



# The *Parents'* and Carers' Revision and Exam Guide

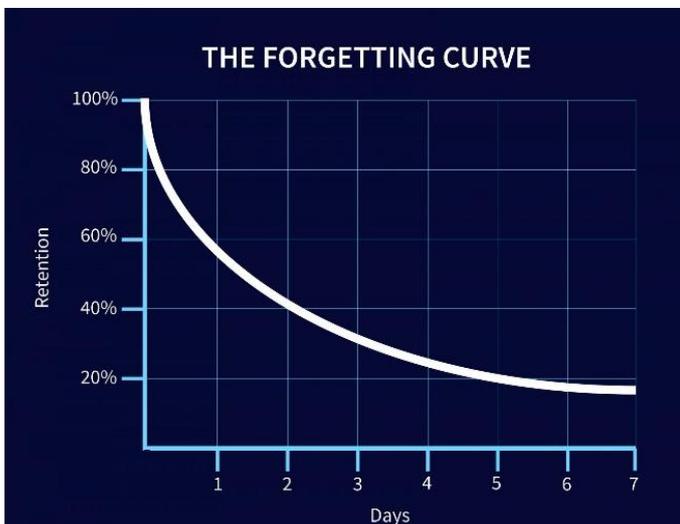
This guide is intended to help parents in supporting their year 11 children as they approach GCSE examinations in the summer. It contains evidence-based recommendations that support young people manage their workload and stress in the build-up to this critical time which may be particularly useful for parents whose first child is in year 11, or whose elder children were examined under different, historic frameworks – as well as explaining why we ask students to do certain things, and how the exam periods work.

The guide covers three main areas:

1. Revision, and the build-up to the examinations
2. The examinations themselves
3. Next steps

## Revision

Why revise?



Some students will begin this period hoping that revision can be avoided. The *Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve* shown opposite demonstrates the reason why revision (literally “seeing again”) is so important. We combat the curve in lessons through retrieval activities and making links to previous work as we move through the curriculum, but students need to revise – **and revise repeatedly** – to maximise their retrievable knowledge for the examinations. If they do so, they top up their knowledge and retention improve.



- Include what they are already doing. Attending a school-based revision session counts, so include them on the plan.
- Reflect on individual areas for development, so that weaker areas of understanding are developed first. Students will often opt to revise subjects they like and feel they are better at as it's easier and they gain a greater sense of achievement – albeit falsely.
- Use the exam information – from knowing what content is on which paper, to knowing when each paper is, factoring in exactly what needs to be revised and by when is key.

## Revision Strategies

Not all strategies and revision techniques work for all students and subjects; here are some key techniques to reflect on:

1. Students have spent eleven years learning in well-lit classrooms free from distractions like music, mobiles and tv screens, and typically sat formally at a desk. Their brain recognises this as a learning environment – sitting on the bed, curtains closed with music on in the background and so on is clearly not what the brain is expecting.
2. The Pomodoro technique is key – in the same way that too little is too little, too much in one go is simply too much and will result in *cognitive overload*.
3. Reading, whilst massively important for understanding in the moment, has limited benefit if it is the only revision strategy used – we are better at remembering themes and feelings than specifics such as definitions when we read; typically, we only remember around 10% of the actual words in a book for example. Strategies that *use* our knowledge are much stronger for revision – websites like GCSEPod and Seneca Learning exist for this purpose, as do some subject specific sites like MathsWatch and MMERevise. Similarly, revision guides are great, but revision guides with workbooks are even better.
4. Exam practice is key – applying knowledge, understanding and skills to real exam questions is the perfect revision practice. Students should be proactive in downloading electronic papers and mark schemes from their exam board, checking with their class teacher which papers to avoid (as they will be used in lessons and so on).

A handy guide to common revision strategies and more explanation can be found here:

<https://thinkstudent.co.uk/revision-techniques-for-gcse-and-a-level/>

## Examinations

Guidance for students around their actual exams falls into three areas: before, during and after.

### Before

Students knowing which exam they have each day, where and when it is, is obviously significant, as is having a good night's sleep. There is lots of evidence that completing sleep cycles – which last approximately 1.5 hours – has a more positive effect than just more sleep. So, 7.5 hours is better than 8 hours and so on.

Evidence also shows that students who have breakfast (almost any version of breakfast) and who regularly hydrate before and during the examination increase their marks by up to 17% and 23%

respectively. This kind of preparation, which should also include *having everything ready the night before* cannot be understated.

## During

There are several myths around examinations in every subject, but good examination strategies for students to consider are:

- Skim-reading the whole paper before starting any questions – this allows students to select which question to start with (it doesn't have to be question 1) and so tailor their own pathway through the paper. Often, selecting a question they feel confident in answering at the start of the time results in a more positive outlook on harder questions later as they've *already got marks in the bag*.



- “BUG” the question, “PEARL” paragraphs and similar subject-specific notions as guides to how to approach and answer questions can be key to ensuring students apply their knowledge and understanding in the right way.
- Understanding the command words – *state*, *explain* and *describe* for example – means students can answer questions confidently.

- Spending the right amount of time on each question is essential – for example in Science exams students need to work at “a mark a minute”, so a 6 mark question should take them about 6 minutes to complete at the most.

## After

Students will need to *decompress* after each examination, and these times are perfect for the physical activity identified earlier. Having a 30-minute walk or playing sport for an hour before starting revision will often be more beneficial than trying to *jump back into* a revision guide.

Of course, all of this is a delicate balancing act and with no set rules for individual students they may need support, prompts and reminders. Having everything in their revision plan and exam timetable shared – often stuck to the fridge – is a good start. Avoiding additional stress, arguments and confrontations is equally beneficial.

## Next Steps

Students and parents are often unaware of “stand down day”, the exam board contingency day which is the last date that students can be called into school for qualification related tasks (such as signing paperwork they missed or completing an exam paper where there was an issue). We will confirm this date with you and, although extremely unlikely it will be needed, we ask that any early summer holidays are booked for after this date.



GCSE and BTEC results days are always the third Thursday in August – this year, that’s the 21<sup>st</sup>. Arrangements will come out to parents and students in due course, but due to data protection regulations any students unable to collect their results in person that day will need to follow certain procedures.

## Useful Links and Support

GCSE Pod (all subjects)	<a href="https://members.gcsepod.com/login">https://members.gcsepod.com/login</a>
BBC Bitesize (all subjects)	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/levels/z98jmp3">https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/levels/z98jmp3</a>
Tassomai (English and Science)	<a href="https://www.tassomai.com/">https://www.tassomai.com/</a>
Seneca Learning (all subjects)	<a href="https://senecalearning.com/en-GB/">https://senecalearning.com/en-GB/</a>
MME Revise (Maths, English and Sciences)	<a href="https://mmerevise.co.uk/">https://mmerevise.co.uk/</a>