



Harton
Academy



Parent & Pupil Guide To Preparing For GCSE Examinations

For parents/Carers

This booklet is not designed to give you a fool proof master plan to achieve tremendous outcomes with your child; rather it is to provide you with a few tips, suggestions and ideas for you to consider to support them through the up-coming exam period. By no means are you expected to put all of these into practice but it may be worth picking out a few that may work for you and your child. You are not expected to fully understand the details of the examination system, know anything about sitting exams or to be an expert in all the subjects your child is studying. One of the best things parents or carers can do if their child is experiencing exam stress is to try to be as supportive and tolerant as possible. The best way to support your child during the stress of revision and exams is to make home life as calm and pleasant as possible. It helps if other members of the household are aware that your child may be under pressure and that allowances should be made for this. If your child is given study leave in the run-up to exams, try to be at home as much as possible so that you can share a break and a chat together. We've put together a list of strategies that may help you and our pupils manage exam stress and perform to the best of their ability during the exams. We've also included some tips on how to help your child deal with exam stress and some effective revision techniques.

Effective study and learning habits

You can help reduce exam stress by supporting your child in establishing effective learning habits:

- ✓ Ask about their plans for revision and look for opportunities to praise their efforts.
- ✓ Help them to plan their study schedule early so they have sufficient time to study. It can be helpful to develop a clear, realistic plan of what they want to cover in each study session. (Example timetable at end of booklet).
- ✓ Don't expect them to study all the time, encourage them to continue to meet up with friends and to attend their usual clubs and activities.
- ✓ Encourage them to work on their weaknesses as well as the things they do well.
- ✓ Offer to help test them at the end of revision sessions.
- ✓ Make sure they have all the equipment they need (pens, pencils, calculator, highlighters etc).
- ✓ Help your child find a quiet place to study without distractions. Ensure their mobile phones are in a separate room when they are studying. Make sure their table is uncluttered so they can focus better.
- ✓ Encourage your child to find out exactly what the test involves - are there past test papers they can look at to help them understand what to expect?
- ✓ Encourage your child to ask for help or ask their teacher for clarification when they are unsure of something or if they feel confused.
- ✓ Help them to make 'mind maps' to collect ideas and summarise thoughts - use bright colours to help remember important links.
- ✓ Remind your child to take a short rest and move around in between each part of their study. A useful cycle to get into is 20 minutes revise, 5 minutes test, 5 minutes rest.
- ✓ Encourage your child to try out different revision techniques to find one which works for them.
- ✓ Strongly encourage your child to attend any revision sessions offered by school.
- ✓ Offer to download past papers from exam board websites for them – **be sure to use the correct exam board and course.**
- ✓ Insist they don't revise in front of the TV and encourage them to put their mobile phone away till break times.
- ✓ Offer occasional help with revision. It can be useful having someone to listen or practise with.

Healthy sleeping and eating habits

- ✓ Encourage your child to stick to a routine of going to bed at a reasonable time. They need to avoid late night TV shows or movies.
- ✓ Motivate them to eat regularly and make time to have fun and exercise.
- ✓ Help them to cut back on coffee and energy drinks as these can increase agitation. Encourage them to drink lots of water instead.
- ✓ Remind them to take time out when they eat, rather than carrying on with study.
- ✓ Encourage them to eat fresh fruit, vegetables, cereals, grains, and protein - they are all good for the brain and blood sugar levels.
- ✓ Encourage them to eat when they get hungry. This keeps blood sugar and hydration levels steady.
- ✓ Avoid junk food if possible. It will bring a sudden sugar high which will fall away quickly, leaving a person feeling tired.

Relaxation ideas to help your child cope with exam stress

- ✓ Always encourage your child to relax before they go to bed after concentrating for long periods of time. Activities such as reading a short story may help them unwind and sleep better.
- ✓ Encourage them to go out for a walk, run or do some other exercise they enjoy.
- ✓ Teach them relaxation techniques such as listening to some gentle music, getting them to lie down, closing their eyes and taking a deep breath while visualising a calming scene such as a deserted beach.
- ✓ Avoid rushing on the day of the exam by organising and packing everything they need to take with them the night before. It is also helpful to review seating plans for each exam.

Leave the little things alone

During exam time it is ok to let things slip that otherwise would have been a cause of friction. If chores are left undone and bedrooms are messy that is ok. Not forcing your child to keep up with these things will help to provide them with time and space to focus on their revision. There will be plenty of time to catch up on housework and chores once exam time is over. Try not to nag or make too many demands on your child during exam time. Arguments are counter-productive and will only add unnecessary stress and distract from revision.

Students put themselves under enough pressure

All parents want their children to do well, that is only natural. However, most children place enough pressure on themselves to do well without additional expectation or demands from mum and dad. Reassure them of your love and support, no matter the outcome of exams and emphasise that this is not the be all and end all for them.

Preparing for an exam

Get them ready for an exam with plenty of planning and support. Encourage them to get all their pens, pencils and equipment ready the evening before. Try to get them to go to bed early so they are able to have a restful sleep. In the morning, arrange for them to have a healthy and nutritious breakfast to help them focus and concentrate. Go through a checklist to make sure they have everything they need, including the location of the exam and their designated seat. Give your child lots of encouragement so they feel more positive before they leave. Let them know how proud you are of them regardless of how they think they do.

After the exam

After each exam, allow them the opportunity to talk about how they have done and allow them to do the talking while you listen. Encourage them not to dwell on mistakes they feel they have made. They may want some space to compare notes with other friends. You may want to share your experiences of exams as this may reassure them.

Exam results mark the end of one phase in your child's life, and the beginning of another. This can be unsettling and difficult, so let them voice their worries and expectations and listen out for any underlying serious issues.

Plan an event to mark the results, whatever they are and have some fun now with your child. Make it clear that you love and value your child for who they are, and not for what they achieve in an exam.

For Pupils - Top Ways to Cope with Exam Stress

1. Remember to breathe

Setting aside a couple of minutes every day to practise techniques, such as breathing exercises helps you to calm down your body's stress response and shift your attention back to the present. In turn, this gives you time to rationally think through the anxieties you have and enables you to deal with a large number of exams and begin more effective revision.

2. Eat, sleep and exercise well

Pulling all-nighters, surviving on a poor diet, and getting minimal amounts of movement into your day can increase symptoms of anxiety. For your body's best performance, make sure you're getting 8 or 9 hours of sleep, enough slow-release carbohydrates, less caffeine and more water, and at least half an hour of exercise per day.

3. Set realistic goals

Setting realistic goals, whether you have several weeks, days or hours before your exam, helps you to put everything into perspective. Acceptance of your situation and working within your capability will help maximise your productivity without the risk of burning yourself out.

4. Don't go it alone

Revising with peers is an effective study technique as it allows individuals to better absorb their own notes. Furthermore, the emotional benefits of social support tend to include a better sense of confidence and autonomy.

5. Pace yourself through panic

Panicking before, during or even after an exam is common. If you experience it at any point, take six deep breaths, hydrate yourself, and then go back to the problem at hand, being sure to break it down into several manageable chunks.

6. Believe in yourself

When being constantly faced with new challenges, we often forget to look back at how far we have come and how much we have already achieved. Given that you have prepared well, there should be no reason for you to worry.

7. If you feel like you are struggling, talk to someone

Asking for help is never shameful. When struggling, talk to friends or family. Alternatively, don't be afraid to seek professional help and support.

8. Prioritise

Prioritising your time, subjects and work load will help reduce your stress levels, as you'll be able to ensure that the really important stuff is covered and at the right time. Draw out a simple diagram with dates, of each exam, and how many topics need to be covered for each exam. Tick the topics off as you complete them— this will give you a sense of achievement.

9. Organise

Taking a bit of time to get yourself in order will make you feel more confident about succeeding in the exams.

10. Avoid social Media

This will be a tough one for you, but if you can bear to part with your beloved Snapchat for a few days, it will do wonders for your stress levels. Checking your Facebook during revision period is the worst type of procrastination possible, as the time disappears when you are on your newsfeed.

11. Avoid negative people

Everyone will be dealing with exam stress at the same time so don't let others bring you down. Don't let negative people impact on the progress you have made. Everyone is different and others may unload their worries onto you as a coping mechanism. Be supportive but don't take on too much.

12. Getting motivated

The scale of the challenge can be so intimidating that just getting started can be really hard. If you struggle with motivation, start in good time by doing SOMETHING. It doesn't matter how small, just something that helps to get things started.

Finally! There are also some unexpected ways that students can rise above the tough exam period such as:

- Playing with your pet
- Bursting bubble wrap
- Repeating mantras and chants
- Listening to comedy

Keep it in perspective

At the end of the day, keeping things in perspective is one of the most powerful ways of keeping your stress levels under control – in 5 years' time this will not be a concern and, regardless of the outcome, things will be ok anyway. The main thing is that you try your best.

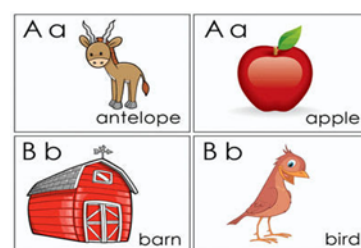
Practical Revision tips

Your GCSE revision should take account of the difference between your subjects and the challenges they represent. Mix up your study habits and methods by listening to **podcasts, watching videos or documentaries, or even something as simple as moving to a new study area**. Nothing beats hard work, especially when it comes to studying, but there are ways you can guide your brain to remember information easier which supports your ability to learn. Make sure you make a timetable to organise what revision or essay work you're going to tackle each day. It really helps you set out what you need to do in small chunks. **Block social media websites temporarily so you don't get distracted**. Effective revision must be active – reading through class notes or textbooks is not always the best method of preparation

Flashcards

Use for key information and facts. You can download a free mobile phone app or you can carry physical cards with you and test yourself anywhere.

Use it to remind and test yourself on factual information such as spellings, lists, dates or a sequence of simple events etc.



Read-Cover-Recall-Check

Read the information you want to remember. Cover it up, write out what you remember. Check to see how much you forgot.

Use it to test yourself on: spellings, lists and a sequence of simple events

Online quizzes or revision guide exam questions

Answer the questions, note down your score, revise the topic some more, have another go at the questions later. Did you improve?

Use it to test yourself on: simple scientific facts and processes



Make a card sort

Make a set of cards that you can cut out, mix up and match.

Use them: when you need to remember pieces of information that go together.

Key word cards

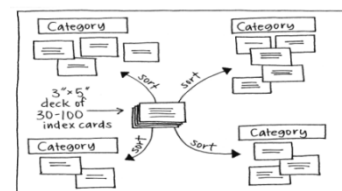
Include definitions on the back. You can test yourself on the definitions, sort them into scientifically relevant categories and put them into a sequence.



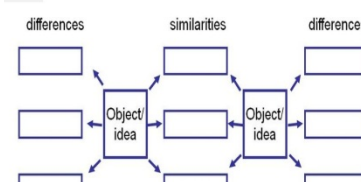
Describe or explain a process/scenario to someone who does not know it or a classmate.

They can ask questions to fill in any gaps you missed and if they are also revising it may help them understand the work better.

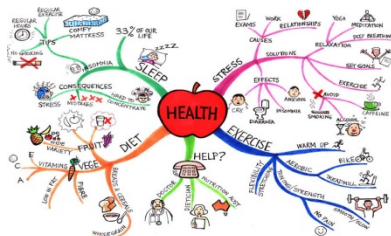
Use it when: Explaining a series of events or a process that has some detail.



Graphic organisers



Decide if you are describing, analysing parts, comparing, analysing cause and effect, predicting or evaluating and display your arguments in a graphic organiser. **Use it to:** look at topics in more detail.



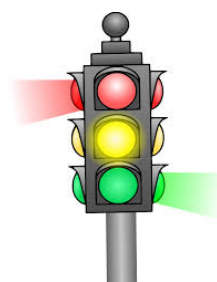
Mind maps

Start with a central theme and organise the information from it, grouped into subtopics. Label the branches with the relationships to summarise a whole topic after revising it in detail. Only put in the key words, everything else should come to mind when you read it.

Past exam questions and analysis

Complete some past exam questions. Mark your answers. Fill in the answers you missed. Go through the paper and colour-code each topic (Red-need to revise, Amber-need to go over a few bits again, Green-I've got it)

Use it to test your ability to: recall the information you have revised, to answer the question asked, not just write down everything you know, to follow the **command words** in an exam.



Online resources

These are the general ones we recommend as a school

GCSEPod, specific exam board websites, BBC Bitesize, s-cool.co.uk, thestudentroom.co.uk, pass my exams.co.uk, studywise.co.uk

Subject specific sites recommended by staff

Business: <https://www.senecalearning.com/>

Science: <https://www.pearsonactivelearn.com/app/Home>

<https://www.senecalearning.com/>

<https://www.senecalearning.com/>

Temple GCSE – Free i-phone App

DT: www.technologystudent.com

www.bbc.com/bitesize

www.fsc-uk.org/en-uk/about

www.woodproducts.fi

www.hse.gov.uk

www.nutrition.org.uk

ICT:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0HzEBLIJxlrwBAHJ5S9JQg/playlists?shelf_id=9&sort=dd&view=50

<https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/subjects/z34k7ty>

<https://cambridgegcsecomputing.org/>

Making revision bearable - It's never going to be fun, but here are a few ideas on how to make revision more bearable :

Put a sweet in random pages – then you'll have a surprise treat every now and then!

Grab a good pair of headphones and play some instrumental music. Lyrics make it harder but instrumental music settles in the background and helps you sharpen your focus.

To make the day more manageable, break down each hour into 40 minutes of solid revision followed by 20 minutes of tea-making/Beyoncé-blasting/wandering in the fresh air, so that you never feel too chained to the task on any given day.

Remember that you're not a machine. You deserve time off! Make sure you factor in time to watch a film, go out with friends or grab a coffee. The most productive brains are those that rest properly too!

Break up your revision with some exercise! Whether it's a brisk walk or a session in the gym, not only will it let your mind relax for an hour, you'll also get a burst of energy.

Go to bed early and drink lots of water.

Holiday week example revision timetable

<u>Day/time</u>	<u>9:00</u> <u>10:00</u>	<u>11:00</u> <u>12:00</u>	<u>12:00</u> <u>13:00</u>	<u>13:00</u> <u>14:00</u>	<u>14:00</u> <u>15:00</u>	<u>9:20</u> <u>9:50</u>
<u>Mon</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>ICT</u>	<u>DT</u>	<u>CS</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>English</u>
<u>Tues</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>Biol</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Geog</u>	<u>PE</u>	<u>Physics</u>
<u>Weds</u>	<u>Chem</u>	<u>RE</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>Music</u>	<u>French</u>
<u>Thurs</u>	<u>Geog</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>Biol</u>	<u>RE</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Geog</u>
<u>Fri</u>	<u>DT</u>	<u>PE</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Biol</u>	<u>English</u>
<u>Sat</u>	<u>Maths</u>					<u>History</u>
<u>Sun</u>	<u>English</u>					

School week example timetable

<u>Day/time</u>	<u>6:00</u> <u>6:30</u>	<u>6:40</u> <u>7:10</u>	<u>7:20</u> <u>7:50</u>	<u>8:00</u> <u>8:30</u>	<u>8:40</u> <u>9:10</u>	<u>9:20</u> <u>9:50</u>
<u>Mon</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>ICT</u>	<u>DT</u>	<u>CS</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>English</u>
<u>Tues</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>Biol</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Geog</u>	<u>PE</u>	<u>Physics</u>
<u>Weds</u>	<u>Chem</u>	<u>RE</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>Music</u>	<u>French</u>
<u>Thurs</u>	<u>Geog</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>Biol</u>	<u>RE</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Geog</u>
<u>Fri</u>	<u>DT</u>	<u>PE</u>	<u>Maths</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Biol</u>	<u>English</u>
<u>Sat</u>	<u>Maths</u>					<u>History</u>
<u>Sun</u>	<u>English</u>					