

# Burning the midnight oil

Major exams are looming on the spring term timetable. [Kate Farr](#) notes down some top tips for getting revision right.

**W**ith exam season fast approaching, now is the perfect time to get ahead of the game and plan that revision timetable.

Founder and director of ITS Education Asia, Danny Harrington, has a heap of top tips and study advice. ITS is Hong Kong's only independent exam centre accredited by British education assessment service Pearson for IGCSE and A-level, and provides a huge range of support and tutoring for students across the territory. And his top tip?

"Don't revise the stuff you already know!" This might sound obvious, but as Harrington explain, "So many students demotivate themselves by going over the same old stuff. Then they start skimming indiscriminately, meaning they feel bored by the things they know, but fail to recognise and learn the bits they don't know."

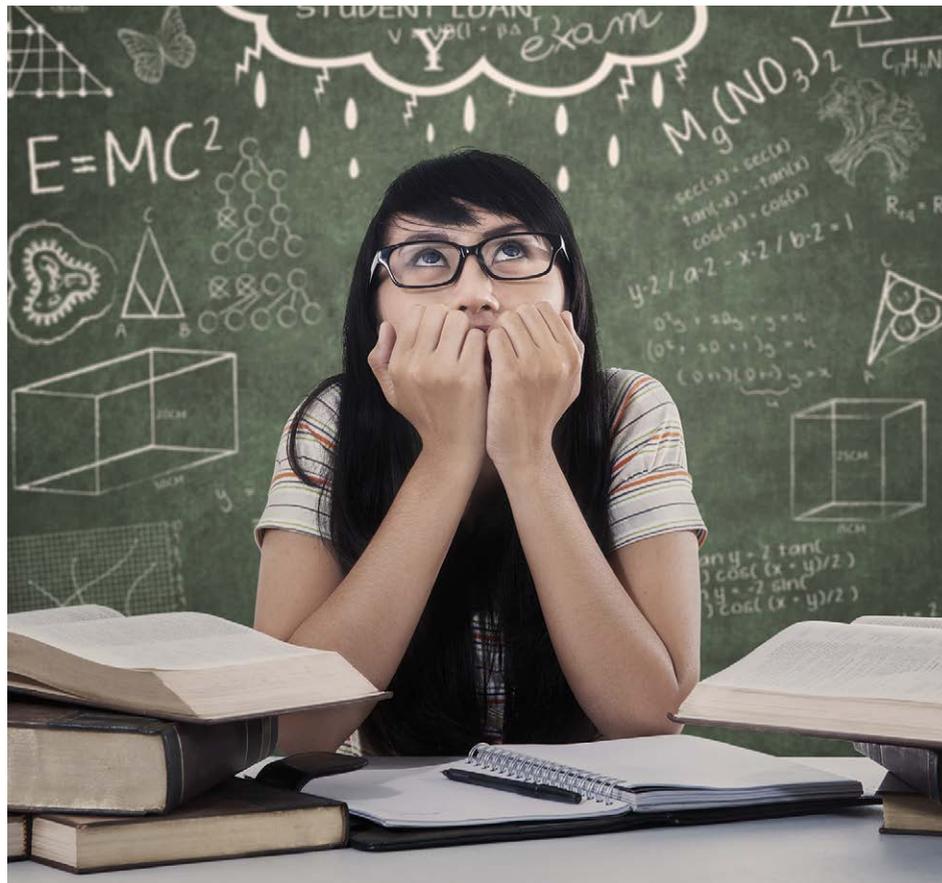
He recommends "studying smart" in order to get the best out of your revision time. "Understand what you know and what you don't, then focus on your weak areas." He adds, "Get regular, shorter study periods in your diary - and tell people what you are doing so they can encourage you."

Cheryl Raper, director of Sylvan Learning, who recently launched "Booster Classes" across key subjects for IGCSE, A-level and IB exam prep, also endorses studying strategically. "Ask yourself, is there a "drop-off" point at which you tend to lose focus? This tends to be after around 30-40 minutes for most people, so be realistic about how long you can study without a break. Aim for a five to ten minute break every 30 to 40 minutes, followed by a longer break after, say, two hours of continual study," she says.

Raper also suggests being realistic about distractions. "Find an area that is conducive for work. Your local coffee shop probably isn't the best option, for example - you need to be paper-watching, not people-watching."

And what about the biggest time-suck of all, screen time? "Turn off your phone, or at least your data. You can switch it back on for a short break every hour or so."

All that time spent chained to a desk can wreak havoc with developing bodies, so how can teens protect their posture? "As most teens still have some growing to do, the



Regular, short study periods are the order of the day.

most important aspect of a desk and chair is adaptability to the growing body," says chiropractor Dr Michelle Zhou of UP!health. "As moveable desks are not always available, it's crucial for chairs to be as adjustable as possible. Most chairs are actually designed for adults, so if the seat is too deep, look for removable back supports to reduce this, allowing the teen's back to be well supported." And when it comes to comfort, angles aren't just a topic for maths revision. "Elbows should be at a neutral angle of around 90 degrees when resting over the keyboard. If you're feet aren't flat on the floor in this position, then add a footstool. Knees should bend naturally in line with, or slightly below, the height of the hips." If in doubt, there are lots of YouTube videos that can help with setting up a workspace, or consult a chiropractor, physiotherapist or occupational therapist.

Keeping stress levels in check is also vital. Counsellor and coach Lucy Graham of Mindquest Group understands that exam revision can be a difficult time for pressurised teens. "When it comes to managing stress, look out for tiredness, poor nutrition, long days with heavy workloads and simply juggling too many things at once," she says. "Overwhelming emotions are much like a massive thunderstorm. It may get worse before it's over, but it will always pass." Graham recommends using the acronym BOLD to break down a stressful situation into manageable chunks. "BOLD comes from Acceptance Commitment Therapy and refers to - Breathe; Observe; Listen to your values; Decide on actions and Do them. I would urge anyone feeling overwhelmed to reach out to a trusted adult, friend or a professional therapist." 

## Mum knows best

Shanta Stevens is a mum-of-three and is in the middle of exam stress with her two boys.

"This year my second son will be sitting his final High School Certificate (Australian Year 12 qualifications) exams for university entrance. My eldest finished his last November" (he is now studying at a top British university) "so for the last four years we haven't really taken a family vacation as the boys work towards their futures.

"They both have dedicated workstations in their rooms, with desks big enough to house books, laptop and odds and ends. In these final two years of school they have needed encouragement, support and unwavering empathy. I've bought food to help them relax (both healthy and junk unfortunately!), trawled shops for that "special" pen that works better for essay writing, warmed heat packs for cricked necks and tired eyes, and given up Saturday nights out with my husband. This became a non-negotiable night for family dinners, we would book a restaurant, stroll

down and no subject would be off limits. For a few hours there were no deadlines, no rushing home for homework and no stress about preparing for the next day. It was wonderful to see the children relaxed and laughing.

"Taking a break is really important, to play sport or even just to walk the dog. And we have been so fortunate to have had teachers who have given up holiday-time and evenings to Skype with the boys - it seems a good teacher is always willing to go the extra mile with students who ask.

"So good luck, remember it will soon be over - and don't forget to say thank you to your parents, it's nice to hear, trust me!"

## The old hand

Bryan Chan of ESF South Island School received a "perfect" score of 45 points in the 2016 IB Diploma, with an additional full score in Further Mathematics. Now studying economics at London School of Economics,

Chan eschewed cramming during his revision process.

"I think staying engaged during class and taking good notes makes the entire process much easier. It's a lot harder to catch up than it is to pick up content at a steady pace."

He admits to a reasonably relaxed approach to his revision timetable. "I didn't really have a set schedule but allocated a couple of days to go over the content of each subject before attempting any practice questions." When it comes to past papers, he cautions, "I would recommend refraining until you are confident with the content. Past papers are a finite resource that are more effective when used to test your exam technique than your knowledge."

And he emphasises that life must continue as normal. "Do whatever you can to get excited about the process. Don't get burnt out - keep on doing the things you love doing."



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