

Parents' Survival Guide to GCSE

2023

Introduction

The next phase in our Year 11's education will be determined by how well they achieve in these exams, so the next few months will bring their own challenges. However, it is important to remember that this final period is actually the consolidation of the significant learning which has taken place over the past two years.

Our partnership is critical in this period, and this *Parents' Survival Guide to GCSE* booklet contains advice about a variety of topics which we hope you will find helpful as you support your son/s or daughter/s through the final months of Year 11. As ever, you can always contact school if you have any concerns over the next few months. Your child's form tutor is the first point of contact.

Advice in this booklet has been drawn from a variety of educational and health sources.

Advice covers:

- a) Revision Techniques;
- b) Healthy Revision;
- c) Coping with exam stress;
- d) Essential exam information;
- e) Useful resources

This year, we have also developed a revision area on Firefly, which contains a wide range of resources to support students during the revision period:

<https://bishopstopford.fireflycloud.net/revision-for-examinations>

Consistent work up to the final exams will pay off, and it is important to keep these months in perspective. We believe the message which is paramount to communicate to students at this stage is, '**Your best is good enough**'.

Jill Silverthorne
HeadTeacher

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Revision



The whole process of revision is daunting for some students. Others see it as less important than it really is. So...

The Facts

- Students who know more do better in exams
- Students who revise know more than those who don't
- *Students who know how to revise do it more effectively*

And...

The Fiction

- No-one else has started revising yet
- It's too early to start
- It's too late to start
- You can't revise for....
- I can revise and watch TV at the same time
- Revision timetables don't work

At school, Year 11 students have one lesson a fortnight of Study Skills. The focus in these lessons is on making sure they know how to revise most effectively and that they are given time to practice revision. So, there is some designated time in school to strengthen independent revision which is taking place at home.

The Science of Learning



There have been enormous developments in recent years in the understanding of how our brains work and how memory is structured. This knowledge can be put to great use during revision time.

Information is transmitted by neurons (brain cells). When we learn something for the first time, new connections are formed and the brain stores the new pattern. We store these patterns daily, and this is excellent for revision. But if the brain is overworked, retrieving those patterns might not work as well as it should.

Repetition

Pathways between neurons can be strengthened over time. Simple repetition – practising retrieving a memory over and over – is the best form of consolidating the pattern.

And again...and again...and again...and again

The ideal time to revise what we've learned is just before we're about to forget it! And because memories get stronger the more we retrieve them, waiting longer each time (a few minutes, hours, then a day, then a few days – a technique known as 'spaced repetition') is effective.

This explains why we forget things so quickly after a week of cramming for an exam. Because the exponential curve of memory retrieval does not continue, the process reverses and within a few weeks, we have forgotten a substantial amount of what we've learnt.

Take regular breaks

Breaks are important to minimise interference. When the brain is forced to store many new (and often similar) patterns in a short space of time, it can get them jumbled up.

It is important to plan breaks into revision and to look over what's just been learnt before moving on to anything new.

Avoid distractions

Attention is the key to memorising. By choosing to focus on something, it is given a personal meaning that makes it easier to remember. In fact, most of the problems when it comes to revision have very little to do with the brain's capacity for remembering things; we just struggle to devote our full attention to the task in hand.

Playing music while revising will make the task harder, because any speech-like sounds, even at low volume, will automatically use up part of the brain's attention capacity.

Revision Planning



A revision plan isn't simply writing up a timetable of things to be covered. It's about having a **plan** and a **method** of study. These two elements combined make students feel in control of their work.

Preparing to Revise

WHERE?

A place which is light, quiet and uncluttered. Access to a computer is important but be careful this doesn't become a distraction. Ask why it's being used.

At school, the Library is open until 5.00pm with great resources and good space for serious work.

Having adults around at home or at school during revision time means that any struggles or anxieties can be quickly identified and dealt with before things get out of proportion.

WHEN?

Some students find it easier to revise at certain times of the day. The bad news is, that this may not always coincide with when time is available! If students can use their favourite times, that's great, but revision is a discipline. It needs to be done, whether or not it's at that optimum time. Set realistic timescales for revision and celebrate achieving those timescales to maintain motivation.

HOW LONG?

This will vary from student to student, but the advice is generally not to revise in long stretches. Short bursts of an hour can be broken up into 20 or 30 minute sessions. While variety is good, focusing on one or two subjects per revision session means that the brain doesn't get confused. More significant chunks of material will be retained.

Revision Timetable

A revision timetable is an essential resource for good revision. While the times may not be stuck to rigidly, it will provide a clear picture of the content which needs to be covered for each course and a realistic timescale for revision. Managed well, it will help to reduce anxiety. There is an example of a Revision Timetable at the back of this booklet (page 11).

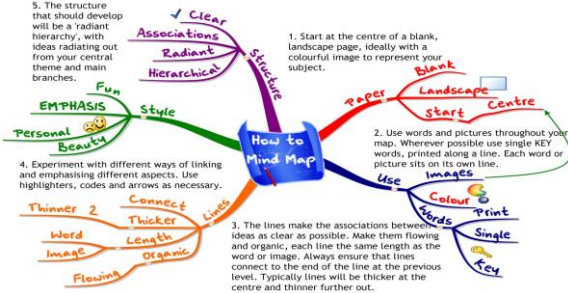
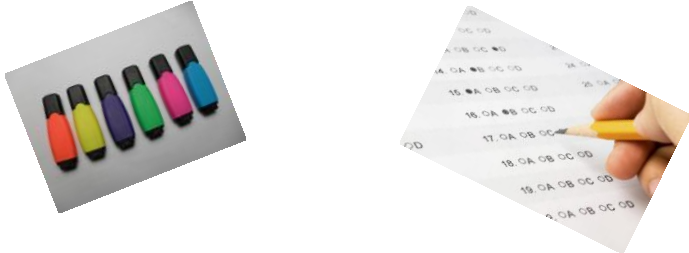


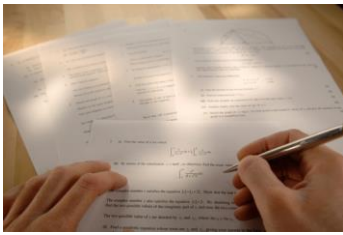
Suggestions for a Revision Timetable

Working through the following activities together will help students to produce effective plans:

- List all the subjects and break them down into their major topics and sub-topics. If possible, link those to each exam paper. Try a different colour for each subject;
- Decide which areas will need more time and which will need less. If it helps, use a traffic light system to help. (Red = difficult; amber = so, so; green = OK);
- Work out the amounts of time which should be spent on each sub-topic;
- Work out the priorities: eg which revision needs to be done first, as other learning depends on it. Identify any areas where your son or daughter is 'stuck'. Ask them to see the relevant subject teacher at school for more help. Which is a big barrier to moving forward at the moment and would be done better first; which is a minor part of the exam and therefore might not need to be such a priority;
- Draw up a detailed timetable for a fortnight at a time. Blank out the times where there are other commitments; allocate the remaining time to revision as appropriate;
- Nearer the exam time, work out the priorities for revision based on the dates of the exams themselves.

Stick the revision timetable somewhere where it can't be missed by you and your son or daughter.

Do the same with the exam timetable. Make sure everyone is clear about the dates and times for each exam. Cross each one off as it's done, as this will contribute to a sense of achievement.

Method	Examples
<p>Mindmaps</p> <p>Great for visualising and remembering complex topics.</p>	 <p>5. The structure that should develop will be a radiant hierarchy, with ideas radiating out from your central theme and main branches.</p> <p>4. Experiment with different ways of linking and emphasising different aspects. Use highlighters, codes and arrows as necessary.</p> <p>3. The lines make the associations between ideas as clear as possible. Make them flowing and organic, each line the same length as the word or image. Always ensure that lines connect to the end of the line at the previous level. Typically lines will be thicker at the centre and thinner further out.</p> <p>2. Use words and pictures throughout your map. Whenever possible use single KEY words, printed along a line. Each word or picture sits on its own line.</p> <p>1. Start at the centre of a blank landscape page, ideally with a colourful image to represent your subject.</p>
<p>Re-reading Notes/Texts</p> <p>Great for going over content, highlighting key ideas, summarising and memorising. (Test at the end.)</p>	
<p>Teaching Someone Else</p> <p>Great for developing clear explanations and cementing facts, processes and sequences.</p>	
<p>Post-Its/Revision Cards</p> <p>Great for capturing key information and providing easy access to it at any time.</p>	
<p>Past Paper Practice</p> <p>Great for getting the sense of the exam; use timed conditions to check how well the last piece of learning has stuck.</p>	
<p>Key Words Definitions</p> <p>Great for checking the most important terms are clear. Also, focus on exam key words.</p>	<p>Describe Explain Define Compare Contrast Evaluate Justify</p>

Healthy Revision



Exercise

Exercise helps to kick start the brain and it's also a good way to relax and switch off. Planning some exercise into a revision programme is a great idea. However, plan how to spend leisure time carefully - exam anxiety can be infectious, so meeting up with school friends may not always be the best idea.

Sleep

Sacrificing sleep for some more revision is *never* a good idea: performance the following day will be impeded.

Winding down to prepare for sleep after revision is critical. Leaving a gap between bedtime and revision reduces the brain's activity, and is more likely to lead to a good night's sleep. Sleep also plays a critical role in memory consolidation – when the brain backs up short-term patterns and creates long-term memories.

Diet

A healthy diet during revision and exams keeps energy levels high. A good diet will also increase chances of staying well during exam time and keep the risks of catching a virus to the minimum.

Eating breakfast is always recommended to maintain mental focus, and protein-rich foods are healthy choices. Sugar rushes might feel good for a very short time, but they lead to highs and lows, and often feelings of fatigue - not the stable approach needed for exams and revision. Provide healthy snacks for your son or daughter to get through revision and exams.

Dehydration undermines thinking and memory, but a high caffeine intake can lead to feelings of anxiety. Lots of water is recommended.

Exam Stress

It would be highly unusual for students *not* to feel stressed about exams. Letting them know that this is normal is a key element for coping. For a few, though, there are times when stress tips over into something unhealthy. The point at which this happens will vary with each individual, but there are some indicators:

Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms	
Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Memory problems ■ Inability to concentrate ■ Poor judgment ■ Seeing only the negative ■ Anxious or racing thoughts ■ Constant worrying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Moodiness ■ Irritability or short temper ■ Agitation, inability to relax ■ Feeling overwhelmed ■ Sense of loneliness and isolation ■ Depression or general unhappiness
Physical Symptoms	Behavioural Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aches and pains ■ Diarrhoea or constipation ■ Nausea, dizziness ■ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat ■ Frequent colds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Eating more or less ■ Sleeping too much or too little ■ Isolating yourself from others ■ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities ■ Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

(Adapted from http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm)

Students need a strong support network at exam time to help them manage stress. You can help by:

- making sure they know that your love and value for them is not conditional on how they perform in exams;
- making sure they know they can talk to you about how they're feeling;
- being the 'voice of reason' by being objective about the exams;
- providing a suitable place for revision;
- maintaining boundaries (eg bedtimes, implementing revision timetables, time out);
- reducing regular household chores for the exam period;
- testing your son or daughter on what they've just learnt, or being a 'student' for them to teach you the material they've covered;
- giving praise for the work completed;
- providing space and time to relax.

Exam Information



Each student is given a **unique Candidate Number**. This is very important, as they must write it on the front of every Exam Answer Booklet.

In February, students received a **Statement of Entry**. It told them which exams they have been entered for and at which level. If there is a query with any of the information on the statement, they should see the Exams Officer at the earliest opportunity (Mrs Bellamy).

A final copy of the exam timetable listing the dates, start times, venues, seat allocation and any rescheduled clashes will be issued to the students in the first week of May via email.

Morning exams start at 9.00 am and afternoon exams at 1.15 pm Students must be in school at least 20 minutes before the exam is due to start. If there is a timetable “clash” between different exams, they will be rescheduled by the Exams Officer within the same exam day. Earlier or later start times may be necessary. The vast majority of exams take place in the Sports Hall or the Main Hall. For those students with access arrangements, other venues will be identified.

Students must attend exams in school uniform.

Students are allowed to take into an exam room pre-release materials if specified by the exam paper, a pencil case, and a small clear plastic bottle of water with all labels removed. The pencil case must be transparent, and students should bring spare equipment with them. All exams must be completed in black ink. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that calculators and any other equipment required is in good working order before they enter the exam room. There are no spare calculators available for those who forget them.

Under no circumstances must mobile phones or any other electronic data devices, including ‘smart watches’ or equivalent be taken into the exam room. If a candidate is found to have these devices in their possession switched on or off, the exam boards will disqualify them from that exam and possibly all other qualifications.

Exams cannot be re-scheduled for absent students. If a student is too ill to attend an exam, you need to contact the Exams Officer (Mrs Bellamy) at the earliest opportunity and obtain a certificate from the doctor, dated on the day of the exam. If students do not attend an exam and have no doctor’s certificate, they will be charged for the cost of the exam.

Full details of the examination process, procedures, rules and regulations and other useful information can be found in the Examinations Information Booklet, issued to all students at the beginning of their GCSE course in Year 10. A copy of this booklet is available to view on the website under the School Information/Examinations tab and on the VLE.

Resources

Awarding Bodies (examination boards)

AQA: www.aqa.org.uk

Pearson Edexcel: www.edexcel.com

OCR: www.ocr.org.uk

Firefly

<https://bishopstopford.fireflycloud.net/revision-for-examinations>

Bitesize BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/>

Childline *Exam Stress and How to Beat It* (Student Focused Leaflet)

http://www.childline.org.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/BeatExamStressPDF_wdf56569.pdf

SAM Learning (via Bishop Stopford VLE)

Revision Timetable: Whole Days

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9.00-9.45							
10.00-10.45							
11.00-11.45							
2.00-2.45							
3.00-3.45							
3.00-4.45							
7.00-7.45							
8.00-8.45							
9.00-9.45							

No more than 6 sessions a day on average