



Aspire - How to Get Your Top Grade: a GCSE Guide to Success

This guide is intended to support you to achieve a top grade in your GCSE subjects. It has been created in collaboration with your subject teachers and past students that achieved grade 9(s).

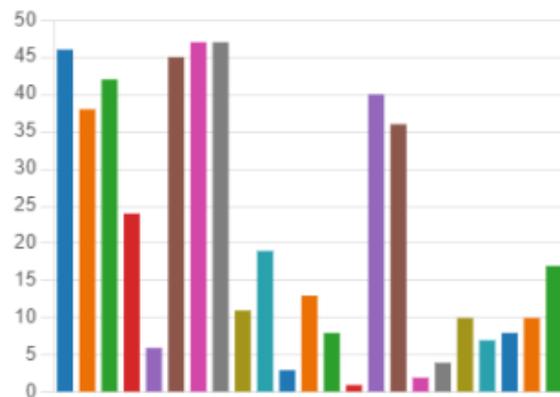
We surveyed 105 Year 12 and 13 students that had achieved at least one grade 9 and asked them questions about how they prepared for those examinations. Remember some of our 6th form students have come from other schools across the city and remember that more students take some subjects than others, i.e. core subjects. The results are as follows:

All subjects are represented in the data:

1. Which subject did you achieve a grade 9 in? (tick all that apply) (0 point)

[More Details](#)

● Maths	46
● English Literature	38
● Geography	42
● History	24
● Double Science	6
● Biology	45
● Chemistry	47
● Physics	47
● PE	11
● Business	19
● DT - Textiles	3
● French	13
● German	8
● DT - Food Tech	1
● RS	40
● English Language	36
● Classics	2
● DT - Product Design	4
● Art and Design	10
● Computing	7
● Drama	8
● Music	10
● Other	17



3. As part of my revision, I used the specification and broke it down into topics and chunks (0 point)

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● Yes	78
● No	27



4. As part of my revision, I condensed class notes down into smaller notes either through flash cards, mind maps or other means. (0 point)

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● Yes	77
● No	28



5. As part of my revision, I used past exam papers to practise my exam technique. (0 point)

[More Details](#)

● Yes, in class	12
● Yes, in class and on my own	89
● No	4



6. As part of my revision I used mark schemes to mark past papers (0 point)

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● Yes, in class	12
● Yes, in class and on my own	83
● No	10



7. As part of my revision, I revisited marked work and made improvements to learn how to improve my own writing (0 point)

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● Yes, in class	25
● Yes, in class and on my own	39
● No	41



8. Did you create a revision timetable in preparation for your exams? (0 point)

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

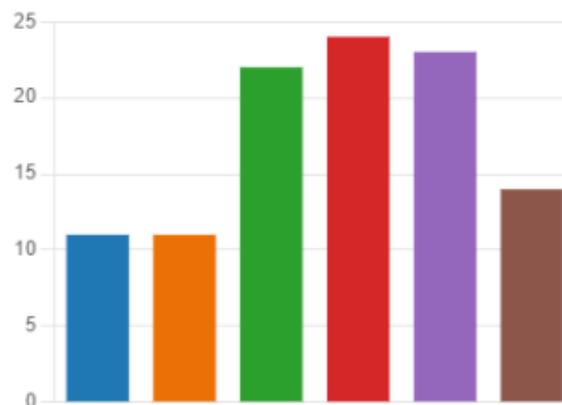
● Yes	56
● No	49



9. What month did you start your revision schedule? (0 point)

[More Details](#)

● December	11
● January	11
● February	22
● March	24
● April	23
● May	14



10. In the subject(s) you achieved a grade 9 in, did you achieve a grade 9 in your Y11 mock? (0 point)

[More Details](#)

● Yes	30
● No	23
● Some, but not all	42
● I can't remember	10



You will interpret this data in different ways. It is important to note that there is not 'one way' to achieve a grade 9. As you can see different students, in different subjects have achieved grade 9s. The next section identifies by Head of Department how you should approach their subject if you want to achieve a top grade.

How to get a Top Grade in Art and Design

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Art:

For GCSE Fine Art, your portfolio consists of coursework that can be selected from the start of Year 10 to the end of your final exam project in Year 11. Over the two years, you will experience new techniques and produce a portfolio of mini-projects on black paper as well as two bodies of sketchbook work: one for your mock exam in November of Year 11 and the other for your externally set task for your final GCSE exam after the Easter Holidays before your other exams start.

We would recommend choosing topics that inspire you and that you can commit to whilst studying for your other GCSEs.

For instance, my mock project was 'Fragments' which I did not choose, however, I chose to produce a project for my exam under 'Details'. Consequently, by choosing a topic that inspires you, especially for the exam when you have to plan your time around revising for other subjects, you will find that you will be able to produce ideas and pages efficiently. However, that is not to say that you should rush through your body of work; I personally believe art is about passion and personal vision, therefore I dedicated a lot of time and thought to my GCSE work which helped to increase my grade.

TRY TO STICK TO DEADLINES – complete work as effectively as you can and use holidays wisely (don't do too much in a day in the holidays but spread out your work so you're not facing the 'lastminute.com' stress!)
Art isn't a burden – it should be something that you look forward to doing (most of my artwork gets completed in front of a film/listening to music).

Art isn't a 'doss' subject – hard work pays off!

ENJOY EVERYTHING YOU DO – EVEN IF YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT :-)

Don't worry if you're behind – absolutely everyone doing GCSE/A level art experiences this and you will get things done if you're determined and want to achieve your best

Sticky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Annotation - write about **why** you have chosen to do something (processes, artists studies; **how** it effects your ideas/thoughts about the project title; **what** you like/find inspiring about the work. *(You don't have to write an essay per page but annotation really helps to convey your thoughts about your work/ideas/processes).*

Do things differently – Don't do what your friends are doing; as much as it sounds comfortable/easy, **think 'outside of the box' and come up with original ideas!**

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 85%
2021 85%
2020 82%
2019 85%
2018 85%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Drawings/Paintings/Showing Skill – Demonstrate your **skills/abilities**: *always challenge yourself and take 'sensible' risks*. Perhaps practise things you find difficult and write about your progression in developing your skills.

Time Management – To achieve higher grades, you should **make the most of your time** when completing your art; **don't sacrifice your other subjects** for the sake of focusing only on art, however. Of course, put **effort** and **passion** into what you do but, to achieve a higher grade, you'll want to show you've put time into your portfolio.

Sketchbook Layout – Making your sketchbook look 'pretty'/artistic is good but don't prioritise the look of a background over the artwork itself. *It is arguably better to have a white background with a high-quality painting/drawing with annotation on it.*

Enjoy what you do & take care of your work – If you show **passion** in your work, it will enhance what you do. (Enjoy GCSE Fine Art – it's very enjoyable and you'll be proud of what you've achieved and how your skill develops from the start of Year 10!)

Different media/primary resources – show that you've **experimented with alternate media** to what you normally feel comfortable with; take your **own photographs** to work from and be **original with how you use them/copy them**.

Try to finish as much as you can – it will help your overall grade but **don't rush** to finish things, especially when you need to complete your work for submission at the end of Year 11.

Push yourself but be realistic – try to **challenge yourself** but don't give yourself more work than you can manage, especially with work from other subjects.

Find your individual 'vision' - through experimenting and exploration in your projects, you will find what you like and wish to develop. Make sure you **communicate** this and how you want to develop your skills/ideas (this will most likely become easier in Year 11).

If you try to do all these things then you will hopefully find yourself feeling very satisfied and proud of yourself on GCSE results day!

How to get a Top Grade in Biology

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Biology:

Students who are successful in biology concentrate on thorough revision, making sure they have a firm grip on all the important concepts as they move through the course rather than leaving all their learning until the end. They employ revision techniques which make their brain work - mind maps, quizzes, flash cards.

They use resources such as snap revise, Seneca learning and BBC bitesize to support their learning.

They make use of all the revision support given to them - attending revision sessions and making use of resources provided to them.

They are not afraid to ask and answer questions to test their own understanding- being involved in the classroom helps you to learn.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Make sure you concentrate on thorough revision, getting a real grip on the core concepts.

Master graphs and tables - both drawing them and interpret them.

Make sure you are writing in enough detail using key words - if you are talking about the movement of water use the word osmosis.

Don't forget about required practicals - make sure you can explain how you would carry them out.

Variables- independent, dependent, control - make sure you know them!

Draw diagrams again and again - if you can draw a diagram of the heart you can label a diagram when it appears in your exam.

Know your key command word - explain and describe do not mean the same thing!

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 66%

2019 67%

2018 66%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Don't be afraid to have a go - what's the worst that's going to happen?

Be confident - you know more than you think you do.

Take your time - read all the information you are given and look at all the data carefully before you look at the questions.

Don't leave any questions blank - especially multiple choice!

Look at the number of marks available - it will guide you on how much and how detailed your answers should be.

If you are struggling - ask for help! We're pretty amazing but we're not mind readers!

How to get a Top Grade in Business

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Business Studies:

Students that are successful in GCSE Business have usually been the most focused students all through the course. They have completed all homework's and class work to a high standard and they have put maximum effort in.

Most importantly, they have mastered the exam technique and are excellent at applying short response questions to the case study. Their answers are specific and show excellent understanding. In the longer mark question (7 and 9 markers) they follow the structure given and they apply and analyse – they discuss the impact of what they have suggested. In the evaluation paragraph they give their clear decisions, use application and then explain, through comparison, why one option is better than another.

Top grade students typically have a passion for the subject and read around it. Whilst this doesn't necessarily help them achieve a higher percentage in the exam, it gives them an interest in the subject. They may follow the news or keep up to date with what is happening in the business world. They are typically students that go above the minimum expectations.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Business Activity – The role, importance and usefulness of a business plan, the concept of limited liability, the effect stakeholders have on business

Marketing - The use and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data in market research, Pricing methods, Interpretation of market data

People - The terminology of organisation charts, Non-financial methods of motivation, Staff development, The benefits to employees and businesses of staff development

Operations - The impact of consumer law on businesses, The role of procurement, The impact of logistical and supply decisions on businesses

Finance - The influence of the finance function on business activity, Calculation and interpretation of profitability ratios, Calculation and interpretation of average rate of return, The difference between cash and profit

Influences on Business - The economic climate and its impact on businesses

The interdependent nature of business - the interdependent nature of business operations, finance, marketing and human resources within a business context, how these interdependencies underpin business decision making

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 69%

2021 no external exams

2020 71%

2019 74% (most reliable)

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Revise as you go along, there is too much to learn to leave it until the end.

Practice exam papers, get them marked and re-do the papers using the teacher / mark scheme feedback.
Use the exam structure!

Everything you need is on Teams – use it.

Marginal gains theory suggests that if you make 1% improvement regularly, you will hit your target before you know it. A 1% improvement will be barely noticeable but it will all add up. The difference between a 7 and a 9 is 10%. Make a 1% improvement 10 times and you will be a grade 9.

How to get a Top Grade in Chemistry

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Chemistry:

To be successful in chemistry you have to have to consider a number of things.

Do you understand the work?

Have you learnt the facts?

Can you apply this to new and unfamiliar situations?

Students that are successful in GCSE Chemistry have tackled each of these by asking for help about areas they find hard to understand, thoroughly learning the factual knowledge in personal revision and completing all homework to get feedback on areas to improve. They have regularly used online revision videos to tackle areas of misconceptions and embed knowledge learned.

Students are confident in all question types and have mastered question decoding (what is it asking you to do?) how to answer both in detail but in a concise manner. In longer analytical questions they structure answers well and draw comparisons using the data provided. Students are confident in the planning and analysis all of the required practicals. In practical design questions they use short, information dense instructions and diagrams (even if the response area is lined).

Top grade students understand models and their areas of weakness, can compare bonding types and how this affects properties, can predict products in unfamiliar reactions and can use mathematical techniques in a variety of contexts.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Particle model. Consideration of how particles move, are attracted to each other and how collisions affect rates of reactions.

Atomic model. The history and development of the current theory. How this relates to the development and structure of the periodic table.

Bonding. The three types and how each type of bonding and structure leads to the properties of the bulk material.

Electrolysis. Being able to name the parts of the apparatus, draw equipment and predict products. Particularly in aqueous solutions. Half equations using electrons.

Equilibria. Understanding the effects of changes to pressure, temperature and concentration. Being able to predict changes in yield with changes to conditions.

Energy changes. Drawing energy change diagrams, calculation of energy changes from reactions and bond energy data.

Organic chemistry. Students see the links with the properties of molecules and the work on bonding and intermolecular forces. Students can see the links between molecules with different functional groups.

Quantitative chemistry and mole calculations. Know how to calculate concentrations, unknown masses and volumes and the volumes of gases.

Chemical reactions. Group 1, group 7 and neutralisation reactions. Be able to complete equations for them all.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

November 2022 69%

June 2022 72%

November 2021 69%

June 2021 no external exams

November 2020 70%

June 2020 no external exams

June 2019 72%

June 2018 75%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Check understanding now – you cannot revise what you do not understand.

There are past papers and questions on pupil share – ask your teacher to show you where they are and do them. Many are in topic packs.

Use online resources and your text book to support your own notes (not replace them).

There are marks for understanding, knowledge and skills. Bright students can shine in understanding and knowledge, but it is that extra knowledge from revision can make the difference between a 7 & a 9!

How to get a Top Grade in Combined Science

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Combined Science:

To be successful in Combined Science you have to have to consider a number of things.

Do you understand the work?

Have you learnt the facts?

Can you apply this to new and unfamiliar situations?

Students that are successful in GCSE combined science have tackled each of these by asking for help about areas they find hard to understand, thoroughly learning the factual knowledge in personal revision and completing all homework to get feedback on areas to improve. They have regularly used online revision videos to tackle areas of misconceptions and embed knowledge learned.

Students are confident in all question types and have mastered question decoding (what is it asking you to do?) how to answer both in detail but in a concise manner. In longer analytical questions they structure answers well and draw comparisons using the data provided. Students are confident in the planning and analysis all of the required practicals. In practical design questions they use short, information dense instructions and diagrams (even if the response area is lined).

Grade 9 students understand theoretical models and their areas of weakness and can use mathematical techniques in a variety of contexts.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Biology	Chemistry	Physics
Make sure you concentrate on thorough revision, getting a real grip on the core concepts.	Particle model. Consideration of how particles move, are attracted to each other and how collisions affect rates of reactions.	Particle model. Consideration of how particles move, are attracted to each other and how collisions affect pressure.
Master graphs and tables - both drawing them and interpret them.	Atomic model. The history and development of the current theory. How this relates to the development and structure of the periodic table.	Atomic model. The history and development of the current theory. What is radiation and why it dangerous. Understanding the importance of half-life and relating it to difference situations.
Make sure you are writing in enough detail using key words - if you are talking about the movement of water use the word osmosis.	Bonding. The three types and how each type of bonding and structure leads to the properties of the bulk material.	Electricity. What is current and voltage. Rules for series and parallel circuits.

Don't forget about required practicals - make sure you can explain how you would carry them out.	Chemical reactions. Group 1, group 7 and neutralisation reactions. Be able to complete equations for them all. Electrolysis. Being able to name the parts of the apparatus, draw equipment and predict products. Particularly in aqueous solutions. Half equations using electrons.	Forces. How forces can change the motion of an object. The ability to know and apply the Newtons Laws and the conservation of momentum.
Variables - independent, dependent, control - make sure you know them!	Equilibria. Understanding the effects of changes to pressure, temperature and concentration. Being able to predict changes in yield with changes to conditions.	Energy changes and how they relate to forces and power. Organic chemistry. Students see the links with the properties of molecules and the work on bonding and intermolecular forces. Students can see the links between molecules with different functional groups.
Draw diagrams again and again - if you can draw a diagram of the heart you can label a diagram when it appears in your exam.	Energy changes. Drawing energy change diagrams, calculation of energy changes from reactions and bond energy data.	Electromagnetism. Understanding how an invisible force can affect current carrying conductors and how this can be used to make things move, such as electromagnets and motors.
Know your key command word - explain and describe do not mean the same thing!	Organic chemistry. Students see the links with the properties of molecules and the work on bonding and intermolecular forces. Students can see the links between molecules with different functional groups.	Memorising the formula and being able to manipulate them. Physics papers are 40% mathematically based so practise using the formula.
	Quantitative chemistry and mole calculations. Know how to calculate concentrations, unknown masses and volumes and the volumes of gases.	Remember your key words and definitions.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

June 2022 66%

November 2021 61%

June 2021 no external exams

November 2020 63%

June 2020 no external exams

June 2019 64%

June 2018 69%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Check understanding now – you cannot revise what you do not understand.

There are past papers and questions on pupil share – ask your teacher to show you where they are and do them. Many are in topic packs.

Use online resources and your text book to support your own notes (not replace them).

There are marks for understanding, knowledge and skills. Bright students can shine in understanding skills, but it is that extra knowledge from revision can make the difference between a 7 & a 9!

How to get a Top Grade in Computer Science

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Computing:

Learn the key terms

Revisit the key terms

Build up the knowledge concept by concept/topic by topic

Draw images showing how topics develop

Use the Cornell notes that have been created in lessons in your revision as you have already got key terms and questions for topics covered.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Architecture of the CPU

Protocols and layers

Ethical, legal, cultural and environmental impact

The use of arrays (or equivalent) when solving problems, including both one-dimensional (1D) and two-dimensional (2D) arrays

Searching and sorting algorithms

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 83% (new J277 course)

2021 80% (J276 course)

2020 84% (J276 course)

2019 85% (J276 course)

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Learn the key terms and definitions then you will be in a better position to apply that knowledge to different exam questions/scenarios.

How to get a Top Grade in Design and Technology

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in DT:

Marking their own work and using the exam spec

Engaging with the wording on the top band of the spec – words like ‘comprehensive’, ‘full’ and ‘continuous’ in relation to research, design and development

Asking the question – ‘what more could I have done’?

Using a real client for the NEA

Starting every revision session by going over basic content as a foundation

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Maths for DT

Longer answer questions

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 80%

2021 n/a

2020 n/a

2019 79%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

You know more than you may think you know – it’s about joining the dots!

Stay inspired – keep following designers, creative companies and projects, products and exhibitions

How to get a Top Grade in Drama

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Drama:

Students that achieve top grades are proactive in their approach to both the practical and written examinations.

Lines are learnt early, allowing students to shape and refine pieces over a longer period of time, capturing both their intent and the aims of the playwright.

In the written paper, students have a secure understanding of all characters in Blood Brothers and can precisely write with a wide range of performance skills and can link their choices to the question demands.

A range of scenes have been analysed for live theatre and each actor has been analysed in detail, enabling students to evaluate the success of their performance in relation to the question.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Analysis of character in live theatre.

Set/costume for all scenes/characters.

Key lines in Blood Brothers.

Interpretations for all characters across the play.

Application of a strong breadth of performance skills.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 – 82%

2021 – 76% (COVID – no practical examinations)

2020 – 75% (COVID – CAGs)

2019 – 87%

2018 – 87%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Use a range of skills and apply with detail!

Justify decisions and always remember to focus on the specific question demands.

The written examination is the final piece of the puzzle and is a great opportunity to wrap up all of your practical successes!

Use the model/exemplar answers in your book to support you.

How to get a Top Grade in English

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in English:

Using mind maps / posters / storyboards / flowcharts / revision cards to consolidate knowledge of characters, themes and plot

Planning as many exam answers as you can

Using Seneca Learning regularly to revise key knowledge

Using sites such as Massolit and ClickView to watch academic analysis videos and performed versions of texts
Reading widely, especially amongst set authors' other works

Seek out critical essays on the set texts – consider different perspectives on these texts

Watch the news and discuss your ideas with friends and family to develop opinions

Read opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines to develop your awareness of the features of opinion writing
Familiarise yourself with mark schemes and the demands of each question

Look at sample answers – highlight and annotate to pick out what's effective

Use teacher feedback to help improve performance

Towards the end of revision, attempt past questions against the clock and formulate a plan in terms of how you tackle the two Lang papers i.e. in number order or hitting the higher mark questions first.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

When writing about literature texts, try to develop overall 'big ideas' or theories about the text rather than mechanically making separate points

In Language Paper 1, try to do the descriptive task, as it is easier to structure and craft for impressive effect
With Language Paper 2, consider writing using a persona (e.g. a mother of young children) for greater impact

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 Lang 74% Lit 69%
2021 no external exams
2020 no external exams
2019 Lang 79% Lit 88%
2018 Lang 80% Lit 84%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Don't forget that Language and Literature use many of the same skills.

Enjoy it! You will be more likely to achieve a top grade if you are engaged with the task and have a passion for Literature.

How to get a Top Grade in Geography

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Geography:

Elevate Education say that mind maps are the most successful form of revision but you need to know that they should include images when you make them (you are 35% more likely to recall an image than words) and they should be full of trigger words. Plus, you need to use them – put them up around the house / bedroom / fridge etc. and read them out aloud, filling in the missing sentences of each branch.

50% of your revision should be past question papers.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Learn Case Studies: know the facts so they are place specific

Sort out your understanding of air circulation (including El Nino / La Nina and tropical storms)

Don't muddle up the natural causes of climate change (Malkovich cycles)

Ensure you know which case study is for which part of the course – it's worth revising which is which as well as what each one is about.

Responding to the command work throughout your answer, not just in summary at the end.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 77%

2021 76%

2020 76%

2019 76%

2018 76%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

5 minutes review your work at the end of every day, then again on the weekend and then once more at the end of the month: Elevate Education say that you are more likely to retain the information and will have less to revise for the exams.

Life is what you make of it so believe in yourself!

Slow and steady revision rather than cramming is far more successful.

How to get a Top Grade in History

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in History:

Students that are successful in GCSE History have usually been the most focused students all through the course. They have completed all homework and class work to a high standard and they have put maximum effort in. They also have an edge (historical knowledge outside the course that has never been taught at school).

Most importantly, they **take on feedback and make the adjustments**. They pay attention to details and specifically answer questions rather than just write what they know.

When describing they describe with **relevant detail**.

When explaining they **are explicit** in their explanations and support with **relevant detail**.

When evaluating they **clearly weigh up** how far/to what extent a view is accurate/reliable/useful.

Sticky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Historiography - Appeasement and Origins of the Cold War

Source evaluation – confusing reliability and usefulness

The detailed evidence and terminology to support source analysis for the Reformation Topic.

Good examples to support comparative analysis in the Power and Monarchy topic.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9:

2022 83%

2019 80%

2018 82%

*(2020-21 there were not external exams)

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Knowledge is power

Revise as you go along, there is too much to learn to leave it until the end.

Practice exam papers, get them marked and re-do the papers using the teacher / mark scheme feedback. Know the exam paper and question style inside out - timings, everything.

Talk to people – explain things to them – get your friends and family to ask you questions about topics. Do quick challenges – take a question and then list the evidence you would need to answer it fully.

You should never use only one method of revision and study. You need to make your study sessions less boring and more productive to retain

Whenever you have gathered information from different sources, for example, your own notes, textbook notes, class notes, and independent notes, you want to merge these all into one single A4 size paper.

Know and use key topic terminology

How to get a Top Grade in Latin

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Latin:

Revise vocabulary little and often throughout every week of the course

Revise noun and verbs endings on a regular basis

Be accurate in your translation

Learn the literature thoroughly – analyse passages to test yourself and know the translation of each passage

Always use Latin quotes in analysis questions

Learn the civilisation topic thoroughly – create revision cards for each topic/piece of evidence

In essays use thoroughly convincing/perceptive arguments that are fully backed up by a wide range of material/evidence

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Indirect Statements

Passives

Future tense

Sentences with multiple clauses

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 80.5%

2021 no public exams

2020 no public exams

2019 85%

2018 83.5%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Ad astras perveni!

How to get a Top Grade in Mathematics

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Mathematics:

Complete a variety of exam questions

Check your working

Revise the things you find difficult not the things you find easy.

Don't forget about the basic stuff

Lots of past papers from pupil shares

You might find looking at the exam questions by topic useful

Practise under exam conditions

Use online resources carefully

Complete homework's well before the due dates so you can get any help needed

Use the mark schemes to see tried and tested methods

Correct your work every time.

Be consistent with revision, little and often works best.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Algebraic proof

Circle theorems – the reasons and proofs.

Problem solving with probability

Trigonometry exact value questions

Graph transformations

Vectors

Problem solving with multiple ratios

Functions

Learn your formulae

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022 81%
2021 78% (November 21)
2020 79% (November 20)
2019 83%
2018 84%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Read the questions carefully and ensure you actually answer it.

Read the question twice to make sure you know what it is asking.

Look to use efficient methods

Watch out for minus signs

Answer the question

Time management in exams is important. A mark a minute, if you are spending double the time you need to leave it and come back to the later.

Try hard all the time not just around exams.

Check you have answered all the question particularly any on the back page.

If it is worth 1 mark you should know the answer without any working.

Work hard early on it means less pressure later on.

Make an exam timetable and try to stick to it

If you don't like maths, keep going - you don't have to do it at A-Level.

Tough times never last; only tough people do

How to get a Top Grade in Music

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Music:

Whilst musical ability and a passion for the subject are fundamental to the achievement of a top grade in GCSE Music, qualities such as perseverance and determination are also crucial factors. These characteristics will often be shown by prompt completion of homework, asking lots of questions in class, working effectively with others and, more importantly, displaying an appetite for independent working in order to attain the best possible outcomes.

Routines such as regular practice and composing, and meeting interim deadlines when performing and composing tasks are set are also crucial, as these empower pupils to explore the detailed feedback they receive about how to improve even further. Involvement in extra-curricular activities offers pupils opportunities to get to know a wide selection of musical works whilst also improving their performance skills.

The most successful musicians are inquisitive about how music works. Whilst it is natural to have different music preferences, pupils need to be open to listening to and learning about music of all different types so that they can appreciate, understand and apply musical techniques in their own work in the most appropriate and effective ways.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Performances must be minimum Grade 5 difficulty, and pupils need to ensure that in ensemble performances their part is also Grade 5 level.

Performances must have no errors, and demonstrate convincing tone quality, technical control, coordination, breath control, diction and/or pedalling, depending on the instrument.

Performances must also be fluent, accurate, and communicate very well through effective phrasing, dynamics, articulation and tempo.

Compositions must be memorable, stylish, and developed and extended successfully, meeting appropriately the intended purpose.

Compositions must have secure control of appropriate musical elements throughout. The instrumental / vocal forces must be handled idiomatically and imaginatively. Textures need to be varied, complex and stylish.

Compositions also require a sense of coherence, development, variety and unity throughout, with a convincing sense of direction and climax.

Listening questions must be answered in depth, with detailed reference to all of the relevant musical elements using appropriate musical vocabulary.

Listening questions must also make detailed references to relevant wider listening in a variety of musical styles.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

2022: 82%

2021: No external exams

2020: No external exams
2019: 85% (most reliable)
2018: 84%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Practise on your instrument regularly: 30 minutes' practice every day will improve your performing by at least two grades.

Involvement in extra-curricular activities is a form of practice, and it's fun! It will also help to improve your skill at melody dictation, which is an important part of the Listening Examination.

When performing, the examiner will compare your performances to the written copy of the music, so performances must be as accurate as possible.

Undertake composition work every week, in and out of lessons, and be willing to experiment with new ideas from your wider listening. This will finesse your compositions so that they achieve the best possible outcomes.

Revise information about the set works as you go along to consolidate your learning and to make your revision easier as the Listening Exam approaches.

Complete regular Listening questions, get them marked using feedback from your teacher and the mark scheme, and revise the command words.

Whilst Section B Listening questions enable pupils to showcase knowledge and application of specialised musical vocabulary, Section A, short-answer questions require detailed knowledge about the set works, and dropping small numbers of marks on several short-answer questions soon mounts up (you can only drop 15% overall if you are to achieve a 9!).

All of the information you need to support successful answers to short and more extended questions is in your GCSE Listening Book.

How to get a Top Grade in Physical Education

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Physical Education:

Students that are successful in GCSE Physical Education have usually been the most focused students all through the course. They have completed all homework's and classwork to a high standard and they have put maximum effort in.

Most importantly, they have mastered the exam technique and a good understanding of both command words and assessment objectives. In the longer mark question (6 and 9 markers) they follow the structure given and demonstrate that they 'know, apply and say why'.

Top grade students typically have a passion for all sports and are regularly participating in at least two activities inside or outside of school, including both training and competing. The highest achievers also produced excellent coursework, demonstrating that they can observe and analysis performance in one chosen activity with depth and detail - they achieved this by listening to instruction and feedback given.

Sticky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Gaseous exchange - Gas exchange at the alveoli – features that assist in gaseous exchange

Excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC)/oxygen debt as the result of muscles respiring anaerobically during vigorous exercise and producing lactic acid

Lever systems, examples of their use in activity and the mechanical advantage they provide in movement
Planes and axes of movement

The principles of training and their application to personal exercise/training programmes

How to optimise training and prevent injury - Particularly Seasonal aspects

Basic information processing - information processing model

Ethical and socio-cultural issues in physical activity and sport - especially Prohibited Substances

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9:

2022 78%

2021 no external exams

2020 70%

2019 77%

2018 76%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Revise as you go along, there is too much to learn to leave it until the end.

Past papers, past papers, past papers!

Long answer questions - structure!

There are lots of online resources available such as:

YouTube - Planet PE

YouTube - The EverLearner

YouTube - Fitness with Mr Matthews

You can do this – if you can get a 7, you can get a 9. Don't see it as 2 grades, it is a 10% improvement. Everyone can improve by 10%.

How to get a Top Grade in Physics

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Physics:

To be successful in Physics you have to have to consider a number of things.

Do you understand the work?

Have you learnt the facts?

Can you apply this to new and unfamiliar situations?

Students that are successful in GCSE Physics have tackled each of these by asking for help about areas they find hard to understand, thoroughly learning the factual knowledge in personal revision and completing all homework to get feedback on areas to improve. They have regularly used online revision videos to tackle areas of misconceptions and embed knowledge learned.

Students are confident in all question types and have mastered question decoding (what is it asking you to do?) how to answer both in detail but in a concise manner. In longer analytical questions they structure answers well and draw comparisons using the data provided. Students are confident in the planning and analysis all of the required practicals. In practical design questions they use short, information dense instructions and diagrams (even if the response area is lined).

Top grade students understand theoretical models and their areas of weakness and can use mathematical techniques in a variety of contexts.

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Particle model. Consideration of how particles move, are attracted to each other and how collisions affect pressure.

Atomic model. The history and development of the current theory. What is radiation and why it dangerous. Understanding the importance of half-life and relating it to difference situations.

Electricity. What is current and voltage. Rules for series and parallel circuits. Being able to apply the idea of an electric field to a situation where there is a big potential difference between 2 objects.

Forces. How forces can change the motion of an object. The ability to know and apply the Newton's Laws and the conservation of momentum. How pressure in fluids depends on various factors.

Energy changes and how they relate to forces and power. Organic chemistry. Students see the links with the properties of molecules and the work on bonding and intermolecular forces. Students can see the links between molecules with different functional groups.

Electromagnetism. Understanding how an invisible force can affect current carrying conductors and how this can be used to make things move, such as electromagnets and motors. How current is produced in generators and what factors affect the size of it.

Space. Linking forces to objects orbiting planets. Understanding the differences in life cycles of stars depending on their size.

Memorising the formula and being able to manipulate them. Physics papers are 40 mathematically based so practise using the formula.

Remember your key words and definitions.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

June 2022 75%

November 2021 75%

June 2021 no external exams

November 2020 70%

June 2020 no external exams

June 2019 71%

June 2018 67%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

Practise applying the concepts. You will come across a question where you have never seen the context before (they cannot all be covered in class), in these situations you need to look at what the question gives you and work out the topic you need. Practice is the key.

Check understanding now – you cannot revise what you do not understand.

Use online resources and your text book to support your own notes (not replace them). Maths & Physics tutor is great for questions are revision resources.

There are marks for understanding, knowledge and skills. Bright students can shine in understanding skills, but it is that extra knowledge from revision can make the difference between a 7 & a 9.

How to get a Top Grade in Religious Studies

Tried and tested successful study / revision techniques used by top grade students in Religious Studies:

Learn **key words** from the specification.

These words can appear in any exam question.

If you don't know what a word means, you can't get *any* marks on the question!

So: do you know what qadr means? Sacrament? Tawalla? Parousia? Etc.

Know what **different Christian groups** and **different Muslim groups** believe.

The exam mark-scheme caps your achievement at around grade 4-5 if you don't do this.

You can't just give a general "*Christians believe...*" answer.

You need "*Most Catholics believe... Many Quakers would say...*", etc

Tricky topics / concepts / theories / formulas to focus on:

Christian beliefs:

Know the basic difference between sacramental Christianity (broadly, the Catholic church) and evangelical Christianity (broadly, the Protestant churches).

Know the different emphasis given by different Christians to the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and the meaning these events have in different Christians' lives.

Know different Christian theories of salvation. (PhD-level stuff!)

Muslim beliefs:

Pay close attention to qadr & free will. (More PhD-level stuff.)

Muslim practices:

Zakat and hajj are not well described in the textbook. Use your notes carefully.

Jihad is not 'holy war'. Learn the difference.

Know your Eids.

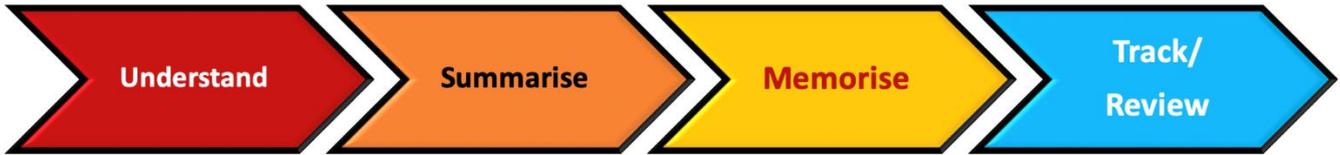
Philosophy: Social justice means wealth and poverty, not (mainly) racism, sexism, etc.

Grade boundary needed for a grade 9 (%):

Varies year to year, always around 78%

Words of wisdom to motivate and inspire:

“Two people will never learn: the one who is arrogant, because she thinks she already knows; and the one who is timid, because he never asks for what he needs.”

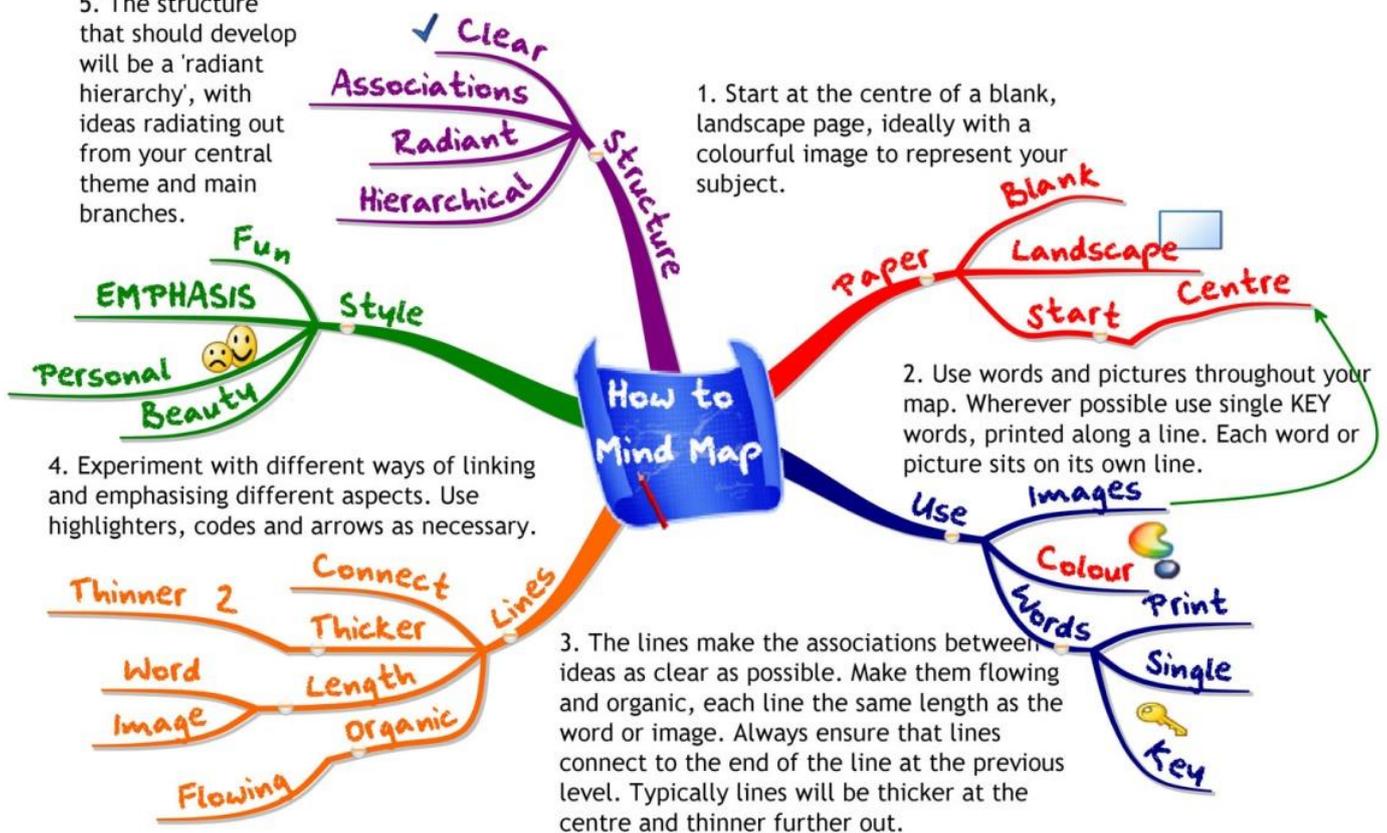


What can you recall about the techniques we went through last year in Good Study Habits sessions? Which ones have you been using?



5. The structure that should develop will be a 'radiant hierarchy', with ideas radiating out from your central theme and main branches.

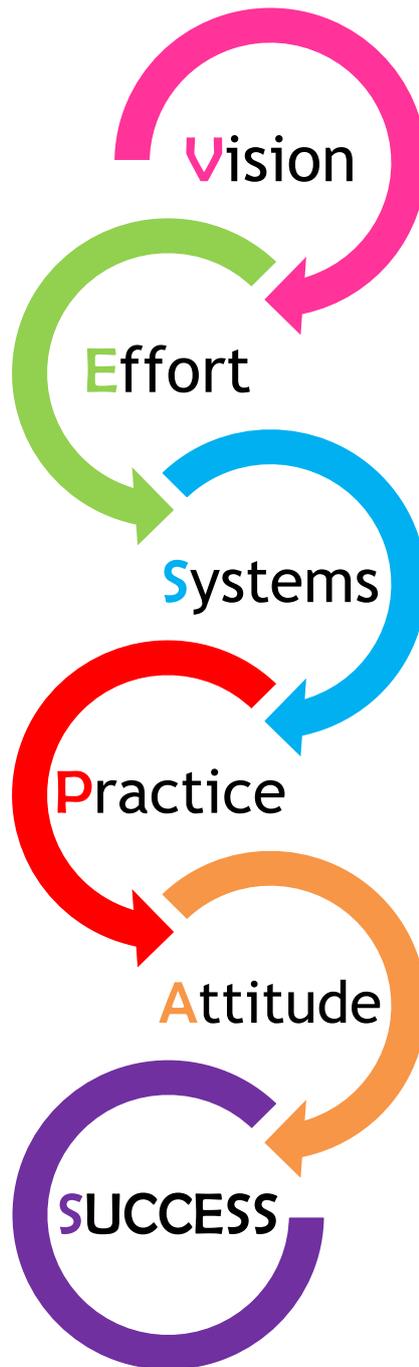
1. Start at the centre of a blank, landscape page, ideally with a colourful image to represent your subject.



2. Use words and pictures throughout your map. Wherever possible use single KEY words, printed along a line. Each word or picture sits on its own line.

4. Experiment with different ways of linking and emphasising different aspects. Use highlighters, codes and arrows as necessary.

3. The lines make the associations between ideas as clear as possible. Make them flowing and organic, each line the same length as the word or image. Always ensure that lines connect to the end of the line at the previous level. Typically lines will be thicker at the centre and thinner further out.



- Having a vision is central to success.
- Dreams become goals when you take action.
- Imagine yourself successful in the future.

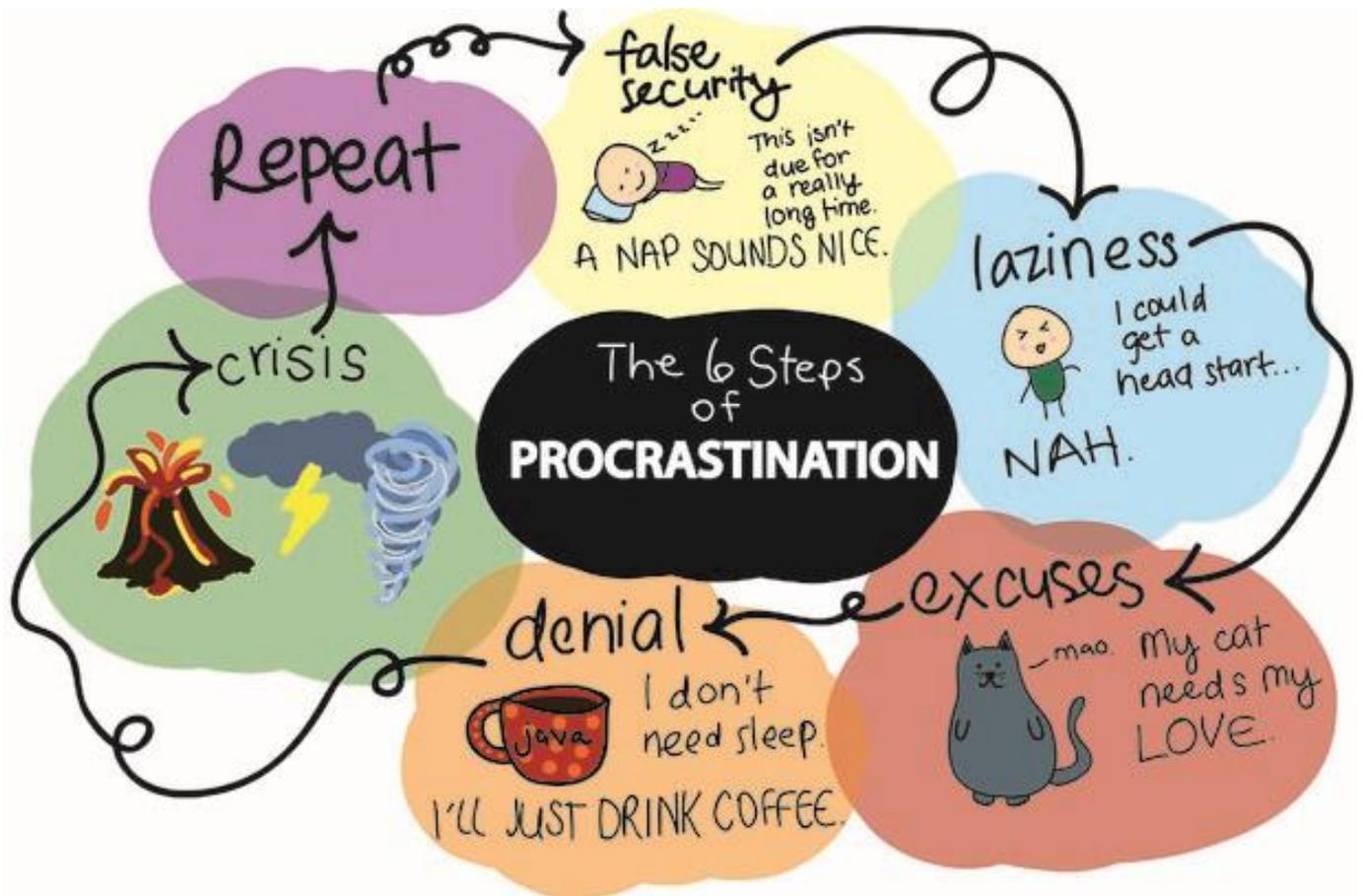
- Effort is relative. Surround yourself with hard-working people and you'll get better grades.
- If you had a job, you'd be doing a 38-hour working week. Aim to match this and your grades will leap up.
- Effort is a habit. New habits need a reminder, a routine and a reward (the three R's).
- We all have blockers - recognise and eliminate yours.

- Little and often beats cramming.
- "Chunking" a task makes it less scary and more achievable.

- Revision is a three-step process: learn the content, develop the skills, and seek feedback.
- Know the skills you will be tested on and practise them under a variety of conditions.
- Successful students take action and practise hard.

- Successful students need to succeed more than they fear failure.
- Negativity will cost you at least a grade in each subject.
- Stay positive and strong when things go badly.
- Kill your inner critic.
- When all else fails, go for a walk.

Procrastination – the road to failure!



24% of people describe themselves as chronic procrastinators. It is a complex problem to solve though. Back in the 1920's, during an informal observation of Russian waiters, psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik noticed that when a customer paid their bill the waiters had no problem remembering the order, but if the customer later queried the bill the waiters struggled to remember what had been ordered. Paying the bill seemed to bring closure to the mind of the waiters so they dismissed the information from their minds.

Zeigarnik tested this in the laboratory by asking people to complete routine tasks and occasionally stopping them before they finished. Unfinished tasks stuck in their minds much more than finished tasks – so starting any activity causes your mind a form of mental anxiety. When we are unable to finish tasks, this nags away at our minds. When we finish we breathe a sigh of relief? How does this affect your starting a task? Some part of your mind knows that if you start – you will be anxious to finish, if you feel overwhelmed by the job it may just be easier not to start!

Getting into the habit of activities that get you “off the starting blocks” and alleviate the stress of facing a difficult piece of work could dramatically improve your organisation skills and your results.

A final thought on time management

A professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks right to the top, rocks about 2" diameter.

He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So, the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them in to the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He asked his students again if the jar was full. They agreed that yes, it was.

The professor then picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. "Now" said the professor, "I want you to recognise that this is your life".

"The rocks are the important things - anything that is so significant to you that if it were lost, you would be devastated. The pebbles are the other things in life that matter, but on a smaller scale. The sand is everything else, the 'small stuff'. If you put the sand or the pebbles into the jar first, there is no room for the rocks.

The same goes for your life. If you spend all your energy and time on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are truly most important. Be aware of the things that matter in your life and spend time on the important".

Exam Boards

- Art and Design (Fine Art) [AQA 8202](#)
- Art and Design (Photography) [AQA 8206](#)
- Biology (Triple Sciences) [AQA 8461](#)
- Business Studies [OCR \(Business 9-1 J204\)](#)
- Chemistry (Triple Sciences) [AQA GCSE Chemistry](#)
- Computer Science OCR [GCSE - Computer Science \(9-1\) - J277 \(from 2020\) - OCR](#)
- Design and Technology: Product Design or Textiles [AQA 8552](#)
- Design & Technology Food Preparation and Nutrition [AQA 8585](#)
- Drama [AQA GCSE Drama](#)
- English Language [AQA 8700](#)
- English Literature [AQA 8702](#)
- Geography [B GCSE - Geography for Enquiring Minds \(J384\)](#)
- History A - [J410 \(FB\) Explaining the Modern World](#)
- Latin [Eduqas](#)
- Maths [Edexcel 1MA1](#),
- Modern Foreign Languages AQA Courses [French](#) & [German](#)
- Music [Edexcel 1MU0](#)
- Physical Education [AQA \(8582\)](#)
- Physics (Triple Sciences) [AQA 8463](#)
- Religious Studies [OCR GCSE full course](#).
- Science (Combined course) [AQA 8464](#)