

Active Recall

Years 7–12 | Highest-Value Study Strategy

WHAT IS ACTIVE RECALL?

Active recall means forcing yourself to retrieve information from memory — without looking at your notes. Instead of reading over your notes passively, you close the book and test yourself. This is the single most evidence-backed study strategy available.

WHY DOES IT WORK? THE PSYCHOLOGY

- Every time you retrieve a memory, it becomes stronger — this is called the "testing effect".
- Retrieving information from scratch builds stronger neural pathways than re-reading, which feels familiar but produces little learning.
- Cognitive psychologists Roediger & Karpicke (2006) found retrieval practice outperformed re-reading by up to 50% on long-term retention tests.
- The "desirable difficulty" — the effort of recall — is precisely what makes it work.

"The struggle to recall is not a sign you haven't learnt it — it is the learning itself."

HOW TO USE ACTIVE RECALL

- After a lesson, close your notes and write or say everything you remember on a blank page.
- Use flashcards — cover the answer and test yourself.
- Write exam-style questions on your topic, then answer them without notes.
- Use the "brain dump" method: blank page, 10 minutes, write everything you know about a topic.

ACTIVE RECALL PRACTICE WORKSHEET

Topic being studied:

Subject / Topic:

STEP 1 — Brain Dump: Close your notes and write everything you know about this topic.

STEP 2 — Check your notes: What did you miss or get wrong? List the gaps here.

STEP 3 — Write 4 retrieval questions for this topic (answer them next time you study):

Question	Answer (fill in next session)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Confidence rating (1–10) after this session:

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