



JOHN HAMPDEN  
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## ***A (hopefully) useful guide to successful home working***



## Welcome to the world of homeworking

Gentlemen (and very possibly parents), you have just joined approximately 35 million people in Britain who are now home working / remote working / teleworking / distance learning. This is an increase from about 4 million about a fortnight ago.

As a result many of the things that make school a more conducive environment for work have been lost. I am not of course referring *just* to the opportunity to sing Jerusalem at full volume. A school day gives you an awful lot of structure. You get up at the same time, put on clothes that differentiate yourself from the 'you' who is socialising outside of school. There are clear timestamps that break up your day, and perhaps most significantly you have a journey each day that takes you from a home, to a school, and back to a home environment. All of these things give a clear signal that it is 'time to learn'.

In this guide I hope that I can offer some useful advice and tips to help you make the most of your time away from school. Oh, and there is still a time for fun, playing on your console, and socialising with your friends, but perhaps not quite as much as you'd like. I have included some links to research and further reading that may be interesting for you and your parents to look into whilst you are at home.

Many of the challenges of working at home are amplified during revision, and this guidance is identical to that which would be offered when you have 'study leave' from school to prepare for your exams. You might also wish to hold on to this guide for such times.

The school closure allows you a very unique opportunity to develop skills that will benefit you for the rest of your life including becoming an independent learner, self-motivation and perseverance. Embrace this rare opportunity, stay safe and healthy, and to "quit ye like men".

Mr J Turner

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## Get structured

- **Get up and go to bed at the same time.** It is too easy to begin falling into a trap of 'lie-ins' when not at school, that begin to reduce your productive day<sup>1</sup>. If you adopt the mindset 'there is no school tomorrow', you are also likely to stay up later and shift your body clock. This can make you more tired, and begin to cause sleep quality issues. Keep your morning wake up alarm set, and consider setting a bedtime alarm too. There is a lot of research that proves the negative impacts of a lack of sleep, but as an example a study by Hult University found failing to get seven hours sleep led to:

*"poorer workplace performance due to tiredness, with over half admitting to struggling to stay focused in meetings, taking longer to complete tasks, and finding it challenging to generate new ideas. Along with a lack of focus and diminished creative capacities, participants also indicated a reduced motivation to learn and be less able to manage competing demands."*

- **Make your bed every morning.** Whilst this simple task will keep your parents happy, it will also help you more broadly whilst working at home. This advice comes from a retired US Naval Admiral<sup>2</sup>:

*"If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day," he said. "It will give you a small sense of pride, and it will encourage you to do another task, and another, and another. And by the end of the day that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed."*

- **Establish 'your' school day.** It is important that you realise that even though you are not physically on site, the school day is still taking place. Staff will be setting work by 9.30am each day, and some will be expecting you to join them in virtual lessons streamed over the internet. It may be sensible to start by adopting the timings of the school day, and then identify necessary adaptations based on your own circumstances. The more structure and routine that you can establish, the easier it will be to get into good habits. The planner at the back of this guide will help you to do this.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of Why we sleep by Matthew Walker [https://www.amazon.com/summary-why-sleep-matthew-walker/dp/1388500248/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?keywords=why+we+sleep+matthew+walker&qid=1585146668&s=books&sr=1-6](https://www.amazon.com/summary-why-sleep-matthew-walker/dp/1388500248/ref=sr_1_6?keywords=why+we+sleep+matthew+walker&qid=1585146668&s=books&sr=1-6)

<sup>2</sup> Make your bed: Little things that can change your life...and maybe the world by Admiral William H. McRaven <https://www.amazon.com/make-your-bed-little-things/dp/1455570249>

- **Get dressed.** The least productive days in school are often non-uniform days. You are in clothes that you associate with home and not school. In the same way that some normally meek and gentle people can become loutish if they put a football shirt on, the clothes we wear impact our mental state and attitudes. You do not need to wear your school uniform (although we won't stop you!), but don't spend the day in your pyjamas. Mentally you would be preparing to rest and wind down if you did so. A number of people who have worked from home for a sustained period have also suggested wearing shoes to make the day feel more formal and work like.
- **Establish a 'learning space'**<sup>3</sup>. It is tempting to try to complete distance learning tasks whilst you are sat in front of the TV, or propped up on (or even 'in' ) bed. Perhaps one of the hardest parts of working from home is trying to clearly distinguish between 'home' and 'school work' environments. Sitting in a Science lab or English classroom mentally distinguishes the fact that you are in school. If you are sleeping, eating, watching TV and then trying to work in a space it becomes very blurred subconsciously where one use starts and the other ones end. Watching TV in bed for instance can cause sleep problems. Your mind stops associating being in bed with sleep and instead is getting ready for mindless Netflix entertainment instead – it will be ready for distraction.

What you need to do is clearly define what different parts of your home are for, and that includes the space you can dedicate to school work. If you can set aside a space (it could just be a corner of your bedroom) to being the 'learning space', it will help you to be mentally prepared for that day's activities. Try to declutter this area including removing distractions from your environment (or at least line of sight) that could start to blur the purpose that you are assigning to it.

It may be a good idea (unless flooded with natural light) to turn the room light on. A brighter working environment can stimulate you, whereas a darker space may make you feel more lethargic.

A change of scenery can work wonders for your focus and productivity. Try to get away from your study space every so often. Take breaks somewhere else, get exercise, and if practical move around your home if you have more than one space where you can work.

- **How will you structure the day?** As mentioned before, you may wish to follow the school day and take breaks at 10:50am, and lunch at 1:35pm. It is important that you reflect on your natural bodily rhythms to find out if you work better in the morning or the afternoon. You can then plan when you should do different tasks and activities to exploit this. There will incidentally be an assembly sent home each

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<sup>3</sup> Further reading on practical ideas for a learning space: <https://www.familyeducation.com/school-learning/how-to-create-a-learning-space-for-your-child>

week for you to enjoy at 10:50am to remind you that you are very much still a part of the JHGS school community. You may decide to add in a limited number of five minute rest breaks – perhaps after every 30 minutes of work. Stretch your legs and get a drink. Perhaps spend that five minutes reading how being dehydrated might reduce your brain power.

(<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/08/180821094153.htm>) Having a regular break time will help you to manage distractions, and ensure that some of the helpful routines that you may have lost from not being physically at school are retained.

## Form good habits

- **Minimise distractions.** There are a lot of things at home that can distract you that are not present at school. Family members, pets, social media, games consoles – in fact many of the things that make home, home. If you can reduce or remove the impact of these distractions it will go a long way to helping you be more productive and more efficient at home.
  - **Mobile devices.** For Generation Z / Centennials, mobile devices are without doubt one of if not ‘the’ biggest distractions. This is one of the main reasons why phones are not allowed in school. Researchers<sup>4</sup> have confirmed that merely having your phone on you, or placed on a table nearby is sufficient for you to become distracted by it. Even adults in similar circumstances are prone to ‘checking’ their phone, interrupting their thought process of another task at best, and completely distracting at worst. Whilst writing that passage, I confess to checking my phone twice. Don’t even mention smart watches. The solution is simple. If you have good self-control, put your phone (on silent, flight mode or even turned off) in a room in a completely different part of your home. There are apps available that will deny you access to your phone to help with this. If you feel that the temptation is too great, and you suffer from FOMO<sup>5</sup>, perhaps give it to a parent who can ‘keep it safe’ until an agreed time. This advice applies to phones / tablets / consoles / TV remotes etc.
  - **Friends & Family.** As a parent putting this advice together, I can very much testify to the distraction that your family can cause, intentionally or not. Putting away your mobile phone can normally fix the issue of friends distracting you, but not those you live with. At the moment many people are working at home and trying to establish new routines. If this is the case work together to plan out how you can work around each other. It may be

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.psypost.org/2018/05/just-cell-phone-possession-can-impair-learning-study-suggests-51228>

<sup>5</sup> <https://time.com/4358140/overcome-fomo/>

a good idea to establish common times for family events like meals or a walk. If the background noise of family life is a distraction, consider listening to calming music (ideally instrumental) whilst working, or investing in earplugs or noise cancelling headphones to help you to concentrate. Alternatively you could shift your 'working' day to another time – perhaps get up a little earlier, or work in the evenings if this is a better time to minimise home distraction.

- **Set deadlines, prioritise.** Some of the work that your teachers set you will be very concise activities that have a clear start and end point within a short period of time. Others will set more open project pieces that may stretch over several days. While teachers will help you to structure this time, you can create your own to do list on paper or using Google Task (find it in the right hand taskbar of the Calendar app) to set up clear deadlines for completing work. The Eisenhower Matrix<sup>6</sup> is a useful way to help you to identify what task needs to be completed next, and ensure that you do not become distracted by meaningless tasks that have no urgency. Update your to do list soon after 9:30am everyday when it becomes clear what work has been set.



## Stay healthy

- **Mental health.** The current public health situation is unavoidable and stressful for many people. Additional factors such as poor sleep, lack of exercise and poor planning can have a detrimental effect on your physical and mental health too. Information was sent out alongside a letter from the Head teacher on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March regarding organisations that can be contacted outside of school. There are a few steps that you can take to help you improve your mental health during the school closure.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/>

- **Visit the Community Classrooms on Google.** The school is currently setting up a 'community classroom' for all boys in a year group. This is a space where you can safely discuss issues and topics with your peers, and receive support and guidance through this difficult time.
- **Phone a friend or family member daily.** Isolation is a significant issue for many people during this time. Take a moment every day to phone (not message) at least one person in your family who you do not regularly see, or a friend who might not have many people around them. The sound of someone else's voice no matter how distant is likely to have a positive impact not only on the person you call, but equally yourself.
- **Embrace positive music and films.** Where appropriate, take the time to listen to upbeat music, and watch positive films and programmes. Listening to positive music releases dopamine, a natural chemical produced by your body which improves your mood<sup>7</sup>. If you prefer to listen to music whilst working, find 'feel good' playlists online to help to lift your spirits.
- **Talk to your teachers.** The staff at JHGS are still there for you, even if you cannot see us. If you want to talk, someone will always be available. This includes what might seem like insignificant things such as finding a set task difficult, to broader more complex concerns that you may have.
- **Physical health.** Being at home for an extended period makes physical health and wellbeing more challenging to maintain. You are not walking between lessons, actively in PE and Games lessons and potentially not leaving your house for extended periods. Here are a few suggestions on how you can look after your physical health.
  - **Snacking.** It is very easy to get into the habit of eating lots of snacks when you are working from home. Often we are not necessarily hungry, just bored, tempted by the easily accessible and often bright packaging, or actually thirsty<sup>8</sup>. Try drinking more water – not only is being fully hydrated good for you, but this will take up space in your stomach that might otherwise have had you reaching for the crisps. It may be a good idea to place a bowl of filling but healthy snacks near your work area, so that you are at least eating foods that are better for you. There are some interesting suggestions around<sup>9</sup>, but even a carrot or banana is a simple solution.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/why-music-is-great-for-your-mental-health/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.corporatewellnessmagazine.com/article/hunger-vs-thirst>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.eatthis.com/snacks-that-fill-you-up/>

- **Screentime.** Your work will be set through Google Classroom, and may include video clips and live lesson streams. However wherever you can you should aim to minimise screentime. Take a look at the tasks that you have been set for the day, and sequence those that require use of a computer to be interspersed with those that do not. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health<sup>10</sup> has put together some excellent resources for parents to help you to manage this.
  
- **Move around.** During the course of the day it is important to undertake some exercise. There are some really simple ways that you can achieve this, and the PE department will be setting you activities to undertake whilst you are at home. Everyday the fitness expert and trainer Joe Wicks is hosting a PE lesson<sup>11</sup> that you can partake in. This is a good opportunity to get some exercise completed and ensure that you are not being lethargic. There are a number of improvised activities that you could do – [here](#) is a list that you can refer to for more ideas. At the moment Government guidance allows you to take a walk, run, bike ride or similar. It is important that you find time to do this.

## Other hints and suggestions

- **Celebrating Success.** In school you will receive regular praise from those in the school community for the successes (however small) in your day. These are motivational – human beings like having positive behaviour affirmed, and it is likely that you will feel a greater sense of satisfaction. You can do this yourself by rewarding yourself for achieving tasks on your to do list. Alternatively you can establish a reward programme at home. Points could be awarded for successfully submitting work, doing exercise, eating healthily and doing chores around the house. The school would welcome hearing about the achievements that you have made over and above minimum expectations, email [office@jhgs.bucks.sch.uk](mailto:office@jhgs.bucks.sch.uk) with information and photos of any notable achievements. We are very keen to give achievement points for those who deserve them.
  
- **Are you comfortable?**<sup>12</sup> You will inevitably be spending quite a lot of time in one space working. Make sure that you are working at the right height, on comfortable furniture with adequate fresh air. An interesting study found that working in an

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/health-impacts-screen-time-guide-clinicians-parents>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.thebodycoach.com/blog/pe-with-joe-1254.html>

<sup>12</sup> Image and further information from <https://www.orchardphysio.co.uk/best-desk-posture-for-a-pain-free-back/>

environment with stale air actually makes you less productive<sup>13</sup>, so open a window and get some fresh air regularly.



- **Do you have the right equipment?** It is not always possible to have access to IT whilst working from home. There are likely to be a number of people who need to use a limited amount of devices. Try to timetable times when you can get access (see 'How will you structure your day?') so that you can remain productive.
- **Be at JHGS (mentally at least).** Set your homepage to the Google landing page, and leave your JHGS account logged in. Add Google Classroom to your browser start-up tabs. These actions help you to establish an in-school frame of mind.



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<sup>13</sup> <https://hbr.org/2017/03/research-stale-office-air-is-making-you-less-productive>