

# Helping your child to achieve their best

**A parents' guide to  
study and revision skills  
for GCSE**

“The dictionary is the only  
place where success  
comes before work.”  
Anon



The next few months are crucial for your child as they will sit their GCSEs next year. These are important exams for your child as the grades achieved will determine what he or she does next in life. You will want your child to achieve the best grades that they can and this can be made possible when there is a partnership between the student, the school and parents.

There is still enough time for students to prepare if they are organised and work hard. There are a number of simple things that you can do as parents to help students to be as prepared as possible. Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a study by The Campaign for Learning. The study 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). This booklet aims to tell you more about what is required for GCSE exams and how you can become involved in the revision process.

## How can I make a difference? It's all completely different from when I was at school!

You don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects your child chooses to make a real difference – you just need to know how best to spend the time you do have to support your child.

## Isn't it the school's job to get my child through the exams?

Yes, the school has an important role to play and provides the expertise and resources to help your child to gain the skills that they need to do their best in each subject. However, one of the hardest tasks for Year 11 is to understand the long-term importance of doing the best they can now in the interest of the long-term benefits of education and exams.

Year 11 students differ in their levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their learning, organisational skills and levels of motivation. 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 big difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exams.

### Your role may include some or all of the following:

- **Attendance officer** – making sure your child attends school on time and understands the importance of making the most of lesson-times. Government statistics show that there is a link between attendance, punctuality and results at GCSE. Every day lost in attendance reduces your child's chance of achieving their best.
- **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 for study, pens, paper and other necessities.
- **Banker** – paying for the tools, files and revision guides they need.
- **Study buddy** – showing an interest in the subjects, helping with homework (but not doing it for them), testing them when they ask you.
- **Adviser** – helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements. Seeing a positive way forward when things go wrong.
- **Project manager** – agreeing the rules for homework or revision, helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work time against recreation time and reviewing the plans as necessary.
- **Go-between** – for your child and the school when necessary; making sure problems are addressed quickly.
- **Information provider** – finding copies of old exam papers, searching out websites, finding out about the subject, exam structures and content.

**The most important role you will play is that of the person who will support your child through the exams and be proud of them whatever happens.**

# Frequently asked Questions

## What are GCSEs ?

GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) are the main qualifications taken by 15-16 year olds in schools or colleges, usually taking 2 years to complete.

## Are GCSEs really that important?

Yes, they are. GCSEs are highly valued by schools, colleges and employers. They are the first step in allowing your child to move on to further education or to a career. They have been the benchmark for measuring student ability for more than 25 years.

## How are the exams graded?

GCSEs are currently graded from A\*-G but for some subjects students are entered for a higher or foundation tier according to their ability which allows them to achieve results within a particular grade range:

Higher tier – grades A\* - D

Foundation tier - grades C - G

## How are the exams assessed?

GCSEs are assessed by a combination of either exams or controlled assessments. Controlled assessments are designed to assess skills which are not effectively measured by external exams. From summer 2014, all exams will be linear. This means that most of your son/daughter's exams will be taken at the end of the course from May onwards instead of being broken down into modular exams as before. This means that your child will need to revise all the work covered in Year 10 and 11 in preparation for the exams. Practice GCSE exams or "mocks" are often held by schools during Year 11 to help the students prepare for their real exams. Attendance at mock exams is also important.

## When will exams begin?

Most GCSE exams will begin from mid-May until the end of June but some foreign language orals and practical examinations may take place during earlier. Your child will be given a timetable. Have a copy of the timetable at home not just to check dates but so that you can provide encouragement for each exam.

## What results should my son/daughter aim to get?

A C grade is considered a good pass, but many post-16 courses require a B grade and many courses and colleges require students to have at least 5 good GCSE passes at C grade including English and Maths.

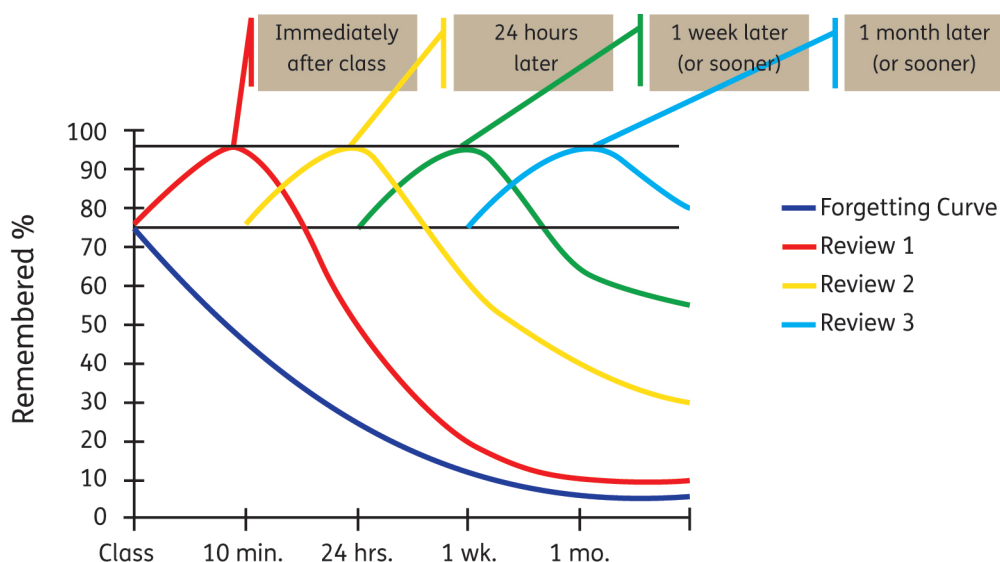
## My daughter doesn't really like English or Maths. Does she have to take these exams?

All pupils must take English (English, English language, English literature), Mathematics & Science. Your child must get a grade C in English or Maths otherwise she will have to continue studying the subjects until she is 18. Some employers will not consider applicants without a grade C in English and Maths and students will need these subjects to carry on studying at college.

## Is it ever too early to begin revising?

Students who do their best in the GCSE exams work hard all through Year 11 rather than relying on last minute revision. It is best for students to start revision early and to keep revising during the year by doing little but often. This will give your child time to review what he/she has studied and to strengthen the memory and this will avoid the panic of leaving things to the last minute.

This diagram called the Ebbinghaus Forgetting curve illustrates how information is quickly forgotten unless it is reviewed at spaced intervals.



## Countdown to Exams – Number of school days



## What can parents do to help?

### Help your child to start preparing for their GCSE exams now!

If homework and revision are left to the last minute, this will limit your child's chance of doing their best. Over the next few months:

- Ensure that your child attends school regularly and is punctual. Every day lost in attendance reduces their chance of achieving their best at GCSE.
- Encourage your son/daughter to persevere and to begin working hard now in preparation for the exams. Check that they are keeping up with homework.
- Encourage your child to begin revising now!

### Revision tips for parents

- Help your child to make a study/revision timetable which includes the dates and times of the examinations in May and June as well as dates of controlled assessments.
- The timetable should be used to plan revision sessions. These should be spread out evenly so that your son/daughter is not planning to do too much all at once.
- Have the timetable displayed in their room to help them to stick to the plan.
- Ask to see your son/daughter's revision notes and make sure that they speak to their teachers if they are missing any.
- Encourage your son/daughter to ask for help at school on any work that they do not understand.
- Encourage your child to attend revision sessions offered by the school.
- Make sure that they have all the books needed to hand to avoid wasted time.
- You can buy revision guides to help with study. Make sure that your child knows which exam board and syllabus have been followed for each subject.
- Make sure that the study area is quiet and well-lit.
- Check how they are doing by asking them to explain something they have just revised.

## Revision tips for students

You can support your son/daughter by helping them to follow these tips and techniques:

- Do not revise for more than one hour without taking a 5-10 minute break. Have a glass of water or something similar to drink.
- Stay focused. Hours can be easily wasted on social networks and mobile phones.
- In the evenings after school, plan to revise one or two subjects for one to two hours. Leave some time for relaxation.
- Plan to revise specific topics in each subject, not everything at once.
- Ensure that each revision session starts by tackling the most difficult topics first.
- Plan to cover each subject several times and revisit each one nearer to the exams.
- Revising or studying with the TV or radio on or with loud music is not a good idea. Quiet background music may help some students.
- Reading is not enough. Making brief notes in either words or pictures will help students to remember.
- Answering questions from past papers, sometimes under exam conditions is a good way to test learning.
- Don't leave revision to the last minute.

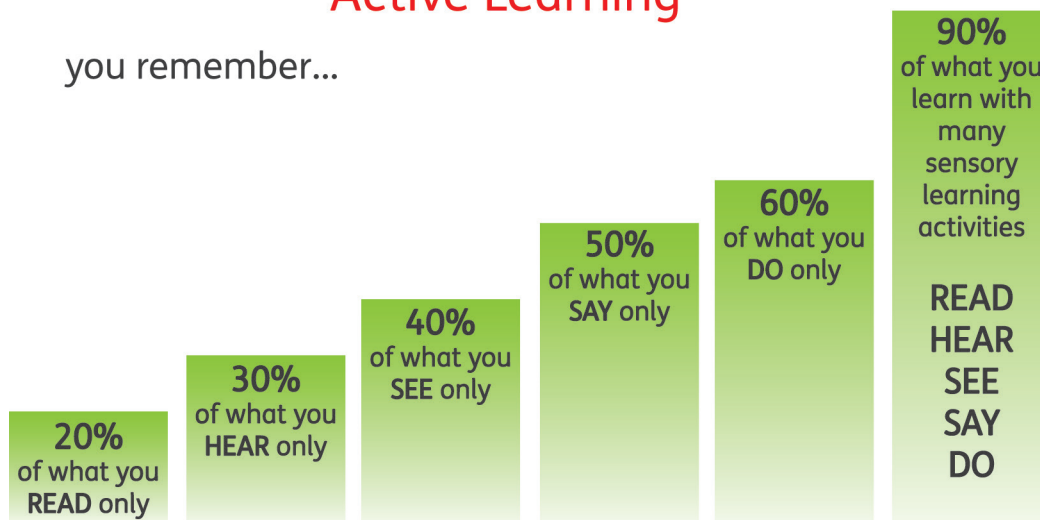
## Revision techniques

Reading text over and over until you remember it may not be very effective unless it is supported by other techniques e.g. :

### Visual

- Write notes on post-its and stick on walls
- Make notes on key ideas
- Summarise notes onto card
- Highlight/circle key information
- Draw pictures diagrams, mind maps, graphs
- Display key words around your room
- Create a picture in your mind of what you have studied

# Active Learning



## Auditory

- Make up rhymes, mnemonics (e.g. Never Eat Shredded Wheat – North, East, South, West)
- Test yourself or your friends
- Get someone to test you
- Teach someone what you have revised
- Read your notes out loud or record them and play them over and over

## Kinaesthetic

- Create revision cards
- Act topics out
- Use gestures to demonstrate concepts

## Parents:

Make sure that your child knows:

- What day the exam is on at what time it starts
- How long the exam is
- What is being tested in each exam

### Before exams, try to ensure that:

- Your son/daughter gets enough sleep, especially the night before exams
- He/she is eating sensibly – especially breakfast on exam days
- He /she has all the equipment required:
  - pens and sharp pencils, erasers, a ruler and a watch ( mobile phones are not allowed in the exams)
  - A calculator & a protractor

## What else can you do?

- Recognise the importance of GCSE exams and the preparation time needed to do as well as possible.
- Reward your child's efforts to revise.
- Reduce the number of chores that they have to do when exams start.
- Make sure that the whole family respects the importance of keeping disturbances to a minimum.
- Be sensitive to the pressure and stress that your teenager may be experiencing. Encourage them to speak to you about it.
- Make sure that time is built in for exercise and recreation.
- Respect their growing independence. Ask them how you can best support them.
- Help them to keep things in perspective.

## School Contacts

Get in touch with your child's school if you would like more help or advice.

**Remember, how you approach the next few months can have a real impact on your child's future. Studies show that high parental interest is linked with better exam results than for children whose parents show no interest. What will you do to give your child the best chance of achieving success?**

## Websites to support students and parents

Bitesize  
[bbc.co.uk/bitesize](http://bbc.co.uk/bitesize)

Get revising  
[getrevising.co.uk](http://getrevising.co.uk)

S-cool  
[s-cool.co.uk](http://s-cool.co.uk)

Revision world  
[revisionworld.co.uk](http://revisionworld.co.uk)

Study Maths.co.uk  
[studymaths.co.uk](http://studymaths.co.uk)

GCSE – pod  
[gcsepod.co.uk](http://gcsepod.co.uk)

My GCSE Science  
[my-gcsescience.com/revision/core](http://my-gcsescience.com/revision/core)

GCSE Science  
[gcsescience.com](http://gcsescience.com)

revision notes for Chemistry and Physics  
[bbc.co.uk/schools/parents](http://bbc.co.uk/schools/parents)  
advice on helping your child

[bbc.co.uk/schools/games/](http://bbc.co.uk/schools/games/)  
interactive games and quizzes for children

[topmarks.co.uk](http://topmarks.co.uk)  
a gateway to revision sites for every subject

[revisioncentre.co.uk](http://revisioncentre.co.uk)  
advice about revision

“Even if you are on  
the right track,  
you’ll get run over  
if you just sit there.”

Will Rogers

“It’s never too late  
to be what you  
might have been.”

George Eliot