



Emily Gale, a student at Laurel Hill Colaiste, tries out a Van De Graf generator at Trinity College. Photograph: Mac Innes Photography

THE A STUDENT



Colm McElwain is a student in St Macartan's College, Monaghan

I started studying for the Junior Cert in October or November. I thought that it would be a better idea to do a bit from day to day rather than loads when the exams came around. I didn't do much, just half an hour every night around that time and then I would have done maybe an hour each night as the exams got closer. I think I might have been more nervous for the exams if I hadn't been doing that sort of steady work.

I'd say I spent an hour at science every week. I'd do exam questions and highlight relevant parts of the book. I preferred studying science and maths so I suppose they were almost a break from the study I had to do for the other subjects.

Homework on the whole was useful. My teachers tended to focus on exam questions, which was good, but sometimes we'd get too much and it would take a long time to do. Most of the time it was okay though and it was a good way of keeping on top of things.

We submitted our reports around March. It's important to make sure that everything is legible and all the diagrams are clearly labelled. If you keep your hardback experiments copy up to date, it's no problem.

I think it's really important to keep up any interests you have outside school during the exam year. I play piano and I'm involved in sports, such as handball. All of that really helps. It's a great break from study and concentrating on the books. You can't study the whole time.

We had most courses finished in class around January or February. After that it was just a matter of going over things again and again. The mocks were useful to give you an idea about what to expect. There were people who didn't study until the mocks came around so there was a bit of stress but most were okay. The exams were fine. Time wasn't really a problem for me, except for English. I found myself rushing to get that exam finished but the others were manageable.

Probably the most important thing for people to remember is to make sure to do all of the exam questions. You get used to the format of the paper but the biggest thing is that questions do repeat themselves. That's not just in science – I found that it happened in history a good bit as well. It's one thing that will really help in the Junior Cert.

Nasa's space shuttle Atlantis launches from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Photograph: Richard Sheinwald/ Bloomberg News



Help! I've only started studying now

What you shouldn't do is panic. Make out a plan which enables you to revise while at the same time keeping up with whatever your teacher is doing now.

Start by learning definitions. Indeed, learn the summaries at the end of each chapter. (When writing *Breakthrough Science* we made sure that the summary at the end of each chapter contained definitions that were short and to the point eg a covalent bond is formed by two atoms sharing a pair of electrons. Asked in question 4(e) 2007.)

Know the name and function of parts of the human body. Question one (a), question two (a) and (b) 2006. Question one (c) and (d) 2007.

Learn the experiments. Not just the mandatory ones. Experiments were asked in 2006 Q1 (d)(h), Q3 b(ii), Q4 (h), Q5 (a), Q6 (a).

Experiments came up again in 2007 Q2 a (ii), b (iv), Q3a (ii), Q5 (a), Q6 (a). There were a lot of marks going for these parts.

Close your book and practise drawing labelled diagrams. Label everything. Now open your book and see if you were right.

The exam papers often ask you to describe how to do an experiment "with the aid of a labelled diagram".

In such a case, a labelled diagram alone is not enough but if you draw a very good labelled diagram you will have to write very little. (There is no need to say something which is obvious from the diagram).

Now see if you can answer all the questions at the end of each chapter of your textbook.

Next, see if you can answer all the questions on the Junior Cert Exam papers in 2007, 2006 and the State Examinations Commission Sample Paper 2006.

If there are parts you can't answer, try to get, and learn, the answers from your textbook.

If you still can't answer them, ask your teacher.