

IGCSE STUDY SKILLS GUIDE



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Achieving the grades we want is easier said than done. There are so many distractions and things we'd rather be doing than focusing on our IGCSEs. If you've ever felt like this, you're in the right place! Our top IGCSE tutors have created this guide that will cover all the best tips and hacks to make sure you are successful!

This guide will cover **staying focused, creating a productive study space, keeping on track, making awesome notes and improving your memory!**

Staying Focused

The first part of achieving success in the IGCSEs is making sure you stay focused! With a wide array of subjects to study, it can be easy to let your mind wander. This, however, leads to the dreaded act of procrastination! So how can we avoid spending hours scrolling through Instagram and binging YouTube videos? It might sound counter-productive, but we can always try and get our phones to help us!



Anti-Procrastination Apps We Love!

FOREST

Plant a virtual seed as you sit down to study, and watch the seed flourish into a beautiful tree! However, give into temptation and leave the app for even a second and your tree will die. Every tree you successfully grow to completion is planted in your forest, each representing one period of productivity and focus. What's more, Forest is partnered with a real-life tree planting organisation, meaning that as you grow enough virtual trees you will actually be planting real seeds along the way! This way, you can study happy with the knowledge that you're making a positive impact on both your grades and the environment!



BE FOCUSED

If you're looking for another study app to help you stay on track, then Be Focused is brilliant. This app follows the Pomodoro Technique, whereby work is broken down into intervals (typically 25 minutes in length), separated by short breaks. Be Focused helps you get things done by breaking up individual tasks into more manageable chunks separated by regular breaks. Similarly to HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training), this allows you to go all-out when you're actually working, as you know that you have a break coming up soon! You are able to specify how much time you want to split between focus and rest, and this is proven to be effective in retaining motivation and productivity. Be Focused also allows you to record how much time you're spending on certain activities, so you can keep a close eye on your study pattern!



QUIZLET

If Forest, Be Focused, or Strict Workflow have helped you stay concentrated and motivated, the next challenge is learning, and specifically memorizing, all the content for





your IGCSE exams. This is where the free app Quizlet comes in, allowing you to study on the go! With Quizlet, you can create your own sets of online flashcards or you can choose from loads of flashcards created by other students. Quizlet generates a number of games and activities for you and your flashcards to help you learn the facts!

EVERNOTE

As we become more proficient with our laptops and tablets, many students are preferring to type their notes rather than hand write them. Evernote is a platform for effective note-taking, allowing you to have all of your notes clearly organised in one place. How many times have you taken notes in a notebook or on a sheet of paper only to never be able to find those notes again? Evernote solves that for you, as everything you write automatically backs itself online. On top of allowing you to find your notes quicker, this also prevents all those last-minute panics when your computer decides to crash the night before an essay deadline.



ANKI

AnkiApp is a flashcard app similar to Quizlet and is designed to make memorising facts easier. This app monitors your progress, and subsequently tests you on the flashcards you are struggling with most. So AnkiApp helps you tackle the topics you find the most challenging. Again, you can either make your own virtual flashcards, or choose from a large selection and download easily. Anki differs from Quizlet in that it is slightly 'smarter', in that it learns precisely what you tend to struggle with and gives you questions to target those areas. You'll need to pay a small fee for Anki, though.





MEMRISE

This fantastic flashcard app lets you learn anywhere and anytime. Put your learning to the test by making your own flashcards or using one of the many sets already available. Memrise especially focuses on language acquisition; perfect for spicing up how you approach your foreign language revision! However, it is not limited to this and can be used for anything! Track your progress and compete against friends



XMIND

If you're searching for a study App to help you collect and organise ideas, then look no further! XMind is a mind mapping tool, meaning that you can effectively brainstorm ideas when you're on the go. This is perfect for you to get all your ideas written down in one place, and helps you create a clear and colourful mind map. This App is great for those of you trying to brainstorm ideas for any forthcoming essays you may have to write!



SELF CONTROL

Ever found yourself sitting at your desk perusing through your cousin's friend's girlfriend's holiday snaps when you're supposed to be working? Be honest, we all have! SelfControl allows you to block distracting websites whilst you work, preventing your inner procrastinator from taking another quiz to find out what piece of obscure furniture you are. You may think that you can outsmart SelfControl by turning your computer on and off again or trying to uninstall the App, but whatever you do, SelfControl will still block those sites for the time that you've set! There's no way around it! This is a procrastinator's dream tool.





Creating a Productive Study Space

Making sure our IGCSEs go well is not a last minute task - it's something we have to put effort in for consistently. That means doing a little bit of work outside of school hours. So many students forget how important a good study space is so let us run through a few tips you can follow that will have a big impact on your IGCSE results.





Tip 1: Study at your desk

We know this sounds simple but when you are feeling very sleepy the temptation is to try and study in your bed. While there is no substitute for snuggling up under your duvet, this will ALWAYS make you fall asleep. It is so much easier to focus if you are sat up straight at your desk with your work laid out in front of you. The truth is, your brain associates certain spaces with certain tasks and so only focusing at our desk means that our brain positively reinforces the idea of studying. If you're someone who doesn't have a desk or you still can't focus there, feel free to experiment with where you work until your brain settles on a good location!

If you get distracted at home by your family, then consider studying in the library or a coffee shop. If you're in school then ask your teachers to find you a free classroom and go to study there. Computer rooms and school or public libraries are a good alternative.

Tip 2: Drink water

Staying healthy physically and mentally is key in succeeding in your IGCSEs. A really easy way you can help yourself, is by drinking water as you work. Many studies have shown that drinking water allows the brain to better process information, and thus allows you to concentrate and power through your assignments much better than if you were quenched for thirst!

You may be a big coffee drinker already, but water has many of the same properties as coffee in allowing you to wake up! So, next time you find yourself going for a coffee in the morning to wake yourself up, try getting a big glass of water instead (or invest in a large water bottle that you can keep on your desk at all times!) This also gives you a nice little study break when you can go and refill it, and this actually involves getting up from my desk (sounds sad, we know, but very useful!)



Tip 3: Have some snacks

There is nothing more motivating than having something nice to snack on while you study, and guess what? Your brain actually needs fuel to function. Mixed nuts or dried fruit are some Lanterna favourites to nibble on throughout the day. You could even choose a sweeter treat and reward yourself with it once you've finished some notes or a past paper! Just make sure that you don't gorge yourself on treats, as a healthy diet is more important to your cognitive ability than you might think!

Tip 4: Take a Break

Perhaps the most important piece of advice: you need to take regular breaks from studying. As we mentioned in the App recommendation section, using a pomodoro-like technique with a five minute break every half an hour works wonders in terms of refreshing your brain. It might seem like you're wasting time, but the productivity boost from taking a few minutes away from your laptop or notes is well worth it! It seems to be widely considered that 'good studying' equals 'a long time studying'... We at Lanterna don't think so at all. Typically some of the best studying happens when you're able to sit down and be extremely focused for 20-30 minutes, and then rewarding yourself with a break! This way you will both remember more information as well as allowing your body and mind to get a well-earned break!

A couple of suggestions of what to do when you are taking a break:

- Stretch
- Take a little walk, even just around your house
- Reply to some texts (if you aren't going to get carried away!)
- Watch a 3-5 minutes YouTube video (as long as it doesn't lead you into the YouTube black hole...)
- Eat your study snacks

The most important thing is that during all of these breaks we'd recommend leaving your study space. If you start relaxing and taking breaks by your desk you are subconsciously tying the study space to the concept of relaxation.



You want your brain to recognize, as soon as you sit down at your desk, that it's time to work! So, as much as possible, only sit at your desk when you're actually working!





Keeping on Track

We all know how it feels. We're sitting in a lesson. We're following what the teacher is saying. But there's something that we just can't get our head around. We try to reread what we've written in our notes. We think it through and... blank. It's just not making sense. By the time we focus back on the lesson, the class has moved on.

This is a very common problem, and it's hard to avoid in a typical classroom setting.

All of us learn at different speeds and think in different ways. Something that might seem as clear as a bottle of Evian to one person might look as muddy as a puddle of rainwater to someone else. In IGCSEs, where each student studies very different subjects, it's inevitable that we'll be faster at picking up some subjects than others.

So what can we do about this problem? How can we find the missing pieces?

Keep Track of the Gaps

The first step to filling in knowledge gaps in a subject is to keep track of each gap. Each time you realise that you're not quite understanding something or making it stick, make sure you at least remember that it exists. Trust us, we know it's tempting to just block the difficult things from your memory, but the truth is, you're only making things worse by doing that.

To keep track of the gaps you can:

- Colour-code your notes and highlight anything you don't understand.
- Keep a checklist of all these things, and make sure this is accessible and visible!
- Even better, add them straight to a To-Do list of 'things I'm going to learn'.
- Stop thinking of the gaps as things you don't understand. Instead, think of them as things you're going to understand!



Take Time to Fill in the Knowledge

Often even when an entire topic feels impossible, there are actually just a few specific things that you don't understand. As soon as you understand those missing gaps, a lot of it will click! This is especially true in subjects like Maths, where each step of the process builds on previous understanding. The only way to make sure everything is fully understood is to take time to go through the subject outside of the lessons.

- Get a tutor who can help support your studies.
- Ask a friend or a teacher to explain it to you.
- Work on the problem by yourself with the textbook (and some chocolate) next to you.

Make sure you set aside extra time as part of your regular schedule so you know that you are always staying on top of the work. Treat each gap in your knowledge as an individual problem and fix them one by one, starting with the simplest thing first. If you have that checklist, go through it and tick it off as you go.

One technique that many Lanterna tutors love is using the power of 'dead time' to keep up with the work our teachers set us.

Dead Time: the quick-fix solution to productivity

Time management is a true art. One which few ever totally master. Students are forever complaining that they don't have enough hours in the day to get everything done. But 24 hours is a lot of time, right? So where does it all go? And how can you better use your time to become more productive? The secret to productivity is hidden in your dead time.

Dead time will enable you to make more time available in your day-to-day life. Or rather, to make use of the time you were otherwise wasting.



What is it?

Dead time is time in which someone or something is not acting productively. Perhaps the time spent when you are waiting for something, or when you do something without a real purpose.

Dead time is everywhere...

Your journey to school. The five minutes you spend between lessons. The two minutes it takes for your laptop to load up in the morning. Although seemingly insignificant in isolation, it really adds up. Based on the many students we've spoken to, we estimate that the average person has in excess of 1.5 hours of dead time every day! If you can get into the habit of using this dead time to do little bits and pieces of larger tasks, you'll be able to use those random, useless moments in your day to your advantage.

Here are some examples of situations where dead time tends to hide, and how you might make use of it:

On your journey to school...

- Download Duolingo and practice your language subject
- Make yourself a set of flashcards on Memrise to help you revise for an upcoming test
- Listen to podcasts. Whether related to your studies or not, listening to podcasts can make you feel worldly-wise!

Whilst you're brushing your teeth...

Take a pack of post-it notes. On each, write a definition that you need to learn, a buzz-word or a quote. Stick these around your bathroom mirror. Then, every morning and evening when you stand there mindlessly brushing your teeth, glance over the notes. Remember – dead time adds up. You may only brush your teeth for 2 minutes, twice a day. But that's half an hour a week. Two hours a month. 24 hours a year! That's a whole lot of studying, and that's time extremely well spent.



Waiting for anything...

Carry a small revision guide or some notes around with you in your backpack. When you find yourself stuck in a waiting room, or outside a teacher's office, take it out and flick through. Perhaps even bring a highlighter in order to remember some key ideas.





Making Awesome Notes

The art of note-taking, or at least of taking effective notes, is often underestimated. Yes, almost all of us make them in lessons, but it's easy to forget how valuable they can be later on. Making awesome notes for your IGCSEs is especially important, as there is so much information across the 6 subjects, which all needs to be remembered for the exams. Good notes aren't just about taking in information as you go along, but are a way to save time, effort and frustration in the long-term.



Tips

1. Use your own Words

Don't just copy what the teacher or textbook says. We know it's tempting, both because it's easier and because you might feel like you'll never be able to phrase a point quite as perfectly. However, if you don't understand a sentence, or a set of words, as you're writing it, then odds are you won't understand it when you read your note back! Think of your notes as messages to yourself in the future, so think about how you would explain it to make sure you actually understand. If you can't think of a way to say it in your own words then you may not fully have grasped the concept yet, so make sure to remind yourself to go back to that concept after class!

2. Stick with the Essentials

The whole point of notes is to preserve the information that you will find useful later. Don't write down everything, just write the key points that you can imagine yourself actually using later. For Mathematics and Sciences, these will include facts, formulae, methods, and examples. For Literature and Social Sciences, write down facts, ideas, quotes. For Languages, think about vocabulary and grammar.

For Literature, Social Sciences and Languages, it's also okay to order your notes according to what you consider to be the most essential information. You'll save yourself time later if you do this as you go along. Rank the information according to how important or useful you consider it to be. Then, when you come to revision, learn it in that order.

3. Keep them Brief

When it comes to notes, rewriting your entire textbook isn't going to be worth anything. Think about condensing the notes as you're writing them, only including information that you will need to remember! Make sure you have enough so that you actually understand it later, but don't write so much



that it just looks like a block of scrawl. Keywords, facts and formulas are the most important. Stick to short, simple sentences and phrases that you can easily remember. This isn't an essay.

Improving Your Memory

"If I had a better memory, all this work would be no problem". Does this thought sound familiar? Does it creep up on you before a test? Day to day in school? Many of us tell ourselves that we've just got a bad memory and that there's nothing we can do about it, but more often than not what distinguishes 'good memorisers' from 'bad memorisers' isn't so much their brain power, but the techniques that they use!

While there is of course more to the IGCSEs than just remembering facts and figures, being able to recall all these facts, formulas, words and ideas is a massive part of getting the top grade. It's not enough to be able to understand something in class. Wherever stage you're at in your IGCSEs, you're going to have to remember all the things you're learning when it comes to the final exams.

You might think that this is what revision is for, and that revision still feels a long time away. But actually, there's a lot that you could be doing to improve your memory right now. And given that some research suggests the adult attention span has got worse by roughly 12 minutes in the last decade, you might want to think twice before relying on the technology around you to get by! From techniques developed over the course of centuries to practical things you can do every day, here are my top tips for improving your memory.

Mnemonic Devices

Mnemonics are techniques created to help us remember large chunks of information, and they use methods such as association, sense memory and reorganisation to give your brain shortcuts to what it needs to know. A study of mnemonic devices back in the 60s showed that students who regularly used these devices increased their test scores by up to 77%!



Examples include:

Acronyms and Acrostics: playing with the words and letters in the information you need to remember can be really effective in turning things that are hard to remember into something, well, memorable. These are especially useful for subjects with hard facts, like sciences. You can create your own or find ones already in use. e.g. “How I wish I could recollect pi” – count the number of letters in each word of that phrase to get the sequence of digits: 3.141592!

Chunking: breaking down big pieces of information into smaller ‘chunks’ of information. We already do this to remember things like telephone numbers, when we’ll break down a list of 10 digits or more into a few smaller chunks of 3 or 4 numbers. So, instead of memorizing a long formula, break it down into smaller chunks and it will prove much easier.

Music mnemonics: how many song lyrics do you think you’re holding in your head right now? Did you sit down and learn them? We doubt it. Music, especially catchy melodies, does wonders for helping words stick in our brains. That’s why half the adverts on TV contain some sort of jingle, or set the brand name to music in some way. You don’t have to be a composer to make this technique work for you though, and you don’t even need to write a whole song (although if you want to, go for it!), but reciting information or words to a melody is a great way to make it stay in your head. Even if you’re not the most musically inclined person, you can take a famous song that you know and just replace the lyrics!

Don’t Repeat – Reorganise

Repetition is probably the most common method of revision and memorising information, but it’s actually one of the most inefficient methods. Most of us find it boring, and that is exactly because repetition alone involves only the most basic, surface level of the brain. Instead, find a way to reorganise the information, and connect it with what you already know – activate your brain. In fancy terms this is called ‘elaborative rehearsal’. So, next time you



learn something new in class, don't just copy down what the teacher is saying, rewrite it in your own words. Next time you are reading a big chunk of text, make notes in your own words in the margins. Think about how this information connects with what you've learnt before, and how it changes the information.

Moving Forward

So there we have it, some of the Lanterna team's best tips for making sure you stay on top of your IGCSEs! If you're looking for more top IGCSE tips then make sure to head to our blog. Moreover, if you're searching for the best IGCSE help around, take a look at the top team of tutors we have available to help you!



Elite IGCSE tutors

All our tutors have completed the IGCSEs themselves!
They understand exactly what is needed to boost your confidence and learn those complicated concepts!



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Tailored to improve your grades

At Lanterna, we only hire the very best to help you prepare for IGCSE success. They are trained to help you with exactly what you need! subjects!



Questions? Email us at info@lanternaeducation.com