



Session One

Preparing The Body To Support The Mind

You all have the equivalent of a sports car between your ears.

You wouldn't get into a real one if you didn't know where the brakes were, and yet we assume that you all know how to put the mental brakes on if you find yourself not going anywhere fast, or worse still, spinning out of control.



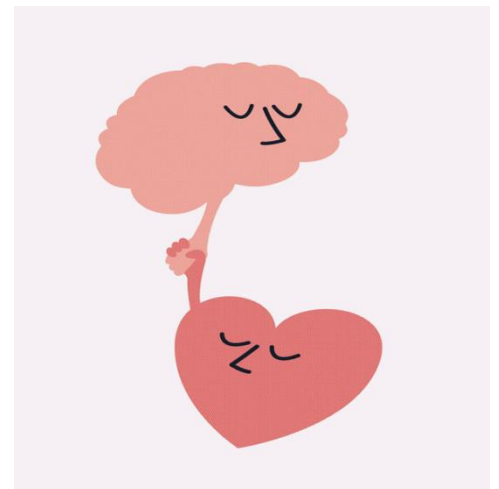
A wandering mind is one of the main reasons why we find it so difficult to be task focussed under exam conditions

Research shows us time and time again that you can prepare your mind in advance for the challenges ahead at exam time. You can choose whether you go into an exam in Fight or Flight mode or in Rest or digest. Whether you go into an exam being directed by "the Feeling" rather than "the Thinking" part of your brain.

Stress

We know that stress is a physical matter and when our bodies are stressed, our minds follow. Thoughts and emotions respond to physical posture. When we slouch, our minds slouch. When we pay attention, so do our minds.

When we lie on our beds curled around a revision book, we restrict the oxygen flow between our minds and our bodies. Harder breathing sends a message to our brains that we are in danger, and in response our brain secretes adrenalin and cortisol into our bloodstreams and diverts oxygen to our muscles, depriving our brains of the very conditions it needs to function properly. The cortisol also affects our memory banks and our ability to retrieve information effectively.



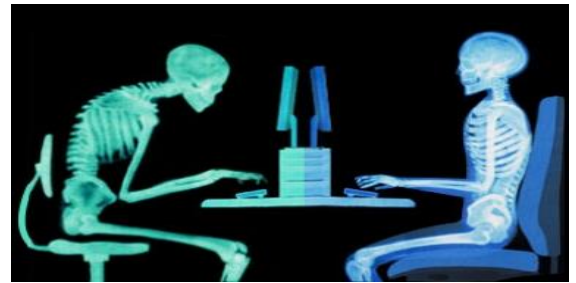
How stress affects our bodies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-t1Z5-oPtU>

When your brain detects stress, it can trigger our threat response and we move from using the thinking, rational and reasonable part of our brain, to the part that is responsible for gut reaction and raw emotions, which is not helpful when we are trying to revise

If we focus for a few moments before each revision session at home seated at our desks preparing our bodies to support our minds, we can start to practice being in a calm state of mind before we learn in a revision session or perform in an exam.

Calm Your Body

Posture can become an anchor and relaxation will follow.



The following exercise is a simple 3-minute audio clip that helps you practice calming your body and mind to respond more helpfully towards your bodily sensations and emotions and impulses rather than react. The more you practice this before a revision session, the more naturally it will happen when you adopt that learning pose before an exam.

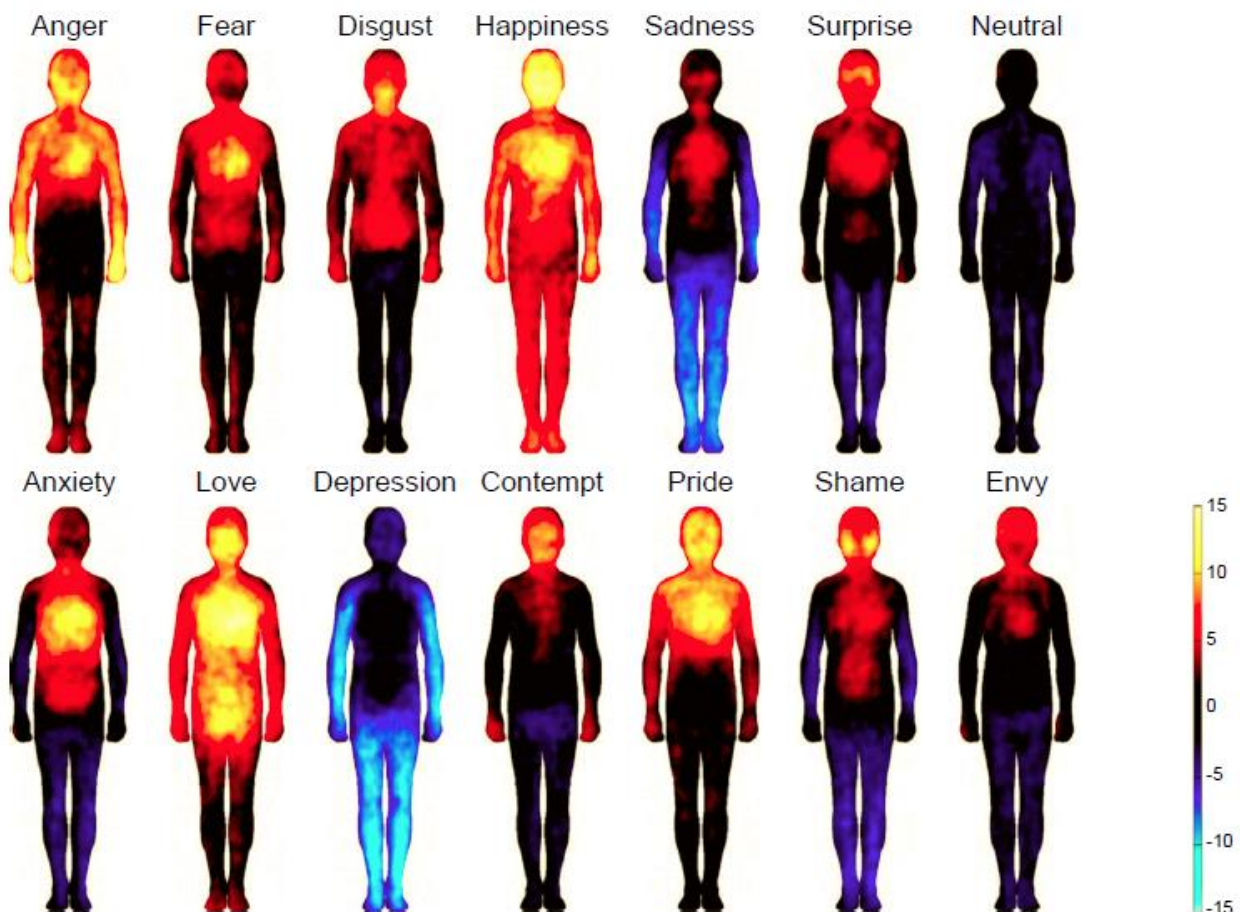
Remember: Just calming your body before you learn tricks the mind into thinking that you are calmer than you feel!

3-Minute Drop Anchor Exercise

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B03Nk3fBQGwjMFR3ck1DUKY4dDQ/view>

7-Minute Drop Anchor Exercise

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B03Nk3fBQGwjDUJPTi1JU0FoOGs/view>



Just naming your feelings during the above exercises can tame the impact of those feelings on our bodies. Remember: Stress is a physical matter.

You cannot control your thoughts and feelings, any more than you can control the weather. But we can learn to turn the volume down or use mindfulness skills to increase our awareness of the bigger picture, using our senses to anchor us in the present moment- that is the moment we need to be in when being tested under exam conditions.

Remember: Ships don't sink because of the water around them. Ships sink because of the water that gets in them. Don't let what is happening around you get inside you and weigh you down



Session Two

Evidence based Revision Tips - The science behind the way we learn

Context Effects Memory

Chew gum when you learn it, chew gum when you recall it and you will recall it more readily. Learn facts in your kitchen, get re-tested on them in the kitchen. Start your morning and afternoon revision sessions during study leave at the same time as when your exams will start in a few weeks, you will create a template that will naturally be duplicated when you get into the exam.

Serious intent to learn, body calm, posture alert and mind flooded with oxygen, not adrenalin. Look at how boxers prepare for a fight- they practice in the weeks leading up to the fight at the same time that the final fight will happen on the night

Our Bodies Natural Anti-Depressants

Even faking a smile can change the way we feel about ourselves and our experiences. I am not suggesting you do your revision with a pencil in your mouth like the picture, but my experiences tell me that if you smile at the end of the drop anchor exercise above, you will feel a flutter of endorphin, one of our bodies natural anti-depressants. Alternatively, eat a square of dark chocolate, over 70% cocoa.



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/isnt-what-i-expected/201207/try-some-smile-therapy>

What We Eat On Exam Day

There is an optimal brain breakfast for exam day and revision days too.

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/eating-exams>



Don't ignore the evidence around your diet during the exam period- slow burning carbs are essential to success. A quarter of adolescent girls may be iron-deficient without realising it.

- Keep Iron levels high by eating spinach, poultry, red meat and beans
- Share with parents and some recipe ideas are on the above link
- Keep bowls of nuts, grains and seeds to hand for the munchies
- Water essential for brain optimal brain function too. At least 1.6L per day

Walking For 10 Minutes

Again, an endorphin secretion prompt but also exercise that raises the heart beat even a little for 10 minutes prior to a revision session or an exam, can flare up the part of the brain that will best support our learning and our retrieval of information.

Boosts both memory and brain power and makes you feel good too.

Combine a walk with a podcast on your headphones and you increase your chances of learning two-fold. If we hear something, we are more likely to remember it. Kill two birds with one stone.



Research also shows us that spending the time before an exam without company, is also better for us. We are quickly distracted by other people's experiences and we cannot control what we hear or the emotions that might be triggered by it.

Zzzzzzz

Memory neurons work best at converting short term memory to long term memory whilst we sleep. 7 hours' minimum a night = 10% better results in exams.

You are driven to things that keep you awake, because if you didn't do them, you could fall asleep. Caffeine, late night internet, chat rooms, cramming etc.

The above can sabotage a good night sleep, which we need to emotionally recharge and mentally reset, as well as bed down the information that we have revised that day, into our medium-term memory banks.

Blue light affects circadian rhythm. Blue wavelengths are great in daytime as they boost mood and attention, but are the most disruptive at night as they impact levels of melatonin production.

Space It Out

Spread your revision out and don't be tempted to cram. If you are going to do 5 hours of geography in one week, 5 sessions of one hour will be more effective as you need a gap to process information properly.

If you plan it well, you can spend less time revising AND learn more. Rachael has revision planning sheets if you want them.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10100363>

Practice The Techniques You Know Are Coming In The Exam

Learning and retrieving information is a skill. You will only improve by doing it. You don't learn to be a great gamer by just studying the moves. You learn when you put them into practice. If you are going to have to write an essay in the exam, don't just memorise stuff. That is not going to work. Practice what you are going to be tested on.

Structure Information And Don't Just Try And Remember It

Trying to remember something has been shown to have no effect on whether you remember it or not.

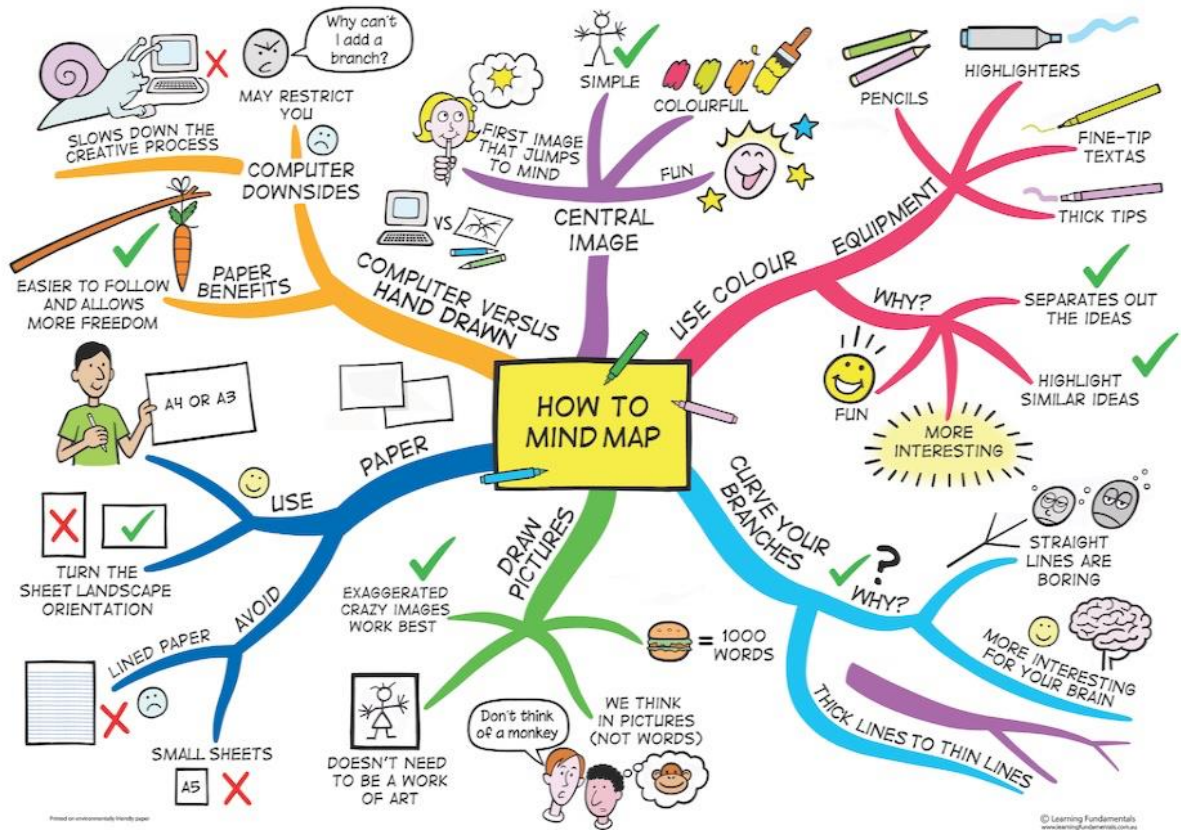
Just looking at notes will not help you remember them. Attach them to something, organise information in different ways so that you can start to see how what you are reading about relates to other things. Depth of processing only comes when we learn using combined techniques- Look, cover, write and check important facts.

Post It's And Highlighter Pens

Many of us learn better if we are more colourful about how we go about it. Writing facts onto post-it notes and leaving them on bathroom mirrors and by the side of our beds or in the car, can create a strong association for making retrieval of information easier

Research on highlighter pens tells us what we already know. Great for singling out information but not as helpful as we thought for revision, as it leads to strong association for isolated facts with little connection with context

Mindmaps are key for visual learners and are great if we design them ourselves and keep by our beds to glance at and allow our mirror neurons to do the rest while we sleep



Audio

- If we hear it, we are more likely to remember it.
- If you must make notes, read them out loud when you make them.
- Take a difficult subject and create a PowerPoint presentation and do it to your mum (or imaginary friend or stuffed toy) - the effect is the same. Hear it and you are more likely to have embedded the information.
- If you explain it to somebody, you win again in honing your retrieval skills.
- Even better, learn with friends where possible in revision groups.

Superb podcasts for A Level subjects. For example: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/approaching-shakespeare/id399194760?mt=10>

Good Luck

And for those of you that like a good read, some student room reflections on study

<https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/content.php?r=370-57-study-learning-and-revision-habits-of-A-star-students>

RAW@clairescourt.net