

Letts

**A Parent's
Guide to GCSE
Revision**



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Introduction

Summer time for hundreds of thousands of teenagers and parents is a time of great anxiety as they wait for GCSE results to be published.

Most books and leaflets about how to succeed in exams are aimed at helping the students themselves improve their study skills, or at helping them revise specific subjects.

This book, however, is different: It's aimed at you, the parent. It puts your needs first, rather than your child's. It looks at your perspectives on the exam process and advises you on how best to help and support your child during the run-up to GCSEs.

The advice offered in this booklet is divided into three sections.



Section 1 focuses on ways that you can help your child to develop and maintain a positive attitude.



Section 2 identifies the sorts of material and psychological support that you might offer your child during this challenging and emotionally charged phase of her life.



Section 3 outlines a number of core study skills that are essential to exam success.

HELPING YOUR CHILD TO DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS EXAMS

The exam system offers young people access to further and higher education and provides them with opportunities to gain a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence. Although full recognition of these opportunities emerges mainly through direct experience of preparing for and taking exams, there are a variety of ways in you can help your child to develop and sustain a positive attitude towards GCSEs.

This section offers you hints and tips on how to raise your child's aspirations through:

- providing inspiration;
- offering incentives; and
- supplying refreshments.



Providing Inspiration

In order to make commitments, overcome obstacles and complete any challenging project we all need someone or something to inspire and motivate us to get started. When reflecting upon the people and things that inspire and uplift your child, it is worth remembering that sources of inspiration are deeply personal and take a wide variety of forms. Maybe there is a particular photograph, piece of music or book that he would, at this time, really benefit from being given or maybe there is a film or a musical that she would really appreciate going to see. You could also create opportunities for your child to talk to friends and family about the benefits and advantages offered by a good set of GCSE results:

- Encourage her to go out for a coffee with someone that she knows and respects who is currently studying in her school's Sixth Form or at a local FE college.
- Ask an older sibling, cousin or friend studying at university to invite him to spend a couple of days experiencing university life.
- Offer opportunities for her to meet people working in professions that she would like to join and encourage her to quiz these individuals on qualifications that are required and preferred within their professions.
- Identify and take-up opportunities to informally and openly discuss your own exam results and the extent to which these facilitated or constrained your personal and professional development.

Offering Incentives

Although the promise of access to further and higher education or a good job is enough to keep some students motivated throughout their GCSEs, others require additional incentives. One option is to discuss with your child what sorts of rewards would motivate him to set more ambitious targets and to revise more diligently. You could then promise certain rewards if he achieves certain grades. When coming to arrangements of this sort take care to ensure, though, that you set fairly challenging but realistic targets. A few examples of possible rewards:

- Tickets to a pop concert
- A new mobile phone
- Driving lessons
- A night out with friends
- Some money to spend on clothes and music
- A party soon after his last exam
- The opportunity to go backpacking with a few friends
- A new computer
- Tickets to a football match
- An electric guitar

Supplying Refreshments

The sheer volume of work that GCSE students are expected to complete in the run-up to their exams makes it essential that you provide your child with opportunities not only to study and revise but also to relax. In addition to helping your child to generate the vision and motivation required for exam success, try to identify ways that you can help her to stay fresh and relaxed. Some possibilities:

- An obvious way that many people wind-down is by spending quality time with their friends. Although you need to ensure that your child doesn't spend excessive amounts of time socialising during the run-up to her exams, take care to ensure that outside of the school day she gains regular access to friends. Consider purchasing a few top-ups for her mobile or offering to give her a lift into town on Saturday mornings.
- Encourage your child to find time to focus his attention completely away from sources of anxiety such as revision and exams through active participation in local clubs and societies. Offer to contribute towards the cost of his membership of a sports centre or to pick him up after he finishes helping-out at the local youth club.
- We all deserve a degree of freedom to find our own ways of resting, relaxing and recouping lost energy. It is therefore worth remembering that an occasional lie-in or the chance to chill-out with friends in front of a good film sometimes does the world of good.

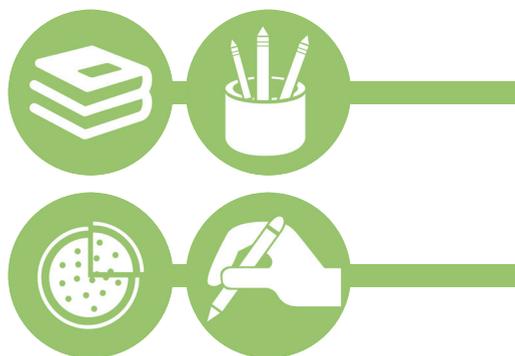


PROVIDING YOUR CHILD WITH MATERIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Despite the fact that some parents might seriously consider the option of taking GCSEs on their children's behalf, you are not going to be able to escort your child into the exam room, interpret her exam questions or correct her answers. Even if you are fully aware of exactly what GCSE success requires, due to the ferociously independent nature of many teenagers, you are also likely to find it very difficult to adopt a directive style of parenting during the run-up to exams. Instead, you need to consider more subtle ways of providing support.

This section discusses different forms of material and psychological support that you can offer your child such as:

- useful equipment;
- a positive home environment; and
- unconditional love.



Useful Equipment

At the most basic level, there are various types of equipment that will help your child to prepare for GCSEs and it is therefore a good idea to set-aside a budget to cover the costs of these materials. Be sure to directly involve your child in the process of clarifying what equipment he most needs and try to make purchases as early in his exam year as possible. Some examples of items that he might find useful:

- Bag or backpack
- Fine-point coloured pens
- Table lamp
- Calculator
- Pin-board
- Diary or personal organiser
- Notebook
- Watch
- Alarm clock
- Calendar
- Highlighter-pens
- Computer
- Printer
- Folders and files
- Educational software
- Past exam papers
- Chair and desk
- Revision guides
- Textbooks

Although this cannot strictly be categorised as ‘equipment’, particularly if she is struggling to study and revise certain subjects, it is also worth considering the option of organising for a local tutor to provide some private tuition for your child. In addition, he may benefit from attending extra-curricular revision courses offered at his school or by other local educational providers (e.g. during the spring half-term or during the Easter holidays). There are now also online tutorial services that offer good value for money.

Positive Home Environment

The inevitable pressures on the limited shared resources available in your home make it essential that you find ways of ensuring that the legitimate demands of other family members are balanced against the particular needs of your child in the run-up to her GCSEs. It is especially important that GCSE students are provided with ample space and time to revise.

Some related issues to bear in mind:

- At the very least, GCSE students deserve a quiet private space (e.g. a desk in the bedroom) where they can study and revise undisturbed by external influences. You may therefore need to insist that at certain times of day the TV is turned-down (or turned-off) and noise levels are kept to an absolute minimum. It can also be helpful to designate this as a family 'quiet time' when everyone (parents included!) participates in 'studious' activities such as doing homework, catching up on email, reading the newspaper or surfing the web.
- We are all creatures of habit and tend to be enabled and constrained not only by our own daily routine but also by the daily routines of those closely connected to us such as parents, siblings and friends. Have a think about ways that family members' habits limit the extent to which your child can prepare for his exams. For example, bringing forward mealtimes may release more time for him to study or beginning the car journey to school earlier may provide him with chances to browse over his revision notes before the school-day starts.

Unconditional Love

Some of the most fascinating research on successful parenting concludes that the most effective parents provide their children with both challenge and unconditional love. Beyond recognising the need for your child to exhibit the vision, self-discipline and fortitude required to secure a good set of GCSE grades, remember that when preparing for exams she will inevitably be subjected and exposed to a variety of forces that are largely beyond her control and that she is therefore likely, at times, to experience a significant degree of uncertainty and insecurity. Providing your child with the reassurance that, whatever mistakes he makes and whatever misfortunes he encounters, you will always be there to love and support him will enable him to approach exams with greater confidence. Some antidotes to GCSE anxiety:

- Regularly invite your child to talk to you openly and confidentially about how she is feeling and to let you know if there is anything at all that you can do to help. At these times, restrain yourself from trying to 'solve' her 'problems' by offering immediate 'solutions' and continue to affirm instead that you understand how she is feeling or just hear her out.

Conclude these conversations by reminding her how much you love and care for her and by reassuring her that you are committed to help her in any way that you can.

- Create opportunities for your child to engage in activities that are completely removed from the world of school, homework, revision and exams. Consider, for example, offering to take him on holiday for a few days or periodically offer to rent a DVD and cook his favourite meal so that he can relax at home with a few friends.

KNOWING THE STUDY SKILLS THAT YOUR CHILD REQUIRES TO ACHIEVE EXAM SUCCESS

In addition to the inspiration and support that you can help to provide for your child, it is important to recognise that the bread and butter of GCSE success centres on your child's capacity to revise a wide range of subject areas. It is therefore worth trying to improve your knowledge and understanding of the study skills that she will need to practice and apply when studying and revising for her GCSEs.

Towards these ends, this unit examines some key concepts and techniques underpinning three core study skills:

- time management;
- note-taking; and
- group-study.



Time Management

One of the main reasons why many young people fail to achieve a good set of GCSE grades relates less to their lack of ability or ambition and more to the fact that they seriously underestimate the amounts of time that they need to set aside for revision.

Many students now take 10 or more GCSEs and are therefore required to revise over 200 GCSE topics. On the basis of 1 hour of revision per topic, this means that your child may need to complete a total of over 200 hours of revision. Assuming that he revises for 1-2 hours a day, he will therefore need to start revising at least 3-6 months before his first exam. For those taking exams in June, **this means starting to revise in February at the very latest.** It is worth running through these figures and dates with your child so that he can begin to see for himself the benefits of starting his revision as soon as possible.

A few secrets of effective time management:

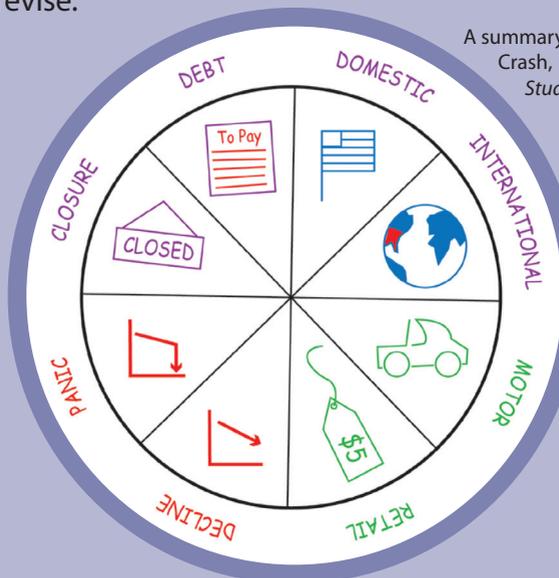
- Like money, time is a limited resource that should ideally be distributed according to what we value and therefore according to our values. If your child values her GCSE grades then she needs to ensure that, at times, her revision takes priority over other interests and activities.
- Due to the fact that our lives tend to be structured around our routines, one of the most direct and effective ways that your child can release more time for revision is by changing his daily routine. For example, at weekends he could get-up an hour earlier so that he can use this 'extra' time for revision.
- In order to provide a clear revision plan and reduce stress levels, it is helpful for your child to create a revision timetable that clarifies what, on any given day, she needs to revise and for how long.

Note-taking

Many students 'revise' by copying-out their class-notes or pages of school textbooks. This is not only a dull and slow way of studying but also highly ineffective – it is possible to copy-out a whole book and still know little or nothing about what you have written. Instead, GCSE students need to find ways of taking notes that require them to analyse and actively think about topics that they are revising.

There are very few hard and fast rules about effective note-taking. The key is to encourage your child to develop a repertoire of note-taking techniques through experimenting with the different options available. Some general principles for your child to bear in mind when taking revision notes:

- It is helpful for him to work towards developing a revision file that is divided into subject areas and that contains a single 'summary' page for each topic that he is studying (e.g. if there are 30 topics in his History syllabus then the History section should contain 30 pages).
- There is no need for GCSE students to take notes by using sentences. Instead, encourage her to use key words from the text that she is studying and to enhance her revision notes by recording information as symbols (e.g. a crown to represent the king or a mask to represent the theatre etc) and by using several colours (highlighter-pens and a pack of good quality fine-point coloured pens come-in very handy here).
- Encourage him to take revision notes on plain paper and to experiment with different ways of organising information on the page. For example, if in a particular topic there are eight key points that he needs to remember and understand then he could: draw a large circle on the page; divide-up this circle into eight parts; and then write in each of the eight parts of the circle key words or symbols that remind him of each of the eight points that he is trying to revise.



A summary circle on The Wall Street Crash, *GCSE Success Essentials: Study Skills*

Group-Study

People tend to associate revision with stark images of pale-faced students sitting silently at desks in giant libraries surrounded by stacks of books. In reality, some of the most effective approaches to revising are centred on providing students with opportunities to interact and, in particular, to talk about the topics that they are learning. To this extent, your child's capacity to prepare for his exams partly depends on the extent to which he can manipulate and master various social spaces.

The classroom

Try to encourage your child to make better use of lessons by adopting a more interactive style of learning in the classroom. Teachers are valuable resources during the run-up to exams and the most effective revisers take-up opportunities in class to ask teachers questions about things that they have found it difficult to revise. If your child is shy or feels too intimidated to ask questions in class then you can always suggest that she quizzes her teachers before class begins, at the end of lessons or during breaks.

The get-together

There are plenty of opportunities for your child to proactively organise to study with a friend or two in his own time (e.g. in the evenings or at weekends). Get-togethers of this sort offer GCSE students the chance to discuss the topics that they are revising, to test each other and to pool resources – for example, by each revising one of three Science topics and then taking it in turns to explain/teach their chosen topic before handing the 'hot-seat' over to one of their friends. As well as acting as powerful learning spaces, these meetings offer students a welcome supplement to the more solitary aspects of their revision schedules.

This handbook has offered a range of hints and tips that you can use to help your child to prepare for GCSEs. The first section focussed on ways of raising your child's aspirations and helping him to develop and sustain a positive attitude towards his GCSEs. The second section examined some of the different forms of material and psychological support that you can offer your child when she is preparing for exams. The final section unpicked some core study skills that your child will need to practice and apply if he is to achieve exam success.

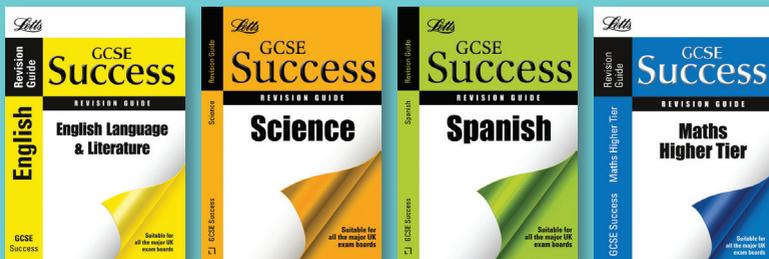
Perhaps most importantly, all of the guidance and advice offered in this publication has highlighted more subtle ways that you can help to inspire, support and guide your child through the exam year. A good set of GCSE grades will certainly provide your child with a passport to further and higher education. It may also provide him with a profound sense of self-worth and accomplishment. Above all else, try to help your son or daughter not only to develop a clear vision and focus but also to remain open and relaxed throughout

Good luck!

HELP YOUR CHILD PREPARE FOR GCSEs WITH CONFIDENCE

Letts revision guides suit a range of different needs.

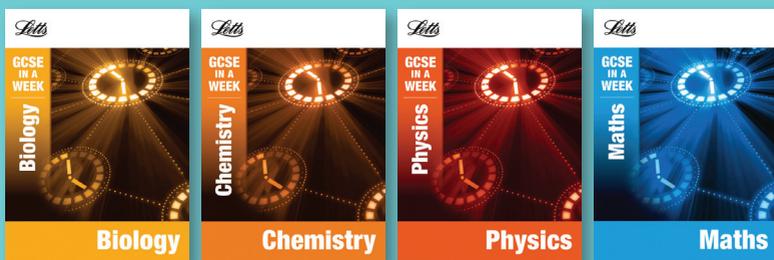
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