

# REVISION CARDS - HARRY BECK AND THE LONDON UNDERGROUND MAP

## HARRY BECK (1902-1974)



Harry Beck was an Engineering Technical Draftsman and he worked for the London Underground Signals Office. He developed an interest in the way rail transport maps were graphically presented. Maps of the London Underground, were geographic representations, although there were attempts by map designers to simplify the route maps. Beck's iconic London Underground Map was first published in 1932. It was very well received by travellers and commuters.

## MAP CHARACTERISTICS

The distance between the stations is not important, as passengers are interested in the order of the stations and how they connected to each other. The busy central area of the map, has been expanded to show more detail. Stations on the periphery of the geographical map are drawn closer to the centre. Straight lines connect the stations, ensuring the map is easy to understand.



## WHY IS IT AN ICONIC DESIGN?

The map was designed in Beck's own time and without a commission from the London Passenger Transport Board. His original sketch was drawn in a school exercise book, whilst he was 'laid off'.

Beck's London Underground Map, is now regarded as an iconic design, as it has inspired other map layouts throughout the world. The style of map that he introduced has been adapted for a vast range of diagrammatic presentations. It set a high benchmark for other map designers to follow. The map provides all the necessary information required by a traveller and no unnecessary detail or decoration. It is strictly functional and yet can be regarded as piece of art, reflecting a modernist philosophy. It is aesthetically pleasing.

1. Write three facts about Harry Beck, including one about his iconic London Underground Map. *3 marks*

2. List four characteristics of the underground map. *4 marks*

3. Why can Beck's map be regarded as an iconic design? *3 marks*