

Beating GCSE Exam Stress by Zoe

Exams, especially GCSE's, can be stressful. With so many exams to take it's no wonder things can feel overwhelming at times. Don't worry! With a focus on organising your revision and looking after yourself, here are my best tips for beating exam stress.

Organising your revision

Timetables may not work for everyone

You'll hear lots of people telling you to create a revision timetable. Planning your revision hour-by-hour like this, as shown in the example below, may be a useful starting point, but if you're anything like me you might struggle to stick to it. So my top tip for you, is to create a 'to-do list.'

Instead of a timetable, you could try writing a list of the essential things you need to do to feel prepared for each exam and work your way through it. Have a look at the 'to-do list' vs. the timetable example below. For me, this makes revision more targeted and efficient, whilst giving a bit more flexibility on what I do and when. Once you've completed everything on the list, you can feel confident that you're prepared and then anything else you do is extra. Plus, there's nothing more satisfying than ticking something off your list!

Timetable vs To-do list

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
10:00 - 10:50	Read Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 1)	Read Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 3)		Read Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 5)			
11:00 - 11:50	Read Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 2)	Research themes in Hamlet	Read Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 4)	Research themes in Hamlet	Test self on chemistry notes	Yoga for stress relief	
12:00 - 12:30	Break	Mindfulness colouring	Test self on periodic table	Break	Mindfulness colouring	FaceTime Nan	
12:30 - 13:20	Find direct quotes in Hamlet	Make flashcards for themes	Maths Past Paper Part 2	Add to flashcards for themes	Attempt Chemistry past paper		Go for a jog
13:30 - 14:20	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
14:30 - 15:20	Maths Past Paper Part 1	Mark Maths Past Paper Part 1	Mark Maths Past Paper Part 2	Re-read chemistry notes	Mark Chemistry Paper		Lunch
15:30 - 16:20	Study periodic table	Correct mistakes	Correct mistakes	Recite chemistry notes	Correct mistakes		Painting
16:30 - 17:20		Work out (YouTube video)			Go over flashcards for themes	Work out (YouTube Video)	
17:30 - 18:30	Go for a walk outside		Video chat with friends	Work out (YouTube Video)			Film night

To Do	
✓	Read Hamlet Act 1 Scene 1
✓	Read Hamlet Act 1 Scene 2
	Read Hamlet Act 1 Scene 3
✓	Maths Past Paper
	Study Period Table
	Video chat with friends
	Chemistry notes

Past Papers, Past Papers, Past Papers

Even if you haven't quite finished revising all the content, make sure you do at least one timed past paper before your real exam. Although this can be a nerve-racking experience, there are multiple benefits to it, for example:

- You will quickly identify areas to focus your revision on.
- You might be able to spot common themes and trends that could appear in your own exam.
- Timed conditions give you an idea of how much you're expected to write for each question and how much thinking time you have.
- By practicing sitting an exam in a calmer environment, and by getting used to the layout and wording of the paper, it will make the actual exam less daunting.



They do say practice makes perfect after all!

Start with your weaknesses

Going over topics you already know can boost your confidence. However, it's important to prioritise your weaknesses, as these areas often take longer to revise and will help improve your overall grade in the long run.

A great way to identify your weaker areas could include doing past papers and looking at the topics you scored lowest on. You could also look through the syllabus for each subject and work out which bits seem less familiar to you than others do. By improving your weak areas, you will boost your overall confidence even more because nothing will be able to stop you from doing well.



You don't have to spend equal time on every subject

I really wish I had realised this when I first started revising. With so many GCSE exams, the idea of spending 6 hours a week on every subject (for example) can suddenly become very stressful.

However, if you're really strong at a certain subject and really struggling with another, it is OK to devote more time to the subject you find more difficult. It's still important to revise for all subjects but it is advisable to spend more time on the topics you find harder.



Looking after your physical and mental well-being

Ditch the caffeine!

I understand that with so many exams, knowing you *need* to revise, and feeling tired on top of it all... a can of energy drink might seem like the answer. Don't do it! I used energy drinks to try and revise late into the evenings and all it did was stop me sleeping and made me constantly need the loo!

Although it may seem like a quick fix, too much caffeine will drain you of energy after a while. This will only make it more likely that you'll feel burnt out when it comes to sitting your exams.



A healthy diet is good for the mind. Eat well.

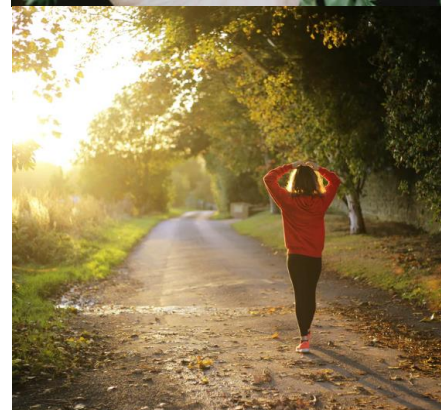
Definitely still treat yourself every now and then but also try really hard to make sure you eat lots of fruit and veg. The vitamins they contain help your mind stay active and alert, which makes it easier to absorb information. On the other hand, by eating lots of food high in fat and sugar, your brain becomes sluggish and sleepy. This isn't what you want whilst you're revising or sitting your exams! Pass me the veggies...



Make sure you exercise

When I was doing my GCSE's there was nothing worse than the thought of exercising! But now I know that exercise really helps to keep your brain awake and improves your ability to retain information.

Exercising a couple of times per week also lowers your baseline levels of stress and anxiety, which is really useful during exam times. It doesn't even have to be a lot, you could just go for a walk or go out on a bike ride with your friends. It all counts.



Making time to rest is just as important as revising

You can't revise 24/7, you will end up exhausted before your exam and you won't perform your best. Having breaks away from your work, and time away from screens, is really important for letting your brain recover. Try to sit outside for a bit each day too, without your phone, just to let your mind wander and unwind.

It's also really important to get enough good quality sleep! Try switching your phone onto "do not disturb" at night and you could even put it over the other side of the room so you're not tempted to check it until the morning.



Have a routine

In all honesty, the first few days will feel hard, but set yourself up with a good routine. Try to get up at the same time each day, set your meal times, and start and end your revision at the same time too. If you do this, you'll easily get into the swing of things and after a while your mind will feel more prepared for learning on your own.

Chat to people!

This is essential! Try not to bottle up your feelings. Remember, you're not alone because your friends are all in the same boat. Chat to family if you can, maybe your parents or guardians, teachers and school counsellors, even your siblings. This is particularly helpful if you're feeling stressed, as they will be able to offer you advice and reassurance.

Chatting regularly, even if it's over video call, will help to boost your mood and lower stress. If you're feeling really concerned but don't feel comfortable talking to your friends or family, you could try talking to people from organisations who specialise in mental health like the Samaritans (phone: 116 123) or Mind (phone: 0300 123 3393). The bottom line is, talk to someone you trust!



Be kind to yourself.

You're not going to remember every tiny bit of information for every exam and that's OK. Some exams will go better than others and that's OK too! It's normal. Examiners are not going to expect you to be an expert on every subject, think of it like you are showing them what you do know, rather than what you don't know.

As cheesy as it sounds, this stressful time won't last forever. Be proud of the effort you have put in and make sure you identify every achievement, no matter how small you think it is.



Good Luck! You've got this!

Zoe,
University of Essex Student

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