Learning
How to Learn

The A Level Edition

The Camden School for Girls 2025-26

Compiled by Simon Flynn

Y12 Parents Online Session

4.00pm - 5.00pm
Thursday 15th January

Simon Flynn

What we'll cover

- Why this session?

- Some of the science behind effective learning

- Some key learning strategies

- How to use AI responsibly

- Creating the right environment

- Questions

Why this session?

- We have the same goal

- How can we work together?

- Communication is key

Where to start

1. How do you study?

2. Why do you study this way?

3. Does it work (and how to you know)?

If their methods *feel* easy…

… they're almost certainly not effective.

- If an athlete or musician wants to make noticeable and continual improvements, how easy are their methods for achieving this likely to be?

- What's the difference if we change 'athlete' or 'musician' to 'learner'?

The problem we're addressing

- Many students work hard but use ineffective methods

- Re-reading notes repeatedly = illusion of learning

- Cramming the night or days before = short-term memory only

- Highlighting and re-reading feel productive but have minimal impact

Working smarter, not just harder

- More effortful strategies produce much greater long-term learning gains → *the struggle is the strategy*

- Active retrieval and self-testing → *retrieve to achieve*

- Regular, spaced practice → *space it, test it, ace it*

- Building sustainable study habits → *consistency compounds*

E   D   C   B   A   A*

E D C B A A*
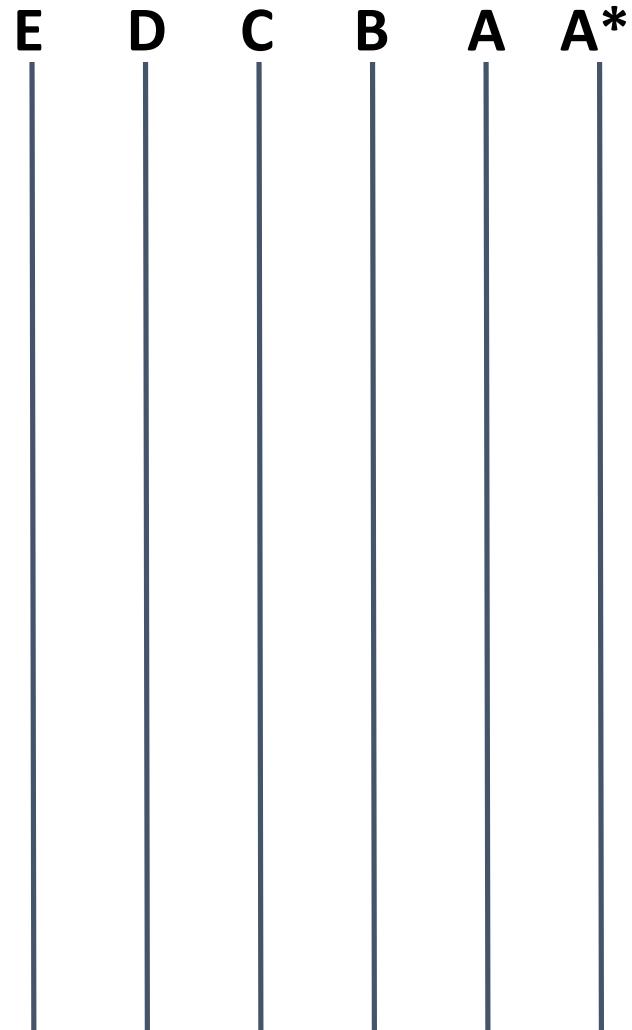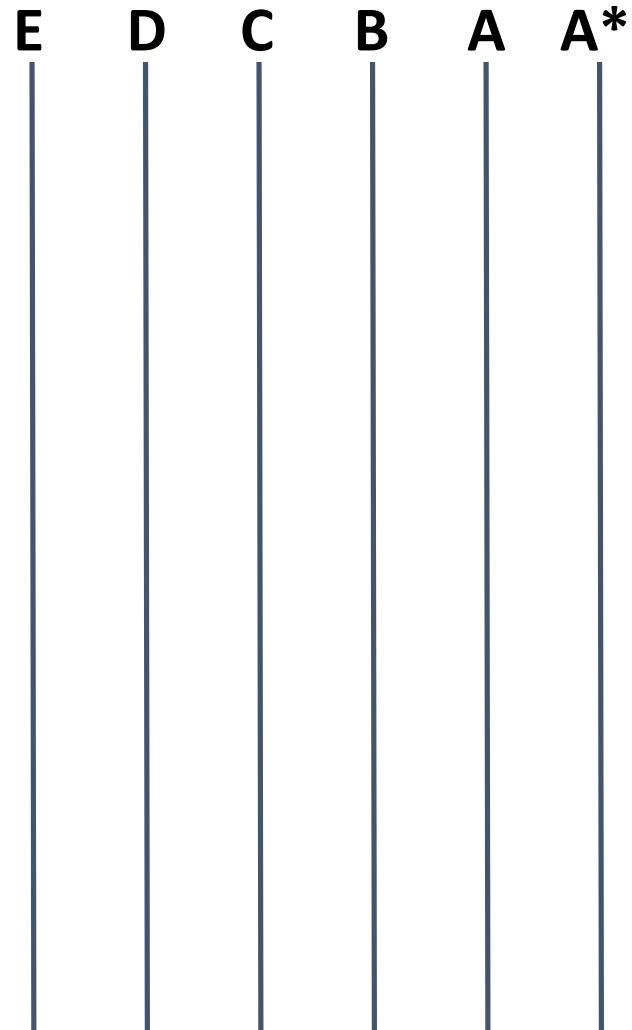
E D C B A A*

E   D   C   B   A   A*

E   D   C   B   A   A*
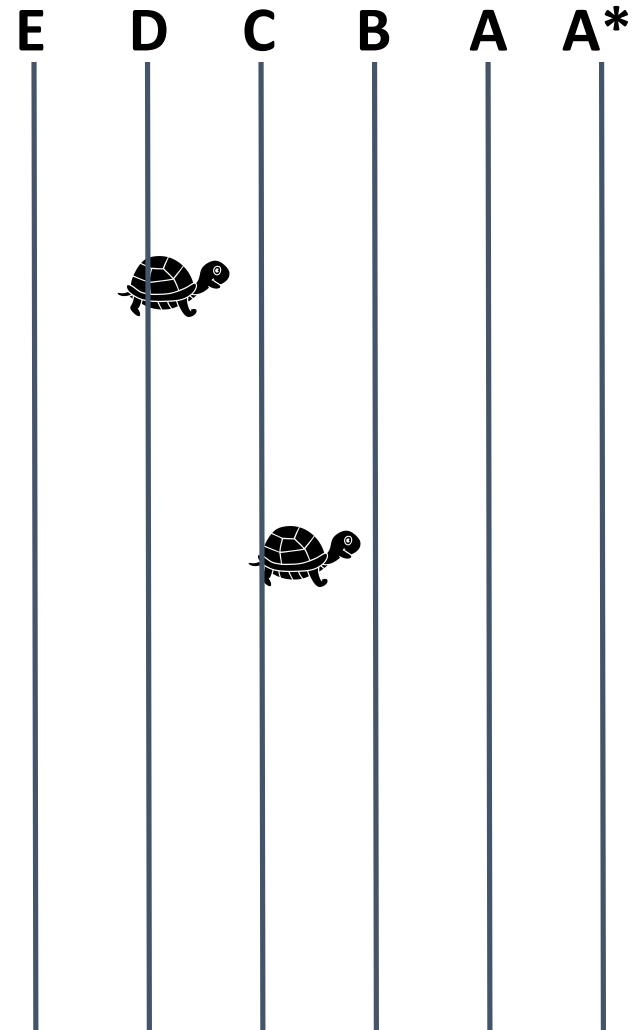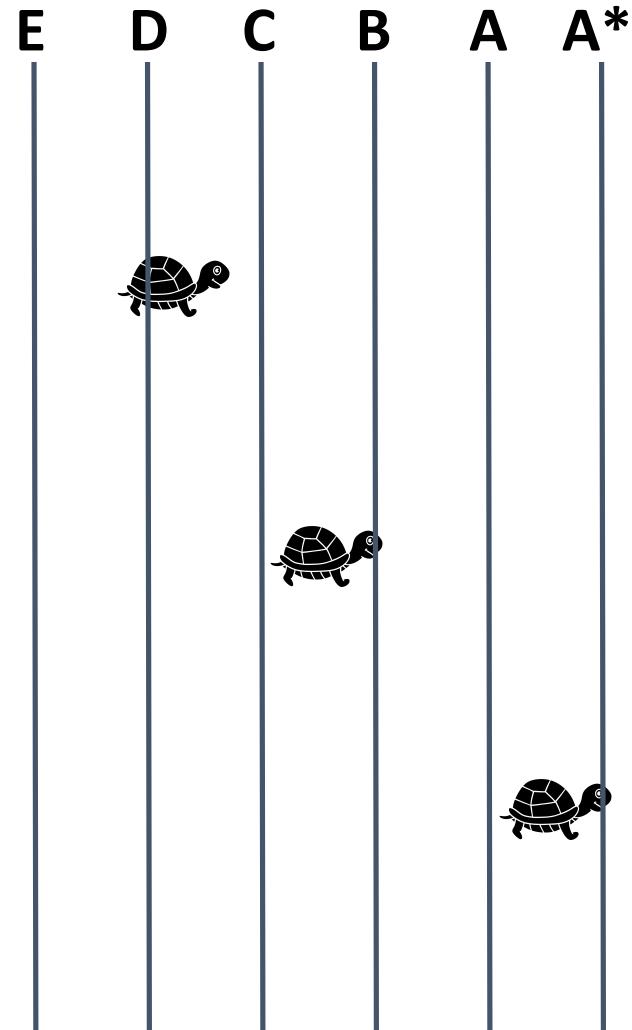
The Forgetting Curve
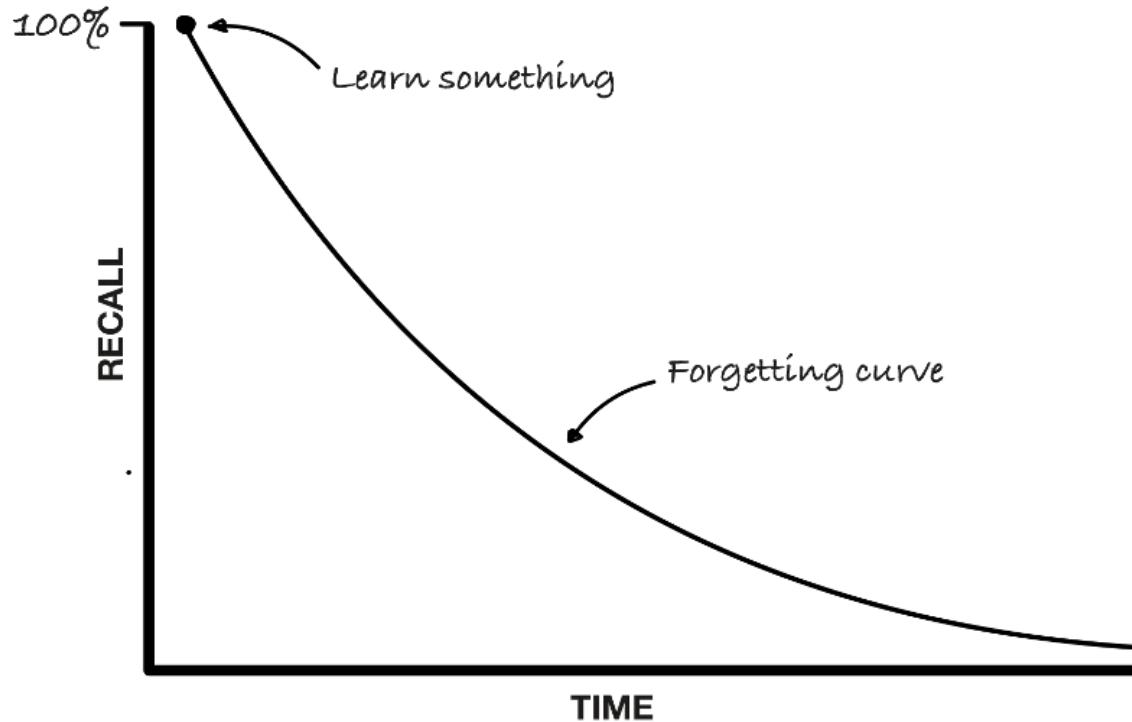
The 1-2-7… Rule
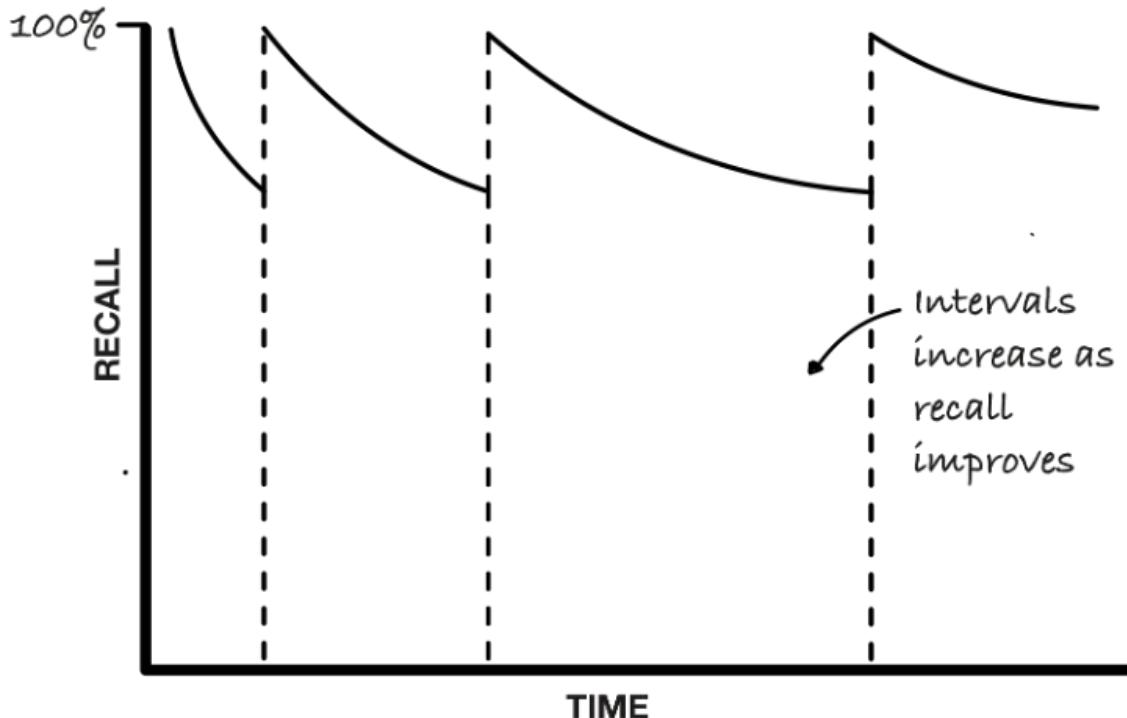
Learning How to Learn

The A Level Edition

The Camden School for Girls 2025-26

Compiled by Simon Flynn

Summary Table of Learning Strategies

Strategy Name	Technique Summary	A Key Advantage	Page
Brain Dumps	Writing everything you know about a topic for 15 minutes, then checking against notes to identify gaps.	Provides diagnostic information about the state of your knowledge and reveals both factual gaps and conceptual misunderstandings.	9
Cornell Notes	A systematic method for creating summary notes by dividing pages into main notes, questions/keywords, and summary sections.	Transforms passive summarising into active processing and creates built-in self-testing materials.	14
Feynman Technique	Explaining complex concepts in simple terms as if teaching someone unfamiliar with the topic, identifying gaps, and refining understanding.	Exposes gaps in understanding and forces organisation of knowledge into coherent explanations.	8
Flashcards	Testing yourself with question-and-answer cards that require explanation and connection-making, vocalising responses rather than merely thinking them.	Enables targeted revision of complex concepts and reveals whether you truly understand material or merely recognise it.	6
Folding Frenzy	A multi-stage revision technique creating increasingly condensed versions of notes through folding and summarising.	Enables spaced processing of information and provides clear visual indicators of learning progress.	13
Generation Effect	Attempting to produce answers, solutions, or explanations yourself before checking sources or being given the information.	Information you generate yourself, even if *initially* incorrect, creates stronger memory pathways than passively reading the same information.	5
Knowledge Mapping	Creating visual representations that connect related ideas and concepts to show relationships between topics.	Reveals connections between concepts that may not be apparent in linear text, improving comprehension.	10
List It	A free recall exercise where you list everything you know about a topic within a set time limit.	Gives clear, immediate feedback on knowledge gaps without the need for external materials.	9
Pomodoro Technique	Working in focused 25-minute sessions followed by short breaks to maintain concentration and prevent burnout.	Maintains high levels of concentration whilst preventing mental fatigue through regular breaks.	23
Read, Recite, Review	Read material, recall main ideas from memory, then check against source to identify gaps.	Combines active retrieval practice with immediate feedback on knowledge gaps.	12
Self-Explaining	Continuously asking yourself 'how' and 'why' questions whilst studying to deepen comprehension.	Forces deeper thinking about material, helping you see connections and differences between ideas.	5
Self-Testing	Deliberately bringing memories to mind to strengthen neural connections and improve long-term retention.	Each retrieval attempt strengthens memory pathways, making future recall easier and more reliable.	5
Teaching Others	Explaining concepts to someone else, which forces you to organise ideas clearly and reveals knowledge gaps.	Compels you to organise information clearly and exposes areas where understanding is incomplete.	5
Using AI to Support Learning	Using AI tools to challenge arguments, explain complex theories from multiple perspectives, generate practice questions, and provide Socratic dialogue.	Acts as a tireless intellectual sparring partner that can explain concepts in varied ways whilst identifying weaknesses in your reasoning.	20
Waterfall Method	A systematic approach to flashcard review where cards are sorted into 'know it' and 'struggled' piles until mastery is achieved.	Ensures difficult material receives more attention whilst reducing time spent on already-mastered content.	7

```
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │     Plan,       │
           ┌───────▶│   set goals     │───────┐
           │        │   and layout    │       │
           │        │   strategies    │       │
           │        └─────────────────┘       │
           │                                   ▼
  ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐
  │                 │              │   Use these     │
  │   Reflect on    │◀─────────────│  strategies and │
  │   performance   │              │    monitor      │
  │                 │              │   performance   │
  └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘
```
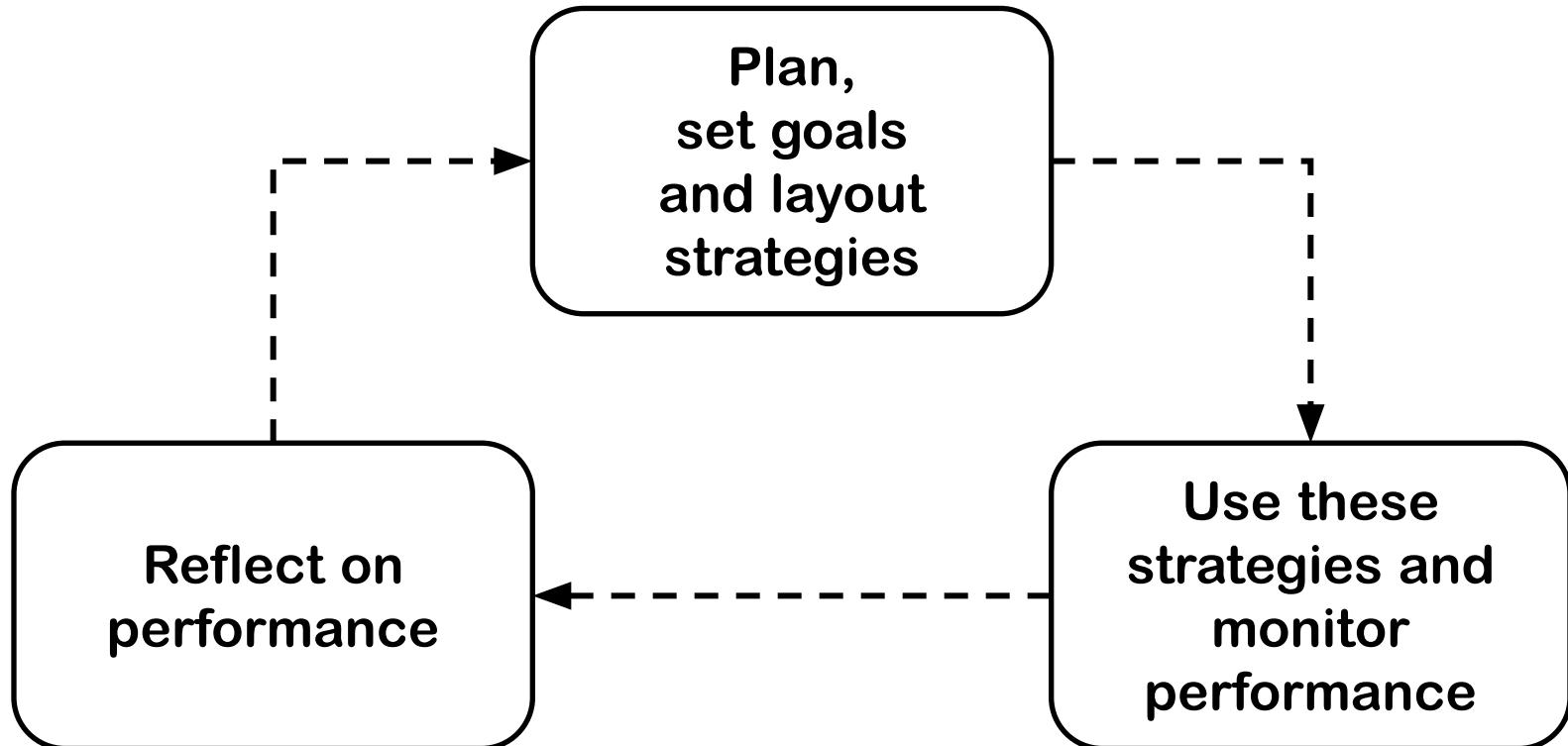
Brain Dump

How It Works:

1. Choose a topic and set a timer for 15 minutes
2. Write everything you know about the topic
3. Don't stop writing - even if you repeat yourself
4. Check against notes, textbooks, and the specification with different coloured pens: Green (correct information you included), Red (missing information you should have known) and blue (incorrect or imprecise information)
5. Analyse patterns: What types of information do you consistently miss?
6. Target learning specifically at identified gaps
7. Store dated attempts: When you repeat the brain dump in 2 weeks, you'll see tangible progress

Brain Dump

Why This Works:

- Reveals exactly what they do and don't know
- Provides immediate feedback
- Dated attempts show tangible improvement

Read, Recite, Review

1. **Read** – understand the material first (focus on comprehension)

2. **Recite** – put away materials and write/say what you remember

3. **Review** – check against source, identify gaps

Read, Recite, Review

Why It Works:

- Combines understanding with retrieval practice
- Identifies knowledge gaps immediately
- More effective than reading three times
- Self-testing built into the process

AI as a learning companion, not a shortcut

- Creating study plans and revision timetables

- Explaining difficult concepts in different ways

- Generating practice questions

- Testing understanding

- Learning exam techniques

Effective AI prompts

- 'Generate five A-level OCR History 25-mark questions on France in revolution, 1774–99 using the mark scheme's typical style and command words.'
- 'What are the different critical approaches to interpreting The Great Gatsby: Marxist, feminist, and New Historicist? Provide examples of arguments from each perspective.'
- 'What connections exist between market failure in microeconomics and economic policy in macroeconomics?'
- 'Create 10 A-level Maths problems mixing quadratics, simultaneous equations, and inequalities, similar to Edexcel Paper 1.'

If responses aren't helpful

- 'Explain this more simply'

- 'Use an analogy or real-world example'

- 'Give me practice questions instead of just theory'

- 'Frame this in the context of GCSE exam requirements'

What NOT to use AI for

Don't:

- Generate complete essay paragraphs to submit as your own
- Rely on AI for precise dates, statistics, or quotations without verification
- Accept AI's interpretation of literary texts or historical events as definitive
- Use AI to avoid engaging with primary sources or set texts
- Let AI think through problems you should solve yourself

Remember: Exams assess your knowledge and thinking, not your ability to prompt AI. If you don't genuinely understand the material because AI did the work, you will struggle in examinations.

The power of habits

- The best learners tend to have excellent learning habits.

- Forming new habits is much easier said than done – studies show that 88% of people who set New Year's resolutions fail them within the first two weeks.

Improving study habits

- Know Where and When

- Use Habit Stacking

- Establish a Dedicated Study Space

- Minimise Digital Distractions

- Set Goals and Rewards

Improving study habits

- Establish a Consistent Routine

- Prioritise and Organise Your Tasks

- Manage Your Physical Environment

- Incorporate Movement and Exercise

- Prioritise Your Well-being

In a nutshell…

A simple question that a student can repeatedly ask themselves to help guide their decisions and actions is:

- *What would an effective learner do?*

ParentMail

You will shortly receive a ParentMail communication. This will include:

- A link to a video of today's session

- A link to a PDF of the A Level *Learning How to Learn* booklet

- A link to a short feedback form

A short Q&A

- Please write any questions you have in the chat box and I'll do my best to answer them.

Thank you!