

Effective revision

Avoiding the pitfalls



Ten common pitfalls in revision....	... and how to avoid them
1. Leaving revision until the last minute	<p>Revision is a way of pulling your understanding together in preparation for the exam. You can include and plan for revision from the beginning of your course. Here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make your notes readable, attractive and visually compelling as you go through your course – this builds memory• Start to over-learn (active learning) names, dates and key points early in the year. Even if you forget them they will be easier to learn a second time around• Begin intense revision about 4 weeks before the exam
2. Reading through notes over and over again	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use creative and interactive strategies. This keeps your mind alert, and helps to integrate information• Instead of just reading, read in order to find out. The best way to do this is to look at material related to possible exam topics. Use pass exam papers to help you identify topics• Discussing past exam questions with friends makes this process more interesting• Time yourself writing some answers to exam questions/ essays without looking at your notes. This shows you both the areas you need to work on and helps to increase your handwriting speed and your ability to think and write under pressure
3. Writing notes out and out again	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This can be a good strategy if you learn through ‘motor memory’. Working to different essay plans keeps the information fresh and develops your thinking about the subject• Alternatively some people prefer to develop a good complete set of notes, plus flash cards• Reduce information to a series of memory triggers. Reduce a set of triggers to one key word or image
4. Writing out essays and learning them off by heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is time-consuming and counter productive, it is unlikely that the identical questions will be asked in your exam• It is better to reflect on and practice a range of answers, so you over-learn the topic. You will then be able to work with this information flexibly during the exam

<p>5. Finding ways of putting off revision (such as 'urgent' things to be done, watching TV, or chatting with friends or family)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a revision timetable which leaves spaces for real emergencies/urgent tasks • Leave TV and other social tasks as rewards, but do put them in the timetable • Involve others in your revision, e.g. explain a subject to them and see if they understand, or ask them to test you using your memory triggers or notes
<p>6. "I cannot force myself back to study."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember or revisit your motivation drivers • Encourage and entice yourself to study rather than force yourself to study—use tricks like studying with others • Check your timetable has enough breaks for rest
<p>7. "I start to panic. I feel I am never going to get through it all or remember it."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with positive-minded people • Use stress management techniques and memory techniques to overcome panic • Work steadily to small goals, bite size chunks • Seek help from University support services
<p>8. "I cannot cope with the boredom of it. I start to daydream or wonder why I am bothering."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in short spells rather than long revision sessions • Use a variety of learning techniques to inspire you and avoid long spells of doing the same thing • Stretch yourself to increase your interest, e.g. read a more advanced article on the topic
<p>9. "I have too many responsibilities to make revision practicable."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use of short spells of time, e.g. public transport travel time, tea breaks, etc. • Always carry a small section of your revision material with you, so you can take advantage of 'spare' moments • 'Carry' an exam question in your head and jot down ideas as they occur
<p>10. Stopping revision before the process of over-learning is complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep checking what you have learnt, reduce your revision material to shorter key memory triggers as your recall improves • Keep asking yourself how you will use this material to answer exam questions • Use spare moments well

Adapted from: Cottrell, Stella (2013). *The exam skills handbook: achieving peak performance*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.