

Year 12

VESPA Student Handbook



St. Joseph's College

Student Name -
Form -

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INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS VESPA?

VESPA is a mindset and a system for success. VESPA has been used in a range of sixth forms across the country and has a proven record of success.

The 'jump' from GCSE to A Level is a huge one and some students struggle with the change. There is sometimes a myth that because you left your revision until the last part of Year 11 you can replicate the same success from GCSE and A Level, but that is totally wrong. A Levels are about much more than that and are not just a larger curriculum for you to cover.

You must have the right study skills, the right environment, the right mindset and the right attitude and commitment - and not just for one day, one week or one month, but, ideally, **throughout the two years**.

So, what is VESPA? VESPA is about changing your mindset and giving you the skills needed to sustain your success throughout your A Level journey. The good news is that there is still time to develop these critical skills after the Easter break and prepare for Year 12 exams and the start of Year 13.

What does **VESPA** stand for?

Vision	Having a clear <u>vision</u>
Effort	Committing fully to the <u>effort</u> required
Systems	Putting support <u>systems</u> in place
Practice	<u>Practice</u> makes perfect
Attitude	Developing a positive mental <u>attitude</u>

INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

To help support you, it is important to be honest about your strengths and weaknesses. Rate each statement in line with your own attitude/beliefs:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

Question 9 only:

1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often 5 = Very Often

2

1) Your intelligence is something about you that you can change easily

1 2 3 4 5

2) I'm committed to finishing school regardless of obstacles

1 2 3 4 5

3) I do my best in class

1 2 3 4 5

4) I know that attending university is the best choice for me

1 2 3 4 5

5) I try to do my best at any task

1 2 3 4 5

6) If a problem is very large, I divide it into small parts

1 2 3 4 5

7) I bounce back after disappointment or failure

1 2 3 4 5

8) I take good notes in class

1 2 3 4 5

9) I can write exam answers under timed conditions*

1 2 3 4 5

10) I have a clear idea about the career I want to pursue

1 2 3 4 5

11) My work is very organised (answers/notes)?

1 2 3 4 5

12) I compare model answers against my own work

1 2 3 4 5

13) Others consider me a hard working student

1 2 3 4 5

14) If I don't understand class work, I talk to my teacher

1 2 3 4 5

15) I have a positive view of myself

1 2 3 4 5

THE MARK SCHEME:

Add up your ratings in the following groups:

Vision = Questions 2, 4 & 10 _____

A high score out of 15 =

Effort = Questions 3, 5 & 13 _____

Strong Element

Systems = Questions 6, 8 & 11 _____

A low score out of 15 =

Practice = Questions 9, 12 & 14 _____

Area to Develop

Attitude = Questions 1, 7 & 15 _____

VISION

Vision is about knowing what you want to achieve. A clear vision helps you pursue dreams and achieve goals because it will help you overcome obstacles in the way and hold on when times are tough. There are three parts to vision:



1. **Having a clear goal** that you want to achieve. Goal setting is used in just about every professional field to improve productivity and potential.
2. **Planning**. This is the hardest part because you need to decide on breaking down your goal into smaller targets and the steps needed to achieve these.
3. **Sticking to the goal** despite any obstacles or difficulties. This is based on your resilience or 'grit' – your ability to carry on despite setbacks.

Once you have your goal, visualise how you will get there.

- **Short term**
 - in the next few days
 - in the next week
 - in the next month
 - in the next term
- **Medium term**
 - the end of Year 13
- **Long term**
 - at university (where and what?)
 - your career aspirations

Achieving your goal is about **balance**. Keep an eye on your long-term goals – remember why you are here and what you are working towards.

BUT...

Do not take your eyes off the steps needed to get you there.

EFFORT

Let's not disguise it – effort is about how much hard work you're putting into your vision, but it's also about so much more than that.

While effort is about hard work, it is also about how resilient you are and how much you are willing to grow to achieve your goals. The first step is about understanding that nothing is fixed. Having a growth mindset is crucial to your development. It doesn't matter where or when you were born or what your genetic code is, the only thing that can help determine your success is how much effort you are going to put it in and the steps you are willing to take. There is one key question for effort:



What are you putting in to achieve your vision?

Think about this: universities need people who can organise their own learning. All degree programmes require students to engage in self-study – lectures can be only a minor part of the course. In fact, most degree courses are based on independent research and small group presentations/practical. Finding support from lecturers can also be difficult because they often have strict research commitments outside of their teaching schedule. Students need to work things out on their own a lot more than in college. Developing independent learning skills now will help you now and in the future!

Effort + Independent Learning = Success!

To study more independently you need to be motivated and organised as well as demonstrate a range of other qualities. All of this means you can work without the need for constant supervision or reminders, and you are able to be in control of your own learning. Consider the following before moving on:

How many hours of independent work are you putting in each week?

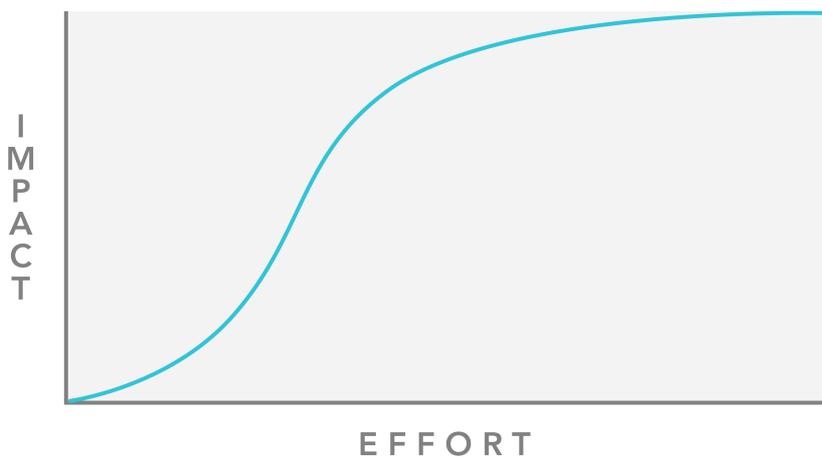
- In your study periods
- In your free periods
- At home / outside of school hours

Think about those students who you think are the hardest working and the most committed in year 12. Ask yourself:

How do you compare?

****A-Level students need to be completing a **MINIMUM** of 5 hours per subject, per week and **IDEALLY** 7 hours per subject, per week****

The first step in effort is always the hardest – making a positive change for the better. Take a fresh view to your studies. It's all about getting into a new habit of working. While it's hard to begin with, you'll eventually start to push the limits of how much study you do. When that happens, you will see incredible results.



SYSTEMS

A system should do two things:

1. Organise learning so you can make sense of it all.
2. Organise your time so you can complete tasks and deadlines.

Consider the following:

- Each A Level contains roughly 130 hours in Year 12.
- Each A Level contains another 130 hours in Year 13.
- Most students do three A Levels.
- In total that's 780 hours.

So, if you have 780 hours of content and information to learn, you need to ask one key question for systems:

IS YOUR ENVIRONMENT AND ORGANISATION HELPING YOU?

VESPA research shows a direct link between a student's level of organisation and their final grade.

What do you need to Start Studying?

- An electronic reminder?
- A clear desk?
- Quiet space?
- Phone on silent/out of reach?
- No music/TV?
- A snack/something to drink before you start?

How do you Organise your Workload Now?

- Do you regularly sort your notes?
- Do you have a to-do list/priority list?
- Do you use your student planner or weekly wall chart/whiteboard?
- Do you give yourself plenty of time to complete all home learning to the best of your ability?

Your planner is a useful tool to record deadlines but a weekly wall planner from this point on will help you to include:

- Lessons
- Study (Timetabled and independent)
- Rest and Relaxation time
- Eating
- Exercising and sleeping

Do I really need to think about eating, exercising and sleeping?

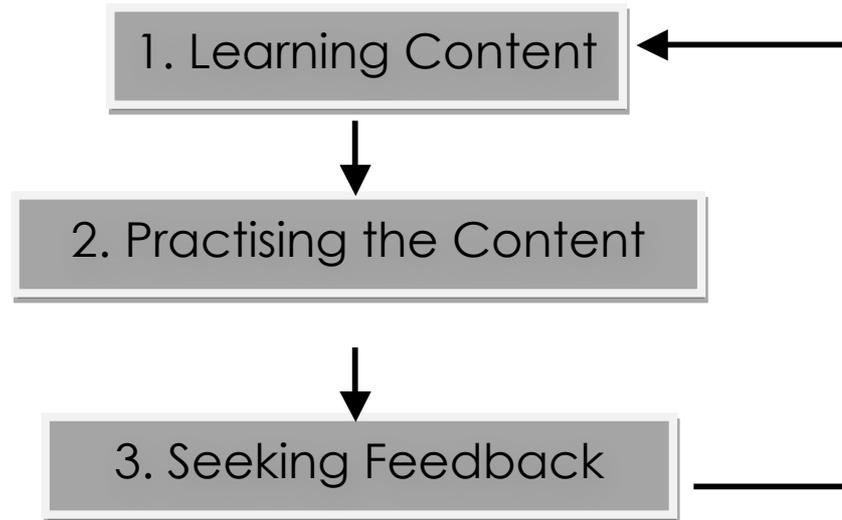
Yes! By timetabling your day-to-day activities, it becomes much easier to get into a routine. Routine is good because it leads to habit. Habit leads to an increase in effort and as we know from the previous section, effort leads to success.

By getting into a routine, you know what is coming up every day, which avoids anxiety and stress. VESPA found that this not only made students much more likely to be prepared when it came to revision, but it also resulted in higher levels of happiness and better sleep. Teachers have known for a long time that happier students perform better.

PRACTICE

“Practice makes Perfect”

Practice represents what you do with your time and what you put into your studies. It's not the how much but the how. To make progress, you don't just need to know the content of the course but you also need the skills required to put that knowledge into practice. Consider the following:



The steps above show the best way to take what you've learned and put it into practice. But think about this for a moment, how often do you move past step 1? To develop the skills required for each of your courses you need to know the exam and the relevant assessment objectives well, but you also need to practise exam questions under timed conditions. Once you've done that, you should seek out expert feedback that allows you to develop your performance. VESPA research shows that most learners prefer to stay in step 1 (e.g. learning in the classroom or revising in your bedroom) because they are comfortable and there is less risk.



Some things to consider:

- Do you know what the exam questions look like for each of your exams in each of your subjects?
- Do you know what skills could be tested in addition to knowledge?
- Do you know where your strengths and areas of development are?

Some things to action:

- Complete exam questions in timed conditions
 - If timing is a problem, try changing the colour of your pen when your 'time is up' and adding any additional content.
 - This will help you to appreciate whether time or knowledge is the underlying issue. `
- Use mark schemes and **fully** annotate your answers to include key words and phrases (what is absolutely needed)
- Review the examiners reports carefully – what are the common errors / what guidance do they offer?
- Compare model answers against your own work.
- Work with your friends to create your own exam questions.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is a settled way of thinking and that means making a change to your attitude can be difficult because it is already settled. In other words, you've thought about something or worked in a certain way for so long that you've become comfortable.

As an A level student, you are constantly challenging yourself – every day you are learning something new. It is no surprise that at times, you might feel overwhelmed.

It's at this point that we need you to be the most honest with your teachers. By being honest and having learning conversations with us you can help us to better understand your strengths and areas of development. It also assists us in helping you to bounce back when things don't quite go to plan.

Some students will avoid failure at all costs. They may choose to skip hard home learning and do insufficient revision for tests so that they have an excuse. They may also say they fully understand work when they don't. If you're too afraid of **making a mistake** you will never **make** any progress on anything. All learning comes from **mistakes!**



As the old saying goes, "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again"

How would you typically respond to the following situation:

You receive a low grade on an essay. *Option a) or b)?*

a) Negative/Fixed Mindset : "I'm rubbish at writing essays"

b) Positive/Growth Mindset : "OK, that didn't go to plan, I'm going to practice more to improve my essay writing." / "Now that I see my mistakes, I know what I need to work on."

Positive thinking is taking control over how to respond to a situation. With control, you can influence the outcome. Choosing a more positive perspective, you can gain more power and confidence. **You may even feel confident in accomplishing tasks that used to look impossible.**

VISION ACTIVITY – Fix Your Dashboard (Part 1)

Step 1

Imagine somebody that you admire and respect. Take your time and choose someone to look at (if you can't choose one then think of a few and try to narrow it down based on qualities that they have in common. Often, the qualities that we admire in others say a lot about the type of person that we want to be.

Step 2

Create a table and think about how your admired person fills the following qualities: career, finance, family/personal relationships, education, activities, characteristics and any other important qualities you can think of. Write a sentence in each heading.

	Martin Luther King
Career	Chose his career from an "inner surge to help humanity"
Finance	Not motivated by money, but what he believed was right
Family / Personal Life	Difficult background, overcame many problems from racism to depression.
Education	Gained a degree, despite significant prejudice.
Activities	Public speaking, Political movements, Intelligent debate.
Characteristics	Brave, Charismatic, Determined, Highly Principled
Other	Able to convey powerful messages with speeches - "I have a dream"

Step 3

Create the same table for yourself but don't limit it. Don't worry about any of the qualities, your fears or obstacles, just make a vision of your ideal self.

VISION ACTIVITY – Fix Your Dashboard (Part 2)

When people get into their cars, the first thing they see is the dashboard. It's also the last thing they see at night when getting out of the car. The dashboard gives all sorts of information that is important to your journey. Having a vision dashboard is great because it is a visual reminder of your future and where you want to go. It can be a reminder for you, either first thing in the morning or last thing at night, about what you want to achieve and the sort of person you want to be that you identified in Part 1.

Create your own vision dashboard that can serve as a reminder of what you want to achieve. It can have a place in your bedroom during your A Level journey (you can also take a photo of it and set it as your wallpaper on your phone).

Use the following to help you:

- Images
- Quotes
- Statistics
- Graphs
- Add pictures of the steps you need to take (pictures of college, people sitting exams).
- Add descriptions of the person you want to be.
- Identify short-term targets that will help you to start achieving those goals (e.g. *increase independent study by at least half an hour per subject per day*)



VISION ACTIVITY – Getting Dreams Done

There is a big difference between a dream and a goal.

A dream is something you imagine happening.

A goal is something you take action towards.

Step 1

Write down as many of your hopes and dreams for the future. Don't limit yourself – there are no barriers so write down anything and everything!

Step 2

Take your list and put all the things you wrote into these three groups.

Fantasy and Pipe Dreams: All the things you want to do or would like to be but have never talked about. This has only ever been in your head.	
Daydreams and Conversations: The things you want to be or do, and you've talked about them with a friend or a family member. You've started to explore these as options.	
Goals: The things you would like to be or do, and you've taken action towards them. What was the action? When did you take it? What did you do when things got difficult?	

Step 3

Consider the following questions:

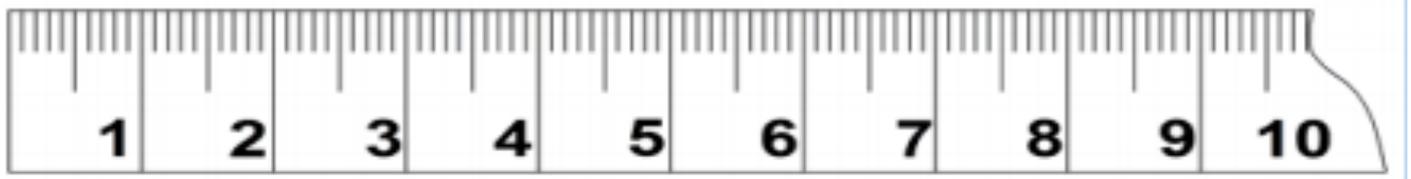
1. What percentage of your hopes and dreams have you acted on? What chance is there of a hope becoming reality?
2. How much action have you taken? Has it been repeated and is it determined? Or was it one action that was taken a long time ago?

What further actions can you take? What could you do to turn your hopes and dreams into goals?

EFFORT ACTIVITY – THE ONE TO TEN SCALE

On a scale of 1 to 10 -

1. Look at the work you've done so far this term and think about the levels of effort that you have put into your studies:
2. Mark your efforts on the ruler



Little or
no effort

Some effort – you're
working 'hard' at times

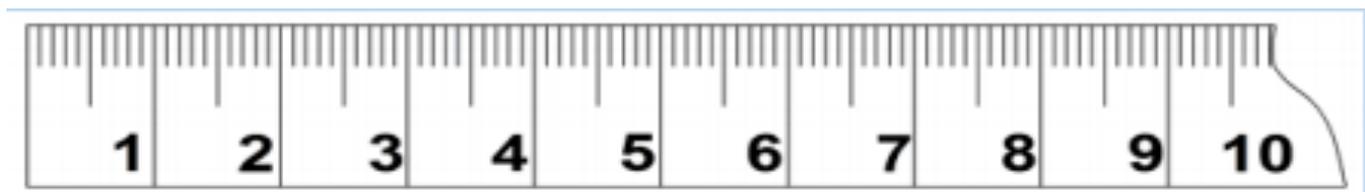
The hardest you
could possibly work

BUT

- These numbers mean different things to different people- they are subjective. It does not tell you how you compare with other people.
- How do you compare with the hardest working students?

So let's take a look at the scale again.

This time think of the amount of time you spent last week, working independently



1 to 2 hours of
independent study a
week

5 to 10 hours of
independent study
a week

Around 20 hours of
independent study a
week

Step it up week by week – you should be aiming for **21 hours** of **UNDISTURBED** independent study for 3 A Levels.

START NOW! REMEMBER...

You could achieve a lot of these hours by working in your frees. **Are you doing this?** You should still have time for socialising and hobbies.

EFFORT ACTIVITY – The Three R's of Habit

Effort is all about habit. The level of effort that you put into your studies is a result of the habits you are in with your independent learning. Good habits lead to good efforts, which in turn produce good results. So, what do you need to do to get into a better habit of working? There are three easy steps.

Reminder

This could be a feeling or time of day. It's your body or brain giving you a trigger that initiates behaviour. Choose a trigger to get started. Some examples could be "At the beginning of my study I will..." "When I get home from college I will..." "When I get a biscuit and make a coffee I will..."

Routine

This is the behaviour itself. Choose something that relates to your studies and is easy to achieve to begin with. For example, "I will unpack my bag and sort my notes." "I will prioritise the homework that I've been set." "I will do one hour of **[subject]** revision."



Reward

This is the good feeling you get from knowing you've engaged in a new behaviour and you've achieved what you set out to. Start with something small like a verbal reward you say to yourself ("I smashed that!" "I never thought I could do that but did it anyway"). Build your rewards up over time by treating yourself to something tangible like chocolate, a new item of clothing or some additional free time in your schedule. Share your success with your parents and ask them to encourage you by sharing in your rewards.

Keep track of the R's and how you're changing your habits by keeping a short diary and sharing this with Mrs Lawrie.

EFFORT ACTIVITY – Frogs and Banisters

Frogs and Banisters is an activity based on two types of tasks.

Firstly, think about **frog tasks**. This comes from a school of thought that says, “If you were made to eat two frogs, you should eat the ugliest one first.” In other words, if you've got tasks that need doing, then start with the one that is biggest/hardest/most important first. If you do the tough tasks first then your effort will be worthwhile because it will pay off later (the remaining tasks will seem much smaller and easier straight away!)



Secondly, there are **banister tasks**. Think about polishing a stair banister. It doesn't matter how well you polish the underside of the banister because it's unimportant as no one will look at it. Think about your current tasks – have you been spending too much time on some tasks that aren't really that important (have you been polishing the underside of the banister?).

Separate your current tasks into two groups – frogs (what are you avoiding that you should tackle?) and banisters (what jobs are unimportant that you can stop for now?)

Frog Tasks	Banister Tasks

SYSTEMS ACTIVITY – The Energy Line

It can sometimes be quite easy to feel overwhelmed by everything that we must do. One of the best ways of getting to grips with this is to write a list of everything you need to do, but that only solves half of the problem because now everything is out of your brain and on a sheet of paper, but it doesn't have any kind of order.

The energy line is a better tool than simply making a list because it helps you put things in order according to how much effort is needed to tackle them. Put things on the left hand side that need the most levels of effort and head towards the right with the things that need less effort and you could leave for a bit.

If you also attach dates for each task then you can prioritise by effort and time too which is a win-win for your organisation. The best way to do this activity is to have a large chart that is permanently pinned up in your study space and you add tasks using post-it notes.

Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
				

SYSTEMS ACTIVITY – The Eisenhower Matrix

The Eisenhower Matrix and the Energy Line share a similar purpose in helping you to prioritise tasks. Where the Energy Line places an emphasis on the effort required for each task, the Eisenhower Matrix focuses on how important a task is and how urgent something is too.

US President Dwight Eisenhower once said “I have two kinds of problems, the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent.

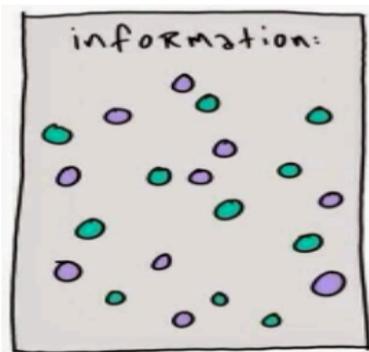
Eisenhower put all his tasks into one of four boxes on the matrix. He would then complete all the tasks that were important and urgent before moving onto the next box. The boxes are numbered below so you know which order to tackle them in.

1. **Urgent-Important** – these are your priority. Do not move on until all these things are done.
2. **Urgent-not important** – you should be able to get through these quickly as they're not important but need completing sooner rather than later.
3. **Important-not urgent** – these tasks need attention to detail but don't need to be rushed so take your time.
4. **Not important-not urgent** – these tasks don't require your immediate attention and don't require a great deal of effort either. Do these last after completing everything else.

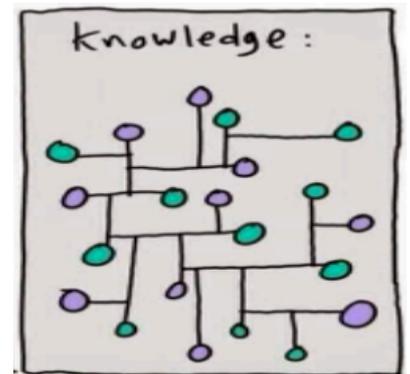
	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important		
Not Important		

PRACTICE ACTIVITY – Graphic Organisers

There is a difference between information and knowledge. Information is a loose collection of facts and often has no connection between different pieces. Information won't help you to pass exams or develop a new skill unless you start to make connections. By making connections between different pieces of information we can turn them into knowledge.



The question is how do you reorganise information into knowledge?



1. Make a **mind-map** of the information and draw links between connecting pieces that are relevant to each other.
2. Make a **comparison table** and come up with similarities and differences between different case studies, texts, diagrams, people, events, etc.
3. Make a **flow-chart** that summarises a sequence of events.
4. Make **graphs** to represent different sources of data.

Notice how each step above starts with the word “make”. This is because each one of these requires you to do something to turn information into knowledge. It's about you putting what you have learned into practice!



PRACTICE ACTIVITY – Learning from Mistakes

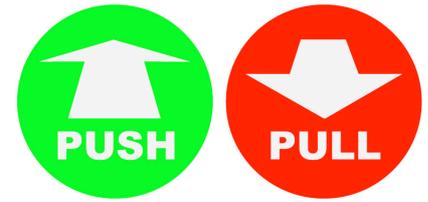
Professor James Reason of Manchester University has done a lot of research into mistakes that led to disasters. His research can be applied to mistakes we make whenever we attempt something challenging. If you want to become good at something it helps to do the following:

1. **Make mistakes.** You need to learn from your mistakes to make progress. Don't worry about getting things wrong – these are important first steps.
2. **Study your mistakes.** This is VITAL information. Study what has gone wrong so you can correct it.
3. **Categorise your mistake.** Please it into one of the three groups below:

Type of Mistake	Possible Response
<p>1. Active Mistake. You've made a mistake because you've used a wrong process (e.g. the wrong formula, misread the mark scheme, you didn't have the right approach to an essay).</p>	<p>Identify the correct process. What should you do next time?</p>
<p>2. Slip-up. You've used the correct process but a couple of small errors have led to you getting a lower mark (there is a little detail missing, or a formula works to a point but then breaks down).</p>	<p>Practise the process a little more so it becomes more accurate.</p>
<p>3. Blackout. The information you needed is either missing or forgotten.</p>	<p>Review your notes and knowledge. Check another student's notes to see what's missing. Strengthen recall of information using revision techniques.</p>

ATTITUDE ACTIVITY – Force Field Analysis

Big challenges can often leave us feeling overwhelmed and that can sometimes lead to us not getting things done when we know what we need to do. Doing this exercise helps us assess our attitude towards a particular challenge by putting our thoughts into two groups: positive forces that justify us doing the task, and negative forces that discourage us or stop us from giving something our full attention. Take time to consider the obstacles you're facing and why a particular task is hard to face. Most importantly, be honest as you do this.



What are your driving forces for doing a task (the things that will help you achieve this or motivate you) and what are your restraining forces (the things that discourage you or go against you)?

Driving Forces	Current Task	Restraining Forces
		

Develop strategies to combat your restraining forces and focus on your driving forces so that they are more compelling than the restraining ones. If you're struggling to do this then ask a member of staff for help and encouragement.

ATTITUDE ACTIVITY – Stopping Negative Thoughts

In 1998 American psychologist Albert Ellis looked at irrational and negative thinking experienced by people during times of stress. He focussed particularly on the types of thought that people had when things went badly. He called this “crooked thinking”.

Have you ever experienced any of the following:

- Not fair thinking – “I don't deserve this.”
- Catastrophe thinking – “This'll be a nightmare if I get it wrong.”
- Stopper thinking – “I'm useless.”
- Illogical thinking – “If I get this wrong then something else will follow.”
- Blaming thinking – “It's his/her fault. If it wasn't for them I could have done better.”
- Overgeneralising – “This always happens to me. Everything always goes wrong.”

Ellis said that the first step to correct this way of thinking is for individuals to recognise when they are slipping into these kinds of thoughts. Once you recognise what you're thinking you should then try to reframe your thought. It requires you to take charge of your own thoughts, so you'll need to be firm with yourself!

- Catastrophe thinking becomes “I'm going to perform well because I'm prepared.”
- Stopper thinking becomes “I'm getting better each time I try this.”
- Illogical thinking becomes “There's no direct connection between this and that. The past does not equal the future.

And so on...

Write down three of your most common thoughts when things go wrong and try to reframe them.

Thought	Reframed Thinking

GETTING STARTED - NEXT STEPS

1. Get into a **habit** of writing a list of things you have to do
 - a. Review of recent lesson content
 - b. Written home learning tasks
 - c. Coursework if applicable
 - d. Online tasks (e.g. Seneca/Dr Frost)
 - e. Exam question practice / Revision for assessments



2. **Prioritise** the list – what needs to be done first?

3. **Fill** in a timetable plan each week. Have systems in place.

4. **Talk** to peers & teachers rather than building up stresses.

5. **Look** at your extra-curricular activities or jobs – could any hours be cut out there?

6. Are you **exercising** regularly? Getting enough **sleep**? Spending some time **relaxing**? Do you have things to look forward to? (A **reward** for hard work)

DAY	DAY						EVENING					
	30 mins (pre-form)	P1-2	P3-4	P5-6	P7-8	P9-10	4-5PM	5-6PM	6-7PM	7-8PM	8-9PM	9-10PM
Monday												
Tuesday												
Wednesday												
Thursday												
Friday												
Saturday												
Sunday												

SHADE IN (1 SQUARE = 30 MINS) TO REFLECT YOUR INDEPENDENT STUDY PER SUBJECT ACROSS THE WEEK												
Subject One -												
Subject Two -												
Subject Three -												

1. FILL IN YOUR LESSONS AND STUDY PERIODS FOR EACH WEEK
2. EACH DAY, COMPLETE THE SLOTS IN THE TIMETABLE TO SHOW WHEN YOU COMPLETED INDEPENDENT STUDY
3. EACH DAY, SHADE THE BOTTOM TABLE TO REFLECT HOURS SPENT ON EACH SUBJECT (use colour coding)