



Repton School

Revision guide

March 2011

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Revision Guide for Easter Holidays 2011

The importance of GCSEs, ASs and A2s

This year, those of you in the Upper Sixth will be taking AS/A2-level examinations, those of you in the Lower Sixth will be taking AS-level examinations and those of you in O Block will be taking GCSEs. Those of you in A Block will be taking your first GCSE modules. Each of these sets of examinations will be extremely important to your future career, either in terms of university entrance or indeed in the world of work.

Many universities and employers look for a good **GCSE** profile, that is to say good GCSE results across all the subjects taken. Therefore you must not focus on those subjects at which you do well to the detriment of those subjects at which you feel you are less good or enjoy less. Indeed there is an argument for saying that these are the subjects on which you should concentrate. Universities will take a great interest in your GCSE results and the GCSE profile is a piece of objective evidence on which admissions tutors can compare the merits of their UCAS applicants. Very high grades are crucial for Oxbridge and other competitive courses. For example, prospective Oxbridge candidates will need a very high number of A* grades. It is also probable that for other competitive courses (e.g. humanities at Durham, Medicine or Economics at the top universities) you will need a similarly high score. For many other courses your GCSE profile will be one of the most important pieces of evidence available to the universities when they make decisions about which applicants to whom to make offers.

AS-level examinations have assumed increased importance since their introduction and the reasons for this are not hard to find. First, high predicted A-level grades on your UCAS form will carry far more weight if, in the reference we write in support of your application, we can back them up by quoting high AS-level UMS scores, and this will significantly improve your chances of receiving the offer of a place. For those of you who wish to apply to the more prestigious universities, tutors will not just be interested in your result, but the quality of your result. For instance, at AS-level in many subjects, you will need 160 marks out of 200 for an A grade, but on your UCAS reference we would very much like to refer to the fact that you achieved perhaps 180 marks or even higher in a particular subject. Indeed you may well be required to include details of your results and numerical scores on individual modules on your university or other higher education application. You should remember that AS-level marks are probably easier to pick up than A2 marks (and yet they carry exactly the same currency) and that if you do well in the Lower Sixth, you will avoid the need to retake in the Upper Sixth.

The importance of **A-level** examinations for many Upper Sixth students is pretty clear since you will have received offers to read a subject of your choice at universities of your choice. It is a sobering thought that, every August, many sixth-form pupils across the country break down in tears when they receive disappointing results which mean they cannot take up their place. Applying for a university place through the clearing system in August is a frustrating and stressful process and you may end trying to apply to an institution you have not seen before and which you don't like or having to take a "gap year". Competition for university places remains extremely high and there have been a very high number of applicants this year.

However, the importance of A-level grades does not end with the taking up of a place at university. Employers will look at A-level grades on your curriculum vitae when you apply for jobs in the future. For some employers, A-level grades are as good an indicator of ability as a degree class, and much easier to understand.

How are you going to ensure *your* success?

If what has gone before has made you concerned about your external exams this summer – and it should have done – the good news is that you can markedly improve your prospects by some focused and productive revision over the Easter holidays. Indeed it is always obvious to teachers which pupils have worked hard over the Easter holidays and those who have not. What teachers also find is that those students who have worked hard over the Easter holidays return to School much more confident about their prospects and then tend to perform better and better as the first half of the Summer Term progresses. Conversely those students who have done little or no work over Easter start the Summer Term way behind the others, are demoralised and become even further demoralised when they find they have been overtaken academically by those in their class whom they had previously outperformed. Make sure that you are in the first camp and not the second!

A question that is often asked is “*How much revision should I be doing over the Easter holidays*” and a rough rule of thumb is as follows. The Easter holidays are about four weeks long in total (adding together the holiday break and the long Easter weekend) and you will need to take some time to relax and to recharge your batteries and this period should be about seven to ten days (including weekends). This leaves you two and a half weeks to three weeks or so which should be focused on revision. Divide each revision day into three sessions - morning, afternoon and evening - of two and a half to three hours each, and work for two of the three sessions. This means that you will be revising for between five and six hours per day. If you work effectively during two of the three sessions, you will be able to reward yourself by taking the third session off. **Do get up early.** Most people work best in the morning and evening; so the afternoon might be good relaxation time and if you have worked well in the morning you will be able to enjoy your time off all the more.

Make sure you get plenty of sleep and fresh air and that you eat properly and sensibly. Drink plenty of water and keep yourself hydrated!

However, revision over the Easter holidays is not simply about the number of hours that you put into your work, although this is very important. **It is about revising efficiently and effectively.** The following advice indicates how you can work more productively for your exams.

How are *you* going to revise efficiently and effectively over the Easter holidays?

Sort out your files

This may take some time, but you need to know how much you have to do and where you have gaps so that you can do something about filling them. Use plenty of dividers. If necessary, ask your teacher for an index so you can organise your file logically and work out those topics on which you need to concentrate.

Remember to take your files and textbooks home over the Easter holidays – there are always some who forget!

Listen to and read the advice given to you by your teachers

Teachers in each of your subjects will give you a specific plan or guide about how to revise their particular subject. Read these carefully.

Ask your teachers how you can improve because they will have the best idea about what you need to do. There are also good revision guides which you can buy or indeed some good revision guides online, but always follow your teachers' advice about the best ones to use.

Most teachers check emails regularly over the holiday, so you should always feel free to ask for advice if you are uncertain or stuck.

Plan your revision

You should construct a plan of how you intend to revise over the Easter holidays and then stick to it. It's a horrible moment when you write down everything you have to do, but you can't afford to stick your head in the sand, particularly over subjects you dislike - there is no such thing as an unimportant exam. Also, be very wary of the "*I don't want to write on that topic*" syndrome. You may have to! Make your plan realistic. Don't demoralise yourself. Tick things off as you go through them and show yourself that you are making progress. However, don't spend time endlessly making revision timetables instead of actually revising!

You will find some weekly planners at the end of this document.

Break your revision down into manageable units

Don't try to do a whole subject in one go. If you want to learn material properly, don't expect to learn too much in any one session. Linguists might aim to revise and learn a limited amount of vocabulary and chemists a small number of organic reactions, each day, and so on.

You will know from previous exams where you are weak and should target these areas at an early stage. However, don't concentrate on one subject to the exclusion of the others: a good subject can become a weak one very quickly.

Divide the day up

As explained above, divide your revision days up into three sessions and work for two sessions. Don't sit at your desk for too long: you are programmed to work for around 40 minutes, so aim to work for this length of time and then have a short break. After the break, write down the essentials of what you have just covered, perhaps in a different form such as a diagram or a numbered plan. Quickly check what you have omitted and fill it in a different colour, then move on to the next section. Set yourself a recap test 24 hours later. Don't work for longer than 3 hours at a stretch. If necessary, bribe yourself with rewards in your breaks!

Ensure you have an appropriate work environment

Find what is best for you and minimise distractions. You will need to concentrate and you may need privacy. You cannot revise lying down on a bed; work at a desk where you can write. You cannot revise with the TV on. If you prefer to work with background music, then set it at a low volume. You cannot revise with a friend unless you are both prepared to take a vow of silence.

If you wish to meet a friend so that you can test each other, then work this into your revision plan and meet at pre-arranged times.

Make revision an ACTIVE process

Revise with a pen in your hand so you can annotate your notes or create new ones. Make revision notes or plan essays, but do not passively copy out what is in the file or the textbook. You need to transfer information from books, notes etc. to your revision notes via your brain so that you understand it. Process the information and condense it. Many students use index cards - these will be useful summaries for the "night before" revision. You can highlight or underline the important points, but beware of just doing this without thinking about what you are studying.

If you come across points you do not understand, do not ignore them. Make a written list of the points of which you are unsure as you revise. You will then be able to ask your teacher to help you with these problems when you return to School.

Practise questions

This is easy and very beneficial, particularly for scientists and mathematicians. Pupils in other disciplines can usefully make essay plans, practise comment questions, etc.

Use past papers, but try making up your own questions as well: what would you ask if you were the examiner?

Test yourself regularly

You can test yourself after a 10 minute break on what you have learnt beforehand or in the morning on what you learnt the day before. If you can't recall information over the course of a single night, then you're not going to remember it until June. Build time for repetition into your plan.

What happens when you return to School after the Easter holidays?

This will rather depend on how much productive revision you have done over the Easter holidays!

Many of the points made above will apply equally to your revision at School. It is important to find a good work environment and you may find it useful to work in a school or departmental library or classroom where you know you will not be distracted.

One of the worst things you can do in a school like Repton is to take comfort from the fact that others in your House are not working as hard as they might. Don't listen to how much other people have or have not done. It is unlikely to be the gospel truth, and anyway what's it got to do with you and your future and your place at university?

Remember, too, that although parents and teachers may be easy to fool, you cannot afford to fool yourself - you will know whether you are working effectively or not.

The very long summer holidays are only four months away. You are likely to enjoy them far more if you begin them knowing you did all you could to make your exams successful rather than feeling that you would have done so much better if only you had tried.

No Reptonian can get through exams on ability alone. Revision can be a pretty dull activity and you have to find ways of getting yourself through it. It will require determination and will-power. Having said this, those students who do revise hard will see their confidence in their subjects grow. One could wish you luck, but the most valuable commodity for you now is time, and if you use that wisely you won't need luck!

Weekly revision planner

Week beginning.....

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
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Tuesday			
Wednesday			
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Saturday			
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