

Effective Learning Strategies:

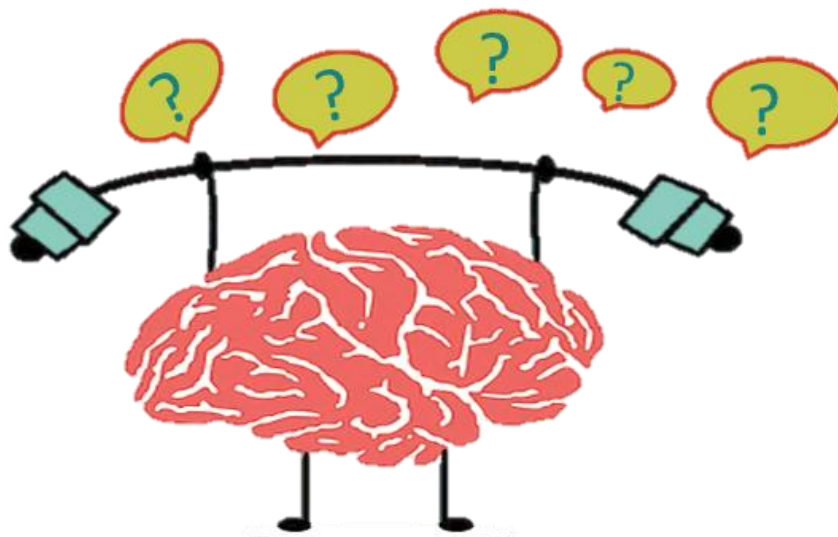
Retrieval Practice

Much research has been carried out to find the most effective learning strategies. Just because they are effective doesn't mean that they are easy! In fact, you may find some of these strategies quite difficult to implement consistently. However, it is partly because they are challenging that they are so effective, so don't give up.

RETRIEVAL PRACTICE focuses on strengthening your memories to make it easier to recall information you've learned. The more often you practice, the easier it becomes as the memory is embedded into the long-term memory. It is also important to space out this practice over time to further embed the information.

What is RETRIEVAL PRACTICE?

RETRIEVAL PRACTICE is any activity that forces you to recall information. There are many different ways that you can achieve this. It is really useful in helping you to identify areas of strength and weakness. Information that we have not had to recall in a long time or have only recalled once or twice before will naturally be harder to recall and will therefore require more practice. Don't become complacent though because memories can deteriorate over time, it is therefore important to practice retrieval on information we feel secure in our recall of to ensure the memory remains strong. It is just like playing a sport, if you don't practice for a long time then your ability begins to wane. A tennis player will practice their serve regularly to perfect it, to the point where it becomes second nature. But even once they've mastered it they have to keep practicing every now and again. If they don't practice for a long time, then despite retaining some muscle memory, their serve may not be as strong or as accurate as it once was. The same is true of your ability to remember information for your subjects.



How do I implement RETRIEVAL PRACTICE?

There are many ways to practice this skill, below are some suggestions:

Step 1: Put away all of your notes and resources.

Step 2: Complete one of the following activities:

- Write everything you can remember about a particular topic onto a blank piece of paper.
- Sketch diagrams.
- Complete practice questions.
- Write a mark scheme for a practice question.
- Use flashcards (extend this one by not just recalling the information but linking two or more flashcards together).
- Draw a timeline of events
- Answer quiz questions
- Teach your friend / pet / sibling / parent / houseplant.

Step 3: Check the accuracy and thoroughness of your recall using your class notes, textbooks and revision guides.

Step 4: Make corrections to anything you recalled wrongly and make additions if you failed to recall something – this is a really important step if you want to progress more quickly! By not only identifying errors but correcting them as well, you are more likely to recall more accurately and thoroughly next time.

A Final Note:

Retrieval is hard! It is much harder than re-reading notes or answering questions using your class notes and other revision resources. Do persevere though as it is the challenge that makes this revision strategy so effective, and don't beat yourself up if you can't remember everything (or much at all) straight away. If you are really struggling, break down the revision into smaller chunks and practice retrieving bit by bit, maybe starting with just a few flashcards and adding a couple more each day until you start using the whole deck.