



Gordonstoun
GCSE Revision Skills



Liza O, Windmill, Year 12

Broader experiences, broader minds.

GORDONSTOUN

Contents

Introduction: Engraining good habits	2
Advice for Parents and Carers 1	3
Advice for Parents and Carers 2	4
Advice for students - GCSE Revisions: Dos and Don'ts	5
How to Revise: Getting Started	6
How to Revise: The Learn - Revise - Test Yourself Cycle	8
- Learn	8
- Revise	9
- Test Yourself	10
Advice to students: Literacy	11
In the Exam Hall	12
- Before the Exam	12
- In the Exam Room	12
- After the Exam	12
Stress Management	13
Think Your Way to Success	14
Who To Ask For Help	15

Introduction: Engraining good habits

I wonder how many of you watch the TV programme 'Masterchef'? In it, a group of either professional or amateur cooks competes against one another over a series of challenges in order to be crowned the Masterchef Champion – a very prestigious award that can lead them eventually to great riches. In that programme, the judges are constantly speaking to the contestants about 'the basics' of good cookery. Do they keep their work area tidy, do they know how to choose the best ingredients, do they know which flavour combinations work, can they tell when meat and fish are cooked etc etc.

As you are entering the second year of your GCSE programme, you are now entering your very own Masterchef challenge, although the end goal is not to win the Masterchef trophy, but to secure the best GCSE results you can. In order to do this, you too need to know and practice 'the basics'. The study habits and skills this booklet covers are those basic routines you need to learn if you are to make the most of the talent you have (and you all do have talent). As with cookery, these basics do not just happen, they need practicing, repeatedly and over a period of time, in order to ensure that, when the pressure is on, they are engrained and not forgotten. As you approach your GCSE exams in the summer, the pressure will certainly be on, so starting to engage with and learn these basics now will be a vital part of being really well prepared for what you will face in a few months' time.

Good luck in developing the habits that will lead you to success!

Mr Cane-Hardy
Head of Senior School



Advice for Parents and Carers 1

Exams, Exams, Exams!

I am sure parents and carers are all too aware of how important the next year is and the pressure students will be under. You may feel that you are worrying more than they are! You may feel anxious that your child is working too hard, or you may feel your child is simply not doing enough. Whatever stage you are at, this booklet can help provide practical tips and information to support your child through the year ahead, particularly when they are with you during the holidays.

Clearly you know your child well, and this booklet sets out some suggestions for you to work alongside him or her. It does not offer a quick solution to the challenges of revision because there is no quick fix. We hope you will find its contents have something to offer you and your own situation.

Helping your child to manage their time can create problems. Parents and carers must remember that calmness and encouragement are the key issues for these discussions. There is a cost associated with spending too much time out with friends, on the computer or watching television, which may only be recognised too late. However difficult it may feel, always try to keep calm and smile a lot – it is important not to add to the pressure. Tell your child when they have done well, but also be determined to guide them where time management is concerned.

You can help them with their organisation by ensuring that their workspace has:

- plenty of fresh air and is the appropriate temperature for studying (18 - 20C)
- natural light but not in front of a window
- desk space that is large enough with a lamp
- resources / equipment nearby
- a good chair
- timetables / syllabus / project plans

You can provide them with the tools to revise with, which may include:

- pens, pencils, rulers
- colours & highlighters
- file dividers, folders, wallets
- plain, lined & graph paper
- index cards & box
- diary/timetables
- computer access
- calculator
- paper clips / stapler / sellotape / glue / hole punch

A word on computers:

- most revision does not have to be completed on the computer
- connecting to the Internet is occasionally required for revision, but should not be the norm
- the biggest time wasters are online gaming sites and social networking. They may kid themselves that they are working when they are connected to these sites – they are not!
- If you are concerned that your child is spending too much time on the internet, switch it off!

Advice for Parents and Carers 2

Helpful Hints

BE A SUPPORTER

When your son or daughter is approaching exams, resisting the temptation to ‘oversee’ their revision can be difficult. Asking questions like ‘Have you done any revision today?’ is bound to cause arguments and come across to your child as nagging, especially if they are already anxious about their GCSEs. Instead, if you can, help with creating their revision timetable. If he or she would prefer to do this alone, take a look at the timetable and let your child know you’re impressed with their organisation. Asking how the schedule is going, rather than if they are doing any work, feels less intrusive for them. If he or she has fallen off track with revision, don’t judge – just ask how they plan to solve the problem and offer your support. Giving your child a sense of responsibility, plus the feeling that you’re behind them in taking this on board, is key.

LOOK FOR SIGNS OF STRESS

If your son or daughter isn’t eating as much as usual, seems to be struggling to sleep or is experiencing unusual aches and pains, it could be that they’re too stressed. Look out for these signs and if you see them, talk to your child about why they are so anxious. You should also encourage your son or daughter healthy eating, regular breaks from revision, as well as unwinding with some exercise. Remembering that there is life beyond the GCSEs is crucial – although it can be a challenge for the students about to sit them!

OFFER PRAISE AND REWARDS – NOT BRIBES

As parents we all want to see our children do well, and it can be tempting to offer attractive ‘incentives’ for them to do so. Be wary, though, of offering rewards for results rather than for the hard work that your son or daughter does in the lead up to the exams. Promising specific treats in exchange for top grades can feel like bribery and may heap extra pressure on your child at an already stressful time – whereas a series of small rewards during the revision period can provide encouragement and help build confidence.

GET INVOLVED

Do whatever you can to help your child – whether that means making endless cups of tea, keeping younger siblings from disturbing them or sending them to bed when they look tired! Offer to test your son or daughter on what they’ve revised and encourage them to put up revision posters, diagrams and post-it notes around the house. Above all, make sure you’re available if they want to talk about any worries they may have.

AVOID ARGUMENTS

GCSE time is likely to be stressful for the whole family: your child will be nervous about the approaching exams while the rest of you will be keen for them to fulfil their potential. Tempers are likely to be frayed during revision time, but do your best not to respond if your teenager is more challenging than usual. Young people’s self esteem can be fragile as the exams approach, particularly if they are pushing themselves to get top results – so stay as positive and supportive as you can.

AVOID SAYING ‘IN MY DAY...’

Telling your son or daughter that you, or older siblings, did exams like GCSEs and survived them might seem helpful but unfortunately it can add to the stress your child is already feeling. The pressure to perform well in relation to others who’ve done the exams before – particularly brothers and sisters who were very successful – might make matters worse.

When it is all over, praise them for their work and tell them to forget about studying for a while!

Advice to students - GCSE Revision: Dos and Don'ts

Helpful Hints

DO... TREAT YOURSELF

Allow yourself a treat after working hard or achieving an important goal. Whether it's relaxing with your favourite film, a simple bar of chocolate or an afternoon out with your friends, enjoy yourself for a while before you get back to the books.

DO... USE THE WEB WISELY

Online forums are full of revision tips in the run up to GCSEs, and the internet boasts a wealth of quizzes that can help test your learning in a variety of subjects. If you start clicking around at random, it could be a long while before you look at your watch and realise how much time you've wasted. Be honest with yourself: if you can't stay on task when you're online, stay off your laptop.

DO... KNOW HOW TO SPOT STRESS – AND PREVENT IT

All of us feel stressed from time to time, but the run up to GCSEs can be especially intense. Stress can cause headaches, lead to difficulty sleeping, cause constant tiredness and result in increased feelings of anxiety – all of which are counterproductive when you're trying to concentrate on important work. If you're experiencing any of these symptoms it's really important to talk to someone about your stress levels – whether you choose a friend, a parent, your tutor or house staff. If stress is a problem for you, relaxing more will help you to revise more effectively – however contrary this might seem. Getting extra sleep, taking regular breaks and letting off steam by doing some exercise will all help.

DO... WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR BODY

It's always sensible to eat a healthy, balanced diet and get plenty of sleep, but this advice is really worth following in the run up to GCSEs. Avoid junk food, opting instead for wholesome meals that will give you plenty of energy for studying. Try to wind down fully before you go to bed and do not use any screen based media, aim for a full eight hours of sleep every night.

DON'T... COMPARE YOURSELF TO YOUR FRIENDS

You might have heard that someone in your English class has read *Of Mice and Men* 10 times – but do you really think it's true? Don't get hung up on what other people are doing to prepare for the GCSE exams... especially as you can't ever completely believe what they say! Stick to your own timetable, stay calm and revise in the way that works best for you.

DON'T... LEAVE EVERYTHING UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE

Trying to stuff your brain full of information immediately before an exam is the worst way to revise. Not only is it unlikely to help you remember anything meaningful, it is almost guaranteed to stress you out right before your big day, when what you really need is a calm mind and a good night's sleep.

DON'T... CONDUCT A 'POST-MORTEM' AFTER EVERY EXAM

'What did you put for question 3b...?' Don't answer that, because it doesn't matter now! Go into every exam and do the best you can, but don't go back over everything you wrote once the test is over. Worrying yourself silly over things you have done (or not done) won't help you to concentrate on the revision and exams that are to come – and they should be your priority.

How to revise: Getting Started

'Failing to plan, is planning to fail'

Make a plan and produce a revision timetable

An important factor in managing stress is being able to see a clear and manageable way forward to make sure that you are ready in time for the exam.



To start you will have a list of the subjects that you study and a summary of the topics for each subject. You then need to use this information to produce a revision timetable. Your revision timetable should also include time for relaxation and breaks. We will provide a template that you can use in school or you may like to use a free online planner such as <https://getrevising.co.uk/planner>

Day	Revision Subject 1	Revision Subject 2	Revision Subject 3	Treat!
Monday	Subject	Subject	Subject	
	Topic	Topic	Topic	
Tuesday	Subject	Subject	Subject	
	Topic	Topic	Topic	
Wednesday	Subject	Subject	Subject	

For most people they have some topics that they find easier than others and so you will need to spend a different amount of time on each topic and it makes sense to plan for this, but don't be afraid to adjust your timetable as you go along. One way of sorting out how much time to spend on each topic is to traffic light them, ask yourself the question 'would I get full marks on this topic?' and colour code them;



Amber and Red topics will need more time and to be revisited more often. For example red topics 45 min every day, yellow 30 min every other day and green one hour once a week.

How to revise: Getting Started

Sessions should be short most people can only focus for 25-45 minutes with 10-minute breaks in between.

No more than three or four sessions should be scheduled in an evening, though at the weekends and in the holidays more slots should be included.

Vary the subjects across each day/evening.

Start each revision session with your most challenging subject topic – don't avoid the subjects you find most difficult, face up to them at the beginning!

Pin your timetable up somewhere you can see it easily.

Build in treats – such as a snack, rewards and time with friends or evenings out; social time is vital in the overall scheme, as long as there is a balance between work and play.

Topics need to be revised more than once based on what we know about the brain.

Include time to review where you are briefly looking at the revision you have already completed.

Change your expectations about socialising – though 'time out' is important, something has to give during the run up to the exams but this won't be for long!

At first, the big picture may look and feel totally overwhelming but try to prioritise your workload and plan ahead. Revision will take up your time and this will last for a few good months if you want to meet your potential. So for a short period your social life has to give a bit! Meeting your friends and/or relaxing is important but not such a priority for this tiny part of your year.

How to revise: The Learn – Revise – Test Yourself Cycle

Learn

Just reading through or copying from your textbooks or exercise books is the least effective way of revising so DON'T do it!

By changing what is in our exercise books or textbooks into a different form, we kick start our brains into action – we start thinking about new ways of presenting and digesting the information and start learning.

Some ideas...

- Start with your notes, textbook or revision guide and **condense them into your own words and try to reorganise and regroup** (don't be tempted to copy, it is putting it into your own words and structure that is important). It should just be a summary of the key points, preferably on a single page that is easy to revise from.
- Create **big and bold** mind maps that allow you to express the information freely – you can download apps for this. Start with the topic in the centre and use colour, diagrams and pictures as well as text.
- Use **flow charts** to summarise processes, starting at the beginning and making each step clear. Try and use both words and images. They don't need to be neat, just easy to follow.
- Use **flash cards**. Make your own as this will get you to organise and condense the information in your own words. They are effective for learning key facts such as key dates, vocabulary, key words, definitions and formulae. They are most effective if they have a picture or question on one side and the corresponding word or answer on the other.
- Create **timelines** to show the order of events and key dates. Use images as well as text and make them visually striking.

How to revise: The Learn – Revise – Test Yourself Cycle

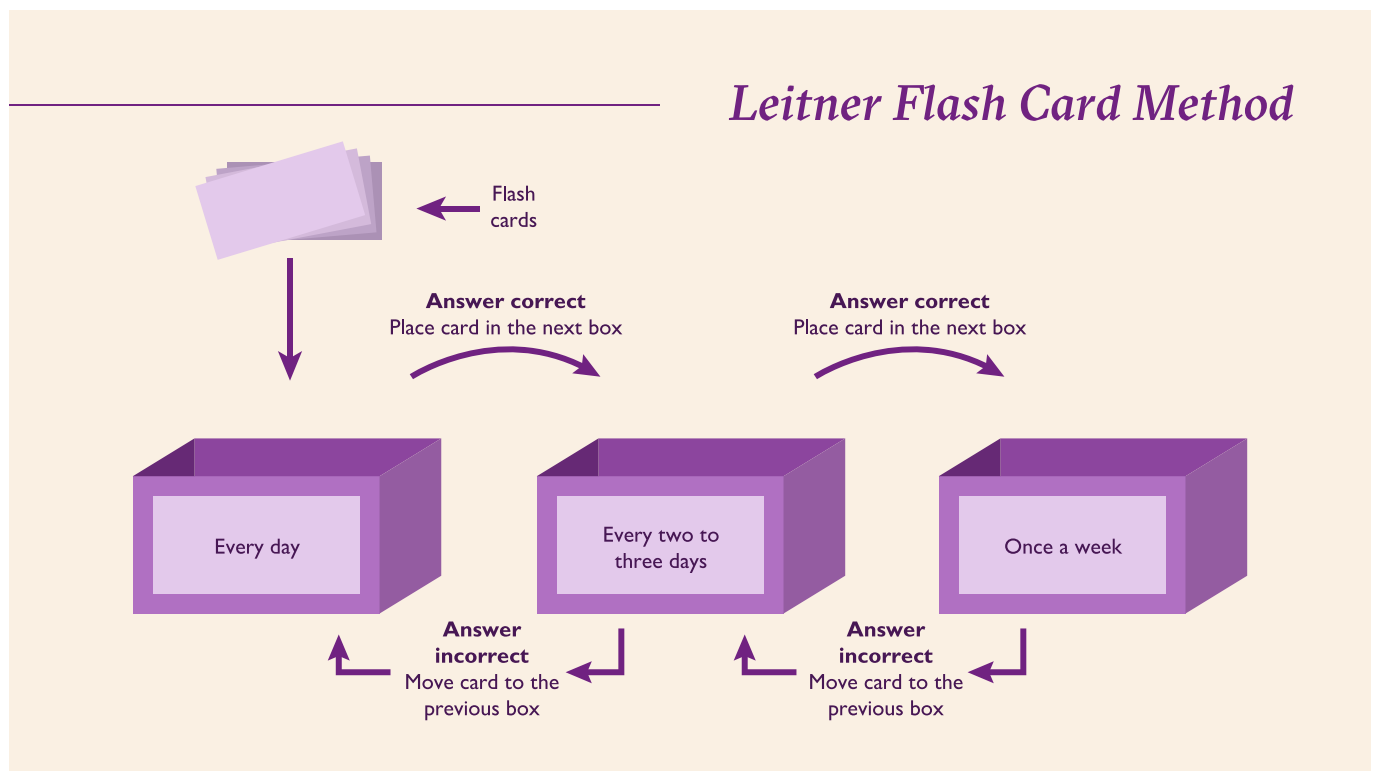
Revise

This is an active process so you have to do something, don't just read.

It is really important that you now actively engage with the condensed notes, timelines, mind maps, flowcharts and flashcards in order for them to be effective.

Some ideas...

- **Cover up** your mind map, time line, flow chart or condensed notes and try and draw/ write as much as you can remember. **Compare** it to the original and use a different colour to highlight the bits you've missed. Keep **repeating** this process until you remember everything. Leave it a few days and then try again.
- Use the **Leitner Flash Card Method**.



- **Contract & expand your notes**; try to get a page of notes down to four or five bullet points. Put them away and then try to re-write your notes from the bullet points the next day.
- **Explain what you have learned to someone else** – especially someone who is not studying the same course as you.

How to revise: The Learn – Revise – Test Yourself Cycle

Test Yourself

Be honest with yourself

Although it can be daunting and easy to put off, it is really important that you regularly test yourself. The key is to either mark your work yourself as honestly as you can or where possible get feedback from your teacher, tutor or a student who has taken the exam previously.

- Test yourself using past paper questions.
- Try and stick to doing the questions under exam conditions and make sure you keep an eye on the time.
- If you are unable to start or feel that you want to keep looking at the markscheme for hints then you are probably not ready to test yourself in this topic yet. You will need to go back to the learn and revise part of the cycle and then try again.
- As you get more experienced at past paper questions and marking them, start to use the markscheme to pick up clues as to the sort of things the examiner will be looking for.
- Remember that it is important to keep testing yourself on each topic over a period of time. So plan to revisit each topic.

Advice to students: Literacy

TRY TO IMPROVE YOUR LITERACY AS MUCH AS YOU CAN...

Your standard of English and your understanding of what words mean could make all the difference in many exams. For example if the Business Studies exam asked you to: 'Describe how a shop steward may infiltrate management negotiations' and you do not know the meaning of "infiltrate" or "negotiations" then, chances are, answering that question is going to be difficult.

If you are more confident about your vocabulary you'll feel more confident about answering questions or understanding the text you have to read in an exam. The best way of improving your vocabulary is to read as much as you can. Trying to improve your capabilities with English will improve your chances in ALL of your subjects.

In exams you can improve your grades by widening your written use of vocabulary. Here are some helpful synonyms below to get you started...

You will also come across 'Command' words in the exam papers which vary from subject to subject. It is important that you understand what they mean and what the examiners want you to do...

EXAMPLES OF 'COMMAND' WORDS

Describe	To provide a detailed account of a topic and give reasons for it
Compare	To show how two, or more, things are different or similar
Outline	To provide a detailed description with examples
Criticise	To examine all the positive and negative aspects of a topic
Demonstrate	To examine and give evidence to support an argument
Discuss	To examine by giving positive and negatives
Illustrate	To provide the main points, showing the main structure rather than great detail
Interpret	To make compatible that which appears to be in conflict
State	To express briefly and clearly
Summarise	To give a concise account of the main points omitting detail

In the Exam Hall

Before the Exam

Set an extra alarm clock.

Get your see through pencil case and clear bottle of water with no label ready the night before.

Get up early.

Be fresh and awake.

Eat a healthy breakfast and drink water.

Leave your phone and watch in House.

Be on time – at least 20 minutes before the exam.

Use flash cards for last minute reviewing of subject.

In The Exam Room

Before looking at the actual questions, read the instructions clearly – are there compulsory questions.

Write your name on all your papers – once the invigilator has said that you can start the exam

How many marks per question? This will help you work out how much time and energy to invest in each one.

Read the questions carefully – read through the paper once and then re-read each question.

Decide on question order – some people like to start with the topic they know best or the easiest questions to give them a good start.

Think about what the question is actually asking – what are you expected to include in your answer? What facts and information will be relevant?

Keep control of your handwriting – consider your use of basic English such as commas, capital letters, etc. and make sure the examiner will be able to read what you have written!

Mind goes blank? Most students fear this happening. If it does – put your pen down, take a deep breath, sit back and relax for a moment. If you're in the middle of an answer, read through what you have written so far. If you really can't progress with this answer, leave a gap. It will probably come back to you once you are less anxious. Try closing your eyes and try to visualise the things you were using to revise (mind map, cue cards, notes) and see if you can remember what was written on them.

If you are running out of time – don't panic! Look at the questions you have left to answer and divide up your remaining time to cover them all. If you really can't finish in time, write briefly parts of the question you wanted to include – they could pick you up a few marks.

After The Exam

Try not to compare too much with friends.

Relax and congratulate yourself.

Re-focus.

Ask for feedback from teachers and note down for next year.

Speak to your tutor honestly and accept advice.

Stress Management

REMEMBER IT IS PERFECTLY NORMAL TO FEEL STRESSED ABOUT EXAMS – IT SHOWS YOU CARE ABOUT YOUR GRADES!

- Accept that you will feel stressed – but it should only be a little bit!
- Try to relax – exercise, have time on your own, chat to friends, etc.
- Encourage yourself and support your friends.
- Reduce your time on technology.
- Practise deep breathing and close your eyes if you feel a rush of stress.
- Go to bed on time.

Help yourself

If you are feeling anxious or stressed about your exams, start by trying to help yourself. Take a piece of paper and note down all the things that are worrying you about your exams – can you do anything about these things yourself? Try to consider solutions – is it just a case of needing to get started?

Is it nervousness rather than stress?

Feeling nervous is normal. Nervousness is a natural reaction to exams. The key is to put these nerves to positive use. Use this energy to review what you have already achieved in the time you have put into studying. Be confident!

Is it nervousness rather than stress?

Techniques such as mindfulness can be a really useful tool in the lead up to exams and to help you manage the feelings of stress – look on the internet for ideas and information.

This website <http://www.meditationinschools.org/resources/#examstress> has a good pdf you can download called 'Mind Space Tips for Dealing with Exam Stress'. There are also a number of mindfulness apps that you can download.

Think Your Way to Success

POSITIVITY MATTERS!

Believe you will succeed

There is nothing like believing in yourself to create a successful reality. Give yourself the benefit of the doubt and believe that you will succeed at meeting your target grades.



Forgive yourself

Constantly beating yourself up about revision and studying that you haven't done in the past won't change anything. Allow yourself to move on and change your approach.



Make a conscious decision to be resilient

In life you can either let a challenge break you down and make you see the world in a negative light or you can draw on strength you didn't even know you had and rise above it. Choose the latter - it's never too late.



Focus on finding solutions and be proactive

Don't wallow in your problems and things you find difficult. Instead, work towards finding a solution and getting them resolved. You'll feel in control of your life - just do it!



Watch your thoughts, they become words.

Watch your words, they become actions.

Watch your actions, they become habits.

Watch your habits, they become your character.

Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.

Who To Ask For Help

Need to talk about Exams? Stress? Revising?

Here at Gordonstoun there are many members of staff to turn to if you need help regarding exams. Everyone is here to support you so you can do your very best but here are some pointers for specific questions or queries:

Questions about your individual subjects?

- Subject teachers
- Heads of Department

Questions about the exam timetable and exam entries?

- Heads of Department
- Mrs Barber – Exams and Data Manager

Need further advice on revision?

- Tutor
- Subject teachers
- House staff
- Mrs Barton – Key Stage Four Leader

Need help managing your time?

- Tutor
- House staff

Feeling stressed or unwell?

- House staff
- Tutor
- Any Healthcare Centre professional
- Mrs Morton – Assistant Head Wellbeing

Help or advice on any of the above?

- Mr Foote – Assistant Head Teaching and Learning

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR EXAMS

‘There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.’



GORDONSTOUN