

Study Skills : Organisation and Habits

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” (W. Durant – summarising Aristotle)

Human beings are creatures of habit. Part of our journey to being a good A level student is about putting in place habits and systems that will help us and keeping to them so that they become second nature to us.

1. Sleep and Rest

	<p>Maslow's hierarchy of needs (opposite) suggests that it is difficult for us to flourish and to higher level things such as learning if our basic needs are not met.</p> <p>Sleep is a magic unseen ingredient in learning. It is an important habit to crack. Studies show that good sleep aids memory and helps us to be more positive. Sleep deprived people retain more negative memories and have more negative emotions. The University of California who carried out studies in this area said 'when troubled, get to bed, you'll feel better in the morning.'</p>
<p>For students – going to bed at a similar time each night and ensuring that you are able to get at least 8 hours sleep, as well as avoiding screen time in the hour before bed are important good sleep habits</p>	

2. Breakfast and Food

Also in Maslow's category of basic needs is regular meals – in particular breakfast. One study showed that students who skipped breakfast were around 50% less focused in morning classes than those who had eaten. Missed breakfast can also lead to low blood sugar and thus low mood and irritability. Try to get up early enough to have breakfast whether at home or in college before classes begin.

3. Planning – the Big Picture

Often people tell us we need to be more organised but this is easier said than done. To be organised you need to have a grasp of the overall big picture – a sense of what the year looks like – as well as a plan for specific days and weeks. In terms of the big picture you need a diary, an electronic calendar or a week by week table mapping out the academic year. As soon as you can get exam dates, mock weeks, dates for assessments, residential trips so that you get an outline of your year. This will help you see pressure points and enable you to arrange your workload – getting ahead where you can.

Date	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Other
Week 1 2/9		RS – topic test	Eng – Read text	
Week 2 9/9	Hist - cw		Eng - essay	
Week 3 16/9	Hist - notes	RS - essay		UCAS statement
And so on....				

4. Planning – days and weeks (see surviving the week)

A weekly planner like the one below is vital in helping you to plan your week. You may be an early person or a late person. You may work better at home or in school. You may have a part time job or caring responsibilities. Put these – along with sleep – into your plans.

To be a successful A level student you will need to do at least 4 hours per week per subject outside of class. Shade in where this will be on your weekly plans.

Day	BEFORE COLLEGE 7.30-8.45am	8.45-10.15am	10.30-12.00	12.15 -2.20	2.30-4pm	AFTER COLLEGE 4pm-6pm	EVENING 7-9pm
Mon		FREE	HISTORY	ENGLISH	FREE		
Tues		FREE	TUTORIAL	RELIGIOUS STUDIES	FREE		
Wed		HISTORY	ENGLISH	FREE	SPORTS/ SOCIETY		
Thurs		FREE	RELIGIOUS STUDIES	FREE	HISTORY		
Fri		ENGLISH	FREE	FREE	RELIGIOUS STUDIES		
SAT							
SUN							

5. Marshmallows and the future you

One of the key barriers that we have when it comes to organisation is our lack of self-control. There is some evidence that this starts at an early age nevertheless we can overcome this. Researchers in the 1970s offered 3 year olds a marshmallow but told them they could have two marshmallows if they managed to avoid eating it for 15 minutes. Follow up research showed that those who at 3 years of age had greater self- control tended to be academically more successful and better able to deal with stress in later life. Fortunately for us, we are not stuck with our 3 year old selves and we can get better (or worse) at self-control. Studying for A levels is the ultimate marshmallow test. The reward comes much later and there are always interesting short term temptations such as part time work and Youtube! Do things that the future you will thank you for.

6. Tomatoes and Concentration

Once we settle down to work, one issue we may face is the difficulty in concentrating. Studies show that quiet or silent study works best. It feels uncomfortable; you may prefer music but your brain will not take in as much. Similarly having a mobile phone nearby can reduce your attention by around 20% - even if it is just on your desk as part of your subconscious is wondering what is happening on Twitter on Instagram.

Concentration – the Pomodoro Technique



Get a 'Pomodoro' or Kitchen

1. Set 25 minutes and work solidly
2. Stop and have a 5 minute reward/break
3. Repeat 4 times (2 hours total)
4. Take a longer break of 30 minutes

Bibliography

Busch, B & Watson, E. (2019) *The Science of Learning*

Eyre, C (2016) *The Elephant in the Staffroom*

Mitchell, A (2020) *Learning Skills for A level success* (available at www.hoddereducation/learningskills)