

Doing better in GCSE geography

This guidance is for teachers working with students who are predicted to be grade D/C on the GCSE exams. It is intended to support teachers in helping these students to achieve a grade C. The advice offered may also be useful to other teachers and in turn to many other students.

By the time students come to revise for their GCSEs they have covered most of the syllabus in lessons. Revision is not about doing those lessons again but about reminding students of what they have covered and learned and revisiting any aspects which remain unclear in their minds.

An important element of subject revision lessons is to provide students with the opportunity to learn, practise and refine revision techniques. In this way individual students will discover for themselves those techniques which are personally most effective. In addition, you can provide focused feedback, not just on the subject material, but also on the techniques. Using lessons just to complete or review past test papers is unlikely to be an effective strategy for helping D/C students to improve. Neither is giving students unstructured lesson time 'to revise' since many of these students are not very good at revising although they may well give the impression of industriously getting on with their work.

Remember to link your planned geography revision with any whole-school programme and with advice that students may be receiving in their other subjects.

Further information and advice on helping these students revise and prepare for their exams can be found towards the beginning of the *GCSE booster pack* in the section 'GCSE booster: guidance for teachers and school leaders on using the materials'.

Using the subject guidance leaflets

There are two leaflets for geography. One is for you, the teacher; the other is for students.

It is envisaged that you will use these flexibly to suit your own circumstances. The student's leaflet can be photocopied and given to targeted students. Go through the leaflet with them. Encourage them to annotate it, and explain how your subject revision programme will fit with and support the students' own revision programmes and the advice on their leaflet.

Use the teacher's leaflet to plan your revision programme, covering those topics and aspects which you have identified as most relevant to the students. Encourage the students, at intervals during the revision programme, to use the traffic light system on their leaflet to assess their confidence in each aspect and to check with you those which remain difficult.

A number of revision activities are suggested in the teacher's leaflet, but plan your revision programme to suit your own students. Using specific revision activities is less important than planning to use a range to ensure that your lessons retain variety and that you offer students opportunities to work in their preferred ways.

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To achieve a grade C in GCSE geography your students need to be able to show that they can do all of the following, not just by chance, but because they understand and are confident in what they are doing. The keys to achieving this lie in teaching which consistently emphasises:

- Learning for understanding rather than just for replication.
- Learning which routinely involves the students processing information rather than simply absorbing it.
- Higher-order learning which practises skills such as problem solving and evaluation because higher grades at GCSE require students to show those types of skill.
- Metacognitive learning which encourages students to develop an understanding and command of their own ways of learning.

The following list is intended to help teachers focus their teaching and revision programmes to bring out the best from those candidates who might otherwise dip beneath the C-grade boundary.

What students need to be able to do	What this means to them	How you can help them improve
<p>1 Remember important information and key ideas from all areas of geography</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing how they can best memorise and understand the big ideas in the different branches of geography • Knowing models and patterns which recur in geography, particularly so that they can cope with exam questions about unfamiliar places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make certain that they have a complete set of notes (preferably their own but, if not, then from a revision guide) • Help them to understand the range of ways to memorise and know which work best for them as individuals • Teach them to select the best memorisation technique for a particular purpose • Show them how to read each topic and then briefly write the main points on cards; model this skill in lesson time, talking your thoughts out loud as you demonstrate; students can then practise the skill and use the cards for further revision later
<p>2 Describe geographical features and processes using the correct words</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being 'fazed' when they see a photo which is new to them • Remembering to use the right word, taking time to be precise • When describing and explaining features, making sure what they write is exactly what they mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every time you or they read or write a new technical word, explicitly establish the agreed meaning • Check meanings regularly/frequently in whole-class sessions • Always match words to visual images to help students remember • Organise group working in which one student names a feature and others choose the correct meaning from a set of subtly different definitions • Help students make a list of key words for every topic and record meanings for any they are unsure of

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<p>3 Explain how things occur and why this is important</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not just describing things but giving a geographical reason • Knowing and understanding the answers to why questions and using the word because 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to draw flow charts to link features to what they are and why they are like that: write the name of the feature in the first box, a description or sketch in the second and why it is as it is in the third; make sure that they include link words such as because between boxes two and three • Reinforce their understanding of cause and effect at every opportunity
<p>4 Describe links between related aspects of geography</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing the bigger geographical picture rather than just remembering geographical facts • Seeing similarities between places and features occurring in different locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students to draw concept maps of some big geographical ideas they have studied, e.g. industrial pollution • Explain that they should write the main ideas in boxes and join boxes with lines to show the links; write a word or two on each line to explain the nature of the link, e.g. 'is part of', 'leads to', 'is the same as'
<p>5 Use diagrams and charts to explain features and processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing geographical features and processes using visual images such as photos, field sketches or diagrams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 'maps from memory' techniques: ask students to look closely at a diagram (over time include as many as possible of the familiar ones); cover it up and tell students to either redraw it to show the main features or write some brief words or notes on what the main features are • Convince students that it is not their artistic skills which are being assessed
<p>6 Use charts and graphs to obtain useful information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing how to draw charts and graphs from numbers and how to obtain numbers from them • Taking detailed readings from charts, line graphs and bar graphs • Interpreting charts and graphs to identify significant patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide frequent opportunities for students to describe the 'big picture' shown in maps, charts or graphs • Teach them to distinguish between detail and the bigger picture using diagrams such as population pyramids • Use paired diagrams/maps referring to the same area and set questions which encourage them to see patterns across the two
<p>7 Identify and interpret important information from graphs and data, explain patterns/trends in results and draw conclusions which match the evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking for the geography in tables, charts and graphs, identifying significant patterns and any anomalous results • Making reasonable predictions of what would happen and what results are likely if a graph is extrapolated beyond existing data or applied to a different location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routinely provide tables of data presented in different ways • Ask students to describe out loud any patterns or conclusions that can be drawn from them; concentrate on developing their use of precise language • Ask students to explain the possible reasons for the patterns, to justify their reasoning and to predict beyond the immediate data they are scrutinising

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<p>8 Describe how different people and organisations may have very different views on geographical issues especially environmental matters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing how and why different people might have different views and explaining their own views using evidence • Saying how two people can look at similar sets of information but emphasise different aspects of them and so draw different conclusions or interpret them in different ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use role play, 'games' and simulations to develop understanding of other people's points of view • Provide conclusions generated by a group of students and in each case a parallel table where the results have been altered slightly to represent different conclusions; ask students to work in small groups to draw and compare conclusions from both sets of information • Develop students' ability and inclination to use the word although at the start of sentences
<p>9 Describe how geographers test hypotheses by looking at a range of evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying what evidence is useful and what is not and then whether any useful evidence is actually enough to support a hypothesis • Making this kind of judgement about evidence provided even if the investigation is not one the student has performed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a range of newspaper or magazine articles on a geographic topic • Tell students to underline or highlight words or phrases which describe evidence, not opinion or conclusion • Ask them to work in groups drawing their own conclusions and comparing them with those in the articles
<p>10 Identify how to plan an investigation to answer a question, including identifying all the sources of information they might seek</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should have done this in coursework • Applying what was learned to other possible investigations, even some that are unfamiliar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get students to practise writing out instructions for an investigation; ensure they record the hypothesis they are investigating and the sources they would use to prove or deny the hypothesis

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To achieve a grade C in GCSE geography you should try to be confident in all these areas.

(Use the code in the second column to say how well you think you are doing: G - green, very confident;

O - orange, not fully sure; and R - red, not very confident. Ask your teacher about anything you colour red.)

Can I?		What can I do to improve?
<p>Describe the big ideas in geography. Describe processes, especially in physical geography, such as in questions on the formation of landforms.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">R</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">O</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">G</div> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that I have a complete set of notes, either my own or a revision guide. • Read each topic and then briefly write the main points on cards. Check my cards against those written by others. Do our main points match? • Use these cards for further revision later.
<p>Identify geographical patterns and models. Don't think of geography as just a set of random facts to learn. Successful geographers spot patterns which recur as they study different places or features.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">R</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">O</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">G</div> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for repeating patterns as I study different places. If I know the general pattern, I can predict what things may be like in places I have not studied before and therefore cope with unexpected items in the examination.
<p>Use geographic words correctly. For example: describe a river as meandering rather than bendy. Using technical terms like abrasion and attrition is much better than just erosion because it demonstrates my understanding.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">R</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">O</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">G</div> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of key words for each topic and write meanings for any I am unsure of. • Try to find photos/pictures to match the key words to help me remember them. • Work with a partner to test each other on the meanings and judge how useful the specialist words might be. • Test each other on spellings.
<p>Read and write accurate grid references and measure scale and distance. Remember too that graphs need to be accurate - make sure I have a sharp pencil - a tolerance of ± 1 mm is all that is given.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">R</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">O</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">G</div> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use some climate figures to produce a graph. • Use the correct form of graph - a line graph for the temperature, a bar graph for rainfall. • Describe the shape of the completed graph using these prompts: What is the general shape? Are there any specific features and what are the exceptions?
<p>Explain features and not just describe them. Examiners look for the signs that I can go beyond just talking about what I see and move on to why things are as they are. Use the word because in sentences to explain why.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">R</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">O</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 2px; text-align: center; line-height: 20px;">G</div> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw flow charts to link features to what they look like and how they were formed. • Write the name of the feature in the first box, what it looks like in the second (a sketch is fine) and how it was formed in the third. • Make sure to include the word because between boxes two and three. • Check the wording on past papers.

Can I?		What can I do to improve?
<p>Make full use of the stimulus materials given out with the exam paper - maps, diagrams, photographs etc.</p> <p>Extract information carefully and precisely from these. When using a stimulus with a key, ensure the answer is given as in the key - that is, fully and accurately.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get used to looking at photographs, in a book, in a newspaper and even ones that I have taken. • Write a description of what I can see on the photograph in words. Always look for and mention the contrasts I notice and think what has caused those differences.
<p>Write explanations and give the evidence in my answers. Provide explanations and marshal any information in photographs or stimulus material to back up/justify the answer. Where possible, add names of any examples.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer precisely to the different features on a photograph. • Direct the examiner's attention to the different points on the photograph by using precise terms like <i>foreground, background, left and right</i>. • This is an excellent opportunity to show that I can use geographical terms accurately.
<p>Select information to match what is required. Don't just rewrite everything from my notes.</p> <p>Identify which bits of theory are relevant to the topic. For example, instead of writing out everything I can on rivers, apply the theory to the actual stretch of river being investigated.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw concept maps of some big geography ideas I have studied - for example, a farming or an industrial system. • Write the main ideas in boxes and join boxes with lines to show the links. • Write a word or two on each line to explain the link - for example, 'inputs', 'processes' and 'outputs'. I can use this to revise my case studies. • Have case studies at more than one scale - for example, a local farm and farming in a particular region.
<p>Use a well-labelled diagram or map instead of writing. Use a clear diagram or map to save myself time - they can be more effective than dozens of words.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at my notes on the formation of a geographical feature - for example, a waterfall. Try to show the stages in its formation by a series of labelled or annotated diagrams. • Remember: a label tends to be one word, while annotating is literally 'adding notes' to a diagram or map. • Use annotations rather than labels whenever possible.
<p>Answer all parts of a question. For example: Describe the effect of a volcanic eruption on the people and the environment. Dealing with only the people part of the question will get fewer marks than having a go at both people and environment.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <input type="radio"/> R <input type="radio"/> O <input type="radio"/> G </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at some <i>GCSE</i> questions. • Underline the key words and decide how many things I have to do in order to cover all parts of the question. For example, does the question ask me to describe and explain? • Be aware that the explanation section may carry more marks.