

## TOP GCSE REVISION TIPS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

### ORGANISE YOURSELF EARLY

When it comes to revision, slow and steady wins the race. Look at when each exam is due to take place, then create a revision timetable that prioritises the subjects you'll be tested on first. You should also include your exam dates, times and locations.

By making a plan in advance of the exam period (and sticking to it!), you'll feel more in control of your work - and you can avoid being gripped by last minute panic.

### MIX IT UP

When you create your revision timetable, be honest with yourself about which subjects you are, and aren't, looking forward to spending time on.

By placing less enjoyable topics next to ones you find more interesting, you'll find it easier to keep going. For example, an hour of maths revision might be more bearable if you know you have history to look forward to after lunch. Avoid spending more than an hour on each subject, and make sure you build in time for regular breaks, too.

### GET COMFORTABLE

Think about where you're going to be revising and make sure it's a space you can truly work in. You'll need plenty of light, plus room to spread out your notes, text books and other resources. You'll need to avoid revising anywhere noisy or where there are distractions that will affect your concentration - so if you can, try to stay out of areas where other family members will keep coming and going.

Have a drink of water handy as staying hydrated will help you to focus. Also, consider opening a nearby window if you're in a warm place; a breath of fresh air will help keep you alert.

Above all, be honest with yourself about whether or not 'background noise' truly helps you to concentrate. While relaxing music, played softly, is an aid to some people when they're revising, almost nobody can work effectively with the TV or radio on.

### DON'T OVER DO IT!

Quality is more important than quantity when you're revising. In other words, it's better to revise effectively for a few hours each day than to be buried in your books 24 / 7. Nobody's attention span is infinite, and it's impossible to concentrate for much more than an hour without a break. In fact, a subject you're struggling to get your head around might make more sense once you've spent a few minutes away from your desk, stretched your legs or had a cup of tea. It's important to stay sociable

when you're revising, too - spend time with friends and family in the evenings and, if you take part in a sport, try to keep it up during exam time. These activities will help you relax, preparing your body and your mind for more revision tomorrow.

## **TOP REVISION TECHNIQUES**

### **DON'T WATCH THE CLOCK**

Timing your revision sessions strictly isn't always the best approach - particularly if you're inclined to keep glancing at your watch, wishing the hours away! While sticking to your revision timetable is important, try to set yourself small goals while you're working as well as time limits.

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related. For example, a SMART goal for an English literature revision session might be: 'By the end of this session, I will have memorised five useful quotations from *Of Mice and Men*.'

Achieving objectives like this will help you feel good about your revision and boost your confidence.

### **REVISE 'ACTIVELY'**

This doesn't mean you have to do star jumps while practicing Pythagorus' Theorem - but it does mean you need to 'exercise' your mind! Simply re-reading your notes is a very ineffective way to revise. According to scientists, your brain will retain less than 10% of what you read, unless you also do something active to boost your brain power.

Re-writing or condensing (simplifying and shortening) your notes, creating posters, drawing mind maps or discussing a topic with friends will help you remember what you've studied far more successfully than reading alone.

### **CREATE KEY WORD LISTS**

Making lists of key words and terms, then looking back at them, can be a great way to test what you've learnt about a particular topic.

For example, after a session spent revising the origins of the Second World War, you could try to list its causes as simply as possible: Treaty of Versailles, Weimar Republic, Wall Street Crash, appeasement, and so on.

You can then use the list again, giving it to a friend or family member so they can see whether you remember your key words and terms - and whether you're able to fully explain them.

### **KEEP THINGS COLOURFUL**

Scribbling on sheets of lined A4 paper day in, day out might not help your motivation to revise - particularly if you're artistically inclined. But there's no rule that says revision always has to mean writing!

Creating colourful A3 posters and drawing bright mind maps can be just as helpful as producing reams of text. Using bright stationery and colour-coding notes according to topic can also help to tackle the boredom you might feel with working in only black and white.

## **LISTEN TO YOURSELF**

Bizarre though it sounds, some people swear by recording themselves reading their notes aloud and then listening back to the track on a laptop, mobile phone or music player.

It might feel embarrassing, but it's definitely worth a try; some of us are 'aural learners' and absorb information particularly well when we listen. If that applies to you, this could be an easy way to get extra revision time in!

## **TRY FLASH CARDS**

Creating flash cards is a great way to condense your notes and revise key topics - and they can also be handy to use with family and friends. Lined, rectangular note cards are available from most stationers, and can be filled with key word lists, important questions and answers and bullet-point explanations of concepts. They can then be passed to willing testers who can check how much you remember!

Flash cards are easily portable, too - helpful if you're heading out for a revision date with a friend.

## **PUT UP POST-IT NOTES**

Using post-it notes can be a fun and powerful way to work on remembering important ideas, facts and definitions. Write single words on brightly coloured post-its and stick them up around the house, placing them on everyday objects such as the kettle, the fridge door... Even the top of the toilet!

If you can't remember what your post-it note means, look it up before you make that cup of tea, raid the fridge or use the bathroom.

## **USE PAST PAPERS**

Past exam papers will be available from your teachers and online from whichever exam boards your school uses. You can use them to test yourself both in timed and un-timed conditions, and to help focus your revision.

Simply planning your answers to questions that require longer responses - such as in English and History - will help you to consolidate your understanding, without the need to produce whole essays.

## **REVISE EXAM SKILLS, AS WELL AS SUBJECTS**

Refreshing your subject knowledge is obviously the primary purpose of revision - but be sure to remind yourself of how to approach exam questions while you're working towards your exams.

Don't neglect vital skills such as properly reading the question and ensuring you answer it in full. Failing to respond to a question in just the right way could cost you marks - even if you really know your stuff. When it comes to subjects where you'll be doing lots of writing, make sure you plan your answers to essay questions. If you don't, it's all too easy to drift off the point and write a response that, even if it's good, doesn't directly address what you've been asked - and which therefore won't bring you any closer to a top grade.

### **IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...**

Try, try again! Re-do questions you get wrong when you test yourself, even once you understand the mistake you've made. Prove to yourself you can do it. The more times you get something right, the more confident you'll feel.

### **DON'T ALWAYS WORK ALONE**

Independent revision can be highly effective, but combining this with revision with a friend, or as part of a group, is the best approach. It's a great way to add variety to your routine, provided you concentrate on the task at hand.

Participating in group discussion helps most students to focus for longer, can give you a different perspective on the topic you're studying and will help you achieve a broader understanding of the subject you're revising. Explaining concepts and ideas to others is also a key way of strengthening your knowledge and consolidating your learning.

### **ASK FOR ADVICE**

Revision is about refreshing what you've already learnt, not teaching yourself something from scratch. If you're really struggling with a particular topic, don't try to get to grips with it on your own - seek advice from a teacher or a friend.

## **GCSE REVISION: DOS AND DON'TS**

### **DO... REWARD YOURSELF**

Allow yourself a treat after working hard or achieving an important goal. Whether it's a relaxing night in with your favourite film, a simple bar of chocolate or an afternoon out with your friends, enjoy yourself for a while before you get back to the books.

### **DON'T... COMPARE YOURSELF TO YOUR FRIENDS**

You might have heard that someone in your English class has read *Romeo & Juliet* 10 times - but do you really think it's true? Don't get hung up on what other people are doing to prepare for their GCSE exams... Especially as you can't ever completely believe what they say!

Stick to your own timetable, stay calm and revise in the way that works best for you.

### **DO... USE THE WEB WISELY**

Online forums are full of revision tips in the run up to GCSEs, and the internet boasts a wealth of quizzes that can help test your learning in a variety of subjects - but use the web wisely when you're revising.

If you start clicking around at random, it could be a long while before you look at your watch and realise how much time you've wasted. Be honest with yourself: if you can't stay on task when you're online, stay off your laptop.

### **DON'T... - LEAVE EVERYTHING UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE**

Trying to stuff your brain full of information immediately before an exam is the worst way to revise.

Not only is it unlikely to help you remember anything meaningful, it is almost guaranteed to stress you out right before your big day, when what you really need is a calm mind and a good night's sleep.

### **DO... KNOW HOW TO SPOT STRESS - AND STOP IT**

All of us feel stressed from time to time, but the run up to GCSEs can be especially intense. Stress can cause headaches, lead to difficulty sleeping, cause constant tiredness and result in increased feelings of anxiety - all of which are counterproductive when you're trying to concentrate on important work.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms it's really important to talk to someone about your stress levels - whether you choose a friend, a parent or a trusted teacher.

If stress is a problem for you, relaxing more will help you to revise more effectively - however contrary this might seem. Getting extra sleep, taking regular breaks and letting off steam by doing some exercise will all help.

### **DON'T... CONDUCT A 'POST-MORTEM' AFTER EVERY EXAM**

'What did you put for question 3b...?' Don't answer that, because it doesn't matter now!

Go into every GCSE exam and do the best you can, but don't go back over everything you wrote once the test is over.

Worrying yourself silly over things you have done (or not done) won't help you to concentrate on the revision and exams that are to come - and they should be your priority.

### **DO... WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR BODY**

It's always sensible to eat a healthy, balanced diet and get plenty of sleep, but this advice is really worth following in the run up to GCSEs.

Avoid junk food, opting instead for wholesome meals that will give you plenty of energy for studying. Try to wind down fully before you go to bed, and aim for a full eight hours of sleep every night.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR PARENTS

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### **BE A SUPPORTER, NOT A NAG**

When your son or daughter is approaching exams, resisting the temptation to ‘oversee’ their revision - or arm-wrestle them into doing it - can be tough. However, asking questions like ‘Have you done any revision today?’ is bound to cause arguments and come across to your child as nagging, especially if they are already anxious about their GCSEs.

Instead, if you can, help your son or daughter with creating their revision timetable. If he or she would prefer to do this alone, at least take a look at the timetable and offer encouragement, letting your child know you’re impressed with their organisation.

Asking how the schedule is going, rather than if they are doing any work, feels less intrusive for your son or daughter and is less likely to create tension. If he or she has fallen off track with revision, don’t judge - just ask how they plan to solve the problem and offer your support.

Giving your child a sense of responsibility, plus the feeling that you’re behind them in taking this on board, is key.

### **LOOK FOR SIGNS OF STRESS**

If your son or daughter isn’t eating as much as usual, seems to be struggling to sleep or is experiencing unusual aches and pains, it could be that they’re too stressed.

Look out for these signs, and if you see them talk to your child about why they are so anxious. Reassurance from someone who loves and knows them well will help to alleviate stress.

You should also encourage your son or daughter to eat as healthily as possible, take regular breaks from revision and engage in normal social activities, as well as unwind with some exercise. Remembering that there is life beyond the GCSEs is crucial - although it can be a challenge for the students about to sit them!

### **OFFER PRAISE AND REWARDS - NOT BRIBES**

As parents we all want to see our children do well, and it can be tempting to offer attractive ‘incentives’ for them to do so.

Be wary, though, of offering rewards for results rather than for the hard work that your son or daughter does in the lead up to the exams.

Promising specific treats in exchange for top grades can feel like bribery, and may heap extra pressure on your child at an already stressful time - whereas a series of small rewards during the revision period can provide encouragement and help build confidence.

### **GET INVOLVED**

Do whatever you can to help your child - whether that means making endless cups of tea, keeping younger siblings from disturbing them or sending them to bed when they look tired!

Offer to test your son or daughter on what they've revised each day and encourage them to put up revision posters, diagrams and post-it notes around the house. Above all, make sure you're available to your child if they want to talk about any worries they may have.

### **AVOID ARGUMENTS**

GCSE time is likely to be stressful for the whole family: your son or daughter will be nervous about the approaching exams, while the rest of you will be keen for them to fulfil their potential.

Tempers are likely to be frayed during revision time, but do your best not to rise to the bait if your teenager is more challenging than usual. Young people's self-esteem can be fragile as the exams approach, particularly if they are pushing themselves to get top results - so stay as positive and supportive as you can.

### **DON'T SAY 'IN MY DAY...'**

Telling your son or daughter that you, or older siblings, did exams like GCSEs and survived them might seem helpful - but unfortunately it can add to the stress your child is already feeling.

If your son or daughter feels under pressure to perform well, thinking about themselves in relation to others who've done the exams before - particularly brothers and sisters who were very successful - might make matters worse.