

How to Prepare for the 11+

Survival Guide for Parents/Carers

twinkl

Introduction

Knowing how much preparation to do beforehand can always be a tough balancing act for any parent. You want to support your child so that they have the skills to pass the test and hopefully get a place in the first-choice school. However, you don't want to cause your child to suffer 'burn out' due to constant revision, preparation and pressure. This could have a detrimental effect on your child and their motivation for learning.

One of the best methods of revision is to do it little and often. That way, your child can stay focused during shorter, frequent study sessions. It's also important that your child has 'down-time' too during busy revision periods. Ensure you go out and do some exercise (a walk, bike ride, football, etc.) and get plenty of rest too.

As part of the preparation process, you must also prepare contingency plans in case your child doesn't get the result you wanted in the test. If your child takes the 11+ test and doesn't receive a place in your first-choice grammar school, this can be very disheartening for you and your child. Therefore, it is best to have other options so you know what next steps you'll need to take if they don't get a place. This will also help your child as the school will be one of several options rather than the sole option for the future. By not pinning all your hopes on one option, it will help lessen the feeling of disappointment if your child doesn't get a place.

The tips below will help you to choose what approach to take when supporting your child to prepare for the 11+ test.

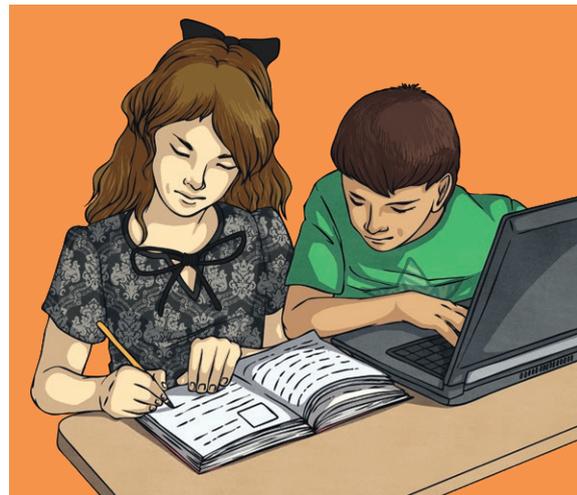


Practising at home

In preparing your child for the 11+ test, the most practical advice is to practise, practise and practise! Using sample test materials that are similar to the ones set by the school you wish your child to attend are a great way to help your child prepare. This is especially important for the verbal and non-verbal reasoning which most children are unfamiliar with.

Using practise test papers is a great way to identify where your child's strengths lie and where they may need further support. If you notice your child struggling in a particular area, that's the test you should practise and the topic you will need to work on more often in order to help them to improve.

When preparing at home, set an agreed amount of time each week to revise and practise for the test. This should be a time when the house is quieter and you and your child can focus on work. Ensure you celebrate your child's effort with lots of positive praise such as: 'Well done! You tried really hard and didn't give up!' By praising effort rather than the number of correctly answered questions, you help your child to develop a growth mindset when it comes to learning. This means that they can feel confident even when getting things wrong as it fosters resilience and determination to not give up on the task - they see their errors as opportunities to improve rather than indications of weakness.



Hiring a Tutor

One option you may wish to consider is hiring a tutor to help support your child's preparation. Due to the increasing competition for places at grammar schools, personal tutors and agencies have flooded the market so in many places you have a wide choice to choose from. You can look online for local agencies and tutors but also ask friends, family and parents of other children if they have had a tutor for the 11+ test. Word of mouth recommendations are usually a good starting point.

When speaking to a tutor or an agency, see if they have had any experience in preparing children for the 11+ test and do they know what tests are set at the school or schools you wish to apply for. If selecting an independent tutor, do ask them for an current DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service check – previously CRB check) and references.

Once you have found a tutor, decide on how much tutoring you would like your child to have and when you would like it to start. Most 11+ tests are taken in the autumn of Year 6, therefore you should be starting practice and revision during Year 5 of primary school. One to two hours a week is usually a sensible amount; anything more could be excessive and counter-productive for your child. Bear in mind that your child should be grammar school ready. Spending lots of time and money on tutors to get them through a test could be the wrong option in the long run. If your child needs large amounts of revision and support, is grammar school a realistic or the most appropriate option for them?

Fun and Games

Children (and adults) learn best when they are engaged and having fun. Therefore, try to make the revision and practise for the 11+ test as fun and as informal as possible. This can help keep your child engaged, especially if they don't realise they are learning and doing work!

A great way to encourage your child to read and to develop their comprehension skills is to read the same books. That way reading becomes more like a book club in which you can discuss the book with your child in an informal way to develop their comprehension. You can ask their opinion on characters, the writer's use of language, what they think is going to happen next and the meaning of particular words.

For the verbal and non-verbal tests, try to encourage your child to play a range of word and puzzle games to develop their vocabulary, understanding of language and related words, spelling and seeing ability to see patterns. These could include: hangman, letter tile games or crosswords – in fact, any word games that they enjoy! Play games and sing songs to help practise times tables and the inverse operations. There are also many online games and apps that can be used to practise English and maths skills such as spellings and times tables. Search for them with your child and find which games they like to play best!

During the Holidays

At the end of Year 5, children have the summer holidays before they start in Year 6 which is a very intense year due to the build-up and practise for the SATs tests. For a parent preparing for the 11+ test, this can be something of a dilemma: do you let your child have a full rest after a busy year of learning before starting another busy year? Or, do you keep revising as much as possible in preparation for the 11+ test in Autumn? The best advice is to keep it light – little and often is usually a good way to do this. Try to practise with games and puzzles rather than formal learning sessions.

Before the Test

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and sleep the week before the test. Ensure they eat well, especially on the day of the test, eating food that will give them the sustained energy they need to complete the tests.

Remain calm and positive! Your child will pick up on your emotions so try to stay positive and relaxed (even if you are feeling anxious and nervous on the inside). Encourage them to try their best and try to create a little excitement by saying positive things such as, 'This is exciting! It'll be like completing all those puzzles we've been practising and you'll get to have a look around the new school!' If you make it seem fun and exciting, it will help reduce any stress your child feels which will help them to complete the test.

After the Test

Praise, praise and praise! Celebrate your child's hard work and effort regardless of the outcome. It can be disappointing if you don't get your first-choice school but your child has tried their best and as a parent your role is to make them feel confident and secure by celebrating their efforts and attitude towards the test. If the outcome isn't the one you were expecting, remain positive and ensure you have contingency plans in place so you know what your next steps will be. It's best to be prepared for all eventualities.

Choosing a school

Choosing the right secondary school for your child can be one of the most difficult decisions you ever make as a parent as you worry which is the right choice. There is also the possibility that the choice may be taken out of your hands based on the results of the 11+ test which can make the decision even more daunting. However, if you start planning early, it can relieve much of the stress for you and your child. Also, the area you live in may affect the choice of grammar schools you have to choose from. Some areas will have lots of grammar schools and some will have only a few.

Use the tips below to help you when choosing the right school for your child.

Make a list of schools



Make a list of all the possible schools that your child could attend in the area that you live. You will need to consider the journey time to each school, the amount of traffic and decide whether it is feasible or not to travel to that school. Include all options at this stage in case your child doesn't get the grades needed in the 11+ test.

Do your research

Begin by looking at the school website. It will contain lots of information about the school and what the curriculum looks like. It's a great way to get a feel for the school. Have a look at the school's academic achievements, extra-curricular activities and trips. Also, see whether there is any specific information about the 11+ exam on the school website. Check the school's admission policy to see if there is a realistic chance of your child getting a place there. The policy may also give you information about the selection process.

Read the current and previous Ofsted reports for the school to see how it is currently performing and if it has a history of high performance in the past.

Ask to visit the school and discuss any questions you have with the staff there. This is a great way to get a feel for the atmosphere in the school and see if you like it or not.

Discuss the options with your child

Discuss the options with your child and seek their opinion too. Arrange to visit each school with your child; this will give both of you a sense of the school and whether it is suitable. Your child will probably be making his or her choice of school based on the social perspective and may have different views to you. If your child has a marked preference for a school, try to uncover the reasons for their preference and discuss it with them. Your child's opinion and preference is key to making any decision. It is best to try and sell the benefits of the other school to them such as the quality of the facilities, the extra-curricular activities and the trips they go on. It is also worth checking with other parents which school they are considering as it may be different to the 'playground-chatter' going on at school.

What is the 11+ test?

The 11+ is an examination taken by some children in their final year of primary school to get into the grammar or private school of their choice. When a school is over-subscribed, or has limited places, the 11+ examination is often used to rate a child's ability as part of the application process for the school.

What does it entail?

There are up to four different disciplines in the 11+ test which are 'Verbal Reasoning', 'Non-verbal reasoning', 'Maths' and 'English'. The combination of test papers varies considerably throughout the country and is dependent on how

each individual school wishes to assess the applicants. If you are considering sending your child to a private/grammar school, it would be useful to discuss with them beforehand about which disciplines they assess in the 11+ test.

Please read below to find out more about each discipline.



Verbal reasoning

Verbal reasoning is the ability to understand and reason using concepts that are framed in words. It aims to assess a child's ability to think constructively with a series of verbal reasoning questions. The types of questions a child might be asked could include:

- find synonyms and antonyms;
- find a letter that will complete two words, e.g. woo (d) oor;
- find a word hidden inside another word, e.g. **independent**;
- spot the odd one out in a list of words;
- break a code where each letter of the alphabet is represented by a different letter or number.

Here is an example of the type of question you may get in this section:

1. Circle the pair of words which are closest in meaning:

mean, scary

horrible, repulsive

repugnant, repulsive

scary, repulsive

The answer to this question would be 'repugnant, repulsive' as they both can mean strong feelings of disgust.

Children perform best in verbal reasoning tests if they have read widely and have an extensive vocabulary. Playing lots of words games at home can help your child with verbal reasoning tests such as: letter tile games, crosswords, word searches, etc.

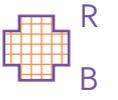
Non-verbal reasoning

The non-verbal reasoning test involves solving problems that are represented with pictures and diagrams. There are a number of different types of questions for the non-verbal reasoning test which could include:

- finding shapes that are like each other based on similarities (for example colours and number of sides);
- find the odd one out in a group of pictures;
- identify a shape which has been rotated;
- break the code in a sequence of images;
- spot the missing shape in a sequence;
- identify the nets of 3d shapes.

Here is an example of the type of question you may get in this section:

1. Which is the correct code for figure 4?

			
1	2	3	4

B	Q	B	R
Y	M	Q	Q
A	B	C	D

The answer would be D. The letter common to the first two shapes is B which represents the cross-hatching pattern they both have. Therefore Q represents the solid orange colour. The M is the letter representing the shape of the moon and it comes at the top of the box. Therefore the answer is D (R to represent the irregular dodecagon and the Q at the bottom to represent the solid orange colour).

The non-verbal reasoning test, for many children, can be very intimidating. The best way to prepare for this is through practise. Complete many different type of practise non-verbal reasoning tests with your child and discuss how each question is solved. This will give your child the experience needed to tackle the on-verbal reasoning tests.

Maths

The maths test varies across areas and schools but will be assessed in some way as this is an integral part to the 11+ test. In some schools, this will take the form of a separate paper which can last from thirty minutes to one hour. Due to the level of variation in the maths test, it is important to visit individual schools' websites to find out more information about the tests that they sit.

The key skills needed for these tests are a strong knowledge of the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) and the ability to work quickly and accurately. Your child will need a sound knowledge of the times tables and the ability to apply their mathematical skills to problem solving and reasoning.

The test should cover the concepts taught in the DfE Programme of Study for Primary maths. Therefore, you can expect questions on:

- **Number:** which includes place value; fractions, decimals and percentages; and the four basic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division).
- **Algebra:** which includes equations and formulae
- **Geometry:** which will include shapes; length, weight and capacity; area; coordinates and nets.
- **Data handling:** including statistics and probability.

Maths skills may also be assessed as part of the verbal reasoning test which could include number sequencing, completing the calculation, find the missing number and finding related numbers.

The best way to prepare for this is to ensure that your child has a sound knowledge of the four operations and their times tables. Use a variety of revision techniques, such as online games, apps, reciting and signing to practise the times tables. Your child will also need to know the inverse operations for each of the times table. For example, the knowledge that $5 \times 7 = 35$ can be used for division (inverse) facts too such as $35 \div 7 = 5$ and $35 \div 5 = 7$. Short walks or car journeys are always a great opportunity to help brush up on times tables with some quickfire questions. In addition, use the Twinkl website to access resources for the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division).

An example question from the 11+ maths test is:

1. Multiply each of these numbers by 100. Write the answer below each number.

0.168

10.6

1.06

English

The English test can again vary considerably depending on where you live. Therefore it is important to check the prospective school's website or speak to them beforehand to find out what type of English test they do. An English test could include any number of the following: a writing task, a reading comprehension and or multiple choice English grammar test.

The writing task could last anything from 20 to 50 minutes depending on the nature of the exercise. Likewise the reading test varies from 30 minutes to 1 hour and may include multiple choice questions. The English test is used to assess your child's knowledge of grammar, punctuation, spelling, comprehension and sometimes their writing ability too. It aims to test children on the skills they have learnt during primary school.

In order to pass the test, your child will need to have a sound knowledge of English grammar, punctuation and spelling. In addition, they will need to have a wide and varied vocabulary (which can help with the verbal reasoning tests too) and be widely read. Their comprehension skills should be strong, especially their ability to make inferences based on clues and information given in the text. However, it is also important that they have experience of reading questions carefully and accurately, working to a time limit and remaining calm.

To help support your child for the English test, encourage them to read, read and read some more! A great variety of fiction and non-fiction, and a range of genres, will help your child to develop their vocabulary and knowledge. Most children read independently once they reach this age but it would be a good idea to have a look at the book they are reading, select some words that you may think are tricky for your child and test them on the meaning of the word. If they are not sure, discuss the meaning of each word with your child and practise using it in context. You might also read a book together - perhaps one you're reading - and discuss your understanding of the character's actions and motives, the plot and what you think the author is trying to achieve. Discussing reading is a great way of developing depth of thinking.

Try to encourage your child to write in a range of styles but try to make this contextualised and linked to something that they enjoy. For example, if you've been on a day trip, you could encourage them to write a news recount about a family visit to the zoo, a diary entry about



the day, an animal information text, a persuasive booklet advertising the zoo or a fictional story set in the zoo.

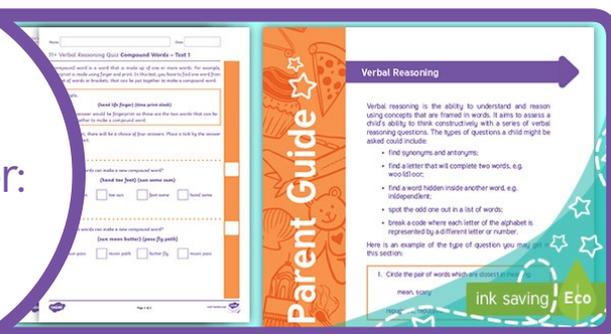
An example question from the 11+ English test could be:

1. Look at the sentence below. Underline the word which is spelt incorrectly and write it out correctly on the line provided.

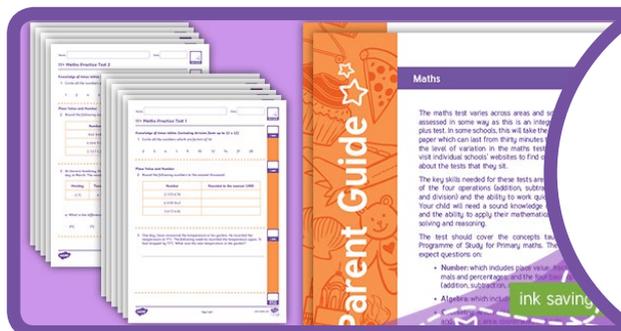
John felt extremely embarrassed when he dropped all the drinks onto the floor.

If you enjoyed this resource, why not try...

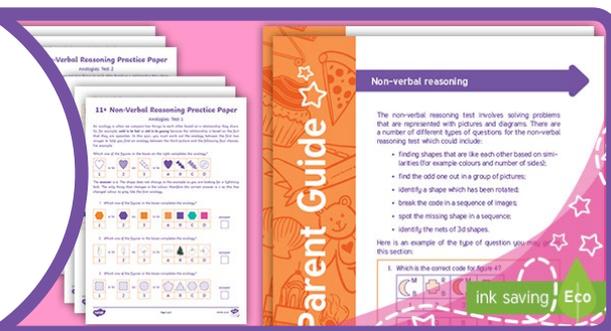
Verbal Reasoning Practice Paper: Compound Words 1



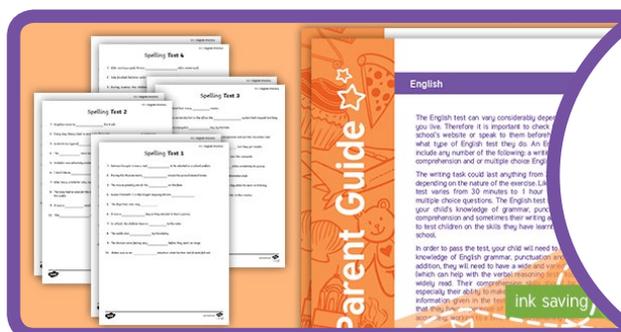
11+ Maths Practice Test



Non-Verbal Reasoning Analogies Assessment Pack



11+ Practice Spelling Pack



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