



Academy Exam Preparation Student Handbook

Academic Year 2023-24

Contents

1. Establishing GOOD Routines

- Addressing some misconceptions
- Coping with exam stress: A guide for young people
- Self-Care and Self-Compassion

2. Revision Techniques

- Memory – the science of learning
- The key principles of effective revision
- Retrieval Practice
- Spacing and Interleaving
- Deliberate Practice
- Dual Coding
- Ineffective revision strategies
- The importance of Habits and Routines
- Tips to help with SEND to Revise
- The Five Step Study Plan
- Student Self-Reflection
- Creating a Revision Timetable
- How to Structure an Hour of Revision
- Revision Strategies Summary

3. Exam Preparation and Technique

- Common Mistakes in Exams
- Understanding Command Words

1. Establishing GOOD Routines

Eat breakfast – Often described as the most important meal of the day, eating breakfast has been shown to improve attention and memory.



Believe You Can Learn the Material – Having a positive mind-set and resilience have been proven to impact on your achievement. The more effort you put into your revision the better the final grades.

Have a Sense of Purpose – Keep reminding yourself that you are doing this to achieve your future goals. Having a good set of GCSE results helps you get into sixth form, college, university and your chosen career.

Put Your Phone Away - Being on your phone divides your focus, making concentration and learning more difficult. In a study that wins an award for 'stating-the-obvious', researchers found that students who spend more time on their phones checking emails, Facebook and texting, get lower grades.

Write About Your Nerves – When done in a group with a teacher this can be a cathartic activity, where you realise that your worries are illogical. It can help address your fears and help you prioritise your revision.

Use Out of School Time Productively - recent study by researchers from Cambridge University found what many teachers/parents have been saying for years. Students who spend more time playing video games and less time doing their homework/reading do worse in their exams. The report states that those who spent an extra two hours in front of a screen scored 18 fewer points in their GCSEs, whereas pupils who spent an extra hour doing their homework or reading each day got on average 23.1 more GCSE points.

Get a Good Night's Sleep - Sleepy students tend to do worse at school because not getting enough sleep can affect your memory, concentration, mood, creativity, health and concentration. This has been found to have a negative effect on grades in both maths and languages.

Addressing some misconceptions

1. Only re-reading their notes for revision

Despite being proven to be one of the most ineffective revision techniques, the popularity of re-reading remains worryingly high because it's easy and you feel purposeful. Remember if you choose to revise in this way you are choosing an ineffective method.

2. Skipping breakfast

Not eating breakfast has been demonstrated to have a detrimental impact on attention and memory. In one particular study, students who skipped breakfast or only had an energy drink performed significantly worse in attention and memory tasks when compared to those who ate breakfast.

3. Revising to Music

Recent research found that students who revised in a quiet environment performed over 50% better in an exam than those who revised listening to music with lyrics.

4. Trying to complete homework in sight of their phone

Multi-tasking is impossible and causes students to make errors, as well as reducing their productivity: it simply wastes their time and energy switching from one task to another.

5. Taking notes in class verbatim

When you select the notes to write down you spend more time processing the information and embedding it in your brain.

6. Cramming their revision

This is an ineffective method: when it comes to revision, a little but often is much better than a lot all at once for long term memory (**spacing**). Recent research proved that those who spaced out their revision scored on average 74%. In comparison, those who crammed only scored an average of 49% if the test was at least a week away.

7. Not getting enough sleep

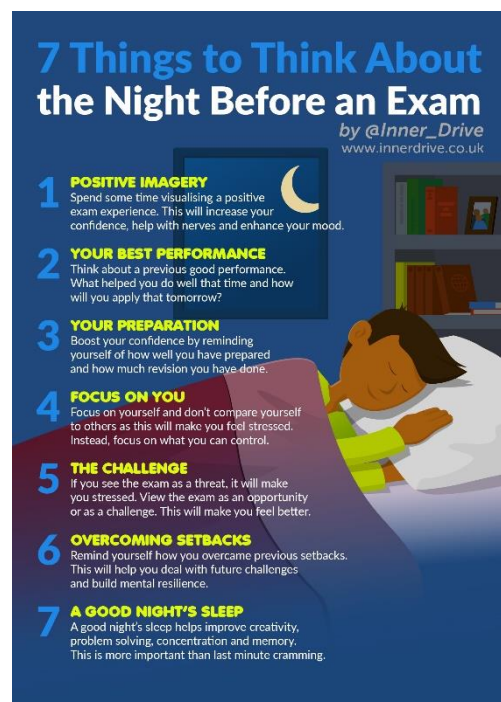
Research has shown that sleep plays a key role in enhancing memory, as the brain uses sleep to form new connections and prioritise the most important information. Setting up a consistent bedtime routine is therefore of paramount importance to students, and it has even been shown that focusing on getting at least 8 hours of sleep a night during exams leads to better grades than revising late into the night.

8. Leaving the hard task until the end

The harder the task, the more energy and focus we need to complete it. Therefore, it makes sense for most students to work on their hardest tasks around 10am when their daily biological clocks make them most alert. Attempting to do these tasks later makes them more difficult and increases the likelihood that they will be left until the next day – by the time get to these tasks, students are usually too tired to complete them well.

9. Not getting enough fresh air

In a world dominated by technology, many students are locking themselves indoors and spending hours on their phone or playing video games. However, getting enough fresh air is very important because of the profound impact it can have on well-being. A recent study found that going for a short walk, even for just 12 minutes, can improve happiness, attentiveness and confidence.



they

Coping with Exam Stress: A Guide for Young People

Exams are stressful!

- It is normal to feel some worry or stress about exams.
- Sometimes this can be useful – for example it can motivate you to revise or help your concentration when you are in the exam.
- BUT sometimes the worry or pressure can feel too much.
- It could make you feel anxious or depressed. It could affect your eating or sleeping habits.
- The tips in this guide can help you to manage exam stress.
- Some young people might need extra help. This is ok.

Look after your physical health

- Physical health underpins our mental health.

- Try and eat regularly. Eat a balance of foods to be as healthy as you can. Drink lots of water.
- Get enough sleep. It may be a cliché but turning off devices at least 30 minutes before sleep can help. As well as turning your phone off so you are not tempted to look at it during the night.
- Keep moving! Being active is really good for our mental health. Even better if you can get outside.

Try and keep perspective

- Make a list of all the things you want from life which don't involve exams. Exams are just a small part of the picture.
- Remind yourself of all the things about you that exams don't measure.
- Focus on the things you *can* do. For example, making sure you do enough revision, asking for help if you need it. It is better to focus on the things you can control rather than the things you can't, such as which questions will come up.
- Keep an eye out for your *catastrophising* voice – the one that says “what if I fail everything!” Remind your self that this is because you are nervous you are having these thoughts. Try and actually tell yourself this e.g. “I am feeling nervous and that's normal. It will feel better once the exam is over.”

Make a revision schedule

- Having a timetable for your revision will make a big difference.
- Break each day up into chunks.
- Make it realistic and make sure you put in regular breaks. Breaks are important to give our brain and body the best chance.
- If one day doesn't go so well, don't give up. We all have off days. Try again the next day.
- Do some revision with friends if it helps you. But don't compare yourself to how much revision others are doing or the way they do it. We are all different. It is important to find a way that works for you.
- If you don't know where to start, ask a trusted adult or a friend to help you draw up a timetable.

Have fun!

- Remember your life outside of exams is important.
- Write down all the things you like to do and make time for these in your revision schedule.
- Down time is really important and you should not feel guilty.
- Down time will help reduce your stress levels, boost your mood and make your revision more effective.

Ask for help if you need it

- Remember to talk about your feelings with a trusted adult. Talking about our feelings can really help.
- If you need help with a subject reach out to your teacher. They will want to do the best for you.
- If you feel like your mental health is suffering it is really important to speak with a trusted adult. Keeping things in can make it worse in the long run. It is better to get help as early as you can before things get worse.

Where to get more information or help

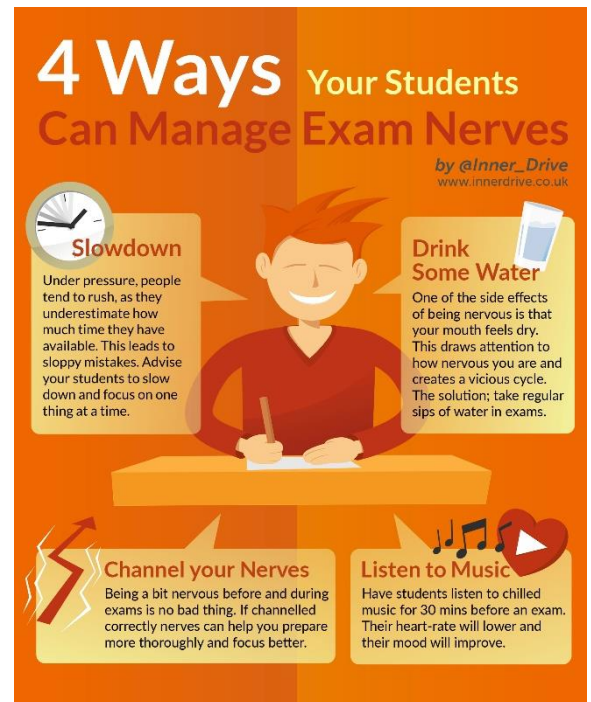
- In school you can speak with your Pastoral Leader, Safeguarding Team or Mentor.
- You can speak to your GP about your mental health
- Useful websites to help with revision

[BBC Bitesize](#)

[Go Congr](#)

- Useful websites for information on looking after your mental health during exams:

[Young Minds](#)



Self-Care and Self-Compassion



4 Ways to Improve Mindfulness

by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk


- 1 Build relationships with the people around you**
Spend time with friends and family. Talking about your problems takes the weight off your shoulders and offers perspective.
- 2 Keep Learning**
This helps you develop and grow. It gives a sense of achievement and facilitates the development of better coping skills.
- 3 Be Active**
Release the stress that has accumulated during the day. Exercise is a great way to wind down and regain control.
- 4 Keep a diary**
Writing down your thoughts and feelings helps you improve your self-awareness. It can also add a sense of closure and allows time for reflection.



6 SESSIONS TO REDUCE TEST ANXIETY

by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk

SESSION 1 HELP STUDENTS TO IDENTIFY SIGNS AND TRIGGERS THAT LEAD TO TEST ANXIETY.	SESSION 4 TEACH STUDENTS EFFECTIVE STUDY AND TEST TAKING SKILLS.
SESSION 2 GIVE STUDENTS METHODS TO REPLACE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK WITH POSITIVE SELF-TALK.	SESSION 5 ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SET THEMSELVES CHALLENGING, YET REALISTIC GOALS.
SESSION 3 OFFER STUDENTS RELAXATION TECHNIQUES, SUCH AS TAKING A FEW DEEP BREATHS, WHICH THEY CAN USE BEFORE AN EXAM TO CALM THEIR NERVES.	SESSION 6 OFFER STUDENTS THE CHANCE TO REFLECT ON WHAT WENT WELL AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED UPON.



6 Ways to Reduce Stress

by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk

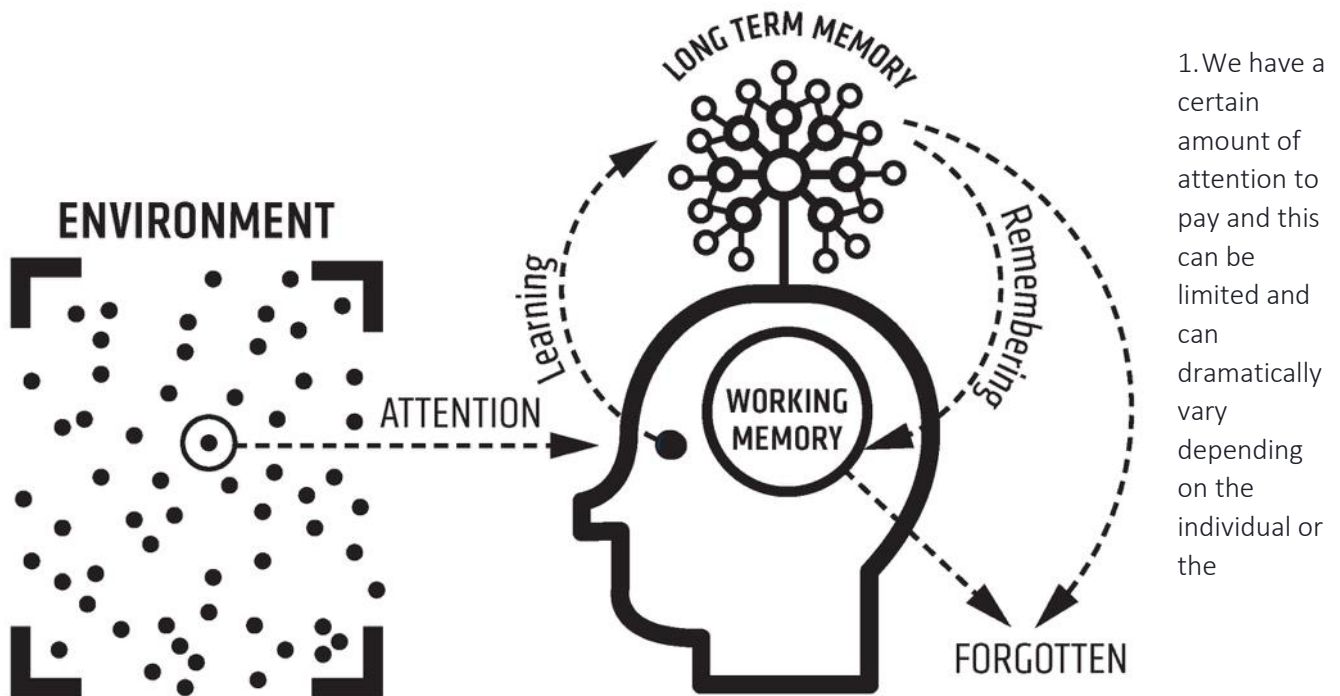
- 1 Remove uncertainty**
How is this similar to what you have done before?
- 2 Be proactive**
What can you do to improve the situation?
- 3 Reframing**
View the task as an opportunity not a threat.
- 4 Best case scenario**
Focus on what you stand to gain, not what you stand to lose.
- 5 Get a good night's sleep**
It's the way the brain works, everything seems worse when you are really tired.
- 6 Talk to someone**
Don't struggle in silence.

2. Revision Techniques & Advice

Memory – the science of learning

In recent years, there has been lots of research around the science of learning and how we learn and retain information.

In summary, if we think of the learning process using the following diagram, it will help us have a greater awareness of the most effective revision strategies based upon the available research.

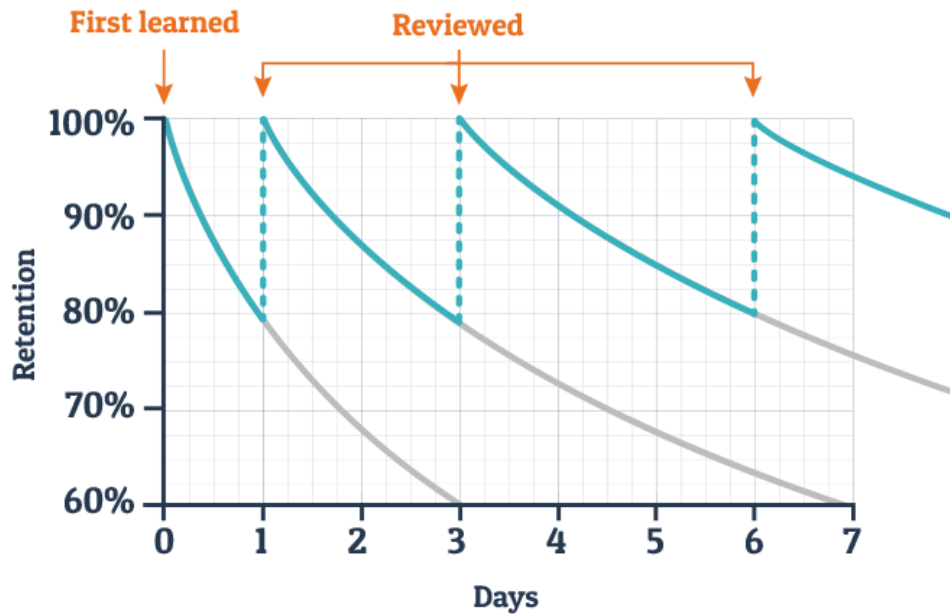


environment. In the diagram above, 'attention' means we acknowledge new information and this is then transferred into our working memory.

2. Our **working memory** is finite and we can only absorb a limited amount of information at a given time. This may be up to 30 seconds. *As an example, if you write down a 'long number' and try and remember it every 30 seconds, you will be surprised how difficult this is to do!*
3. Information is processed into our **long-term memory** through 'learning'. This long-term memory is effectively unlimited, and we can retrieve information from here back into our working memory as needed in a given moment. *As an example, this might be your phone number or address. We don't walk around thinking about those two things every second of the day but it is in our long-term memory ready to be used and retrieved when needed.*
4. Information in our **long-term memory** is interconnected and linked with prior knowledge. Anything that is not connected or not successfully stored well enough in our long-term memory is forgotten and this is completely natural.
5. If students undertake enough **retrieval practice**, generating the information in our long-term memory, it increases a level of fluency within the subject. Practice makes perfect!

As stated above, forgetting is completely natural. The following diagram outlines this process and is called the **Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve** (1885).

Typical Forgetting Curve for Newly Learned Information



Ebbinghaus proposed that humans start losing 'memory of knowledge' over time unless the knowledge is consciously reviewed time and time again. He conducted a series of tests on himself which included the memorization of a meaningless set of words. He tested himself consistently across a period of time to see if he could retain the information. He found that:

- **Memory retention is 100% at the time of learning any particular piece of information (in the moment). However, this drops to 60% after three days.**
- A range of factors affect the rate of forgetting including motivation, the meaningful nature of the information, the strategies for revision and also psychological factors (sleep for example).
- **If each day, repetition of learning occurs and students take time to repeat information then the effects of forgetting are decreased.** According to research, information should be repeated within the first 24 hours of learning to reduce the rate of memory loss.

In summary, what do we know about memory?

- Consistent practice and revisiting previous material strengthens memory and boosts learning.
- Information, if not revisited, is 'lost' from our memory.
- Our working memory is finite and limited and so overloading this or cramming for revision doesn't work.

The key principles of effective revision

Let's explore a number of different strategies to ensure your revision is as effective as it can be.

Retrieval Practice

Simply put, recalling information from memory is simple and powerful. Retrieval practice is a learning strategy which makes you think hard and brings information to mind. It is the action of actively retrieving knowledge that boosts learning and strengthens memory. **It means trying to remember previously learned information as opposed to simply re-reading it.** Examples include:

- Knowledge quizzing and low stakes testing.
- Multiple choice tests.
- Completing past paper questions or practice answers.

- Answering verbal questions asked by teacher/peers/parents.
- Creating flashcards or revision materials where you can 'test' yourself.

One particularly effective strategy is the creation and use of **flashcards**. Flashcards are generally a card containing a small amount of information as an aid to learning. The use of flashcards are for low stakes testing to improve recall and to strengthen memory.

An effective flashcard may include the following (*in each subject they will be used in a different way*):

- A key term/key word with definition on the back.
- A key date with the event on the back.
- A key equation with its use in practice on the back.
- A past paper question and a model answer on the back.

Soliloquy	An act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play.
-----------	--

In order to use flashcards most effectively, the **Leitner System** is a desired strategy. Once you have created a set of flashcards, create three boxes/areas marked as the following.

BOX 1: Every day	BOX 2: Twice a week	BOX 3: Once a week
----------------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------

- Test yourself on the flashcards in the Box 1 pile. If you get the answer correct on the flashcard, move it to the Box 2 pile. If you get it incorrect, it stays in Box 1.
- Twice a week, test yourself on the flashcards in Box 2. If you get the answer correct on the flashcard, move it to the Box 3 pile. If you get it incorrect, it stays in Box 2. The aim is to get all of the flashcards to Box 3.

This video will help support you in using the Leitner system: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C20EvKtdJwQ>

This diagram will also further support your implementation of the **Leitner System**.

USING FLASHCARDS TO REVISE

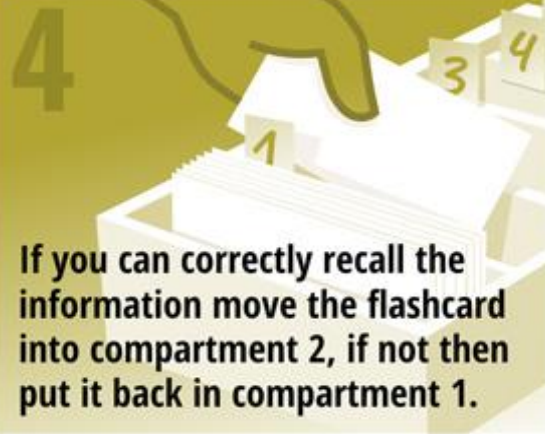
by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk

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.

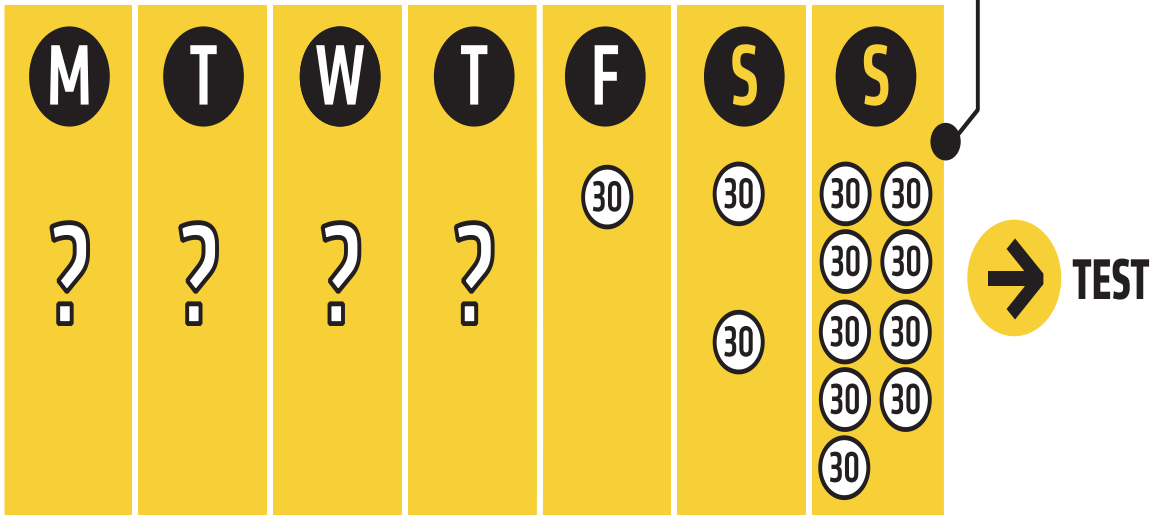


Eventually, all your flashcards will have been transferred to compartment 5 and the information they contain stored in your long-term memory.

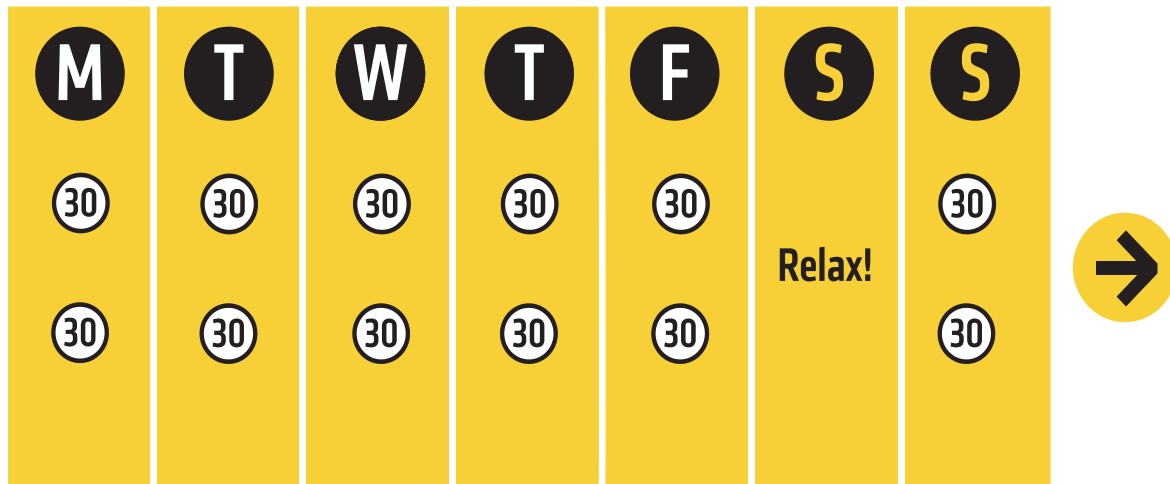
Spacing and Interleaving

Spacing out your revision into smaller chunks over a period of time helps you to remember the material better and ensures you are less stressed with your revision.

Let's say you have a test one week and you have 5 hours to prepare for it broken down into 30 minute chunks. Very often that process looks like this.



Instead of mass practice, a much more effective way of revising is to space out your revision like this:



By breaking up your revision into 30 minute chunks and spacing out the time between revision, you will consolidate what you have learned and retain the material much more effectively.

Interleaving involves switching between ideas and topics during a study session. This ensures that you are not studying one idea or topic for too long. Mixing up your revision and chunking it supports learning and strengthens your memory.

As we have seen with spaced practice, leaving gaps between studying is very effective but what if you are studying multiple topics within a subject? Interleaving means mixing it up and not studying all the material at once.

For example, instead of organising your revision week like this:

M	T	W	T	F
MACBETH	AN INSPECTOR CALLS	CREATIVE WRITING	UNSEEN POETRY	JEKYLL AND HYDE
MACBETH	AN INSPECTOR CALLS	CREATIVE WRITING	UNSEEN POETRY	JEKYLL AND HYDE
MACBETH	AN INSPECTOR CALLS	CREATIVE WRITING	UNSEEN POETRY	JEKYLL AND HYDE

Deliberate Practice

This follows a simple process to support your revision. Start by spending time reviewing a topic/unit before quizzing/testing yourself **with no notes and from your memory (this is vital for revision)**. Once you have finished, check your answers. **This will support you in showing where your 'knowledge gaps' are and where focus needs to be in your future revision.** Revision shouldn't keep you in your comfort zone, you need to be thinking hard and identifying your own areas for development. Avoid simply revising topics you enjoy. A technique to support deliberate practice is the **Pomodoro Technique**.

A much more effective way of organising your revision would be like this:

M	T	W	T	F
MACBETH	UNSEEN POETRY	AN INSPECTOR CALLS	JEKYLL AND HYDE	CREATIVE WRITING
AN INSPECTOR CALLS	JEKYLL AND HYDE	CREATIVE WRITING	MACBETH	UNSEEN POETRY
CREATIVE WRITING	MACBETH	UNSEEN POETRY	AN INSPECTOR CALLS	JEKYLL AND HYDE

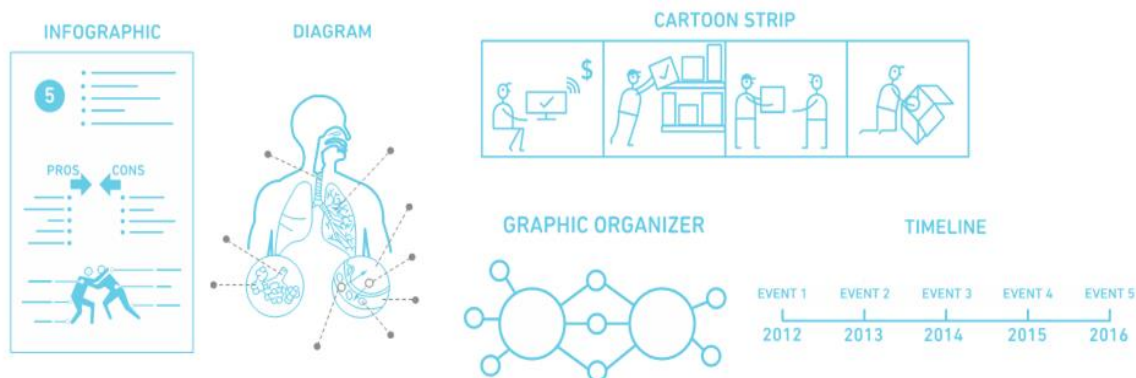
As you are doing this, another highly effective strategy is to try to think of connections between topics you are studying considering similarities and differences.

Studying one topic for a long time can give them impression you have mastered it but often this can be misleading.



Dual Coding

When reviewing something you have learnt, combining words and pictures can be powerful. Examples of this include creating a:



Ineffective revision strategies

With the above in mind, it is vitally important to think about strategies that students may employ that

have a limited or no real benefit on learning or memory. These include:

- Simply writing out notes or copying from a textbook/exercise book.

- Reading and doing nothing with the information. Trying to focus on ‘too much information’ on a single page and cramming revision.
- Highlighting information for the sake of it.
- Not enough silent work or attention to a given task. Attempting to revise while multitasking and doing other things.
- Comfort zone revision of easy material that pupils have already mastered because it makes you ‘feel good’.

The importance of Habits and Routines when revising

Within your revision, it is vitally important to establish a strong routine. Having goals are good for setting a direction. What do you want to achieve in *this* revision session?

In order to support the forming of good revision habits, there are a number of areas to consider:



- **Start small and build up** – reduce distractions where and when you revise and get your family to encourage the creation of a revision timetable and placing it somewhere visual in your house. Ensure someone else is knowledgeable of this timetable to enable accountability and aid support.
- **Make it attractive** – collaborative focused revision is beneficial (alongside attending interventions or revision sessions) but you could also ensure there is a ‘reward’ at the end of a revision session. *If I complete this, I can do this.*
- **Make it satisfying** – challenge yourself, track your own revision progress and ensure you stick to your revision timetable. Small steps build success and motivation. Use checklists to support.
- **Make it obvious** – revise in one area, leave your materials out ready to support organisation and ensure routines are stuck to. Ensure your environment is clear, uncluttered and comfortable.

Tips to Help Students with SEND to Revise

Twelve tips to help students with SEND revise | TES

1. Break revision down into small steps

For pupils with SEND, push the specificity of revision topic and instructions. Let’s take the periodic table: you might set the class the task of remembering a certain number of elements. For those with SEND, you might need to scaffold this further. You could create a resource with a picture of each of the elements down one side of A4 paper and dotted lines next to each. Ask the student to describe the symbols in one or two sentences. Following this activity, give the sheet out again and see if they can repeat the exercise from memory. Such an approach can be adapted for different subjects.

2. Visual prompts can be really useful

Assist students with SEND to create images, mind maps and spider diagrams to revise from.

Help students to cluster this information around specific areas. This should be incredibly detailed, not just key quotes or characters, but clearly structured: what, when, why, where and how?

Transfer information into pictures, patterns, posters or comic strips.

Using highlighters in different colours, and symbols to identify linking information can help visual learners to organise and disseminate information.

Sites like [Quizlet](#) allow pupils to make their own online flashcards, diagrams, interactive quizzes and more.

3. Partnerships

Getting students to work in pairs can be very effective. Use flashcards that pose questions and answers, so that students can quiz each other.

4. Never underestimate the power of song and rhythm

Making things into songs can be incredibly powerful. For example, learning the parts of the body for PE to the tune of Old MacDonald can work wonders, especially if actions are included. It has to be multisensory: sing it, physically touch the area to feel where the parts are, write it out, say it, put it in a sentence, then answer some practice exam questions. You might observe some students quietly acting out the actions in the exam hall.

5. Narrative is key

Create a narrative around the topic. Visualising conversations may help many students with SEND to memorise information by setting it in real-world context.

6. Mnemonics are really useful

These little verbal exercises are effective and engaging, particularly for those with SEND. It can help them remember the order of key facts and information.

7. Active listening

The teacher reads out a section of text but asks students to listen and feedback on one specific area. If reading Macbeth, for instance, give students different characters to listen out for, or if you are studying a poem, give out different words.

For those with SEND, it can be a useful way of not overloading the student and ensuring they are not intimidated by the need to try to spot everything. This ensures that they listen to the whole much more attentively than they would have done otherwise.

8. Decoding exam questions

Train the students to differentiate between the command words of a question and the subject-specific words. Have two separate colours and get students to highlight which are which. What should be left is extraneous carrier language that can be ignored. For some students with SEND, this can be important in enabling them to process what exactly it is they are being asked to do in an exam.

9. Making connections

Practice contextualising and understanding the question as some students may struggle to connect what the exam question is asking them to do with the subject knowledge they possess. Again, spider diagrams and decoding exercises may help the students to literally “see” the question and think around the topic.

10. Categorisation

Pupils may have a raft of knowledge, but can they tell you what topic it is a part of? When studying wind turbines, for example, can the students tell you that the subject is part of “renewable energy”? Without initially learning the category, it’s very difficult for students to learn and then retrieve the information correctly. Support students with making flashcards.

11. Practise using key vocab in sentences

There are many students who have memorised key words, learned to spell them, even say them, but are less comfortable using them in a sentence. Rather than getting students to merely explain what a word means, they need to practise using the words.

12. Literacy doughnuts

Using three circles prioritise the important information or words into the inner circle and then, in descending priority, the middle and the outer.

Literacy doughnuts allow students to revise in a slightly different way to concept maps. But they can also prevent some students from panicking, as they can initially concentrate on memorising the inner circle.

The Five Step Study Plan

- 1. Make a list** - What do you need to know?



- 2. Timetable a spaced schedule** - Study each topic little but often, and leave yourself enough time.



- 3. Use effective study strategies** - Test yourself and keep the re-reading and highlighting to a minimum.



- 4. Identify the gaps in your knowledge**
What do you need to study more?
What can you move on from?



- 5. Close the gaps** - Repeat steps 3 & 4 as many times as you need until you are comfortable with everything.



Student self-reflection

Use your mock results to complete the following information.

Subject	Target grade	Recent Mock Grade	Difference?	Reflection
English				
Maths				
Science				

What subjects do you study? How can these subject be broken down into topics for revision?

Subject:	Subject:	Subject:	Subject:
Topics:	Topics:	Topics:	Topics:
Subject:	Subject:	Subject:	Subject:
Topics:	Topics:	Topics:	Topics:

Task: Create a revision timetable based on the interleaving model to include a variety of topics linked to your actions from your mock data.

Remember the advice:

- Start small and build up
- Make it attractive
- Make it satisfying
- Make it obvious.

Consider/ include:

What were your areas of weakness?

What topics will you need to recover?

What format will it take/ What resources will you need to revise?

How will you know if you have been successful? What is your success criteria?

Where will you revise?

How Can Students Revise Effectively?

by @inner_drive | www.innerdrive.co.uk

TEST YOURSELF

Research has shown that testing yourself helps you remember significantly more than just re-reading information.

Testing yourself can also help reduce the negative effects of stress associated with exams.



USE SPACING

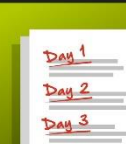
Spread out your learning of material across several days and revisit it.

This helps transfer information to your long-term memory.

STOP PROCRASTINATING

Schedule the revision of harder topics for the morning when you will be most awake.

This stops you using tiredness as an excuse for leaving the harder topics until the next day.



MANAGE YOUR TIME

Break your revision down and give yourself a certain amount of content to learn each day.

Revision timetable

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



Week:

Key Areas of Revision to Focus on
This Week:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

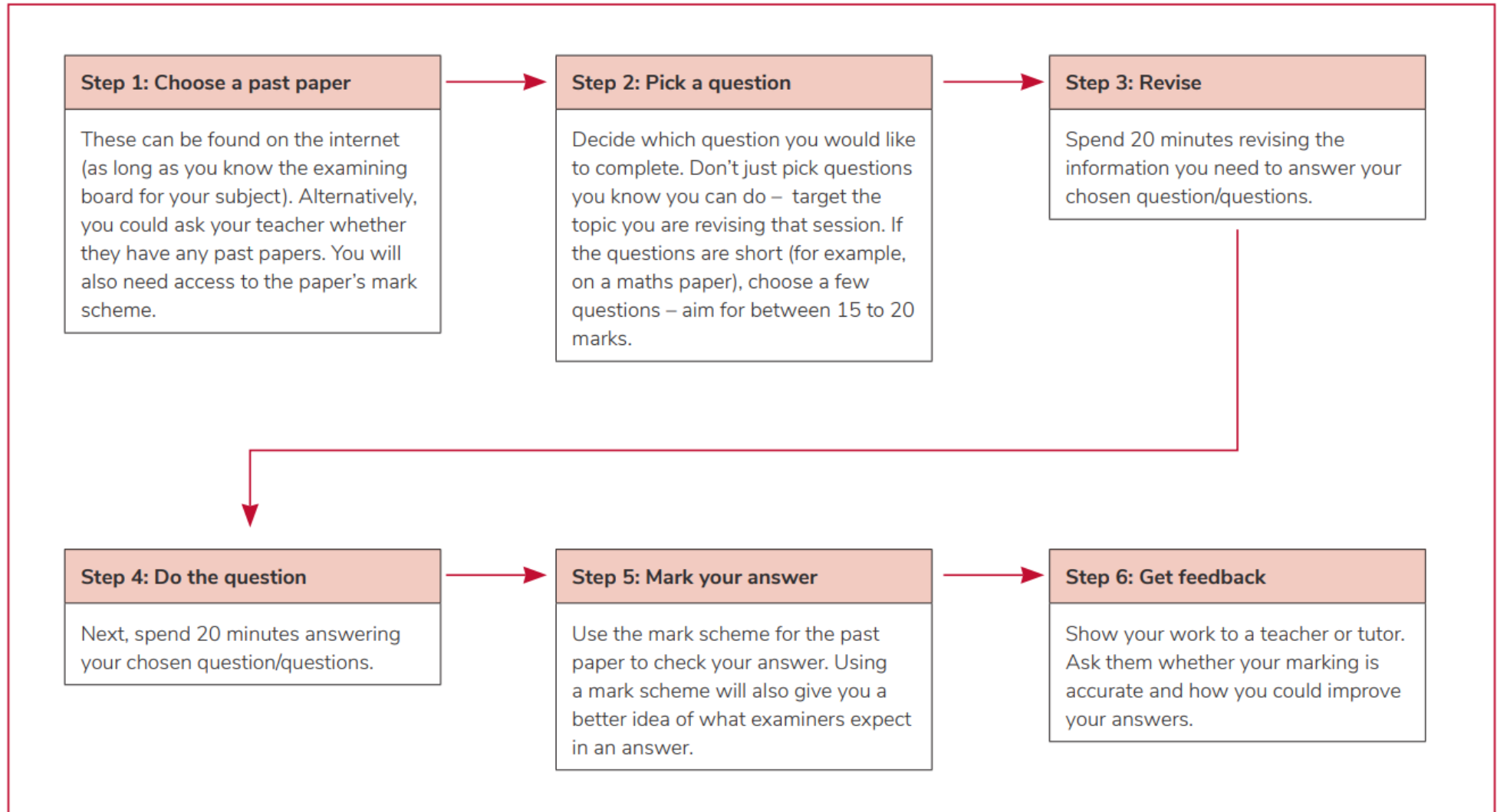
Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

How to Structure an Hour of Revision



21.

Revision Strategies



Brain Dump

Choose a topic and write down as much as you can remember, without referring to your notes. Check your notes and see what you missed then try fill the gaps without the notes. Check your notes a third time and add the missing information.



Flash cards

Write flash cards for each topic, in all subjects, then mix them up for the most effective revision. Check out the Leitner System for effective spacing and interleaving. Keep your flash cards simple – one question, one answer per card.



Map it out

Take an essay question or writing question and map out your answer, without writing a full response. Look at the mark scheme and decide if your plan meets the criteria. DO this for a number of questions, then choose one and write the full response.



Past papers

Ask your teacher for practice questions or exam papers. Complete them without notes in the exam conditions, then check your answers and identify the gaps in your knowledge, so you can target your revision.



Quizzes

Write a set of questions and answers and ask someone to test you. Its important to either write or say your answers loud. Reading through quizzes in your head can give you a false sense of security.



Thinking hard: Reduce

Read a section of your notes then put them aside and reduce what you need into 3 bullet points, each one no more than 10 words. Look back at the notes and decide if you missed anything important. Hide the notes and write a fourth bullet point.



Practice Introductions

For essay subjects, take a past exam question and practice writing effective introductions and conclusion. Look back at your notes and remind yourself of the important things to remember. Practice for different topics, texts and papers.



Thinking hard: Connect

For each subject, consider the exam paper and group together questions that require the same technique to answer. Write down the requirements for each type. Find a previous example you have completed and identify where you've met the criteria.



Thinking hard: Transform

Read a paragraph from your notes or a text book, and transform it into a diagram, chart or sketch – no words allowed. OR Look a diagram in science, for example, and transform it into a paragraph of explanation.



Key vocabulary

For a particular topic, make a list of key vocabulary, then do the following: define each word; use each term in a sentence; create a question where the key word is the answer; identify other words which connect to each of the words in your list.

3. Exam Preparation and Technique

The night before, get enough sleep and eat well – do not cram into the night! Have a good breakfast, preferably brain foods like eggs or fish, which release energy. Avoid coffee or energy drinks like Red Bull whose effect fades after an hour or two.

Check you have the equipment you need – pens, pencil, calculator, water, student ID etc

Arrive early and avoid the stress of running late. Follow the old saying – “if you are not early you are late” However, don’t mingle with other students who are negative and stress you out. Try to mix with positive people who make you feel calm and confident. If you do feel panicky, try taking a few deep breaths.

The first task is to carefully read over the whole exam paper taking 5 to 10 minutes before you write anything. Take a note of the marking scheme to establish how many marks are allocated to each question so that you can calculate how much time to allocate per question. Work out which questions you intend to answer in which order. A good plan always allows for you to answer the easiest questions first and you do not have to follow their order in the exam paper. This will instil confidence in you and help to stop the panic when you progress to the harder questions.

Plan your time accordingly and don’t try to write down everything you know about one particular topic. A long answer does not get you more marks and it might run you out of time to answer all the questions.

Read each question thoroughly using the BUG method:

Box – box the command word – state, describe, explain or suggest, which reveals the type of answer the examiner wants.

Underline highlight key words which jog your memory

Go – go over the question again to analyse the question to determine what the examiner is asking

Don’t get stuck with writer’s block, move on to the next question. The answer may come back to you later in the exam.

If you are running short of time, try to give a part answer to each of the remaining questions. You tend to score more marks in the first half of a question. Better to get scores for two halves of the last two questions, than only complete one of two. You can abbreviate answers by writing bullet point answers than whole sentences.

Write your workings or explanations in the margins. Even if you get an answer wrong you can sometimes get points if the examiner can see you were adopting the right approach in your workings.

Never leave an exam early!! If you have spare time at the end, go back over your answers and check to see you have not made errors or if they can be improved. There is a mnemonic – ACUTE – which can help you as follows

A for assumptions – did you explain all of yours?

C for calculations – have you checked them? Check again.

U for units – if quantities have measurements (like kilometres or grams) have you stated and recorded them correctly? Do your formulae make sense?

T for truth - have you answered all parts of each question?

E for explain – have you explained what you are doing at all stages? You can get marks even when your answer is incorrect

Common Mistakes in Exams

[Avoiding Common Exam Mistakes | SkillsYouNeed](#)

1. Not answering the question

There are two main reasons for this:

1. Not reading the question properly, or
2. Wanting to answer a slightly different question.

The first is easier to manage:

Always read the question fully. Then go back and read it again to check that you have understood.

Only then should you start to answer it, once you are sure you have understood it fully.

The second often arises from a mistake in preparation or revision. Some students prepare set answers, either because they are doing practice questions, or because they have panicked and not left enough time to revise fully. If you have done this, there is a tendency to use your prepared answer and hope that you will get enough marks for doing so.

You won't. Examiners are looking for evidence that you can think and work under pressure, not that you can learn an essay off by heart.

The real answer to this mistake is to ensure that you have learned your subject well, and read around it.

There is no substitute for plenty of time spent revising. This will enable you to respond to any question in a more considered way. By all means do practice answers, and draw on these in your exam, but make sure that you answer the question **that has been asked** and not the question you wanted.

2. Not looking at the mark scheme or the space provided

Both the mark scheme and the space provided (if there is one) will provide clues about how much the examiners are expecting to see.

A one-word answer is not going to be enough for a 15-mark question. Check the marks available, and make sure that your answer fits.

That said, if you are able to condense your analysis into a shorter space, then do so. You should never write solely to word limits.

If your answer is much shorter, be aware that you may have missed something. Check back and make sure that you have really answered the whole question.

3. Panicking

Faced with an exam paper, it is easy to panic, especially if your first reaction is that you are unable to answer any of the questions.

Take a deep breath and count to ten, slowly. That will help you to calm down.

Remember that you will get no marks if there is nothing written on your answer paper.

It sounds obvious, but it is important to provide some answers, even if they are not very good. Even if you are really struggling, you should be able to find one question that you can answer, or make a reasonable attempt to answer.

Start with that, and when you have finished it, go through the same process again.

JCQ On your exam day

This checklist will help you to be as prepared as possible for your exams, so that on the day itself you can focus on doing your best.

<p>Before sitting your exams, ensure you know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> the date, time and location of your exams - you might find it helpful to write this information in a calendar or planner <input type="checkbox"/> who to contact at school or college in case there's an emergency that makes you late or unable to sit your exam 	<p>What you cannot take into exams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> any type of phone <input type="checkbox"/> revision notes <input type="checkbox"/> any type of watch (this includes analogue, digital and smart watches)
<p>What you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a clear pencil case <input type="checkbox"/> at least two black ink pens - blue pens are not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> an approved calculator for relevant exams <input type="checkbox"/> appropriate apparatus such as a ruler or protractor for relevant exams <input type="checkbox"/> a clear water bottle if you wish to take one in - it must not have a label 	<p>Other important information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Listen carefully to the invigilator's instructions which will be specific to your exam. If you are unsure of anything, please raise your hand and wait for the invigilator <input type="checkbox"/> Fill in your details on the front of your answer booklet. <input type="checkbox"/> If you need additional answer sheets, raise your hand and wait for an invigilator who will provide you with one. Remember to add your details to this booklet too. <input type="checkbox"/> If you need to use the toilet or feel unwell, raise your hand and wait for an invigilator who will escort you from the exam room. <input type="checkbox"/> Make sure you stay silent - talking to a fellow candidate could result in disqualification from all your exams.

If you have any questions about the format on the day, please ask your teacher or exams officer.

You can also find useful information about preparing for exams at www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/information-for-candidates/documents

EFFECTIVE FROM 1 SEPTEMBER 2022

Do not be tempted to leave halfway through the exam, because you cannot think of anything else to write. That will earn no marks at all.

4. Failing to plan your time

Before you start writing, check the number of questions, and the amount of time you have. This will tell you roughly how long you have for each question.

Try to spend no more than that much time on each question. You can always go back later if you have time left over, but it is better to make at least some attempt at each question.

For example, in a three-hour exam, if you have to write three essays, you should plan to spend an hour on each. As you get to around 55 minutes in, start to draw your first essay to a conclusion, and then start your next one. Do the same after another 55 minutes.

The same goes for multiple choice exams. Try to be aware of the time, and the number of questions completed, and ensure that you have left enough time to complete the paper.

5. Failing to plan your answers (particularly for essays)

In writing an essay, which includes a shorter essay-type response to a question, it is important to get the structure right. An essay usually needs to make an argument, and have a reasonable flow from start to finish. This requires planning.

Before you start writing your essay, take five to ten minutes to plan what you are going to include in each section, and how you will structure your argument.

When you've finished the essay, go back and check that you have included everything you intended, and then cross out your plan with a single diagonal line through it.

6. Over-generalising

It is best to be as specific as possible in whatever you write. You should show that you understand the limits of your statements.

If you can, it is best to back up what you say with evidence, but nobody really, seriously, expects you to be able to provide detailed references under exam pressure.

7. Making basic spelling and grammar errors

You do, however, need to be able to write basic English well, without spelling or grammar errors.

Just as a basic check, read back over what you have written at the end, and **make sure it makes sense**. In English, for example, you are awarded marks for SPAG so it is essential that you write with accuracy.

“Information in our **long-term memory** is interconnected and linked with prior knowledge. Anything that is not connected or not successfully stored well enough in our long-term memory is forgotten and this is completely natural.”

Understanding command words

Command words tell you how to answer a specific exam question or complete an assessment task.

Most frequent Command Words by Subject

Biology Describe Calculate Explain Compare Estimate Suggest	Business Why Which Identify Explain Show Analyse Recommend Evaluate	Computer Science Outline Explain Convert Express State Describe Show
Design and Technology Evaluate Explain Complete Describe	Drama Describe Explain	Engineering Describe Explain
English Select Summarise Explore How... Compare Write Describe Evaluate Comment	Geography Study Describe Outline Suggest Assess Complete	Health & Social Care Identify Explain Describe Analyse Evaluate
History Describe Explain	Hospitality Match Complete Outline Discuss State Suggest Describe Identify	Maths Simplify Estimate Explain Work out Express Find Calculate

Media Studies	Modern Foreign Languages	Music
Explain Analyse	Translate	State Describe Explain Identify Evaluate Compare Name
PE	Religious Studies	Science
Identify Outline Name Suggest Justify Discuss Complete Define State Plot Analyse Evaluate	Explain Evaluate	Describe Calculate Explain Determine

Common Science & Maths commands:	
Command	Meaning
Describe	Talk through a process or trend
Outline	State information about...
Suggest	Give possible causes for...
Calculate	Complete a calculation
Show	Prove something is true/false
Explain	Give reasons for something
Common English & Humanities commands:	
Discuss	Talk about difference perspectives
How far do you agree?	Give your opinion (and why)
How important is...	Discuss the significance of...
How useful is...	Weigh up the pros and cons of...
Use evidence to show...	Support a view with examples
Explain	Give reasons for something