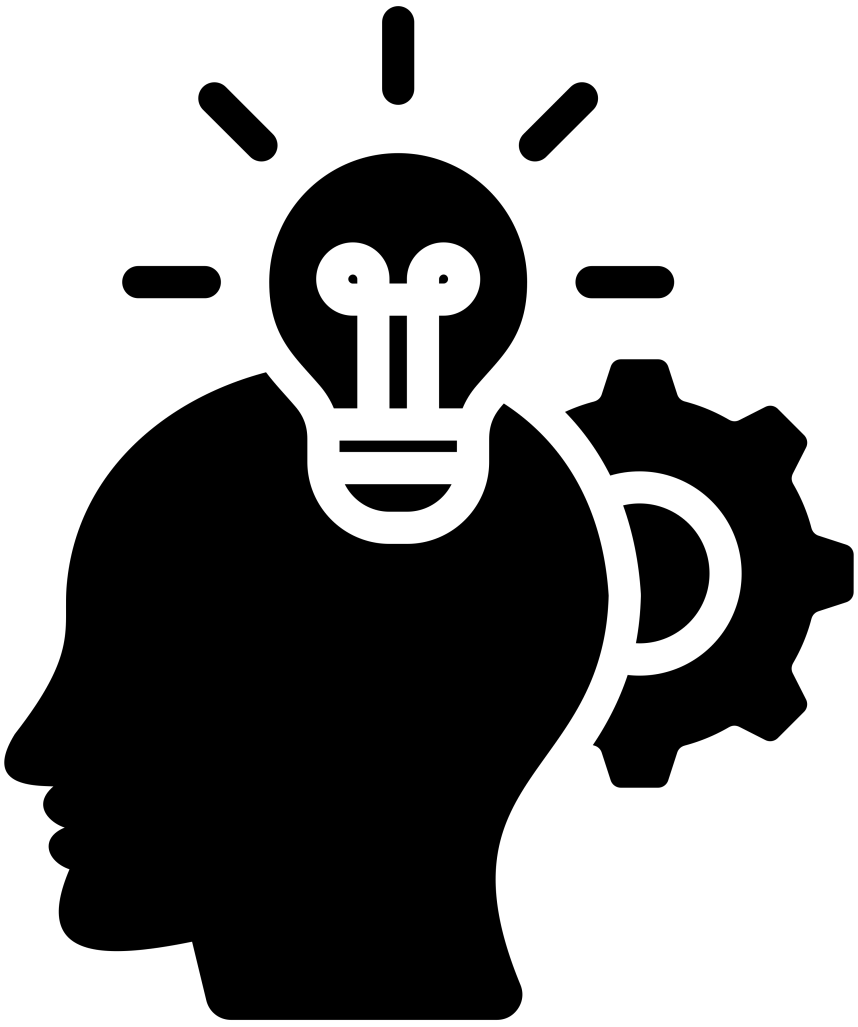
# Learning How to Learn

## The GCSE Edition



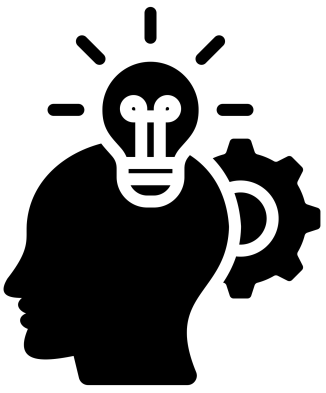
## The Camden School for Girls 2026-27

*Compiled by Simon Flynn*

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Start by choosing one strategy from Part One. Then use Part Two to identify what you need to improve, and Part Three to make your study routine realistic and sustainable.



# A True Story?



Miayla and Samiyah began Year 10 at Camden School for Girls with similar marks in their previous end-of-year exams. However, as the autumn term progressed, their approaches to learning began to diverge.

In Maths, Miayla took careful notes but usually put her exercise book away until the night before the next lesson. Samiyah spent ten minutes each evening reviewing new work and quizzing herself on formulae and methods. In History, Miayla sometimes lost focus, whereas Samiyah asked questions and linked new learning to topics she already knew.

Both students found it difficult to remember quotations from *Macbeth*. Miayla reread and highlighted entire scenes, but by the following week had forgotten much of what she had read. Samiyah made flashcards and tested herself briefly at breakfast or before dinner.

By spring, Samiyah was remembering more across her subjects. She used short retrieval sessions and Brain Dumps, setting a ten-minute timer and writing everything she could recall about a topic, such as the causes of the First World War or photosynthesis. She then checked her work, identified gaps, and focused her next study session on those areas.

As exams approached, Miayla grew increasingly stressed. She relied on late-night cramming for Chemistry equations and French vocabulary. Although she could recall information for a short time, it often disappeared after the test. She was also frequently distracted by her phone. Samiyah, by contrast, used her phone purposefully: she set study timers and used spare moments for quick retrieval practice.

By the summer term, Samiyah's grades had improved steadily, whilst Miayla's stayed the same or fell in some subjects. The difference was not in ability. Samiyah's small, regular habits helped her retrieve, check and improve her learning. Miayla decided to adopt some of these habits the following year.

***

Samiyah and Miayla did not differ because one was naturally more intelligent. Their results changed because Samiyah used her time to retrieve, connect, check and improve her learning.

**Choose one:** Which part of Samiyah's approach would make the greatest difference to your own study right now?

- Reviewing soon after a lesson
- Testing yourself instead of rereading
- Identifying and acting on weaknesses
- Planning study around distractions and commitments

# Your Learning Toolkit

There is no single 'best' revision technique. Choose a strategy that matches what you need to do: **remember information, understand it more deeply, identify a gap, or build a routine.** The following pages explain each strategy and show when to use it.

### 1. Learn and remember

| Strategy | What you do | Best used when | Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Flashcards** | Answer a clear question from memory. | Learning vocabulary, quotations, dates, formulae and definitions. | 6 |
| **Waterfall Method** | Sort flashcards according to how securely you know them. | You have a stack of cards and need to focus on the difficult ones. | 7 |
| **List It** | List everything you can recall in a short time. | You need a quick check of factual knowledge. | 8 |
| **Brain Dump** | Write everything you know, then check for gaps. | You need to recall and explain a whole topic. | 8 |
| **Read, Recite, Review** | Read a section, close the source, recall it, then check. | You are working from class notes or a textbook. | 11 |
| **Folding Frenzy** | Turn notes into increasingly short summaries, keywords and symbols. | You need to organise a topic before testing yourself. | 12 |

### 2. Understand and connect

| Strategy | What you do | Best used when | Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Self-explaining** | Ask yourself 'How?' and 'Why?' and explain the answer aloud or in writing. | You can remember facts but are unsure how they fit together. | 5 |
| **Teach it** | Explain an idea simply to another person or an imagined audience. | You want to test whether you truly understand a topic. | 5 |
| **Knowledge Maps** | Draw and label links between ideas, causes, effects and examples. | You need to see the bigger picture or compare concepts. | 9 |
| **Generation Effect** | Attempt an answer before looking at notes, a textbook or a mark scheme. | You are tempted to check the answer too quickly. | 5 |

### 3. Check and improve

| Strategy | What you do | Best used when | Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Feedback** | Check your work, identify precisely what is missing or incorrect, then act on it. | You have completed a quiz, practice question, Brain Dump or map. | 10 |
| **Spaced practice** | Return to learning after a gap and retrieve it again. | You want information to stay in your memory for longer. | 17 |
| **Error log** | Record repeated errors and one specific action to correct each one. | You notice the same mistakes in homework, tests or practice papers. | 18 |

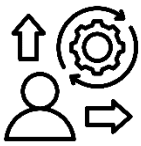
### 4. Manage your learning

| Strategy | What you do | Best used when | Page |
|---|---|---|---|
| **AI as a learning tool** | Use AI to explain, question, practise and give feedback—while doing the thinking yourself. | You are stuck and need a different explanation or extra practice. | 13 |
| **Focused study sessions** | Set up your space, remove distractions and use timed work periods. | Starting work or staying focused feels difficult. | 16 |
| **Study habits** | Make small, specific study actions part of your routine. | You want revision to become more consistent. | 16 |
| **Self-regulation** | Plan, monitor and reflect on how you learn. | Before, during and after any study session. | 20 |

# The Principles of Active Learning

Students often know less than they think and underestimate how quickly they'll forget what they have learned. To learn successfully, you must actively construct your understanding so it can be stored in your long-term memory. This knowledge then needs to be retrieved regularly to make its use automatic. Here are some guiding principles to help you do so.

### Generation Effect



Before checking answers or notes, try generating information yourself first. Research shows that what you produce yourself, even if *initially* incorrect, is remembered far better than what you simply read. This might involve attempting problems before seeing the solutions or recalling definitions before checking them.

### Summarising



When asked a question such as 'What have you done today?', you'll likely provide a summary. This involves selecting, organising and integrating the key moments of your day. Writing key information in your own words can have a powerful effect on your learning. What is vital is that you use your own words and don't mindlessly copy your notes or revision guide.

### Self-testing



Research shows that each time you recall a memory, you strengthen it. The more challenging you make the retrieval, the greater the benefit. Self-testing enhances recall, facilitates knowledge transfer, and improves your ability to draw inferences between pieces of information. There are also many indirect effects, such as a greater appreciation of what you do and don't know, which helps you plan your next steps.

### Mapping



Mapping is a brilliant way to improve your understanding. It helps you break down complex information, memorise it, and see the connections between different ideas. Doing so involves selecting, organising, and integrating the information that matters, which forces you to think. You can also incorporate this approach into the three strategies above.

### Self-explaining



Continually ask yourself 'How?' and 'Why?' when studying a topic, and then try to answer them. Doing so helps you see connections and differences between ideas. Self-explaining can also involve saying out loud the steps you're taking when solving a problem. For example, a recent analysis of 64 research studies showed that 'it is better to ask a student to see if they can explain something to themselves, than for a teacher or book to always explain it to them'.

### Teaching



Einstein is often quoted as saying, 'If you can't explain it simply, you don't know it well enough'. This strategy works best when you know in advance that you will be teaching someone. You're forced to select and organise what's important so that your teaching is as straightforward as possible. Having someone to interact with and ask you questions strengthens your learning.

# Flashcards



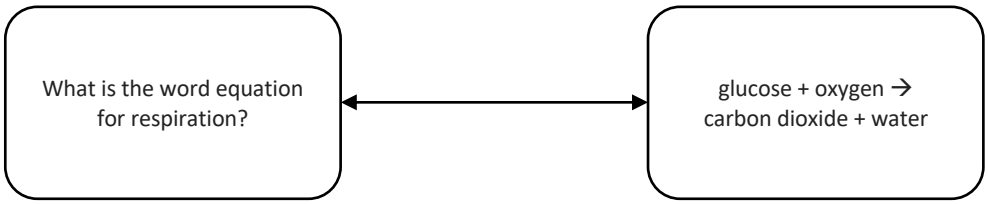
Flashcards can be a powerful learning aid. However, their success depends on the thought you put into making them and how you use them. Remember: they're for testing, not summarising.

### Making Effective Flashcards

- **One clear question or idea per card** - keep it simple
- **Use your own words** - don't just copy textbooks
- **Include topic codes** (e.g., 'B3' for Biology Topic 3)
- **Add diagrams** where helpful

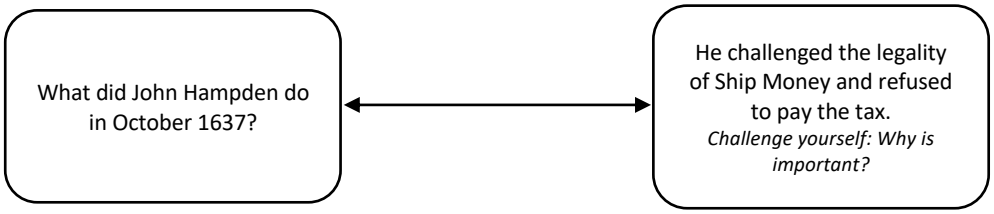
### Using flashcards

- Say your answer out loud and not just in your head. You must be fully committed to your response. Even better would be to write your answer as you would have to do in an exam.
- Use them both ways – look at the answers and say what the question is.




### Taking things further: making meaning with flashcards

- **Ask yourself questions about individual cards**. Then, once you can remember the information on the back associated with the prompt on the front, raise questions such as, 'What else is this related to?', 'Why is this important?' and 'How would I apply this information?'



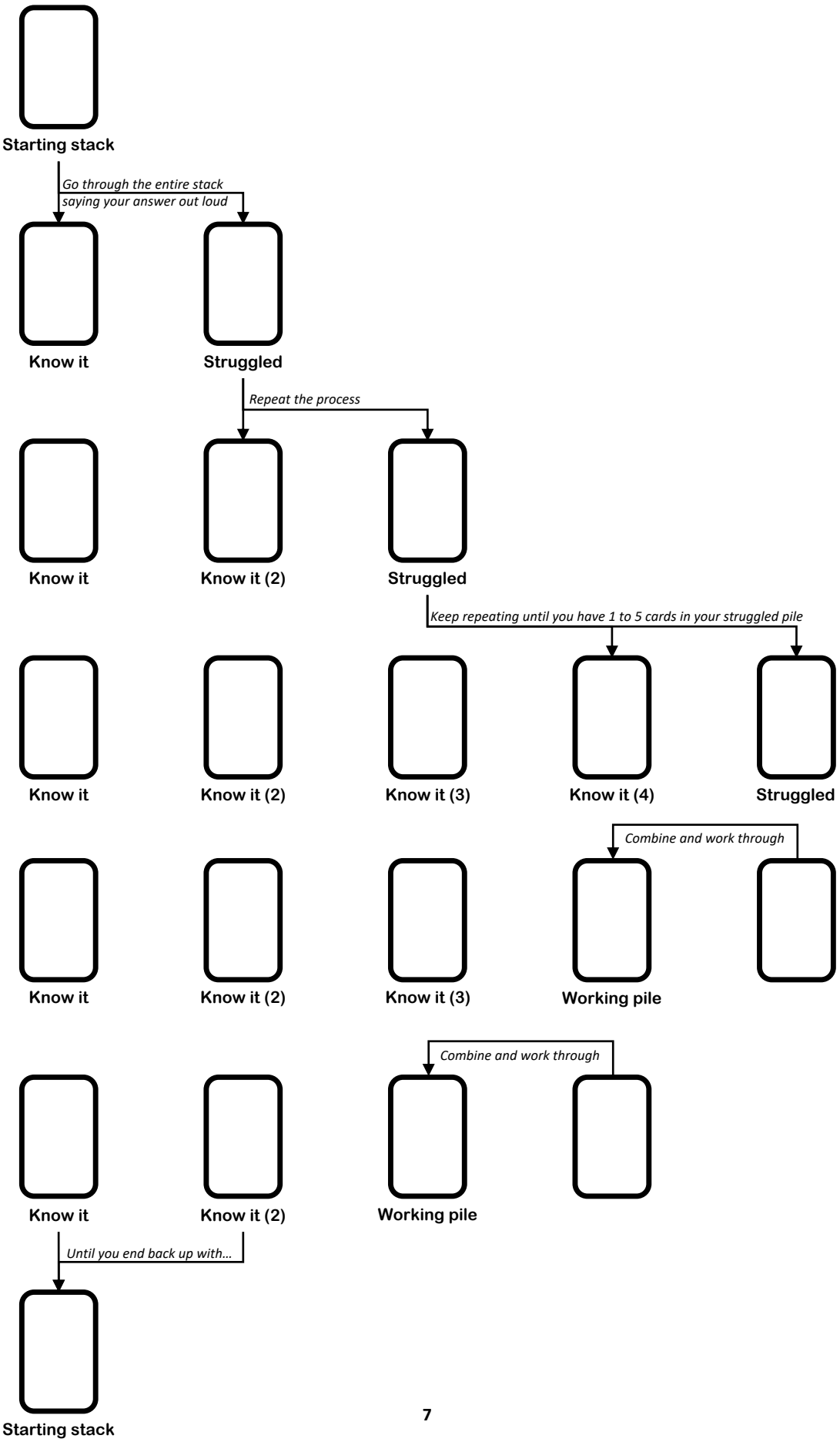

- **Group cards together in themes**. Taking this additional step forces you to ask yourself, 'Which cards have something in common with others?'. This also serves as a form of chunking, which helps you remember information as a group rather than separately.
- **Create a mind map with the cards**. Explain all the connections you see between individual cards and between groups of cards. A related strategy is to use yarn or string to connect cards.

### Digital flashcards



Apps like ANKI and Quizlet (and others) let you dive straight into self-testing, making it easier to test yourself whenever you have a free moment, such as on a bus or while waiting to see the dentist.

# Flashcards – The Waterfall Method






Adapted from https://blog.prepscholar.com/flashcards

# List It



This is a simple free recall task that is very versatile. It can feel challenging, but this is a good thing, and it provides clear feedback on what you do and don't know.

**Time needed:** 5-10 minutes

Choose a topic, set yourself a time limit and…

- List as many keywords as you can
- List as many facts as you can
- List as many key events/quotes/individuals as you can
- List as many causes of X as you can
- List as many consequences of Y as you can

**Example:** List everything you know about photosynthesis

- Chloroplasts, sunlight, glucose, oxygen, carbon dioxide, water, green plants...

# Brain Dumps

Brain dumps can be incredibly effective as an extension of 'list it' above.

**Time needed:** 10-15 minutes

**Steps:**

1. Choose a topic and set a timer for 15 minutes
2. Write everything you know about the topic
3. Don't stop writing - even if you repeat yourself
4. Check what you've written against your notes/textbook
5. Identify and focus on gaps
6. Date and store sheets so you can 'see' your progress when doing dumps at a later date.

To create a gentler, if less effective, version, compile a list of keywords, terms, people, countries, and other relevant elements connected to a topic and write uninterrupted, using these as prompts.

**= ½ mv$^2$** = W/t **= F x s** = mc∆T **= mgh** biofuel **chemical** conduction **conservation of energy** dissipate **distance** efficiency **elastic potential** electricity **electrostatic** force **fossil fuels** friction **geothermal** gravitational potential **heating** hydroelectric **insulation** Joule (J) **kilogram (kg)** kinetic **lubricant** magnetic **metre (m)** Newton (N) **non-renewable** nuclear **power** renewable solar **specific heat capacity** store **thermal** tidal **transfer** useful energy **wasted energy** water waves **Watt (W)** waves **wind** work done

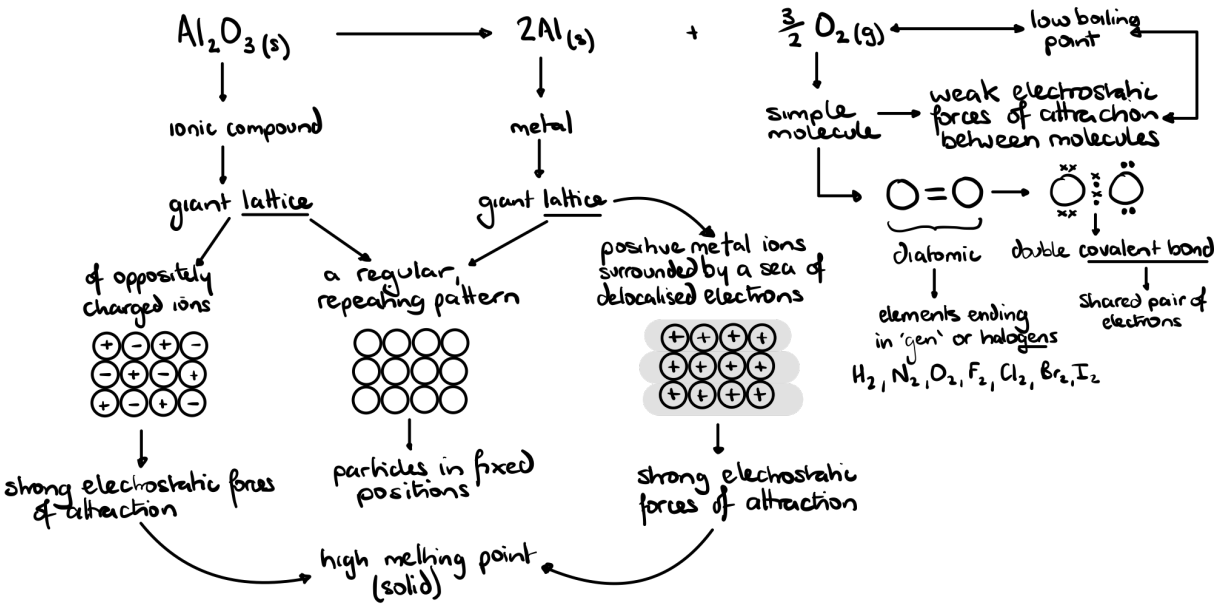
So, a brain dump on energy might start… *Energy cannot be created or destroyed but is only transferred from one store to another. There are eight energy stores. These are: kinetic, gravitational potential, chemical, elastic potential, internal (thermal), nuclear, electrostatic, and magnetic. Anything moving has a kinetic energy store. Anything raised to a height has a gravitational potential store. Food, fuels and batteries are examples of chemical stores. Anything that can be squashed or stretched has an elastic potential store. A change in temperature means a change in the internal (thermal) store. There are four energy transfers: work done (mechanical), radiation…*

# Knowledge Maps

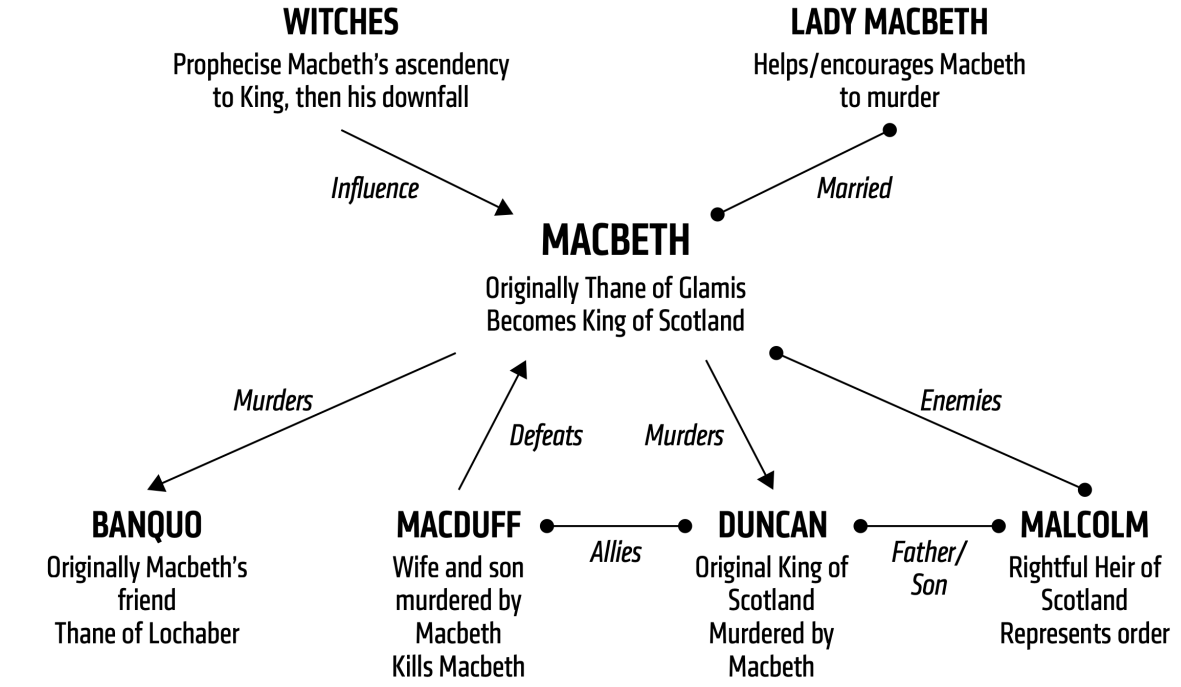
Knowledge maps are like Brain Dumps in that you try to recall everything you know about a topic onto a blank piece of paper. The difference is that you connect ideas visually rather than in continuous prose.

Start from memory; link ideas with labelled arrows. As with Brain Dumps, once finished, review your class notes, textbook and/or revision guide to check that what you've written is correct. Then consider what you've forgotten and focus on it. Redraw one section later without support.

Here are two entirely different examples:




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*(Taken from* Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory in Action *by Oliver Lovell)*

# Read, Recite, Review



This method is useful when working from class notes, a textbook or a revision guide. It turns reading into a test of what you can actually remember.

| Step | What to do | Do not… |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Read** | Read one short section carefully. Underline or annotate only the most important ideas. | Read a whole chapter at once or highlight nearly every line. |
| **2. Recite** | Close the book. Say, write or draw everything you can remember in your own words. | Peek at your notes as soon as you get stuck. |
| **3. Review** | Check against the original. Mark what was correct, what was missing and what was inaccurate. | Simply reread your notes and move on. |

**Worked example: Biology—photosynthesis**

1. **Read:** Read one page on the word equation, site of photosynthesis and limiting factors.

2. **Recite:** Close the book and write: 'Photosynthesis takes place in chloroplasts, present in most plant cells. Light is used to make glucose from carbon dioxide and water. Oxygen is also produced. The rate can be limited by light intensity, carbon dioxide concentration and temperature.'

3. **Review:** Check the notes. Add missing details in a different colour, correct errors, then make one flashcard or answer one question on the weakest point.

**Make it work**

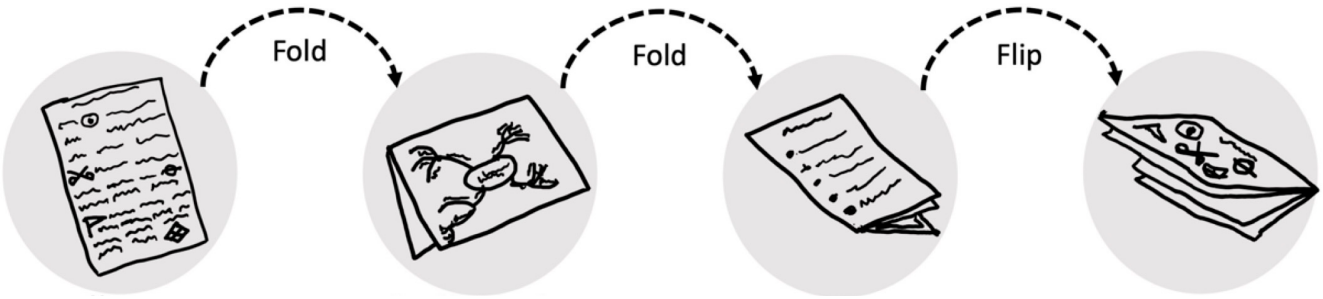
- Work in **small sections**: one page, one lesson's notes, or one sub-topic.
- Do the recite stage **without notes**; struggling is the useful part.
- Revisit the same section later, rather than assuming one successful recall means it is secure.
- Use the method for all subjects: a science process, a History event, a Geography case study, a language grammar rule or a literature scene.

**Best for:** Turning notes and textbook reading into active revision.
**Try it now:** Choose one page of notes. Read it for five minutes, close it, and write five things you can remember.

**Why This Method Works**
Research shows that actively recalling information from memory strengthens your ability to remember it later. When you force yourself to retrieve information during the 'recite' phase, you're practising the same mental process you'll need in your GCSE exams. The review phase is equally important because it helps you identify which concepts you haven't fully grasped, allowing you to focus your future study time more efficiently.

# Folding Frenzy

You can complete the 'folding frenzy' learning strategy in one sitting or spread it out over time. Here's how you would go about it, with the option of taking breaks between stages:




| Stage | What to put on the page | Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Notes** | Write a page of short notes in your own words. Include key terms, examples, diagrams and arrows. | Build an organised starting point. |
| **2. Graphic organiser** | Fold the paper to hide some notes. On the visible section, draw a simple diagram, flow chart, timeline or mind map. | Show the main structure and links. |
| **3. Keyword prompts** | Fold again. Write five or six key words, dates, quotations, formulae or question prompts. | Create cues that trigger fuller recall. |
| **4. Symbol or image** | Fold again. Draw one small symbol, image or diagram that represents the topic. | Give yourself the hardest possible retrieval cue. |

**Use it to test yourself**

1. Start with the **symbol side** facing up. Explain the whole topic aloud or write what you remember.
2. If you cannot do this, unfold to the **keyword side** and try again.
3. Still stuck? Unfold to the **graphic organiser**, then finally to the **notes**.
4. Re-fold it and test yourself again after a gap of a few days.

| Side facing up | What it tells you |
|---|---|
| **Symbol or image** | You can retrieve the topic from a very small prompt. |
| **Keywords** | You understand the topic but need prompts to recall it. |
| **Graphic organiser** | You can see the links but need more practice recalling detail. |
| **Notes** | You are still learning the topic for the first time. |

By using this multi-layered learning technique regularly, either in one sitting or spread out over time, you'll rigorously encode and synthesise knowledge for better retrieval during exams.



# Use Feedback to Improve



Feedback tells you what to do next. It might come from a teacher, a mark scheme, a friend, a quiz or your own checking. The most useful feedback is specific: not just 'I got this wrong,' but what was wrong, why it happened, and how you will improve.

## The Feedback Cycle: Attempt → Check → Diagnose → Act → Revisit

**1. Attempt** – Complete a question, quiz, brain dump, knowledge map, or piece of classwork without looking at the answer first.
**2. Check** – Use notes, a textbook, a mark scheme or teacher feedback to see what was correct, missing or inaccurate.
**3. Diagnose** – Choose the main reason for the error

| Error type | What it might look like | Useful next step |
|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge gap** | Could not remember a fact, definition, quotation, date or formula. | Make a flashcard; test again after a few days. |
| **Misunderstanding** | Mixed up related ideas or processes, e.g. mitosis and meiosis. | Compare the two ideas side by side or explain the difference aloud. |
| **Method error** | Knew what to do but made a calculation, grammar or method mistake. | Slow down, show each step, build in a checking routine. |
| **Command word error** | Misread what the question was asking. | Underline the instruction word before answering; check what it requires. |
| **Exam technique** | Ran out of time or gave an incomplete structure. | Practise the same question type under timed conditions. |

**4. Act** – Do one small, specific task that targets the problem. Do not simply reread everything.
**5. Revisit** – Return to the same topic after a gap. Can you now answer it without help?

## Brain Dumps and Knowledge Maps

When you check a Brain Dump or Knowledge Map

- **Green pen — your corrections:** add anything you missed and fix anything you got wrong
- **Red — mixed up or incorrect:** underline what you got wrong.

There's no 'correct' colour — if it's right, leave it. Then pick your most important green or red point and turn it into a flashcard, a diagram or a practice question.

**The goal is improvement, not perfection.** Each time you find and fix a gap, you make your next study session more focused. The next page shows one way to turn recurring errors into a practical error log.

# ‘The Only Real Mistake Is the One from Which We Learn Nothing’



Mistakes show exactly what to work on next. The most useful response is not simply correcting the answer—it is identifying **why** it happened and choosing one specific action to prevent it from recurring.

**Examples of What You Can Learn from Different Types of Mistakes**

- *Maths or Science* – if you consistently make calculation errors, you may need to slow down and lay out your working more carefully. Every shortcut you make can lead to a mistake.
- *Biology* – confusing processes like mitosis and meiosis demonstrate the need for more precise diagrams and memory techniques.
- *English literature* – a poor essay structure indicates that you need to work on planning and organising your arguments.
- *History* – Confusing dates or causes of events indicates that you need better learning techniques, such as creating timelines or mind maps, to see connections between events.

**Command Word Mistakes - Particularly Important**

Many students lose marks because they fail to understand what the question actually asks. If you *describe* when asked to *evaluate*, or provide facts when asked to *analyse*, you're missing easy marks. Key command words include (check with your teachers regarding specific subjects):

- *Describe* – say what something is like
- *Explain* – give reasons why something happens
- *Analyse* – examine in detail, looking at different parts
- *Evaluate* – weigh up advantages and disadvantages, make a judgement
- *Compare* – show similarities and differences

Getting these wrong teaches you to slow down, highlight the instruction word, and check what type of answer structure is needed before you start writing.

**Create an Error Log**

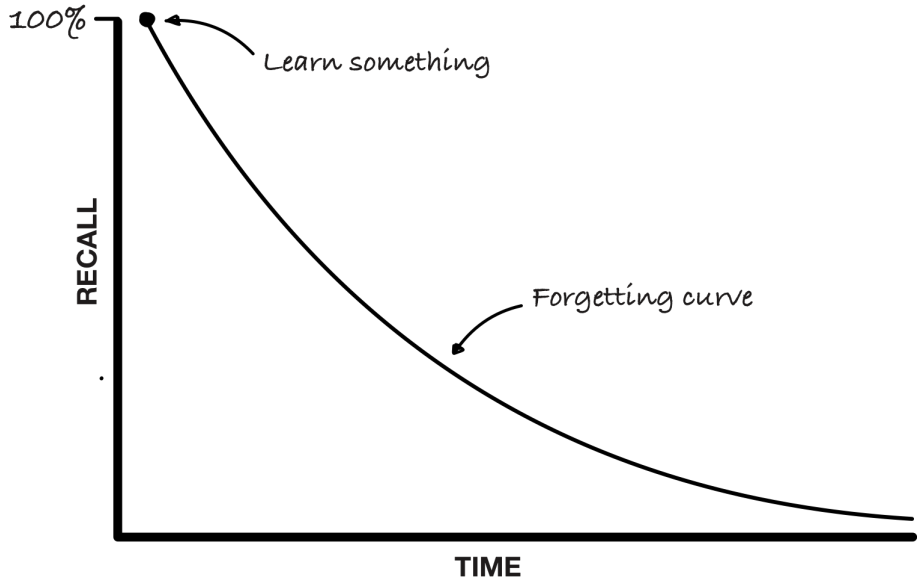
Keep a record of common mistakes in each subject:

| Date | Subject and topic | Task or question | Error type | What exactly went wrong? | Why did it happen? | Specific improvement action | Review date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **14/10** | Maths: algebra | Expanding double brackets | Method error | Lost a minus sign when multiplying out terms. | Worked too quickly and did not write each step separately. | Write one line of working per step; check signs before moving on. | 21/10 |
| **18/10** | French: verb tenses | Translation exercise | Method error | Used the present tense where the perfect tense was needed. | Did not check the time markers in the sentence before translating. | Create a checklist: identify the time marker first, then choose the tense. | 25/10 |
| **22/10** | Biology: cell transport | Short-answer question | Misunderstanding | Confused osmosis with active transport. | Learned both processes separately rather than comparing them. | Draw a labelled comparison diagram of both processes side by side. | 29/10 |

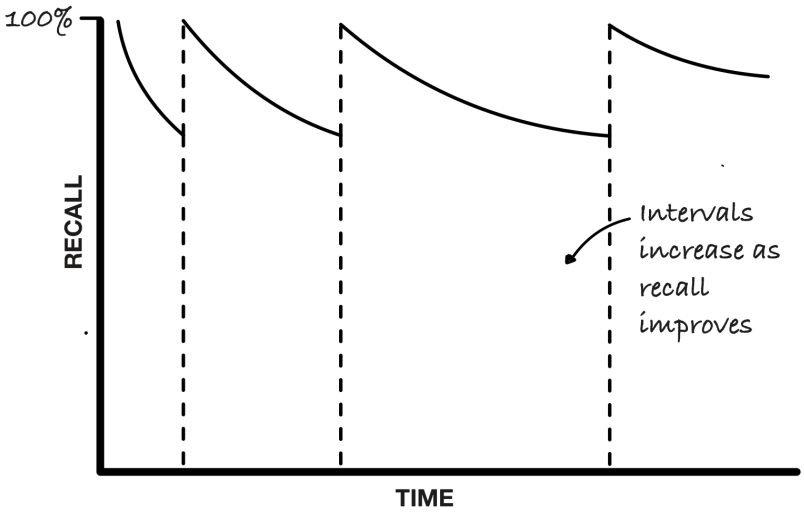
**How to use this table:** Fill it in as soon as possible after marked work, a quiz or a practice question—while the mistake is still fresh. Review the table every couple of weeks to spot patterns, such as the same error type recurring across different subjects.

# Spaced Practice: Planning for Long-Term Memory

The **Forgetting Curve** reveals a rather uncomfortable truth: we forget much of what we learn incredibly quickly. However, when we review information at carefully timed intervals, we can dramatically slow down forgetting and move knowledge from short-term to long-term memory.




Memories weaken when they are not revisited. Short, effortful retrieval sessions spaced across time are generally more effective for durable learning than leaving all revision until the end.




| When | What to do |
|---|---|
| **Within 24 hours** | Brief retrieval: flashcards, List It or a five-minute Brain Dump |
| **About one week later** | Retrieve again and correct gaps |
| **About one month later** | Retrieve in a mixed practice session or exam-style task |
| **Before an assessment** | Prioritise topics that remain insecure |

# Using AI to Support Learning



AI can be a useful learning tool when it helps you **think, practise and improve**. It should not do the thinking for you. In an exam, you will need to recall knowledge, solve problems and write answers independently, so always attempt work yourself before asking AI for help.

A good prompt tells the AI:

- Your exam board, subject and topic
- Your year group or GCSE level
- What you have already tried
- The kind of help you need
- That you want to attempt the answer first

**Example:** 'I'm studying AQA GCSE Combined Science (Higher), and I am confused about active transport. Explain it simply, then ask me one question to check my understanding. Do not give the answer straight away.'

**Stay in charge**

AI can make mistakes, give incomplete information or sound more certain than it should. Check important facts, quotations, dates, formulae and scientific information against your class notes, textbook, teacher or a trusted source. The current GCSE guide also stresses that AI should support independent learning, not replace it.

**Use AI responsibly**

- Do not submit AI-generated work as if it were your own.
- Do not copy answers without understanding them.
- Follow your school's rules about AI and homework.
- Do not share personal information, passwords, photographs or private schoolwork.
- After using AI, close the chat and test yourself again **without help**.

**A useful rule: Attempt → Ask → Check → Test yourself again.** If AI has given you an explanation, prove that you understand it by explaining it in your own words or answering a new question independently.

**Study Planning and Organisation**

AI can help create personalised revision timetables based on your exam dates, subject priorities, and available time. You can ask for suggestions on breaking down large topics into manageable chunks, or for help structuring your study sessions for maximum effectiveness. AI tools can also suggest active learning techniques suited to different subjects, from mind mapping for history to practice problem sequences for maths.

*Example prompts:*

- 'Create a 6-week revision timetable for GCSEs: Maths, English Language, Biology, History, and French. I have 2 hours per day on weekdays and 4 hours on weekends'
- 'Break down the AQA GCSE Chemistry topic 'Atomic Structure' into daily study chunks for one week'

**Understanding Complex Concepts**

When struggling with challenging topics, AI can provide alternative explanations in different formats. For instance, if you're finding photosynthesis confusing in biology, you could ask for analogies, visual descriptions, or step-by-step breakdowns. AI excels at explaining concepts at different levels of complexity, helping you build understanding gradually from basic principles to exam-level detail.

*Example prompts:*

- ‘Explain photosynthesis for AQA GCSE Combined Science Biology - focus on the key processes they expect students to know’
- ‘Break down quadratic equations using Edexcel GCSE Maths specification requirements - I'm struggling with the factorising method’
- ‘What's electromagnetic induction in AQA GCSE Physics? Use a simple analogy to help me understand’

**Practice and Feedback**

AI can generate practice questions similar to past papers, create flashcards for key terms, or provide instant feedback on your understanding. For subjects like English literature, you could discuss themes and character analysis to test your interpretations. In maths and the sciences, AI can work through problem-solving methods with you, helping you identify where you've gone wrong in calculations or logical reasoning.

*Example prompts:*

- ‘Generate 5 Edexcel GCSE-level maths questions on simultaneous equations in their typical style’
- ‘Quiz me on the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany using Edexcel GCSE History mark scheme expectations’
- ‘Create flashcard content for AQA GCSE Biology cell biology using their specification language’
- ‘Test my understanding of Macbeth's themes for OCR GCSE English Literature’

**Essay Writing Support**

For coursework and exam preparation, AI can help brainstorm ideas, suggest essay structures, and provide feedback on your arguments. It's particularly useful for improving writing techniques, expanding vocabulary, and ensuring your work flows logically. However, remember that any final work must be entirely your own - use AI for guidance and inspiration, not content generation.

*Example prompts:*

- ‘Help me plan an Edexcel GCSE History essay on Explain why the Spanish Armada was defeated ' - include their assessment objectives’
- ‘Structure an OCR GCSE English Literature response comparing conflict in two poems’
- ‘What would an AQA GCSE Geography case study answer need to include about urban regeneration?’
- ‘Suggest ways to improve the flow between these two paragraphs in my English essay’

**Language Learning Enhancement**

AI offers excellent opportunities for language practice through conversation, grammar explanations, and cultural context. You can practise speaking with AI in your target language, get instant translations with explanations, or explore how native speakers might phrase certain expressions.

*Example prompts:*

- ‘Let's practise AQA GCSE French speaking topics about family and relationships - use their typical question styles’
- ‘Help me with AQA GCSE Spanish writing tasks about holidays - what vocabulary and structures do they expect?’
- ‘Let's have a conversation in French about school subjects - correct my grammar as we go’

**Exam Technique and Strategy**

AI can simulate exam conditions by timing your responses, suggesting how to approach different question types, and helping you understand mark schemes. It can also provide techniques for managing exam stress and optimising your performance under pressure.

*Example prompts:*

- ‘Explain the Edexcel GCSE Maths mark scheme for solving quadratic equation questions’
- ‘What's the best approach for AQA GCSE English Language Paper 1 Question 4 (language analysis)?’
- ‘Time me for 10 minutes while I answer this Edexcel GCSE History 8-mark question about causes’

## Tweaking AI Responses

*If the explanation is too complex:*

- ‘That's still too advanced - can you explain it more simply?’
- ‘Pretend you're explaining this to someone who's never studied this topic before’
- ‘Use an analogy or real-world example to help me understand’

*If you need more detail:*

- ‘Can you expand on the second point with more examples?’
- ‘I understand the basics, but can you go deeper into the advanced concepts?’
- ‘What are some common mistakes students make with this topic?’

*If you need a different format:*

- ‘Can you present this information as a step-by-step process?’
- ‘I need this explained with more concrete examples rather than abstract concepts’
- ‘Give me some practice questions instead of just theory’

*For better exam preparation:*

- ‘Frame this information in the context of GCSE exam requirements’
- ‘What would a Grade 9 answer include that a Grade 6 answer wouldn't?’
- ‘How would this topic typically be tested in an exam?’

*Follow-up prompts for deeper learning:*

- ‘What's a common misconception about this topic?’
- ‘How does this concept connect to other areas of the syllabus?’
- ‘Can you give me a challenging example to test my understanding?’

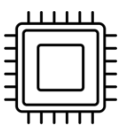
*If you're preparing for different types of assessments:*

- 'I need this for coursework, so give me research starting points'
- 'I'm doing a practical assessment - what do I need to remember?'
- 'Focus on what I need for the speaking exam, not written work'

*If you're struggling with applying your knowledge and understanding:*

- 'Give me real exam questions where I'd use this knowledge'
- 'How would I actually apply this in a 6-mark question?'
- 'Show me how this appears in past papers'

Remember, **the most effective use of AI in education is as a tutor and study companion** that helps you learn more efficiently, not as a shortcut that undermines your education. When used responsibly, AI can enhance your GCSE preparation and help you achieve better results.



# Set Up Your Study Environment and Build Study Habits



Effective revision is easier when your environment makes the right action simple. You do not need a perfect desk or hours of free time; you need a space with fewer distractions and a small routine you can repeat.

Before you begin, make it easier to focus:

| Make it easier | What to do |
|---|---|
| **Choose a study spot** | Use a desk, table, library or other regular place where you can work. If possible, avoid studying on your bed. |
| **Prepare materials** | Put the book, notes, pens, calculator and water you need within reach before starting. |
| **Manage your phone** | Put it in another room, turn on Do Not Disturb, or use it only as a timer or revision tool. Turn off notifications. |
| **Make the space comfortable** | Use good lighting and a comfortable temperature. Sit somewhere that helps you stay alert. |
| **Tell others your plan** | If you are at home, let people know when you are doing a focused session. |

Use focused sessions: A timer gives your work a clear beginning and end. The Pomodoro Technique is one simple option:

1. Choose one specific task, such as 'complete ten flashcards on cell structure.'
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes.
3. Work on that task until the timer ends.
4. Take a 5-minute break away from your work.
5. Repeat. After four sessions, take a longer break of around 20–30 minutes.

If 25 minutes feels too long, start with 10 or 15 minutes. Focused effort matters more than the timer's exact length.

# Building Study Habits

*Study habits are built through small, repeatable actions—not one huge session before a test.*

| Instead of… | Try… |
|---|---|
| **'I will revise for three hours.'** | 'I will review five flashcards after dinner.' |
| **'I will do Maths later.'** | 'At 4 pm, I will complete three algebra questions at the kitchen table.' |
| **'I need more motivation.'** | 'I will put my book and pen on my desk before I go to bed.' |

**Make a specific plan:** After […], I will […] for […] minutes.

**Example:** 'After I have dinner, I will test myself on French vocabulary at the kitchen table for 10 minutes.'

Small actions reduce the barrier to starting. Once you have begun, continuing often feels easier. The original guide also recommends preparing resources in advance, making goals specific and linking a new revision habit to an existing routine.

# Successful Learning in a Nutshell



Every student has the potential to achieve their goals when they combine effective study strategies with the right mindset and utilise available support. Finding specific topics or subjects difficult doesn't reflect your ability or potential; it simply means you're engaging with complex material and developing new ways of thinking. What matters most is how you approach your learning journey. As you make decisions about your learning, ask yourself this question:

***'What would an effective learner do?'***

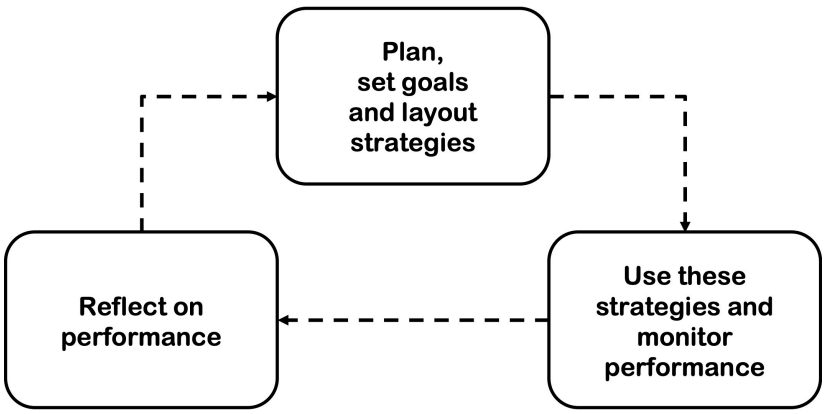
An effective learner would:

- Choose strategies that require mental effort
- Practice regularly rather than cramming
- Test themselves frequently
- Focus on their weaknesses
- Create a distraction-free environment
- Connect new information to prior knowledge
- Ask questions and seek feedback
- View mistakes as learning opportunities

There are no quick fixes in learning. Success comes from consistently using effective strategies over time. The goal isn't perfection from the start, but rather continuous improvement and growth. Every time you actively engage with your learning - whether through self-testing, creating knowledge maps, or reflecting on your understanding - you're strengthening the neural pathways that make future learning easier and more effective.

When implementing the strategies in this booklet, remember that developing practical study skills is a learning process in its own right. You might find some techniques work better for you than others, or that certain strategies are more suited to particular subjects. This is entirely normal and part of discovering your own path to success.

**Remember**: Focus on the *process*, and the results will follow.



# Questions That Self-Regulated Learners Ask Themselves

| | Thinking about your thinking | Thinking about your emotions | Thinking about your environment |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Planning before learning or performance task** | • What kind of a task is this?<br>• What is my goal? How will I know I have reached it?<br>• What do I already know about the topic?<br>• What additional information, if any, will I need?<br>• What strategies should I use? (actively listening, taking notes, outlining, visually representing the material, occasionally self-quizzing, reviewing, or writing a summary)<br>• What strengths can I bring to the task?<br>• What are my weaknesses, and how can I make up for them? | • How interested and motivated am I to do the task, and how can I increase my interest and motivation if they are low?<br>• What's the value or relevance of what I'll be learning?<br>• How confident am I in my ability to learn this material? If not very, how can I increase my belief in my ability to learn it, without becoming over-confident? What similar tasks can I recall doing well in the past? | • What is the best environment that I can create for the task?<br>• Am I in a good physical place and position to do this task?<br>• Is the temperature right for me? How about the background sounds?<br>• Have I had enough sleep?<br>• Have I put potential distractions far, far away?<br>• How much time and what resources will I need? Are these resources handy? |
| **Monitoring during a learning or performance task** | • Am I sure I know what I am doing?<br>• Does my approach to the task make sense?<br>• Am I making good progress toward my goal?<br>• How focused am I? Am I getting tired? If so, how can I keep myself focused and alert?<br>• How well are my strategies working?<br>• What changes in approach or strategies should I make, if any?<br>• What material is the most important?<br>• What material am I having trouble understanding?<br>• How does what I am learning relate to what I already know?<br>• How is my thinking on the topic changing? | • If my interest and motivation are sagging, how is what I'm learning relevant to my experience or my future?<br>• What material is challenging what I've thought about the subject? Am I resisting it?<br>• Am I starting to get discouraged or give up? Am I thinking I'm just no good at this subject? How can I change this negative thinking? What similar tasks can I recall doing well in the past? | • Should I try another environment to see if it works better?<br>• How about another physical position?<br>• How are the temperature and background sounds working out? Am I staying away from distractions? If not, I have to get further away from them.<br>• Do I need a short break to refresh my mind and body? |
| **Evaluating after a learning or performance task** | • How well did I achieve my goal or master what I set out to learn?<br>• What can I recall and what do I need to review?<br>• What were the most important points I learned? Can I see and organize the interrelationships among them?<br>• What am I still having trouble understanding? What questions do I have to ask my teacher?<br>• How does what I learned relate to other things I've been learning or have experienced?<br>• How has my thinking on the topic changed?<br>• Which approaches and strategies worked well? Which didn't?<br>• What do I need to do differently next time I take on a similar task? | • How am I reacting emotionally to my evaluation of my learning?<br>  ○ Being pleased reinforces your motivation and other positive emotions you generated about the material and your ability to learn it.<br>  ○ Being disappointed may lead either to you improving your learning strategies or defensively withdrawing your energy from the next learning or performance task.<br>  ○ This last reaction can undermine the positive emotions needed to begin the next learning or performance task. | • How well did I avoid distractions and stay on task?<br>• If not that well, how can I avoid distractions more effectively in the future?<br>• Do I need to experiment more with different physical factors to find the best working environment and break schedule for myself? |