

# **GCSE** **GUIDE**

**FROM US TO YOU.**

**HERE'S EVERYTHING THAT  
WE'VE LEARNED**

**Written by past GCSE students of  
Stephen Perse Cambridge**

# GCSE Guide

**Stephen Perse**  
Cambridge

## Important

We're students. Just like you, but a year or two older and having seen the GCSEs inside out, it was a challenge for us too. This is why we set out to create the ultimate guidebook to help you go through yours smoothly.

This guidebook includes experiences of many people: it's written by top-band students, based on a year group-wide survey, and reviewed by counsellors and teachers. With carefully selected advice and exam-tested methods, this guidebook was made to empower you and go through GCSEs confidently.

It contains many different revision resources and ways to revise. There is no obligation at all to use all/any of these tools as everyone revises in different ways. It is definitely still possible to get high grades by using whatever the right resources and revision schedules are for you. We understand that this guidebook is long and probably seems daunting, remember that you're free to use it as much or a little as you like. Also, do not be overwhelmed if you are not doing lots of the things mentioned in the book - it is the way which works best for *you*.

We know the pain of cramming, the pressure of expectations, the panic of "I'm not gonna finish it all", the nervous "Am I ready?", and the exhausted "too tired to revise". We've been clueless too - not knowing where to start or how to study. The main thing is to develop a daily revision routine as this will normalise your day. This includes getting good sleep and eating well as this will fuel your brain in the best possible way!

But we also know the smiles on the results day, the cozy buddying over revision, the excitement for the summer holidays, the feeling of being on top of the world when revision pays off and the feeling of being fulfilled with hobbies, friends, and relationships.

We know it all. And our goal is to help you make the highs prevail. We cannot do the hard work for you, but we can give you tools to make it effective. We won't gatekeep anything: all study tips, strategies, and advice - it's all there. Everything we've learned is here for you to use.

The power to use it is in your hands.

Sincerely,

*The Authors Kseniia Strelbytska, Nina [], Alice [], Abigail [].*

*Students of **Stephen Perse Cambridge***

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## Revision strategies



### Get ahead with using AI effectively

You can partner with AI to *learn* more actively. It opens doors to millions of new ideas and perspectives. It can even be your 24/7 personal expert study coach – if you use it cleverly. You can try many different AIs – ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude, etc, and experiment with your prompts. Find something that accelerates your revision. We've compiled a couple of suggestions:

- **Listen to an engaging podcast on a GCSE topic.** Prompt an AI "Generate a 5000+ word essay that teaches me sophisticated thinking required for understanding this GCSE topic...". Paste the essay into a text-to-speech tool (such as [luvvoice.com](https://www.luvvoice.com)) to create an audio version. Ready to go!
- **Chat back and forth discussing, debating a concept.** Prompt an AI "Continuously challenge my reasoning until it's perfect for GCSE Edexcel Physics" or "I need to revise [topic]. I will explain and evaluate opportunities in [city], one at a time. Rebut and challenge my claims to develop my understanding." Critical thinking in action!
- **Identify weak areas.** Upload your recent test scans and prompt an AI "Identify my knowledge gaps and create a targeted revision plan with personalised GCSE practice questions."
- **Get feedback on your revision timetable or generate one!** Upload your timetable to an AI and prompt it "Evaluate my revision timetable for GCSE and identify weak areas. Generate an improved version." You can also upload revision lists and exam dates, and ask AI to create a timetable tailored to your preferences – for example, "Add spaced repetition" or "I prefer to revise 1 topic per day".

**NotebookLM** is a powerful AI assistant with tools to help your studying. You can upload anything – revision notes, textbook chapters, YT videos, links – and ask AI to create **explainer videos, podcasts, flashcards, quizzes, mind maps**, and so much more. It makes it easy to collect all your materials in one place and revise in many **different formats**.

# Top Tips for Revision

## Collaborate

**Discuss the topics with your friends** – just have a conversation where you explain the content and exchange facts you know. You can both see what you've missed and consolidate what you know – in a friendly and nice format. Try explaining hard concepts to each other: their intuitive explanation might be insightful for you, and vice versa.

**Explain a topic you are learning to someone** – a friend, your family, a plastic platypus, or even talk to yourself out loud – you are very likely to struggle to explain some concepts. This is *gold* – a clear marker of where your understanding is weak! Read up and come back to your listener (they should be excited to see you again!) – see if you improve. The last stage of the quest: explain *the same things* to your examiner.

**Plastic platypus learning** is a study method where you teach an inanimate object. This forces you to retrieve and explain facts from your memory, improving retention and understanding.

Put sticky notes with questions and answers right onto your notes, hand them to your family and ask them to test you. Make the questions stretch your abilities – not too hard but just enough to be challenging and engaging for your mind.

## Spaced repetition

Make a short set of **flashcards** (or equivalent) of hard topics/questions for each subject. Every time you go to revise that subject, go through them! It should only take 5 minutes (10 max), but the spaced repetition will help hard topics stick in your brain. It will also help get you in the right mindset to study that subject, so it will be easier to get started. [gizmo.ai](https://www.gizmo.ai) is excellent for making your flashcards!

## Blurting

Read through your notes for 10-15 minutes. Then close them and write down *everything* you remember on a clean sheet. Once done, compare it with your notes. Use a different coloured pen to write down everything you missed – these are your gaps. Re-read, then move on with the next blurt. Blurting forces active recall and identifies weak spots.

## Mind hooks

Your brain gives more attention to information it finds meaningful and exciting. This is why new knowledge will stick better if you link it to something you love and care about. So how do we create memorable hooks for boring info?

- **Add surprise – break the monotony of revision.**

# Revision Resources

Table showing how many students from our Year group used each resource.

## Specifications:

Each GCSE provides full information about the exam structure, including what topics are covered in each paper. You can find specifications by searching “[Subject Name] [Board Name] GCSE specification” or by clicking the link in each of the subject-specific guides. You need to know the exam inside-out before sitting your GCSEs!

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## Cognito



<https://cognitoedu.org/>

*Covers: Most subjects*

Features: Graphical video lessons, quizzes, ready-made flashcards, practice questions and past papers – for all subjects, all in one place.

It makes the content stick so much more than words in a textbook.

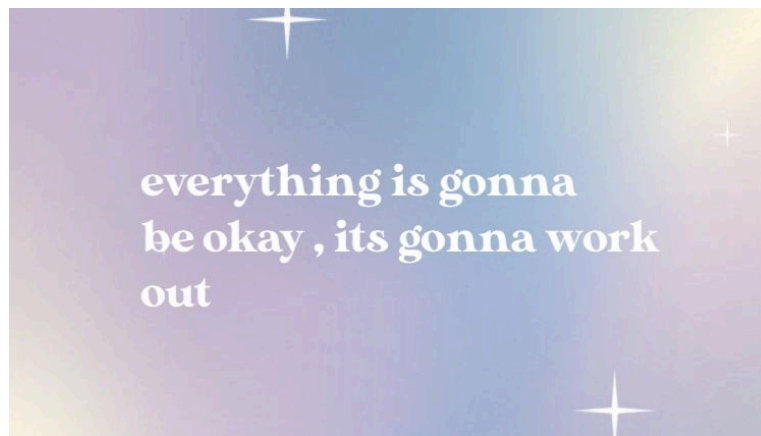
Cognito offers short (usually under 5-minute) animated videos that explain tricky Science and Maths topics using clear visuals and concise language. Each topic comes with matching quiz questions to test your understanding straight away. It's especially useful for visual learners or when you're tired and need quick refreshers.

Whether you're revisiting a topic you didn't fully understand in class or doing last-minute revision the night before the exam, Cognito is great for reinforcing surface-level knowledge. It won't give you the depth for top-grade answers on its own, but it's an excellent tool for building or refreshing your foundation.

*“It was absolutely brilliant for my Y11 mocks and I wish I had found it for the Y10 end of year exams. Cognito is such a brilliant way to quickly learn topics and cover surface content speedily with matching questions for each topic, however it doesn't necessarily cover topics in the depth required for the real GCSEs.”*

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# Exam day



## Know your exams

Usually, you will be asked to arrive 25-30 minutes before the start of the exam. This gives you buffer time if you are running late, and you can chat with your friends or do a final notes review. The End of Year 10 exams are held in the Sports hall. Year 11 Mocks and the official GCSEs are held in the Hall. People with extra time sit both exams in the N block. During mock exams, make sure you dress warm (as you will be lining up outside!).

## Before an exam.

### Night before an exam.

Review past papers you've already done and re-read your notes. This helps your brain consolidate knowledge during sleep and refresh common phrasing, mistakes and key terms.

### Morning before an exam.

Make sure you pack **spare stationery** (pens, pencils) and all **equipment required** (calculator, ruler, compass, protractor, rubber). Don't panic if you forgot something – there are usually spares in the GCSE exam hall (but you never know). Having all you need genuinely means one less thing to worry about.

Stick to your **regular daily routine** to make your day less stressful. Familiar habits help calm your nervous system and give your brain a sense of control.

Look through the **notes in the morning** and/or on the way to school. This reactivates information in the short-term memory, making recall during the exam faster and more accurate.

## Exam strategy: find your special strategy

You should try out different exam techniques when doing **past papers** and find the one that **works best for you**. Before starting the past paper exam, write down the exact details of the technique you are testing, and follow it through. After finishing the exam, analyze how it went. Here are some points you should consider:

### 1. **Having enough time.**

If you ran out of time, spend less time on easier (short-answer) questions and answer only the question you are asked – no irrelevant info. If you had time left at the end – don't rush on the questions and take your time to *check answers multiple* times.

### 2. **Ensuring all questions get attention.**

If you spent too long on a single question, next time, skip such questions and come back to them later. Try to adhere to the "one mark per minute" method. For essay questions, finish the current paragraph and add one more if you have time at the end.

### 3. **Having the correct wording.**

If you lost marks due to imprecise wording, your understanding is solid but you're missing key exam phrasing. Write down the correct phrasing from the mark scheme – these usually come up often and do not change. For example "*ionizes fully*" instead of "*ionizes almost completely*" in chemistry.

### 4. **Preparing for the hard, long-answer questions.**

If you felt unprepared for the long-answer questions, *read* them first in the exam. Then solve all questions in order. This will keep your brain thinking about the long questions in the background, so you know what to write when you come to them later.

### 5. **Choosing question order wisely.**

You might choose to do 6/9 marker questions at the very end of the exam. Doing short-answer questions first secures "easier" marks and jogs your memory of key concepts tested in them, which prepares you for the long-answer questions when they come. However, you might be too tired when you come to the essay-based questions at the end of the exam. This can make your phrasing clumsier and cost you SPaG marks or marks for logical structure in sciences. Monitor your strength and energy throughout the exam when doing past papers.

## Maximising marks

**Learn the exam structure inside out.** Going into the exam, you shouldn't be surprised by the structure of the paper. For sciences, you can read this Edexcel guide

(<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Science/2016/teaching-and-learning-materials>)

# English Language and Literature



Our school takes two exams.

– Cambridge IGCSE (9-1) English - First Language 0990 (syllabus:

<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-igcse-9-1-first-language-english-0990/>) Contains two papers: ...

– Cambridge IGCSE (9-1) Literature in English 0992 (syllabus:

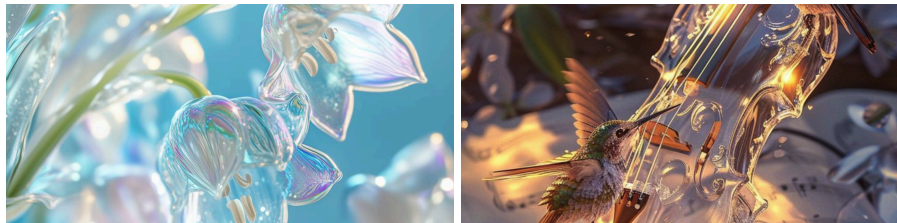
<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-igcse-english-literature-0992/>). Contains three papers: ...

...

## Creative writing

- Once you have learned how to write descriptive and narrative texts, their specialities and structures, it's time to practise. Do a lot of **practice and always seek feedback!** You can produce short paragraphs of writing and ask your English teacher to mark some of them, or use AI if they are unavailable. Try to explore powerful structures that can be used in various contexts. For example, 'spidery web of cracks" can be used to describe an old brick fence, a forgotten attic or an antique vase – something you can tie into (almost) any description.
- **Make every word earn its place.** A powerful description is not a powerful waffle! It's a creative piece where each sentence introduces a new, rich idea, and every word conveys meaning or sets the tone for the essay. So before writing any sentence, think critically about what you want to communicate to the reader.

- **Start sentences not just with the subject** – occasionally starting with a verb or an adverb adds variety to the rhythm, emphasis (should the reader notice the character, sounds, movement, etc first?) and sometimes even suspense (if you hide the subject until the end). In addition, try to vary sentence lengths: short sentences to signal abruptness or finality, and long sentences to show a peaceful and steady flow.
- For descriptive writing, **move around the scene**, as if you are filming it with a camera. Choose different corners, objects, or events to focus on in each paragraph; then deepen your description to add significance.
- **Appeal to the reader's senses.** We have five senses: sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. Try to include sensory images, as they immerse the reader into your written world; they make it more tangible and interesting for the mind. Practice to pull up interesting descriptions (AND synonyms) for each sense, for example:
  1. Sight: colours (explore unique shades, like emerald!), patterns (polka dot, striped, flowery, etc), size, light or darkness.
  2. Smell: sweet, tangy, faint, stale, musky, fresh, etc  
(<https://www.writerswrite.co.za/75-words-that-describe-smells/> )
  3. Sound: monotonous, broken, rhythmic, roaring, melodic, etc + onomatopoeia  
(<https://www.writerswrite.co.za/106-ways-to-describe-sounds/>)
  4. Taste: subtle, tender, harsh, distinct, buttery (<https://kathysteinemann.com/Musings/taste/>)
  5. Touch: silky, glossy, grainy, feathery, layered  
(<https://owlcation.com/humanities/describing-texture-400-words-to-describe-texture>)



## Text analysis (all of Literature and Q2 of English Reading)

- **Zoom in:** examiners love close-up shots of word choices. Try to mix the high-level explanations (motifs, key themes, and your own interpretations) with close analysis of each word. Why is it significant that the author used that particular word in the sentence? What feeling are they trying to evoke and why is that word choice effective? Here is an example: *The first word 'Sun-warmed' is a memorable compound adjective and suggests how pleasurable the warmth from the sun is to the walkers. There is nothing harmful about the natural world at this point - the word 'grace' personifies Autumn as a benevolent presence and suggests the beautiful weather is a gift, and the use of enjambment as the first few lines flow into each other suggests how leisurely and calm the walk is.*

- **Quote** quite often, but try to use shorter quotes that illustrate the one or two points you make. Don't quote the whole sentence and try to dissect it: it makes it confusing. Embed the quotations within your sentences to make the flow steady.
- Time is limited, so **be selective with your points**. Choose ones that describe the text from different perspectives. Don't try to re-explain the same point in different paragraphs – only do that if you introduce a new idea, otherwise briefly state “which draws a parallel with X”. Choose a range of powerful literary devices. Here is a list of common techniques:  
<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/literary-devices/common-literary-devices/>
- Make sure you understand how to **analyse each type of text**: poem, prose, and drama. They all have specific techniques you should focus on, and sometimes even recommended essay structures.
- For word studies in the Reading paper, use the **denotation-connotation structure**. First explain the literal meaning of the phrase (denotation) and then what the phrase suggests metaphorically or what emotions it evokes (connotation).
- Make an **essay plan**. Split the essay into an introduction and paragraphs. For each paragraph, jot down key techniques you will focus on – especially the ones you are not covering in other paragraphs. Make a note of quotations and words you will analyse and any wider context references you want to make. This prevents you from only covering metaphors, or including too few quotations.

## Exam

- Beware! It is easy to lose track of **time**. Make sure you know exactly how long you spend per paragraph and spend the advised amount of time for each question.
- **Plan** first – don't let the writing carry you, as it might turn the essay incohesive!
- Carefully **proofread** in the end.