

IGCSE tips

*Do note: Wherever “syllabus” is mentioned, I am referring to the Cambridge IGCSE syllabus of that subject found on cie.org.uk

Sciences

- While revising MCQs (during your final exam), attempt every question again as though for the first time, reading **every single word** again.
- Try not to mark your answers on the QP, as this might affect your revision and increases chances of someone copying off you.
- **Strictly** restrict to syllabus aims- study with syllabus kept at your side
- Unless specifically mentioned by the question, **always** give your answer to same number of sig. figs. as the question
- Always include the appropriate **units** in your answers, taking care of nomenclature (uppercase/lowercase/punctuation)
- Always **show your working** for numerical question along with the **general formula** used. Then, if you make a calculation error, you may still be awarded marks for using the correct formula/correct scientific concept
- The depth of your explanations should match the number of lines and marks given for that question – **do not over-write** (writing too much outside lines can be penalised) but also ensure that you **give sufficient detail**. For example, if a part of a question is worth three marks you should make at least three separate points. Be careful that you do not make the same point three times (just phrased differently)
- When drawing graphs and diagrams, use a sharp 2B/HB pencil and draw thin, neat lines/curves- try to erase minimally (as this causes fading of graph lines and leaves untidy marks.) If in doubt, draw light lines and plan the shape of your graph/diagram. Then draw bold lines when you are sure.
- While practising past papers/other questions, if you encounter a question you do not understand, **seek help** and clarify that concept. **Do not** simply mug up the answer from the mark scheme or convince yourself of the unlikeness of that concept appearing in the exam.
- When practising past papers/final exam, **never** leave any question empty. Fill up the lines with the answer that seems most likely.
- (Especially for Bio)- Mug up definitions of key terms **exactly** as given in the syllabus
- If you have just finished learning a new concept, try and explain it **out loud**, as though you are teaching a beginner. If you can explain it convincingly, using key terms, you are clear. Else, revise the concept again till you are confident you can explain it to someone.
- Use mnemonics, colour coded notes, mind maps, audio-visuals, whatever helps you to remember. However, do not get so carried away colour coding that it manifests into a distraction more than a study aid.

- When using online notes/study help, always be wary of what you are reading. Be vigilant. Do not blindly accept everything you read, as there may be errors in those sources (Z-notes!!!)
- Though it is important to save trees and electricity, I found it very beneficial to solve physical printed past papers (especially for the sciences) under a time constraint and strict exam conditions when practising for my exams.
- Underline key terms in the question, especially things that you think you will overlook when working your answer (for eg, “Air resistance may be ignored”/”Give your answer to the nearest degree”/”Object is stationary”)
- Remember – it is highly unlikely that a piece of information given in the question is redundant. Thus, read every question twice before answering and notice the words used. There are often subtle hints hidden in the question itself.
- Most of the questions have many sub-parts (for eg, Q1 (a),(i), (ii)) It is important to remember that these are meant to be answered in the chronological sequence as follow up questions often require the use of the concept/answer of the previous question.

Math

*I took additional maths, but these tips might be useful for extended as well

- Add math may seem very overwhelming at first, but don't be too intimidated!
- The mantra for add math for me was **practice, practice, practice**
- I cannot even stress how important it is to solve questions repeatedly till you are confident
- You might feel very lost in particular areas, especially when learning slightly challenging topics for the first time. Try going back home and revising the chapter, (re)reading the **explanations** in your textbook. If you are still not confident, do not hesitate to approach fellow peers, teachers or seniors for help
- Usually, we got homework everyday for math. Make it a point to do at least add math homework on a regular basis (preferably, daily). This is **extremely** important.
- While practising past papers/other questions, if you encounter a question you do not understand, **seek help** and clarify that concept. **Do not** simply mug up the answer from the mark scheme or convince yourself of the unlikeliness of that concept appearing in the exam. Even if you don't understand just one step, get it clarified- it's often the tiniest details that trap you.
- I know that this might seem repetitive, but I can't reiterate this enough. If you do not understand something, do not feel shy to seek help. You will not be considered rude, annoying or stupid. If you feel your lack of understanding disrupts your class, then arrange for a one-to-one session with your teacher/senior. This is especially important for add math because there is a

- lot to cover and class is often fast-paced. If you do not get your foundation strong, you will feel lost and left behind in class, ultimately your loss.
- Remember, almost every topic is connected. Never ignore any small topic if you do not fully understand it. Get your basics right- identities, graphs, circle properties, etc.
 - Always make effort to stay on par with the rest of your class. If you find yourself distracted in (especially, add math) class, be **responsible** and take initiative to change your place or talk to your teacher.
 - When you are nearing your final examinations and you have finished learning all the topics, do a thorough revision of *concepts*, referring to the syllabus. Make notes regarding formulae, application of concepts, graphs or areas where you commonly err.
 - I printed past papers of add math from 2008 as 2 large bundles (paper 1 and 2). Nearing my final exams, I would aim to do at least one pair of papers everyday, solving each and every question under a strict time limit. I found this incredibly helpful. If you do not wish to print past papers, keep a notebook for past paper answers and write down your answers there. Do not leave out questions under the false assumption that you know how to do it. Attempt each and every question as though it is part of your **final** exam.
 - For IGCSE add math, it is not just your final answer that is credited. In fact, if you simply write your answer without showing any steps, you wouldn't be awarded even a single mark (unless it is a 1 mark question). Thus, it is important that you practice writing the **necessary steps** that lead up to the final answer. Generally, follow the rule: number of marks=number of steps to be shown
 - Mark yourself **strictly** according to the mark scheme. If you default, penalise yourself accordingly- do not be lenient with yourself. Moreover, after completing every past paper, total up your **final score** and write it on the first page. This way you'll be able to track your progress.
 - There are errors in the mark scheme more often that you would expect. If you are in doubt, do **not** take the mark scheme as your holy grail and blindly mug up answers from there. Confirm with a fellow peer/teacher/senior
 - Your **electronic calculator** can be of more help than you may know. Learn how to solve quadratics, simple equations for x, matrices functions, trigonometry, calculus (differentiation and integration) verification. This proved to be my saviour in my final exam :")
 - You are required to answer on the question paper itself. Thus, there is a limited (nevertheless, sufficient) amount of space available for you to present your answer. For longer/more complicated questions, it is advisable to work out your answer in **pencil** first. Then when you're sure, you can copy that down in pen. This prevents untidiness and problems with lack of space. (This is something I always joke about- I find myself using my pencil and eraser more than my pen in an add math exam :P). But in case you mess up, don't worry, you are provided with additional sheets upon request.

- I cannot even explain how important it is to **revise**. After working out every answer (in pencil first), **verify** your answer. There is always a way of verifying- either by working backwards or using your calculator. After completing the entire paper, revise it **thoroughly** at least twice- attempting each and every question all over again. Scrutinise every step of yours- do not become negligent during revision- this is the most important leg of the exam!!
- When attempting the paper for the first time, focus on reaching the end first. If you are stuck on any question, simply leave it and move on to the next till you reach the end. Then go back and think about the questions that you left. Do not stay for too long on one question- this might stress you (subconsciously) and you might develop a mental block, which you don't want.
- The easy thing about add math is that the questions of the same topic usually conform to a similar pattern. So though they will never be exactly the same, the method of approach is often very similar. Don't forget to enjoy the course by stressing too much!!

English Language

- Though this is might be one of the more annoying papers to practice, do not neglect doing so!!
- Start by practising individual questions, focussing on obtaining the correct points and their development (by verifying with the MS). Once you've got the hang of that, attempt doing full papers, under a time limit.
- The entire of paper 2 and first question of paper 3 can be corrected by yourself to an extent with the mark scheme. Get familiar with the level of development that the MS prefers.
- Usually, we tend to get carried away with development and inference, forgetting to state the obvious by providing evidence/key pieces of information from extracts. It is essential to state your point **explicitly** before developing and inferring to gain the highest marks.
- For the composition question (paper 3, question 2), it's all up to your **unique style**. It is your preference whether you want to specialise in either or be versatile and comfortable with both styles. I, personally, always did the descriptive. For both styles, it is highly beneficial to have a wide range of developed vocabulary. Apart from that, you can approach different seniors to talk about their unique style of writing.

English Literature

- It is of utmost importance to be familiar with **all** your texts. Key quotes from short stories and dramas should be at the back of your hand
- For all texts, I recommend forming notes. Sit down, re read and analyse every word of the text, penning down any ideas/opinions or themes that come to you. Often rereading in detail uncovers many ideas that you might not have thought about before.

- Though easier said than done, try not to have too many texts that you hate. Be familiar with all. Though you do get a choice in your final exam, if both the choices are something that you are not keen about, it will be incredibly unfortunate.
- For extract questions, treat it like a writer's effect question. Highest marks are awarded for in depth analysis of key words and their effect.

Economics

- **Memorise** definitions of key terms
- Learn to draw basic **graphs** to aid your explanations. This portrays your knowledge of the subject.
- Your answers should be a continuous flow of thought. Though you should have developed points, one point should lead to the next. This shows that you understand the concept of the domino effect.
- Number of marks=number of developed points expected
- For discuss questions, you will need to present arguments of **both** sides. By weighing the arguments, you should be able to conclude with your stance.
- Try to include graphs/diagrams/examples for 6 and 8 mark questions.
- Read every question **twice** before attempting. You are often racing against time in an econs exam and cannot afford to make silly understanding errors.
- Answer exactly what the question requires first. Any additional information that you wish to provide is at your risk (for completing on time).
- I found the mark scheme quite useful while preparing. Even though I rarely did an entire econs past paper, I would write down my answer as points while practising. I would then compare my points to the one in the mark scheme. By doing so, you can alter your way of thinking to that expected by the examiner.