

Practical advice for student time management during the exam years - a rough guide for students and parents



Introduction

There is no doubt that the exams years, and in particular the months before and during the exams, can be a stressful time for some students. Young people can find it difficult to effectively manage the demands on their time at any time. They are also in the midst of the emotional strain of 'growing up' and considering their futures. Students are often busy with normal school work, exam preparation and revision, coursework as well as extra-curricular activities and home life. Stress can be added to as some students are torn between the academic and non-academic aspects of their life. With this in mind, we hope that this information assists both students and parents in preparing for this period of school life.

Academic support

Academic support is available in school from mentors, subject teachers and Heads of Key Stage. This may be organised by staff as support sessions before school, during lunchtimes and after school. Teachers are available in school time to give extra help at students' request. For the majority of students, these sessions should not be necessary and the teaching staff are encouraged to arrange bespoke, individualised sessions to assist with specific issues that students might have. Although teachers can see through a student's classwork and homework and through their general demeanour that there are academic or non-academic issues that need addressing, we must also stress that teachers are not mindreaders. It is important that students (or parents) communicate their worries, concerns and queries to the appropriate teacher as soon as possible. With the use of 24/7 technology such as the Google Classroom students can now ask questions whenever they want and teachers will respond.

It must also be remembered that the most useful support is when students try to do the work first, e.g. complete a past paper, and the teacher helps them by correcting it and giving written and oral feedback.

Parents can find out whether a student needs extra support by looking at the traffic light or termly reports, but also by asking. This can be done via email or making an appointment, but it is important that this is only done if a parent has a genuine concern as we do not want to fill up a staff members' inbox or calendar so they do not have time to work with those students who do have a genuine issue.

Extra-curricular activities

Commitment to extra-curricular activities is an issue that students and parents often ask about; the concern being that such commitments take students away from valuable time preparing for exams. However, we must remember the benefits of such activities even in the run up to exams. Extra-curricular activities allow students to participate in something different to their academic pursuits - doing something different with a 'downtime' from studies is beneficial to a student's well-being. Sports are obviously a way of staying fit and healthy so we would encourage students to continue with some sporting activities in or outside of school.

There must obviously be a balanced approach to this. As more time is needed for coursework and exam preparation, students (with guidance from staff and parents) must consider the appropriate balance of extra-curricular activities and academic studies. This balance is not a 'one size fits all' solution. All students are different and their ability to meet varied commitments differs. With better time management, it is possible to be fully engaged in extra-curricular and academic pursuits. There is even evidence that points to those students being more engaged in school activities actually doing better in exams.

At school in Term 3 of exam years, there are less extra curricular activities offered. Students and parents must also remember that time is also used for other things other than studying and extra-curricular activities. Family time, TV, online non-academic activities, etc also use up our waking hours. Family time is obviously important, but it may not be the most appropriate time of a student's school career to missing school or private study time to visit relatives in Australia for two weeks, attend numerous family weddings and parties, etc. The impact of

family commitments should be if possible minimal in impact. The growth of social media and the online lives that young people have need also to be monitored as they can take up considerable hours and can also be low-level distractions and disruptions to work (e.g. SnapChat being open whilst studying). Students should watch their online behaviour - am I really working when on my iPad or laptop? - is a question they should ask themselves.

Organising yourself

Being organised is the first step to successful time management. Students need to organise themselves. Using Google Calendar which is linked to Google Classroom and shows what work needs to be done is a great tool. It can also be useful for planning regular and irregular activities (not just work!) and even shared with parents (ask the TBS ICT Helpdesk if you want to know how to share a calendar).

Students should aim to get ahead with their studies. Start revising months ahead, not weeks ahead, do homework on the day it is set and not the night before it is due to be handed in. Go to the library in school at lunch or after school if you are less effective at home.

It is important that students have some times of the week when they do relax, but must make sure they also have some times of the week when they always work - use Google Calendar!

Attendance is key to exam success, there are clear correlations between the two. Students and parents must work together on this to minimise absence. One day off is 6 hours of teaching missed for a Year 11 student.

It is also important to not procrastinate over work - just do it!

Private tuition

We know that a small number of students engage the services of a private tutor to assist with their studies. To be frank, this is effectively throwing money at a perceived problem and from the school's point of view often a waste of that money and a student's time. Research suggests that private tutors are rarely effective at improving grades, in fact some evidence suggests they can do more harm than good. Private tutors reduce a student's independence and more hours of teaching does not equal more hours of learning!

Rarely do tutors have the in depth knowledge of the syllabus and subject material in the way that TBS teachers do. And they certainly are not trained in teaching and learning to the same, if any, degree. Tutors do not teach effectively, they teach to past papers and not to further understanding. They are often 'crammers' and can teach bad habits and give student's (and parents) a false sense of confidence.

Several hours of tuition per week adds to the burden and time management issue, particularly if they also involve travel time.

Healthy lifestyle

The exam period can obviously be both physically as well as mentally challenging. It is therefore important that students take care of their physical and mental well-being. Both of these can be helped by sufficient sleep (at least 8 hours per night and advice says no electronic devices should be used at least 30 minutes before sleep), regular exercise and a healthy diet. Advice on exercise and diet can be sought in school. The school counsellors are also available all day every school day for students to seek advice on exam-related stress or other issues.

Who to contact for advice

The first port of call should be a student's mentor. Email to request advice back by email or an appointment. The Heads of Key Stage ([Mr Wambeek for KS4](#) and [Miss Caines for KS5](#)) can also be contacted.