

GCSEs

What can a parent do?



101 tips to ensure success

Dr Julie Casey CPsychol AFBPsS



FutureLink
PUBLISHING

5th Edition

GCSEs: What can a parent do? 101 tips to ensure success

Section 1: Introduction	Page No
• The most common frustrations for parents	3
• Number 1 Top Tip: Get them there!	4
• How can I make a difference?	5
• Good exam results – what is the secret?	10
 Section 2: Getting it right at each stage	
• Making the right GCSE choices	13
• Getting off to a good start	19
• Coping with homework and non-exam assessments	23
• When the going gets tough... maintaining, motivating and encouraging persistence	29
• Revision	33
• The moment of truth – sitting the exams	45
• When it all goes pear-shaped – a troubleshooting guide	51
 Section 3: What do I need to know?	
• Tips on working in partnership with the school	56
◦ General tips	
◦ Finding out how your child is really doing	
◦ When to contact the school	
• Finding your way around the examination system	59
 Section 4: Useful resources	
• Subject information sheet (Samples 1 and 2)	62
• Four easy steps for making the best revision plan in the WORLD!	64
• Useful websites and stuff	70 / 71

Section 1: Introduction

The most common frustrations for parents

So what's the difference between a GCSE and an NVQ? And what's this EBacc?

He always leaves everything to the last minute. One moment he has all the time in the world; the next it's all stress and stropping because he's got an exam the next day...

I didn't even do GCSEs - how can I help him?

I don't understand these grades and what they mean - it's completely different from when I was at school.

There are a million websites to help but how do you know which are any good?

I can't stand the arguments and stress when I tell him exams are important, and try to make him work - it always ends up with him saying it's his life and slamming the door.

She's always got an excuse - I don't know what to believe.

She's always panicked in exams - when I try to help her, it always ends in a slanging match. I encourage her but it always seems to end in me making her more stressed.

Surely she shouldn't be going out **again** when she's got exams coming up?



Number 1 Top Tip: Get them there!

The single most effective thing you can do to ensure good GCSE results is this...

GET THEM TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY, ON TIME...

Well, my child's got a 95% attendance record – that seems pretty good to me!

Think again....

95% Attendance = **Half a day** of lessons missed every two weeks.

95% Attendance = **Two weeks** of lessons missed each year.

This is the equivalent of almost a **whole years' lessons** for one GCSE subject!

...BECAUSE EVERY LESSON COUNTS!

A GCSE in 19 days?

They may think they've got forever BUT look at how much time they typically have over the two years...

Citizenship	19 days	(3 x 1 hour lessons a fortnight)
French	32 days	(5 x 1 hour lessons a fortnight)
Maths	50 days	(8 x 1 hour lessons a fortnight)

They will cover most topics **only once** in these hours – learning first time around is the key to successful revision and exam results!

How can I make a difference?



Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter their examination years, known in schools as Key Stage 4 (usually Years 10 and 11, although some schools begin KS4 in Y9), confused by the complicated systems of choosing subjects and courses (GCSEs, BTECs, NVQs...). 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, with different types of schools

(Academies, Foundation Schools, Independent Schools, Free Schools) all doing something a little bit differently! Sometimes it feels as if it is best just to let the 'experts' at your child's school get on with it.

But your involvement during these crucial years can make an enormous difference – the crucial difference between success and failure or gaining a Grade 3 and a Grade 5 (the difference between getting into further or higher education or not).

The more parents are engaged in the education of their children, the more likely their children are to succeed in the education system. School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups. (DfE Research Report 156, September 2011).

And the good news is – you don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects your child chooses to make a real difference, and you don't have to become a 'super-parent', giving up your own life and responsibilities – you just need to know how best to spend the time you do have, at each stage of the process.

This booklet enables you to do just this – providing you with the clear and practical information you will need to help your child to meet the demands of the exam years, in partnership with the school. The booklet outlines exactly what your child needs to be able to do to succeed at each stage of the process to the best of their ability ('Key tasks for

students') and provides as many practical ideas to apply throughout the two examination years as we could cram in ('Tips for parents').

As with all our books, the suggestions are down to earth and have been used by ordinary parents with busy lives, just like yours.

Isn't it the school's job to get them through their exams?

Yes, of course the school has an important role to play and can provide the expertise and resources to help your child acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to do their best in each subject.

There will be many new expectations of your child in Years 10 and 11 – expectations which for many children, even the very brightest, are hard to meet. You don't need to know anything about maths, science or fine art to help them with these things – you've been doing it all their lives! New demands on your child are likely to include:

- **Being more self-motivated** and taking more responsibility for their own learning – this can be a big change from earlier years, with most teachers viewing it as the student's responsibility to attend and make the most of lessons once they start their GCSE courses. Asking when they do not understand. (This requires confidence and can be difficult at a time when friends' opinions hold such sway).
- **Developing** their abilities to overcome frustrations, and strategies for persisting when they are learning material that they find challenging.
- **Organising** themselves, notes, handouts and information for different subjects, and different topics within these.
- **Completing** more work at home, independently.
- **Organising** and planning their time over longer periods.
- **Understanding** the exam structure.
- **Planning** and carrying out their revision (especially now that most subjects are examined at the end of the two year period).
- **Perfecting** their 'exam technique'.



Perhaps the hardest demand on KS4 students 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).

Unfortunately for us, from the teenage perspective, interest and effort in education and the

long-term benefits these can bring often come rather a long way down the priority list, after friendships, the 'right' clothes, social life, romantic concerns and hobbies.

In addition, teenagers will differ in their levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and levels of motivation.

And this is where you come in. You are the expert on your own child and have always been his or her most important teacher. Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam years.

When you, your child and the school work in partnership, you can be sure that your child will achieve the best results possible.

So what is my role as a parent*?

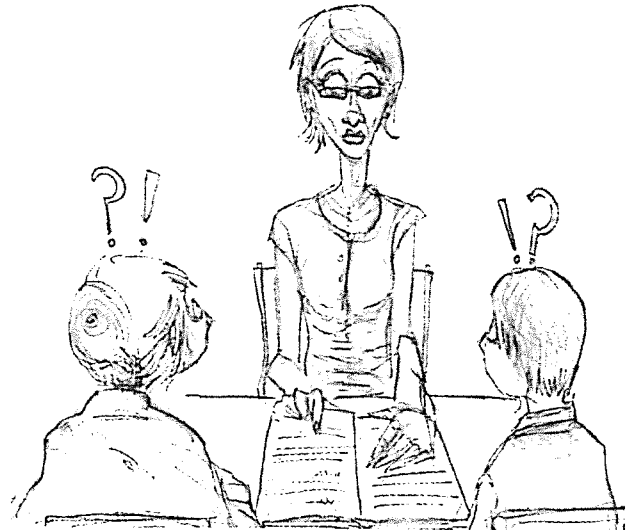
Of course your role in helping your child to succeed will vary according to their needs and strengths. You will find that in the areas covered by some sections of the booklet you will have little to do, while others will require more support. All four of my own children have needed different levels of support in different areas – the final one getting on pretty much independently until her exams were looming, and then only needing support with drawing up a revision timetable and buying the files. With my older daughter it was a different story; although good at understanding the work she did in school, she needed much more support and structure – daily reminders to empty her bag of the day's

stack of hand outs and notes, help with filing them, endless supplies to replace lost pens and, during the revision period, outright bribery to stick to the plan we had agreed.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- **Partner with school and child**
 - going to parents' evenings, asking questions and finding out how you can best help your child at home.

- **Provider of the tools for home work and revision**
 - a quiet space, a 'workbox' of pens, Post-its™ and other necessities.



- **Banker** – paying for the tools, files and revision guides they need.
- **Study buddy** – showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (but not doing it for them), testing them when they ask you etc.
- **Entertainments officer** – finding out about podcasts, apps, theatre productions, films, exhibitions etc. that are relevant to your child's learning, and enjoying them together.
- **Sounding board and adviser** – helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements, and helping to find a positive way forward when things go badly.
- **Project manager** – agreeing the rules for homework or revision (they won't work if they're imposed), helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun stuff' and revising the plans as necessary.
- **Go-between** - for your child and the school when necessary; making sure problems are nipped in the bud and asking the questions your child can't or won't.

- **Information provider and interpreter** – searching out websites, finding out about the subject, and familiarising yourself with exam structures and content etc.



Whatever your individual child's needs, your chief role will always be that of the person who cares most in the world, the champion of their needs and admirer of every achievement. The most important role you will play is that of the person who will love them and be proud of them whatever happens.

** The word 'parent' is used throughout the booklet, but of course you don't have to be a parent to make the difference. Carer, older brother, grandparent or neighbour - it won't make any difference to the effect you can have.*

Good exam results – what is the secret?

We tend to think of our children's results being down to what happens on the day of the exam itself. Will they be in the right frame of mind? Will they be lucky and get the right questions? Will they remember what they have revised? In fact the results of exams are generally determined well before they sit the exam itself. There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success. The secret of good results in exams is about getting things right (and being aware of what can go wrong) at each stage of the process. The broad stages are:

STAGE 1: Learning the content first time round

The process of revision (literally 'looking at something again') does assume that the content of the subject has been learnt in the first place - every lesson counts!

STAGE 2: Revision

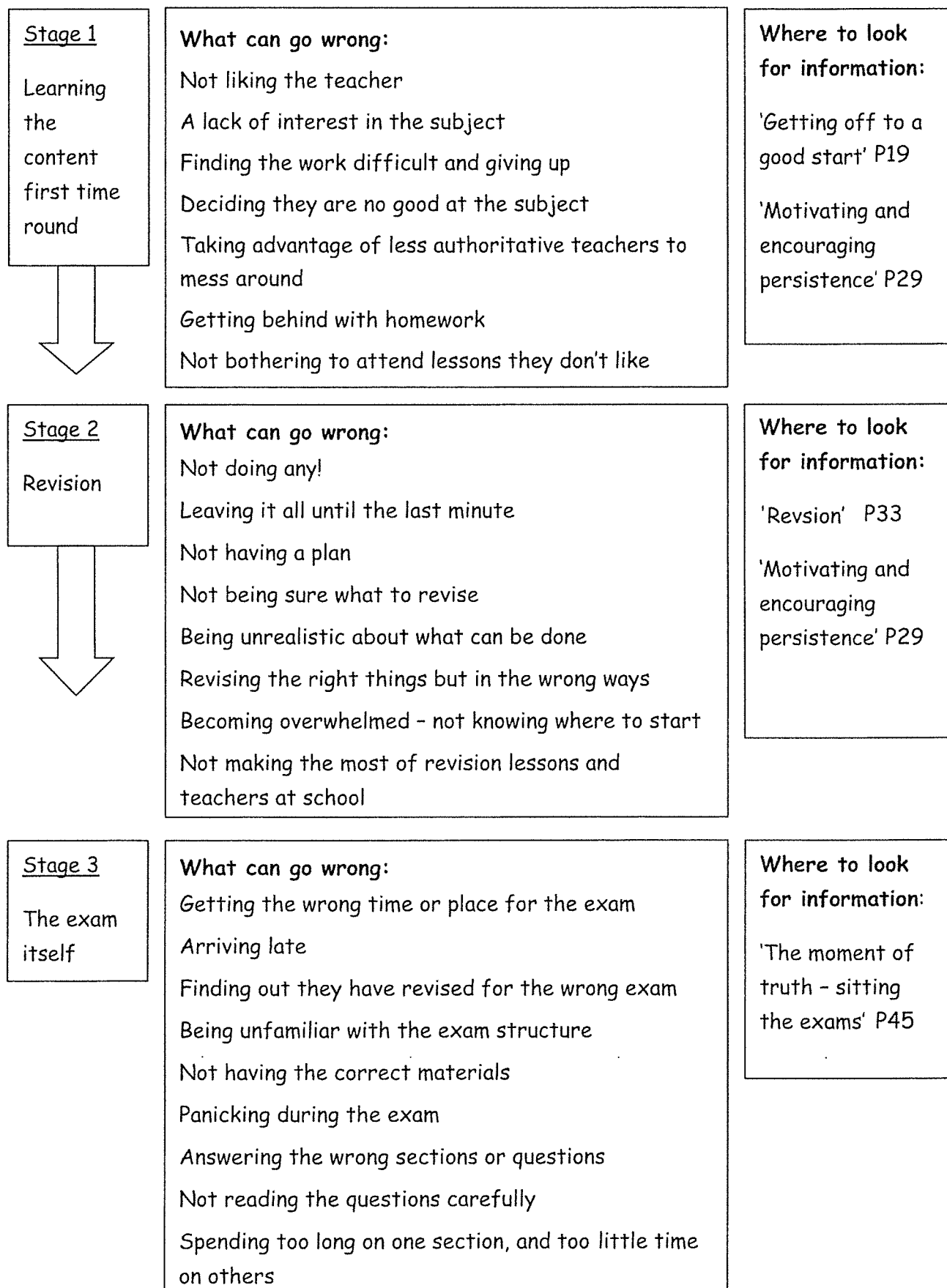
Even the 'perfect student', who has attended every lesson and paid attention throughout the exam years needs to revise to achieve their potential. For the rest of us the need for revision is even greater. Revision can be done in many ways, some of which are more effective than others. The booklet offers a way of planning revision as well as tips for using the most effective techniques.

STAGE 3: The exam itself

Even with the first two stages successfully achieved, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams – knowing the subject matter, organisational skills and 'exam technique'. These are dealt with in the booklet in the section entitled 'The moment of truth – sitting the exams'.

Fig 1

Getting it right at each stage



Section 2: Getting it right at each stage

Making the right GCSE choices



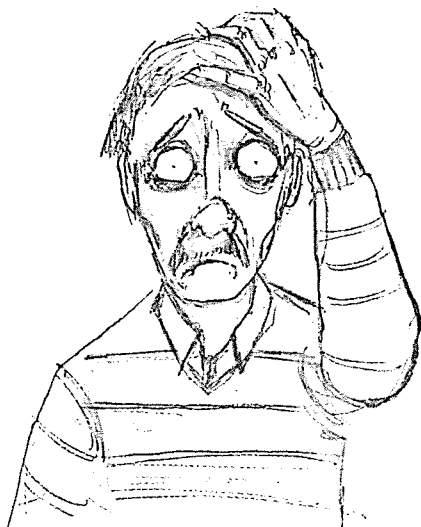
Key tasks for students

- Take home all the information about your choices/know how to access it on the school website and where to find out more.
- Know the final date you can let the school know your choices.
- Find out what subjects your school offers, and any 'taster' days or similar on offer.
- Find out what you need to take for any college course or career you may have in mind. (Don't worry if you don't have any idea yet.)
- Find out about what each subject involves – how much practical work there is and how much, if any, depends on non-exam assessment.
- Think about which GCSEs will best match your strengths and interests – ask yourself: what do you really enjoy doing?
- Talk to your parents and people at school who can advise you. You may like to talk to other students who have taken the course – be careful though as courses may have changed significantly.
- Put aside plenty of time to think and talk about your choices – don't leave it until the last minute.
- Have some back-up choices in case you can't get your first options.

Tips for parents

- Read 'Finding your way around the examination system: (Section 3)'.

Note that the examination system has changed substantially for students beginning courses from 2016, so be careful when talking to other people about their courses in previous years.



Read any information the school sends or publishes on their website about your child's choices (usually called 'options'), in Years 8 or 9 and make sure you know the dates of parents' evenings and deadlines.

- Talk to your child about their strengths and interests and which subjects they enjoy. Many schools offer non-traditional or more vocational subjects at KS4 that may prove motivating for your child.
- Encourage your child to think about what subjects they might need for any college course or career they may have in mind. Don't worry if they have no idea at this stage – most courses and employers like to see a broad range of subjects studied at GCSE.
- Find out (or, even better, encourage your child to find out) what each subject they are interested in involves and how it is assessed. Some students excel at practical work but go to pieces in exams - for others the opposite is true.

A cautionary tale

A friend of my son, who was a brilliant footballer but hated science (and any form of writing), happily signed up to do a PE qualification, and only later found out that the course was largely science and the results determined by written examination papers which carried as many marks as the practical assessments. By the time he found out, most of the other options he would have considered were full.

Don't let it happen to you!

- Make sure that your child has a number of back-up options as they may not get their first choices. (Classes might be full or the timetable might mean that subjects clash).
- Year 9 students will often want to make choices based on a particular teacher or on what their friends are doing. However, schools can rarely guarantee that your child will have a certain teacher or be with certain friends – teachers leave and best friends are often placed in different groups.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions at the parents' evening if you are unclear about something. It won't be just you – the system IS complicated!
- Make the most of parents' evenings (see P. 17) and listen carefully to what your child's teachers say about their aptitudes and abilities – it will give another perspective.
- Encourage your child and provide information for them, but remember that the final choice is theirs. Learning is life-long and qualifications can be taken at any age!



Key questions for parents' evenings:

- What are the subjects my child must take?
- What are the options for other subjects (including any new courses offered)?
- What do you see as their strengths and interests? Which subjects would you advise them to take?
- What sort of assessment does each course involve?
- When do the final choices have to be made and how do we let the school know?
- Where can we find out more information about the courses?
- If your son/daughter has a career or particular college course in mind, what are the subjects that must be taken and what grades would they need to get?
- What type of qualification would my child be able to progress to at post-16 from this course?

Further information

- <https://www.plotr.co.uk/career-choices/school/gcse-options-advice-guide/>
- <http://www.parentsintouch.co.uk/year-9-making-choices-of-subjects-for-years-10-11>
- www.careersadviceforparents.org
- <http://www.careerpilot.org.uk> (*good for parents and students*)
- *National Careers Service. You can phone (0800 100 900), email or talk one to one on the web with an advisor by visiting:*
<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/aboutus/contactus/Pages/young-person.aspx>

Getting off to a good start



Key tasks for students

- Find out about the structure of each course – does it include non- exam based assessment? How many exams are there? What percentage of the final mark does each count for? Read the information the school provides (booklets and web-based).
- Create a work-area where you will be comfortable (and where you will not be interrupted).
- Agree regular ‘check-ins’ with your parents or study-buddy to look at where you are and what work you need to complete by when.
- Agree the ‘Rules for Homework’ with your parents – it saves endless nagging and they can always be renegotiated.



Tips for parents

- Build good relationships with teachers. Use parents’ information or target-setting evenings to explain from the start that you want to work with the school to ensure that your child does the very best that they can. Explain clearly what you would like their help with. Make sure that they know that you are happy to be contacted and keep contact details up to date.
- Work with your child and the school to ensure that you understand the course structure and requirements, including the dates of the exams and any non-exam based assessments. (The blank ‘Subject Information Sheet’, Sample 2, Section 4, offers a framework for recording this information.) It is much less frustrating to do this at the beginning than to find out retrospectively!

- Make sure you have the name of the person responsible for your child's academic progress in each of the subject areas (some schools will give email addresses out) and how and when they can be contacted.

- Help your child to organise a work-area, ensuring that they have all the materials and resources they need. Have plenty of spares of the basics - battles fought over mislaid pens are rarely worth the effort and are often just the distraction that a reluctant teenager is looking for!



- Talk about your own and your child's expectations in terms of how much work they should be doing during the week and when the best time to do it is.
- Negotiate a set of 'Rules for Homework' that you can both live with. Talk about whether combining homework or revision with music, TV, Facebook, Twitter etc. will help or hinder them. As always with teenagers, be prepared to compromise – if they get the work done their way, that's good enough! It is a good idea to agree a trial period on their terms and review how they are getting on.
- Agree regular 'check-ins' where you are allowed to discuss with your child where they are in relation to each subject, areas they are enjoying, having difficulty with etc. Once a half- term (or term if you live in an area where the school year is divided into 6 terms) is a good aim. Having a set time to discuss work beats 'nagging' which is often how teenagers perceive adult interest in their progress.

Further information

- *Each Exam board has its own website. You can find out about the specification and assessment methods etc. from these websites (see Section 4, 'Useful websites and stuff' for the main boards' details).*

Coping with homework and non-exam assessments



Key tasks for students

A GCSE in 19 days?

They may think they've got forever BUT look at how much time they typically have over the two years...

Citizenship **19 days** (3 x 1 hour lessons a fortnight)

French **32 days** (5 x 1 hour lessons a fortnight)

Maths **50 days** (8 x 1 hour lessons a fortnight)

They will cover most topics ***only once*** in these hours – learning first time around is the key to successful revision and exam results!

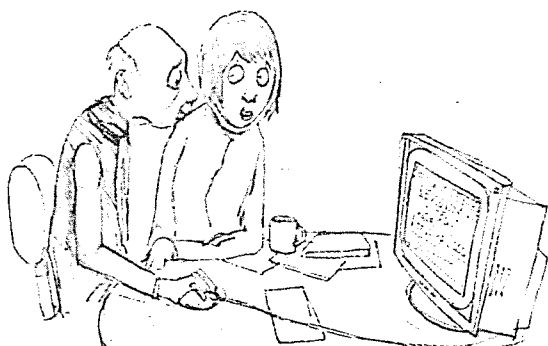
- Go to all your lessons.
- Record homework accurately and DO IT! Many schools allow you to access homework tasks on the internet. You will get more out of each lesson if you do the preparation/follow up.
- If homework piles up and your homework timetable is unmanageable, talk to your Year Head or Tutor. They'll be pleased you have asked and you'd be surprised what can be arranged!
- Listen extra-carefully to any information about work that will contribute to your final grade such as non-exam assessments, portfolio work etc. Record the information carefully and ask if you are not completely clear about what you need to do, and by when.
- Keep a file for each subject with dividers for each new section (will save HOURS of infuriation spent rifling through notes in the long run).
- File information, notes and handouts immediately or at the end of the day.

- Keep a balance between social life, work commitments and studying. If you have done the studying you will feel much better when you go out – you CAN do both!

Tips for parents

- Your most important role, as always, is to encourage and praise your child. Show an interest by talking to them about what they are learning in different subjects and in their homework tasks.
- The most important thing is that your child attends lessons (see page 24 for the impact of lost sessions). Sometimes just missing one lesson means that they miss out on key information or the introduction to a topic – starting out behind often results in a vicious circle of not understanding, falling further behind, disagreements with teachers, an increasing dislike of the subject and giving up.
- Encourage your child to see the relevance every lesson has to their end results – two years seems an enormous period of time to a teenager, but help them to put it in context by dividing the time available for each subject over the year (see P24).
- Make sure the ‘workbox’ (see ‘Getting off to a good start’) is kept stocked and the workspace is suitable.
- Put key dates and deadlines in your own diary so that you can support before the ‘panic stage’.
- If you have agreed regular ‘check-ins’ (see ‘Getting off to a good start’), take the opportunity to discuss how they are getting on in each subject and if there are any difficulties you can help with.
- Review the ‘Rules for Homework’ regularly (See P.21).
- Know your child’s homework timetable and gently probe further if they are ‘not getting any homework’ in a subject. They will be! Check with the school if in doubt – they’re not doing their job if they’re really not giving homework. (See next section for advice on how to deal with excuses.)

- For some children who are not well-organised (like my eldest daughter) you may need to have more knowledge about specific course requirements in order to be able to support your child fully. Subject teachers will provide this information to students but it's usually worth having a look yourself – it may be on the school website or you can ask for a copy for yourself. The internet is a good source of specific information about different examination specifications. (Make sure you know the name of the examination board and exact title of the GCSE – the main websites are listed in Section 4.)
- Save copies of specification descriptions, mark-schemes etc. for yourself as many children lose this vital information, only realising they don't have it when it's too late.
- Find out if there are any YouTube clips, podcasts, apps, museums, exhibitions, or theatre productions relevant to any of the GCSE courses your child is following which they could access. Books, plays or podcasts can be read, watched or listened to together – an excellent way to show your interest and develop your own knowledge. It's always worth checking with the school to find out about these.
- Help your child to use the internet to search for relevant materials and information. If you do not have internet access at home, most public libraries offer it for free.



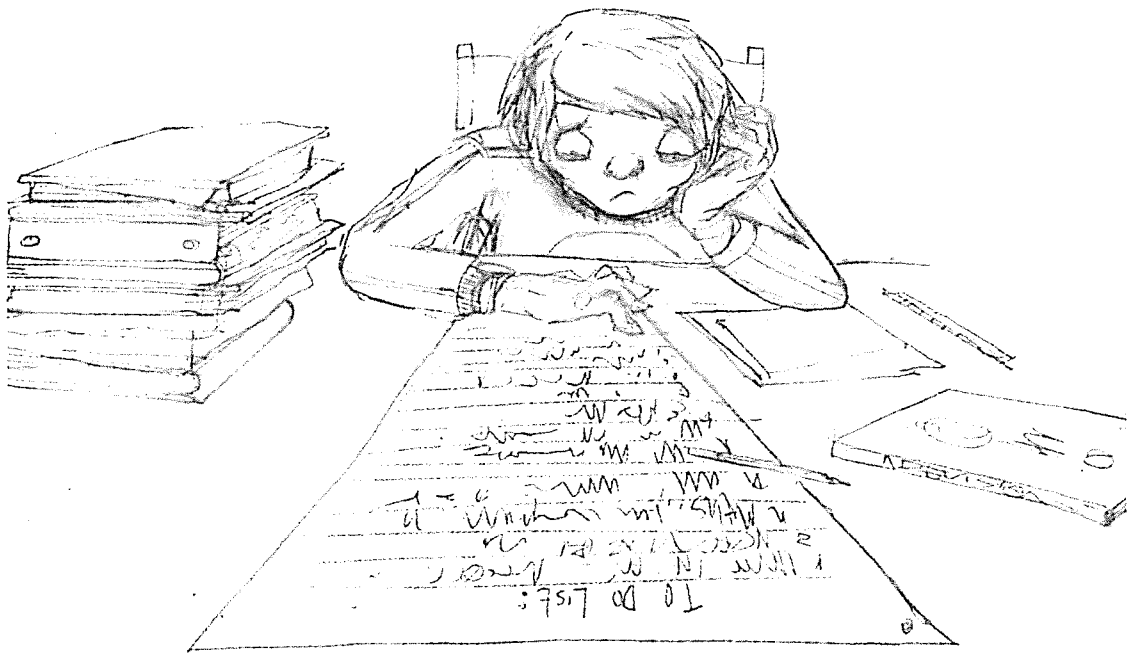
The internet is a great resource, but the information it offers can be unselective and overwhelming. Support your child by finding appropriate websites or helping them to do so. The school will be willing to offer guidance in most areas.

- Let your child's Tutor or other key teacher know if your child is experiencing any difficulties in their home circumstances or personal lives where appropriate – most schools and examination boards can be flexible in special circumstances.

Further information

- www.bbc.co.uk/education
- <https://getrevising.co.uk/>
- <http://www.parents.com/kids/development/intellectual/establish-good-homework-habits/>

**When the going gets
tough...**



**Maintaining motivation
and encouraging
persistence**

Key tasks for students

- Don't stop going to, or working in, lessons you find hard or dislike. Talk to someone early on about any difficulties you are having – there is always a solution!
- Revise your homework schedule if necessary and stick to the new plan – even when you don't feel like it. Don't wait until you are in the mood – the further behind you get the less you will be in the mood. (Agree the schedule with your parents for a hassle-free life.)
- Resist the temptation to bury your head in the sand if things are getting out of hand - talk to your parents/Tutor/subject teacher, whoever you get on best with.
- Ignore what friends and others are doing or saying. You are working for an easy life for YOU now and later – let them have the last-minute panics!

Tips for parents

- Agree the balance between work and social life and stick to the agreement. Again, flexibility is the key – if a special night comes up, agree that they can make up the work at a specified time.
- All students will fall behind, feel de-motivated or overwhelmed, or struggle with the balance of social, work and school demands at times. When your child feels like this, berating and threatening them will have a negative effect. Talk to them about the issues, acknowledge their feelings and adopt a sensible attitude in wanting to find a solution. Help them prioritise and if necessary talk to the school about rescheduling deadlines where possible. See the section entitled 'When it all goes pear-shaped' (P.51).
- Consider using a reward structure to motivate your child. This is NOT bribery (bribery is generally for encouraging anti-social or illegal behaviour). It is a reward, just as you are rewarded by a salary or bonuses for working even when you don't feel like it.

My work's on the computer at school...

We didn't get homework because there was a supply teacher...

I'm doing that with a friend, and she's got the book...

It doesn't have to be in for ages - I've got loads of time...

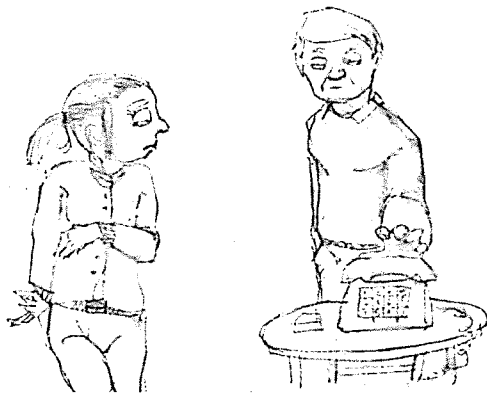
I need to be in the library at school to do it - I'll do it tomorrow...

Mr. X never gives us homework...

A strategy for dealing with excuses...

The best thing I have found to do is:

- Keep track of the 'excuses' (they won't be able to!), writing them down with the date and subject.
- Agree or suggest a solution e.g. that he or she brings the work home and shows you the next day.
- Follow up without fail.
- In the last resort, explain that you are concerned about the problem, for example that the school 'isn't giving you homework' and that you will need to contact them.
- Remember that the aim is to get the work done, not win the battle. Let your child save face, as long as they agree to do the work and stick to it.

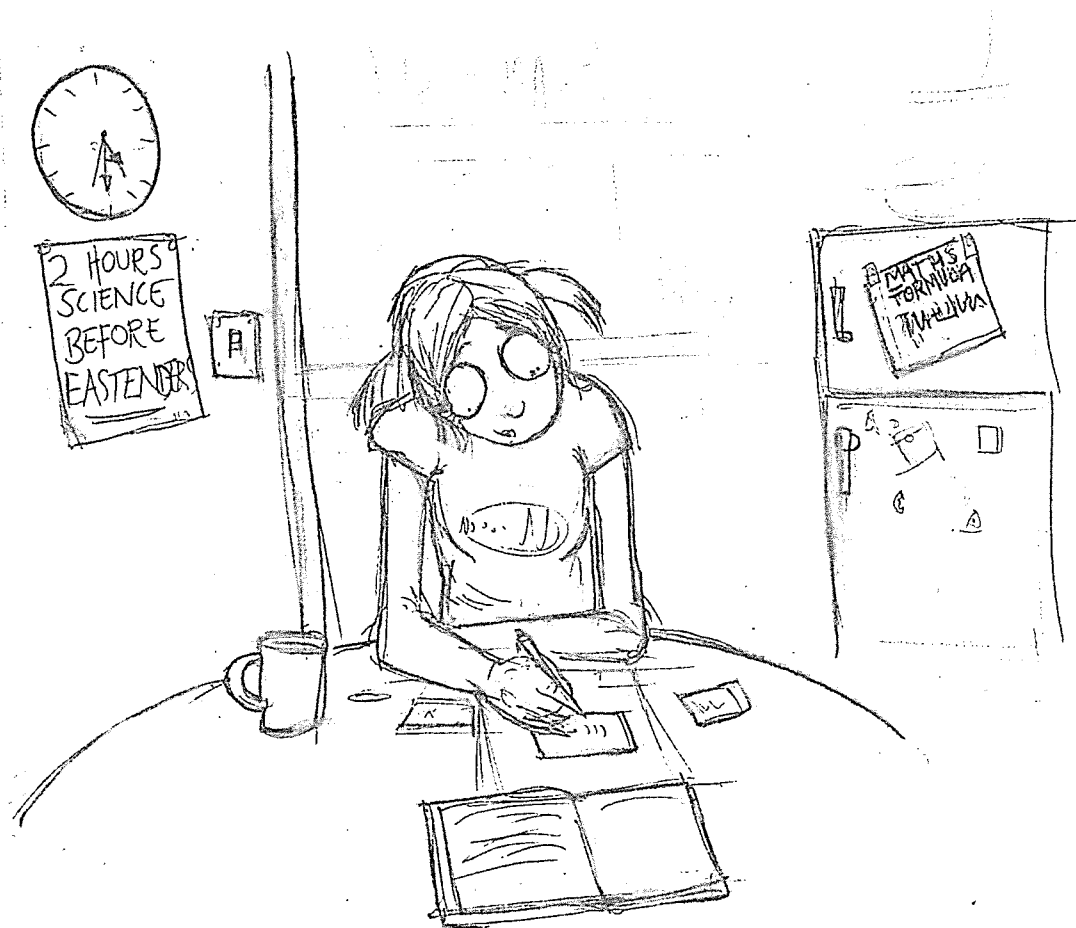


- If your child becomes anxious or withdrawn, encourage them to talk to you or a trusted adult, and let them know you are there for them, and proud of them whatever. Talk about their successes and avoid damaging their self-esteem by always talking about behaviour rather than them (e.g. avoid 'you're lazy', 'you'll never get anywhere in life' and instead talk about specific behaviours, 'the way you sometimes leave things to the last minute').
- If your child asks for your support, encourage them by helping them to see the difficulties in perspective. Teenagers often take an all or nothing 'catastrophic' approach to difficulties: 'I've messed up on this essay; I might as well give up – I'll never get to college now'. If this happens, or if you are really concerned about your child's level of stress, refer to the section 'When it all goes pear-shaped – A troubleshooting guide' (P.51).

Further information

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/advice> - offers advice on a whole range of issues that might worry your son/daughter
- Childline <http://www.childline.org.uk> - offers tips and advice on exam stress as well as anxiety, bullying etc. You or your child can speak to a counsellor by calling free on 0800 1111 or through 1-2-1 chat online, or email, or get support from other young people on the message boards. <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-stress/>
- www.familylives.org.uk (formerly www.parentlineplus.org.uk) Also confidential helpline for parents on 0808 800 2222
- www.youthaccess.org.uk/
- www.themix.org.uk

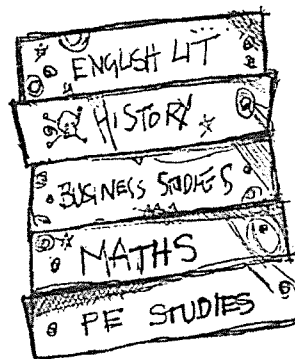
Revision



Key tasks for students

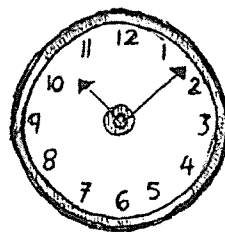
Setting yourself up for revision

- Buy (or get your parents to buy you) a set of files especially for your revision – one for each exam you will take (for many subjects you will take two or more separate exams).
- File hand outs and information from lessons in the relevant files at the end of each day.
- Start revision **early**. The sooner you start, the less you will have to do each day and the less stressed out you will be.
- The most important thing is to make a realistic **revision timetable** and plan that you will stick to. Follow the instructions in Section 4, 'Making a revision plan'. Allow plenty of time for setting up your revision plan (at least a day) and rope your parents into helping you – it's the best investment of your and their time out of everything in this section!
- Get one good revision aid for each subject. There are lists of useful revision apps and other aids on the internet with flash- cards, quizzes and revision notes in all subjects. These do much of the initial work for you by breaking the subject matter down into 'do-able' chunks and key facts. Be selective about which you buy – check with your subject teacher for the best ones for the exam you are taking.
- For subjects that you find really tough, consider asking your parents and teachers about additional tuition opportunities.
- Keep everything you need – paper, pens, calculator etc. in one place so you don't waste ten minutes of each session searching for a pen.
- Remember the 'Rules for Homework' you have agreed with your parents (see P.21). These may need to be renegotiated as you need to ensure your focus is the best it can be for revision times if you are to make the very best use of them.



Doing the revision

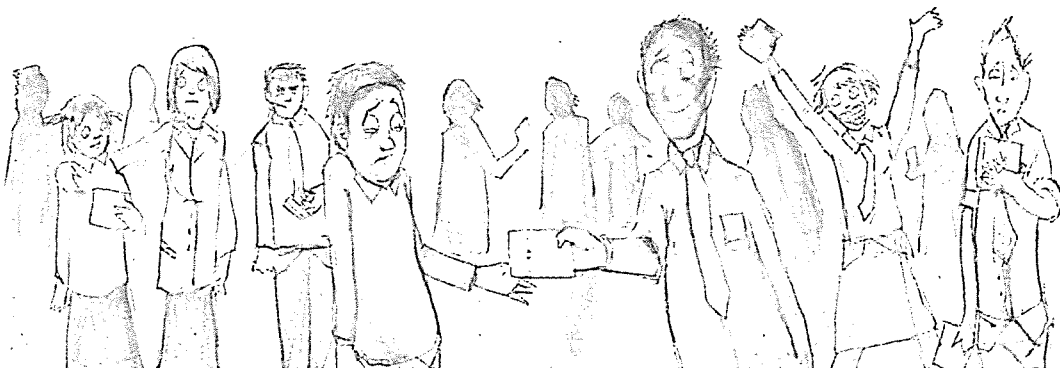
- Go to all lessons, including any additional revision lessons or opportunities, and make them work for you – especially the ones you don't like or find harder. In the past, your work might have depended on how much you liked the teacher – but now you are working for YOU. Make the most of their knowledge about the subject, revision and exam techniques.
- Find out about good and bad revision techniques (see 'Good and Bad Revision' at the end of this section) and try them out – find out what works for you. The key thing is to reduce the notes you work from to a single A4 page by the night before the exam – look briefly at the notes you make a day later, a week later, and just before the exam. This WORKS!
- Match the revision notes you make to the sort of questions you will be asked in the exam. Get hold of sample or previous papers from your school or from the internet to double check your understanding. (Make sure the papers reflect the current exam specification.)
- Have clear and specific goals for each revision period, for example – 'at the end of this two hours, I will be able to label a diagram of the heart and answer a question on how the heart works'.
- Have a start and finish time and stick to them.
- Get into the routine of following your revision plan – if you really don't feel like it, tell yourself you will do it for fifteen minutes and then decide whether to carry on. At least you will have done fifteen minutes. Set your aim for the session and get right on with it – ignore the impulse to suddenly tidy your room for the first time in three years.
- Clear your head before you begin – give yourself two minutes to write down anything on your mind and tell yourself you will deal with that later.
- STOP and take a break if you are becoming frustrated, angry or overwhelmed. Write down the problem and then put it aside. When you have had a break and feel less stressed, think about what issue is causing the problem and talk to someone about possible solutions.



- If you can't sort the problem there and then, don't waste time struggling - note down anything you are finding hard or don't understand when you are revising and take it into your next lesson.
- If there are one or two things that you just can't 'get' after spending a reasonable amount of time on them, leave them out (unless you are aiming for a Grade 9, or you know that they're very important, in which case follow it up with your teacher).
- Don't be influenced by friends who talk about how little work they are doing, and get your head down – your results don't matter to them, but they will be crucial for you. Tell yourself it's not for long, and think of that long summer holiday!

Last-minute revision

- Yes it is worth it! By the day before the exam, your revision notes should be short enough to read through in one session. The final read-through will help key words and concepts to stick in your mind.
- Focus on revising your notes for one or two key areas immediately before the exam.



It will be worth it!

GOOD and BAD Revision – If you read nothing else, READ THIS!

What is revision? It means literally 're-looking' at information you have learnt previously. The aim is that you know the information you will be tested on and can remember it for the exam. Knowing something depends on understanding it.

The aim of revision. The aim is to reduce the amount of information relating to a subject to a series of key-points, any of which you can expand upon in an exam answer. The key point, phrase or word prompts your brain to retrieve the information stored in it. At the end of your revision for each topic or sub-topic, aim to end up with a card or A4 sheet with the KEY points for that section.

The structure of revision sessions. Good revision techniques always include:

- An aim for the session. e.g. 'By the end of this two hour revision session I will understand and be able to answer questions on photosynthesis'.
- Thinking about what you know already and identifying the bits you need to spend more time on (usually by doing some sort of self-testing – many revision aids include opportunities for self-testing).
- Breaking down each topic into 'do-able' chunks. Revise each section – not just reading the information but doing something active with it (see below).
- Producing notes (shorter each time you revise a particular area) of the key points, phrases or words.
- Testing yourself to see what you have learnt.
- Ticking off the subject on your 'overall list' so that you can see regular progress.
- Revisiting your notes briefly after one day, one week and one month, as well as just before the exam – THIS REALLY WORKS!
- The key to effective revision. Useful revision involves DOING SOMETHING with the information you are trying to learn and remember. This is ESSENTIAL to allow your brain to learn, make connections and remember. Different people find different activities useful, and you need to find out how you revise best. Some ideas are:

- Drawing 'spider maps' on large pieces of paper – to show how different parts of a subject hang together.
- Use pictures and big flip-chart sheets and colour to make posters with key points, and display these on the walls or where you will see them regularly (e.g. kitchen or bathroom).
- Put revision aids up around the house, especially for any 'rote learning' – chemical or mathematical formulae, French verbs etc. Read them when sitting on the loo, brushing your teeth or eating your breakfast.
- Record yourself making 10 key points about a particular topic, then play it back when you are travelling, running etc.
- Highlight key areas of notes or books (if yours), picking out the important points or summaries.
- Listen to podcasts of books and plays and discuss them with another person.
- Use apps and watch relevant video clips on YouTube etc. but don't just sit back passively – pause them and make notes of key or difficult areas, test yourself or get someone to watch with you and test each other.
- Read a page and shut the book – what can you remember?
- Tell someone about what you have learned – explain how the heart works over a meal (or perhaps stick to something less gory).
- Get people around you to test you on 'rote knowledge' – have a family quiz.

Memory techniques. Find out what helps you to remember stuff

Some ideas are:

- ➞ **Acronyms** (using the first letter of each word to make a word to prompt your memory) e.g. you may find it hard to remember this sentence 'Wholly Inadequate Needless Damned Outrageous Waste of Space'. However, turn it into an acronym and it becomes much easier: WINDOWS.
- ➞ **Picture stories** (thinking of a strong visual image to associate with each word and linking them together in an unlikely and silly story). For example, you may find it hard to remember the facts in this sentence simply by reading it through:

'The Great Plague struck London in 1665, followed by the fire of London in 1666, starting in the shop of the baker to King Charles II in Pudding Lane.'

Try this out: get a picture in your head (for example) of a large rat (the plague) running around before being burnt (plague year before fire) in a bread oven (baker's shop) with the flames curling up around it like the curls of the numbers 666 (1666), and then being put into a pudding eaten by two King Charles spaniels. Go through the picture sequence a couple of times, then see if you can remember the 7 facts in the sentence. Ask someone to test you, and see if it works for them. It's magic!

- ☞ **Mnemonics** are also useful – make up a silly sentence to help you remember the order of something e.g. Never Eat Shredded Wheat (North, East, South, West).

Review. Take time occasionally to ask yourself how well your revision techniques are working for you. How much have you covered? Have you stuck to your timetable? Are you ending up with notes you can use for last minute revision? Congratulate yourself for all the subjects you have covered. Change your timetable plan if necessary.

Later on. When you have revised and revisited each topic, have a go at some sample exam questions. Make sure you set the appropriate time limit, and try to work under exam conditions. Don't do this too early (although it's worth looking at them early on to get an idea of the sort of question you will be answering – essays, short or long answers etc.). Do these in plenty of time so that your teacher can look over them with you (see 'Making a Revision Plan – Phase 3').

Quick tips for revising

- Make yourself start however much you don't want to - the hardest bit is over with then!
- Build in short breaks.
- Do frequent short exercises - stretches, neck and shoulder rolls, walking around etc.
- Drink water and get fresh air. Keep the temperature cool.
- Eat 'brain food' - avoid sugar and have lots of healthy snacks around to eat little and often.
- Take a day off and do something completely different.
- Don't leave the difficult bits to the end.
- Do something relaxing between revising and bedtime.
- STOP and take a break if you start feeling frustrated, angry, overwhelmed. Make a note of the problem to take to your next lesson, and move on to something else.
- Focus on what you have done, not all the things that you haven't - every little helps.
- Promise yourself little rewards after each session - a favourite TV programme, reading a trashy novel or going out with friends.
- At the end of each session, file away your notes and clutter so that your work-area is clear for the next session.

Tips for parents

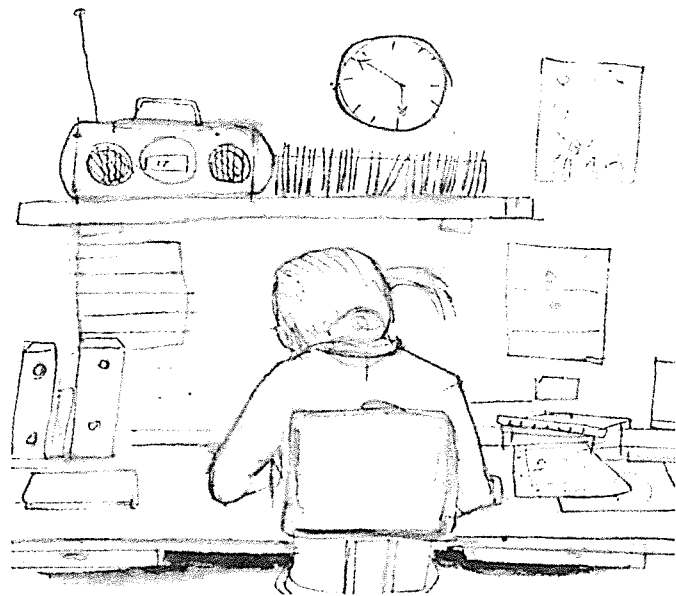
Supporting your child in setting themselves up for revision

- Talk to your child about how you can support them and what they would find helpful.
- The simplest things often get in the way of starting revision – weeks can be lost while students ‘are going to get around to sorting it soon...’. Get around these by making a list of what is needed and providing it (including the old- fashioned stuff like files, dividers, wall-charts etc.) for the revision period.
- Encourage your child to empty their bag and file hand outs and information from lessons at the end of each day. They won’t seem important until they need them, at which point they are likely to be lost under a mountain of random papers...
- Find out what support the school offers for revision (e.g. additional classes after school) via the school website or by asking the subject contact or Year Head/Progress Manager.
- Support your child in choosing one good revision aid – book, app or website - for each subject. It’s the best investment you will make. There are lots around so check with the teacher yourself if your child isn’t aware of any guidance the school has offered (it may not have seemed important to your child at the time!).
- Help your child to plan their revision timetable. Step by step instructions are listed in Section 4. It will take an investment of your time (probably several hours), but it is the single thing that will make the biggest difference to the effectiveness of the revision, and therefore the outcome. Children vary in the amount of support they need at each stage of the process.

Supporting your child in doing the revision

- Support your child in sticking to their revision plan and keeping to the start and finishing times they have agreed. Praise them when they do it, and if necessary agree a reward structure. Don’t make treats dependent on certain results – it will only add to their feelings of disappointment and failure if they don’t do as well as expected.

- Quietly top-up the 'workbox' with pens, memory-sticks, sticky notes, paper-clips etc. Don't get wound up about lost items if you can help it – motivation is hard enough to find for revision, and arguments about a 50p pen just aren't worth it.



- Review any 'Rules for Homework' (see P. 21). It will be important that your child is as focused as possible to make the best of revision time – it's intense brain-work – and rules regarding the use of music and social media may need to be renegotiated.
- Provide favourite snacks and water for revision periods.
- Be flexible – if they want to go out to a party on a revision night, agree when they will make the time up.
- Be sensitive to the pressure your child is feeling – let them know that if they are really not up to it on odd days, it isn't the end of the world. Let it go when it really matters to them, and remind them of all the good work they have done, and will continue to do. It's the big picture that will count in the end.
- Keep up with regular 'check-ins' (see 'Getting off to a good start') and don't nag in between times. Show an interest in how the revision is going, talk through any difficulties and be prepared to help them reschedule their planning as necessary.
- Keep things in perspective – your child may not be doing things the way you would do them, or as often as you would like, but they are doing the best they can in the way that works for them at the stage they are at.

Further information

Check with your child's school that the websites listed have been updated to reflect current arrangements for specification and assessment if you are unsure.

- <http://www.lifehacker.co.uk/2015/04/28/10-great-apps-to-help-you-ace-your-exams> - *useful list of apps to help with revision.*
- Visit <http://www.wikihow.com/Memorize> or <http://www.positivelymad.co.uk/> *for some excellent ideas for remembering information.*
- www.bbc.co.uk/education - *and choose 'GCSE' – resources galore for almost all subjects, along with specific advice and planners from tips.*
- <http://www.justincraig.ac.uk/revision-techniques-gcse>
- <https://getrevising.co.uk/>
- [http://www.schoolsnet.com/pls/hot_school/sn_revision.page_pls_show_subjects?x =](http://www.schoolsnet.com/pls/hot_school/sn_revision.page_pls_show_subjects?x=)
- www.s-cool.co.uk and <http://revisionworld.co.uk/gcse-revision> *for some general tips and subject-specific information.*
- www.khanacademy.org *Although this site has an American focus, it offers lots of excellent learning resources for a wide range of topics, particularly maths and programming.*
- *Amazon, WH Smith and other online retailers all sell a wide variety of hard copy subject-specific revision guides, such as the popular CGP series; search 'GCSE Guides'.*

The moment of truth - sitting the exams



Key tasks for students

Before the exam

- Know your exam timetable (put your exams in red on a wall planner; set an alert).
- Know where and when you need to be each day, and plan to get there early – leave plenty of time for last-minute crises.
- Allow time for your brain to wake up – have a shower or a relaxing bath and eat breakfast (or take a banana or other energy giving food if you really can't eat in the morning).
- Before the exam, check the exact subjects you will be asked about, and be familiar with the structure and marking system of the exam (e.g. two essay questions, one from Section A and one from Section B, each worth 30 marks with 4 extra marks available for meeting the four Assessment Objectives in Section A).
- Make sure you have EVERYTHING you will need, including spare pens/pencils etc.
- Take a pen you enjoy writing with – it will improve your performance no end. Take two, just in case.
- Keep to your normal routine as far as you can – go to bed and get up at the normal time.
- Keep anxieties at bay by repeating to yourself 'It will be fine', 'It will all be over tomorrow by three', 'Nobody's going to die', or whatever works for you. If you have worrying thoughts, say to yourself 'STOP', and try to think of something positive or unrelated to the exam for a little while. Breathe deeply five times, taking time over the out breath – this relaxes your body and your mind.
- Visit the toilet before the exam begins.
- Take water into the exam if you can and sip it throughout – your retention and concentration will be up to 70% better if you are well hydrated.

- Don't worry if you feel that you can't remember anything at all before you go into the exam – if you have revised, the information will be there and will come back.

During the exam:

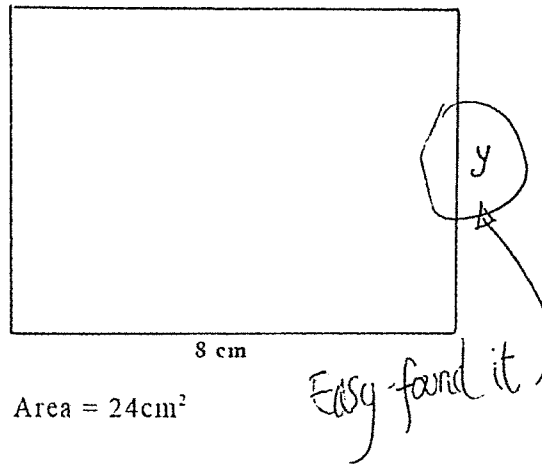
- Remember that nervousness is normal and gives your brain extra adrenaline which will help you to make the final effort.
- Take one or two deep breaths and tell yourself something positive, such as 'I can handle this', or, 'If it's hard for me it will be hard for other people too'.
- If your mind goes blank at any stage, don't panic. Turn the paper over and take three deep breaths. There will be some of the paper that you can do. Reread it slowly and calmly.
- Remind yourself of the exam structure. READ the instructions and then through the paper.
- Don't pick up your pen until you have done this.
- If appropriate, mark the questions you think that you will answer and check again that you have marked the correct number of questions from each section.
- If appropriate, spend 5 minutes at the beginning of the exam writing down any key formulae, facts or quotes that you are going to need so that you won't forget them or leave them out.
- Make, and keep to, a time-scale for each question depending on the number of marks awarded. If you have only three minutes left for one question, finish it in note form – you will get extra marks for this. BUT MOVE ON TO THE NEXT QUESTION at the right time...
- In exam papers where there are several questions to answer, work on those that you are most confident about first, then tackle the harder ones. Do not spend too long on one question – you can come back to it if you have time.



- Allow a few minutes at the end of the exam to check through your work and make any changes. Examiners have told me that you can up your score by one whole grade by doing this.

And don't make this mistake.....

4. Find y



Tips for parents

- Try out the 'exam challenge' on the next page, then encourage your child to try it too – it teaches a valuable lesson in always reading the questions through first!
- The exam period can be very stressful for students. Encourage your child to keep a positive perspective – soon they will be on the other side of the 'exam mountain'. If you are concerned about your child's level of stress, please refer to the section 'When it all goes pear-shaped' (P51).
- Try not to add to the stress levels in the house by 'rising to the bait' when your child pushes the limits. None of us is at our best under stress and it is likely that their behaviour will be challenging during this time. Pick your battles carefully, shelving any issues that are not of immediate importance. Now is not the time to bring up the issue of the untidy bedroom or the washing up being left again. There will be time to address these issues, just not now!
- Ensure that your child is prepared for the exam and talk through where and when it is, what they need to take etc. On the day of the exam, make sure they have a watch, water and supplies of pens, pencils etc. Remind them that they will not be able to have their phone or smart watch in the exam with them.
- Try to keep to routines, and not to introduce any instability unless it is absolutely necessary. On exam days, try to ensure they have a good breakfast (or suggest that they take a banana or other source of energy-food if they can't eat first thing).
- Before the exam, remind them that you love and value them whatever happens. Remind them of any strategies they have for keeping calm, and wish them good luck.
- After an exam, ask how it went but don't insist on a long post-mortem. Be available but respect your child's wishes to deal with their feelings in their own way. Try to adopt an attitude of 'tomorrow is another day', if things have gone badly.

Further information

- www.s-cool.co.uk - offers tips on getting through exam days.
- www.childline.org.uk (choose 'Examstress') (Tel: 0800 11111) - offers tips and advice on exam stress.

EXAM CHALLENGE – BEAT THE PARENT

Do our brains work more slowly as we get older?
Take this general knowledge timed test after your parent has completed it to find out.

Results

Adult time:

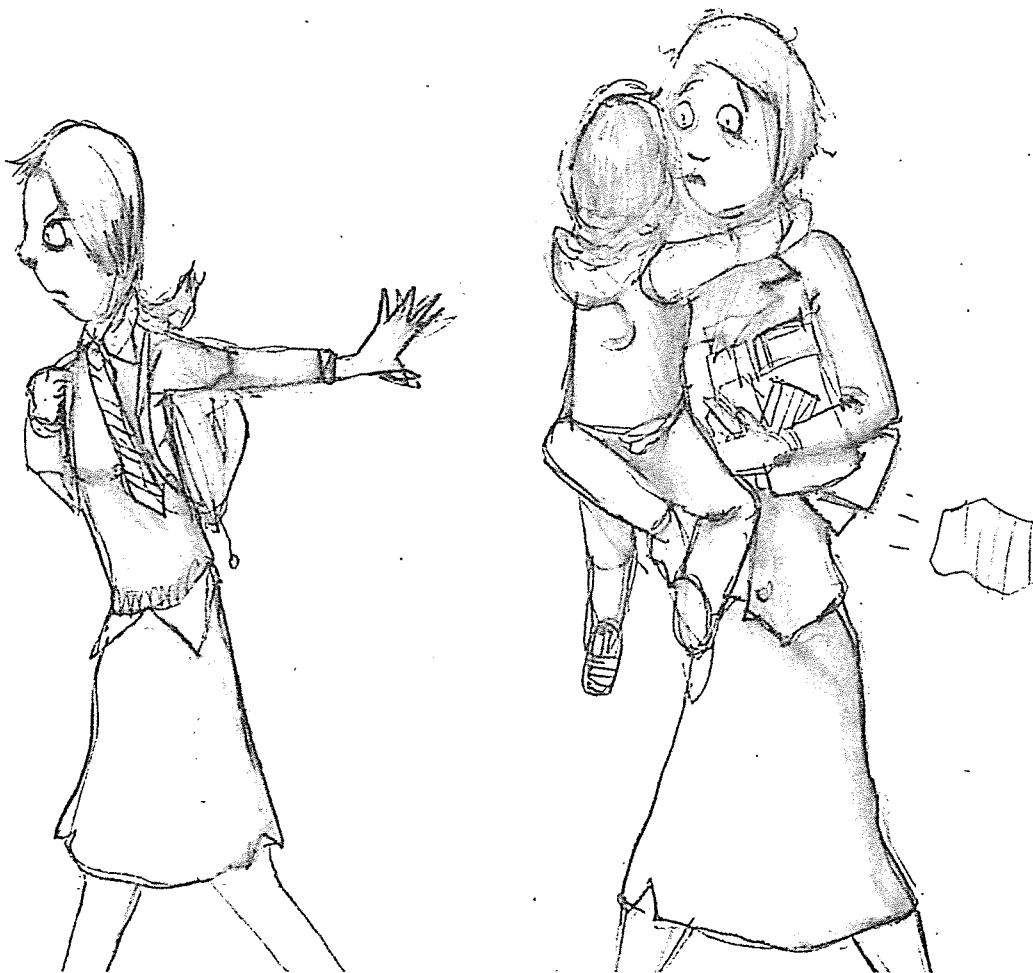
Student time:

Please read through all the questions before beginning this general knowledge timed test.

1. Write your name in the top left hand corner of the page.
2. Write, and *underline*, the date on the second line down.
3. Write down the numbers 1-8 in a column on the left hand side of the page.
4. Next to number 1, write the capital of France.
5. Next to number 2, write the answer to the sum $321-67$.
6. Next to number 3, write the past tense of the verb 'to walk'.
7. Next to number 4, write down 4 states of the USA.
8. Next to number 5, write down the colours of the rainbow in order.
9. Next to number 6, write down the names of the planets, in order of closeness to the sun.
10. Make sure you only answer questions 1 to 3.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this test

When it all goes pear-shaped: A troubleshooting guide



Tips for parents

'I hate this subject/teacher – I'm going to drop it.'

Teenagers are often prone to 'all or nothing' thinking, leading them to exaggerate the importance of incidents and tend towards extreme thinking such as 'giving it all up', running away or having an all-out argument in an effort to solve a problem. This is because their emotions are so strong at this age, and their strategies for dealing with them limited.

Try to find out exactly what is causing the problem by encouraging your child to talk about what happens in the class, what is it that the teacher actually does or says that your child objects to. Don't minimise the feelings that your child is experiencing as this leads to the 'you just don't understand' response – accept that the feelings are real and that the problem to be resolved is one of finding a less extreme strategy.

For teenagers, problems often seem permanent ('I will never be able to understand this subject/get on with this teacher'), global ('I hate everything he says/does' or 'Everything about science is boring/difficult/stupid'), and insoluble. The trick is to talk to them using language that makes the problem more manageable, by making it seem:

- specific rather than global ('What is it specifically that you find difficult/don't like about what she says/does?')
- temporary ('How long have you been feeling like this about her/the subject?')
- solvable ('What would you like to happen? What would make it more bearable?')

If, after discussion, there does seem to be an underlying personality clash, rather than a temporary hiccup in the relationship, or if the work really does seem to be beyond him or her, it is always a good idea to talk to the teacher concerned. Your child's worries can then be explained in a calm environment. While the temptation may be to show your indignation and to 'protect' your child (a natural inclination) do try to listen to the other side of the story and acknowledge the teacher's frustrations or worries. You need to keep the teacher on your side, and most will appreciate helping to solve a problem couched in terms of

‘what can we both do, in partnership, to support Roxy and move forward from this situation’, rather than a replay of the wrongs and rights of the past six months. If this doesn’t work, it is worth following up the matter with the Head of Year/Progress Manager or the Head. Changing schools is rarely a good solution mid-way through the exam years!

If your child is really struggling with a subject, and it is not essential to the qualifications they absolutely need (most employers and colleges are likely to require a Grade 5 or above in English and maths), it is worth discussing the possibility of them dropping the subject as a last resort, once all other avenues have been explored.

'I can't cope - there's too much to do!'

If your child’s workload becomes overwhelming with homework or portfolio tasks stacking up you will need to address the issue with both the school and with your child.

Encourage your child to talk about the problems honestly. You will not accomplish this by sighing loudly and saying, ‘I told you this would happen if you left everything until the last minute’, throughout the conversation (not easy, I know, but keep that tongue bitten!). Instead accept how things are and look for a workable solution. See the tips in the section above on talking to your child. When you have a clear idea of the problem, contact the school and ask for an appointment with the subject teacher. There will sometimes be some flexibility around school deadlines which the teacher may have discretion over.

If there is the possibility of extending a deadline, find out exactly what the outstanding tasks entail, and draw up a plan with your child so that they know what needs to be done and when (you could use the ideas for drawing up a revision plan in Section 4). Don’t forget to praise them for sticking to the plan.

'I've left it too late to revise'

One of the biggest mistakes that students make is not allowing enough time for revision. This usually results, when they do realise what is involved, in de-motivation and the attitude that there is no point in doing anything as the task is too big. The first point about ‘all or nothing’ thinking in the section entitled ‘I hate this subject/teacher – I’m going to drop it’ is relevant here.

The key point to remember is that it is never too late until you enter the exam room – with revision, a little knowledge is better than none, and could make the difference between a Grade 3 or a Grade 5 outcome (the difference between getting into college or not).

Put in place a damage-limitation plan. Help your child to make use of the time they have got, however little, by helping them to prioritise and structure revision tasks into manageable chunks. Focus on the subjects in which they are likely to get passes, ignoring those in which there is no hope, and rather than reading hurriedly through the whole specification, identify and agree on a few key areas and encourage them to revise these as thoroughly as possible.

Keep up motivation and self-esteem by reminding them of how they have coped with difficult situations in the past, telling them that the exam period will soon be over and talking to them about their strengths and qualities which will contribute to the best outcome in the circumstances.

Dealing with stress

A degree of stress is normal and actually necessary for successfully tackling exams. If you or your child feel that they are becoming too stressed you can use the tips in 'I hate this subject/teacher – I'm going to drop it' to encourage them to talk about the underlying issues.

Some of the symptoms of stress are listed below. However, you know your child best so any marked changes in behaviour are worth checking out.

- Difficulty getting to sleep or waking up
- Tiredness
- Poor appetite
- Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- Headaches and other unexplained aches and pains
- Irritability and frequent angry episodes

If your child is stressed, try to encourage them to take time out away from work, doing something that they enjoy. Exercise promotes hormones that actively counter stress, so try to encourage this. Ensure your child eats well, and let them know that you are always there to

listen. (Try not to offer immediate solutions to worries or to give advice, unless they ask for it – what stressed people most need is somebody to listen and empathise with the feelings they express.)

I have used each of the following strategies with my children at different points with some success in helping them to regain a sense of perspective, but the important thing is to use the strategies that you know have worked in the past:

- Asking them ‘what’s the worst that can happen?’, or saying, ‘OK, well the starting point is that nobody is going to die’.
- Reminding them of when they have overcome difficulties in the past.
- Getting them to focus on what they have achieved, despite this ‘blip’.
- Pointing out that little is achieved without hard work and mistakes being made – it’s part of life and learning and adults frequently make mistakes too.

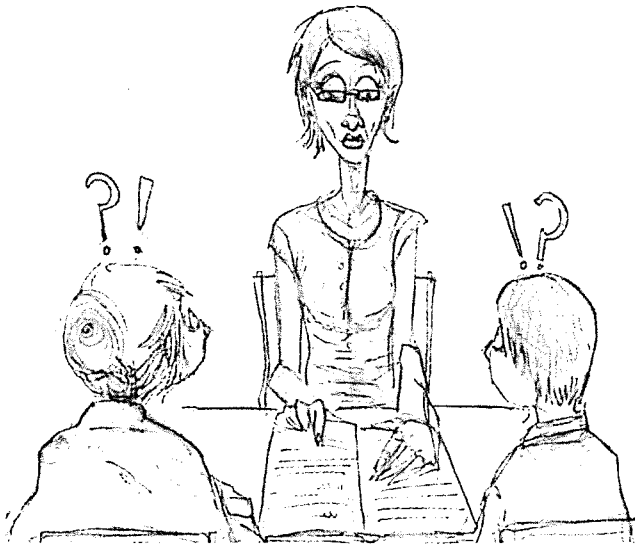
There are many sources of advice for dealing with stress. These are listed on P.49.

Exams affected by adverse circumstances.

If your child misses an exam or doesn’t do as well as he or she could have done because of illness, bereavement or other serious adverse circumstances, or if they are unable to complete homework or portfolio tasks for similar reasons, the most important thing to do is to let the school know immediately. Most examination boards will give special consideration in these circumstances, and the school will be able to let you know the procedures to follow.

Section 3: What do I need to know?

Tips on working in partnership with the school



At secondary school, it can be difficult to feel that you are really on top of what is going on in your child's life. Secondary schools are complicated organisations with many people with unfamiliar titles involved with your child at different levels (learning mentor; Progress Manager; Year Head; Tutor; Head of Faculty; Assistant Head; Examinations Officer).

Sometimes it seems easier not to get involved when you are not sure who to call, when or why. These tips offer some suggestions to help you through the maze.

General tips

- Try to attend all parents' meetings and open evenings – even if you feel intimidated (lots of us do) or unsure what it is about, it is really important that you keep up to date with your child's progress and with school developments.
- Find out when you should receive information during the year – option or pathway choices, reports on how your child is doing, any regular newsletters or updates, parents' evenings or target-setting meetings etc. Most schools keep up to date information on their websites.
- Meet with your child's teachers as early as possible – don't wait for things to go wrong.
- Let each teacher know that you want to work with them to support your child from the beginning.

- Write down the names and contact details of your child's teacher(s) for each subject – they will be able to tell you the best way to contact them and tell you when they are usually free to discuss any issues.
- If you need to speak to a teacher, ring the school to find out when would be a good time – don't expect to speak to them straight away. Remember that most of the time they are in classrooms, teaching.
- If your child habitually forgets to bring home letters and communications, ask if they can be sent to you by post or email, or if they are published on the school website.
- Explain how you are supporting your child at home (for example, using the ideas in this booklet) and ask for any additional ideas at parents' evenings.

Finding out how your child is doing

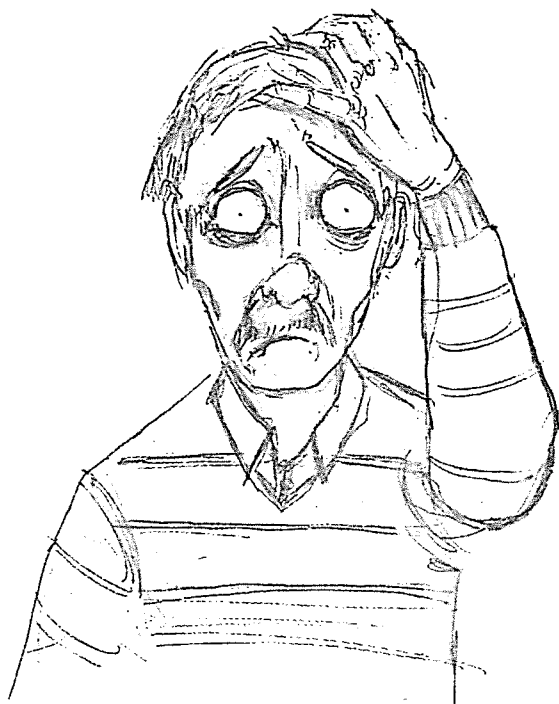
- Most schools will hold regular parents' evenings or target setting meetings. The appointments are usually very short, so if you have real worries about particular issues, use the time to make an appointment for a longer meeting.
- Before the meeting, think through exactly what it is you would like to get out of that meeting – what you want to find out. Write down your questions in case you forget.
- Listen to what school staff say about your child. Their perspective may be different from yours, but remember that children are different at school from at home.
- Even if you hear negative news about your child's abilities, motivation or performance, try to keep a positive focus – ask what can you BOTH do, in partnership, to support your child. The subject teacher is your child's greatest resource in succeeding in their exams so it is best to try to work with them rather than against them, even if you secretly agree with your child's views on the matter!

When to contact the school...

Contact the school:

- If your child consistently tells you they have no homework or preparation to do.
- If you are worried about your child's behaviour (for example if they often do not want to go to school, become withdrawn or more aggressive than normal whenever you mention school) ask for a meeting with your child's Tutor or equivalent.
- If your child is clearly behind, or you see that they are becoming overwhelmed with a backlog of work, make an appointment (probably with their Tutor) earlier rather than later, while there is still time to put things right.
- If a specific subject is causing your child particular difficulties over an extended period of time (half a term or more). This meeting should be with the subject teacher.
- If you do not receive any information from your child – the school reception or Head of Year may well know what you should have had, and can probably send you copies. The school website will often contain the information that you need.
- If your child has an on-going clash with a particular teacher – try to arrange an appointment with your child and the teacher involved, or someone with whom they have a good relationship in school to sort out issues earlier rather than later.
- If you are not happy with the outcome after trying to sort things out with the teacher involved, ask for an appointment with the Head to discuss your concerns.
- If there are any home circumstances that might be affecting your child's school work.
- If you need to take your child out of school for any reason. Remember that only the most serious situations should warrant time off, as every lesson is so crucial. It is not acceptable to take children out of school for holidays, but if there are exceptional circumstances that mean that you have no choice but to keep them off, talk to the school at the earliest opportunity.

Finding your way around the examination system



If you have a child entering, or in, Key Stage 4 (KS4), the chances are that the examination system is very different from how it was when you were at school.

There is more flexibility now about the choices open to students in KS4, and a whole range of examination choices outside of GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), to suit children of differing ability levels and interests. These include BTECs, NVQs and

others. All of these, as well as GCSEs, fit into a 'Regulated Qualifications Framework' which enables you to find out which qualifications are equal to which. You can find out more about it from the National Careers Service or on the government's website¹ if the school has suggested that your child takes qualifications that are not GCSEs.

This section focuses specifically on what you need to know when your child is taking GCSEs.

The range of GCSEs that students can take now is constantly changing, so do check out any new developments with your child's school.

Of course, not all schools will be able to offer all subjects to all students, but there will be a broad range of options on offer. In addition, in state schools, your child will undertake some studies that do not necessarily lead to a qualification. Your child's school will be able to advise you on your child's options and those they consider most appropriate to your child's interests, abilities and needs. See 'Making the right GCSE choices'.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/compare-different-qualification-levels>

GCSEs at KS4

- **What a GCSE is worth.** GCSEs can be full qualifications (one GCSE) or double qualifications (equal to two GCSEs, for example Combined Science). Some schools may offer short-course GCSEs, for example in Religious Studies, and these are worth one half of a GCSE.
- **The English Baccalaureate (Ebacc).** The English Baccalaureate is not a qualification separate from GCSEs. Rather it is a performance measure, introduced in the 2010 performance tables. The measure recognises where students have secured good grades in GCSEs across a core of academic subjects.
- **Compulsory subjects.** In most schools (including Academies and Free Schools which do not have to follow the National Curriculum) children will be required to take some compulsory subjects which will include English, Maths, and Science. In most schools students will be expected to sit both English Language and English Literature, and either Combined Science (2 GCSEs) or Triple Science (3 GCSEs).
- **Options.** As well as the compulsory subjects, your child will have the choice of taking a number of other subjects which will lead to GCSE qualifications. These are often referred to as 'options'. Most of these will be worth one GCSE although some are equal to two GCSEs. Different schools will offer different options, but most will offer GCSEs in the arts, design and technology, the humanities (Geography, History), and modern foreign languages ('MFL', French, Spanish). Some schools may offer 'short courses' which are the equivalent of a half-GCSE, for example in Religious Studies (RS).
- **Grades and pass marks.** Grades awarded for GCSEs go from 9 to 1, with the highest Grade being 9 (this represents a higher grade than the previous top grade of A*). The grade awarded takes account of the marks from non-exam assessments and exam marks. The new GCSE grades do not align perfectly to the old system of grading, and there is overlap across the grades as shown below. This means that students in the past who would have gained a B grade for instance could be awarded either a grade 6 or a grade 5 in the new qualifications.

NEW GRADES	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U	
PREVIOUS GRADES	A*	A		B	C		D	E	F	G	U

- **Tiered Exams.** In some subjects all students sit the same paper, for example in English, History, Music, PE and RS. Some subjects, like French, have different papers representing different levels of difficulty – with a less challenging ‘foundation’ level. These are often called ‘tiers’. Within each tier students can only get a certain range of grades. Schools will decide which tier your child is most likely to do well in, usually by the January before the exam in the summer.
- **Non-exam assessment.** Some qualifications depend on both exam marks and marks for non-exam assessments which take place throughout the course. Non-exam assessments can be practical, for example performances in PE and Drama; speaking assessments in Modern Foreign Languages; or pieces of work which contribute to a portfolio, such as in Art or Product Design. You can find out how the particular courses that your child is taking are marked, and what assessments there are by checking with the school or on the examination board’s website.
- **Examination boards.** Examination specifications have to be approved by the government. There are a number of different companies who offer exam services to schools, and the websites for the main ones approved for GCSEs are included in Section 4. It is important to know the name of the exam board when buying revision aids or going on the website, and the exact name of the qualification being taken.
- **Progress 8 and Attainment 8.** These terms refer to the ways in which schools’ and students’ overall performance in examinations are measured (from 2016), replacing the older measure of how many GCSEs students achieve at A*-C grades, including English and Maths. The Progress 8 measure is based on students’ progress measured across eight subjects: English; Maths; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (Sciences, Computer Science, Geography, History and Languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification. Grades for English and Maths are double-weighted. The Attainment 8 is the student’s average achievement across the eight subjects. The school will be able to explain how these measures are worked out and how they relate to your own child.

Section 4: Useful Resources

Subject Information Sheet: Sample 1 (completed)

This is the information you may need to know for each subject your child is taking. It can be used at the initial parents' evening, or prior to this, when you are helping your child to decide which options to take in Year 10 and 11 (although you won't be able to complete all the information at this stage). A blank copy is included for you to copy.

Subject	Exam Board	Name of course/ number	Structure and method of assessment			Notes
			Non-examination Assessment	Final Exam Paper 1 Structure, % of GCSE and dates	Final Exam Paper 2 Structure, % of GCSE and dates	
English Language	AQA	English (8700)	<p>Spoken Language (0% of GCSE) The mark will be reported on the certificate but does not count towards the GCSE grade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presenting Responding to questions & feedback Use of standard English 	<p>Explorations in Creative Writing: 50% of GCSE 1hr 45m</p> <p>Section A: Reading (25%) One literary fiction text 1 short form question (4 marks) 2 long questions (2 x 8 marks) 1 extended question (1 x 20 marks)</p> <p>Section B: Writing (25%) Descriptive or narrative writing 1 extended writing question (24 marks for content, 16 marks for technical accuracy)</p> <p>Date: Set throughout the course & marked by teacher</p>	<p>Writers' Viewpoint and Perspectives: 50% of GCSE 1hr 45m</p> <p>Section A: Reading (25%) One non-fiction and one literary non-fiction text 1 short form question (4 marks) 2 long questions (1 x 8, 1 x 12 marks) 1 extended question (1 x 16 marks)</p> <p>Section B: Writing (25%) Writing to present a viewpoint 1 extended writing question (24 marks for content, 16 marks for technical accuracy)</p>	<p>Tutor: Mr Smith (Wed pm free)</p> <p>Revision aids to use:</p> <p>Other:</p>

Subject Information Sheet: Sample 2

Subject	Exam Board	Name/ number	Structure and method of assessment					Notes
			Non Examination Assessment	Final Exam 1: Structure, % of GCSE and dates	Final Exam 2: Structure, % of GCSE and dates	Final Exam	Final Exam	
Science								
English								
Maths								

Four easy steps for making the best revision plan in the WORLD!

Step 1: Tasks and time needed

- Allow two or three hours for this step. For each exam, list the topics that have to be revised. Make sure you are looking at the right exam – check the name, number and exam board (See Fig :1). You can find information out at school or by going to the examination board's website (see Page 70). Estimate how much time you will need to revise for each topic. Ask your teacher for advice.

Fig 1:

Exam Papers	Time needed	Completed/ Get help Notes
Maths (AQA 8300) Paper 1 + 2	TOTAL: 34 hours	
• Number and Algebra	10	
• Ratio, proportion and rates of change	8	
• Geometry and measures	8	
• Statistics and probability	8	
French (AQA 8658) Paper 1: Listening	TOTAL: 15 hours	
• Identity & Culture	5	
• Local, national, international and global areas of interest	5	
• Current and future study and employment	5	
French Paper 2: Speaking	TOTAL:	
•		
French Paper 3: Reading		
Etc.		

Step 2: Planning Revision Period 1

- This is the main revision period. Work backwards from the date of your first exam (if you know it - if not, ask your teachers when your exams are likely to be), allowing 2 weeks for each exam paper – not subject – that you are taking. This is the starting date for your revision (yes, much earlier than you had thought!). Make a chart like the one shown in Fig. 2, beginning on the date you have arrived at as the start date for your revision period. Put the date on the left, and four columns labelled 'morning', 'afternoon', 'evening' and 'support available'.

Fig 2: Revision Period 1

APRIL	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Support Available
Sat 1st	Weekend away			
Sun 2nd	Weekend away			
Mon 3rd	School	School	Revision	
Tues 4th	School	School	Revision	
Wed 5th	School	School	Revision	
Thu 6th	School	School	Evening off	
Fri 7th	School	School	Working	
Sat 8th	Day off			
Sun 9th	Revision	Revision	Revision	
Mon 10th	Revision	Revision	Revision	Easter Holidays

- Mark any planned days when you know you won't be able to revise at home. Colour code your chart if possible, e.g. school times in orange, working commitments in green, and days off and planned weekends away in blue. Make sure you have at least one day and two evenings off each week.
- The remaining squares are your revision times (in sessions of morning, afternoon and evening). It is suggested that morning and afternoon revision periods last approximately 3 hours each, while evening ones last 2 hours.
- Work out approximately how much time you will have to revise in this period by adding together the hours in each session.
- Divide the number of hours available by the number of exams you will be taking (not the number of subjects).
- Decide how you will spend the time you have for revision using the plan you made in Step 1 as a guide – some subjects will need more time than others.
- Write in the subject and sub-topic (as identified in Step 1) you will aim to cover in each revision session so that it looks like the timetable in Fig 3. Now you will have clear sections and goals to work from for each session.
- Remember to build in time to revisit each subject briefly after 1 day, 1 week, 1 month and just before the exam.
- Remember, this is only a plan. Be prepared to revise it when subjects turn out to take longer (or less time) than you had anticipated.

Fig 3: Revision Period 1 – completed

APRIL	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Support available/TV etc
Sun 2nd	Weekend away			
Mon 3rd	School	School	Maths: Number: Fractions, decimals and percentages	
Tues 4th	School	School	Maths: Ratio, proportion and rates of change : scale factors	
Wed 5th	School	School	Maths: Statistics: Scatter graphs	
Thu 6th	School	School	Evening off	
Fri 7th	School	School	Working	
Sat 8th	Day off			

Step 3: Planning Revision Period 2

- This period of revision lasts a week or so, and allows you time to try out sample exam questions or papers.
- Start by making a similar calendar to Revision Period 1 for the week before the exam period begins.
- Ensure that you have at least one sample exam paper in each subject (your school will provide these, or you can download specimen papers from the examination board's website - see Page 70). Make sure you know the exam name, reference number and your own entry tier to ensure you get the right one. Often mark-schemes and examiner reports are available too, so that if your teachers cannot mark your papers (see below), you can do it yourself from the materials provided on the websites.
- Go through your practice papers with your teacher if they have agreed to do this with you. Make CLEAR and definite arrangements to get feedback in time to go over any weak areas before your exam in that subject. Use the 'support' column on your timetable to mark meetings you arrange with your teachers.

Step 4: Planning Revision Period 3

- If you have a part-time job, try to cancel any work commitments for this period, as you will need all your energy and time to cope with the demands of the exam period.
- Starting with the date of your first exam, make a chart as in the previous two steps for revision period three – the exam period. Yes, unfortunately there is still one last hurdle - 'last-minute' revision.
- When you have made your chart, enter the dates and time of each exam and highlight them, to ensure that they are not overlooked. Double check these dates nearer the time – the first list the school will give you (usually in early March) may be changed.
- Pencil in any final revision opportunities that can be done during the exam period as close as possible to the exam itself (although this gets hard when you have four exams in two days!).
- Try, wherever possible, to continue to build in an evening and a complete day off each week.
- **FINALLY** – plan a celebration for the end of the exams, you will deserve it!

Fig 4: Revision Period 3 - Last minute revision.

(The shaded squares represent the exam times, and the unshaded squares list the last minute revision sessions.)

JUNE	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Support available
Mon 5th	Maths (Paper 1)	1.30 - 3.00 Maths Paper 1	English Language Paper 1	
Tues 6th	9.00 - 10.45 English Language Paper 1	Computer Science Paper 1 Science Paper 1	Maths Paper 2/ Science Paper 1	
Wed 7th	9.00 - 10.45 Maths Paper 2	1.30 - 3.15 Science Paper 1	French Paper 1: Listening	French revision session
Thu 8th	French Paper 1: Listening	1.30 - 2.15 French Paper 1: Listening	History Paper 1	
Fri 9th	History Paper 1	1.30 - 3.15 History Paper 1		

Good Luck!

Useful websites and stuff

Information is currently correct. Be aware that some websites may not have been updated to reflect changes in the GCSE system. Check with your child's school if you are unsure.

Making GCSE choices

- www.plotr.co.uk/career-choices/school/gcse-options-advice-guide
- <http://www.parentsintouch.co.uk/year-9-making-choices-of-subjects-for-years-10-11>
- www.careersadviceforparents.org
- www.careerpilot.org.uk
- *National Careers Service. You can phone (0800 100 900), email or talk one to one on the web with an advisor by visiting:*
<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/%20aboutus/contactus/Pages/youngperson.aspx>

General – support for teenagers

- www.themix.org.uk
- www.childline.org.uk (Tel: 0800 1111)
- www.youthaccess.org.uk/

General - parent support

- <http://www.familylives.org.uk> (formerly www.parentlineplus.org.uk).
Also confidential helpline for parents on 0808 800 2222
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/advice>: *Offers advice on a whole range of issues that might worry your child.*

Exam board websites

- www.aqa.org.uk : *The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)*
- www.edexcel.org.uk : *Edexcel*
- www.ocr.org.uk : *Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)*
- www.wjec.co.uk : *The Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) (Welsh language version: www.cbac.co.uk)*
- www.ccea.org.uk/ : *Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland).*

Revision and subject support

- *Amazon, WH Smith and other online retailers all sell a wide variety of hard copy subject-specific revision guides, such as the popular CGP series. Search 'GCSE Guides' for a selection.*
- <http://www.parents.com/kids/development/intellectual/establish-good-homework-habits/>
- <https://getrevising.co.uk/>
- www.bbc.co.uk/education (choose 'GCSEs')
- <http://www.justincraig.ac.uk/revision-techniques-gcse> : *Useful post with lots of great revision ideas*
- www.s-cool.co.uk
- http://www.schoolsnet.com/pls/hot_school/sn_revision.page_pls_show_subjects?x=16180339
- www.wikihow.com/memorize : *Offers some excellent ideas for remembering information.*
- <http://revisionworld.co.uk/gcse-revision> : *Offers a range of tips and support for specific subjects.*
- <http://www.lifehacker.co.uk/2015/04/28/10-great-apps-to-help-you-ace-your-exams> : *Useful list of apps to help with revision.*
- www.khanacademy.org : *Although it has an American focus, it offers lots of excellent learning resources for a wide range of topics, particularly maths.*

NOTES