



KEYS TO SUCCESS

Study Smarter
Not Just Harder

"Even the woodpecker owes its success to the fact that it uses its head and keeps pecking away until it has finished the job begun!" - Columbus Cox

IN THE BOARD EXAMINATIONS

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KEY 1: SET YOURSELF A GOAL.

What are your realistic goals for each subject and overall in the Boards? Let's say, you want to get 90% in mathematics, 80% overall.

What if the Board examination was this week? What marks could you get? Let's say, this week you could get 60% in mathematics, 50% overall.

The questions you need to think about (which are addressed in the 10 Keys) are:

- How am I going to bridge the gap of 30%?
- What am I going to study first, second and third in the revision process?
- Should I give equal importance to all my subjects?
- Should I study the most difficult topics and subjects first?

KEY 2: MAKE A SMART STUDY PLAN.

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!

Sharpen your saw before chopping the wood! First make a plan before you start your revision process. This will take some time but it will ensure that you can achieve more in less time. Remember a wood cutter who chops away for hours ineffectively when with a few minutes of sharpening his saw, he could have cut much more wood in the same time!

- The less time you have available before the Board, the better should be your study plan and strategy. There is no doubt that a good strategy combined with a realistic plan can make you achieve your goals and beat them.
- Make a list of the TOPICS by subject on a separate sheet in four columns. Put the topics you find EASY to understand in the first column, MODERATE in the 2nd column, DIFFICULT in the 3rd column, DON'T KNOW in the 4th column.
- Make a separate plan for all that you will need to memorize. These are the marks waiting for you to get, only if you can recall the facts on Exam day!

KEY 3: DIFFERENTIATE.

Do you revise chapter by chapter or on your difficult topics first? Don't!

To gain the maximum marks, move from Easy to Difficult topics in each subject.

How do I differentiate between subjects? Get a smart study plan made for you through a Board related diagnostic survey or make your own estimate of concepts you are GOOD, MODERATE and LIMITED in.

- For concepts in which you are good, practice for speed and accuracy and avoid careless mistakes. Avoid overconfidence at all times.
- For concepts in which you are moderately good, consolidate at the class level.
- For concepts in which you have a limited understanding, go back a few steps and build understanding from below class level. Going back to the basics might be quicker than struggling away at the class level in these concepts.
- For aspects you need to memorise, mark these according to Keys 4 and 5. Make a plan to read and re-read bookmarked pages on a daily basis. Read once at night time when you are tired and cannot do much thinking work. Read once again the exact same matter first thing in the morning. It works like magic!

KEY 4: WORK BACKWARDS.

Do you revise theory first, then attempt questions? Don't!

Reading theory first will give you a false sense of how much you really know for the Boards. Between now and the examination, you will not have adequate time to re-read all the theory again. Besides, you can revise your theory better and remember more by working backwards from questions than by working forwards from theory.

Put yourself in the examination mode right now. Attempt to do all past questions whether or not you know a chapter well or not. Then, if you cannot recall or apply logic to solve a particular question, go back to your textbook and look up just that amount of information/theory you will need by using your textbook as a reference book only (like a dictionary). It is most important that you mark in your textbook with a highlighter pen all the bits you had difficulty with. This way, you can build up an inventory of the facts you should especially attempt to remember for the Boards.

- Have you done past 10+ year papers? This will build more confidence than any revision work you can think of doing right now. This is true for all students whether they are 'weak' or 'strong'.
- Attempt past questions topic wise, not year wise, so that you can understand your own strengths and weaknesses in each topic. Sometimes, you think a topic is easy until you make an attempt. Students who have already mastered past questions, can move on to cover model questions in the topics that did not feature fully in the past papers, just in case those topics came up in the future, but not before the past questions are fully revised.
- Topic wise study of past questions will give you a fair idea of the trends and patterns and types of questions on a topic that have come in the past.
- Notice any common mistakes you make. Make a special entry of these in your textbook so as to avoid these in the future.
- Mental calculations should be double checked with written rough work and backwards calculations, for example, recheck your division by multiplication. Xth and Xth students often make mistakes at class V level or below!

KEY 5: MAKE SMART REVISION NOTES.

Are your revision notes summaries of your textbooks? Avoid.

Revision notes should, ideally, not be in a separate notebook. You can use your textbook as the best place to mark the key points for recollection. Here's how...

- While working backwards from a question, mark with a highlighter pen just those portions of your textbook you needed to solve past/other questions with and especially bits you could not recall in solving them. Write down also the year(s) in which the questions appeared. Bookmark these pages.
- Use yellow sticky paper (post-it slips) to write any additional facts, formulae or notes which you need to remind yourself of for later recollection. As time is limited just before Exams, these highlighted pages will aid your short term memory and come in really handy on the day before examination.
- Do not mark large chunks of your textbook but just the keywords on a few most essential pages of your textbook. Try to reconstruct the rest of your answers around them (a very useful process!).
- Throughout revision, review these notes again and again.
- You are more likely to recall things marked in your textbook which you see everyday than notes made in a separate notebook. You will also better recall a context in which you marked a particular section, for example, when you could not solve a particular past question. You are also more likely to remember theory for questions you struggled with the most. This is why you should put yourself under Exam conditions during revision time, as though every day were your Exam day. Remember you are not allowed to read from your textbook first in the Board Exam

before answering. Most students do the wrong practice of reading theory first before attempting questions, which gives them a false sense of their knowledge. Instead, attempt questions first and mark up in your textbook that which you could not recall. Mind maps, graphic organizers and other visuals additionally help in better remembering and later recalling the interconnectedness of thoughts or ideas being conveyed in a chapter. Attach them within the relevant pages in your textbook. Rip through and review your textbooks daily.

- Bookmark the highlighted pages so that these become an essential part of your last minute revision process. Do not bookmark many pages of your textbook, only the most essential, so that when you put your textbook on the shelf, you can see exactly the amount of material important to review and recall on Exam day. Simply read and re-read these bits frequently, especially when you are tired and cannot engage in work that requires more effort.
- These methods will ensure that you will recollect more while using your precious revision hours productively to get the best marks on Exam day.

KEY 6: WORK TO IMPROVE YOUR AVERAGE.

How many you make Hindi your last priority?

Imagine your 7 or 11 subjects are like 7 or 11 mango trees. Your job is to get the most mangoes off these trees in the shortest possible time. Would you first go for the mangoes which are far away from you or those that are nearest to you? Obviously, you can get more marks with less effort in topics which are easier to master. For example, 20 hours of revision time in Hindi may gain you more marks than mathematics or physics or a subject you find difficult. Also, wouldn't you want to pluck all the "easy to get mangoes from all the trees first? Obviously, first cover all the topics which are easy for you in all subjects before moving on to the moderately difficult topics in all subjects and then lastly to the most difficult topics in all subjects. Sometimes, you may have to drop the most difficult topics in some subjects altogether if time is short, or risk lowering your average to below what is possible for you to get with what you can master. For students in the top ranks, you will need to work on your difficult topics as well, to gain every possible mark. The rest of you must first work on easier topics first, else you risk losing time and marks.

- First focus on those topics and subjects in which you can gain the most marks with the least amount of effort.
- Make sure you are able to score full marks on your good topics, without committing careless mistakes. Avoid overconfidence. Re-check your work.

KEY 7: MAKE A DAILY REVISION PLAN.

Before embarking on revision, you should make a clear timetable

- Allocate a "realistic" measure of time on what you can accomplish each day.
- Differentiate and re-adjust your priorities to fit in within the time available.
- Consider by what date you can start a second round of revision?
- Make a note of those aspects you were unable to cover in the first round of revision. Find time for these in the next round (improving the field each time).
- Make a note of what were your stumbling blocks in each round of revision.
- Be determined to meet the goals set for each day and week. Don't slacken.

KEY 8: MANAGE YOUR TIME WELL.

How do you organise your time in the most effective manner?

- Guard your time, the most valuable resource you have, or it will simply slip away!
- If you are tired or find you are being ineffective in your studies, take a break.
- Remember you are not studying to please anybody but to be effective.
- There are 168 hours in a week, which are plenty to do about 50 hours (7 hours per day or so) of solid work instead of 100 hours of ineffective study.
- Be realistic in your planning. Do not make plans which you cannot fulfill.
- A four hour cycle of solid sleep is the absolute minimum and ideally you will sleep 6-8 hours. A short siesta in the afternoons additionally boosts capacity at night.
- Start study at a time when you are most alert and most relaxed.
- When you are feeling tired, take on easier tasks, including just read and re-read those portions marked in your textbook you need to commit to memory.
- Do not waste your time watching TV (it strains your eyes, even though you think you are relaxing). Also, quit worrying (as it lowers your energy). Take a walk in fresh air or simply close your eyes, meditate and listen to relaxing classical music such as Swan Lake.

KEY 9: MOTIVATE YOURSELF.

Be determined to succeed. Do not rely upon external motivators, parents, teachers or peers. Don't let others discourage you either. This is your project. Motivate yourself. No one can push you harder than you yourself!

- Study in small groups. This can really provide a charged environment. Choose your group members prudently.
- An ideal size of the group is three to five.
- Involve your parents who can help monitor your progress.
- Give yourself specific awards for completing a task.
- It improves motivation by changing your place of study.
- Seek help from your friends and teachers.
- You can learn much more by your own efforts. Now is not the time to develop new understanding. What you don't understand, ask your peers, teachers or tutors. Don't let tutors run your revision. Plan what they teach you. Focus on consolidating marks by what you know, can quickly learn and revise for memory everyday.

KEY 10: AVOID STRESS.

Don't get stressed and think it all possible.

- Thinking positively helps avoid stress. Remember, stress lowers efficiency.
- Get adequate sleep daily, or you will burn out, fall sick and lose marks.
- Create a manageable daily routine (don't wake up at 3 a.m. and off to sleep again!). Don't change your routine or your biorhythms will be affected.
- Most importantly, avoid any form of negative self-suggestions. Talk yourself into thinking and feeling positive. This is the hidden key to success.
- Take food liver oil daily to prevent falling sick (following Dr. Amitabh Pandit's advice). Avoid fried foods at any time and milk at night (its OK in the morning). Dr. Pandit can be reached at Tel: +91 94 154 101 34.

"If you don't enjoy doing something for twenty minutes, try it for forty. If you don't enjoy doing it for forty minutes, try it for eighty. You will eventually begin to enjoy it." - A Zen saying



NOVEMBER 2001							DECEMBER 2001							JANUARY 2002							FEBRUARY 2002							MARCH 2002																														
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*These views are the personal views of Dr Sunita Gandhi who used these strategies to improve her results while doing A-Levels (12th Class) in the UK. Later, Dr Sunita Gandhi, who considers herself to have been an average student, went on to receive three merit based scholarships at Cambridge University, UK.

If you have any questions regarding the 10 Keys, please feel free to contact Dr Sunita Gandhi, who considers herself to have been an average student, went on to receive three merit based scholarships at Cambridge University, UK. Email: sunitag@ems.in

All the best!