

# 11 WAYS TO BE BRILLIANT AT SCHOOL

By Jon Sellick

## Being Brilliant

Attending school regularly, keeping on top of your work and making sure you are always within range of your target grade is not easy.

So, nobody should underestimate how challenging it is to go beyond ‘satisfactory’ to achieve brilliance.

Being brilliant is hard.

However, the good news is that you are already well on your way.

Simply by reading this, you are displaying an *intention* to be brilliant. Intentions are deep, powerful and an indication of your inner strength.

How many of your classmates are simply happy to get through their school day without getting into trouble? How many would settle for the bare minimum? How many, let’s be honest, act like they couldn’t care less?

But not you!

You care, you want more than the bare minimum, and your goals go way beyond staying out of trouble.

You want to be brilliant.

Good on you!

## What is Brilliance?

*“Brilliance is in the eye of the beholder.”*

## What does it mean to you?

- It might mean a grade 9 or an A\* in every subject.
- It might be doing your best - and for most of us that will mean our best grades are reserved for the subjects we care about most.
- It might not actually be aligned with grades - it might be connected to our feelings rather than our certificates: It might mean thriving, enjoying a challenge, growing as a person, gaining a feeling of pride, feeling fit and healthy in body and mind, or simply knowing that you have made the most of all the opportunities that school furnishes you with beyond the desks in the exam hall.



*Being brilliant at school is about exams, lessons, and life beyond the classroom.*

## This Guide

### How it will help you:

This guide will help you in two ways.

Firstly, it will teach you proven ways to enhance your learning. It will demonstrate how research, revision and routine can have an extraordinary impact on your learning. It will provide this information in the form of top tips and advice, broadly organised into 11 chapters.

Secondly, it will show you that lifestyle is arguably more important than any revision strategy or learning tool. It will demonstrate the beauty of how adopting new habits results in increased satisfaction, strength of mind and positivity.

Everybody can be brilliant at school. Of course, that doesn't mean the same thing for everybody. But whether you want straight A grades, or to flourish in your well-being and satisfaction, it is important to realise that brilliance - whilst not easy - is undoubtedly achievable.

### Eleven Ways: Two Categories

This guide will show you how to establish a routine that brings you satisfaction, peace, and fantastic exam results.

It will change your attitude towards things you already do - like sleeping, eating, and walking to school. In doing so, it will help you see the link between those actions and how successful you are.

It will bring you the tools and wisdom, used by other brilliant students and witnessed by observant teachers, in order for you to excel in the classroom.

Each of the eleven ways is labelled as belonging to one of two categories: either **Study Skill** or **Life Habit**. They are equally important and complement one another. I sincerely hope that you will come to view the life habits as vital components of your studying.

## ELEVEN WAYS TO BE BRILLIANT AT SCHOOL

Sleep Well Life Habit  
Ask Questions Study Skill  
Establish A Routine Life Habit  
Space Your Repetition Study Skill  
Exercise Life Habit  
Take Notes (Or Don't) Study Skill  
Visualise Life Habit



Recognise Topic Sentences Study Skill  
Learn Something New Life Habit  
Draw Study Skill  
Focus on Today Life Habit

## 1. SLEEP WELL (Life Habit)

*Have a great night's sleep - every night!*

Really good sleep is the foundation to all your future success.

Sleep is everything.

Your sleep routine is the most important routine of all.

Which, on the face of it, may come as very good news to teenagers like you, who are well-known for and wrongly criticised for your sleeping. The chances are you love nothing more than a good lie in, and hate nothing more than the sound of an alarm or, even worse, continued requests from mithering parents to “get up!”

Your love of sleep and your difficulty getting out of bed in the morning does not mean you are lazy. It does not mean you are somehow deficient or not as good as others. It means you are a teenager, and there are sound scientific reasons why sleep may be something of an issue for you and your household.

So, before we go any further, let go of any idea you might have that you are inferior because you need to sleep so much. And embrace the idea that sleep - rather than being a hindrance to brilliance - is an acutely important component of your success.

So, does that mean the next time your parents shout at you to “get out of bed” you can simply retort by quoting this guide and snuggling back in for twenty more minutes? Not exactly.

World class performers will tell you that they dedicate *every waking hour* to their craft. *Every waking hour* is an idiom that is often used as shorthand for a level of dedication that consumes individuals; the type of dedication that becomes obsession. Many thinkers believe that a certain level of obsession is required to become seriously good at anything. You can't take a passing interest in ballet and expect to suddenly find yourself top of the bill at The Metropolitan Opera House.

But the term is deeply flawed. Because if what we do with our every waking hour is somehow a marker of our success, it stands to reason that the more hours we are awake, the more successful we can be.

Not so.

The truth is that the time *before* we wake holds the key to our successes.



It is sleep that matters most. It is sleep that underpins our ability to do everything we do when we are awake well. It is sleep that underpins our ability to carry out all the other suggestions in this book. It is sleep that is our most under-valued tool of all.

Sleep is everything!

The quantity of your sleep and the quality of your sleep are incredibly important to you.

I cannot overstate how important sleep is. And you can tell I'm giving it a good go!

That's why sleep is the topic of the first chapter in this guide.

And if you really do want to be better at school, then you will start paying attention to your sleep now.

If you improve the quality, quantity and regularity of your sleep, you will notice the difference within days.

It is true that some students' desperation to achieve brilliant results often leads to them attempting the opposite of sleep - the 'all-nighter' - in which they stay awake on purpose to cram in as much last-minute revision as possible.

This is the antithesis of everything this guide sets out to promote. So, understand that you should never pull an 'all-nighter'. Ever.

Instead, you should put in place now the building blocks of sleep that will ensure you never have to contemplate such a self-destructive act!

The superpower of our dreams (pardon the pun) lies (see what I did there?) in our sleep.

And we need to consider two things: the regularity of our sleep and the quality of our sleep.

## **Regularity**

Let's cut to the chase here: you need 9 hours of sleep every night.

For the purpose of giving you clear advice, let's assume that you have to leave your house at 8am to get to school on time. You can adapt the times accordingly to fit your own departure time.

Setting your alarm for 7am will give you a whole hour before you need to leave the house.



Most of you will live close enough to your school to mean that setting your alarm for 7am will give you ample time to get to school on time.

So, that means a 10pm bedtime to enable you to get 9 hours.

That's pretty clear advice in my book: the first finite thing you can do to become brilliant at school is to go to bed at 10pm every night and get up at 7am every morning.

That is it right there.

That is the secret.

If this guide had to be boiled down to one single piece of advice, then that would be it right there:

“Go to bed at 10pm every night and wake up at 7am.”

Bingo.

And, ok, perhaps a little adaption will be required depending on some of your own personal variables: some of you - perhaps after reading the exercise section in this guide - will want to build in some extra time for a workout in the mornings; some of you will have longer commutes to school; some of you will have other classes or clubs you attend in the evening. So, you might have to shift the times slightly to suit.

But as for the 9 hours and the consistency: do everything you can to make those two elements of sleep permanent fixtures in your life.

## Quality

It is important to remember that we are talking about 9 hours of actual *sleep*. You'll only be fooling yourself if you think being in your bedroom for 9 hours or lying in your bed for 9 hours will give you the kind of superpowers that 9 hours of *actual* sleep will provide.

So, you should be looking to give yourself the best possible quality of sleep.

Here's how...

Preparation for a good night's sleep should begin as soon as you wake up. Take your sleep preparation seriously by dividing your day into three parts: the beginning, middle and end:

## The Beginning:



Just one rule here, but it's a deceptively important one: make your bed! Making your bed is an incredibly powerful action. Firstly, it marks the beginning of your day and helps you avoid the temptation of 'five more minutes'; secondly, it gives you a powerful sense of accomplishment - your day is only seconds old and you have already achieved something! In turn, this encourages you to complete other small tasks (you will become addicted to that feeling of accomplishment and you will begin to realise that, in life, the small things matter!). Finally, it guarantees that when bedtime comes round again, your bed will be comfortable.

### **The Middle:**

Ensure your day contains at least 45 minutes of physical exercise: this might be accounted for in a PE lesson; your commute to and from school might be on foot; you may have football or hockey training after school; or else ensure that you find the time for a long walk or a good run. Of course, a gym membership might be your preference - but they are expensive and when you account for the time spent packing, travelling, and changing, often don't prove as efficient as a simple walk or run.

### **The End:**

Create your own micro-routine before bed. This is the easiest place in your day to establish routine because so many of us already have habits in place for this time (like drinking a glass of water, visiting the bathroom and brushing our teeth). Consider the following bolt-ons to your existing routine: make sure your school bag is packed for the following day; lay out your clothes for the morning; read a good book; make a habit of saying goodnight to each member of your family (and your pets!); and, most importantly, ensure your alarm is set!

## **2. Ask Questions (Study Skill)**

*Ask your teachers questions - answering them is what they're paid to do!*

Asking questions does not mean you are stupid.

*Not* asking questions means you probably are being a little bit stupid (no offence).

**Consider the following:**

1. The whole point of teachers is to help you learn.
2. How can teachers help you learn effectively if they don't know what you don't know?
3. How much more would you know if you had asked more questions in the past?

Whilst you might think that a silent classroom is everything a teacher wants, the truth is that there are times when a silent classroom is soul-destroying. If they are doing their jobs well, then teachers should be creating a thriving learning



environment: a classroom in which pupils are enjoying the challenge of learning new information; a classroom in which they are challenging themselves to make their understanding of topics deeper and permanent; a classroom (and this really would be nirvana) in which pupils are enjoying learning for the sake of learning!

The biggest single indicator that those things are happening is that pupils are asking questions. If pupils are asking questions, then things are going really well. If you have the fortune of already belonging to a class like that, then you will already appreciate how helpful it is.

### The three big advantages of asking a question:

1. You get an answer! OK, perhaps this one is a little obvious. But it's also often overlooked by students. Please, if you don't know something, just ask!
2. By asking questions, you are communicating. The more questions you ask, the better communicator you will become.
3. To form a question in your mind, you have to engage in some thought about the topic you are being taught. This type of thought is incredibly useful. It helps you retain information for a longer time, and it helps you think critically about the topic you are learning about. Thought is incredibly important. A very clever man called Daniel T. Willingham once said, "Memory is the residue of thought."

### The Magic

There is another element of asking questions which happens to be a little bit magical.

When we ask ourselves questions, we prompt ourselves to answer questions too. In doing so, we force ourselves to retrieve information from our memory.

Ask yourself: what is alliteration? And you will prompt yourself to retrieve the following information: *alliteration is the occurrence of the same letter at the beginning of closely connected words in a sentence.*

Ask yourself: according to Pythagoras, what is a hypotenuse? And you will prompt yourself to retrieve the following information: *a hypotenuse is the longest side of a right-angled triangle.*

Asking questions of yourself like this, at spaced intervals (see chapter 4), starting from after immediately having been taught something, all the way up to the eve of an exam, is an incredibly powerful way of learning and revising.

In fact, it is scientifically proven to be far more effective than simply taking notes.

Taking notes is better than not taking notes of course.



But it's not nearly as efficient as writing down questions.

The idea is that when you then revise, instead of reading your notes, you ask yourself the questions you have written down.

You don't have to write your answers down. You just have to answer in your head. If you don't know the answer, you immediately know what you need to look up. Then you look it up. You repeat the process until you can answer all the questions. There is more information on this in chapter 6.

### **Success**

The most successful students in the world ask questions. The most successful professionals in the world ask questions. The most successful entrepreneurs in the world ask questions.

Asking questions does not show a lack of knowledge.

Asking questions shows a thirst for knowledge.

It's as simple as this:

Ask questions.

## **3. Establish A Routine (Life Habit)**

***Make a positive routine a non-negotiable!***

Routine is defined as a series of actions regularly followed.

There isn't a single piece of advice in this guide that will work if it isn't regularly followed.

So, getting yourself into a positive routine really is essential.

### **Getting Started**

We can all get stuck in bad routines. Often, a bad routine is called a rut. If you feel trapped in a cycle of not studying, handing in homework late, going to bed in the early hours of the morning, endlessly scrolling, getting up late, not exercising, barely eating breakfast and being late for school, then you are stuck in a rut.

Let's be realistic. You're not going to be able to switch from anything resembling the type of routine I have just described to a world class routine overnight.

To begin with, you should aim to establish a basic routine.

The most important element of a routine is routine.





Meaning that if you propose a set of actions to regularly follow but they are too challenging to stick to, there is no routine.

So, don't begin by telling yourself that you will complete a 10k run and a novel every day. You won't.

Over-ambition prior to the launch of a routine inevitably leads to failure. And that can result in a downward spiral of self-esteem.

Instead, you should start by deciding on some realistic, do-able, daily actions.

The beauty of starting small is that successful completion of those actions will result in an increased sense of self-esteem. You will begin to believe that you can achieve. And whilst I'd still warn against daily 10k runs, it won't be long before you can implement additional helpful habits into your schedule.

So, a basic routine should look something more like this:

#### **Before school:**

- Wake up at the same time everyday
- Drink a glass of water and do some light stretching/exercising
- Eat a nutritious breakfast
- Check your bag
- Leave for school in good time

#### **After school:**

- Arrive home at a similar time everyday
- Change into comfortable clothes
- Have a nutritious snack and unwind a little
- Complete your homework (preferably before your evening meal)
- Brush your teeth and go to bed at the same time every night.

Don't expect to change overnight. And don't feel bad when you don't.

Whilst I have presented the above as a 'basic routine', it's still a stretch to imagine anybody going from no routine to a basic routine in the space of 24 hours.

Build in some transition time.

Give yourself a week or two to transition from no routine to a basic routine. On day one, you might simply aim to set your alarm for a specific time and go to bed at a specific time. (Read chapter 1 again for a reminder about this). The next day, you might decide to complete your homework before your evening meal. By the time you have built up the routine over a week or two, you will be confident and consistent in your routine.



Then you will be able to make additions to take your routine to the next level: the brilliant level.

The repeated actions that make up routines are called habits.

A habit is defined as ‘a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up’.

There is an unshakeable relationship between routines and habits. Successful routines are purposeful collations of positive habits.

In a nutshell, routine is repetition, repetition, repetition!

So...

Establish a routine.

Establish a routine.

Establish a routine.

#### 4. Space Repetition (Study Skill)

*OK, repetition isn't rocket science.*

But SPACED repetition is clever stuff!

Revision is rereading. It is the act of rereading stuff you have previously read or done to improve your knowledge.

It stands to reason that the more you reread something, the better chance you will have of remembering it. That is the beauty of repetition. Pupils who leave everything to the last minute deny themselves repetition.

Repetition works.

But not indiscriminately so.

The key to effective revision is spacing.

You need to space out your revision over a sensible period.

The three key things to remember about spaced repetition are:

- Little and often!
- Leave space between your revision sessions
- Embrace the challenge of remembering stuff



## Little and often

Consider how long in total it will take you to revise something to master it. If the answer to that question is six hours, do not plan to revise for six hours on a single day.

Do not plan to revise for three hours across two days either. Do not even plan to revise for two hours across three days.

Instead, plan for 20 minutes across 18 separate days. Remember, little and often!

## Leave space between your revision sessions

Plan to leave space between your revision days. The following 35-day model is ideal for 18 x 20-minute revision sessions:

Day 1 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 2 Rest  
Day 3 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 4 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 5 Rest  
Day 6 Rest  
Day 7 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 8 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 9 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 10 Rest  
Day 11 Rest  
Day 12 Rest  
Day 13 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 14 Rest  
Day 15 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 16 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 17 Rest  
Day 18 Rest  
Day 19 Review (20 mins)  
Day 20 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 21 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 22 Rest  
Day 23 Rest  
Day 24 Rest  
Day 25 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 26 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 27 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 28 Rest  
Day 29 Rest  
Day 30 Rest  
Day 31 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 32 Revise (20 mins)  
Day 33 Rest  
Day 34 Rest  
Day 35 Revise (20 mins)

## Embrace the challenge of remembering stuff!

On your first day of revision after a day or more of rest, begin your session by recalling what you revised last time.



This will be difficult, especially in the early days of your plan. However, you must embrace this feeling. Research tells us that by forcing our brain to recall information, we strengthen our ability to retain the information in the future. Begin each session by challenging yourself to write down everything you revised last time - you will love the feeling of satisfaction you gain as you progress. By day 25 you will be able to recall everything almost automatically.

### **Change your attitude towards homework**

Some days you will get lots of homework, some days you won't get any. Make that irrelevant: give yourself homework every school night - in the form of making notes about what you covered in each lesson that day.

Don't do it as soon as you get home - remember that space is important. But after taking some time to get a snack and some relaxation, sit down to recall what you covered. If you can't remember, think hard - remember how important that process is! If you still can't remember, take your books out and look for yourself. If you still need clarification about something discussed, or something still doesn't make sense, remember what we covered earlier (about asking questions), make a note, and ask your teacher next lesson. This type of homework won't take you too long - especially when you get in the habit. It will put you way ahead of your classmates, consolidate your learning and, in the same way as going to the gym regularly builds your muscles, it will build your resolve and your ability to recall.

## **5. Exercise (Life Habit)**

*Healthy body, healthy mind.*

Exercise increases endorphins and endorphins make us feel fantastic.

Exercise is incredible.

Exercise will bring you so much happiness that, once you start, you won't be able to figure out how there are people on the planet who choose not to do it.

Exercise is a gateway to success and joy and satisfaction and *all* the good emotions.

Most usefully for you, exercise will improve your motivation, your concentration and your memory. So, for any aspiring scholar, exercise is key.

Understandably, exercise is often associated with sport. So, those who are particularly interested or gifted at sport will naturally exercise on a more regular basis than those who aren't.

If you are reading this as somebody who plays football three times a week for a local team, or attends swimming classes, or is a member of their local netball team, then you will probably already appreciate how good it feels to exercise. Or, more specifically, how good you feel once you have finished exercising.



But exercise is not just the preserve of the ‘sporty ones’: exercise is for everybody.

If you hate PE and think that exercise is only for those who love it, you must reframe your thinking. Because exercise is not just a product of sporting activity.

Exercise is a goal.

Which means that you are free to carry on hating PE, but you must begin to exercise for all the joy and success it can bring you in all the other subjects.

You need to exercise for the sake of exercising. And once you have done that, on purpose, regularly, for a month, you will realise that you are no longer exercising for the sake of exercising; you are exercising for the sake of feeling happy, motivated, and content. Furthermore, you will be exercising for the sake of helping your brain work faster, smarter and with more clarity.

So, whether you currently play sports or not, you need to begin exercising - every day for 20 minutes - for the sake of exercising.

Cardio is key. This means exercise designed to raise your heart rate. There are more 20-minute YouTube workout videos than you can imagine. So, you could simply choose one, stick to it, and do it.

However, my advice is to get outside for 20 minutes and pound the pavement. Either walking fast or running will do the trick. Perhaps start by walking fast and take it from there.

The bonus of exercising outdoors is that you will *be* outdoors.

Come rain or shine, you will gain all the advantages of fresh air.

There is no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothes.

So, get outside and get moving.

Do so with intention, and know that alongside all the health benefits - physical and mental - your actions are having fabulous impacts on your learning, your memory, and your academic performance.

## 6. Note Taking (Study Skill)

*There's more to taking notes than writing stuff down!*

You should strive to find the note taking technique that suits you best.

Taking notes must be done.



Teachers ask you to take notes in lessons and at home, and, for most pupils, it's the go-to activity when faced with the task of revision.

The art of notetaking is in finding the form of notes that works best for you. So, trial and error must play a part.

There are lots of options available to you, but there is one that certainly won't work: copying everything.

Copying everything you read is as futile as highlighting every word you read.

The most important consideration when it comes to successful note taking is selection.

You must be selective.

When you read selected information, your brain automatically fills in the rest by retrieving it. The retrieval is the most important aspect of your memory.

Unedited text, copied verbatim from a source, demands nothing of your brain.

Selected information demands that your brain gets to work.

So, whether you use bullet-points, spider diagrams, colour-coding, drawings (see chapter 10), underlining, abbreviations, or paraphrasing, so long as you are being selective, you will learn.

### Don't Take Notes!

Or perhaps taking notes doesn't have to be done?

So long as you 'take questions' instead!

Writing down questions instead of notes is an incredibly effective method for learning and revising material.

Let's say you need to learn the following information about condensation:

*When cold air turns water vapour back into liquid, clouds are formed. We call this **condensation**. You can observe this process at home or in school by pouring a glass of cold water on a hot day. After a short amount of time, water will appear on the outside of the glass. This is because the warm water vapour turns to liquid as soon as it gets cold.*

Instead of writing notes, try writing questions - like this:

1. What does cold air turn water vapour into?
2. What is formed when this happens?



3. What could you do to observe this process at home or in school?
4. What will appear on the outside of the glass?
5. Why has this appeared?

When you are finished, you will have lots of questions for each topic. That means you have a long list of revision questions - the most useful of revision tools.

The best thing is you don't have to write any answers down. You can simply read through the questions and answer them in your head. Keep reading and answering until you really can't remember an answer. At that point, revisit the source material (whatever you were reading when you wrote down the questions), remind yourself of the answer, and carry on. Repeat and repeat until you can answer everything on your question list without needing to look at the source material! If you can do that by the day before the exam, you can be certain you will know it the next day too.

## 7. Visualise (Life Habit)

*Visualisation conditions your brain for success.*

Never under-estimate the power of your imagination.

Visualisation is the act of taking time to think hard about how you want events to unfold. The point of visualisation is to reach the point in your mind where you can see - in your mind's eye - the event that you are concentrating on.

It is brilliant because it motivates you to achieve the same results, in reality, as you are able to achieve in your imagination.

It is brilliant because it trains your brain how to behave when the future event occurs.

It is brilliant because it aligns you with top sportspeople, chief executives and high-fliers who use visualisation to help them achieve their goals.

Visualisation is best practised under the same conditions as meditation - when you are alone, comfortable, and quiet. Closing your eyes certainly helps.

However, one of the beauties of visualisation is that you don't need to limit it to the times when conditions are perfect. You can visualise your successes when you're out for a walk or a run, sitting on a bus, or about to complete a piece of work.

In truth, you already visualise. To lesser or greater extents, we all daydream about our goals and our actions. We all have imaginations! You certainly won't have many technical issues when it comes to being able to visualise.

However, the point here is intention.



Intentional visualisation gives you four things: a sense of satisfaction; the reassurance that your regular practice is benefitting your work; and a bolstering of your positive routine. Most impressively, it helps you perform better when you are *actually* completing the task.

You can visualise the short term and the long term.

Certainly, spending time visualising your long-term goals, and what life will look like when you achieve them, can be a powerful motivational technique.

In the same way a footballer might visualise lifting a trophy, receiving a medal, or seeing their name in the record books, you might visualise results day, graduating from university, or working in your dream career. Perhaps you will go a step further and visualise the healthy impact those achievements will have on your mental health and your relationships. Revisiting this long-term aim will motivate you and serve as a useful reminder of why you are in school. This type of visualisation focuses on outcome.

Visualisation also works very effectively when focused on process. It helps enormously by preparing your brain for the task at hand. By visualising the act, you become far less likely to be distracted by things that have nothing to do with the act.

Olympic relay teams spend time visualising handing over the baton to their team-mate. They think, in detail, about their pace, the action their arm will make, and how it will feel to release the baton at the perfect moment.

International goalkeepers prepare for saving penalties by visualising diving to their right or left at full stretch. They use other senses too to imagine the sound of the ball being struck and the feel of the ball as it hits their gloves.

You can prepare for success in a similar way. How will your art coursework look when it is complete? What about the feeling of satisfaction as your tired hand completes writing that essay? How will your drama monologue sound to the audience as you perform your practical? If you're a PE student, you can take inspiration from the sporting examples I have just described. Or if you are a musician, you might imagine the beautiful sounds you are about to make and the movement of your body as you make them.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of school is the multitasking that you are expected to complete on a daily basis. Without wishing to be dismissive of that, let me isolate one task to demonstrate the layers of visualisation you can apply in order to improve your performance: let's imagine you have a forthcoming French speaking exam...

**Layer 1: Long Term (start at the beginning of the course - repeat once a month)**  
**Form of visualisation: Outcome**





Take some time to visualise how wonderful it would feel to use French to order your lunch in a Parisian cafe with confidence. How proud would you feel making that order whilst in the company of a friend or family member? What about going a step further and imagining broadening that conversation beyond a food order? How would it feel to converse in fluent French? How would it be to make friends with a French person? How wonderful would it be to travel around France with the confidence and freedom that a second language brings?

**Result: improved motivation**

## **Layer 2: Medium Term (begin a month before the exam - repeat once a week)**

### **Form of visualisation: Outcome**

How is it going to feel to tell your family that you have achieved a grade you are really proud of? How lovely will it be to look your teacher in the eye and thank them sincerely for helping you achieve a grade you are both proud of? What about the moment you open your certificates on results day and you feel a glow of achievement deep inside?

**Result: improved motivation**

## **Layer 3: Short Term (prior to revising)**

### **Form of visualisation: Process**

Think about the revision you are about to complete. Where will you sit? How will you organise your books? What form of notetaking will you use? How will the notes look when you have written them? Will you record yourself speaking? How do you want to sound when you play it back? What do you want to have achieved (be as specific as possible) by the time you finish your revision session?

**Result: improved motivation**

## **Layer 4: Very Short Term (the night before or the morning of the exam):**

### **Form of visualisation: Process**

Think about sitting outside the exam room waiting for your turn. Visualise your stride and purpose as you walk into the room with the confidence that knowledge brings. Imagine how you will smile when your teacher asks you the first question. Hear your voice and your tone. Hear the words you will say. Hear yourself going beyond the basic expectation and asking a question back! Hear the confident accent that you will use!

**Result: improved performance**

## **8. Topic Sentences (Study Skill)**

*They're the most important sentences!*

Knowing how to recognise topic sentences can make an incredible difference to your reading and writing in every subject.

Now, there's every chance your English teacher has taught you about these. In fact, your primary school teachers will have probably talked to you about them when they were teaching you about paragraphs for the first time.



A topic sentence is the sentence in a paragraph that tells the reader what the paragraph is about.

Naturally, they are usually at the beginning of a paragraph. Most often they are the first sentence of the paragraph - but be careful because this is not always the case.

In the following paragraph, the topic sentence is the first sentence. The paragraph is about the speaker's friend's guitar, and we are introduced to this *topic* in the first sentence.

*Last week I borrowed my friend's guitar. I have always wanted to learn how to play the guitar. I figured that if I asked Rachel to lend me her guitar, I could use YouTube tutorials to learn some of my favourite tunes. Rachel's guitar is pink and has stickers of musical notes all around the edge. However, it was more difficult to play than I imagined!*

The next paragraph is a good example of why it is important not to presume that the topic sentence is *always* the first sentence; in this paragraph, it is the second sentence that introduces us to the topic.

*I had wanted to learn how to play the drums for a long time. However, from the moment I was taught some basic chords, I fell in love with the piano. Since then, I have learnt seven songs and I can play all twelve chords. I don't own my own piano yet, but I am saving up! Once I have enough money for a piano, I will have to convince my parents that we have enough space in our house for one!*

It may have seemed at first that the paragraph was going to be about drums, but, in fact (drumroll), it was about pianos.

Anyway, knowing this certainly helps you write your own paragraphs. When you are planning - on paper or in your head - you will be able to think and write with much more clarity. You should always make a conscious effort to think about the topic of each paragraph. This will enhance the clarity of both your thinking and your writing.

That would be reason enough to give thought to topic sentences. However, an appreciation of them has the additional benefit of enhancing your reading. Particularly the kind of reading that is of most use when time is in short supply: skimming.

Skimming is the act of reading text quickly to get an overview of the information.

You skim a chapter in a book by only reading headings, sub-headings, anything in bold, and - crucially - the topic sentences in each paragraph.



If you take a page of text and only read the topic sentence of each paragraph, you can't fail to gain a solid understanding. The *topic* sentences alone - perhaps unsurprisingly - will give you a clear comprehension of the topic.

This is very useful news for your studies. You should definitely use topic sentences.

## 9. Learn Something New (Life Habit)

*Learn something that isn't for school.*

Learn something for you.

At first, this may seem like too much to take on. You want to be brilliant at school so why would you focus on anything other than that?

There are plenty of reasons.

Perhaps the most important is that learning something new and enjoying a hobby reminds you that despite all of *this*, there *are* more important things in life than school.

Learn to play a musical instrument, sing, act, dance, swim, take up a new language, do some scrapbooking, make models, paint, draw or cook.

Relax and enjoy whatever your thing is, but if you would like some educational reasons to justify doing so, there are plenty to choose from. By learning something new you will: stimulate both sides of your brain; feel a notable reduction in your stress levels; make strong social connections with others who share your new passion; exercise your resilience in overcoming new challenges; improve your time management; cultivate your creativity; improve your patience levels; enhance your cognitive and muscle memory; and experience the healthy glow of satisfaction that comes along with overcoming a challenge or creating something new.

All of these are transferable skills. Learning something new will improve your chances of thriving at school and, at the same time, give you much needed respite from it!

So, go and learn, create, make, play, design, and fly!

## 10. Draw (Study Skill)

*Creative approaches to revision notes are an under-estimated revision tool.*

The act of drawing helps us learn; the images we make leave a lasting imprint on our memory.



You absolutely do not need to have any artistic talent to use drawing as a revision technique. A pen and the ability to draw very basic shapes are all you need to be able to create.

Drawing the information we want to use at a later point in time is an extremely useful tool. For many, it will be far more useful than writing it.

Recalling information from our mind's eye is an ability most of us are blessed with. So, it really is worth using.

High pressure situations like exams and interviews follow the basic format of asking us to answer questions under pressure. Most often, in these contexts, we have already prepared our answers. Therefore, the pressure is on our ability to recall what we have prepared. In a scenario such as this, it is often far easier to 'see' an image of our answer rather than to 'see' or 'hear' a written version of our answer.

Be aware that colour enhances this ability. So consider using colour too.

Preparing for an exam by producing colourful drawings of the concepts, information and ideas you need to remember is a great idea.

You can have fun with your drawings too! Be literal or symbolic, play with words, use puns. If you can't think of an image for a word - try an image of a word that sounds like it! If you need to remind yourself to describe the conditions of a desert as "bare and hostile" but can't think of a distinctive image, draw a bear wearing a shirt and tie (a bear who looks like a host with style). Get it? You certainly won't forget it.

It simply doesn't matter whether anybody else gets it, so long as you do! If I was preparing for a geography exam and I needed to remember that the layers of earth are crust, mantle, inner core and outer core. I'd draw an apple and a sandwich sitting on top of a fireplace. In an exam, that would help me; I would decode that the sandwich indicates 'crust', the apple indicates core, and the fireplace refers to the mantle(piece).

This stuff sounds silly - and my examples may not be what you would choose - but it works! Drawing makes whatever you need to learn memorable - and when it comes to performing well in exams (or interviews), that is priceless.

## 11. Focus On Today (Life Habit)

*Today is the only day you can control today! If you look after the present, the future will look after itself.*

Finally, it is important to understand that you can't change the future right now. Or rather, you can... but only by controlling the present.



Planning is certainly important. Indeed, it's a crucial aspect of so much of the content of this guide: routine, sleep, repetition, exercise, note taking... They all require some pre-planning.

However, too much ruminating about the future can be very unhelpful.

Too much and you won't achieve anything except causing yourself anxiety.

The one sure way of positively impacting the future is to take positive action in the present.

So, this means that if you go for that run today, you will have more chance of going again tomorrow; if you begin that revision today, you'll be one day closer to not being able to forget the content; or, if you spend today practising the first few actions of that routine you have planned, you will be one day closer to forming brilliant habits.

*If you look after the present, the future will look after itself.*

And as for the past... do not waste a second pondering why you haven't started any of this stuff sooner.

Instead, always remember: the only yesterday you can change is tomorrow's.

## IN SUMMARY

It's over to you!

You can **be brilliant at school**.

Yes, **you**.

The truth is the fact that you have read this guide already indicates that you will be brilliant. In fact, you probably already are.

I wrote this guide so that you can become a successful human being in the most direct and efficient way possible: by first becoming a successful pupil.

By taking an interest in these words, you are displaying an intention to be brilliant - not just in the future - but in the here and now.

You have a drive and determination to be brilliant. So, now, do your best to ensure that your brilliance comes to fruition *at school*.

Because if it does, you'll be flying.



The reason so many adults say they regret not paying enough attention in school is because there have always been so many children who do not pay enough attention in school.

There are many people - many adults - who are in awe of the ambition that you are currently displaying and the potential that you have.

The word 'potential' is potent.

It is powerful.

Quite literally.

It is derived from the Latin for 'being able' and the noun *potentia*, which directly translates as 'power'.

This guide was written to help you achieve your potential.

"My potential in what?" you might well ponder.

In 1991, Arthur W. Foshay, in an article for the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, proclaimed that *"The one continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realisation as possible of what it is to be a human being."*

So, by intending to reach your potential in school, you are - by extension - intending to reach your potential in life: your potential as a human being.

And that is powerful motivation.

Potent, in fact.

Good luck!

