

Active revision strategies for C/D borderline students using ICT

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Overview

Revision can often mean more of the same, typically in the guise of some rather dry and unexciting worksheets. Just at the time you want them to concentrate the most, they lose interest! Here Sam Custance tackles this tricky situation and explores how ICT can help to make revision an appealing process in which students actively engage with and develop their understanding in preparation for an examination. Through employing a range of websites and strategies, often based around the use of an interactive whiteboard (IWB), Sam has made revision an opportunity for students to build confidence and a positive approach to their examinations.

Context and aims

Holsworthy Community College is a small mixed comprehensive secondary school in rural Devon, with about 700 students from 11-16; it has technology college status. During the period of this case study, I had two GCSE classes. The first was a C/D borderline group, made up of 14 students, with half the class targeting a C grade. The second class consisted of 29 boys, with predicted grades ranging from A* to E. My aim in using ICT with these classes was to engage students with their revision lessons, enabling them to recall and then develop their understanding, so that they reached and possibly exceeded their target grades.

Hard-to-teach topics: reading assessment objectives

The 'hard-to-teach topics' that I have addressed include: comparisons and cross references, explanations, examination language. The strategies that I shall be discussing in my case study are designed to aid students with their preparation for GCSE Paper 1 Section A, where their reading skills are being assessed.

Method and description

The following activities were used both during lesson time and during two separate revision days, one during the Easter holidays, the second during the May half-term. Student feedback from both the class and the revision days was very positive, due to the variety of strategies used.

Interactive games

In order to reinforce my students' familiarity with examination language, I used www.classtools.net. This fabulous website is free to use and is very easy to set up so that multiple computer games can be played with the same set of questions and answers. I would recommend that you type up the questions and answers in a Word document, as then this can be copied and pasted into the yellow box. The questions and answers need to be separated by a *, as in these examples which give a description of a term, followed by the term itself:

How and why? Analyse*

*Refers to something that happens (in the poems)*An event
Thoughts and ideas shown through a text.*Attitudes*

You need at least ten questions and answers. I typed up the questions and answers and placed the resulting Word document (see Appendix A) into a drive which all of my students can access. They were then able to copy and paste them into the correct place.

Classools.net Interactive Quiz Generator!

[TITLE OF QUIZ GOES HERE]

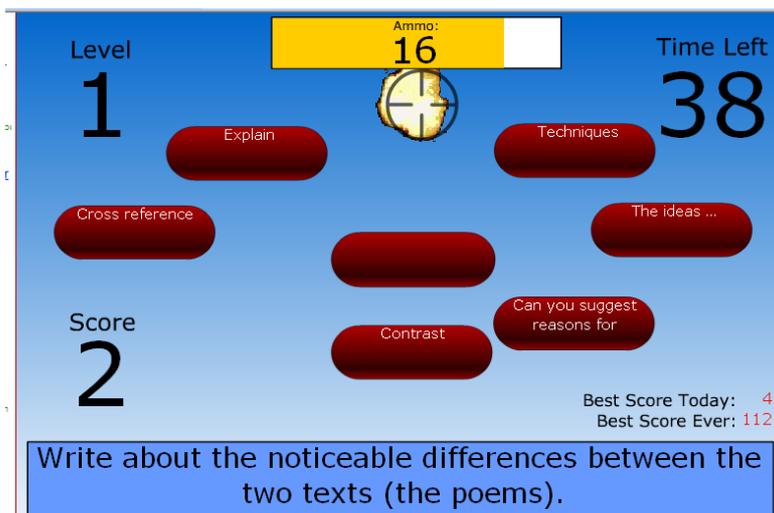
1. Type the title of your quiz in the box above.
2. Input your questions & answers in the box below (or paste from a word processor).
Separate each question from its answer with an asterisk: **question*answer** **Example**
Start each question on a fresh line.

How and why? * Analyse
Thoughts and ideas shown through a text. *Attitudes
You MUST give reasons, it is not optional * Can you suggest reasons for
Devices or techniques used by the writer e.g. similes. * Comment on the effects achieved by the writer
Examine to find the similarities and differences of whatever is being asked of you e.g. language, purpose, presentational, detail, layout etc * Compare
Links, comparisons, between and within texts, use connectives to help you e.g. Both * Connections
Write about the noticeable differences between the two texts (the poems). * Contrast
Make links either throughout a text, or between different texts * Cross reference
Give many reasons: use Point, Evidence, Explanation. * Develop
Consider something and give a variety of points. * Discuss
How good or impressive / how appropriate * Effective

Password to stop players editing this screen (leave blank if not required) Game to direct players to automatically (only works if password set): **Play!**

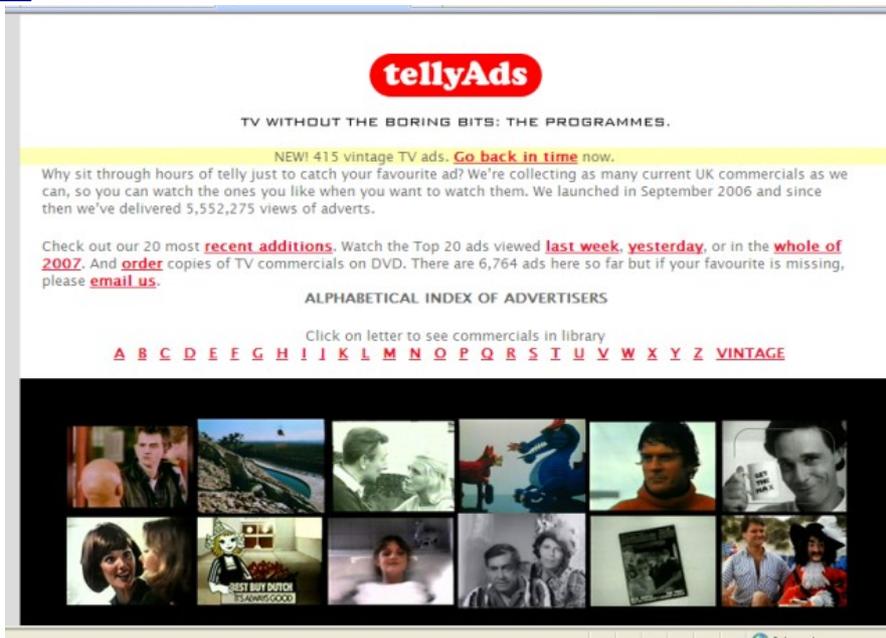
An example of how to input the questions and answers or, in this case, descriptions of terms followed by the terms

There are many different games on www.classools.net, my favourite being Word Shoot. This allows you to create a version of Space Invaders, whereby the question appears with the remaining answers, and when you fire at the correct answer, it rather satisfyingly blows up. The second and third level becomes harder, from a gamer's point of view, as the answers move around. The games were played both individually, in a computer suite, and on an interactive whiteboard with pupils lining up in two lines to play against each other in teams. Word Shoot limits both the time and the ammo, which means that the player does better if they are not taking random guesses. With the same set of questions and answers, other games which can also be played on this website include: Manic Miner, Cannon Ball Fun and Matching Pairs.



An example screen from Word Shoot

Another successful revision game we played was Persuasive Bingo, where students would use the Teachit Persuasive Bingo template to look for the persuasive techniques being used on adverts from www.tellyads.com.



A possible resource for 'Persuasive Bingo'

PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES BINGO CARD

EMOTIVE WORDS	FORCEFUL PHRASES	RHETORICAL QUESTIONS	CHATTY STYLE	STATISTICS	CRITICISE THE OPPOSITE OPINION
CLUSTERS OF THREE	PERSONAL PRONOUNS	HUMOUR	PLAY ON THE READER'S SYMPATHY	EXAGGERATION (HYPERBOLE)	REPETITION OF WORDS/ PHRASES
CATCHY PHRASES OR SLOGANS	FIGURES OF SPEECH	CONTRASTS	MAKE POSITIVE POINTS PERSONAL	ANECDOTES	MAKE NEGATIVE POINTS IMPERSONAL
EMOTIVE PICTURES	SHORT SENTENCES/ PARAGRAPHS	PLAY ON THE READER'S GUILT	IMAGERY	QUOTE A RELIABLE SOURCE	SHOCK TACTICS

Persuasive Bingo template

Podcasting

One of the websites that I admire is www.podcastrevision.com. Podcasts are recordings made available on the Internet for people to play back on computer or personal media player. The idea of being able to create my own podcasts really appealed to me, as a number of my students had such strong aural memories. Having read the 'Make your Own' section on the website, I thought, 'I can do that!' Luckily for me, a physics teacher at my school had already been creating his own podcasts to assist students through the science text book. He helped me get the sound levels right and found me an amplifier (borrowed from the music department). I purchased a microphone and was off. I was hooked. The facility to prepare readings and commentaries of the AQA 'Poems from Different Cultures' for Cluster 2 meant that I could guide my students through the poem with annotations and making comparisons between poems without digression. The sheer novelty of hearing my recordings had my group spellbound.



Podcast revision gives advice on how to make your own podcasts

In creating the podcasts, I tried to keep them between two and five minutes long (the length of a song). Any longer would risk losing my audience's attention. I didn't write a script but kept the poem in front of me with the annotations that we had made and a couple of revision guides. I realised that I 'ummed' and 'erred' but I decided not to make each podcast perfect, preferring to just talk into the microphone as I would if they were in front of me in a class. I encouraged my class to listen to the podcasts repeatedly and know that for some of my students, this might be the only independent revision they would do, outside the classroom.

Whilst teaching this unit to my Year 10s, I have introduced the podcasts at the time of teaching this unit, rather than for revision only, as I would like them to use my podcasts as a model and hopefully go on to create their own. The only disadvantage to the podcasts is with the cringe factor, although I do believe the positives outweigh the negatives.

Music to revise by

The assessment objective to *read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to text and developing and sustaining interpretations of them* meant that I needed to enthuse my students with the idea of engaging with the texts. To start them off, as a class, we created a list of language devices that we needed to revise and chose a song which would help us to think of each device. The results were an eclectic mix of 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' by the Verve to revise oxymoron and 'No Woman, No Cry' to remind students about repetition. This blossomed into a way of helping us to revise the Poems from Different Cultures, with 'Unrelated Incidents' being revised using 'I'm Gonna be (500 miles)' by the Proclaimers, to remind students of accent and dialect. We ended up with an anthology called 'Music to revise by'. The music was played when I was encouraging them to plan their writing, revise key ideas, or when we played some of the revision games. Students were then able to apply their understanding of the language devices to other texts, for examples with leaflets, newspaper articles, travel brochures etc.

Independence and collaboration

To encourage my students both to read a variety of texts and to recognise that exam texts follow a theme, I allowed them to select their own theme to practise their revision. The students were provided with a list of generic questions for any non-fiction and media texts (see Appendix B). The topics chosen varied from a debate about 'Size 0' to advertising cars and whether the driving age should be raised. This meant that the students were able to revise their understanding of the exam questions, as well as developing their confidence in reading, making appropriate references and sustaining their interpretations.

As a class, we practised our exam skills, and together we created the best model answer to Paper 1 Section A from 2006. By writing the answers together and then marking them together, my students could see where they gained marks, but also where they were needlessly losing them. Exam tips like reading how many marks the question was worth and answering all of the bullet points quickly became apparent when they realised that they were no longer scoring the necessary marks. Sharing the writing process meant that each member of the class could contribute but that we developed and sustained the ideas, rather than simply writing an answer and then moving on which is the technique that so many of them had used in their mock exams. The model answer was then distributed to the students, to remind them of the level of detail that they were all capable of producing.

Who's the biggest slapper?

The second assessment objective - *distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented* - is an area that was revised at first with a quiz, to see if students could identify the difference between a fact and an opinion, and followed on from our active reading lessons. When evaluating the presentation of information, past experience showed they tended to comment on one or two aspects but failed to develop their responses. To help sustain their responses, we played a game called: 'Who is the biggest slapper?' This required two plastic fly swats, non-fiction and media terminology projected onto my IWB and the class divided into two teams - a team lined up on each side of the IWB. I held up different types of media texts in turn including: magazine front covers, film posters, front pages of newspapers, leaflets etc. The student at the head of the each line held a fly swat and used this to slap or select the feature they wanted to comment on. The team whose word was hit first, was allowed to go first. So, for example, if I held up a poster the student might slap *picture* and then had to comment on how the picture was used, e.g. to attract attention, establish a mood, etc. Each team also had a scribe, to jot their ideas down. (The scribe's notes could then be used to review students' understanding; students

could then attempt to answer exam style questions about the text in full sentences.) Another student kept score between the two groups by tallying the marks up between each team. Once they had attempted to slap a word with the fly swat and use it correctly, they had to pass the fly swat onto the next member of their team. This game was so successful that I then introduced connectives for comparison and contrast so that students drew upon their previous statements and developed their ideas.

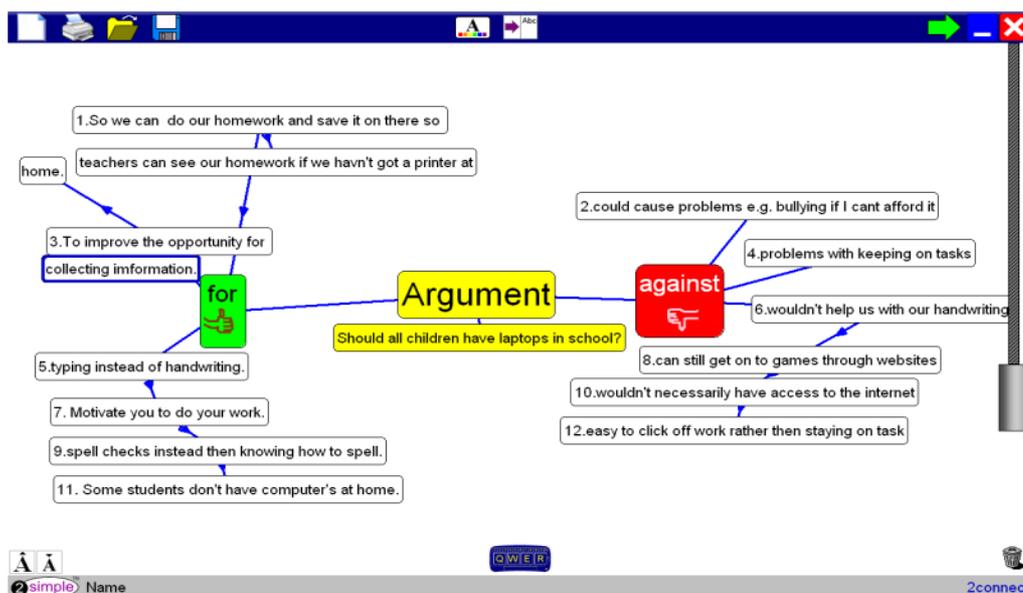
Media vocabulary	
bold	italics
broadsheet/tabloid	logos
bullet points	masthead
by-line	photographs/pictures
capitals	paragraphs
charts	slogans
colour	sub-headings
cropping	text
diagrams	wrap
font styles	quotations
headlines	

Terminology used in the 'biggest slapper' game

The use of ICT was simplistic – the projection of different sets of words – but it enabled the students to develop their understanding. This was so successful that I developed the game to include phrases and language devices for the different writing triplets. This was especially useful for students who were finding it difficult to start their sentences in different ways, but also to develop their abilities to discuss a range of presentational features.

Getting planning in shape

The different writing triplets were also revised using planning shapes. The software 2simple 2connect is on our network, which utilizes Sue Palmer's writing skeletons. This allowed the students to use the planning templates to show their understanding of the structure of a piece of writing.



An example of planning an argument

This followed neatly into revising the third assessment objective: *Follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies.* When selecting reading matter for this learning objective, in the past I have used writers who create humour effectively such as Bill Bryson who has been used in the exam. Charlie Brooker is probably a little too risqué for the examination boards. However, my students find his dry wit entertaining.

We started off by annotating the text simply by writing a + for positives and – for negative points. This allowed us to follow the ideas that were being discussed. We were also able to annotate the text using a key which allowed humour to be broken down. Looking at Brooker's sentence structure and how humour was created was also an interesting exercise. This led into students writing their own ideas for an argument. We used a table in Word, which allowed statements to be picked up and transferred from the middle into the left or right. The table allowed students to compare and contrast statements regarding the Poems from Different Cultures; statements in the middle were about both poems, statements either side were about one poem. Students were then able to sort the statements and then build the essay slowly by transferring the statements to the bottom of the page and building upon their Point, Evidence, Explanation paragraphs.

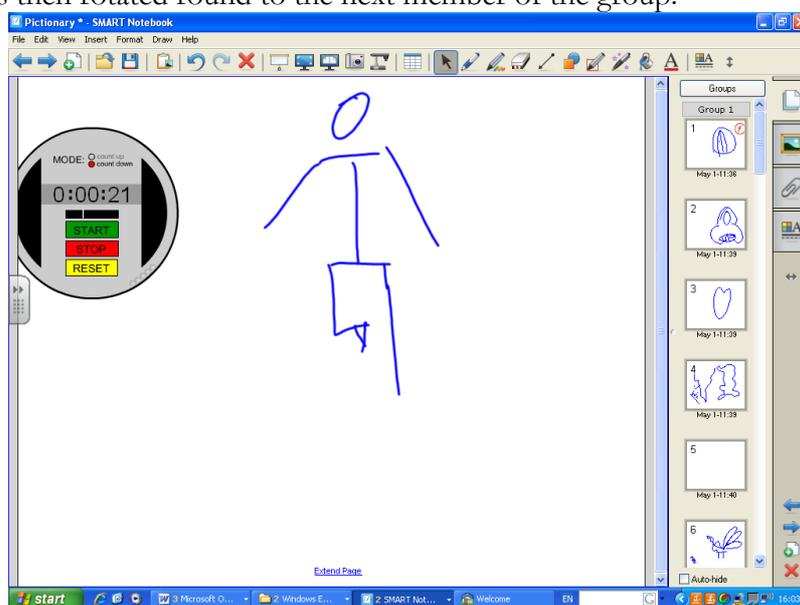
Pictionary and Taboo

The fourth assessment objective demands that students: *Select material appropriate to their purpose, collate material from different sources, and make cross references.* I was keen to ensure that my students saw the poems from different cultures as a collection, rather than as individual poems. To aid their ability to collate material from different sources and to make cross references, students created visual PowerPoints of the poems. As students saw the pictures relating to time, movement, locations and language, clear connections and cross references were made.

The students were able to make the links but their capacity to explain them needed to be developed. I attempted to do this by playing two games: Pictionary and Taboo. To create both games, students were

given two pieces of A4 paper which were each cut into eight pieces. Each student was then assigned a poem and asked to select the key words, ideas, themes, images and poetic devices etc. Students were given the advice that the fewer the words on the card, the easier they would find the next task. The cards were then collected in and shuffled. On the IWB I used a timer (from the SMART board Gallery) and each team was given a space to tally up their scores; one point for each correct answer was awarded.

Students were then placed into groups. We played Pictionary first. One person from each group was given a board pen and the stack of cards was placed inside a pot (no cherry picking was allowed). The student then had to do a drawing which explained the writing on the card. If a member of their group guessed correctly, the 'drawer' then took the next card and tried to generate as many points for their teams in the thirty seconds as possible. The scores were then collected at the end of each round. The role of 'drawer' was then rotated round to the next member of the group.

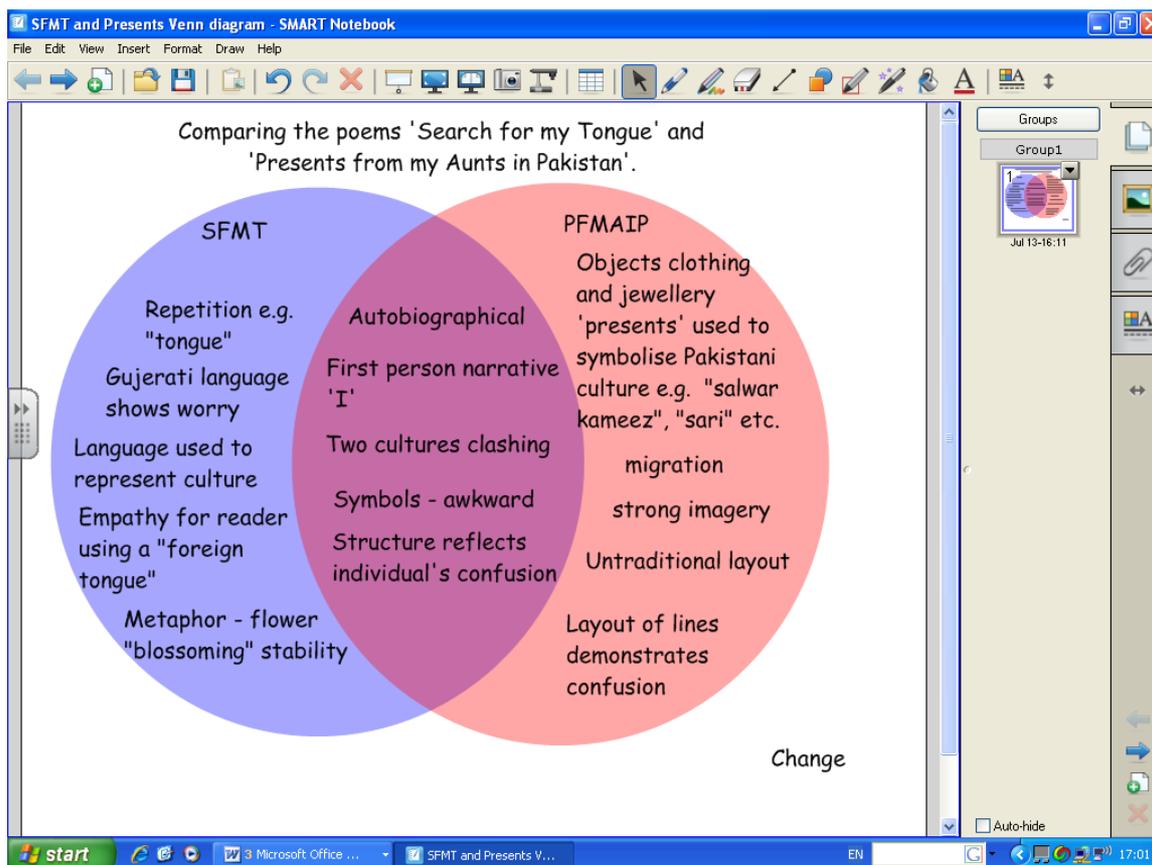


Playing 'Pictionary' on the IWB

The game of Taboo is played in the same way, with the same resources. Students were encouraged to focus their explanations not on the abstract but to use the poems to help explain what is on the card. They were not allowed to use any of the words on the cards to aid their explanation. If you wanted to make this game even harder, you could also add on the obvious clues onto the card so that they could also not be used, to ensure that the students worked harder on their explanations.

IWB tools

I used the IWB annotation tools with students to highlight key words in the question and texts then I created a Venn diagram. In SMART, this involves just drawing two circles freehand, or with the shapes icon. The same can be carried out in Word, using Insert, Picture, AutoShapes and selecting the circles. The concept is that the place where the circles overlap is where key words denoting similarities are written. This ensures that the students make comparisons immediately, in their introductions rather than waiting until the conclusion and writing about the poems separately.



An example of a Venn diagram, showing similarities between poems in the overlapping section

We also played the 'Who's the biggest slapper?' game again, mainly to generate statements to support the students' ability to make the comparisons. My D/C students were able to create statements which included:

- 'Search for my Tongue' uses Gujarati, whereas 'Presents from my Aunts' uses place.
- Both poems involve emotions.
- They both write about being lonely.
- Similarly, the feelings are of isolation from being away from their culture.
- 'Search for my Tongue' uses another language, whereas 'Presents' illustrates the differences through clothing and objects.
- Extended metaphors are used in 'Search for my Tongue' to illustrate the growth of her mother tongue, whereas similes are used to show the comparisons between the British and Pakistani cultures, through the clothes.
- Both tell the story of their lives, they are autobiographical.
- In the same way, they are both worried about the about they way they live their lives.
- Likewise the conflicts are within themselves.
- To conclude: the conflict is resolved in 'Search for my Tongue', whereas the conflict is unresolved in 'Presents from My Aunts', she is still 'unfixed'.

Being able to make cross references between two poems enables them to achieve a C grade.

Some IWBs have a 'banner' or 'tickertape' facility which scrolls across the board. I used this to continually remind my students of the connectives which signal comparisons and contrasts. This could

also be used for the lesson objective, spellings, or reminders about anything for students to use that lesson.

Key findings

My main finding is that using these teaching activities led to my students adopting a more confident approach to the exams. The lessons were pacy and feedback from students was largely positive. The class made up of boys appeared to be keen to come to my lessons and their behaviour, I felt, improved.

After their exams, I surveyed my students for feedback. My D/C borderline students seemed confident in gaining the C grade (see Appendix C). My students gave me ten out of ten for the teaching styles that were used. They also believe that they have reached their target grade C in their exams. 30 students (C/D borderline) chose to give up two days of their holidays to revise with me and all those who returned the feedback questionnaires said that they would recommend the revision days to other students.

The final results were pleasing. Of the C/D borderline group in which half were given a C target grade, just over 50% gained a C, with the rest all gaining a D grade. The all-boy class also did well with 19 meeting their target, 3 failing to meet it and 6 actually exceeding their target grade.

Next steps

I will continue to build a repertoire of teaching and learning techniques, particularly to enable revision to be active, engaging and interesting. Furthermore, I have been adapting the techniques described here for Key Stage students, especially to improve their reading skills.

Appendices

- A: Examination language games
- B: Active reading chart
- C: Sample student evaluations

Appendix A: Examination language games

Using <http://www.classtools.net/>

1. How and why? * **Analyse**
2. Thoughts and ideas shown through a text. * **Attitudes**
3. You **MUST** give reasons, it is not optional * **Can you suggest reasons for**
4. Devices or techniques used by the writer e.g. similes. * **Comment on the effects achieved by the writer**
5. Examine to find the similarities and differences of whatever is being asked of you e.g. language, purpose, presentational, detail, layout etc * **Compare**
6. Links, comparisons, between and within texts, use connectives to help you e.g. Both * **Connections**
7. Write about the noticeable differences between the two texts (the poems). * **Contrast**
8. Make links either throughout a text, or between different texts * **Cross reference**
9. Give many reasons: use Point, Evidence, Explanation. * **Develop**
10. Consider something and give a variety of points. * **Discuss**
11. How good or impressive / how appropriate * **Effective**
12. Find or judge the value of the text * **Evaluate**
13. Make clear and give reasons for. * **Explain**
14. Provide details and discuss a variety of ideas. * **Explore**
15. How is the narrator feeling, consider the variety of emotions e.g. concerned, confused, inquisitive, remorseful, etc. * **Feelings**
16. In what ways? By what means? Which techniques are used? * **How do ...?**
17. Plan or thought formed, belief or opinions. In the Poetry section it refers to the poem's themes. * **The ideas ...**
18. What are the methods used? * **In what ways ...?**
19. Do not only use quotations, summarise and explain your thoughts, supported by references. * **In your own words**
20. Choice of words, type of language e.g. formal, informal, emotive, scientific, persuasive, argumentative, instructional anecdotal * **Language**
21. Use of language features e.g. figurative language such as similes and metaphors * **Linguistic**
22. Which way? Which devices? Which techniques are being used? Which stylistic features * **The methods used ...**
23. Visuals e.g. pictures, images etc. * **Presentational**
24. Use quotations to support your answer * **Refer to**
25. How the text is put together. * **Structural**
26. Methods a writer can use * **Techniques**
27. Clearly explain the main points and select appropriate quotes to help you explain your ideas. * **What are the key points...?**
28. Give your own opinion which must be explained * **What do you think...?**
29. How does the text make you feel when you read it? * **Your reaction**
30. What do you think the text is about? * **Your response**

Appendix B: Active reading chart

Task: As part of your revision, collect at least three texts which all have a similar theme. Try and complete the chart below. This will help to focus your reading.

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
What is the purpose of each item?			
Who is this item for? (Audience)			
What is the format?			
What are the presentational features?			
What type of language has been used?			
Pick out one fact.			
Pick out two opinions.			
Pick out four words that show this text's point of view.			
How effective is each text? Why?			
How are texts 1, 2 and 3 similar? How are texts 1, 2 and 3 different?			

Appendix C: Student evaluations

The responses here (in *italics*) are from two students in the group.

Student A's evaluation

1. What did you think about the teaching styles used during your revision?

Great

2. Which activities helped you learn the most from and why?

10 because she made them fun and enjoyable which meant you wanted to go.

When had guess what is being drawn.

All whiteboard games.

3.

- What is your target grade? *C*
- What grade do you need for your future? *C*
- Overall, what grade do you think you have achieved in your exams? *Dunno*

4. If you attended the revision day(s) did they help you towards achieving your target grade? *Yes*

5. Using 10-1 please rate your effort grade during the revision lessons? *7*

6. What kind of revision activities would you like to have more of? *None they were all great and Miss gave us lots of choice.*

7. If you attended would you recommend the revision days to friends in the year below you? *Yes*

8. Before Paper 1, I gave a PowerPoint presentation. Give a mark out of 10 for it, to say how helpful you found it.

9. Did you listen to the podcasts? *Yes*

10.

- Did you use your revision book? *Yes*
- Give a mark out of 10 for how useful you found it.
- What were the most useful items from the guide? *The circles and learning words*
- Please share any further comments or thoughts about your revision below: *Miss Custance was really great throughout she helped us in as many ways as she could. Thank you x.*

Student B's evaluation

1. What did you think about the teaching styles used during your revision? 10

Please give reasons

They were very helpful, helpful on the questions by making different activities fun.

2. Which activities helped you learn the most from and why?

Playing the Pictionary helped a lot it made you think about what the poem was about.

3.

- What is your target grade? C
- What grade do you need for your future? E
- Overall, what grade do you think you have achieved in your exams? C I'm hoping

4. If you attended the revision day(s) did they help you towards achieving your target grade? Yes

5. Using 10-1 please rate your effort grade during the revision lessons? 8

6. What kind of revision activities would you like to have more of? *Not sure we revised all the revision a lot.*

7. If you attended would you recommend the revision days to friends in the year below you? Yes

8. Before Paper 1, I gave a PowerPoint presentation. Give a mark out of 10 for it, to say how helpful you found it. 8 *It reminded me to PAFF and AFOREST and punctuation.*

9. Did you listen to the podcasts? Yes

10.

- Did you use your revision book? Yes
- Give a mark out of 10 for how useful you found it.
- What were the most useful items from the guide? *Practice questions*
- Please share any further comments or thoughts about your revision below: