



# Preparing for Success

## KS4 GCSE Exam Preparation Booklet

**Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School**



# Introduction

This exam preparation guide is designed to support you and your parents/carers through the coming weeks as you prepare for your GCSE exams. This is one of the most important periods of your educational life, where carefully planned preparation will ensure you achieve your full potential.

It is full of practical tips which will enable you to approach the exams in the most effective way to bring about success.

All of the staff at the school are fully behind you and will support you through your exam period. However, we can only offer so much, the rest is up to you. Commitment, hard work and determination will ensure that you achieve your best. No one has ever stated that exams are easy, they are not! But if you fully prepare for them, then you are more likely to come away with the best possible chance of success.

## What can parents and carers do to support their child at home before and during the exams?

Some young people sail through exams with very little stress. In fact, some parents wish their children would get more stressed about exams! For others even small tests cause real anxiety. There are lots of ways to help your child deal with exam stress, from practical things like providing healthy food and helping them to get organised, to actually supporting your child with revision.

The information below highlights a few simple things to help your child in the coming weeks and months.

### Organisation of Time and Work

Work out a revision timetable together early on so that your child allows enough time to cover all the topics they need to revise. Ticking off each topic as it's done can help revision seem more manageable. Make sure your child is setting realistic targets. Trying to cram in too much creates stress and prevents learning.

On a calendar, mark exam dates and cross off exam days once they're over. This will help you both feel that there is an end in sight! Help your child to organise their clothes, food and equipment the night before each exam. Feeling organised about the little things will help to cut down on stress.

### Sleep and Rest

Encourage your child to get plenty of sleep and to take regular breaks while they are revising. The brain will work better if it's rested. Trying to cram in last-minute revision the night before an exam is generally a bad idea. It will make your child panic and might even affect their performance the following day. It's much better to have a relaxing evening the night before each exam so they can do their best the following day.

Exercise, even a walk to the shops, will help your child to concentrate when they get back to work. It can also help them to sleep better. Discourage your child from drinking caffeine-rich drinks like tea, coffee and fizzy drinks in the evening as caffeine can disturb sleep.

Make sure an alarm is set for the next morning! Waking up in a panic or even arriving late for an exam only makes things more stressful.

## Healthy Eating

It's important to eat a healthy, balanced diet all the time, but during exam times this is vital. Eating well will help your child to focus and do their best. Try to discourage your child from eating lots of sugary snacks, as these can actually stop them from concentrating.

Taking a drink into the exam will help them to stay alert. This is especially true during the long exams your child will sit.

Exam stress can make some children lose their appetites. If this happens, encourage your child to eat light meals or snacks.

## Revision Do's and Don'ts

### Do....

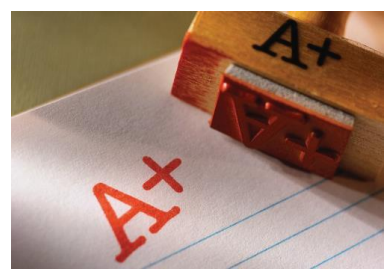
- Ask your child what areas/subjects they want help with.
- Make your child feel you are there for them physically and emotionally.
- Organise some 'non-study' activities for them.
- Encourage your child with praise and rewards.
- Make your child's environment revision-friendly.

### Don't...

- Force your child to revise in a way you think best. Focus on what the research suggests is the right approach. See examples later in this document
- Put any extra pressure on them.
- Keep telling your child how much better organised you were about revision when you were that age.



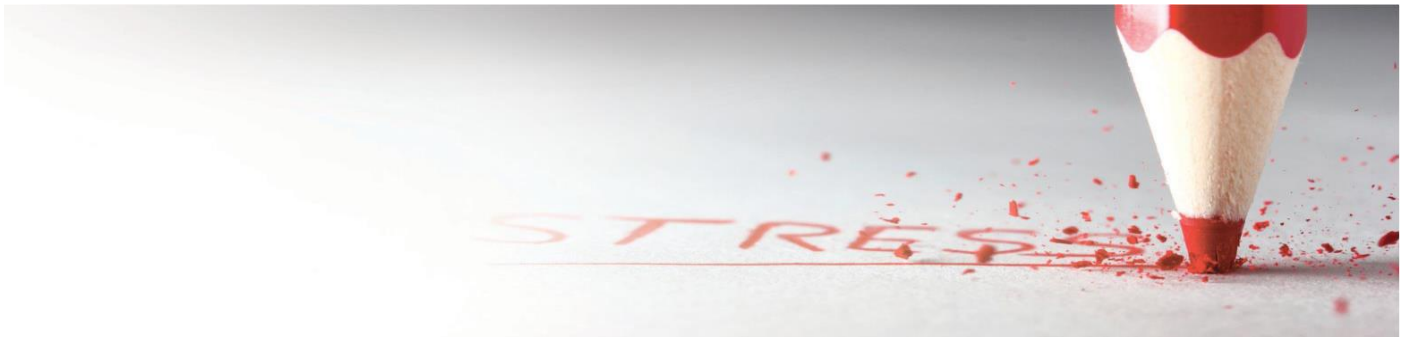
# Top Tips for Revision



- Check that you have all the right resources to hand for all of your subjects and exams that you will be sitting.
- Build up a bank of exam papers and questions at home so you will always have plenty to complete.
- You must plan your revision and exam preparation so you reach your best performance just as the exams start.
- Design a realistic programme for revision and exam preparation, starting with small amounts of time which gradually increase week on week. See information about spaced and interleaved practice.
- Start to map out the final few weeks to take into account any key points when you know other things will be happening. Ensure your revision programme takes these into account.
- Ensure that your programme considers when the exams start, how many papers and units, any units you have already completed, etc.
- Create a physical copy of your timetable and ask someone to check it to see if it is manageable.
- Design and think of the strategies you are going to use to prepare and revise for your exams.
- The problem with some revision plans is that they are planned for too far ahead. Design your programme every two weeks so you can adjust it at regular intervals when required.



# Managing and Coping with Stress



When stress is managed in the right way it can be a positive experience as it makes us do things. Stress of ten becomes negative when we feel we do not have any control over the outcome. For example, if you left your revision too late and you felt that whatever you did would not prepare you for the exam. This becomes negative as you believe you cannot control the outcome.

## **Tell someone**

**Talk about it to  
teachers,  
friends and  
family**

**Positive mental  
attitude**

**Improves  
confidence and  
reduces stress**

## **Exercise**

**Relaxes muscles  
and helps to  
clear your mind.**

## **Breathing**

**Use  
breathing  
techniques  
to  
calm yourself**

## **Fun**

**Take some time  
out and build this  
into your revision  
plan**

## **Diet**

**Eat the right  
food, ensure you  
have a  
balanced diet**

## Exam day stress

It is important to remember that stress is part of everyday life and you are likely to feel stressed prior to starting an exam. This is natural, and your body will adapt to stress by increasing your heart rate, shallow breathing and in some cases the release of adrenaline. The important thing here is to manage these physical responses so you can remain fully focused on the exam paper.

- **Mental imagery** - Imagine yourself being somewhere that you feel relaxed, safe and calm. This will help slow your breathing and make you feel more relaxed.
- **Breathing** - Try not to take shallow breaths as you will need to breathe faster to get the same amount of oxygen as when you take deeper, but fewer breaths.
- **Relaxation** - Take yourself somewhere quiet so you can relax in a peaceful environment.
- **Visualisation** - Try and imagine that you're sat in the exam and doing really well because you have prepared so well for it.

## The day before

- Ensure you know the correct time and location of your exam. You will be surprised how many students get it wrong, increasing stress.
- Spend the day tackling past exam papers so you can really apply your knowledge and do any last-minute checks that have been highlighted by your answers. Check your answers against the mark scheme.
- You must ensure you have an early night, as you want to feel fresh in the morning. 8 hours sleep is the recommended amount.
- Ensure you have all the necessary equipment that you need for the exam.

## The day of the exam

- Ensure that you get up in plenty of time so you do not have to rush. If you have to rush this will cause unnecessary stress that you do not need.
- Ensure you have breakfast and water. This can add 5% to your performance as your brain needs energy to function efficiently.
- Avoid last minute discussions with friends on what might be in the exam, as this might confuse you and cause stress.
- Use relaxation strategies to ensure that you remain in control of any physical changes brought on by stress.
- Remember you have prepared well for this exam so be confident.

## The Exam Paper

- Do not panic - remember you are well prepared.
- Read the questions carefully. Pay attention to the key words in the exam question, underline them and ensure you fully understand what it is asking you to do.
- Check the mark allocation for each question that you answer as this will determine how long you will spend on it.
- Ensure that you check the clock at regular intervals so you can identify if you are on track.
- Scan the paper and mark those questions that you feel very confident answering. If you attempt the questions that you find difficult first you might take too long on them and run out of time.
- At the end of the exam paper, make sure you go back and check through each question carefully.

