



2020/21

**Examination Preparation &
Revision Guide**

What kind of support might pupils need?



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

What happens at home has just as much impact on GCSE grades as what happens in school.

The grades achieved in the final exams remain with a pupil 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 who do not have at least a Grade 4/5 (Grade C) in English and Maths at GCSE level, even if they are applying as a mature pupil.

Research and experience show that children whose parents/carers take the opportunity to be frequently interested in their child's learning make most progress. However, many parents feel at a loss when their children enter their examination years and it is hard to get the balance right between being a supportive parent and putting a child under too much pressure.

The hardest demand on our Year 11 pupils is that of understanding the long-term importance of achieving the best they possibly can. This can mean making some short-term sacrifices to ensure they are truly successful and learning to shelve 'short-term fun' on occasions in the interest of long-term benefits (not easy even for adults!).

The aim of this booklet is to provide you, as parents, with key information to help support your child in preparing & revising for exams. It is also a source of ideas for how to revise and provides some top tips to help beat exam stress. Exams can be a challenging time for us all but hopefully, by working in partnership, we can ensure that pupils are as supported and prepared as they can be for any exams they need to take, knowing that we all 'did our best' along the way.

Coping with Exam Stress

(for parents/carers)



Putting off revision, finding excuses to do other things or leaving all the work until the last minute are some of the most common mistakes pupils can make when preparing for exams. The fact is the more they delay, the more likely they are to get into a panic.

Probably 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.
- Avoid caffeine and energy drinks, they can make stress worse and dehydrate the brain.

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/timer

Textbooks

Calendar

Pin-board

Access to a computer and printer

Coping with Exam Stress

(for pupils)



1. Keep it in perspective

- Lots of people will tell you this, because it's true - exams aren't everything. Whatever happens in your exams, you can still be successful in life afterwards. So, if you don't do as well as you'd hoped, try to keep things in perspective.
- Employers don't just look at your exam scores. They're just as interested in your attitude, your transferable skills and how well you'll get on with other people.
- Exam success doesn't define you as a person. Everyone copes differently in different situations and there's so much more to your personality than how well you can respond to an exam.
- Think about how far you've come already.
- Once you've done an exam, try to forget about it. There's nothing you can do about it and worrying won't change your mark. Try to resist asking other people what they wrote for a particular question or checking other peoples' answers.

2. Get that organised feeling

- Picture your exams as a time-bound project. Are the mock exams 90 days away? That's your 90 day challenge. Best of all, there's a definite end point.
- Work out the basics: which exams you have, how the marks are allocated, and how much you have to learn for each one. Don't expect to learn everything; but having in mind where you'll get the marks can help you prioritise.
- Break your revision down into small chunks and form a plan. Once you've got a plan, you won't have any more dilemmas at the start of the day about what to work on.
- Schedule in plenty of free time to unwind and protect this time. Nobody can work all day every day. If you give yourself plenty of rest, you can do the same amount of work in half the time or less.
- Equally, don't panic if you go slightly off schedule - tomorrow is another day.

3. Get into some good habits

- These habits will help you concentrate as well as reducing stress:
- Take frequent breaks. Psychologists say we can only concentrate properly for 30-45 minutes. You could use a technique like Pomodoro, that helps you to take regular breaks. When you do take a break make sure you don't stay at your desk, you could go for a walk or even just make a cup of tea!
- Eat well. Keep a good blood sugar level to avoid highs and lows of energy, by eating slow release foods like bread, rice, pasta, fruit and veg.

3. Get into some good habits continued

- Drink lots of water. People often underestimate how much hydration helps!
- Think about when and where you work best. Not everyone is a morning person, and some people don't find the library a productive place to work. There's no one best place or time to work - it's about what works for you.
- Keep active. Even a short walk will do. Exercising is one of the quickest and most effective ways to de-stress. Fresh air will clear your head and perk you up.
- Try to get about 8 hours' sleep a night. If you're stressed about not being able to sleep, there are lots of ways to aid a good night's sleep.
- Find activities that help you relax. Maybe it's a hot bath, watching a TV show, or a creative activity. Schedule this down-time into your timetable.

4. Avoid bad habits

- Don't set yourself ridiculous goals. Nobody can revise 10 topics in a day! Avoid setting the day up to be a disappointment.
- Don't cut out all the enjoyment from your life. It's tempting to decide you'll just knuckle down to work and "focus", but this is counterproductive - it's impossible to focus without giving your brain rest by doing other activities.

5. Get support from friends and family

- Don't be put off by friends saying that they are doing huge amounts of revision. As already mentioned, that's probably not actually a productive or efficient way of working long term. One of the key reasons people feel exam stress is due to comparing themselves to other people.
- If you can, discuss with your parents what they are expecting you to achieve. Parents with steep or unrealistic expectations will just add unnecessary pressure. It's helpful to let them know what you think you have the capacity to achieve, and to insist that the best way to get there is to have support from your parents, not pressure.
- If you're feeling really worried or anxious, chat to a good friend, family member, or tutor. It helps to get it out of your system, and they may well be able to help think about practical strategies to deal with exam stress.

Information taken from the Student Minds website:

www.studentminds.org.uk/examstress

What's the best way to revise?



Research by Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2012) demonstrated that pupils don't always tend to use the most effective revision techniques like self-testing, using flashcards and quizzing. Instead they default to less effective techniques such as rereading their class books and highlighting their notes. Applying these ineffective techniques over long periods means they clock up hours of revision in the belief that time spent equates to exam success but, actually, a lot of this time is wasted.

So how do we help pupils to revise better, and how do we help them to understand that more revision is not always beneficial?

- Different pupils prefer different approaches, but in every case the best option is to help your child 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 needs to belong 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	<i>Maths:</i> Fractions Percentages	<i>Science:</i> Atoms Molecules	<i>Geography:</i> Glaciation	<i>History:</i> American West
Tuesday	<i>English:</i>	<i>ICT:</i>		
Wednesday				

Ideally your child should be aiming to complete revision chunked into 20-25 minute slots. They should make a topic or subject tick list, this way they can see what they need to cover revision wise before the exam.

What's the best way to revise?



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.
- 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 information other than class notes. The internet, for example, offers some innovative learning resources (see subject specific information for further ideas).
- 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 an exam. Instead, support them to complete their revision plan early.
- Ensure your child attends school every day. Even one lesson lost 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 accessing one good revision guide for each subject. There are lots around so check with your teacher before investing in a guide or ask your teacher if you are able to borrow one – there may be some spare!

Subject Specific Information

Your son/daughter will be provided with a wide range of support materials from their subject teachers – these will also be shared with you as parents/carers via links on the school website and/or information sent home.

Revision Strategies



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, 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.

Use of mnemonics: these are various word games which can act as memory aids and which allow personalisation and creativity. Think of stalactites (**c**ome down from the **c**eiling) and stalagmites (**g**o up from the **g**round); 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 - Mrs. Gren (Movement, Reproduction, Sensitivity, Growth, Respiration, Excretion, Nutrition). You can devise many more of these to aid your personalised recall of items in your subjects.

Mind Maps

Mind Maps are useful for:

- Summarising information and note taking.
- Consolidating information from different research sources.
- Thinking through complex problems.
- Presenting information in a format that shows the overall structure of the subject.
- Studying and memorising information.

Using Mind Maps Effectively:

Once you understand how to take notes in Mind Map format, you can develop your own conventions for taking them further. The following suggestions can help you draw impactful Mind Maps:

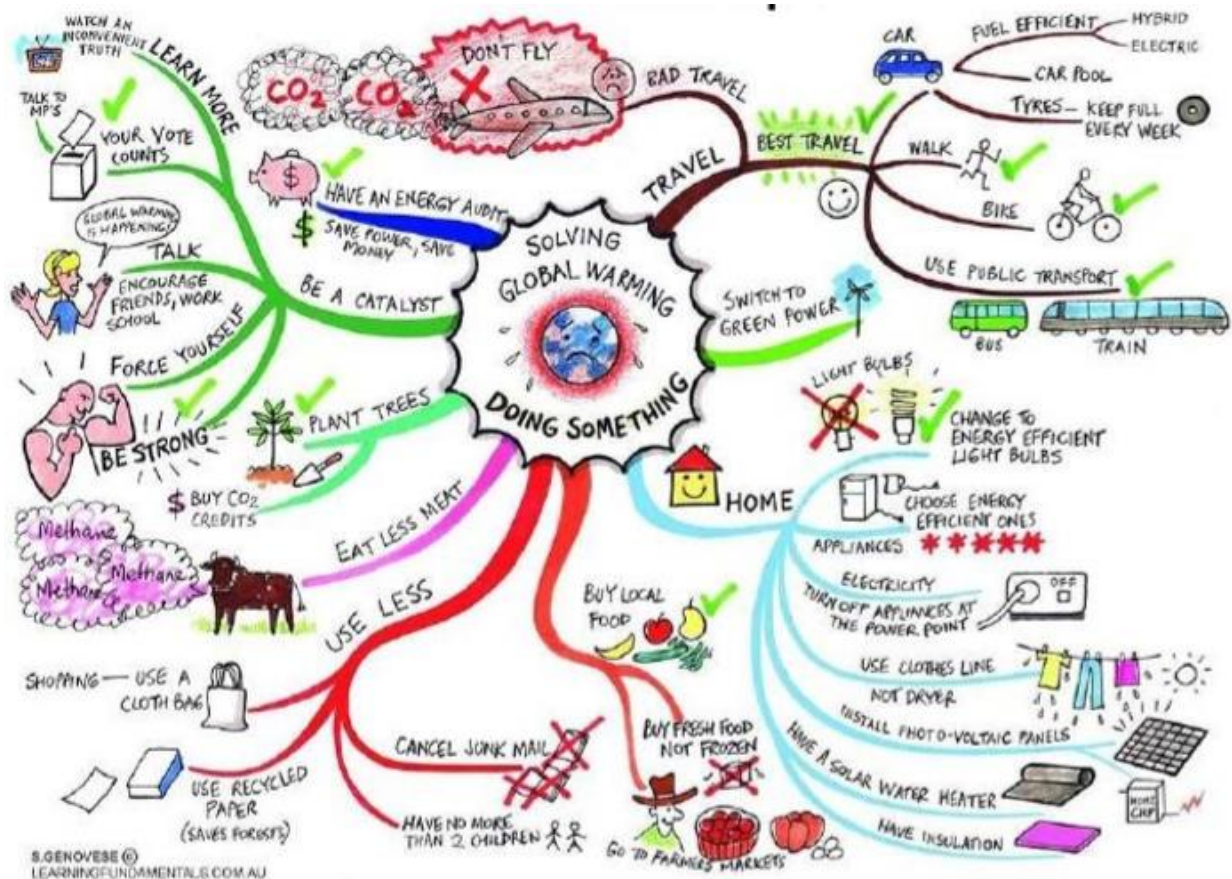
Use Single Words or Simple Phrases – Many words in normal writing are padding, as they ensure that facts are conveyed in the correct context, and in a format that is pleasant to read. In Mind Maps, single strong words and short, meaningful phrases can convey the same meaning more potently. Excess words just clutter the Mind Map.

Print Words – Joined up or indistinct writing is more difficult to read.

Use Colour to Separate Different Ideas – This will help you to separate ideas where necessary. It also helps you to visualize the Mind Map for recall. Colour can help to show the organisation of the subject.

Use Symbols and Images – Pictures can help you to remember information more effectively than words, so, where a symbol or picture means something to you, use it. You can use photo libraries like iStockPhoto to source images inexpensively.

Using Cross-Linkages – Information in one part of a Mind Map may relate to another part. Here you can draw lines to show the cross-linkages. This helps you to see how one part of the subject affects another.



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 pupils fail to gain the marks on exam papers they hoped for:

- 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.
- Running out of time, so that the final question is not answered in enough 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

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

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

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

Video: Use short videos from YouTube, Corbett Maths etc. to help to understand 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.