

The Parents' Guide to GCSE Maths

What the grades mean, what happens when,
and how to help without being a maths
teacher.

 Years 9 to 11

 Foundation and Higher

 AQA, Edexcel and OCR

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Founder of MyGCSEMaths



Hi,

Thanks for grabbing this guide.

Most parents feel a bit lost with GCSE Maths. The grades changed from letters to numbers, the papers look nothing like the ones we sat, and "how's maths going?" usually gets a shrug.

You don't need to be good at maths to help. You need to know how the exam works, what to look out for and which questions to ask. That's what this guide is for.

It takes about 15 minutes to read. Keep it somewhere handy and come back to it before parents' evening and before the mocks.

I'm rooting for them.

Matt ⚡

Founder, MyGCSEMaths

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WHO IS MATT?

Matt teaches GCSE Maths to students across the UK through MyGCSEMaths: free lessons on YouTube and live Group Tutoring classes every week. He got 11 A*s at GCSE, 3 A*s at A-level and a First.



SECTION 01

How GCSE Maths works

One subject, one of three exam boards, three papers at the end of Year 11.

The exam boards

In England most schools use one of three boards: **AQA**, **Pearson Edexcel** or **OCR**. They all teach the same national content and grade on the same 9 to 1 scale. The papers look a little different, so it helps to know which one your child sits. Ask the school if you're not sure.

Three papers

Every student sits three papers, all at the end of the course:

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

Each paper counts for a third of the grade. There is no coursework: the grade comes from these three papers alone.

One grade

The three papers add up to a single grade from 9 (highest) to 1. A U means the work was below grade 1.



WHAT THEY NEED ON THE DAY

A black pen, a pencil, a ruler, a protractor, a pair of compasses, an eraser and a scientific calculator for Papers 2 and 3. A calculator they already know well beats a new one.



SECTION 02

Foundation, Higher and the grades

Two tiers, and the tier decides which grades are possible.

FOUNDATION TIER

1 to 5

The core of the course. The top grade available is a **5**.

HIGHER TIER

4 to 9

Everything, including the hardest topics. Just short of a **4** can still earn a **3**; below that is a **U**.

Who decides?

The school enters your child for one tier, usually in Year 11, based on their work and mock results. It's worth asking which tier they're heading for and why: a strong Foundation student aiming for a **5** and a Higher student hoping to scrape a **4** need different plans.

The 9 to 1 scale, in old money

NEW GRADE	ROUGHLY THE OLD GRADE
9	the top of the old A*
8	A*
7	A
6	B
5	between B and C
4	C
3	D
2	E and F
1	F and G

Grade boundaries (the marks needed for each grade) are set after the exams and change a little every year.



SECTION 03

What a 4, 5 and 7 mean

Three grades that open doors.

4

THE STANDARD PASS

5

THE STRONG PASS

7+

A-LEVEL MATHS
TERRITORY

Grade 4: the standard pass

This is the one that matters most. Students who finish Year 11 without at least a 4 in Maths have to keep studying maths after 16, alongside whatever else they do, and most resit the GCSE.

Grade 5: the strong pass

Many sixth forms and colleges ask for a 5 or above, and it's the measure schools are judged on.

Grade 7 and above

Most sixth forms ask for at least a 6 or a 7 to take A-level Maths. If your child is thinking about A-level Maths or a science, check the entry grade with the sixth form now.



Every sixth form and college sets its own entry grades. Check the ones your child is looking at; open evenings are the place to ask.



SECTION 04

Year 10 and Year 11

What usually happens when. Your school's calendar is the one that counts.

Year 10

Most of the course content is taught. Some schools hold end-of-year exams. A good year to build habits, not to cram.

Year 11, autumn

The last topics, plus regular practice papers. Many schools hold the first full mock exams before or after Christmas.

Year 11, spring

The school confirms entries and the tier. Revision gets serious; many schools run a second set of mocks.

Year 11, May and June

The three GCSE Maths papers. The exact dates come from the exam timetable, published by the boards.

August

Results day.

If they need a resit

Students who don't get a 4 can resit, including in the November exam series after Year 11.



Mock results are a forecast, not a verdict. A mock in the winter of Year 11 is the best early warning you'll get, with time to act on it.



SECTION 05

On track or not?

Signs to look for, without marking a single page.

ON TRACK

- ✓ They can tell you their target grade and their last mock or test grade.
- ✓ Homework comes home and gets done most weeks.
- ✓ They do some maths outside lessons: a past paper, a topic or a video.
- ✓ They can name the topics they find hard, not just "all of it".
- ✓ Test scores are steady or rising.

WORTH A CLOSER LOOK

- "We didn't get any homework" most weeks.
- A mock grade well below their target, with no plan after it.
- Avoiding the calculator-free paper, or panicking about it.
- Gaps in basics: fractions, percentages, negative numbers, rearranging.
- "I'll revise nearer the time."



One worrying sign isn't a crisis. Two or three together, or a mock well below target, are worth a conversation with their teacher this half-term rather than next term.



SECTION 06

How to help at home

You don't need to know the maths. You need routines and good questions.

QUESTIONS THAT WORK BETTER THAN "HOW'S MATHS GOING?"

- "What did you do in maths today?"
- "What's your target grade, and what did you get last time?"
- "Which topic is costing you the most marks?"
- "Can you show me how you did that question?" Explaining it to you helps them learn it.
- "What's your plan before the next test?"

ROUTINES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- ✓ **Little and often.** 20 to 30 minutes of maths most days beats a three-hour session once a week.
- ✓ **A regular time and place.** Same time, phone in another room.
- ✓ **Practise without a calculator** some of the time, ready for Paper 1.
- ✓ **Mix the topics.** Doing a bit of everything, not one topic for a week, is how the real papers work.
- ✓ **Praise effort and method,** not just the score.



WHEN IT GETS TENSE

If revision turns into arguments, step back from the maths and keep the routine. Ask what the plan is, not what the answer is. Getting them to a lesson, a teacher or a tutor for the maths itself is a job you can hand over.



SECTION 07

Past papers and trackers

The best revision for GCSE Maths is the real thing.

Past papers

Every board publishes past papers and mark schemes on its website. Doing full papers under timed conditions is the closest thing to the real exam.

THE METHOD

- 1 Do the paper in 1 hour 30 minutes, no notes.
- 2 Mark it with the mark scheme.
- 3 Write down the topics where marks were lost.
- 4 Fix those topics, then try the next paper.

Trackers

A tracker turns a pile of papers into a plan: it shows the marks going up and the topics still costing marks. MyGCSEMaths has a free **Past Paper Tracker** and a free **Topic Tracker** at mygcsemaths.com.



Use the right papers. Make sure they practise the board and tier they'll actually sit.



SECTION 08

Questions to ask the school

Take these to parents' evening.

- 1 Which exam board is my child sitting?
- 2 Which tier: Foundation or Higher? Is that likely to change?
- 3 What is their target grade, and what are they working at now?
- 4 When are the mock exams?
- 5 Which topics should they focus on?
- 6 Is there extra help in school: a revision club or intervention group?
- 7 How can I see homework and test results through the year?
- 8 What grade do the local sixth forms and colleges ask for in Maths?



Write the answers down. Questions 1 to 3 tell you exactly which papers to use for practice.

Hi again,

If you'd like your child to have a maths teacher in their corner every week, here's how MyGCSEMaths works.



Free live lesson

I teach a free GCSE Maths lesson live on YouTube. Your child can join, ask questions in the chat and see if the way I teach works for them. The next date is at mygcsemaths.com/free-lesson-signup.



Group Tutoring

Three live lessons a week, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 5.30pm, plus the recordings and a community where they can ask questions.

£59 a month • cancel any time

Claim your free 7-day trial for Group Tutoring:
<https://www.skool.com/mygcsemaths-group-tutoring/about>



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