

HELPING HISTORY STUDENTS COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY: DEVELOPING A 'CAN DO' MENTALITY

PART 1:

The Memory Task – Helping students with 'how to' remember

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a) Plan courses to help memory – the importance of starting with overviews

Experience shows that it's important to stand back and identify how the overall nature of a course can create memory problems for students and then plan courses in ways that reduce those problems. For example, GCSE and A level students often struggle to remember the big picture of an examination unit. This most obviously applies to Thematic Studies but, perhaps surprisingly, also applies to studies in depth where students may have difficulty remembering how the different aspects of the course are linked. Therefore, after using carefully chosen initial stimulus material to 'hook' students into the course, one or two lessons should be taken to build a 'big picture overview' of each exam unit, whether it covers a long span of time or a short period.

For example, when teaching a thematic unit such as 'Medicine & Health Through Time', start with images and sources or pieces of information relating to the full chronological span of the course. Students sequence this evidence and construct a hypothesis in answer to the overall question 'Why do people today have better health and live longer than people in the past?'. This hypothesis would take the form of a 'living graph' with time on the chronological axis and life expectancy on the vertical axis. The graph can also be turned into an interactive classroom display and its conclusions regularly debated, reviewed and refined as the course progresses.

At KS3 overview introductions (and re-introductions each year) of the 'Big Stories' that students can follow over a thousand years or more (standards of living, power and democracy etc) are even more important – reminding students of the stories they are building up across time, the links from one period to another and helping them remember key points that are part of those stories. Visible reminders of these overview in the forms of graphs or summaries are again a valuable addition to classroom displays.

Big picture frameworks help students make links as they progress through a course. The living graph acts as an advanced organiser, allowing students to build more detailed understanding as they integrate new knowledge into a clear structure. It also strengthens memory as pupils revisit previously learnt material and relate it to new knowledge. It means that students revise as they go along. Music and props can be added to make the overview even more memorable.

For detailed discussions of these issues, illustrated by examples of strategies in textbook pages see the Raising Attainment section of this site:

Key Principles for teaching Thematic Studies

<http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/attainment/AttainmentThemes.html>

Planning principles for teaching Depth and Period Studies

<http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/attainment/AttainmentDepth.html>

b) Identify takeaways clearly for students

Over time, forgetting is natural – we all forget details we wish we could remember – and so a history curriculum needs to provide meaningful opportunities to revisit key topics to help students retain the most important things they need to remember. But what are those things they need to remember? One way of helping students identify the items that are most important to remember is to create and discuss with them a list of 'key takeaways'. These are the understandings we want students to remember and take away from their study of a topic or enquiry or a period, whether at KS3, GCSE or A level. For example, here is a list of takeaways from the Middle Ages about power and monarchy which will be needed when exploring royal power after 1500 are:

- Monarchs were seen as God's representatives and remained central to government, being expected to defend their people from enemies and disorder at home and from abroad.
- Monarchs were expected to consult their nobles about important decisions before taking the decisions themselves. Magna Carta was one example of attempts to ensure kings did consult nobles and others.
- Nobles were very reluctant to rebel but sometimes did so when their own positions were threatened by the uncontrolled actions of kings. Kings were usually only deposed in the last resort.

- The commons were increasingly well-informed about political events and expected kings and nobles to provide defence, peace and prosperity. They became confident and well-organised enough to protest when feeling threatened by poor government.

Defining takeaways is one of the bedrocks of planning and they need to be discussed explicitly with students so that they know what it is that's the core of their work. It's therefore important to build work on takeaways into memory tasks (e.g. see below for the creation of flashcards) and to discuss students at the end of a topic what they see as the most important takeaways on order to identify any misconceptions about what they think they should be remembering and revising.

There isn't space here to develop this point but for a more detailed discussion of using takeaways in planning at KS3 see <http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/Takeaways.html>

c) Create activities which help students combat common memory problems

In Depth Studies in particular students often struggle to remember the names of people they are studying, especially when faced with a large number of unfamiliar or very similar names. Uncertainty undermines confidence – they doubt their capacity to remember – and so their efforts to learn are undermined too. Therefore diagnosing this problem and creating an activity which helps students tackle it and gain confidence is very important – and this is just one example of the kinds of topics where creating specific activities can reduce memory problems and offer students ways of tackling such problems in future topics or when working independently.

In this case, our solution is to create a human diagram in your classroom with students (wearing tabards with names on) acting as one of the people from the period studied. For example, when studying Elizabethan England, place students in the 'diagram' in relation to Queen Elizabeth and grouped by role (e.g. seafarers or Catholic plotters). This has to be built up individual by individual and group by group to give students time to familiarise themselves with the names. For the full details of this activity and of consolidation activities used to 'cement' memory see:

<http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/WholsWho.html>

That is just one example of the kinds of memory problems that students can face. The key point for teachers is the importance of identifying the specific problems students face within a course and devising ways of helping students overcome them – which is one of the most creative and rewarding aspects of teaching.

d) Model and provide regular retrieval practice

The results from the 2020 Revision Census, a major published survey of student study habits, highlights that 'best practice is not always common practice' when it comes to revising for exams, tests or quizzes. The diagram below shows the result from one school that we work in. Taking part in the 2020 Revision Census and working with William Wadsworth (see <https://examstudyexpert.com/>) was invaluable, it highlighted

that a large percentage of our learners were not using effective revision techniques and that we need to do more to model effective retrieval practice and spaced practice strategies with our students.

FIND OUT HOW YOUR STUDENTS ARE REVISING

How do you spend your revision time?

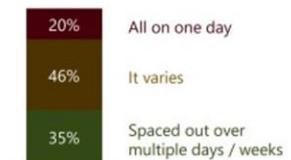
Showing top 5 methods by reported % of revision time, Y10+ students



Keep moving the balance away from re-reading, towards retrieval practice strategies esp. for 24% of learners spending less than a fifth of revision time effectively

Spacing is a major opportunity

Describe your usual pattern of revision for a particular topic? Y10+



Space out revision

@ExamStudyExpert: the Twitter feed for handy research-informed teaching & learning ideas

40

www.ExamStudyExpert.com
Book: Outsmart Your Exams



As teachers we need to model revision strategies that will help students remember at a subject level. Whole school approaches to 'study skills' are not as effective as carefully thought through, subject specific strategies that are regularly modelled and embedded into the curriculum. This modelling process needs to start in Year 7, not left until the GCSE course kicks in.

Example 1: Blank page retrieval tasks

Mind Maps that summarise the key features of a period can initially be co-constructed with the students. After a gap of at least a week, students should then be set regular blank page retrieval tasks that challenge them to recreate these mind maps from memory.

Example 2: Red – Amber – Green box flashcards

During a unit, students should be encouraged to build up a bank of flashcards which cover key terms, concepts, events and individuals. Teachers need to model what makes an effective flashcard – on one side of the card the amount of detail should be kept to a minimum, on the other there should be a question or memory challenge. The making of the flashcards provides a useful way of highlighting to students the key learning takeaways from the unit.

Students should be encouraged to regularly test themselves or each other using these flashcards. One effective technique is to model the 'red, amber, green' approach to using flashcards. Students test themselves and, depending on their level of understanding/recall they place the card in a red box (did not remember), amber box (remembered part of it) or green box (strong recall). They return to the red box the next day, the amber box at the end of the week and the green box after a fortnight. The challenge is to move their 'red box' flashcards to 'green'.

e) Develop memory aids

As the 2020 Revision Census shows, going from 'not remembering' to 'full recall' can be very challenging for many students. One solution is to develop 'memory aids' – an easy to remember cue that triggers full memory of the information. The example below is taken from the 'Medicine Through Time' thematic study. It helps students 'see the wood for the trees', firstly by making the key takeaways explicit and secondly by providing a visual set of memory cues for that help students recall the development of surgery from the Renaissance period to the First World War.

MEMORY AIDS ... THEMATIC STORIES

Paré learned through experience.

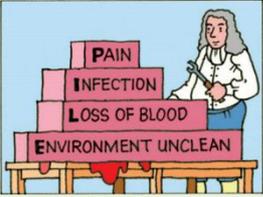
L **imbs** (artificial)

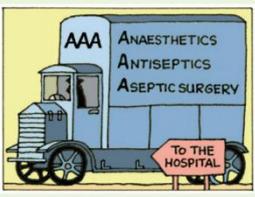
L **igatures** (of silk)

L **otion** (of egg yolk, oil of roses and turpentine)

Surgeons in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance faced a **PILE** of problems ...

P = Pain
I = Infection
L = Loss of blood
E = Environment to operate in was unclean





Dealing with blood loss = **3Bs**





Ideally, the memory cues should form part of a story. So, in this case, students visualise surgeons, such as Pare, in the Renaissance as having their 'L plates' on. They remember that surgeons from the Middle Ages through to the early nineteenth century faced a 'PILE' of problems but that, thankfully, during the second half of the nineteenth century the 'AAA van' brings some solutions to these problems, whilst the 'BBB' van brings further improvements in surgery in the early twentieth century. Memory aids such as this utilise the power of mind-pegging through a story, acrostics, and dual coding.

These memory aids can be incorporated into regular knowledge quizzes. The example below is taken from a GCSE depth study (Conflict 1919-1939). The nine tasks that the students are set correspond to the nine sections of the specification. Using the diagnostic evaluation grid, students can identify their own weak areas in the specification that they need to revisit. Each task that is set has visual clues or memory aid prompts to help the students. The students get a set of the nine answer slides so that they can continue to test themselves at 'spaced' intervals and self-assess as we progress with the course.

MEMORY AIDS LINKED TO QUIZZES & KNOWLEDGE TESTS

EXAMPLE STUDENT TASK

EXAMPLE ANSWER SLIDE

TASK 1: The Armistice & the Paris Peace Conference (8 marks)

- List 2 things that President Wilson want to achieve (Think IDEALS)
- List 2 of Clemenceau's aims
- List 2 of Lloyd-George's aims
- Give 2 examples of disagreements between them in Paris.

Clemenceau's main aims

SLAPP



David Lloyd George

CCLAP



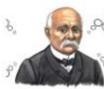
TASK 1: The Armistice & the Paris Peace Conference (8 marks)

- List 2 things that President Wilson want to achieve *independence and democracy*
- List 2 of Clemenceau's aims *security and payment*
- List 2 of Lloyd-George's aims *communism and colonies*
- Give 2 examples of disagreements between them in Paris. *Germany shouldn't be punished too harshly*

Clemenceau's main aims

SLAPP

Security
League
Alsace-Lorraine
Payment
Punishment & revenge



David Lloyd George

CCLAP

Communism
Colonies
League
Alsace-Lorraine
Payment



Section of the exam spec	Your score (out of 8)	Attempt 2
1. The Armistice & Paris Peace Conference	? 7	
2. The Treaty of Versailles (key terms)	? 8	
3. The impact of the Treaty	? 6	
4. The League of Nations	? 7	
5. Diplomacy inside and outside the League (1919-29)	? 8	
6. The collapse of the League (1929-1936)	? 4	Try these again *
7. The development of tension (1934-1935)	? 8	
8. The escalation in tension (1934-1936)	? 3	* *
9. The outbreak of war (1939)	? 4	* *
TOTAL SCORE	55	3 PLUS POINTS

f) The importance of spaced practice and homework

Even with retrieval practice, memory fades over time. The solution is to space learning out, revisiting the 'key takeaways' (using retrieval practice-based quizzes and challenges) with time lags in between. We have been using homework tasks as means of incorporating spaced retrieval tasks into our curriculum. An example of a Year 11 homework task (based on content covered in Year 10) is provided below. Note that the focus is on the core knowledge (key individuals and events) and that there is a sequencing activity in order to strengthen chronological understanding.

EXAMPLE ... Y11 HOMEWORK BASED ON Y10 CONTENT

Extra Challenge

30 marks

Apply  Recall Challenge

1 Know your individuals

How much can you remember from the Big Picture of Conflict and Tension, 1918–39?
Match each of the key individuals with the correct description.

Individual	Description
Woodrow Wilson	A diplomat who led the German delegation at the Paris Peace Conference
Georges Clemenceau	The leader of the Soviet Union during the 1930s
David Lloyd George	German foreign minister (1923–29) who won the Nobel Peace Prize
Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau	An economist who advised the British government during the Paris Peace Conference and resigned in protest at the Treaty of Versailles
John Maynard Keynes	The French Prime Minister during negotiations in Paris
Robert Cecil	The British Prime Minister during negotiations in Paris
Gustav Stresemann	A British diplomat who helped to form the League of Nations
Benito Mussolini	The British Prime Minister (1937–40) who followed a policy of appeasement
Adolf Hitler	A politician who became Chancellor of Germany in 1933
Neville Chamberlain	A politician who became leader of Italy in 1922
Joseph Stalin	The President of the USA during negotiations in Paris

2 Know your key words

Match each of the key words below with its definition or description.

Key words	Definition
Self-determination	A document that all members of the League of Nations had to sign
The peacemakers	Compensation paid by Germany to other countries after the war
Diktat	The policy followed by Britain and France towards Hitler in the 1930s
Reparations	People living in a specific area decide on their own political future
Covenant	A system whereby people are forced to join the armed forces of their country
The Great Depression	Building up the size of your armed forces
Conscription	A period when many countries faced severe economic problems
Rearmament	The politicians who attended the Paris Peace Conference
Appeasement	The word used in Germany to describe the Treaty of Versailles

3 Know your key events

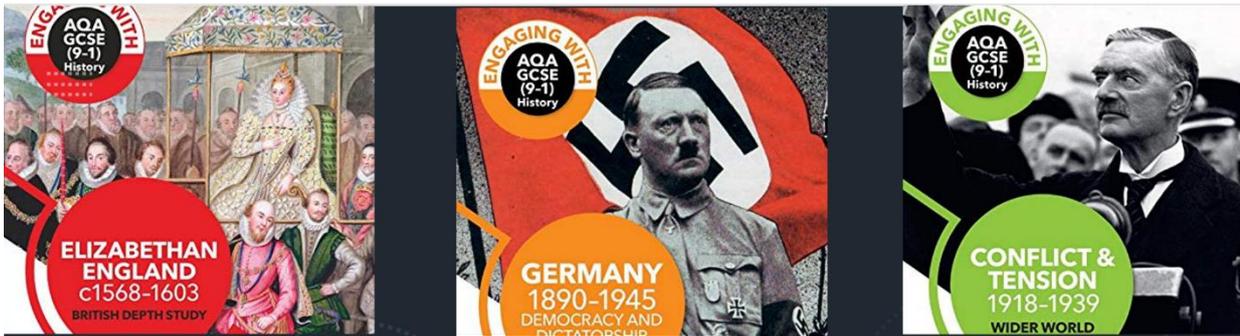
Place the events below into the correct chronological order.

Wall Street Crash	Locarno Treaties	Kellogg–Briand Pact	Armistice	Treaty of Versailles	The Great Depression
The invasion of Abyssinia	The invasion of Manchuria	The Nazi–Soviet Pact	The invasion of Czechoslovakia	The Munich Conference	The invasion of Poland

We have found that complex, open ended homework is often completed least effectively by students; whereas short, frequent homework is more likely to have impact. Most of our homework tasks now involve the practice or rehearsal of subject knowledge already taught. It is important to explain to students and parents why we are doing this and to remember that teacher modelling is essential to guide effective home learning.

g) Explain this approach to learning to students and parents

Retrieval practice, especially when the key content and concepts have been covered a few months before, can feel difficult to students if it's not what they expect. It is a lot harder than testing yourself within a few days of studying a topic and students might not see the importance of revisiting content that they see as having already been covered. It is therefore crucial to spend time in lessons communicating to students why retrieval practice and spaced practice are important. We have produced a booklet (see below) at school, aimed at both students and parents, explaining why spaced retrieval practice is a crucial part of the history curriculum. Links to the 'general theory' are provided (for example websites such as 'Exam Study Expert' and the 'Learning Scientists') but we exemplify the theory with History specific examples.



HOW TO DO WELL AT GCSE HISTORY

Key Messages for students and parents

January 2021

- Keep focused in **lessons** and keep up-to-date with **homework** (minimum 1 hour per week on Go4Schools)
- Use the **online support** available and attend the **after-school support** sessions if you need further help
- Be clear on what you need to revise ... Use your **content checklists**
- Use the right **revision methods** ... Know which methods work and why
- Be clear on the structure of each exam ... Know your **question types**