

How to...



HECKMONDWIKE
GRAMMAR SIXTH FORM

...Be Organised

Overview



Being Organised can be broadly divided into organising your work, and organising your time. It should not surprise you to learn that there is a proven link between how organised students are and the level of success they achieve at A level.

A Level teaching is delivered in 1 hour lessons, of which you should expect around 130 to cover Y12 study, and another 130 to cover Y13 material. This means ~260 'bits' of learning for each subject, so for most there will be 780 separate bits of learning across 3 A levels (that's *a lot* in case the penny hasn't dropped!).

The more organised you are, the more able you are to **spot patterns** in the material being learned. You will also be better at **making connections**, to be able to **make sense** of the mass of knowledge and skills and allow you to **own it, recast it in your own words** and ultimately **master it**.

- You need to **organise your learning** in order to make sense of it all
- You need to **organise your time** in order to complete tasks to deadlines and keep on top

Hopefully you are ready and motivated for having to work hard to achieve success at A level. If you don't feel that you are, or you aren't clear exactly what this 'hard work' really means, then now is the time to address these gaps.

You'll probably quickly tire of being told that you should be aiming to do at least **16 hours of independent study** each week (more if you are doing extra A levels, Core Maths or EPQ), but there is a reason why you will hear this guidance so often.

Like anything in life, if you are going to invest that level of effort over a prolonged period of time, you want to be sure that your effort isn't being wasted, so being organised is going to be absolutely key.

Of course you might say...

“But I wasn't organised during my GCSEs and look how well I did!”

The nature of GCSEs means you can rely on a wide support network of teachers, friends and parents to keep you on track. If you miss something, there is usually someone to either remind you to finish something, or perhaps someone to copy from if things get really desperate. You'll either have had homework recorded for you on an app (e.g. classcharts) or teachers might have insisted you write specific details and deadlines in your planner. The fact is, at A level, you will now study your own suite of subjects, and it's likely this will be different to your friends. Your parents are less likely to feel confident helping you with A level content, and your **specific needs**, deadlines and

personal projects all mean that it is **too complex** for you to rely upon anyone but **yourself** to keep you **organised**.

On top of this, *so much* of your study at A level will need to be **proactive** and **independent** from what you are being directed to do by your teachers. The most successful A level students take **ownership** of their learning by choosing for themselves what activities they do in order to ensure they are consistently on top of their learning.

So should be no surprise that fitting all of this in whilst maintaining your mental and physical well-being is going to require you to get on top of organising yourself!

Details

It is beyond the scope of one leaflet to cover every possible aspect of organisation, so my aim here is to present you with a couple of founding principles and a couple of suggestions as to how you might get going.

Become a 'Project Manager'

In case it isn't obvious, Project Managers are responsible for ensuring that the aims of a particular project are met, usually to a particular deadline. Project Management can be a career in itself, and normally requires the organisation of numerous other people or organisations at the right times to being an overall objective to fruition. The best project managers know when and how to utilise particular resources (including people) for a particular purpose – *they don't necessarily have to be expert in a particular field themselves.*

It is useful to think of the different aspects of your life during A levels as separate (but connected) projects, though you might think of your overall 'life goal' as a project in itself! The difference between you and a professional project manager is that it will be *you* who does most of the work (you can't sub-contract your learning I am afraid!), though you will certainly utilise the help and support of others – and that is all part of the 'project'. It is also your aim to become an expert (of sorts), in your subjects at least.

Your projects might include:

- Each of your subjects (plus electives)
- part time employment
- Extra-curricular interests e.g. sports, social life (family & friends), religious activities
- Anything else that you invest your time in that you are unwilling or unable to give up

Learn how to prioritise

Within each subject, you will have certain tasks to complete, including lesson-by-lesson learning, set homework and your independently driven study (which includes revision for assessments and exams). In certain subjects you may have coursework to complete too.

Bigger or longer term tasks (like revising for exams or completing coursework) can be broken down into shorter term tasks (e.g. what do you need to have done and by when).

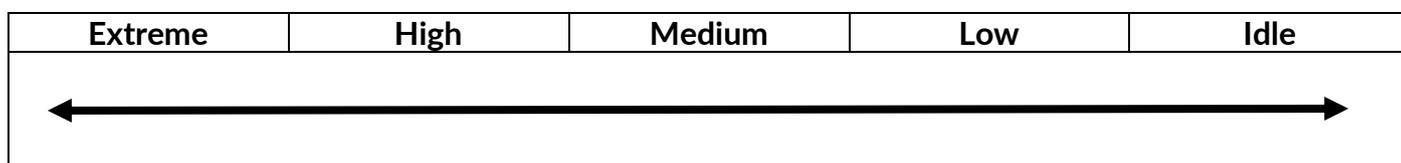
Being organised means giving yourself enough time to plan out how you will get these tasks completed. Remember that I am using the term 'task' to cover both set work (i.e. stuff that needs

handing in) as well as all the different aspects of your ongoing independent learning - which you set for yourself (i.e. topics you need to learn or skills you need to practice).

The Energy Line

There are strategies you can use to help you prioritise your work; 'to-do' lists are a popular and easy example, though it is a natural tendency to prioritise the easier or more enjoyable tasks, and these are often the ones we gain the least from (I am certainly guilty of this!). A to-do list doesn't tell you what to do first, but using an **energy line** does.

Sketch out your line (see below) on a whiteboard or a large piece of paper. Write out each task on a post-it note (or use blue-tac). Put things towards the left hand side (high or extreme) if you need to work like mad on them. Put them on the right if you can leave it for a bit. Include submission dates (or your own deadlines if relevant) and you will really start to see the benefits. Because you have written each job on a sticky note you can move them around and remove them as you finish them. You could even have a spike for the finished ones like they have in restaurants for completed orders so you can keep track of how much you have done!



The energy line works well for keeping on top of discrete tasks (those which have a defined end point i.e. a submission date or an assessment) and this may all have to take place alongside your regular independent study. So how should you manage your time? Let's look at that next.

Organising your time

We'll look at goal/target setting in a different booklet, but it's useful to think of planning your time in the short, medium and long-term.

Long Term Planning

Having a calendar or wall chart which shows the whole of the year ahead (if not the whole 2 years of your A levels) with all the major events (like exams and holidays) marked on it is a really good idea. You won't lose sight of really important milestones, and you can spot any major conflicts way before they occur. Some subjects might even be able to share their curriculum map with you so you can see ahead of time when different topics are going to be covered.

Medium Term Planning

This can mean sketching out your learning aims over a period of weeks (e.g. a half term). This could be particularly useful for ongoing revision so you make enough time to re-visit all-topics ahead of assessments and exams for example.

Short Term Planning

Some Students like to have their work for each day of the week specified in precise detail, whereas others prefer to have a list of aims for week which allows them to be more flexible with when they do the work. A lot depends on what other commitments you have.

Independent Study – Should you “timetable” it or not?

This is definitely down to what works best for you – but ultimately it **has** to work! Don't choose any option because it is the easiest – choose it because it is going to work!

It is wise to begin by carrying out an **audit** of all your time. How do you currently account for all your time, both in and out of school? It can be useful to start with a blank table (we can give you one) covering all of the hours in a week when you are likely to be awake (yes - including the weekend). Mark on this table everything that is fixed, like lessons, non-contact periods and any other immovable commitments that you have.

Non-contact periods

If you are serious about succeeding at A level, you should be prepared to **make maximum use of your non-contact periods**. Some students prefer to prioritise these for set homework tasks, and get on with these as soon as possible after they are set. If you allow yourself to think of these periods as 'free' time, you might want to question just how serious you are about achieving your goal – imagine there are alternate parallel universes all with a version of you – what would the best version of you be doing with that time? Be that version of you!

Organising your time outside of school

Roughly speaking, if you are using your non-contact periods for homework, you'll need to fit those 16 hours of independent study in outside of the school day. Remember that 16 hours is a guide, and your effectiveness shouldn't be measured in simple terms of time – 8 hours of focussed study is more valuable than 16 hours of sitting with your folder open whilst you chat to your friends or play on your phone!

Have a look across your week and see where you are prepared to fit the hours in. If you can commit to 2 hours of independent study (remember that's *not* supposed to include homework) each evening and 3 hours per day at the weekend, you can see how it is relatively easy to reach 16 hours! You can structure your time to suit you – but try to ensure that your studies are the priority or you will find you'll soon find excuses not to get it done.

What should I do in my independent study time?

This is where prioritisation becomes more important. You should really have a set routine of activities which you follow after and before each lesson, and each subject can advise what sorts of things you should be doing (every department has produced an independent study guide – so use it to help you structure your time).

Some students like to focus on a different subject each day, whilst others prefer the variety of doing a bit of each subject each day. Others might prioritise based on need, but don't put so much into one subject that you neglect the others! See what works for you – the important thing is that you are working.

Whatever you do, it is important **to constantly reflect** on whether it is working for you and to make changes or seek help as appropriate. Doing nothing, or continuing with an ineffective approach is never the answer!

Organising your learning

This may sound obvious but keeping your work in a sensible and accessible state of order is big part of being successful. I have seen this described as 'collecting and capturing', but we are basically talking about you keeping all of your work well organised in some kind of file.

Each subject will be able to advise you on what works best for them, but these are some basic suggestions that should see you right:

- **Have at least one folder for each subject** – possibly 2 if you have 2 different teachers. Sturdy, 4 ring-binders are the gold standard if you want to be sure that your work doesn't get ruined after a few months.
- **Sub-divide** your folder into sensible sections so you can easily find work when you need it e.g.:
 - **Notes**
 - **Question Practice**
 - **Assessed work (including mock exam papers)**
 - **Glossaries**
 - **Super-curricular work (reading around the subject)**

Plastic wallets are useful but do consider the environment!

- **Keep 'master' folders at home** – once you have moved on from a topic in lesson, there probably isn't any need to keep bringing that work into school.
- **Have a 'day' folder.** A day folder requires you to be organised to think ahead about exactly what you will need each day, but the big benefit of this is that you only need to bring one folder with you! Getting into the habit of reviewing your day folder each evening before decanting work into your master files is a good way to ensure you always review your learning from each day. It is a good idea to take this time to review your lesson notes, write them up in neat and add in any extra work you may have done.

Actions: what you need to do next

Every A level student has their own set of needs when it comes to organisation. Different students will be beginning their A levels with different levels of organisation. Use these actions as a place to start, and if you need any additional help come and speak to one of the Sixth Form Team

- **Audit your time** – Your time and effort are a finite resource, so how are you currently spending it?
- **Make a list of the tasks you need to complete.** Divide these into ongoing tasks (independent learning you do before and after each lesson) and those with a set deadline.
- **Practice prioritising tasks** – it is ok, and sensible to include non-academic tasks in this, but if you are finding there are too many non-study related tasks, perhaps you need to question whether you have enough time!
- **Be reflective** – If you think that what you are doing isn't working, or you are struggling to keep on top of your work, then first and foremost try to be honest with yourself and think what the cause might be. If you are confident enough to make positive changes then go for it – and if you need some advice then come and speak to one of the team or your subject teachers.

Useful links

- *'The Student Mindset – A 30-item toolkit for anyone learning anything'* by Steve Oakes and Martin Griffin is an excellent book for any student wanting help with how to learn more effectively.
- <https://www.heckgrammar.co.uk/sixth-form/transition/the-induction-period/sixth-form-induction-2020/>

If you need any further support, please speak to Mrs Whitelaw, Mrs Barnard or Mr Ellis