



# Don't overstress during exams



**LEARNING:** Explaining the concept to a peer may also reinforce learning.

## By Dr Subhash Nair

**T**housands of students of Grade X-XII are going through their CBSE Board Examination.

Teachers and parents set high expectations for their wards' achievement. Mostly high achievers are under stress as their schools expect them to emerge as toppers. They work hard to achieve A1 grades in all the subjects to get CBSE Merit Certificates that are awarded to the 0.1% of the top scorers. The competition in Qatar is very healthy as the schools part of CBSE Gulf Sahodaya collaborate to support students from all the schools.

Children having excellent learning skills find it easy to prepare well for their examination and for them high achievement is a habit formed over a period. Schools use digital content and learning platforms to make learning interesting and enjoyable. Certain learning platforms like EduBrisk help students to diagnose their learning gaps and scale down learning to the facts and attributes

of the concepts that they had learnt in the lower classes without wasting a lot of time in digging information. Children resort to both focused and diffused learning during their preparation for examination.

Focused learning for a certain period of time, say ten minutes, must be followed by at least five minutes of diffused learning during which the child goes for a walk or dance or sing a song or do something else that relaxes him/her. The neural connections established through the focused learning will be reinforced during the diffused learning process. Many students resort to continuous focused learning that causes fatigue to their brain and leaves the mind confused due to the lack of reinforcement. After reading a piece of content trying to recollect the essence of what is learnt will reinforce learning and strengthen memory. Many students resort to effective mnemonic techniques to strengthen memory as well. Explaining the concept to a peer may also reinforce learning.

During the revision time interleaving rather than proceeding in a particular

sequence through chapters may help in better preparation for examination as they are expected to correctly associate the questions to the right content and concept to answer it well. Going through the content at random not in any particular sequence during revision is better for this purpose.

Chunking is another method to gradually develop concepts in our mind. Rather than memorising in a rote fashion, chunking helps to give a structure to the concepts in our mind. A few significant aspects or facts related to the concept form the initial chunk that is kept in our mind first. Every time we revise the concept some more related facts are added to that chunk and this chunking strengthens the concept. The initial chunk that we form in our mind helps to answer the question and what we added subsequently to the chunk helps to make the answer rich to score better marks.

This means that scoring better marks in an examination is not just a co-incidence. It is a result of a purposeful preparation. As we practice again and again to perform a dance or song, well there must be deliberate practice

to answer questions as well. High achievers do this all the time and their preparation for examination appears effortless. It is extremely important to give our brain sufficient rest every day to ensure its better performance during the examination. Students must sleep well for not less than six hours at night preferably in total darkness. This will rejuvenate the brain cells and will give them power for better neural connections which are essential for memory, intelligence, and reasoning that are needed for a better performance during any examination.

Having healthy food rich in fruits and vegetable, drinking lots of water and regular physical exercise are also essential to ensure well performance in exams. Junk food and carbonated drinks must be reduced and regularity of meals of balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals must be ensured. A few minutes of prayer or meditation will help in calming the mind and to reduce stress.

Children must be told that a little bit of stress is essential for better performance. However, unreasonably high level of stress

will reduce performance to a huge level. Parents and teachers must show signs of increased trust in children and must give reassurance that their wards' results and marks will not affect the way they love their children. Parents must pay great attention to provide a suitable atmosphere at home for their ward to prepare for the examination which includes a better study space, quite atmosphere, a little bit of sacrifice of TV and other entertainment time during the study hours and dining together. Try to avoid get-togethers till the exams are over. Stop advising and correcting them now. That period is over and now is the time to demonstrate trust and confidence. Allow them to resort to their style of learning.

Let them feel our support and concern through our action. Encourage them to call their teacher if they are stuck with a doubt instead of wasting a lot of time digging to clear it. Encourage them to write the answers as they revise rather than just depending on reading.

● Dr Subhash Nair is Principal of Shantiniketan Indian School.