Studying to maximise your performance in the HSC

Some of you may be looking for a quick and easy fix to boost your results in the HSC. Unfortunately, there is no book you can buy, tutor you can pay, or course you can attend that will suddenly and significantly boost your exam results. Luckily there are a few techniques you can apply that controlled studies have shown will improve your learning and recall in exam situations.

1. Practice retrieval - how many times have you read over your notes for hours and hours on end and still got a crap mark? That's because you need to exercise your ability to retrieve information from your memory. You can do this by testing yourself. Grab a copy of the syllabus and test yourself answering each dot point as if it were a question. NB: If you haven't placed anything in memory in the first place this won't help much...

2. Repetition - here's where it gets boring. You need to repeatedly practice retrieving information from memory. It isn't good enough to do it once the night before an exam. You won't see any significant improvement. The more practice, the better you get at it...much like anything in life.

3. Explain what you're learning to yourself or to someone else - you don't have to write things out again and again and again. Talk to yourself. Go for a walk and have a couple of syllabus dot points written on your arm or on a card. While you are getting some fresh air and exercise, talk to yourself about the topic.

4. Distinctiveness - this is a little trickier to grasp, but try to think about everything you are learning and ask yourself, “how is this similar to something else I know about, how is it different?”

5. Beware of a feeling of familiarity - don't settle for thinking you know something. Go back to point 1 and test yourself to see if you know it.

These five pointers aren't just “hand waving” advice. They have been shown to be effective in carefully controlled experiments. Use them well and your study time will be more effective and you will see improved results.

You might also want to look at these videos:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RH95h36NChI

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O7y7XEC66M

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xeHh5DnCtw

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9GrOxhYZdQ

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QVRiMkdRsU

**Final bonus** - do you find yourself getting really stressed out in exams? Do you get worried or anxious and find that you forget everything?

Researchers at the University of Chicago found that if stressed students spent the ten minutes before an exam writing down how they feel and why they are stressed they performed much better in the subsequent exam. It's like you get all the worry out of your head, so you can perform better. Try it out - what's the worst that could happen?

Good Luck!