

Exam Preparation: Marathon or Sprint?

Your education, and the work that you have been putting in to get to these exams, is a marathon. When you're running a marathon, you need to focus on the short-term, clocking those miles bit by bit, and the long-term, to keep you focused when the going gets tough.

Below are some tips and tricks for short-term and long-term motivation.

Long Term Motivation

Staying motivated is tough. It's all well and good for people to tell you that you just need to 'stay motivated', but how do you do this? Staying motivated in the long term is a bit like running and prepping for a marathon. You need to focus on the end goal and then every day you can work that little bit closer towards it. Getting to the end of the marathon requires long term motivation.

1. Set your goals

It's important to make sure that any goals you set are clear and specific. Rather than doing what some students do where they just set a grade that they are aiming for, the top students set a specific mark down. They will say 'I want to get 84% in my final Biology exam so that I get an A overall'. To get to a specific mark, you need to do specific work, and your teacher can help you identify the right work that you need to be doing.

2. Break them down

Once you know your overall goal, you need to know how to get there. When you're running a marathon, you don't think 'today I'm going to go out and run 26 miles'. You work out how long you have until your race and then you draw up a training plan that will build up your distance bit by bit. It's exactly the same with your exams. Once you know what your goals are you can draw yourself a plan that will improve your marks bit by bit. To get to your overall goal, you need to improve your marks by x% in the next in-class test, which means you need to do 3 practice papers before that, so you know which topics you still need to revise.

3. Visible and trackable

What gets measured gets done. Stick your goals on your wall, write them in the front of your planner for you to look at every day, tell your teacher about them so your teacher can check in with you. If you're looking at your goals every day then it will be a constant reminder that you need to keep going so that you will get there. Also, make sure you're checking in with your plan that you have broken down. Did you do your 3 practice papers? Tick that off the list!

Short Term Motivation

Once you have your long-term goals and you are working towards them, we need to know what to do on a daily basis. Having clear long-term goals keeps us going in the marathon, but it's important to also be able to do the practice runs and the sprints. This is the short-term motivation that will keep us on track!

1. Have your plan

Before you can start your work, you need to know exactly what it is that you need to do. Write down what you need to get done during that study slot and put it in front of you. It can be as simple as a bullet point list!

2. Short, sharp sessions

The best way to stay focused is by making sure that you are doing short sessions with regular breaks. Pop a timer on for 30 minutes and do 30 minutes of work. Time's up? Have a 5-minute break! Repeat 3 times and then take a longer break.

3. Active breaks

Use your breaks wisely! Use your break to do something active: get outside and take a walk, play with the dog, have a 10-minute kickabout with your friend or sibling. Getting moving on your break gets the endorphins going and helps you use up your energy, so you are ready to focus again when you sit down.

4. Give yourself rewards

Set yourself rewards to keep you on task. For example, you could a gummy bear at the bottom of every page of a practice exam. Once you have completed that page of questions, you get the gummy bear. Or you could reward yourself with an episode of your favourite Netflix show once you have completed all your work for the evening. Need to complete 5 practice papers over the next week? Set yourself a bigger rewards for when you have completed all 5 – you could have an evening with your friends.

5. Review your long-term goals

Make sure you keep checking in with your long-term goals to tie it all together! Choose a regular time when you will take stock of how you are doing in relation to your long-term goals. This could be once a week or every two weeks! How are you progressing towards them? If you need to change anything, you can then go straight back to step 1 and put it in your plan for the next study slot!