

# Read the talk

'Examattack' is a contribution I make to schools to help students prepare for their GCSEs, 'AS' levels or 'A' level exams. At the heart of it is the desire for each student to **"give of their best"** and **"achieve their potential"**. This is the main aim of 'examattack' and the most important thing I will say. Below is the talk that Wayne gives in schools.

Exams are important, but they are not the most important things in the world. I have taken a few exams in my life and some I have passed, some I failed, but I always aimed to give it my best and ACHIEVE MY POTENTIAL and that is what is important. In this presentation I will tell some stories to illustrate some points. Some will be humorous, some made up, some serious and some based on my own experiences and very true stories. There will be some things that you will immediately relate to, others may be outside your current experience. Hold on to what is helpful and let go of what is not relevant. However, the things I will talk about will be relevant, not just for exams now, but the basic ideas and principles are relevant for any exams you may take in the future.

How are you feeling about exams at the moment? Nervous, anxious, scared, panicky? Here is an exaggerated illustration about a student who has only got five minutes left in the exam but is still on question 1. Exaggerated YES, but for some student's panic can set in and we can freeze on the day. What I want to do is help you so you can give of your best and achieve your potential and not freeze!

I want to talk about the **EXPECTATIONS and PRESSURES**.

## 1. Parents

Generally speaking our parent(s) want the best for us. But sometimes the way this is communicated is unhelpful and can be a real pressure.

**First true story:** When I was at school one of my fellow students was under pressure by her well meaning parents. She did a lot of studying but not much else. In the end she did not achieve her potential. But when her parents eased off and gave her space, she was able to achieve in a relaxed environment. She passed her 'O' levels, then 'A' levels and went on to do a degree. Communication was key in this area and it made the difference.

If this is an issue for you, talk about it to your parent(s) or guardian.

## 2. Teachers

Again, teachers want the best for us and are on our side. They are approachable and wanting to help us. If there are concerns, then take the initiative and talk about it. Talk to tutors, head of years or subject teachers. Don't bottle it up. When I was at school, teachers were great and helped me enormously – this made such a difference; communication is the key.

## 3. Peers

This can be a positive and a negative. Firstly, the positive: Working together when you are studying the same subjects can mean you help one another. But the reality is sometimes that peers can be negative and this is what I call unhealthy competition.

**True story:** A student came up to me once in school expressing her concerns about the GCSE exams. Why was she concerned? Well, it was because of her sister who had previously done exceptionally well – 29 A\* Grades!!! She felt a pressure to achieve a similar standard and I told her that she was not her sister; she can give of her best, achieve her potential and that is what is important. Matching her sister's grades was not important. There may have been pressure from home to achieve, but I tried to stress to her the importance of ACHIEVING HER POTENTIAL and not anyone else's.

## 4. You and me

It is good to have goals, dreams and ambitions, but make sure they are yours and no one else's. I want to encourage you to achieve your goals, but sometimes we are our own worst enemy when we set our targets too high. Two things I have always wanted to do:

1. To be a teacher (maths and PE)
2. Be a professional footballer with Arsenal and score the winning goal in an FA cup final!! Have a look at this video >

These have not happened! More realistically, what I am doing now is me, and I am happy. Sometimes parents may impose/suggest we go for a particular career. It is good to get advice, but make sure you listen and respond as necessary; sometimes that may be to do something different to what someone else suggests.

**True story:** A lad approached me once and asked my advice as his parents were pushing him in a direction he had no interest and little ability in. He had other ideas but conflict arose. I suggested he talk it through with parents and school to work this one out.

## THREE IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS

### 1. PRAY

Most people pray at some point in life and at exam time the prayer which is most said is "HELP!!" My suggestion is to pray for a sense of peace and calm in the exam. Pray for discipline to study and for the opportunity to give your best and ACHIEVE YOUR POTENTIAL.

### 2. PREPARE

You have been preparing for a long time

Did you know, since the age of 5 when you started school, you have spent 15,000 HOURS in school (give or take the odd in-service day). If you stay on into the sixth form you have another couple of thousand to look forward to!

More realistically, you have been preparing since you joined this school, or 2 years ago when you chose your options. I would like to make some comments about preparing as far as revision is concerned. Now, between now and when you go on study leave you will spend Monday to Friday mornings and afternoons in lessons so REVISION will happen in the evenings and at weekends. It is good to have a revision timetable but make sure it is REALISTIC! It is no good going home for school and for 6 hours doing non-stop studying.

- a) You will have a headache
- b) you will be hungry
- c) you will not retain much.

**You need a balance of revision and relaxation.** Most people recommend about an hour to an hour and a half and then stop, have a break, have a KIT KAT! Then come back to it. BALANCE. Maybe one night a week have a night off; pursue your hobby. For me it is badminton and I enjoy a regular game when I can switch off and do something else. How many of you have a part time job? Now for some it may be right to stop your job for a period of time. Only you can decide this. However, remember this - after your last exam you will have one long holiday, so it may be worthwhile giving more time now to the exams. It is worth it. What about weekends? I used to work at "Bejams", now known as Iceland and after working Thursday, Friday and Saturday, I was so tired that I couldn't even watch "Match of the Day" – and you know how much I love football! You may want something to look forward to in the summer holidays, possibly a Scripture Union Holiday!!

**Revise and Relax.** Also, get enough sleep and eat properly. Sometimes when we are worried we can't sleep or our eating patterns change. If this is an issue don't bottle it up! Talk to someone about it – there are people who care and can help; teachers, heads of years, doctors and so on!! Or you could ring 'Childline' on 0800 1111 for free.

### 3. PERFORM

This is what I want to spend the rest of the time on.

**1. Get a good night's sleep before the exam.** No late night parties or videos. Imagine it is Sunday afternoon and you are just about to start some revision for an exam the next morning when the phone rings. It is your friend telling you about a great party happening that evening. You think – revise or party?, party or revise?...PARTY. You go and have a good night out and then come in at 4 am. Fall asleep, wake up at 10 – your exam started at 9 am!!

2. **Awake earlier than normal.** Give yourself time. Don't be rushed.
3. **Do your normal thing.** If you have breakfast do it, if you don't - leave it. Try and treat it as a normal day.
4. **Check you have all your necessary stationery** and spares. You turn up at a school maths exam. The night before you packed your calculator. When you arrive at school it is not there. PANIC! Your little brother or sister borrowed it to show to a friend at primary school and you are well mad. It is your responsibility to make sure you have everything you need each day for the exams that follow.
5. **Arrive earlier than normal**, at least 15 minutes before start time. My biggest fear is arriving late for assembly because I have been held up in traffic. If you get a lift, cycle, or come by public transport try and leave early. Once I arrived so early the school was not even open! That was over the top. If you walk, you know how long it takes so you should be OK.
6. **Know exactly where to go.** This is all part of your preparation. We had 3 different venues for our exams and it is embarrassing arriving at the wrong venue.
7. **Go to the toilet before the exam.** If you have a 2 - 3 hour exam and after an hour you want to visit the loo, it is embarrassing. You have to put your hand up, be accompanied by a member of staff of the same sex and be escorted to and from!! Hit the loo before you hit the exam. It will relax you. I like to visit the loo before assembly because these can be nerve-wracking occasions.
8. **Have a watch that works.** Time is an important element in an exam. It does you well to see the clock or have a watch that works so you can keep an eye on the time.
9. **Listen carefully to any instructions** given out at the beginning. This is important. Then obey them.
10. **Read the top sheet carefully and complete correctly.** If you do a great exam and then hand it in only to find you did not put your name, candidate number and so on then what a waste. Don't mix up your candidate number with your PIN number!!
11. **Know your candidate number.** If in doubt, check it out!
12. **Say a prayer before starting.** To give of you're best and ACHIEVE YOUR POTENTIAL.
13. **Go for it.** Do not be put off by your immediate reaction.  
**True story:** School mock exam. 15 out of 30 got it wrong. WHY? Not because it was hard but because we were nervous, it was the first question and we panicked. This need not happen. You can do it and you will be OK.
14. **Read the questions CAREFULLY and SLOWLY.** The biggest mistake students make in exams each year is in this area I think.  
**Made up story:** They have just introduced a new subject to the National Curriculum "The History of the FA Cup". Yes. The first question is 'Describe the events of the 2006 F.A Cup Final'. Answer: The 2005 FA Cup Final was between Arsenal & Man United and Arsenal won on penalties after extra time and a 0-0 draw. What is wrong with the answer? It should be 2006 F.A Cup Final was between Liverpool & West Ham and Liverpool won on penalties after extra time and a 3-3 draw.
15. **Decide on how you will tackle the exam.** Can I answer the questions in any order? Do I have to answer all the questions? This is all part of your preparation and the reason for doing mock exams and past papers. Answer the easier questions first as this will give you confidence. This is what I did, and stuck with it. If you find out work better another way, then stick with it. When I did mock exams and past papers for Economics I always found that the questions I did first got me higher marks...and then it went down hill as the exam went by.
16. **Know how much time to spend on each question.** (QUESTION) What is wrong with spending too long on this question? It is only worth 1 mark. Time is crucial in exams – don't waste it. If you are not sure, leave it out and come back at the end (time allowing). ALWAYS ANSWER MULTIPLE CHOICE

QUESTIONS. Guess if you do not know!

**17. Do not be influenced by the activity of students around you.**

**Made up story:** Imagine you are 5 minutes into an exam when someone near you raises a hand. A teacher approaches and you hear your fellow student whisper “Can I have some more paper please?” You think, more paper!! The exam is only 5 minutes old. What is going on? Then you glance across and see smoke coming from the pen as this student is writing away. Do not be influenced by what other people are doing. In the exam it is you, the clock and the exam paper. As far as possible ignore everything and everyone else.

**18. If something is not clear put your hand up and ask.** Obviously not a neighbour, but a teacher.

**True story:** In one exam I did I was struggling with a question. I broke one rule by spending too much time on it and then in the end I put down 2 answers. It was bugging me. After the exam, I went to my Economics teacher to be put out of my misery. I expected her to say “*Wayne you should have done this*”. She said there was an error in the paper. What! I assumed the people who wrote the papers were perfect. Actually they are ordinary people like you and me. Ordinary people make mistakes. Yes they are checked and re-checked. This only happened once and I have not heard of it happening too often. It does no harm to check it out. Teachers know if you are trying to pull a fast one.

**19. Check all sides of the exam paper.** People talk at the end of an exam. Imagine this conversation: “*John, what did you put for question 10?*” “*What question 10 Alan, there wasn’t one.*” “*Yes there was; the last one on the back sheet about...*” “*I don’t remember seeing one!*” They go and check the paper and there it is – Question 10 – on the back paper and worth 25 marks. How does John feel? This need not happen. He had time. If he had checked all sides he would have seen it and also it says clearly how many pages there are, how many questions there are and at the bottom of every page it says TURN OVER. Examiners are not out there to trick us, they are trying to find out what we know!

**20. Label all answers clearly.** Use diagrams, quotes and facts, and be as neat as you can. When the examiners are marking the papers they do not want to spend time deciphering your illegible writing. Take your time. Be neat but do not overdo it unless it is an art exam or something. If your writing is not very neat it doesn't matter, as long as you try your best.

**21. Leave 5 minutes at the end to go through and tidy up.** This is where you can answer those questions left out earlier or where last minute inspiration can give you some extra marks. Don't just put your feet up and wait for the bell.

**22. Show all working out and attach any notes made on questions you fail to complete.** Once the teacher says stop, you have to stop writing and remain quite. But if you have started a question and made some bullet points, these can be included. Any work done in exam time under exam conditions can be credited to your overall grade.

**23. Use non-exam time to collect your work together and hand it in.** Most exams are done in booklets.

**Made up story:** You finish an exam. You go away for lunch and return for an afternoon exam. You go to take your place where you were in the morning and you notice something familiar on the floor. It is some of your work from the morning exam. Disaster. You can't now hand it in and you think it must have fallen during all the panic of the morning.

Don't let this happen to you.

**24. Relax.** If you have an exam in the morning try to forget what happened, and focus on the exam in the afternoon. After your last exam try to forget about it and relax, there is nothing you can do to change your results- so just chill.

## WHAT ABOUT THE EXAM RESULTS?

If they are not what you expected- DON'T PANIC. Get advice. If they are what you hoped for – well done!! Congratulations!

**True story:** When I did my 'A' levels I needed to let my college know of my results so they could confirm or deny my place. The morning they arrived I was doing my part time job at Iceland. My brother phoned

to say they were there. I got permission to leave to get home and action them. I arrived home, into my room and started to open the envelope – I was shaking. OH NO! I thought, I did not get the results needed and I was disappointed. I went back to work and everyone was talking about results and I felt low. But I had worked my hardest and ACHIEVED MY POTENTIAL. What happened next? I got advice from friends, family, people at church and at school. My Head of 6th Form was great and encouraged me. It was not the end of the world. I then moved from London to Slough to follow a Business Studies course and looking back, it was not so bad after all.

It is certainly not worth committing suicide for – which sadly does happen, as the newspaper stories show. It is not the end of the world if the exams do not go as well as expected or hoped for. The most important thing is to GIVE OF YOUR BEST and ACHIEVE YOUR POTENTIAL. A verse from the Bible that helped me:

### **Jeremiah 29: 11**

**“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord,  
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give  
you hope and a future”.**