

# A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR YOUR GCSE EXAMS



# INTRODUCTION

So you've got GCSEs coming up! If you prepare well, there's nothing to worry about – you should get the good results you want. This booklet helps you to prepare by giving you ideas about organising your work. You'll find plenty of tips on the three main steps to exam achievement.

- Step 1**      Understand your coursework
- Step 2**      Learn coursework thoroughly
- Step 3**      Practice using the information so you're prepared for anything

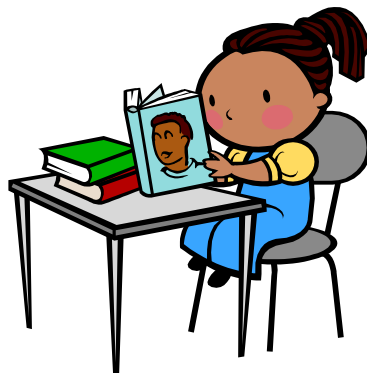
Teachers mostly help you with Step 1. They can guide you in finding information, and help you to understand it, but the rest is up to you!

There's so much you can do at Steps 2 and 3 to boost your confidence – and your grades. Read on for some ideas.

## WHEN DO YOU NEED TO START?

Clear the decks for revision as early in your course as you can.

Make things easier for yourself – and avoid too much stress, panic and lower grades – by beginning to prepare for GCSE early.



# LEARNING AND REVISION

There are a lot of differences between learning your work and revising it for an examination. Here are a few of them:

**Learning** is an on-going process in which you build upon previous knowledge and understanding. There will be a lot a new work and if you really learn this new work as you do it, you'll save yourself a lot of time later on, when it comes to revision.

**Learning** is a long-term process and cannot be done by trying to cram information into a few weeks. It involves completely understanding topics and memorising information.

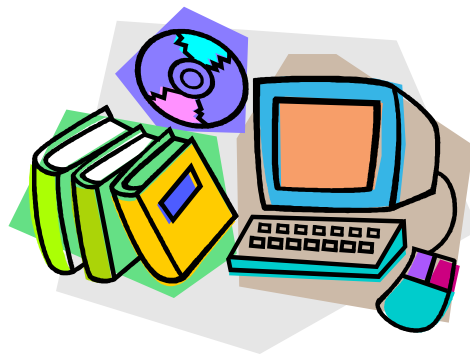
**Learning** is rather like inputting and processing the information on a computer. At first the computer needs to be programmed – the information it will use needs to be fed into the processor – the computer's brain. This stage takes time. Once 'stored' in the processor, the program and data can be 'accessed' as required. This is learning.

**Revision** is fixing in your memory the things that you know. Think of the computer again. It can reproduce the information you have put into it, provided you ask it the right questions. Unlike the computer, your memory needs refreshing regularly, but if you do this, the information can be 'called up' in the same way.

**Revision** is learning to unlock your memory. You need to have memory prompts to help you to 'call up' what you know.

**Revision** is learning to select and adapt what you know.

By doing this, you can answer different types of exam questions



# LEARNING TO LEARN

You've been learning all your life, but you need to start learning for GCSE as soon as you start your exam courses.

Here are some practical 'Dos' and 'Don'ts':

**DO make sure that you get all you can from each lesson.** It makes sense to ask if you don't understand

**DO make sure you understand new concepts – if in doubt ask.** Never leave something you don't understand in the hope that it will sort itself out. That won't happen!

**DO discuss new ideas and concepts with a friend.** Try to test your own understanding by explaining the idea or concept to someone else.

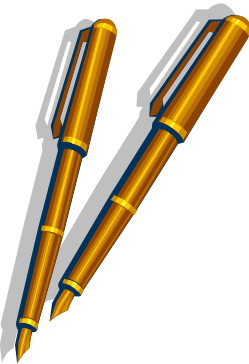
**DO go over your day's work at home.** You know that homework helps you to learn your class-work – programme the brain – and helps you understand new concepts. Don't let yourself down – do it!

**DO practise doing questions.** This helps to ensure that you understand your work, gives you practice in doing research, and helps your memory.

**DO develop ways of memorising information.** Write notes or read out loud – this helps concentration. Keep doing this until you can remember all the information easily.

**DON'T let yourself get tired.** Your brain will be 'fuzzy' after a really late night and even easy tasks may seem harder.

**DON'T worry if you haven't solved every single problem before you finish your evening's work.** The brain is a problem solver and can solve problems while you are asleep – use it!



# WHEN TO START REVISING

**It's not all work, work, work – of course, you can enjoy life and revise at the same time.** Revision does need **determination** and **planning**, though.

You need to keep refreshing your memory of what you've learned. If you spread the workload over a period of time you:

- ★ are likely to achieve more.
- ★ will be under a lot less pressure and can enjoy your work.
- ★ are less likely to experience stress and strain.
- ★ will have more time to relax, keep fit and enjoy life.

## A PLANNING TIP

*You should begin revising for examinations between 6 – 8 weeks before the exam. If you start later than this you can still succeed, but it will be more difficult because you will have less time to revise in – this means harder work and less time to enjoy yourself.*



# PLANNING YOUR WORK

Planning your work means that you are more likely to revise all your work properly. Another bonus is that good planning always reduces stress. Try to:

- ★ make a list of what you have to do
- ★ find out the dates of the exams and make an exam timetable
- ★ plan / design / draw up a timetable for revision.

Think about the best way to fairly divide your evening time ....

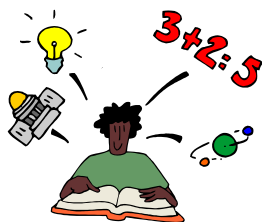
Homework



Coursework



Revision

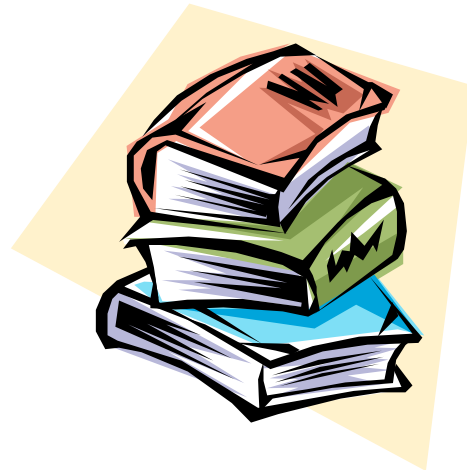


Relaxation



## Remember to:

- ★ find a quiet place where you can work undisturbed.
- ★ include every subject in your revision.
- ★ plan to do short burst of revision in a variety of subjects every day.
- ★ get into the habit of revising at set times. Different people learn best at different times. Find out which is the best time for you.
- ★ arrange to have regular breaks of 5-10 minutes between revision sessions. Can you use this time to treat yourself to something you really enjoy?
- ★ switch off the radio, TV or CD. Your mind will concentrate better if you are not distracted. Ask people not to disturb you – not even to bring you a coffee – until your revision period has finished.



# PREPARING YOUR REVISION PLAN

Your revision plan will help you to know what you want to do and when you want to do it. It also helps you to enjoy life.

- ★ Use the timetable on the next page to help you – make as many copies as you like. Use a new one for each week between now and the first examination.
- ★ Divide each day into session with a break of 5 minutes between some and 10 between others. Don't forget to mark in time for meals and be realistic about how long you can keep going – eight hours a day, even if you are behind with your work, is really over the top!
- ★ Set some time aside each day for relaxation – perhaps an hour each evening during the week and a little more time in the afternoons on Saturday and Sunday. Plan some treats for these times.

## FILL IN ALL YOUR COMMITMENTS, INCLUDING:

- lesson times
- school activities – matches, rehearsals, clubs etc
- other activities – part-time jobs etc
- times for relaxation and enjoyment



If time is short you may need to decide on which activities to drop for a while: remember, it will only be for a few weeks.



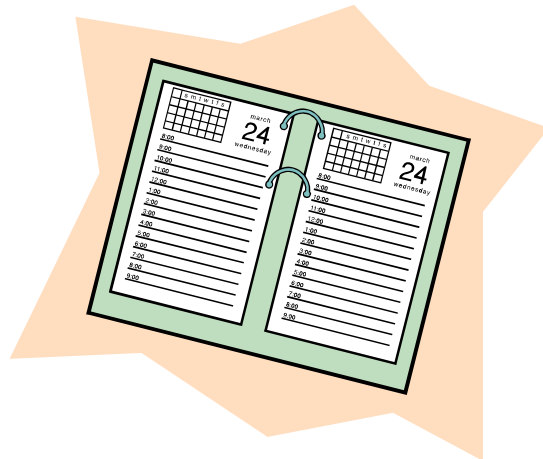
# REVISION PLANNER

Week Beginning: \_\_\_\_\_

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9am							
10am							
11am							
12 noon							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							

# CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING:

- ★ make a list of all topics to revise
- ★ highlight those parts of your work you're not sure of and give them more time.
- ★ ensure that there's enough time to go through each topic several times.
- ★ make sure that you cover every topic at least once.
- ★ leave some time during the final week of revision to cover the most difficult topics again
- ★ cover several subjects during revision sessions
- ★ divide each topic into manageable parts.



# AVOIDABLE STRESS

A little bit of stress can be good for you, but too much of it causes strain, which is very harmful.

## Reasons for Stress:

- loneliness
- fear of failure
- overwork
- pressure from parents
- guilt
- boredom

People who are suffering from excess stress often show it.

They often:

- want to be alone
- have difficulty in sleeping
- lose the ability to concentrate
- become very emotional or sensitive
- lose self-esteem and feel depressed
- become irritable and short-tempered
- suffer from headaches, skin problems etc.



# BEATING STRESS

If you are organised, you are far less likely to suffer from stress. Some people can cope with stress and always seem to be very relaxed, but most of us find stress difficult to cope with. If you experience some of the symptoms of stress, the chances are that you are under too much strain. Here are some strategies which may help you to cope with stressful times.

**DO establish a routine** – and stick to it. Make sure that you have proper meals and that you sleep well and keep to your work plan.

**DO get plenty of exercise.** If you are fit, your mind will be more alert and revision will be just that little bit easier.

**DO start revising as early as possible.** Give yourself a head start.

**DO take regular breaks when revising** – the result is less stress

**DO practice past papers** – these help you to know what to expect and give you experience in doing exam papers.

**DO build in variety** – beat the boredom factor this way.

**DO seek company** – make sure that you see friends regularly, enjoy yourself and get right away from work!

**Do your best.** Decide what works for you, and stick to it. If others are panicking keep away from them.

**DO relax regularly.** Make sure you still have plenty of fun.

**DON'T feel guilty.** If you miss a session in your revision plan try not to panic – you can catch up as time goes on.



**A good relaxation exercise.** Whenever you are ‘stressed out’ or you can’t relax, this exercise will help you.

**Find a quiet comfortable place, lie down and close your eyes.**

**Tense all your muscles, clench fists, etc.**

**Now deliberately relax each muscle until you are totally still.**

**Breathe in deeply and hold your breath for a count of 5.**

**Breathe out gently, Repeat this – listening to your breathing for a couple of minutes.**

**If thoughts enter your head let them go – just concentrate on breathing.**

**Now that you are relaxed enjoy the quiet.**



# FIVE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE REVISION

## ★ Prepare your Workplace

### Make sure you have:

- a tidy, undisturbed place to work
- a comfortable chair
- a table which gives you enough room for your books etc
- a bright table lamp
- all the books you need – school notes, revision guides etc
- pens, pencils, scrap paper.

## ★ Learning by Heart

### Try to memorise:

- connections between fact and patterns which give shape to a topic e.g. definitions, scientific laws
- vocabulary in whichever foreign language you are learning
- quotations from literature
- diagrams of drawings, say, of science apparatus you may have to draw
- scientific facts such as chemical symbols
- mathematical formulae – times tables, etc.



## **\* ACTIVE LEARNING**

**You can stimulate your mind and learn effectively by:**

- briefly writing down important points
- drawing diagrams or flow charts several times
- testing yourself by covering an original drawing, drawing it again and then checking it against the original
- reading out loud
- underlining interesting points or quotations
- making up word games or mnemonics to help you e.g. to distinguish stalactites from stalagmite growth, remember that tights fall down, mites go up!
- persuading someone to test and re-test you on what you have learned
- working through past exam paper.

## **\* REVISION NOTES**

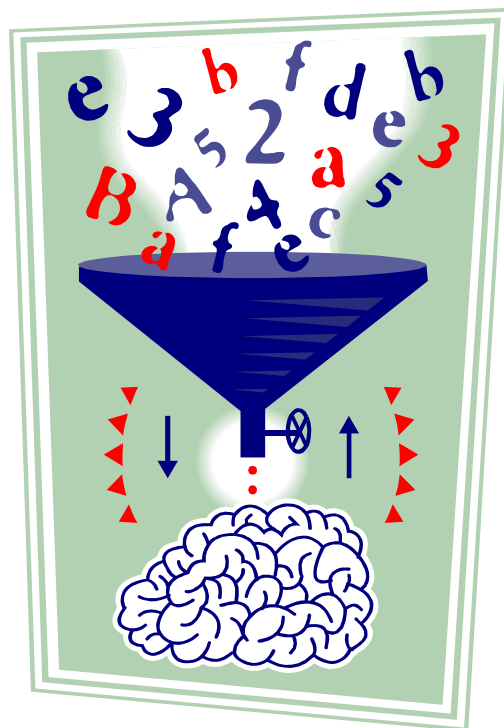
**Make and modify your notes to help you learn by:**

- taking short, well-spaced, numbered and headed notes in lessons.
- putting only the main points on cards (post-cards)
- using these main-point cards to help you to test yourself by listing key ideas or patterns
- numbering the points in your list e.g. listing the seven characteristics of living things
- using the revision guide which provides all the essential information required for your GCSE syllabus.

## \* WORD PATTERNS TO MEMORISE

Some people jog their memories using word patterns – using initial letters, names etc. Some are show below:

- Word association, e.g. meiosis in ovaries, mitosis in toes.
- Initial letters e.g. common elements which have an initial letter only for their symbol – CHOPINS – Carbon, Hydrogen, Oxygen, Phosphorus, Iodine, Nitrogen, Sulphur.
- Rhymes, e.g. winds blow from high to low



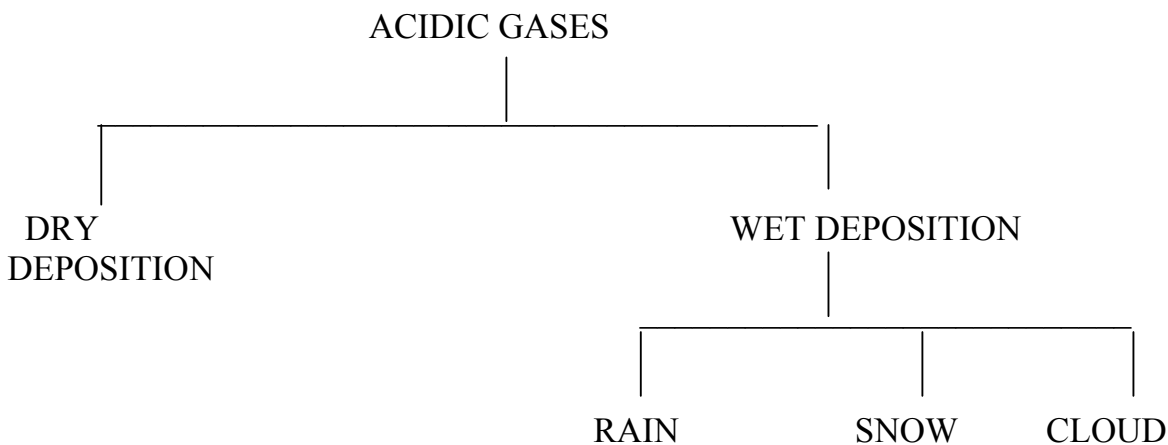


# PATTERNS AND PICTURES TO JOG YOUR MEMORY IN THE EXAM

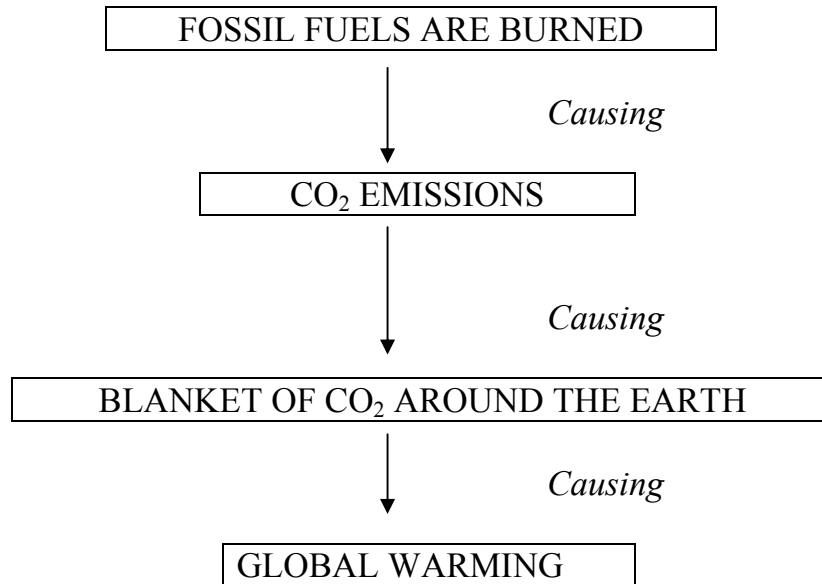
Quick diagrams of the main points you need to answer a question help you to collect maximum marks. Experiment with diagrams, as they are great time-savers. Also, 'pictures' of important patterns are much easier to remember than words, and are quicker to read. A funny – or rude – mental picture will certainly help you to remember facts and patterns.

Try asking yourself the following questions while you are revising – and when you're sitting in the exam room.

**What happens next?** Can you make a **chronological list** of events which, for instance, lead up to a battle in history, or an important event in the plot of a novel? **Tree charts** may help to trigger your memory.



**What happens next and why?** Try to use the consequences of each action to jog your memory about the next stage. This makes a useful **flowchart** of events. Here's one to illustrate how global warming happens:



**What are the two sides to an argument?** What are the arguments for and against a point or question? Try drawing up a **split list** with for and against points to be included. This one compares the pros and cons of using a credit card:

### **ADVANTAGES (Pro)**

- a. Wide range of outlets
- b. Buy now, pay later
- c. Convenience of payment
- d. Security – no cash
- e. ‘Perks’ – e.g. insurance, gift schemes.

### **DISADVANTAGES (Con)**

- a. Need good credit record
- b. Interest charged after time allowed for repayment
- c. Minimum age 18 (usually)
- d. High interest rates
- e. Risk of fraud

**What are the similarities and differences between objects or substances?** Again, **split lists which compare and contrast** are good memory joggers. This one compares two types of blood vessel:

### **ARTERY**

- TUBULAR
- ENDOTHELIUM PRESENT
- TRANSPORTS BLOOD
- THICK WALL
- NO VALVES
- CAN CONSTRICT
- BLOOD FROM HEART
- HIGH PRESSURE

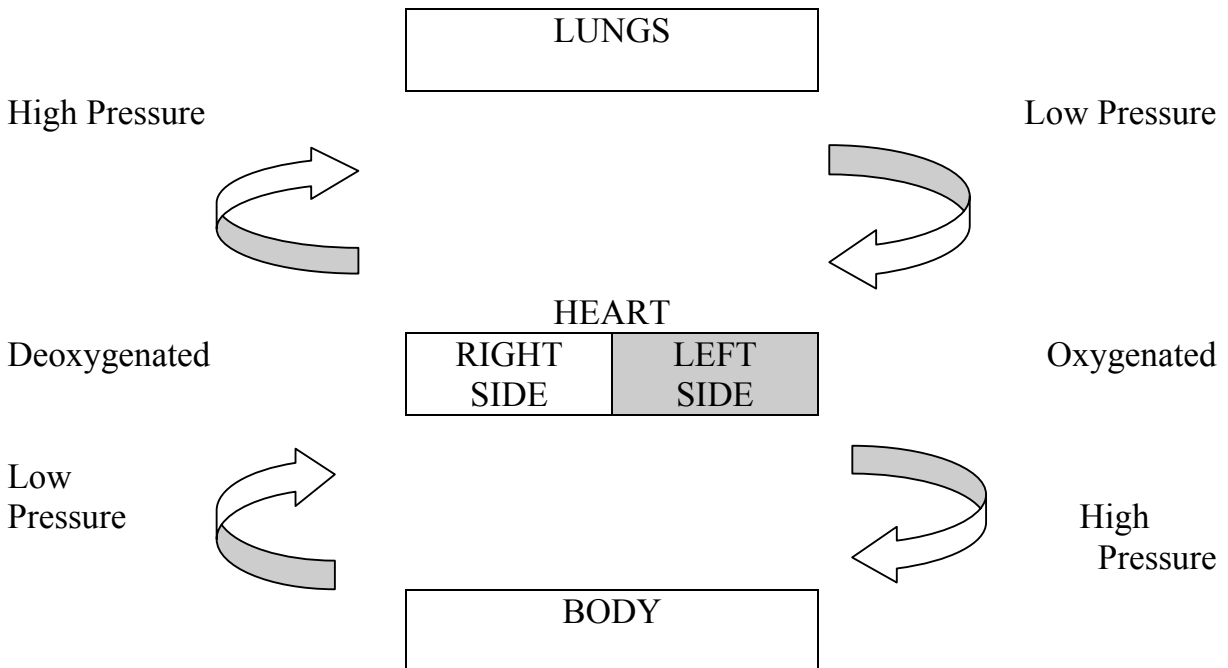
### **VEIN**

- TUBULAR
- ENDOTHELIUM PRESENT
- TRANSPORTS BLOOD
- THIN WALL
- POCKET VALVES
- CAN'T CONSTRICT
- BLOOD TO HEART
- LOW PRESSURE

**Sets** also help you to recall similarities and differences. This set shows the same information about blood vessels:

THICK WALL NO VALVES CAN CONSTRICT BLOOD FROM HEART HIGH PRESSURE		ARTERY
TUBULAR ENDOTHELIUM PRESENT TRANSPORTS BLOOD	) ) ) )	similarities
LOW PRESSURE CAN'T CONSTRICT BLOOD TO HEART POCKET VALVES THIN WALL		VEIN

**Can a simple diagram help you to explain a complicated process?** Diagrams such as this one, showing several stages in the process of oxygenating blood, keep you on the right track when there are lots of interrelated features to remember.



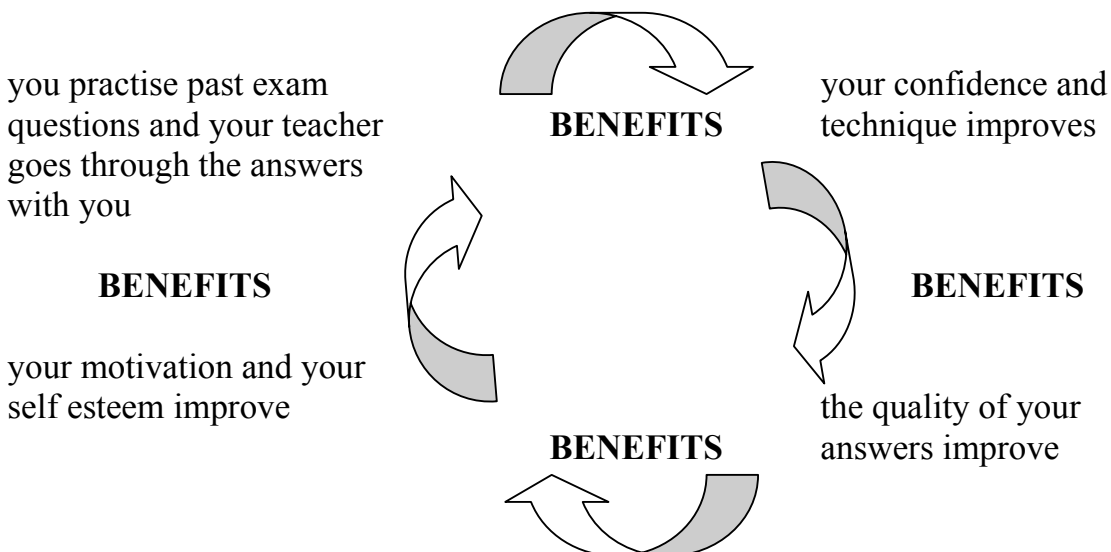
## PRACTISING EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Practising exam questions is a very good use of your time. Different kinds of exam questions are designed to make you:

- ★ select relevant and important points – those that relate only to the question.
- ★ combine points from different aspects of a topic or from different topics
- ★ interpret unseen information and apply your knowledge and understanding of a topic to new situations.

### The good news is:

- exam questions help you to remember important points in your revision.
- examiners have a limited number of ways of asking questions, so the more practice you get the less likely you are to be caught out by an unfamiliar style of question
- practice helps you to understand how many questions to answer on each paper and how many marks each part carries
- practising questions helps you to time how long different types take to answer
- practising longer-style questions, such as essays, will help you to score the best marks



**The bad news is:**

- \* if you try past exam questions before you have thoroughly revised a topic, you will get stressed out.

you take in less when you are tired and have less time to work in



you try practising past exam questions before you've thoroughly revised, and have difficulties



you get stressed out and tired

**Hints to help tackle past papers:**

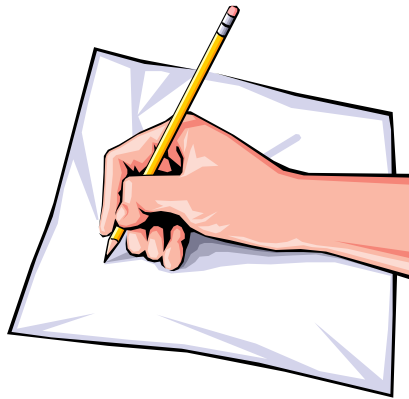
- **Keep to the time limit**
- **underline important points in the question**
- **make brief answer plans for essay questions**
- **do as many essay questions as you can**

# THE EXAM

Like an athlete who times his, or her, physical peak to coincide with the athletics event, you should now be approaching Like an athlete who times his, or her, physical peak to coincide with the athletics event, you should now be approaching **your** peak! Let yourself ease off a bit in the week before the first exam. If you work right up to the last minute all of the topics will be churning about in your mind, so **take time out before each exam**. As a result you will be fresh and those topics you thought you could not remember will come flooding back.

## During the week before the examinations:

- \* make sure that you get plenty of exercise and sleep
- \* use some of the time to refresh your memory on a few of the difficult or essential points
- \* catch up if you have fallen behind – but don't overdo it.



# THE NIGHT BEFORE THE FIRST EXAM

Now is the time to pamper yourself. Do something you really enjoy doing, totally relax. A few of these worry-busters should help you to sleep.

- make sure that you have all your examination equipment ready – pen (and at least one spare), pencil, pencil sharpener, rubber, ruler and other items which you may be allowed to take in to the exam, such as a calculator.
- make sure that you have a centre number and a candidate number.
- check your exam timetable – which room is the exam in? What time do you have to be there?
- have a warm bath and, afterwards, try some relaxation exercises
- try to get an early night





## IN THE EXAM ROOM

You'd probably be mad if you weren't a bit nervous – everybody will be.

### **Action checklist to calm your nerves!**

**DO** get out all the equipment that you will need for this exam and arrange it on your desk.

**DO** take your watch off and check the time against the exam room clock; put it on your desk so that you can easily see it.

**DO** fill in the relevant sections on the front of your exam script, including your centre number and candidate number in the boxes provided for them.

**DO** read your exam paper. Make sure that you read the instructions – underline important points.

**DO** read the exam paper twice over. Ten minutes now can save errors later on.

**DO** underline important words, in the questions.

**DO** work out how much time you have for each question.

**DO** decide which question you can do best and do it first – this helps to boost your confidence.

**DO** make sure that you have at least five minutes at the end of the exam to go over what you have done.

**DON'T** panic if your mind appears to go blank. Once you start answering questions your memory will start to work again – look at key words in the question, this will help.

**DON'T** forget to include all your workings – you could get plenty of marks for them.

**DON'T** waste time thinking and worrying about losing an odd mark in part of a question you don't know the answer to. Leave it. Come back to it later, if you have time.

**DON'T** let your handwriting let you down – if they can't read it, examiners can't give you marks.

# GET ALL THE MARKS YOU DESERVE

## Essay questions

Planning is vital, of course. Before you start writing an essay spend a few minutes planning what you are going to say. Write down brief notes on the:

**introduction** - this tells the examiner what the essay is about. This can be very useful if you do not finish since it may give the examiner some information for which marks can be awarded.

**headings** - these are your main points. You will need around five, and should plan to write a paragraph on each.

**key words** - these are the notes you will use when you write the essay proper. Key words will help jog your memory.

**evidence** - each new idea should be in a new paragraph, and you need to provide some evidence for each point you made. Use quotation marks 'quote' when quoting speech etc and be precise.

**conclusion** - this is a short section used to sum up your ideas at the end.

## TOP TIP

*It's a good idea to put a pencil cross through your rough plan when you've finished the essay. This way, the examiner can see that you have planned carefully. If you happen to run out of time when writing that essay, you may well be awarded marks just for the plan.*



# WORDS USED BY EXAMINERS

Check out these words – they’re all used by examiners. How sure are you of their meanings?

**calculate** – this means that a numerical answer is needed – remember, show your working

**complete** – you must complete a sentence, drawing, table, graph, etc.

**define** – describe precisely

*‘Don’t start answering a question before you’ve read it!  
The question itself contains information which is there to help you –  
and it’s obvious which candidates have ignored it’.*

*Bob – GCSE Examiner*

**describe** – a series of important points which must be written down in a few sentences.

**discuss** – you must indicate points in favour of an argument and points against – then sum up in a conclusion at the end

**explain** – write down what you understand – sometimes particularly in Science, a diagram helps

*“Students tend to make the same mistakes year  
after year. They run out of time on the last essay question  
because they’ve spent too long on the first answers. Watch your  
timing carefully”.*

*Bob – GCSE Examiner*

**find** – this term is often used in maths and may mean that you have to do a calculation, or make a reading from a graph, or take a measurement.

**outline** – brief notes are needed, about only the most important points

**predict** – use some given information or information which you have found to say what is likely to happen as a result

**state** – a brief answer giving basic facts is needed

**suggest** – this often refers to information or a situation which is not on the syllabus but you will have been given information in the question which you can use

*“I actually took a Maths exam when I was a girl in which  
I got the answer wrong in every single question – but  
I still passed because I got all the working right!”  
Ann – GCSE Examiner*

**Remember that the examiner is on your side – he or she wants to give you the marks if at all possible – but you have to earn them.**

### **What to do between exams**

Only revise points which are particularly important or you are not absolutely sure about for the following day’s examination. Remember to take the night off for relaxation and rest before an exam the next day!

Although it is tempting, try not to discuss the last exam with friends and certainly don’t do a ‘post mortem’ on it. Everybody thinks that they can’t have done as well as they really have, so talking about it will only make you depressed and cause stress which will make you less confident for the next examination.



# ONCE THE EXAMINATIONS ARE OVER

Let your hair down and party – you deserve it!

The important thing now is not to worry – there is little point in worrying about something you cannot change. It is not the end of the world – there are always other opportunities.

The worst that can happen, if you don't get the grades you hoped for, is that you may have to re-sit some subjects or amend your plans.

**Be positive – go in to the exam thinking about passing with good grades. Never go in an exam afraid that you might fail. After all – you've worked hard, so you deserve a good grade!**

*GOOD LUCK!!*

