





Surviving and Thriving in Sixth Form at Ballyclare Secondary School

This guide contains information which:

-  can help you keep on top of your workload
-  help you meet deadlines
-  help you get more from your study time
-  can be shared with parents/carers to help identify how to support you in your studies

The booklet is not designed to be read cover to cover like an instruction book.





Flick through the sections to find what is most relevant to you.

Try out the tips that appeal to you but don't be afraid to adapt them and make them personal.

Keep the booklet in a handy place in your study area so you can dip back in from time to time.

Use it to give your study style a boost or to get back on track if you ever feel a little lost or behind.

The booklet contains sections on:

-  Motivation
-  Using your study periods in school constructively
-  Getting down to study at home
-  Dealing with deadlines

Getting and Staying Motivated

For the first time you have returned to school in September out of personal choice rather than out of legal obligation.

Being well motivated to learn has a huge impact on your ability to achieve your best.

1. Have high personal expectations.

Set yourself high standards of attendance at school, preparation for lessons and quality of work. Set yourself high expectations and believe that you can meet them.

Don't give in to negative self-talk by running yourself down and saying how rubbish you are at everything.

Don't fear getting things wrong. Give it your best effort and if it doesn't work out, use what you have learned as an opportunity to do things differently the next time.

2. Ask yourself "why"?

Consider why you have opted to study the courses you have chosen.

What do you hope they will lead to?

Identify how they will help you develop as a person: what skills and personal capabilities will you gain?

3. Take ownership of your target grades

Once you have begun your courses in earnest your teachers will share your target grades with you. Take ownership of these by noting them in your planner. Discuss them with your parents/carers. Track your progress at each assessment point. If you are ever unsure about your progress towards the targets, ask your teacher. If you aren't reaching your target grade, remain realistically optimistic that you can. Start to examine how you can make adjustments in your approach to your work to move in the right direction. Seeking support and advice from teachers and parents would be particularly important.

4. Take a wider interest in your course

In order to motivate yourself when things seem tough you will need to take a real interest in the subject. I am sure you have noticed that when someone is really passionate about a subject or activity he or she has much more drive and focus to succeed.

Read about the subject in books, magazines, blogs and journals. Discuss your learning with other people on your course.

Try to relate the topics you are learning to real life events or potential career opportunities.

5. Congratulate yourself on a job well done!

Celebrate finishing a major piece of work with a treat. Even better, decide on what the treat will be beforehand and use that to spur you on to finish.

When you get positive feedback about a piece of work or in an assessment task make sure to acknowledge it. Learn from the “feel good factor” so that you can apply the same approach again.

Share your success with parents and friends. This really enhances the “feel good factor”. Don’t you just love it when someone else is really proud of what you have achieved?

Getting the most out of study periods in school

1. Ensure you know where to study

It may be very tempting to leave the “blanks” in your timetable empty until your class teacher and year teacher are really pressing you to hand in your completed timetable. One of the most challenging things for year 13 and 14 students is to get down to regular study in school hours. Your study periods are built into your timetable to allow you to focus on the more demanding content of your post-16 studies. At this stage lessons with your teacher are really the jumping off point. You need to continue to work and to consolidate your learning in your own time. It is very easy to fritter away study periods, do not leave yourself having to play catch up at home.

Start by knowing where to go when. Some teachers will ask you to study in their departmental area. You may need to use equipment or they may wish to be close at hand to give you advice or support.

Otherwise, you should be in the Sixth Form Centre where you can study in the work area. A member of staff will be on hand to ensure that a quiet work environment is maintained. Please respect the rights of other students to work free from disruption or distraction.

Study for coursework based subjects has been allocated a chunk of study time in areas where computers are available. During other periods pupils should get on with work for their other subjects

Any students wishing to continue coursework or use computers for a one-off research may use the computers after school during home and should speak to a member of ICT staff about making arrangements.

2. Use “to do” lists

You should record all homework, assessments and deadlines in your planner. However, these dates may well be given to you quite far in advance. You should see the planner as your master “to do” list. This should then be condensed into specific lists of what you need to get done each day.

It is best to write one the night before or even first thing in the morning. This is something you could realistically achieve in class assembly each morning; your class teacher could help you if you don’t know where to start.

Some people get real satisfaction out of ticking things off a list. Even if you don’t have a list obsession, this approach still lets you see that you are making progress towards your goal.

3. Don't bank on having a free lesson to finish work

This is one sure way to get stressed out. You might get a last minute offer to go out and see that you have a free lesson the next day so put off a fairly substantial piece of work. You can't guarantee that something else won't crop up once you get to school to get in the way of your plan. Organise your work carefully and don't leave things to the last minute. Try not to get into situations where you are tempted to cram work in just before you have to go to class.

This is a dangerous habit to get into. It will inevitably lead to incomplete or poor quality work. Cramming for tests is not advisable as knowledge will not reach your long term memory.

4. Work actively

Some of the work in your study periods will be active by design: completing tasks in preparation for classes, coursework and homework. However, you will also need to regularly review and revise your work. This can be a good use of time in school, reviewing material ahead of the next lesson or "backing up" what you have just learned. Sitting passively staring at a page of notes can often lead to day dreaming and poor levels of concentration.

You could rewrite your notes, make cue cards draw spider diagrams or pictograms, for example.

5. Identify when you are most productive

Are you a "morning person" or does it take you a while to get up to speed? Identify when you are most alert and focused. Try to schedule tasks that need most concentration for when you are at your peak. Aim to do this regularly and you will find you work more efficiently and produce your best quality work.

Use your "to do" list to help you out here. If you are free at a time of day when you are not at your best, tackle something relatively easy or routine. This way at least you will get something done.

Getting down to work at home

1. Planning your time

This can be the most challenging part of your work.

Exam boards recommend that a minimum of the same amount of time spent in the classroom with your teacher should be spent on private study. Some of this time is of course devoted to homework and completing coursework. However, just because you have finished your homework it shouldn't end there. To be really successful in your courses you must find time to do regular revision.

In coursework based subjects you should use the additional hours to proof read work. This will eventually speed up your overall work rate as you will get less work back to redraft in the long run.

You may have other commitments, you do not need to give these up but you do need to plan carefully.

You should also plan a cut-off point each evening, if you plan your time at home well and use your time in school wisely there is no need to be sitting up doing work until very late in the evenings. If you are, you need to talk to someone about your approach to work.

2. Find your space

Find where you can best work at home. Some people work well in their own room but others find that there are too many distractions. This space can be particularly difficult to work in if you share a room.

You should sit at a desk so you have space to spread your work out in front of you. A lot of your work this year will require you to check back in your textbook or notes.

Sitting on the sofa balancing books on your knee won't give you the right conditions to work in. Sitting or lying on your bed isn't a great choice either. Psychologists say that as we connect this area with sleep you are unlikely to retain the information you are working on if you study in this way.

You may need to study in a communal area of the house such as at a kitchen or dining room table. If this is the case then you need to make sure you are organised so you don't misplace notes or information.

A comfortable chair at a desk will make sure you are relaxed yet alert, ready to tackle your work. Good lighting would also be important to prevent eye strain.

Remove distractions if you know you won't be able to resist them. Leave your phone in another room if you won't be able to ignore messages coming through that may break your concentration.

If it's challenging to find a quiet space at home you are welcome to use the school library during homework club hours, it's not just there for the juniors!

3. Equip your space, including a good filing system

So, you've found your space with a desk, chair and good light.

Make sure that wherever you work you have set of essentials such as pens, pencils, highlighters and paper. This is so that when you sit down to work you are ready to go.

Keep your study materials and files in one place rather than scattered around the house.

Resist the temptation to tidy up by stuffing all your papers into one file! There is no need to take all your notes to school each day. However, if you take a smaller file to school make sure you file them in the correct place when you get home.

Here are a few tips on creating a filing system.

- ✓ Have different coloured folders for each of your courses.
- ✓ Label the folders on the outside
- ✓ Use dividers inside
- ✓ Make an index for each folder
- ✓ Date or number your notes pages
- ✓ Keep loose handouts in poly pockets

If you have to use shared areas of the house where you cannot leave your work sitting out, get a box into which you can clear your things but still keep them together. Avoid clearing them into piles on chairs or the floor where things can be misplaced or get mixed up with other people's belongings.

Make sure you give the same attention to your computer files. You should ensure you make folders, labelling each version of your work carefully and ensuring you have make backups of all files. Do not simply assume that one version saved on the school system will be safe. Files anywhere can be corrupted or lost. Having been careless about how you have stored your files is not an excuse to miss deadlines.

4. Build in study breaks

Make sure you take breaks to avoid slumps in concentration.

Try to aim for between 20-40 minutes focused work, with breaks of 5-10 minutes. Your schedule of work to breaks does, however, depend on the type of task you are doing. Having a break can be as simple as standing up and having a good stretch. Some people find that if they leave the room they can be distracted. It is probably a good idea not to use your phone or social media during a break, unless you have very strong will power to leave it alone as soon as your break is over.

Have an end point for your study. You need to get 7-8 hours of sleep each night.

If you have planned carefully you should be able to avoid last minute, late night study sessions.

If you know that you have planned carefully, have used your time in school and at home productively but still cannot get sufficient rest you need to speak to someone (teachers or parents) and work out why this might be happening. Don't struggle on in silence.

Dealing with coursework

Some courses are assessed in the form of portfolio work rather than examinations.

These often mean that a great deal of work needs to be completed over a long period of time. Most of us tend to leave tasks until the last minute, this is not a helpful approach to this type of work. Studying these courses requires a different skill set to what you have been used to a GCSE.

Here are some tips on tackling this type of work:

1. Be clear about the task

Make sure you refer to the task guidelines. Ensure you lay the work out in the appropriate format. Know what types of examples or applications of knowledge you are expected to give.

Having a copy of the mark scheme is also useful.

If you are in any doubt, ask your teacher for clarification.

2. Keep a note of deadlines

Make sure you are very clear about how long you have to complete a piece of work. These deadlines should be noted clearly in your student planner. Aim to finish ahead of the set deadline. You may not always achieve this, but if you do it will give you a chance to carefully review the work before you hand it in. Starting early is the best way to make sure you have the task finished in time.

If you are studying several coursework based subjects you may have several dates to keep track of. It may be worthwhile noting these on a calendar displayed in your study area or noting them in the calendar of your phone (if you use that function).

3. Set mini-deadlines

Staff delivering these courses will indicate when you should have reached a certain point in the overall assignment. Stick to their schedule. These mini-deadlines will give you a chance to see how you are progressing and they will keep you on track for the completing the bigger picture. The same advice about recording deadlines applies.

4. Organise your thoughts and resources

Quite often coursework must be presented in word processed format.

The temptation is to sit down and just start typing. This rarely leads to good quality drafts of work.

It is best to:

- ✓ Have the task outline to hand
- ✓ Read the guidance for the section you are working on
- ✓ Get out relevant class notes or text books
- ✓ Jot down a rough plan of what you need to include, perhaps any examples that you can use to illustrate the points you are making
- ✓ Use the rough handwritten plan to make sure you include the points you intended to
- ✓ Regularly review sections as you type e.g. every time you save your work, read what you written to check that it makes sense.
- ✓ When you come back to a piece of work, perhaps the next day, read what you have written to avoid repetition or missing out something you needed to include.

Make sure you have read the rules from the exam boards on what reference material is permitted and be clear about the rules and penalties for plagiarism.

5. Allow some “down time”

Make sure you have allowed time extra time in your planning. This down time will be of benefit if you have problems with your computer or if you happen to be ill. You don't know what demands there might be on your time close to the submission date.

If you don't need it, that's an added bonus as you will have finished ahead of your deadline.