

# Practice Testing

## What is Practice Testing?

Tests are likely to be viewed by students as being undesirable and something that students do not like about education. Most would probably like to do as little tests/exams as possible.

This view of testing and exams is understandable because when most students think about tests or exams, they think of big, scary SQA exams or prelims preparing students for SQA exams. These types of tests can bring with them anxiety and worry because they are generally there to assess and evaluate how much you have learned.

But, this view of exams and testing is unfortunate, because it overshadows the fact that testing and exams also **improve** your learning. This is why schools often have 'prelims'. These prelims assess what you know, but they also help to improve your learning and strengthen the information already stored in your memory.

**Practice testing improves and enhances your learning and retention of information.**

For the purposes of studying, however, practice testing should be thought of as something that is done without pressure and only to help you engage in your own learning.

Practice testing could include using flashcards to test your own knowledge, completing practice example questions from past papers, or completing questions found in textbooks. These are just a few examples.

### Why Would a Student Use Practice Testing?

Practice testing may be used as a method of testing and assessing your own knowledge whilst studying.

### Does Practice Testing Work?

Practice testing can increase the amount you learn because of elaborative retrieval processes. Attempting to retrieve information involves people searching through their long-term memory and this search activates information that is related to the information you are looking for. This extra activated information may then be stored along with the information you were originally looking for, which then forms another way for people to retrieve the information at a later date.

### How Helpful Is Practice Testing?

In terms of time, practice testing does not have to be overly time consuming.

It is also something which can be done with minimal to no training. Students are able to take part in self-assessment of their knowledge through practice tests relatively easily. For example, students can self-test through creating flash cards which will test how much they know about a specific topic. More formal practice tests and past papers are also readily available to students and can often be free-of-charge when sourced online or through teachers at school.

However, students can benefit from learning more about when and how practice testing is most effective, in terms of how often they should do it and how long for. Most agree that practice testing seems to be most helpful when it requires students to retrieve learned information from memory and is used continuously until questions are answered correctly. Practice tests

are also most effective when they are spaced out over studying sessions.

Something which can increase the effectiveness of practice testing is having someone else mark your work (or having a corrected answer sheet to use if self-assessing). Having an 'expert' such as a teacher check your work on a practice test will lower the chance of students learning information that is incorrect.

**Overall Rating of Effectiveness: Very Useful**