

1. Study Goals

It's good to have goals when you study. Because when you say "This is what I'm working for", you put effort into achieving it. Just like it's easier to save your money when there's something to save for, when you decide what marks you're aiming at, you have a reason to study. And this helps to motivate you. (See Goal Setting.)

2. Timetabling

Good work isn't about using time. It's about being smart! Often learners study for hours and hours because they feel they're being "good", but it's much better to work smart. Ask yourself, "What's the most important work in this section?" and focus most on that. Always work out how much work you need to do – not how much time you think it'll take. Say "six pages of Biology", not "an hour of Biology" – because that work may take 10 minutes or two hours! It's about finishing it. (See Time Management.)

This is how you make a timetable

- Draw a table divided into days and timeslots. Timeslots should be half an hour each.
- Write down times when you're expected to do something other than study (like jobs, supper, school and homework). Homework time isn't study time!
- Write down specific activities that you enjoy and do often (like sport, TV programmes or time you spend with friends).
- After you've written these in the table you'll see "gaps". These are usually when you "do nothing" (look in the fridge, walk around).
- Study during these gaps! If you do, there'll be less to distract you. Decide when to study which subjects (spend more time on the ones you battle with, but give attention and energy to all) and write them down in the gaps.

If you're stressed, getting nervous or struggling to concentrate, here's a good way to focus: You can do this exercise for 30 seconds, three minutes or 20 minutes – whatever you like. Try it!

- Find a quiet area where you can be alone.
- Close your eyes and get into a comfortable position. Make sure your spine is straight.
- Concentrate on loud noises (people talking, the radio, traffic on the road).
- Listen to softer noises (the wind, birds, traffic far away).
- Concentrate deeply on your breathing – feel it as much as you can.
- See if you can find and feel your heartbeat (if you can't find it, don't worry - your breath will be enough).
- Feel your breath again – then heartbeat – then breath – then heartbeat, and so on.
- Notice a few thoughts in your mind.
- Feel your breath again – then heartbeat etc., for a while.
- Listen to soft noises around you (the wind, birds, traffic far away).
- Concentrate on loud noises around you (people talking, the radio, traffic).
- Open your eyes.

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3. Brain Food

A well-balanced diet (see Nutrition) and lots of fluids will boost your brain during exam time. Don't drink too much coffee – it can cause anxiety, confusion and disorganised thought processes – and don't use drugs like stimulants or tranquillisers because they can damage your ability to think clearly. The worst "brain foods" are colourants, sweeteners, flavourants and preservatives. Sweets, chips and cold drinks contain lots of these things.

NOTE

Here's a simple rule: If you can't pronounce what's written on the side of the package or tin – don't eat it!

4. The Left And Right Brain

(Using Colour And Creativity)

There are two parts to your brain – a left half and a right half. The Left helps with Logic, the Right is creative. Almost all school subjects are leftbrain; for example, Maths problems are very logical and so is Science. When studying, try to use both portions of your brain. The right side is creative, exciting and visual and so is your memory – that's why it's good to use your right brain as much as possible.

- Have fun and be creative
- Draw pictures (but don't waste time; keep it simple)
- Create mind maps
- **WRITE IN COLOUR!** It doesn't take any longer to write in colour than in black or blue and the brain finds colour easier to remember. It really works. Try it!

5. Mind Mapping

To make a mind map, write the heading of your subject or section in the middle of a page and circle it. Then draw "arms" away from it to the corners of the page. Here you write your subheadings (the next most important information). Then you draw arms away from each of these to take in slightly less important facts belonging to the different subsections. You continue doing this – going from most important information to least. This way, eventually, you can have large portions of a section/subject presented on one page.

Make sure to use lots of colour with mind maps, and when facts from different sections have something to do with one another, join them with dotted lines. This allows you to see how information connects and forces you to try to understand your subject better. You can include pictures and anything creative that helps you to remember and stay interested.

NOTE

A good tip is to draw your mind map on a big piece of paper (perhaps A3 or A2), to fit in more information. You can also stick your mind map onto a wall or behind a door, so that you can look at it often.

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6. Reading Skills

When you read, focus on the following parts of the textbook:

- The first line of the paragraph. It usually introduces the paragraph's important idea.
- The last line of a paragraph. It usually summarises the important idea.
- Headings. They'll tell you if a section is important.
- The Table of Contents. It's a list of the book's headings, telling you what each chapter, section and sub-section is about.
- The Index. It's a list of words in the back of the book with page numbers. If you find a number in bold (or anything strange like that) there's often important information there such as definitions or diagrams.
- Glossaries. These are mini-dictionaries of important words.
- The Introduction. This is a map of the book or chapter. Just as you look at a map when going somewhere new, use the Introduction when you don't know a section well. If you have a map, you don't need to know a place to give directions. And if you have an Introduction, you don't need to be an expert to discuss a section for the exam.
- The Conclusion. It gives important points, usually in argument form. Teachers often like this way of writing, so looking at the Conclusion will help you. Read the Introduction, then the Conclusion and then the rest of the chapter! This often helps you to understand difficult sections.
- Summaries. These are mini-jackpots! Memorise summaries; their contents are often examined.
- Study Aims and Objectives. These are the most important things in the textbook! They are usually written in a block at the beginning of the chapter and may be called something different like "educational outcomes", "learning objectives", or "what you should know". Look at them. Turn them into questions. Get the answers. And memorise them! This marvellous trick has more chance of helping you than any other study trick!

Here's an example:

- Objective: To understand the job of the Axon in the Brain.
- "What IS the job of the Axon in the Brain?" (Look it up).
- "The Axon conducts electrical impulses between the brain and the body."
- Memorise this for the exam.

NOTE

When you read through work, underline or highlight important points. Sometimes having a colour system helps. For instance, the most important points can be purple and definitions red. This helps your right brain to remember and keeps you concentrating because you need to be awake to decide what information deserves what colour.

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NOTE

When you make summaries, take the information from these important points and re-word them! Make sure they mean exactly the same thing, but rephrasethem because this helps you to understand, remember and (later in the exam) discuss the work.

7. Using Visual Memory

Few people realise that memory is visual. Have you noticed how easily you remember what you saw on TV? Have you noticed that when your friends speak, you make a picture of what they say and remember it? They say, "I met a cute person! And she had a tall friend with her", and when you meet the cute person a few weeks later you realise that she doesn't look like you thought she would! The tall friend may also be fatter, taller or shorter than you imagined.

Let's see how we can use this with facts. If you have to remember the nine planets, decide what the facts remind you of (this will be different for different people) and make a picture that way:

Mercury	Merc	(or Freddie Mercury)
Venus	Van	(or Venus Williams)
Earth	Earth	(or planet Earth)
Mars	Cars	or stars)
Jupiter	Jump Meter	(or jump on Peter)
Saturn	An Urn	(or Satin)
Uranus	U Rains	(or Urine)
Neptune	Neptune	(or Nap Tin)
Pluto	Blue Toe	(or Pluto, the cartoon dog)

You could then make a picture likethis: A MERCEdes Benz drives into a VAN and finds a pile of brown EARTH. In the Earth are small CARS and inside someone is JUMPing on a METER ruler. AN URN runs out and steals the ruler and a big 'U' RAINS out of the sky and squashes it. King NEPTUNE walks up holding a TIN. We look down and see that he has a BLUE TOE.

It sounds odd. But that makes it easier to picture strongly. Do it with a friend and you'll even have a few laughs together. Remember that if you see it in your mind, you'll remember it, and then you'll remember the facts.

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8. Tackling Different School Subjects

Sometimes learners say things like, “You can’t study Maths – it’s an understanding subject”. Wrong! Just because Maths requires understanding doesn’t mean you can’t study it. It just means you should study it in a different way. Here are three categories of subjects and different ways to approach them:

Memory Subjects

History, Biology, Geography (not map-work) or Business Economics. If you know and understand the facts of these subjects, you’ll succeed. With these:

- identify the important information using reading skills;
- look in the first and last lines, introductions, conclusions, summaries and study aims and objectives;
- get core information; and
- memorise the important facts (using the visual memory trick).

Languages

Zulu, English, Afrikaans, French or Xhosa.

- Learn and stick to all grammar rules.
- Deliberately increase your vocabulary, including figures of speech and metaphors, by reading or memorising new words from books or a dictionary.
- Memorise the meaning of terms your teacher uses (like “idiom”, “stanza”).
- With set-works, always have a list of important themes and images used in the book, or in the play, or by the poet. As you read, refer back to this list. For instance, if you know that “Deceit and Lying” is a major theme in MacBeth, and that Nature is often used as an image, when you read “Appear as the flower but be the Serpent under’t” you will be able to say that this reinforces the theme of “Deceit”, and that Shakespeare is drawing on natural imagery to do so. This will indicate that you understand the work very well.
- When writing creative essays, describe using your senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell and emotion and thought). This allows the reader to understand the story better. Also, use “good” words. Good vocabulary often boosts your grade.
- Practise reading, writing and speaking the language.

Application Subjects

“Understanding subjects” like Maths, Accounting, Science or Geography mapwork.

These usually contain a few core concepts that you must understand and then apply by doing equations or exercises. Until you understand the core ideas you won’t get these subjects right! The biggest problem with these subjects is that learners try to apply before understanding. With these subjects:

- Understand and memorise all the rules and theory of the subject!
- Ask questions like How?, When?, What? and Why? When you see any theory, especially in headings in the chapter, see if you can answer these questions about the heading. If you can’t, you probably don’t understand it well enough.

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- Do all exercises given to you to apply and practise these rules.

Imagine that you're given a bicycle and told to "practise". Practice would make you stronger and you'd get better at riding. But imagine if the wheel was broken. Practice wouldn't help at all! You'd just fall over. You need to fix the wheel and then practise! For instance, if you're doing a section in Maths on "finding the square", ask yourself, "How, when and why do I find the square?"

Once you've answered these questions (once you have "fixed the wheel"), then do the exercises to make yourself stronger.

Information courtesy of the Juno Study Course For more information, e-mail info@junostudycourse.com

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