

The GCSE  
Mindset  
Student  
Workbook

40 activities for  
transforming  
commitment,  
motivation and  
productivity

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# Introduction

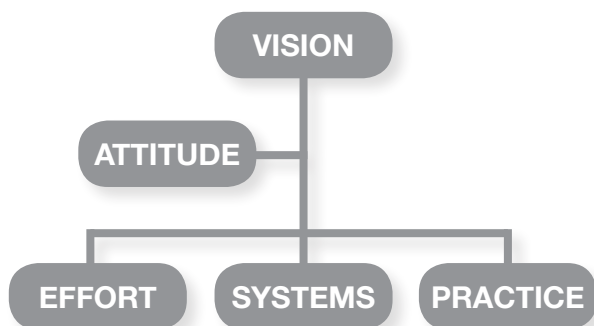
The assumption that pupils who succeed at the end of Year 9 continue this pathway of success and succeed again at the end of Year 11, then 12 and 13, is false. There isn't a cast-iron link between success at the end of one key stage and success at the next. Past performance doesn't guarantee future performance.

Some pupils make giant strides between fourteen and sixteen, or sixteen and eighteen, leaping up from modest results in Year 9, for example, to outstanding results in Year 11. Others go from great performance at fourteen to modest grades at the end of their GCSE courses.

Why is this? We used to think it was to do with intelligence. But having taught thousands of pupils, and spoken to hundreds of them about their studies, we couldn't find any specific intellectual weaknesses that meant poor performance at GCSE. We've spent years looking and never found them. When we interviewed successful pupils what we *did* find was that they had certain habits, routines, attitudes and approaches to study. We found it over and over again – the successful pupils who got the best grades weren't the cleverest, they were the ones who worked a certain way. It's your skills, systems and approaches to study that are the best predictor of academic success.

Our work suggests that pupils who are successful score highly in the following characteristics or qualities:

- » **VISION** – they know what they want to achieve.
- » **EFFORT** – they put in many hours of proactive independent study.
- » **SYSTEMS** – they organise their learning resources and their time.
- » **PRACTICE** – they practise and develop their skills.
- » **ATTITUDE** – they respond constructively to setbacks.



These characteristics beat intelligence hands down. Forget how clever you feel, or what set you're in – if you get to grips with what you want to achieve and why (V), you begin working harder (E), you organise your time and resources well (S), practise a certain way (P) and stay positive during setbacks (A), you're heading for great grades no matter what has happened to you up to now. Or, in other words:

**Students who are success seekers are not bluffed by setback, poor performance, failure or academic adversity. They take the lesson to be learnt and move on.** Martin (2010), p. 21

## The VESPA Activities

The activities in this booklet are designed to:

- » Raise awareness about the impact a quality/characteristic can have on your potential success.
- » Encourage you to reflect on the strength of that quality on a personal level.
- » Engage you in a task that develops you as a learner – a reflection, discussion, coaching conversation or experiment.

Each session is designed to take fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. We've included a variety of tasks under each heading, giving you a total of forty to start experimenting with.

Good luck!

# September Activities

September can feel like a fresh start, a chance to try to be a better learner with new and effective habits. We certainly feel that way in September! The month can be what some people call an 'inflection point' or a turning point, a great opportunity to try something new. So this month's activities focus on aims and goals, and give you resources that will help clarify what it is you want to achieve. In short, you need to know *what success looks like for you*. That way, you can make good decisions as you work towards it.

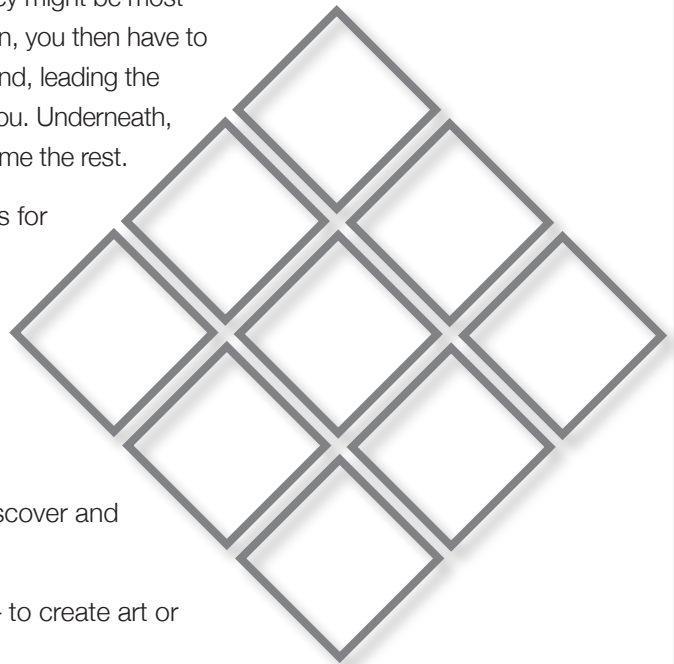
## 1. Vision Activity: The Motivation Diamond

Sometimes, it's easier to express the motivations and desires that are important to us rather than the jobs or courses that might fulfil them. Professor Steven Reiss, who worked as a psychologist at Ohio State University, conducted studies with over 6,000 people to try to define their underlying motivations. He concluded his work by suggesting there are sixteen different motivations that guide all human behaviour. We've adjusted his list a little to make it more accessible and easy to work with. There are fifteen in ours.

Study the list below and decide which seem as though they might be most important to you. Once you've shortlisted nine of the fifteen, you then have to prioritise them using the diamond. At the top of the diamond, leading the others, should be the motivation that beats all others for you. Underneath, you can have two deputies alongside each other. Then come the rest.

Fifteen possible motivations (adapted from Steven Reiss for the purposes of this task):

1. Acceptance: the need for approval, support and good feeling from those around you.
2. Competition: the need to pit yourself against others – to compete and win.
3. Curiosity: the need to learn, explore, research, discover and try new things.
4. Creativity: the need to design, write, draw, build – to create art or entertainment.
5. Family: the need to raise or help children, to nurture others or to work in small, loyal units supporting those around you.
6. Honour: the need to be loyal to the key values of a group or society – to observe the rules, do what is expected and guide others in these values.



# September Activities

7. Idealism: the need for fairness, equality and social justice.
8. Independence: the need for individuality – the ability to organise and run things your way.
9. Order: the need for organised, stable, predictable environments; creating routines and patterns.
10. Physical activity: the need for movement, exercise and physical challenge.
11. Power: the need for influence, the ability to determine the direction of others; the responsibility for the performance of groups.
12. Saving: the need to collect things, to own things and categorise or order them.
13. Social contact: the need for friends, to have extensive peer relationships.
14. Social status: the need to appear to be of a high social standing or a person of importance.
15. Tranquillity: the need to be calm, relaxed and safe.

Once you've drawn up your leading motivations, think about the times in your life when you are at your most energised. Times when you're buzzing with excitement, good feeling and happiness.

» What are you doing?

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» What elements of your motivation are being rewarded?

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## Final Thoughts

The nature of our working lives are changing. People used to choose a profession or trade, and stick to it for the entirety of their working lives. Now, employment is much more fluid. The *Telegraph* recently summarised a study which showed people will, on average, work for six different employers and have between ten and twenty-five job interviews before they retire. 45% of us will be made redundant at least once. 46% of us will retrain completely and switch careers as we seek greater satisfaction.

So your experience will be different from that of your parents and teachers. Opportunities, careers and jobs will emerge that didn't exist twenty years ago, and you'll switch between them more regularly.

Bearing all of that in mind, have a go at this light-hearted thought experiment. Don't limit your thinking!

If you had to design a crazy, impossible, perfect job that satisfied your top three motivations, what would it be?

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