

Hello!

Welcome to the third issue of the ZSB's newsletter.

This edition is all about **how to revise effectively and make your exams stress-free (sort of).**



Photo by Green Chameleon
on Unsplash

'Learning is like rowing against the tide. If you stop, you will drift backwards.' (Laotse)

The semester is speeding past, exams are getting ever closer. Every day, you resolve to start revising, but you just can't find your way into it. There's less and less time left, but each day that passes makes the revision pile bigger – at least it seems like that to you. You're beginning to get worried. How on earth are you going to manage it all?

Do you know this feeling? Perhaps you're wondering how you can find your way into focused, productive revision which will help you look to your exams with confidence?

Your first step to getting rowing again and not drifting backwards is to work out what factors are affecting your learning.

What influences my revision?

All sorts of things can affect your revision process. First of all, consider these questions:

- **Managing your time:** Do I plan my revision, and if so, how thoroughly? When is my best time of day for focusing and working effectively? How fast do I work?
- **Your surroundings:** Where do I feel most comfortable revising? What conditions do I need to revise well? How can I make those happen?
- **Revision methods and techniques:** What is my learning and revision style? Which revision strategies do I know of? How and when do I use which one?
- **Revision buddies:** Which other students do I find it easiest to revise with, or how can I find others to share the revision process with?
- **Your energy levels:** Am I getting enough sleep and keeping hydrated? Am I making sure to take breaks regularly and get enough 'downtime'?
- **Your aims and objectives:** What do I want to revise in the next hour (short-term goal)? How am I going to manage my revision over the next few weeks (medium-term goal)? Where do I want to be in two semesters' time (long-term goal)?

Do you need some methods and techniques to improve your revision? Read on for tried-and-tested strategies to practise for yourself.

Useful revision strategies

Put it in your own words

Say (aloud) what you've just been revising, using your own words; this will help you to understand and internalise the information better and make you aware of parts of it that you still need to work on. Make sure you note down these gaps.

Illustrate

Whatever you're revising, it'll come to life – and your memory will be better at retaining it – if you put it in visual form. You can use any method you like – mind maps, sketches, flow charts...

Start from what you know

This strategy helps you activate your previously acquired knowledge and make it available to yourself. The more you already know about a topic, the easier it is for you to learn new content in the same area. Before a revision session, try asking yourself: What do I already know about this topic? Which are the key points, what terminology is essential to know?

Downsize

It's easier for your brain to retain smaller chunks of information than bigger ones. When you start to revise a topic, do a quick survey of the total amount of information you want to learn and choose which you'll work on and which you'll leave aside. Sometimes it can be counter-productive to try and

cover absolutely everything. You can rationalise your revision by setting priorities, summarising content, creating memory aids, drawing up visualisations and writing flashcards with the key facts or formulae you need to know.

Test yourself

If you make sure you systematically test yourself on whether, and how well, you understand the material you've been revising, you'll know where there are still gaps in your knowledge and can work on filling them. You can talk to yourself about the material you've been revising, use index cards (for instance) to test yourself, get someone else to test you, and/or set yourself a 'mock exam'.

Try out different strategies to see what suits you best. Be creative, use your imagination and your senses and diversify your methods – use reading, listening, a combination of the two, writing things down, and pulling together the information you need by yourself.

Planning your revision is important, too. Making a plan well in advance of the exams can be a big boost to your preparation.

Your advance exam plan

Many learners find that having a long-term plan for revision and learning helps them reduce stress, optimise their performance, avoid frantic last-minute revision sessions, and – through the successes they achieve this way - keep their motivation high.

Before you make your plan, check the overall situation and make sure you know these things:

- When is the exam?
- What topics will it be on?
- Which format/type of exam is it?
- How much revision will I need to do?
- How much time will I need to do it?
- Do I have all the materials I need (lecture notes, books, etc)?
- How quickly do I revise?

Now it's time to make your plan. Divide up the time you have available across five phases of revision:

1. Understanding

This phase involves going through the material you need to revise, ensuring you understand it, and reducing it to its key aspects by (for instance) summarising it in your own words, putting it in a visual form, making audio files with the information, etc. If you're not sure about something or are struggling to understand an aspect of the topic, it might help to discuss it with other students or ask the academic staff member who is going to examine the module.

2. Drilling down (shorter than phase 1)

At this stage, you go over the material again in greater depth, note additional aspects, make connections with other parts of the subject, and focus more closely still on central issues to help your memory retain the crucial information.

3. Consolidation (shorter than phases 1 and 2)

You now go over everything again, anchor the information in your mind and go into further depth where appropriate. You shouldn't start on new topics at this stage – just go through what you've already revised and get to know it better still.

4. Insurance

There should be no new tasks or content in this fourth phase of revision – it's there as a buffer in case you don't progress as quickly as you'd anticipated or in case there's an unforeseen event in your life. It's your 'insurance policy'. If everything has gone to plan, you can use this time to get some rest.

5. Day before the exam

Ideally, you should take the day immediately before the exam off and do something you enjoy so that you'll be relaxed and full of energy on the day. Reassure yourself that you're as well prepared as you can possibly be.

Aspects to note when making your plan:

- Exactly how long each of the phases above will last depends on your personal learning speed and style and on which exam you are revising for.
- Make sure you schedule regular breaks to boost your concentration and efficiency.
- Don't forget to establish regular 're-revision' sessions to ensure that your knowledge is solid and stable.
- Choose some rewards for yourself after long days of revision. This will give you something to look forward to once your work is done.
- Schedule days as emergency reserves of time in case something doesn't go to plan (e.g. you get ill).
- Keep your plan updated and adapt it to your progress. This will ensure you know where you are and stay motivated.

Now – we hope – you'll be able to go into your exams well-prepared, highly motivated and with a positive attitude, ready to do your best. If you can, do something you enjoy the day after the exam as a reward for all your hard work.

The Toolbox

Featuring in this issue: Scheduling
your time

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Have you seen...

...these books? They're a good read and are full of practical tips to help you revise effectively and prepare for exams.

Hans-Christian Kossak: *Lernen leicht gemacht*"

Martin Lehner: *Viel Stoff – schnell gelernt*

What's next?

Our next newsletter will be full of tips and ideas about rest, relaxation, and taking time for yourself.

Missed one of our issues?

Don't worry – just message us on Instagram or email us at studienberatung@haw-hamburg.de.

On Course with the ZSB

The [Student Counselling Office \(ZSB\)](#) team is here to support you through your degree course, whatever situation you find yourself in.

We've launched this **newsletter**, *On Course with the ZSB*, to provide you with ideas, information and inspiration that will help you to manage your studies successfully.

See you next issue! Until then – stay safe and study smart!

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