

# End of Year Exams are Important

Learning how to revise effectively in earlier years means that by the time students approach their GCSEs, they are organized, confident learners who know the best revision techniques to use for each subject.

In addition:-

- The process of preparing for End of Year Exams shows students what parts the course they understand, and those where they need more support.
- Sitting the exams gives valuable practice in exam skills; answering questions under pressure whilst trying to remember everything they have learned about the best technique to gain maximum marks.
- Their results gives a good indication of how they might do with similar levels of preparation in their GCSEs - which can be reassuring - or a wake-up call depending on how they have done.
- The exams introduce low-level exam stress, which allows students, with support, to start to develop coping techniques. In this way they are better able to cope when the exams are 'real' and anxiety potentially a far more significant problem.

## The Best Approach to Exam Preparation

- A mad panic and long hours spent in the week before the exam is not a smart way to revise. The official term for this is Massed or Block Practice - we sometimes call it 'cramming'
- We want all our students to use the most effective techniques - which means those that store the most material in their long-term memory in the shortest possible time.
- 'Value for effort' is to start early and just to do a little and often, fitting short sessions in regularly around other commitments - reviewing their studies as they go along so that there is no big stress just before the exam.
- Getting into the habit of doing a quick mental re-test on a topic a week after they learned and were tested on it in class (just as they were beginning to forget parts of it)- and then again a month later - and once more at the end of the term, will ensure that it is moved effectively into their long-term memory, ready to be used whenever they need it. This is called Spaced Learning

## How to Revise Effectively

- We have given students lots of guidance about the techniques that are most effective in making the brain hold on to information (this can be found in the 'Student' section on the school website)
- Many of the things they like to do - because they are easy, and satisfying, such as re-reading, summarizing, highlighting, are extremely ineffective.
- The best way, proven by much academic research, to learn material is by 'Retrieval Practice'
- This basically means asking yourself questions about the material - or testing yourself on it. It can be any form of test or self-test, asking yourself questions or getting others to ask you - anything that makes you search your memory for a piece of information and 'retrieve it' successfully.
- So the old favourite 'Read-Cover-Say or Write- Check' is actually a very accurate summary of the scientifically proven best technique!

## Brains Can't Multi-task!

We have shared with students in assemblies, and in tutor-time activities, information on how the brain works and how, how it can only do one thing at once (however much we talk about multitasking!) and how distractions can stop them from learning.

When they are revising they should avoid all possible distractions. Ideally choose a quiet room where people aren't talking and there is no:-

- television
- computer - other than when specifically using an app/website to revise - and then use with caution - it is so easy to stray...
- games consoles
- music (despite the claims of many students, it does not help them to revise. How can your brain be giving 100% when you are singing along to the music? The work you do will take longer and the quality won't be as good. What they mean is that they LIKE to have it on - it is actually hindering their concentration to some degree.
- phones - research shows that even turned off, their mere presence reduces concentration by up to 20%!

## **A Time-Table is Helpful**

All of us work better when we feel in control - and we are certainly more successful when we are IN control!

As we said before, the best approach to exam preparation is little and often throughout the school year - but in the last few weeks before the End of Year Exams you will want a more formal timetable which identifies: -

- how many sessions you are going to try and fit into a week
- where each one sits
- what subjects or topics you will study in each (ideally spreading topics out, a little bit of one topic followed by a little bit of another is better for effective learning than a big block of one topic or subject.

Keep timetables SIMPLE and REALISTIC - if students are over ambitious they will fall behind very quickly and be tempted to give up - and time spent on elaborate or colour coded grids is almost inevitably an avoidance tactic - easier to colour in the time table than to actually start the revision....

Include rest and reward points on time timetable - they are important too.

Encourage students to use a timer for breaks - 10 minutes can easily become 30 if no alarm goes off to remind them to get back to work!

## **Have a Conversation**

Feedback in school shows that students really do appreciate their parents' support during the run-up to exams.

- We would strongly recommend sitting down together with a piece of paper and agreeing some key points before exam preparation gets underway.
- You need to agree what time will be set aside for revision - and how you can help to ensure that a quiet space is set aside for it.
- Parents often want to reward results but research, very much backed up by our experience, shows that it is better to reward effort in preparing for the exams rather than actual results.

- Some parents pay a small amount per hour of revision completed - or per unit of work successfully revised. Others use small incentives like a favorite meal or a take-away on a Friday for sticking to revision time tables during the week.
- It is important that they feel you are on their side and willing to help with testing, and other support as needed (possibly keeping younger brothers and sisters out of the way as needed) but also that you agree expectations and consequences around revision - what is the minimum amount expected? What will be the consequence if not completed? No play station? Grounded? No phone?
- Some parents find a parental control app such as OurPact is very helpful as it means they can shut down their child's phone at the press of a button on their own phone - REAL power!

## **Healthy Mind/Healthy Body for Best Results**

Anxiety and stress can be a normal part of growing up and facing examinations but it is important that students learn techniques to cope with stress so that it doesn't negatively affect their performance - or make them unhappy more generally.

- Breathing techniques are important - breathing in slowly for a count of 5 and then out equally slowly until they start to feel calmer.
- Sleep is important for memory - regular bed times are essential. Avoid phone use in the run up to bed times as the blue light from the screen can interfere with sleep hormones and prevent healthy sleep. Make sure that they use the screen dimmer function on iPhones or download an app such as F.lux on their laptop.
- Diet and exercise are also important - it's tempting to ban football during revision and to snack on junk food to keep going - neither is a good idea!