

Revising for exams

Exams are a fact of life. Some students feel intimidated by the whole exam process. This leaflet provides some advice on how to improve your revision techniques so that exams become less stressful.

Why are exams necessary?

Exams give you a chance to make sense of your learning and to apply your knowledge under time-limited conditions. In a sense, this is the kind of skill you need in the workplace; rather like 'thinking on your feet'.

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Active revision

Students often find planning their revision difficult because they're not sure which revision and learning strategies to use. One key thing to remember about revision is that it should be an active process.

Revising actively means making a real effort to understand what you are learning, rather than simply memorising by rote. Even if your exams require you to remember a lot of facts, you are much more likely to retain detailed information if it is related to an underlying understanding.

How to make your revision active

➤ Look at the list of active revision strategies and identify which strategies you will use:

Active revision strategies	✓ I will use this strategy
➤ Look for underlying themes or principles	
➤ Think about inter-relationships	
➤ Relate what you are learning to 'real-life' situations	
➤ Think how the solution to one problem may help you solve others	
➤ Organise material into a hierarchical structure	
➤ Create a diagram or chart to represent a topic	
➤ Look for similarities or differences	
➤ Look for points for and against an argument	
➤ Try to really understand how formulae work	
➤ Critically evaluate what you are learning	
➤ Discuss topics with a friend	
➤ Pick key topics and ask yourself questions to make sense of them e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these areas relate to each other? • What is the cause and effect? • How can I justify that conclusion? 	

Other revision techniques

Revision cards

Many students revise by reducing their notes down. This might involve summarising your notes from your classes and readings onto index cards. Alternatively, you might create a list of headings and bullet points.

If you have trouble summarising your notes within the time you have set aside, you might find it helpful to decide that each set of lecture notes will be condensed onto, say, no more than 1 page or a small number of cards. Be careful that this does not become a passive exercise – your revision must remain active!

➤ *Think how you will use your revision cards:*

- ✓ Keep bullet points on cards for reading during ‘free times’ e.g. on the bus.
- ✓ If you like to listen to your revision, record your bullet points onto your iPod or mobile phone.

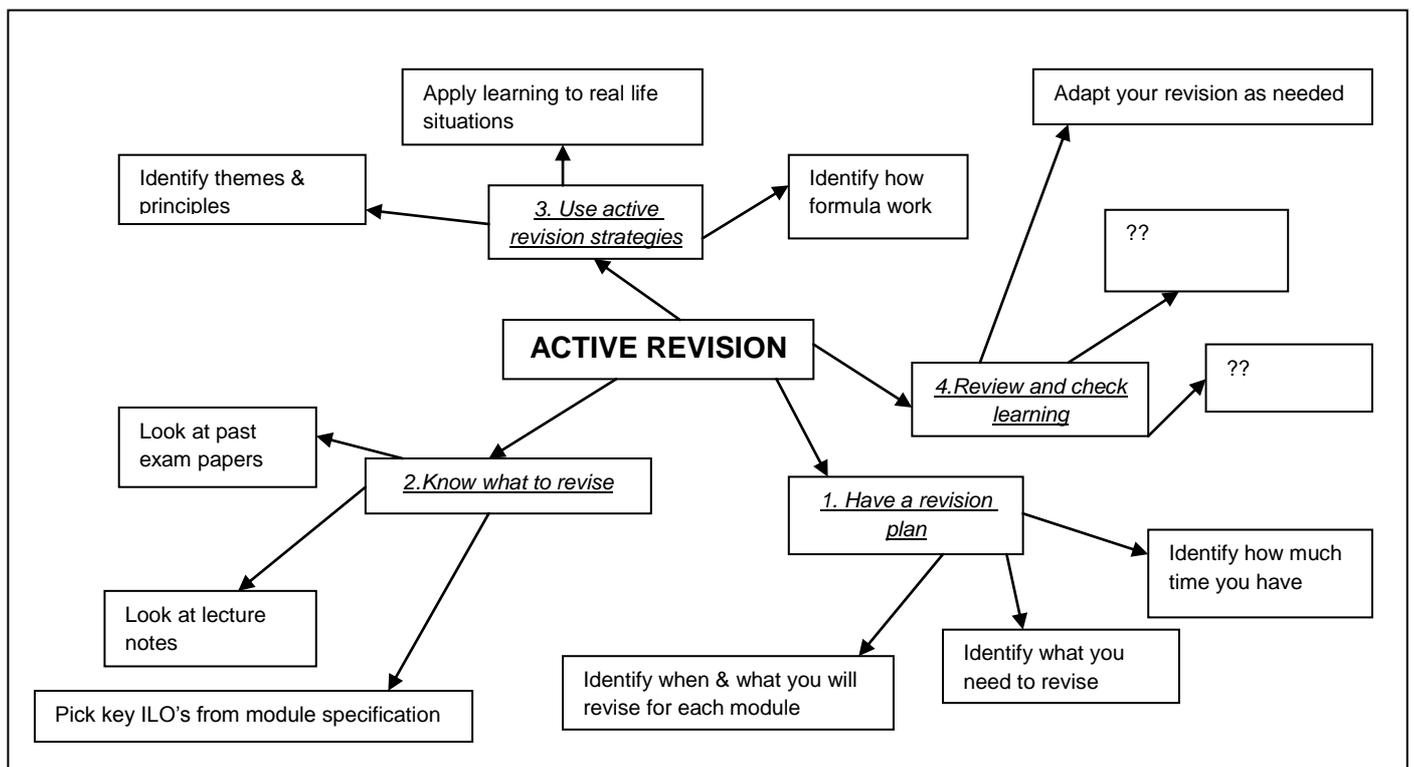
Mind maps or spider diagrams

Some students find it very helpful to do ‘mind maps’ or ‘spider diagrams’. These involve:

1. Writing your study topic in the middle of a page.
2. Adding additional layers out from the centre for the key themes, ideas, concepts etc.
3. You can use words, pictures, diagrams ... whatever seems to help.

Here’s an example of a simple mind map/spider diagram on the topic of active revision.

➤ *Look at the mind map and fill in the missing information.*



Mnemonics

If the facts you need do not seem to be sticking, even when you think you understand the topic, then you might find it helpful to develop a mnemonic, or trick, to help you remember. One of the best known mnemonics is this one for learning the colours of the spectrum:

- *Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain*
- Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet

If you get a chance to talk to more experienced students in your subject area they may be able to tell you about memory tricks or strategies that have worked for them.

Checking your progress

Regularly checking your progress, and adapting your revision if there are any problems, is a really important part of successful exam preparation.

If you discover any problems early on then you've got more time to fix them. Here are some ways you can check your progress and develop better exam technique:

- *Look at the list of strategies to check your progress. Identify which strategies you will use:*

Strategies to check my progress	✓ I will use this strategy
➤ Keep an eye on your time plan, so that you don't spend too long on some topics.	
➤ Test yourself as you are going along. (This may involve no more than putting aside your notes for a few minutes and scribbling down what you can remember from them).	
➤ Bring together all of the past exam questions on one topic into a 'question bank'. This can give you a sense of what to cover and how much depth to go into - but don't depend on a particular question coming up in the exam!	
➤ Sketch out rough answers to exam questions.	
➤ Write full exam answers from past exam papers. This may help to build up your confidence for the exam - but don't depend on a particular question coming up in the exam!	
➤ Practise writing answers to past exam questions under timed conditions - but don't depend on a particular question coming up in the exam!	

Other study guides

Other study guides you might find useful can be downloaded from: <http://lib.bue.edu.eg/wiki>



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Adapted from Loughborough University and Edinburgh University.