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FOR STUDENTS BY STUDENTS

# STUDY SKILLS BOOKLET

A HELPING HAND

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## Study Techniques

### Flashcards

Flashcards can be an extremely beneficial way to help **memorise large chunks of information in short periods of time**. Flashcards also help in **long-term understanding** of concepts as they **require repetition**.

Flashcards are **most effective when created by the student themselves** as the information can be gathered directly from notes and the **process of creating them helps with understanding** and begins the initial memorisation process.

Flashcards can be made and studied in many different ways including:

- **Paper index cards** that have been handwritten
- **Cut up pieces of paper or card** (colour coordination can also be used here to aid memory)
- **Online portals such as Chegg Prep and Quizlet** (both are available as apps and online)

**Online flashcards can be really effective in saving time** as they require the notes to be typed out rather than being handwritten. The flashcards are **available online and offline through the app** meaning they can be accessed anytime, anywhere for ease of studying- **airplane mode can also be turned on to prevent distractions**.

Photographs of diagrams can also be uploaded to the flashcard itself. Chegg prep can be accessed on a laptop or as an app on both apple and android, here flashcards can be created and categorised. Quizlet is useful for other techniques also as there are options for “learning, flashcards, writing, matching and testing” once the questions have been created.

IF POSSIBLE, **AVOID USING FLASHCARDS MADE BY OTHER STUDENTS ONLINE**. THE INFORMATION MAY NOT BE RELEVANT, UP-TO-DATE OR RELIABLE.



# Mind Maps

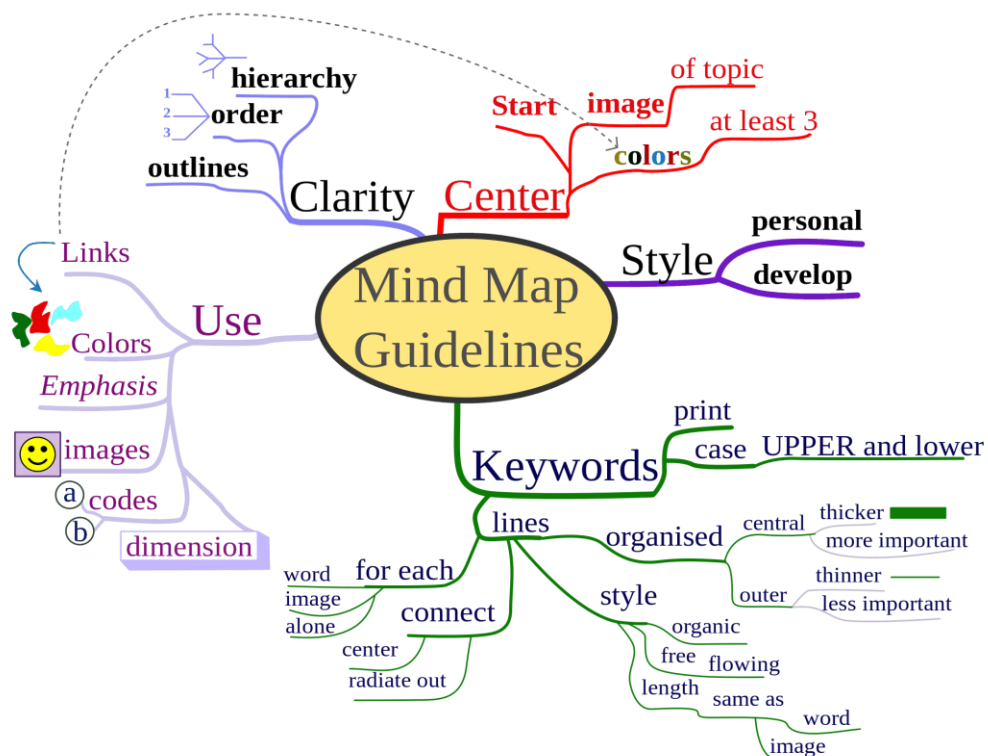
Mind Maps are beneficial for a variety of reasons. The basic idea behind them is to mirror the brain, hence the idea of “mind map” the information can be laid out in a way that is organised- allowing for a **simple way to understand and learn information quickly**.

Using **colour association, images and curved lines**, notes can be recalled more easily, this is especially **helpful for visual learners or those with dyslexia**.

Mind maps are **most effective when notes are simplified** so that they can be more easily recalled, your mind can **create links between ideas leading to a deeper understanding of the information**.

Mind maps can be created using paper and coloured pens or online. Microsoft Word can be used but there are also websites that have a mind map creation tool. Paper mind maps are the most effective as notes have to be written down; if they are simple enough and easy to recall it is possible to quickly draw them up on a scrap piece of paper during test and exam situations to help recall key information.

Keep mind maps safe if they are created early in the year so that they can be used for continuous revision, this is helpful in the lead up to exams.



## Textbook Questions

As a revision technique textbook questions are often overlooked. In most textbooks there are consolidation questions either throughout or at the end of a key area.

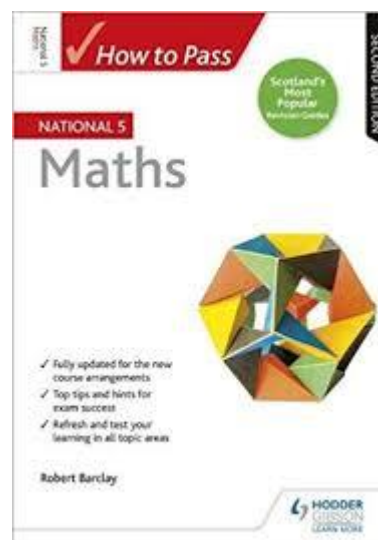
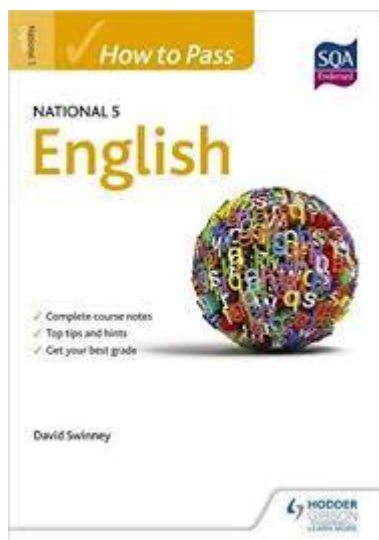
Practicing these questions can help you to understand the material before moving on to more advanced questions, like those in past papers.

Textbook questions can be extremely helpful to understand areas of difficulty as things are often asked and explained in different ways that can be easier to understand. The questions usually relate directly to the notes for that section and the answers are often at the back of the textbook so you can check your progress.

People often believe that while answering questions they can't use any notes, although this can be helpful if you already understand the information it doesn't do much to guarantee success if you are struggling. Try answering the questions using your notes to guide you, however, don't just copy the answer directly from the notes, use them to help you formulate your own answer that you understand and are likely to remember.

If you are not getting the answers right after completing the questions and don't know where you went wrong make sure you ask for help.

Textbook questions are also useful in tight study times as a key area can be chosen and a few questions completed, these can also be useful as a 'refresher' or a 'warm up' to do before trying a past paper if you haven't revised parts of the course in a while.



## Pomodoro Technique

The pomodoro technique is an extremely useful technique for studying, especially with a large workload or even just to aid you in getting more work done in shorter periods of time.

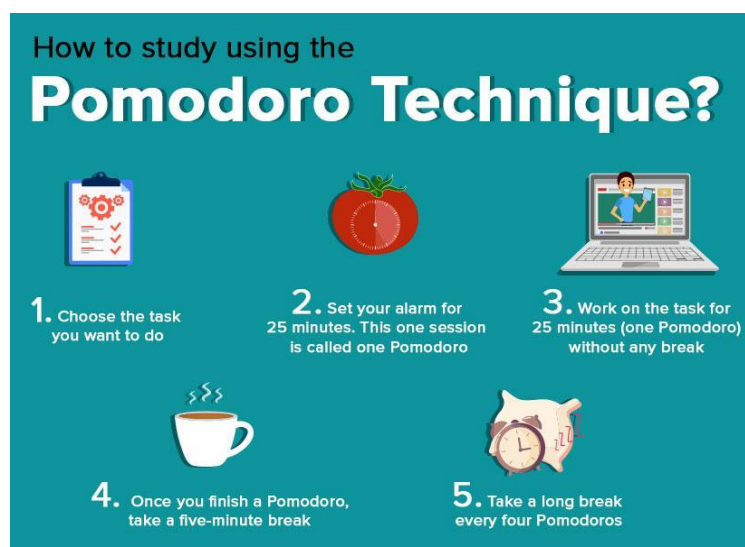
The pomodoro technique **typically consists of a 25 minute burst of continuous studying followed by a 5 or 10 minute break. This is usually repeated 4 or 5 times**; if you are continuing to study after 4 or 5 sessions it is recommended to take a 30 minute break before starting again.

This technique is **useful in preventing procrastination and is key to time management**- it can also help prevent excess stress in the leadup to exams or multiple assessments as **time can be set aside for each subject** or area that needs revised.

The pomodoro technique may not suit everyone but it does have many benefits.

Benefits:

- **Increased motivation**: less likely to be distracted as you know you only have to fully concentrate for 25 minutes before you get a break. The pressure of the clock can help too.
- **Increased determination**: difficult tasks may seem more bearable as again, you know you only have 25 minutes before you get a break. You know you should continue as the clock is ticking which encourages you to push through and complete the task.
- **Increased energy**: concentrating for 25 minutes while being able to refresh during breaks allows you to be energised for longer.



## Study Support

Although it isn't very commonly thought of, **where you study can play a vital role in how you take in the information**. Study supports can be useful for you if you find it difficult to learn from home as it is a **familiar educational environment** that your brain associates with learning. Some stigma may exist that study supports are only for those who are really struggling in their classes, this is not true.

Study supports are **beneficial as they give you the opportunity to ask questions in a smaller setting** (great for people who are shy or have anxiety). It also allows for more one-on-one time with the teacher which can help deepen the understanding of difficult topics or to work through difficult questions with a little more aid.

However, study supports may not always be available but your environment still plays a role in how much you are taking in information. UCAS recommend a variety of things to help you get the best from your study sessions:

- **Comfort**: ensure you are **comfortable** enough where you are studying as it allows you to **stay focused and motivated for longer**.
- 
- **Lighting**: you are **more likely to take in information in a room lit by natural light compared to a dim environment**. Try and take advantage of natural light as much as possible by **positioning yourself near windows and studying during the day**. Natural light has also been shown to boost mood and reduce stress and anxiety while studying. Try and avoid fluorescent lighting as much as possible as these can cause glare and make you feel tired quicker.
- 
- **Noise**: the level of noise needed depends on the person, but think about **where you normally work at your best**. Is it under test conditions with the low-level noise of people writing? Is it in a busy environment like a coffee shop or somewhere similar? Is it with background music? Whatever it is **mirror this in your study environment to maximise your performance**.
- 
- **Clutter**: minimising the level of mess in your study space can **limit the amount of distraction and stress while studying**. **Keep your study space clean and tidy**.

Avoid watching TV, texting or something similar while studying as this is a guaranteed distraction.

## Teaching Others

One of the most effective ways to study is by teaching others the information; or at least pretending to. This works as it **tests your understanding of the topic and your brain makes links while you are going through the material**. This leads to a deepened, long-lasting understanding of the material.

Teaching others is a good way to test your memory on the subject and **allows you to explain it in a way that you understand** and therefore will be **more likely to recall correctly in a test situation**.

It doesn't have to be elaborate or difficult **just simply talk through a question or topic, like your teacher would you, and explain to the best of your ability**. This is most **effective when done without notes** as you are forced to recall the information to the best of your ability.

Although it may not always be possible it can be **helpful to teach an actual person**, such as a parent or a friend, as they **may ask questions to test your understanding**. Or **pair up with a friend who is studying the same subject and take turns teaching topics**, that way if you get information slightly wrong it can be identified and corrected and you can both learn.

If it's not possible to teach someone else and just talking through the information to yourself isn't working **try preparing to teach by making a 'lesson plan' or making a powerpoint** with the information you want to go over in your 'lesson', you are still revising in a less conventional way that has benefits in the long term and can allow you to learn the information.

This is a quick and easy way to revise that isn't necessarily boring.

This technique was also effective in helping students with dyslexia in understanding information.



## Exam Questions

A popular way of studying that **allows a feel for what you could be asked in an exam situation**. Exam questions can be **really beneficial in getting you used to the specific command words** that could be asked, such as ‘Describe...’ ‘Explain...’ or ‘Analyse...’ so that there are no surprises during tests or exams. It also allows you to **become familiar with the marks awarded** for certain question types and what you need to write to pick them up.

In the beginning you can **practice exam questions with notes**, as long as you don’t copy directly from them. **Once you are familiar with the information try the exam questions without any notes but give yourself as much time as you need**. You can go through past papers and select questions on the material you are focusing on.

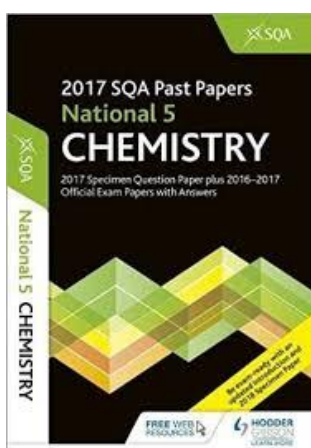
It is **important to practice whole past papers before exams or prelims under timed conditions** in order to work out time management strategies and identify areas you are struggling with. This ensures you are fully prepared for what could come up in the exam.

If you **find yourself overwhelmed** and struggling with **what the questions are asking you to do**, try taking a highlighter and **highlighting the command word and the key points in the question**. This can make it easier for you to identify what exactly it is asking you to do.

Example:

**Name** the **2 primary colours** that would have been **mixed to make** the **orange** background of the painting. (2)

The SQA have books available with old exam papers or they are available by subject on the SQA website. In the books the answer papers are at the back and on the website they are available as a separate document.



## Listing Steps

Many question types have a **process that you have to remember** or would be worthwhile remembering. In English based subjects these may be **essay plans** or in Science and Math based **subjects where certain question types require certain steps to be taken**. Practice a question and pay close attention to the process, from this create simple steps to follow that are easy to understand and recall.

Once **steps have been created they can be put on flashcards** and committed to memory to make answering those question types easier.

It is useful to **create simple steps that are numbered and have a clear process**. It is useful when doing **practice questions to write the steps next to the question as and when you are doing them**. This aids the memory association of the steps with the question type while also **allowing for less questions to be practiced** before the concept is fully grasped.

Listing steps is **also useful for returning to subjects after long periods of time** as the process does not need to be relearned but can just be practiced again to refresh your memory.

If you are struggling to find the steps you follow to answer the question type try writing out in words fully what you would do. Then work on simplifying them as much as possible.



## Diagrams

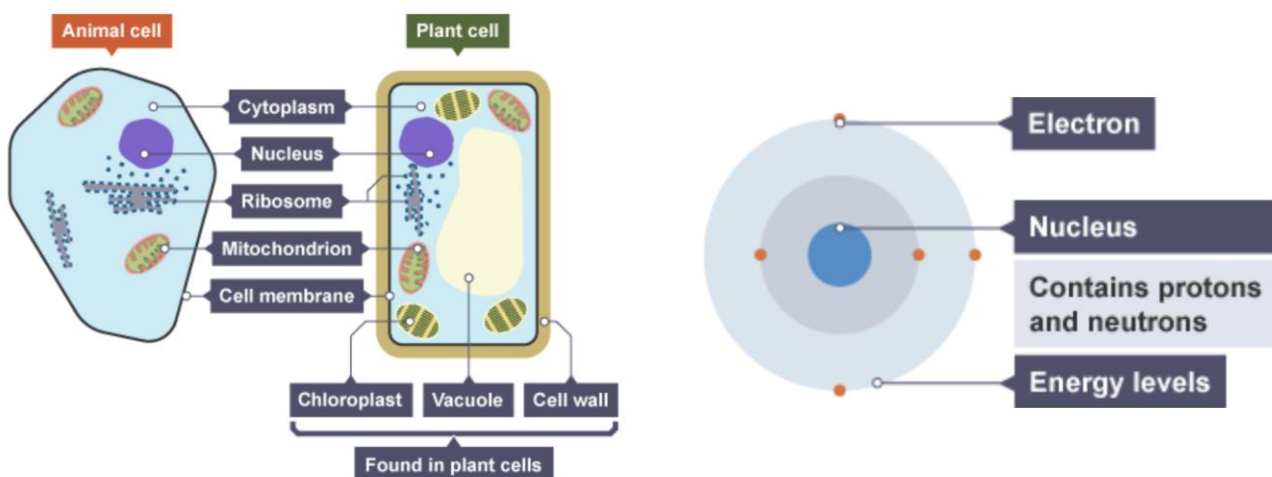
Some people find diagrams really helpful to understand information, especially visual learners. Most **diagrams relate directly to the material that they are focusing on** and can be given by the teacher, found in textbooks or on BBC bitesize to **help you visualise the information you are trying to remember**. Diagrams can make the **information seem more real and concrete** in your head, making the information harder to forget.

Simple diagrams are **useful to help make complex information easier to understand**, whether you create your own diagrams or copy existing ones, they can be created and **redrawn under test/exam conditions to help recall difficult material**.

It can be helpful to use **colour association** when learning/drawing diagrams to help commit them to memory.

If you are a visual learner diagrams can make a world of difference in helping you study. Don't let the work go to waste however, **simply drawing a diagram once doesn't guarantee you remember it**. Diagrams can be **added to flashcards, mind maps or drawn individually beside questions** to help aid memory.

Here are some real examples of diagrams from some National 5 BBC Bitesize pages:



## Acronyms and Mnemonics

Acronyms and Mnemonics are useful as a memory technique as they **make the information simpler and more interesting to remember**. Acronyms and mnemonics are helpful to **remember processes or rules, or even essay plans**.

If you aren't sure if something can be made into an acronym **try finding the key word or point in the information and taking the first letters**, see if they make a word or at least something easy to remember. If this doesn't make anything memorable try see if you can come up with a mnemonic- these sorts of things are more likely to be memorable if they are funny.

An example of a mnemonic is **Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants**, to spell **BECAUSE**.

Whereas an acronym would be **ROY G BIV** to remember the colours of the rainbow (**Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet**)

There are also PEE/PEEL etc. chains that are used in essay based subjects

**P**-point  
**E**-evidence  
**E**-explain  
**L**-link

This technique is also used in maths, you may already know **BODMAS**. This is the general idea, get something easy to remember and commit it to memory- **this could be by writing it on a flashcard, speaking it out loud multiple times or even by teaching it to someone else**

Acronyms and Mnemonics are more commonly used than people realise, they are very useful for remembering information quickly. If you are stuck unable to remember something try see if you can use this technique. Make sure you write it down, so that it can be used for future revision.

My	M	Mercury
Very	V	Venus
Educated	E	Earth
Mother	M	Mars
Just	J	Jupiter
Served	S	Saturn
Us	U	Uranus
Nachos	N	Neptune

### Study Skills - Mnemonics: Acronyms

**Mnemonic** - A memory aid.

#### **Acronym**

You take the first letter from each word of a list to make a word.

## Word Association

Word association is a helpful memory **aid to remember difficult and easily forgotten words and phrases**. It can be helpful for all types of learners as **links can be made through writing, speaking or even drawing pictures**. For example to remember the phrase je m'appelle the following pictures could be used.



(Blue) JAY



(Mum) MA



APPLE

This **can be used along with the diagram technique to really help aid memory** and can make studying more fun. This technique has also helped friends with dyslexia understand the material they are studying.

Word association does not need to be long winded or complicated, **keep it simple and easy to remember**. Basic words are best used here as they are more likely to be recalled under stressful conditions, **visualising the images in your head can also help the information stick**. Even try **drawing or printing out the pictures and displaying them in places you know you are likely to see them**.

Word association **can be studied through mind maps or spider diagrams too** if you aren't a visual learner, try and find a way that works for you.

You can also use the "around the room" technique too. This works by:

- **Choosing a random room** whether it be at home or in school.
- Start in **one corner of the room and allocate an area of study to this corner**. For example the colour red.
- Then **look at the objects in that corner and dedicate a fact to each object**, e.g. the computer would be that red is a primary colour, the mirror would be that mixing red and blue make purple, the candle would be mixing red and yellow would make orange and so on.
- **Give each corner of the room a different area of study**.
- When returning to the information in test/exam conditions you can return to the room in your mind and use the objects in the room to aid your memory.

## Storytelling

Storytelling is a **simple technique** that can be helpful to **remember processes** as they are **unchanging and can just be recalled when needed**, similar to mnemonics.

Storytelling is useful as it **simplifies long complicated processes**, but can also be used for simple processes too.

A **really adaptable study technique** which is **good for people with active imaginations**. Storytelling allows you to simplify complicated topics so they can be recalled easier.

Example:

In **H<sub>2</sub>O** the **hydrogen** atoms **become a couple and live with oxygen**- they live in a street named **water**.

Putting the **stories on flashcards or including them in mind maps with diagrams** can all help as a memory aid.

## Post-it Reminders

Simple yet effective, post-it reminders can be useful and good as a study technique in a **time crunch**. Place **post-its around the house with questions or words on them, only enter the room or open the cupboard door after answering the question or translating the word**.

**Really efficient and easily introduced into everyday life** even if it may look a little funny, it can also be used as a more visual way to do the 'around the room' technique mentioned earlier.

Colour association can help here to recall the information in exam settings, no need for highlighting or coloured pens as **different coloured post-its could be used to represent different areas of difficulty**. This technique is especially useful for long term memorising and has been helpful for people with dyslexia



## Relaxation, Diet and Exercise

Stress and anxiety can for many people be a regular occurrence when studying. However, **there are ways to help combat stress and anxiety safely**, here are some tips listed directly from the St Kent's Mental Health Ambassadors pack that can help release tension, calm you down and boost concentration.

### Breath Control

- **Breathe in gently for 10 seconds, hold for 2 and then breathe out for 10. Repeat this at least 3 times.** You can use a watch, clock or count the seconds in your head to time yourself.

### Island Escape

- **Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful place**, like an island. Choose your own 'happy place' then **for a few moments imagine you're really there**. (You could combine this with breath control)

It is also important to **do things that you enjoy regularly** and take a step away from continuous studying. It may be the last thing you feel like doing but **getting active is really important for your physical and mental wellbeing**. Fresh air can help you relax and also help you sleep better too. You could try:

- **Going for a walk**, you could go with a friend, family member or dog.
- **Riding your bike.**
- **Taking part in your favourite sport**

Believe it or not, **what you eat can affect your mental wellbeing and how you deal with stress**. Your eating habits can change when you're stressed, but **not eating properly can make you feel worse and affect your concentration and energy levels**. Try to **have three meals a day with a couple of healthy snacks**. **Stay hydrated**, make sure you drink plenty of water - especially when studying. Try to **avoid high caffeine drinks** as they can make you more stressed or anxious.

It is also important to **make sure you get enough sleep**, try to avoid technology or studying right before you go to bed. You can **try breathing exercises** to reduce tension and worries that keep you awake. If you are struggling to fall asleep **try counting back from 1000 in 3's** as it is complicated and boring and can distract you from stress. **If this doesn't work try getting up and doing something else for 15 minutes**, sit on a chair or the floor and read a book or tidy up something quickly. **Try to stick to a consistent routine** when it comes to sleeping, don't study too late or change your routine too much at weekends- consistency is key.

## Panic Attacks

Unfortunately some people will experience a panic attack if they are feeling stressed and overwhelmed. These can be controlled through some self-help practices, here are some that are recommended by the senior mental health ambassadors:

### Breathing Retraining

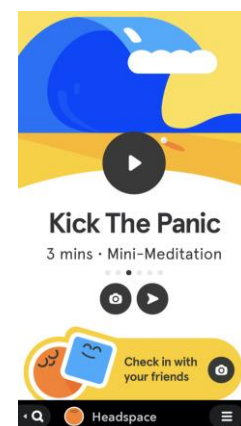
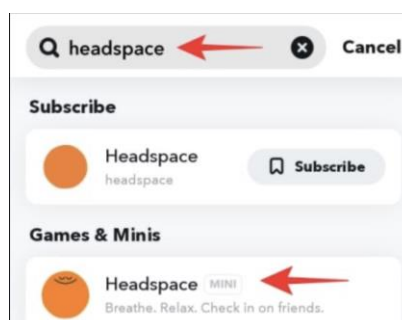
- Sit in a comfy chair and relax as much as possible
- Take a slow normal breath (not a deep breath) and think 'one' to yourself
- As you breathe out, think 'relax'
- Breathe in again and think 'two'
- Breathe out and think 'relax'
- Keep doing this up to ten. If you still feel anxious when you reach ten reverse the numbers and start back down to one
- Try to put all else out of your mind. Try to see the numbers and the word 'relax' in your mind's eye when you are doing this.

### Describe Your Setting

- This is a **grounding exercise** that can help you calm down
- Describe (aloud if you want to) **something you can see in great detail**
- For example 'I can see a picture on the wall. The wall is white and the picture is in a dark wood frame. There is a boat on a loch. There is a mountain at the back of the loch. There are trees at the front of the loch. The sky is clear and it looks like it is a sunset.'

If you have **Snapchat** there is a 'Headspace' meditation option in the **Games and Minis** section of the app. You can **type it into the search bar at the top**, when you find the mini swipe until you find a mini that suits you. There are options such as 'Just Breathe' and 'Kick the Panic'. These can be really helpful.

If you are in school and feel overwhelmed there is a lot of support available, you can speak to a teacher you trust or a guidance teacher. They can help you calm down and find a safe place for you to calm down until you feel comfortable again. **If you regularly get panic attacks consider talking to your GP, a teacher or a family member.**





## Night Before Exams and Tests

- Do some **last minute recap** using flashcards or practice questions.
- Go over **command word meanings and structures** for essays etc. so that you know how to approach certain question types.
- Make sure your **bag is packed and you have everything you will need**- pens, rulers, calculators, highlighters etc.
- If it is an exam remember your candidate number, stationary that you will need and anything else like water etc.
- Try to **go to sleep early and make sure you set an alarm** to avoid extra stress in the morning.
- **Do not study after 10pm**, if you don't know it by then you won't learn it before the next day
- **Eat breakfast in the morning** so you have energy and won't be distracted by hunger

## Last Minute Panic

**Leaving studying to the last minute should be avoided** under all circumstances but if that is the situation you find yourself in here are some tips. **Focus on perfecting what you already know**, not trying to learn what you find difficult and don't already have a basic idea of. You are better knowing how to do somethings really well than lots of things not very well.

**Try to fit in some practice questions either exam level or textbook questions** so that you know what you could potentially be asked, if all else fails and you are really tight for time try to read some practice questions and answer in your head, make notes on post it notes or on paper.

There are flashcards made by other students available on chegg prep and quizlet but there is no guarantee that these are reliable and ideally should not be used to study but they can be used for last minute studying if needed especially before bed.

Try to **utilise all the time you have available, but finish up at a reasonable time with a quick recap** of what you studied before bed as the **information is circulating your brain while you are asleep** giving you a higher chance of remembering it.

**Don't stay up too late, sleep is important and you'll perform worse if you're tired.** Try and accept that you won't do as well as you hoped but make plans for how you're going to improve, if you had exceptional circumstances that prevented you from studying try talking to your teacher about an extension or something similar.