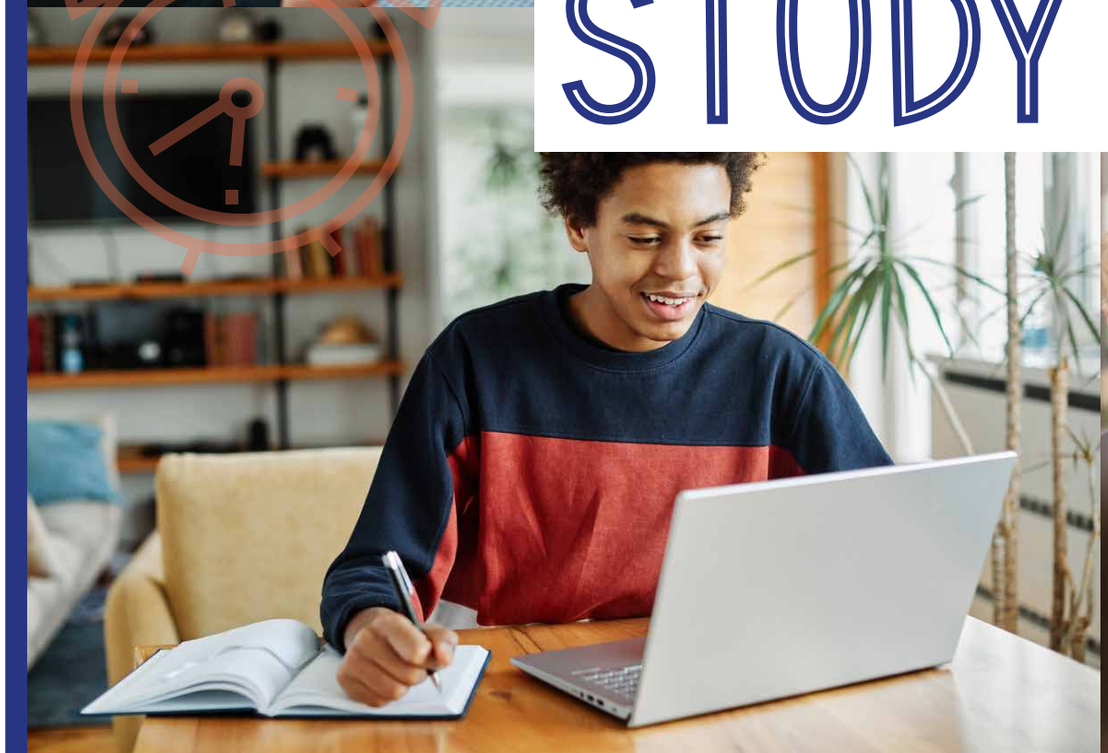
ESSENTIAL GUIDE





ESSENTIAL GUIDE

STUDY TIPS

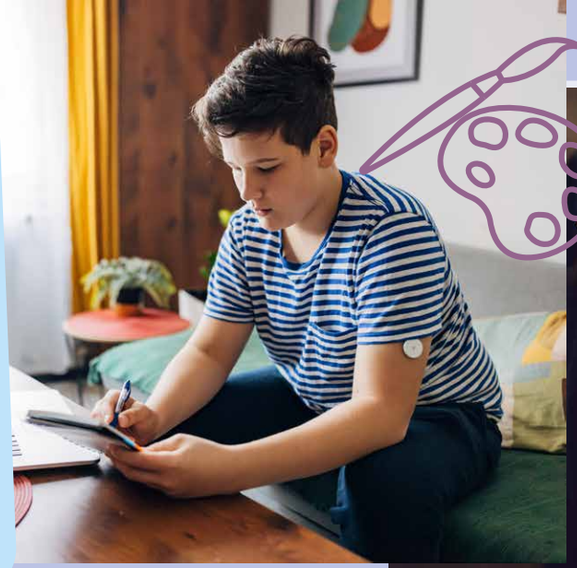




Introduction

Now that you're in secondary school, there are so many subjects to learn. This is exciting but you may be wondering how on earth you are going to find the time to study them all!

That is what this study guide is all about – to help you plan your study time effectively and make the most of your learning at school.





Regardless of what stage you are at in secondary school, you will be attending classes, doing coursework and assessments throughout the year, and sitting exams. Therefore, it is important that you get as much as you can out of your studies. To do this you need to get into a good system of learning and revising for both your coursework and preparation for your end of year exams.

In this guide we will cover:

1 An overview of the Scottish curriculum 3

2 Get yourself organised! 5

3 Learning - how do you learn 8

4 How to approach study and revision 9

5 Set yourself goals to keep you on track 11

6 Senior phase - targeted study for exams 12

7 Look after yourself 16

8 Useful resources 17





An overview of the Scottish curriculum

When you are in S1 and S2 you will study a general foundation of subjects across the curriculum which will prepare you for the senior phase of your studies, from S4 onwards.

There are over 30 subjects available for study – so you may have a hard time deciding which ones you want to take further! Before we get to that, let's look at the qualification structure set out by Qualifications Scotland.



The National Qualifications

Once you reach senior phase you will be studying towards achieving the National Qualifications – these can not only be studied at school but at college, or some training centres, too.

The qualifications are at various levels where you can progress from one level to the next. Here is a diagram showing the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). You can see here where the subjects you study at school fit in (mostly the first column), along with the qualifications that you can study after school (other columns).

SCQF Levels	Qualifications of Qualifications Scotland (formerly SQA)			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutes	Apprenticeships & SVQs
12				Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11				Integrated Masters Degree/ Masters Degree Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
10				Honours Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
9			Professional Development Award	Bachelors / Ordinary Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	Grauduate Apprenticeship Higher Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
8		Higher National Diploma		Diploma of Higher Education	
7	Advanced Higher Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate		Certificate of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
6	Higher SfW Higher				Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
5	National 5 SfW National 5				Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
4	National 4 SfW National 4	National Certificate	National Progression Award		Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
3	National 3 SfW National 3				
2	National 2				
1	National 1				

An Overview of the Scottish curriculum



The level and number of qualifications you study at school will determine which college and university courses you can apply to. They are also required by most employers as proof of your level of knowledge and skills learned.

So, whether you plan to leave school after S4 to work or stay on later to go to college or university, they are important for any school leaver to attain for their future.

The key to the success of your studies lies in your enthusiasm for learning – as well as your organisational skills.

Now that you understand more about the National Qualification system, we will explore how to get you sailing through your studies at school!



You may want to read the following for further information:

Your National Qualifications from Qualifications Scotland
https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Your-NQ-2025-26-school.pdf

You may find the '**Making Subject Choices for S3, S4 and Beyond**' leaflet useful - you can download this from https://www.planitplus.net/Schools/OptionChoices/

Get yourself organised!

With so many subjects to study and so little time in the evening to do your homework and other activities – how do you stay on top of it all?

The key is to organise yourself and your time. Here are some tips and tools.



Organise Your Studies With A Planner

Planning your study or homework time slots in advance will mean you are more likely to stick to it. Your planner could be a simple paper calendar or diary where you mark up your weekly schedule, or it can be an app you can download on your phone, tablet or computer.



My Qualifications Scotland

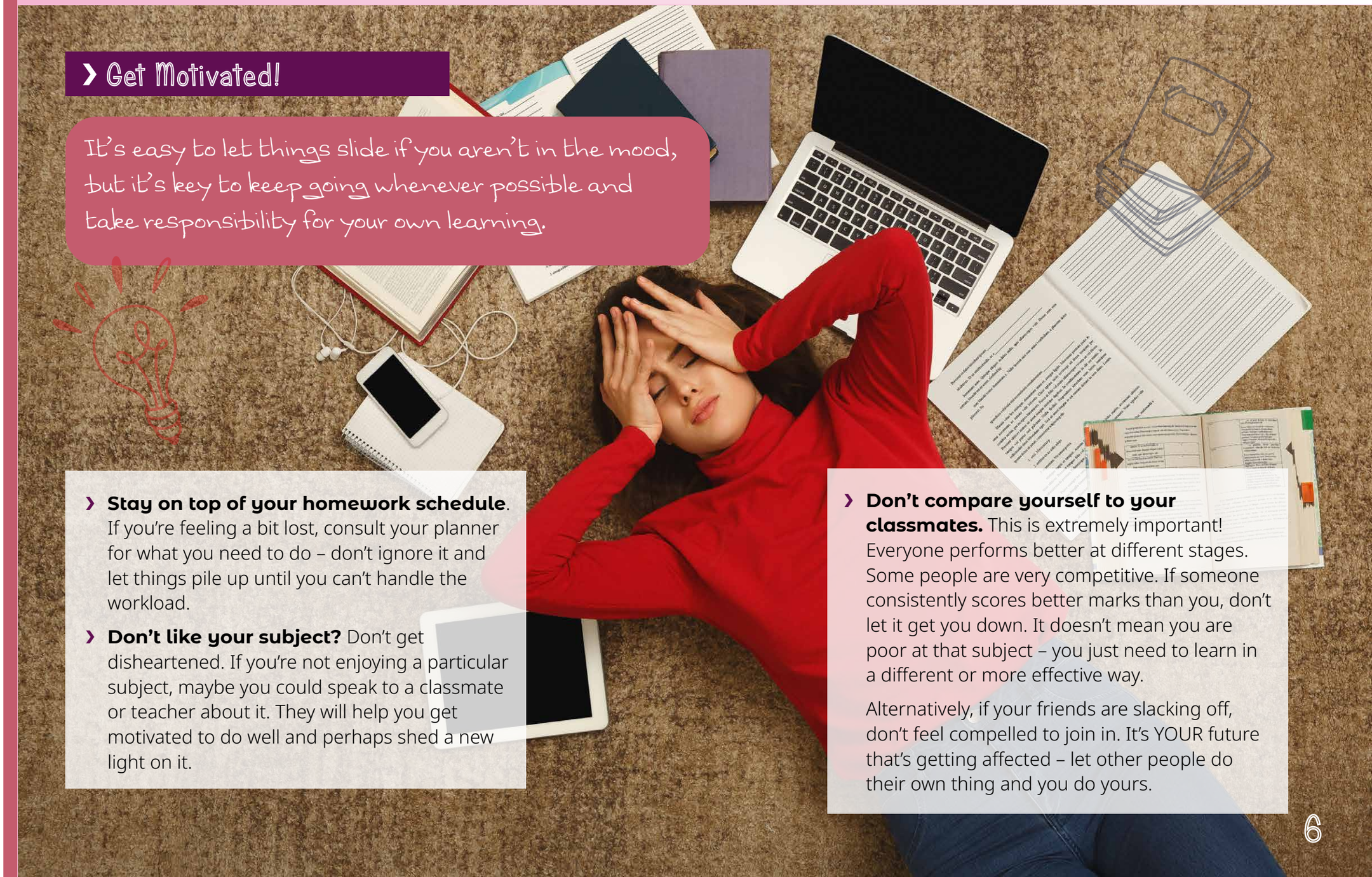
Qualifications Scotland has designed an app just for this purpose. You can download the app **MyStudyPlan** from both Android and Apple app stores.

Alternatively, you could download a printable yearly or monthly planner from the internet, there are many available. Here is an example of a daily planner split into hours https://www.smartgirlstudy.com/_files/ugd/9a59f0_29cafecb781341b884fb46f30e4746e1.pdf You mark up all your activities including clubs and hobbies. This includes time allocated for your PlayStation or XBox!

Breaking it down and including free time makes it more achievable and less daunting.

Get Motivated!

It's easy to let things slide if you aren't in the mood, but it's key to keep going whenever possible and take responsibility for your own learning.



- **Stay on top of your homework schedule**. If you're feeling a bit lost, consult your planner for what you need to do – don't ignore it and let things pile up until you can't handle the workload.
- **Don't like your subject?** Don't get disheartened. If you're not enjoying a particular subject, maybe you could speak to a classmate or teacher about it. They will help you get motivated to do well and perhaps shed a new light on it.

- **Don't compare yourself to your classmates.** This is extremely important! Everyone performs better at different stages. Some people are very competitive. If someone consistently scores better marks than you, don't let it get you down. It doesn't mean you are poor at that subject – you just need to learn in a different or more effective way.

  Alternatively, if your friends are slacking off, don't feel compelled to join in. It's YOUR future that's getting affected – let other people do their own thing and you do yours.

Get yourself organised!

Revise NOW!

Reinforce what you have learned during the day now, and don't wait to cram it all in the week or day before an exam.

Get into the habit of reviewing all your notes from that day **before** you do your homework. The information will still be fresh in your mind, and you may want to expand on your notes. For anything you are unsure about, look up your textbook or the internet for a better explanation so that it's clearer. You could always ask a friend for clarification.



Organise Your Notes

Don't waste time searching for handouts or notes at the last minute when you are about to do your homework or an assignment – sort out all your learning materials for each subject in a designated place so you know where to find everything before starting.

Test Yourself

Have you understood what you have been learning? Check by writing a series of questions on that topic and answering them – or get someone else to test you.

You can read this article from BBC Bitesize (which includes a video) on how you can organise your time at school How to get into a good secondary school routine - BBC Bitesize

Learning – How do you learn?

There are lots of different ways to learn, and everyone's preference is different. What works for your friend may not work for you. Try different methods and see what suits you best. There is no right or wrong.



Here are some examples of different ways of studying.

› **Visual** – some people prefer to take things in visually using pictures, graphs or other diagrams.

› **Listening** – this could be listening to webinars, audible books or recording your notes and listening over and over. It could also be listening to music while studying helps you learn.

› **Reading and writing** – writing notes and reading them over is probably something most people associate with studying. This may suit you or may not.

› **Social** – you may prefer to study with friends as a group. You can talk things over and solve problems together.

› **Combination** – most people will probably use a bit of all of the above methods.

Here are some general tips to help you get the most out of study and revision. Remember, it's your future and it's important you put the work in.





Some students might give the impression of doing very little work and getting good results, but that isn't true for most people. Trying your very best and being diligent will lead to good results for you in the long run.

Before you start revising, it's good to remember WHY you are studying. It's not about just memorising and repeating facts that are fed to you by your teacher. You are learning about a subject you hopefully enjoy, and which benefits your self-development and knowledge – and not just about getting good exam results.

1 **Study in an area where you will not get disturbed**. If you can't get a quiet space at home, you could study in a public space such as your local library or at a study session during your lunch break or after school. Make sure you are sitting at a workspace that will allow you to sit comfortably for a decent period of time.

2 **Don't get distracted**. Having the TV or music on in the background is a personal choice. For some it would be a distraction, but for others it helps to have some background noise. Put your mobile phone on silent so you don't get disturbed or get tempted to start messaging friends or watching TikTok videos.

How to approach study and revision

3 **Be consistent**. Choosing the same time to study each day will get you into a routine you will enjoy.

4 **Join a study group**. You can help each other out as well as have the same learning goals. Your school may offer study support classes after school in the lead up to exam time. Make the most of these.

e-Sgoil run an online Study Support programme throughout the year for learners working towards National Qualifications, hosting weekly evening study webinars during term time. You can register for the programme here https://www.e-sgoil.com/senior-phase/study-support/

5 **Give your study session a goal**. Is it to understand a certain theory or perfect an art technique? Then make it your aim for that session.

6 **Tackle the inevitable**. Dreading learning a topic you find difficult? Get it over and done with first then the rest will be easy after that!

7 **Keep it simple**. Don't try to do too many things at one time. Study in smaller chunks if you have an overwhelming amount to read up on.







If you need motivation in getting your homework started, then watch this video https://youtu.be/pDr_caPhY18?si=s9sdD0N6ZlcsFNTY



Set yourself goals to keep you on track

Nothing keeps you more motivated than setting yourself goals to achieve. The SMART model is a common tool for setting yourself such goals. SMART stands for:

Specific

What is your goal? Why is it important to you?
For example: I want to achieve 75% or higher in my final Maths exam.

Measurable

Is your goal measurable? This could be measured with exam grades or teacher's feedback. Measuring shows how close you are to achieving your goal.
For example, you could say I want to achieve 75% or higher in my Maths exam so I will study three 1-hour sessions a week and test myself.



Attainable

It is important that you set a realistic goal. If you set one too high, you may become demotivated down the line and not achieve your goal at all.
For example, aiming for 90% in a subject you are not already getting good marks in may be unattainable at the present, so aiming for 75% or higher is much more attainable without setting your goal too low.

Relevant

Set goals relevant to your study needs and your overall aims.
For example, you could say I want to achieve 75% in Maths because I want to study engineering, so I need to improve on that subject to get into engineering courses when I leave school. Therefore, focussing equally on another unrelated subject to the same degree, such as RMPS, is not relevant to that goal.

Time-based

When do you want to achieve this goal? Setting a deadline will allow you to prioritise your work and not get distracted by other less important things.
For example, you could say I want to achieve 75% or higher in Maths and study three 1-hour sessions a week and test myself so I can pass my exam in April next year.



Here is a short video on how to set yourself smart goals https://youtu.be/i0QfCZjASX8?si=eF46dN9glzgsalAB



Study smart - exam mark allocation and past papers

It's important to know what you will get marks for in an exam. This will serve as a guide to focus on the correct subject areas in your coursework.

You can quickly check these out on the Nationals section on Planit to see the mark allocation for the level of exam you will be sitting. They are also available on the National Qualifications section on the Qualifications Scotland website. This is a much smarter way of studying. You will also find links to past papers on the subject, which gives you an idea of how to prepare.

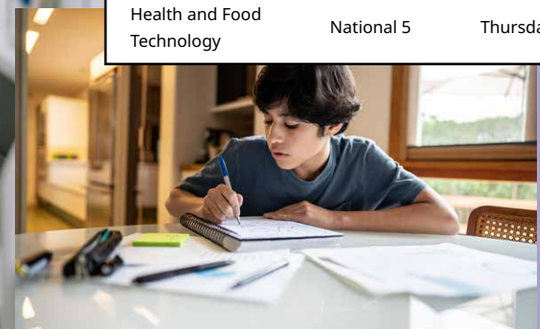


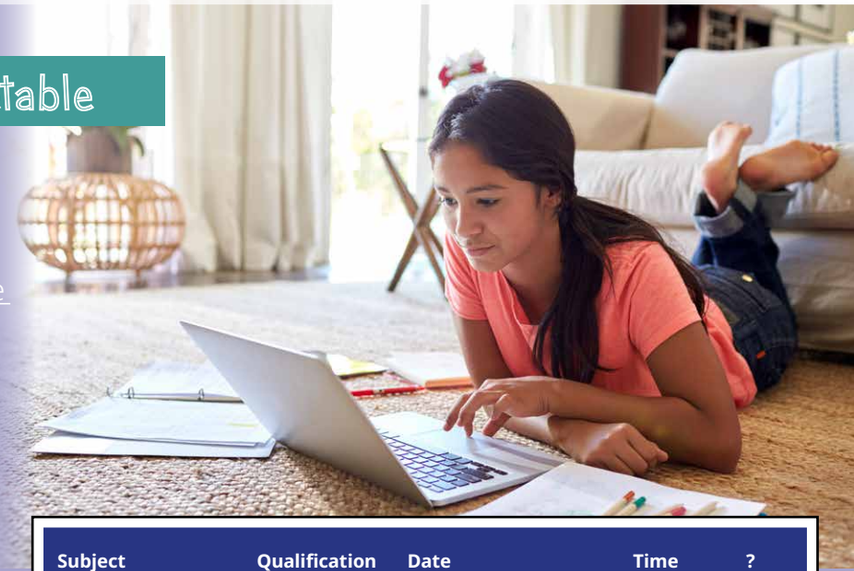
Organise your study timetable

When you know the dates for your final exams you can import these into the **MyStudyPlan** app, use the Qualifications Scotland Personal Timetable Builder to create your own, or write into a diary/calendar. This allows you to see what time you have before and between each exam and plan your revision time. So for example, if you had National 5 Biology on the 10th May and National 5 Maths on the 13th May, you would concentrate more on Biology at the beginning and plan to revise for Maths after that.

Sometimes exams can be quite close together, so that involves really planning your revision ahead. Imagine that this was your timetable – have a think about how you would plan your studying.

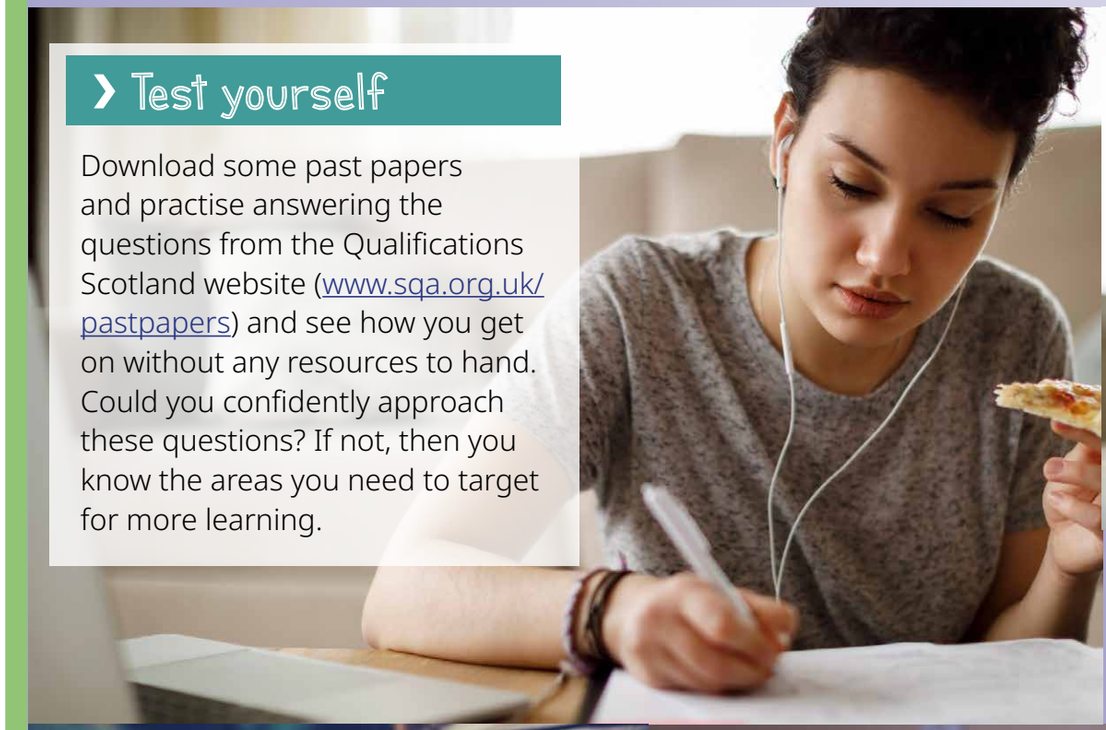






Subject	Qualification	Date	Time	?
Administration and IT	National 5	Wednesday 5 May 2027	09.30 - 11.30	Remove
English	National 5	Thursday 6 May 2027	09.00 - 10.00	Remove
English	National 5	Thursday 6 May 2027	10.30 - 12.00	Remove
Biology	National 5	Monday 10 May 2027	13.00 - 15.30	Remove
Mathematics	National 5	Thursday 13 May 2027	09.00 - 10.00	Remove
Mathematics	National 5	Thursday 13 May 2027	10.30 - 12.00	Remove
Health and Food Technology	National 5	Thursday 27 May 2027	13.00 - 14.50	Remove

Senior Phase - targeted study for exams



Test yourself

Download some past papers and practise answering the questions from the Qualifications Scotland website (www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers) and see how you get on without any resources to hand. Could you confidently approach these questions? If not, then you know the areas you need to target for more learning.







Your planner

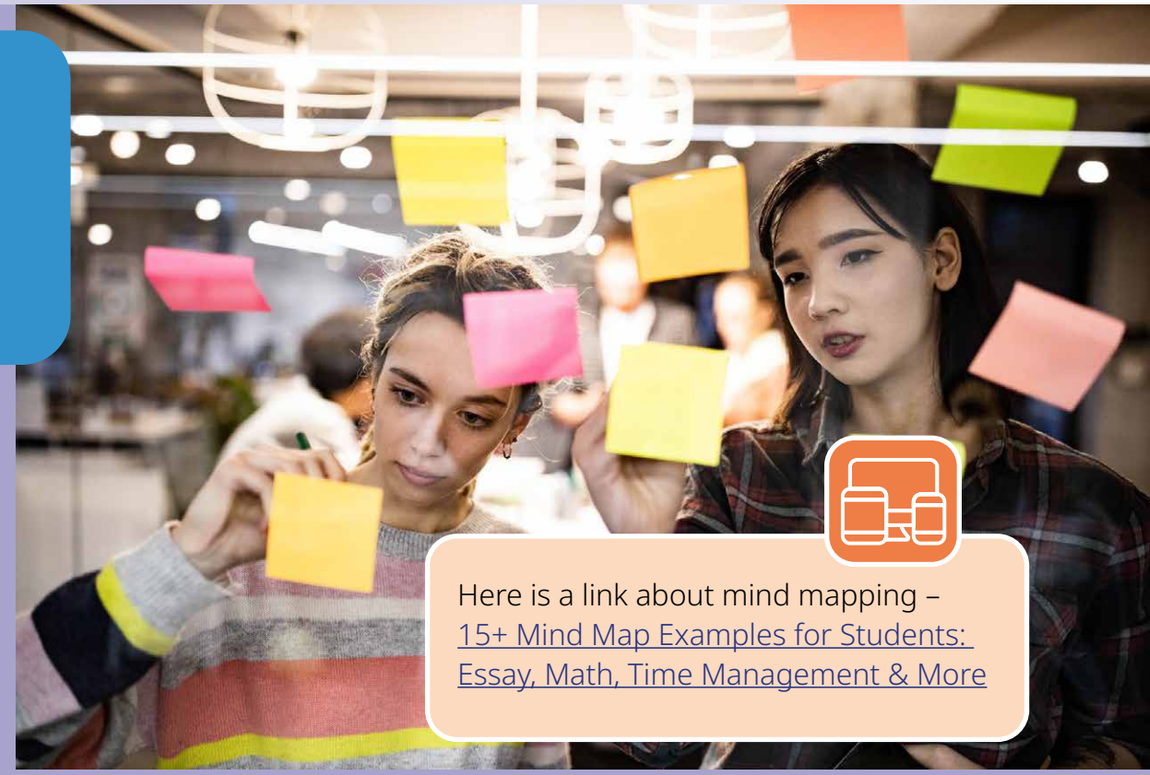
Remember to check up on all your key dates (you do have a study calendar, right?) for all upcoming exams, whether that's prelims or final exams. Stay organised and your mind will be free from clutter.

Watch this video on smart study and preparing for an exam https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oyKH5WVE3U



The role of revision tools

Many people like to use different methods to help them retain information. Here are a few of the most popular ones.

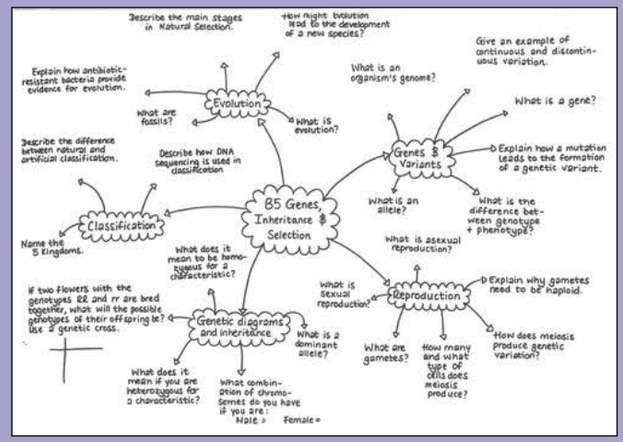


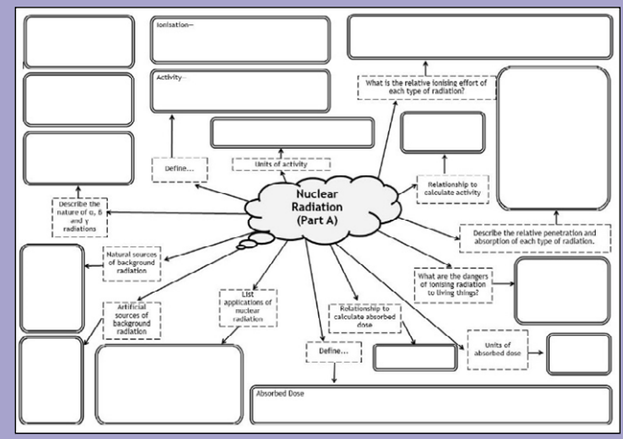
Mind maps

These are freestyle drawings that you create where the subject is at the centre, and you draw related branches outwards from it related to that topic. This method simulates how the brain links information you learn, and by drawing these out for each subject it will dramatically improve how you retain information.

Here are some examples of what a mind map could look like.

Here is a link about mind mapping – [15+ Mind Map Examples for Students: Essay, Math, Time Management & More]





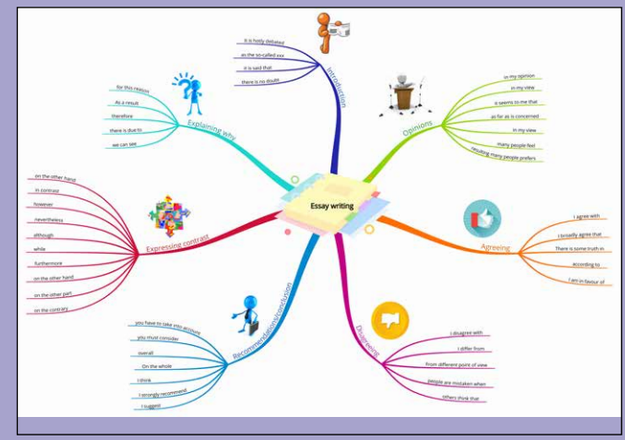
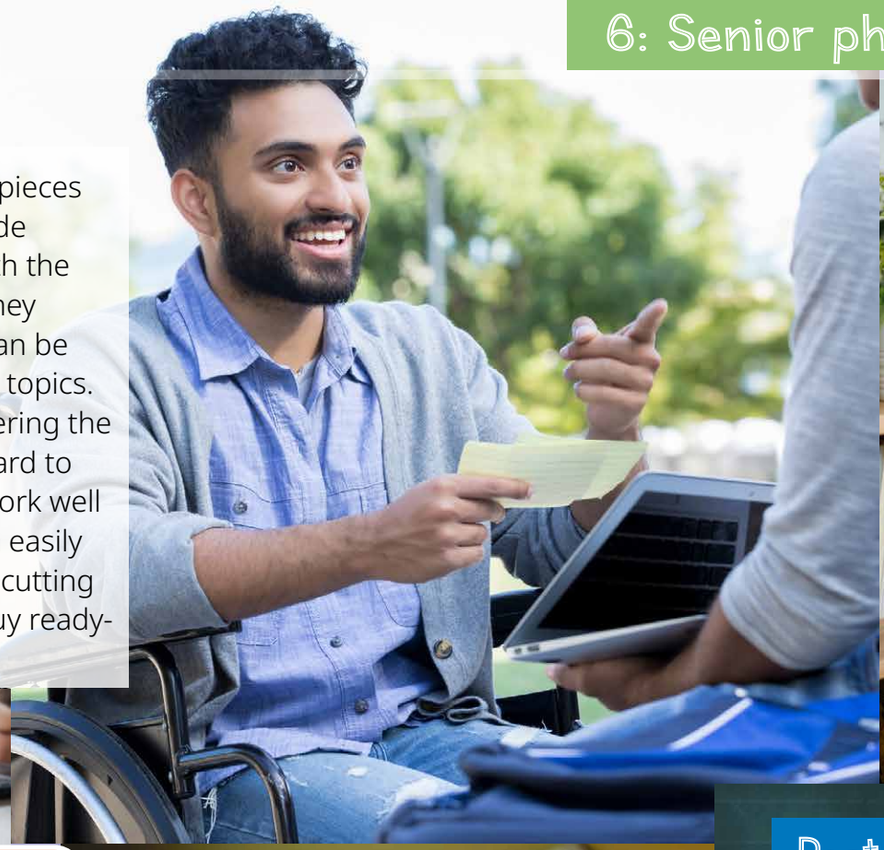


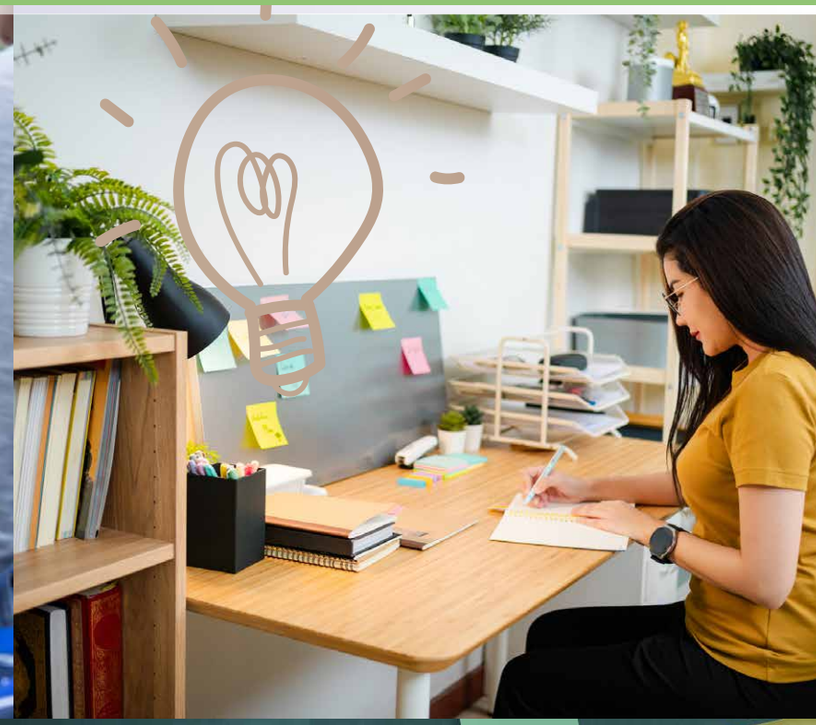
Image from [6 Mind Mapping examples for students and teachers - Ayoa]

Flash cards

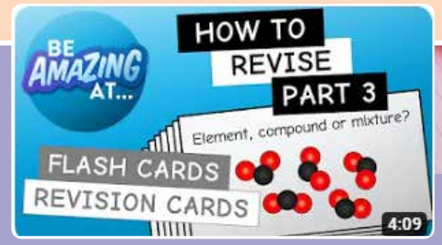
These are small double-sided pieces of card or paper where one side has a key term or question with the answer on the reverse side. They are extremely useful as they can be grouped together for relevant topics. You can test yourself by answering the question before flipping the card to reveal the answer. They also work well if studying in a group. You can easily make your own flash cards by cutting up pieces of blank paper or buy ready-made cards.







Here is a video on their role in study – https://youtu.be/6-YMt6xsCPQ?si=DeXQkBnEt3S5vbWo



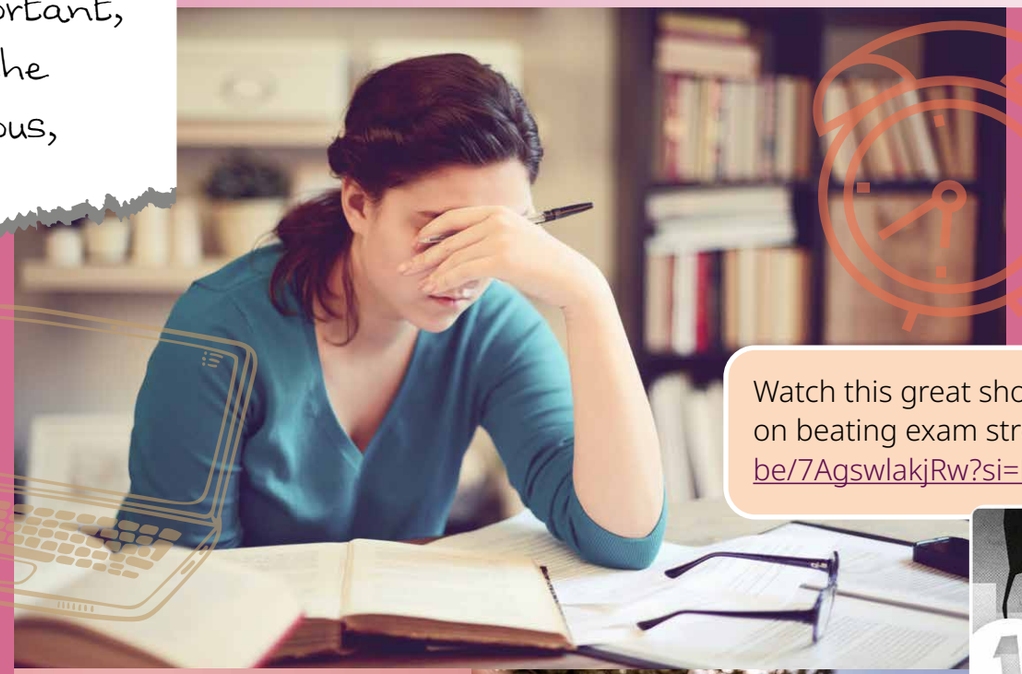


Post-it notes

These are a great tool for visual learners. Have a pad of Post-it notes handy and jot down some facts. Stick them somewhere prominent in your room and the information will sink in. You could have a different colour for each subject.

Look after yourself

Although passing exams IS important, don't let it take over your life to the point you are getting overly anxious, stressed or upset about it.



- **Take enough breaks in between chunks of revision periods**
  Ideal study time is 45 minutes with 5 minute breaks in between.
- **Don't cram or do late night study**
  You will get tired and not learn effectively.
- **Don't sit in for extended periods of study**
  Get out and take a walk or do something you enjoy, then start back again later.
- **Eat well and get enough sleep**
  You will retain information better and not suffer from stress.
- **If things are getting on top of you**
  Be sure to talk to your subject teacher, guidance teacher or your parent or carer. They will be able to help you.



Watch this great short video from the BBC on beating exam stress - https://youtu.be/7AgswlakjRw?si=H2nUHmsopA6pSHH1







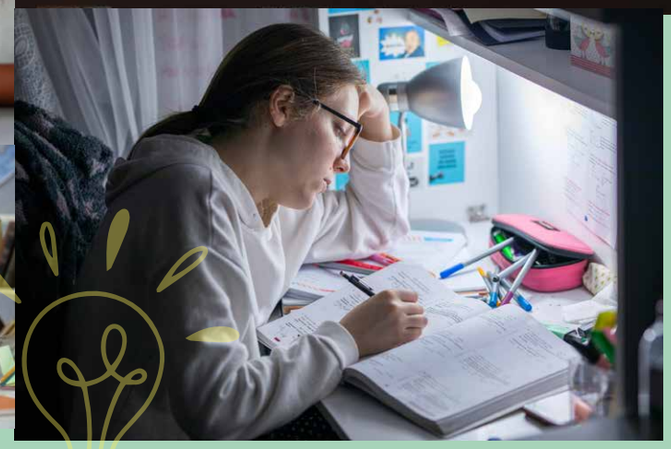
You may want to read this helpful article from BBC Bitesize on how to take care of yourself What exactly is self-care and why do we need it? - BBC Bitesize

Useful resources

We hope this study guide helps you to make the most of your study at secondary school. This is by no means a comprehensive guide and there are other resources out there that can provide more in-depth information.









BBC Bitesize Study Support –
Exams and revision - Study support - BBC Bitesize

E-sgoil / HeadStrong Exam Mindset Guide –
Exam Mindset Guide

Support for Secondary School Learners –
Support for Secondary School Learners | Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (scqf.org.uk)

Young Scot Exam Stress with Mental Health Foundation –
https://young.scot/get-informed/exam-stress-with-mental-health-foundation/

Finally - good luck with your studies!