

The Students' Guide to GCSE Maths

How the exam works, how to get the grade you want, and the habits that get you there.

 Years 9 to 11

 Foundation and Higher

 AQA, Edexcel and OCR

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How GCSE Maths works

Know the game you're playing. It makes everything else easier.

Three papers, one grade

PAPER	CALCULATOR	TIME
Paper 1	No calculator	1 hour 30
Paper 2	Calculator allowed	1 hour 30
Paper 3	Calculator allowed	1 hour 30

All three count the same. Your grade comes from your total across all three, so a bad paper can be made up on the next one.

Ask your teacher which board you sit (AQA, Edexcel or OCR) and use that board's past papers.

Foundation or Higher

1 to 5

Foundation

Top grade a 5. More marks for the core topics.

4 to 9

Higher

The full course. The grade 4 and 5 questions are in here too.

Your school decides your tier, usually in Year 11. Ask your teacher which one and what it would take to move up.

The grades that open doors

- 4** **The pass.** Without a 4 by the end of Year 11 you keep studying Maths after 16.
- 5** **The strong pass.** Many sixth forms and colleges ask for a 5 or above.
- 7+** **A-level Maths.** Most sixth forms want a 6 or a 7 to take it.

Check the entry grades for the sixth form or college you want. That's your real target.

How to get the grade

- ✓ **Know your number.** Your target grade and the grade you're working at now. The gap is the job.
- ✓ **Know your gaps by name.** "Bounds and vectors", not "all of it". Write them down.
- ✓ **Bank the easier marks first.** The early questions on every paper are the cheapest marks there are. Don't lose them to rushing.
- ✓ **Show your working.** Method marks are given even when the final answer is wrong.
- ✓ **Practise without a calculator.** A third of your grade is Paper 1.



Your mock is a map, not a verdict. Every mark you dropped shows you exactly what to fix next. And there is real time between the mocks and the summer to close the gap.

Habits, and the exam room

Small things done every week beat a big push at the end.

Habits that work

- ✓ **Little and often.** 20 to 30 minutes most days beats three hours on a Sunday.
- ✓ **Same time, same place.** It stops being a decision.
- ✓ **Phone in another room.** Not face down. Another room.
- ✓ **Do the homework properly.** It's free practice, marked by your teacher.
- ✓ **Ask the question.** If you're stuck in class, someone else is too. Ask.
- ✓ **Fix one thing at a time.** One weak topic a week adds up to a lot by May.

When you're stuck

- Find a video on that exact topic and pause before each step to try it.
- Do three easier questions on the topic, then try the hard one again.
- Ask your teacher, or bring it to a free live lesson.

In the exam room

- ✓ **Read every question twice.** Underline what it actually asks for.
- ✓ **Watch the marks.** Roughly a mark a minute. A 2-mark question shouldn't take ten minutes.
- ✓ **Stuck? Move on.** Mark it, come back at the end with fresh eyes.
- ✓ **Write every step.** Working gets marks, even if the answer is wrong.
- ✓ **Check units and rounding.** "To 1 decimal place" means exactly that.
- ✓ **Use every minute.** Finish early? Check the questions you were least sure of.

Free from MyGCSEMaths

How to Revise GCSE Maths (the revision method), the Topic Tracker and the Past Paper Tracker, all free at mygcsemaths.com.

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