

# Chapter One

## Some Realities

### 1. There will always be exams.

Although 'continuous assessment', involving the evaluation of coursework, has over recent years become much more common as part of examinations, many courses and skill levels are still assessed by exam papers and will continue to be so. Fashions change, exam styles change, and the curriculum to be studied can alter, but sooner or later students have to show that their studied material has been memorised, learnt and understood, and can be recalled. This has been a part of study and education for centuries. Other skills may come to be added to those of numeracy and literacy, for example IT and communication skills, but these will often be subject to testing in broadly similar ways.

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### 2. Exams need to be passed!

People and organisations in the world around you want to know if your child has skills and abilities that are useful to them. One way they can find out is to see what exams your child has taken and passed. If he/she hasn't taken or passed any exams, then they will tend to think he/she doesn't have any skills, and the people next in the queue, the ones with the exam certificates, will get first chance at the interesting jobs. Your child may be a King of the PlayStation, brilliant on a skateboard or a netball hotshot, but he/she needs to take and pass exams in order to pave a way in life.

### 3. They need to learn how!

There's no great mystery to exams, and there's no need to be afraid of them. But there's more to passing them than just being 'good at' the subject. There's a way of approaching the whole process that the pupils need to know as well. They need to know what they should know, certainly, but you can also make sure your child builds up their confidence so that they are ready for the exams without being stressed, and they don't panic on the day.

It's important that they manage themselves through the exam process, as well as mastering the subjects as best they can. This is a life skill that they need to pick up, and as a parent it's your job to help them with that.

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### 4. Skills take time!

This isn't really the book to be opened for the first time the day before the exam. If you are going to climb a big mountain you prepare for months, getting yourself fit, getting your equipment together, studying the terrain, and so on. Exams are the same, the student needs to get ready in plenty of time, and this book takes the two-year period up to GCSEs as its time frame.

One of the best ways to get ready is to ***practise***.

### 5. Practise.

It's hard to sharpen a skill unless you put the practice hours in, and taking exams is no different. Your child needs to be thinking about it and getting familiar with the process so that he/she will be relaxed and able to focus on the questions, and not be put off by imaginary pressure, or the strangeness of the exam hall, or other people's nerves. Practise (such as mock exams) is good. Treat 'mocks' like a training session.

## 6. Exams aren't just a school thing!

Education goes on long after school days are over and your children are going to find all sorts of exams cropping up in their lives. You have to take a theory test to get a driving licence, for example. Universities and colleges have exams, training courses have exams, and many professions have entrance exams. Being examined and taking tests is part of life, so the life skill of exam-sitting will continue to be useful.

A very necessary development that will need to occur is that of getting organised. You will be wise to lay your hands on some ring binders, a hole punch, some section separators and so on. Filing is not something young people are particularly used to (or inclined towards) but you are going to need some basic office supplies – the school will probably have some recommendations here.

**'Universities are increasingly looking at setting admission tests as they feel they cannot rely on A Levels to select students'.**

Source:  
[education-marketing@yahoogroups.com](mailto:education-marketing@yahoo.com), 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006.