

# DOWN HIGH SCHOOL



## LEARNING TO LEARN

Revision and Learning Methodologies  
A Guide for Pupils and their Parents

- "I don't know how to revise."
- "I revise by reading and re-reading my notes loads of times."
- "I put off revision until the last minute."
- "I cannot remember things."
- "Revision is boring."
- "He/she doesn't know how to start his/her revision."

The statements above have been mentioned by pupils and parents in conversations with teachers during the past year. A lot of students crisis-manage their revision by cramming and use their time inefficiently because revision consists primarily (or solely) of simply reading through their notes. For many pupils, especially boys, this is monotonous and unrewarding.

The Study Skills initiative, led by the members of the Learning and Teaching Committee, is about pupils equipping themselves with the techniques and strategies that help them to become better learners and allow them to prepare more effectively for the examinations they need. Equally important is the expectation that pupils in Down High School can, over time, become better, less dependent learners who can approach university level education with the confidence that comes from higher levels of reflectiveness, resourcefulness and resilience.

The emphasis on study skills this year is the beginning of a process of building pupils' **learning power** that will allow them to become better learners at home and in the classroom. This was referred to as "**Learning to Learn**".

Our Homework Diaries include age-appropriate study skills advice created by the Learning and Teaching Committee, and every year group attended a study skills seminar in the Assembly Hall during the Autumn Term (2014). Study skills methodologies were also promoted within individual subject areas as part of the departmental planning process for 2010-11 and beyond.

**It is hoped that the methodologies set out in this guide will help pupils in all age groups. The strategies can be made more sophisticated in Years 11-14.**

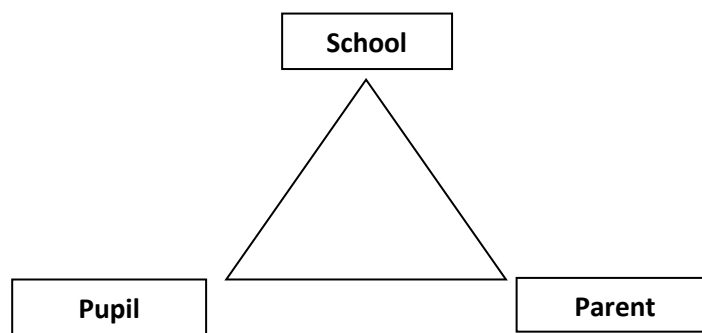
Your child will face a number of learning challenges in their quest for success and certain behaviours will be encouraged as they progress through Down High:

- Being more self-motivated and taking more responsibility for their own learning.
- Asking questions when they do not understand. This requires both confidence and curiosity in his/her own learning.
- Developing their abilities to overcome frustrations, and strategies for persisting when they are learning material they find challenging. Our advice would be: "If it's hard, you're learning." Pupils need to be shown how to become more resilient, allowing setbacks to become valuable learning moments.
- Organising themselves, their notes and information on different subjects - and different topics within these.
- Organising and planning their **time** over longer periods

- Understanding the exam structure and the relative importance of each piece of work to their final grade.
- Planning and carrying out revision, using a variety of methodologies that work for them and avoiding the inefficient practice of merely reading and re-reading notes.
- Perfecting exam 'technique' by answering questions and "doing" examples.

### **Isn't it the School's job to be helping pupils to achieve academic success?**

Of course, the School will provide the teaching and learning support your child needs as he/she progresses through Down High, but we view parents as an important part of the triangular relationship that promotes both a child's happiness and security in school - and also their learning power.



Helping your child to succeed will vary according to their needs and strengths. You may find that you will have little to do in some of the areas covered in this booklet while, in others, more support will be required. Some children will need very little help, but some will require assistance with homework and revision timetables, others with sorting and filing notes and handouts. A parent's role may be in one or more of the following:

- Providing the tools for homework and revision - a quiet space, pens, paper and other necessities.
- Showing an interest in the subjects being revised, helping as your child reviews his/her work and testing them when they ask you.
- Helping your child break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and suggesting ways in which your son/daughter can best spend their revision time.
- Agreeing the rules for homework and revision, helping your child to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun' stuff and revising the plans as necessary.
- Supporting your child in sticking to the revision plan and keeping to the start and finishing times they have agreed.
- Providing favourite snacks and water for revision periods.
- Keeping up with regular 'check-ins'. Showing an interest in how the revision is going, talking through any difficulties and being prepared to help them reschedule their planning if necessary.
- Keeping things in perspective. Your child may not be doing things the way you would do them or as often as you would like but they are doing the best they can in the ways that work for them.

## **Getting the Basics Right**

In order to ensure that you achieve your potential in school, it is important that you try to develop good study habits right from the beginning of your Down High career. Here are some helpful tips that will improve the quality of your studying:

### **Where to study**

You can study anywhere, but obviously, some places are better than others. The place you choose, whether your bedroom, your garage, or another room in your house, should not be full of distractions. Your study space should be as quiet and comfortable as possible. Avoid somewhere where you will be interrupted. Avoid revising while the TV is switched on! Switch off your mobile phone when studying.

### **Don't try to do too much all at once.**

If you try to do too much studying at one time, you will tire and your revision will not be very effective. Study in chunks: 20-50 minute time periods followed by a brief break (5-10 minutes) is the most effective way to study.

### **Plan specific times for studying.**

Time is a very valuable resource. It is also one of the most wasted of resources. It is important to use your time productively. Devise a timetable for completing your homework or a revision schedule before exams. Sticking to your schedule can be tough - but it will help to ensure that you do not simply revise those subjects that you like or find easiest.

## **Creating the Right Atmosphere**

### **Sleep well**

The right amount of sleep is essential for being able to learn. Most of us need eight hours sleep each night. Before going to bed, try and spend some time relaxing so that the quality of your sleep is good. Before going to bed, try to relax by reading a book or listening to some music. Avoid watching TV or playing computer games late into the evening.

### **You are what you eat!**

Eating the right foods will help your brain work better and can help sharpen your memory, improve your mood and keep your mind active.

Eating a well-balanced [diet](#) that includes foods from all the food groups is important. Breakfast helps to boost your thinking power so make sure that you have breakfast every morning. If you don't have time, a breakfast club operates in the school canteen from 8.30am every morning. Drinking water is also important to help the brain to function. During the school day, you have access to free drinking water from the water fountains located around the school.

### **Have a break!**

In order to make the most of your studying, it is important that you take regular breaks and get fresh air.

**Most importantly...remain positive as you CAN do it!**

### Example of revision timetable:-

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
4-5 pm		<i>After-school club</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>After-school club</i>	<i>Geography</i>	<i>Three hours - subjects you find most difficult</i>	
5-6 pm	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Dinner</i>		
6-7 pm	<i>Maths</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>RS</i>	<i>Science</i>			
7-8 pm	<i>History</i>	<i>Technology</i>	<i>HE</i>	<i>English</i>			
8-9 pm							

### **Review schoolwork over the weekend.**

Your weekends should be times to enjoy, but taking a short time to review your work at the end of each week can be very beneficial. This will help you to retain information for longer.

### **How to make sure Learning Happens**

Some learning will happen without you realising it. For example, you'll find that it's easy to remember some lyrics from your favourite song without sitting down and memorising them.

### **Learning Styles**

People learn in a variety of ways and there are different models of learning styles; Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic being perhaps the best known. While a lot of research suggests that people are either visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners, recent investigations would suggest that pupils and adults learn using a **variety** of learning styles and are not necessarily pigeonholed into one of these categories.

The main learning styles are: Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic

**Visual Learners** - like to see information. They may create pictures in their mind to help remember things. Visual learners like using diagrams, videos and charts.

**Auditory Learners** - like to listen to information being read to them. They remember things they have heard. They enjoy using sophisticated language.

**Kinaesthetic Learners** - like to play with, or handle things. They remember doing practical work.

We each learn from a **combination** of these styles and it is a good idea to try to revise in a way that embraces a range of styles.

## SIMPLE REVISION STRATEGIES

Revision is not simply about reading your notes time and time again. Instead, you should adapt ways of helping you to remember important pieces of information and understand the material that you have studied across a range of subjects.

There are several ways in which you can make your revision work for you:

### 1. ASKING QUESTIONS - The 6 Ws

You can apply this exercise to many topics in a variety of subjects. Choose a topic and ask yourself six questions on it using the following prompts:

Who?  
How?  
When?  
What?  
Why?  
Where?

Make brief notes under each of these prompts or create a spider diagram - topics can include volcanoes, forces, shapes, reasons for the Normans coming to Ireland, religious groups, characters in a novel etc.

### 2. TEACH YOURSELF

For every topic, imagine yourself as a teacher who has the job of communicating difficult information in a way that is easily understood, well-structured and simplified into a number of key points. You can retain information by talking aloud and "teaching" the topic that you are revising. Prepare key words and definitions and perhaps six important points for each topic. Then teach the topic a family member, friend, pet or even a stuffed toy! It is estimated that we can take in **10% of what we see, 20% of what we hear, 50% of what we say** and hear and an amazing **95% of what we teach someone else**. This is why teachers are able to remember a lot of facts!

Give yourself three minutes to teach a topic. You will be amazed at the results. Talk into a voice recorder - many mobile phones have these functions!

### 3. FLASHCARDS

Flashcards are excellent in helping you to revise key topics. Put a question or a word on one side of a small piece of card and write out the definition or key facts on the other. Place the cards on a table and revise by remembering the important details before checking the answers by turning over the cards.

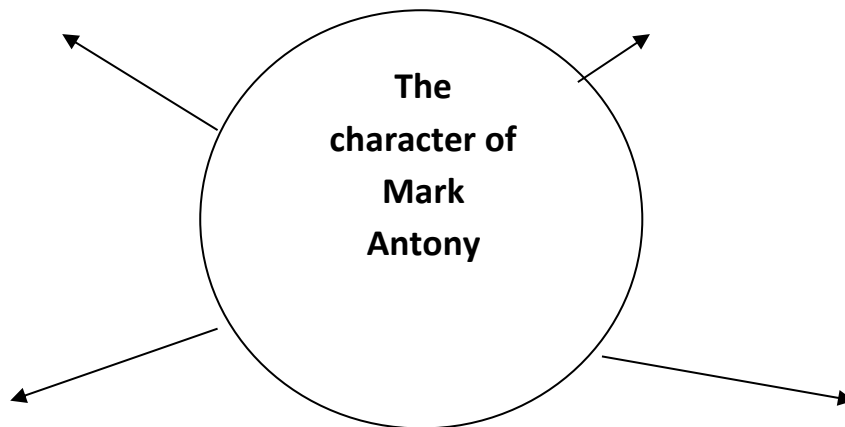
Buy coloured cardboard - a different colour for each subject - and carry these around with you. Work with a friend to test each other.

#### 4. NOTE MAKING

Revision means that you need to be active in the way that you learn. This will inevitably mean that you will need to write out information to help you recall certain information. The best way to recall information is to present it in an attractive manner.

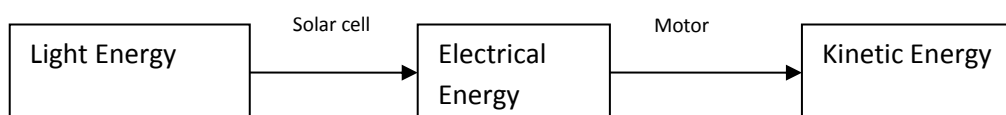
##### Spider Diagrams

- Record the topic in the spider's body
- Place key words at the end of each leg
- You can provide some information under the key words



##### Flow charts

A flow chart is a common type of diagram that represents a process.



You should use diagrams to help you to remember key points and details in all of your subjects. In Languages, you can create diagrams to help you to remember the days of the week, rooms in a house, seasons etc. Add pictures and colour.

You can also try **CLOSED BOOK NOTEMAKING**. This will allow you to test yourself after you have read over a section of notes on a topic in any subject. The point of this methodology is that it can help you get information out of your head and on to the page - a key element of exams.

##### Method:

- Take a piece of information and skim read through it
- Read it again and identify the six (or eight, ten etc) most important points - you can number these on the text
- Turn over your notes and write out the main points from memory

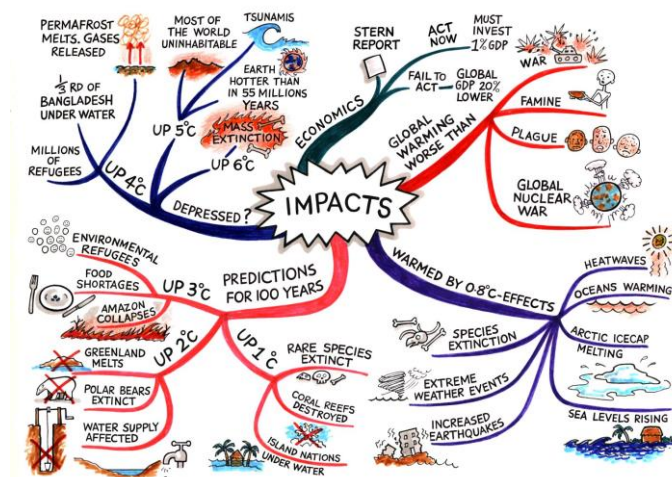
## 5. MIND-MAPS

You can use mind-mapping techniques to help you to absorb information IN ALL OF YOUR SUBJECTS. Developed by Tony Buzan, mind-maps are an excellent way of taking in information and allowing you to make all sorts of links and connections. This is how you mind-map:

- Take a large sheet of paper and turn it on its side
- In the centre of the page, draw a logo or heading that sums up the topic you are studying
- Draw a number of large branches coming out of the central topic heading - these are your key themes. Write the key theme along each branch
- Draw smaller branches coming out of the main branches and write along these as you begin to develop your topic
- At the end of branches, you can draw pictures that help you to memorise the information
- When you have finished your mind-map, it should resemble the picture that you would see if you were underground, looking up at the roots of a tree

You can begin practising mind-mapping by compiling a mind-map of your life so far. This is your central heading. Then draw and write along the main branches, e.g. where you live, your family, your friends, your hobbies and your pet. Develop each of these areas by creating additional branches and drawing pictures to represent some of the points that you make. Remember to use colours.

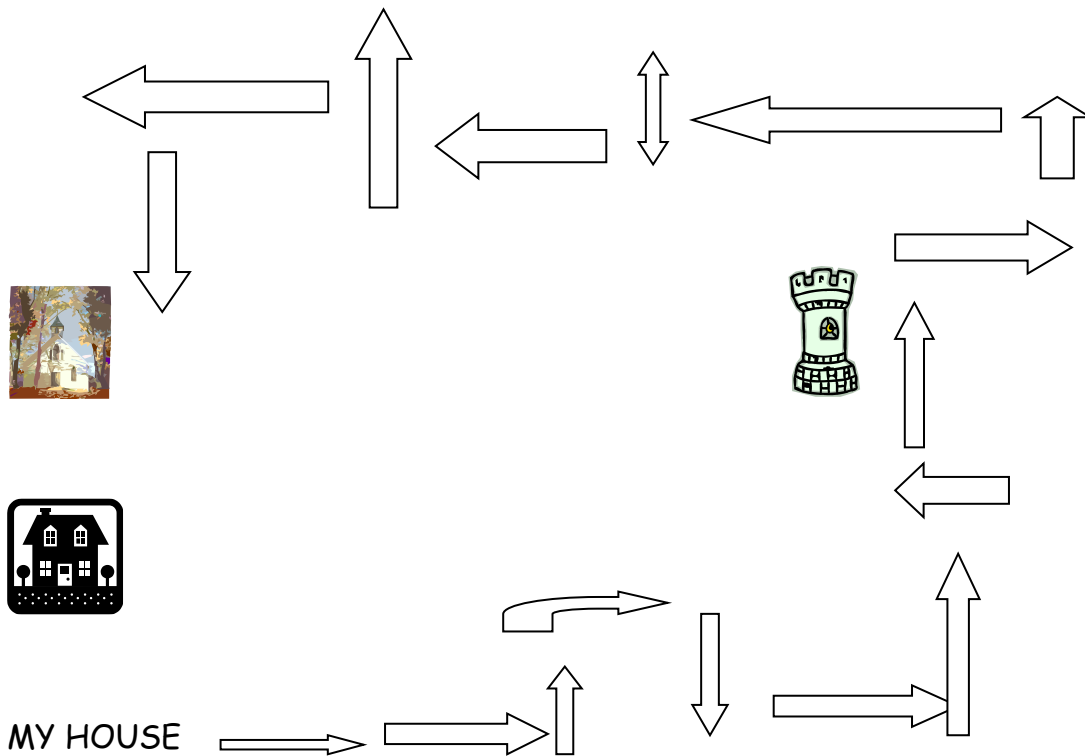
The following example gives you an idea of what a mind-map looks like.





## 6. STREET MAPPING

Another useful revision strategy is one which involves recording important information in a way that is familiar to you. Everyone can visualise a familiar walking route or car journey. You can revise by linking subject information to a map of your journey to school or to your friend's house. Every turn you take represent a key fact. When you are in an exam, you will be able to remember things by visualising your map. An example is set out below. Try something like this to help you remember the functions of the heart or the consequences of an earthquake. Write along the arrows and add to your map by drawing landmarks such as churches, forests, schools, shops etc.



## 7. SUPER-SUMMARIES

Super-summaries will help you to create single-page revision blitzes on important topics. These can be produced as bullet points, spider diagrams and mindmaps. Condense your learning onto a single sheet and add colour or pictures as aids to learning.

One possible method is to adopt the following approach to super-summarising:

"Ten things I need to know about John de Courcy"

"Ten things I need to know about safety in a laboratory"

"Twelve things I need to remember about food safety"

Try to use words rather than sentences in order to keep your super-summaries brief and memorable.

## 8. WRITING OUT SHORT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Efficient revision requires that you memorise and then practise recalling the key facts. Inefficient revision techniques can result in you struggling to get the key facts down on paper during a test but then readily recognising them when going over the test later in class. This is because you have successfully memorised the information but have **not** spent enough time practising recalling it.

An alternative to writing out summaries to help you to practise recall is to write out a series of questions and answers on the key facts. Each question and each answer should be written on separate lines. The answers should not be too long but a question can cover more than one key point, e.g., "What are the four main causes (or functions) of.....?" The fact that you are rephrasing the key information by turning it into a question and answer helps you to memorise the information.

After creating a set of 10 or 20 questions to cover a topic, you should read them a number of times, then practise recalling the information. To do this you should cover everything but the first question with another piece of paper. On reading the first question, you should recall the answer if able to do so. If you are unable to recall the answer with ease, simply reveal the answer and read it through. You should then continue with the full set of questions, recalling some answers and reading the others. Each time you repeat this process, you may be able to recall a greater proportion of the answers. Recalling the answers is excellent practice for what you will be required to do in some test questions.

It is of great importance that, when revising, you do not become unduly stressed or anxious, since a calm relaxed mind learns much more efficiently. Do not become cross with yourself when you are unable to recall an answer – simply reveal and read the answer. The ideal amount of time to be spent on memorising and on recalling will vary from pupil to pupil, but everyone needs to devote a significant proportion of their revision time to each activity.

Many people make the mistake of spending too much time putting information **into** their heads (i.e. memorising) and not enough time practising getting it **out of** their heads (i.e. recalling). This often means that you were unable to recall the information during the test, yet were able to recognise the correct answers afterwards. This method will help you to recall the information when it matters!

## 9. LYRICS AND RAPS

It is amazing to think that we can remember song lyrics and raps easily and yet we cannot always recall French verbs, Spanish tenses, scientific formulae, historical dates, capital cities and so on.

Another useful revision tool is to turn key themes into lyrics and raps. Make up raps on the Reformation or the periodic table, The Russian Revolution, weather systems, the reproductive system, the properties of triangles, population, the failure of the Weimar Republic, cells, the future tense, emigration, the role of the entrepreneur, the character of Romeo, the use of ICT in business, advertising in sport etc.

Practise these raps or songs and you will definitely remember them if a related question comes up in an exam.

## 10. FAMOUS PEOPLE

Another useful way to remember important subject information is to make connections with famous people - this could be rugby teams, football teams or pop/rock groups.

In History, for example, you can investigate the reasons for the Norman invasion of England by linking factors with members of the Irish rugby team - e.g.



Andrew Trimble tells me that William of Normandy had been promised the throne after Harold Godwinson swore an oath on holy relics.



Johnny Sexton tells me William was angry when Harold Godwinson became King of England in 1066.

Identify as many points as you can by connecting reasons to as many Irish players as you can.

This is a particularly popular revision strategy amongst boys. You can use top footballers (e.g. the Manchester City team) to help you revise any topic in any subject.

Boys and girls may find it useful to revise like this with reference to **singers, groups and celebrities**.



## 11. TEACHING TOPICS

It is a well-known fact that we learn effectively by teaching a topic to someone else. Pupils can revise in pairs, taking it in turns to teach an aspect of Geography, Science, Home Economics or any subject for that matter. Similarly, when revising maths, it is a good idea for the young person to TALK through his or her method - as if the topic is being taught. This will help to ensure that understanding is achieved. You may want to be taught a topic by your son or daughter - you can ask questions about what has been taught. A younger brother or sister can be entertained for hours by being taught!

## **12. PODCASTING**

One useful method that is helpful in auditory learning is podcasting. Young people are familiar with the concept and may download radio programmes to their phones or MP3 players.

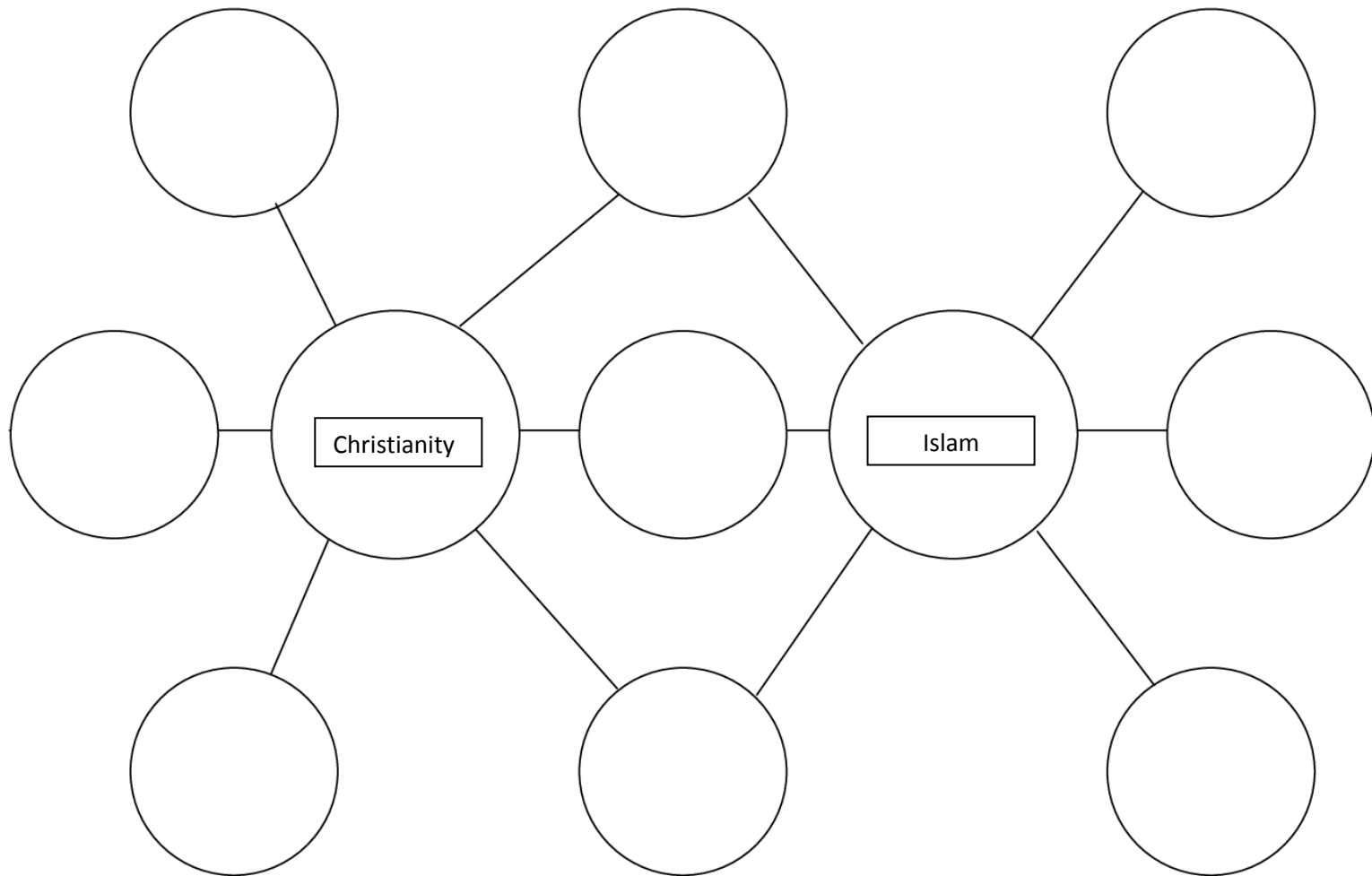
At a very simple level, your child may use the voice recorder function of their smart-phone to record and playback information on any of their subjects.

A more sophisticated approach is to download the free Audacity software and follow the simple instructions that will allow you to record topics and play them back. You can download the free software at: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

## **13. DOUBLE BUBBLE**

This is a very good technique for remembering the similarities and differences between two things - two characters in a novel, two religious faiths, two examples of colonisation.

The central circles can be used to show the similarities between the two things being compared, while the outer circles contain the points that make the two items different. See the model on the next page.



**Double Bubble Map for Comparing Similarities and Contrasting Differences**

## **RETAINING INFORMATION - THE KEYS TO LEARNING**

Educationalists have analysed the ways in which information is retained and it has been argued that there are seven keys to memory, six of which are listed below. We naturally remember things that are:

1. Funny
2. Outstanding
3. Personal
4. Emotional
5. Linked to our senses
6. The first and last thing we learn in a reading or revision session

With this in mind, try to remember your notes by making connections, rhymes, links or visual images. Make these funny and personal to you.

### **Managing Stress**

For most people, taking exams is a stressful. However, there are a number of things you can do to minimise anxiety.

#### **Before your exams**

##### **1. Don't Panic.**

Exam nerves are natural but panicking will only make things worse and you may not be able to think clearly.

##### **2. Stay positive.**

Believe in yourself. If you prepare for your exams properly you should do well. Try to create mental images of how happy you and your family will be if you do well.

##### **3. Don't bottle things up.**

If the exams are making you feel worried, talk to your friends, a family member or a teacher. Don't bottle things up.

##### **4. Plan.**

#### **Timetables and study plans**

Make sure you leave plenty of time to revise so that you don't have to cram at the last minute. If you plan you will become more confident and will be better prepared for your exams so you should also be more relaxed.

## **5. Ask for help.**

If you don't understand something ask someone for help. You may find that you can help a classmate in something they don't understand - you may be able to help each other. Don't stress yourself but take action to find out answers to problems.

## **6. Prepare everything you need for the exam.**

The night before the exam, make sure you have your calculator (if needed), your pens and pencils and a watch so you can monitor the time during the exam. Your teacher can advise you on what you are allowed to take into each examination.

## **During the exam**

### **1. Take deep breaths.**

Taking several long, slow, deep breaths will help to calm you down and help you feel more relaxed. Remember: positive thinking!

### **2. Reading instructions and questions.**

Make sure you read each question carefully and listen to instructions given by the invigilators. Read the front of the exam paper which has important information on what questions you are required to answer and how many marks are awarded. Ask an invigilator if you are unsure.

### **3. Staying in control.**

If your mind goes blank, don't panic! Panicking will just make it harder for you to remember what you learnt. Everyone panics. Put your pen down and take several long, slow, deep breaths until you feel more relaxed again.

## **Other important information**

### **Rest and relaxation**

Make sure you allow yourself time for fun and relaxation away from where you are studying so that you avoid exhaustion. Have regular breaks and get enough exercise and sleep to keep yourself relaxed and refreshed. Research shows that taking breaks (e.g. 10 minutes for every hour of studying) will help your brain to learn and remember things and also lengthen your concentration. You are not wasting time by taking some time out to relax from your studies but are helping yourself to work more effectively.

### **Eat and drink well**

Fizzy drinks, tea and coffee contain caffeine and this can mean that you're not able to think as clearly. You can keep your mind active by eating healthily and regularly. If you don't drink enough water you could dehydrate and you may suffer from headaches, tiredness and poor

concentration. On the morning of an exam, make sure you eat breakfast. Go for something like wholegrain cereals e.g. porridge, bran, egg, toast which are slow energy burners.

**GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR REVISION!**

If parents would like to ask questions about revision and learning to learn strategies, please do not hesitate to contact

Mr Dawson.