



THE A-LEVEL MINDSET

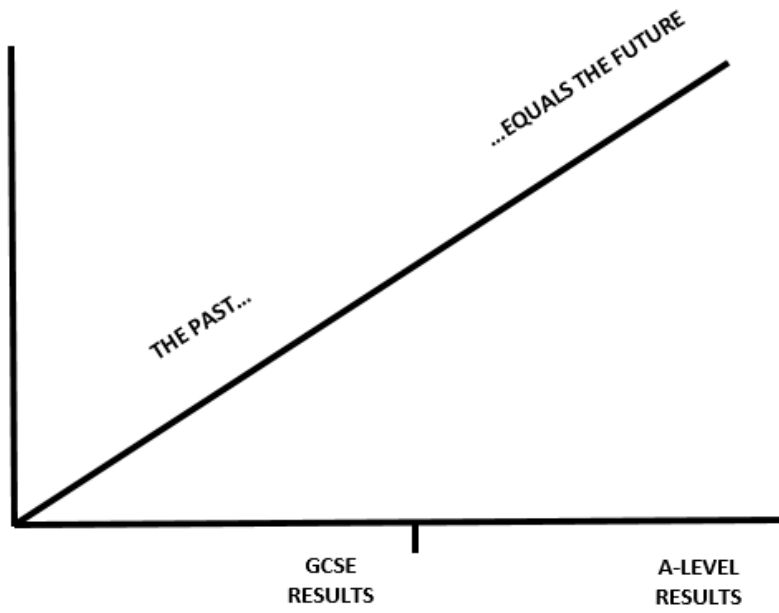
A-Levels are a different 'beast' to GCSE's. Many of you will have achieved grades at GCSE with only a moderate amount of work and using often 'outdated' systems of revision.

You will need to evolve if you are to achieve success at A-Level. If you revise as you did for your GCSE's you will seriously underachieve at A-Level.

The following booklet has been taken from '*The A-Level Mindset*' (Steve Oakes and Martin Griffin) and compiled by experienced teachers who have researched the challenges faced by A-Level students when it comes to their studies and future career aspirations. It contains useful tips and advice to guide you through the 'maze' that is A-Level study.

Use the time you have been given during your tutor periods (morning and afternoon), as well as your life skills sessions to utilise this booklet in helping you organise your study and revision effectively so that you can achieve the best grades possible come your prelim and final examinations.

IN AN IDEAL WORLD...



Is this you?



Listless, bored, low-level anxiety, exasperation and a tendency to procrastinate!

OR...is this you?



Characterised by satisfaction, contentment and short-termism – oblivious to levels of hard work put in by others.

Is this you?



Characterised by a scalin-up of old systems that now can't cope, missing deadlines because the work has been forgotten, poor sleep and late waking, chaotic bags and folders, often high stress.

OR...is this you?



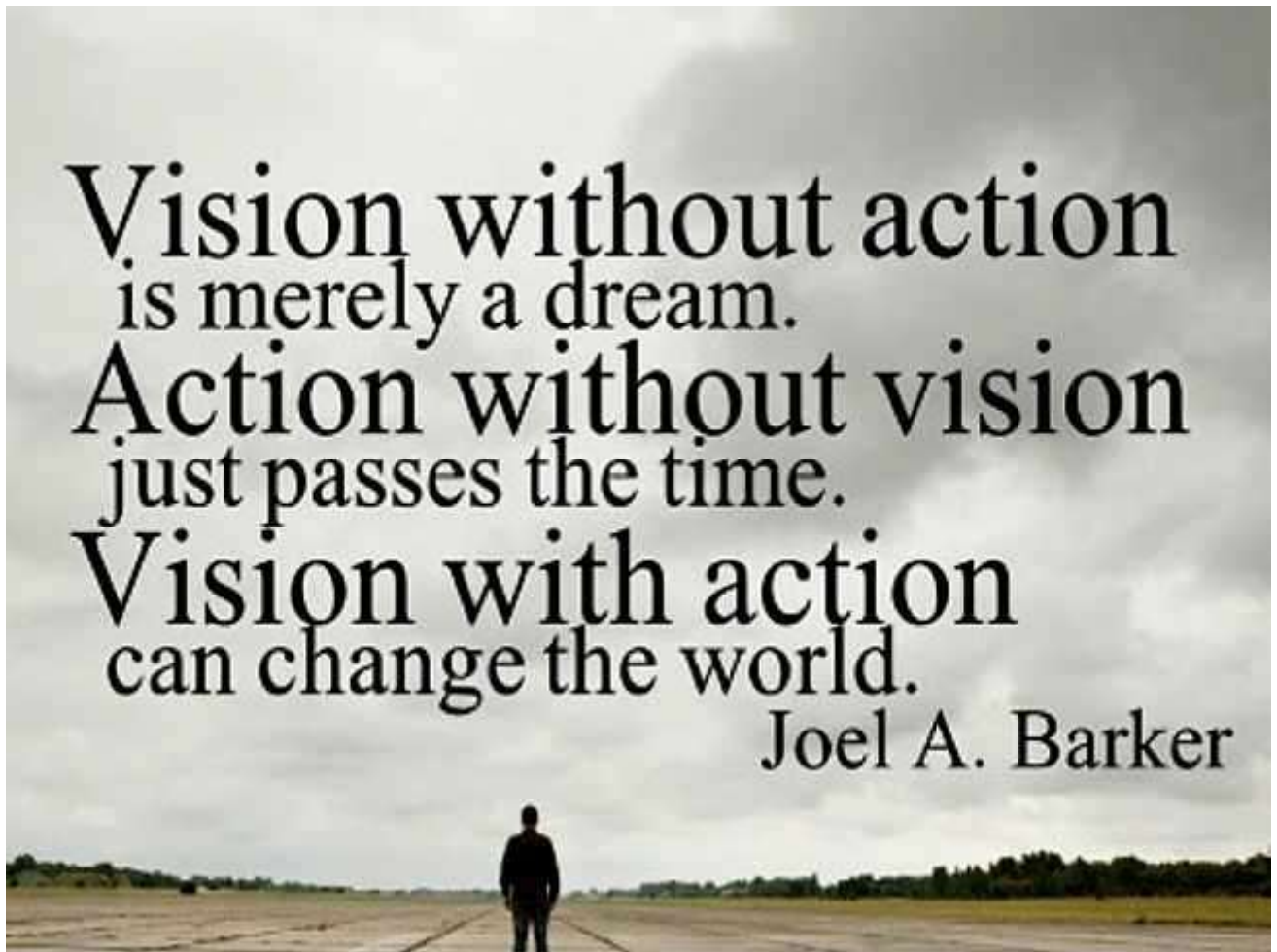
Often organised and hardworking but loyal to repeated patterns of GCSE preparation, comfortable behaviours, sense of control achieved through large stationery purchases, claims “*you can't revise*” for skills-based courses.

Do you....

- Highlight work?
- Construct flashcards?
- Mark your own work with a mark scheme?
- Attend regular support sessions?
- Have one-to-one discussions with staff?

ATTENDANCE is vital! Poor attendance is the single most contributing factor to poor grades being achieved by students.

1. 'VISION'



Research has found that students without a goal or a vision hit a ceiling and underperform by about one grade. Students who don't have a clear outcome, who don't know *why* they're doing A-Levels, are usually the first to show decreased levels of effort when the going gets tough.

"Setting a goal which is specific and challenging leads to increases in productivity." (Locke and Latham, 1984)

Vision is about the voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action. This means sticking to the goal despite any obstacles or difficulties that arise.

The following pages are designed to help you set goals and make decisions which can lead to you unlocking your vision.

HAVE A PLAN...



What do you want to achieve over the next week, month, term, year, two years?

WHAT IS YOUR VISION?

- Do you have a clear goal that you want to achieve?
- Do you have an actionable plan (breaking your goal down into sub-components)?
- Can you stick to your goal despite any obstacles or difficulties that may arise?

Answer these questions with reference to study and work. Try your best to practise honest and fearless thinking – that means you answer without feeling stupid or embarrassed, and you say what you feel and think.

1. If you could only take one subject what would it be and why?	
2. What lessons or elements of study do you find easy?	
3. What do you do with your spare time?	
4. Describe an interesting lesson you had recently. Why was it interesting?	
5. What jobs do you avoid doing, and why?	
6. When does time fly? What are you doing?	
7. When does time seem to drag or stop? What are you doing?	
8. What job would you do for free?	
9. Who do you look up to?	
10. What would you try if you knew you couldn't fail?	

11. What puts a smile on your face?	
12. If you had the afternoon off to work at home, which piece of work would you choose to do?	
13. When you have a lot of homework, which subject do you do first?	
14. Describe a homework task you have recently left until the last minute or not done at all. Why?	
15. What do you get obsessed about?	
16. When you're with your friends, what do you want to talk about?	
17. What stresses you out?	
18. If you had an hour off A-level work and a laptop, what would you type into a search engine?	
19. If you were given a small amount of money to start a company, what would it be?	
20. List five words you associate with happiness.	



GETTING DREAMS DONE

There is a big difference between a dream and a goal. A dream is something you imagine happening; a goal is something you take action towards.

Make a list of your hopes for the future and then put them into one of the following categories.

<p>Pure fantasy and pipe dreams List here the things you would one day like to be or do but that you never ever talked about. It's never been verbalised at all – it's just in your head.</p>	
<p>Daydreams and conversations List here the things you would one day like to be or do that you have talked about with a friend. You've admitted them and started exploring and discussing them.</p>	
<p>Goals List here the things you would like to do that you've taken action about. What was the action? When did you take it? What did you do when things got difficult?</p>	

This activity will show you two things. When your list is complete, consider the following questions:

1. What percentage of your hopes have you acted on? What chance is there of your hopes becoming a reality?
2. How much action have you taken? Has it been repeated, determined action? Or has it been one action taken some time ago?

What further actions can you take? What could you do to make pure fantasy and pipe dreams into goals? Success is much more to do with determination than talent.



YOUR 21ST BIRTHDAY

Get a pen and paper at the ready! Imagine it's your 21st birthday. You need to picture an unusual 21st at which your family and friends stand up and describe the type of person that you are for them.

Think about the following questions:

- What would you like your friends to say about you? What qualities would you like them to admire in you?
- How would you like to be described by your colleagues?
- When they list your achievements so far, what do you want them to be?
- When they describe all the things you are still going to do, and the hopes they have for your future, what will they say?

By creating a vision of what you would like to be in the near future, in different areas of your life, you often reflect the personal values that are most important to you in each of these different areas.

Write down **in the space below** what you would like each person to say about the different areas of your life (go onto the reverse of this page if you need more space).



FIX YOUR DASHBOARD

Imagine somebody that you admire and respect. Take your time and choose someone you look up to – often, your first thought isn't your best. Perhaps list five or ten people you admire to begin with and see what they have in common. What qualities do they have that you admire?

The characteristics you admire in others can say a lot about the type of person you would like to be. In the table below write down the qualities of the person in each life domain:



Career	
Finance	
Family	
Personal relationships	
Education	
Qualities	
Activities	
Community citizenship	
Others	

Write a paragraph below on the type of person you would like to be in each area of your life. Practice 'no limit' thinking. Don't limit yourself by your fears, lack of money or lack of time – clarify a vision of your ideal self.



THE DASHBOARD

Millions of people drive to work every day. The dashboard of their car is one of the first things they see on their way in and one of the last things they see as they arrive home. We use the word 'dashboard' to mean what you see first thing in the morning or last thing at night. It might be the wall above your desk or next to your bedside table. It might be the wallpaper on your phone or the inside cover of your files.

We each live with a mental dashboard of people and ideas.

Try a dashboard display of your own...

This could be a collage of pictures, a photograph or one slide power point of the University you aspire to study at placed (one you have an offer from, a photo of the campus, the sports facilities, the learning resource centre – whatever inspires you) on the inside of your files (so you see it every time you open them to work). It could be covering a bedroom wall with inspiring quotes and/or messages or a list of people who would feel proud and excited if you do really well.

This could be a form activity where each student creates their own A3 dashboard poster, which can then be printed in colour and displayed in the form room and/or Hub.



THE PERFECT DAY

Almost every primary school pupil in the country will be able to tell you what they want to be. Why?

Because at that age teachers encourage children to express their hopes and dreams in writing activities with titles like, “*When I grow up...*”

But nobody asks teenagers to write about what they want to be. It’s as if, by this age, we’re embarrassed to have hopes and dreams. We shouldn’t be. *Having hopes and dreams is more important at this age than at any other time of life.*

Your task is to have a go at describing your perfect day at work to help you develop a long-term vision.

Here are some questions to help get you thinking.

- Am I working indoors or outdoors?
- Do I work at home or away from home?
- Who am I with?
- Am I leading a team? Part of a team? Alone?
- When do I start and finish?
- What am I wearing?
- What is my workplace like?



SMART GOALS

Pick one of your goals. Whether you choose an educational goal, a career goal or a personal goal, try to identify how you can make your goal SMART.

- **Specific** – Be as precise as you can be rather than general.
- **Measurable** – How will you know when you’ve reached your goal? Write, *“I will know I have reached my goal because...”*
- **Action-based** – What can you do to get the goal started? How? What’s step one, step two and so on?
- **Realistic** – has someone done it before? Could you speak to that person? Is there evidence to suggest you can do it? What previous personal successes are connected to your goal?
- **Time-bound** – When do you want to do this by? Avoid, *“One day I’m going to...”* Be more specific.

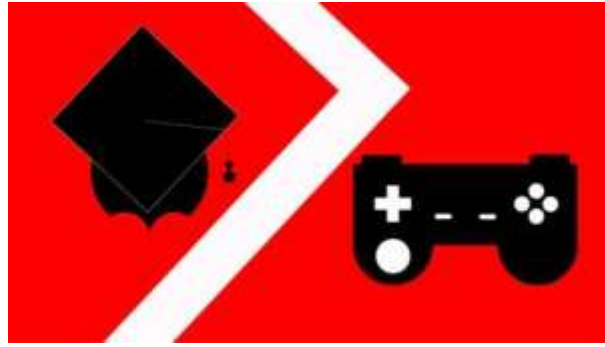
Use the template below to record your SMART goals.

Specific	
Measurable	
Action-based	
Realistic	
Time-bound	

Short-term SMARTs

Try setting four or five SMART goals for the next fortnight. Imagine how you would feel if you had every one of those five short-term goals done in the next ten working days! You may want to choose one per – for example:

- A homework piece you want to complete really well.
- A part-time job application and interview you want to go smoothly.
- An upcoming test you want to perform well in.
- A selection of notes you want to reorganise and revise.



MENTAL CONTRASTING

This is a positive thinking exercise that helps you define your vision. Any goal you set will have obstacles in the way of you achieving them, (if they were easy everyone would be able to achieve them).

Mental contrasting gets you to think about these obstacles and develop an *"if...then"* plan to help you overcome them. The process also gets you thinking about the feasibility of your goals. If you can't formulate an *"if...then"* plan, then your goal might not be possible at all.

Here's how it works:

1. WISH

Spend a minute or two thinking in detail about something you want to accomplish. For example this could be the grade you want to achieve in particular subject.

2. OUTCOME

Vividly imagine the best thing you associate with having achieved that outcome (it might be anything related to the outcome. it might mean getting into the university of your dreams.

3. OBSTACLE

Ask yourself what internal obstacles are the most likely to get in the way (that weakness inside you that holds you back from higher grades or a better exam performance).

4. PLAN

Formulate and *"If...then"* plan for what you will do when that obstacle arises (If I find myself checking social media or going on netflix, I'll get up immediately and turn off the wi-fi)



FAKE IT

Sometimes it almost feels impossible to make a decision. Sometimes you can't decide or you're torn between two or more goals.

Try the 'Fake it' method.

Here's how it works...

Week 1

Choose one of your options. It might be applying to university to study philosophy, getting a business and management apprenticeship or taking a gap year.

For a whole week you're going to pretend that you've made your decision, that the option you've chosen for the week is what you want to do with your life more than anything else. The burden of having to make a decision is gone – you've made the decision. You're not allowed to think about the other options at all for the whole week.

In pretending you've already made the decision, do the following:

- Research the option – find out all you can about it
- Get excited about it. What's on the course? How much will you earn on the apprenticeship? What are the career prospects afterwards? Who else among the people you know has chosen that option? Why are they choosing it? What's making them excited?

On Friday, make a note of the way the week made you feel. Has it been a good week? Discuss it with a friend or your tutor.

Week 2

Choose another one of your options (not the week 1 option) and repeat the process for your new option.

Compare and contrast:

- Which was the better week?
- Which was more enjoyable?
- Which made you feel more excited?
- Which felt more like you?

2. EFFORT



'Is a function of the intensity, direction and duration of one's exertions toward a goal'

- How many hours of independent study do you carry out per subject, per week?
- Is your independent study reactive or proactive?

Reactive Independent Study	Proactive Independent Study
Completing tasks set by teachers and should only form a small proportion of a successful student's time. Reactive students have a list of jobs to do; they complete those and then they stop.	Work students set themselves, (e.g. a Science student who reviews each lessons notes, a Politics student who keeps a folder of current affairs news items and/or a linguist who watches target-language movies for fun).

'The difference between 'TRY' and 'TRIUMPH' is a little 'UMPH!'



The following pages are designed to offer you advice for overcoming and beating the problem that is.... 'effort' especially when it comes to those areas you find difficult.



THE 0 – 10 SCALE



Look back at the work you've done so far this term and think about the levels of effort you've put into your studies. Use the scale above and the following guidance to choose your number:

- **0** = 0 – 2 hours independent study a week
- **5** = 10 hours independent study per week
- **10** = 20 hours independent study per week

Be honest with yourself and choose your number.

Top students at A-level aiming for three A's or A*'s do about **thirty hours** of independent study per week.

What can you do?

First, reach 5/10. That means putting a timetable in place that takes you to ten hours of independent study per week (including private study periods). Plan what that week will look like and try it for a period of time. Remember, it takes time to establish a habit – so take make ten hours a week your habit for a month.

Once accomplished, step this up gradually, (e.g. twelve hours a week).

WORKING WEEKS



As a student who takes three A-Levels and takes all private study periods as frees, you're on about 23-24 hours per fortnight.

As a student who works all your study periods, you're working 11-12 hours per week during your study periods. If you work solidly (lessons and study periods) you work for 25 hours per week.

A 9 to 5 working week amounts to 40 hours per week.

The average UK worker does 43 hours a week.

The government recommends a maximum working week of 48 hours.

High earners (top tax bracket of over £50K a year) average 50 hours per week.

Company bosses interviewed worked between 60 – 80 hours per week.

What does a working week like that look like?

A fifty-hour working week is...

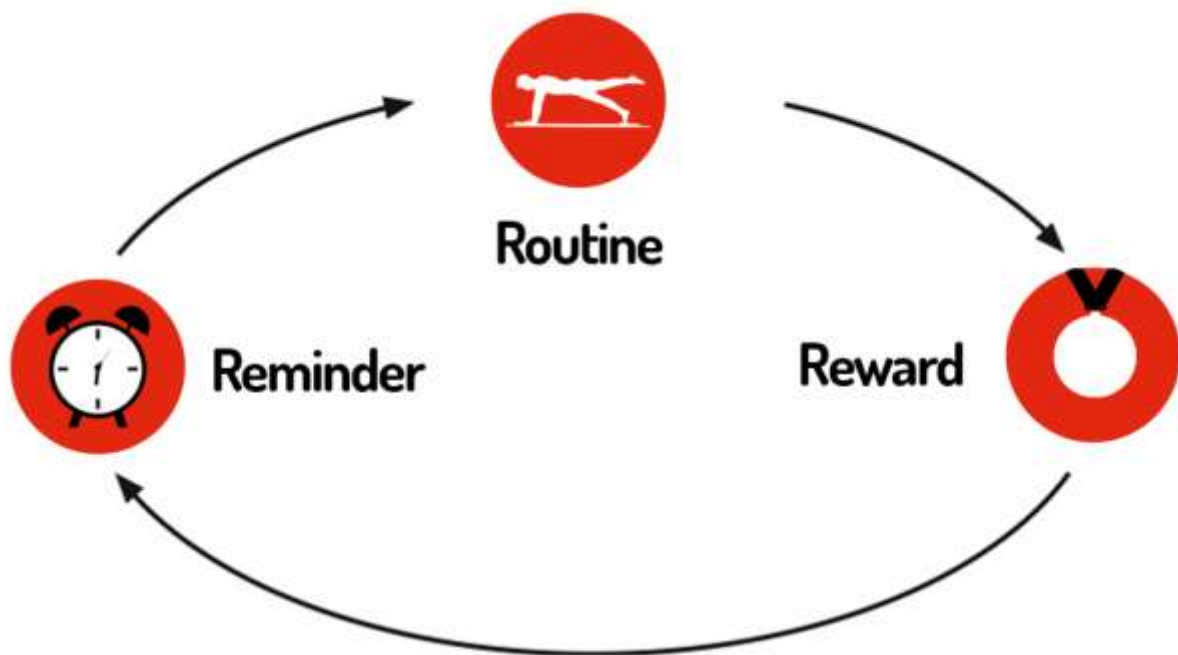
Start each day at:	Take a lunch break from/to:	Go home at:
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An eighty-hour working week is...

Start each day at:	Take a lunch break from/to:	Go home at:
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Review your working week

How many hours are you putting in? How do you compare to your parents, or to the average UK worker? Plan where you could get some extra hours from.



THE THREE R's OF HABIT

- **The reminder.** This could be a feeling, a place or a time of the day – it's your body or brain giving you a trigger that initiates the behaviour. It might be getting some chocolate, going home early or putting away the work you know you should be completing.
- **The routine.** This is the behaviour itself. Going to the canteen and buying the chocolate or taking the bus home instead of staying on to do some studying. Other people will feel a tinge of guilt during the routine, but do it anyway.
- **The reward.** This is the good feeling you get – the benefit you gain from engaging in the behaviour. It might not last long but it is a tempting prospect.

If you haven't already got into your effort habit, how can you go about changing? You can use the three R's in your favour. Rather than thinking about stopping old habits – which is a mistake many people make when 'giving up' something – the trick is to think of it as studying a new habit. This means you will need a new reminder to trigger your new habit, a new routine to go through and best of all, a new reward to give yourself.

How to do it

- Choose a trigger attached to something that happens to you every day. For example, *"at the end of every lunch hour I will..."*, *"As I finish my breakfast I will..."*, *as the end of the lesson approaches I will..."* or *"at the end of the 6 o'clock news I will..."*
- Choose a routine that is easy to achieve. It might be to sort out your notes for thirty minutes, create a thinking map for an area of weakness, review the homework you've been set for thirty minutes or do one hours work a difficult A-level. The key thing is the beginning, performance doesn't matter. Routine matters.
- Finally, the reward. Start small with a verbal reward, a short period of time doing something you enjoy or even a cup of tea or coffee.



RECOGNISING YOUR BLOCKERS

A blocker is a psychological barrier that stops you working. It might be a pattern of thinking or a habit you've established that you can't break. All of us have blockers – thoughts and feelings that stop us doing the thing we really need to do.

To put in the effort for A-level success you have to recognise your blockers and break those patterns of thought. This four-stage model is useful for recognising the behaviour and thought patterns that are a sign of blockers.

1. Initial lack of motivation

Everyone feels discouraged at some point – the feeling that they don't want to complete a piece of work, finish an essay or put in a couple of hours on a tricky piece of coursework. The difference is what you tend to do next...

2. Bypassing Conscience

Most people will feel guilty when they don't work, (*I should be finishing that essay...*) but sometimes we find ways of bypassing our conscience. We deliberately rethink the situation until we feel better about it. Some thought patterns you might have include:

- hasn't done it either so I'm not that bad.
- At other schools/colleges they don't even do this piece, so why should I?
- The instructions were unclear, so I've got an excuse. I'm telling myself I don't really understand.
- I rushed a piece last time and the grade was ok. I'll do that again.
- I deserve a break. I've always really loved this TV programme – I'll watch it instead.
- I'm going to do something else that has some 'educational value'.

3. Creating an Opportunity

Next, there needs to be something nearby that can distract you. Some students work near others and tell themselves this is beneficial because they can ask for help if they need it. What they might actually be doing is hoping for a distraction to occur. The same goes for workspaces. Do you work near or next to your phone, laptop, tablet, PS4 console or TV, secretly hoping for something to take you away from your work? If this is you, then you are subconsciously (or maybe deliberately) creating the opportunity for blocks to occur.

4. Getting Away with It

Finally, for the pattern to continue, you need to feel that you have got away with it. The thought pattern here often goes, *"Nobody said anything, so it must be alright"* or *"I don't get told off, so I'll do it again"*.

This activity might help you recognise your own tendency to self-sabotage. Don't worry, everyone does it to a certain extent – really productive people have learned to fight the feeling!

Once you've noticed the ways in which your blockers get in the way, try the following:

- Think about a piece of work you never completed. How did you justify the non-completion to yourself? Which task on your list at the moment are you least likely to do? Why?
- Take a task that has been on your to-do list for a while because you've been putting it off. Why is it there? Is there an action you can take right away which will make the task suddenly achievable?
- Next time you put a task off, ask yourself why. Are you simply sequencing tasks and saving it for later? Or is this an act of self-sabotage?

The response: If you feel self-sabotage coming on, move location. Get yourself to another table or study area away from others. Start the task. You don't even have to finish it – work for thirty minutes or so – but get it started. You're less likely to sabotage a project that is already underway!



TEN MINUTE RULE

If you are in a position where you are regularly putting up barriers to work, the Ten-Minute Rule is a good way of breaking them down.

Many students will avoid A-level classwork or homework because it is hard. Instead they will:

- Do something more comfortable but less useful. They may copy out some notes or make a mind map when they really know they should be doing the exam question or paper that their teacher has set them under timed conditions.
- Claim their homework or independent work isn't realistic as a way of avoiding it (*this is pointless; the real exam will be totally different so why bother*).
- Get into a deep discussion about something related so they feel they are working.
- Look for someone else who isn't doing it. Or in extreme cases, tell themselves that no one is doing it.

You may recognise these behaviours in yourself and others – putting up barriers to independent work to avoid it.

If this is you, the Ten-Minute Rule is a good way to break through barriers. It's very simple:

1. Tell yourself you are going to do ten minutes of **intense** work. That's all.
2. Decide what work the ten minutes is going to be spent on.
3. Clear a space or move to a table on your own and sit down with the right materials at hand.
4. Start.

You can of course stop after ten minutes. Even if you do, you've done ten minutes more work than you would have done. But what often happens is that ten minutes becomes twenty. Sometimes even half an hour or longer.

Often the thought of work is much worse than the work itself.



INNER STORYTELLING

The language we use to describe ourselves, (our inner storytelling) massively influences the amount of effort we put into a project. It helps us live up to our own hopes and fears.

For a week, your challenge is to change your inner storytelling. This, in turn, could well change your patterns of behaviour, your habits and, ultimately, the effort you put into your work. A good place to start would be to choose one of the following stories to tell about yourself.

- When I started A-levels, I suddenly became a hard worker. I battle.
- I give 100% whatever I do. I never give up.
- When I say I'll do something, I do it.
- I'll deliver, I always do.
- I don't waste time. I get things done.
- I'm dedicated and strong under pressure. People can rely on me.
- When there is a challenging task, I go at it until I'm done.
- I'm not lazy or flaky. I'm no shirker.

Once you've chosen your new story, you need to find a method of verbalising it. The word 'mantra' is often used to describe an utterance or phrase with psychological power. This is what you are creating here. Find a time of the day when you can repeat your mantra – on the bus, in the shower, walking home or between lessons. Then try it for a week.



THE POWER OF IF...THEN THINKING

Many people who want to put their efforts into achieving great things, but don't, are derailed by seemingly small problems like these:

- They want to finish a task to a high standard, but a phone call, or text disrupts them.
- They want to complete a coursework piece, but the weekend is just too busy.
- They want to do some serious revision, but some friends disturb them and the work is abandoned.

If this happens to you, it's because you have low 'implementation intention' – you sort of want to put in the effort, but you will easily be put off if one thing goes wrong.

The solution? Successful students anticipate these problems and plan for how they will respond to them with maximum effort. You sequence actions that anticipate obstacles and build in pre-prepared solutions – you effectively beat self-sabotage before it even happens.

Consider these examples:

Student 1: *"I'll get started on this first thing in the morning."* This is a really common mental dialogue you might experience as a student – lots do it! And with one small disruption the whole plan comes to a standstill.

Student 2: *"I'll get started on this first thing in the morning, but..."*

- *If I wake up late by accident, then I'll use my morning break to start it instead and...*
- *If I feel demotivated, then I'll get drink and a bite to eat from the canteen and consume them quickly to give me a boost and...*
- *If I get disturbed by friends, then I'll make an excuse and either move tables or go to another study area and...*
- *If the internet is down or I can't access a computer, then I'll start by using my class notes or creating some revision resources and save my computer research until later.*

It's easy to see which student might be the one most likely to succeed. Student 2 has listed a series of potential problems and has recognised their tendency to self-sabotage when small things go wrong. By planning a change in action when those small obstacles come along, they are much more likely to keep pushing forward.

In the space below and overleaf list all the usual blockers you use to prevent high levels of effort and for each one commit to a solution. Think them all through in your head and make notes. What you are doing is strengthening your implementation intention. You will put the effort in, even if small things crop up to stop you.

Try it for a week.

3. SYSTEMS

“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.”



Usually there is something like 130 lessons in a Year 12 curriculum and another 130 in Year 13. That's 260 bits to organise for each course. Most students do three A-Levels so, in total, that's 780 separate bits. If students can't organise these bits, they can't learn them!

Our conversations show there is a direct link between their level of organisation and their final grade.

When we say 'systems', we mean two things:

1. A system to organise learning so students can make sense of it all
2. A system to organise their time so students can complete key tasks to deadlines set.

- How do you prioritise what needs to be done?
- On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being the most positive rating, how would you rate yourself in terms of your organisation?
- Have you ever done anything related to study and/or revision that is NOT set by your teacher?
- How organised are your notes?
- How organised is your work space?

The following pages contain strategies to help you organise both your learning and your time management. So be sure to try them and persist with them.



THE ENERGY LINE

Many students feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do. Some keep lists – scribbling down jobs and crossing them off when they're done. And lists are good – they help you keep on top of what it is you've got to do.

The drawback of a list is that it doesn't tell you what to do first. A better tool to use for prioritising tasks is an energy line – it beats a to-do list any day of the week. It helps you put things in order according to how much effort you need to give them. Put things on the left-hand side – high or extreme – if you need to work like mad on them! Put them on the right if you can kick back and leave it for a bit. Attach dates for submission and you're really getting there. Write the jobs on post-its and move them around, taking them off altogether when they're done.

Extreme	High	Medium	Low	Idle

Try prioritising on the energy line.

How much are you going to put into getting them done? Some will need a big energy push – you'll need to be working at them every day. Others will tick over – you'll need to work at them once a week.



THE BREAKFAST CLUB

Some research suggests that for most people, the brain is at its sharpest in the first hours after waking. Not straightaway – it needs time to up to speed. But then it hits a sweet spot when it really is firing. Brain efficiency can vary, but in the morning, it can be up to 30% more active and sharp than it is at other times.

Here's something else to consider: the longer the day goes on; the more self-control problems you will have. If you're trying to give up chocolate, for example, you will rarely crack at 10 am. But by 4:40pm, when you're feeling tired, your self-control slips. It's the same with work. If you tell yourself you will start a big project at 3pm or 6pm, the chances of that happening are low. If you set aside some 'breakfast club' time – sweet spot time in the morning – you're so much likely to clear the job.

We often see students using a morning study period to ease themselves into the day and/or catch up with fiends on the latest gossip. They waste their moments of high brain energy on social media and gaming, then turn their attention to work later on when they're not as productive. Think about what you do prior to am tutor period and/or during am tutor period.

The Morning Routine

With all this in mind, look at your morning routine. Make some notes under the following headings:

- What time do you wake up?
- What do you do with your first hour?
- What are your habits and rituals, your repeated behaviours?
- Are they positive? Do they set you up for a good day?
- How long do they take? Are they worth it?

Scheduling

Now look at the work you have to do this week. Use the energy line to figure out what's coming up in terms of deadlines, then:

- Take your highest priority (or your hardest tasks) and schedule them in morning slots for the whole week. **Note these in your planner.**
- Commit to clearing them early in the day. Stick with it, and at the end of the period reflect on what went well and what needs adjusting as a result.



SNACK, DON'T BINGE (OR THE WEEKLY REVIEW)

Studies show that cramming, or binging on learning isn't as successful as snacking on it. In other words, students do significantly better if they review their learning regularly rather than if they leave it to pile up, and then try to deal with it all at once. Your productivity – the amount of efficient and effective work you do – is significantly improved by doing the work frequently.

Here's a habit to work on developing. It's called the 'Weekly Review'. Follow these steps and you will find yourself snacking – checking your learning regularly – instead of bingeing.

1. Set aside an hour a week. This time must be sacred – don't let anyone disturb you! Put your phone on aeroplane mode, go offline and never swap your hour for something else or skip it. Make it a crucial part of your week. We suggest a Friday afternoon or a Monday morning.
2. Split up the hour evenly. We suggest fifteen minutes per A-level. Be strict with yourself.
3. For fifteen minutes, review the weeks work in that A-level. We suggest the following:
 - Check your notes are clear, legible and in order (they are organised).
 - Summarise your learning in a quick diagram, thinking map or a few lines of notes.
 - Highlight or circle material you've found hard this week. This is the stuff you will need to work on during your independent study time.
 - Go through the jobs you've been given and the deadlines you've got. Make a prioritised list for the week ahead.
 - Use your planner to organise your week ahead.
4. Once you've done this three times, once for each subject, you should be feeling pretty good. You're in control. You know what needs to be done.

Students who make a habit of the weekly review are often much calmer and less stressed. They can leave school on Friday knowing they're on top of things. They've emptied their heads of all the little niggling worries that might keep them awake at night.

THE 2-4-8 RULE

This is a simple system of time management. It's based on the idea of a long-term project being like a bridge. Imagine a bridge built over a wide valley. What kind of bridge are you imagining? We would bet it has vertical parts holding it up. That's because everyone knows that something which spans a long distance needs regular structure to support it.

Now imagine that bridge as a long-term project – an essay that needs to be handed in to your teacher in two weeks or a coursework project that needs to be submitted in three months. The project is a long-term, long-distance project so it needs a regular structure to support it. The 2-4-8 rule helps you build that solid structure, like vertical piers supporting a bridge.

1. The short-term project: "You've got two weeks to complete this"

Many teachers might give you two weeks to complete a project. Here's how to use the 2-4-8 rule to respond:

- **Target 1:** two days. Make a note of what you would like to achieve to get the project started – a side of writing, three hours of reading, some research, organising your notes or preparing your piece. Set yourself a target of two days to complete this work.
- **Target 2:** four days later. Make a note of where you want to be in four days after that. Halfway through would be a sensible plan. Break the back of the task – get through the hard bit.
- **Target 3:** eight days later. You're handing in the assignment today. It needs to be complete. Make sure you've finished early, gone through it, proof read it and made any adjustments.

2. The long-term project: "This needs finishing by March"

Often coursework submissions come with more extended deadlines like this. If your deadline is a longer one, it's worth working backwards from targets like this:

- **Target 3:** eight months until submission. In these early stages, you should be finding an example of what you're trying to achieve – for example, another student's coursework submission, (an exemplar). Look it over and say to yourself, "*I want mine to look like this.*" Make a list of what needs to be done by the end of the project. Get started on rough, early versions or drafts.
- **Target 2:** four months until submission. Make notes of where you would like to be halfway through, assuming it's going really well. By now you will have been working on early versions and fleshing them out. How many sections will be complete in rough form by this point? What will your word count be (if it's a written task)? What reading and research will you have done and incorporated by this point? What standard will you have achieved?
- **Target 1:** two months until submission. If you've met your targets up until this point, you'll know very clearly what needs to be done to complete the project, and you can begin the final stages in earnest. What groundwork do you still need to do? What reading needs to be completed? What notes do you still need to take and incorporate? How many words are left to write? How do you conclude and reference your work?



STQR

Successful project managers suggest you begin any huge project, (like passing an A-level) with an understanding of the following four things:

SCOPE

The size of the project

TIME

Completion by when?

QUALITY

the standards you want

RESOURCE

Staff, students, internet, library, exam papers

The first is SCOPE – the size of the project. This is crucial, how big is the job ahead of you? Surprisingly, lots of students never really get to grips with what they need to know.

Second is the TIME frame. You need to consider two things here: when is the deadline for the project, and how many hours will you need to complete it? Thinking in terms of hours will give you a much clearer idea when it comes to scheduling the project.

Third is QUALITY. Not only do you have to consider the standards you want to achieve, but you also need to know the criteria you are working towards. What exactly do you have to do to meet the standards? Write these down in this box.

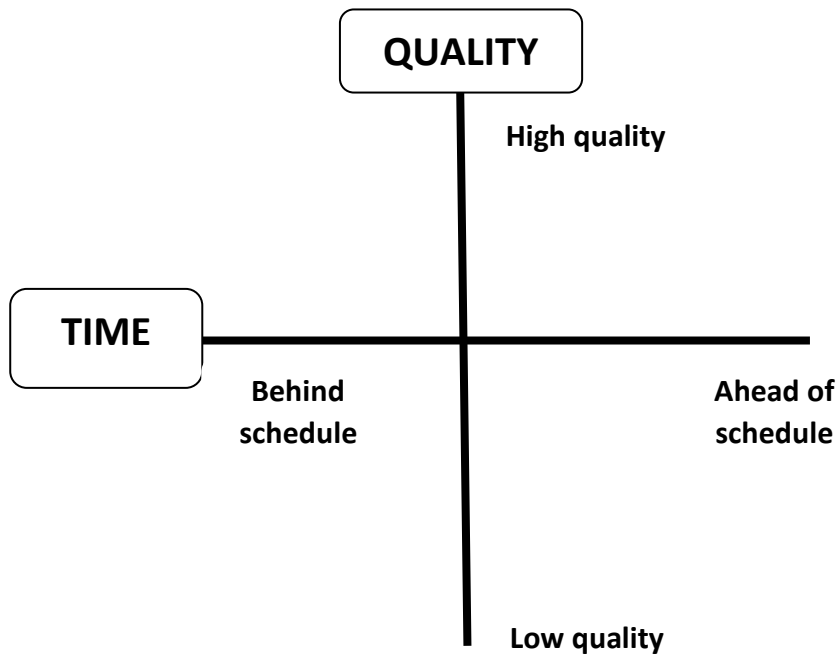
Finally, in the RESOURCES box list everything you will need to complete the project. This can also include people – for example, you might try to meet certain teachers.

PROJECT PROGRESS CHART

This is a simple tool to keep track of where you are with everything on which you're working. Whether you are taking three or four A-levels, applying to university, organising some work shadowing or completing an extended project qualification, the number of projects you're running at one time can sometimes be a bit overwhelming.

The project progress chart helps you track where you are with each one. List every job or task you've got to do and place them somewhere on the grid. It will help you prioritise what to do next.

On the horizontal axis is time. Projects ahead of schedule go far right and projects lagging behind go far left. On the vertical axis is quality. Projects heading for a high-quality finish go at the top and projects that are running on a low quality go towards the bottom.



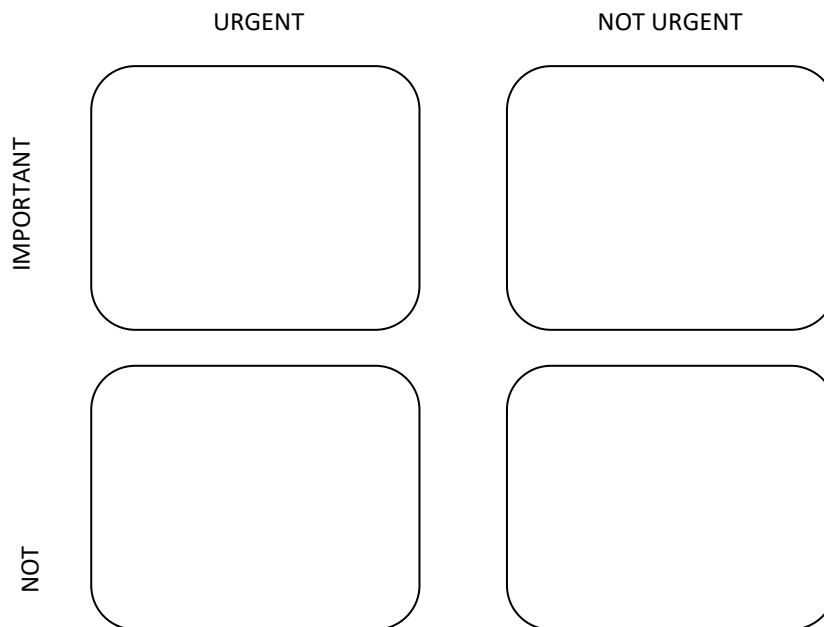


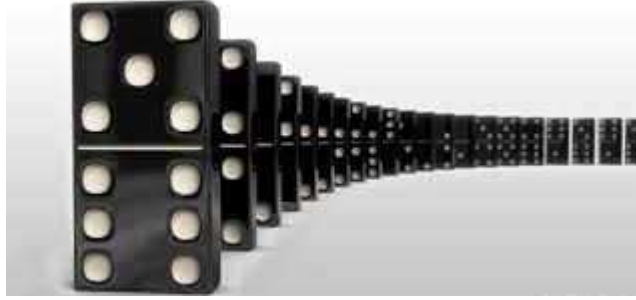
THE EISENHOWER MATRIX

This model was successfully developed by US President Dwight Eisenhower – he was considered a master of time management, always getting everything done by the deadline. His famous alleged quote, *“I have two kinds of problems, the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important and the important are never urgent.”* Led to the development of what is now referred to as the Eisenhower Matrix, which is used all over the world in business.

Eisenhower put all the tasks into one of four boxes on the matrix. He then dealt with ones that were urgent and important. Only when the tasks in this box were completed did he move onto the other boxes.

Now try to organise your tasks using this framework.





THE LEAD DOMINO

What should I focus my time on?

Some argue that a lot of work can be saved by focussing on jobs that will have the biggest knock-on effect. There are two principles when choosing your next task.

Go for the Lead Domino

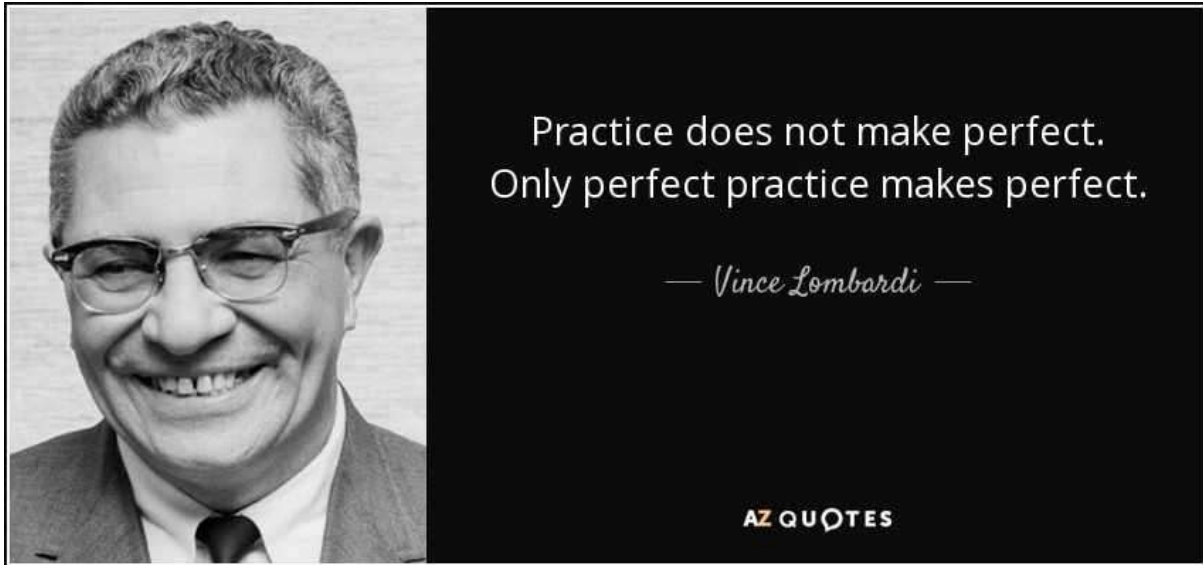
You should put your effort into the one job which, when done, will render the largest number of other jobs either easier or irrelevant. In other words, the job that has the largest number of possible knock-on effects.

When you've got a list of things to do, use this principle to guide where you put your effort. It will stop you spending time on jobs that aren't necessary.

Go for the task which makes you feel most uncomfortable

The second principle suggests that the job that makes you feel most anxious is likely to be your Lead Domino. By focussing on it now will save time later.

4. PRACTICE



We see practice is a distinct form of effort; it represents what learners do with the time they put into their studies. When it comes to learning quickly, it's the way you practice and not how often you practice that counts. In other words, effort alone is not enough to guarantee success.

Academic progress is as much about how you work as it is about how long you work for.

Learning and mastery are a combination of the following;

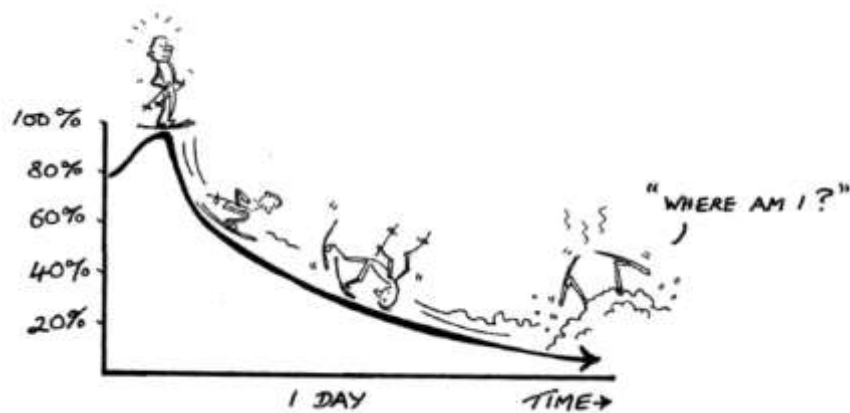
1. **Content** – The learner masters the content being taught by reviewing and consolidating it, checking it and ensuring understanding.
2. **Skills** – The learner puts this knowledge into practice in high stakes contexts; they practice exam questions, time themselves, try tough questions and complex prelim tests/examinations.
3. **Feedback** – The learner seeks out expert feedback that allows them to develop their performance.

- In your studies – how do you feel / react when you have made a mistake?
- Do you tend to focus / practice the content that you enjoy or find easy?
- Do you regularly review your work to make it better?
- When was the last time you really tested yourself on the difficult stuff?

The following pages are designed to offer revision strategies to help you learn and master your revision effectively and, in some cases, evolve your current revision strategies.

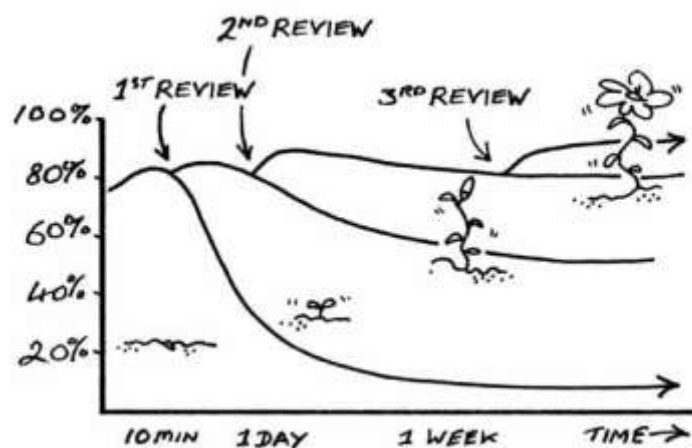


INITIAL MEMORY



Research has proven that information you learn is quickly lost or forgotten without regular review. You leave a lesson and unless you review your notes within an hour, a day, a week or a month, you will forget most of what you learn.

REVIEW STRATEGY



A review strategy (as demonstrated above), has been proven to significantly aid retrieval of information and memory.

A SELF EVALUATION OF YOUR PRACTICE

Complete the table below to identify what you currently do to improve your grades.

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Reading through class notes			
Using online resources			
Using course textbooks			
Using thinking maps / thinking tools			
Making / re-making notes			
Highlighting / colour coding			
Using flashcards			
Using a revision wall to display your learning			
Writing exam answers under timed conditions			
Reading model answers			
Using past exam questions and planning answers			
Marking your own work to a mark scheme			
Studying mark schemes or examiner's reports			
Working with other students in pairs / groups			
Comparing model answers against your own work			
Creating your own exam questions			
Handing in extra exam work for marking			
One-to-one discussions with teachers / tutor			

High Impact Learning strategies (HILs)

Evidence shows that you need to be actively involved in your learning, to actively manage your time, develop a range of techniques and identify with how you learn best. Learning together with teachers and peers is essential but taking responsibility and evaluating ones' progress is key. (Hattie 2008)

High Impact learning strategies are designed to help you succeed in your studies. They link into developing fantastic independent learning skills that you will need in the work place and or university. They relate to what you can do to help yourself and the best results, year on year, come to those who take the time consistently to work at these learning strategies. HILs underline all the learning and VESPA is used to support this process

TASK: read through the learning strategies overleaf and rate how well you are currently implementing them.

THE REVISION QUESTIONNAIRE

It's been found that there is a strong link between the kind of revision someone does and the outcomes they get. So which student will do better in an exam?

- **Student 1** does fifteen hours' revision – all of it reading through class notes
- **Student 2** does only ten hours' revision – two hours making thinking-maps, two hours creating flash cards of key terms, three hours writing timed essays, two hours working through past paper questions and looking for patterns in the questions asked, and half an hour attempting to answer the hardest question they could find, followed by a half an hour talking it through with their teacher. They then spend five hours shopping with their friends and watching TV.

You can make less mean more. Try this questionnaire:

Name: _____ Subject: _____

1. How many hours of effective, independent work do you do on your subjects outside of class? Please state the time spent on each subject.
2. What sort of activities do you do? Use the table below:

		Always	Sometimes	Never
Reading through class notes	C			
Using resources on the school drive & SMHW	C			
Using course text books	C			
Thinking maps / mind-maps / diagrams	C			
Making/remaking class notes	C			
Highlighting/colour coding	C			
Flash cards	C			
Using a revision wall to display your learning	C			
Writing exam answers under timed conditions	S			
Reading model / top level answers	S			
Using past paper questions and planning answers	S			
Marking your own work, following a mark scheme	F			
Studying mark schemes or examiner's reports	F			
Working with other students in groups or pairs	F			
Comparing model answers against your own work	F			
Creating your own exam questions	F			
Handing in extra exam work for marking	F			
One-to-one discussions with teachers / tutors	F			

3. Additional activities not mentioned above:

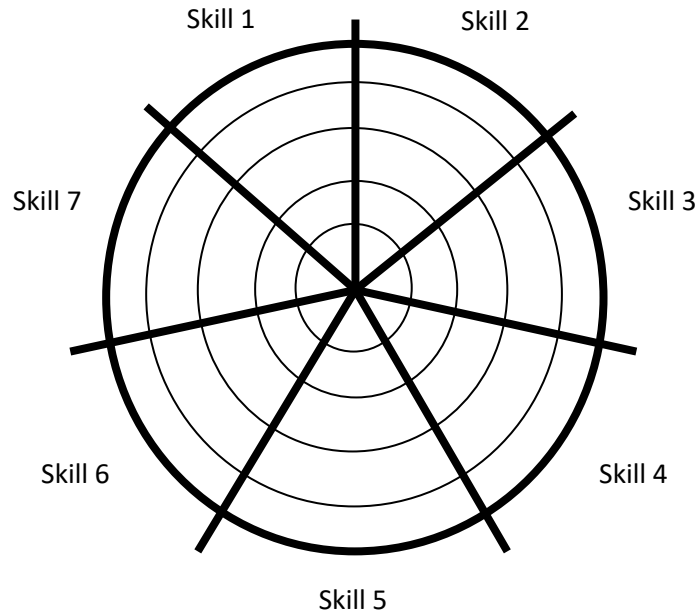
4. Write a brief account of what you do if you can't understand something (e.g. try again, read text books, check the school's website / SMHW, see teachers, see other students).

You will notice some activities have a 'C' next to them – these are the *content* techniques. Some have an 'S' next to them – these are the *skills* techniques. Others have an 'F' next to them – these are the *feedback* techniques.

Notice in the example that student 1 only does content revision, while student 2 does all three stages and then takes some time off. In our experience, student 2 will pretty much always achieve a better grade than student 1. And they put in fewer hours.

Make sure you do some revision for each of C, S and F!

KNOW THE SKILLS

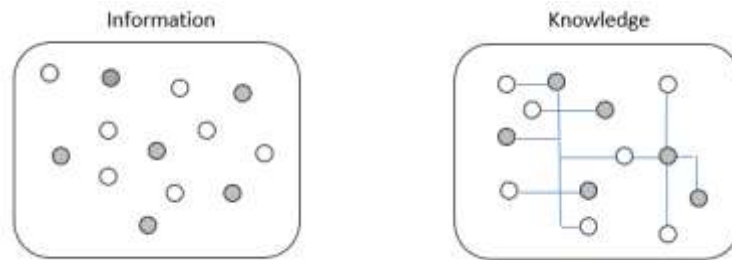


The slice of the target diagram is coloured depending on how confident and practiced you feel with a particular skill – a fully coloured slice for a skill that you feel is fully developed and a totally empty slice for a skill that needs a lot of work.

Meet with your subject teachers and ask them, 'What are the seven skills that I need to master to get an A?' Read your syllabuses and look at the assessment objectives (AO's), which are the skills the examiner is looking for? Then begin a regular self-assessment of those skills.

GRAPHIC ORGANISERS

There is a difference between information and knowledge.



Information on the left, is a loose collection of facts, with no connections between them, no overall understanding, so there is very little we can do with it. Information won't help you pass an exam or master a skill. On the right, you can see that knowledge is connected information. The job of any learner is to turn information into knowledge.

So how do we build these connections to turn information into knowledge? One way is by reorganising pieces of information.

Graphic organiser can help you do this. Some are very simple:

- Make a thinking map / mind-map of the information
- Make a comparison table (or double bubble) and pull out the similarities and differences between two studies, methods, people, characters or historical events.
- Make a flow map to summarise a process, sequence or series of events.
- Make a graph to represent the data.

Notice the focus on action here – each of our suggestions begins with 'make'. That's you being active, engaging with information and reorganising it so it becomes knowledge.

Alternatively, you can use complex graphic organisers. They usually take the form of a metaphor, where you turn something into something else.

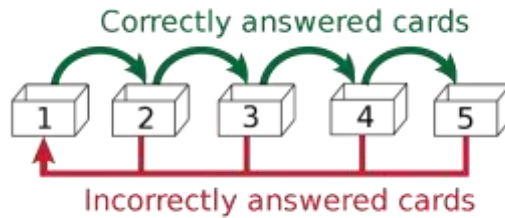
For example, summarise everything you know about a topic using the metaphor of a tree.



- What key information forms the trunk?
- What underlying information makes the roots?
- What are the important branches?
- What subsections of information become the twigs and leaves?

If this metaphor works for you, try the following:

- A castle with separate turrets and a strong foundation
- A stream flowing into a river and then a sea / ocean
- A village with a central square and streets around it.



THE LEITNER BOX

The Leitner box, which was developed by a German scientist called Sebastian Leitner, is a really effective, easy-to-develop practice and recall system. It's based on using **flash cards** to learn and then recall information, so this activity will need a whole bunch of subject-related flash cards. The cards are used as normal to record quick, easy-to-read bullet-pointed information about topics.

Leitner suggests that when we have a large amount of information to learn on flash cards, we tend to gravitate towards the cards we already know and subconsciously avoid those we find difficult. To circumvent this, you create four subsections in your box (or four separate boxes):

- **Box 1** – Here you put items for frequent practice. This is the stuff you're not remembering well – it needs regular review and rereading because you're making mistakes when you practice recalling it or you don't know it at all. Around 40% of your time should be spent hammering the content of these cards. When you score a victory and fully recall a card, you move it down to box 2.
- **Box 2** – About 30% of your time is spent here. It is the stuff you've only just moved out of box 1 or learning that still trips you up or confuses you in any way. This material should be moving up (if you're not remembering it) or down (if you've nailed it) fairly regularly.
- **Box 3** – You spend 20% of your time here, and you nearly always get this stuff correct when you test yourself on it. You feel confident, even when the material is complex. However, if you dip in here and make any mistakes in recall at all, the information must be moved back into box 2.
- **Box 4** – You begin with only a small number of cards here. This is the material you consider easy. You always get it right, so you need only spend 10% of your time checking stuff in this box. However, and this is key, nothing ever leaves this box because you know it so well. No matter how confident you feel, you still check it every now and again.

If you practice your recall in this way, you will find you won't neglect information. You won't get caught by the 'familiarity trap' – the feeling that you know something so well you never need to test yourself on it. Plus, you keep your focus where it needs to be: on the tough stuff you keep forgetting.



TWO SLOW, ONE FAST

This idea is borrowed from the sporting world. In sport, the word 'drill' is often used to describe practice. A drill is specific and focused practice where all the chaos and uncertainty of the actual game is removed. Instead, a single skill is focused on and repeated. After some time working on a drill, a player might then play a game in which the particular is tested.

Does this work with study too? With a maths problem or a history essay? The answer is yes.

- **Go slow.** To begin with you should try the equivalent of a drill. You're taking out the stress, worry and complexity, so you're not thinking about the chaos and uncertainty of doing an exam. You're going slowly, paying attention to what you do. This might mean taking half an hour to work through a short answer exam question, twenty minutes on a maths problem, an hour on a couple of science questions or half an hour writing a single killer paragraph for an essay.
- **Go fast.** Then you try to apply the learning in a 'game' situation – in other words, under exam conditions. Pick an exam question, work out how long you would have in the exam and see whether you can perform at the same level but under the pressure of time.

Two Slow, One Fast describes the best sequence for developing a skill. Do it twice slowly and safely, paying attention to what you're doing and why you're doing it. Then do it fast and see how you cope. You won't be perfect first time, but you will certainly accelerate the speed at which you get better.



RIGHT, WRONG, RIGHT

One way to burn understanding into your brain, particularly a skill, is to find someone who does it well. It might be your teacher or a fellow student, someone in your class or someone in the year above. Find an example of them doing it right. It might be a complex mathematical problem worked through, a definition and example question in social science, a perfect paragraph or a calculation in Chemistry or Physics.

Once you've got the example, you can do the following activity. We've found it works well at helping students see the difference between a successful answer and unsuccessful answer by making you focus on the differences between wrong and right.

The principle is very simple. It goes like this:

1. Using your example, copy the skill. You must do it right. It might be that you write a paragraph that borrows the best bits from the example you've got, or you might solve a very similar mathematical problem following your example.
2. Then do it wrong. Do it the way you've been doing it. Examine the differences. Where exactly do you go wrong? What is the result of that error? Where does it lead? How does wrong look different?
3. Then copy the skill right again.

You go – right, wrong, right. The two rights start to burn the understanding into your brain. The wrong in the middle helps you see why the wrong is wrong.



LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

Professor James Reason of the University of Manchester has done a lot of work about mistakes that lead to disasters (aeroplane crashes, mistakes in surgery, etc...). His findings can be applied to mistakes we make whenever we do something challenging. Luckily, the mistakes you make don't have any serious consequences – at least not compared to an air crash.

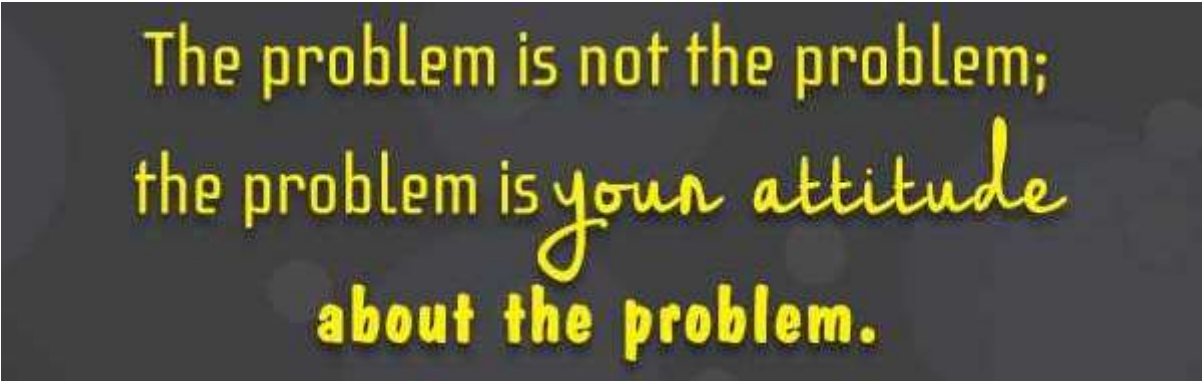
If you want to accelerate the speed at which you get good at something, it helps if you do the following:

1. Make mistakes. This may sound obvious but some students feel frightened or depressed when they make mistakes, so they avoid making them. If a piece of work is difficult and they are likely to make lots of mistakes, they copy someone else's or 'forget' to hand it in. You must make mistakes in order to learn from them.
2. Once the error is made, grab it. Mistakes are information. Don't ignore them, hide them or quickly correct them. Study them.
3. Categorise your mistake and work out why it happened. Professor Reason argues that there are three broad reasons for error:

Type of Mistake	Possible response
<p>1. Active mistake The wrong process is carried out (e.g. the calculation goes wrong because an incorrect approach is used, the mark scheme isn't present, the student doesn't know what to do to get a high mark).</p>	<p>Examine processes. Categorise them. Attach processes to problems – are you using the right one?</p>
<p>2. Slip up The correct process is chosen but errors in execution lead to a lower mark (e.g. a paragraph lacks detail or is missing a key component, a science or maths solution works up to a point and then breaks down, you run out of time).</p>	<p>Practice the process. Collect examples of the process being done well.</p>
<p>3. Blackout The information needed to complete the challenge is either missing or forgotten.</p>	<p>Review notes and knowledge. Check another student's notes. Use course textbooks to strengthen learning. Strengthen recall through revision techniques.</p>

Try categorising your errors, then draw up a list of actions you could take to reduce the chances of that error occurring again.

5.ATTITUDE



The problem is not the problem;
the problem is *your attitude*
about the problem.

Simply put, attitude is a settled way of thinking that has been established over a period of time and sufficiently embedded to colour a person's perception of anything that might happen to them.

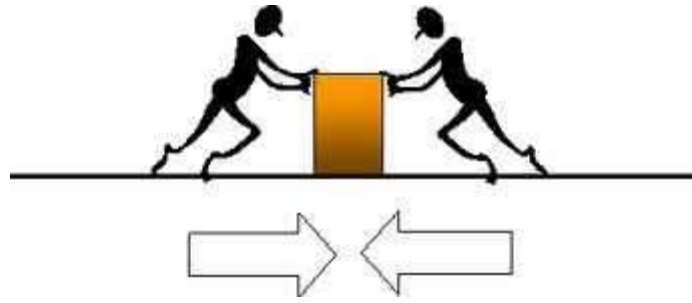
When we talk about a student's attitude we generally mean:

- Their process of learning (the presence or absence of a growth mindset)
 - Their buoyancy and positivity
 - Their response to challenge or difficulty
 - Their resilience and, of course, their grit.

Questions to ask yourself

- How do you respond when you get work back?
- Are there any people or activities, (blockers) that are stopping you from achieving?
- How do you respond to not getting the grade that you want?

The following pages are designed to develop an insight into your existing attitude. They aim to help you develop a positive attitude about yourself, your ability and your learning. They don't work for everyone, but you may find one or two that help elicit some change in your existing attitude.





FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Is a method for listing, discussing and assessing the various forces for and against a proposed challenge you are facing. It helps you look at the big picture by analysing all of the forces impacting on you and weighing up the pros and cons. Having identified these, you can then develop strategies to reduce the impact of the opposing forces and strengthen the supporting forces. So, if you are finding it difficult to motivate yourself towards a certain aspect of your studies, this might be the one for you.

Forces that help you achieve the challenge are called 'driving forces'. Forces that work against the challenge are called 'restraining forces'. Chart the forces by listing, in strength scale, the driving forces on the left and the restraining forces on the right. The important thing to do is to make sure the driving forces are more compelling than the restraining forces.

Have a go with a challenge you are facing.

The Challenge

Driving forces 	Current state	 Restraining forces



STOPPING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

In his 1998 book, *'How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable About Anything'*, American psychologist Albert Ellis looked at irrational and negative thinking experienced by people in times of stress. He particularly looked at types of thoughts that people experience when things go badly. He called this 'crooked thinking'.

His work can be directly applied to students in stressful situations – see if you've experienced these kinds of thoughts when things go wrong:

- Not fair thinking: *'I don't deserve this treatment. Things shouldn't be like this.'*
- Catastrophe thinking: *'If this goes wrong, it'll be a total nightmare.'*
- Stopper thinking: *'I'm useless. I can't do this. I'm bound to screw up.'*
- Illogical thinking: *'If this bad thing happens, this one will surely follow.'*
- Blaming thinking: *'It's his fault. It's everyone's fault except mine.'*
- Overgeneralising: *'I never get the breaks. This always happens to me. Everything is going wrong in my life.'*

Ellis argues that the first step was for the individual to recognise when they were slipping into negative thinking. Once they could do that, his suggestion was 'reframing the thought positively'. He said this meant being hard on yourself. Only one person could be in charge of your thoughts – you. So, you have to be firm, strong and not take any nonsense.

- Not fair thinking comes: *'I did what I could do. It's a setback but I can handle it.'*
- Catastrophe thinking: *'I'm going to perform well. I'm well prepared.'*
- Stopper thinking: *'I'm learning. I'm getting better each time I hit a challenge like this.'*
- Illogical thinking: *'There's no direct connection between this and that. The past does not equal the future. Tomorrow's another day.'*
- Blaming thinking: *'It's happened now. It doesn't matter whose fault it was. The important thing is to move on and learn from it.'*
- Overgeneralising: *'There are a few problems I am dealing with at the moment. Everyone has tough times and I'm no exception. But I know I'm strong enough to cope.'*

Coaching exercise

These are the kinds of thoughts you might find yourself, or hear others, expressing in difficult times. Take the statements below and see how you might reframe them into something more positive.

- I've never been good at exams
- Stuff like this always happens to me
- If my report is bad, my mum and dad are going to hate me
- I'm only going to fail, so what's the point in trying?
- The teacher doesn't like me
- Nothing goes right for me. Why should Geography be any different?
- I've been rubbish at science since primary school. I should never have picked it for an A-Level.
- I'm not going to get the grades to get to university, so I'll end up without a job and have a miserable life.
- If I fail this mock, it will mean the whole term has been disaster.
- This is typical of my life. Nothing is easy or straightforward. I'm sick of it.

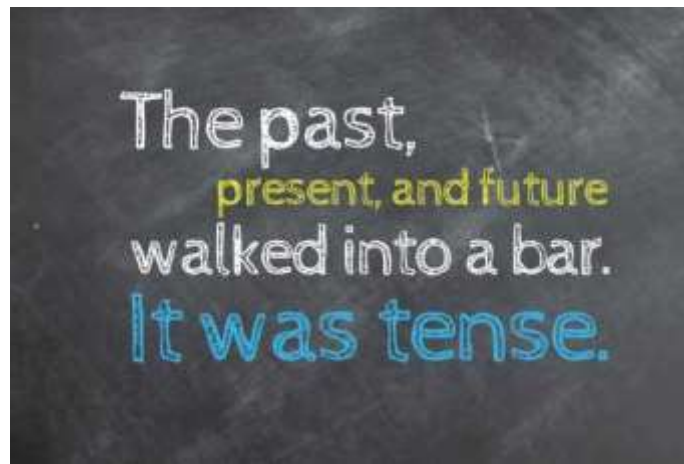


KILL YOUR CRITIC

Popular psychology often refers to the 'inner critic' – the voice inside our heads that pokes fun at our achievements, hopes and dreams. Some people have inner critics with such strong voices that they are too scared to commit to anything – we've worked with students who couldn't bring themselves to admit (even to a teacher or parent) what their dream or goal was.

If this is you, try the following activities to improve your confidence in yourself. Killing your critic isn't easy, but there are some ways forward.

- Name your critic. Seriously. Some students find it easier to dismiss the voice if they've given it a silly name.
- Listen to it – recognise its voice. Next time you hear it, label it: 'That's my inner critic.' At least you will start recognising it.
- Kill all comparisons. Let the inner critic say what it wants for ten minutes but all comparisons are banned. If it tries telling you, 'You're not as good as...' shut it down. It's called 'imposter syndrome' when you feel you are a fraud. 'I don't deserve to be here' or 'others are cleverer than me' are common feelings and messages. Refuse to accept the voice if it tries any comparisons like these.
- Challenge your inner critic with data, such as your GCSE grades or the last grade you got on a piece of work. Or challenge your inner critic with a demand: 'Well, if you think that, what should I do about it? Got any ideas?'
- Start working on something new but tell your inner critic you're just messing about. This is apparently a tactic used regularly in advertising and movie writing. You say to yourself, 'I'm just messing around here, making a few sketches or writing a few words, it's just a bit of fun...'
- Invite it to come back at another time. This is a good one. You say, 'I'd appreciate your constructive criticism when this is finished.' Set a date and write it down. Say to yourself, 'I'll listen to my critic – in a week's time for fifteen minutes.'



THERE AND BACK

This activity has been used successfully with adults experiencing difficulties in their work or personal life. It's a balancing exercise that frees up the mind and lets you make sense of hundreds of competing thoughts, ideas, worries and fears. So, if you're in a muddle, if you're struggling to feel positive or if you're feeling gloomy, this one might work for you.

The human brain works more effectively with good blood flow, so walking is essential to this activity. After you walk, you will need a half an hour to collect your thoughts, jotting things down and making notes. Alternatively, you can use the voice recorder on a mobile phone to record your thoughts and ideas as you go. For this activity to work, you need to be disciplined and follow these rules to the letter.

Block out an hour of your time. You must be alone and undisturbed for this hour. Choose a destination that is about 20 minutes' walk away. While you walk there, you can only think positive thoughts. Your topic is: things I am good at and things I am thankful for. Nothing else can enter your mind. Bully yourself into staying on these two topics. Record your thoughts or list them quickly on a notepad.

Then turn around and return to your starting point. While you walk back, you can address the problems you think you have, but here is the rule – your topic is: things I can do to solve my problems. Be strong with yourself. This is the only thing you can think about. When you arrive back, take a few minutes alone and make a note of your thoughts and ideas.

A final thought: worry is a call to action. If you're worrying, make a list of actions and then act on what you have listed. If you don't change things, things don't change.

Some people repeat this activity a couple of times a month to help them refocus. One person we know has the top of a hill as their destination – they say that walking down it helps them to relax after the hard slog of getting to the top, and they always come up with actions they can take to solve problems on the way down.



FALLING FORWARDS

American journalist Dan Coyle (author of *The Talent Code* and *The Little Book of Talent*) argues that mistakes are information. He says that those who have become brilliant at something have got better at it quickly because they have made a lot of mistakes and they have paid attention to their mistakes and drawn the learning out of them.

So, failure is important if we are ultimately going to succeed. There are, however, different attitudes to failure. Some students hate it and avoid it at all costs. It makes them feel embarrassed, humiliated, and worthless. They hide mistakes, don't complete tests or skip hard homework so they can avoid failing. As a result, they make slower progress.

Other students recognise the importance of failure. Your job is to try to become one of those people. John Maxwell puts it this way in his book *Falling Forward* (2012): some people fall backwards (the failure takes them in a backwards direction), whereas some people fall forwards (the failure accelerates their progress).

Have a look at the characteristics Maxwell associates with these different types of falling in the table below.

Falling backwards	Falling Forwards
Blaming others	Taking responsibility
Repeating the same mistake	Learning from each mistake
Expecting never to fail	Knowing failure is part of the process
Expecting to fail continuously	Maintaining a positive attitude
Accepting tradition blindly	Challenge outdated assumptions
Being limited by past mistakes	Taking new risks
Thinking 'I'm a failure'	Believing something didn't work
Withdrawing effort	Persevering

Now try to adapt your thinking so that it takes in the statements from the right-hand column.

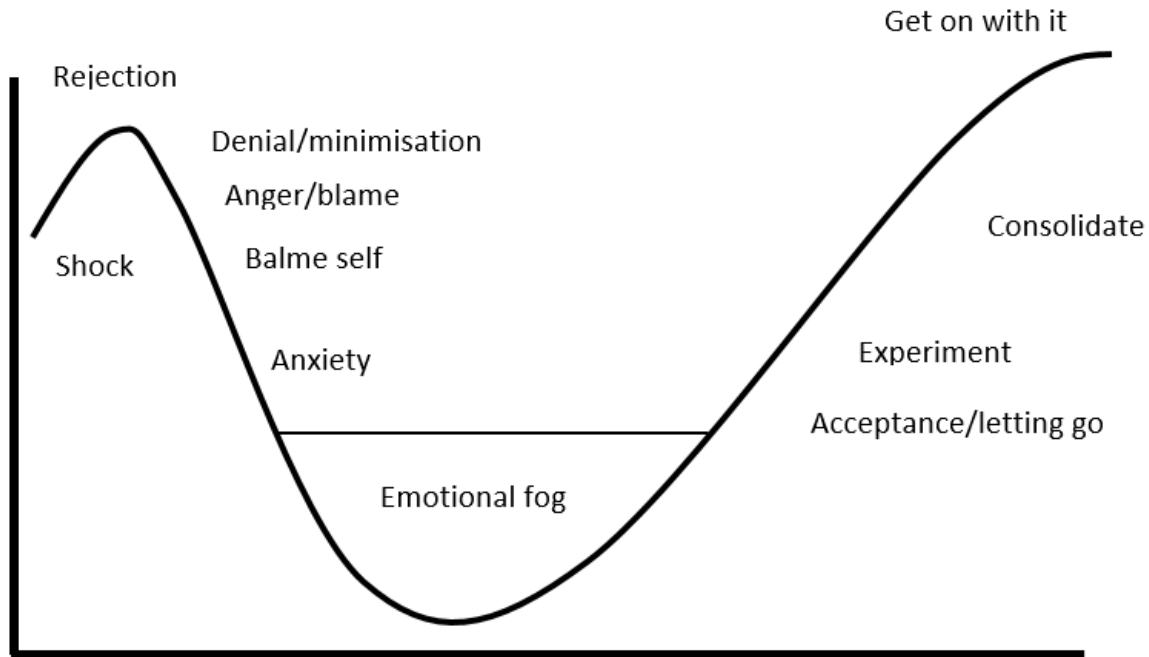
- Take a recent failure and describe it in a paragraph. It might be a test, essay or homework that went badly.
- Now look at your teacher's feedback. What are they picking out as areas of weakness? Make some notes about this, rephrasing their feedback in your own words.
- Finish by making a simple list: what are you doing differently next time?

THE CHANGE CURVE

The change curve is based on a model originally developed in the 1960's by psychologist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross to explain the phases people go through during the grieving process. Kubler-Ross proposed that a terminally ill patient would progress through certain stages of grief when informed of their illness. Nowadays, the curve is used to help people understand their reactions to significant change in their lives.

Starting A-Level study is a significant change in any student's life and, like any change, it's likely that you will experience some of the following feelings.

The Change Curve



Think about your response to A-Level. We've heard things like this:

- **Rejection:** 'I don't believe what you're telling me about A-Level study. It doesn't seem any different. I'll carry on as normal.'
- **Denial/minimisation:** 'I'm fine. It'll be alright. Stop hassling me about how different it is.'
- **Anger:** 'I actually hate this. The teachers are rubbish. The subjects are nothing like they said they would be. I wish I'd never started or gone to another school/college.'
- **Blame self:** 'It turns out I'm just not clever enough to do this.'
- **Anxiety:** 'Everyone else is better than me. I'm missing deadlines. I'm not sleeping well. I don't understand the work. I'm not enjoying the challenge at all. I'm scared I'll fail.'
- **Emotional fog:** Withdrawing effort. Giving up.
- **Acceptance/letting go:** 'Things are different now. It's hard, but I'm getting to grips with it.'
- **Experiment/consolidate/get on with it:** 'I'm getting better at this. My grades aren't great but they're improving. There are some parts of these courses I like.'

How does this help? First, you're not alone. Everyone goes through these feelings. Acknowledge and accept them. Second, some students go faster than others, but for most people it takes until the spring to get through the fog. Third, wherever you are on the curve, keep your eyes on the next stage. You *will* get there!



THE VAMPIRE TEST

Jim Rohn is an entrepreneur and writer who studies success. In essence, he argues that those who surround themselves with good people become good – those who surround themselves with hard working people become hard working. Equally, those who surround themselves with lazy people become lazy.

This is something we see every year: promising students who have a friendship group which almost enforces disengagement. The group will mock or punish any group member who is enjoying study, succeeding or working hard. It's sometimes difficult to tell if it's happening to you, and by the time you've figured it out it can be too late.

Taking the test

Writer and artist Austin Kleon has a solution. He calls it the vampire test, and he explains it in his book, *Show Your Work!* Kleon advises that 'if, after hanging out with someone you feel worn out and depleted, that person is a vampire. If, after hanging out with someone you still feel full of energy, that person is not a vampire' (2014, p. 129).

Think about the five people you spend most time with and ask yourself five questions about them:

1. Are they positive people?
2. Do they enjoy their lives?
3. Are they a good influence?
4. Have they helped you through problems?
5. Do they make you feel good about yourself and about life?

If you answer 'no' to these questions, can you list the names of five people who might be better students to spend time with?



STAND TALL

If you're a football fan, what do you do when your team scores a goal? What do you do if you win when playing a game or listening to your favourite band? For most people the answer is to stand up tall with their arms outstretched – something similar to the pose you often used to see Usain Bolt adopt as he crossed the finish line in the 100m.

Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard University, has looked at why people adopt this pose and the effects it can have on your physiology. She has found that by changing your physiology, (or your posture) you can have a profound effect on how you feel. In her 2012 TED talk, *'Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are'*, she argues that by standing in certain 'power poses' you can increase your confidence and self-esteem, enhance your memory and reduce feelings of fear.

Cuddy goes on to argue that weaker postures, (such as curling up, making yourself small or moving into defensive positions) trigger other psychological responses – feelings of imminent danger, stress or threat. And yet we often see nervous students hunched over their notes or hiding in a corner in those last few moments before an exam.

Instead we think it's worth trying more confident and powerful postures before taking final exams or important assessments.

Here's how you do it...

Power Pose 1

Stand tall with your hands on your hips and elbows pointing out. Your feet should be approximately one foot apart. Look straight ahead and think of a time you felt confident, strong and in control. Hold the pose for as long as you can. Aim for five minutes. You may need to begin with two to three minutes and build up.

Power Pose 2

You will need a little more space for this one. Stand as above, but this time put your arms above your head, stretched out like the arms of a clock at the 10 to 2 position. Again, hold your head high, stick your chest out and think about a time you felt really confident. And again, if you can, hold the pose for five minutes.

These poses are positive and confidence building – but not ones you might feel comfortable doing in public. Therefore, don't think of this as an activity you can only do outside an exam hall. We've found standing tall can also benefit students when they hit a block in their revision.

So, next time you're working away in your room and you hit a block, don't hunch yourself over your notes. Take a break and stand in the power pose!