

How to study like a star

Just as an athlete makes a long-term plan for success, involving time management, eating right and dealing with stress, you can devise a plan of action that will help you ace the Junior Cert and feel great while you do it, says nutritionist and lifestyle expert **Tina Dunne**

HOW DO I SETTLE DOWN TO STUDY?

When I was talking to my students, many of them seemed to find it very difficult to study. They knew what had to be done, and they would make study plans for the mid-term break. But when it came down to actually settling down and getting a decent amount of work done, they often found that tough and got stressed as the time seemed to slip away.

REMEMBER:

Now is the time to start. Not tomorrow, not next week – right now.

After-school study is a good idea, as it is structured and keeps you focused. There's no messing about watching TV and making cups of tea, as you might at home.

If you don't have the opportunity to attend supervised after-school study, try and organise a study space that's well lit, well ventilated and, above all, quiet.

GET ORGANISED. MAKE A PLAN FOR STUDY AND STICK TO IT

Your study plan shouldn't be too detailed. Set out the topics you want to cover each week and stick to that. It means that if you have an evening where you just can't concentrate properly, you can make up for that later on in the week.

Spend 45 focused minutes on each subject, and take a quick break before starting on another. There is no point in trying to concentrate on one thing for two hours.

In saying that, if you are on a roll and feel you are getting real work done, stick with it beyond the 45 minutes. You have to listen to yourself when you're studying.

Commit to your study. Turn off the mobile phone and stay away from the internet. Answer emails and texts in one go once you have finished. Don't do that when you're supposed to be studying.

HOW AM I GOING TO STUDY THREE YEARS' WORTH OF MATERIAL IN THE TIME THAT'S LEFT?

This is something that a lot of people are concerned about, but there are a couple of things that need to be highlighted.

The Junior Cert isn't really about learning a full three years' material. First and second year lay the foundations for the material you learn in third year.

Your teachers are very experienced. If you are having trouble trying to make your plan for one particular subject, ask your teacher for help. He or she will be able to advise you on how to split it up.

You have a lot of time left. If you revise every night from here on in, you will get more material under your belt than you ever thought possible. The key is to be focused, and stick to your study plan.

I'M DREADING THE MATHS EXAM . . .

. . . or English, or French. Many students I spoke to were worried about one particular subject.

Don't suffer in silence. Speak to your teacher. There might be something you are not understanding – a quick, focused explanation can work wonders.

Maybe a friend of yours is good at one subject; maybe you're good at something else. Help each other.

Stick with it. It can take time for the penny to drop, but keep at it. Don't get discouraged.

Go back to basics. If it's a language, learn your vocabulary. Try going back to the basics of grammar. If it's maths, identify where your weaknesses are, and go back to the start. If you don't understand the basics, you won't understand what comes afterwards.

Manage your time. Don't avoid your weak subjects, but don't spend so much time on them that you neglect your other subjects either.

HOW DO I BALANCE MY STUDY WITH MY EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES?

This is another big one. Trying to juggle too many things can be stressful. You don't want your whole Junior Cert year to be about the exam, but remember, if you are having trouble doing everything, you may have to make a compromise. At the end of the day, this exam is an important part of the year, so if giving up one of your sports will help free up some study time as the year goes on, you should consider doing that.

Extra-curricular activities can be excellent for people for whom a more limited amount of study time makes them focus, so just listen to yourself and make your own judgments, depending on how you feel.

HOW AM I GOING TO MANAGE IN THE EXAMS?

This is where your mocks come in. Many students say that the mocks are actually worse than the real exam. Around this time of year, you have almost finished your courses, but not quite. The mocks are stressful, but remember, they are a means to an end. If you use them properly, you will learn a lot about exam technique for the Junior Cert.

You make mistakes in the mocks that, providing you learn from them, you won't make in the real exam.

Tina Dunne: Many students seem to find it difficult to study. They know what has to be done and they make study plans for the midterm, but when it comes down to it they found it tough and got stressed

Timing is really important. Make a time plan for each exam and stick to it in the mocks. See what needs to be changed, and modify it for the real exam.

Your teachers will go through the mocks papers with you. Listen and learn. You will learn valuable tips about how to approach the real exam.

WHAT IF I BLANK IN ONE OF THE EXAMS?

This won't happen. You may be nervous and temporarily unable to remember something or other. Take a deep breath and focus.

Look through the paper for something you can answer. Jot down the things that you can remember in your rough work. Once you start writing, things will come back to you.

The key to relaxing and remembering is in the build-up to the exam.

