

unravel

# Exam survival guide



**A guide to exam preparation  
promoting positive mental health for teenagers**

[unravelsupport.co.uk](http://unravelsupport.co.uk)



# Introduction

## 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

- 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.

### REVISING


- 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. It's worth it – so try it and see.

 **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

It is advisable to begin revising between 6 – 8 weeks before the exams.

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.



# Revision Planning

## 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.
- Colour code so you know when you are in worker - relaxation mode

### 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.

### 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.

**Remember, it will only be for a few weeks.**



**REVISION PLANNER**

Week \_\_\_\_\_

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



## 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.

## OTHER USEFUL TIPS

- Listen to a guided meditation on Youtube, 'Calm' or 'Headspace' apps to help you relax or sleep
- The five minute rule – this is really helpful on days when motivations feel low. Set yourself to work for 5 minutes as this is much easier to start than the idea of two hours. If after 5 mins you stop then at least you have done 5 mins more than you would have done. Often however, once the 5 mins is up we are committed and we are likely to work for longer
- Try the 5 senses mindfulness exercise to get out of the head and reconnect with what's around. Notice 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel (sensations or things on your body, not emotions), 2 things you can smell and one thing you can taste.
- Sleep on your revision book after revising some information to memorise it better - put it under the pillow literally - this one will work if you believe it will, due to the incredible power of belief!
- Self-belief- try to challenge any negative thoughts that may pop up due to anxiety e.g 'I can't do this'. Remember, thoughts are just guesses and self-belief is very important to success. Believe you can and put the work in and you will.
- Try to get fresh air and exercise between revision sessions, even if you don't feel like it, this will wake you up and revitalise you, ready for the next stint.
- 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?



# Avoiding Stress

## OTHER USEFUL TIPS

- Teenagers need 9 and ¼ hours sleep per night, this is the time when our brain and body get to work, repairing and strengthening connections made through learning. If you get this optimum amount of sleep you will be able to focus and concentrate easier too!
- 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? (sort of covered)
- Divide your time into small manageable chunks with plenty of short but mindfully restful breaks i.e. reading, listening to music, going for a walk, having a snack, chatting to someone
- Write the key words down of the most important information you need to remember
- Make some short notes to read before bed, this will be the first thing that your brain consolidates while you sleep
- Have a separate notepad to write important information down which you want to memorise, using different colours and creating diagrams and schemas to highlight the most important parts
- Create a colour coded timetable that shows when you are going to work and when you are going to play. This helps you to see visually the difference in time zones and so can help switch of the “should be working” mindset at the times when you are not working.
- Try to establish a routine e.g. have a set time when people know not to disturb you.
- Find somewhere comfortable and quiet to study. This does not mean in a comfy chair next to the fire with the TV on, or in a freezing room with a chair like a wooden board! The place where you study can greatly affect your studying, so make sure that its right for you.
- Always try to study in the same place. Moving from room to room means that you have different distractions each time you move, which is difficult to deal with when revising.
- Make sure you have all of your files, pens, books, calculator, etc. ready when you start revision. Having to go and find them gives you an extra distraction and another reason not to get down to work!
- Keep your work organised. Use dividers, separate notebooks – whatever works for you!



- Give yourself a time limit – not too much and not too little, and remember to reward yourself for working hard.
- Set yourself a task. To help you start your revision, set yourself a task at the end of a revision session that you can complete at the start of your next session. For example you may leave a piece of blank paper with the title of the work you were revising the night before, so that when you next sit down to revise you have to recall as much as you can. Not only does this recap work you've already done and help your mind to store the information, but it also provides you with a mental exercise to start your revision.
- Practice mindful eating and walking to school/the exam as it helps you switch off anxious FM before the exams and grounds you in the present so that you feel more focussed as they enter the exam
- Postpone the worry - allocate a half an hour time at the end of the day to postpone the worrying thought till then if you can still remember to go through all the worries
- Erase the worry - visualising to write all the worrying thoughts up on the white board/blank piece of paper and use the cloth/eraser to wipe them off
- Reframing the irrational exaggerating thoughts
- Playing a detective with the irrational and demanding thoughts, searching for evidence of them to be facts
- Separate the feeling from thinking and behaviour



# Effective Revision

## FIVE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE REVISION

### 1 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, cue cards
- Learning by Heart

### 2

#### 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 or drawings, say, of science apparatus you may have to draw
- Scientific facts such as chemical symbols  
Mathematical formulae – times tables, etc.

### 3 WORD PATTERNS TO MEMORISE

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

### 4

#### 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



## 5 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 of 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 papers.



# Exam Prep

## 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 your topic, you will get stressed out.

1. You take in less when you are tired and have less time to work in
2. You try practising past exam questions before you've thoroughly revised, and have difficulties
3. 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 can 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





# Exams

## IN THE EXAM ROOM

You'd probably be unusual 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 properly. 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
- **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
- **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

**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!!

### Contact and Links



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## Taking care of your mind during exam time

Relaxing and giving your mind time away from revision is important.  
Using a mindfulness recording could be a way to do this and help you to relax

**Why not check out some of these guided sessions available on you tube**

	<b>The daily calm</b> <b>10 minute guided mediations</b>
	<b>Great meditation</b> <b>These are 5 minute sessions to encourage a mindful state of mind</b>
	<b>The mindful movement</b> <b>Sessions to encourage you to be 'in the present'</b>
	<b>Goodful</b> <b>10 minute sessions aimed specifically at relieving anxiety</b>
	<b>Sunnybrook</b> <b>Advice about using your breath to calm feelings and reduce stress</b>

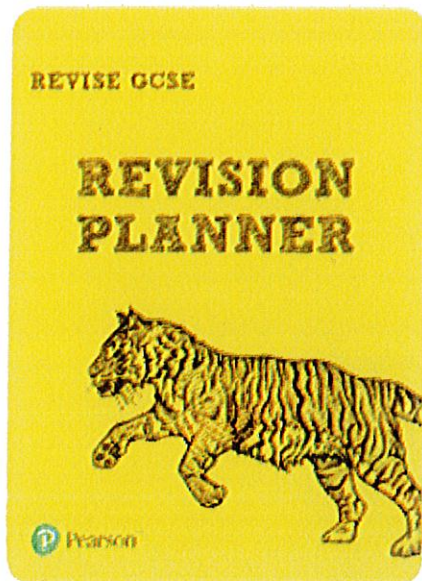




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Don't forget to use your Revision Planner to help you.

Ambition  
Knowledge  
Determination  
Leadership at all levels

**Our Whole School Mission Statement and Intent:**  
To create Sheffield's influential young leaders of tomorrow



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