



Year 11

Preparing for examinations

Parent advice booklet

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Introduction

We hope you find this booklet helpful as we come to the final preparation for the mock and summer GCSE examinations. We want all of our students to leave Year 11 with the best possible results. Results that will not only enable them to take the next step in their chosen career pathway but that they will be proud to write whenever and wherever required for the rest of their lives.

For those students who are intending to continue their education beyond Sixth Form to university then the GCSE results will form a very important part of the application process. Most Universities will ask for at least a Grade 4 in English and maths. For Science and Engineering some Universities will ask for Grades 5 or 6 in English and maths. A number of medical courses will ask for at least 5 Grade 8s especially in English and maths.

If students enter Sixth Form without at least a grade 4 in English or maths they will be required to attend the resit GCSE groups and spend some of their curriculum time making sure that they gain these important qualifications.

If at any point in the revision, mock or GCSE examination periods you are concerned or worried then please contact us – we will help whenever possible.



Revision techniques:

Research from four universities led to the publication of a review of hundreds of studies that explored the most effective strategies to lead to long-term learning.

What works:

- **Hard work** gets grades. Students that spend at least two hours a night on their homework/revision are statistically more likely to get better grades. It is important that the students follow the homework/revision schedule set by the teachers.
- **Retrieval practice** (the testing effect) requires students to answer a question. It is proven to be the most effective revision strategy. Examples of strategies used in retrieval practice are:
 - Use flashcards (Quizlet) and testing applications to practise recalling the information from topics.
 - Use mind-maps or revision clocks to quiz – read, cover, write. Students are aiming to recall all of the information on the revision resource and should be able to reproduce it.
 - Answering short retrieval questions or multiple choice quizzes
- **Spacing** is another good revision technique that students must employ. This involves learning a little information regularly, rather than trying to learn a lot in a single day. Recent research has found that the use of spacing resulted in a 10% to 30% difference in final test results compared to students who did lots of cramming. Spacing out revision gives students enough time to forget previously learnt information, meaning that when this information is re-visited and re-learnt it is more likely to be transferred to their long-term memory.
- **Interleaving** involves mixing up the topics the students study within a given subject. Recent research has shown how effective this technique is: those students who used interleaving performed more than three times better if the test was more than a day later. Interleaving helps students make links between different topics as well as discriminate between different types of problems, allowing them to identify the most ideal thought process for each.

The revision planner teachers set for homework incorporates the strategies mentioned above.



What does not work:

Often the easiest strategies prove to be the most ineffective. The following have all been proven by research to have little or no impact on learning:

- Re-reading your notes
- Highlighting your notes
- Making summaries of your notes



9 Ways to use retrieval practice

by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk

1



Past papers

2



Practice tests

3



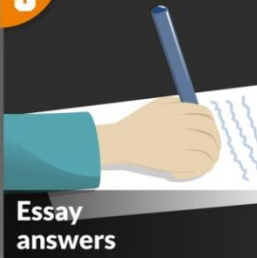
Quizzes

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Multiple choice tests

5



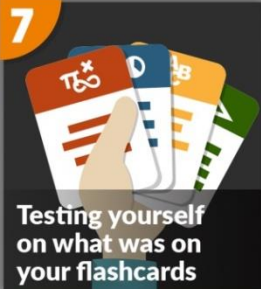
Essay answers

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Answering a spoken question

7



Testing yourself on what was on your flashcards

8



Making your own questions and answering them

9



Having someone ask you 3 questions about a topic

Examples of effective revision activities

The following activities are all activities that have been proven to be effective and will be central to the revision lessons and homework set.

Past papers are particularly useful as they are specific to the exams you will be taking, rather than just general test questions. By doing past papers – most of which are free online or available through your teacher – you can use retrieval practice with content that is directly relevant to your studies and exams. They should be completed later in the revision schedule when your son/daughters have revised enough content.

Multiple choice tests can be particularly useful if you are at an earlier stage of revision, as you don't need to know the answer instinctively; you just need to be able to recognise the correct answer from a set of options. This is still an effective method of retrieval practice as you are responding to a question.

Essay answers may well be included in your past papers, but they are a useful method of retrieval practice independently too. This is because they require you to synthesise multiple pieces of information into fluent prose and likely perform some analysis, which will improve retention more than merely recalling isolated facts. In the early stages of the revision schedule your son/daughter should “quiz” on the essay plan so they know what information they should include on the essay question.

Answering a question aloud is a useful form of retrieval practice as replying aloud makes you think about the information differently and make quick connections under pressure.

Testing yourself with flashcards you've made yourself is great because all the questions are directly relevant to your exam rather than being generic questions about the topic. You know what you need to be tested on the most, so you can tailor the questions to your weak spots while using retrieval practice.

Having someone ask you questions lets your son/daughter discover how well they understand the material, as they'll need to explain it to you. Quizzing your son/daughter multiple times on the same quiz helps them their memory recall.



Make notes

The right-hand and larger of the two columns should be used to take notes from the lesson. Students should ensure that these notes are concise and that they are not simply writing down exactly what their teachers says but instead summarising the most important concepts in their own words. This helps ensure that they are deeply thinking about the topic.

Summarise

After each lesson or after the school day, students should summarise the key takeaways from each lecture in the row at the bottom of the page. This allows them to take another look at the material before they forget about it, and to engage with it more deeply by figuring out the most important pieces of information.

Ask Questions

As soon as the lesson finishes, students should write questions surrounding the subject matter in the left-hand column. Writing questions is an important part of this strategy, as it forces students to really consider the information they have learnt.

Students should also use this column to record any important keywords or equations.

Practice

When revising, students can then cover the right-hand column and try to formulate answers to the questions and recall the subject matter related to the keywords/equations written in the left-hand column.

For maximum effect, students' answers should be given aloud, rather than in their head, as this forces them to organise the information and make quick connections. Both of these things increase the likelihood of the material being successfully transferred to the long-term memory.



USING FLASHCARDS TO REVISE

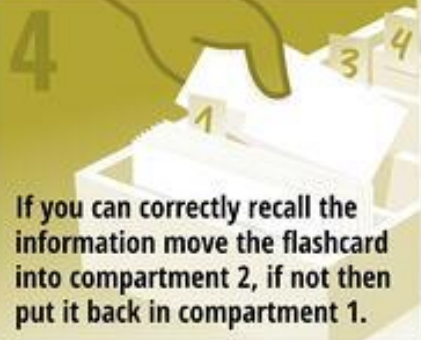
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- 1** Split a box into 5 different compartments and label them 1 to 5.



Place all your flashcards in compartment 1.

- 3** Test yourself on a flashcard



If you can correctly recall the information move the flashcard into compartment 2, if not then put it back in compartment 1.

- 5** Continue to test yourself and each time you correctly recall the information, move the flashcard into the next compartment. Flashcards from compartment 1 should be reviewed daily, with flashcards from compartment 2 being reviewed every other day, compartment 3 every third day and so on.



Eventually, all your flashcards will have been transferred to compartment 5 and the information they contain stored in your long-term memory.



Dealing with exam stress

Self-talk: Recent research demonstrated a link between high levels of cognitive distortion and high test anxiety, which together led to lower exam results. Cognitive distortions include catastrophising (belief in the worst possible outcome e.g. “I will fail all my exams”), personalising (excessive attribution of failure to self, for instance “I will not pass this exam because I am a failure”) and concentrating too much on negative elements (for example, “I will fail my exam because I could not answer some questions”).

Therefore, to overcome test anxiety, these cognitive distortions need to be overridden with positive and helpful self-talk where students focus on previous exam successes.

Reframing: Exam anxiety boosts performance. It triggers the release of hormones that boost energy supplies and enhances the brain’s effectivity. Researchers have found that students who accept exam anxiety showed lower levels of test anxiety and performed better in their exam. More importantly, the positive effects of reframing are long lasting, decreasing test anxiety in subsequent exams.

Prepare well: In one particularly study, researchers found that when students felt underprepared they experienced higher levels of test anxiety and lower levels of performance. Good preparation involves engaging with revision, eating well and getting a good night’s sleep. It also includes avoiding interacting with others who are also anxious, and instead engage in conversation with calmer students.

Take Deep Breaths: Research has shown that by slowing your breathing, you can reduce your heart rate, moving the body closer to a state of physiological rest, allowing you to regain more control over your emotions.



4 Ways to Overcome Test Anxiety
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USE SELF TALK
Talk to yourself in a positive way, focusing on previous exam success.

USE REFRAMING
Look at test anxiety in a helpful way. Test anxiety is natural and can be beneficial to performance.

PREPARE WELL
Good preparation does not only involve carrying out the necessary revision. Other preparation such as getting a good night's sleep before an exam improve your performance.

TAKE DEEP BREATHS
This will allow you to reduce your heart rate and take control of your emotions.

What can I do to support my child?

Researchers reviewed 37 studies on the effects of parental behaviours and attitudes on students' grades. They sampled over 80,000 students and their families. They then made suggestions as to what does and doesn't work.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

Their study found that four of the best things a parent can do at primary and secondary school level to help their child's grades are:

1 Have high academic expectations

Having high aspirations and expectations of your child **has the biggest impact** on their grades. Parental expectations include how important school is, their attitude towards teachers, and the value of education.



2 Regular communication

This includes developing and maintaining communication with children about their school life. This **helps parents nip any potential problems** in the bud before they manifest into bigger issues.



3 Good reading habits

This involves **reading frequently and regularly with your child**. This includes reading to them and encouraging them to read alongside you as well.



4 Homework rules

This revolves around having clear rules to deal with how they divide their homework and leisure time. Explaining why these rules are in place **can help them to make better decisions** regarding their independent study time later in their school career.



What can I do to support my child?

Make sure they don't have their phone on them while they are working:

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THE STUDY

Mobile phones are a part of everyday life. They have the power to connect people and can be great tools for learning. Most people have their mobile phone next to them for large parts of the day. But is there a darker side to mobile phones? Can the mere presence of a mobile phone negatively impact student performance?

To answer this question, researchers had students complete a concentration task with either a mobile phone or a notepad on the table near them. The students didn't use the phone during the experiment, it was just within their eye-line.

To gather further information, the researchers had students complete a range of questionnaires about themselves and also ran the experiment twice: once with someone else's phone near them and once with their own phone.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

1 The mere presence of a mobile phone led to a **20% reduction in attention, concentration and performance** in tasks that were demanding and complex (i.e. ones that students had to think hard about).

2 Students **performed worse** in these tasks, regardless of whether they could see their own **phone nearby** or someone else's.

3 This **reduction in performance was found to be true** regardless of the student's gender, age, how much they normally used their own phone or how attached they said they felt to it.

What can I do to support my child?

Make sure they get a good night sleep:

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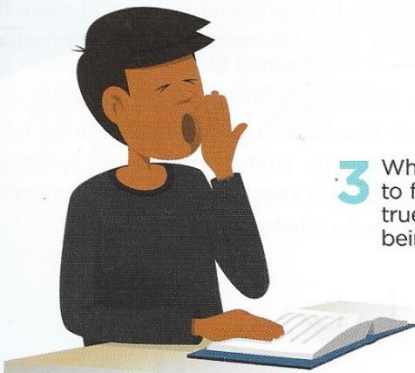
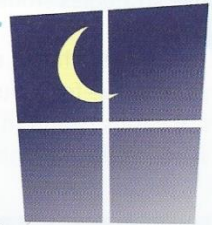
THE STUDY

We all do it. Only a few of us are getting enough of it and most of us want a bit more. On average we spend over 20 years of our life doing it, but the benefits of sleeping are still underappreciated. Despite The National Sleep Foundation recommending that teenagers need up to ten hours a night, many report getting less than seven.

Researchers reviewed the many different functions that sleep plays and how important it is in terms of students' memory, emotional regulation and mood. Their findings confirm that it is a fundamental part of the thinking and learning processes.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

- 1 Having a **good night's sleep** prior to learning allows students to create **new memory associations more effectively**. This is known as their ability to "encode information".
- 2 If students do not get **enough sleep**, it **hinders their ability** to commit what they have been taught to memory. This is known as an inability to "consolidate information".
- 3 When **sleep deprived**, people are more likely to forget positive memories. The opposite is true with negative memories, with tired students being more likely to retain and recall these.
- 4 **Excessive sleep loss** increases the likelihood of students displaying negative emotions, feeling stressed and being unable to manage their emotions.



What can I do to support my child?

Make sure they eat breakfast:

THE STUDY

Many students report skipping eating breakfast on a regular basis. But is there a cost to this?

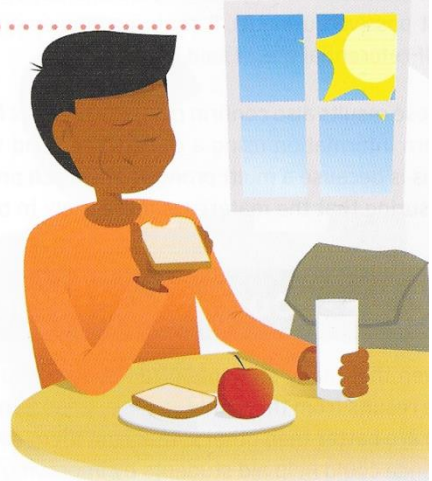
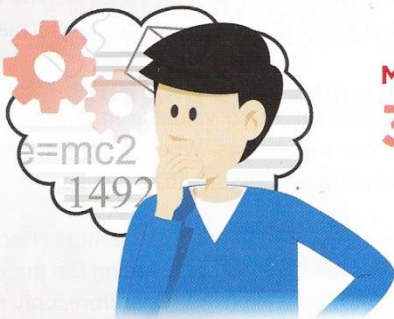
To find out, researchers ran a study that compared students who ate breakfast, drank a glucose drink instead, or skipped breakfast altogether. As well as administering concentration tests throughout the morning, the researchers also ran a memory recall exam and had the students report how they were feeling.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

Concentration levels

1 All students had a **dip in their ability to focus** as the morning went on. However, if students had **eaten breakfast**, this decline was **reduced by 50-65%** compared to those who hadn't.

2 For the first few hours, **having a glucose drink** instead of skipping breakfast actually led to a **bigger drop** in student's attention levels.



Memory recall

3 In a memory test conducted four hours after a revision session, students who had **not had breakfast** suffered **12%** reduction in their score. Students who had **only had a glucose drink** for breakfast had a **27%** decline, with those who **had breakfast** improving their performance by **3-5%**.

Alertness

4 Students who ate breakfast felt the **most alert over the course of the morning**. A glucose drink gave an initial boost for the first few hours before dropping to the same low levels by mid-day as those who had missed breakfast.



Subject revision resources:

Subject	Exam board	Revision resources
English Language	AQA	▪ https://www.educake.co.uk/ ▪ https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/levels/z98jmp3 ▪ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM2vdqz-7e4HAuzhpFuRY8w
English Literature	AQA	▪ GCSE English Macbeth revision guide ▪ GCSE English J&H revision guide ▪ GCSE English Poetry revision guide ▪ GCSE English An Inspector Calls revision guide ▪ https://www.educake.co.uk/ ▪ https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/levels/z98jmp3 ▪ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM2vdqz-7e4HAuzhpFuRY8w
Mathematics	Edexcel	▪ https://sparxmaths.com/ ▪ https://corbettmaths.com/ (5 a day, worksheets, videos and practice paper questions) ▪ https://www.mathsgenie.co.uk/gcse.html (questions by topic) ▪ https://www.mathsgenie.co.uk/papers.html (past papers) ▪ https://mathsbot.com/ (variety of resources to help with revision) ▪ CGP revision guides and flashcards
French	Edexcel	▪ Revision guides ▪ Sentence Builders ▪ Language Gym



Subject	Exam board	Revision resources
Science	AQA	- CGP revision cards https://mathsmadeeasy.co.uk/gcse-science-revision/ https://revisionscience.com/gcse-revision https://www.s-cool.co.uk/ https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/subjects/zrkw2hv https://www.my-gcsescience.com/ Sign up is free to access some excellent resources and blogs https://studywise.co.uk/gcse-revision/
History	AQA (SHP)	- Revision guides for each topic – Normans, Health, Germany, Conflict and Tension https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/examspecs/zxjk4j6
Geography	AQA	- GCSE Geography revision guide . - GCSE Geography workbooks
Art	AQA	Worthwhile research starting points: https://www.tate.org.uk https://www.art2day.co.uk/ https://www.axisweb.org https://www.pinterest.co.uk

Subject	Exam board	Revision resources
Computing	AQA	▪ https://www.computerscience.gcse.guru/
Child Development	OCR	▪ Revision guide
ICT (iMedia)	OCR	▪ Revision guide
Physical Education	AQA	▪ Revision guide
Music	AQA	▪ CGP Revision Guide ▪ Practice listening questions with accompanying tracks distributed ▪ Year 11 Music revision page
Design - <i>Resistant Materials, Textiles and Food Technology</i>	AQA	▪ CGP Revision guides ▪ www.technologystudent.com
Religious Studies	AQA (Specification A)	▪ AQA revision guide ▪ Knowledge organisers ▪ Seneca Learning ▪ BBC Bitesize
Sport	Edexcel (BTEC)	▪ Pearson revision guide ▪ Pearson workbook