



Irlam and Cadishead Academy

The best in everyone™

Part of United Learning

GCSE Revision: How Parents Can Help

Tips and ideas for supporting your child through their exams

Using this booklet

The intention of this booklet is not to provide a foolproof master plan but to provide tips, suggestions and ideas for you to consider. *Do not attempt to put all of these suggestions into practice; that would be unrealistic. Select a few that you think would be suitable for both you and your child.*

Do

- ✓ Read through the booklet
- ✓ Try out and adapt ideas that appeal to you
- ✓ Keep this booklet handy throughout the revision period
- ✓ Keep pens and highlighters ready to highlight ideas you like

Don't

- ✗ Use ideas that you feel are unsuitable for your situation
- ✗ Continue with ideas that aren't working for you
- ✗ Stop using your own ideas and approaches if they work for you and your child

Success in exams is a team effort which involves you, the school and your child working together and so you will play a variety of roles.

As a parent/carer you will:

- Support the work of the academy as, like you, we want the best for your child. Positive home-academy relationships are vital in helping your child achieve success.
- At home you will be parent, counsellor, coach, project manager, supplies co-ordinator and motivator.
- Exams are stressful for both you and your child so providing a calm and supportive environment is key.

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*How can I
motivate my child?*

Motivation

Key points:

- Students are motivated by a variety of reasons
- Students with strong reasons for wanting to do well find it easier to revise
- Your interest, support and encouragement will help establish and maintain a high level of motivation in your child

Take an interest

The most important thing you can do is take an interest in what they are doing.

- Ask about revision plans
- Look for opportunities to praise their efforts
- Encourage them to believe in themselves (highlight past examples of success)

Target grades

Keep your expectations realistic.

- Check your child knows where they are currently and where they need to be
- Ask them which subjects they want to do particularly well in
- Discuss which subjects they find most challenging

Incentives and rewards

For most students, wanting to get good grades, a place in Sixth Form/College or the route to a future career is sufficient motivation. Some students respond well to other incentives.

- Before offering incentives think about whether they really will increase the effort your child makes
- If you do embark on this method, discuss with your child which incentives/rewards will motivate them; make the targets you set challenging but realistic
- You could offer incentives based on improvements at smaller intervals or as a post exam treat regardless of how well they do.

Encourage your child to take mock exams seriously

Revision planning

Key points:

- GCSE exams require many hours of personal study
- Final grades will not only depend on how many hours they spend revising but also how well they use this time
- Revision plans are individual and vary enormously; they all require routine

It's never too soon to make a plan and start revising!

Our first set of Pre-Public Exams (PPEs) are in November. This will give you and your child a sense of where they are currently and what they need to do to make progress. The main reason to begin revision early is to ensure they have fully revised work covered over the past 2 years, especially in subjects that are assessed by exams only.

- ✓ Ask your child's teachers what guidance they have given about when to start revising
- ✓ Ensure that your child has a copy of their exam timetable
- ✓ Write key dates on a calendar at home
- ✓ Encourage them to treat mock exams seriously and revise for them.

What to revise?

- Make sure your child has a complete set of notes for each subject (Show My Homework will provide lesson notes if your child has been absent)
- Topics don't always need to be revised in the exact same order they were taught
- Starting revision with topics they find easier will help boost confidence
- Students must not spend too much time on subjects they like/are good at and neglect those they find more challenging.

Planning

Routine is key in getting into good study habits. Routines will look different during term time and during the school holidays; therefore, it may be appropriate to have a separate revision plan for these situations.

When helping your child plan their revision:

- ✓ Discuss and agree with your child an appropriate balance between revision and social
- ✓ Encourage them to continue interacting with their friends
- ✓ Be flexible if something special comes along such as family celebrations
- ✓ Don't impose a revision plan on your child as it is unlikely to work
- ✓ When they return home from school encourage them to make a list of the subjects they are going to revise that evening.

If you are going to support your child to create a revision timetable, try using these steps:

Step 1	Use the timetable template your child was given in school, or create your own template to suit your own needs.
Step 2	Ask your child to make a list of all their subjects.
Step 3	Get them to write in all regular non-school commitments for the week such as leisure activities, going out, seeing friends, time to relax, etc.
Step 4	Get them to enter when to revise each subject for the week, keeping in mind the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - balance of revision time between subjects - space out the revision for each subject - vary the subjects revised on each day.
Step 5	Pin up the timetable in a prominent place at home so that everyone knows what is going on.

Try to make sure they have a quiet place to study at home

Revision sessions

Key points:

- A successful revision session is when a solid amount of work gets done
- Sessions need to be structured to keep concentration levels high
- Having a suitable place to study at home is important during the revision period

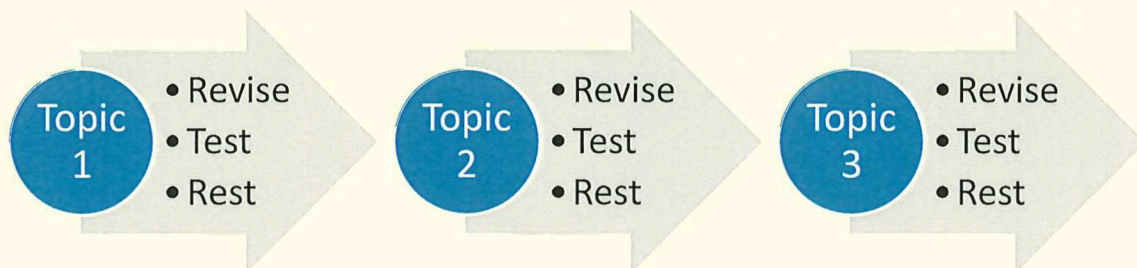
Revision resources

Your child will need a variety of books, stationery and equipment before they start.

- ✓ Make sure they have all basic equipment such as pens, pencils, highlighters, a calculator, a compass, a protractor, etc.
- ✓ Sticky notes, revision cards, etc are also useful
- ✓ Ask them if they need any specific revision guides.

Ideally your child will need a permanent, quiet, well lit place to study with few distractions or interruptions. This isn't always easy but any quiet space you can create to support your child will work if it's suitable for your family environment. The best set up is a flat surface such as a desk or table in their bedroom, however some students do like to work in 'busier' places such as a kitchen or living room. When studying they should ensure their space is free from all clutter and only necessary revision materials are to hand. They should clear and tidy their space after each session to stay organised.

Revise, test, rest



An effective revision session should be a reasonable length of time with regular short breaks. A suggested session could be timed as follows:

40 minutes revising, 10 minutes testing, 10 or 20 minutes resting, 20 minutes revising, 5 minutes testing, 5 minutes resting.

- ✓ Offer to help them structure their revision sessions
- ✓ Ask if they would like help with testing
- ✓ Buy a cheap digital timer (or use a phone) so they can keep track of time during revision sessions and breaks.

Boredom

The best way to keep concentration levels high is to take regular breaks. A general guide is for every hour of revision they should take a 10 minute break. They will need to build stamina for those exams that are 2 hours long. Mornings tend to work best for revision (though not of everyone).

- ✓ Help them find which subjects they prefer to revise when they get home
- ✓ Encourage them to have regular, short breaks
- ✓ Get them to recognise when they are 'zoning out' and acknowledge that it's time to change subjects.

Difficult situations

Key points:

- You can expect some difficult issues to crop up during revision
- These issues can be a source of disagreement and friction
- Try to avoid arguments at these times

Difficulty 1: TV or no TV?

- ✓ Insist they do not revise in front of the TV

Difficulty 2: Phones or no phones?

- ✓ Remove phones especially during the test phase of revision
- ✓ If they need their phone to revise (use websites etc.) discuss ways they can avoid other distractions such as social media

Difficulty 3: Silence

Some students find it beneficial to listen to music or other sound as it aids concentration. If sounds is desired it should be low volume.

- ✓ Encourage them to be selective with what they listen to
- ✓ Memorising and testing phases need to be undertaken in silence
- ✓ Don't make a battle out of whether they listen to music or not

Difficulty 4: Screening out

Self-discipline is needed if they use tablets or laptops for revision. Removal of social media apps is a good starting place as is muting notification settings.

- ✓ Suggest they don't leave social media apps open and watch revision videos on full screen to avoid clicking other links.

Difficulty 5: Bed time

A good night's sleep is vital when studying hard, so a regular time to switch off and sleep is important.

- ✓ Discuss a regular time for lights out
- ✓ Suggest they leave time after studying to unwind
- ✓ Be flexible with lights out at weekends and for special events.

Difficulty 6: Don't compare

Do not make comparisons between your child and another child or sibling. Every child is different. Routines and revision methods are different for everyone

Difficulty 7: Reluctant revisors

- ✓ Maintain an active interest in what they are doing
- ✓ Encourage them to go to revision classes and interventions run by the school
- ✓ Make revision at home active by offering to test them
- ✓ Help them decide what to revise each day

Managing stress

Key points:

- All students feel a degree of stress during exam periods
- There are many simple ways to reduce stress
- You have a vital role in supporting your child to reduce stress

It is perfectly normal if your child is anxious about exams. Some may want to talk about their feelings while others choose not to. All students need to feel supported and reassured.

- ✓ Make sure you are available to listen to your child, although they may not want to talk directly about exams
- ✓ Expect to encounter uncharacteristic outbursts leading up to exams
- ✓ If things aren't going too well in a subject contact the teacher
- ✓ Look out of signs of unhealthy levels of stress and contact your GP or the school for support

Healthy body, healthy mind

- ✓ Provide your child with a variety of healthy meals
- ✓ Encourage them to exercise
- ✓ Encourage them to drink lots of water

Think positively

- ✓ If your child is constantly saying negative things, find something positive to say about the way they are working
- ✓ Look for ways to help them believe in themselves
- ✓ Get them focused on short term revision to avoiding feeling overwhelmed about the long term goals.

Above all, keep things in perspective!

Sitting exams

Key points:

- Sitting the final exams is the most stressful time for your child – and you!
- Exam days can be particularly anxious
- Emotions after exams vary considerably

The night before an exam

- ✓ Ask them if they need to leave earlier than usual for school – adjust your routine
- ✓ Make sure they have all equipment ready for the next day (including water bottle, pencil case, bus pass)
- ✓ Check they know the timing of the exam (e.g. AM or PM)
- ✓ Make allowances for the fact they may behave differently and could possibly be more moody or short tempered

On the day of the exam

- ✓ Avoid asking how they feel or giving them last minute advice
- ✓ Encourage them to have breakfast
- ✓ Arrive in good time if you are taking them to school or ensure they leave in plenty of time
- ✓ Tell them to avoid people who may talk negatively about the exam
- ✓ Wish them luck!

During the exam period

- ✓ Continue to show an interest, supporting them and giving plenty of praise and encouragement

Once all exams are over CELEBRATE! Treat your child (and yourself)!

GCSEs
What can a parent do?
REVISION GUIDE
Tips to ensure success

Section 1: Introduction

The most common frustration for parents

He always leaves everything to the last minute - one moment he has all the time in the world - the next it's all stress and stropping because it has to be in tomorrow and he hasn't got the stuff he needs to do it...

I didn't even do GCSEs - how can I help him?.....

She's always got an excuse - I don't know what to believe....

Surely she shouldn't be going out again when she's got exams coming up?.....

I don't understand all this coursework, levels and module exams - it's completely different from when I was at school....

She's always panicked in exams - when I try to help her it always ends in a slanging match - it always seems to end in me making her more stressed....

There's a million websites to help but how do you know which are any good?.....

I can't stand the arguments and stress when I tell him exams are important and try to make him work - it always ends up with him saying it's his life and slamming the door....

How can I make a difference?

Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a new study. The Campaign for Learning found that parental involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between an A and an 'also-ran' at GCSE. (TES, 10 October 2003)*

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.

And 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 to do 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 us at Unity College. 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 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 job of the college to get them through their exams?

Yes, of course the college 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. New demands on your child are likely to include:

- Being more self-motivated and taking more responsibility for their own learning
- Asking when they do not understand.
- Developing their abilities to overcome frustration's 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.
- 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 for GCSE students 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.

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 examination years.

When you, your child and the college 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. You will find that in the areas covered by some sections of the booklet you will have little to do, while other will require more support.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- Making sure your child gets to college and lessons on time and understands the importance of making the most of lesson-times.
- 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.
- Paying for the equipment, files and revision guides they need.
- Showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (but not doing it for them), testing them when they ask you etc.
- Sounding board and adviser - helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping an eye on progress and celebrating achievements.
- Agreeing the rules for homework or revision, helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun stuff' and revising the plans as necessary.
- Getting 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 a 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 a 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'.

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 students are 'going to get some folders soon..'. Get 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.
- 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 subject 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.

Support 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.

How much revision?

It is also important to not leave revision to the last minute. The earlier your child starts their GCSE revision, the better. Many students underestimate the time needed for proper revision; this adds more stress and anxiety to the situation because they begin to overextend themselves to make up for the lack of time.

Here is a simple way to work out the least amount of revision time needed: For one GCSE subject, allow 1 hour of revision per topic. Therefore, the least amount of revision time needed for one subject is "1 hour X total number of topics". If a subject covers 50 topics, then that subject would require at least 50 hours of revision time. If your child is doing 8 subjects, he/she would need at least 400 hours of studying. Then, set aside 3 hours every day for revision. Your son/daughter will therefore need to start revising at least 5 months before the GCSE exams to cover all topics.

Do this exercise with your child to let them appreciate the number of hours it will take to revise their subjects and understand why it will benefit them to begin GCSE revision at the earliest possible time.

Planning GCSE Revision Time

Teenagers are not known to be the most organised individuals but effective revision first begins with organisation. So parents, hopefully you are more organised than your child and can assist them with planning their revision time.

There is the erroneous belief that "serious revision" equates to studying hours on end. Marathon studying sessions are certainly not recommended. Encourage 30-45 minute revision sessions with short breaks in between. Optimally, students should study for no more than 4 hours per day. Studying for long stretches of hours is counterproductive because the brain will become tired, they will experience difficulty in focusing and increasingly less and less information will be retained. The fundamental principle to revising is to do it habitually and constantly, little chunks at a time. A student who studies for 2 hours 7 days a week would be much better off than a student who studies 10 hours straight on Saturday and Sunday.

Revision planning begins with creating a revision timetable. To be consistent, students should strive to study at least 5 days of the week. On weekdays, this time would be after school and the choice is theirs on weekends. Advise

your child to breakdown the subjects by topics; so revising Mathematics on Tuesday night becomes revising quadratic equations instead. Give priority to the subjects and topics that are most difficult; this means placing them early on in the timetable and allowing more revision time.

Sometimes, it's good to plan a night off. This can be every other week. On these "off" nights, let your child have fun and relax. Maybe watch a movie or have a friend over. Allow them the opportunity to be stress-free in this stressful GCSE period.

Further support:

- www.gcseguide.co.uk - use the 'bookshop' option to see what revision guides are available in each subject area.
- Visit www.positivelymad.co.uk for some excellent and fun ideas for remembering information.
- Exam board websites:
www.aqa.org.uk
www.edexcel.org.uk
www.ocr.org.uk
www.wjec.co.uk
- For help with revision techniques visit www.gcse.com.

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**I've left it too late to revise;**

- One of the biggest mistakes that students 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. Focus on the subjects in which they are likely to get passes, ignoring those in which there is no hope, and rather than reading hurriedly through the whole syllabus, identify and agree on a few key areas and encourage them to revise these as thoroughly as possible.
- Keep up motivation and self-esteem 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. Exercise promotes hormones that actively counter stress, so try to encourage this. Ensure your child eats well, and let them know that you are always there to listen.

(Try not to offer immediate solutions to worries or to give advice, unless they ask for it - what stressed people most need are somebody to listen and empathise with the feelings they express.)

- We have used each of the following strategies with students at different points with some success in helping them to regain a sense of perspective, but the important thing is to use the strategies that you know have worked in the past:
  - 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?'
  - 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 they 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 college know immediately. Most examination boards will give special consideration in these circumstances and staff at college will be able to let you know the procedures to follow.

**GOOD LUCK!**