

Doing better at GCSE: advice for students

Year after year students don't do as well as they could at GCSE because they don't revise well and they make very common mistakes in exams. This leaflet can help you make the best of what you have learned during your GCSE courses.

Revision tips

- Start your revision in good time.
- Plan a revision timetable.
- Highlight coursework deadlines and examination dates and times.
- Spread your subjects out over time so you cover each one several times.
- Plan for half-hour or, at most, one-hour slots. Any more of one subject and nothing extra is likely to sink in.
- In the evenings after school, plan one or two subjects only. Leave time for relaxation.
- Allow yourself some days off but not in the few weeks just before the exams.
- Plan to revise specific topics or aspects of a subject - for example, not just science but human systems, or waves, or chemical reactions, or electricity.

Revising at home

Know how you learn best

Everybody has a way of learning that suits them well. What works best for you? Do you remember things better if you write them down in a list or perhaps draw a 'spider diagram' or maybe record some notes on cassette tape?

Try some of these to see what works for you

- Music in the background sometimes helps, but don't try to revise with the TV or radio on.
- Read through a topic and make brief notes on cards which can be used for further revision later.
- Instead of writing notes in words, draw a picture.
- Redraw diagrams and check how well they match the original.
- Use flow charts to sequence events or activities. Use linking words between boxes to illustrate the nature of the sequence.
- Draw concept maps using key words from topics. Label the linking lines with, for example, 'comes before', 'is eroded into', 'reacts to form', 'is the past tense of', 'was the father of'.
- Use colours to highlight key words in your notes or revision books.
- Work with a partner to help and test each other on, for example, explaining the meaning of key words (and spelling them correctly), rearranging chemical equations, performing calculations, recalling linked facts or dates, drawing conclusions from evidence.

Being prepared for the exam

Make sure you are ready on the day. You will need:

- A couple of pens and sharpened pencils, a rubber and a ruler
- A watch

You may sometimes need (check with your subject teacher):

- A calculator
- A protractor

Don't forget: you can make notes or practise calculations on the question paper; you don't need scrap paper.

Tackling the exam

- While waiting for the exam to start, read the front of the exam paper so you know exactly what to do.
- Read each question carefully - twice is better than once. Check how many marks are available for the answer. Write neither too much nor too little.
- Answer the question; don't simply repeat it or make up a question of your own.
- Write your answer if you feel confident. If not, go on to the next question. Don't spend time on questions you are unsure of until you have been through the whole paper once.
- Check all calculations. Does the answer make sense and have you included the units?
- Check information in graphs, tables and pictures. Did you read them correctly?
- Check your spellings of specific words, but if you are not sure of the spelling write your answer anyway. You may get the mark.
- If you have to draw diagrams, charts or graphs, use a sharp pencil and draw accurately, using a ruler where necessary.
- Once you have answered all the more straightforward questions go through the paper again, tackling those questions which are more difficult. If on the second reading a question is still very difficult, move on to the next question.

Avoiding common exam mistakes

- Read the question correctly so you don't miss the point.
- Check how many marks are given for each question and write enough but not too much.
- Look at tables, graphs, drawings and photographs very carefully so you don't miss anything.
- Use the correct words and try to spell them properly.
- Answer the question; don't just repeat it.

Managing your coursework

- If you keep your work on a computer make sure you have a back-up copy.
- Make certain you know the deadlines when coursework must be handed in.