



# ExamAngel Study Guide to Exam Success

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MADE FOR LEARNERS, CURATED BY EXAMANGEL

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# Introduction

Welcome to the ExamAngel study guide. This guide could change the way you approach study, reduce the amount of time you take to pass exams and generally make the whole process much easier!

This study guide represents the bringing together of a wide range of resources and experience. In putting it together, we've:

- Undertaken conversations with educationalists
- Conducted an extensive literature review
- Drawn on our own, pretty vast, experience
- Brought together best practice from many different fields

We've broken the guide down into bite-size easy digestible chunks:

- Consider the ways you can make every hour of study count - no wasted efforts!
- Learn how to read and take notes effectively. This might sound totally obvious, but it is a vital skill and one that can save you many, many hours.
- This guide will also cover revision techniques - drawn from extensive research.
- Finally, we look at what you can do on the day of the exam to warm up your brain and then how best to approach your exam once the clock starts ticking.



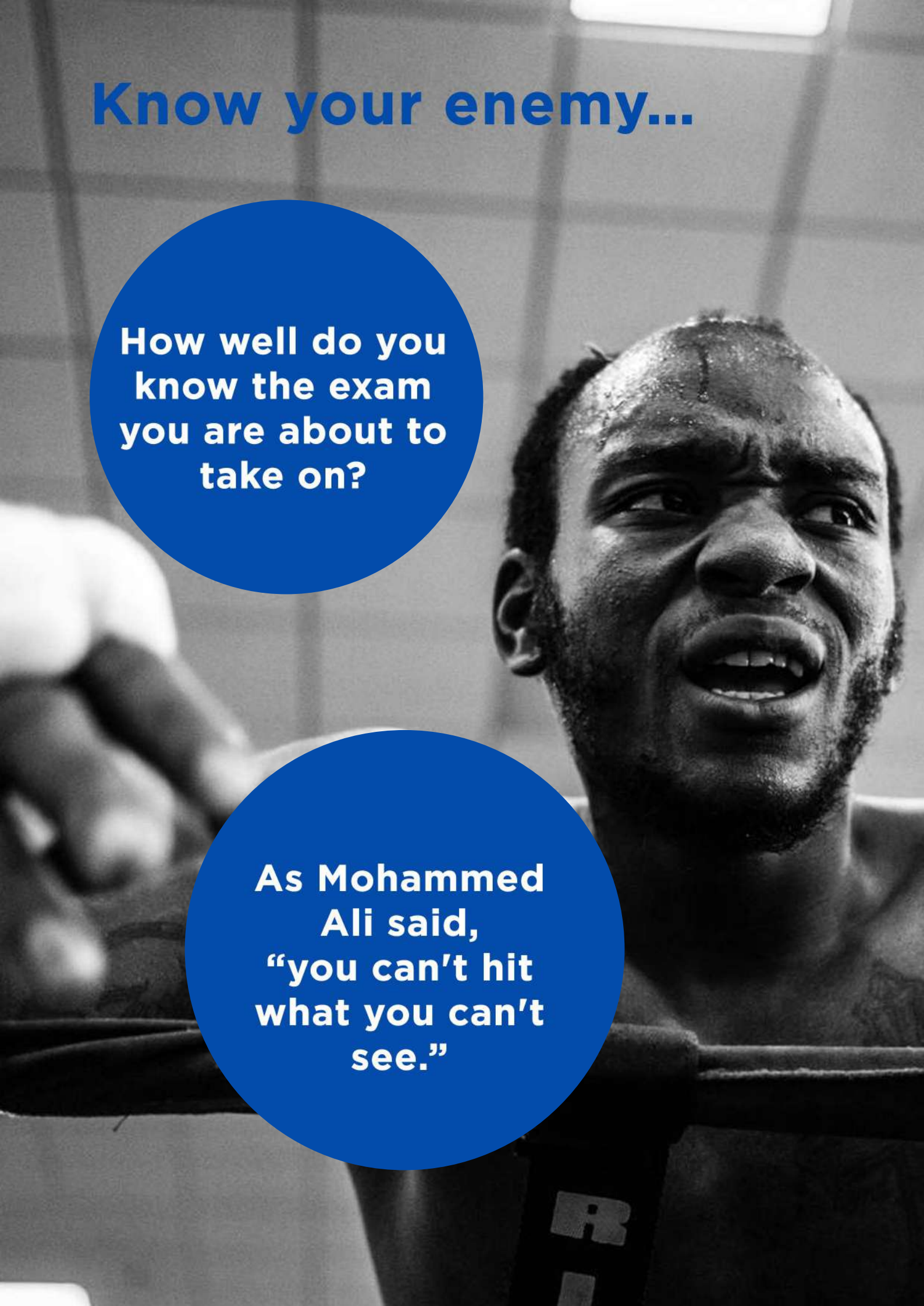
Useful exam technique



# Know your enemy...

**How well do you know the exam you are about to take on?**

**As Mohammed Ali said,  
“you can’t hit what you can’t see.”**



# Consider each of the points below...

**1.**

## **Exam format**

What is the format of the exam? Is it a traditional 'exam hall' type test or is it essay submission based? This course is primarily designed for those who are studying for exams, but many of the techniques in this guide will help regardless of the format.

**2.**

## **Length of exam**

How long are you going to be sat at the desk? 2 hours? 3 hours? Knowing how long the exam takes allows you start preparing - not least for being able to write that long!

**3.**

## **Exam level**

By this, we mean the QCA level which gives an element of fair comparison to examinations. Level 3 & 4 examinations are akin to A/S and A 'levels.

Whereas Level 6 is akin to an undergraduate degree. The level of the exam will determine what's expected of you, with application being the key at level 6, in particular.

**4.**

## **How many credits?**

How many credits will pass be worth? How far along the road will this take you? Knowing this can be quite motivational!

**5.**

## **Number of questions**

This is the nuts and bolts of the exam. When you open the exam paper, what will be in front of you? Will there be two or three case studies? Will each case study have a certain number of questions?



**6.**

### **Recommendation study time**

Each examining body gives you an indication of the amount of time you should spend studying. For instance, the CII recommends 150 hours of study for each of their level 6 exams, other than the Pension Transfer exam. This is a shorter exam with a recommendation of 100 hours.

**7.**

### **Nominal pass mark**

So many students can't answer this and yet it is probably the most important of all these considerations. The pass mark tells you how many marks you need to achieve in order to pass!

**8.**

### **Success rate**

How many of your fellow students pass the exam? Knowing how well (or badly) other people do can give you an indication of the relative difficulty associated with the exam.



Best  
prepared  
candidates

do best.

Some people assume that the most intelligent students will always do best in exams. The reality, however, is that the best prepared candidates do best. This means employing effective strategies that have stood the test of time!

1.

### **Prepare, prepare, prepare**

Preparation is the key - the old adage of 'fail to prepare, prepare to fail' holds very true in exams. Make sure you have everything you are going to need prepared the night before. This means having your admission permit, your proof of ID, your pens, calculator, sweets, trigger smell etc...

2.

### **Nerves are normal**

It is normal to feel nervous before an exam. Some exam nerves are good, they keep your mind focused. However some exam nerves are not so helpful.

To help with this, in the run up to an exam, each day spend some time sitting in a quiet place and breathe deeply. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you do this, press together your thumb and forefinger. This becomes an 'anchor'.





Best  
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3.

### **Cramming doesn't work**

Don't be tempted to stay up the night before cramming, it doesn't work (remember short term and long-term memory). It is much more beneficial to get a good sleep and turn up fresh. This will give your mind more benefit than a few last-minute cramming sessions and a gallon of caffeine.

4.

### **Power of visualisation**

Visualising success can also help, yes it sounds like one of those pseudo-scientific self-help techniques, but it does work. Imagine different scenarios vividly, some where you smash it out of the park and others where it doesn't go your way. How do you deal with each?

A top-down photograph of a desk setup. On the left is a black smartphone. In the center is an open notebook with blank white pages. To the right of the notebook is a yellow pencil and a pair of black-rimmed glasses. In the top right corner, a portion of a silver laptop is visible. A large blue circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Study Techniques' in white.

# Study Techniques

Let's get down to business. When you start a course of study, what's your normal starting point? In other words, when faced with the prospect of an exam in a few months' time, what would be the first thing you'd do?

If your answer was to order the textbook and read through it several times, this is definitely the study guide for you, because that is not at all efficient!

Our starting point is always the same - review the syllabus and get our hands on the examiners' guides.

Let us explain why...

## Top Tip

The syllabus is, essentially, a list of the things you might be tested on. By looking at the syllabus with a critical eye, before you even start study, you can tell where the gaps lie in your current knowledge. This will form the basis of your ongoing study.

With the CII level 6 exams, you'll find that the syllabus also gives you expected prior learning. This tells you the level 4 subjects that you will be expected to have passed (or at least possess the knowledge from) before tackling the level 6 effort. This is really useful in highlighting your knowledge gaps.



A top-down view of a desk with a smartphone, an open notebook, a yellow pencil, a pair of glasses, and a laptop. A large blue circle is overlaid on the notebook, containing the text 'Study Techniques'.

# Study Techniques

Take, for instance, the AF1 tax and trusts exam.

This expects you to have passed the R03 Personal Taxation exam (most have) and the J02 Trusts exam (most haven't). Right there is your first knowledge gap to fill!

Make sure to look for the keywords in the syllabus that tell you the DEPTH of knowledge expected... 'know', 'understand', 'demonstrate' etc.

## Top Tip

For the 'AF' exams refer to the FCA's Approved Examination (ApEx) standards. These set out the information that the FCA expects examiners to test in approved exams. Right there, in black and white, you'll find a detailed list of topics that you will be expected to know - much more detailed than the normal syllabus.

The second 'top tip' is to make maximum use of the examiners' guides. These are published for most exams and certainly for all the Level 6 exams.

The examiners' guides generally comprise of two parts:

1. Part one gives commentary from the examiner, explaining how students did in that sitting. It covers what they did well and where they went wrong.
2. Part two gives the full exam and then model answers for each question.



A top-down view of a study desk. In the center is an open notebook with blank pages. To its left is a black smartphone. To its right is a yellow pencil and a pair of black-rimmed glasses. In the top right corner, a portion of a silver laptop is visible. A large blue circle is overlaid on the left side of the notebook, containing the text 'Study Techniques' in white.

# Study Techniques

## Now, here's the important bit!

Many students get hold of the examiner guides but only look at the exam and the model answers.

What you should also take advantage of is the examiner's commentary at the front, It is literally a 'how to pass the exam' guide.

It tells you exactly what they wanted to see, and why students did or didn't get marks. This **MUST** be your starting point.

Get hold of all the exam guides you can. Make notes of what the examiner wants to see - highlight to yourself your own weak areas and when you get to the model answers compile a 'style guide' that sets out the way the examiner likes answers to be written.



Don't just study more,  
study more effectively!

# How to study more effectively

Every single hour you spend studying is a trade-off. You are choosing to spend time learning, rather than doing the many other things you ought to be doing (or would rather be doing).

Each hour of study is an hour not spent with your partner, children, friends or customers. It is an hour you aren't getting fitter and you aren't selling anything. If you are going to spend that time on study, spend it wisely and only do it if it drives you forward toward your goal.

## How do you get faster by running less?

There's a question for you! Parkrun has become a massive success around the world, with thousands of people coming out every Saturday to run 5km. But if you want to get faster, how can you do this?

Too often, people looking to get faster by running lots of miles at the same old pace. Guess what? It seldom works!

These are known as 'junk miles'. Miles of running that don't actually improve fitness at all.

The answer is not to run more, it is to run more effectively. Doing intervals is much more effective than just running lots of miles. This same principle applies to study.

Below you will find our top 6 study tips to make each hour of study count, and will help you cut out the 'junk miles'.



**1.**

## **Never work without purpose**

This is the most important way to avoid junk study. Every time you sit down to study, know what your objective is for that session.

How will you know you had a good session?  
What are you hoping to understand at the end of your time?

Setting an objective in this way gives focus, it cuts down the time you spend 'drifting' and gives you a demonstrable success measure.

**2.**

## **Short bursts beat long efforts**

The human concentration span is not endless...far from it. There is endless research on this and the consensus is that the optimum length of each study session is about 40 minutes.

After this, the mind starts to wander and you are less effective. For this reason, study should always be broken into chunks of not more than 40 minutes.

**3.**

## **Breaks of at least 10 minutes**

Between each 40 min study session, take a break of 10 min. This gives the brain time to cool down and your concentration span time to reset.

Make sure these are genuine breaks! No checking emails, instead, get up and make a cuppa, walk around outside. Do whatever you need to do to reboot your system.

**4.**

## **Decide your next topic**

Before you take your break write down the topic you will be studying when you come back.

Doing this means you can crack on as soon as you come back and you aren't wasting time trying to work out what comes next.

**5.**

### **Burn-out is the enemy!**

We can only do so much. If you are working 50 hours a week and have family commitments on top, it isn't realistic to expect yourself to also study for 20 hours a week.

Decide what is realistic and achievable for you to build a schedule to cater your study time.

**6.**

### **Good habits from the start**

Start as you mean to go on. Find a regular pattern for your study that you are more likely to stick to.

The danger of not employing these good habits is that you leave everything to the last minute and then cram - which doesn't work and leads to burnout.





“Time is what we want most,  
but what we use worst.”

William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania.



# Use your time wisely

Building a regular routine can be really beneficial. For each session of study, try to follow these golden rules:



To paraphrase Yoda, 'work or do not, there is no try!' In other words, **never 'sort of work'**. When you sit down to study, this must be the only focus of your attention. Short bursts of totally focused time.



Switch off the phone and the laptop - these are just distractions and we don't need them. Some people like to type notes but we are going to recommend you don't. The information is absorbed better if you write it and you are going to need to get used to writing for hours on end in the exam!



Review your work at the end of each study session - this is SO important. It has been said that we will remember something forever if we review it immediately after we learn it and then again after one day, one week, one month and one year. The review at the end of the study session is our immediate review.



# A bit of psychology...

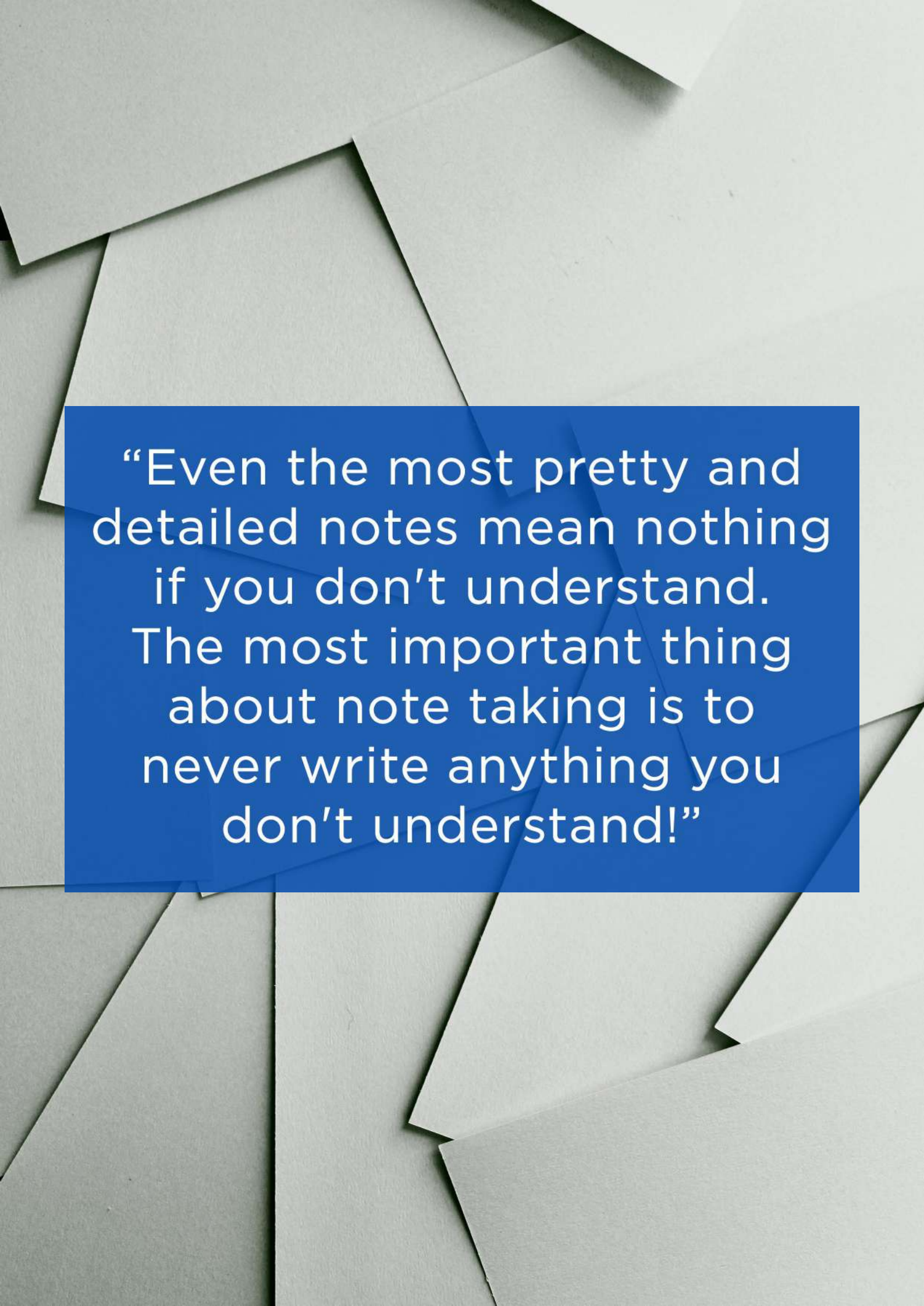
Suspend your disbelief for a second. What follows sounds 'off the wall' but it is effective and scientific!

Some interesting research was conducted with deep sea divers. They were asked to study a passage of text underwater. Half of them were then asked to recall this information on dry land and the other half back underwater.


Guess what? Those who recalled the information underwater achieved significantly better results... this is a principle known as 'state dependency'.

State dependency tells us that we can recall something better in the environment in which we learned it. This tells us that if we are going to sit at a desk for the exam, we'd do better to learn whilst sitting at a desk.





“Even the most pretty and detailed notes mean nothing if you don’t understand. The most important thing about note taking is to never write anything you don’t understand!”



# Reading with purpose

## How to take notes effectively

Taking notes will form the basis of your revision and again there is an art to this...

### 1. Note after reading

Only make notes after you have done your reading!

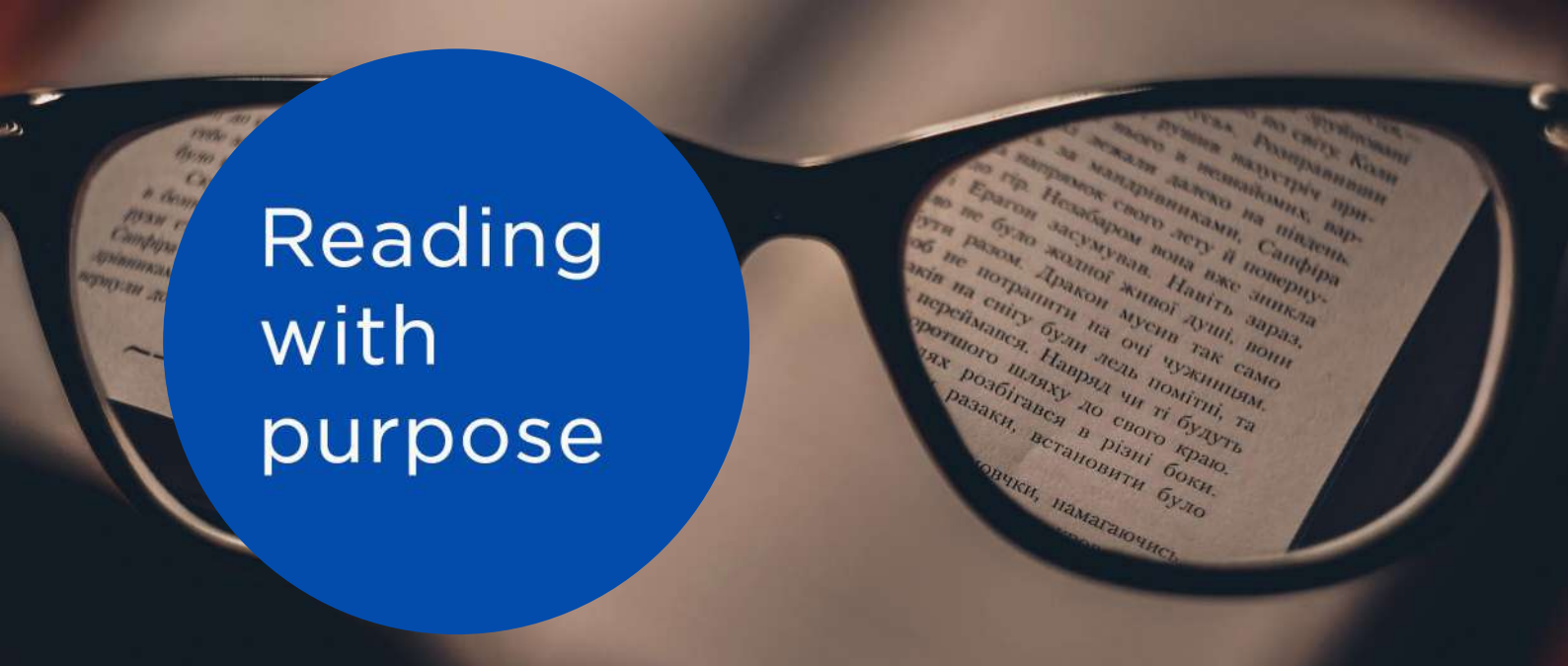
### 2. Be selective

You don't want hundreds of pages of notes. You want the key elements that you could shape into exam answers. Your notes should act as memory prompts when you come back to reading your notes.

### 3. Use bullet points

In the exam you will be writing in bullet points, so let's start now! Use bullet points for the key points you want to remember and then sub-bullets for additional points that hang off this.





# Reading with purpose

## 4. Use a multi-colour pen

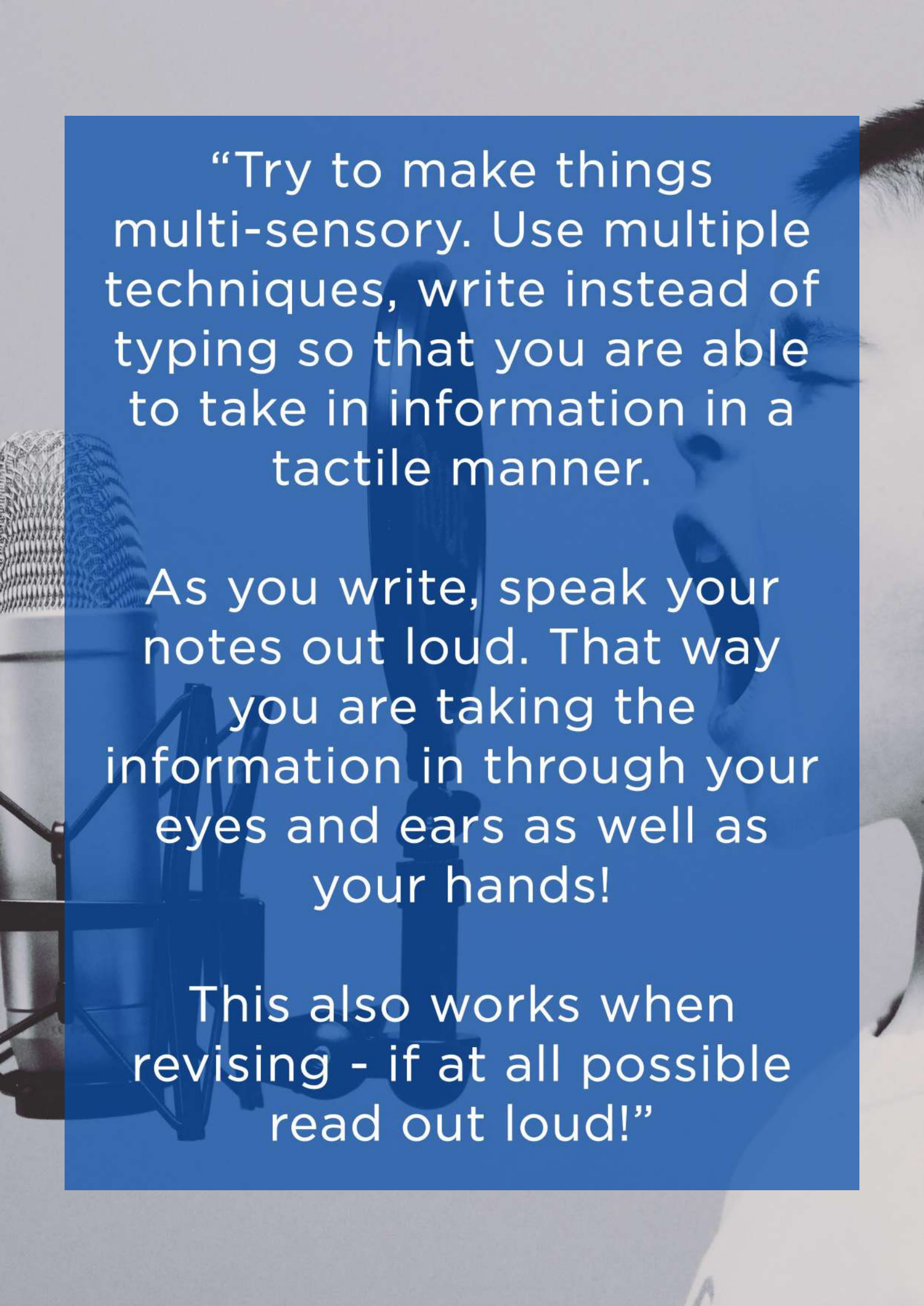
Putting notes in multiple different colours is visually appealing and helps recall. Have a system - red can mean one thing, and blue another..

## 5. Paraphrase

Paraphrasing forces you to internalise and understand the information.

## 6. Include your own thoughts

Include your own thoughts in brackets. This can help separate what you are thinking from what the textbook is telling you.

A person is shown in profile, speaking into a professional microphone. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue rectangle that contains white text. The background is a light, neutral color.

“Try to make things multi-sensory. Use multiple techniques, write instead of typing so that you are able to take in information in a tactile manner.

As you write, speak your notes out loud. That way you are taking the information in through your eyes and ears as well as your hands!

This also works when revising - if at all possible read out loud!”



# Revision Techniques

# That Work...

Work through the following techniques, considering how each might work for you...

1.

## **Summarise**

The first technique is to summarise. This means reviewing material and writing a summary - it shows that you understand it well enough to be able to distil it to the key components.

2.

## **Blank pad**

This second technique involves starting from nothing... a blank pad. On to this, you write everything you know about the subject - how much can you recall? Then use your notes to infill the blanks and rinse/repeat!

3.

## **The study wall**

A study wall is a place in your home or office where you assemble relevant info. Review it every day - take it in, make things vibrant and meaningful.

Use it as a living, breathing space for retaining and recalling your study. Take items down, look at them, put them back... interact with your wall...

# Revision Techniques

# That Work...

4.

## **The power of stupid**

Don't underestimate the power of stupid! When retaining information proves difficult, take a child's toy and present to it!

When trying to recall the information later, it becomes much easier if you have the stupid memory... you don't forget how stupid you felt talking to a toy!

5.

## **Revision cards**

Revision cards are an old and effective method... don't put too much on each card. Carry them around and review them often.

6.

## **Music**

The human mind is hard wired for music. We can all switch on the radio and sing along to a tune we haven't heard for a decade. By setting information to music we are much more likely to recall it.

If you happen to play an instrument or sing, this is an amazingly powerful tool and definitely one you should be trying...



# Revision Techniques

# That Work...

7.

## Testing

Test, test and test again – it's been proven to be the single most effective way to learn and cement learning.

Give yourself calculations, ask people to ask you questions, ask yourself a technical question and give yourself a few minutes to write down what you know. Consider how well you answered the question or whether you brain dumped, apply the information from the examiner's guide.

8.

## Interleaved practice

Mix in subjects, mix in old and new material – keep it all fresh! Think of it as 'tapas study'.

254 studies were reviewed. It was found that 10% more is retained when you have a bit of A and a bit of B on the same day rather than just doing a day of A and a day of B.

9.

## Elaborative interrogation

Read the fact to be remembered and generate an explanation for it. Ask yourself 'why does it work like this?' or 'how can this be applied?' – 'how does the MPAA apply?' 'why was it introduced?' 'what things trigger it?'

This process allows you to make connections and to understand at a deeper level.

Good luck with  
your studies and  
your exams.

