

## REPEATING THE LEAVING CERT

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More than 3,000 students repeat the Leaving Cert every year. The majority of these students repeat because they are unhappy with the results they gained the first time around, and feel they can do better. This includes people who didn't put the work in, those who just missed out on medicine by five points, and those who, for personal, illness, or other reasons, were not able to give their full attention to their studies. Some students only repeat one or two subjects (e.g. Maths or English) to get a grade they need for a particular course, but most look to improve their CAO points by taking six or seven subjects again.

People who are considering repeating should think long and hard about this decision. It takes up a full year of your life, and there is obviously no guarantee that you will get the desired results second time around. The numbers repeating their Leaving have dropped in recent years, as more and more options are now available to students. For example, even if you have not made the points for a degree course, it is now possible to take a higher certificate course and then move on to a degree later.

Repeating the Leaving Cert rarely seems like fun for those who have just finished sixth year. Your friends will be going to college or getting a job, while you are left feeling like a key cast member of Groundhog Day. However, repeating doesn't have to involve boredom and self-flagellation – to a large extent, it is what you make it.

Many of the institutions that offer repeat Leaving courses recognise that you are not strictly “in school” any more. Students are allowed a greater deal of responsibility, there is generally no uniform and teachers realise that you are taking the exam very seriously. These differences can make the experience of repeating a “half-way house” between school and third level, and prepare you for the transition to college life.

It is important to go into repeating the Leaving Certificate with the right attitude. Like a contestant on the X Factor, you will need drive, motivation, focus and the ability to work hard (singing ability is optional). Another tip is to be positive. All right, so it might feel like you're learning about the life cycle of the liver fluke for the fiftieth time, but this is actually a good thing – in the Leaving Cert, as with most things in life, practice makes perfect.

Be careful not to repeat any mistakes you made last year. For example, if you previously left everything until the last minute, this time make sure that you have a strong revision plan. Or, if you gambled and lost on studying only certain curriculum areas the first time around, take this opportunity to make doubly sure that you have all your bases covered.

The good news is that the majority of those who repeat the Leaving Certificate do increase their points, although this is obviously not automatic. Results tend to be better because students have a clearer idea of what is involved the second time around. Improvements in grades vary considerably and depend on the students' abilities and their willingness to put in the work.

Be honest with yourself before making a commitment to repeating. If you studied hard throughout the year and felt that you did your best in the exams, then how likely is it that your grades will improve significantly? Think carefully about all the other options and talk to as many people as you possibly can before you make up your mind.

However, if you feel that your Leaving Cert results do not reflect your potential, either because you didn't study enough or because you under-performed in the exam, then repeating is a real option to consider. Instead of settling for a course that you are not totally committed to, instead you will have the chance to aim for what you really want to do.