

Smart revising for A-level Chemistry

Pre-revision

Nearing the time that you will start formal revision, read over all of the notes and hand-outs that you have in your beautifully presented folder.

Main revision process

- 1) Take a sheet of A3 paper, and in the centre, stick an A5 version of the syllabus for that topic (you'll need to chop it up).
- 2) Go through the syllabus point by point, and try to write notes for each syllabus point. Check you've covered the key points by referring to a revision guide or your notes, and amend as appropriate. For syllabus points where you were far less sure, go and learn these properly using your revision guide, textbook, own notes, etc., and then demonstrate your understanding by adding notes to your revision sheet without any help. Repeat this learning process until you can do this confidently.
- 3) Go through your class notes and look for work and tests where you received feedback on things you got wrong or could have done better (use your Learning Points sheets). Add these points to the relevant syllabus points, perhaps in a different colour.
- 4) Try some past paper questions. Use the mark schemes to check your answers. If there's anything you learn here, add this to the relevant point(s) on the syllabus on your revision sheet. Again, using a different colour might help.

Rationale

As I see it, there are several advantages to this approach over ploughing through a revision guide or just your class notes from beginning to end.

- 1) It ensures that you cover everything you need to know and nothing else, since you won't be tested on things not on the syllabus.
- 2) It allows you to review what you do know and not waste time revising areas of strength.
- 3) The focus on the syllabus should allow you to get into the examiner's head. Remember, the questions that they set directly relate to the syllabus and, in many cases, the syllabus contains the specific answer to a question. For instance, on the Salters Chemistry specification, there are the steps for determining the concentration of a coloured solution by colorimetry, the similarities and difference between line absorption and emission spectra, and the reasons why clinical trials for drugs are required (to name but a few), which are the direct answers to the typical questions given on the exam papers that relate to these topics. Simply no other answers are required, or, indeed, necessarily accepted. More subtly, there are other cases where a knowledge of the syllabus will help you to appreciate what things a question wants mentioning. An example on the OCR course is in Agriculture and Industry (old specification), where the syllabus says that students must recall the physical properties of different types of substances, but in brackets lists solubility in water, melting point and ability to conduct electricity. So if you get a compare and contrast question on the properties of different substances, these would be the properties to go for.
- 4) It forces you to learn from your mistakes, be that through the course of the year or at the end of revision when doing past papers.
- 5) You end up summarising a whole unit on a couple of sheets of A3 paper, which is a personalised, pared-down summary that hopefully can be learnt in the time available to you.