



EARLSTON HIGH SCHOOL

PREPARING FOR EXAMS

SOME GENERAL NOTES

PREPARED FROM SUGGESTIONS BY STUDENTS, PARENTS,
TEACHERS AND ADVISERS

EARLSTON HIGH SCHOOL
PREPARATION FOR EXAMS

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PURPOSE

The purpose of these notes is to help students use their time more effectively when studying for tests and exams.

It is not the intention of these notes to put students under more pressure. It is the opposite.

If you prepare well, you will feel less pressure and you will save time.

THE FURTHER THROUGH THE SCHOOL YOU GO THE MORE LEARNING TAKES PLACE AT HOME.

IT IS UP TO YOU

Most of the "tips" and advice are simply "common sense". It is up to you to decide which might be most useful to you - and try them out.

SOME FACTS

- The way students prepare for exams makes a great difference to results.
 - There are many effective ways to prepare for exams but most share basic ground rules.
 - Revision must be focused on what you need to do in the exam. Few people have time to waste doing work which is not needed.
 - You do not know how good you are at a subject until you have worked hard at revision. Some pupils have been "shocked" at the improvement.
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- If you can get marks before the exam, try your best! Eg English folios, Biology practical skills etc.

RESULTS

Most pupils do much better than they expect. If you try hard and ask for help - there is no need to worry.

ESSENTIAL PUPIL MATERIALS

WHAT WE MUST PROVIDE FOR YOU

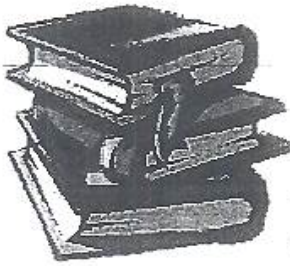
As part of our Teaching and Learning policy we have agreed on certain basic things which pupils must receive to allow them to achieve their best progress in each course.

They are :-

1. A plan of the course giving topics and times.
2. Work appropriate to the ability of each pupil and the stage he/she has reached.
3. A complete set of information to learn/revise (notes/books etc).
4. Regular assessment eg tests.
5. Regular and frequent homework which is marked.
6. Summaries of each "topic" (these may be in the book)
or
A list of required learning outcomes so that the pupils have precise information on the requirements of the course.
7. Guidance on preparation for tests/exams and techniques during tests/exams.

NOTES

- These things in themselves do not ensure "a good educational experience". This depends on the skill and enthusiasm of the teacher to motivate and stretch every pupil – and on the willingness of pupils to try their best – and ask for help.
 - Parents can help by letting us know if you think your children are not receiving any of the "essential" materials.
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Preparing to Study: A Good Study Place

You need a good study place to be prepared to study. You should be able to answer YES to all of the following questions:

1. Is my Study Place available to me whenever I need it?

Your Study Place does you little good if you cannot use it when you need it. If you are using a Study Place that you must share with others for any reason, work out a schedule so that you know when you can use it.

2. Is my Study Place free from interruptions?

It is important to have uninterrupted study time. You may have to hang a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door or take the phone off the hook.

3. Is my Study Place free from distractions?

Research shows that most students study best in a quiet environment. If you find that playing a stereo or TV improves your mood, keep the volume low.

4. Does my Study Place contain all the study materials I need?

Be sure your Study Place includes reference sources and supplies such as pens and pencils, paper, ruler, calculator, and whatever else you might need. If you use a computer for your schoolwork, it should be in your Study Place.



5. Does my Study Space contain a large enough desk or table?

While working on an assignment or studying for a test, use a desk or table that is large enough to hold everything you need. Allow enough room for writing and try to avoid clutter.

6. Does my Study Place have enough storage space?

You need enough room to store your study materials. Be sure you have enough storage space to allow you to keep your desktop or other work surface clear of unnecessary materials that can get in the way.

7. Does my Study Place have a comfortable chair?

A chair that is not comfortable can cause discomfort or pain that will interfere with your studying. A chair that is too comfortable might make you sleepy. Select a chair in which you can sit for long periods while maintaining your attention.

8. Does my Study Place have enough light?

The amount of light you need depends on what you are doing. The important thing is that you can clearly see what you need to see without any strain or discomfort.

9. Does my Study Place have a comfortable temperature?

If your Study Place is too warm, you might become sleepy. If it is too cold, your thinking may slow down and become unclear. Select a temperature at which your mind and body function best.

Having a good Study Place is important for good studying.

STUDY TIMETABLE

PLAN HOW TO USE YOUR TIME – AND BE REALISTIC!

- At Social Education you will receive Timetable sheets.
- Have a long term timetable (weeks) and a short term (days).
- Do not be too ambitious. Be realistic and try to stick to it.
- Build in “rewards” for yourself. Short breaks for food/drink, exercise, etc.
- Holidays can be very useful times to catch up and study. Get the balance right. Not too much work - not too much play.
- Exam Leave : many S4, S5 and S6 pupils will have exam leave in April/May/June. S4 will have exam leave in Nov/Dec and S5 and S6 will have exam leave during prelims in February. Try to use this time well.
- During study leave you do not need to stay on your own. Come into school to check things with your teachers and to see other students.
- During study leave try to start early each day.
- If you are a very busy person you might have to reduce commitments, but do not give up all recreational activities.
- Do not fool yourself. Turning pages when you are not concentrating is a waste of time.
- Vary your study activities.
- Research has shown that sleep is very important to learning and memory. Most people need at least 8 hours. While you sleep your brain (hopefully) sorts out the day's learning.
- Be prepared to change your study timetable quite often – you might do better than planned. You might not manage to go as fast as you thought.
- Finish basic revision well before the exam to allow plenty time for past papers/learning/practice, etc.
- Ask for help/advice on your timetable.

Procrastination

What is Procrastination?

Procrastination is putting off or avoiding doing something that must be done. It is natural to procrastinate occasionally. However, excessive procrastination can result in guilt feelings about not doing a task when it should be done. It can also cause anxiety since the task still needs to be done. Further, excessive procrastination can cause poor performance if the task is completed without sufficient time to do it well. In short, excessive procrastination can interfere with school and personal success.

Why Do Students Procrastinate?

There are many reasons why students procrastinate. Here are the most common reasons:

1. **Perfectionism.** A student's standard of performance may be so high for a task that it does not seem possible to meet that standard.
2. **Fear of Failure.** A student may lack confidence and fear that he/she will be unable to accomplish a task successfully.
3. **Confusion.** A student may be unsure about how to start a task or how it should be completed.
4. **Task Difficulty.** A student may lack the skills and abilities needed to accomplish a task.
5. **Poor Motivation.** A student may have little or no interest in completing a task because he/she finds the task boring or lacking in relevance.
6. **Difficulty Concentrating.** A student may have too many things around that distract him/her from doing a task.
7. **Task Unpleasantness.** A student may dislike doing what a task requires.
8. **Lack of Priorities.** A student may have little or no sense about which tasks are most important to do.



How Do I Know if I Procrastinate Excessively?

You procrastinate excessively if you agree with five or more of the following statements:

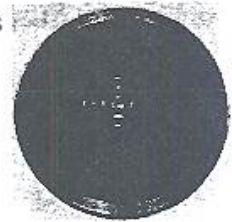
1. I often put off starting a task I find difficult
2. I often give up on a task as soon as I start to find it difficult.
3. I often wonder why I should be doing a task.
4. I often have difficulty getting started on a task.
5. I often try to do so many tasks at once that I cannot do any of them.
6. I often put off a task in which I have little or no interest.
7. I often try to come up with reasons to do something other than a task I have to do.
8. I often ignore a task when I am not certain about how to start it or complete it.

9. I often start a task but stop before completing it.
10. I often find myself thinking that if I ignore a task, it will go away.
11. I often cannot decide which of a number of tasks I should complete first.
12. I often find my mind wandering to things other than the task on which I am trying to work.

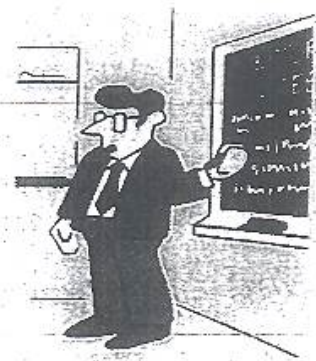
What Can I Do About Excessive Procrastination?

Here are some things you can do to control excessive procrastination.

1. Motivate yourself to work on a task with thoughts such as "There is no time like the present," or "Nobody's perfect."
2. Prioritize the tasks you have to do.
3. Commit yourself to completing a task once started.
4. Reward yourself whenever you complete a task.
5. Work on tasks at the times you work best.
6. Break large tasks into small manageable parts.
7. Work on tasks as part of a study group.
8. Get help from teachers and other students when you find a task difficult.
9. Make a schedule of the tasks you have to do and stick to it.
10. Eliminate distractions that interfere with working on tasks.
11. Set reasonable standards that you can meet for a task.
12. Take breaks when working on a task so that you do not wear down.
13. Work on difficult and/or unpleasant tasks first.
14. Work on a task you find easier after you complete a difficult task.
15. Find a good place to work on tasks.



Above all, think positively and get going. Once you are into a task, you will probably find that it is more interesting than you thought it would be and not as difficult as you feared. You will feel increasingly relieved as you work toward its accomplishment and will come to look forward to the feeling of satisfaction you will experience when you have completed the task.



Good Listening In Class

It is important for you to be a good listener in class. Much of what you will have to learn will be presented verbally by your teachers. Just hearing what your teachers say is not the same as listening to what they say. Listening is a cognitive act that requires you to pay attention and think about and mentally process what you hear.

Here are some things you should do to be a good listener in class.

- ▶ **Be Cognitively Ready to Listen When You Come to Class.** Make sure you complete all assigned work and readings. Review your notes from previous class sessions. Think about what you know about the topic that will be covered in class that day.
 - ▶ **Be Emotionally Ready to Listen When You Come to Class.** Your attitude is important. Make a conscious choice to find the topic useful and interesting. Be committed to learning all that you can.
 - ▶ **Listen with a Purpose.** Identify what you expect and hope to learn from the class session. Listen for these things as your teacher talks.
 - ▶ **Listen with an Open Mind.** Be receptive to what your teacher says. It is good to question what is said as long as you remain open to points of view other than your own.
 - ▶ **Be Attentive.** Focus on what your teacher is saying. Try not to daydream and let your mind wander to other things. It helps to sit in the front and center of the class, and to maintain eye contact with your teacher.
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- ▶ **Be an Active Listener.** You can think faster than your teacher can speak. Use this to your advantage by evaluating what is being said and trying to anticipate what will be said next. Take good written notes about what your teacher says. While you can think faster than your teacher can speak, you cannot write faster than your teacher can speak. Taking notes requires you to make decisions about what to write, and you have to be an active listener to do this.
 - ▶ **Meet the Challenge.** Don't give up and stop listening when you find the information being presented difficult to understand. Listen even more carefully at these times and work hard to understand what is being said. Don't be reluctant to ask questions.
 - ▶ **Triumph Over the Environment.** The classroom may too noisy, too hot, too cold, too bright, or too dark. Don't give in to these inconveniences. Stay focused on the big picture - **LEARNING.**

LEARNING STYLES

- Different pupils learn in different ways.
 - A lot of research has been done in this area and the main styles identified.
 - The next two pages give some details.
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- During the 2-day visit in June P7 pupils completed questionnaires to give a guide to their own preferred learning styles. They will receive their own personal details from their Guidance teachers soon.
 - Being aware of this might help a pupil choose how to study and to try various methods.
 - We have found most students have strengths in several of the learning styles.
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REVISING - SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Most people cannot learn by only reading. They have to "do something".
Most learning takes place when you re-organise/summarise/solve problems/etc.

- Make sure you have everything you need to start a topic/subject, etc. Notes, books, past papers and any revision materials from your teachers.
 - You have to start at a level you understand. You may have to go back very far!
 - When you go back to the start of a course it usually seems very easy.
 - Study can be enjoyable! if you have something to show for your time, eg summary notes, answers to questions, etc.
 - When you are "doing something" and making progress it is possible to work for quite long periods of time.
 - Try a variety of methods. Mind maps, summaries, etc.
 - At an early stage have a look at a past paper. How much time is given? What kind of questions are asked? Note any areas you think might need "more attention". Ask your teachers for examples of past papers.
 - Music seems to help most people.
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- No-one can study well with the TV on!
 - If possible use a room where you can be alone.
 - Divide courses into units or topics - if they are not already organised for you.
 - After revising a topic - TEST YOURSELF. Use old homework questions, old test questions, past paper questions, etc. Try to start with easy questions.
 - Revision guides can be purchased.
 - Use materials posted on Glow or Edmodo.
 - When in doubt ASK for help.
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USING SUMMARIES

Reduce and simplify → understand and learn

- Most subjects have a great deal of information. Try to reduce it drastically.
- Most students have found the use of summaries an important part of preparing for exams.
- Use diagrams, colours, etc in your summary. Do not use sentences. It should be neat and very clear. Each page should have “shapes” and colours. You will find you will remember what each page is like.
- Your summary should contain only important things you might forget. Do not include a lot of obvious basic details.
- Use your summary to test yourself. Cover part of the page - see if you know what is there.
- See if your summary is enough to answer questions on the topic. If it is not you need to add to it.
- You might decide to “summarise your summary” - to finish up with “key ideas”. These “key ideas” will remind you of the rest of the topic.
- If you prepare a summary you may want to ask a teacher to check on it.

REMINDERS

- Put up charts, posters, lists, etc, of things you need to remember around the house.
- Close your eyes – can you “picture” the chart, poster, page of your summary etc?

AN EXAMPLE OF A SUMMARY

THE RIVER DIVIDES

The river Torrent flows through the farmland of Perthshire. Near the village of Downfield there are two large farms; one on either side of the river. To the north side is Rosshall farm which has been owned by the Brooke family for four hundred years. To the south side of the river is Oldhall farm which has been owned by the Jeeves family for two years. Oldhall is bigger and more profitable.

There have been many disputes between the families. The two Brooke boys, James and Steven, enjoy fishing and have been accused of wading to the "wrong side" of the river.

There are three girls in the Jeeves family, Anne, Janice and Belinda. The girls keep horses and there have been complaints that the horses have crossed the river and damaged the wheat fields at Rosshall.

The main hope for the future is the secret romance between James and Anne (the oldest children). James is 21 and Anne is 18, but the only chance they get to meet is at the Wednesday night youth club in St Mark's Church.

SUMMARY USING DIAGRAM

AN EXAMPLE OF A SUMMARY

PHOTOSYNTHESIS

Foods contain chemical energy. If we trace their source all foods come from green plants.

Green plants make food by a process called photosynthesis. "Photo" means light and "synthesis" means making. Green leaves take in carbon dioxide from the air and water from the soil. A green chemical called chlorophyll takes in light from the sun and makes starch from the water and carbon dioxide. The starch is stored in the leaves or another part of the plant eg potatoes.

During photosynthesis the green leaves give off oxygen. This is vital to keep the oxygen levels in the air which are needed by animals. Animals breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. (The opposite of plants.)

Thus plants provide the oxygen that animals need and animals provide the carbon dioxide which plants need.

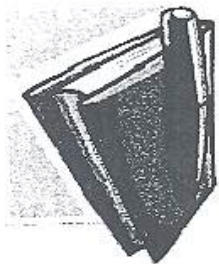
A SUMMARY ON A DIAGRAM

A SUMMARY IN AN "EQUATION"

MIND MAPPING

Very effective learning takes place when the student re-organises information to be learned. A mind map is another form of summary which some students like to use. It is particularly useful to show connections between ideas and events. Here is an example from basic science. Another example is to "map out" the events in a novel/play etc.

This is done by the student, not given by the teacher.



Using Acronyms to Remember Information

Forming an acronym is a good strategy to use to remember information in any order that can be remembered. An acronym is a word that is formed from the first letter of each fact to be remembered. It can be a real word or a nonsense word you are able to pronounce.

Here is how to form an acronym.

- ▶ Write the facts you need to remember.
- ▶ Underline the first letter of each fact. If there is more than one word in a fact, underline the first letter of only the first word in the fact.
- ▶ Arrange the underlined letters to form an acronym that is a real word or a nonsense word you can pronounce.



“HOMES” is an example of an acronym that is a real word you can use to remember the names of the five Great Lakes: Michigan, Erie, Superior, Ontario, Huron: In HOMES, H is the first letter of Huron and helps you remember that name; O is the first letter of Ontario, and so on.

“Telk” is an acronym that can be used to remember the following animals: tiger, lion, elephant, kangaroo. “Telk” is not a real word, but you can easily pronounce it. You could also have used “kelt” as an acronym. Notice that in this example, you cannot form a real word using the first letter of each fact to be remembered.

Sometimes two or more of the facts you must remember each begin with the same first letter. For example, the acronym “capp” can be used to remember the following fruits: pear, apple, peach, cherry. You can use the first letter “p” in the acronym to remember either “pear” or “peach” and the second letter “p” to remember the other.

Use the acronym strategy as a way to remember information.

Using Acronymic Sentences to Remember Information

Creating an acronymic sentence is a good strategy to use when you have to remember information in a certain order. An acronymic sentence is a sentence that is created using the first letter of each piece of information to be remembered.

Here is how to create an acronymic sentence.

- Write each piece of information you have to remember.
- Underline the first letter of each piece of information. If there is more than one word in a piece of information, underline the first letter of the most important word.
- Write a sentence using words that begin with the underlined letters.



"My (Mercury) very (Venus) earthy (Earth) mother (Mars) just (Jupiter) served (Saturn) us (Uranus) nine (Neptune) pizzas (Pluto)" is an acronymic sentence that students through the years have used to remember the order of planets around our sun, from closest to furthest. If you accept recent evidence that Pluto is not a planet, you can use "My very earthy mother just served us noodles."



Here are the five most populous cities in Indiana shown in order from highest to lowest: Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Evansville, South Bend, Gary. Here is an acronymic sentence you can use to remember these cities in the order shown:

"Insects from everywhere seem gross."

Try to form an acronymic sentence that is funny or has a personal meaning for you. You will find the sentence easier to remember if you do this. When you remember the acronymic sentence you create, each word in the sentence will help you remember the piece of information it represents (for example, "Insects" represents "Indianapolis").

Creating acronymic sentences is an effective and fun way to remember information.

PAST/EXEMPLAR PAPERS

USING PAST/EXEMPLAR PAPERS GIVES YOU A HUGE ADVANTAGE

- Teachers will give you photocopies of past papers – ask!
 - Books of Past/Exemplar Papers can be bought or found on the SQA website
 - Have a look at Past/Exemplar Papers early in your revision to see the kind of thing you need to do.
 - After revising a topic, try some past paper questions on that topic.
 - Try whole Pas/Exemplar Papers near the exam, to check your learning but also to check your timing.
 - See your teacher with any problems you have with past papers.
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TUTORIAL/DROP-IN SESSIONS

Many departments offer help at lunchtimes and after school.. These sessions are advertised in the daily bulletin/noticeboards/school website. Copies can also be picked up from the school office. All pupils are encouraged to attend these sessions or they can arrange a time to meet with their teachers.

DURING THE EXAM

GOOD EXAM TECHNIQUE IS WORTH MANY MARKS!

- Arrive early for the exams and always check exam times. (Dates!)
 - Read the questions very carefully.
 - If you have a choice of questions, do not rush the choice.
 - Make a plan for essay-type questions. (Show the plan on your exam answer sheet.)
 - Keep looking back at the question to make sure you stick to the point.
 - Do not fall behind your times by more than five minutes.
 - Leave most difficult questions till last – but make sure you go back.
 - Make sure your answer “answers the question”.
 - Think of the person marking your exam. He/she will have many papers to mark. It will help if you set your work clearly - taking plenty of space. The marker is going to try to give you as many marks as possible.
 - If possible, leave some time to go over the questions and answers. You will always find some silly mistakes.
 - Make sure you have looked at the whole question paper! and that you have tried all questions.
-
- If you get stuck - move on quickly.
 - You can always make a start, even if you cannot finish a question put down as much as possible, eg diagrams, formulas, plans, relevant facts, etc.
 - If you can't do the first part of a question and you need the result to do the second part, say you are going to assume an answer – and use it.
 - You get marks for what is correct. You very seldom lose marks for what is wrong - so have a try - “nothing to lose”.
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HEALTH

We are told the brain works best when :

- The body gets plenty sleep.
 - The body gets regular, nutritious food.
 - Some people do not feel like eating much just before an exam but they must keep blood sugar levels high. A sweet snack could help.
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- Drink lots of water. The “expert” on the Whole Brain Learning Course said drinking water is very important. (Don’t forget to go to the toilet before the exam!!)
- Keep up leisure activities. They help. Eg exercise, sport, music, etc.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS/RELATIVES

- Parents/guardians can be useful!
- They can check work you have done.
- They can ask questions from your notes/summaries.
- They can help encourage you to stick to plans?!?
- They can remind you of exam dates!!!
- They worry too. Try to reassure them. Don’t tell them you are “learning nothing and going to fail everything” – they might believe you!

THE BEST OF LUCK
