



Preparing and  
Revising  
for your  
GCSE Exams

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## Introduction

Most of you are involved in coursework and project assignments for your GCSE subjects and are beginning to feel the pressure of this final step in your school career.

During the spring term, you will be sitting your Year 11 exams in most subjects and now is the time to get to grips with the best ways of achieving good results with careful and planned revision.

Proper revision cannot be done in just the few nights directly before the exams! It is something that you should **constantly** be doing in some way. As you approach your exams make sure that you

- ✓ **Plan carefully well in advance**
- ✓ **Talk about your work to your teachers and tutor**
- ✓ **Work through essays, notes and past papers**
- ✓ **Keep to a schedule**

This will work much better than any last minute panic!



## Effective Learning and Revision

Do you have good study habits?  
Do you organise yourself well?  
Do you make sure that you have the right books, notes and equipment?  
Do you study at reasonable times of the day?  
Do you study in a quiet place, away from distractions?  
Do you make clear notes which you properly understand?  
Do you re-organise your work, underlining key words and ideas?  
Do you break large pieces of work into smaller units?  
Do you summarise the main points from long pieces of writing?

The following shows you how you might improve your learning and revision techniques:

- Plan your work carefully and stick to your plans
- Set yourself challenging yet realistic targets and check on your progress
- Use a variety of study methods to help you concentrate
- Try to become interested in your subjects
- Always fully understand your work before trying to memorise it
- Use active methods of learning
- Use your knowledge as often as you can

## What you need to revise

Check through your various subjects, listing the various major topics and their parts. Refer to past papers so that you know how questions will be asked on each section and topic; Do the examiners want:

- Essays?
- Shorts answers?
- One-word answers?

List those topics or parts which you feel unhappy about – which need more attention than others. Don't give all topics equal importance. By mixing subjects and topics which give you difficulty with those which are easier and/or interest you more, you will be able to plan a varied programme of revision so that you don't get bored by doing too much of one subject, or depressed by doing things which you find very difficult.

### Where to revise?

Everybody needs to work out where and how they work best.

Don't fool yourself that you can work in front of the TV!!!  
You can't!!!!

Some people find it useful to work in the same place all the time, every time. Others find it useful to have a change of scenery, working somewhere else each time.

### For how long?

Remember that your concentration span is limited!  
Have a timed break – but make sure that you start again! Don't get caught up in some terrible TV show!

## Revision Notes and Practice

Whatever the present state of your notes, it is important that you make revision notes.

Though they can sometimes be bought, it is much better to make your own notes – just making the notes is a great way of revising. You have to actually read through your work!!

You can make sure that **your** notes help **you** revise. You can use colours, symbols and abbreviations that are meaningful to **you**.

People differ about how they can remember things and how to write notes, BUT, however you make your notes, make sure you include questions from past papers amongst all the information. That way your revision is always heading in the right direction.

Make a collection of revision cards with key information. It will take a long time to do for all your subjects, so don't leave it until the last week or two before an exam!

You can use the cards to quickly check up on a definition or key ideas, not just facts.

**Remember** to include vital **diagrams** or **formulae**.

You are not a machine!

When you read your notes you need to have a focus. Don't just go through every word without taking any of it in! Be aware of past papers, and the type of questions you might be asked.

Have copies of past questions on the topic that you are revising at hand, so you have a specific question in your head **before** you start reading notes

## Getting the Timing Right!

Most teachers will give you some practice answering past papers against the clock. You need to try this as much as possible so that you can feel comfortable in the real exam!

This practice should help you

- ❖ Plan your use of time – REMEMBER: You need to be able to complete all of the questions that you are asked to in the real exam.
- ❖ Plan each answer – five minutes' thought without writing anything or jotting brief notes is worth thirty minutes' waffle!
- ❖ Use your memory of revision cards and notes to remind you of key ideas and facts



## Planning Your Revision Time

Do you have trouble settling to your work?

Do you rush your work to meet deadlines?

Do you seem to run out of time?

Are your study/revision sessions as well planned and effective as you would like?

### Sound Familiar? Then try this:

First you need to look at how you spend you time now. Leave out your lessons, but fill in;

- Homework/Revision
- Activities/Commitments (sports, clubs, household jobs, etc.)
- Free Time

Complete this study week planer as honestly as you can;

	7:00 – 8:30 AM	<b>LESSONS</b>	4:00 – 5:00 PM	5:00 – 7:00 PM	7:00 – 9:00PM
Mon					
Tues					
Wed					
Thurs					
Fri					

## What about the weekend?

You could do the same sort of exercise for a typical weekend. So how do you spend your time on Saturday and Sunday?

	7:00 – 9:00 AM	9:00 – 11:00 AM	11:00 – 1:00 PM	1:00 – 3:00 PM	3:00 – 5:00 PM	5:00 – 7:00 PM	7:00 – 9:00 PM
Saturday							
Sunday							

Now ask yourself the question:

### “Am I making the best use of my time?”

Most people have difficulty in saying where the time went. You don't need to become a complete slave to revision – in fact having time to relax and to socialise can be a very helpful diversion that will give your mind time to refresh itself. You probably waste a lot of your time at present, where you could use that half hour before tea or between lessons doing a little revision or writing up notes. Half an hour may not seem like a long time, but, over the course of the week it can soon add up to two or three hours – which could leave you with an extra evening to go out with.

Perhaps you should plan your week differently to allow for more effective study and revision!

A well thought out study timetable will

- ✓ Give you a target to aim for.
- ✓ Spread your study throughout the week
- ✓ Save time in decision making, and lets you get down to things
- ✓ Help you to establish a routine for study
- ✓ Encourage you to keep up with your work

## Examination Questions

*Will all the examination questions require the same type of answer?*

*Do you find some questions more difficult than others?*

You will have to answer many different types of exam questions in your various GCSE subjects. To answer these successfully you will need to make sure you apply the right techniques to the appropriate question.

The following guidelines should help you to think more carefully about the different types of questions and help you to improve your skills in being able to tackle them all.

- 1) Produce a list of all the different types of exam paper and question you will come across in each subject paper.
- 2) Discuss your strengths and weaknesses in relation to each type of question with your subject teacher
- 3) Plan and follow a programme to improve on your areas of weakness, including plenty of practice questions.

## Answering Long Questions and Essay Titles

*Do you sometimes find it difficult to fully understand what you have to write about?*

*Do some of the words in the questions or essays confuse you?*

*Do you plan your answers and essays?*

### Knowing what the question means

Look at your past papers. Examiners choose their words carefully. For example, if you are asked to **name** a piece of equipment, then you really have to name it!! You will get no marks for simply describing it – no matter how correct you are. If you are asked to show you working, then show it!

The number of marks to each question can be used as a guide to how much detail is required. These are normally shown on the paper.

- It is essential that you understand exactly what the examiner is looking for, and you can only do this by studying the wording of the question carefully.
- Read the question three or four times
- Underline key words in the text that indicate how the question should be answered, for example:

After reading all the sources do you accept Scott's claim in source B that "The causes of the disaster are not to faulty organisation, but bad luck"? Answer this question as fully as you can.

- Make sure you understand the key words

## Planning essay answers

Unplanned answers are not good answers. They are often unclear, muddled, repetitious and full of irrelevant comments. So, quite rightly, they get low marks!

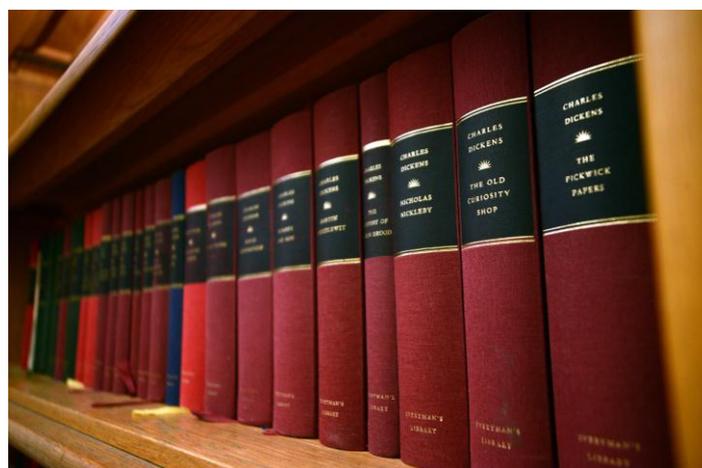
You must spend a few minutes planning your answer.

- ❖ Make a few notes on the examination paper of the main points / useful facts / relevant examples.
- ❖ Do not forget to cross out the notes when you have answered the question

## Structuring your answer

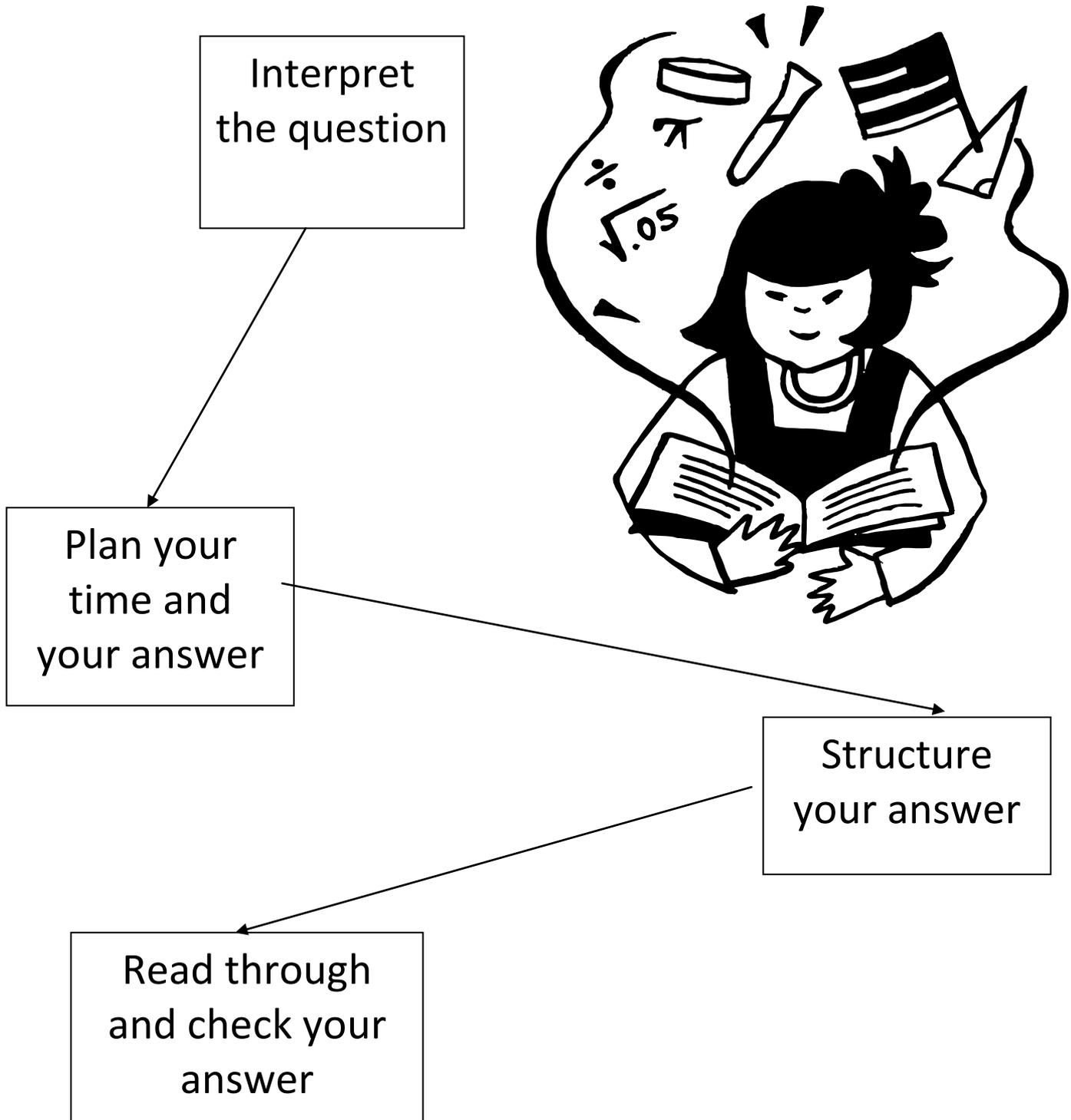
*All good answers are well structured.*

- 1) They have an introduction that tries to explain the terms of the question. This may include a statement of your own views or opinions
- 2) They are written in paragraphs which
  - a. Keep to one main point of the question
  - b. Contain supporting facts, details, figures, examples, evidence, etc.
  - c. Link at the end to the next paragraph
- 3) They reach a conclusion in the final paragraph, related to the original question and tying up the main points.



## Long Questions: Conclusion

*Start with questions you can do easily to give you confidence.  
Mark your answer clearly with the correct question number  
Then:*



## A typical GCSE revision schedule

### March/April

Make notes and lists of key facts and points for each section of work in each subject.

Plan and begin a comprehensive learning/revision programme and enter this on your planning chart.

### April

Revise! Revise! Revise!

### April/May

Test yourself on different types of questions in exam conditions. Practice your timing. Continue to talk to your teachers!

### May/June

Get plenty of sleep. Know what to expect in each paper. Be properly equipped. Get to school in good time.

Examinations!



## Your Personal Planning Chart

You really need to plan how to spend the months leading up to your exams. A last minute rush will leave you panicky and tired. You need to fit in relaxation time as well as revision.

You may not have many months left, or your schedule may have gone wrong. Don't worry! The main idea - of planning the use of the time that does remain – is still a good one.

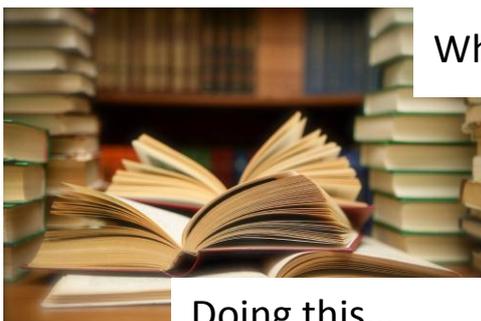


# Don't panic Don't give up

On the planning chart, enter your examinations and other key dates such as coursework deadlines. Then work back towards the present with a realistic revision schedule for each subject. Tick off what you manage to achieve – it'll make you feel good! If you do not achieve something then re-schedule and ask yourself why you couldn't keep to the schedule? unrealistic target? Laziness? Unexpected visitors? Going out in Pitsea? etc.

### I haven't got enough time!!

When you realise just how near the exams are, you may feel that you just have not got enough time. If you do feel that way, now is the time to be very honest with yourself. Where does your time go?



Doing this...

Where does your time go now ...



...or this?

## Personal Planning Chart

	April	May	June	
1				1
2				2
3				3
4				4
5				5
6				6
7				7
8				8
9				9
10				10
11				11
12				12
13				13
14				14
15				15
16				16
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21				21
22				22
23				23
24				24
25				25
26				26
27				27
28				28
29				29
30				30
31				31

Shaded days represent weekends and school holiday time. Remember you can fit much more revision into these days!

## Glossary of exam words

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Compare	Are the things alike or are there important differences? Which do you think is best? Why?
Contrast	Look for differences
Criticise	Use the evidence to support your opinion on the value of merit of ideas, facts or views of others
Define	Give the meaning
Describe	Write in detail
Differentiate	Explain the difference
Discuss	Write about important aspects of the topic, are there two sides to the question? Consider the arguments for and against
Distinguish	Explain the difference
Evaluate	Judge the importance of success/failure
Evaluate (Maths)	Find the numerical answer to a problem
Explain	Make clear
Illustrate	Give examples which make the point clear
Interpret	Explain the meaning in your own words, for example you may have to interpret a graph
Justify	Give reasons to support and argument of action
Outline	Choose the most important aspects of a topic. Ignore the minor details
Relate	Show the connection between things
State	Write briefly the main point
Summarise	Bring together the main points

## Final Thoughts

### You are not on your own!

There are many people around you who are just as keen for you to do well as you are, so don't be afraid to ask teachers/tutors/parents for help. Your friends may well be taking the same exams – why not work together on the topics that bore you; share your thoughts about revision cards. Remember too that if you can explain something to someone else before the exam, the chances are that you can explain it in an exam as well.

Beware of other people who tell you either that they are doing very little or a great deal. The first lot may be lying to look cool; the second lot panic you into overworking! Think for yourself; don't let other people ruin your revision schedule.

Exams are not designed to catch you out; they are simply to find out what you know, what you understand and what you can do.

**And remember, it's only a short time to sacrifice for something that you can be proud of forever.** Once the exams are over, take some time to relax and celebrate your own achievements!

I know you are all so able and will do yourself, your parents and all of us proud...

*Good  
Luck!*