

# PAST EXAM PAPERS

## WHY IS THIS A GOOD REVISION TOOL?

Why use past exam papers as a basis for revision?

Make model answers to revise from. Annotate and highlight points to focus on.

Practice drawing and labelling accurate diagrams

How do they mark? Are there similarities or common themes they are looking for?

Practice timing

Re-do past exam paper questions 2 or 3 times with or without notes

Highlight key words used in exam questions with a highlighter - e.g. Explain, Describe, Evaluate, calculate

Use notes/revision guides to answer exam questions

Make a mind map of the key points in a 'longer' answer

Form a study group with 2/3 friends and work together through an exam paper

Review past exam papers to identify topics you are not sure of

Use the markscheme to mark your work  
4 marks = 4 points to be made

Practice question types e.g. short/long topic area

Write down a list of what you will need to know or find out to answer the question

# Using Past Papers

## **What are past papers?**

When you're studying for A-levels, your teacher or tutor may give you practice papers. These are papers similar to what you'll be handed in an exam. They'll have example questions in an exam format for you to practise answering. Past papers are ones that have been used in actual exams in previous years. They've got questions that students before you actually had to answer in an exam setting! Qualifications you study for and the exams set for them can change over time, but doing past papers is still a great way to prepare for the real thing.

## **How important are past papers?**

How do past papers help you revise for the real thing?

- **Get familiar with the types of questions**

Past papers help you to spot certain types of questions and recognise them. Understanding how questions are structured and what they're asking makes life easier in exams when you're faced with lots of questions to sort through!

- **Get familiar with the types of answers**

Need help in understanding how papers are marked? Doing past papers helps you understand what they look for in an answer. In this way, you can see what points get awarded for. This can really help when you're doing exams for real and want to frame your answers well.

- **Discover useful areas of focus for revision**

Which areas of the syllabus are you strong in? Which areas would you like to improve? Doing past papers can help you get a feel for your stronger and weaker areas. Knowing this can help you structure your revision to make the most of your study time.

- **Practise managing your time**

Exams have to be completed in a set time period. Doing a past paper in the same time limit you'd be given for the actual exam can help you get a feel for how to give enough time for each section of the paper. You can also practise planning out your answers quickly for questions that require a longer answer, like essays.

- **Practise staying focused**

When doing exams you'll aim to be completely focused on your exam paper, with no distractions. Doing past papers can give you a taste of that, which can help you to find it easier on the day!

## How to use past papers

- **The key step – use them!**

First of all, if a teacher or tutor gives you past papers, use them! Do as many as you can, because doing multiple past papers can teach you even more than doing just one, and they can go a long way to help you improve your **exam technique**, **revision knowledge** and, ultimately, exam grades.

- **Teacher (or tutor) knows best**

If you're given past papers by your teacher, aim to follow their instructions on how to do the past paper and learn from the experience. For example, you may be asked to do a past paper in a classroom environment or as part of home revision.

- **Do past papers early**

Like revision, it can help to balance your exam stress levels if you do past papers fairly early on and try not to leave them until the last minute. You'll find it useful to get an early idea what to expect and improve on, and you'll leave yourself with enough time to do more than one past paper.

- **Do them at least THREE times**

They do say practice makes perfect! If you find yourself struggling with a particular past paper, you may feel the benefit of doing the same paper again to see how you're improving!

- **Use past papers to do mini mock exams at home**

See if you can do a past paper at home that's as close to exam conditions as possible:

- Allocate the exam time limit to answer the questions.
- Answer the questions in a quiet environment where you won't be disturbed or distracted.
- Aim to answer every question, not just the questions you have a stronger knowledge in.
- Aim not to look at any reference materials or notes other than the ones the exam allows.
- Practice your exam technique – this can include checking you've spotted all the questions and haven't missed one, moving on from trickier questions and coming back to them, getting easier questions out of the way first, and going back to check everything through if you manage to finish early!

## Use past papers as an indicator

If you're doing past papers and are worried about the results, don't worry – past papers can be used as an indicator to show you where you're strong in your knowledge and where you might aim to improve. You can think of them as a useful tool, not a crystal ball. Your past paper marks are just for learning and practice, so there is no need to worry.

