

Message for students from Ofqual:

As we head towards the start of the summer term, I firstly want to take the opportunity to send you my best wishes in your upcoming exams and assessments. While I know some of you might be approaching your exams with some nervousness, that is perfectly normal. This is an opportunity for you to really show what you can do.

Where to find more information

Qualifications will help you to find the right pathway for you. The [National Careers Service](#) provides free and impartial careers advice, information and guidance and runs a dedicated exam results helpline for all students taking qualifications.

Ofqual has produced a [student guide](#) to exams and assessments in 2023 with more information about what to expect this summer. Ofqual has also worked with specialists to develop [a guide to coping with exam pressure](#).

It's important that before your exams start you make sure that you understand the rules, including what you can and can't take into exams. For example, you must not take mobile phones or watches into the exam room. Sometimes people will offer fake exam papers online before exams take place. Make sure that you don't engage with these, because you could face consequences if you do. Tell your teacher if someone offers you an exam paper in advance of the exam.

Your teachers will be able to help you if you're not sure what you need to do. If you're not studying at a school or college, you should speak to the exam centre where you'll be sitting your exams.

Support in place this summer



There is a package of exam and assessment support in place this summer, including formulae and equation sheets in some GCSEs, the spacing of exams in the timetable to give you time to prepare between exams, and protection in place when it comes to grading. The grading protection that we have introduced for GCSE and A level students means that a student who would have achieved a particular grade before the pandemic should be just as likely to do so in 2023, even if the quality of their work is a little weaker.

If you are taking a different qualification, such as a vocational or technical qualification, then it is likely you will already have taken some assessments. You may already have a teacher assessed grade from 2021 that will contribute to your final qualification result for example. For this reason, vocational and technical assessments and exams happening this year will take place as normal. Some awarding organisations have also put in place, permanently, arrangements that worked well through the pandemic, such as changing the timing or format of assessment and introducing remote assessment. For those vocational and technical qualifications that are similar in structure to GCSE

Coping with exam pressure – a guide for students



How to feel more confident about exams

What are negative beliefs?

Many people with high exam anxiety can't stop worrying about failing or the consequences of failing. For instance, 'If I fail my GCSEs my whole life will be a failure'. These types of beliefs focus on what you can't do rather than what you can.



Replacing negative beliefs with positive beliefs

Find a positive, realistic belief that can replace the negative belief. For instance, if your negative belief is 'I am rubbish at maths' a positive, realistic alternative could be: 'Even if I will never be the best at maths, I will do better if I have a revision plan and stick to it'.

The key things to remember are that:

- if you suffer from anxiety, replacing negative beliefs can help
- some people find it helpful to keep a record of their beliefs
- you can become a more confident person with a 'can do' attitude

How to best plan your revision



For many students, starting revision is the biggest hurdle to overcome.

One of the most effective ways to build confidence about taking exams, overcome any nervousness about starting revision, and manage any worry about taking exams, is to structure revision.

A good way to manage this is to:

Create a plan: break down everything you need to revise into small topics and just revise one topic at a time. By creating a plan, you are taking control

Set targets: identify when you are going to revise each topic. Give yourself a time limit for when to complete each topic

Check progress: check your progress and set yourself a new time limit if necessary. Once you've met a target, set yourself a new one

A way you can approach revision of a specific topic is to structure it in 4 stages. Stage 1 is to set a specific target for what you want to revise and when. Make it manageable and don't try to do too much. Stage 2 is to revise the topic you specified at the time you planned to revise it. Stage 3 is then to test your revision. This could be immediately after your revision, later in the day, or the next day. You could test yourself by simply practising an exam question. Stage 4 is to review your target. If you met it, then set yourself a new target (Stage 1) and start the cycle of revision again.

It will be important to look at the same topic more than once to make sure your comprehension is good. If you struggle with the topic a second time, try to work out why that is. Were you distracted and finding it difficult to concentrate or have you identified part of a topic you don't quite understand as well?

Of course, these are suggestions for ways to practise revision and there are certainly other ways, so if you have found a good way that works for you, stick with it. The thing to take from this is that planning ahead can help to manage any concerns you might have about revising.

The key things to remember are that:

- targets should be achievable and manageable
- targets must be short-term and include a time-limit
- review your targets, and when complete, set new ones
- it is important to test yourself to see if your revision is effective

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing

People react to stress in different ways. Stress can be a great motivator for some students, giving them the 'get up and go' that they need to succeed. Other students are indifferent to stress; they can float along without getting affected by stress in a good or bad way. Stress can be a bad thing for some students when exam pressures become overwhelming.

The key things to remember are that:

- stress is nothing to fear
- anxiety is not inevitable
- you can learn how to cope more effectively

The signs of high exam anxiety



Cognitive signs (thoughts)

- going blank in an exam
- difficulty concentrating
- negative thoughts about past performance or consequences of failure

Affective signs (emotions)

- feeling excessive tension
- feeling panic
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling not in control

Physical signs

- dizzy or faint
- sweating
- fast heartbeat
- tight churning stomach
- jelly or wobbly legs

The key things to remember are that:

- most people experience some of these signs during an exam
- high exam anxiety is when you experience them most of the time
- you can learn to control your physical reactions to anxiety

How to control physical reactions to anxiety



Deep breathing

When you become anxious your breathing becomes shallow and fast. Breathing slowly and deeply will help you calm down and feel in control.

How do I do it?

1. Sit comfortably with a straight back.
2. Place your left hand on your chest, and right hand below it, on your diaphragm.
3. Inhale deeply through your nose for 5 seconds.
4. Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
5. Exhale slowly through your mouth.
6. Feel the expansion in your diaphragm.
7. Repeat for 1 or 2 minutes until you feel calm.

The key things to remember are that:

- you can learn to control anxiety with deep breathing
- many people find it easier to learn with an instructor
- yoga or mindfulness classes can also be helpful