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Revision Handbook

2026

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Effective Revision: How to Revise Smarter

Revision is not about rereading notes or highlighting for hours. Effective revision means **training your brain to remember and apply knowledge over time**. The following strategies are backed by cognitive science and are proven to improve long-term memory.

Key Principles of Effective Revision

1. Retrieval Practice

"If you don't pull it out, you won't remember it."

Retrieval practice means **actively trying to recall information from memory**, rather than passively rereading notes.

✅ Examples of retrieval practice:

- Answering exam questions from memory
- Writing everything you remember about a topic, then checking
- Flashcards (answer first, then flip)
- Quizzing yourself or others

❌ What retrieval practice is NOT:

- Rereading notes
- Copying information out
- Highlighting without testing yourself

One particularly effective strategy is the creation and use of **flashcards**. Flashcards are generally a card containing a small amount of information as an aid to learning. The use of flashcards are for low stakes testing to improve recall and to strengthen memory.

An effective flashcard may include the following (*in each subject they will be used in a different way*):

- A key term/key word with definition on the back.
- A key date with the event on the back.
- A key equation with its use in practice on the back.

- A past paper question and a model answer on the back.

Why it works
Every time you retrieve information, you strengthen the memory. Even getting things wrong helps your brain learn.

2. Spacing and Interleaving

"Little and often beats last-minute cramming."

Spacing

Spacing means **revisiting topics multiple times over weeks and months**, not all at once.

✅ Example:

- Revise Romeo & Juliet today
- Revisit it at the end of the week
- Revisit again at the weekend

Each time, your brain works harder - and that's good.

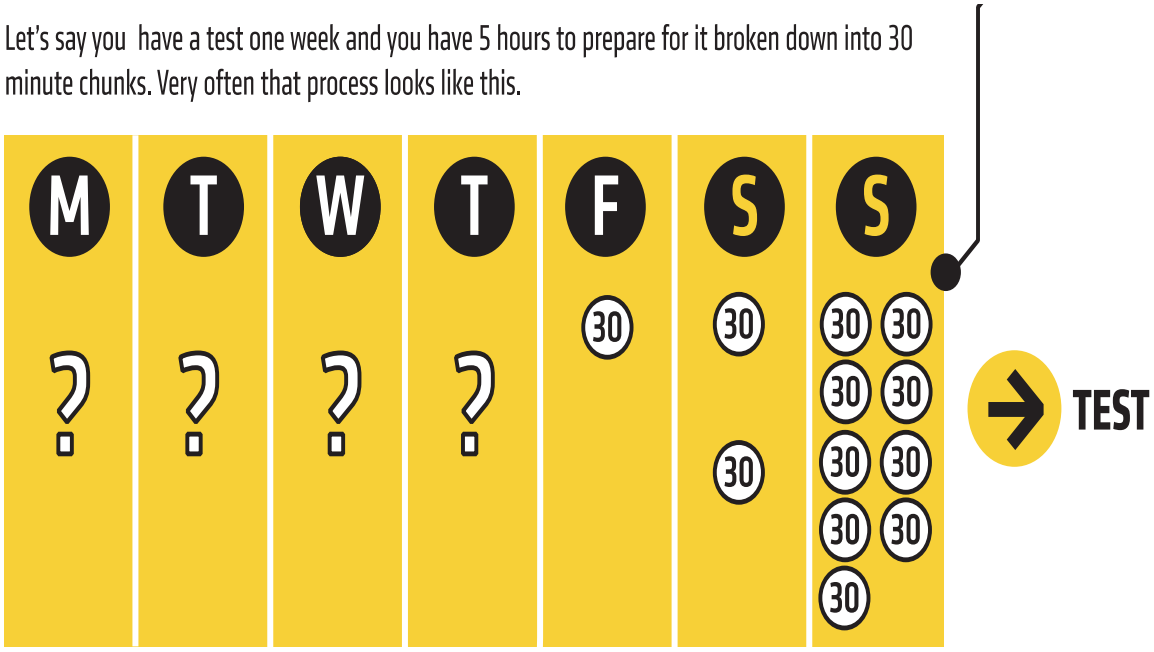
Interleaving

Interleaving means **mixing different topics or skills**, rather than studying just one thing at a time.

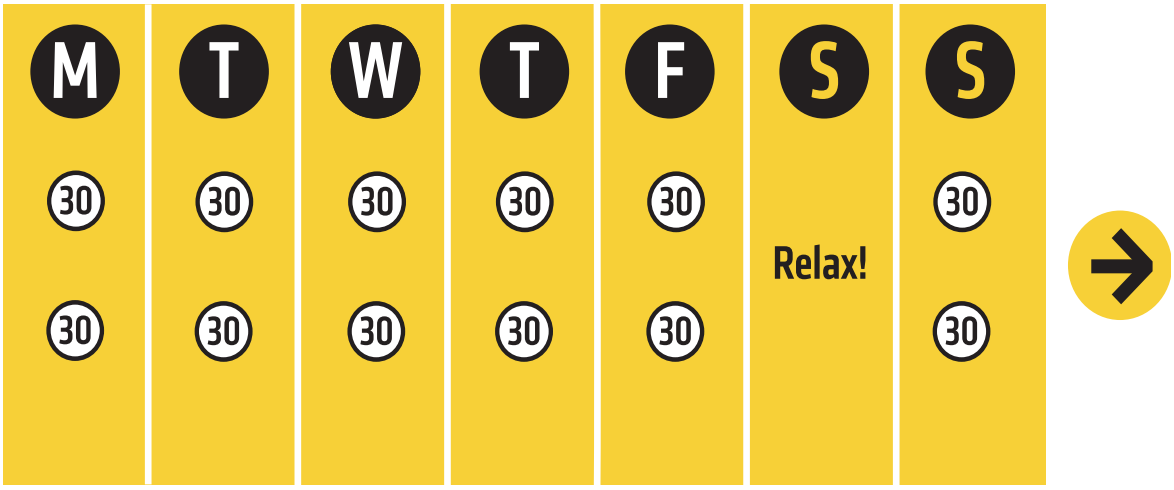
✅ Example:

- Revise language techniques, then context, then essay planning
- Mix poetry from different themes rather than one poem at a time

Let's say you have a test one week and you have 5 hours to prepare for it broken down into 30 minute chunks. Very often that process looks like this.



Instead of mass practice, a much more effective way of revising is to space out your revision like this:



By breaking up your revision into 30 minute chunks and spacing out the time between revision, you will consolidate what you have learned and retain the material much more effectively.

Interleaving involves switching between ideas and topics during a study session. This ensures that you are not studying one idea or topic for too long. Mixing up your revision and chunking it supports learning and strengthens your memory.

> *As we have seen with spaced practice, leaving gaps between studying is very effective but what if you are studying multiple topics within a subject? Interleaving means mixing it up and not studying all the material at once.*

For example, instead of organising your revision week like this:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Romeo and Juliet	**P&C Poetry**	**P1Q5**	**Unseen Poetry**	**ACC**
Romeo and Juliet	**P&C Poetry**	**P1Q5**	**Unseen Poetry**	**ACC**
Romeo and Juliet	**P&C Poetry**	**P1Q5**	**Unseen Poetry**	**ACC**

A much more effective way of organising revision would be like this:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Romeo and Juliet	**Unseen Poetry**	**P1Q5**	**ACC**	**P&C Poetry**
P1Q5	**ACC**	**P&C Poetry**	**Romeo and Juliet**	**ACC**
P&C Poetry	**Romeo and Juliet**	**Unseen Poetry**	**P1Q5**	**Romeo and Juliet**

As you are doing this, another highly effective strategy is to try and think of connections between topics you are studying considering similarities and differences.

Studying one topic for a long term can give them impression that you have mastered it but often this can be misleading

Why it works
Your brain is forced to notice differences between topics and choose the right strategy — just like in exams.

3. Deliberate Practice

“Focus on what you can’t do yet.”

Deliberate practice means **targeting weaknesses on purpose**, not avoiding them.

✅ Examples:

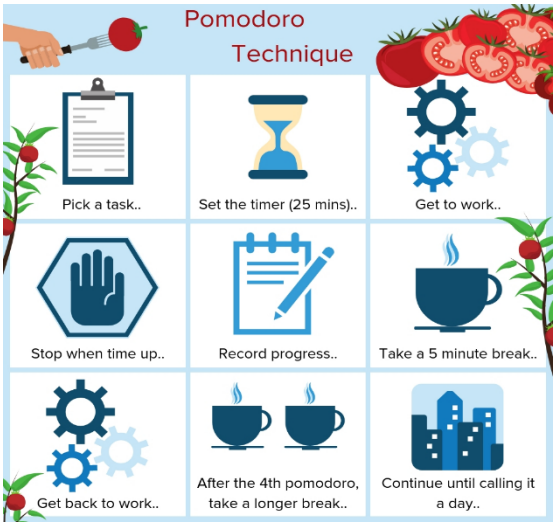
- Practising paragraph structure if marks are lost there
- Rewriting exam answers after feedback
- Improving timing on essays

Key features:

- Specific (not vague)
- Challenging
- Based on feedback
- Repeated

❌ Not deliberate practice:

- Rewriting neat notes
- Revising topics you already know well



Why it works
Progress comes from struggle — not comfort.

4. Dual Coding

“Words + pictures = stronger memory.”

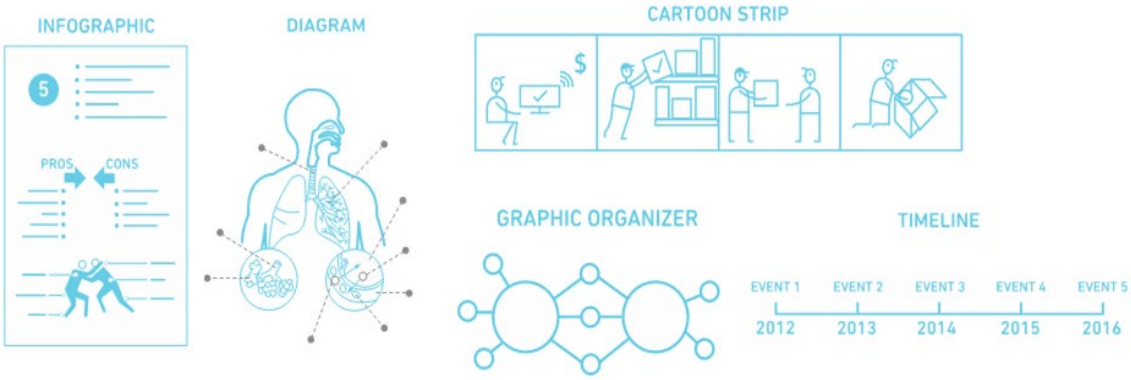
Dual coding means **combining text with visuals** so information is processed in two ways.

✅ Examples:

- Diagrams with labels
- Timelines
- Storyboards
- Mind maps
- Tables and flowcharts

❌ Not dual coding:

- Decorative images with no meaning
- Copying diagrams without understanding



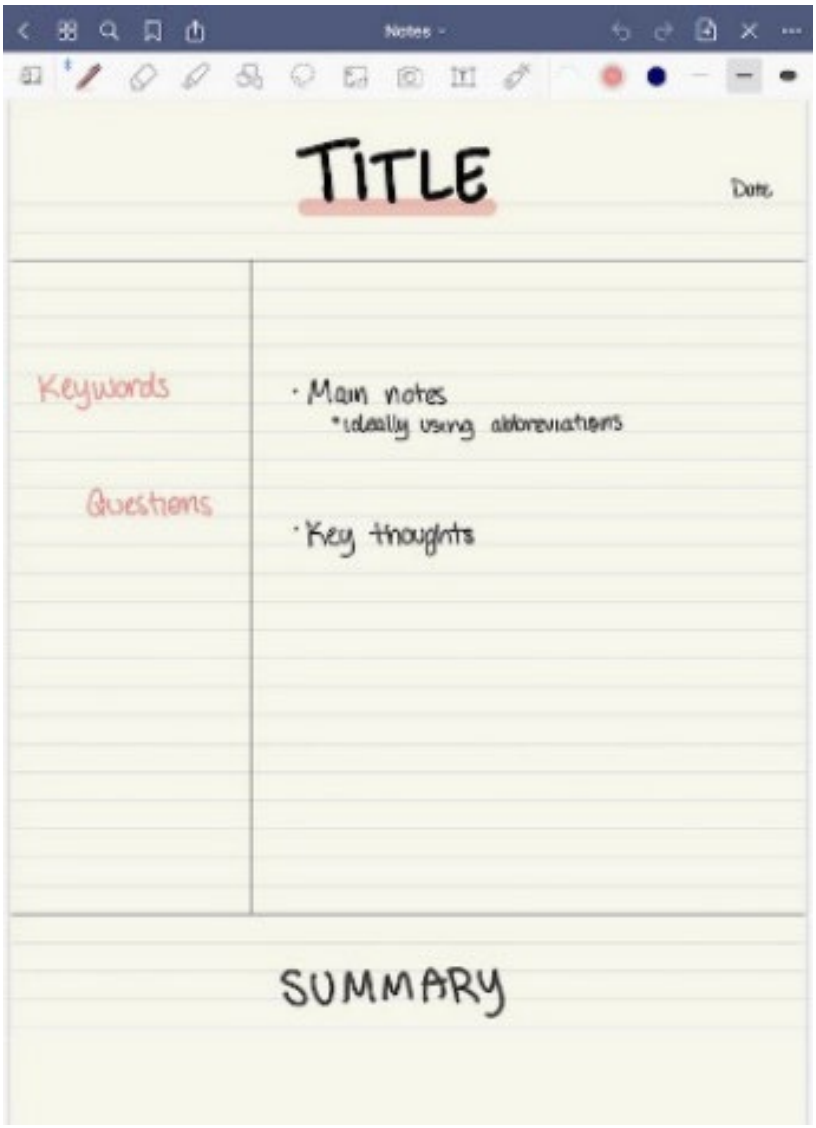
Why it works
Visuals help organise information and make it easier to recall under pressure.

5. The Cornell Notes Method

The Cornell Notes method helps students **organise, review, and revise effectively**.

How to Set Up a Cornell Notes Page

Section	Purpose
Notes Section	Main notes from lesson or revision
Cue Column	Keywords, questions, prompts
Summary	Short explanation in own words



Step-by-Step Cornell Method

1. During the Lesson or Revision

- Write notes in the **main notes section**
- Focus on key ideas, not full sentences

2. After the Lesson

- Add questions or keywords in the **cue column**
- These become retrieval practice prompts

✅ Example questions:

- "What is dramatic irony?"
- "Why is context important here?"

3. Summarise

- At the bottom, write a **3–4 line summary**
- Use your own words

4. Revise Using the Notes

- Cover the notes section
- Answer cue questions fr

The Five-Step Revision Plan

This plan helps students revise **efficiently and independently**.

Step 1: Identify What You Need to Revise

- Use your specification, checklist, or knowledge organiser
- Traffic-light topics:
  - ✅ Green = confident
  - ⚠ Amber = partial understanding
  - ❌ Red = weak area

Step 2: Plan Your Revision Time

- Short sessions (20–40 minutes)
- Spread over weeks
- Balance subjects and topics

✅ Aim for **consistency**, not hours at once.

Step 3: Learn or Review the Content

- Read or watch explanations
- Create **concise notes**
- Use dual coding

⚠ Keep this phase short — don't stay here too long.

Step 4: Retrieve and Practise

This is the most important step.

✅ Use:

- Exam questions
- Retrieval grids
- Flashcards
- Brain dumps

Always try first **before** checking notes.

Step 5: Check, Reflect, Improve

- Mark your work using mark schemes
- Identify mistakes
- Rewrite answers
- Focus next session on weaknesses

Ineffective Revision Strategies: What *Doesn't* Work (and Why)

With effective revision in mind, it is just as important to recognise **revision strategies that feel productive but have little or no real impact on learning or memory**. Many students use these methods because they are familiar or comfortable — but they do not help information stick.

Understanding what *doesn't* work will help you replace poor habits with strategies that actually improve results.

Common Ineffective Revision Strategies

❌ **1. Copying Notes or Rewriting from a Revision Guide**

Simply writing out notes or copying from textbooks or exercise books **does not require your brain to think deeply**.

- It feels busy, but it is passive
- You are looking at information rather than recalling it
- There is little challenge or struggle

✅ Instead:

- Condense notes
- Turn content into questions
- Use retrieval practice

Why this doesn't work:

Learning happens when your brain has to *retrieve* information, not just rewrite it.

❌ **2. Reading Without Doing Anything With the Information**

Reading notes or textbooks over and over again **creates familiarity, not understanding**.

Common problems:

- Trying to revise *too much information* on one page
- Long reading sessions with no testing
- Last-minute cramming

✅ Instead:

- Read small sections
- Close the book
- Write or say what you remember
- Return to the content later (spacing)

Why this doesn't work:

Recognition ("I've seen this before") is not the same as recall ("I can explain this").

❌ 3. Highlighting for the Sake of It

Highlighting without purpose is one of the **least effective** revision strategies.

- Everything ends up highlighted
- No thinking is required
- It looks neat but changes nothing

✅ Instead:

- Highlight *after* attempting retrieval
- Use colour coding linked to meaning
- Turn highlighted sections into questions

Key rule:

👉 *Highlighting should support thinking — not replace it.*

❌ 4. Multitasking and Lack of Focus

Trying to revise while:

- Using a phone
- Watching TV
- Listening to lyrics
- Frequently switching tasks means your attention is constantly broken.

✅ Instead:

- Short, focused sessions
- Silent or instrumental background only
- One task at a time

Why this doesn't work:

Your brain cannot fully focus on learning while doing something else. Multitasking lowers retention.

❌ 5. Comfort-Zone Revision

Revising only topics you already know well because it:

- Feels easier
- Feels successful
- Builds false confidence

✅ Instead:

- Target weak areas
- Practise difficult skills
- Use feedback to guide revision

AQA GCSE CITIZENSHIP STUDIES – SUBJECT OVERVIEW

Citizenship Studies explores **rights, responsibilities, democracy, law, and participation** in society. It helps students understand how the UK is governed and how citizens can make a difference.

Exam Breakdown

Paper 1: Active Citizenship and Politics & Participation **1 hour 45 minutes | 50%**	**Paper 2: Politics & Participation** **1 hour 45 minutes | 50%**
• Active Citizenship • Politics and Participation • Campaigning and taking action • Elections, democracy and Parliament	• Life in Modern Britain • Rights and Responsibilities • Identity, diversity and the media • Law, justice and human rights

Key Skills Tested

- Knowledge and understanding
- Use of real-world examples
- Structured extended writing
- Explanation and evaluation

Hints & Tips

✅ Use **current examples**
✅ Learn key **citizenship vocabulary**
✅ Practise **8-mark questions**
✅ Answer using structured paragraphs
✅ Always link to democracy and participation

TOPICS FOR REVISION		**SKILLS**
Theme A: Life in Modern Britain • Rights and responsibilities • Human rights in the UK • Identity and diversity • Community cohesion • The role of the media	**Theme B: Rights and Responsibilities** • The law and the justice system • Youth justice • Civil and criminal law • Courts and sentencing • Equality and discrimination	• Knowledge and understanding of citizenship issues • Analysis of sources and evidence • Application of citizenship

• Free press and censorship		concepts to real-life situations • Constructing balanced arguments • Evaluation of different viewpoints • Reaching justified conclusions • Planning and evaluating citizenship action • Structured extended writing using evidence and examples
Theme C: Politics and Participation • Parliamentary democracy • The role of MPs • Political parties • Elections and voting • Pressure groups • Citizenship participation	**Theme D: Active Citizenship** • Planning a citizenship action • Carrying out action • Evaluating impact	

OCR GCSE COMPUTER SCIENCE – SUBJECT OVERVIEW

Computer Science focuses on **how computers work**, **how data is represented**, and **how programs are designed and written**.

Exam Breakdown

Paper 1: Computer Systems **1 hour 30 minutes | 50%**	**Paper 2: Computational Thinking, Algorithms & Programming** **1 hour 30 minutes | 50%**
• Systems architecture • Memory and storage • Networks and protocols • Cyber security • Systems software • Ethical, legal and environmental issues	• Algorithms • Programming techniques • Computational thinking • Boolean logic • Data representation • Testing and robust programming

Hints & Tips

- ✅ Show working for calculations
- ✅ Practise **trace tables**
- ✅ Use correct **technical language**
- ✅ Read command words carefully
- ✅ Revised Python syntax regularly

TOPICS FOR REVISION		SKILLS
Programming & Algorithms • Algorithms and pseudocode • Flowcharts • Variables and data types • Sequence, selection, iteration • Subroutines • Boolean logic • Trace tables	**Data Representation** • Binary, hexadecimal • Images and sound representation • Data compression • Character encoding (ASCII, Unicode) **Databases & Ethics** • Databases and SQL • Validation and verification • Legal, ethical and environmental issues	• Algorithm design • Programming and code tracing • Problem solving • Computational thinking • Technical analysis • Application of knowledge
Computer Systems • Hardware components • CPU and memory • Storage devices • Operating systems • Embedded systems	**Networks & Cyber Security** • Networks (LAN, WAN) • Protocols • Network topologies • Threats and vulnerabilities • Malware • Encryption	

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE – SUBJECT OVERVIEW

English Language tests reading, analysing and writing **unseen texts**. There are **no set texts** to memorise.

Exam Breakdown

Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing 1 hour 45 minutes | 50%	Paper 2: Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives 1 hour 45 minutes | 50%
• Fiction reading analysis • Descriptive or narrative writing	• Non-fiction reading • Comparative analysis • Transactional writing (argiue/persuade) •

Things to note: 32 marks available for SPAG across both papers.

Hints & Tips

- ✅ Stick to the question focus
- ✅ Use **short quotations**
- ✅ Plan extended writing
- ✅ Manage time carefully
- ✅ Accuracy in SPaG matters

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE – TOPICS FOR REVISION	
Reading Skills • Language analysis (P1Q2+P2Q3) • Structural analysis (P1Q3) • Comparing texts (P2Q2 and P2Q4) • Evaluative responses (P1Q4)	**Writing Skills** • Descriptive writing • Narrative writing • Transactional writing (letters, articles, speeches) • Writing to argue, persuade and explain • Sentence variety • Paragraph structure
Technical Accuracy • Spelling • Punctuation • Grammar • Vocabulary choices	

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE – SUBJECT OVERVIEW

English Literature involves studying **set texts** including Shakespeare, a 19th-century novel, modern texts and poetry.

Exam Breakdown

Paper 1: Shakespeare & the 19th-Century Novel **1 hour 45 minutes | 40%**	**Paper 2: Modern Texts & Poetry** **2 hours 15 minutes | 60%**
Romeo and Juliet A Christmas Carol	• Blood Brothers • Power & Conflict Poetry Comparison • Unseen poetry

Hints & Tips

- ✅ Learn **short, flexible quotations**
- ✅ Analyse language and structure
- ✅ Link context to meaning
- ✅ Compare ideas **and** methods
- ✅ Clear paragraph structure is key

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE – TOPICS FOR REVISION	
Romeo and Juliet • Plot and characters • Key themes • Language and imagery • Contextual influences • Structure and dramatic techniques	**A Christmas Carol** • Character development • Themes and messages • Writer's methods • Historical context
Blood Brothers • Theme development • Character relationships • Social and cultural context • Structure and form	**Power and Conflict poetry** • First impressions • Language analysis • Form and structure • Personal interpretation
Unseen Poetry **First impressions** **Language analysis** **Form and structure** **Personal interpretation**	

EDEXCEL GCSE MATHEMATICS – SUBJECT OVERVIEW

GCSE Maths develops **numerical fluency**, **problem-solving**, and **logical reasoning**. Students take **three exam papers** at either **Foundation or Higher tier**.

Exam Breakdown (All Students)

- **Paper 1:** Non-calculator
- **Paper 2:** Calculator
- **Paper 3:** Calculator
- Each exam: **1 hour 30 minutes**
- Foundation tier: Grades **1–5**
- Higher tier: Grades **4–9**

FOUNDATION **Paper 1: Non-Calculator**	**HIGHER** **Paper 1: Non-Calculator**
What to Expect • Arithmetic without a calculator • Fractions, decimals and percentages • Basic ratio and proportion • Simple algebra (substitution, solving one-step equations) • Sequences • Basic geometry (angles, perimeter, area) • Simple probability This paper tests **number skills**, **accuracy**, and **basic algebraic understanding**. ✅ Expect shorter questions ✅ Clear methods are rewarded ✅ Mental maths and written methods are essential	**What to Expect** • Surds and exact values • Algebraic manipulation • Quadratics (expanding and factorising) • Proof • Advanced number problems • Algebraic sequences This paper tests **algebraic fluency**, **reasoning**, and **deep understanding** without calculator support. ✅ Accuracy is critical ✅ Algebra dominates this paper ✅ Structure your working clearly
Paper 2: Calculator	**Paper 2: Calculator**
What to Expect • Calculator-based calculations • Percentages and ratio problems • Speed, distance, time • Simple graphs • Averages and charts • Area and volume • Introductory problem-solving	**What to Expect** • Quadratic and simultaneous equations • Trigonometry (including real-life problems) • Circle theorems • Ratio and proportion (including growth and decay) • Graphs and functions • More complex geometry

This paper allows harder calculations but still focuses on core maths skills**.** ✅ Calculator helps with arithmetic, not thinking ✅ Questions often combine topics ✅ Working out must still be shown	This paper introduces higher-level problem-solving using calculator support. ✅ **Use calculator wisely** ✅ **Set problems out logically** ✅ **Justify answers clearly**
Paper 3: Calculator	**Paper 3: Calculator**
What to Expect • Multi-step problem-solving • Ratio and proportion in context • Geometry involving shapes and measures • Interpreting data and graphs • Probability of single events • Understanding mathematical language This paper focuses more on **application of skills** and **real-life problems**. ✅ Read questions carefully ✅ Identify what maths is needed ✅ Show every step clearly	**What to Expect** • Multi-topic problem-solving • Algebraic fractions • Functions and transformations • Vectors • Advanced probability • Proof and reasoning questions This paper heavily focuses on **thinking**, **linking topics**, and **applying maths to unfamiliar situations**. ✅ Expect fewer but harder questions ✅ Method marks are crucial ✅ Explain reasoning where asked

MATHS EXAM HINTS & TIPS (ALL PAPERS)

✅ Show **full working**, even if unsure
✅ Use clear layout and labels
✅ Answer in context (units, rounding)
✅ Check answers using estimation
✅ Higher tier: explain *why*, not just *how*

MATHS TOPICS FOR REVISION	
FOUNDATION TIER	**HIGHER TIER**
Number • Integers and decimals • Fractions, decimals and percentages • Ratio (basic sharing) • Standard form (limited) • Estimation and rounding	**Number** • Surds • Standard form • Bounds • Compound interest • Exact values
Algebra • Simplifying expressions • Solving simple equations • Sequences • Substitution • Straight-line graphs (basic)	**Algebra** • Factorising (including quadratics) • Solving quadratic equations • Simultaneous equations • Inequalities • Algebraic fractions • Rearranging formulae
Ratio, Proportion & Rates • Ratio and proportion • Conversions • Simple speed, distance, time	**Ratio, Proportion & Rates** • Direct and inverse proportion • Growth and decay • Compound measures • Similarity
Geometry & Measures • Angles and basic angle rules • Perimeter, area and volume • Properties of shapes • Pythagoras (basic) • Transformations	**Geometry & Measures** • Trigonometry (including sine/cosine rule) • Pythagoras in 3D • Circle theorems • Vectors • Proof • Area under graphs
Statistics & Probability • Averages • Charts and graphs • Probability of single events	**Statistics & Probability** • Cumulative frequency • Box plots • Tree diagrams • Conditional probability

AQA GCSE COMBINED SCIENCE: SUBJECT OVERVIEW

Combined Science: Trilogy covers **Biology, Chemistry and Physics**, resulting in **two GCSE grades**. All students sit **six exams** at either **Foundation or Higher tier**.

Exam Breakdown (All Students)

- **6 exams total**
  - Biology Paper 1 & 2
  - Chemistry Paper 1 & 2
  - Physics Paper 1 & 2
- Each exam: **1 hour 15 minutes**
- **16.7% per paper**
- Foundation tier: Grades **1–5**
- Higher tier: Grades **4–9**

FOUNDATION **Biology Paper 1**	**HIGHER** **Biology Paper 1**
• Basic understanding of **cells** and specialised cells • Organisation of organisms (tissues, organs, organ systems) • **Infection and response** (pathogens, immunity, vaccination) • **Bioenergetics** (photosynthesis and respiration – word equations) • Simple required practical questions (method, variables, results) • Focus is on **recall**, **simple explanations**, and **basic data interpretation**.	• Detailed cell structure and **mitosis** • Enzyme action and factors affecting enzyme activity • Detailed immune response and monoclonal antibodies • **Rates of photosynthesis** and limiting factors • Required practicals with **analysis, graphs and evaluation** • Focus is on **explaining processes**, **interpreting data**, and **applying knowledge to unfamiliar situations**.
Biology Paper 2	**Biology Paper 2**
• **Homeostasis** (nervous system and hormones – basic roles) • **Inheritance and variation** (simple Punnett squares) • Adaptations, natural selection and extinction • **Ecology** (food chains, cycles, human impact) Required practical recall	• Control systems and feedback loops • Genetic inheritance with probability and ratios • Genetic engineering and evolution • Detailed ecological cycles and sustainability Practical analysis and evaluation questions

Chemistry Paper 1	Chemistry Paper 2
• **Atomic structure** and the periodic table • Ionic and covalent bonding (simple diagrams) • **Quantitative chemistry** (basic calculations) • Acids, alkalis and neutralisation • Required practicals (methods and conclusions)	• Electron structure and isotopes • Detailed bonding and structure • **Mole calculations** and balanced equations • Electrolysis and reactivity series • Required practicals with calculations and evaluation
Chemistry Paper 2	**Chemistry Paper 2**
• **Energy changes** (exothermic/endothermic reactions) • Rates of reaction (factors only) • Earth's resources and sustainability • Simple chemical analysis	• Energy profile diagrams and bond energy calculations • Rates of reaction including graphs • **Organic chemistry** (alkanes, alkenes, polymers) • Advanced chemical analysis (flame tests, chromatography)
Physics Paper 1	**Physics Paper 1**
• **Energy stores and transfers** • Basic efficiency calculations • Simple electrical circuits • Uses of energy and power • Required practical methods	• Calculations involving power, work done and efficiency • Circuit calculations including **resistance** • Energy resources and impacts • Practical analysis and graph interpretation
Physics Paper 2	**Physics Paper 2**
• Forces and motion (speed, distance, time) • Waves (sound and light properties) • Magnetism (basic ideas) • Space physics overview	• Newton's laws and momentum • **Wave calculations** and electromagnetic spectrum • Magnetism and electromagnetism in detail • Space physics including star life cycles and red shift

Science – Hints & Tips

- ✅ Learn **required practicals** thoroughly
- ✅ Always include **units**
- ✅ Practise calculations regularly
- ✅ Structure **6-mark explanations**
- ✅ Higher tier: show full mathematical reasoning

SCIENCE TOPICS FOR REVISION – FOUNDATION TIER	SCIENCE TOPICS FOR REVISION – HIGHER TIER
Biology (Foundation) • Cell biology • Organisation • Infection and response • Bioenergetics • Homeostasis and response • Inheritance, variation and evolution • Ecology • Required practicals (methods & variables only	**Biology (Higher)** • Cell biology (mitosis, microscopy) • Organisation (blood, heart, enzymes) • Infection and response • Bioenergetics (photosynthesis rates) • Homeostasis and response (hormones, thermoregulation) • Inheritance, variation and evolution (genetics calculations) • Ecology (cycles and human impact) • Required practicals (analysis, evaluation, calculations)
Chemistry (Foundation) • Atomic structure and periodic table • Bonding, structure and properties of matter • Quantitative chemistry (basic calculations) • Chemical changes • Energy changes (simple energy profiles) • Earth's resources • Required practicals (recall and simple analysis)	**Chemistry (Higher)** • Atomic structure (isotopes, electron structure) • Bonding (ionic, covalent, metallic) • Quantitative chemistry (moles, gas volumes) • Chemical changes (electrolysis, reactivity) • Energy changes (bond energy calculations) • Organic chemistry • Chemical analysis • Earth's resources • Required practicals (data handling, graphs, evaluation)
Physics (Foundation) • Energy (basic calculations and transfers) • Electricity (simple circuits) • Particle model of matter • Atomic structure • Forces (speed, distance, basic motion)	**Physics (Higher)** • Energy (efficiency, power, work done) • Electricity (resistance, series/parallel circuits) • Particle model (specific heat capacity) • Atomic structure

• Waves (properties of waves • Magnetism and electromagnetism (basic concepts) • Space physics (overview) • Required practicals (method and conclusions)	• Forces (Newton's laws, momentum) • Waves (electromagnetic spectrum) • Magnetism and electromagnetism • Space physics (red shift, life cycle of stars) • Required practicals (full calculations and evaluation)