

# A GUIDE TO EXCELLING AT REVISION

## PREPARATION

### EFFECTIVE REVISION ENVIRONMENT

#### PARENTS

**There may not be a perfect place to revise, but encourage your son/daughter to choose the place where he/she can be most productive.**

#### PUPILS

There should be few distractions and all of the equipment to hand that may be necessary.

The Base is a dedicated after-school study area for Year 11 pupils. It is fully resourced with revision materials and computers and has complimentary refreshments.

At home, try to organise a specific study area. Consider:

- A tidy desk with space to work
- Minimal clutter
- A well-lit space
- Door closed
- Revision resources and stationery: post-it notes, highlighters, flashcards, pens and pencils, coloured pens, folders with dividers, plastic wallets, paper.

### MANAGING DISTRACTIONS

#### PARENTS

**This will be one of the most difficult negotiations at home over the revision period. Be aware that often when pupils say they are revising together, the time is less productive than working alone. Suggest that they have a clear plan for joint revision – exactly what will they achieve during this time?**

#### PUPILS

Recognise what the greatest distractions are:

- mobile phone
- tablet
- X-box
- TV
- music
- siblings
- friends

Encourage the use of technology as a reward during scheduled breaks.

Discuss whether it would be possible to move distractions out of the study area, eg keep mobile phones in a different room.



Look for apps that encourage you to stay off your phone, such as Flipd, Moment or Forest.

## SLEEP AND DIET

### PARENTS

**The following advice will help to maximise productivity and may be useful conversations to have at home.**

### PUPILS

Don't skip sleep in order to revise more – this will be counter-productive. Do something relaxing before bed to help switch off – don't try to go to sleep straight after revising. Get good quality sleep without disruptions. Try to charge your phone downstairs and use an alternative alarm clock to avoid notifications going off during the night. Don't skip meals – it makes it difficult to concentrate when you are hungry. Try to maintain a balanced diet for energy and drink extra water to ensure that your brain is well hydrated in order to keep focussed.

## THE REVISION PROCESS

### PARENTS

**Preparing for exams is a 3-step process. Talk to your son / daughter about where they are up to in the process with each subject.**

### PUPILS

1. Learn – this has to have happened before revision can start. It should have happened in class and through homework throughout the GCSE course. If you have missed lessons or skipped tasks over the last two years, you will have to speak to your teachers to catch up as a priority or do extra research.
2. Revise – once you understand a topic, you can revise it. This is going back over what you have previously learned. You will need to revisit information multiple times in different ways for it to be stored effectively in your long-term memory. When this happens, you will be able to retrieve more detailed information and it will happen more quickly. See *below for revision strategies*.
3. Test Yourself – once you think you understand a topic, you have to put this to the test. Initially, use flashcards and online quizzes for quick recall. Once this is strong, practise more detailed exam style questions to apply what you have learned.

### **As a parent/carer, you can play an active role in revision and testing.**

- Take an interest in the resources that your son/daughter has produced. Ask to see what they have produced in each session.
- Get them to teach you what they have revised and ask lots of questions so that you fully understand.



- Try to learn something they are finding difficult with them, using some of the techniques below. You might try to create a 'memory journey' or 'memory palace' (see below) together and see who can remember the most facts.
- Family members can play a vital role in the testing element of revision. Ask them questions from their flashcards; help to check knowledge organisers / mind maps done from memory against the originals for mistakes or missing information; get involved in online quizzes, such as Kahoot.

## REVISION STRATEGIES

### PARENTS

**These are strategies that all pupils have been taught. Encourage your son/daughter to use the most appropriate strategy for the type of information they are trying to revise. If something is not sticking, suggest they try a different method.**

**Keep reminding them that creating the resource is only one step of the process. They have to be able to recall the information from memory and need to do repeated tests.**

### PUPILS

#### Condensing Notes

1. Read your full notes (this may be from an exercise book, a textbook or revision guide) and make sure you understand the information – if not see your teacher and ask.
2. Aim to write all of the key points from a topic on a single piece of paper in your own words. This will not be in full sentences.
3. Test yourself – once you have simplified the information, cover sections up and try to re-write them from memory. Compare what you have recalled with the original notes and fill in gaps in a different colour.  
Your teachers have done Step 2 of this for you if you have Knowledge Organisers – make the most of this!

#### Mind Maps

Create one mind map per topic.

Use colour and add pictures to make them easier to recall.

Test yourself by trying to replicate you mind map from memory and comparing it to the original one you created using your notes.

#### Flow Charts

Flow charts are a diagram to show the different steps in a process or how events are linked. They are useful for subjects that have sequences, e.g. Business Studies, History, Chemistry, Geography, Biology.

You may add quick images or a few extra bullet points around the edge.

Remember to test yourself on the knowledge they contain – you might try to say the steps from memory to someone else who can tell you what you missed.

#### Flash cards

Flash cards should have a question on one side and an answer on the other. They are good for dates in History, vocabulary in MFL, key words and definitions, formulae, simple labelled diagrams.

Try to colour code your different subjects.



Creating the flashcards is not revision – you have to test yourself on the questions frequently (or get someone else to test you). Keep going until you can get them all correct – make a pile of the ones you get wrong and keep going over them. Make sure you know them both ways.

### Memory Techniques

**Mnemonics** are good for remembering facts or information in order, e.g. order of the planets: **My Very Enthusiastic Mother Just Served Us Noodles!**

**Memory Journeys** are good for remembering processes or sequences of events. Think of a familiar journey, such as your journey to school. For each stage of the journey (e.g. a landmark or junction), assign a key fact. In your mind, walk through the journey and try to recall all of the facts in order.

**Memory Palaces** are similar to Memory Journeys, but you assign facts to rooms in your house or even furniture around the room. In your mind, you should be able to wander around the space, recalling the facts as you see each trigger.

### Online Revision

There are many subject-specific websites dedicated to revision. Speak to members of staff or other pupils for recommendations.

### Practice Papers

Try to do as many practice papers as possible for each subject.

There may be benefits to doing papers from older specifications and other exam boards – **but check with teachers beforehand** as content and question styles can vary.

1. Practice the paper in exam conditions.
2. Check your answers against the mark scheme – correct anything you got wrong. Make sure that you understand the correct answer and ask your teacher for help if needed.
3. A few days later, re-visit the questions you got wrong to see if the correct answer/technique has stuck in your head.

**Steps 2 and 3** are the most important – don't just do the paper and then stop.

Some people also check the examiner's reports – they point out common mistakes students have made and tell you what they look for.

## MAKING A REVISION TIMETABLE

### PARENTS

**Many pupils find creating a revision timetable a daunting experience. It may be appropriate to do some of this together. Encourage your son/daughter to share their revision planner with you, so that you know how they plan to use their time and help keep them on track when they are lacking motivation. It is essential to talk about having a sensible balance between revision and free time to minimise stress.**

### PUPILS

#### Subject Audits

Break down each subject into topics. You can get these from your teachers or the exam specifications.

Red/Amber/Green each topic in each subject to identify which areas will require the most time and effort. These should appear on your timetables as a priority.



## The Revision Timetable

Write in any exams you have coming up.

Each day is divided into 5 sessions. Decide how you will divide your time and how long each session will last. This will look different in term time and during the half term holiday.

Block out any time you have other commitments, such as special events, appointments, jobs or hobbies, or times that you use to switch off and relax.

Maintaining a healthy balance between revision and free time is important to make sure you have the stamina to keep working hard right through until June.

Schedule regular rest breaks. However, be specific about when they will be so that they don't last a full evening.

Alternatively, some people with very busy social calendars may have to make some sacrifices to ensure they commit enough time to be successful.

Fill in a subject for each session that you have dedicated to revision. Try to colour code your subjects.

Try to be even more specific. Which topic will you revise? Do you know which strategies you will use? How will you test yourself afterwards?

Make sure each day has a variety of subjects and that all subjects rotate regularly. Remember that the subjects that were identified as the weakest from the subject audit will have to appear more frequently at the beginning.

Don't think that revising a topic once will be enough. At the start of each session for that subject, try to go through a very quick recap of the last one, such as going over a set of flashcards.

If you have a bad day and don't stick to the plan, don't panic. Re-schedule these subjects where you have gaps. Don't let it put a stop to your plan altogether.

## Rewards

Many studies show that it is much more important to reward the effort put in to an activity, rather than the outcome.

In the past, some pupils have been offered rewards for the grades they get in the summer, such as different sums of cash per grade. However, it is more effective and better for mental health to offer smaller rewards for sticking to their revision schedule for a week and showing commitment over this time.

