



Parents' Guide to the 11+

How to practice and pass 11+ English, Maths,
Verbal & Non-verbal reasoning

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR 11+ SUCCESS

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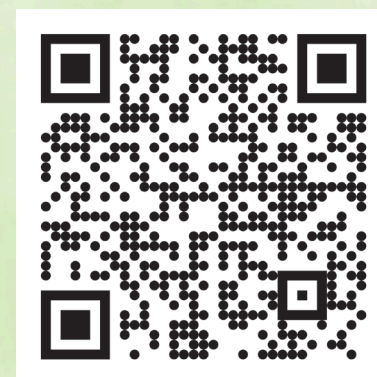


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PART 1: THE 11+ JOURNEY

INTRODUCTION

You are vital to your child's success

As a homeschooling parent you are vital to your child's achievement in the 11+. You will play a crucial role in giving your child the self-belief to tackle the 11+ with confidence.

11 plus and Homeschooling

If you are a full-time homeschooling parent or a part-time home-schooling parent: you should give your child the opportunity to sit the 11+ exam. There is no loss as the grammar school exam is free to take and the exam preparation can help accelerate your child's understanding in core subjects of Maths and English. As IGCSE and GCSE foundation is at the similar level to the 11+ exam for Maths and English, the exam preparation will help develop a very strong academic foundation for your child and greatly benefit them in the future.

This guide will be with you every step of the way

We understand that preparing for the 11+ can be bewildering, stressful and time-consuming. As a homeschooling parent we will give you essential advice and support alongside step-by-step guidance on:

- **The Best way to prepare for the 11+**
- **How your child can do their best in English, Maths, Verbal and Non-Verbal Reasoning exams.**
- **How to teach your child to achieve high marks.**
- **What the 11+ examiners are looking for.**
- **How to support your child through the journey.**

The 11+ is not a secret

Secrecy seems to surround the 11+, largely because it is a competitive test. Parents worry that they might reveal successful strategies for tackling it and give other children an advantage over their own child. You will probably find that:

- Parents tend not to discuss the 11+ openly.
- To prevent preparation, some schools do not reveal the content of the test, even though parents with older children who have been tested will already know what they are.
- Parents often avoid telling each other that their child is being tutored, or give the impression that their child is 'not doing much', even when their child might be seeing a tutor for several hours a week.

As one parent put it: 'Around here, people are more secretive about the 11+ than MI5 and the CIA put together!' In this guide, we will break the secrecy and explain what the test is all about.

So, what is the 11+ all about?

The 11+ was introduced back in 1944. All 11-12 year-olds (Year 6) took the test and those who passed went to grammar school. When comprehensive schools were introduced in 1965, the number of grammar schools began to reduce. There are now only 164 grammar schools. However, the 11+ is still used by grammar schools and some private schools to decide who will be awarded bursaries or have their fees paid in full.

The 11+ (also called the 11 plus or Eleven Plus) is an examination taken by some pupils in their last year of primary school. The name '11+' refers to the fact that the test is part of the selection process for schools who admit children when they are aged 11 and over

There are up to four different tests in the 11+: English, Maths, Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal Reasoning. The combination of test papers varies considerably around the country.

Verbal Reasoning features in the test in almost every area. Non-Verbal Reasoning papers are also very common. Both of these types of tests are designed to test a child's intelligence and potential. They are not tests which assess how much your child has learned at school.

You may also be worried about tutoring your own child, especially if you did not sit the 11+ yourself. If your child finds studying difficult, you will need someone experienced and creative to help them to see that learning can also be fun and to take some of the stress away from you. You can play an equally important role by giving them support and encouragement.

Some local authorities use the 11+ alongside the SATs. In other local authorities, the 11+ is voluntary. You should be an expert at preparing your child for the test, whatever the reason for taking it. This guide will give you the expertise, whilst you provide reinforcement, encouragement and praise.

How can my child prepare for the test?

There is no child who has successfully passed the 11+ without hard work. This is especially true for children in state primary schools, where the syllabus is designed to prepare Year 6 pupils for the Key Stage 2 tests in English, Maths and Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar – very different from the 11-plus format.

In some areas, sample tests or past papers are not published, and the tests are described as 'tutor- proof', meaning that children cannot easily be coached in advance. Even if this is the case, good vocabulary and mental Maths skills are vital in a range of subjects so are worth developing for their own sake.



You might be afraid of 'cramming' your child as a homeschooling parent, thinking they might struggle at selective schools, unable to cope with the pace. The truth is that the 11+ is so competitive, it is unlikely that your child will pass if they are going to struggle to keep up in secondary school. On the other hand, if your child has the potential, you naturally want to give them every opportunity to show what they can do.

This guide will help you every step of the way and answer your most important questions:

?

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- What should my child be doing, and when?
- How much work does my child need to do?
- How do I motivate my son or daughter?
- Are boys different from girls in the way they study?
- What should I focus on?
- What happens in interviews?

The 11+ Homeschooling Guide will help you with your preparation and enable you to understand what your child needs to know. You will make the difference in helping your child to do their very best.

WHAT IS IN THE 11+ EXAM?

There are five aspects that your child could be tested on:

1. English Comprehension
2. English Composition
3. Maths
4. Verbal Reasoning
5. Non-Verbal Reasoning

11+ = ?

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO PREPARE FOR ALL OF THESE TESTS?

The homeschooling guide will be able to advise you on which aspects of the exam your child needs to cover. This varies from school to school. Some, especially grammar schools, may test only Verbal Reasoning and Non- Verbal Reasoning. Others also include Maths and comprehension. Many schools, especially selective independent schools, will test all five aspects and all on the same day. Some ask your child to sit a Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal Reasoning test as a first stage, and then invite successful candidates to return for English and Maths tests.

WHEN ARE THE TESTS HELD?

Most grammar schools ask your child to sit 11+ tests in the Autumn term of Year 6. Private school entrance exams tend to be a bit later, at the beginning of the Spring term of Year 6.

? WHAT NATIONAL CURRICULUM LEVEL SHOULD MY CHILD BE ACHIEVING TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE 11+?

Your child should aim for Level 5 at the beginning of Year 6. They should be a Level 4A by the end of year 4 in Maths and English. Unfortunately, the rate of success in the exam for a pupil with level 4 in year 6 is very low. In addition, the Year 6 SATs are very different from the 11+ and so your child needs to be taught different strategies to prepare for it.



HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD WITH STRESS?

Most children taking the 11+ will experience some stress during the process. Even if you manage to stay calm and reassuring, your child may not feel the same way.

Your reassurance and encouragement are invaluable. It is important to convey the message that if your child does not pass, they have failed a test and not failed as a person. You will be proud of them for their hard work and for the way that they have tackled their nerves. Sometimes, our disappointment gives children the impression that they have failed us as well as themselves.



Aim for success but have a back-up plan

Discuss a back-up plan with your child if they are not successful. Negative opinions are often exaggerated, and your child has every chance of succeeding. Your child needs to have the security of knowing that you will support them whatever happens, and you will help them to plan their future.

EXERCISE, SLEEPING AND DIET

As adults, we know how important it is to take exercise, to eat a healthy diet and to get enough sleep – even if, as parents, we never seem to get the balance right! Your child will learn better and manage stress more effectively if they keep fit, eat a balanced diet and sleep well.



Exercise

Most children who play sports (including lunch-time playground games) get enough exercise. If your child is not 'sporty', find an activity that they enjoy doing and try to fit one or two sessions into your week. This can be playing with them in the garden, swimming, walking the dog with you, climbing or skiing at an indoor centre, even ten-pin bowling.



Diet

Eating well means eating a range of foods including vegetables, fruit, protein, oily fish, carbohydrates and even fats. Do what you can to ensure that your child's diet is balanced. Involve them in choosing what is included. Make a list of foods in different categories and ask them to choose something from each category for each day of the week in advance. Include a special treat once a week as a reward for helping to make their own lunches.



Sleep

By the time your child is 10 or 11, they should be sleeping around 9 – 10 hours a night. This is an average. Some children need more and some less. What is important is that they are given the opportunity to have as much sleep as they need by going to bed at the right time. As a parent, you will know if they are getting enough sleep or they are too tired during the day. Although it is difficult, try to make sure that your child is not playing games on their tablets, phones or consoles last thing at night, as video games tend to stimulate rather than relax the mind.

PREPARATION

? WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS?

- Find out how the admissions process works for the grammar, private and public schools you would like your child to attend. Places may be dependent on 11+ score, proximity to the school, religious commitment, sibling priority or feeder school or a combination of factors.
- Admission rules can vary from year to year, so check them carefully and don't assume that they will be the same as the year before.
- Identify which aspects of the 11+ are tested by your preferred schools. Check what the tests are and when they take place.
- Keep yourself informed throughout the process of changes in content, rules or timing.

? HOW FAR IN ADVANCE SHOULD MY CHILD PREPARE FOR THE 11+?

For a homeschooling parent we advise that 11+ revision preparation and practice should start in Year 3, ideally no earlier than the January term to prevent boredom and burnout. The end of Year 4 and the first term of Year 5 are important to establish the basics, and to cover the groundwork.

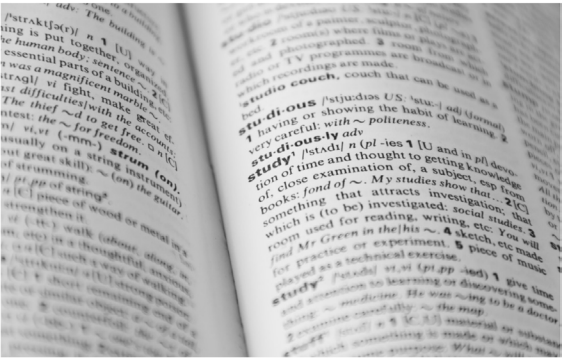
? MY CHILD IS IN YEAR 4. HOW CAN I HELP THEM TO PREPARE FOR THE 11+?

General progress

Your aim is for your child to reach Level 4A by the end of year 4. Developmental differences between children born in autumn and summer are still very evident at this age. Your child has plenty of time to develop and, if they were born in the summer term, to catch up. Keep an eye on aspects of their academic work they seem to be struggling with. Motivate them strongly at this time and it will pay dividends over the following 18 months.

English

By the end of Year 4 aim for your child to achieve Level 4A in Reading and Writing. This will be a challenge as level 4 is the target for children leaving primary school in Year 6. Make sure they read a **wide range of books**. Are they being stretched by their reading? Are they extending their vocabulary? Wide vocabulary is needed for Comprehension and Creative Writing papers and is extremely useful for Verbal Reasoning Papers too.



Create a vocabulary book for your child to write down any words they don't know. Ask them to look up their meaning and write down the definition in their own words, using a dictionary to help if necessary. Every so often, go through their vocabulary book with them and see if they can remember what the words mean.

Maths

Start doing additional Maths exercises and activities. There are many age-specific workbooks available in bookshops or online and, at this stage, there is no significant difference in the quality of the exercises. The most helpful preparation you can do in Year 4 is to ensure they really know the basics of the four fundamental operations: adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing.

36 × 6 = ?

Help your child to **know their multiplication tables** so that they can recite them up to 12 x 12. You might also try games-based apps on tablets, such as Squeebles for multiplication tables and DoodleMaths.

Verbal Reasoning

Word-games on car journeys or in spare moments are helpful. Try **challenging your child** to find synonyms for 'happy', or 'angry'. Alternatively, ask them to describe the busy traffic, or the colour of the sky, with rewards/ treats for good descriptions.



Non-Verbal Reasoning

Try to get your child interested in **doing puzzles and looking at patterns**. Sudoku is invaluable for introducing number patterns. Playing chess or learning a musical instrument are also good ways of improving Non-Verbal Reasoning. Choose a small selection of activities which best motivate your child.

There's plenty of hard work to come, so take it steadily. Encourage your child to see it as a marathon, rather than a sprint.

? MY CHILD IS IN YEAR 5/6. HOW CAN I HELP THEM TO PREPARE FOR THE 11+?

Serious preparation begins in September of Year 5. However, children learn best when activities are fun and engaging so try to keep this in mind during Years 3 and 4.

You will know which schools you are targeting, whether private, grammar or a mixture of both. You know the mix of Comprehension, Composition, Maths, Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal Reasoning tests your target schools will require. Increase your child's confidence first with the basics.

Between Years 5 and 6, you can start timed exam papers. Practise one or two Verbal Reasoning or Non-Verbal Reasoning papers each week. In the Autumn term of Year 6, do mock exams if you can or practise an entrance exam for a school that is not your first choice. Some grammar school exams start in September, so you will need to enrol. Keep an eye on the local press, as schools usually place adverts announcing open days, enrolment procedures and entrance exam dates.

Most independent schools hold exams at the beginning of the Spring Term in Year 6. If your child is taking exams in the Spring term, practise one paper each day during the Christmas holiday.

! REVISION TIPS

- **Don't overwhelm or overload your child. Have plenty of breaks. Even short breaks of 5-10 minutes can help the absorption of new learning.**
- **A child's attention span usually ranges from 20 minutes to 50 minutes. Most adults start to lose concentration after 20 minutes if the activity is not varied. Start with less and increase gradually. Vary the activities within each session.**
- **Make a fridge magnet list to display the topics in each subject**
- **Revise by practising papers in exam conditions.**
- **If the exam is in the morning, in the run-up to the exams do all the practice papers around the same time so that your child mentally adjusts to peak performance at exam time.**
- **Use visual aids, for example, mind maps and spider diagrams, to show parts of a topic to be learnt, to summarise a topic, to link information and mark progress. This gives your child a visual sense of achievement.**
- **Use mnemonics e.g. 'Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain' (taking the first letter of each word to give you the first letter of the seven colours of the rainbow: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet). Personalise them by asking your child to add colours and drawings. This will make the mnemonic easier to remember, especially for visual learners.**



- **Give rewards when each 11+ topic or question type is finished or if a better mark than expected is achieved. Rewards at this age can be stars on a chart or symbols in your child's book. Perhaps your child can accumulate stars for a small prize.**
- **When doing practice 11+ papers, devise tasks which mirror the style of question that will be in the test. The question can either be in the standard format (no choice of answers) or a multiple choice format where the candidate has to choose one or more answers from a list. Check which format your chosen school uses.**
- **Practising 11+ papers under exam conditions reveals if your child needs to work on increasing their speed, since every question not completed means lost marks.**
- **Use the answer book to identify mistakes. When we work in timed conditions and therefore under pressure, we tend to make more errors.**
- **Understand and apply learning to real-life problems to reinforce the learning e.g. practical maths linked to everyday life, such as the weight of a bag of pick-and-mix and the cost at the till.**
- **Spend more time on areas which need development, rather than allowing your child to avoid them.**
- **Focus on the process of learning as well as the goal or end result.**
- **Make sure your child rests to recover from activity and brain overload. Avoid talking about exams in their break times.**



How do I keep my child motivated?

The 11+ is a long haul. So, staying motivated is very important – for you, the whole family and especially for your child. You should remember **what motivates each child differs**.

Reward effort

Focus on rewarding effort, rather than just achievement. Emphasise that you want to see your child do their best and that this is all you or anyone else can expect of them. Think about offering small rewards for effort (as in the example of stars earlier), and then break it down into long-term and cumulative rewards. Like adults, children respond to challenging but attainable goals that have a specific outcome and a clear reward. Praise is a huge motivator – we all love to be told how well we have done.

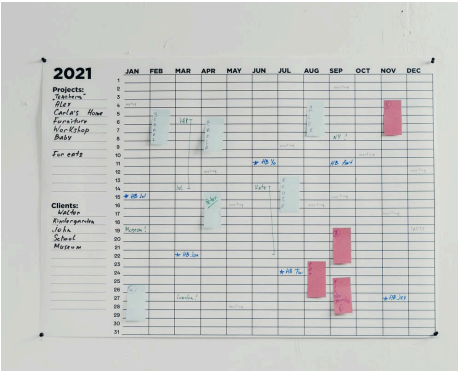
Visit schools in the area

A school visit can also be a motivator. If possible, visit several schools in the area to avoid disappointment if your child doesn't get into your school of choice. Talk in more general terms about the facilities and the kind of activities that your child will experience when they go to 'big school' rather than focusing only on the school which your child will attend if they pass the 11+ or entrance exam. Seeing the wonderful grounds, sporting facilities and well-equipped art room can be exciting – your child also needs reassurance that there will be opportunities at whichever secondary school they join in Year 7. Remind them also that you can continue with homeschooling if they do not pass.

A Year 4 round of school visits is sometimes better than in Year 5, if the schools that you wish to view offer the opportunity. It gives more time for your child to adjust to the idea of what moving to secondary school means for them. In Year 5, school visits feel a lot more real and, for that reason, visits can be a stressful experience.

Make a revision timetable

Make a revision timetable for exam practice. This can be incorporated into your home-schooling timetable. Regular, small amounts of time are best. Take into account when your family schedule can fit in half an hour to an hour of daily practice and also the times when your child is likely to be able to concentrate well. Try mornings, afternoons and evenings at different times, and you will discover when your child learns best. Your child will stay motivated if you are realistic about how much you expect from them. Do things together to begin with, and gradually withdraw your involvement until they develop more self- reliance. Praise will increase your child's self- confidence and reinforce their belief that they are valued, thus maintaining their motivation and determination.



An example of how much time your child should be spending on 11+ exam paper practice is provided here: always change around suiting your child's individual needs.

- 5 hours a week for Maths
- 5 hours a week for English
- 2 hours a week for verbal reasoning
- 2 hours a week for non-verbal reasoning

These hours should be broken down throughout the week and weekends and should start in Year 3 and progressively build to the above suggestion by Year 5.

Involve different family members

If one of you is doing most of the encouraging and coaching, it is very useful to involve another member of the family for fresh praise and reinforcement: 'Mum was saying how hard you've been working...' 'Grandad says he was really impressed that you didn't give up yesterday when the questions were getting a bit hard.'

To help your child stay motivated, let them know that when they do get things wrong, it's OK. **It's all right to make mistakes – this is how we learn.**

Reinforce the fact that your child is learning to work at a level above the expectation of their primary school and well beyond most children their age. They are challenging themselves and should expect to get things wrong.

Marking their work and going over mistakes to learn what to do to improve is much more valuable than doing yet another practice paper where the answers are simply marked right or wrong and the total counted at the end.

Things are not going to go well every day or even every week. Know when to challenge, and when good is good enough.

When you do hit a rough patch, **slow down and do some work together.** Work through fewer questions with your child, take it gently and don't expect to get too much done for a few days. They will appreciate the breather and the attention you are giving them.

Above all – try to **be patient, praise your child for their effort and, if they are worried, reassure them that how they are feeling is normal** and that other children will feel the way that they do.

? DO BOYS AND GIRLS LEARN DIFFERENTLY?

Boys and girls learn in different ways. They tackle the 11+ differently too. Of course, these are generalisations, so you might find that some tips suit your child, irrespective of gender.

Boys

Concentration

Generally, boys will have more trouble concentrating. Short, frequent bursts of learning tend to work better. Four 10-minute activities one after the other can be more motivating than a 40-minute full-length practice paper. You may want to begin with a series of short activities with regular breaks; then gradually reduce the breaks until your son has built up the ability to concentrate for the length of time it will take them to complete their longest test or exam.

Movement

Boys tend to be more kinaesthetic and learn best when moving objects around, such as word cards. Playing with objects with their hands helps them to concentrate, but if they start turning their stationery into a battle zone, complete with sound effects and running war commentary – they've gone too far!

Fair play

Avoid exchanging their favourite sport or leisure activity for 11+ practice. It will seem like punishment. If you say you are going to do a Verbal Reasoning paper and your son completes it sooner than expected, don't start another paper. Boys like challenges and thrive on competition – but they value fairness.

Give your son control

Although boys appear to thrive on challenge, they also like to feel in control. They are very responsive to doing their own marking, which is great with maths, verbal and non-verbal reasoning tasks. Most practice books have the answers at the back. If your son marks his work, he owns his successes and failures. Ask your son to work out why an answer is wrong – boys tend to resist returning to wrong answers once they have finished a task.

Presentation

Organising work and presenting it can sometimes be problematic for boys. So encourage any efforts to do this, however small. Boys dislike showing their working out more than girls, but they will lose points in the Maths 11+ exam if they fail to do so, so impress upon them the reasons for this so they get into the habit.

Imagination

Some boys are very good at creative writing, but if your son struggles, start with what they know. Boys' imaginations can be inspired through humour or fantasy so it is a good place to start. Ask your son to



describe the plot of 'The Dark Knight Returns' or 'The Hobbit' in five lines and develop their story from it, or construct an alternative ending. Accept your son's interests and work with them.

Hiding stress

Over-confidence can conceal fear, stress and insecurity. Boys can be less verbal and expressive than girls when they are feeling worried or overburdened, especially if they are working outside their comfort zone. Notice their body language and facial expressions and alter the task or pace of work accordingly.

Girls

Focus

As for boys, short, frequent sessions can work better for girls than substantial lengths of time, at least at first. However, girls tend to be able to focus for longer than boys, and tend to mature earlier. They are thus often considered more 'sensible'.

Creative Writing

Girls tend to be better at English – and communication in general – than boys, so they will be more likely to enjoy creative writing. Allow your daughter to have some control over choosing what sort of writing she does.

Physical activity

Incorporate fun activities into your weekend as well as work. Some girls are happy to work on practice papers if they can go shopping or skating afterwards. Physical exercise is important. Swimming can be relaxing (and for your son too!) so perhaps organise a trip to the local swimming pool between revision sessions.

Self-confidence

Girls can lack confidence, so ensure that you give your daughter lots of praise and positive encouragement. Point out her good points rather than her weaknesses, because she can take criticism personally. If she is struggling with something she finds difficult, change the activity to something she enjoys and is good at, like creative writing. This can give her a boost for when you return to the work she likes/understands less.

Try to relax – girls tend to be more sensitive to other people's emotions and your daughter will pick up on your anxiety if you are worrying. Adopt a calm, positive approach, and she will feel less anxious herself.



? How should I help my child in the last few days leading up to the 11+ ?

General advice

This depends on how many exams your child will be sitting. Many parents decide to go for a prestigious long-shot, two target schools appropriate to their child and a back-up school.

Don't cram

Hopefully, you are not doing a lot of last-minute cramming. There is always something that seems to need more practice, but doing well on the big day itself is not just about academic preparation. Some very able, well-prepared children fall apart in the exam, while less prepared children sail through. This is because exam performance is as much about controlling nerves and feeling confident as it is about ability. Try to keep your child calm in the days leading to the exam itself. Have a carefully structured revision schedule to try to avoid last-minute panic.

Praise

During the ten days before the exam, tell your child regularly how proud you are of them, and all the work they've done so far. Make sure they know you will support them, whatever the outcome.

! 7 DAYS LEADING UP TO THE TEST:

- **Doing a practice paper just before the test is not a good idea – it can increase pressure on your child, especially if they do not do well. What is worth doing is to remind your child about the structure of the paper, its length and the content. Go through exam strategies such as writing the time the test ends at the top of the paper, marking their answers clearly and, if appropriate, tackling questions worth more marks first.**
- **Check your child's equipment - most schools will provide a list of what each child should take into the exam room. HB pencils must be used because some papers are read by an optical reader and answers need to be clear and stand out. Pencils with an eraser topper are more convenient for eradicating mistakes. Pack your child's pencil case with several sharpened pencils, so they don't waste time sharpening during the exam, and also include several pens.**
- **Try to plan ahead as much as possible so that you are not rushing around during the week leading to the test and, as far as possible, the house is calm and organised. It will be good for you too!**
- **Plan in advance to set off for the test venue in plenty of time to avoid panicking if the journey takes longer than you anticipated. Double check start times and instructions with the school. Arrangements for the test may be published on the**



website. If you haven't been to the test venue before, it is helpful to do a dry run of the journey, especially at the time you intend to leave on the day itself so that you can experience the traffic at that time. You can then make adjustments to your journey time and the time you need to leave home.

- **Prepare yourself that your child or other children may become upset. Test supervisors will be experienced in dealing with such situations and will have been advised about what to do.**
- **If a child, including your own, cannot be reassured in the exam room, in most circumstances a supervisor will accompany the child out of the room, calm them down and then return them to the exam room. It is very rare that a child cannot be encouraged to continue with the test.**
- **Make sure your child (and you!) go to bed early, and eat a healthy breakfast together.**

! ON THE DAY:

- **Use constructive talk about the task ahead, preparing your child mentally to face the challenge. Try to normalise the day by keeping to your usual routine as much as possible.**
- **Aim to arrive at the school early, in case of problems on the journey.**
- **If your child has a mobile phone, remind them to turn it off and not to turn it back on until after the test or take it from them to prevent any problems.**
- **Try to avoid topics of conversation that make you – and your child – tense, unless, of course, they want to talk over their worries and concerns with you.**
- **If your child starts to panic, try to counter self-defeating thoughts by telling them that, whatever the outcome, you are proud of the effort they have made. All they need to do is to work calmly through the paper and do the best they can.**
- **If you get there early, try to avoid giving your child last minute reminders – they will not take them in and will make them anxious. Be calm and reassuring, and you will help them to feel calm too.**
- **If things go wrong and you get there late, stay calm. If you are anxious, this will transfer to your child, and they will begin to worry too. Find a senior member of staff and explain what has happened. It is entirely up to the test supervisors whether your child will be given extra time but, if this is not possible, you can ask them to help your child settle in so that they can begin work as soon as they can.**

If your child is unwell during the test, try to get written confirmation from the supervisors or test centre about what happened. Ask if information will be sent to the exam board so they can take your child's illness into account when they mark their paper.

What if my child is unwell before they leave home?

- If your child is unwell before they leave home on the test day itself or in the days leading up to the test, the guidance from all of the examining bodies is the same: your child should not sit the test if they are ill. Ask yourself the question: 'Would I have kept my child at home if this was an ordinary school day?' If the answer is 'Yes', do not send them to take the test.
- It is advisable to take your child to the GP or to arrange a home visit if they are very ill and to ask the GP for a letter to confirm that your child was ill on the day of the test. This should be sent or taken to the school where your child would have taken the test. Make a photocopy for your records.
- Contact the school or test exam board to find out when and where your child can retake the test. In some cases, this will be at a time and a place to suit the school or test centre and individual arrangements may be made for your child.
- You will understandably be eager to know how the test went, what the hardest question was, and what your child wrote in their English Composition. You will want to hear positive comments from your child that they did well. But avoid interrogating them! They will be exhausted and need a break and something to eat and drink before they can speak coherently. When they eventually tell you that they did not answer three questions on the Comprehension paper, try to appear calm and unconcerned. They need your continuing support, especially if they have to take more tests.
- Tell your child that you are proud of them, whatever the outcome of the test and that they have done their best, and that is all anyone can expect.
- If your child tells you that something happened during the exam which affected their concentration e.g. a fire alarm, call the centre to find out if the exam board has been notified. This is important as there may be grounds for an appeal if your child is unsuccessful and you believe that the incident may have been a contributory factor.



INTERVIEWS

Most interviews last around 15 minutes and include the following questions:

- What do you like doing in your spare time?
- What is your favourite sport/hobby?
- What is your favourite book/film/TV programme?
- Which school do you attend?
- What is your favourite subject?
- Do you play a musical instrument?



Some schools ask some mental Maths questions, but they are usually not too demanding. It is a way of seeing how your child copes under pressure.

Another school might ask general knowledge questions e.g.: 'Who is the prime minister?' 'What is the capital of China?'

Self-confidence

Interviewers are usually looking for confidence rather than knowledge. If your child does not know the answer, tell them to be honest and say 'I'm sorry, I don't know' and, if they are very self-confident, to add 'General knowledge is not my strong point,' and the interviewer will move onto the next question.

Many schools show a picture as a starting point for discussion, e.g: Can you describe the picture? How do you think the people in the picture are feeling? Do you like the picture and why?

Speaking clearly

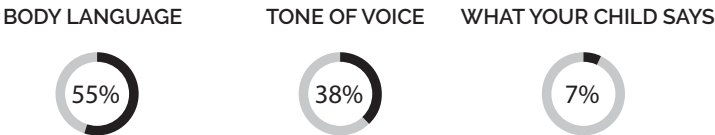
There are no right or wrong answers to this kind of task. The examiners are looking for a child who can express ideas well and who speaks clearly, intelligently and coherently. Remind your child to be polite and to say their name confidently. Encourage them to speak clearly, naturally and with assurance.

Why our school?

Your child might be asked why they would like to attend a particular school and what they liked about it on the Open Day. So make sure your child is prepared by visiting the school and/or by looking at its website to gather as much background information as possible.

First impressions

First impressions are very important. According to research, we make up our minds about someone in the first ten seconds of meeting them and, if the first impression is negative, it will take longer for our judgement to be reversed. The most important aspects of how your child presents themselves are:



Appearance

Paying attention to physical appearance is vital. Make sure your child has brushed their hair, and their clothing is formal and smart. If your child has a school uniform and it still looks presentable, they should wear it to the interview.



Body language

Help your child with their posture, to stand and sit straight, to look confident and calm. Remind them to make eye contact, smile, and to look friendly. Help your child to practise a firm handshake. Shaking hands is mainly an adult form of greeting so your child may need to become familiar with it. It is impressive if your child can offer their hand to the interviewer first.

Any questions?

Your child might be asked if they have any questions, so prepare one or two in advance e.g.: 'What sports are available to Year 7?' 'Can I learn a musical instrument?' 'What books do you read in English in the first year?'

Topics

Apart from finding out information about the school (see above), ask your child to list their hobbies and interests and think about what they might say about them. Hobbies frequently crop up as an interview topic.

Reading First News and watching news programmes is great to prepare for these questions, but don't turn it into another test. If your child acknowledges that they don't know the answer to a question clearly, articulately or politely – that is fine! An ideal answer is 'I'm afraid I haven't come across that yet, but it sounds interesting, and I'd love to find out more...' or something similar. **Good schools love curious minds!**

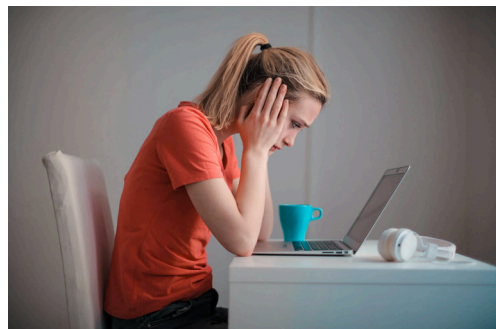
Practice Interviews

Ask an adult friend your child doesn't know well to come round and conduct a mock interview. You can listen outside the door and check how your child gets on! Try this with several people if you can. Although your child will be nervous at first, after a few practice runs they will be much more comfortable.

The Real Interview

Look back at the section of the guide on preparing your child for the 11-plus and entrance exams. A number of tips are also relevant for preparing them for their interview, such as reducing stress by exercising, eating a balanced diet and getting a good night's sleep.

Take your child's favourite book along to help them relax while they are waiting to be called into the interview room. Take some water, too and ensure that they keep themselves hydrated in order to stave off that 'dry mouth' feeling which comes from being nervous.



Good Luck!

Results of the 11+ and school allocations

In some areas, you will receive your child's 11+ result before the outcome of their school allocation. In other areas, you receive both on the same day. The notification usually arrives by post or email.

? TIPS TO GET YOU THROUGH THIS NERVE-WRACKING TIME:

1. **Meet up with friends in the same position rather than sit and worry.**
2. **Results and school allocations are strictly confidential until they are officially published. Avoid calling the Admissions' department before the published date/ time.**
3. **Remind your child that there are options and it is not a disaster if they do not pass or if their application to a school is not successful.**
4. **If the letter is handed to your child, open it away from the school. Whooping for joy while other parents are coming to terms with disappointment lacks dignity!**
5. **If your child is successful, explain that their friends may not have passed, and they should be careful of announcing their success to everyone. Prepare your child to be sensitive when they go into school and be kind to children who have failed.**
6. **If your child has been allocated a different school from their friends, explore how they will still be able to stay in touch with them after September. Reassure them that they will soon make new friends.**
7. **Suggest to your child that they should speak to a teacher that they get on well with if they do not pass and are upset or teased. In most cases, this will be their class teacher. Remind them about all the good things about their current school that they will be able to enjoy until the end of Year 6: their friends, the school facilities, after-school clubs, proximity to home and even the sweet shop en route!**
8. **Reassure your child regularly about their future school. Make positive comments and tell them that they will do well there, make new friends and join in new and exciting activities.**



SCHOLARSHIPS AND BURSARIES

If you are thinking about private education, but are unsure whether you can afford it, you might be able to get financial support.

Scholarships

Most schools award scholarships for academic achievement; for example, the child with the highest marks in the English entrance exam will probably be awarded the English scholarship place. However, scholarships can be worth only a couple of hundred pounds, and you will have to pay the rest of the fees.

Other scholarships are awarded for talent in music or sport. Sporting and music scholarships can be worth up to 50% of the fees, and you usually have to submit an additional application form. For a music scholarship, your child normally needs to be at least grade 5 on their chosen instrument and, in some schools, even grade 6 – and most schools prefer it if you can play two instruments. You also stand a better chance if you play a rare instrument.

There are also scholarships for subjects such as drama and art. Again, you have to apply separately and sit a separate exam and/or attend an audition.

Bursaries

Bursaries are usually means-tested and based on need. You submit a year's worth of family accounts and fill in a detailed questionnaire about your financial circumstances. This can be quite probing. If you qualify, some schools make home visits before granting bursaries. Other schools take existing financial commitments into account, such as the care costs of a disabled child, or if you are already paying school fees for another child.

Schools outside London usually only offer bursaries if you have a joint income below £30k. One top London school will consider your application if your income is less than £100k. Some schools are transparent and publish details of their bursaries, or will explain their requirements if you speak to the Bursar. Others are keen to keep their conditions more fluid, and exercise flexibility to find their preferred candidates each year.

It is well worth speaking to the school and Bursar to explore whether their policy is rigid or if there is room for manoeuvre. The more you get to know the Bursar or Admissions Officer, the better. You will learn a lot, you can talk about your child's strengths, and you also become less anonymous.

Many schools consider 50% awards and a few lucky children get 100% bursaries including books, uniform, school trips and music lesson allowances.

The levels of funding are reviewed yearly, and adjustments are made to the amount of income you can earn before you are unable to apply.

What if my child does not pass the 11+ or does not get in to their chosen school?

Try to hide your disappointment

Take a look again at the section 'After the Test'. Every year, very able children don't succeed, for a variety of reasons. Try to hide your disappointment so that your child doesn't feel that they have let you down. It is only natural if your child feels a bit low. Be supportive and encouraging, and they will feel better about things in their own time.

It might help to have a few facts and figures to hand which can put your child's disappointment into perspective: 'There were 300 people trying to get in this year – more than they had last year. ... I've heard it was the toughest year ever.' Make sure, too, that if you promised your child a reward for effort they receive it as soon as possible.

Be positive about the school your child will attend

13+

Talk positively about the school which is your back-up option. Most schools these days are improving rapidly and have policies in place for 'Gifted and Talented' students. If your child has innate ability, the chances are that they will be able to succeed and educationalists believe that some children, especially boys, mature later and that the 13+ exam is a more appropriate age at which to test their ability.

The future

There is more movement from secondary schools to the private sector than some schools will acknowledge – places in other years do become available, although schools are not keen to publicise this. So there may be an option for your child to start again elsewhere. It is worth staying in touch with your preferred school to receive information about places which might become available during the year and signing up to receive email alerts or the school newsletter.

There is always a 6th form to consider too. Fees for two years might suit your finances better than for seven. Again, there are bursaries available, especially for girls' private schools which seem to lose more numbers than their male counterparts in the 6th form. Many church schools relax their entrance requirements in the 6th form – another possible option.

Academic success is not everything

Many entrepreneurs, authors or wealthy games designers did not have academic success at school. Sir Richard Branson and Sir Alan Sugar are notable examples. Of equal importance is helping your child to find out what their interests and passions are, and encouraging them to develop them in a direction that will help them feel fulfilled.

Now that you know the background to tests at 11+ and have an overview of the whole process, it's time to look at each test in more detail.

PART 2: CLOSE-UP ON THE 11+

ENGLISH

Overview

Nearly all 11+ entrance exams require your child to sit an English paper, and most English papers have two parts:

1. *Comprehension.*
2. *Creative Writing or Composition.*

A small proportion of schools do things differently, but Comprehension and Creative Writing are the two skills your child needs to master. Although your child will have learnt how to read, understand and respond to a piece of writing, the kind of comprehension skills demanded by the 11+ are different, and they will need specific preparation.

Preparing your child: The Long-Term

Encourage a love of reading. It doesn't matter nearly as much what your child is reading, as long as they are reading something. Boys tend to give up reading earlier than girls, and reading in general declines from Year 5. Movies based on books can be a good way to encourage reluctant readers – movie first, and then the book. This strategy is especially appropriate for boys. Try to persuade your child to read on a tablet, or on an e-reader such as Kindle, and consider a star chart for effort. There is also a great deal you can do to build vocabulary and spelling, such as playing Scrabble or Hangman or other word games.



! TIP:

If you are starting late and are pressed for time, focus on the Comprehension section of the paper rather than the Creative Writing. Children are generally more motivated by the Creative Writing paper than by any other part of the 11+ exam.

COMPREHENSION

What are the examiners looking for?

As the name comprehension suggests, examiners are looking for evidence of understanding of one (or sometimes two) short passages of writing, focusing on plot, an appreciation of the characters' feelings and behaviour, and the meaning and use of vocabulary.

They also want to see evidence that your child can understand and explain two other features of a piece of writing:

- 1) **The atmosphere.**
- 2) **The author's intention.**

How to read the text

Children need to appreciate that reading for a comprehension exam is quite different from normal reading. The reading passages can be very dull, perhaps because examiners believe that a comprehension test should not be enjoyable!

It can be difficult to read the text with the level of understanding that the 11+ requires, and when they first start, many children need to read it several times before they have 'got it'. Because it is difficult to grasp a passage on first reading, many children fail to complete the comprehension questions in the available time. Acquiring the ability to read and understand quickly is vital. There is no easy short-cut, but here are some tips.

Pay attention to all aspects of the text

It is essential to pay attention to all aspects of the text. It will only cover one side of paper at most, so everything will count. It is different from reading the whole book, where you can let your attention slip, or skip over parts, and pick up the thread by reading on. Avoid plunging straight into practising exam papers. That can be daunting.

Practise by discussing answers to questions. Photocopy a page from your child's favourite book and ask your child to read it aloud (to begin with) and work through some simple questions together, such as:

'Who is this passage about?'

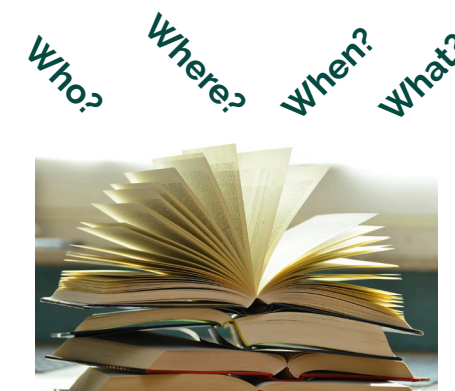
'Where and when is it set?'

'What is happening?'

'Are the characters likeable or unpleasant?'

'Are the characters facing a problem or challenge of some sort?'

'Is the passage written in the 1st, 2nd or 3rd person?'



Comprehension: Cracking the Code

It can be useful to think of comprehension as 'cracking a code' or doing a puzzle. The passage has hidden clues – spot them to get the marks. The 'surface' questions offer lower marks and are basic 'fetch and retrieve' questions that show to what extent candidates are able to read for information e.g. who the characters are, when the passage was set and what is taking place. This will entail questions such as 'What three words are used to describe Polly's Aunt's umbrella?' 'What three details tell the reader that this story is set in Victorian times?' They can also include some difficult vocabulary questions, possibly challenging for the average 10-11 year old. If a child has not met the word before, the examiner expects them to have a good guess at its meaning, based on the context of the passage.

Finding the deeper meaning

The deeper layer questions are worth higher marks e.g. 'What are the characters feeling?' 'What is the atmosphere like in the passage?' and 'What is the author trying to make you, the reader, feel?' Your child must demonstrate an appreciation of the meaning below the surface. To do well, your child needs to practise finding the 'deeper' meaning. This usually involves seeing implications which may not be expressed openly, but can be deduced from the way characters speak and behave and from the way the author describes what is happening.

Encourage your child to consider how people in their everyday lives might be feeling. Build it into other activities, such as reading stories at bedtime together, or watching TV or a film. Ask 'What do you think X felt when Y happened?' or 'How would you have felt in Y's position?' As your child becomes more confident in their judgements, ask them to turn this into concise, brief and grammatically correct sentences. Do this out loud at first and then progress to a written response. Some of the more dramatic passages from Harry Potter or Northern Lights are ideal for this activity.

Opposites

If your child struggles to put their opinions into words, encourage them to think about feelings in simple pairs of opposites. 'Is Peter happy or sad?' 'Is the grandmother kind or cruel?' This technique can also be used to discuss the 'atmosphere' of the passage: 'Does this poem feel dark or light?' 'Is it a light, sunny atmosphere or is it dark and stormy?'

The author's Intention

The author's intention – the writer's aim in writing the passage – is a more difficult challenge for children. A typical question might be:

Q: 'In the passage, find an example of a description in which the author describes the trees as if they were people. Explain what impression the author is trying to create in this description.'

Explain to your child that they should turn each task into a sentence opener for each part of their answer. So, they might write:

A: "An example of a description in which the author describes the trees as if they were people is 'the bony fingers of the trees'. The impression the author is trying to create is of a spooky atmosphere as it makes you think the trees might come alive and touch you."

Writing techniques to look out for that will enable your child to gain marks for explaining the author's intention are:

1. **Repetition, rhyming words, alliteration (words beginning with the same letter e.g. gentle giant).**
2. **Similes and metaphors. A simile is a comparison using the words 'like' or 'as' e.g. 'as swift as a cheetah' or 'her voice was like an angel's'. A metaphor makes a comparison by comparing one thing to another with words that would not be usually used to describe it e.g. 'Her words are pearls' or 'You are my sunshine'. Similes are much easier to spot than metaphors – your child will need to practise finding examples of both.**
3. **Short sentences for tension.**
4. **Anthropomorphic language (where inanimate objects are given human qualities e.g. 'the bony fingers of the trees', 'the wind groaned like an old man.' Notice that the first example is also a metaphor and the second is also a simile).**
5. **A word or sentence set apart for impact. e.g. 'The shot rang out. It's over.'**
6. **Strong contrasts that make the reader sit up and take notice: e.g. 'The languid summer's day was shocked into life by an explosion'.**
7. **Words that are particularly dramatic or extreme e.g. gargantuan, razor-sharp.**



Question prompts

Some question prompts to get your child thinking:

What is the basic mood / feeling of the passage? Is it scary, dreamy, serious, funny, lonely? What is the language like? Long sentences or short? Are any words or phrases different from the rest of the text? Why would the author have done this? Is the language formal (such as in a business letter) or informal (such as in a conversation between friends)?

Practice papers

Once your child has grasped this, begin to practise weekly EPP's and mock exams. There are some 11+ practice papers available free online.

Take care not to start practice papers too early. Getting used to breaking down a passage is more useful than too many exam comprehensions. The Easter holiday in Year 5 is probably the best time to start practice papers. It is more effective to tackle fewer papers and take time to go through them together afterwards, working out where your child went wrong and how they

could have done better. Doing the same paper again a few weeks later is also a good idea, especially at first, as your child will gain encouragement from being able to tackle questions more confidently on the second occasion.

The book **ISEB English Practice Exercises 11+** by Andrew Hammond offers a good basic introduction, although it is better for 'surface' questions than deeper analysis. You can then move on to practice papers from a specific school.

Most schools will offer one example of their past papers but rarely more than one. Manchester Grammar School offers a selection, which can be downloaded for free. The City of London Boys' School's sample papers are very demanding, and are good for practice closer to the exam and once your child has gained in confidence. At **Learnenglishmaths.com** we use a range of past papers from different schools.



How to read the passage in the exam

Your child needs a technique to enable them to read the passage when under pressure. There is a range of approaches, but one technique that is effective is as follows:

1. Read the rubric (the instructions)

Double-check how long you have. Check which parts are compulsory and where there are choices. Do you have to write in pen or pencil, or is it up to you? Then:

2. 'Scan' the text

Train your child to use a pencil to underline key descriptions/ individual words/bits of speech as they read. Underlining helps your child to 'fix' the text in their minds and to break it up. It is also useful to ask your child to look for the sections of the text which are the most important because they provide the most information. The objective is for your child to establish the basics – is it fiction or poetry? Contemporary or Victorian? Main characters – child or adult? Basic action/plot?

3. Quickly scan the questions

Advise your child against trying to absorb the detail of each question on the first scan. Note which questions have the highest marks, and circle them. Often, these are questions about the characters' 'feelings or other aspects of the 'deeper layer' of meaning.

4. Read the text again

This time, look for any clues about the 'atmosphere' or the 'feelings' of the characters (the 'deeper layer'). Be swift, but look beyond what happens – the action. If you're struggling, ask yourself simple pair questions, to kick-start your thinking: Is the passage happy or sad? Stormy or sunny? Keep the two or three high mark questions in mind which you read a moment ago – they will give you useful clues as to what is most significant in the passage.

5. Answer the questions

Your child will develop their favourite order to tackle things, but experiment with doing this:

- Complete a couple of the first questions on the paper, which tend to be low mark questions – just to get going.
- Then, tackle the highest mark questions. They tend to be towards the end of the paper.
- Go back and do the rest of the lower mark questions. In the unlikely event that you have any spare time, read over your longest (high mark) answers and correct any spelling or punctuation mistakes – a marker's pet hate! Emphasise to your child that it is very important to number the questions accurately if they answer the questions in a different order.

QUESTION TYPES – AND HOW TO ANSWER

Ensure your child takes notice of which questions have the highest marks, as they will take the most time to answer.

Calculate how much time your child can give to the high mark answers. With past papers from a specific school, you can work this out, approximately at least, and let your child practise accordingly – say, writing 12 lines of A4 in 8 minutes so they have a feel for how much they should write for those answers which offer the highest marks.

Evidence

- Always provide evidence from the text. Comprehension papers are about looking for specific details, to back up the answer

e.g. **Q:** How can we tell Molly is a sad character?

A: She is a sad character because her hat is described as 'droopy', and her hair is described as 'faded'. (As explained earlier, notice how the question has been turned into a statement in the answer).

Number of marks

- The number of marks available also suggests how many pieces of evidence the examiner is looking for e.g. Q2: What characteristics does the writer emphasise about Molly's aunt's umbrella? (3 marks). The mark allocation suggests that there are three attributes of the umbrella which you need to find and that identifying one will only earn one mark.

Always attempt an answer

- Always give an answer, even if you don't know. You might get some credit if you are partly right.

Read the question carefully

4. Answer the question! That is why it is a good habit to get your child used to turning part of the question into a statement at the beginning of the answer to make sure they don't get side-tracked.

Short sentences

5. Get your child used to writing in short, sharp sentences, unless they are capable of writing fluently at speed under exam conditions.

Answer all parts of the question

6. Some questions have more than one section.
e.g. **Q:** What is Polly's aunt's full title? What nickname has Polly secretly given her Aunt?

Make sure your child answers both parts.

Compare and Contrast

7. Some papers use compare and contrast, often for fairly high marks.

e.g. **Q2:** Describe three ways Polly and her sister Rachel are similar and three ways they are different.

Describing the differences between Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley is good practice.

Make sure your child gives evidence from the text and not the movie!

Give a Reason

8. Some questions ask for your child's opinion.
e.g. **Q4:** Did you like or dislike this character / passage? Give your reasons why.

Make sure they include their reasons for their opinion, based on how the author presents the character in the passage.

This type of question is asking your child to demonstrate their understanding of the text by providing evidence from the passage to justify their opinion.

Your child will not gain marks for just saying what they like or dislike without referring in detail to the passage.

Plot, Setting and Language

9. More marks will be gained by producing evidence from the plot, setting and language used.

e.g. **A:** I think Polly dislikes her aunt. Everyone else is very impressed by her title, but Polly makes up a cheeky nickname for her. The author also tells us that Polly notices her aunt's 'tight smile' and 'narrow eyes' which aren't the sort of features Polly would notice if she felt warmly

towards her aunt.

Summarising

10. Another favourite question is 'Summarise in your own words...' which is difficult if your child's vocabulary is limited. Practise word games.

For example, you say 'hot' and your child thinks of synonyms such as 'fiery.'

CREATIVE WRITING OR COMPOSITION

Most 11-plus independent schools and grammar schools include Creative Writing in the English exam. There is usually a choice of task and questions can take a number of forms. For example:

- Continue the passage above (often the same passage as the Comprehension section).
- A choice of titles designed to allow reasonable freedom e.g. 'The Dream', 'The Stormy Night'.
- Write a story inspired by this photograph / picture.
- A non-fiction option e.g. Write a description of a celebrity or sports person you admire.

Choosing the Task

Your child needs to practise deciding which task they will do in the exam and revising that style of writing. Help them by giving them three titles verbally and ask them to choose one in thirty seconds. They don't have to write their response – just get them used to making a decision quickly. Your child may be better at one type of creative writing than another and it is an effective strategy to train them to choose that kind of writing task and to have a second choice if that type of writing does not appear on the exam paper. For the same reason, it is helpful for your child to know which type of creative writing question they don't want to tackle. It depends on your child's personal preferences. They need to play to their strengths.

'Continue the passage above' questions have the advantage of providing your child with ready-made characters and a plot that they don't have to imagine from scratch. Encourage your child to try to write in a similar style to the author. If your child selects this option, they should realise that this is the choice which is most likely to be selected by the majority of candidates. This means that it is harder to stand out from lots of other children's writing and to be original.

The Basics

First of all, make sure the basics are nailed:

Who are the characters – are you going to continue the story by including all of them or just one or two?

Is the passage written in the first or third person? – it is important that you carry on in the same style.

Are there any particular features of the author's writing you are being asked to reproduce? e.g. very short or very long sentences, a journalistic feel, Victorian language.

Mood

What is the basic mood– happy, sad, tense, threatening? Make sure your child knows where they are heading and what the ending will be before they start and reinforce the message that they must still plan even though the story is not being created from scratch. The story's beginning is the passage, but it still has to have a middle and an end, both of which should be planned before your child starts to write.

Dramatic Events

Encourage your child not to be afraid to make something dramatic, or even surprising, happen – it is important that their responses to the 'Continue the Passage' Creative Writing task stand out. A dramatic or surprising turn of events can be distinctive. Just as long as it is believable.

Feelings and Emotions

Your child needs to deliver more than plot development. Schools are very keen on seeing whether children can appreciate characters' feelings and motivations in Comprehension exercises, and will be looking for the same in Creative Writing or Composition questions. Encourage your child to include at least one or two sentences about what their character feels in every Creative Writing or Composition practice task. Girls tend to describe feelings more than boys.

Be Creative

Even if your child is a natural storyteller, they are going to need to practise being creative and to construct a plot, to invent characters and produce eye-catching language, as well as to keep an eye on their spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Length of Writing

Make sure your child knows how much they are aiming to write. Get a good idea from past papers of how long they will have for the Creative Writing section. It is usually 30 or 40 minutes, and schools expect about a page and a half of A4 of writing in this time – about five paragraphs worth. Writing more isn't a problem, but the quality, structure and accuracy of the writing is far more important than length.

One successful technique your child can practise during their preparation is to develop 3 or 4 skeleton story plans that they can adapt to different titles. They can decide on basics like the name of the main character and the location, and then work out a simple three- point plan.

HOW TO WORK OUT A SIMPLE SKELETON STORY

! Your child needs the following ingredients

- **A decision about whether they are writing in the first ('I') or third person ('he, she, it'). They should follow the style of the passage.**
- **A main character (just one developed character – the story is only a side and a half!)**
- **Identifying where and when the story is located.**
- **A problem or a challenge for that character. This is essential. It could be another character e.g. an enemy of the main character. Make sure your child identifies only one challenge – there isn't time for more.**
- **A surprising or dramatic way that the problem gets resolved.**

Your child should only start writing when they have got all 5 elements in place.

Keep it Simple

Help them to avoid over-complicating the story. They should write in simple sentences, avoiding 'and then, and then...'

The Ending

Producing an effective ending is possibly the most difficult decision, so it is worth putting effort into helping your child to develop several alternative endings which they can use or adapt, perhaps using favourite books or films for inspiration.

Adapting the Skeleton Story

Once your child has worked out their skeleton stories, they should practise adapting them so they fit lots of different titles such as 'The Dream', 'The Day I Nearly Died', 'The Best Summer Ever', 'The Crystal Cave', 'The Escape', 'An Unexpected Event'. So, if the stock character they have developed is mad scientist Dr. Roger Strangeways, they decide what happens to him in 'The Dream', what happens to him in 'The Best Summer Ever', in 'The Escape' and so on.

Of course, your child doesn't have to use these skeleton stories – but it will give them confidence knowing they have the stories in their exam 'toolkit' and have something to fall back on in the exam. It is very important that they can adapt their stories rather than be at a loss because the exact title doesn't appear on the exam paper.

Bring Characters to Life

Encourage your child to bring their main character(s) to life. This involves more than giving them a name – it includes a description, idiosyncrasies and habits. Ask your child to practise describing their character to you. It will help your child to know that 'Dr. Roger Strangeways' has thin hair, already flecked with grey...' or how 'Alice always felt better wearing her battered old glasses; they were her armour against the world...'

Direct Speech

Advise your child to include some direct speech but make sure it is vital to the story rather than everyday pleasantries such as "Alice said, 'Hello.'" Direct speech should move the plot on or express emotions.

Description

Encourage your child to include at least one ambitious descriptive paragraph, because Creative Writing is their opportunity to show off their writing skills. Places, landscape and the weather are always good topics for descriptive language such as adjectives, similes and metaphors. Almost any fictional title allows for a paragraph about the sky, season or time of day. It may help your child to think about story writing as if it is a film, describing what the camera can see, especially if they are a visual learner and 'see' pictures in their mind.



Techniques

When practising the Comprehension exercise your child will have learned that they can get high marks if they can spot how an author uses contrasts to create impact, or how a writer chooses to put a sentence on a separate line for dramatic effect – you could suggest mirroring the same techniques to make their story more effective.

Staying on Track

Story writing from a picture or photo provides some inspiration on location and possibly period and character to get things started and is helpful for those 'gone blank' times that even the most talented children face from time to time. However, it is also easy to go off track. With a period passage your child has to take care that the story is historically accurate. So, if the passage is about Victorian times, the story cannot include a plane taking off from London Heathrow. Obvious – well yes, but in the pressurised environment of an exam room these things can happen.



All the same rules apply as when writing from a title. The story still needs:

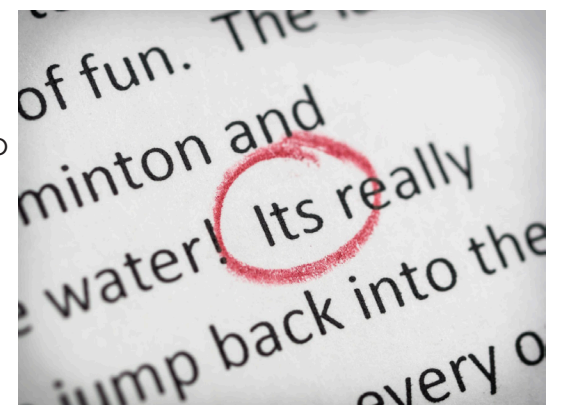
- A decision about whether the story is to be written in the first or third person.
- A main character.
- A problem or a challenge for that character – this is essential.
- A firm grasp of where and when the story is located.
- A surprising or interesting way that the problem or challenge is resolved.
- An appropriate and effective ending.

Unless it is your child's favourite kind of writing and they have a flair for it, avoid non-fiction options such as 'Describe Your Favourite Holiday' ('Easy to write, hard to delight!') or 'Make an Argument in Favour of Vegetarianism'. This demands a logical mind, capable of organising a coherent argument in carefully ordered paragraphs.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Your child will have practised their spelling, punctuation and grammar for the Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar Test (SPAG) if they are in a state primary school, as it is a separate test in the Key Stage 2 SATs at the end of Year 6. However, spotting mistakes in their own writing is more difficult than being accurate in individual questions on the SPAG test. We all find it harder to see errors in our own writing than to identify inaccuracies in someone else's writing.

As your child will receive marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar in the Creative Writing task, they should practise finding mistakes in their own writing and correcting them or asking advice if they don't know how to do so. As well as capital letters, full stops, speech marks, commas and apostrophes, teach your child how to use brackets, semicolons and colons. If they are confident about their use, encourage them to try to include them in their writing in the exam. They will gain credit for being able to use more complex punctuation.



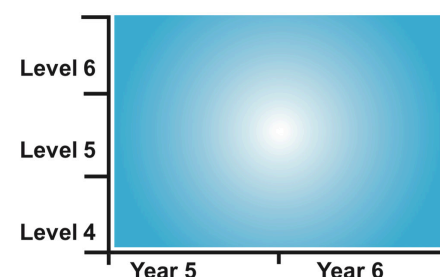
General Advice

You should have a good idea of your child's maths ability from the work you give to them on a daily basis. If you feel maths is an area of weakness, it is certainly worth investing more time in. Together with the Non-Verbal Reasoning test, Maths is the paper that many top schools look at the most closely. Your child will need to aim to achieve at least the equivalent of Level 6 by the time they sit their entrance exams. This is two levels above the minimum expectation at the end of Year 6 (Level 4) and one level above the level expected by the end of Year 7 in the Secondary School in the state sector (Level 5).



Starting Early? Make it Fun

If you are starting to prepare your child early, grab our homeschooling strategies guide and learn more on what you need. Maths is also about having confidence to apply what has been learned to a task or problem. The earlier you can ensure that your child knows their times-tables (up to 12), the better. Chanting or clapping games and tunes – even creating a rap – can help to keep this fun and reinforce learning.



Number Patterns

App programmes like Squeebles are worth some iPad time if your child has one. Some children enjoy finding the patterns in the times tables as an aid to committing them to memory. Pointing out number patterns also helps to vary rote learning. In the 9 times table, for example, the individual numbers in the totals always add up to 9, so 9, 18 (1+8=9), 27 (2+7=9), 36 (3+6=9) and so on. In the 11 times table, the totals are the multiplier repeated twice so $3 \times 11 = 33$, $4 \times 11 = 44$, $5 \times 11 = 55$. The 10 times table adds a zero to the increasing number so $3 \times 10 = 30$, $4 \times 10 = 40$, $5 \times 10 = 50$.



Basic Fractions

A knowledge of basic fractions is also needed. Number cubes and cutting up fruit or cakes help make this fun. You can also teach fractions and Maths related to circles by cutting up a pizza! Eating it afterwards adds to the enjoyment! Sudoku also helps develop confidence with numbers.

Incorporate Maths into everyday life – working out how many grapes would be left in the fruit

bowl if someone ate a third of them; weeks and months until Christmas; money Maths when you're shopping.

Into Year 5: Four basic operations

As your child moves into Year 5, check that they are secure with the Four Basic Operations: Adding, Subtracting, Multiplying, Dividing. These four operations are the foundation of Maths. January of Year 5 is when you ought to be preparing more seriously, but don't start practising exam papers yet. Take a look at a few past papers for your target school (or similar schools, if yours doesn't issue past papers) so that you can plan ahead. However, don't show them to your child at this stage.

Past Papers

The Easter term is the right time to begin past papers. Begin with one or two Bond papers for their age group and give them papers from a higher group if they are confident. This will give you a good idea of where you need to focus your efforts in helping them to extend their learning. A weekly Maths Bond paper is a good idea, interspersed with fun Maths activities. Try to apply what your child is learning to their everyday lives – it will seem more relevant and they will remember it better.

Focus

Bond practice papers mirror exam papers by setting questions which move between different kinds of maths problems. However, most children learn maths by focusing on similar problems or activities for a while and consolidating what they have learned, before moving on to another range of skills and related problems. One effective way of finding out how well your child has learned a particular skill e.g. converting fractions into percentages is to select questions from past papers which test that skill.

Bitesize

The Bitesize KS2 website is a very effective learning tool. It has very clear, simple explanations with examples, including interactive activities where your child can attempt questions before revealing the correct answer. It is clearly divided up by topic but also moves between different types of problems, similar to the way the exam paper is structured. You can also move between introductory explanations, games and practice sheets.

DoodleMaths

DoodleMaths, an online learning site, gets harder as your child improves. It also introduces new topics clearly and explains them well ('New This Week') while also mixing things up ('My 9 a Day'). You are also sent a weekly report showing how much time your child has spent on the site so they can work independently, but you can keep an overview.

Show working out

Encourage your child to **get into the habit of writing down their working out**. This helps to track where they are going wrong, and what needs more practice. Most selective schools who have entrance exams also give marks for attempting a question in a logical fashion, even if the answer is wrong. It is hard to develop this habit just before the exam so it is important to ask your child to practise this as early as possible. If they have shown their working out, and their approach is right, they can pick up vital marks, even if the answer is incorrect.

$$542 + 210 + 23 = 775$$

Inverse operations

Similarly, they need to be able to understand the idea of inverse operations – that multiplication and division are the opposite of each other, for example.

Maths dictionary

A Maths dictionary is also helpful for looking up the meaning of mathematical terms. The Usborne Junior Illustrated Maths Dictionary is not only very useful for definitions but also includes examples to illustrate meaning. Usborne has a good website too, with lots of Maths links at www.usborne-quicklinks.com.

KEY TOPICS

Some crucial topics your child needs to cover during the Spring and Summer terms in Year 5:

Measurement

Your child should be able to work confidently in metric measurements. Conversion backwards and forwards (e.g. cm to metres, kilometres to centimetres) is essential. Make sure they also know how to convert weights (e.g. grams to ounces and kilograms to pounds and vice versa). Also check that they understand the abbreviations of length and weight e.g. ft, yds, lbs, oz, gms, kgs.

Check that your child knows the shortcuts to conversions within the metric system: Millimetres to centimetres: take away 1 zero. Centimetres to metres: take away 2 zeros. Metres to kilometres, take away 3 zeros. And, of course, adding zeros for the reverse conversion.

Time: the 12 and 24-hour clock

Converting one to the other can be made into a game, e.g. on car journeys, which can also include working out how long you have been driving, how long to the destination and how long since you saw a green lorry. You can also use the speedometer to convert miles into kilometres and vice versa. This is not easy and will need your child to use a notepad and pen. Again, using everyday examples like this will contextualise the maths involved, and your child will be more likely to remember what they have learned.

The digital (24 hour) clock appears more often in everyday life than the analogue (12 hour) clock. The digital clock is usually selected to be shown on computer screens, mobile phones and tablets, as well as on public buildings. So you might have to practise reading time and calculating hours and minutes on an analogue clock. Perhaps you could display both in your child's bedroom or the kitchen.



Factors

Numbers which divide exactly into another given number.

So the factors of 12 are 12, 6, 4, 3, 1

Prime Numbers

Numbers which do not divide exactly by anything other than themselves and 1. (Although 1 is not classed as a prime number!)

Prime Factors

Prime Factors are numbers which divide exactly into another given number and which are also Prime Numbers. So the (only) Prime Factor of 12 is 3.

Square Numbers, Cube Numbers and Square Roots

For example, $6/36$, $7/49$, $8/64$. These are relatively straightforward if your child knows their multiplication tables.

Mode, Mean, Medians and Range

- Median sounds like middle, and is literally in the middle of a group of numbers organised by size.
- Mode is another word for fashionable, so it is the number that is most fashionable – the one that crops up the most times in the group.
- Mean wants everything for himself so is the total of all the numbers in the group, divided by the total number of individual numbers.
- Range is another way of saying spread – the spread, or the difference, between the biggest and smallest numbers in the group.

Decimals, Fractions and Percentages

Your child will need to know place values for decimals, how to add and subtract, how to extract percentages of amounts and fractions of amounts. They need to be confident at converting between fractions; decimals and percentages, e.g., $\frac{1}{4} = 0.25 = 25\%$ and to be able to use all three in calculations.

It is almost always easier to turn decimals into fractions:

Q. If 0.4 of 20 children are wearing red, how many children are wearing red?

A. Turn 0.4 into $\frac{4}{10}$ and then multiply by 20 to get 8. 8 out of 20 children are wearing red.

To multiply by 10, move the decimal point one place to the right. To multiply by 100, move the decimal point two places to the right e.g. $50 \times 10 = 500$; $40 \times 100 = 4000$.

To divide by 10, move the decimal point one place to the left. To divide by 100, move the decimal point two places to the left e.g. $60 \div 10 = 6$; $700 \div 100 = 7$

Q. Find 40% of £50.

A. 10% of £50 is £5.

Now multiply £5 by 4 = £20. So 40% of £50 is £20.

Your child needs to know the shortcuts: 10% (divide by 10) or 1% (divide by 100):

Q. Find 42% of £50:

A. 10% of £50 is £5.

Now multiply £5 by 4 = £20.

1pc of £50 is £0.50.

Now multiply £0.50 by 2 = £1.00. Now add £20 plus £1 = £21.

So 42pc of £50 is £21.

To find fractions of amounts, your child must remember to divide the amount by the denominator (bottom number) and then times by the numerator (top number):

Q. $\frac{3}{4}$ of 24.

A. $24 \div 4 = 6$.

$6 \times 3 = 18$.

So $\frac{3}{4}$ of 24 = 18.

Your child should also understand how to divide fractions. The rule is to flip the second fraction and multiply:

Q. $\frac{2}{3}$ divided by $\frac{6}{13}$.

A. Turn this into $\frac{2}{3} \times \frac{13}{6} = \frac{26}{18}$

and then break it down = $1 \frac{8}{18}$ or $1 \frac{4}{9}$

! TIP:


11-plus examiners are keen on setting problems which include working percentages, especially problems involving money.

Volume, Shape and Area

Volume


Some 11+ schools seem to favour volume questions along the lines of how many cubic centimetres would fit into a box 6cm x 8cm x 4cm or into more complicated shapes like a 3-dimensional staircase. Suggest that your child turns a shape like this into a number of smaller shapes, in this case a number of cuboids.

Your child needs to be able to name the different kinds of triangles (**Equilateral, Isosceles, Right-angled, Scalene**), to make triangle measurements and to work out 'missing' angles.



! **REMEMBER**

- 1. The area of a triangle is half its base x its height.**
- 2. The angles in a triangle always add up to 180 degrees.**
- 3. Angles in a straight line always add up to 180 degrees.**



Probability

Probability means the chances of something happening.
At its simplest:

Q. Tom has 100 marbles; 14 are red, and 5 are blue. What is the probability that Tom will pick up a blue marble?

A. This is 5 in 100, which cancels down to 1 in 20.

Q. What is the probability he will pick a red marble?

A. This is 14 in 100, which cancels down to 7 in 50.

BIDMAS stands for Brackets, Indices, Division, Multiplication, Addition and Subtraction.

BODMAS stands for Brackets, Order, Division, Multiplication, Addition and Subtraction.

Both mnemonics refer to the order in which the child needs to do maths operations when they are tackling a question where there is more than one operation to perform. The Usborne Maths Dictionary is useful for explaining BIDMAS and BODMAS in detail.

Harder Questions

Aspects of maths which your child needs to be able to understand and apply to problems, in addition to the national curriculum and independent of their school work, are:

- Problems using Ratios.
- The Nth term.
- Line Symmetry and Rotational Symmetry.
- Algebra beyond basic knowledge.

Key Stage 2 v The 11+

The phrasing of Maths problems at Key Stage 2 is more basic and has fewer sections than the 11+. Your child needs to spend additional time practising problems in these four areas on 11+ papers and identifying which Maths operations they need to do to solve the basic problem: Is it an addition, followed by a multiplication, followed by division, or what?

If your child can cope with it, use the Bitesize KS3 website. Some of the content of 11+ past papers is finding its way into the KS3 curriculum, particularly in questions at the end which tend to be more difficult.

In the final months, it is important for your child to tackle the most difficult areas above, as well as to revise the Year 5 maths curriculum.

FROM THE END OF YEAR 5

Timing

From Easter of Year 5 is the time to be tackling practice papers. Aim for two papers each week from the 4th or Further 4th Bond series. Speed is important, so start to time your child as you move into the summer holidays. Turn it into a game. Perhaps they can choose a quirky timer sound on a mobile to signal that they should have finished the paper. Write how far they got by the end of the exam time at the top of the first page of answers. Encourage your child to try to get further next time while remembering that the quality of the answer is still more important than the number of questions they complete.

Ask them to mark their answers themselves, and then go through their mistakes, working out together what went wrong. If there are any weak spots, now is the time to nail them.



The purpose of doing real past papers shouldn't be to encounter new areas of Maths for the first time but to consolidate learning, to become familiar with the layout and style of questions, and to increase your child's speed.

If your child gets the answers right, but the timing issue keeps cropping up and your child does not finish the paper within the set time, they could be slightly dyslexic or have reading or writing issues. If you think there is a possibility of a more fundamental issue, it is worth getting it properly checked out. Some top schools allow extra exam time for candidates with a diagnosis of a learning difficulty. In most cases, it will be a question of practising under timed conditions rather than any specific underlying problem.

The small 10-minute maths test books that Bond produces are useful. They will not teach your child anything new, but they are good for practice.

STRUGGLING OR STARTING LATE?

Working backwards from the answer

If your child is struggling as they move on to harder school practice papers, allowing them to have the answers can be surprisingly helpful. Working out how to get to the right answer is a good revision technique because your child will know how to tackle a similar question when it is presented differently. Looking at the answer, and then working backwards, can be a real help in grasping what the underlying mechanics are.

Praise

A reminder again to praise. Your child's effort since the last time they tackled a past paper, or the way they tried their best when they were tired, or neat work – all can be praised.

Confidence is vital, and you need to keep up your child's spirits and affirm their belief that 'I can do this'. Try asking your child how they arrived at the answer and ask them to show you their working out. Let them talk you through it once, then go back to the beginning and work through it together until you find the section where things went wrong.

If you are starting late, don't panic! If you feel you are playing catch up and are not sure what your child knows, take the approach for early-starters of trying them on age-specific Bond papers and seeing how they get on.

Knowing Key Definitions

If you are panicking and want an idea of where your child is in their understanding, try asking them for definitions of the following key terms which they will need to be able to recognise in an 11-plus exam. Make sure they know it is not a test, it is just to work out what they have or have not learned yet and to identify where you are going to give them some support. The definitions they provide do not have to be in formal language – as long as they make sense, they explain the terms correctly and you understand what your child means.

! MUST KNOW'S:

- Mode, Mean, Median.
- Perpendicular
- Parallel, Right, Angle, Tally, Frequency, Range, Factors, Multiples.
- Cubed numbers.
- Square numbers, Prime numbers, Prime factors, Ratio.
- Square root.
- Quadrilaterals, Rhombus, Trapezium.

VERBAL REASONING

General advice

Most 11+ entrance exams include a Verbal Reasoning (VR) test which often includes both English and maths. Many grammar schools use both Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal Reasoning (Non-VR) papers as their main method of selecting students. Independent schools tend to focus on separate English and maths papers, but more are adding VR and Non-VR tests to their entrance exams too. VR and Non-VR tests are believed to be an effective way of testing a child's potential, not just their learned ability, and are still regarded by many secondary schools as a reliable indicator of academic potential.

The VR Exam

The scope and content of an 11+ VR exam can differ across the UK so make sure you familiarise yourself with the paper set by the school(s) your child is interested in attending.

Avoid putting your child under time pressure too early in their preparation as it can have a negative impact on their performance. You want them to feel relaxed, to be able to access all their learning, and to give them the space to get used to the kinds of questions they are likely to be asked in the exam.

Starting Early

You can get your child into some good habits by doing the following:

Reading

- Encourage your child to read as much as possible (See our reading list at the end of the guide).
- Ask your child to read to you for half an hour every day. If it is impossible to fit this in, can they read out loud in the bath? Over breakfast in the morning? If necessary, cut this down to ten minutes a day, but discuss vocabulary and help with definitions.



Vocabulary

- Ask your child to write down any words they do not know in a vocabulary book and look up their definitions in a dictionary. [Learnenglishmaths.com](https://www.learnenglishmaths.com) suggests ten new words a week.
- At the end of the week, go back through these words and see if your child remembers the meanings. This stands them in good stead when they start the real vocabulary work in Year 5. Use a dictionary. Encourage the habit of looking up definitions for themselves. There is a range of free online dictionaries if this will be more motivational.

Non-fiction

- Reading doesn't have to be all fiction. Newspapers such as the children's newspaper First News or magazines like National Geographic are excellent for improving vocabulary. Think about your child's interests and buy a specialist magazine or publication written for adults. If they like history, try BBC History magazine. If they are into cars, buy Top Gear Magazine. Horses, Surfing, Pets, Astronomy, Computer Games - all have specialist magazines. The BBC has an interesting magazine called Knowledge, and there is a good general science magazine called Focus that some children like too.
- Ask your child to underline words with a pen or pencil that they do not understand (children often love being given 'permission' to scribble on magazines)! The vocabulary won't be literary, but it will be a notch above their 8/9/10-year-old level, and tailoring the learning of new words to their interests will be motivational.
- Crosswords, word searches and games that include words or spelling such as Scrabble and Articulate extend your child's vocabulary.

Know the Alphabet

For VR tests, your child needs to know their alphabet inside out and the meanings of a wide range of words. While some of the question types simply test a child's logical deduction skills or their ability to decipher codes, a VR test will also require good vocabulary as well as strong basic Maths skills.

VR includes Maths

Most verbal reasoning tests also include Maths questions. You can find more help in both of these areas in the English and Maths sections in this guide. Some children are naturals at VR, even if they have never encountered it before. These children also tend to be keen on puzzles such as crosswords, word searches, word games, jigsaws, Sudoku and Scrabble. If you can encourage your child to enjoy these activities, they are good informal preparation for VR tests.

Learn the Techniques

It is possible to become adept at VR by learning the techniques to solve the problems. Preparation and practice will assist children who find VR more difficult than curriculum-based learning. The analogy is that if you do the crossword every day you become familiar with how the compilers think, and you can see the solutions more quickly. However, if you do not

possess a good vocabulary in the first place, you will not know the answers to the clues. It is the same principle with VR practice. There is a very wide range of VR question types, so research exactly which question types feature in the papers in your area.

? What kind of questions are on VR tests?

The most common VR tests used in the 11+ are those prepared by GL Assessment (formerly NFER) so our advice focuses on their question types.

There are either 15 or 21 question types on each paper, although papers using all 21 types are most common.

The format of the papers can either be 'standard' format (no answer options are provided, so the child has to provide their own answer) or multiple choice, where five possible answer options are shown and the child has to choose one or more. It is often easier to work out answers using this format as the answer must be one or more of the given options in the list. However, your child must enter their answers very carefully and clearly in the boxes, as the answer sheets are mostly read and marked by a computerised system which uses an optical mark reader.

In areas where the tests are not set by GL Assessment and past papers are not available (such as the Durham CEM test used in Birmingham and Warwickshire, or the Moray House papers used by many Hertfordshire schools) you might need to cover a wider variety of VR question types. The publisher that features the biggest range of questions is probably Bond Assessment, but buy a selection of other books that include different question types.

GL Assessment (NFER) Verbal Reasoning 11+ Multiple-Choice Question Types by Region

There are 21 types of question set by GL Assessment for the 11+, although in some areas only the first 15 types will appear on the question paper. The test types are subject to change without notice, so this chart serves as a rough guide only. Check the content of the relevant past paper from the previous year to identify whether there have been any changes to the format.

QUESTION TYPE	IPS	BUCKS	ESSEX	KENT	WILTS	WIRRAL	GLOS
01 – INSERT A LETTER	A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
02 – RELATED WORDS	B	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
03 – WORD-LETTER CODES	C	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
04 – CLOSEST MEANING	D	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
05 – HIDDEN WORD	E	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
06 – MISSING WORD	F	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
07 – LETTERS FOR NUMBERS	G	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
08 – MOVE A LETTER	J	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
09 – LETTER SERIES	L	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10 – WORD CONNECTIONS	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11 – NUMBER SERIES	P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12 – COMPOUND WORDS	Q	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

13 – MAKE A WORD	R	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
14 – LETTER CONNECTIONS	U	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
15 – READING INFORMATION	Z	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
16 – OPPOSITE MEANING	H	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
17 – COMPLETE THE SUM	I	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
18 – RELATED NUMBERS	K	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
19 – WORD-NUMBER CODES	N	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
20 – COMPLETE THE WORD	O	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
21 – SAME MEANING	S	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

IPS = Internet Primary School, one of the first publishers to categorise the question styles for Verbal Reasoning, using a lettering system.
Note that the last 6 types – the additional questions used in certain areas – are frequently referred to as HIKNOS because the IPS uses these letters to categorise them.

Question Types Grouped Together

When helping your child at home, it may help to link question types together rather than to go through each of the 21 question types in order. This is because the answers to some question types can be worked out by using similar methods and techniques. This is a suggested list:

TYPE	QUESTION NUMBERS	IPS LETTER TYPES
CODE	Types 3, 9 and 14 Type 19	Types C, L and U Type N
MAKING WORDS	Types 1 and 8 Types 5, 6 and 12 Types 13 and 20	Types A and J Types E, F and Q Types R and O
WORD MEANING	Types 2 and 10 Types 4, 16 and 21	Types B and M Types D, H and S
MATHS	Types 7 and 17 Types 11 and 18	Types G and I Types P and K
READING INFORMATION	Type 15	Type Z

Year 5

Most prep schools build VR and non-VR into their lessons from about Year 3. State primary schools do not focus on teaching how to tackle VR and non-VR questions, although they feature in diagnostic tests. Your child needs to master up to 20 different types of questions.

Useful books are:

Bond - How to Do 11+ Verbal Reasoning
11+ & CATs Workbooks (Series) by Stephen Curran (AE Publications). Verbal Reasoning Technique and Practice Books by Susan Daughtrey

Each of these books contains exercises for your child to try. Encourage them to learn a new type of question each week and, when your child understands all the methods, start doing practice papers.

**Here are some of the different types of questions.
(The questions in the actual papers will be a lot harder!)**

Word groups

Q. Underline which of the words in brackets goes best with the words here: Apple, banana, peach, strawberry (cat, train, sausage, pear).

A. Pear – as all the words in the first group are types of fruit.

You can practise this sort of question on long car journeys.

Word categories

Q. Write the following words into the correct groups. Apple, Gazelle, Train, Cat, Banana, Car, Strawberry

A. Fruits – apple, banana, strawberry. Animals – gazelle, cat. Transport – train, car.

This is where your child's vocabulary work from year 4 helps. Continue to build on this.

Pairing words

Q. Underline the two words, one from each group, which are closest in meaning. (run, eat, sing) (race, cry, laugh).

A. Run and race

Again, a wide vocabulary and being able to recognise synonyms – different words with similar meanings – will help your child with this type of question.

Find words that do not belong or are most similar

Q. Underline the two words which are the odd ones out in the following group of words: Cat, strawberry, gazelle, king, dog.

A. Strawberry and king (as they are not animals)

Or

Q. Underline the two words in each line which are most similar in meaning.

Run, cry, look, Race, sing, train

A. Run and race

Find words that are opposite

Your child needs to know antonyms for these types of questions. Again, playing games on car journeys, where your child shouts out a word with an opposite meaning, is a fun way of practising vocabulary.

Q. Underline one word in the brackets which is the most opposite in meaning to the word in capitals.

HAPPY (long, thin, bored, sad, black)

A. Sad

Combine two words to make new words

Q. Identify two words, one from each group, which go together to form a new word. (blue, hand, cat) (look, shake, kind)

A. Handshake.

Choose pairs of opposites

Q. Which pair of words is most opposite in meaning? green, blue. tall, short. angry, greedy.

A. tall, short.

A good way of practising this type of question is to say words which are opposites when you speak to each other e.g 'I am happy', Reply: 'I am sad'.

Complete crosswords

Some exam papers include a simple crossword so your child can show off their Guardian crossword skills.

Alphabetical order

Q. Put these words in alphabetical order: Anteater, Aardvark, Avarice.

A. Aardvark, Anteater, Avarice.

An easy way to pick up marks, but your child might panic, so practise alphabet games with your child. It is a good tip to learn the middle letters of the alphabet rather than your child having to work them out by reciting the whole alphabet in their head from the beginning.

Find a word hidden in a sentence

Q. Find the four letter word hidden between two words in this sentence: We watched the boy have a go at the lucky dip.

A. Goat (go at).

This tests your child's spelling, their vocabulary and their ability to see letter and sound combinations.

Find a small word in a larger word

Q. What three letter word can be added to the letters in capitals to make a new word? The juggler caught the BS.

A. ALL (BALLS).

These questions can be tricky but with practice your child will be able to spot new words confidently.

Work out letter and number sequences

Q. Give the two missing pairs of letters in the following sequence: AB DE GH JK.

A. MN (the third, sixth, ninth and twelfth letters are missing from the sequence).

Your child needs to be focused and organised. Try to encourage them to get into the habit of writing out the full alphabet, and identifying the pattern on the alphabet line.

Code and decode words using numbers, letters and symbols

Q. Here are the number codes for four words. Find the code for BOB.

123 124 154
CAT CAB COB

A. 454 (C = 1, A = 2, 3 = T, 4 = B, 5 = O)

Do word and number puzzles to practise for this type of question.



NON-VERBAL REASONING

General advice

Grammar schools often use marks from the Non-Verbal Reasoning (Non-VR) paper as their main method of choosing students, so it needs to be mastered. More of the top independent schools are also putting extra weight on Non-VR tests in their entrance exams. Non-VR is alleged to be a skill that most clearly shows the potential of your child. Many Non-VR papers are full of shapes you have to rotate, find the mirror image of, turn inside out, so it is sometimes hard for children to see its relevance. It is difficult to teach Non-VR skills, because a great deal is down to innate ability – you either see the patterns or you don't.

Try making practice fun and use puzzles. Some children find it helpful to make the shapes out of cardboard and physically turn and move them around. While your child won't be able to do this in the exam, they might become more skilled at imagining how the shape will look when it is moved or rotated if they have seen it happen for real.

The 11+ Non-Verbal Reasoning Exam

The exam content differs across the UK so check the format with your school of choice. As with VR, exams are likely to be multiple choice, and may come with separate question and answer sheets, so make sure your child carefully matches the question number they are answering with the number on their answer sheet. The test usually lasts for around 50 minutes.

There are five main types of questions, with different versions of each one:

Identifying shapes

This group of questions tests your child's understanding and recognition of shape and pattern. It relies on:

- Your child's ability to find shapes that are similar or different.
- Your child's skills in sorting given shapes or symbols.

Make sure that your child's basic Maths skills are robust for these types of questions and that they know about angles and shapes. Your child also needs to recognise 3D shapes quickly. So point out shapes, patterns of buildings, cars and other everyday objects. This can also be turned into a game on car journeys: 'See if you can spot a triangle shape on a building' or 'Look for a road sign which is a circle'.

Missing shapes

This group of questions also tests your child's understanding of shape and pattern. They need to be able to follow rules clearly.

Rotating shapes

Rely on your child recognising the line of symmetry in a shape. Practise with a small mirror to see the mirror image of the shape. They need to dispense with the mirror eventually and to be able to recognise lines of symmetry by simply looking at them.

3 Dimensional shapes

These are also called nets, and are tricky. Questions test your child's spatial awareness. They need to relate a two-dimensional outline or net, to a three- dimensional shape. It can be hard to visualise. If your child is struggling, make cubes from paper. Daughtrey's book (see below) will show you the different shapes that can be folded into cubes.

Codes

Encourage your child to work methodically and clearly and always check their answers by working backwards from them.

Exam preparation

After six months, start practice papers. There's not much to choose between the books for Non- VR, but the following are particularly helpful:

- Non-Verbal Reasoning by Mary and Barbara Walsh,
- Bond - How to Do 11+ Non-Verbal Reasoning,
- Non-Verbal Reasoning Technique and Practice Books by Susan Daughtrey,
- Non-Verbal Reasoning Practice Exercises by Susan Daughtrey,
- 11+ & CATs Workbooks (Series) by Stephen Curran. AE Publications.

Most prep schools build in VR and Non-VR into their lessons from about Year 3. VR and Non-VR are not part of the National Curriculum so state primary children will not have had explicit teaching in these disciplines, although they will have come across puzzles or activities which call upon them to use VR and Non-VR skills.

Once your child has mastered the different types of questions, start doing timed practice papers to improve their speed. Do one VR and one Non-VR timed paper per week in the last 3 months before the exams. Timing is very important: they need to be getting top marks in 50 minutes.

Try to make time to go through the answers with your child. This is the only way your child will improve and to learn to avoid repeating mistakes.

FICTION READING LIST FOR 9 TO 11 YEAR OLDS

Author	Book
Aiken Joan	Tale of One-Way Street Midnight is a Place
Alcott L M	Little Women
Alcott L M	Almond DavidSkellig
Alcott L M	Kit's Wilderness
Ashley Bernard	Little Soldier
Banks Lynn Reid	Angela and Diabola
Baldwin Michael	Grandad with Snails
Barrie J M	Peter Pan
Bawden Nina	Carrie's War
Bell Adrian	My Own Master
Berna P	The Street Musician
Blackman Malorie	Computer Ghost
Blume J	It isn't the End of the World
Boston Lucy M	The Children of Green Knowe
Bowler Tim	River Boy
Burnford S	The Incredible Journey
Canning Victor	Goose
Carpenter Richard	Catweazle
Childs Rob	Moving the Goalposts
Christopher John	The Tripod's Trilogy
Cleaver Hilton	The Forbidden Study
Coleman Michael	Weirdo's War
Cookson Catherine	The Gladiator
Cooper Susan	The Dark is Rising (series)
Crompton Richmal	Just William
Cross Gillian	The Demon Headmaster
Dahl R	Any e.g., Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Danziger Paula	Amber Brown is Feeling Blue
Deary Terry	The Knight of Stars and Storms
Dickens Charles	Great Expectations
Dicks Terance	The Pyramid Incident

Doherty Berlie	Bella's Den
Durrel Gerald	My Family and Other Animals
Fine Anne	Care of Henry
Fine Anne	Flour Babies
Fisher Catherine	Belin's Hill
Fisk Nicholas	Grinny
Frank Ann	Ann Frank's Diary
Gallico Paul	The Snow Goose
Gaarder Jostein	The Christmas Mystery
Garner Alan	The Weirdstone of Brisingamen
Gates Susan	The Hummingbird Secret
Gordon John	The Giant Under the Snow
Goudge E	The Little White Horse
Hodgson Burnett F	The Secret Garden
Holm A	I am David
Hunter N	The Incredible Adventures of Professor
Hunter N	Branestawm
Ibbotson E	The Great Ghost Rescue
Jansson T	Finn Moomintroll Series
Kastner E	Emil and the Detectives
King Clive	Stig of the Dump
King-Smith Dick	The Crowstaver
Le Guin U	Wizard of Earthsea
Lewis C S	Narnia series
Mayne W	Earthfasts
Morpurgo M	Any
Naughton B	The Goalkeeper's Revenge
Nesbit E	The Railway Children
Norris A	Aquila
Norton Mary	The Borrowers
Pratchett Terry	Johnny and the Bomb
Pullman Philip	Any
Ransome A	Swallows and Amazons, etc.
Serrallier I	The Silver Sword
Sewell Anna	Black Beauty
Streatfield Noel	Ballet Shoes
Swindells R	Nightmare Stairs

SUMMARY

To repeat, YOU are vital to your child's achievement. Parental involvement is a HUGE factor in 11+ success or failure. We know it makes all the difference when parents understand the process, and support their child at home. You might not be sitting the 11+ yourselves (although you might wish you were in your child's place!), but you may be surprised what a huge difference parents can make.

We also know it can be bewildering, stressful and time-consuming all round, so we hope we have made it easier for you with this guide. It will help you with the preparation, to understand what your child really needs to know for the 11+, so that you can back up whatever they are doing in a calm and knowledgeable way, and ultimately help them gain the success which will have such far reaching effects on their future academic progress and career.

Good luck!

APPENDIX

Practice Papers

A number of grammar schools, especially independent schools, publish sample papers showing the standard required for the 11+. In some cases, they also provide valuable free practice material and advice.

St. Olave's website has sample papers for English and Maths relevant to Bromley and also of use in other areas.

Haberdashers Aske's School publishes three full past papers of one hour each for English and Maths for the 11+ and also for entry at 7+ and 13+.

Dulwich College publishes one hour sample papers for English and Maths, and also papers for several curriculum subjects in languages and humanities that may be of interest to parents looking at scholarship exams.

Emmanuel School publishes one hour sample papers for entry at 10+, 11+ and 13+.

King's School in Chester publishes 45 minute sample papers in English and Maths.

You can also download for free 11+ exams in Comprehension and English at www.elevenplusexams.co.uk.

Reading list of relevant publications and websites:

- 11 plus Common Entrance questions
- 11 plus & CATs Workbooks (Series) by Stephen Curran. AE Publications
- www.elevenplusexams.co.uk
- Bitesize KS2 website
- Bond 11 plus Non-Verbal Reasoning Assessment Papers
- Bond How to Do... 11 plus Verbal Reasoning
- Bond How to Do... 11 plus Non-Verbal Reasoning
- DoodleMaths app
- First News (children's newspaper)
- GL Assessment – 11 plus Explained Series
- ISEB English Practice Exercises
- Letts 11 plus Practice Papers
- Maths Bond papers
- Non-Verbal Reasoning by Mary and Barbara Walsh
- Non-Verbal Reasoning Practice Exercises by Susan Daughtrey
- Non-Verbal Reasoning Technique and Practice Books by Susan Daughtrey
- Usborne Maths Dictionary
- www.usborne-quicklinks.com
- Verbal Reasoning Technique and Practice Books by Susan Daughtrey

Homeschooling 11+ Guide for Parents How to practise and pass 11+ English, Maths, Verbal & Non-verbal reasoning

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