

GCSE BASICS FOR PARENTS

This guide provides a brief overview of the acronyms and terminology used in education regarding your child's GCSEs. It'll help you to better understand the GCSE and to provide support.

1

AQA

OCR
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

edexcel

eduqas
Part of WJEC

Exam boards

There are several examination boards in England and Wales. The main boards are AQA, Edexcel (now called Pearson), OCR and WJEC (WJEC is the Welsh schools' exam board but is known as Eduqas for schools in England.)

Each exam board will offer a course specification for as many GCSEs, A Levels or vocational courses as they wish to support. The boards' specifications are approved by the Government.

Your child will be studying many courses, that may well be from different exam boards. For example, English Language may be with AQA, History may be Edexcel and Computer Science may be with OCR. This is entirely normal as each department in each school will select the exam board specification for their subject that they deem most suitable for the students they teach.

2

Specifications

Each course will have a specification which contains all of the points relevant to the subject that should be taught. Specifications outline the scope of the course for teachers to be delivered over two years. Some schools deliver them over more time too. There is a huge amount for students to learn over this period so some students print and use the specifications as a checklist for revision. The language used in many specifications however, can make it more difficult for students to understand exactly what is required. ClearRevise breaks this down simply in each subject guide.

An IGCSE is an International version of a GCSE. IGCSEs are commonly used in the independent sector as well as in international schools but have the same level of rigour and recognition as GCSEs.

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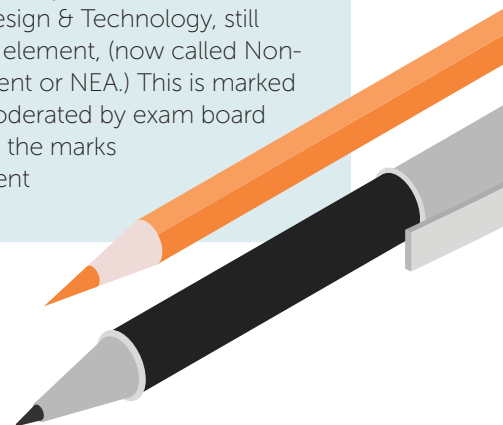
Course modules

In some subjects, for example English Literature and History, students will study only some elements of the specification. It is helpful to find out from your child or their school which options they are studying within these subjects. In English Literature (a separate GCSE from English Language), find out which novels they will study, and which poetry anthology they are going to be examined on. In History, it will include which topics they will study.

4

Exams and coursework

Most courses at GCSE and A Level are now externally examined which means students will sit a formal exam, usually in a school hall. Some subjects such as Design & Technology, still have a coursework element, (now called Non-examined Assessment or NEA.) This is marked by teachers and moderated by exam board specialists to check the marks are fair and consistent across the country.



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Exam dates and details

Each exam board will have a web page that outlines the date and the details of each examination. The ClearRevise guides also contain other useful details such as the grade boundaries, exam tips and mark allocations.

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Success at GCSE

GCSE success determines the pathways available to your child post-16. This may be a vocational course, an apprenticeship or A Levels.

GCSEs are measured with grades 9 to 1 with 9 being the highest. This replaced the A-G system in 2016. A level 4 is regarded as a standard pass and is necessary in English and Maths to avoid retakes. A Level 5 is regarded as a strong pass. The equivalent of the old 'A' is about a Level 7. Level 9 grades are only given to the highest performing percentage of students in the country for that course or examination.

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GCSE options

Whilst many subjects are compulsory (for example English, Maths and Science), there are plenty of other optional GCSE subjects. Some schools may add subjects to their own list of mandatory subjects, but they will still offer some choice at GCSE. It is also possible to register as a private candidate with some exam boards to take some additional GCSEs outside of those offered by the school. The school may also help with this. Additional GCSEs commonly include other languages such as Latin, Mandarin and Urdu.

Exam timetables

Find the times and dates of all the exams from the exam board websites so you can plan around these dates. The school will likely provide an exam timetable as well.



Specifications and past papers

Download specifications and past papers for your child directly from the exam board websites.

