

HISTORY – Study techniques

RETRIEVAL PRACTICE

What is retrieval practice?

Retrieval practice is the strategy of recalling facts, information, concepts, or events from memory in order to enhance learning.

Why does it work?

We know from the work of cognitive (brain) scientists that our short-term memory can only retain 3-5 facts or pieces of information at any one time before it becomes overloaded and we start to forget. Therefore, the act of retrieving something from your memory actually strengthens the connections holding it there, making it more likely that you'll be able to recall it in the future. This is because remembering something strengthens the neural (electrical) pathways in the brain. The more we remember something, the stronger the neural pathways become and the more we remember.

Brain scientists believe that deliberately recalling information forces us to pull our knowledge “out” and examine what we know. In fact, if a piece of information is re-visited at least 7 times, it starts to be transferred from our short term into our long term memory, making it easier and quicker for us to recall that information.

Methodology

The Edexcel GCSE syllabus is content heavy and comprises four topics:

- Crime and Punishment, c.1000-present day (Paper 1)
- Early Elizabethan England, 1558-1588 and Superpower Relations and the Cold War, 1941-1991 (Paper 2)
- Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918-1939 (Paper 3)

In order for your child to remember and recall all the information that they will need to successfully complete each exam paper, they should start retrieval practice immediately at home.

Retrieval practice templates for Paper 2 have been posted on Google Classroom for your child to access and this will be followed by retrieval practice templates for Papers 1 and 3. Your child should spend 20 minutes each week proactively answering one of the factual questions or/and an exam question from the retrieval practice templates. By re-visiting the topic every week and seeing it multiple times over the year, the information should transfer into long term memory.

In the long term, this will make revision for the GCSE exams in the summer a much less onerous and pressurised affair because a lot of the information that your child will need for the exam will already be stored in their long-term memory. It is impossible to ‘cram’ for exams because the brain does not learn, or retain information in this way, so undertaking retrieval practice over a long period of time is the best way to prepare for their exams.