

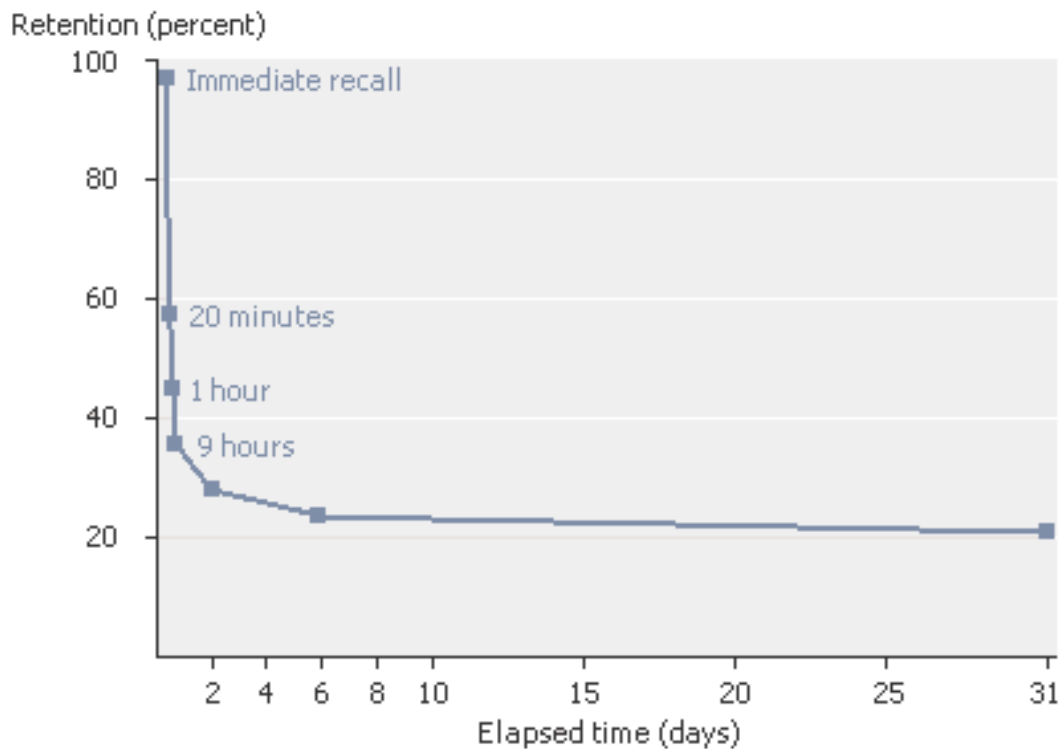
Memory, Revision and Exam Techniques



Introduction

Memory is a very important part of learning. It *is* possible to improve your memory, but there is no magic wand; hard work is involved. However, developing memory techniques that suit you will be useful for life.

Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve



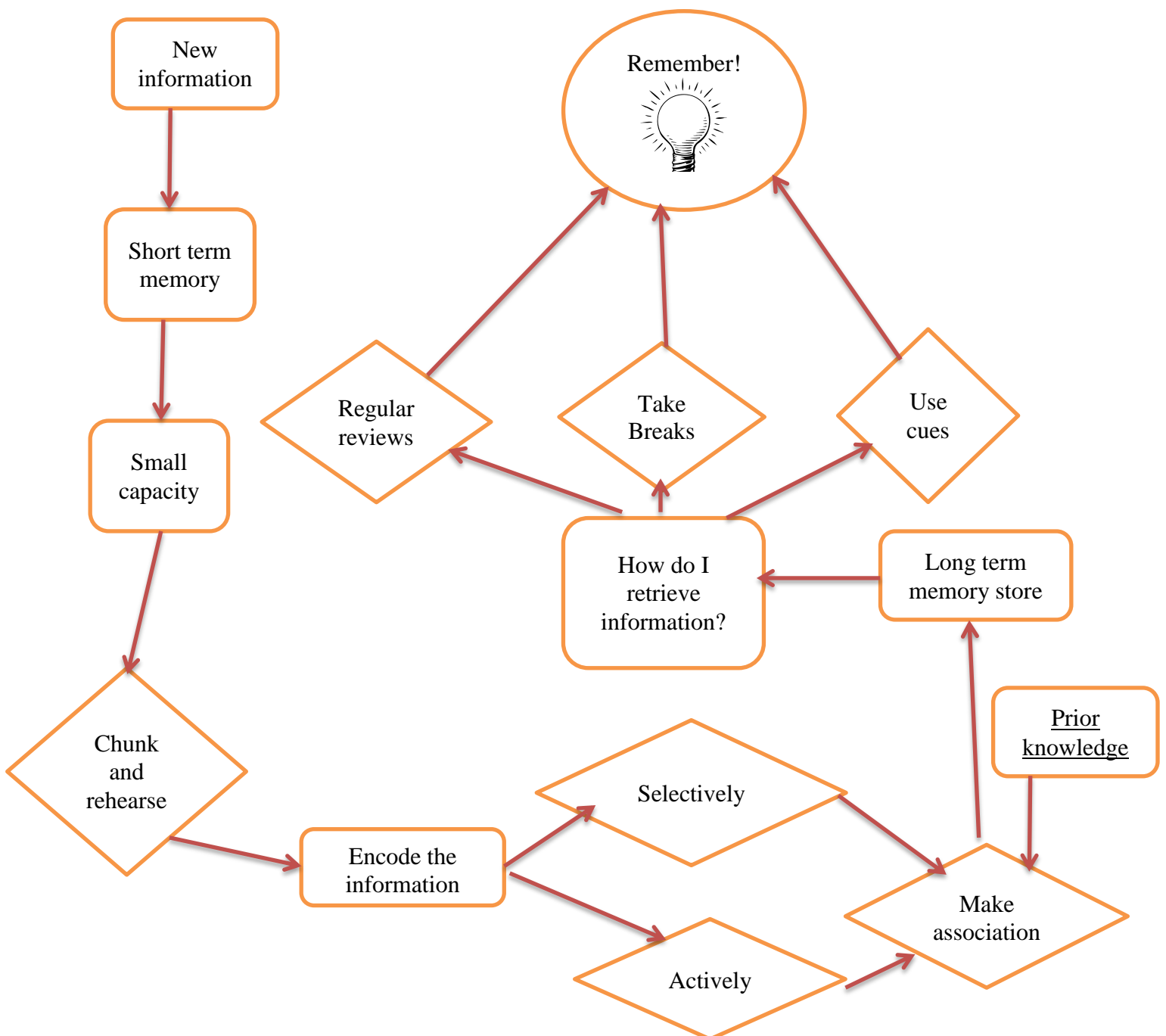
Source: Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*, 1885/1913

Ebbinghaus' famous research on memory decay took place in the 1880s, but is still valid: 80% of what you learn today will be forgotten within 24 hours if you do not make a conscious effort to remember it.

It is also very important that you regularly review the knowledge that you are acquiring; this is how things move from short-term to long term memory and become easier to recall at speed. Effective revision is an on-going process, not a cramming session just before the exams. This strategy also helps you to acquire a knowledge base rather than simply to pass an exam and then forget the information.

Prior knowledge and understanding also affect learning. It is *vital* to understand new material before trying to remember it.

Remembering: an overview



You need to be focused and alert in order for your memory to work. If you are not concentrating when taking in new information you cannot hope to remember. If you don't understand the new information you won't remember it.

Association is very important. Try to link new information in your brain with something you already know.

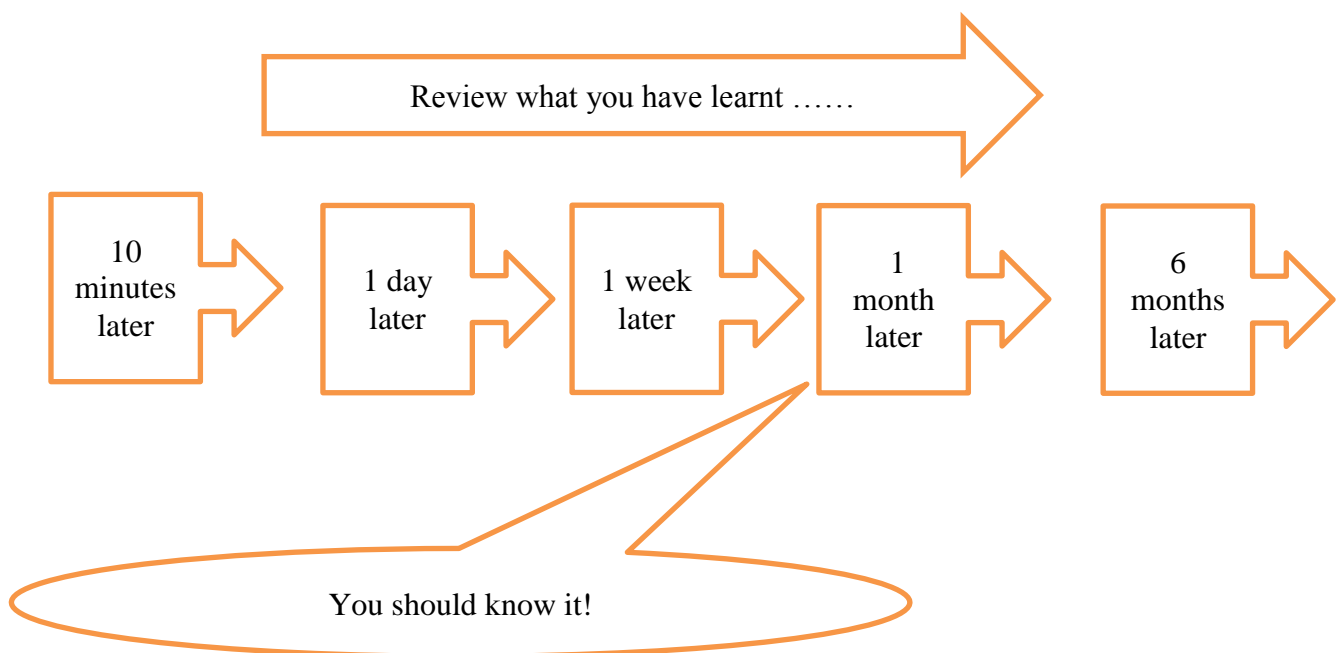
Review

Review should be an active attempt to hook the facts into your visual, auditory and kinaesthetic memory. This is why multisensory learning is so important. Review does not just mean repetition or reading through; you need to work on the material in different ways.

- Mind maps can be particularly useful as they present information in a visual form

At the end of a learning session, your ability to recall the material actually rises; it peaks after about 10 minutes and then falls off dramatically. If you can do your review at that 10 minute point, you will reinforce the information at its strongest.

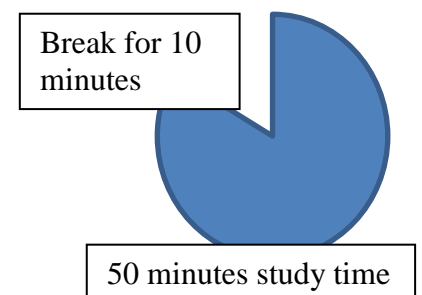
Each additional review engraves the learning deeper and deeper in your mind. Reviewing should be quite quick. Rework and condense the material so that you can remind yourself quickly.



Taking Breaks

Split your personal study time into 50 minute chunks with 10 minute breaks in between.

It is important that you relax or do something physical or creative during the break to refresh your brain.

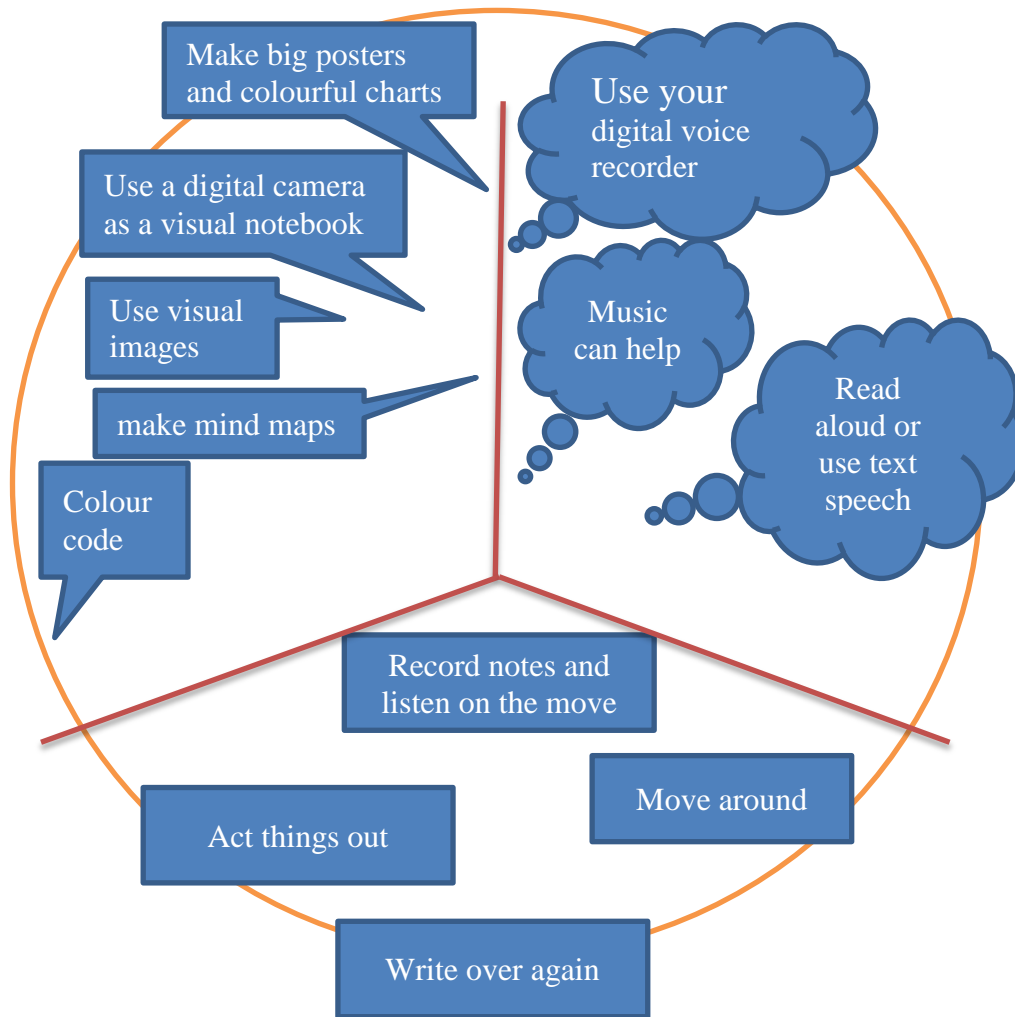


Make your preferences work for you

Some people find that they learn best using highly visual cues, others prefer listening, reading, doing, singing, reciting...there aren't any right or wrong ways to learn or memorise, just ones that work for you.

Visual Learner

Auditory Learner



Kinaesthetic Learner

If you think of yourself as **visual**:

- Make big posters and colourful charts.
- Put these up all around your space and look at them often.
- Make mindmaps, either on paper or on the screen.
- Use visual images in your revision cards or mind maps.
- Make good use of colour.
- Use a digital camera as a 'visual notebook'.

Colour and images are good memory aids.

If you learn best by **listening**:

- Record your learning materials or revision notes on your digital voice recorder.
- Speak your revision summaries aloud to yourself.
- Ask yourself, or someone else, questions.
- Record a series of questions and answers, leaving a gap for you to say the answer aloud before hearing it.
- Read aloud to yourself or use text-to-speech software.
- Using music as an aid:
 - Associate different tracks or albums with different topics, and always match them up. Remembering the music should help you remember the topic.
 - Create a rhythm so that you tap out the key points of the information as you are learning.
 - Make song lyrics out of your notes.
 - Make up a tune so that the low notes and high notes are associated with different things.

Reciting or reviewing out loud strengthens the links made to your brain.

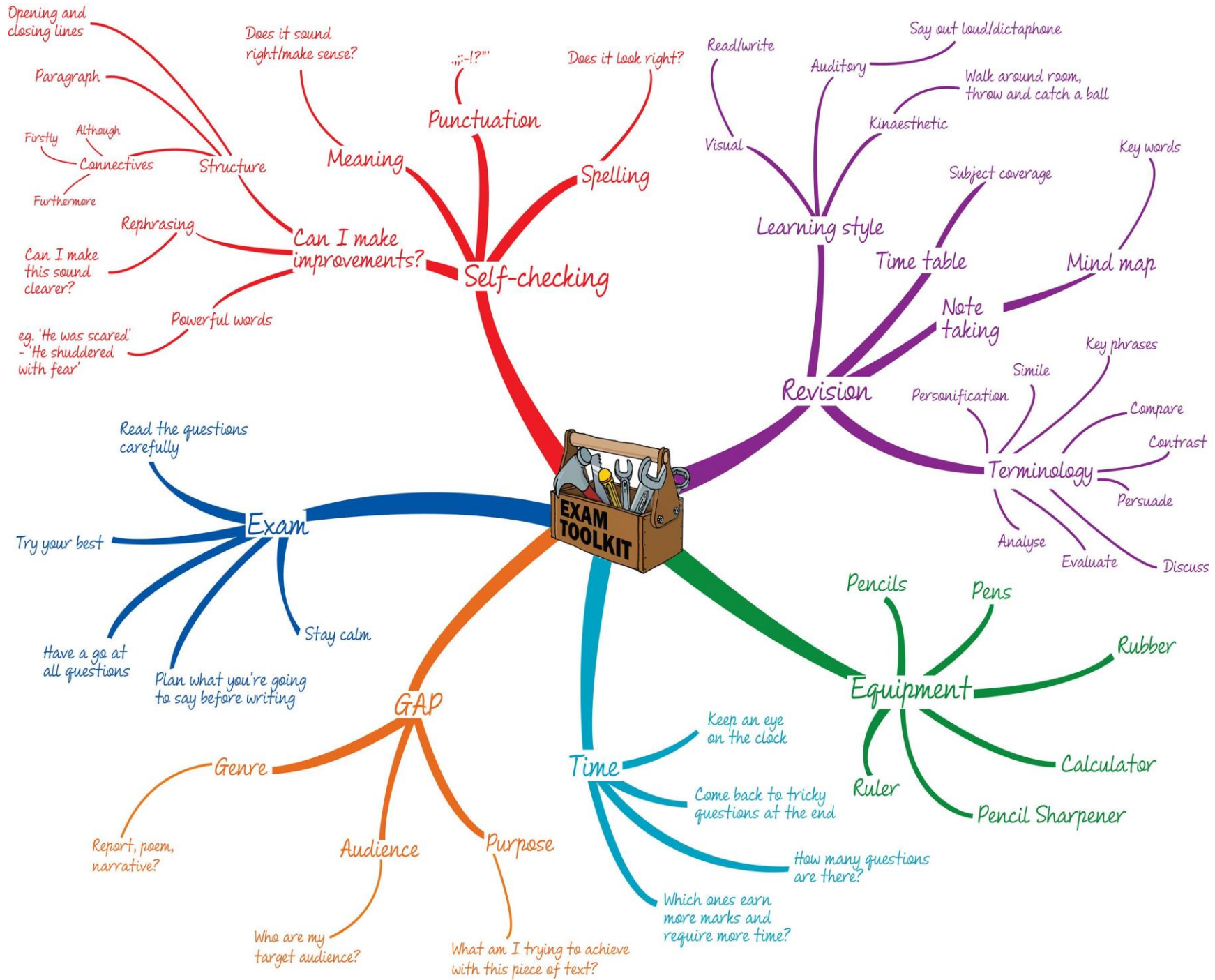
If you prefer to learn by **doing**:

- Act out procedures if possible.
- Move around while you are revising.
- Write your notes repeatedly – but don't just copy.
- Record your notes, but listen back while you are on the move.

But best of all, engage all your senses actively for multisensory learning!

Making Links

Our memory works by building links. We remember things which are associated in our mind by repetition, sense, colour, rhythm, rhyme, or anything which is unique, absurd or unusual.



Exams

- Do not fall into the trap of thinking that a good memory is the only thing you need for passing exams. Exams tend to be about what you understand, more than about what you can remember.
- If you revise effectively, throughout the year and before the exam, and have a good understanding of the subject, then you have the potential to do well.
- It is crucial to adopt a positive mental attitude.
- Think of an exam as a challenge, a way to demonstrate your knowledge. If you have been working steadily, there is no reason why you should not do well in the exam.
- Ideally, you should have been reviewing your work throughout the year. If not, you still need to allow plenty of time to revise – at least 6 to 8 weeks. You will need to get organised and start your revision well in advance of the exam start date.
- At all costs avoid last minute panic and cramming.

Revision strategies

- Break down your subject into topics.
- Plan your revision timetable in detail – but not as an excuse not to get on with the revision.
- Don't spend all your time on the interesting things!
- Allow some free time – all-night marathons are not the way to revise.
- If you haven't been reworking and condensing your notes throughout the year, start to do so now!
- Revise everything more than once – overlearning is important for retention.
- Try explaining your topic to someone who does not know anything about it. If you can do this, it proves that you understand it.
- Practise writing under timed conditions and be realistic about how much you can produce in the given time.

Look, cover, write, check.

This is an old and trusted technique that still works for many people:

- Revise a section of work
- Cover it up or put it aside
- Write down or record as much as you can remember
- Check against the original
- Highlight anything you got wrong or forgot
- Prioritise these areas for future revision

Past papers

Going through past question papers is very helpful. You can familiarise yourself with the format of the paper and the wording of the questions. Past papers may also act as a guide to the types of topic which crop up in the exam, but do not rely on this too much!

Practise making brief plans to answer the questions. You do not need to answer the question in full, but by going through what you know, selecting the most relevant material and ordering it coherently, you are practising a technique which will be used in the exams.

Techniques for the exam itself

Plan your exam time in advance. Set a time limit for each question.

Take your watch off and place it on the desk so that you can keep to your time frame. Allow time for planning and checking.

When you have a paper with multiple choice or essay type questions read through quickly to start with:

✓ the ones you can do

? the ones you are unsure about

x the ones you definitely cannot do

Look very carefully at each question before starting your answer to make sure you understand exactly what is required.

Box the instruction words.

Underline the key points.

Make a quick plan.

Get to the point quickly.

Try not to give vague, generalised remarks but do give plenty of explanations and examples. Examiners can only give you credit for what you actually write; they do not assume any knowledge.

Coping with pre-examination stress

- Do not drink too much caffeine –try herb teas or fruit juices instead.
- Try relaxation exercises or listening to music.
- As the exam approaches, think of all the things you can do, not all the things you cannot.
- Allow yourself time for rest and recreation.

REVISION TIMETABLE

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							