68 ideas for
Revving up Revision

Starting-points:

1. We should try to see things from the student's point of view: they haven't sat major exams before, they don't know what to expect, and they will appreciate clear, practical, unpatronising advice
2. If we don't teach students how to revise, then it's an equal opportunities issue: those from supportive backgrounds will do better than those who have to fend for themselves
3. Good revision won't be a succession of past papers. It will be a process within lessons and across the final stage of a course that moves students from dependence to independence
4. In good revision the teacher will do increasingly less whilst the students do increasingly more
5. We should teach knowledge and skills and techniques, but recognise that the best teachers may be other students, and possibly slightly older ones
6. Literacy skills are crucial in most exams – the terminology that distinguishes middle from top grades, the skills needed for reading papers and organising answers, and – most significantly – writing skills
7. The most powerful way we will help our students to do better in exams is therefore possibly by doing shared writing (composition – planning – demonstration)
8. Students – especially boys – improve their writing skills when allowed very brief spoken opportunities to discuss what they will write
9. We should be realistic telling students that most revision sessions should last no more than 25 minutes, followed by a built-in reward. Let's give them realistic revision skills that fit into their lifestyle. Teach the Pomodoro Technique

Teaching what revision looks like:

10. Get some Sixth Form students who did your subject last year to come and do speed dating with groups of students – how they revised, which bits they found easiest/hardest, which revision approaches worked best: all of this humanises the process of revision
11. Get students to devise a chart, map, plan, grid which shows the key bits of knowledge and the key skills they will need to develop. In any revision session get them to map where it fits with the big picture
12. Get students to create a timeline of what they will know by when and how they should be able to demonstrate it
13. Have a downloadable summary of key skills and knowledge posted on the homework forum
14. Use a traffic lights system for students to colour bits they feel very confident about (green), less so (yellow) and weak on (red)
15. Use the traffic lights for students to talk to a Sixth Form student who took your subject last year about bits they can and can't do
16. Teach students how to make summaries, to synthesis key points, to make spider diagrams, to create mind-maps: demonstrate how to do these
17. Feed information about students' revision skills (eg how much MyMaths they have been doing) to their Active Mentor, so that progress is noted and praised

Reinforcing learning:

18. Explain this concept to me as if I'm a 6-year old or grandparent
19. Explain this concept in a spider diagram
20. Explain this concept in a sequence of 3 pictures – no words allowed
21. Create a poster of 6 words which sum up all the key information in this topic. Then explain your words to a partner
22. Play a true/false quiz with key concepts
23. Display key words around the classroom and occasionally test students on their meaning
24. Give an extract of a text with key words missing: students work out what the concepts are
25. Get some Sixth Form students to put together a comprehensive list of websites that are useful for revision. Put this on the Homework Forum
26. Teach memory skills by doing a series of starter activities in which students have to learn facts or concepts quickly and under pressure. Get some students to explain to others how they approached the task and managed to learn things
27. Teach students how we can memorise through visualising (eg create a journey of the things you have to remember) or sound (make up silly mnemonics/jingles)
28. Speed dating to test each other / answer questions / demonstrate how much they know on a topic

Applying knowledge:

29. Students write the first part of a model answer (the first paragraph will do), then share it with a partner to get feedback on how clear, accurate and knowledgeable it is – ie focus on small sections at first
30. In groups, students design and write one page of a revision textbook. You collate them into one document and publish it on the Homework Forum – a tailor-made revision guide
31. Every lesson, as a starter, brainstorm the key concepts students need, asking them to explain / define / summarise key ideas
32. Ask students in small groups to think up a question, to produce the answer, and to write the guidance a chief examiner would provide. Look at sample questions to help get the tone and style right
33. Take an exam question and annotate it – showing what the key words are that students must know; better still, get students to do this
34. Take an exam answer or three and annotate them, showing what students need to know about the difference between a C, B and A*
35. Play Mastermind to reinforce knowledge
36. Play Who Wants to Be a Millionaire with students posing the questions, knowing the answers, and structuring them from easy to hard
37. Play Splat! where students have to run to the part of the room displaying the right answer to a question you read aloud
38. Play word associations, saying some key words and asking students to see what comes into their head. This will tell you how embedded their revision is
39. Produce a revision podcast for other groups
40. Design a leaflet for Year 10 which summarises key concepts
41. Produce a rap to help students memorise the key concepts of your course
42. Roll a dice and ask questions relating to one subject – students have 10 seconds to think about what they will say before (no hands up) answering
43. Write a "bad" first paragraph to a question. Students annotate it to show why it's not great

44. Play starter activities that help students to know the key connectives of their subject – *although, as, because, despite, however*, and so on
45. Display the key spellings that students will need
46. Design a courtroom exercise in which one student or more answers other students' questions on key topics
47. Look at past exam or sample questions and answers and let students annotate the key features
48. We only truly know something when we can teach it to others. Group students with others in different groups or years. Their challenge is to teach the other/younger students the skills they have learnt, and then to get feedback on how clear and accessible they made the subject

Focus on reading skills:

49. Teach the reading skills students will need in your subject, both for revision and for the exam – eg skimming, scanning, analysing
50. Take past questions and put them into a PowerPoint, one question per slide. Get students thinking of the key words and phrases they should be looking for; then flash the slides up, getting students to tell you the important information in each question. This applies to Maths as much as any other subject
51. If students have to read lots of text in an exam, practise the skill through a sequence of starters which flash different texts in front of them. Give them a small amount of time and, working in pairs or groups, get them to skim a text (get the gist) or scan a text (find specific information). This will build confidence in their own reading
52. Show them how in an exam you might read actively – highlighting or underlining key words

Focus on writing skills:

53. Take an exam question and get students to think of the opening sentence of a BAD answer. Then ask them to explain why it's bad (bad answers help to build confidence and to focus on the essential skills for success)
54. Model a good answer on the board, listening to students' comments and advice. Students need to see that when we write, all of us make errors, think, correct ourselves frequently
55. Make sure students know the conventions of writing in your subject (should they use the passive voice in Science ["potassium was added to the test tube" rather than "I added potassium to the test tube"]?, should they avoid using "I" and "me" in analytical work in History and Technology; should they use an introduction which says "in this essay I am going to show …." or just dive into the answer?)
56. If students are expected to provide evidence to support their points (eg quotations in English Lit), demonstrate how to bed these into existing sentences
57. Demonstrate how good writing uses connectives which help to guide a reader through a text – eg "Firstly … Later … Another way of looking at this … In conclusion"
58. Teach students how to take notes, showing them that we all have a preferred style (eg spider diagrams, bullet-points, mind maps, etc)
59. Give them practice in making notes – dictate a boring lecture on something obscure; do it at a fast pace. Their job is to make notes which will allow them to answer 10 questions on what they have heard
60. Put some sample revision cards / notes on display to help students know what they might look like
61. Ask some Sixth Form students to explain and demonstrate the form of note-making they used

Guide students on creating the conditions for learning:

62. Talk with students about where they work, how they work, how they cope with distractions, how they resist laziness, how they reward themselves, whether they use music in the background; get some older students to talk about this
63. Talk to students about how examiners work, who they are, what they look for and how to make a good impression from the first page of the answer book
64. Ask students to show you their traffic lighted revision plan
65. Put together a mini revision guide for parents – questions they could ask, ways they could help their child
66. Praise students who attend revision sessions and booster classes
67. Write a note or card to each student wishing them well
68. Remind students of how they can get support and guidance once study leave begins

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