



SHSB Guide to Key Stage 4 for students and parents

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WELCOME TO KEY STAGE 4

This guide is designed to give information to help students and parents excel throughout Key Stage 4. GCSEs can be a scary time, so it is important to hit the ground running to maximise potential.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Parents Use the parents' section to understand vital information about being at Key Stage 4

Then read the student's section with your son so that are both in agreement about how to approach the next two years.

Students Read everything about revision and examination preparation with your parents and start early!

PARENTS' SECTION

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR SON

Many of your sons have already made significant progress in their GCSEs. Some have already achieved GCSE module results – outstanding achievements by any standards.

As a school we have employed a range of resources to further support your child, including after school revision classes in various subject areas, mentoring and access to departmental staff outside of lessons.

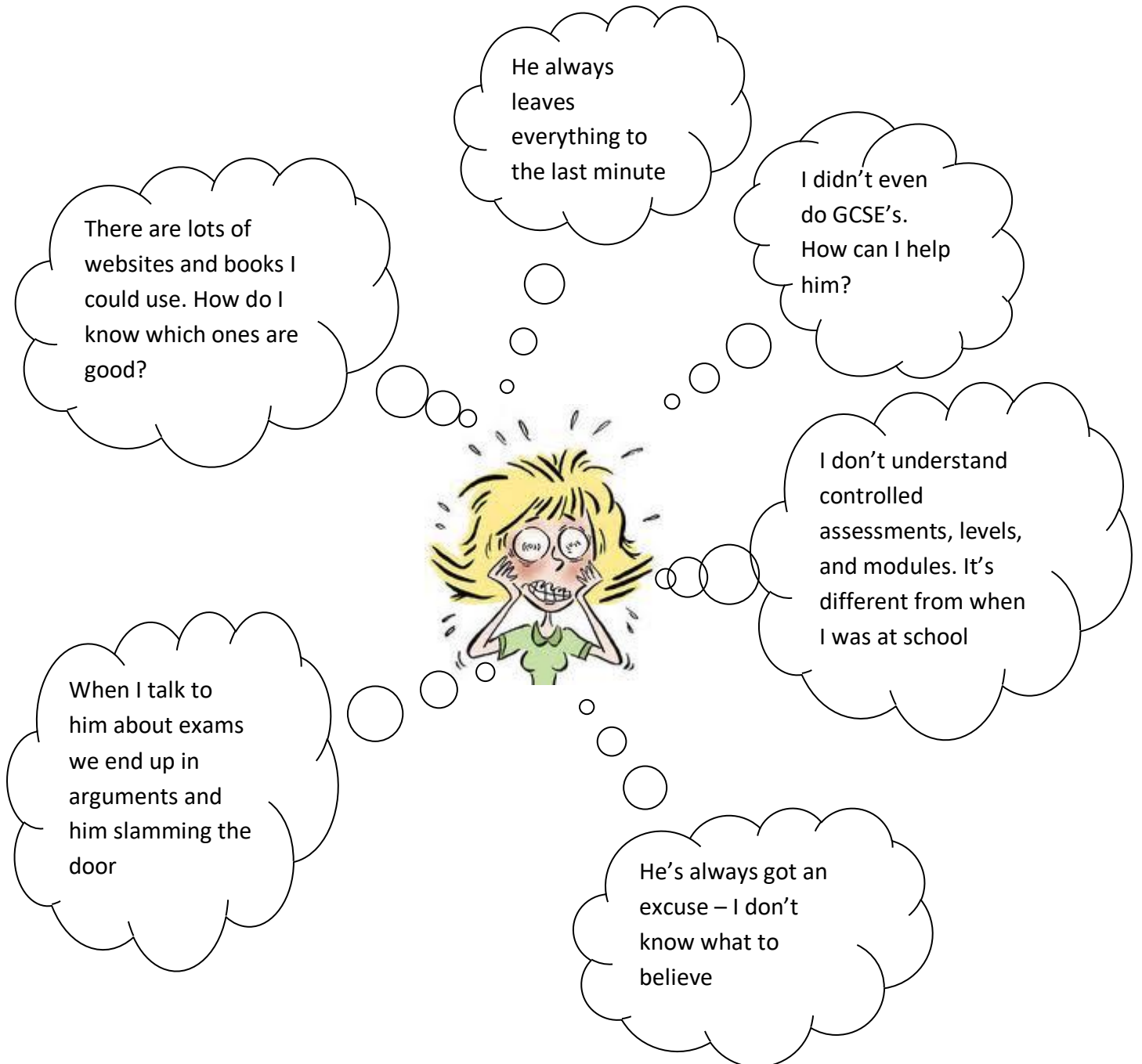
Education experts say that the key factors for success in examinations are hard work and determination. Pupils achieve the highest results when parents are supportive and place a high priority on education as the ladder to success in later life. These parents insist on children doing their homework and revision, and striving as hard as they can.

This booklet is designed to inform you of all the opportunities available to your child in order to support them through the stages of their GCSE examinations. Tips on how to help with revision and examinations are incorporated within it.

GCSE examination dates will be published to your sons in Year 11. These must be noted if your son is to have an organised approach to his studies. Some departments have set early deadline dates for controlled assessments and coursework. If your son misses these, he will find himself overloaded with work to be handed in by the final date and consequently will fail to produce work which reflects his true ability. It is essential that your son revises for all modular and mock exams as they are excellent preparation for the Year 11 exams. Together with coursework grades they will be used to confirm predicted grades.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

The most common frustrations for parents.....



CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter examination years, known in school as Key Stage 4, Years 10 and 11. It is confusing to get your head around exams, modules, controlled assessments, entry tiers and practise assessments. The exam system has changed greatly over the past few years and is still continuing to change. Sometimes it feels like it is just best to let the teaching experts at school to get on with it.

But your involvement in these crucial exam years can make an enormous difference, sometimes the difference between an 8 and a 9.

Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a study in 2003. The campaign for learning found that parental involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between A (8) and also-ran at GCSE. (TES, 10 October 2003)*

Recent research confirms that parental involvement is a stronger predictor of academic success than socio-economic status, even when controlling for income and parental education.

Systematic reviews in the 2020s show that active parental engagement can narrow socio-economic status-based achievement gaps, often more so than improvements in income or schooling alone. (Pegem Journal (2022) review)

The good news is you don't have to become experts in all your son's subjects or become a super-parent giving up your own life and responsibilities. This booklet aims to help your son meet the demands of the exam years, in partnership with SHSB.

ISN'T IT THE SCHOOL'S JOB TO GET THEM THROUGH THE EXAMS?

Yes, of course. The school provides the expertise and resources to help your son acquire the knowledge skills and understanding to do his best. But these new demands will affect even the most academic pupils. These demands include:

- Being self-motivated
- Asking when they do not understand
- Developing the ability to overcome frustrations
- Organising themselves
- Completing more work at home
- Organising planning their time over longer periods
- Revisions
- Perfecting exam technique

All teenage boys are different. Interest in effort in education is not always on the top of their priority list. Friendships, clothes, social lives, girls, hobbies, doing their hair, X-box and many other things often come first.

Boys also differ in their levels of maturity, their ability to take responsibility for their own learning, organisational skills and motivation.

This is where you come in. You are the expert on your own son and always have been. When you, your son and the school work in partnership, you can be sure your son will achieve the best results possible.



WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A PARENT?

- **Attendance officer:** Please do not book appointments for your child in school hours. Do not let them have any unnecessary time away from school.
- **Attender:** please attend parents' evenings; ask questions of every teacher as to how you can best support your son at home.
- **Stationery shop:** provide tools for homework, a quiet space for revision. Ban TV and Xbox use when necessary.
- **Banker:** provide tools and revision guides.
- **Study buddy:** show an interest in their subjects, test them on it. "You can't have pudding" till you answer this question etc.
- **Entertainments officer:** find out about TV programmes, theatre productions, films, exhibitions relevant to your son's learning and enjoy them together.
- **Sounding board and advisor:** help your son to break down tasks so they are more manageable.
- **Go between:** ask the school questions you know your son won't.

ATTENDANCE

Government Statistics show there is a link between attendance and punctuality and results at GCSE. We ask, therefore, for your support in ensuring that your son attends school regularly and is punctual. Parents should encourage their son's good attendance at all times.

Results show that poor attendance significantly impacts on attainment. Every day lost in attendance reduces your son's chance of achieving at their best. Below shows the impact of days lost nationally.

95% attendance might sound good but it impacts significantly on your son's chances of achieving well! Every day counts!

% Attendance	% of cohort on this attendance attaining 5+ Grades 5-9 nationally	Number of days missed
97%	84%	7.5 or less
95%	68%	10 or less
93%	57%	15 or less
90%	28%	20 or less
88%	Not available	21 or less

What is the most important thing you can do to support your son?

Ensure they attend school. Every boy has a target of 100%. Research has shown that achievement is directly linked to attendance. Pupils with a high level of attendance invariably perform better in class and in examinations.

Holidays in term time

Holidays in term time should be avoided as an unnecessary absence. If there is an important reason why you want to take your son out of school you must seek the permission of the Head teacher. However be prepared to have your request turned down.

Any pupil taken out of school without permission will have the absences recorded in the register as unauthorised. It is important to remember that employers and colleges look at a pupil's school attendance record when they are considering an application.

Lateness

Pupils who are habitually late miss more school than they might expect. It may be surprising to hear that being 5 minutes late every day actually costs students around 3 full school days of education over the course of an academic year. The minutes add up quickly so being on time in the morning and moving in between lessons promptly is essential for high achievement.



SIXTH FORM ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

You will no doubt be aware that GCSE grading is based on a numerical system. Consequently, to be able to take up his place in the Sixth Form, the published admissions criteria indicate your son must achieve the following in his GCSE performance:

- *Applicants will need to accrue at least 52 points from their 8 best GCSE grades (where numerical grades are scored at face value). Grades below 6 do not contribute to this points score. Short course GCSEs may be included within this calculation.*
- *Applicants must achieve at least GCSE Grade 5 in English and Mathematics.*
- *Applicants must achieve at least GCSE Grade 6 in subjects to be taken at AS Level (or, in the case of new subjects, in related subject areas).*

In simple terms, he needs his best 8 GCSE scores to add to 52 points, with anything below a 6 not counting towards the score. This means four GCSEs at Level 7 and four GCSEs at Level 6 will be enough to enter the Sixth Form.

Your son will also have a priority place within our Sixth Form, as long as he meets the above requirements.

To help you understand the new numbering system and how it compares to the system of old, please see the below information from OfQual.

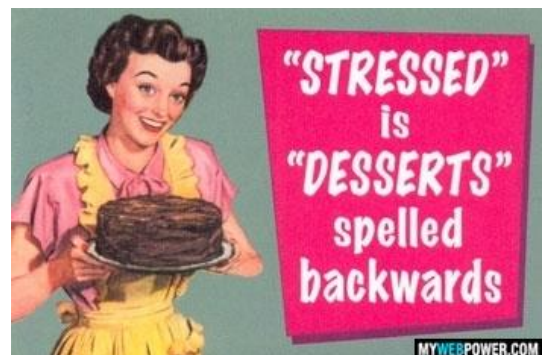
Old grades	New grades
A*	9
A	8
B	7
C	6 5 STRONG PASS 4 STANDARD PASS
D	3
E	2
F	1
G	1
U	U

HOW CAN PARENTS/CARERS HELP THEIR CHILDREN?

Your son will be supported with revision skills and strategies through the school programme. However your awareness and mentoring of them work at home will help to develop these skills. Listed below are some strategies, which you may find helpful.

PLANNING WORK REDUCES STRESS

- Pupils should make a list of what they have to do.
- Find out the dates of the exams (including Modular and end of year exams, coursework and deadlines) and make an examination timetable.
- Draw up a timetable for revision for Modular now and for summer exams later. This will help your son to know what they need to do and when to do it. It also helps them to enjoy life.
- Every subject should be included in the revision plan. Remember that some modular exams take place and these will contribute to the final GCSE grades.
- Get your son into the habit of working and revising at set times.
- Make sure that your son has regular breaks between revision sessions.
- Pupils work most effectively in a structured and quiet environment; switch off the radio and TV as this will help concentration. Your son should not be disturbed until the revision period is finished.
- If it is not possible to find a quiet area to revise at home, the school library is an ideal place to go. There is also a homework club with access to the teachers and there are further opportunities at lunchtimes.
- Make sure that your son sets aside time for relaxation, e.g. an hour each evening in the week and an evening at the weekend. Plan a treat for these times!



AVOIDING STRESS

It is acknowledged that public examinations are a very stressful period in a young person's life. The reasons for stress are varied and include: loneliness, fear of failure, over work, pressure from parents and others. Signs of stress are often shown when your child: -

- wants to be alone;
- has difficulties in sleeping;
- loses the ability to concentrate;
- becomes very emotional;
- loses self-esteem and feels depressed;
- becomes short tempered;
- suffers from headaches.

HELPFUL STRATEGIES

There are a number of strategies that can help your child cope with stress. You may suggest the following to help them feel more confident.

- Establish a routine and stick to it.
- Get plenty of exercise.
- Take regular breaks.
- Build variety into your revision programme to avoid boredom.
- Practise past papers to build confidence.
- Good attendance helps to secure success.
- Research shows that simply talking to your child about their work can make a difference of 20% in exam results.

Above all good food, plenty of sleep, a sympathetic ear and a keen interest in what they are studying will help your child feel confident and supported as they face the challenge of GCSEs.

If you have concerns, talk to us as we have many support options available.

THE BEST THINGS TO DO FROM NOW:

- Monitor revision – get your son to explain or show you his work.
- Talk to him about possible career options to provide motivation for his subjects.
- Go through the next section of the book with him and help him understand what effective revision looks like.
- Help him to plan a revision timetable using the document later in this booklet.
- Keep in touch with the school and let us know of any concerns you have or events that may impact on your son's learning.

STUDENT SECTION

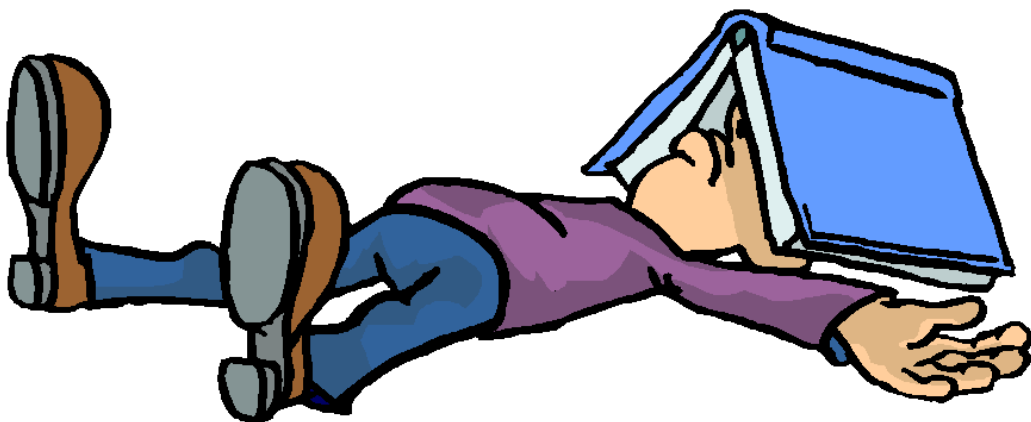
REVISION – HOW TO REVISE MORE EFFECTIVELY

THE FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESS

Just like many things in life, learning is much easier when you take it one step at a time.

It is a simple process. In order to learn anything efficiently, you need to:

1. Understand it
2. Condense it
3. Memorise it
4. Review it



SETTING UP A REVISION TIMETABLE

THE STUDYING ENVIRONMENT

The following is a list of simple tips which might seem like common sense - but it is all too easy to neglect them when settling down to a study session. Don't make this mistake!

- Work at a desk. Preferably large enough to spread out all of the required study materials for the topics at hand. Even a small desk is better than the floor or your lap!
- Sit in a comfortable chair. Studying requires concentration and discipline. Do not make it harder by making yourself uncomfortable
- Ensure that you have good lighting and ventilation and, if needs be, a fan or a heater. These all add to your general level of comfort
- Have some water available. Keeping your brain hydrated will ensure that your work is completed efficiently
- No Distractions! When you study, make sure that the time spent is being spent wisely. Keep video games, TV and social networking for after your study sessions (or, if you must, during your breaks).

TERM TIME

You will have to fit in your revision with the school work that you are still doing. At this stage, smaller amounts of revision are more likely to succeed.

Aim to do 15 minutes revision each on two subjects a night for four out of the five week-days. This gives you 8 slots. You can fill these with either one subject each, covering all your subjects. Alternatively, you might prefer to concentrate more on the subjects you know you have more trouble with or that have a higher amount of content.

At the weekend, you should spend 5 minutes reviewing what you did in each 15 minute session during the week. That makes two 20 minute sessions (do one on Saturday and one on Sunday). All you need to do in the session is check your understanding or memory of what you covered in the 15 minute revision session; you should not have to relearn it. If you have forgotten it, make a note to go over it again next time you revise that subject.

The review is important because you must embed the information in your brain so that you don't forget it. It helps to transfer the information from short term memory to long term memory. Without the reviews you will find it harder to remember the information until the exam.

HOLIDAYS AND STUDY LEAVE

Either get a calendar, or make your own, to cover the time period from now to the exams. You can copy the blank timetable from these notes. Divide each day into six 1-hour sessions: 2 in the morning, 2 in the afternoon and 2 in the evening. Only work 4 out of the 6 sessions on these study days i.e. morning/afternoon or morning/evening or afternoon/evening. Each session should be about 45-60 minutes with a short break between the two sessions. You will also need about 20-30 minutes for two days at the end of your week for reviewing.

It is important not to overstretch yourself and get exhausted. You will not be able to perform at your best if that happens. Therefore, plan your rest days or days when you are unavailable to work e.g. going away.

If you are not one of those lucky people who have a photographic memory and can remember everything you have read, you will need to revise for your exams. Each year you will have 'revised' for numerous tests and common tests. Ask yourself, how successful were you? Now multiply that work by 10 or 20 and do it all in a few months. It seems like a huge task. And it is. But you can do a lot to help yourself make it easier....it's not going to be easy.... just easier. The information in this booklet will help you to get organised and stay in control.

Make sure that you start to revise early enough in the year. Make an action plan: this would change depending upon whether it is term time or Easter holiday or if you are on study leave. When you have a plan, you are in charge of your work and you are more likely to stay in control. This will reduce the stress you feel and make you less panicky.

Remember you owe it to yourself to be as prepared as you can be for your exams. This means putting in an appropriate amount of effort. If you put in the minimum amount of effort, you will get the minimum grade out. So if you would like to take a few days off hanging around with your mates, think if that is something that would be better done after your exams and your time used

for revision. Remember you should aim to work for 2 out of the 6 sessions in a day. That gives you plenty of rest and relaxation time.

Make a list of the topics you still need to revise for each subject. Work out how many revision sessions you have in a particular subject, and divide up the work into that many sessions. For example, you can divide your chemistry into 12 topics; say you devote 2 sessions a week plus an extra weekend session in 2/5 weekends to chemistry revision. That gives you your 12 sessions.

Plan a week at a time. Fill in which sessions you are going to use for which subjects/topics. You may find that some subjects need more time and that some don't need as much. That's all part of the planning you are doing now.

Plan reviewing sessions for the week's work at some stage, at the end of the week. Just as you did in the term time timetable. Ideally, as each week passes, you should review the past weeks work. This need only be a quick look - a few minutes' worth - at the condensed revision notes (see below) you have created in your revision sessions. This means that you will remember the work that you revised at the start of your revision and not forgotten it by not looking at it for a month or more.

When making your plan for a week, set realistic targets for yourself. However, once you have done the week's plan, don't think that it has to be followed to the letter. Allow a certain amount of flexibility, particularly at the start as you get used to how it works and how much can be done in a session. If you don't complete a day as planned, don't abandon the timetable and think that it's not going to work. Get back to it the next day. Or change it if necessary. Once you get it working, try to stick to it.

To Do - Chemistry

Acids and alkalis

Rates of reaction

Bonding

Mole calculations

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8 am							
9 am							
10 am							
11 am							
12 pm							
1 pm							
2 pm							
3 pm							
4 pm							
5 pm							
6 pm							
7 pm							
8 pm							

REVISION TECHNIQUES

TEN TOP TIPS

1. Write all homework tasks in your planner.
2. If you don't understand, make sure you ask your teacher.
3. Have an emergency number of a friend from your class.
4. Do your homework as soon as you get home.
5. Try to do your revision with someone.
6. Be aware of learning preferences and how this will impact on how best you revise– i.e. Flash cards or notes etc.
7. Do long term or coursework as soon as possible and identify dates for drafts and reviews.
8. Get holiday homework completed at the start of the holiday.
9. Keep to schedules and plans identified. Make sure you know the deadlines you need to revise.
10. If your workload is really horrible, make sure you tell your form tutor/teacher/head of year for support.

CHUNKING



Chunking is breaking up a big piece of information into smaller chunks rather like steps in a ladder.

It can be used for numbers and words. Often students use bullet points to break up information.

Try to remember this by breaking it up into chunks:

The average person can take in four numbers or words at a time, can concentrate on revision for a maximum of 45 minutes – 1 hour at a time and remembers information best shortly before bedtime.

Chunked:

- Remember 4 words/numbers at a time.
- Revision maximum 45-60 minutes.
- Remember best before bedtime.

MNEMONICS

Mnemonics help you to remember by using short words that stand for something to help you. Here is a Mnemonic for REVISION. Try as hard as you can to remember it.

Rest

Exercise

Variety

Imagination

Structure

Individual

On-going

Not too long

LOCI

Loci is the memory trick of memory masters. It involves thinking about a journey that you know well and the landmarks along the way. You then add in images to help you remember information. (They do not have to be famous, but things that you notice as you go by.)

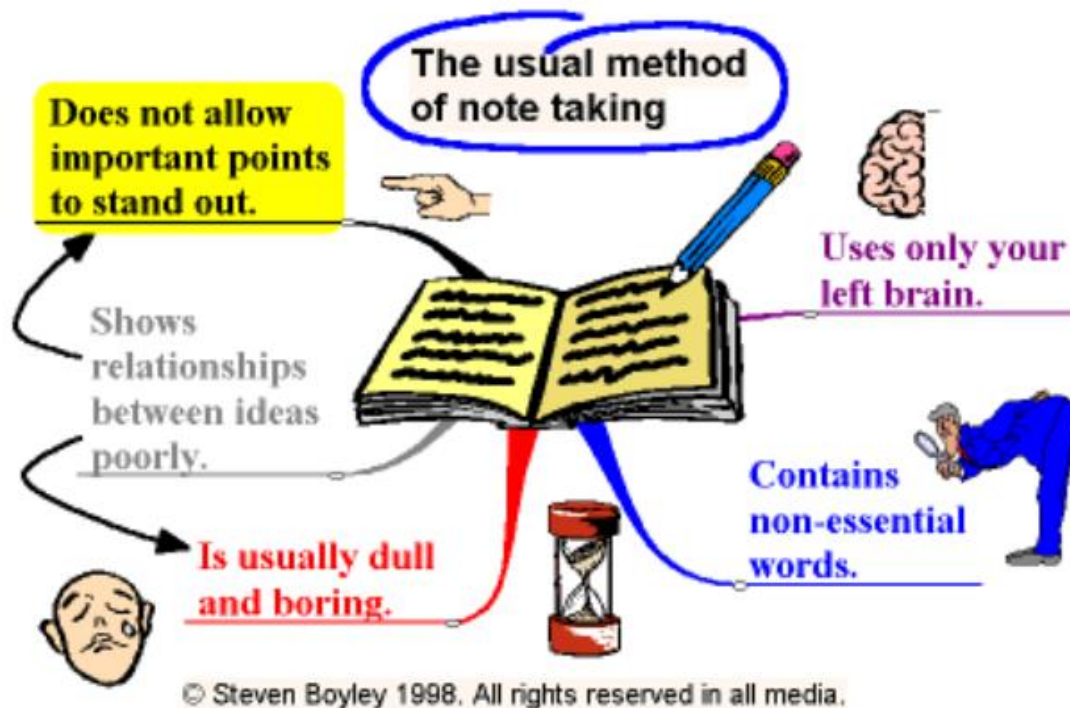
When revising you could do the following:

1. Read through your books
2. If you do not understand something ask somebody.
3. Now choose the memory tricks that work best for you
4. Create posters to help you to organise information
5. Create cards with key points and practice
6. Use past papers to practice answering questions

ASSOCIATION

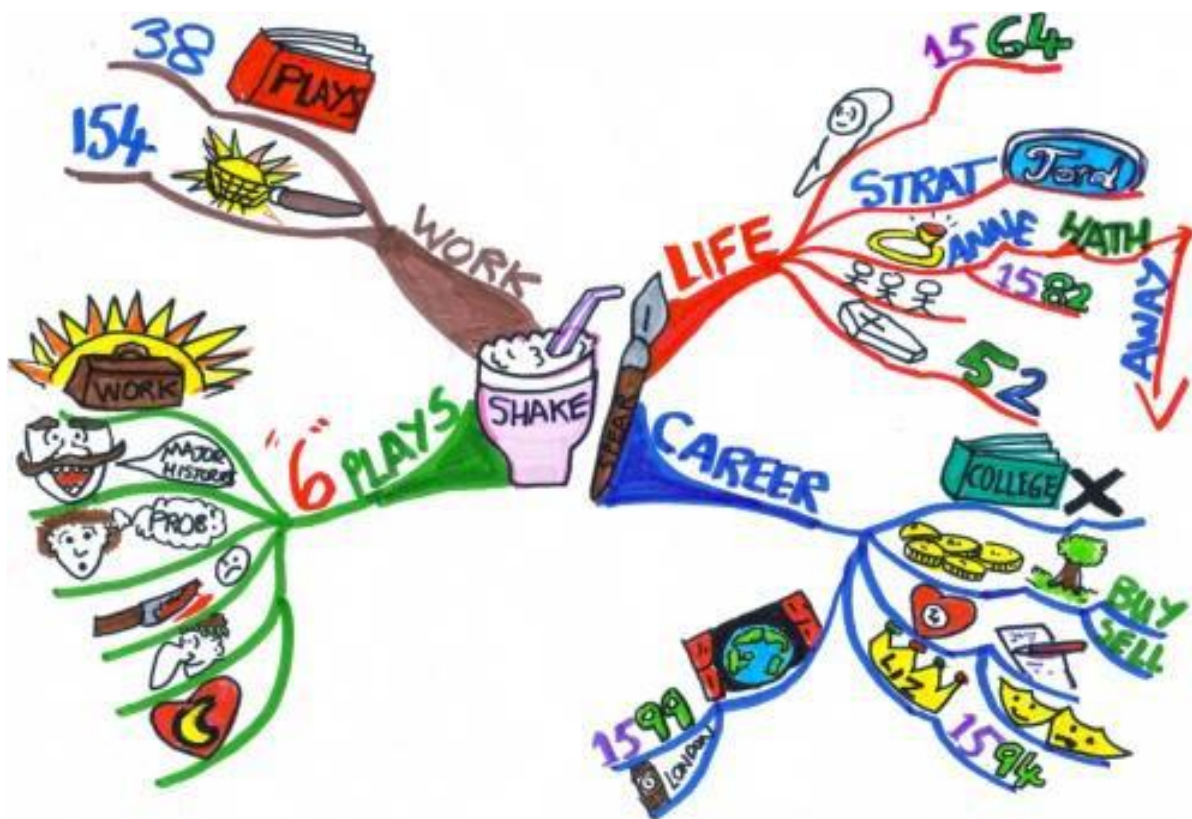
Association helps a lot of people to remember, because it is much more powerful when we use our imagination. The idea is to link objects and ideas to each other in the craziest way possible.

Mind-maps (also called Spidergrams) are good for remembering topics and sub-topics such as characters in a book. On the other hand concept maps are good for remembering items where the order is important such as the storyline (plot).



How to mind map:

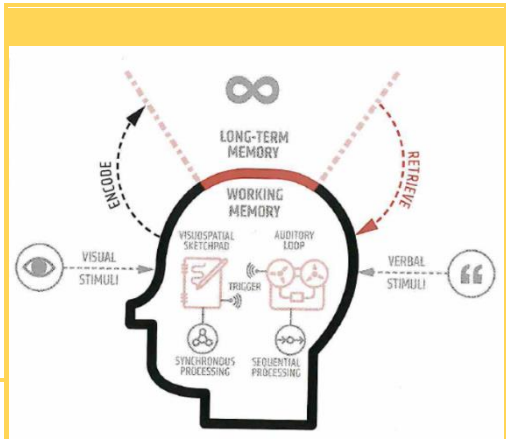
1. Start with the theme in the middle of the page.
2. Then develop your main idea.
3. Each branch must relate to the branch before it.
4. Use only key words and images.
5. Key words must be written along the branches.
6. Printing your key words makes them more memorable.
7. Use highlighters and coloured markers to colour code branches.
8. Make things stand out on the page so they stand out in your mind.
9. Brainstorm ideas. Be creative.
10. Design images you can relate to which will help you remember key information.



DUAL CODING FOR LEARNING/REVISION

WHAT IS IT?

The idea that the brain can process visual stimuli and verbal stimuli at the same time. Verbal stimuli includes written text. This means we can add/use visual stimuli to help increase our understanding of written/spoken words.



HOW TO USE IT?

Visual Aids/Diagrams

Add pictures or diagrams to written notes to improve retention. Pictures can even be used instead of words in some circumstances.

Sketchnote

A more organized form of notetaking whereby rough notes are transformed into arranged graphic representations of the information afterwards.

Graphic Organisers

The most common way that we dual code – this is arranging words in a memorable graphic layout. These include mind-maps, flow charts, venn diagrams, tree diagrams and many more

Icons

Use of given icons across all notes taken can help to link content, increase understanding and minimize time taken creating notes (i.e. less replication of common words/phrases/etc.).

BENEFITS OF DUAL CODING



Direct attention



Trigger prior know



Manage cognitive load



Build schema



Transfer to working



Motivate

BEWARE

Text placed away from diagrams wastes effort splitting attention between the two



BY ROTE

Learning by rote is simply reading the text over and over until you remember it. It is the most basic kind of revision, but without the help of other techniques may not be very effective and it can be very boring. There are a few students with excellent auditory memories, who can learn effectively this way.

Try reading the passage above again and again and see how much you can remember.

Read intelligently

Spend five minutes flipping through a book or your notes looking at headings and summaries. Then attempt to mind map what you have spotted and what you can remember.

Use cards

Write questions on one side and answers on the other. Then get your family to test you. Merely creating the cards will help your recall. You can also use them to test yourself when faced with 'dead' time at bus stops or waiting for someone.

Physical learning

Use the environment Use a different room for each subject.

- Notice aspects of the environment such as the light or feel of the room - how do you feel in that place?
- Attach your notes to the furniture. Notice their location.
- Associate a different location with each subject. Associate furniture, windows, plants and ornaments with particular topics.

Using your clothes

- Associate items of clothing with topics in your learning - a shoe could represent one aspect of foreign policy; each button on a shirt could represent a quotation. Clothes with patterns, pockets and buttons are especially useful.

Using the parts of your body

- Parts of your body are especially helpful as triggers to memory, as your body will be there in the exam room! For example, each hand could represent an essay plan – each finger one major topic; each segment of each finger a principal reference you would use. The fingernails could represent counterarguments; the knuckles could be associated with relevant quotations.

Use motor memory

- Study on the move. If you exercise, associate each movement with something you wish to remember. To refresh the memory, go through the exercise in your mind.
- Writing, drawing and speaking also use motor memory: the fine-muscle sequence is recorded by the brain.

Condense

- Fitting notes onto one side of paper makes them easier to stomach, so rewrite and cut down as you go.

Highlight

- Target key areas using colours and symbols. Visuals help you remember the facts.

Record

- Try putting important points, quotes and formulae on tape. If you hear them and read them, they are more likely to sink in.

Talk

- Read your notes out loud, it's one way of getting them to register.

Test

- See what you can remember without notes, but avoid testing yourself on subjects you know already. Why not ask someone else to test you?

Time

- Do past exam papers against the clock; it's an excellent way of getting up to speed and of checking where there are gaps in your knowledge.

Most students, when faced with a textbook or chapter to study, will 'start at the beginning, read through at the same pace until the end, then stop and put the book away'. This passive approach is a most inefficient way to learn, as it can take longer and leave you bogged down in detail, with no overall grasp of the subject matter. By adopting a more active approach to reading, you can begin to read better and faster within a very short space of time. The PQ2R method has proved to be most successful in this regard. Try it for the remaining weeks of term and see the benefits.

P = Preview Begin your reading task with a quick skim (2-3 minutes) of the text, trying to get an overview of the chapter or text. Look for section headings, illustrative charts and diagrams, signposts or key words. Don't start highlighting text at this point.

Q = Question This is the key to active learning. Look for answers to the basic questions of "Who?", "What?", "Where?", "Why?" and "When?" Identify the main theme or learning point of the particular text.

R = Read Now read the chapter carefully, with these questions in mind. Your mind will be actively looking for answers as you read. Work with a pen and paper, make brief summary notes, look for 'topic sentences' that summarise the most important point in a paragraph or section and highlight them, if necessary. Vary your reading speed - move quickly over lighter, less important material and slow down when you come to a difficult section.

R = Review Always check your understanding of the material by reviewing and testing your recall before putting the text away. Look at the notes you have taken and check that they answer your initial questions. Summarise your findings from this study session.

MAKING YOUR NOTES USEFUL

The purpose of making summary notes on a topic or section is to aid your overall understanding of material, to help you distinguish between what is really important information (depth) and what is merely supporting detail. Reference to the main syllabus topics will help the process of discernment within each subject.

In addition, good summary notes make retrieval of information quicker and easier.

- **Sort out your filing system**
If you haven't already done so, get your subject folders and notes organised immediately. Invest in some ring binders, dividers, plastic pockets, etc. Have a separate folder for each subject (a permanent reference point) and then keep a 'current folder' for managing notes in progress.
- **Less is always more when writing notes, remember they should contain a summary, not an extensive repetition of what is in the textbook. Don't crowd the page. Stick to main headings and sub-headings. Use abbreviations where appropriate. Try to reduce what you need to know on the topic down to one A4 sheet. Once you have an overview, it is easier to fill out the detail.**
- **Make your notes visual. Ensure your notes have a memorable appearance so that you can recall them easily. Use illustrations, diagrams, graphs, colours, and boxes ('a picture is worth a thousand words'). Arrange the material in a logical hierarchy (title, sub-point, explanation, example). Ideally, you should be able to close your eyes in an exam and visualise a particular page of notes.**
- **Beware of transcribing and highlighting! Merely re-writing the text from the book into your notes does not ensure retention. Try to put things in your own words and devise your own examples - this will make the material more meaningful. Only use the highlighter pen AFTER you have previewed and questioned a text, thus ensuring you identify the most important material and you avoid the creation of a fluorescent textbook!**

- 'Save' your notes carefully Practise following the logic of your computer files, when storing information. Think - "Where does this material best fit (subject, section, topic, sub-topic, etc.)?" In this way, you will ensure that it is efficiently processed and easily retrieved both physically (during revision) and mentally (when you need it in an exam).

REVIEW

Looking over a topic every now and then will help to keep it in the memory, taking away the need to cram before exams.

Make a summary of the work and look over it ten minutes later, the next day, the next week and then the next month for a few minutes each time. This reinforces the knowledge learned.

Understanding increases as time spent studying passes. However, the ability to recall things being memorised becomes progressively less efficient as time passes in a study session.

20 minutes is needed for the mind to get into the rhythm and flow of the material. Any more than 40 minutes spent memorising means that memory declines to a point where it is no longer valuable.

The answer in revision lessons therefore is to do 30 minutes with a 5-minute stretch break and then review the topic.

After a one hour memorising session:

10 minutes later revise the topic for 10 minutes

1 day later revise the topic for 5 minutes

1 week later revise the topic for 2-5 minutes

1 month later revise the topic for 2-5 minutes

Before exams revise the topic as required.

Each time, knowledge is reinforced; it enters deeper into the long-term memory and becomes more stable.

DEALING WITH DISTRACTIONS

- "I just start daydreaming".
Become an active learner. Always work with a pen and paper. Focus on a specific task, not a specified time for your study.
- "I can't focus because I'm anxious about the exams".
Try to limit yourself to your immediate concerns, the things you have some control over (preparation for the upcoming revision test) rather than the things you cannot determine (like what questions the examiners will choose for this year's English Lit paper.)
- "I often fall asleep when I'm supposed to be studying".
Try to get to bed on time over the coming weeks. A tired brain is very unproductive. Get some genuine rest at the weekend. Be sure to get regular exercise, even just a walk around the block at night to clear your head.
- "I'm constantly interrupted by other people".
Study in the location most likely to offer peace and quiet. Ask for consideration from family members over the final run up to exams. Never have a TV, phone, computer game, or music system within arm's reach while you are trying to work. Make a rule of not taking phone calls within certain defined periods.
- "I keep thinking of other things while I'm studying".
Divide the study session into smaller, short-range goals which demand your full attention e.g. vocabulary or poetry test. Keep a 'reminder pad' beside you, a little notebook to jot down something that strikes you (someone to call, a job to do, etc.) and deal with it after the study period. Having made a note of it, you can more easily re-focus on your work.

PREPARING FOR EXAMS

TIPS FOR SUCCESS AT GCSE FOR PUPILS!

Listed below are the tips for success from last year's successful candidates at GCSE:

- Be realistic with yourself by tackling the subjects you find difficult, e.g. first, e.g. Maths, Science- and seeking support.
- Follow your homework timetable, which will allocate the most appropriate time for each subject. In addition, you must set aside extra time for completion of coursework.
- Follow the timetable and take regular breaks.
- Plan a Revision Schedule. Cramming only allows you to remember things for a short time. You should be preparing for your End of Year and Modular Exams NOW and using holidays to revise. The grades achieved in these exams will be used as predictions.
- Continuously test yourself with past question papers. (Get these from your teachers).
- Find a quiet and comfortable place to work.
- Eat and drink well to keep up your energy.
- Get appropriate amounts of rest and go to bed at sensible times, and don't work too late.
- Most importantly, be confident with yourself and believe that you can and will get the grades you want.
- AND DO NOT STRESS! But seek help if this becomes an issue.

COUNTDOWN TO THE EXAMS

The week before the exam:

- The week before the exam, you should get plenty of exercise and sleep.
- Refresh your memory on a few of the difficult and essential points.
- Do not overdo it.

The night before the exam:

- It is important to check you have all essential equipment necessary for the exam, e.g. a pen (and a spare), pencils, rulers, calculator, etc.
- Make sure you have your candidate number and centre number.
- Check the exam timetable in order that you are certain of the exam subject and the time you are expected to be in school.
- Avoid cramming or trying to tackle any new material.
- Stop working at least an hour before bed to let your mind relax.
- Have a warm bath.
- Try to get an early night.

The morning of the exam:

- Have a good, healthy breakfast
- Stick to your normal routine
- Use positive self-talk
- Imagine positive situations
- Leave plenty of time for the journey; arriving in a rush will not help you to perform at your best.



EXAM TECHNIQUE

Read the instructions and descriptions (rubric) at the front of the exam. Make sure you know which sections to read and which questions to answer. It will tell you how long you have and how many marks there are for that paper. Follow the instructions carefully.

The examiners are on your side. They are trying to find ways to give you the marks. They are not trying to take away marks from you. However, if you make it like hunting for a needle in a haystack, it is very difficult for the examiners to find anything worth giving a mark to.

One of the most common mistakes is that people don't read the question properly and answer the question they think they read, or wanted to read, not the actual question. As good as the answer may be, if it's not the one to the question, it won't get any marks.

Address the question showing understanding and detailed explanation. You must demonstrate clear thinking and understanding of the topic. A muddled answer is hard to award marks to. Plan your answer. Even if it is jotting down all the key words that you associate with that question, numbering them, and then using them to construct a full explanation. It may help to underline or circle the questioning word (how, why, what, explain, compare, contrast, describe, outline etc.). Also, highlight the key words or concepts mentioned in the question. Doing this gives you a breathing space if you need it, and helps to clarify your thoughts and ideas, so that you can communicate them clearly.

You may not know this, but if you cross out a correct answer and don't replace it with a wrong answer, the examiner can give you credit for it even though it's crossed out. However, if you obliterate the crossed out answer, it can't happen. Use a single line to cross out, so it can still be read. Just in case!

Lay out your answer clearly. Use the space given.

The exam setters have worked out how much space a well laid out answer will take and have put that in the paper. For numerical questions show all your working. Credit will be given for the method even if you don't get the correct answer. It will be possible in most cases to get follow through marks even if

you carry an incorrect answer through, but use the correct method. If you pluck numbers out of the air i.e. don't show how you got them, you cannot get the method marks, and in some cases may not even get the mark for the correct answer.

When you are sitting your exams, you are going to feel nervous (to a greater or lesser degree). This is normal. Use that nervous energy to help you. Don't let it panic you into writing too soon.

In an exam, everyone's writing gets more untidy than it would be normally. However, it must be legible. If the examiner can't read it, it doesn't matter how good the answer is. If you know this is a problem for you. Practise writing out answers. Get someone else to read them to check that it is legible.

- Check with your teacher what is appropriate in their subject.
- If there are, for example, 3 marks, then you must make 3 points to get them.
- Before you answer the question, look at how many marks there are for it.
- Space out the same number of bullet points as marks, over the space given for the answer.
- Write down a point next to each bullet point.
- The advantage in doing this is that it gives you breathing space. It focuses you on making enough points to get all the marks for the question. It makes your communication to the examiner much clearer than a sentence that starts, waffles around a bit and eventually ends not having covered the appropriate number of points because you lost track of what you were doing.

Don't spend too long on any one question at the expense of others. As a rough guide, you should aim to spend as many minutes on a question as there are marks for it. Think, 'a mark, a minute'. This means that you should be working for most of the time that the exam is going on, with a short time at the end for checking your work. If you are really stuck on a question, jot down all the keywords you associate with that topic. Leave it. Move on to the next question. When you have finished, go back to the question that you had trouble with. Look at the words you have written down. See if they help you find the correct answer now.

CLUE WORDS IN EXAM QUESTIONS

Analyse means to show the main ideas and show how they are related and why they are important.

Comment on means to discuss, criticise or explain its meaning as completely as possible.

Compare means to show both the similarities and the differences.

Contrast means to compare by showing the difference.

Criticise means to give your judgement or reasoned opinion or something, showing its good and bad points. It is not necessary to attack it.

Define means to give the formal meaning by distinguishing it from related terms. This is often a matter of giving a memorised definition.

Describe means to write a detailed account or verbal picture in a logical sequence or story form.

Diagram means to make a graph, chart, or drawing. Be sure that you label it and add a brief explanation if it is needed.

Discuss means to describe, giving the details and explaining the pros and cons of it.

Enumerate means to list. Name and list the main ideas one by one and number them.

Evaluate means to give your opinion or some expert's opinion of the truth or importance of a concept. Tell the advantages and disadvantages.

Illustrate means to explain or make clear by concrete examples, comparisons or analogies.

Interpret means to give the meaning using examples and personal comments to make it clear.

Justify means to give a statement of why you think it is so. Give reasons for your statement and conclusion.

List See Enumerate.

Outline means to give a general summary. It should contain a series of main ideas supported by secondary ideas. Omit minor details. Show the organisation of your ideas.

Prove means to show by argument or logic that it is true. (The word 'prove' has a very special meaning in mathematics and physics).

Relate means to show the connections between things telling how one causes or is like another.

Review means to give a survey or summary in which you look at the important parts and criticise where necessary.

State means to describe the main points in precise terms. Be formal. Use brief clear sentences. Omit details or examples.

Summarise means to give a brief, condensed account of the main ideas. Omit details and examples.

Trace means to follow the progress or history of a subject.



ANSWERING EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Scan all the questions.
2. Mark all the questions you could answer.
3. Read these questions carefully.
4. Choose the correct number of questions in each section.
5. Decide on an order: best answers first.
6. Divide up your time, allowing more time for the questions with the most marks.
7. Underline the key words in the question.
8. Plan your answer.
9. Stick to the point of the question.
10. Write your answer.
11. Use the plan at every stage – e.g. every paragraph.
12. Check your answer against the plan. Look out for mistakes.
13. If you have time, re-read the questions and your answers and make any necessary corrections.

PRACTISING OUTPUT

To prepare for an exam, you must practise doing what the exam requires you to do; giving out information, not taking it in! This applies to regular class tests as well as the final exams. Prior to final exams, you will probably have had the benefit of many class tests and some modular exams where the GCSE conditions are simulated for your benefit – you can learn a lot by reflecting honestly on your performance in these tests. You also have the benefit of a wealth of freely available information about the exams. Past exam papers, marking schemes, study guides and examiners' reports are all there to be used.

- **Make use of past papers.**

These should be your constant companion in all revision tasks. For each topic you revise, consult the past questions on this subject and then attempt answers to them. Check your answers, fill in the 'knowledge gaps' where necessary, and file away the correct 'model answer' in your notes for future reference. You will also start to notice any trends in the questions asked.

- **Follow the marking schemes.**

These are an invaluable aid to exam preparation (available online from DfE, AQA, etc.). You can see how the marks are allocated for each question on the paper and what quantity or style of answer is required in each case. This knowledge will greatly inform your revision work and helps to remove the mystique of the exam.

- **Try a dress rehearsal.**

Each exam paper contains its own particular structure and challenge, with varying emphasis on answering style and depth. While much of your ongoing revision will be based on individual topics and questions, it is a very useful exercise to tackle an exam paper in its totality (at least once before summer examinations). It forces you to consider your strategy – the questions you will want to attempt or avoid, the issues of timing, the number of points you will need to make in each part of a question. Having performed this exercise a couple of times, your confidence levels rise as you fix on your strategy for the exam and realise that there can't be any major surprises for you in the summer.

You can largely determine the end result by simply heeding the voice of experience. The job of examiners is to give you marks, not to take them away, but they are powerless to help you if you fall into the most common traps. These are the biggest pitfalls they have identified:

- **Not reading the paper correctly.**
Examiners say that this is one of the most regular and fatal errors. They call it the 'triggered answer'. You have your pre-prepared answer ready but you don't look at the exact terms of the question and therefore supply the wrong information in your answer.
- **Not finishing the paper.**
Mismanaging your time within the exam can easily cost you a full grade. The biggest exam 'crime' is to leave suitable questions un-attempted. Remember: it is much easier to get the first 20% of the marks for any question than the last 5%. Therefore, if you find yourself stuck for time as you struggle through your third answer out of five, do not spend your remaining time extending and perfecting that answer. Instead, move on to questions four and five, even if your attempt is sketched or in point form. If you have answered only three questions instead of five, the highest mark you can get is 60%.
- **Ignoring the marking scheme.**
You must take the marking scheme into account when you allocate time to each question or part of a question. If the marks allotted to a question clearly indicate that a few paragraphs are sufficient, do not write an essay on the subject. Avoid the temptation of writing everything you know about a topic – just give the appropriate amount of information.
- **Repetition.**
Make the point once. There are no extra marks for restating facts, even if you phrase them differently. Examiners say repetition is a very common mistake. It is also a time-waster and an irritant.

- **Missing part of a question.**

Sometimes, part of a question can be carried onto the next page and, in the pressure of the moment, you don't see it. As a consequence you might fail to do a compulsory part of a question or miss out on the chance to take an option that would have suited you better. Always take time to familiarise yourself with the whole paper before you start answering it.

- **Irrelevant quotations.**

In literary subjects, don't use irrelevant quotations you may have learned off, as it only irritates the examiner.

- **Rough work.**

Include your rough work with your exam script – you might get some credit for any planning, formulae or calculations contained therein.

CAREERS

We run a whole range of activities over the next two years focused on Post-16 choices. This includes a tutor time programme about choosing options for A-level or alternative areas and places of study; a careers interview to inform them of requirements to enter their chosen fields; and access to UniFrog, a dedicated careers system with a whole host of information on Post-16, A-Level and University options.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Over the next two years, it is likely your son will feel stressed and anxious about his exams. Whilst this is normal, we also accept that for some of our students there will be concerns about their welfare and we are here every step of the way.

If you have any concerns at all, please do not hesitate to get in touch through enquiries@shsb.org.uk and we will use one of our extensive network of support services to help you and your son through the next two years.

We have a plethora of services available, including a Mental Health Support Team, Counselling services and other council services available to cover every need.

Finally: *Good luck from the Key Stage 4 Team*