

GCSE Revision Guide for Parents



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"A good school... maintaining a culture of ambition" (April 2017)

THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO EXAM REVISION

Should I help with revision?

Parental support is 8 times more important than social class and can make the difference between an A* and an also ran at GCSE (TES, 10 October 2003).

The next 6 month period is one of the most important times in a student's life. It is the culmination of 12 -13 years of school education.

Our young people can rarely achieve their best independently; best results are always achieved when a partnership is formed between student, family and school, and your support as parents is fundamental to success.

What happens at home in the next 12 weeks can have more impact on GCSE grades than what happens at school.

The grades achieved this June remain with a student throughout their life no matter what else they go on to achieve; more frequently we are seeing colleges, employers and further education institutions declining applications from people that do not have at least a C grade in English and Maths at GCSE, even if they are applying as a mature student.

Research and experience shows that children whose parents/carers take the opportunity to be frequently interested in their child's learning make most progress.

"It's what parents do [with their child], rather than who they are, that counts" Sacker (2002)

Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter their examination years, known in schools as Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11, or 4th and 5th Year to those old enough to remember), confused by the complicated systems of choosing subjects and courses (GCSEs, vocational GCSEs, BTECs, – just some of the options available), coursework, entry tiers, modular exams and practical assessments.

If you feel like this you are not alone! The exam system has changed greatly over the past few years, and is continuing to change, and sometimes it feels as if it is best just to let the 'experts' at your child's school get on with it.

You do not have to be an expert in the GCSE subjects that your child has chosen to be able to make a real difference.

The hardest demand on our Year 10 and 11 students is that of understanding the long term importance of achieving the best they possibly can. Even if this means making some short term sacrifices to ensure they are truly successful. Perhaps the hardest demand on Year 10 and 11 pupils is that of understanding the long-term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve short-term fun at times in the interest of long-term benefits (not easy even for adults). The aim of this booklet is to provide you, the parents, with key points to support the GCSE process.

If you have any other questions regarding specific subjects please contact the school for further information.

What's the best way to revise?

- Different students swear by different approaches, but in every case the best bet is to help your child to set out a revision plan.
- Establish how much time they have available between now and the exams, and then draw up a realistic timetable together. Let your child decide what they need to focus on, this timetable belongs to them.
- In working out how much time they should devote to each subject, encourage them to concentrate on their weaknesses without losing sight of their strong points.
- Revision timetables are useful and effective tools that can help your child to prepare for exams and achieve the grades they deserve. Some people prefer A4 sized daily or weekly timetables whilst others prefer larger wall sized charts that cover a month long period.



Example of a revision timetable:

	subject 1	subject 2	subject 3	subject 4
Monday	Maths fractions percentages	French clothing -re verbs	Science atoms molecules	Geography glaciation
Tuesday	ICT spread sheets	English		
Wednesday				

Ideally your child should be aiming to complete around 2.5 hours every evening in the run up to an exam.

They should make a topic or subject tick list, this way they can see what they need to cover revision wise before the exam.

So you have set a revision plan together, what next?

- Encourage and support your child to stick to it! That way you can help them to keep track of how much work they have done and what they have left to cover.
- Choose a place in the house to revise where they won't be distracted.
- Also make all of your family members aware of the fact that your child will need some peace and quiet during this time, so they know not to disturb them.
- Switching revision between subjects avoids them becoming bored of a single topic.
- Look for fresh sources of info other than class notes. The internet, for example, offers some innovative learning resources.
- You can offer small 'rewards' after every revision session. Nothing extravagant, just a small treat to help them to get back to their books.
- Ensure that your child avoids last-minute revision the night before. Instead, support them to complete their revision plan early.
- Ensure your child attends every day if possible. Even one lesson missed means that key information could be missing regarding coursework/deadlines.

- The simplest things often get in the way of starting revision – days can be lost while pupils are 'going to get some folders soon.....'Get around this by providing the files, dividers, wall charts etc. your child will need for the revision period.
- Support your child in choosing one good revision guide for each subject; it's the best investment you will make. There are lots around so check with the teacher yourself if you are not sure which is best.

What are the common problems students face?

- Putting off revision, finding excuses to do other things or leaving all the work until the last minute. The fact is the more you delay, the more likely you are to get into a stew and panic.



- Perhaps the biggest problem surrounding revision and exams is stress. It can make even the most ardent reviser think they can't remember anything, and even lead to panic attacks.

So how should I help my child to deal with exam stress?

- Encourage them not to be frightened of exam stress, but to see it as a positive force - after all, it keeps them on their toes mentally, and can help them focus on the task in hand.
- Learn to recognise when they are stressing out, and understand its causes. Often, a break or a chat with someone who knows the pressure they are under will get things into perspective.
- Make sure that they get a good nights sleep before each exam - it will be much easier for them to concentrate during the exam if they are not feeling too tired.
- Encourage them to eat healthily during their revision and exams: Plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Bananas are brilliant for brains!
- Avoid caffeine, it makes stress worse and it dehydrates their brains.



Useful equipment

Making sure your child has all the right equipment so they can get ready for their exams is also something you could really help with. Some things that your child could find very useful during their revision:

Fine-point coloured pens	Post-it notes	Folders and files
Highlighters	Note or record cards	Revision guides
Table lamp	Notebooks	Past exam papers
Watch	Alarm clock	Textbooks
Calculator (scientific)	Calendar	
Pin-board	Access to a computer and printer	

Revision Strategies – Past Papers

- Going through past question papers is very helpful. Your child can familiarise themselves with the format of the paper and the wording of the questions.
- Past papers may also act as a guide to the types of topic which crop up in the exam, but your child should not rely on this too much!
- They should practice making brief plans to answer the questions. Your child should not need to answer the question in full, but by going through what they know, selecting the most relevant material and ordering it coherently, they are practicing a technique which will be used in the exams.



Some of the main reasons why students fail to gain the marks they hope for:

- Failing to answer the question set.
- Misinterpreting the question, perhaps because they misread the instruction words or specialist terms.
- Not reading the instructions carefully.
- Not writing answers in the way they are required.
- Not referring sufficiently or selectively to the course material.
- Running out of time, so that the final question is not answered in sufficient depth.
- Not checking through the paper carefully to avoid obvious mistakes, such as dates or simple mathematical calculations.
- Writing long, complex sentences where the meaning gets lost.
- Illegible handwriting.

Discuss these with your child and keep an eye out for them when they are practicing.

Reading is not enough.

They need to make brief notes either in words and/or pictures, and use other methods to help them remember.

More Revision Strategies



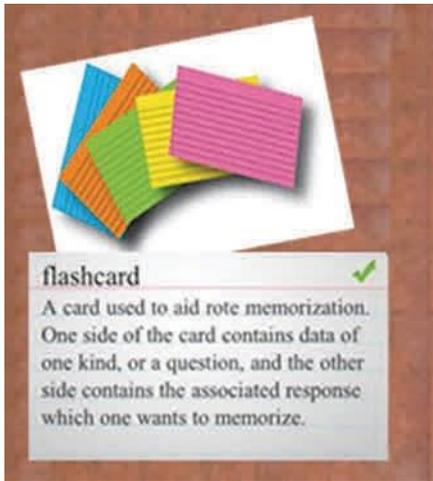
Acrostic Method

How does it work?

The Acrostic Method works by linking words and concepts to sentences that will stick in your mind. Simply list the words you need to learn, then take the first letter of each and think of alternative words that begin with those letters. Choose words that link together to make a memorable sentence.

This method works particularly well when you have a list to learn. An extra advantage is that it helps you to remember things in order- which is sometimes important.

Take the time to invent sentences that you really won't forget- make them as funny and imaginative as you can!



Index cards

How does it work?

Index Cards: many students find these highly effective revision aids allowing them to break down information into smaller units under key headings. Some students write a key word or point on one side of the card and an explanation on the other side. This allows them to read through the key points using them to trigger memory before checking accuracy of recall on the other side. Index cards are useful as they allow sorting and grouping of ideas in different ways and make it easy for other people to test out your knowledge.

Look, cover, write, check.

This is an old and trusted technique that still works for many people:

- Revise a section of work
- Cover it up or put it aside
- Write down or record as much as you can remember
- Check against the original
- Highlight anything you got wrong or forgot
- Prioritise these areas for future revision



Condense. Fitting notes onto one side of paper makes them easier to stomach; they should rewrite and cut down as they go.

Highlight. Target key areas using colours and symbols. Visuals will help them to remember the facts.

Record. Try recording important points, quotes and formulae on CD or iPod. If your child hears them and reads the notes as well, they're more likely to sink in.

Video. Use YouTube and Khan Academy on the internet to find short videos on difficult concepts.

Talk. Encourage your child to read their notes out loud; it's one way of getting them to register.

Test. See what they can remember without notes, but they should avoid testing themselves on subjects they know already. You can help by testing them.

Time. Do past exam papers against the clock; it's an excellent way of getting up to speed and of checking where there are gaps in knowledge.



Brainstorm

How does it work?

This is a simple tool and one that's useful to use at the beginning of revision. Write the name of the topic in the central rectangle, then simply jot down everything about it in the rectangle around it. Ideas don't need to be organised in any way at this stage.

Using the Brainstorm tool will help identify what you know already. Complete it without any help, then - once it is finished - compare it with your notes. In the outer rectangle, add any key words and concepts that you had forgotten to include.

Don't use a Brainstorm diagram for a whole subject - there would be too much to include. Break each subject into mini- topics first.



Draw It: Posters, Diagrams, Cartoons

How does it work?

Take a topic and turn your notes into a poster or annotated diagram, with lots of illustrations and colour. Alternatively, create a cartoon strip version of your subject. Add speech bubbles and comments to explain what is going on in each picture.

Your brain often remembers pictures and colours better than words, so you're only tapping in to part of your learning power if you rely on written methods. Display your posters in parts of your home where you're likely to see them. For example by your bed or next to a mirror!

Improving Memory

'Chunking': as the average person can only hold seven 'items' in short-term memory, grouping items together into 'chunks' can increase capacity. This is generally used for remembering numbers (think of how you remember phone numbers by grouping the seven digits into 2 or 3 chunks) but can be applied to other listings in various subjects.

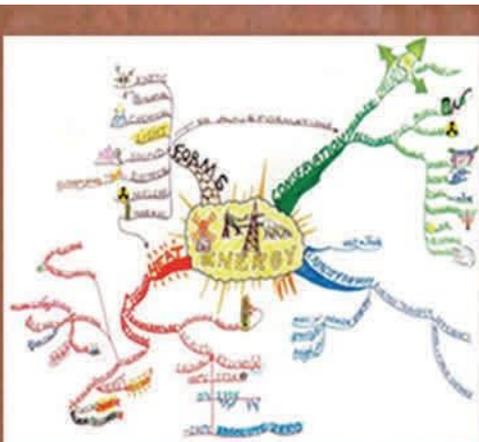
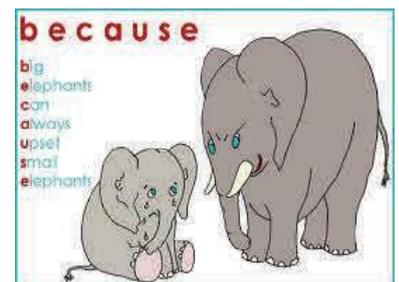


Repetition: Studies indicate that 66% of material is forgotten within seven days if it is not reviewed or recited again by the student, and 88% is gone after six weeks. Don't make life harder for yourself - build in a brief daily and weekly review of material covered. It will save you having to re-learn material from scratch!

Application and association: The best way to channel material to long-term memory is to organise it into meaningful associations. Link it to existing information and topics and create vivid personal examples which act as 'mental hooks' or 'cues' for recalling material in the future. Thus, new items are put in context. If you learn a new formula / verb / rule, try to put it into practice immediately with a relevant example.

Mnemonics:

Use of mnemonics: these are various word games which can act as memory aids and which allow personalisation and creativity. Think of stalactites (come down from the ceiling) and stalagmites (go up from the ground); the colours of the rainbow - **Roy G. Biv** ('Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain' to remember red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet); the seven characteristics of living organisms - **Mr. Grief** (**M**ovement, **R**eproduction, **G**rowth, **R**espiration, **I**rritability, **E**xcretion, **F**eeding). You can devise many more of these to aid your personalised recall of items in your subjects.



Mind Map It:

How does it work?

Mind maps help you to generate ideas and make associations. They can act as a powerful memory aid in an examination because they are visual. Mind maps are not spider diagrams.

- Use just key words, or wherever possible images.
- Start from the centre of the page and work out.
- Make the centre a clear and strong visual image of the general theme of the map. Be creative. Creativity aids memory
- Put key words on lines. This reinforces the structure of notes.
- Print rather than write in script. It makes them more readable and memorable.
- Use colour to depict themes, associations and to make things stand out.

Free Essential Websites

<http://getrevising.co.uk/> - sign up and get access to resources and interactive tools to make revision cards, revision timetables etc.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/> - Check to make sure that the quizzes etc. on this site are compatible with what your child has been learning.

<http://www.s-cool.co.uk/> - Free GCSE revision website.

www.samlearning.com Check that your child has their login details from school.

<http://revisionworld.co.uk/> - create a revision timetable, lots of useful revision materials

Ask subject area teachers for subject specific sites.

Always remember to remind your child to follow the tips given to them by their teachers - they will give them more tips on how to answer subject specific questions.

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