

Learner Guide – Planning, Reflection and Revision

Cambridge International AS & A Level

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Cambridge
International
AS & A Levels
are taken in
130 countries

with over **495 000**
subject entries per year



About this guide

This guide will help you to:

- understand better what to expect when you start your Cambridge International AS & A Level course
- become more confident
- prepare for the course
- think about and reflect on ways to achieve success
- provide advice and help for revision.

Cambridge International AS & A Level prepares you to study at university, and the move from Cambridge IGCSE® to Cambridge International AS & A Level has been designed to be as smooth a transition as possible. Many of the topics and skills are the same so you will already be familiar with some of the course, and will progress from there. The style of questions may be similar and the skills you have developed will be useful.

Cambridge learners

Our mission is to provide educational benefit through provision of international programmes and qualifications for school education and to be the world leader in this field. Together with schools, we develop Cambridge learners who are:

- **confident** in working with information and ideas – their own and those of others
- **responsible** for themselves responsive to and respectful of others
- **reflective** as learners, developing their ability to learn
- **innovative** and equipped for new and future challenges
- **engaged** intellectually and socially ready to make a difference.

Cambridge IGCSE® compared with Cambridge International AS & A Level

What is the difference?

Fewer subjects: You will have hopefully chosen the subjects that you really enjoy, are really good at or those which you need to take you onto university and/or your chosen career.

Smaller classes: You will have an opportunity to contribute more to lessons and have more one to one interaction with your teacher. You will have more lessons each week. There is a recommended 130 guided learning hours for IGCSE compared with 180 learning hours for AS and 360 learning hours for the full A Level qualification.

Detailed and specialist content: There will be increased challenge as you study in greater depth, work more independently and begin to develop your own ideas. You will be able to explore topics in more depth, finding answers to unanswered questions and learning about certain topics which are completely new!

Independent study: Greater independence is an important part of bridging the gap between A Level qualifications and study at university. It is likely that you will have more independent study time than you did whilst studying for IGCSE. It is important that you use this independent study time well. You can use this time in a variety of constructive ways – for completion of homework tasks, assignments, research or for completing additional reading around the subject.

Independent research: You may have done some research tasks at IGCSE but you can expect this to be a more regular feature of homework tasks. Ask your teacher for a recommended list of textbooks and websites that you can use so you have a good starting point. Save useful websites that you use to your favourites bar so you know where to find them again. Look for websites that are specifically designed for AS & A Level courses.

Folders: You will probably move from note books to folders to record your learning and it is important to be organised. Divide your folder into sections (for example, by topic) and keep your notes in date order within each section. Keep copies of past questions, mark schemes and example answers alongside any completed work and assessed pieces. If it is more appropriate to keep electronic folders for a subject, organise them in the same way. Make sure each piece of work has a title so you can see how it links to the syllabus at a later date.

Taking responsibility: You need to take more responsibility for knowing what examinations you will sit, how long each examination is; whether you have a choice of questions or not; how many marks each question/paper carries and what the structure of the questions is like. There may be new styles of assessment task (for example, essay writing) at AS & A Level – make sure that you become familiar with these.

The words in the question that explain to you what you need to do such as describe, explain, state, evaluate (command words). At AS & A Level, you may be introduced to some new command words. You should keep a glossary of command words alongside your mark schemes, past questions and example answers in your folder.

Key concepts: Key concepts are essential ideas that help you to develop a deep understanding of the subject and make links between different aspects. Key concepts may open up new ways of thinking about, understanding or interpreting the important things to be learned. The syllabus has been designed to help you develop not only subject knowledge, but also a strong understanding of some of the key concepts that are critical to mastering the subject. The key concepts are detailed in the syllabus.

What extra work is needed?

Extra work you may have to do will depend on the previous course you have taken. Many learners without a Cambridge IGCSE background have the same skills and subject knowledge and generally adjust quickly to the ‘Cambridge’ style when they start their Cambridge International AS & A Level course.

It may be that you have not covered some topics that are a useful base for AS & A Level. This is not a problem – you will probably find that your teacher goes over some IGCSE work as a start to a new AS & A Level topic, or if not, you can easily develop your research skills and read up what you need to know. It may be helpful to highlight in the syllabus areas where you have prior knowledge and those that are completely new. It can be helpful to read more widely around new topics to make up any gaps in your knowledge or you may decide to devote more time to new topics for revision later on.

What is ‘the syllabus’?

The syllabus for Cambridge International AS & A Levels is a document mainly intended for your teacher to use to make sure that they have all the information they need to help you get the most out of the course.

One important part of the syllabus for you is the syllabus content, which details all the subject material you should cover during the course. This content is divided into main topics, learning objectives or skills.

Your teacher may give you a copy of the subject content of the syllabus, or may give you a summary of this. They may direct you to the Cambridge International Examinations website, which publishes the full copy of the syllabus. Keep a copy of the syllabus outline at the front of your folder. You can then use this as a guide, highlighting topics as you cover them in class. You can then use this as a revision checklist. You could also indicate the subjects that you feel least confident about so you know to devote extra revision time to them.

What do Cambridge examiners assess?

For the exams you take at AS & A Level, we assess you on skills known as **assessment objectives (AOs)**. The examiners take account of the skills areas in the examination papers and the skills are divided into AO_s. You will find the assessment objectives for your subject listed in the syllabus or your teacher will be able to provide you with more detailed information on each one. It is important that you know the different weightings (%) of the assessment objectives, as this affects how the examiner will assess your work.

Here are some examples of assessment objectives and what they mean:

Assessment objective (AO)	Meaning
1. Knowledge	Remembering facts and ideas.
2. Understanding and application	How you use what you know and relate it to unfamiliar situations.
3. Skills	How you study data and come to conclusions about it.
4. Evaluation	How you assess, judge and consider information in different contexts.

Many of the skills are considered to be transferable skills. This means that they are useful and desirable in other areas of life. For example, as an AS & A Level biologist you demonstrate that you are able to learn large quantities of (sometimes complex) information; have analytical skills; have good manipulative skills; can cope with difficult concepts; and can make predictions and suggest ideas.

Time management and planning independent work

Time management

Efficient and effective time management is a skill which you need to have and it can make the difference between getting good or poor results. Here are some tips to help you think about how you are going to manage your time:

- Make sure you timetable the tasks you need to do and prioritise these on a weekly basis and for each subject.
- Collect the resources you need before beginning a task so you don't waste time looking for things. Ask your teacher for guidance.
- Make sure you fully understand the tasks and the level of detail you are required to work to in order to accurately plan how long things will take you and to ensure that your work is of the appropriate standard.
- Ask your teacher for examples to help you plan accurately.
- Check you understand your teachers' expectations so you don't spend too long or too little time on tasks.
- If you get stuck, ask for help and don't forget to talk to your peers.
- Don't leave tasks until near to the deadline – start them early, even if you then complete them later. This gives you time to identify problem areas, or areas you will need to spend longer on and seek further advice or information should you require it.

Planning independent work

From the beginning, and throughout your A Level course, you will have the opportunity and be expected to work independently. This shift of responsibility from the teacher to the learner will enable you to have a greater understanding of learning, motivate you to learn and prepare you for your studies after school or college, or for work. Here are some tips to help prepare you for independent studying:

- Make sure you fully understand the task being set – ask your teacher if you are not sure.
- What are the parameters of the work and how will you check you have met them all? Do you need to create a check list or detailed plan?
- Do some preliminary work and show your teacher to get feedback. This gives you the opportunity to reorganise work if you need to.
- How will your work be marked – are you sure you know how to fulfil all of the criteria? Obtain a copy of a mark scheme to inform you.
- Look at past examples to help you understand what the outcomes should look like.
- Organise and make notes on materials as you do research. This will help you to write up your final work at the end. Keep these notes for revision later.
- Think about the strategies you are going to use to complete the work. Do you need to collect your own information/data? Do you need to research particular sources? Do you need to create something original? How are you going to collate your information? How will you organise and present your ideas?

Learning style and taking notes

What is your learning style?

How do you learn? The way you remember new information is unique to you. There is no right way, just the way that works best for you. Are you a visual, auditory, reading/writing or kinaesthetic (physical) learner?

A visual learner may:

- Draw information and replace words with pictures or symbols
- Highlight important details by colour-coding, circling, highlighting or underlining
- Make lists
- Write detailed notes
- Watch videos
- Use mind maps
- Think in pictures and/or form a picture in the mind to imagine the new information.

An auditory learner may:

- Record or video lessons
- Watch videos or listen to podcasts
- Record themselves reading their notes and play them back
- Repeat facts and information out loud
- Use word association, poems, rhymes, phrases or word puzzles
- Discuss topic with their friends
- Ask and answer questions in the classroom.

A reading/writing learner may:

- Copy down information from the board
- Write summaries of what they have learned
- Use quizzes
- Write notes
- Write key information in lists
- Read and rewrite notes
- Write information from books or their teacher in their own words.

A kinaesthetic learner may:

- Ask and answer questions in the classroom
- Start and contribute to discussions
- Use large sheets of paper (posters) and pens to feel more active when writing and drawing
- Use flashcards
- Use short definitions when writing notes
- Try to apply the information to real life.

What kind of learner are you? Tick the learning styles which you like to use, or would like to try.

How do you take notes?

The process of writing and reviewing your classroom or lesson notes helps you to remember information. Making notes as you go along, little and often, will make it easier when you come to revise later. Here are some different ways of taking notes:

Freestyle method

Just write down what you hear as the teacher says it.

Write on hand outs

Write notes at key points directly on hand outs that contain notes or important information.

Charting method

Use when learning about different or contrasting factors or approaches.

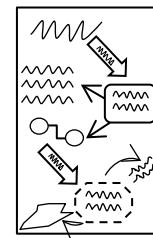
- Make a chart with a different column for each factor or approach.
- Write details in each column, so that you can easily compare items between columns.

□□□□1	□□□□2
~~~~~	~~~~~
~~~~~	~~~~~
~~~~~	~~~~~
~~~~~	~~~~~
~~~~~	~~~~~
~~~~~	~~~~~

Flow method

Learn while you listen. Create your own representation of the new information.

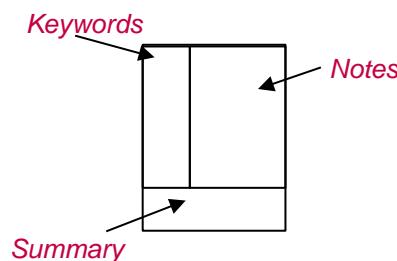
- Put what the teacher says into your own words
- Use quick drawings to break down the content into simple ideas
- Use arrows to link ideas together and to add supporting points
- Circle or boxing different points using different lines, shapes or coloured pens.



Cornell method

Divide your page into three sections.

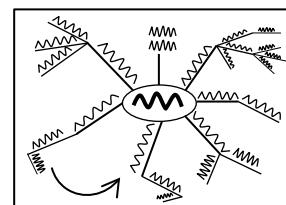
- Use the 'notes' section to make notes during the lesson.
- After the lesson, review your notes. Reduce sections of the notes into keywords and write them in the 'keywords' column.
- Write a summary to consolidate what you learned.



Mind map method

Write the lesson topic in the centre of your page.

- Add a new branch for each new sub-topic.
- Add extra smaller and smaller branches for more detail; these show the connections between facts or ideas.
- Add notes using words and diagrams; use arrows to show links.
- Keep your notes short and put key words along branches.
- Use coloured pens and highlighter pens to emphasise key points.



Outline method

Use bullet points.

- Top level bullets are the key issues in the lesson.
- Sub-level bullets are details about the top-level points.
- Sub-sub level bullets provide more separation if needed.

How do you take notes? Why don't you try some of the different techniques listed above?

Remember that you will need well detailed and clearly organised notes to help you revise. You may ask your teacher to check your notes in the early stages of the course to ensure that you are making a full and accurate record ready for revision. You can always supplement your notes with wider reading from recommended websites and texts.

Some tips for taking notes

Note-taking is a skill that can be developed and improved. Here are some tips:

Tips for taking notes

Don't write down everything; focus on the important points, such as keywords and concepts, new information, what is written on the board.

Highlight and annotate hand outs.

Develop your own shorthand, e.g. w/ for 'with'.

Keep your notes simple and short but clear, organised and easy to read.

Use abbreviations, symbols and diagrams.

Date the start of your notes for each lesson. Provide a title which links to syllabus content.

If you take notes from a textbook, read the content first before you write anything down. Then go back to the start and note down any keywords, dates, facts, concepts or quotes. Now write notes using the information you pulled out. Don't copy full sentences; write the content in your own words. Make a note of the textbook name and page numbers so you can revisit it should you need to.

Compare your notes with a friend or classmate and add in detail that you have missed.

Read and re read your notes regularly – not just before the exam! This will help to consolidate learning and save time (and pressure in the long run).

Reflection

The methods you use to remember and understand new knowledge are how you learn. Your methods might include making lists of information, asking questions or drawing diagrams.

In order to actively **engage** in your learning, you need to think deeply about the ways you learn, and whether you can improve your learning by using different methods. This process of thinking deeply about your approach and changing it when you need to is known as **reflection**.

Reflecting on your learning in this way will help you to develop into an effective learner with **confidence** in your skills and knowledge, which in turn can lead to **innovative** thinking.

Keeping a **reflective journal** or **diary** is a useful way to record, analyse and reflect on how you learn. You can discuss this with your teacher and ask to their advice too.

Here are some questions to get you thinking.

Write in the boxes, or create your own journal somewhere else.

I am studying this subject because: (*Which subjects are you studying? Think about what you want to achieve by studying each subject?*)

I like this subject because: (*What did you like about the subjects when you have studied them in the past? Or what about a new subject interested you?*)

... is a good subject to learn because: (*What skills will each subject help you develop? Are there any uses in the real world?*)

Learner Guide –Planning, Reflection and Revision

Your teacher will also ask you to reflect on your progress during the AS & A Level course. This may involve a consideration of what you have done well in a piece of work and what needs to be improved. You should use the marking criteria provided and teacher feedback to inform this reflection. Ask your teacher for support if you are at all unclear about how to improve any of the areas identified in a piece of work.

Use your reflection to inform your learning. Consider your targets when completing your next piece of work. How can you address them? Use your targets to inform your areas for additional research or revision if required.

You may also be asked to respond to questions about your work – to address any gaps in your knowledge, understanding or skills. Time might be provided in lessons or this could be an independent learning task. Either way, it will help to ensure that you produce a final piece of work to the best of your ability.

Sometimes, you may work through a piece of assessed work as a class and be expected to annotate your work with extra information or key points as you go. You may also receive peer feedback to respond to or self-evaluate a piece of work. This is helpful because it allows you to see what you have done well, how your work could be improved and also helps you to better understand how the marking criteria has been applied.



Revision

Try to build in some time for revision throughout the course – consolidating and learning notes as you go along makes it much easier to remember when it comes to examination time. Do not leave revision to the ‘last minute’ – ensure you leave plenty of time to revise all to the topics that you need with an opportunity to revisit areas should you need to. Here are some suggestions for how to plan your revision and some tips about good revision techniques.

Plan your revision

It is important that you plan your revision in plenty of time for the examinations and that you develop a revision technique that works for you. This applies to mock or trial examinations too.

A well-structured revision plan can give you the best chance of success in your examinations. As early as possible) identify the time you will spend revising and **schedule** slots for revision of each subject that you are taking examinations in.

To create a revision schedule, you could use an overall planner for the weeks leading up to the examinations. You could then create weekly revision plans at the start of each week, which include the detail of which subjects you will revise and when. Make sure that you plan your revision realistically around other commitments and take regular breaks. Breaking down your revision into chunks of time is helpful.

Weekly planner

This allows you to input greater detail about what you will revise each week. In the example below, each day is split into three.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
09:00 – 10:00							
10:00 – 11:00							
11:00 – 12:00							
12:00 – 13:00							
13:00 – 14:00							
14:00 – 15:00							
15:00 – 16:00							
16:00 – 17:00							
17:00 – 18:00							
18:00 – 19:00							
19:00 – 20:00							
20:00 – 21:00							

Here are some useful tips to help you with your revision. You may not know or have thought about how to revise but it is never too late to learn. Ask your teacher for subject specific revision tips or have a look at the Learner Guide for the subject you are studying, in addition to the ideas below.

Revision tips

Make accurate notes during the course and check your notes are complete and make sense as you go along. Supplement with wider reading and research as required.

Make lots of new notes: remember that the process of writing and reviewing your notes helps you to remember information. Revision cards are a good idea as they are portable too.

Be organised: keep your notes, textbooks, exercise books and websites to hand.

Find a revision method that works for you; this might be working alone, with friends, with parents, online, at school, at home or a mixture of many different methods.

Have a clear revision plan, schedule or timetable for each subject you are studying. Remember to manage your revision and plan in breaks.

Mind maps are a great way to revise the links between different factors or to explore a larger topic. They can also be used to brainstorm your ideas.

Use plenty of pens, colours, paper and card of different sizes to make your notes more fun. Colour can help to highlight different information within your notes – for example, key words.

Vary your revision and study activities. Try watching videos or documentaries, listening to podcasts. Remember your learning style from earlier and find ideas that work for you.

Spend most of your time on specific skills, knowledge or issues that you have found more difficult. Use your syllabus checklist and reflection from key pieces of work to guide you.

Look at past question papers and the mark scheme helps to familiarise yourself with what to expect and what the standard is. You can find plenty of past exam papers and mark schemes on the Cambridge website. Practise timed questions so you know how long you will have in the actual examination. Use mark schemes to reflect on your performance and identify areas for improvement. This should supplement practice questions that will be marked by your teacher.

Buy a good revision guide. Make sure it is appropriate for your syllabus. There are lots of revision websites that your teacher can recommend too. Attend any revision classes that may be offered by your education provider.

Sources of information

There will be a variety of textbooks available – some which cover the entire course and some which specialise in certain topics. Your teacher will suggest reading materials for you and may provide a reading list. Here is a list of the types of sources you will use for your course:

- One or more endorsed textbooks
- A list with suggestions of other textbooks – for example, those that might specialise in a chosen topic
- Websites
- Subject specific magazines and publications
- Key word and command word glossaries
- A copy of the syllabus
- Revision guide (appropriate to the syllabus)
- Specimen and past questions, mark schemes and example answers
- Top tips and common mistakes (based on examiner reports)



Other resources

Past examination papers and specimen papers provide opportunities for you to become familiar with the assessment requirements of the course. Try to get as much practice in as you can before your final exams.

Mark schemes can be used for peer and self-assessment activities. They will help you become familiar with how your work will be assessed. Remember that mark schemes are written for teachers so you may need some advice on how to use them to begin with. Don't just learn mark schemes – apply them to your work to see what has gone well and how your work can be improved. Your teacher will provide guidance to you. It may be useful to build in more practice of the topics that you have found difficult, allowing to you to focus on the areas for improvement that your teacher has identified.

In addition to completing practice questions yourself, and as part of your ongoing assessment, you may have mock examinations. Revise for these thoroughly and treat them seriously. They are an ideal opportunity for you to diagnose areas of improvement in plenty of time to remedy them before the actual examination. Remember that if you have revised thoroughly for a mock examination, the revision should be easier for you next time round.

Getting the balance right

A final consideration at Cambridge International AS & A Level may be how to balance increasing social commitments with adequate preparation for your examinations. This will be different for every learner and you will have to work out what is the right balance for you. It is important that you have a good work-life balance and enjoy your new Cambridge International AS & A Level courses whilst at the same time ensuring that you meet the requirements of the course. Cambridge International AS & A Level will offer many new opportunities and challenges for you – we are sure you will enjoy them!

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