

Petts

GCSE
SUCCESS

AUTHOR

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ESSENTIALS
STUDY SKILLS

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Developing better study skills

As you know, a good set of GCSE grades will provide you with a passport to further education. In addition, good grades give a strong sense of self-confidence in your capacity to study and to revise effectively that will remain with you for the rest of your life. It is therefore really worth preparing as well as you can for your GCSEs – by starting your revision earlier rather than later, by staying positive throughout, and by developing better study skills.

As will become increasingly apparent as you work through this book, one of the beauties of study skills is that they take so many different forms. Some relate to managing yourself (e.g. time management and stress management), others are about the nuts and bolts of revision (e.g. reading and note-taking techniques), and there are other tools to use in specific situations (e.g. for

particular subjects, for completing project work or for revising with a group of friends). Above all else, always bear in mind that study skills are meant to make studying more effective, more satisfying and more fun!

When developing better study skills, it is especially important to recognise that we all have unique learning styles. Some ways of learning and studying suit some people better than others. As you try out the various techniques and exercises outlined in this book, be sure to keep a mental note of which approaches help you most. Once you have finished this book, keep coming back to read through the various sections again. This will ensure that you strengthen your study skills in the run-up to your exams. Good luck!

Time management

MAKING YOUR REVISION A PRIORITY

- 1 A long tree trunk has been laid out in a park and you are offered £1,000 if you manage to walk from one end to the other without falling off. Would you have a go?
- 2 The same tree trunk is balanced across the summit of a giant waterfall. Would you still have a go for £1,000?
- 3 Finally, this trunk is balanced across the same waterfall but someone is holding your friend hostage at the other side and threatens to throw him/her into the waterfall if you don't walk across. Would you try?

In terms of the next few months, place these activities in order from 1 (the most important) to 10 (the least important):

- Socialising with my friends
- Looking after my appearance
- Planning my next summer holiday
- Contributing towards local charitable projects
- Spending time with my parents
- Earning some extra cash
- Keeping fit/playing sports
- Finding/spending time with a/my partner
- Watching TV
- Revising for my exams.

The exercises above are about your values and your priorities. When we say that we don't have time to do something, often this is not strictly true. Instead, we don't see it as a priority. Do you currently view your revision as a high enough priority? Are you being too strict on yourself?

Good time managers are good at asserting their priorities. For example, if a friend asks you to go to the cinema then you will need to assert yourself with a response such as: 'Not today because I need to work. How about at the weekend?'

You should not, however, view your revision as your only priority. It is important that you also keep fit and fresh. At times you will therefore need to assert (e.g. to parents) that you need to rest, to play sport or to go out with friends.

BEGINNING TO ORGANISE YOUR TIME

Like being asked to recruit and train a football team, or write and direct a play, or organise an art exhibition, or market a new pop-band, revising for GCSEs is best viewed as a project that needs to be managed. An important project management skill is the ability to create good plans. When revising, this means creating good revision timetables.

SOME INITIAL QUESTIONS

The best timetables are **realistic** and **flexible**. When creating timetables, begin therefore by answering some important questions:

1. How many days are there until my first exam?
2. What is the maximum amount of time that I am willing to revise on a typical weekday, on a typical Saturday, and on a typical Sunday?
3. Are there any dates between now and my first exam when it will be very difficult or impossible for me to revise?
4. How many subjects am I studying?
5. How many topics am I expected to revise for each subject?

THE AMOUNT OF TIME AVAILABLE

Having answered these questions, you can now estimate the total number of hours available for revision between now and your first exam. You can calculate this (a diary and calculator are helpful here!) by following these steps:

1. Multiply the number of weekdays between now and your first exam by the time you intend to revise on weekdays.
2. Multiply the number of Saturdays between now and your first exam by the time you intend to revise on Saturdays.
3. Multiply the number of Sundays between now and your first exam by the time you intend to revise on Sundays.
4. Add these three totals together.
5. Subtract any time that is unavailable because it would be very difficult or impossible for you to revise on these days (e.g. you are playing in a sports tournament all day).

AMOUNT OF TIME FOR REVISION: AN EXAMPLE

Number of days until the first exam:

50 weekdays

10 Saturdays

10 Sundays

50

10

10

70

I will revise for:

2 hours on weekdays

3 hours on Saturdays

4 hours on Sundays

I cannot revise on:

5 weekdays

Calculations:

Weekdays: 50 (days) x 2 hours: 100 hours

Saturdays: 10 (days) x 3 hours: 30 hours

Sundays: 10 (days) x 4 hours: 40 hours

100

30

40

170!

★ Total: 170 hours

Unavailable: 5 (days) x 2 hours: 10 hours

★ Total time available to revise: 160 hours

ALLOCATING TIME ACROSS SUBJECTS

Let's continue with our example.

Between now and your first exam you have 160 hours available for revision. You decide to assume, though, that you have underestimated the number of 'unavailable' Saturdays and Sundays, and therefore you round this figure down to 150 hours.

You are taking five subjects (English, Maths, French, Science and Geography) and, on average, you therefore have 30 hours available to revise each subject.

However, up until now you have spent most of your time preparing for English and Maths and you are less confident about your grasp of Science and Geography. You decide to divide up the 150 hours available as shown in the box below. There are 10 weeks until your first exam, so you also divide these figures by 10 to calculate the amount of time available for revising each subject each week.

Subject	Time (hours) to revise in total	Time (hours) to revise each week
English	20	2
Maths	20	2
French	30	3
Science	40	4
Geography	40	4
Total	<u>150</u>	<u>15</u>

ALLOCATING TIME ACROSS TOPICS

Before constructing a timetable, you now need to divide up this time between the various topics within each subject.

Continuing with our example:

- You have allocated 40 hours to Geography.
- The Geography specification is made up of 15 topics.
- You have begun to revise five topics (tourism, trade and aid, geomorphic processes, settlement, energy resources).
- One topic you have not revised at all and is very long (weather and climate). You therefore decide to divide up the 40 hours of revision allocated to Geography as shown below.

1. Geomorphic processes	1 hour
2. River landscapes and hydrology	3 hours
3. Coastal landscapes	3 hours
4. Glacial landscapes	3 hours
5. Weather and climate	8 hours
6. Ecosystems	3 hours
7. Tectonic activity	3 hours
8. Population	3 hours
9. Settlement	1 hour
10. Urbanisation	3 hours
11. Energy resources	1 hour
12. Agriculture	3 hours
13. Industry	3 hours
14. Development, trade and aid	1 hour
15. Tourism	1 hour
Total	<u>40 hours</u>

NEXT...

A similar procedure can now be followed to divide up the time available to revise each of the other subjects that you are studying.

CONSTRUCTING WEEKLY TIMETABLES

You can now construct weekly timetables. You can follow one of two approaches here:

- You can create timetables on a week-by-week basis (e.g. each Sunday in advance of the week ahead).
- You can create all of the weekly timetables at the same time.

Returning to our scenario, here is an example of a weekly timetable. In addition to the topics noted, set aside 15–30 minutes every day to review topics that you have already revised.

Weekly timetable

	English (2 hours)	Maths (2 hours)	French (3 hours)	Science (4 hours)	Geography (4 hours)	TOTAL
Monday (2 hours)		Equations (1 hour)		Bonding (1 hour)		2 hours
Tuesday (2 hours)			Holidays (1 hour)		Tourism (1 hour)	2 hours
Wednesday (2 hours)	Newspapers (1 hour)			Waves (1 hour)		2 hours
Thursday (2 hours)			Grammar (1 hour)		Trade and aid (1 hour)	2 hours
Friday (2 hours)	Competing all day in the regional athletics championships 					0 hours
Saturday (3 hours)	Shakespeare (1 hour)	Vectors (1 hour)	Transport (1 hour)			3 hours
Sunday (4 hours)				Digestion (2 hours)	Weather (2 hours)	4 hours
TOTAL	2 hours	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	4 hours	<u>15 hours</u>

REMEMBER

Timetables reduce stress levels by putting you in control of your revision. Stay calm if you get behind. By working towards the completion of all of your revision before your first exam, you will keep free all of the time between your exams, if necessary, to catch up on certain topics.

Using mnemonics

A QUICK MEMORY TEST

A **mnemonic** is something that helps you to remember information. To help you understand the principles underpinning the use of mnemonics, give yourself 30 seconds to try to remember the following 15 words. Then try to write down as many as you can.

Warehouse

Brother

Mop

Tea

Mobile

Surfboard

Lipstick

Water

Mirror

Wall

Desert

Snake

Wind

Rainbow

Diamonds

TRY AGAIN

Did you remember all 15 words? Now read through the following story. Try to recount it to a friend or family member, or aloud to yourself (if no one else is around).

You wake up to find yourself in a huge **warehouse**. The voice of big **brother** suddenly asks you to pick up the **mop** at the other end of the factory and to clean the whole factory floor. You work all morning but then you become tired so you sit down on a bench to have a cup of **tea**. As you drink your tea your **mobile** phone rings. You look at the screen and there is an advert of a girl carrying a **surfboard**. Suddenly she breaks through the screen, sits down beside you, puts on some **lipstick**, throws a glass of **water** into your face, smashes a **mirror** and then jumps through the factory **wall**. You follow her and discover that you are in the middle of an enormous **desert**. There is nothing to see other than a **snake** that slithers towards you. As it gets closer the **wind** begins to blow very strongly. You put your hand down to stroke the snake and it transforms into a **rainbow** and a bag of **diamonds**.

Read through the list of words one more time before trying to recall them once again. This time have a go at remembering all 15 in the correct order.

PRINCIPLES TO FOLLOW WHEN USING MNEMONICS

Symbols

The manipulation of **symbols** allows us to represent information in simple and memorable ways. To remember, for example, that at the end of World War 1 a peace conference took place in Paris, you could think of a dove (a symbol of peace) flying over the Eiffel Tower (a symbol of Paris).

Outstanding

We are more likely to remember mnemonics that are **outstanding**. In the story there was therefore a 'huge' warehouse, an 'enormous' desert and shocking experiences such as a girl who threw water in your face, smashed a mirror and then jumped through a wall.

Links

Mnemonics make clear **links** between symbols. To remember, for example, the link between the depletion of the ozone layer and increased rates of skin cancer in Australia, you could think of a kangaroo (for Australia) that takes its jacket off (symbolising that it is no longer protected by the ozone layer) to reveal that it has blotchy white skin (for skin cancer).

All five senses

Mnemonics are easier to remember when they evoke **all five senses**. As you read the story you might, for example, have imagined the smell of freshly brewed tea, the taste of water thrown in your face, the sight of a snake transforming into a rainbow, the touch on your skin of a strong wind, and the sound of big brother's voice.

Repetition

We also remember mnemonics through **repetition**. Good ways of repeating and reviewing mnemonics are:

- Explaining them to friends.
- Keeping a written record of them using creative note-taking techniques based on the use of symbols and colour.
- Taking short 'memory walks' where you test your memory of various mnemonics as you walk.

AN EXAMPLE: MEMORISING CHEMICAL PROCESSES

Reactivity

The reactivity series

Some metals are more reactive than others:

Not reactive at all	–	gold
Not very reactive	–	tin
Quite reactive	–	aluminium
Very reactive	–	potassium

Some reactions

When metals react with oxygen a metal oxide is formed.

When metals react with water a metal oxide (or hydroxide) and H_2 are formed.

When metals react with dilute acid a salt and H_2 are formed.

A mnemonic on the reactivity series could be based around the symbol of a big fire into which different objects are thrown with different effects.

1. When you throw a gold watch (**gold**) into the fire there is no effect because gold is not reactive at all.
2. When you throw a tin can (**tin**) into the fire there is a very slight crackling because tin is not very reactive.
3. When you throw an aluminium can (**aluminium**) into the fire there is a bang because aluminium is quite reactive.
4. When you throw a pot (**potassium**) into the fire there is a huge explosion because potassium is very reactive.

The three reactions mentioned are with oxygen, water and dilute acid. A mnemonic to help remember each reaction could be based on the symbols of an aluminium can (for metals) and three buckets (for the three types of reaction).

1. When an aluminium can is placed in an empty bucket (reaction with oxygen) it changes colour (forms an oxide).
2. When an aluminium can is placed in a bucket of water (reaction with water) it changes colour (forms an oxide or hydroxide) and lots of little 'H's float into space (releases hydrogen).
3. When an aluminium can is placed in a bucket of thick smelly liquid (reaction with dilute acid) it turns into table salt (forms a salt) and lots of little 'H's float into space (releases hydrogen).

Note-taking: Summary shapes

DEVELOPING A PORTFOLIO OF SUMMARY SHEETS

In the run-up to your exams you will spend a long time taking revision notes from textbooks, from handouts or from your own class notes. Instead of copying these out in your own words (you can copy out a whole book and still not remember or understand what you have written), try to work towards developing a portfolio of summary sheets.

For each topic, create summary sheets on plain A4, A3 or A2 paper. Instead of sentences, these sheets should use key words, symbols and colour to summarise and highlight important facts and concepts. This chapter introduces you to the use of summary shapes to help revise less complex texts. The next chapter then outlines the use of summary maps to help revise more complex texts.

USING ANNOTATIONS

Whatever text you are studying, it is very helpful to have the freedom to write annotations (e.g. key words or symbols) in the margins. Annotations are best written using a selection of colours, but if the texts that you are reading belong to a library then you may need to photocopy sections or to use a very light (e.g. 2H) pencil and then carefully erase all of your annotations before returning texts you have borrowed. Page 38 illustrates how you might use key words, symbols and colour to annotate text – in this case about the life of David Beckham.

KEY WORDS

You do not need to use sentences when writing revision notes. You do not, for example, need to write 'David Beckham married Posh Spice in Ireland' in order to remember this section of his life. Underlining the key words 'married' and 'Ireland' would be enough to trigger your memory. Similarly, you do not need to write 'Beckham's first child was called Brooklyn and was born in 1999'. Underlining the key word 'Brooklyn' and the date '1999' would be enough.

SYMBOLS

Symbols represent or remind us of something else. A symbol of Big Ben with the number '75' next to it will, for example, remind us that Beckham was born in London in 1975. Similarly, drawing a cap and a trophy with the number '02' above it will remind us that Beckham captained the England team during the 2002 World Cup.

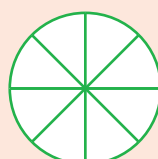
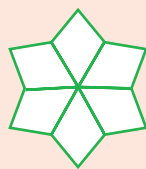
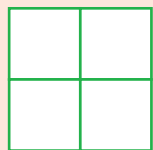
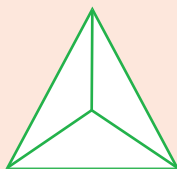
COLOUR

When studying and revising, use a selection of fine-point coloured pens to discriminate and highlight information. Look again at the text on the life of Beckham. You can see that all of the key words or symbols referring to his personal life or family are underlined, written or drawn in blue. All of the key words and symbols referring to Beckham's career are underlined, written or drawn in red.



The Life of David Beckham

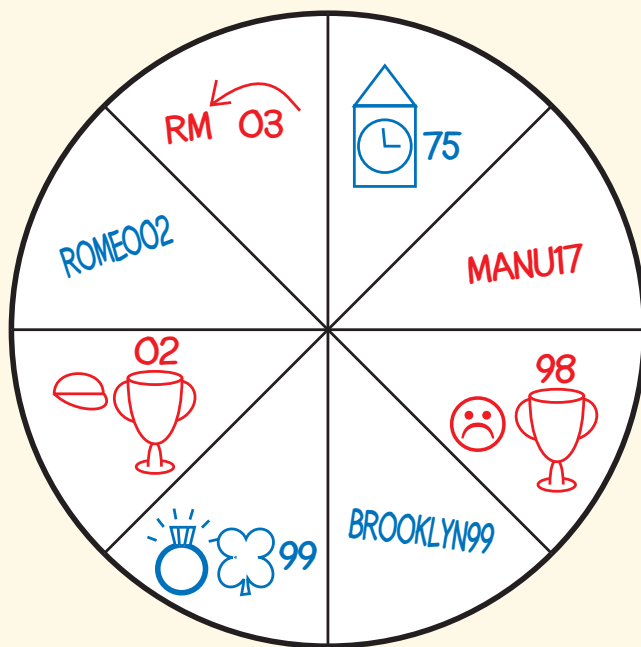
- 75 1. Born in North London on 2nd May 1975.
- MANUT 2. First played for the Manchester United senior team at 17.
- 98 3. Blamed for England's defeat in the 1998 World Cup after being sent off for a foul against an Argentinean player.
- BROOKLYN 99 4. First child, Brooklyn, was born in March 1999.
5. Married Posh Spice (Victoria Adams) in Ireland in July 1999.
- 02 6. Captained the England team during the 2002 World Cup.
- ROME 002 7. Second child, Romeo, was born in September 2002.
- RM 03 8. Transferred to Real Madrid in summer of 2003.



Which shape you use for your summary will depend on the number of sections into which you split the text. If, for example, you split a text into three sections then use a triangle; if you split it into four sections then use a square; if you split it into five or six sections then use a five-point or a six-point star; and if you split it into eight sections then use a circle. In the case of the life of Beckham, this has been split into eight sections and therefore we can use an eight-part **summary circle**.

A SUMMARY CIRCLE ON THE LIFE OF DAVID BECKHAM

Draw your summary shape on a plain piece of paper and fill it in with the key words, symbols and colours that you used to annotate the text itself. In the case of the life of Beckham, this will involve the use of an eight-part summary circle. The example below illustrates what this might look like once it has been completed.



TEST YOURSELF

Once you have completed the shape, test yourself. For our Beckham example you could:

- Talk through Beckham's life aloud.
- Close your eyes and try to visualise the contents of the circle in your mind's eye.
- Try to fill in a blank eight-part circle that you have sketched on a rough piece of paper.
- Ask a friend or a member of your family to test you on Beckham's life.

You may well be surprised just how much you can remember!

Exam technique

FINAL PREPARATIONS

As soon as possible: Visit the room in which you will take your exams to familiarise yourself with this environment. Remember that you are highly unlikely to gain free access to this space once the examination period begins. It is especially helpful to visit at a quiet time of day so that you can imagine yourself entering and sitting in this room feeling relaxed, alert, focused and confident. This will help you to dissolve fears of what can otherwise appear to be an unknown and very threatening place. Repeat the visit a couple of weeks before exams start.

The weeks before: Use the experience above as a basis for positive visualisation exercises. Focus on enjoying a relaxed and successful experience of each exam.

The week before: Take regular exercise and get to bed early on nights before exams. Make every effort to maintain good physical and mental health during the final stages of your revision and preparation for GCSEs.

The day before: There is nothing wrong with flicking through your notes (e.g. the summary sheets that you have made when revising) and testing yourself the night and morning before exams.

The day before: Avoid activities that create unnecessary tension and set aside plenty of time to maintain and restore a sense of relaxed focus. It is especially helpful to get plenty of fresh air, to breathe deeply and to stretch.

The hour before: Avoid conversations that might distract you away from the task at hand. Focus instead on imagining the likely format and content of the exam paper and the approach that you will adopt when completing this exam.

LOOKING THROUGH PAST EXAM PAPERS

It is essential that you familiarise yourself with the format of each exam paper. As far in advance of your exams as possible, ask your teachers to confirm the exact names of exam boards and papers that you are taking, and if possible to provide you with copies of several past papers or to let you know how to obtain these from exam boards.

Before taking a closer look at past papers, find out whether the format is due to change in any way this year. Ask your teachers or the exam board. Bearing their reply in mind, then complete a close analysis of the format of past papers. In particular, pay close attention to:

- Any initial instructions or guidance
- The names of different sections
- The number of different sections
- Which sections are optional and which are compulsory
- The types of questions asked (e.g. multiple choice, structured short answer, long answer, essays)
- Any topics or questions that appear to crop up each year
- The marking scheme (e.g. the total number of marks allocated to individual questions and to each section)
- The total amount of time available to answer each section
- Commonly used key words (e.g. describe, explain, compare).

If you are unclear in any way about the requirements of any of the papers then do not hesitate to ask your teachers or exam boards to clarify your queries. They will be able to offer you more comprehensive and detailed advice than the exam invigilators.

ALLOCATING LIMITED TIME

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of answering questions under exam conditions is the need to work within strict time constraints. When you practise answering questions from past papers, limit yourself to the total amount of time made available in exams. Practise quickly identifying how much time is available to answer sections or questions. Here is an example for a GCSE History paper:

GCSE History: Paper 1

Time available: 2 hours

Answer questions in **TWO** of the following choice of six sections. For each section answer part (a) and **EITHER** part (b) **OR** part (c).

Section 1: History of industry	Total marks: 55
Section 2: History of agriculture	Total marks: 55
Section 3: History of transport and leisure	Total marks: 55
Section 4: History of health	Total marks: 55
Section 5: History of education	Total marks: 55
Section 6: History of politics	Total marks: 55

Within each section

Part (a) - shorter-answer questions	→ 35 marks
Parts (b) and (c) - longer-answer question	→ 20 marks

Sensible allocation of time

Time available to answer questions - approx 1 minute per mark

Read through exam paper	5 minutes
Part (a)	35 minutes
Part (b) or (c)	20 minutes
Part (a)	35 minutes
Part (b) or (c)	20 minutes
Check answers	5 minutes
TOTAL	120 minutes

ANSWERING THE QUESTION

When allocating the time available within an exam, always set aside 5–10 minutes for reading through the questions and for planning. Take very great care to read and analyse questions carefully before formulating answers. Misreading even a single word can have serious consequences. For example:

Explain how agricultural practices have changed over the past 20 years in developed countries.

Here, you are unlikely to receive any marks for explaining how agricultural practices have changed over the last 20 years in developing countries.

It is especially tempting to answer the questions that you would have really liked to have been asked rather than questions that you have actually been asked! Contrary to misconceptions, examiners are required to adhere to strict marking criteria and cannot therefore award marks even to the most extensive and impressive of irrelevant answers. Underline and pay especially close attention to key command words in order to identify the type of question you are being asked:

- Descriptive questions tend to require the observation or recall of facts, e.g. 'Describe what Source A says about levels of unemployment in the USA in the 1930s'.
- Evaluative questions tend to require the explanation of causes and processes, e.g. 'Explain the causes and consequences of the Wall Street Crash'.

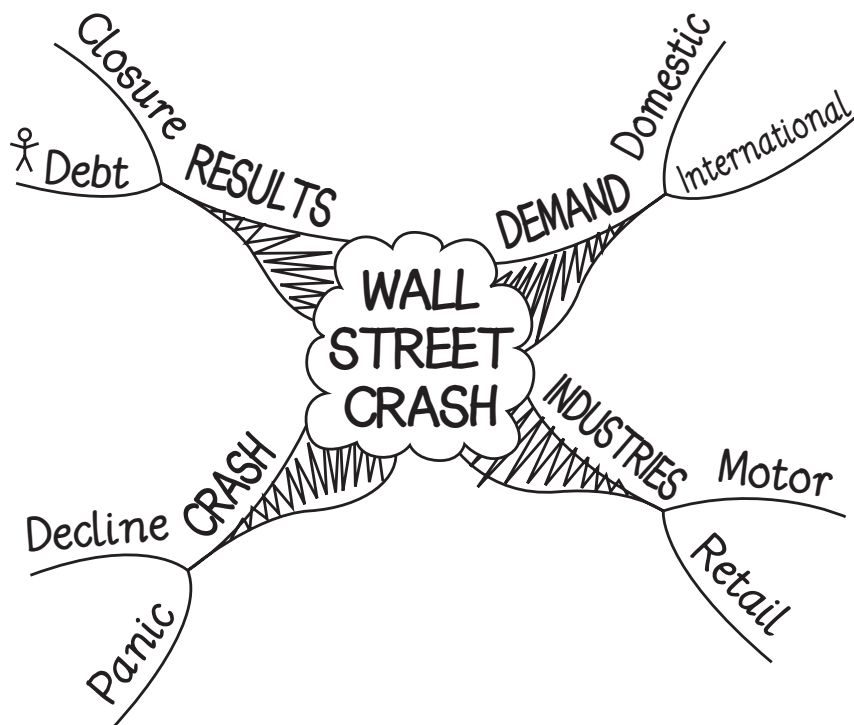
Command words

describe explain compare choose list
what when where how why

Always mentally rehearse answers to questions before writing anything. This will help to keep later corrections and amendments to a minimum. During this process, try to ensure that answers are as relevant, precise and thorough as possible.

LONGER-ANSWER QUESTIONS

When responding to longer-answer questions, you will need to make more comprehensive plans. It can prove especially helpful to sketch out versions of summary sheets that you have been revising as a basis to such plans. When preparing, for example, to answer the question 'Explain the causes and consequences of the Wall Street Crash' you might spend a couple of minutes making a rough sketch of the summary map on this topic outlined in the 'Revising History' section on page 85:



Some other hints on responding to longer-answer questions:

- Keep to the question, to your plan and to time.
- Write at least one main point per paragraph.
- Use examples to illustrate your statements.
- Define important words.
- Focus on quality rather than quantity.

COMPLETING FINAL CHECKS

When allocating the time available within an exam, always set aside 5–10 minutes at the end to complete final checks. During this time:

- Make sure you have answered all of the questions. Even if you are not sure, you will not be penalised for having a go. It is especially important to answer all multiple choice questions as you will typically have a 15%–25% chance of estimating or guessing the correct answer.
- Ensure that you have answered the actual questions that were asked and that your answers are as relevant, precise and thorough as possible.
- When answering Maths and Science questions, make sure that you have shown all of your working.
- Check your grammar, spelling and punctuation. Examiners can mark students up and down according to the accuracy and fluency of their writing style.
- If you run out of time when answering certain questions then try to jot down relevant key words and half sentences. Examiners may be able to give you a few additional marks for work of this sort.
- If you finish early don't sit around twiddling your thumbs! Use this time to check through your paper carefully to see whether or not there are areas where you could make corrections or improvements.

AFTER THE EXAM

At the end of each exam, feel free to debrief on your experiences with friends. However, don't allow this to degenerate into an unhealthy preoccupation with how you may or may not have performed. After an hour or so, treat this chapter of the exam process as closed and take some rest or begin to focus positively towards your next exam.

Good luck!



Letts

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