

WORK



SMART



NOT HARD

THE COMPLETE GUIDE
TO THE UK EDUCATION SYSTEM

UMAR SIDDIQUE

For my amazing teachers and friends at LIS

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WELCOME

Here's something that I thought I'd never do. Currently in quarantine for six months, I am on the verge of extreme boredom, and so as recommended by a friend, I am writing this book for as long as it keeps me occupied. English, being my least favourite subject throughout my time in education, was something that I had never enjoyed or saw the importance of. After doing some reflecting, I discovered the importance of English in writing and spreading knowledge through words. In this book, I aim to spread everything that I've learnt and acquired up until GCSEs, with the help of good friends of course, in the hope that many can succeed and do well in the UK education system. You will hopefully learn a bit more about me, and the secrets I have discovered to achieving good grades, despite the situation you may be in.

UMAR SIDDIQUE

Now you're probably wondering, who am I, and why should I take importance in his words? I am currently an ex-Year 11 student from a school in East London and achieved all A*s at GCSE, or 8s and 9s, or so I have been predicted. I have always been asked questions as to how I have revised, or how I put in little hours but come out with great results. Believe me, I have tried it all. Watched revision tips on YouTube, read books on how to revise effectively, and even researched what makes a successful student. In this book, I aim to collate all my knowledge before I forget it all from my lack of effort in quarantine, in the hopes to come back to this book for myself, but also for anyone else wanting to achieve similar results to me. I am a working-class student, which may seem surprising given my results, but after reading this book, I hope you realise that everyone and anyone can do well if taught how to do it correctly. You've already made the first step by reading this book, and sooner rather than later, you will be wishing you read this book sooner :)

SPACED REPETITION¹

Let's get straight into it. As the name suggests, spaced repetition involves spacing your revision and reviewing topics, ideally by active recall, at specific intervals over a period of time.

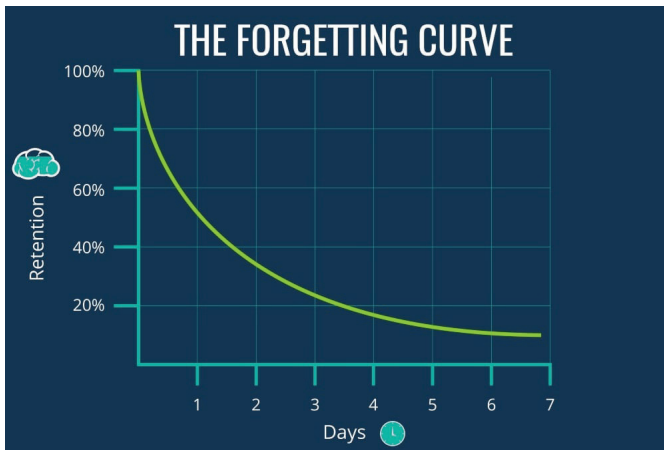
It can be explained by the 'forgetting curve' – an idea that has been around in psychology literature for over one hundred years. The forgetting curve is the idea that over time we forget things at an exponential rate – akin to the half-life of radioactive substances if you want a scientific analogy.

The way we can take advantage of the forgetting curve is through breaking the cycle by reviewing material at spaced intervals. This might be obvious to you but its importance cannot be overstated. The more that we practice and the more spaced this repetition becomes, the more likely we are to encode this information into our long-term memory.

In essence, the idea behind spaced repetition is that you allow your brain to forget some of the information to ensure that the active recall process is mentally taxing.

The Forgetting Curve²

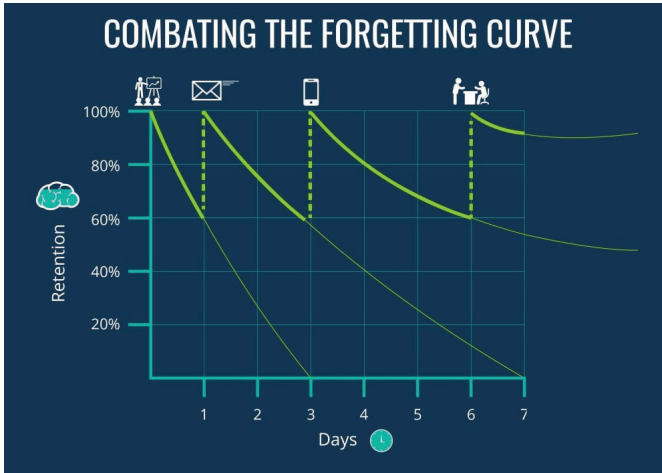
First, let's look at the history of the Forgetting Curve. In the late 19th century, German psychologist, Hermann Ebbinghaus tested his memory over various periods of time. Once he'd gathered all the data from his spaced learning studies, he plotted it on a graph that looked a little something like this:



Now, contrary to appearances, Ebbinghaus didn't invent a fun slide. He'd actually discovered the nature of memory loss over time. The graph illustrates that when you first learn something, the information depreciates at an exponential rate, i.e. you lose most of it in the first couple of days, after which the rate of loss tapers off.

There are several ways of combating the forgetting curve.

One of which is spaced repetition as mentioned above. By spacing out your learning, you are preserving the maintenance of knowledge as shown below:



In fact, spaced repetition may be the reason your classmates can answer a question in class that you would have never remembered the answer to. Yes, they may have learnt the content initially more strongly, and paid more attention in class, but they may have also coincidentally been reminded of their knowledge whilst you weren't. For example, they could have been watching YouTube and stumbled upon an educational video of how to factorise. They refreshed their memory, whilst yours was still pending in maths class.

Now you're probably wondering how spaced repetition can work for a secondary school student, and what techniques I could use to implement spaced repetition into our revision. The next section will discuss these issues.

Retrospective Timetables

A retrospective timetable sets out the work and revision to be completed in advance. For example, one may assign a science topic to be revised next week at 5pm after school. This eliminates any worries and can be changed if necessary, in contrast to the lack of flexibility of a typical revision timetable.

Retrospective timetables can also be used to combat the forgetting curve. One can revise a topic a day later, three days later, a week later and a month later, in order to maintain the same quantity of knowledge. You will find this repetition of revision more useful, and is often something many students forget to do. We may revise a lot initially, but struggle to realise to go over the topic a day or two later and test our knowledge. This is the reason why testing and exams are so useful, as they clearly show the gaps in our knowledge rather than revision sessions, which only give us a false sense of confidence.

In fact, repeated practice and testing is what all schools use today, as they follow the curriculum backed by scientific evidence that repeated testing improves our knowledge. Think of it this way, you remember the things you got wrong, rather than the things you got right in a test. If we never knew what questions we failed to answer, how would we be sure we would rectify those same mistakes before the exam?

Spaced repetition is actually unintentionally used in mathematics. In primary school in the UK, many pupils will be taught their timetables, up until year 6 using mental maths tests and timetables tests. By secondary school, most students will know their times tables to 12. Now you may ask, why is it that most students still know their times tables when they have left secondary school, or even know them as adults? This is all because of the nature of mathematics. Almost all maths exams at GCSE include some form of mental arithmetic or times tables, and so each exam will refresh their memory and disrupt the forgetting curve once more, until they are forced to refresh their memory again. Eventually, they master the times tables, which is why it takes so long to flatten out their memory of the times tables until adult-hood.

Here is an example of a retrospective revision timetable I used myself in Year 11:

15 February 2020

- ~~1.1 Systems Architecture~~
- ~~1. Global Hazards~~

16 February 2020

- ~~Daily Life 1-80~~
- ~~Social Processes 1/2~~
- ~~Maths Hard Questions~~

17 February 2020

- ~~1. Cell biology~~
- ~~1.2 Memory~~
- An Inspector Calls Act 1

THE MOST EFFECTIVE REVISION TECHNIQUE

There are many ways to revise for exams, but not every method works for everyone, and as proven by science, there are indeed some that work more effectively than others.

To put out there first, highlighting and making notes solely for revision is the worst strategy for revision. It does not provide regurgitation of information of any kind, rather it involves copying and summarising from a textbook. This does not retrieve information in the slightest, and is proven by many scientists to be a 'time-waster'.

One of the best revision techniques as shown by lots of evidence with numerous studies is active recall and the concept of practice testing. This involves writing questions for yourself instead of producing notes and actively recalling information as you would from a textbook. This uses regurgitation to strengthen the connections in your brain. Think of it this way, your brain is a library of information, and the more you access the books in each aisle, the faster you'll remember where they are next time.

Professor Dunlosky et al in 2013 investigated how to improve students' learning with effective learning techniques and concluded that:

“On the basis of the evidence described above, we rate practice testing as having high utility. Testing effects have been demonstrated across an impressive range of practice-test formats, kinds of material, learner ages, outcome measures and retention intervals. Practice testing is not particularly time intensive relative to other techniques, and it can be implemented with minimal training.

Finally, several studies have provided evidence of the efficacy of practice testing in representative educational contexts.”³

There are, of course, numerous other ways to revise, but as shown by evidence, active recall is the most effective strategy. Other effective strategies may include spider diagrams, flashcards with clues on the back or completing the sentence, and of course, practicing questions and learning from mistakes. It is important to note, however, that active recall and regurgitation of information is inevitable, and must be performed before each exam to test your knowledge. The lack of testing will often not improve results, and students may wonder why. Active recall is why.

Active Recall

Research from 2013 which analysed hundreds of separate studies about effective revision techniques, concluded that testing, or active recall, is a technique that has 'high utility' and can be implemented effectively with minimal training.

Several studies from 1939⁴ and 2010 provide valuable verification of the effectiveness of active recall but it was a study from 2011⁵ that I found particularly convincing.

In that study, the researchers split students into 4 groups with each student tasked with learning the same material before being tested on what they learnt. However, each group was given different instructions and parameters for learning the content.

- The first group would read the material only once.
- The second group would read the material four times.
- The third group would read the material then were told to make a mind map.
- The fourth group would read the material once, then recall as much as possible.

In both the verbatim test – when asked to recall facts – as well as the inference test – when asked to recall concepts – the active recall group, group 4, significantly outperformed the other groups.

This study shows that testing yourself just once is more effective than rereading a chapter four times. I'm sure we've all used rereading at some point but simply through testing yourself once you could drastically improve the efficacy and efficiency of your studies. This is such a simple technique but has such substantial, obvious benefits that we would be foolish to not use it!

Perhaps the reason we don't like to use active recall is that it's more difficult and mentally taxing than rereading. But the key point is revision should be cognitively demanding! It's useful to think about this in terms of going to the gym – if you're lifting weights that are light, you're not going to make much progress but if you're lifting weights that test your strength, you're more likely to develop muscle faster. It's the same with developing the 'muscle' of your brain - the harder we have to work to retrieve information, the more effective our brains will become in storing and recalling that information in the future.

Implementing Active Recall Into Revision

So you now know what active recall is, and why it is proven to be the most effective revision strategy. How can I implement this into my GCSE revision, and turn out with grade 9s in my subjects? Here's how:

During Year 11, instead of writing notes and highlighting parts to make it look pretty, I instead wrote questions for myself using the specification, and answered these questions regularly. For example, instead of writing: mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell, I would write, what is the function of the mitochondria? This would get me used to retrieving information from my brain and strengthening connections in the brain, rather than reading information for 5 seconds. Here's a document I used for computer science for instance:

1.1 Systems Architecture

CPU

What is the purpose of the CPU?

What does CPU stand for?

Components of Computer

What does the MAR (Memory Address Register) do?

What does the MDR (Memory Data Register) do?

What does the Program Counter do?

What does the Accumulator do?

What does the ALU (Arithmetic Logic Unit) do?

What does the CU (Control Unit) do?

What is Cache?

Performance

How does Cache improve performance?

How does Clock Speed impact a CPU's performance?

How does Cache Size impact a CPU's performance?

How does the Number of Cores impact a CPU's performance?

This way, I would only take in my questions to school, and use a textbook for guidance. This only took a day or two to write, and I would highly recommend for anyone who struggles to write notes effectively. Remember, your notes will eventually become useless, so spend your time on them wisely. I currently have five A4 books full of notes that mean nothing now, but five documents of questions that were more meaningful.

What Works Best For You? ⁶

The earlier you start, the more prepared you will be. Starting early allows you time to really learn the material and understand it – and it means you can cope with any factors that may unexpectedly disrupt your revision. Also, “cramming” is just not effective for everyone, and will often only create more stress. Spend a couple of hours figuring out the material you will need to know for each exam and map out a revision timetable that takes into account when each of your exams is.

Work out what type of learner you are. Everyone learns in different ways. Some like colour-coded spider diagrams, others will be able to learn simply by reading and copying. Some people like to learn through listening to others speak. Revision can be a highly personal process and it’s worth testing out a few different methods before finding an approach that suits you. This will make sure that you are working smarter, not harder.

Along the same lines, figure out when you learn best. This may be early in the morning or late at night – again, each person is different. Plan your revision to utilise the times when you think you are at peak productivity levels.

Be strict. No matter how you dress it up, revision isn't the most enjoyable of pastimes and I'm sure there are millions of things you would rather be doing. But you have to be strict with yourself. Eliminate all distractions and stick to your revision timetable as best as you can. Keep your phone away from you, switch off the wi-fi on your laptop if you don't need the internet, and make sure you have everything you need before you begin, to stop yourself having to get up.

If you must have your phone near you, download an app that stops you from continuously checking Instagram or Twitter. Forest is a particularly innovative one. It plants a seed when you lock your phone and a tree continues to grow until you quit the app. To make sure your tree keeps growing, don't go on to any other apps on your phone. If this doesn't work for you, there are plenty of other productivity apps that can stop you unnecessarily checking your phone.

GCSE SUBJECTS

Mathematics

This is my most passionate subject, so I should spread some good advice on this. Practice, practice, practice. There are thousands of questions categorised by each grade. When teaching others how to factorise or differentiate for example, a common mistake everyone makes is attempting before learning. Go through the theory and the methods, and then practice until you can't get it wrong, not until you get it right. Work your way through each grade and realise that that shiny Grade 9 was not far from reach after all.

English

Honestly, I wasn't the best at English, and wasn't the most passionate, but I made do and still achieved well despite my lack of effort. I used a lot of different techniques, but my go-to was to learn the quotes inside out and read the literature texts often. Develop a good understanding of the texts before attempting questions, and create mindmaps of themes that could possibly come up. You can't go wrong if you read and analyse, and go over critical and conceptualised ideas.

For language, learn how to score high marks on each question, and develop a structure and plan to use for any question that may come up. On AQA, Q5 is the most important question, so spend time learning how to use complex ideas and manipulating the reader for effect. I'm not an expert, but the most important thing is to be ambitious and use the picture as a spring-board to many ideas. If you need more help, watch Mr Bruff or Mr Salles teaches English on YouTube, they are amazing.

Science

Science is a subject not many people know how to revise for. My science teacher once said, 'learn the mark scheme', which really stuck with me during revision. Instead of writing notes and cramming in content-learning, I would print off exam questions, complete them in timed conditions, and learn from my mistakes. The next time I would see a similar question in an exam, I would already know what the mark scheme would look like, so while answering, it was much easier to find marks. Finally, learn the content through-out and understand the science behind the required practicals. One way you know that you understand something is if you can explain it to a 5 year old. There's a reason why doctors earn so much, because of the intense nature of science. It is not easy, but damn is it fun.

Computer Science

Computer Science was one of the most interesting and fascinating subjects for me. Learning the content is a given task for all students, but not all people know what to do to learn content. Make flashcards. I personally used Quizlet - my quizlet link is at the end of the book ;). However, make your own, and go through the process of writing flashcards, they should cater to your needs and how you learn. If you have time, learn a programming language, as this will help you with the algorithmic nature of Paper 2.

Geography

Geography is another subject where you must learn, learn and especially learn the content. Make flashcards, make questions, and practice questions non-stop. Also, try to make essay plans for questions that could possibly come up. Know your case-studies inside out, and make sure you cover every point of the spec. If you learn your content inside-out, there should be no reason you do not get a high grade.

Sociology

Sociology is a sticky one. The exams are very intensive and difficult for the average student. It will consist of high mark questions, so practice writing them in timed conditions and go over the structure to ensure to gain

the marks easily. Sociologists and research must be learnt thoroughly, so I recommend using Quizlet once more, or even creating a mindmap of sociologists if that helps you. I wasn't the best at sociology, but one thing I wish I did earlier was practicing questions. The questions are very repetitive at times.

Religious Studies

Religious Studies is also very intensive. Learn how to write quickly, but also consistently. The only way to do this is to practice in timed conditions again, there is unfortunately no way out of this. Learn your quotes for each religion, and for philosophy and ethics, be critical and evaluative. My teacher taught me the PEACE strategy, which involves a critique and evaluation at the end of each paragraph, so even if you do not reach the end of 15 markers, you already have given some evaluation previously. Additionally, having good general knowledge helps greatly, so be sure to keep updated with the current affairs.

History ^{7,8}

I did not study History, but I did get a few great friends who did very well to help out. When taking notes in history, a must is to always mention the cause, course and consequence. This way, if a question is based on the event, you will be prepared for all three things they will ask. Essay writing in timed conditions is also a must for this subject too, and exam technique should

be practiced accordingly. Structure your notes like an essay and make essay plans for the different mark questions. I know we just talked about the inefficiency of taking notes, but they are very-much essential for humanities like History, and should be done according to how you learn, if a textbook is not enough.

Food Technology⁸

Food Technology is a very practical based subject but also requires content to be learned thoroughly. Again, I did not study this, but had an intelligent friend to help with this as well. According to your exam board, you should have a high-mark question. In Edexcel, the 12 mark question is usually asking you to plan a meal for a certain type of person, so make sure you know the needs of each type before the exam, e.g. the elderly or teenagers. Food Technology has lots of elements of Biology, so flashcards will be very essential in learning the key words. Finally, cook at home to generally improve your technique. If this is not do-able, maybe watch others cook online and learn from their technique.

Practical Subjects

If you study a practical subject, such as Art or Drama, chances are you enjoy drawing or acting, so follow your passion and take this passion outside of school . Outside school-hours, make sure you're always practicing your skills, whether it be how to cross-hatch or cre-

ate gradients from paint. There is also theory you must learn, so use whatever technique works best for you to learn all the content thoroughly.

Languages

I studied French, and it was my favourite subject by far. There are many different things you could do to help aid your progress in Modern Foreign Languages. One that helped a lot was reading, watching, and listening to anything related to French. Whether it was watching a French film or listening to French music, it helped greatly with listening skills, and getting the pronunciation of words precise. If it helps, record yourself reading out your work, and listen over to see where you went wrong. Your school would have given you textbooks or sheets full of vocabulary and phrases. Learn these with flashcards, and go over them regularly. If you want the higher grades, you need to impress the examiner, and include phrases that the average student wouldn't. For example, in French, instead of writing, *j'aime vraiment la pizza*, write, *la pizza me rend heureuse*, which sounds better and includes more complicated words, showing your in-depth understanding of your language.

There are more resources at the end of the book to help with the subjects listed above ;)

MINDSET

Someone who wants top grades with a fiery passion is much more likely to achieve those grades than someone who is content with what they have - satiety repels success. Get hungry. The key thing here is maintaining that mindset and keeping motivation high. I believe anyone can study when they suddenly get super motivated, but if that's only once per week, it's futile. You need consistency. The best and most efficient way to achieve consistency are habits. When the GCSE period ended I didn't stop studying, it was so ingrained into my daily ritual that I felt guilty not doing it. Humans love routine, use this to your advantage!

Embrace competition. It can a daunting experience going against the entire country but it is the reality - if everyone got 100% there would only be one grade '9'. But since everyone got a '9', it's value to employers decreases to a 4 because there are no differences between candidates. If you get 80% and the entire country gets 79%, by being better than average, you raise the average to just over 79%... now the entire country is, mathematically, below average. So you have to go into these exams knowing that when you do incredibly well, it means other people get, very slightly, lower grades. It

should be obvious to you that other people definitely do not want lower grades, so they will all try their best to beat you! Without this competition, everyone would be fine getting the same grade, so everyone could just get 0% and employers wouldn't know the difference. Of course in real life examination boards would never allow this to happen and they sometimes will set a passing mark without too much consideration to standardisation (IGCSE exam boards do this more often than GCSE exam boards). Warning - don't let your competitive nature get out of hand as it can induce lots of stress and depression if you end up losing to your competition. Another note - don't let your competitive nature evoke negative traits such as jeopardising other people or not giving advice.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

When I first started Year 11, I thought I should start revising immediately, but I quickly got bored and lost motivation as exams were so far away - I wanted to see my hard work pay off. In the end I started properly revising 1.5 months before my first mock exams and I felt like this was enough time personally, though I am very attentive in class so my thoughts and exam strategies were pretty well defined. Sometimes putting in the work in class and trying your hardest to properly learn the content at its initial stage can be enough for you, and it may even make revising content much easier.

Don't be afraid to revise subjects that you don't like - these are the ones you should be focusing on. make sure all your revision is finished around 5 days before your exams.

There is often a common misconception, and is in fact the reason for the title of this book. Work smarter, not harder. Someone can put in less hours than you and turn out with better results. Student 1 may spend 1 hour using active recall, while the other spends 5 hours

highlighting and making notes. If student 1 was always destined to do better, and student 2 was always going to do worse, why do schools not teach this? Here are a few tips that may help you understand how to study that little bit more effectively.

Studying Cheats And Tips

Study in exam conditions. Use the same pen, same water bottle and put all things that wouldn't be allowed in your exam away. This will make the exam a more familiar and comfortable experience for you. By the time the exam rolls on by you'll be like - 'Ah, it's just another day'.

Study in chunks - I prefer 1 hour chunks followed by a 15 min break but this is entirely up to you and what you think is best is probably best (placebo effect).

Ask yourself - 'How would an examiner test me on this knowledge? How would I form a full mark answer?'

Get your exam technique sorted and rooted in your mind. Know how much time you're going to spend on each section of your exam and know the way examiners like their questions answered. Examiners aren't evil beings.

One last tip that I discovered the hard way, is work harder than your teachers. If your teachers work harder than you, there is something wrong.

Also, if you're stuck on something, don't immediately ask for help, rather try and figure it out yourself and go through the struggle of learning content independently, this could perhaps strengthen your knowledge of content.

TALENT

You're talented. Accept it. If you got this far through my guide you must have some incredible patience too. Don't let people set limits for you. Talent can get you far, but hard work can get you anywhere.

Some say talent is born, not grown. I say absolutely not. A group of sociologists known as the Functionalists present the idea of meritocracy - success through hard work. So long as you believe, you can and will achieve. Though if you want to change you've got to put in the work. There is no substitute to sitting down and focusing solely on studying. No-one has ever fallen asleep and woken up the next day with a new, perfectly organised library of knowledge in their brain (literally and metaphorically). Many people want to change but they don't have the willpower to do so or they don't believe they can because others don't believe they can. That's great news for you though, it means there will be less competition and a higher ceiling for you to jump under. It may seem selfish, but it's the reality - if you take something from someone, they will no longer have that something. Don't like it? Feel free to try communism, comrade.

If you have some free time you want to spend productively but don't feel like studying, you can try the following to increase general intelligence:

- Reading (personally I read around 30 mins a day. During exam time I read textbooks to take me to the dreamland)

- An instrument (ukuleles are cheap if you don't have any instruments)

- Puzzles, strategic games and logic games (Sudoku, chess, logic puzzles, and of course, the puzzle of having absolutely no willpower to get out of bed)

- Analysing everything and being generally curious (Why do all odd numbers have an e in them? (yes that's a joke)) Why am I currently reading a book from some crazy guy instead of sitting down and putting in the hard work and dedicating myself to obtaining the best grades?)

- Philosophy and ethics (what is right and wrong? Why do I believe that? Is my opinion as valuable as everyone else's? Should a death sentence be justified for criminals? Do I want to be a criminal? Why? Why doesn't society like criminals.. etc)

MOTIVATION

I used to have problems with ‘motivation’. I don’t anymore, because I’ve fully internalised the notion that motivation is a myth. In fact, I think we’d all be much happier and get much more done if we scrubbed the word motivation from our vocabulary altogether.

Here’s a quote from one of my favourite articles on the subject:

Motivation, broadly speaking, operates on the erroneous assumption that a particular mental or emotional state is necessary to complete a task. ⁵

Put simply, motivation is waiting until you feel like doing something before doing it. Discipline on the other hand, is doing it regardless of how you’re feeling about it. Here’s another fun quote:

At its core, chasing motivation is insistence on the infantile fantasy that we should only be doing things we feel like doing. The problem is then framed thus: “How do I get myself to feel like doing what I have rationally decided to do?”. Bad. ⁶

The proper question is “How do I make my feelings inconsequential and do the things I consciously want to do without making it a big deal?”.

These days, the only circumstance in which I let myself even think about motivation as a concept is if a friend is complaining 'aarghh I just don't have the motivation to work right now'. If I don't know them very well, I reply 'yeah me too lol'. If however, I know the person well, I give them an unsolicited lecture about exactly why motivation is a myth, and why/how they should be cultivating discipline. If they're still in the room by the end of this conversation, they usually think 'wow you're right, I shouldn't be trying to feel like doing stuff, I should just do it!'

So yeah, motivation is a myth. Trying to get yourself to feel like doing something useful is a fool's errand. A 3-year old bases their day-to-day decisions on what they feel like doing. An intelligent student/adult recognises that feeling like doing something useful should have absolutely nothing to do with whether they actually do it. Literally, just get on with it!

DOING THE EXAM

Imagine this. Everything goes well, you know all your content inside out and you've practiced until you can't get it wrong. Now comes the exam. You sit down, your heart is racing, and the answers don't come to you. It happens to the best of us, and the psychology behind sitting an exam and regurgitating information under pressure is not often talked about. Panicking is the worst thing that could happen - so here's how to resolve that issue.

Normal levels of stress can help you work, think faster and more effectively, and generally improve your performance. However, if the anxiety you are experiencing feels overwhelming, your performance can be affected heavily. Being aware of what is causing the anxiety can help reduce its effects.

One way that schools actually help combat exam stress is by doing mock exams. They may seem annoying and pointless at first, but after doing numerous mock exams myself, the last exam I did felt like just another day, and I was never anxious as I would have been with the first. Exams are like standing in front of an audience, or trying out something new, you'll get used to it.

Okay so you don't get stressed during an exam, and you are usually really relaxed? Great! But there's still some things that could go wrong, even if you're the brightest student in the world.

Read. Every. Question. Carefully. They say this at the start of every exam. They don't say this for no reason. The amount of times I have misread a question, or simply gained an extra mark if I payed more attention is countless. Take your time to understand the question and recall information, before rushing to the answer you assume it is. With science and many other subjects, they often give a diagram. One of the things my science teacher told us was, every bit of ink they use costs AQA lots of money, to print and copy for millions of students across the nation. They will NOT print a diagram if it had no use to the question - and waste money. Every word and every shape in every question matters.

Go through your paper. Again, again, and again. It's your fifth time? Go through it again. I guarantee you, you will not get full marks. If it helps, do the paper and envision yourself writing again once you're done.

Most exams are over an hour long, and it can be very tempting to lay your head down or give mid-way. You could be 90% through the paper and decide that one question is too hard for you. Don't skip it. Don't miss the whole question out. Attempt it at least. You could get one mark that sets you apart from thousands of students in the country, but you didn't.

PROCASTINATION

Your worst enemy is procrastination. How do you solve procrastination? How do you get rid of it entirely? Here's something that may help.

Writing a personal statement or an essay? Great, just start typing and force yourself to write something. It doesn't matter if it sucks, because you can always edit it later, but you need to write something. Want to start a blog? Great, start writing your first post in Notepad and figure out the logistics of setting up the website later.

If you've studied Chemistry, you'll know about activation energy - the 'hump' of energy required to get a reaction started. It's the same in real life - if we want to get anything done, we need to put in a burst of activation energy to begin with, and things become a lot easier.

This is one of the best 'productivity hacks' that I've ever come across - the idea that to overcome activation energy, you can force yourself to start. Everything takes care of itself after that.

I often find myself needing this advice when finishing off an assignment, or even completing homework. There are some weeks when I spend an hour trying to work out what to write about, and then another hour working out the first paragraph. That's a pretty unsustainable way of doing this. This week however, I just started typing whatever came to mind, and then edited it a bit afterwards. And what do you know, I'm almost done with this book.

As someone famous once said, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I think that's probably relevant.

DEALING WITH SUCCESS

So what now? You've followed all the steps in this book. You're achieving good grades. This is all you ever wanted, right? Now is the hardest part. Staying humble. Do not, I repeat do not, talk about your grades and share them. Your grades are your grades, and are what you have achieved.

Being humble, however, does not mean having a poor opinion of yourself, but rather accepting yourself and your many good qualities, as well as your limitations, and recognising that others also have good qualities that are equally valuable. Whatever it is that you're not humble about, there's always someone out there that's doing better than you in regards to.

Help others out. Be a teacher. Be a good friend. Now that you may understand how to better, maybe others don't so much. There's always things you can do better, so a Grade 9 is not the end at GCSE level, and certainly not in the education system. If you thought GCSEs were difficult, wait until you enter A-Levels - they're a whole different breed as I've been told.

THE NEXT STEP

Exams and GCSEs are not the end of it. There is still much more for every student to discover and fight through. Use everything you have learnt during this time and carry on wanting more and desiring the best.

Finally to end with, my most important tip is getting enough sleep. You must treat your sleep schedule like something sacred. If you feel active, ready to go and confident on the day of the exam you'll get a higher mark for sure. I don't know what else to say so here are a few quotes to end with.

"Each night, when I go to sleep, I die. And the next morning, when I wake up, I am reborn."

"According to Albert Einstein, the definition of insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results".

Thanks for reading, let's change who we were before we set our eyes on this book. You're now a changed person.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Maths:

Desmos

OnMaths

MathsGenie

Science:

MyGCSEScience

Kerboodle

FreeScienceLessons (YT)

Primrose Kitten (YT)

Physics & Maths Tutor

English:

TheTraditionalTeacher

Mr Bruff (YT)

Mr Salles Teaches English (YT)

Computer Science:

MrFraser

TeachICT

Doddle

Dynamic Learning

Cambridge Elevate

Religious Studies:

BBC Bitesize

RE:Quest

OpenBible

QuranicQuotes

History:

Simple History (YT)

Geography:

BBC Bitesize

GCSEGeography

Cool Geography

Sociology:

Tutor2U

ReviseSociology

MFL:

Duolingo

Quizlet

Memrise

General:

Quizlet

Anki

Seneca

TES

CGP Books

WITH THANKS TO

¹ <https://www.aliabdaal.com/>

² <https://www.growthengineering.co.uk/what-is-the-forget-ting-curve/>

³ Dunlosky et al 2013 - [Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques: Promising Directions From Cognitive and Educational Psychology. - PubMed - NCBI]

⁴ Herbet F. Spitzer - THE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

⁵ REPORT Retrieval Practice Produces More Learning than Elaborative Studying with Concept Mapping - Jeffrey D. Karpicke, Janell R. Blunt

⁶ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/5-revision-tips-help-you-ace-exam-season-plus-7-more-un-usual-approaches>

⁷ Masooma

⁸ Lyba

