

Twelve tips to help students with SEND revise

When it comes to helping a child with SEND to revise for exams, we often need extra guidance. Jules Daulby serves up a dozen revision tips you can try... There are many things that we can think about when it comes to helping a child with special educational needs and disability (SEND) to revise for their exams. A detailed knowledge of the child in question and the assistance of the Sendco should be the beginning point of any strategy to help the individual succeed, but there are some general tips that can provide a framework for properly supporting the revision of a child with SEND. Here are 12 things to consider:

1. Break revision down into small steps

Even when a child is revising a specific topic, for a child with SEND, we need to push the topic and clarify instructions even further. When helping a child with SEND to revise, you might need to scaffold/support further. You could create a resource with a picture of each of the elements down one side of A4 and dotted lines next to each. Ask the child to describe the symbols in one to two sentences. Following this activity, give the sheet out again and see if they can repeat the exercise from memory.

2. Visual prompts are really useful

A child with SEND could create lots of images, mind maps and spider diagrams to revise from. Not only is making these visual reminders useful for memory but for those with SEND they can also be a comfort blanket through what, for many, feels an ordeal. Help a child to cluster this information into specific areas. This should be detailed, not just facts, instead clearly structured "what, when, why, where and how".

3. Partnerships

Getting children to work in pairs can be very effective. You could use flashcards that pose questions on one side and give answers on the other so that they can quiz each other.

4. Never underestimate the power of song and rhythm

Turning things into songs can be incredibly powerful. Recalling knowledge to a tune can work wonders, especially if actions are included. It has to be multi-sensory: sing it, point to it, write it out, say it, put it in a sentence, then answer some practice exam questions.

5. Narrative is key

If a child can attach a hook to something, they are more likely to remember it. A great way of doing this is to create a narrative around the topic, even role-playing a conversation. Visualising conversations may help an individual with SEND memorise information by setting it in real-world contexts.

6. Mnemonics are really useful

I still use the phrase "big elephants are ugly" so I can spell "beautiful" correctly. These little verbal exercises are effective and engaging, particularly for those with SEND, but you could go one step further.

- A mirror for "reflect"
- An elastic band for "manipulate"
- Lego for "sound structure"
- And a dictionary for "words"

7. Active listening

Someone could read out a section of text, whilst a child is listening, then they could be asked to feed-back on the specific area to see how much they heard and remember. For those with SEND, it can be a useful way of not overloading them and ensuring that they are not intimidated by trying to spot everything. What this actually ensures, is that they do listen to it all much more attentively than they would have done otherwise.

8. Decoding exam questions

If a child can differentiate between the command words (State, Explain, Analyse) of a question it can help them to understand the question. It's worth having two separate colours and getting a child to highlight which are which. What should be left is extraneous carrier language (the additional wording used to create a full sentence that is of lesser importance) which can be ignored. For a child with SEND, it is important to work this out, so they know exactly what is being asked of them in an exam.

9. Making connections

Some children, particularly with autism, may struggle connecting what the exam question is asking them to do with the subject knowledge they possess. Lots of practice contextualising and understanding the question will be required. Again, spider diagrams may help the students to literally "see" the question and think around the topic.

10. Categorisation

A child may have a raft of knowledge, but can they tell you what topic it is part of? Without initially learning the category, it's very difficult for a child to learn, and then retrieve the information correctly. It can help if they make flashcards of all the key words linked to a unit or create a graphic organiser (arranging information through image).

11. Practise using key vocabulary in sentences

While this may seem obvious, there are many children who have memorised key words, learned to spell them, even say them, but who are less comfortable using them in a sentence. Rather than getting them to merely explain what a word means, ask them to practise using the words in context.

12. Literacy Doughnuts

This idea has come from speech and language therapists. Using three circles, prioritise the important information or words into the inner circle, then the middle and the outer. It allows a child to revise in a slightly different way as it prevents some children f