



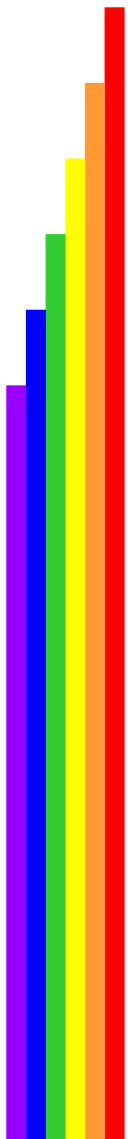
Eleven Plus Exam Group

The Eleven Plus Handbook

A Guide for Parents

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An Introduction to the Eleven Plus.

This handbook has been created to help you with your practice of and revision for Eleven-plus type examinations. You may already have thought about much that is here, but some reminders will do no harm, and there may be something new which hasn't occurred to you before.

It is important to recognise that there is no one perfect formula which will enable a child to sail successfully through their examination, so it is important to remember that every child is different. Use what is useful to you, and don't worry overmuch about what may seem not to help.

What is the Eleven Plus?

Eleven-plus is the name given to School Entrance Examinations taken when children are about to transfer from Primary to Secondary School, at 10 or 11 years old. Historically, the Eleven-plus was a way of selecting which children would most benefit from a Grammar School education. At that time the system operated across the whole country.

Today it operates in areas where there are still Grammar Schools, or Grant-maintained or Private Schools. In those areas it will not necessarily be taken by all children. Examinations in a similar style but at an easier standard are also available for 8 or 9 year old children.

The exams are usually taken about 11 months before the actual transfer to Secondary School, in other words, in October or November of Year Six. This means that if help or practice is needed to prepare for them, that should be begun sometime during Year Five.

What does the test consist of?

Each school or Education Authority will have developed their own selection system, choosing from among four possible tests.

Verbal Reasoning;
Non-Verbal Reasoning;
Mathematics;
English.

Some use only one test, usually Verbal Reasoning, others will use a combination of tests, and may also add a Creative Writing Task.

Verbal Reasoning

This Test contains language or number based problem solving and reasoning questions. Questions are based on knowledge of vocabulary and spelling, analogies, codes and transformations, and mathematical calculations.

A strong and varied vocabulary is essential for this test, and will best be acquired by wide reading. Some questions will need a thorough knowledge of multiplication tables, and good mental-arithmetic skills. Codes and analogies can be tackled with pattern finding and formulae, and don't rely so much on vocabulary.

Non-Verbal Reasoning:

This Test uses shapes and symbols to test the ability to find patterns and sequences and to create codes for the symbols. The questions require the ability to recognise what is happening – often to more than one symbol at the same time - and to solve problems relating to them.

Mathematics:

These tests cover all aspects of mathematical knowledge, and require a thorough knowledge of maths principles and concepts. It may be necessary to learn one or two concepts in Year Five not normally taught until Year Six.

English:

Different publishers may include a slightly different mix of questions in a test labelled "English."

There are likely to be questions on comprehension; spelling; punctuation; capital letters; and 'best use' of English.

There may also be a test asking for a piece of Creative Writing.

The Format of the Test

Standard Tests:

A Standard Test will have a space on the question paper where the answer should be written.

Multiple Choice Tests:

In a Multiple Choice Test, there will be a separate answer sheet. Several different answers are suggested for each question, and the correct one must be marked in the box on the sheet. Some answer sheets show a choice of letters separated by brackets.

38	
A	<input type="checkbox"/>
B	<input type="checkbox"/>
C	<input type="checkbox"/>
D	<input type="checkbox"/>
E	<input type="checkbox"/>

<A> <C> <D> <E>

Dual Format Tests:

On some *practice* papers (including *Eleven Plus Exam Group* papers) you will see this phrase. This means that the papers have been written in such a way that they can be answered in either of the above formats, depending on the choice made by the School or Education Authority.

Important Matters For Parents To Be Aware Of From The Beginning

Which Tests?

Find out from the School or Authority which tests your child will be given. Some websites will give you the information, but as systems may change it is wise to double-check and be certain.

Which Format?

You need to be aware of which format will be used for each test. It would be unhelpful to practise using Standard Tests, and then be confronted with a Multiple Choice answer sheet.

Note that different formats may be used for different tests by the same school. One school uses Multiple Choice for all tests *except Mathematics*, where they use Standard Format. Double-check and be certain.

Length of Tests?

Tests may vary in their length and number of questions. Be aware of this when practising in the run up to the exam. Try to find out exactly how many questions there will be and how much time will be allowed, so that you can adjust your practice sessions accordingly.

Standardisation

In order to make the exam fair for all the entrants - who will be of different ages – a process called standardisation is used. It also takes into account the overall scoring pattern of everyone who takes the exam.

The score on the test sheet is the Raw Score. The score communicated to parents and pupils is the Standardised Score, which has been arrived at by mathematical adjustments. This score is the one used by the school or Authority for selection.

Competition

The competition for some schools is so high that a child must score in the 80s or 90s in order to gain a place. It is therefore unhelpful to tell them they have "failed" if with a mark of 79% for instance, they are not accepted. Make it clear to them that they have done really well to get that score, and avoid all talk of passing or of failure. They are able to gain a place or not – and the numbers taking the exam will make a significant difference each year.

Stress!

Preparing for and taking Eleven Plus exams creates a lot of stress for both parents and pupils. Be prepared for it and try to alleviate it as much as possible. The child's emotional state is of paramount importance.

You can't do much about peer pressure, but steady encouragement and a willingness to listen to how they are feeling will be a real help. Don't brush it off by saying, "Ignore it!" - that is much more easily said than done.

Try to avoid the following mistakes which some parents have *quite unintentionally* made, so putting pressure on their child and building up the stress levels:

Telling their child it is imperative that they "pass".

Telling their child they must "pass" if they want to "get on in life and be a success".

Using the word "fail".

Telling their child they'll never succeed in life if they "fail" the exam.

Obsessing about the exam, becoming stressed themselves, and passing that on.

Talking in front of their child about it: "Of course, J will pass, she's so clever." "I don't know where we'll send him if he doesn't get in, all the other schools are dreadful."

Spending far *too much time* practising.

Giving *too little* praise, encouragement, and clear explanations.

Giving *too much* criticism and pointing out of errors.

Talking about other children's chances – especially friends and peers of their child.

Talking about how well or badly siblings, relatives or friends did in the past. "How awful it was when S failed last year!"

Talking about the high cost of sending the child to a tutor.

Imagine what it would be like for you if you were applying for a new job, or were hoping for promotion, and your partner or best friend acted like the parents above. Now think what it would be like if you were just nine or ten years old. Peer pressure is bad enough, try your hardest not to add to that at home.

In some areas pupils are asked to sit a different test for each school they wish to apply for. This produces much more stress. Try not to ask your child to take more than one exam unless it cannot be avoided

Motivation

There are many reasons why a child will want to "pass" the Eleven-Plus exam. Sadly some of them are not helpful or healthy. The following are among many real examples:

"I have to do it to please Mum and Dad."

"I don't want people to think I'm thick."

"My sister passed, and I've got to do as well as her, or Mum won't like me as much as her."

"I'm going to get a new bike."

"Dad says he'll take us to Disneyland."

Placing the responsibility for an expensive family holiday on the shoulders of a nine or ten year old is far more than any child should have to bear.

Make an effort to help your child find good and healthy reasons for wanting to gain a place at the school.

Start by making it a school of their choice, as far as that is possible.

Emphasise how much the school will enable them to do what they really enjoy.

If they already have a strong ambition in one particular area show how this school can foster it.

Look at the immediate benefits and pleasures, rather than at "success" in the future.

It may be that for a variety of reasons they will feel particularly *at home* in this school, help them to look forward to that.

A delicate balance is required here, so that they don't feel that the world will end if they are not offered a place. This is not easy at all. It will require much thought and care on your part.

Easing the Process

What can you do to help? Make sure that they keep a balanced life-style in the run up to the exam:

Exercise – Exercise boosts energy levels. It clears the mind and relieves stress. Any exercise is good – walking, swimming, cycling and dancing are all effective. Avoid using a new competitive sport as a stress relief, although if they already play one they should continue in it.

Eat well – A healthy, balanced diet will help in many ways.

Sleep – Make sure they get enough sleep, it will allow the mind to concentrate and think clearly.

Attitude – Be positive and encouraging. Support them, and help them to believe in their abilities.

Assure them that the world will not end if things don't work out as they hope.

Preparation At Home

Your child might be lucky enough to go to a school where Eleven Plus preparation is part of the curriculum; or you might have employed the services of a private tutor; on the other hand your child may be relying on you to work with them at home.

Starting To Help Your Child At Home

Whether or not your child has help at school or from a tutor you need to know how best to help your child at home. You need to be aware how to make the best start.

If you think about it, when somebody learns to drive they are not taken straight out and expected to complete a mock driving test. Over many lessons they practice all the component parts of the test until they are ready to put them together, and finally they are ready to take their test.

Prepare yourself.

It is a good, if not vital idea to make sure that you understand how each type of question works, and how to tackle it. Find a book on method and techniques – there are many available, some better than others – and do some preparation yourself.

If your child is being helped by a teacher or tutor *use the method they have already been taught.* Don't confuse them with a different technique.

If your child is not helped by a tutor or teacher find out which topics you may have to teach them, and practice them yourself.

Prepare for the session.

Find a quiet place to work with no distractions. Turn off any TV or Radio.

Work at a table or desk, not on your lap.

Don't sit at a window where they can see other children playing.

Make sure the area is well lit so that the materials can be read easily.

Make sure everything is ready and to hand – books, pencils, eraser, pencil sharpener, rough working-out paper.

Make sure you and your child have been to the bathroom.

Have a drink handy, and perhaps something non-sticky to nibble.

When

Do not work too late in the day - tiredness will hinder concentration, and devalue practice. Do not turn each session into a marathon – have a sensible set length of lesson.

Little and often is better than a long two hour session – the repetition over the week will fix information in their head. Three brief times at short intervals is proven to work best.

What

Don't *start* by trying to work through whole practice papers. Many children will never have seen Verbal or Non-Verbal Reasoning in this form before. First use a book with practice questions which is not set out as a test.

Look at the types of questions, learn how each works, and practice several of each type to gain confidence.

At this early stage *speed* is not important. Spotting variations and subtleties in each type of question is what matters.

Avoid the disheartening experience of trying a full test too soon, only to make lots of errors and not complete it in the time.

Avoid over-practice of the questions your child likes best and is already good at.

Attitude

Have fun when you can. It won't take away the seriousness of the task, but they will remember what has been fun. It also makes learning easier and less fraught.

Find fun ways of improving vocabulary and spelling (handwriting if needed), tables and mental arithmetic *away from the eleven-plus sessions*.

Be patient – tell them *making a mistake does not matter*. What does matter is learning how to correct it themselves, then they won't repeat it.

Tutting, sighing or becoming annoyed is unhelpful to you and to them.

Search for a *different way* to explain the question.

Don't push too hard too soon.

Be positive and encouraging – praise their successes, however small.

Be careful to avoid your child resenting the extra work – especially as you approach the exam.

Using Practice Papers

When your child is ready, begin with shorter papers. They make an ideal starting point. There are several on the market. IPS produce a range of 30 minute papers with a wide range of question types. The number of questions is in the same proportion to the time allowed as a full test.

Most children will not previously have had to sit and concentrate on a single task for a great length of time. Breaking them in gradually with shorter papers is a good idea.

Step back a little and let your child work on their own.

Mark the paper together – if there is an error ask "*Can you see what you've done here?*" and give them time to think it through. Praise them if they spot their mistake.

Explain how to correct errors, then let them do them.

Praise them for their corrections.

Try to do a ten minute paper (available from a few publishers) on most days.

Continue fun work on the basics.

Do a longer paper twice a week.

As the exam date draws closer you can introduce the longer practice papers and pay more attention to the time taken. But remember that too much practice can be damaging. So is doing paper after paper endlessly.

Set aside time to go back and work on the types of question which are still a problem.

Continue the shorter papers in between the full length ones.

Continue fun sessions on the basics.

Continue the ten minute papers in the holidays.

The Importance of Timing

Your child will have to complete every question in the Eleven Plus papers in order to score highly enough to be offered a place. If they only complete 75% of the questions they may lose out, even if they get all of them correct.

This is another of those delicate balancing situations. Make timing too big an issue and stress levels will rise; ignore it and they will not learn to work faster.

Help them to understand the proportion of questions to time, *as well as* understanding that some questions can be done very quickly while others take much longer.

There is no magical formula for how long each question should take.

Help them to work faster without letting stupid errors creep in.

Give more help and practice on the question types which are slowing them down.

Make it easy for them to concentrate without any distractions.

Gently point out any habits which are wasting time.

EXAM TIPS

TRY NOT TO WORRY DON'T PANIC!

Make sure you have had a drink – nothing fizzy, plain water is best, but not too much! - and that you have been to the bathroom – it is hard to do an exam cross-legged!
Make sure you have a handkerchief or tissue in your pocket.

Hardly anyone gets every question correct. You will not need to do that to gain a place. Calm yourself and you will work better. Panic and your performance will suffer.

Finish the paper. You can only get marks for questions you have answered.

If you find that you cannot do a question then *guess and move on*. Circle the number on the question paper so that you can come back to it if you have the time. This will help you find it quickly. Remember some questions do take longer to work out than others.

Go through the paper in order. Don't skip whole sections that you don't like. But don't take too long on them either. If you have time you can come back and try them again.

If possible do any working out on the question paper, as near to the question as possible. This will help you to find it when double checking. If there is no space, put the question number in a circle next to your working out.

If working out on a separate piece of paper put the circled question number clearly beside the notes and keep them in order if possible, so that you can find them again if need be. Don't just scribble notes or numbers anywhere on the paper.

Make sure your answers are written clearly, or the multiple choice boxes are marked carefully. RUB OUT mistakes thoroughly, DON'T CROSS OUT unless instructed to.

CHECK YOUR ANSWERS if you have time at the end – especially those questions you know have given you more problems.

Good luck!