

Preparing for GCSE examinations

The next few months are critical for your son in preparing for his GCSE examinations. He should have started revision for his trial exams which begin on **Monday 3rd December 2018**. At this stage pupils should be finalising their revision notes and moving onto the other revision strategies such as past exam questions, mind maps and revision cards. Please encourage your son to work hard for these trial exams because they provide an excellent learning opportunity to both review the material and fine tune exam skills. We recognise that this is a very stressful time for pupils but if we encourage them to prepare well for trial exams they are much better equipped to deal with the stress of the final exams which begin in May.

We will support pupils in the following ways:

- Teachers will reduce the amount of homework during November to allow pupils to spend longer on their revision
- Mr Kidd has identified students that need additional support; these pupils will be mentored by a member of teaching staff
- Individual departments are putting together programmes which involve review lessons and sixth form mentoring sessions
- All departments will give work that will require the review of previous module/units, mainly after the Christmas break, together with specific revision advice

General advice about revision

A landmark paper was released a few years ago in which revision techniques were analysed for their effectiveness. The paper is technical and rather lengthy (use Dunlosky in a search engine to find) but two key techniques identified as very effective also appear to be very pertinent in preparing for terminal assessment. They are:

- **Practice testing** – this is the regular testing of revised material. Any revision that is eventually tested will be learnt more effectively. Building in simple tests for your son using exam specifications/revision guides/websites (such as BBC) will therefore help him learn and retain information
- **Distributed practice** – this is the spreading out of study sessions over time. Many studies have shown that distributing the revision over time is much more effective and leads to long term retention in comparison to mass learning opportunities i.e. cramming. It is human nature to leave revision until the last minute but revisiting core material every 4 to 6 weeks appears ideal for retention of information for exams spaced after 2 years.

Combining the two techniques is therefore a very effective way to revise but requires careful planning. It is suggested that core material studied in Year 10 should be identified and summarised. This material, kept in a revision folder for example, should be revisited every half term, then tested. If problems become evident this planned approach gives time for advice to be sought from the class teacher.

Detailed below is an outline of the assessment regime for the core curriculum together with specific revision advice for that particular subject.

English Language

The AQA GCSE course is now 100% exam-based, with no coursework or controlled assessment.

There are **two** exam papers, both assessing reading and writing skills in different ways:

Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing

Assessed by written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes | 80 marks | 50% of GCSE

Section A: Reading | 40 marks | 25%

Students read one unseen literature fiction text and answer the following questions:

- 1 short form question | identify and interpret information | **4 marks**
- 1 longer form question | language analysis | **8 marks**
- 1 longer form question | structural analysis | **8 marks**
- 1 extended question | evaluating texts critically | **20 marks**

Section B: Writing | 40 marks | 25%

Students are offered a choice of two tasks – either descriptive or narrative writing – and must produce one extended writing question | **24 marks for content + 16 marks for technical accuracy.**

Paper 2: Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives

Assessed by written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes | 80 marks | 50% of GCSE

Section A: Reading | 40 marks | 25%

Students read two unseen linked texts - one non-fiction text and one literary non-fiction text and answer the following questions:

- 1 short form question | identify and interpret information | **4 marks**
- 1 longer form question | select and synthesise evidence from different texts | **8 marks**
- 1 longer form question | language analysis | **12 marks**
- 1 extended question | compare writers' ideas and perspectives | **16 marks**

Section B: Writing | 40 marks | 25%

Students are given one extended writing task - to present a viewpoint | **24 marks for content + 16 marks for technical accuracy.**

Revision

Revision materials, past papers and sample answers are available on O365 **STU_English** (identifiable by the "I Love English logo"), including a glossary technical terms that students will need to memorise.

An email link to the revision pack specifically for the Mock exams in December is sent to every boy in Year 11.

The best preparation for English Language is to practise completing reading and writing tasks in the exam format, under timed conditions.

When purchasing revision guides, students are advised to make sure the guide is for 'AQA' GCSE English Language 9-1 (2015 onwards)

English Literature

The new AQA GCSE course which is now 100% exam-based, with no coursework or controlled assessment.

There are **two** exam papers, assessing different literary texts and skills.

Paper 1: Shakespeare and the 19th-century novel

Assessed by written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes | 64 marks | 40% of GCSE

Section A

Shakespeare: students will answer one question on their play of choice. They will be required to write in detail about an extract from the play and then to write about the play as a whole | **34 marks**

Section B

The 19th-century novel: students will answer one question on their novel of choice. They will be required to write in detail about an extract from the novel and then to write about the novel as a whole | **30 marks**

Paper 2: Modern texts and poetry

Assessed by written exam: 2 hours 15 minutes | 96 marks | 60% of GCSE

Section A

Modern texts: students will answer one essay question from a choice of two on their studied modern prose or drama text | **34 marks**

Section B

Poetry: students will answer one comparative question on one named poem printed on the paper and one other poem from their chosen anthology cluster | **30 marks**

Section C

Unseen poetry: Students will answer one question on one unseen poem and one question comparing this poem with a second unseen poem | **24 marks + 8 marks**

Revision

Revision materials, past papers and sample answers are available on O365 **STU_English** (identifiable by the "I Love English" logo), including a glossary technical terms and quotation lists that students will need to memorise.

An email link to the revision pack specifically for the Mock exams in December is sent to every boy in Year 11.

All exams are now "closed book" which means set texts cannot be taken into the exam hall. Therefore, the emphasis on memorising quotations and details of plot, theme and character is far more important than it once was.

In preparing for these exams, the boys need to re-read their set texts several times and to have a close understanding of major themes and characters. Teachers will provide revision materials and exam questions will be practised in class under timed conditions, and set as independent tasks to complete at home. Strong answers will explore how language and structure is used to create particular effects, and select quotations carefully to support ideas. A knowledge of context will be used relevantly too.

When purchasing revision guides, students are advised to make sure the guide is for 'AQA' GCSE English Literature 9-1 (2015 onwards)

English Mock Exam Seasons and Papers:

As a result of the number of English examinations, there are **two** Mock exam seasons in English.

Mock Season 1 in December of Year 11 covers ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 2 and ENGLISH LITERATURE PAPER 1

Mock Season 2 before Easter of Year 11 covers ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 1 and ENGLISH LITERATURE PAPER 2

Mathematics

Set 1 Pupils will be taking the OCR Free standing Mathematics Qualification. This is assessed by a single two hour examination.

Pupils in sets 2-4 are studying AQA Maths GCSE (8300). This consists of 3 papers each 1.5 hours long. Paper 1 is a non-calculator paper, papers 2 and 3 are calculator.

There are plenty of revision resources on STU Maths (KS4 folder) including past papers and weekly revision tasks.

Pupils can also use their Login for the MyMaths website to access online tutorials and exercises. We also recommend two websites for revision: www.mathsgenie.co.uk and corbettmaths.com.

Any revision guide for AQA Mathematics can be used to support your revision. We recommend Collins GCSE 9-1 Maths Higher All-in-One Revision and Practice book.

To support all pupils we have 6th form Mathematics prefects in M5 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday lunchtimes to answer any question you may have on homework, revision or classwork.

Science

Chemistry

Chemistry is assessed at the end of the course via two 1hr 45 minute papers.

Paper 1 covers the syllabus units 1-5; 6-10 are covered in Paper 2.

Each paper consists of a mixture of multiple choice, structured, close short answer and open response type questions. 100 marks per paper.

The students are assigned a grade from 4-9 based upon the total mark from these two papers (Grades 1-5 are covered by a Foundation papers that we do not expect to enter our students for.)

As a rough guide, last year a Grade 9 was awarded for scores higher than 150/200. This is likely to increase and so is included for guidance only.

Within both papers are questions based upon the practical skills the students learn throughout their GCSE course. There is no longer any coursework or practical component separate from the exam papers.

For details about the subject content then please refer to the AQA Chemistry syllabus(8462).

Physics –

Specification: AQA GCSE 8463.

Students will sit two 1 hour 45 minute papers, each worth 50% of the marks. Both papers are composed of multiple choice, structured, closed short answer and open response type questions.

Topics 1-4 are assessed in paper 1

Topics 5-8 are assessed in paper 2

Topics:

1. Energy
2. Electricity
3. Particle model of matter
4. Atomic structure
5. Forces
6. Waves
7. Magnetism and electromagnetism
8. Space physics

The specification can be found on the AQA website and students should read it very carefully when revising. There are also a large number of publications mainly from cgp, Collins and Letts. These consist of: sets of practice papers, revision guides, workbooks grade 1-9, workbooks aimed at higher grades 8-9 and of course text books. With this being only the second year of the examinations for this specification, the practice papers and workbooks are of particular importance.

Biology –

AQA GCSE Biology specification 8461

There are 8 major subject areas in the course

1. Cell biology
2. Organisation
3. Infection and response
4. Bioenergetics
5. Homeostasis and response
6. Inheritance, variation and evolution
7. Ecology
8. Key ideas

How it's assessed

Topics 1-4 are assessed in paper 1

Written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes

100 marks

50% of GCSE

Multiple choice, structured, closed short answer and open response

Topics 5-8 are assessed in paper 2

Written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes

100 marks

50% of GCSE

Multiple choice, structured, closed short answer and open response

Within both papers there are some questions based upon the practical skills the students learn throughout their GCSE course. There is no longer any coursework or a practical exam.

Revision materials

Powerpoints from all lessons are available on Office 365

Students are provided with past paper questions during lessons and through each end of topic test.

Students have access to an online version of the textbook we use and other resources through their Kerboodle account.

Seneca learning is a free on line resource that is very useful for revision.

The AQA website has a limited number of resources for students.

Revision guides are available from major publishers such as CGP and can be found in retailers such as Waterstones, WH.Smith and on Amazon.

GCSE Combined Science: Trilogy (8464)

There are two “Dual Award” or Combined Science Syllabuses - Trilogy (which is taught at AGSB) and Synergy which is not. The syllabus, past ad specimen papers and other related materials can be found on www.aqa.org.co.uk

Students study 2/3 of the Biology, Chemistry and Physics syllabuses and at the end of year 11 are assessed with 2 x 1h 15min papers of 70 marks in each Science (6 papers in all).

Pupils will be awarded a paired grade; e.g. 9-9, 8-9, 8-8 to reflect their performance over all 6 papers. In Summer 2018 a 9-9 was awarded for 289/420, 69%.

All papers have questions requiring recall and application of knowledge and upon the practical skills that the students learned throughout their GCSE course. There is no longer any coursework or practical exam.

Topics covered are:

Biology paper 1 topics 1–4: Cell Biology; Organisation; Infection and response; and Bioenergetics.

Biology paper 2 topics 5–7: Homeostasis and response; Inheritance, variation and evolution; and Ecology.

Chemistry paper 1 topics 8–12: Atomic structure and the periodic table; Bonding, structure, and the properties of matter; Quantitative chemistry; Chemical changes; and Energy changes.

Chemistry paper 2 topics 13–17: The rate and extent of chemical change; Organic chemistry; Chemical analysis; Chemistry of the atmosphere; and Using resources.

Physics paper 1 topics 18–21: Energy; Electricity; Particle model of matter; and Atomic structure.

Physics paper 2 topics 22–24: Forces; Waves; and Magnetism and electromagnetism

The Key to Successful Revision



1. Buy a file for each subject.
2. Download specifications and use to produce topic lists for each subject. Use this list as the first column of a table with at least 6 blank columns next to it (see appendix 1). *This is not easy to do but the process is worthwhile because it will organise your thoughts and allow you to track your own progress.*
3. Print out the table and specifications and put in the front of your file for each subject
4. Produce notes on each of the topics from the sources recommended by your teacher E.g exercise book and text book. *Do not use just a revision guide (not the standard that you need to get the top marks). (See appendix 2 for an example)*
5. Once notes have been completed you can then do the more varied and interesting revision techniques (see appendix 3).

All of this can be completed at any time during your GCSE course

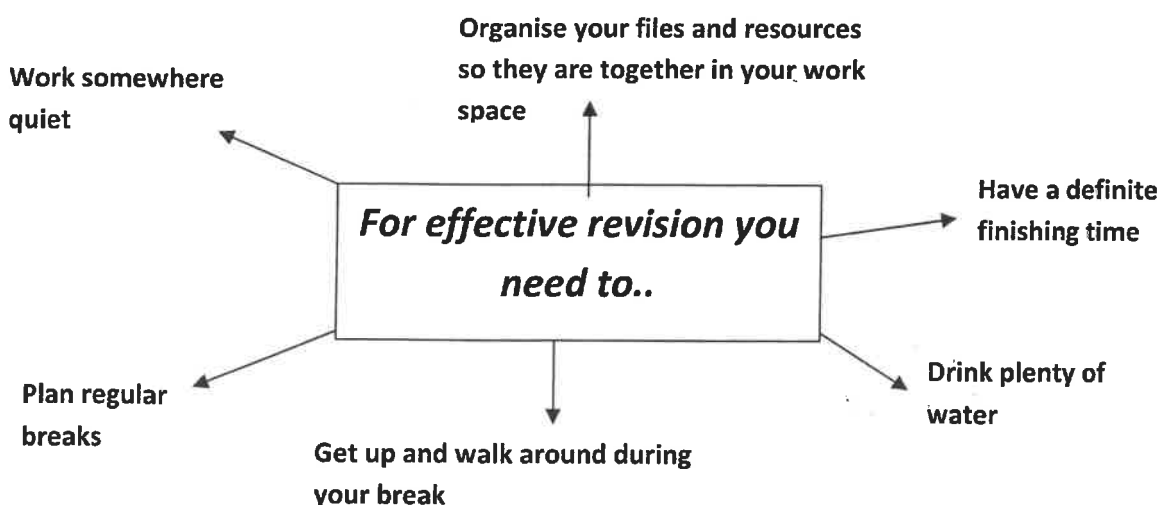
In the run up to your GCSEs

(Guideline 4-6 weeks before mocks, 8-10 weeks before GCSE)

1-2 hours per night and a few hours on each day at the weekend)

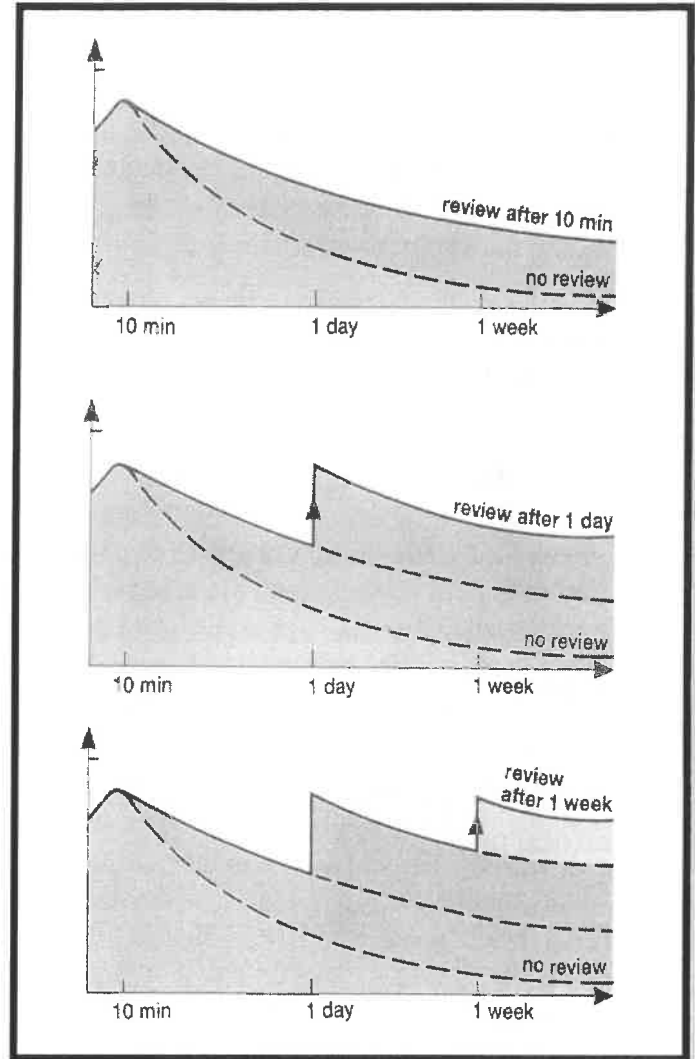
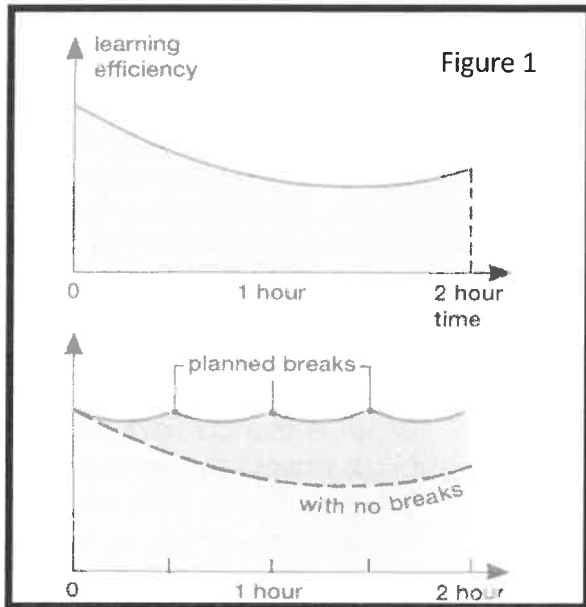
6. This is when your revision should become much more active, the more you make your brain think the better your revision is. You should review everything three times (minimum). You can choose from any of the following: (see appendix 3)

Models, podcasts, storyboards, mind maps, concept maps, walk and talk, exam questions, teaching someone else, quizzes.



How to manage your time effectively

- Our brains remember the beginning and end of revision sessions and so you should create more by having short breaks
- Breaks should be proportionate to the study e.g. 3-4 minute break every 20 minutes



Reviewing information is important...

- If you learn something new, in general it will already start fading in your mind after a few hours (unless it is particularly exciting). However, if you revise it again in the next four hours, it will take about 24 hours before it starts to fade. Revise it in the next 24 hour period and it will last for four days, then one and a half weeks, then one month, and so on (figure 2).

How does the brain work?

Each cell in the brain is connected to around 10,000 others.

So the total number of connections in your brain is about 1000 trillion.

Your brain works best when:

- *We can link what we are learning to what we already know*
- *We can attach an emotion to what we are learning*
- You can see where your learning fits into the 'bigger picture'

