

Information for students (and parents) to support with preparation and taking of exams

The following information is intended to support students as they approach and during exams. The information has been drawn from a range of sources.

The guide contains the following:

- 1. Ofqual information – top tips for exam preparation**
- 2. JCQ – on your exam day guide**
- 3. Top revision tips**
- 4. Technique during exams**
- 5. Mental health and wellbeing**
- 6. Test anxiety and managing test anxiety**
- 7. Tips for parents including information from the NHS on how to support your child to beat exam stress**



1. Ofqual has provided the following information.

The [2-year transition to pre-pandemic grading](#) is now complete. Normal grading arrangements will continue for GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2024. Ofqual expects national results in 2024 to be broadly similar to those in 2023. Precise outcomes may vary a little, for example if the cohort of students taking a qualification is stronger or weaker than in previous years. As such, overall national results may change slightly year on year, just as they did before the pandemic.

Familiarise yourself with exam arrangements

Familiarise yourself with your exam timetable and where your exams are taking place. Make sure you know the rules around what you can and can't do in an exam. For example, taking your mobile phone into the exam is not allowed. Not following the rules could cause you to lose marks or be disqualified from the exam. Listen closely to all the instructions given by your school.

Know your exam/syllabus

It is beneficial to look at old exam papers and make sure you understand what type of questions you'll have to answer and can practice. You can also use useful free tools such as [BBC bitesize](#) to aid your revision.

Find a form of revision that works for you

Some people find it helpful to stick with one style of revision, while for some, it's helpful to have some variety. You can find some helpful revision techniques, including mind maps and using sounds [here](#).

Oak Academy also has a wide range of resources that can help you with your revision. You can access these tools [here](#). You can also do mock exams, [online quizzes](#), make cue cards, or read textbooks and revision guides.

The most important thing is to find what works best for you.

Make a plan

Making a plan of what you need to revise and when you're going to do it is a really good way to make sure you stay on track. Download a [free revision planning tool](#) to help you plan efficiently. You can then mark out what days and times your exams are. It may be a good idea to identify the key topics you need to revise and plan when you'll fit it all in ahead of the exam.

Take care of yourself

It is normal to feel a little worried or stressed in the run up to your exams but there are things you can do to help manage this.

Talk to your friends, family and teachers about how you are feeling. They are there to support and encourage you.

Creating a revision plan, setting targets and focusing on your progress can help you feel more prepared. Make sure you take regular breaks to go outside for a walk or to do something you enjoy.




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.

Before sitting your exams, ensure you know:

- the date, time and location of your exams – you might find it helpful to write this information in a calendar or planner
- who to contact at school or college in case there's an emergency that makes you late or unable to sit your exam

What you cannot take into exams:

- any type of phone
 - revision notes
 - any type of watch (this includes analogue, digital and smart watches)
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What you will need:

- a clear pencil case
 - at least two black ink pens – blue pens are not acceptable
 - an approved calculator for relevant exams
 - appropriate apparatus such as a ruler or protractor for relevant exams
 - a clear water bottle if you wish to take one in – it must not have a label
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Other important information:

- 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.
- Fill in your details on the front of your answer booklet.
- 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.
- 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.
- Make sure you stay silent – talking to a fellow candidate could result in disqualification from all your exams.

Contingency sessions:

- There are contingency sessions within the Summer 2024 exam timetable – the afternoon of 6 June and 13 June 2024 and the morning and afternoon of 26 June 2024. Make sure you are available on all three dates even if you do not have an exam.

If you have any questions about your exams, 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 2023

3. Preparing for exams

Top revision tips can be found using this BBC resource.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z3hpgdm>

Revision charts, highlighter pens and sticky notes around the room are some of the methods people use to ensure information stays in their mind.

But now psychologists in the US warn many favourite revision techniques will not lead to exam success.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22565912>

When preparing for exams, you need to think about how you learn and consider the best ways to revise. There are techniques that may feel familiar and comfortable, but are these really the best ways of ensuring that you embed and retrieve information?

Professor Dunlovsky

Back in 2013 Prof John Dunlovsky of Kent State University in the United States reviewed 1,000 scientific studies, looking at the ten most popular revision methods. Only two of the 10 techniques examined turned out to be really effective - testing yourself and spreading out your revision over time.

"Students who can test themselves or try to retrieve material from their memory are going to learn that material better in the long run", says Prof Dunlovsky.

"Start by reading the text book then make flash cards of the critical concepts and test yourself.

"A century of research has shown that repeated testing works."

Revision

Students who are aware of how they learn best and can apply these strategies are more likely to be ready to revise independently and effectively. It's not about clocking up the most hours of revision, but about being efficient and effective, spacing out revision activities and interleaving them with revision activities for other subjects as well as ensuring time is made for rest and relaxation.

The most effective techniques

The study looked at ten different revision methods such as highlighting and underlining, re-reading notes and writing summaries. Prof Dunlovsky and his team concluded that two of the methods tested came out on top.

1. Spreading study out over time

Spreading your revision out over a longer period of time proved to be very effective. So get started as early as you can with revision and avoid cramming in the days before an exam.

2. Self-testing

According to research conducted by Prof Dunlovsky, "students who can test themselves or try to retrieve material from their memory are going to learn that material better in the long run".

Top revision tips



Revision: Top revision tips
Smart revision advice from those who've been there.



Revision: Memory hacks and tips
Memory hacks and tips from our coaches to help you with revision.



Revision: Expert memory hacks and tips
Memory hacks and tips from our experts to help you with your revision.



Exams and assessments

Revision techniques - the good, the OK and the useless

By Deborah Cohen
Health Check, BBC World Service

© 18 May 2013



“Start by reading the text book, then make flash cards of the critical concepts and test yourself. A century of research has shown that repeated testing works.” Prof Dunlovsky

The study rated the following three revision techniques as 'moderately effective'.

- Explaining a point or fact you are learning to another person.
- Explaining to yourself, without prompts, how a problem is solved or how facts relate to each other.
- Switching between different subjects and/or types of questions.

A screenshot of a Bitesize article. The header is orange with the word 'Bitesize' in white. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'Learn', 'Support', and 'Careers'. On the right side of the navigation bar, there are links for 'My Bitesize' and 'All Bitesize'. The main content area has a title 'Revision techniques - what really works?' and a sub-header 'Part of Learn & revise'. Below the title is an orange button that says '+ Add to My Bitesize'.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z9jn97h>

4. Technique during the exams

Be clear about your objective – presumably to clearly demonstrate your knowledge and score as many marks as you can on the paper.

Prior to the exam, you should become familiar with how you will be assessed, what the paper will require in terms of knowledge (what will be tested) and equipment, how long the paper is and how many questions you have to answer (thus becoming aware of how long you have for each section). At the beginning of the exam, read the instructions carefully and check the above information based on what you then have in front of you. Choose the questions you will answer (if there is a choice) and the order in which you will answer them and how much time you will dedicate to each question.

When your time has started but before you start to write, identify command words (or action verbs) to understand how you are expected to answer the question (you give yourself a better chance by having identified these in advance with the support of your teacher(s)). Identify key words or phrases and focus on the question that is asked.

As you write, keep an eye on the clock and stick to time allocations for each question/section. If you are running short of time, use bullet points rather than missing some questions due to too much detail early on in the paper.

5. Mental health and wellbeing

We all have mental health. How we feel mentally is often hidden and experienced internally. Talking about how we feel and seeking support is a vital means by which we can give ourselves the best support we can.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says that mental health relates to how – and to what extent – we can realise our abilities, actualise our intellectual and emotional potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, be productive and contribute to our community.

Test anxiety

Most of us experience anxiety in our lives and to some degree when we are being assessed on our performance. Some of us experience high anxiety which is when we experience symptoms most of the time in assessment situations.

Test anxiety may manifest itself in our thinking such as going blank in an exam, having difficulty concentrating or having negative thoughts about past performance or the consequences of failure. Some of us may feel emotions such as tension, panic, being overwhelmed or not in control. Some of us may experience physical reactions such as dizziness, sweating, wobbly legs or a raised heartbeat.

It is more common for females to experience test anxiety than males.

Ofqual states that test anxiety is usually a result of one or more of the following factors:

- An individual will have their own beliefs about their academic ability, why they want to succeed, and the ways in which they cope.
- The ways in which a student interacts with their teachers, parents and peers can increase or reduce test anxiety.
- Some types of test are more likely to cause anxiety than others, for example assessments that are in front of one or more people.

6. How can we manage test anxiety?

Some people need professional diagnosis and support and they may well receive reasonable adjustments which can also be known as access arrangements.

Preparation

Being well-prepared can be a significant factor in reducing test anxiety. If you have an important event taking place at a known point in the future, you need to be ready for it. Preparation for exams takes place over an extended period of time in schools and this preparation will largely comprise of what is taught, assessments, information about how assessment works and what is assessed. Healthy, cooperative relationships between students and between students and the teacher provide the best environment. From all those involved, support and nurture are better than coercion.

Routines

Allow flexibility and make routines as natural as possible. Successful sportspeople create routines to help them focus and avoid distractions or having to think about things that are peripheral to their goal. In the case of exams, the goal is demonstrating what you know and anything that distracts from that needs to be shut out. In the run up to the exam itself, preparation can take many forms. Lessons running right up to the exam, revision sessions, final preparation sessions, individual or group revision etc. In the exam venue, distraction should not happen and is not allowed. If you are worried you will forget something for the morning or afternoon of the exam, pack and check your bag the night before so that you don't have to worry about that in the morning before leaving home. This will relieve the cognitive load and rather than worrying about what you might have forgotten, you can have confidence you have what you need and focus on 'getting in the zone' with your thoughts focused on the assessment.

Fitness

Keeping yourself fit is advisable – this will help prevent illness and to keep your mind focused. Don't start going to the gym in the week before your exams if you don't normally and don't do something that will overtire you. On the day of the exam, you should do nothing different to your normal routine. Ensuring that you have time built in to your schedule to get some fresh air, talk to family and/or friends or relax in the way you normally do.

The ideal posture during an exam is to sit upright, feet flat on the floor and you should ensure you are used to writing with a black pen for extended periods of time, increasing your writing stamina and strengthening the necessary muscles.

Physical activity is also important for your mental health. Undertaking exercise or taking breaks doing something you enjoy can help to combat stress and reduce anxiety for people of all ages. We secrete endorphins when we exercise, one of the 4 hormones known to make us happy.

Sleep is essential and should not be sacrificed for last-minute preparation as the intended benefit may well be counter-productive. Matthew Walker, in his book 'Why We Sleep' explains how our brains hippocampus has limited capacity for storage, and so we need a means by which we can move memories and information to other parts of our brain. His research shows that sleep restores our capacity for learning, making more secure that which has been learned the day before.

Nutrition

Making radical changes to what you eat or drink on the day of the exam is not recommended. Some food and drink is better for you than others. Sugar can give you a 'quick fix' but likely won't last the length of the exam. Caffeine can be good for concentration and alertness, but it can increase anxiety and so non-sugary and decaffeinated drinks should be used. In line with JCQ regulations, drinks during the exam (and their containers) must be transparent.

Water is arguably best for hydration, but it should be drunk in moderation, firstly to avoid the need to visit the toilet during the exam which is disruptive to the candidate and all other candidates, and secondly because too much water can dilute some micronutrients in your blood, which is bad for your blood pressure and concentration. If the temperature is warm, it is important to increase your intake accordingly, drinking smaller amounts more regularly.

Overall, it is recommended that we eat lean protein supplemented by vegetables and a small number of starchy, fibrous foods. Natural, locally sourced, unprocessed foods are best to make you the fittest – both physically and mentally – for anxiety-provoking situations.

Support

Consider the GROW model to support preparation.

Goal: Where do you want to get to?

Reality: Where are you now?

Options: How might you make progress?

Way forward: What actions can you take to reach your goal?

Using this model can help us make sense in a positive way of what we need to do to influence how we act.

Breathing techniques can also help us to take control of our emotions in a variety of situations. breath in and out and count in seconds at the same time to find your own rhythm, then add two seconds each time you exhale. When we think about how we breathe, we are helping to 'anchor' ourselves so that we can take greater control of our emotions.

Tips from students

Students that share advice emphasise the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between exam preparation and everyday life including a social life and regular exercise.

They also stressed how important it is to open up and talk with each other with parents and with teachers as well as having and agreeing upon appropriate expectations. Once an exam is over the recommendation is to stay calm refocus and get ready for the next one. Students could give themselves a treat, either following a period of revision or following an exam and when they are ready reflecting upon the experience either alone or with others.

If you want to be successful, you need to identify and understand what might get in the way. This could be seen as performance equals potential minus interference.

In the right environment with appropriate support and with a clear plan in mind to improve our methods and overcome barriers, we can create the conditions for success in what we are doing. Success can be bred from how we look after our body and mind.

7. Tips for parents

Top ten tips for parents: revision

Exams are undoubtedly nerve-racking for children and their parents. Fraught mums and dads watch over their children during the holidays or 'study leave' and wonder to what degree they should be helping. So, with that in mind, here are our top ten tips on how to help children to revise effectively.



1. Encourage your child to make a revision timetable – and stick to it.
2. Make sure your child has a quiet space to work, with no distractions.
3. Help to find the method of learning and retaining information that works best for them. It could be reading and making notes, using flash cards or Post-it notes, looking at video clips, playing back recordings of their own voice, mind mapping or perhaps a mixture of these. [A clutch of youtube videos produced for Radio 1, 1Xtra and BBC Bitesize is full of useful ideas.](#)
4. Check the exam specifications. All exam boards publish these, along with practice papers and mark schemes too.
5. Search out revision apps and online resources – such as [BBC Bitesize](#) – to clarify areas your child feels less confident about. Teenagers sometimes concentrate on their best subjects and leave their weaker ones till the end but it is a good idea to tackle weak areas early on.
6. Be around as much as possible. You don't have to be at their side 24/7 but children like parents taking an interest in their revision (but not taking over).
7. Keep the kitchen cupboard stocked with delicious food. When the going gets tough children really appreciate a cup of tea, a plate of biscuits or their favourite meal.
8. Encourage them to break revision into manageable chunks and to take regular breaks in between revision sessions. It's far more effective to do 30 minutes of successful revision – rather than plough on for hours on end and not get anywhere. This is backed up by research by academics at the University of Sheffield who found that learning is more effective when spread out over stretches of time.
9. Exercise, fresh air, healthy food and lots of sleep are crucial.

Help your child beat exam stress

Tests and exams can be a challenging part of school life for children and young people and their parents or carers. But there are ways to ease the stress.

Watch for signs of stress

Children and young people who are stressed may:

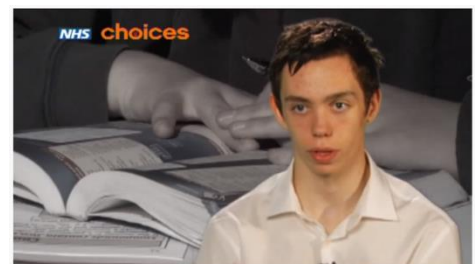
- worry a lot
- feel tense
- have headaches and stomach pains
- not sleep well
- be irritable
- lose interest in food or eat more than normal
- not enjoy activities they previously enjoyed
- be negative and have a low mood
- feel hopeless about the future

Having someone to talk to about their work can help. Support from a parent, tutor or study buddy can help young people share their worries and keep things in perspective.

10. Most important of all, help your child to keep everything in perspective. Remind them that the better they prepare and the more confident they feel in their subject knowledge the less stressed they will feel when the exams start. But by the end of June the exams will be over and it will be the start of the long summer holidays.

<https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/curricula-and-exams/revision-top-ten-tips-for-parents>

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/help-your-child-beat-exam-stress/>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTFMUufEcrw>