



Ysgol Morgan Llwyd
GCSEs

WHAT CAN A PARENT DO?

GCSE's What can a Parent Do?

Section 1: Introduction

- How can I make a difference?
- Good exam results - What is the secret?

Section 2: Getting it right at each stage

- Coping with coursework
- When the going gets tough....maintaining, motivating and encouraging persistence
- Revision
- The moment of truth - sitting the exams
- When it all goes pear-shaped - A troubleshooting guide

Section 3: What do I need to know?

- Tips on working in partnership with the school o General tips
- Finding out how your child is really doing

Section 4: Useful resources

- Making a revision plan

Section 1: Introduction

The most common frustrations for parents

How can I make a difference?

Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter their examination years, known in schools as Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) confused by the complicated systems of choosing subjects and courses (GCSEs, vocational GCSEs, GNVQs, BTECs, VRQs - just some of the options available), coursework, entry tiers, modular exams and practical assessments. If you feel like this you are not alone! The exam system has changed greatly over the past few years, and is continuing to change, and sometimes it feels as if it is best just to let the 'experts' at your child's school get on with it.

But your involvement during these crucial years can make an enormous difference - the difference between success and failure or between 'D' and 'E' passes and 'A's and 'B's.

Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a new study.

The good news is - you don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects your child chooses to make a real difference, and you don't have to become a 'super-parent' giving up your own life and responsibilities - you just need to know how best to spend the time you do have, at each stage of the process.

This booklet enables you do to just this - providing you with the clear and practical information you will need to help him or her to meet the demands of the exam years, in partnership with the school.

The booklet outlines exactly what your child needs to be able to do to succeed at each stage of the process to the best of their ability ('Key tasks for pupils') and provides as many practical ideas to apply throughout the two examination years as we could cram in (Tips for parents').

Isn't it the schools' job to get them through their exams?

Yes, of course the school has an important role to play and can provide the expertise and resources to help your child acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to do their best in each subject. There will be many new expectations of your child in Years 10 and 11 - expectations which for many children, even the very brightest, are hard to meet. You don't need to know anything about maths, science or resistant materials to help them with these things - you've been doing it all their lives! New demands on your child are likely to include:

- Being more self-motivated and taking more responsibility for their own learning - this can be a big change from earlier years, with most teachers viewing it as the pupil's responsibility to attend and make the most of lessons once they get to Year 10.
- Asking when they do not understand. (This requires confidence and can be difficult at a time when friends' opinions hold such sway.)
- Developing their abilities to overcome frustrations, and strategies for persisting when they are learning material that they find challenging.
- Organising themselves, notes, handouts and information for different subjects, and different topics within these.
- Completing more work at home, independently.
- Organising and planning their time over longer periods, for example to complete a coursework project.
- Understanding the exam structure and the relative importance of each piece of work to their final grade.

- **Planning and carrying out their revision.**
- Perfecting their 'exam technique'.

Perhaps the hardest demand on Year 10 and 11 pupils is that of understanding the long-term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve short-term fun at times in the interest of long-term benefits. Unfortunately for us, from the teenage perspective, interest and effort in education and the long-term benefits these can bring often come rather a long way down the priority list, after friendships, the 'right' clothes, social life, romantic concerns and hobbies.

In addition, children will differ in their levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and levels of motivation.

And this is where you come in. You are the expert on your own child and have always been his or her most important teacher. Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam years.

When you, your child and the school work in partnership, you can be sure that your child will achieve the best results possible.

So what is my role as a parent?

Of course your role in helping your child to succeed will vary according to their needs and strengths.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- **Attendance officer** - making sure your child goes to lessons and understands the importance of making the most of lesson-times.
- **Partner with school and child** - going to parents' evenings, asking questions and finding out how you can best help your child at home.
- **Provider of the tools for homework and revision** - a quiet space, a 'workbox' of pens, paper and other necessities.
- **Banker** - paying for the tools, files and revision guides they need
- **Study buddy** - showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (but not doing it for them), testing them when they ask you etc.
- **Entertainments officer** - finding out about TV programmes, theatre productions, films, exhibitions relevant to your child's learning and enjoying them together.
- **Sounding board and adviser** - helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements, and seeing a positive way forward when things go badly.
- **Project manager** - agreeing the rules for homework or revision (they won't work if they're imposed), helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun stuff and revising the plans as necessary.
- **Go-between** - for your child and the school when necessary; making sure problems are nipped in the bud and asking the questions your child can't or won't. Information provider and interpreter - finding copies of old exam papers, searching out websites, finding out about the subject, exam structures and content.

Whatever your individual child's needs your chief role will always be that of person who cares most in the world, champion of their needs and admirer of every achievement. The most important role you will play is that of person who will love them and be proud of them whatever happens.

Good exam results what is the secret?

We tend to think of our children's results being down to what happens on the day of the exam itself.

- Will they be in the right frame of mind?
- Will they be lucky and get the right questions?
- Will they remember what they have revised?

In fact the results of exams are generally determined well before they sit the exam itself. There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success. The secret of good results in exams is about getting things right (and being aware of what can go wrong) at each stage of the process. The broad stages are:

STAGE 1: Learning the content first time round

The process of revision (literally 'looking at something again') does assume that the content of the subject has been learnt in the first place - every lesson counts.

STAGE 2: Revision

Even the 'perfect student', who has attended every lesson and paid attention throughout the exam years needs to revise to achieve their potential. For the rest of us the need for revision is even greater. Revision can be done in many ways, some of which are more effective than others. The booklet offers a way of planning revision as well as tips for using the most effective techniques.

STAGE 3: The exam itself

Even with the first two stages successfully achieved, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams - knowing the subject matter, organisational skills and 'exam technique'. These are dealt with in the booklet in the section entitled 'The moment of truth - sitting the exams'.

Section 2: Getting it right at each stage

Getting off to a good start

Key tasks for pupils

- Find out about the structure of each course –
 1. what coursework is there?
 2. When are the exams?
 3. What percentage of the final mark does each count for?
 4. Read the information the school provides.
- Write all coursework deadlines and modular exams on a wall-planner or similar.
- Create a **work-area** where you will be comfortable (and where you will not be interrupted).
- Agree regular '**check-ins**' with your parents or study-buddy to look at where you are and what work you need to complete by when.
- Agree the '**rules for homework**' with your parents - it saves endless nagging and can always be renegotiated.

Tips for parents

- Build good relationships with teachers.
- Use parents' information or target-setting evenings to explain from the start that you want to work with the school to ensure that your child does the very best that they can.
- Explain clearly what you would like their help with.
- Make sure that they know that you are happy to be contacted.
- Work with your child and the school to ensure that you understand the course structure and requirements, such as timings of coursework and exams.
- Make sure you have the name of the person responsible for your child in each of the subject areas.
- Help your child to organise a work-area, ensuring that they have all the materials and resources they need
- Have plenty of spares of the basics - battles fought over mislaid pens or rulers are rarely worth the effort and are often just the distraction that a reluctant teenager is looking for!
- Talk about your own and your child's expectations about how much work they should be doing during the week and when the best time is to do it.
- Talk about whether or not music or TV will help or hinder them. Be prepared to compromise - if they get the work done with the TV on, it is probably not an issue.
- Agree regular 'check-ins' where you are 'allowed' to discuss with your child where they are in relation to each subject's deadlines, areas they are enjoying, having difficulty with etc.
- Having a set time to discuss work beats 'nagging'!

Coping with Coursework

Tips for Pupils

- Go to all your lessons
- Listen extra-carefully to any information about coursework, write it down, and ask if you are not completely clear about what you need to do, and by when.
- Keep on top of your coursework - know what is due in when, and schedule in time to do it - it usually takes longer than you think.
- Make sure you know exactly what is expected for each piece of coursework and how marks are awarded
- Hundreds of hours are wasted by students spending too long on the wrong thing because they didn't ask what they were supposed to be doing.
- Don't leave coursework until the last minute - having 6 weeks to complete a piece of coursework may seem like forever, but it passes quickly.
- Make a plan of the work to be done, dividing it into smaller sections.
- Aim to tackle sections one at a time and reward yourself for each small step completed.
- No-one likes going over work they have done, but allow some time for this before the dead-line - it really does make a difference.
- Get draft work in before the deadline so that your teacher can comment and make suggestions before you submit your final draft.
- Your grade will be much improved and you won't have to redo it.
- Keep a balance between social life, work commitments and studying - if you have done the studying you will feel much better when you go out - you CAN do both!
- Remember that coursework COUNTS - sometimes you can redo it, it's true, but this is extra work and extra stress when you will have other pressures on you. Do it the best you can the first time.

Tips for parents

- Your most important role, as always, is to encourage and praise your child. Show an interest by talking to them about what they are learning in different subjects and in their homework and coursework.
- The most important thing is that your child attends lessons. Sometimes just missing one lesson means that they miss out on key information about coursework or the introduction to a topic - starting out behind often results in a vicious circle of not understanding, falling further behind, disagreements with teachers, an increasing dislike of the subject and giving up.
- Encourage your child to see the relevance of every lesson to their end results - two years seems like an endless time to a teenager but help them to put it in context, by breaking the time available for each subject over the year.
- Make sure the 'workbox' (is kept stocked and the workspace is suitable).
- Put key dates and deadlines in your own diary so that you can support before the 'panic stage'.
- If you have agreed regular 'check-ins', take the opportunity to discuss how the coursework is going, and if there are any difficulties you can help with.
- For some children who are not well-organised you may need to have more knowledge about specific coursework requirements in order to be able to support your child fully. This knowledge might include the length, how many marks are awarded for each question etc. Subject teachers will often provide this information to pupils, but if you haven't seen it, don't hesitate to ask for a copy for yourself if you feel your child needs this level of support. The internet is a good source of specific information about different examination syllabuses. (Make sure you know the name of the examination board and exact title of the GCSE.)
- Make copies for yourself of course-work descriptions and mark-schemes etc. as many children lose this vital information, only realising they don't have it when it's too late.
- Find out if there are any TV programmes, museums, exhibitions, or theatre productions relevant to any of the GCSE courses your child is following which they could visit. Books or plays on CD or tape

can be listened to together.

- Help your child to use the internet to search for relevant materials and information. If you do not have internet access at home, most public libraries offer access. The internet is a great resource, but the information it offers can be unselective and overwhelming. Support your child by finding appropriate websites or helping them to do so. The school will be willing to offer guidance in most areas.
- Let your child's tutor or other key teacher know if your child is experiencing any difficulties in their home circumstances or personal lives where appropriate -most schools and examination boards can be flexible in special circumstances. School deadlines can sometimes be extended if there is good reason.

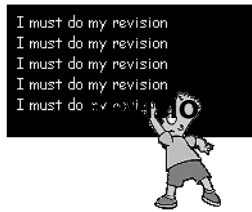
When the going gets tough... Maintaining motivation and encouraging persistence

Key tasks for pupils

- Don't stop going to, or working in, lessons you find hard or dislike - talk to someone about any difficulties you are having - there is always a solution!
- Revise your homework schedule if necessary and stick to it - even when you don't feel like it. Don't wait until you are in the mood - the further behind you get the less you will be in the mood. (Agree the schedule with your parents for a hassle-free life.)
- Resist the temptation to bury your head in the sand if things are getting out of hand - talk to your parents/ tutor/subject teacher.
- Ignore what friends and others are doing or saying - you are working for an easy life for YOU now and later - let them have the hassle of redoing coursework and the last-minute panics.
- Keep yourself going by making a list of coursework pieces you have to do over the two years and ticking each one off as it is completed. Remember to celebrate and reward yourself when you complete a piece of work.

Tips for parents

- Agree the balance between work and social life and stick to the agreement. Again, flexibility is the key - if a special night comes up, agree that they can make up the work at a specified time.
- All pupils will fall behind, feel demotivated or overwhelmed, or struggle with the balance of social, work and school demands at times. When your child feels like this, berating and threatening them will have a negative effect.
- Consider using a reward structure to motivate your child.
- Be flexible - use the 80/20 rule. If your child is sticking to what they are supposed to be doing 80% of the time, they will be doing alright.
- 'If they say they've got no homework in Year 10 and 11, they may be liberal with the truth!!



Key tasks for pupils

Setting yourself up for revision

- Buy (or get your parents to buy you) a set of files especially for your revision- one for each exam you will take (for many subjects you will take two or more separate exams).
- File handouts and information from lessons in the relevant files at the end of each day.
- Start revision early - allowing at least 2 weeks for each exam. The sooner you start, the less you will have to do each day and the less stressed out you will be.
- The most important thing is to **make a realistic revision timetable that you will stick to.**
- Allow plenty of time for setting up your revision plan (at least a day) and rope your parents into helping you - it's the best investment of your, and their time out of everything in this section!
- Set one good revision book or aid for each subject. These do much of the initial work for you by breaking the subject matter down into 'do-able' chunks and key facts. Be selective about which you buy - check with your subject teacher for the best ones for the level of exam you are taking.
- Keep everything you need - hole-punch, paper, pens, calculators etc. in one place so you don't waste ten minutes of each session searching for a pen.

Doing the revision

- Go to all lessons and make them work for you -especially the ones you don't like or find harder. In the past your work might have depended on how much you liked the teacher - but now you are working for YOU. Make the most of their knowledge about the subject, revision and exam techniques.
- Find out about good and bad revision techniques and try them out - find out what works for you. The key thing is to reduce the notes you work from to a single A4 page by the night before the exam - look briefly at the notes you make a day later, a week later, and just before the exam. This WORKS!
- Match the revision notes you make to the sort of questions you will be asked in the exam. Get hold of old papers from your school or from the net.
- Have clear and specific goals for each revision period, for example - 'at the end of this two hours, I will be able to label a diagram of the heart and answer a question on how the heart works'.
- Have a start and finish time and stick to them.
- Get into the routine of following your revision plan - if you really don't feel like it tell yourself you will do it for fifteen minutes and then decide whether to carry on. At least you will have done fifteen minutes. Set your aim for the session and get right on with it - ignore the impulse to suddenly tidy your room for the first time in three years!!!
- Clear your head before you begin - give yourself 2 minutes to write down anything on your mind and tell yourself you will deal with that later.
- STOP and take a break if you are becoming frustrated, angry or overwhelmed. Put aside the problem. When you have had a break and feel less stressed, think about what issue is causing the problem and talk to someone about possible solutions.
- Don't waste time struggling - note down anything you are finding hard or don't understand when you are revising and take it into your next lesson.
- If there are one or two things that you just can't 'get' leave them out (unless you are aiming for an A).
- Don't be influenced by friends who talk about how little work they are doing and get your head down - your results don't matter to them, but they will be crucial for you. Tell yourself it's not for long and think of that long summer holiday!

Last-minute revision

- Yes it is worth it! By the day before the exam, your revision notes should be short enough to read through in one session. The final read-through will help key words and concepts to stick in your mind.
- Focus on revising your notes for one or two key areas immediately before the exam.

The structure of revision sessions. Good revision techniques always include:

GOOD and BAD Revision - If you read nothing else, **READ THIS!**

What is revision? It means literally 're-looking' at information you have learnt previously. The aim is that you know the information you will be tested on and can remember it for the exam. Knowing something depends on understanding it.

The aim of revision - The aim is to reduce the amount of information relating to a subject to a series of key-points, any of which you can expand upon in an exam answer. The key point, phrase or word prompts your brain to retrieve the information stored in it. At the end of your revision for each topic or sub-topic, aim to end up with a card or A4 sheet with the KEY points for that section.

- An aim for the session, e.g. 'By the end of this two hour revision session I will understand and be able to answer questions on photosynthesis'.
- Thinking about what you know already and identifying the bits you need to spend more time on (usually by doing some sort of self-testing - many revision aids include opportunities for self-testing).
- Breaking down each topic into 'do-able' chunks. Revise each section - not just reading the information but

doing something active with it.

- Producing notes (shorter each time you revise a particular area) noting key points, phrases or words.
- Testing yourself to see what you have learnt.
- Ticking off the subject on your 'overall list' so that you can see regular progress.
- Revisiting your notes briefly after one day, one week and one month, as well as just before the exam - **THIS REALLY WORKS!**

The key to effective revision. Useful revision involves DOING SOMETHING with the information you are trying to learn and remember. This is ESSENTIAL to allow your brain to learn, make connections and remember. Different people find different activities useful, and you need to find out how you revise best. Some ideas are:

1. Drawing 'spider maps / diagrams' on large pieces of paper – to show how different parts of a subject hang together.
2. Use pictures and big flip-chart sheets and colour to make posters with key points and display these on the walls or where you will see them regularly.
3. Put revision aids up around the house – especially for any 'rote learning' – chemical or mathematical formulae, French verbs etc.
4. Record yourself making 10 key points about a particular subject / topic and then play it back when you are travelling, running etc (A chance for you to use your phones!!!)
5. Highlight key areas of notes or books (if yours), picking out the key points or summaries.
6. Listen to tapes of e.g. books, plays and discuss them with another person.
7. Watch revision DVD's, www.youtube.co.uk Pause them and make notes of key or difficult areas, test yourself.
8. Read a page and shut the book – what can you remember?
9. Tell someone about what you have learned.
10. Get people around you to test you on 'rote knowledge' – have a family quiz!!

Memory techniques

Find out what helps you to remember stuff. Some ideas are:

- **Acronyms** (using the first letter of each word to make a word to prompt your memory) e.g. you may find it hard to remember this sentence 'Wholly Inadequate Needless Damned Outrageous Waste of Space'. However, turn it into an acronym and it becomes much easier: WINDOWS.

- **Picture stories** (thinking of a strong visual image to associate with each word and linking them together in an unlikely and silly story) e.g. you may find it hard to remember the facts in this sentence, simply by reading it through,
'The great Plague struck London in 1665, followed by the fire of London in 1666, starting in the shop of the baker to King Charles II in Pudding Lane'.
Try this out: get a picture (for example) of a large rat (the plague) running around before being burnt (plague year before fire) in a bread oven (bakers shop) with the flames curling up around it like the curls of the numbers 666 (1666), and then being put into a pudding eaten by two King Charles spaniels. Go through the picture sequence a couple of times, then see if you can remember the 7 facts in the sentence. Ask someone to test you, and see if it works for them.
- **Mnemonics** are also useful - make up a silly sentence to help you remember the order of something e.g. Never Eat Shredded Wheat (North, East, South, West).
- **Review.** Take time occasionally to ask yourself how well your revision techniques are working for you. How much have you covered? Have you stuck to your timetable? Are you ending up with notes you can use for last minute revision? Congratulate yourself for all the subjects you have covered. Change your timetable plan if necessary.
- **Later on.** When you have revised and revisited each topic, have a go at some old exam questions. Make sure you set the appropriate time limit, and try to work under exam conditions. Don't do this too early (although it's worth looking at them early on to get an idea of the sort of question you will be answering - essays, multiple choice etc.). Do these in plenty of time so that your teacher can mark them.

Tips for parents

Supporting your child in setting themselves up for revision

- Talk to your child about how you can support them and what they would find helpful.
- The simplest things often get in the way of starting revision - weeks can be lost while pupils 'are going to get some folders soon...'. Set around these by simply providing the files, dividers, wall-charts etc. your child will need for the revision period.
- Encourage your child to empty their bag and file handouts and information from lessons at the end of each day. They won't seem important until they need them, at which point they are likely to be lost under a mountain of random papers.
- Support your child in choosing one good revision guide for each subject - it's the best investment you will make. There are lots around so check with the teacher yourself if you are not sure which is best.
- Help your child to **plan their revision timetable**. It will take an investment of your time (probably several hours), but it is the single thing that will make the biggest difference to the effectiveness of the revision, and therefore the outcome. Children vary in the amount of support they need at each stage of the process.

Supporting your child in doing the revision

- Support your child in sticking to their revision plan and keeping to the start and finishing times they have agreed. Praise them when they do it, and if necessary agree a reward structure. Don't make treats dependent on certain results - it will only add to their feelings of disappointment if they don't do as well as expected.
- Quietly top-up the 'workbox' with pens, rulers, paper pads etc. Don't get wound up about lost items if you can help it - motivation is hard enough to find for revision, and arguments about a 50p pen just aren't worth it.
- Provide favourite snacks and water for revision periods.
- Be flexible - if they want to go out to a party on a revision night, agree when they will make the time up.
- Be sensitive to the pressure your child is feeling - let them know that if they are really not up to it on odd days, it isn't the end of the world - let it go when it really matters to them, and remind them of all the good work they have done, and will continue to do. It's the big picture that will count in the end.
- Keep up with regular 'check-ins' and don't nag in between times. Show an interest in how the revision

is going, talk through any difficulties and be prepared to help them reschedule their planning as necessary.

- Keep things in perspective - your child may not be doing things the way you would do them, or as often as you would like, but they are doing the best they can in the way that works for them at the stage they are at.

The moment of truth sitting the exams

Key tasks for pupils - Before the exam

- Know your exam timetable (put your exams in red on a wall planner or similar).
- Know where and when you need to be each day and plan to get there early - leave plenty of time for last-minute crises.
- Allow time for your brain to wake up - have a shower or a relaxing bath and eat breakfast (or take a banana or other energy giving food if you really can't eat in the morning).
- Before the exam, check the exact subjects you will be asked about, and be familiar with the structure and marking system of the exam (e.g. 2 essay questions, one from Section A and one from Section B,

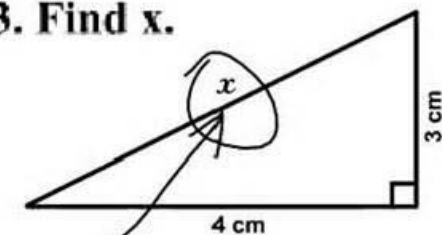
each worth 30 marks).

- Make sure you have EVERYTHING you will need, including spares and any notes or books you are allowed to take in. Make sure these are in the correct format - e.g. type-written notes or handwritten? 1 page or 2?
- Take a pen you enjoy writing with - it will improve your performance no end. Take two, just in case.
- Keep to your normal routine - go to bed and get up at the normal time.
- Keep anxieties at bay by repeating to yourself 'It will be fine', 'It will all be over tomorrow by three', 'Nobody's going to die', or whatever works for you. If you have worried thoughts say to yourself 'STOP', and think of something positive.
- Visit the toilet before the exam begins.
- Take water into the exam if you can and sip it throughout - your retention and concentration will be up to 70% better if you are well hydrated.
- Don't worry if you feel that you can't remember anything at all before you go into the exam - if you have revised, the information will be there and will come back.

During the exam:

- Remember that nervousness is normal and gives your brain extra adrenalin which will help you to make the final effort.
- Take one or two deep breaths and tell yourself something positive, such as 'I can handle this', or, 'If it's hard for me it will be hard for other people too'.
- If your mind goes blank at any stage, don't panic. Turn the paper over and take three deep breaths. There will be some of the paper that you can do. Reread it slowly and calmly.
- Remind yourself of the exam structure. READ the instructions and then through the paper. Don't pick up your pen until you have done this.
- If appropriate, mark the questions you think that you will answer and check again that you have marked the correct number of questions from each section.
- If appropriate, spend 5 minutes at the beginning of the exam writing down any key formulae, facts or quotes that you are going to need so that you won't forget them or leave them out.
- Make, and keep to, a time-scale for each question depending on the number of marks awarded. If you have only 3 minutes left for one question, finish it in note form - you will get extra marks for this. BUT MOVE ON TO THE NEXT QUESTION at the right time...
- In exam papers where there are several questions to answer, work on those that you are most confident about first, then tackle the harder ones, do not spend too long on one question - you can come back to it if you have time.

3. Find x .



Here it is

- Allow a few minutes at the end of the exam to check through your work and make any changes. Examiners have told me that you can up your score by one whole grade by doing this.

And don't make this mistake

EXAM CHALLENGE - BEAT THE PARENT

Do our brains work more slowly as we get older? Take this general knowledge timed test after your parent has completed it to find out.

Results

Adult time:

Pupil time:

Please read through all the questions before beginning this general knowledge timed test.

1. Write your name in the top left hand corner of the page.
2. Write, and underline, the date on the second line down.
3. Write down the numbers 1-8 in a column on the left hand side of the page.
4. Next to number 1, write the capital of France.
5. Next to number 2, write the answer to the sum $321-67$.
6. Next to number 3, write the past tense of the verb 'to walk'.
7. Next to number 4, write down 4 states of the USA.
8. Next to number 5, write down the colours of the rainbow in order.
9. Next to number 6, write down the names of the planets, in order of closeness to the sun.
10. Make sure you only answer questions 1 to 3.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this test.

- Try out the 'exam challenge', then encourage your child to try it out - it teaches a valuable lesson in always reading the questions through first (read the last question).
- The exam period can be very stressful for pupils. Encourage your child to keep a positive perspective - soon they will be on the other side of the 'exam mountain'.
- Ensure that your child is prepared for the exam and talk through where and when it is, what they need to take etc. On the day of the exam, make sure they have a watch and supplies of pens, pencils etc.
- Try to keep routines the same, and not to introduce any instability unless it is absolutely necessary. On exam days, try to ensure they have a good breakfast (or suggest that they take a banana or other source of energy-food if they can't eat first thing).

When it all goes pear-shaped

A troubleshooting guide

I hate this subject/teacher - I'm going to drop it!!!

- Children at exam age are often prone to 'all or nothing' thinking, leading them to exaggerate the importance of incidents and resort to extreme strategies such as 'giving it all up', running away or having an all-out argument in an effort to solve a problem. This is because their emotions are so strong at this age, and their strategies for dealing with them limited.
- Try to find out exactly what is causing the problem by encouraging your child to talk about what happens in the class, what is it that the teacher does or says that your child objects to.
- For teenagers, problems often seem permanent ('I will never be able to understand this subject/get on with this teacher'), global ('I hate everything he says/ does' or 'Everything about science is boring/difficult/ stupid) and insoluble. The trick is to talk to them using language that makes the problem more manageable, by making it seem
 - specific rather than global ('What is it specifically that you find difficult/don't like about what she says/does?')
 - temporary ('How long have you been feeling like this about her/the subject?')
 - solvable ('What would you like to happen? What would make it more bearable?')

Coursework not on target

- The key to coursework issues, as with so many others, is catching the problem early. If, despite your

best efforts, there are deadlines looming and work has still not started, you will need to address the issue with both the school and with your child.

- Encourage your child to talk about the problems honestly.
- The problem may be one of too many deadlines coming together so that the tasks seem overwhelming. When you have a clear idea of the problem, contact the school and ask for an appointment with the subject teacher.
- If there is the possibility of extra time, find out exactly what the coursework entails, and draw up a plan with your child so that they know what needs to be done and when

I've left it too late to revise

One of the biggest mistakes that pupils make is not allowing enough time for revision. This usually results, when they do realise what is involved, in demotivation and the attitude that there is no point in doing anything as the task is too big.

- **The key point to remember is that it is never too late until you enter the exam room** - with revision, a little knowledge is better than none, and could make the difference between a pass and a fail.
- Put in place a damage-limitation plan. Help your child to make use of the time they have got, however little, by helping them to prioritise and structure revision tasks into manageable chunks.
- Keep up motivation by reminding them of how they have coped with difficult situations in the past, that the exam period will soon be over and by talking about the strengths and qualities that they have which will contribute to the best outcome in the circumstances.

Dealing with stress

- A degree of stress is normal and actually necessary for successfully tackling exams.
- Some of the symptoms of stress are listed below. However, you know your child best so any marked changes in behaviour are worth checking out.
 - *Difficulty getting to sleep or waking up*
 - *Tiredness*
 - *Poor appetite*
 - *Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy*
 - *Headaches and other unexplained aches and pains*
 - *Irritability and frequent angry episodes*
- If your child is stressed, try to encourage them to take time out away from work, doing something that they enjoy.
- Ensure your child eats well, and let them know that you are always there to listen
- Some strategies
 - Reminding them what percentage of the final result the piece of work represents and talking about possible ways around the problem.
 - Asking them 'what's the worst that can happen?' or saying 'OK, well the starting point is that nobody died'.
 - Reminding them of when they have overcome difficulties in the past.
 - Getting them to focus on what they have achieved, despite this 'blip'.
 - Pointing out that little is achieved without hard-work and mistakes being made - it's part of life and learning and adults frequently make mistakes too.

Exams or coursework affected by adverse circumstances.

If your child misses an exam or doesn't do as well as he or she could have done because of illness, bereavement or other serious adverse circumstances, or if they are unable to complete coursework for similar reasons, the most important thing to do is to let the school know immediately. Most examination boards will give special consideration in these circumstances, and the school will be able to let you know the procedures to follow.

Section 3 - What do I need to know? Tips on working in partnership with the school

At secondary school, it can be difficult to feel that you are really on top of what is going on in your child's life. Secondary schools are complicated organisations with many people with unfamiliar titles involved with your child at different levels. Sometimes it seems easier not to get involved when you are not sure who to call, when or why. These tips offer some suggestions to help you through the maze.

General tips

Try to attend all parents' meetings and open evenings, it is really important that you keep up to date with your child's progress and with school developments.

- Find out when you should receive information during the year -, reports on how your child is doing, any regular newsletters or updates, parents' evenings etc.
- Meet with your child's teachers as early as possible - don't wait for things to go wrong.
- If you need to speak to a teacher, ring the school to find out when would be a good time - don't expect to speak to them straight away. Remember that most of the time they are in classrooms teaching.
- If your child habitually forgets to bring home letters and communications, ask if they can be sent to you **by e mail – Parent mail is a useful tool.**

Finding out how your child is doing

- Most schools will hold regular parents' evenings or target setting meetings.
- Before the meeting, think through exactly what it is you would like to get out of that meeting - what you want to find out. Write down your questions in case you forget.
- Listen to what school staff say about your child. Their perspective may be different from yours, but remember that children are different at school and at home.
- Even when you hear negative news about your child's abilities, motivation or performance, try to keep a positive focus - ask what can you BOTH do, in partnership, to support your child. The subject teacher is your child's greatest resource in succeeding in their exams so it is best to try to work with them rather than against them, even if you secretly agree with your child's views on the matter!

When to contact the school

Contact the school:

- If your child consistently tells you they have no homework or coursework.
- If you are worried about your child's behaviour (for example if they often do not want to go to school, become withdrawn or more aggressive than normal whenever you mention school) do ask for a meeting with your child's tutor or equivalent.
- If your child is clearly behind with coursework or you see that they are becoming overwhelmed with a backlog of work, make an appointment earlier rather than later, while there is still time to put things right.
- If a particular subject is causing your child particular difficulties over an extended period of time (half a term or more).
- If you do not receive any information from your child - the head of year may well know what you should have had, and can probably send you copies.
- If there are any home circumstances that might be affecting your child's school work.
- If you need to take your child out of school for any reason. Remember that only the most serious situations should warrant time off, as **every lesson is so crucial**. It is not usually acceptable to take children out of school for holidays, but if you have to keep them off, let the school know so that they can arrange work for the period that they will be away.

4 Easy Steps For Making The Best Revision Plan In The WORLD!

Step 1: Tasks and time

Allow two or three hours for this step. For each exam, list the topics that have to be revised. Make sure you are looking at the right exam - check the name, number and exam board . (See Fig: 1). You can find information out at school or by going to the examination board's website. Estimate how much time you will need to revise for each topic. Ask your teacher for advice.

Fig 1 – Example

	Time Needed	Completed / Get Help / Notes
History – Paper 1	Total 12 Hrs	
Germany after ww1	4	
The Munich Putsch	2	
Wall Street Crash	3	
Depression	3	

Step 2: Planning Revision Period 1

- This is the main revision period. Work backwards from the date of your first exam (if you know it - if not, ask your teachers) allowing 2 weeks for each exam paper - not subject - that you are taking.
- Add 1 extra week to the final number of weeks. This is the starting date for your revision (**yes, much earlier than you had thought!**).
- Make a chart like the one shown in Fig. 2, beginning on the date you have arrived at as the start date for your revision period.
- Put the date on the left, and four columns labelled 'morning', 'afternoon', 'evening' and 'support available/TV etc.'. (This is for your parents or school staff to show when they will be available to help you, or for any relevant TV programmes e.g. BBC 'Bitesize' to watch or record.)

Fig. 2

April	a.m.	p.m.	Evening	Support available / TV etc.
Sat 1st	Weekend away			
Sun 2 nd	Weekend away			
Mon 3 rd	School	School	Revision	
Tue 4 th	School	School	Revision	
Wed 5 th	School	School	Revision	
Thu 6 th	School	School	Evening Off	
Fri 7 th	School	School	Revision	
Sat 8 th	Day Off			
Sun 9 th	Revision	Revision	Revision	
Mon 10 th	Revision	Revision	Revision	Easter Hols

- Mark any planned days when you know you won't be able to revise at home.
- Colour code your chart if possible, e.g. school times in orange, working commitments in green, and days off and planned weekends away in blue.
- Make sure you have at least one day and two evenings off each week.
- The remaining squares are your revision times (in sessions of morning, afternoon and evening). It is suggested that morning and afternoon revision periods last approximately 3 hours each, while evening ones last 2 hours.
- Work out approximately how much time you will have to revise in this period by adding together the hours in each session.
- Divide the number of exams you will be taking (not number of subjects) with the number of hours available.
- Decide how you will spend the time you have for revision using the plan you made in STEP 1 as a guide - some subjects will need more time than others.
- Write in the subject and sub-topic (as identified in Step 1) you will aim to cover in each revision session so that it looks like the timetable in Fig 3. Now you will have clear sections and goals to work from for

each session.

Fig.3

April	a.m.	p.m.	Evening	Support available
Sat 1st	Weekend away			
Sun 2 nd	Weekend away			
Mon 3 rd	School	School	Science – Biol	
Tue 4 th	School	School	Science – Physics	
Wed 5 th	School	School	Science – Chemistry	
Thu 6 th	School	School	Evening Off	
Fri 7 th	School	School	Revision	
Sat 8 th	Day Off			
Sun 9 th	Science – Unit 1 – Metals	Science Unit 2 – Evolution	Science 3 – Experiments	
Mon 10 th	English Lit – Poetry	English Lit – Shakespeare	English Lit – Exam practice	Past paper copied

- Remember to build in time to revisit each subject briefly after 1 day, 1 week, 1 month and just before the exam.
- Remember, this is only a plan. Be prepared to revise it when subjects turn out to take longer (or less time) than you had anticipated.

Step 3: Planning Revision Period 2

- This period of revision lasts a week or so, and allows you time to try out old exam questions or papers.
- Start by making a similar calendar to Revision Period 1 for the week before the exam period begins.
- Ensure that you have at least one old exam paper that you haven't completed before in each subject (your school will provide these, or you can download them from the examination board's website). Make sure you know the exam name, reference number and your own entry tier to ensure you get the right one). Often mark-schemes are available too, so that if your teachers cannot mark your papers you can do it yourself from the 'model answers' provided on the websites.
- Plan to complete one paper a day, three at the weekend. Make sure your teachers know that you are going to be doing these and are happy to mark them during your exam period (or download the mark-schemes with the paper).
- Give your completed practice exam papers (and mark-schemes) to your teachers if they have agreed to mark them.

Step 4: Planning Revision Period 3

- Try to cancel any work commitments for this period, as you will need all your energy and time to cope with the demands of the exam period.
- Starting with the date of your first exam, make a chart as in the previous two steps for revision period three - the exam period. Yes, unfortunately there is still one last hurdle - 'last-minute' revision.
- When you have made your chart, put in the dates and time of each exam and highlight them, to ensure that they are not overlooked. Double check these dates nearer the time - the first list the school will give you (usually in early March) may be changed.
- Pencil in any final revision opportunities that can be done during the exam period as close as possible to the exam itself (although this gets hard when you have four exams in two days!).

- Try, wherever possible, to continue to build in an evening and a complete day off each week.

FINALLY - plan a celebration for the end of the exams, you will deserve it!

Tips on making a revision timetable:

- When compiling a schedule try to be as realistic as possible. Do not try to overburden your day with an agenda that you have no real chance of completing.
- Make a list of the subjects that you need to revise for between now and your exams.
- Work out which subjects have the most content that needs to be revised.
- Concentrate on those specific topics or modules that you are weak on.
- Break down major revision subjects into smaller parts, this can help you make your studying more precise.
- Ensure that you include break times during the day, these are important to help you unwind and to make sure you don't burn yourself out.
- Work out when you 'study best', for instance some people are able to concentrate better in the morning. Then use these times to study those topics that require the most effort and energy.
- Do not leave your most difficult or hardest subjects till the end of the day. Instead try to get these out of the way early on.
- After completing a revision period cross it off from your timetable. This will help to instil a sense of accomplishment.
- At the end of each week assess your performance and change your plans accordingly.
- Consider using different coloured pens to highlight specific classes or rank subjects according to importance. However if you feel you may be changing things around then use a simple pencil.
- Keep your timetable flexible and be ready to change it if circumstances change.
- Try not to spend the whole day revising one subject.
- Most experts suggest studying in slots of 40 minutes and then taking a break before your next session.

Weekday Evening Revision Timetable

Day	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm
Mon							
Tues							
Wed							
Thurs							
Fri							

monthly revision

timetable

..... (month & year)

.....daydaydaydaydaydayday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Notes:

revision

Name

timetabl



Revision timetable

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
8am							
9am							
10am							
11 am							
12 pm							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							

