



Year 11: Moving beyond the mock exams...



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Contents:

- **What makes a successful GCSE candidate?**

A look at the attributes you will need to show between your mock examinations and the final examinations in order give yourself the best possible chance of achieving your potential.

- **The VESPA model**

Vision, Effort, Systems, Practice, Attitude: a recipe for successful study

- **Planning your time**

Examining how important it is to plan your revision time

- **Revision Techniques**

There are many different revision techniques. Which ones are most effective?

- **Which? Articles**

Tips on revision planning and examination preparation.



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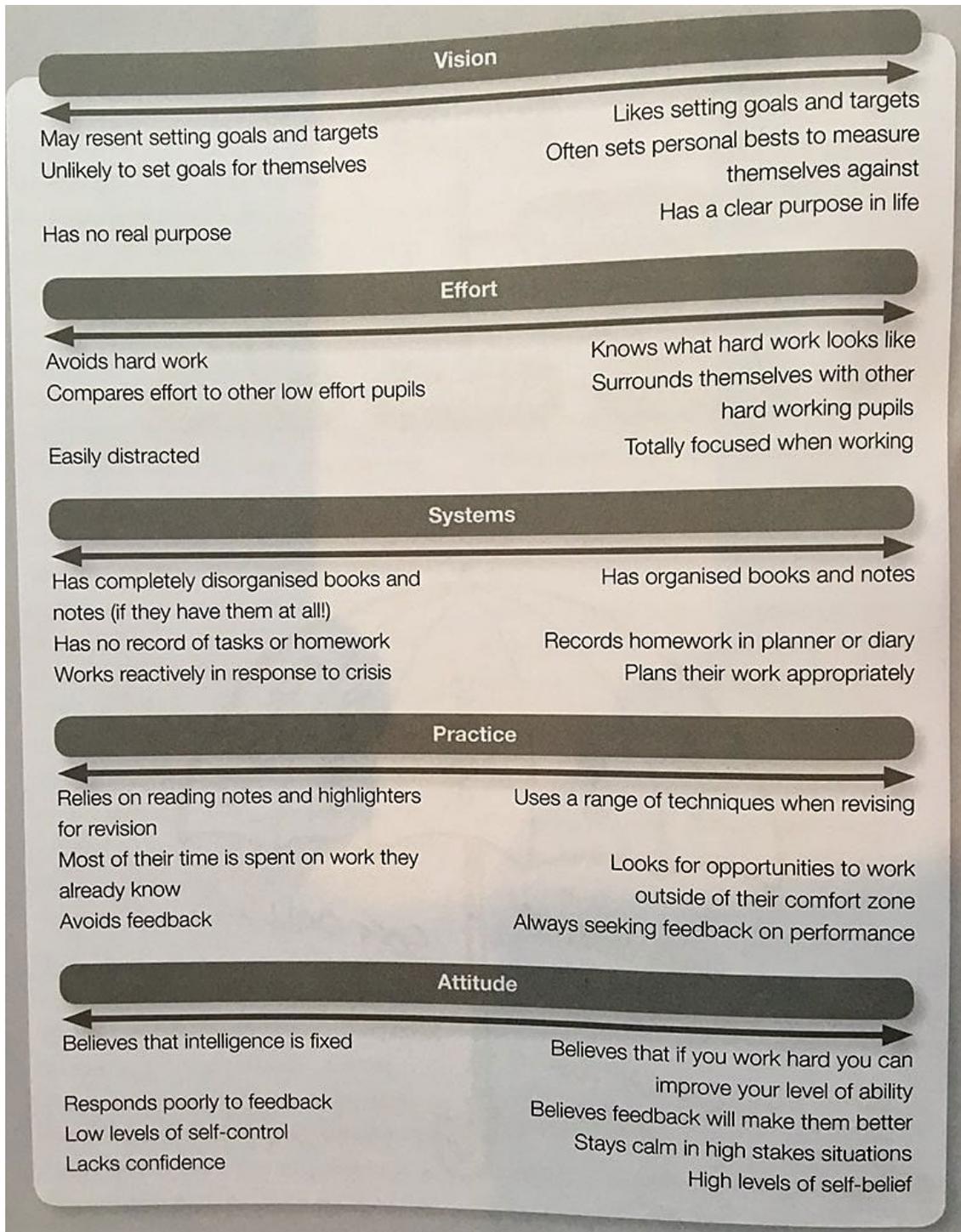
Successful GCSE candidates...

- **Complete a thorough self-reflection for every subject after their mocks**
- **Focus in class and manage their distractions**
- **Use prep time and independent study periods for structured revision**
- **Are aware when and where subject tutorials are taking place... and attend them!**
- **Ask questions in class and stay behind to clarify any misunderstandings**
- **Ensure they meet deadlines, so that teachers can mark work on time and provide feedback**
- **Respond to feedback in their next piece of work**
- **Re-do pieces of work, acting on feedback**
- **Have a clear, realistic revision plan that includes extensive use of past papers and exam questions**
- **Divide their time effectively between all their subjects**
- **Build rewards and rest into their revision plan**

The VESPA model

You should aim to be on the right hand side of this page!

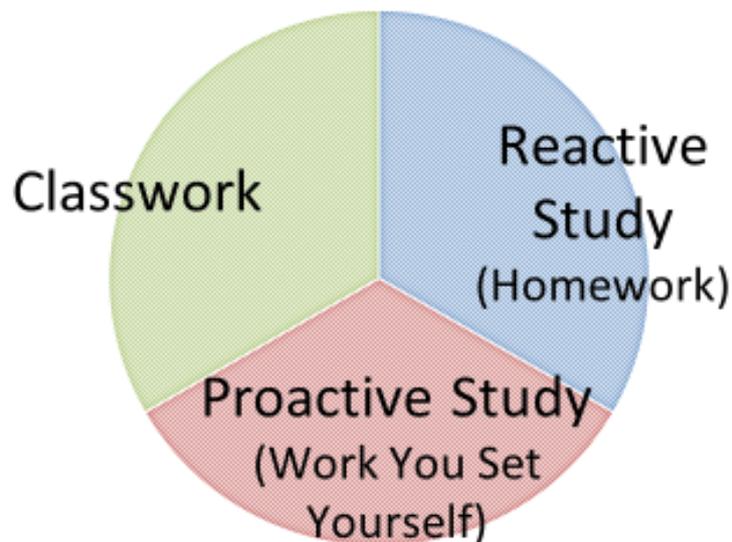
What do you need to do to move yourself from left to right?



Time preparing for your exams can be divided into three sections – note how all three are equally important!



Three Types of Work



Planning your revision time is essential.

Try to fill in this table for each subject or topic:

How am I going to revise/work? (revision techniques)	
How long am I going to do it for? (length of study time)	
How will I know if I've made progress? (testing myself)	

There are many different ways to revise, but some have been proven to be more effective than others.

The table below suggests that you should complete more tasks from Step Three to ensure your revision is as effective as possible:



	Always	Sometimes	Never
Reading Through Class Notes			
Using resources on Bloodle			
Using Course Textbooks			
Mind Maps / Diagrams			
Making / Re-making Class Notes	Step One		
Highlighting / Colour Coding			
Flashcards			
Using a Revision Wall to Display your Learning			
Writing Exam Answers Under Timed Conditions	Step Two		
Reading Model Answers			
Using Past Exam Questions & Planning Answers			
Marking Your Own Work to a Mark Scheme			
Studying Mark Schemes or Examiner's Reports			
Working with Other Students in Groups / Pairs			
Comparing Model Answers Against Your Own Work	Step Three		
Creating Your Own Exam Questions			
Handing in Extra Exam Work for Marking			
One to One Discussions with Teachers / Tutors			

The following table also highlights the most effect learning techniques...

Table 1: Effectiveness of ten learning techniques, from Dunlosky et al (2013) [39]

expand 

High utility	Practice testing	Self-testing or taking practice tests on material to be learned.
	Distributed ('spaced') practice	Implementing a schedule of practice that spreads out activities over time.
	Elaborative interrogation	Generating an explanation for why an explicitly stated fact or concept is true.
	Self-explanation	Explaining how new information is related to known information, or explaining steps taken during problem solving.
Moderate utility	Interleaved practice	Implementing a schedule of practice that mixes different kinds of problems, or a schedule of study that mixes different kinds of material, within a single study session.
	Summarization	Writing summaries (of various lengths) of to-be-learned texts.
	Highlighting	Marking potentially important portions of to-be-learned materials while reading.
	Keyword mnemonic	Using keywords and mental imagery to associate verbal materials.
Low utility	Imagery use for text learning	Attempting to form mental images of text materials while reading or listening.
	Rereading	Restudying text material again after an initial reading.

How could you use these different techniques in your revision?

The following 3 articles are taken from the website
<https://university.which.co.uk/advice/revision-help/>

Five revision no-nos you should drop right now

Revision season is here, but are you going about studying the right way? Here are five definite revision no-nos I've discovered, plus what to do instead to get the absolute most from every study session:

1. Highlighting the *wrong* way

A revision favourite, using coloured highlighters is a great way to draw attention to key words. However, the most effective revision is that which draws links between information, not isolating it.

The more links you have joining different areas together, the more you have to help you recall something if your mind goes blank in an exam (It *can* happen). Highlighting lots of separate bits and not thinking about how they relate to each other can make it hard to get your mind round all the material you need to cover. Plus, drawing comparisons is a key exam skill that can grab you those top marks.

This is why mind-maps or brain-storms are a good study technique as they encourage you to link ideas and structure your thinking.

2. *Just* reading

Firstly, this technique is incredibly boring! Revision is already hard enough - don't make it worse with passive reading for hours.

In order to actually take in what you read, making (brief) notes to summarise large sections is important. By reading alone, it's unlikely that you'll transfer that information into your long-term memory (unless you have a photographic memory, which sadly does not apply to most of us).

If notes really aren't your thing, you can record yourself reading aloud, and then play it back while doing the washing-up or tidying. You'll be surprised how much you can absorb unconsciously just by listening.

3. Copying full sentences

Not only is this far more time-consuming than summarising, but it makes reading back through the notes even more of a chore than it already is. Detail is great, but not if it overwhelms you - especially if it isn't relevant (in which case, you're just wasting your time by writing it out).

I was once told by a teacher: 'When note-taking, imagine each word that you write costs you 5p and you will instantly be more frugal with your word choice.' Think like this to make your notes more succinct and get to the point quicker.

4. Putting all bets on black

Okay, so this might just be a personal preference; but I'm far more interested in reading notes that have a bit of colour to them, rather than all being in black ink. Yes, 'black is classic'; but writing your notes for every subject in one colour makes it hard for anything to really stand out.

Even if you can't be bothered to use a myriad of colours (fair enough), studies show that you're apparently more likely to remember information that you have written down in blue ink than black ink. So when it comes to your main note-taking pen, perhaps it's time to turn your back on black and go blue.

5. Ignoring technique for content

Perhaps the biggest no-no of them all. It's all well and good to know the content (names, dates, events, terms and so on) inside out; but if you don't know how to get that down on paper - in a way that hits the exam criteria - then it's pretty useless.

The best way to avoid this is to practise past papers once you have learned this content. By marking yourself against an actual mark scheme, you can see the kind of thing examiners will look for, and adjust your future answers accordingly.

Admittedly, this is harder to do in essay-based subjects. But even just practising how to plan essays is a good revision technique, so you can do this quickly in the exam and focus all your ideas to fit in your answer here (and the time you have to do it).

Plus, it's far less gruelling than actually writing the essay...

Making a revision timetable that actually works

Just as an architect wouldn't begin a project without a blueprint, you can't just open a book randomly one day, begin reading and build a strong basis for your exams. A solid revision schedule not only guarantees you cover everything you need to in time for the exam, but it also breaks everything down into more manageable chunks – much less scary!

Once you start getting everything out on paper or screen, you'll have a proper idea of the task ahead. The ideal revision timetable will be prepared enough in advance that you have a bit of balance and don't burn yourself out. So what are you waiting for? Let's get started on that winning revision timetable...

How to make a revision timetable

1. Compiling your study timetable?

A basic revision timetable is essentially a calendar. But instead of holidays and birthdays, it contains topics and subjects you need to revise on specific days. Yours doesn't really have to stray far from this very simple model:

1. Divide however long you have until your exams by how many subjects you study.

2. Divide all the topics and areas you need to cover accordingly

If you can access your timetable on the go (using something such as Google Docs or an app – see some app ideas below) you'll have more flexibility over where you can study.

2. How do I prioritise what I need to revise?

Ask yourself what subjects or particular topics within those subjects do you need to spend more time on?

Perhaps some disappointing mock results have flagged areas you need to pay attention to? Or there are certain subjects where you need to achieve a certain grade, to progress into what you plan to do next? Make sure you prioritise these in your revision schedule.

Remember not to get cocky and neglect those subjects that you're already strong at.

3. Regular refreshers

Don't just cover an area once and move on. If you do this, the material you study first will be a distant memory by the time you come to exams.

So fit in time to revisit material among your study timetable.

4. Past papers

Past papers are always a great idea. Lots of exam boards have copies of past papers and you can test yourself to check that it's sticking. It also gives you practice with the format of the questions you might be asked.

5. Approach subjects differently

Have a varied approach, as certain study methods will suit some subjects better than others. This might depend on how intense the material is, how it will be assessed or simply how you best retain everything.

For example, the following methods might work for you:

- flashcards for key dates in [history](#)
- jingles or rhymes for phrases you'll have to speak in a [French](#) oral exam
- pictures to identify parts of the human body in [biology](#).

The length of your study periods can also be flexible according to what works for you. For example, you might find that two 45-minute sessions of maths, with a break in between, are most productive. But you can focus on your chemistry revision for longer periods of time.

6. Revision timetable apps

These popular apps can help you structure and plan your revision schedule. They offer study timetable templates to start from, plus a whole host of other nifty features:

My Study Life: an app to use throughout the year, not just during your revision period. Track homework and assignments, and organise your daily and weekly schedule. Everything is stored in the Cloud for easy access on multiple devices.

Timetable: if you're an Android-head, Timetable is one way to manage school life across your devices. The app even mutes your phone during lessons, in case you forget...

10 game-changing revision tips you don't want to miss

1. Get organised

Start with a study timetable. It's a quick win and will help you get a grasp of what needs to get done! A revision timetable helps you focus on what needs to be done and when by, which is very useful as exam season approaches. Essentially, it will make you study more efficiently and wisely. We'd recommend putting your timetable together on a [cloud storage service](#) like Google Docs or an app, so you can easily access it wherever you're working from.

2. Break topics down into bitesize chunks

Tackling a whole subject, a tricky module or a certain topic you've struggled with can be scary. Break these down into more manageable chunks to make them less overwhelming. Start by dividing how long you have until your exams by how many subjects you study. Then, divide all the topics and areas you need to cover. You can (and should) use this information to help put together your revision timetable.

3. Set manageable goals

Set goals you want to achieve every time you sit down to study (and test yourself on these). This will ensure you're getting something out of EVERY study session and an inspiring sense of achievement throughout. It's important to challenge yourself, but try not to give yourself unachievable aims for one study session. Manageable goals will help keep you motivated – so instead of expecting yourself to absorb everything about Henry VIII's reign in half an hour, maybe focus on committing to memory ten key dates. After all, not many of us would be able to learn everything you need to know about any given topic in just one sitting.

4. Shrink your notes

Writing down everything you need to remember can really help things stick! Gradually refine pages and pages down to brief notes and acronyms. Try to avoid reading the same set of notes over and over (and over) again – you'll probably get bored and will stop taking things in. Keep shortening your revision notes, as by doing this you're continually interacting with what you need to remember.

5. Don't forget to sleep (not that we imagine you will...)

Sleep is important! Exam season can be emotionally (and literally) exhausting. Try to get at least eight hours a night (and stick to a routine). Good sleep can help you remember things more easily, which is very important when it comes to revising and taking exams. If you don't sleep well, you're also more at risk of burning out and losing focus and motivation.

6. A good friend doesn't always make a good study buddy

Pick your study buddies carefully! Which ones let you crack on or make a positive difference, and which ones just distract you? If you think you'll get more done on your own, do it! Simply put, you have to be a little selfish when it comes to studying and revising. This doesn't mean you can't make any time for your friends or that you need to be alone all the time – but it does mean that you have to prioritise yourself and what kind of study works best for you.

7. Try to avoid burning out

You can't work non-stop. Take breaks and treat yourself to stay motivated to get the work done, e.g. a sweet treat, an extra episode of your fave show, an afternoon off. Take time out to relax your brain, as otherwise you may find it tricky to concentrate and really absorb things. Go for a walk, watch an episode or two of a TV show you like, catch up with your friends, or anything else that will help you wind down.

8. Tune in and focus

Studying with music on, yes or no? Provided you don't waste time creating playlists, the right tunes can block out your surroundings and help you focus. Music without vocals may prove the most study-friendly option – anything with lyrics could distract you and make you want to perfect your lip sync rather than revise. It may also be worth not listening to your favourite artists and songs while studying – your future enjoyment of them could be at risk!

9. Practise, practise, practise...

Past papers will get you accustomed to the Qs you'll face - this way you won't be thrown off by the wording or format. Also, practise picking out the key parts of the question quickly. Apply what you've committed to memory through revising by tackling exams from previous years – it will help you focus what you know to achieve the highest marks. It's also worth doing some past papers under exam conditions, to give you a better sense of how quickly you need to work through them when the day comes.

10. Remove tempting distractions

And finally (now you've read these tips), deactivate/uninstall social media or apps that suck up tons of time.

You may be surprised how much your productivity skyrockets. Many of us know the feeling of deciding to 'quickly check Instagram' to then find ourselves still watching stories hours later. If the prospect of deleting your social media apps feels like a step too far, maybe just be strict with yourself about when you can use them and for how long.