APROACHING YOUR EXAMS

TOP EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGIES

1. Use retrieval practice
2. Space out your revision
3. Mix up your study topics
4. Apply elaborative interrogation
5. Use practice tests as revision
6. Organize information visually
7. Prioritize sleep and wellbeing
8. Strategically approach the actual exam

USE RETRIEVAL PRACTICE

This method is more effective than simply re-reading notes or highlighting, as it strengthens memory and understanding because it asks you to first retrieve from your brain what you can remember, and then identifies what you still need to get from short-term to long-term memory.

You can do this by:

- **Creating Brain Dumps**
- **Flash cards**
- **Using your Unit outlines to self-quiz**
- **Using your classwork and/or homework to self-quizz**

SPACING

Plan multiple shorter study sessions over time instead of cramming, which boosts long-term retention of information.
Science shows that this approach strengthens long-term memory by allowing some forgetting to occur between sessions, forcing your brain to retrieve and consolidate information more deeply with each review.
Neurocognitively, spacing taps into the brain's consolidation processes, encouraging a shift from short-term to long-term memory.

How to do this:

- Review new material, then revisit it after an interval (e.g. after one day, three days, a week, and so on), expanding the time gap after each recall session
- Tools like flashcards and apps (Anki, Quizlet) make spaced repetition easy by automating review intervals.
- Plan to revise smaller chunks in each session; avoid re-reading whole chapters—focus review on active recall (quizzing, brain dumps).
- Each spaced review should be effortful and focus on remembering, not re-studying; if you get it wrong, that's normal—correct and revisit as needed

INTERLEAVING

Switch between different subjects or topics in one session (interleaving), which challenges your brain and improves learning across subjects.
Research shows that interleaving improves long-term retention, mastery, and transfer of skills because it forces your brain to constantly retrieve and choose between different concepts, making learning more effortful—and therefore more effective.

How to do this:

- In revision, mix different but related topics together
- Sample practice: For maths, solve a mix of algebra, geometry, and statistics questions in the same session; for science, alternate between biology and physics topics.
- Expect to feel less confident at first—this is normal and part of what makes interleaving effective. The struggle signals deeper learning.

Advice from the Students

Student Voice - Class of 2025

I used something called the 'pomodoro method'. I would allocate one hour to each subject a day while having half an hour breaks between each. This allowed me to compress everything I needed to do for that subject in that time frame without having the chance to procrastinate or get distracted. This way I didn't spend large amounts of time sat at the desk thinking I studied for that amount of time when I really would’ve studied for half the time. Switching from subject to subject was very beneficial to allow for spaced repetition and lower saturation and boredom.

COMPLETE AN OLD PAPER

Complete old exam papers or create mock tests under timed conditions to get familiar with question structure and time management.

How to do it:

1. Try on your own first, don't look at a marking key, recall what you can from your own brain.
2. Then look at the marking key or solutions to see what you are doing well, and where you need to review.
3. Then if you are unsure, ask the teacher for feedback.

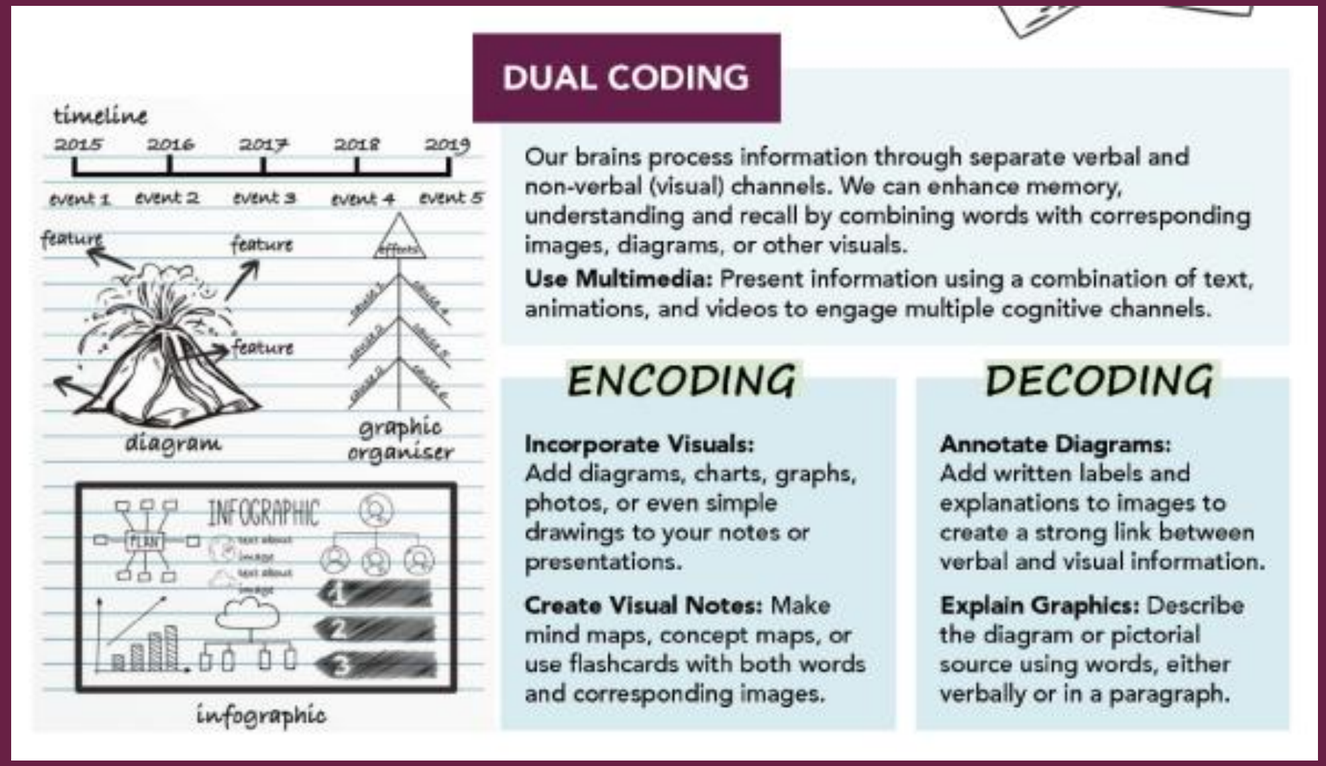
Advice from the Students

Student Voice - Class of 2025

One bit of advice that I would give is to do every prctice exam, practice test or practice question that teachers give you and to always ask for more if they can give them to you. Complete under timed conditions and mark yourself harshly, then go over what you do wrong. The only way I studied the whole of Year 12 was by past papers, they can only ask the same question so many ways and its basically active recall every time you do one.

DUAL CODING

Organize information visually: Convert notes into diagrams, mind maps, or concept maps to support understanding and memory (dual coding).



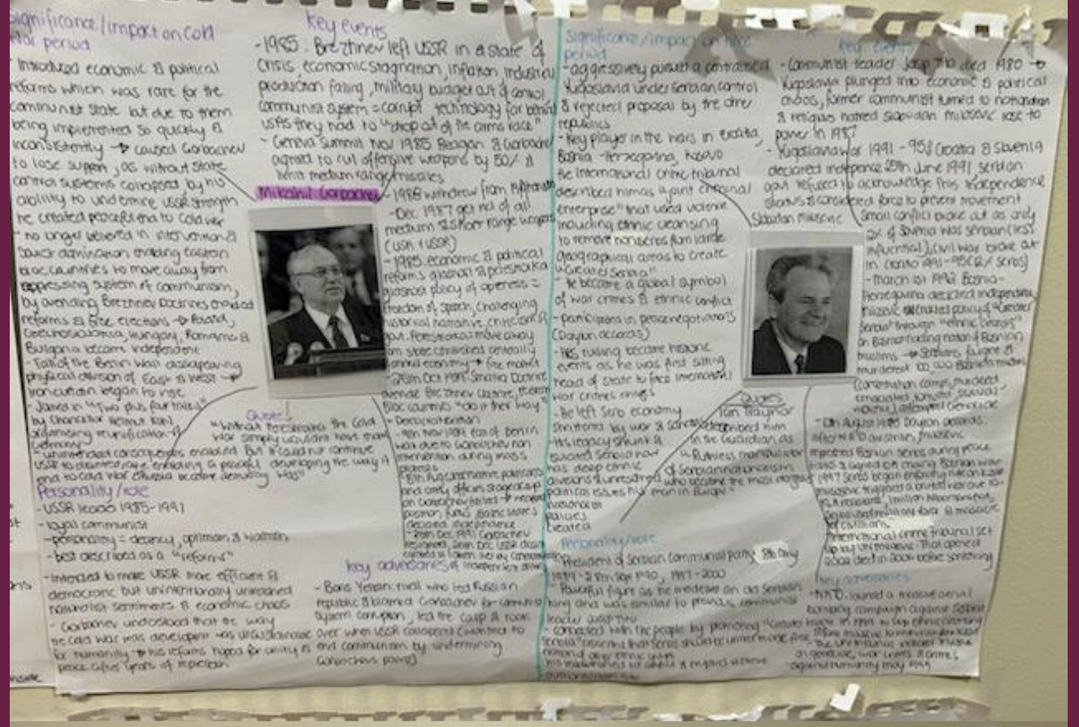
EEAA

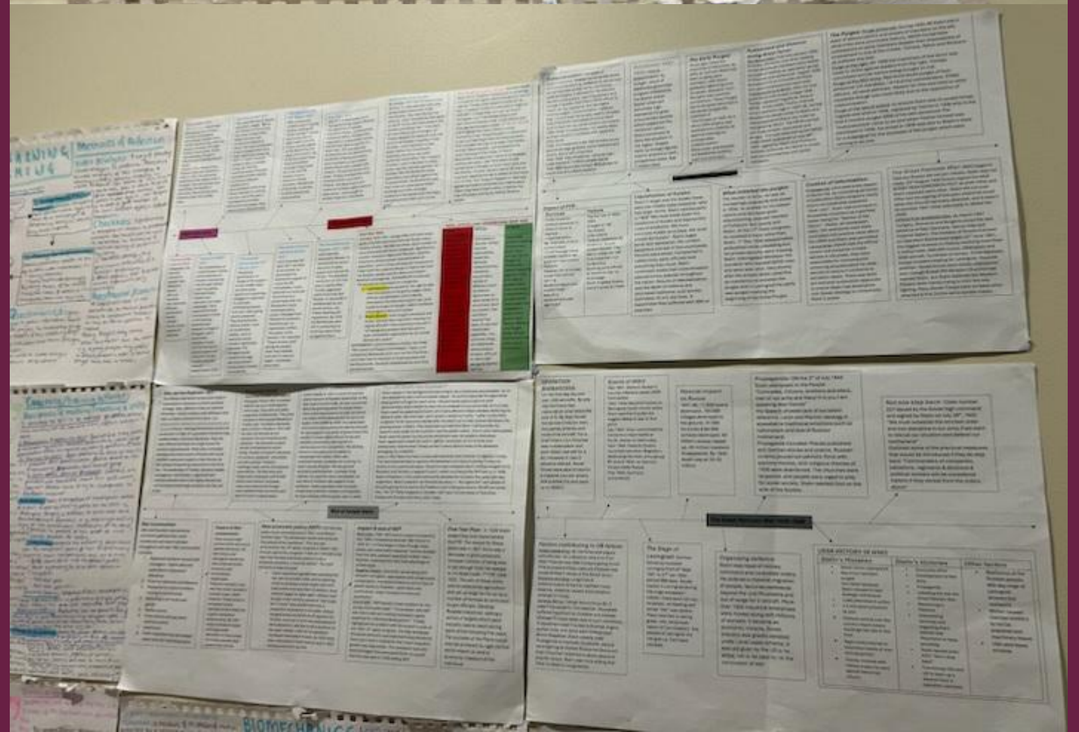
Apply elaborative interrogation: Ask yourself “why” questions as you study (for example: “Why does this happen?” or “Why is this answer correct?”), which helps link new information to what you already know.

When studying - use the EEAA method:

- Elaborate
- Evidence
- Arguments for
- Arguments Against

Use this to exlain larger concepts e.g. Inflation
Elaborate - who collects inflation data? Who acts on inflation data? What do they target? How do they ensure that they keep inflation within the target range?
Evidence - provide evidence when they have acted on inlfation data duirng COVID 19
Arugments for - this was good because...
Arguments against - it had negative impact however, because...


Significance/impact on cold war period
Key events
Significance/impact on cold war period
Key events
Mikhail Gorbachev
Quotes
Quotes
Personality/role
Personality/role
Key adversaries of independence drive



WELL-BEING PREP

Prioritize sleep and wellbeing: Getting a good night's sleep before exams and managing stress with healthy routines (exercise, nutrition, breaks) is proven to boost performance.

Advice from the Students

Student Voice - Class of 2025

1. Learn which study methods work for you. It's very important to learn how to study better, not longer.
2. Sleep is extrememly important for memory consolidation so pulling all-nighters or going to bed late is doing you worse not better. Being tired leads you to make more silly mistakes than you would make if you were alert.
3. It’s really important to create a healthy study environment. You should associate your area with study only. I highly reccomend not eating food or scrolling on social media whilst in your study area. Definitely no studying in bed.
4. Music works for some people, but remember that tests and exams are sat in complete silence. Music can be very distracting, so I recommend listening to jazz or classical music without lyrics.
5. I recommend not having your phone in your study area either. My friends and I would give our phones to family members or lock them in our cars to ensure we didn't get distracted whilst studying.

BE STRATEGIC

- Don't join in a conversation with people who like to compare what little work they have done in preparation for the exam.
- Stay hydrated. Dehydration causes massive reduction in the capability of short-term memory.
- Breathe.
- Strategically approach the actual exam: Start by answering the questions you know, then return to challenging ones. If you get stuck, move on and come back later to maximize your marks and time.
- Underline key words in the questions so you answer the whole question e.g. '**Identify causes and explain why...**'
- In multiple choice, if unsure cross out those you know are definitely incorrect, then read the alternatives
- Use all the available time - check over answers, look for any words that are misspelt or illegible - teachers can't give you marks for what they can't read.

IF THINGS GO WRONG...

Panic Attacks - preparing thoroughly is the best way to avoid panic attacks. But, if you feel your heartbeat accelerating, or breathing rate increasing, recognise the onset. Take long, deep, slow breaths. Breathe in for a count of 6, breath out for a count of 8. Think positive. You know you're prepared. You know you can pass.

Memory block - everyone has occasional memory blocks. You know the info is there, you just can't recall it. Don't panic. Relax. Think back over your notes. If it doesn't come, leave it and return to it later. Memory blocks usually come out of last-minute cramming. So, prepare and start your revision early.