



Keep Calm And PASS Your Exams

A guide to effective preparation and performance in exams

Revision

Let's start by being crystal clear about revision.

In this context revision means 'going over' things you have already learned.

If there are small gaps in your knowledge then these might be filled with some thorough revision but a few weeks (or days before an exam is not the best time to start leaning new material. Though there are some good texts that can take you through key elements of a course in just a week or two.

Usually revision means going back to notes you've made or been given and making sure your grasp of the topic means you can demonstrate knowledge in the exam.

Is revision all about memory? Well it plays a part but if you know a subject well you can often reduce the number of disconnected pieces of information you need to remember.

On the next page are some **Really Useful Revision Tips** - I've put them so if you want you can print that page, cut out the boxes and pin them together into a fob to tuck neatly into a pencil case, have on your desk or distribute around the house.

Make notes of the main points of a subject or topic on index cards, 'post its' or in a booklet.



Make sure they are notes - a summary or bullet points - not simply a rewrite of the whole set of notes. If you find you are writing lots of notes highlight key parts.

My teacher says **revision** is **important.**

Read through notes on a topic a few times and then try and write them again or say them verbally and see how much can be remembered.

To reduce pages of notes try putting main points on a topic web or spider graph, try writing key facts on 'post its' or even record them on your phone



Put key facts all over the house on family notice boards, on the fridge door, on the mirror in the hall, on your bedroom door, wherever will see it during the course of the day- then change where they are every few days, and swap for new ones when that exam is done.

Try 'teaching' what you have just revised - it can be fun and it is a great way to commit things to memory



Use different colours to pick out the really important parts in your notes and make writing them more fun!

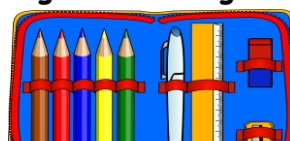


A revision time table is really useful - first get your exam timetable and then build your revision timetable around it.

List **WHAT** you will revise as well as **WHEN**.

Take short breaks when revising - even if you feel there is a lot to do breaks will actually help you concentrate and make revision more effective. So will having plenty of water to hydrate, a healthy diet **AND** enough sleep!

It doesn't matter where you revise but it does help to have all the stuff you need in one place or you can end up wasting time finding books, notes, pens



Reducing Exam Stress

In many ways exam stress is no different from any other type of stress BUT it does happen to lots of people at the same time and this can create a feeling that everyone is stressed which can have a negative impact.

If you add into that the fact that lots of people tell folk doing exams that 'their future depends on them' then it is no surprise that many people, teenagers and children too feel stressed about exams.

Many people feel anxious before exams and a degree of anxiety or stress often improves performance if however the stress is too great and there isn't a strategy to manage the stress it can completely detract from the exam and result in an unhappy experience and poor result.

What can then happen is that the next time there is an exam the body, subconscious mind and possibly conscious memory can remember that experience and often that will 'trigger' a similar response.

So it is vital to adopt a strategy to manage exam stress such as mindfulness, deep breathing or meditation and to re frame your memory by visualising success. Remind yourself that you can be successful and you can take an exam without experiencing crippling stress.

Let's start with a few general tips about managing and reducing stress. I've aimed this at parents and adults (it was an earlier blog post) who can be a big support for young folk taking exams - if you are reading this as someone who is sitting exams yourself then just apply the advice to yourself

The role of a parent and teacher is clearly different but every adult working with or parenting children and teenagers has a duty to promote positive mental health and therefore at the very least to do no harm – i.e. not to ADD to levels of stress about exams even more.

So of the tips below some will be more appropriate for teachers or adults working in schools and others are more for parents.

1. **Get the basics right**

It doesn't matter what the source of stress might be the experience of it is worse when our general health is not good.

Make sure they get

enough sleep, teenagers have a tendency to become a bit nocturnal but sleep will have an impact on performance. So they need to be in bed by a reasonable hour if they need to get up for exams or to revise. If they go to bed and have trouble sleeping then work with them to develop strategies to make sure they can get a good night's sleep – there are some useful tips at <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers/>

a balanced diet – we know that our diet has an impact on our physical and mental performance so make sure they get plenty of fresh foods, with protein and fresh fruit and vegetables and try to avoid the tendency many develop of snacking on sugar laden processed food and drinks.

some exercise when the pressure is on it is easy to feel like there isn't time for exercise but it is not only good for our bodies' evidence suggests it helps our brains as well – read more by clicking on the link below <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jun/18/how-physical-exercise-makes-your-brain-work-better>

Exercise is also known to reduce stress. It doesn't need to be competitive or formal but making sure that children and young

people get some exercise will help reduce stress and help them study more efficiently so even if it's just a brisk walk or a short bike ride, kicking a ball about or running around with mates it will help and is worth making time for.



2. Encourage Relaxation

However much there is to do it is important to take regular breaks and to building some time for relaxing. In fact studying is often more effective in short bursts. We have all probably experienced working for hours and feeling ourselves become unproductive. A break away from it even for a short time can renew our concentration and we can sustain working for a bit longer. Remember too that Mindfulness can be very useful for both relaxation AND improving concentration- you can read the earlier blog post about Mindfulness

<http://attunededucation.com/2017/03/14/4-mindful-exercises-to-try-today/>

Motivate without Threats

While some students may need hefty doses of motivation they, in fact few of us, are rarely motivated by threats. These may be specific – I've heard people say they won't get to go on holiday unless they work/succeed or much more general, the 'you'll never get a good job' 'you won't get to go to University' or whatever. In my years of experience as a teacher and as a parent honestly I've never seen this work.

But many do need some motivation so encourage them to think of the positives, remind them that any 'sacrifices' they do make (not going out with mates for a few evenings etc) will only be for a short time.

Lots of people offer rewards for success and I think that is a personal decision but generally speaking intrinsic rewards – that is the student working hard because they want to and they see value in it tend to be more effective. You can read more

here <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jun/25/cash-for-grades-should-parents-reward-exam-results>

4. Be Available and involved



It is said a lot but simply being around giving time, for a cuppa and chat or a bit of encouragement can be really helpful. It certainly isn't possible in every situation but getting involved by offering to 'test' them on what they have been revising or asking them how it's going and where they are up to – is likely to be more supportive than nagging. But it is important to give advice and offer suggestions

when asked or when you can see it is needed. It is also really useful to know the specific times, dates and requirements for each exam.

5. Encourage them to talk

They may not all want to, but if you think they are worried or stressed do encourage them to talk about it – and try to get them to be specific – worries are easier to handle when you know exactly what the actual worry is. It's also a good time to discuss plans – a good plan B can mean the fear of not achieving what they want is greatly reduced. But talking doesn't have to be about big worries it can be just about how they are getting on, what bits they are finding tough but also what are they finding ok.

6. Build resilience



Life can be full of hard knocks and one of the important things that needs to happen for every adult is that they need to learn to be resilient, to cope with those knocks and be defeated by them. Now is a great time to start. Make sure they know that while they are being

encouraged and exhorted to try their best to put in the effort and to do well, they are of value anyway. If you are a parent make sure they know they will be loved whatever happens and if you work in schools make sure they know that there are always other options and there will be people who will care and support them though whatever happens.

We need to remember as well that it is not just the children and teenagers that get stressed during exam time- it can be a stressful time for parents, especially if there is more than one child in the house sitting exams, and the focus on results means it is also stressful for school staff. So it is important to learn effective ways to manage your own stress to make sure you can keep on supporting the children and teenagers who need to rely on YOU. Click [here](#) to read an article that might help – its all about making sure you look after yourself.

On the next page I've put some of the top tips for reducing stress.

Encourage them to revise (situations are less stressful when we feel prepared). Try not to NAG which may well have the opposite effect.

Don't get sucked into their stress - they need you to stay calm - so make sure you have your own strategies to deal with your stress.

Take Care of the basics. Try to make sure they get enough sleep, have a healthy diet and drink plenty of water.

Encourage them to get some exercise - revision is important but our brains function better with exercise.

Don't promise the earth if they pass - an incentive can be good but setting a huge reward may increase pressure in an unhelpful way.

Encourage them to ease up a little on other pastimes just for the period of the exams (though they do still need some relaxation). Stress will be worse if they fell unprepared.

Let them know that you are there to support them in any way you can and if they want to talk about how they feel be available to LISTEN.

Be around to help - and offer to test them on what they've learned. If you see they are getting jaded suggest a break, switching topic or even a change of scene to revive them!

Teach them some strategies to cope with their stress - it's an essential lesson in life these days.

Stay positive even if they aren't - these times will pass and life goes on. Marking days off on a calendar can be a reminder that time is passing.

BEFORE THE EXAM

Every year I meet students who make on of the errors below and it effects their result - so make sure you don't fall into any of these traps.

Check the date time and length of the exam

Honestly every year someone misses an exam - not because their alarm clock failed but because they got the date or time wrong. Get the dates and times write them down in several places and remember to check each day what is ahead.

Give yourself plenty of time

Nothing increases stress like running late and often you are simply not allowed in if you are late. So plan journey time to ensure that you have catered for the bus not arriving, or being unable to find a parking space.

Know exactly what the exam is

You can't possibly prepare well if you don't know exactly what you are preparing for. Make sure you know what the subject is AND which exam it is as it is very common to have more than one exam in a subject. One may be multiple choice and one essay style - is it a paper based or online exam -you need to be clear exactly what exam you are turning up for.

Make sure you have all the right equipment

It may be that all you need is a pen (plus a spare) but it could also be that you need pencils rubbers maybe felt pens and possible mathematical equipment or a calculator. There are also exams which are open book and you are allowed to take specified texts in - quite simply if you don't have them you will be at a disadvantage.

Don't risk disqualification

It's usually better to NOT TAKE anything you are not allowed. It's simply not worth trying to hide phones or anything else if it means you run the risk of being disqualified.

Stay Hydrated

Drink water before and during the exam (it is allowed in many exams nowadays) to help keep your brain functioning well.

EXAMS

There are many different types of exams and it is important you know what type it is - all part of being prepared.

Multiple Choice Exams

- Read instructions carefully - do you circle or tick right answers
- Read the questions carefully
- Check negatives in questions - are you looking for one thing that IS or something that isn't?
- Read the question and then read your answer to see if it makes sense
- Be really careful with answer options that look similar
- Only circle or check the number of options you asked to - circling 2 when only 1 is needed usually means both answers are discounted
- Use the correct tool - pencil, black pen or whatever.
- Keep an eye on the time
- If there are questions you are unsure about leave them, but make a note of them so you can go back to them
- At the end of the exam, if you need to transfer answers onto another sheet be certain to do it accurately
- If you finish ahead of time have a read through and check your answers

At the beginning of the Exam

When you finally get to the exam hopefully well prepared and well rested use whatever stress management strategies you have to make sure that you feel calm. Its often good to do this while papers are being handed out BFORE you are told to turn the paper over. BUT if you feel nervous when you've looked at the paper then just go through your deep breathing or mindfulness exercise again.

Once you have turned over paper make sure you do all of the following

- Put you name and/or candidate number on the paper
- Read the instructions at the beginning find out which questions you must answer and which you can maybe choose.
- Re read the instructions - I can't emphasise this enough. There are so many times that marks are simply thrown away because students fail to follow the instructions.
- Look at the marks awarded for each question. This effectively tells you how long to spend on each question - a question worth say 5 marks will clearly not require as much time as one worth 20 marks.
- Make a rough time plan to ensure you will have time to answer each question and a few minutes at the end to check over your paper
- If you do have a choice of questions to answer read each option carefully. If you are unsure which one to choose try spending just a minute or two jotting down main points for each - that way you can see how much knowledge you have about each question .and it may make the choice easier.

During the Exam

- Usually when the exam is underway nervousness disappears but if you find yourself becoming anxious just take few deep breaths.
- Do keep an eye on the time - there is nearly always a clock in exam rooms, stick to the time plan you made at the beginning of the exam.
- When you have run out of time for a particular question MOVE ON. Spending too long on one won't guarantee extra marks but if you leave questions without attempting them, because you have run out of time, you definitely won't get marks.
- Be sure you actually answer the questions if it says discuss - discuss - if it says analyse then analyse and obviously if it says describe then that's what you do.
- If you are given a word limit for certain questions make sure you stick to it but do check if it is a minimum (you must write at least that many words) or a maximum (any words over that limit may be unmarked) limit.

At the End of the Exam







If you have planned your time well you should have a few minutes left at the end - use them wisely.

- Check once more that you have put your name on the paper
- Make sure you have clearly put the number or title of the question(s) you have answered
- Answer booklets usually have page numbers on them but if you have written on paper it's worth numbering your pages.
- Try and read through your answers - you won't have time to make huge changes but if you realise you have missed an important point you should have time to add it in now
- Try to have a quick read through what you have written and correct mistakes or add in words you may have missed but this is not the time for wholesale changes.

So now you have everything you need to be successful in exams and although they will have started it is never too late to do a bit of last minute revision so I'm finishing with a sheet that gives a few tips for anyone that needs to do just that!

GOOD LUCK AND KEEP CALM

TOP TIPS FOR LAST MINUTE REVISION

| | |
|---|---|
|  | <p>Prioritise -</p> <p>As exams get nearer, time to revise gets less so it's important to be really clear about, not just the subject, but the particular topic you need to crack.</p> <p>Don't worry about lack of time in just 10 minutes you can usefully revise some things that you need to know for the exam.</p> <p>Get rid of distractions, (TV, MUSIC for some, YOUR PHONE unless you can be disciplined enough not to check it every 2 minutes) then set a timer and do short bursts of concentrated work.</p> <p>Then repeat of course - 10 minutes is unlikely to work!!</p> |
|  | <p>Focus</p> <p>Don't spend ages just reading large junks of text -it's rarely effective.</p> <p>Ditch the books and make notes on post-it notes or pieces of paper or highlight important points in pages of notes that you might have.</p> <p>The LOOK COVER WRITE CHECK method is terrible for spelling (we are better to decode than memorise) BUT for committing facts or dates etc to memory it can work.</p> <p>Make spider grams to collect important points about a topic on one sheet.</p> <p>The act of writing will help you to remember.</p> <p>But don't get caught up in making all your notes colour co-ordinated and pretty!!</p> |
|  | <p>Be Active</p> <p>Sitting in one place for any length of time is rarely helpful when you are trying to revise so try going for a walk, (with post it notes in pocket) or try explaining what you've just learned to a parent or sibling (if they don't understand it doesn't matter it's the fact of you rehearsing what you've learned by saying it that counts). Even moving to another room can be helpful. In fact leaning certain things in certain locations can be another 'cue' for memory. Even associating things with particular smells can help.</p> |
|  | <p>Surround yourself with what you need to know</p> <p>If you have written stuff on notes then put them up around the house - even when you are not formally revising you might see an important fact while making a peanut butter sandwich and think 'Oh yes I remember that'.</p> <p>You can even have stuff posted all round your room and reminders when you brush your teeth etc.</p> |
|  | <p>Answer questions</p> <p>It's so easy to think we can remember things and even convince ourselves that we can so actually answering a question from a past paper or the questions in revision books - it's really one of the acid tests and when we actually have to write it down then check the answers it can be a great reality check</p> |
|  | <p>Stay Calm</p> <p>Even if you know you could have done more - that isn't an excuse for not doing anything now. I know loads of students who have revised just the right things, literally the day of the exam. If you get very stressed try some mindfulness exercises you can find some here http://attunededucation.com/2017/03/14/4-mindful-exercises-to-try-today/</p> <p>Also make</p> <p>GOOD LUCK</p> |