal meaning that makes it easier to remember. Playing music while revising will make the task harder, because any speech-like sounds, even at low volume, will automatically use up part of the brain’s attention capacity.

*Adapted from How your Brain Likes to be Treated at Revision Time The Guardian 2012*
Revision Planning

A revision plan isn’t simply writing up a timetable of things to be covered. It’s about having a plan and a method of study. These two elements combined make students feel in control of their work.

Preparing to Revise

WHERE?
A place which is light, quiet and uncluttered. Access to a computer is important, but be careful this doesn’t become a distraction. Ask why it’s being used.

At school, the LRC is open from 7.30am and until 3.30 pm. After 3.30 pm, a lot of staff stay to complete their lesson preparation and marking. Pupils are welcome to stay and use the facilities for their study if they would like to.

Having adults around at home or at school during revision time means that any struggles or anxieties can be quickly identified and dealt with before things get out of proportion.

WHEN?
Some students find it easier to revise at certain times of the day. The bad news is, that this may not always coincide with when time is available! If students can use their favourite times, that’s great, but revision is a discipline. It needs to be done, whether or not it’s at that optimum time. Set realistic timescales for revision and celebrate achieving those timescales to maintain motivation.

HOW LONG?
This will vary from student to student, but the advice is generally not to revise in long stretches. Short bursts of an hour can be broken up into 20 or 30 minute sessions. While variety is good, focusing on one or two subjects per revision session means that the brain doesn’t get confused. More significant chunks of material will be retained.
Revision Timetable

A revision timetable is an essential resource for good revision. While the times may not be stuck to rigidly, it will provide a clear picture of the content which needs to be covered for each course and a realistic timescale for revision. Managed well, it will help to reduce anxiety.

Some examples of revision timetables are on the pages that follow.

Suggestions for a Revision Timetable
Working through the following activities together will help students to produce effective plans:

- List all the subjects and break them down into their major topics and sub-topics. If possible, link those to each exam paper. Try a different colour for each subject;
- Decide which areas will need more time and which will need less. If it helps, use a traffic light system to help. (Red = difficult; amber = so, so; green = OK);
- Work out the amounts of time which should be spent on each sub-topic;
- Work out the priorities: eg which revision needs to be done first, as other learning depends on it. Identify any areas where your son or daughter is 'stuck'. Ask them to see the relevant subject teacher at school for more help. Which is a big barrier to moving forward at the moment and would be done better first; which is a minor part of the exam and therefore might not need to be such a priority;
- Draw up a detailed timetable for a fortnight at a time. Blank out the times where there are other commitments; allocate the remaining time to revision as appropriate;
- Nearer the exam time, work out the priorities for revision based on the dates of the exams themselves.

Stick the revision timetable somewhere where it can’t be missed by you and your child.
### Monthly Revision Timetable

(Month and Year)

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**Notes**
This week’s Priorities:

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## Revision timetable

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Memory Technique - Mnemonics

There are lots of different types of mnemonics, but some of the most common are below:

**First Letter Triggers**

Take the first letter of each word you need to remember and then use your imagination to create an imaginative sentence.

An example for remembering lists is:

Mercury  Venus  Earth  Mars  Jupiter  Saturn  Uranus  Neptune  Pluto
My  Very  Efficient  Memory  Just  Stored  Up  Nine  Planets

An example for remembering spellings is:

Because

Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants

**Visual Triggers**

What shape does Italy look like? Sometimes you can easily associate a more familiar image with a less familiar one.

Other times you might need to ‘force’ an image. For example, to remember how to spell simile, you might imagine two similar smiles.

😊😊

**Rhyming Triggers**

Your brain can find it easier to remember rhymes, rhythms and tunes. If they are creative and fun then they stay in your brain! An example is:

“In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

“Thirty days hath September, April, June and November; February has twenty eight alone, All the rest have thirty-one Except in Leap Year, that’s the time, When February’s Days are twenty-nine.”
Memory Technique – Loci

When you lose something, like your keys, do you notice that people tend to ask, “Well, where did you see them last?” Then, you try to picture in your head where they might be. The ancient technique of Loci works in a similar way as it gets you to think about a location and create links in your brain.

Using Loci

In your mind, you picture locations in a room and you place the items you have tried to remember in those locations. You then picture yourself looking around the room in a clear order. As long as you made up a creative reason for each item being where it is, you’ll find that your memory works amazingly well!

If you prefer, you could create a journey in your mind picturing different things you need to remember at key points along the way. When you need to recall the information, you then picture yourself going on that journey.

For example, if you needed to remember the following things: a monkey, an iron, a rope, a kite and a car, you might come up with the following story:

You go to leave your house and a (monkey) is dancing around outside your house making monkey noises. Now the monkey walks with you to the bus stop. At the bus stop, the monkey picks up an (iron). On the bus, the iron starts sliding around, but a (rope) attaches itself to the iron. You get to school and look at the rope and see the other end attached to a (kite). The kite now smashes into a (car) right outside school.

The story seems pretty silly, but the way you have created the story makes links to places in your mind, which makes it easier to remember.
Active Reading Strategies

Start with something general

Reading is easier if you have a sense of the context and a general overview. Read the most basic text you can find first. Familiarise yourself with the main ideas and vocabulary.

Re-read difficult passages

Text books and other school resources often contain difficult parts. Don’t panic! You are bound to need to re-read some passages slowly, several times. You might also need to use a dictionary, or the glossary in the textbook, to look up the meaning of some of the words to help you work out what it is telling you.

Highlight key words and phrases

On your own text or a photocopy, underline in pencil the information that you think may be relevant. Look especially at headings and first and last sentences of paragraphs. Select one or two of the key words in each paragraph. When you have done that for the whole piece of text select words that you think you will need to remember and highlight them in colour. Double-underline or star the most important points or facts that you think will help you in your exams or understanding. Make a faint wavy line under the fairly important points or facts that you think would be useful to remember but aren’t essential.

Be selective! If you underline or highlight everything, nothing will stand out.

Monitor your comprehension

Read a few sentences, then stop. Without looking back at the text, sum up what you have read in just a few words. Repeat these words in your head, or note them down. If you cannot do this, read back over what you have read, using an additional idea mentioned above.

Guide your reading

Set yourself specific questions to start off your reading. Write them down. They could be something like; ‘What is the writer’s opinion about a particular topic?’, ‘Who is the most important character?’ or whatever is relevant about what you are reading. Change the questions as your reading goes on. The clearer you are about what you are trying to find out, the easier it is to find it in the text.
Memory Thrives on Organisation

It is easier to remember things if they are well organised. This is because:

- grouping similar items together helps you remember
- using headings helps you remember
- being able to see there are only four types of information gives the task manageable limits
- many of the items on List B were also on List A and going over information helps you remember.

Concept Pyramids

Concept pyramids organise information and are used to help you remember things, as long as you order the information properly.

In an experiment in 1969, Bower and other psychologists asked a group of people to learn 112 words. The words were grouped and linked in clear ways and organised into pyramids. People remembered 100% of the words by the third try.

A second group of people were given the same words, also arranged into pyramid shapes, but this time with words placed at random. The second group remembered only 47% of the words by the third attempt.
7 steps for revision

Step 1 - Give yourself time to prepare
1. Finish your notes
2. Memorise notes
3. Practice papers

Step 2 - Go through past papers and identify where you lost marks
1. Circle where you lost marks
2. Identify what the mistakes are
3. Mistakes = lack of knowledge

Step 3 - Get teacher’s advice
1. Ask them where you lost marks
2. Ask them to show you how to do it correctly
3. Make sure you understand
4. Create a checklist

Step 4 - Learn from the people around you
1. Borrow papers from people higher in the class/doing well in the subject
2. Identify what they do well and copy it

Step 5 - Fix the mistakes
1. Redo the paper - just where you went wrong
2. Get them marked

Step 6 - Use an exam planner

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>To do</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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Step 7 - Practice papers
1. Do a minimum of 3 practice papers
2. Do the first few NOT under exam conditions - use notes to help
3. Do the last few under exam conditions
4. Get them marked

In the exam room

Step 1 - Stay calm
1. Get a routine
2. Avoid people who will negatively affect your mood
3. Take deep breaths!

Step 2 - Ration your time
Each mark = minutes/marks
e.g. If a paper is worth 20 marks and you have 2 hours to do it each mark is worth 6 minutes
Which means if the sections are:
4 marks = 24 minutes
6 marks = 36 minutes
10 marks = 60 minutes

Step 3 - Consider all answers
Use a mind map to plan