

B B C BITESIZE

Hello. I'm Dr Alex Lathbridge and this is Bitesize Biology.

This series is all about exam techniques. Tips, tricks and advice to make sure that you can pass your exam.

Today, it's all about making the most out of your revision, how to stay calm and how to stay focused.

Let me start by saying that there are no perfect ways to revise. Your parents, teachers, mates might have things that they swear worked for them, but when you try it, you might feel a little bit sad, because it doesn't work for you. Even what I tell you today, it might not be perfect for you, but stuff we're going to chat about today will give you some good insights into how you can best learn.

And don't just take it from me, we've got some helpful hints from real students who very recently passed their GCSE Biology exams, so do listen to what they've got to say.

Here are a few things to think about:

First, phones.

Phones are useful for lots of things. You might be listening to me, right now on your phone. But you know what it's like; you pick it up to check just one thing and then three hours later you are just churning through videos that the social media algorithms feed you, to grab hold of your attention.

Student: I was getting distracted by my phone quite a lot, but I didn't really do anything about it and I probably should have. My mum would always say she was going to take it off me, but I'd never really give it her. If you can try and keep your phone away from you, whilst you're revising, because as soon as you go on it once and a notification pops up, you won't get off it, and then the revision is just worthless because you've lost focus and none of it is actually going into your head.

If your phone is pulling focus, this is good advice.

You can put your phone onto do not disturb mode, or aeroplane mode, give it to someone else, put it in another room, maybe even turn it off.

And if you want to keep listening to the rest of the bitesize biology podcast? Why not stick it in your pocket, put your headphones on and go for a walk.

So, let's move onto flash cards.

Now it's all well and good to listen to the Bitesize Biology podcast, make some notes and read them a couple of times, but if you don't test yourself, you won't know what's gone into your brain.

Flash cards are a really good way of testing your knowledge, they break it down into manageable chunks, and there's something kind of satisfying when you see that pile of flash cards that you've made grow.

You could have two-sided flash cards with a key term on one side, and then the definition on the other. You could highlight or underline key words, use doodles or pictures, or whatever works for you.

Student: I think flash cards are a really good at GCSE because, especially with biology, it's mostly memory based, and then going through topic lists, everything you've done in a year, making sure you can answer every question that you might get.

You might find that making a flash card is really useful, because you're deciding what you feel are the key points are for each topic. You could try listening to each episode of the Bitesize Biology podcast and then make a flash card afterwards from what you can remember.

It's important to have some way of testing your knowledge. Revision has to be active; it can't just be passive.

Active revision is where you take an action to test yourself, things like using flashcards or getting someone at school to test you.

Whereas passive revision are things happening to you. So, flicking through a revision guide or listening to this podcast, which is a great way of getting your head around the key facts, but it's important that you do make your own notes, doodles, diagrams, whatever you need to make sure that the facts are inside your brain.

Something else really good is to check out past papers. You can find them online and they really help. Why?

Let's say you see the question: "where is the hormone testosterone produced?"

You know that the answer is the testes. You can answer that one easily in class or when you're revising at home.

But, as soon as it's an exam paper, in that scary exam font, telling you how many marks it's worth, you might just freeze up.

So, if you do enough past papers, you'll be able to desensitise yourself to that fear just a little bit and focus on the content of the question.

Student: For me, past papers were the main thing. Past papers helped me a lot. Because in the exams they use the same terminology and sometimes even the same questions. So, for me I would just repeat past papers, mark them, and do them again the next day and keep on doing that.

Student: I agree with the past papers, they're definitely helpful for the content and the technique of answering questions. But then also, flash cards I used mostly. I'd go through the revision guide, and

I'd split each page up into 3 or 4 flash cards, and I'd use the specification as well to make sure I'm answering everything on the specification, so I've covered everything I possibly can.

See?

Some people like to answer six mark questions first, some people like to leave them to the end and some people like to get the maths done out of the way first. If you do practice papers first. You'll know what works for you.

Knowing where to revise is important. Where is your best learning environment?

For effective revision you need to be somewhere calm and quiet with no distractions, so at home in front of the television, maybe isn't your best bet.

Student: Teachers are always welcoming students to come and ask them questions if they don't understand anything, so I think staying an extra hour after school is a pretty good idea, and it's also a good environment, because you're already used to studying there.

Student: I think libraries are a really good place to revise, especially when you don't have a quiet place at home. Because over there everyone's focused, but you need to make sure that you don't do this as a social thing and you have an aim when you go to a library.

Student: I personally think that schools are the best place. If you have a biology teacher, going into his room for an hour, at lunch or after school is the best, because whilst you're doing your revision there, you also have the person that's teaching you to give you help and advice in case you don't know anything.

And if home is not a calm environment, remember that the school is there to help.

Dealing with stress is really important. Obviously, exams are stressful. I'm not going to pretend that they're not.

It's really important that you recognise signs of stress early and have strategies to deal with them.

Student: To deal with stress, just try to separate yourself from anything to do with work, I would go to the gym as much as I could, you've got different people there, different surroundings, and I wouldn't associate it with doing any work or exams.

Student: When I got too stressed, I'd try and leave the environment, I'd go and sit with my mum, I'd go for a shower to do something that would relax me.

Student: Even if I was in the middle of a block of revision, if you're that stressed, you know you're not going to take anything in, so I'd just stop, take a breather, play a game or something and come back to it later.

Student: I think stress is a really big thing around exams and it can have a really big toll on your mental health. Reaching out and asking for help from parents and teachers can really help ease your mind and reassure you that you don't have to do this alone, and you can get help whenever you

want.

Student: I'd go out hang out with friends to take my mind off it, I'd go do my sport, I'd go running, play a game. Either with family, with friends, or anything to take your mind off the work, and the amount of work you have to do. And then when you come back to it, you can do it efficiently and to the best of your ability.

That's all really good advice personally, I didn't have a good technique for handling stress, and nobody gave me the tools to do so. I didn't realise that this was one of the reasons why I struggled to revise so much.

And finally, BBC Bitesize is there.

I would say this wouldn't I - Bitesize is really useful. It helped me pass my exams many years ago, it's really good for breaking down topics in ways that make it accessible, and look where I am now: in your ear, telling you how to pass your exams.

Student: Bitesize is a really great source, if you've got any holes or you don't quite understand something, it's explained in a different way, there's loads of videos on there, just loads of really great stuff.

Student: Bitesize is really good because it has revision notes, and then on a different page it has questions for the notes you just learnt. So, if you use the notes, and revise from them, and then straight after use the questions, then you can be sure you know everything that you've just learnt.

There is no one miracle way to revise, everyone is different, but revision isn't just about learning facts and exam techniques. It's also about learning about how you learn, and that knowledge will make the rest of your life a breeze.

I'm Dr Alex Lathbridge and this is Bitesize Biology. To listen to the rest of the series, search Bitesize Biology on the BBC Sounds app.