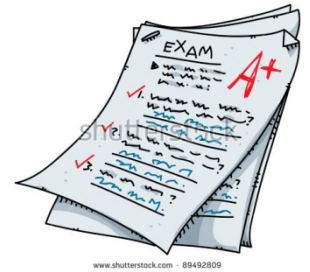


11 Plus English Preparation Guide



Who is this guide for?

- Pupils in year 5 and year 6
- Those looking to improve their English skills for an 11 Plus exam
- Pupils sitting: GL style, school written or Essex (CSSE) exam

It is quite important that before reading this preparation guide you also read [our preparation advice for all parents](#) (hold CTRL whilst clicking link to open in a new tab) that provides advice on what sort of difficulties you can expect and how to tackle them.

Organisation

As most parents have limited knowledge of the 11 Plus the organisation of exam preparation can become challenging. Common problems that many parents face include:

- Which books to use
- Which tests to use
- What to do and when to do it
- What a parent's role should be



This guide looks at how parents should tackle these problems. We have traditionally shown parents the solution to these problems in terms of books, however, we have begun to see a number of specialised structured course products being produced. We believe these courses, which combine many aspects of books into a pre-prepared course, offer a comparable alternative for parents to consider and are gaining popularity as an 11 Plus preparation technique.

Advantages of structured courses in comparison to books:

- Content is pre-organised saving a huge amount of time.
- Specialised courses for different exam boards, subjects and preparation lengths.
- No need to buy multiple books for revision and tests.
- Often cheaper, even taking into account printing costs.

If you wish to prepare using specialised courses we offer some advice below, however due to the complications and need for advice for preparation using books, this will form the bulk of the preparation guide.

Preparation for English using structured courses

If you have chosen to prepare using a structured course you will not need any further help from us on how to complete your course. But with a variety of courses available you may need some help choosing the correct one for your circumstances.

On our main [English year five papers and books page](#) we have recommend four different course options. Below we supply a little more detail to help parents choose the course which is most appropriate for their needs.

1. Full structured courses

We recommend two full structured courses. The full courses offer English alongside the additional subjects (e.g. a numerical element, a non-verbal reasoning element and a verbal reasoning element etc.). For this reason they should only be purchased if you are proposing to use a structured course as your **Main** preparation method.

- The main difference between the two courses is their length. The [Enhance Course](#) is 20 parts (about 1000 pages in total) whilst the Boost Course is 10 parts (about 650 pages in total).
- The [Boost Course](#) is recommended if you have less than 20 weeks for your preparation.
- In our opinion the courses cover all bases very well.
- However, if you are going to face an individual NVR (non-verbal reasoning) paper as part of your exams, you may benefit from a little more NVR coverage. This can easily be supplemented via an additional book (such as the one we suggest [here](#)).



If you finish the course early and like the format and want to do some more then they do produce [Revision Courses](#) which would be really useful to do over the summer holidays. Watch out though as these are very intensive, our advice would be to allow six weeks to complete them not the four weeks suggested.

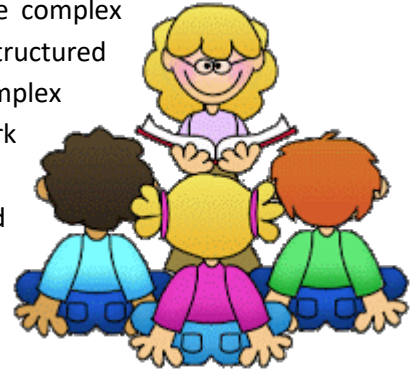
2. Subject specific structured courses

From the available courses there are no structured English-only courses we would recommend. However, there are two structured literacy courses we could recommend.

- The courses we recommend contain vocabulary, verbal reasoning and English.
- Use the Vocab/VR/English Boost course if you have less than 20 weeks to go until the exam

3. Special advice for families preparing for school written tests/ Essex (CSSE) English

- School written and Essex (CSSE) tests tend to require more complex comprehension skills, often based off classic book texts. The structured courses we recommend above include lots of the more complex classic text comprehension work and lots of vocabulary work and so will be ideal in that respect.
- As some tests do not include a VR aspect this can be omitted from the structured courses during preparation.
- NB Essex (CSSE) tests do include some Verbal Reasoning but questions tend to be vocabulary based which we believe is given sufficient focus in VR question types 1-10 within the structured courses.



Detailed advice for families using books (to be used with our [book recommendations](#))

Before beginning our advice please note the following:

1. Our recommendations are broken down by section: **core skills development**, **exam technique development** and **full timed English papers**.
2. We very strongly recommend you do not leap forwards to doing papers before a child is ready as although they will develop exam technique, they will not develop the core understanding required for some trickier questions. Focussing primarily on papers will not help your child to improve and they are likely to simply reach a plateau and not be able to progress further.
3. The advice below is designed for children with more than 30 weeks to go until the exam, if you have less time available then see our advice at the end of the sections.
4. The advice takes into account that children need spare time for other activities e.g. Maths.

Step One – Core skills development (Week 1 to Week 30)

General English Skills

- Either choose the [Bond no nonsense books](#) or the [Schofield and Sims - English Skills books](#). Try to do 3 pages a week.

Additional English

- We only suggest the [Schofield and Sims Springboard books](#) for this. Children love these books so we would recommend them as it is useful to have something children enjoy on the agenda - again try to do three pages a week.

Vocabulary and Spelling



- Ideally we would suggest you use one of the structured courses we have recommended as the content is really excellent and it is an area that is really difficult to cover with books. Choose the course which suits the time you have left.
- If you wish to use books then we recommend the [11+ Vocabulary in Context books](#) we have suggested. Try and do three pages a week.
- Additionally please make sure your child reads for at least half an hour every day.
- It is also useful to note down and learn any words that are new, unfamiliar or they struggle with.
- We suggest weekly that you try and identify 20 new words and keep them recorded to revise them regularly and build up knowledge through frequency of exposure.

Comprehension

- Your regular daily reading and vocabulary work will help to develop better comprehension skills.
- In addition use the books ([Schofield & Sims - Comprehension](#)) we have identified. Try and do two comprehensions per week.

Summary of Step One

- Work needs to be little and often.
- You will need to adjust what you do depending on the time you have available.
- Spend time developing your child's core skills - this is essential for improvement.
- Doing paper after paper will not help improve your child. It will only teach exam technique - that's why this core work is so important.

Step Two - Exam Technique Development (Week 22 - Week 24)

1. Exam technique development helps children to understand how to proceed when faced with an exam paper. Common problems that children have are discussed below.
2. Start this with about six to eight weeks to go (in addition to core skills work if you haven't quite finished). We only stay on this stage for two weeks.
3. The purpose of doing easier papers (which these are) is to ensure children get used to working to time while at the same time boosting their confidence.
4. We suggest you choose one of the two resources we have suggested in step two ([CGP practice book or Bond 11 plus English assessment tests](#)) and do one or two papers per week for two weeks - don't do more than this.
5. A good measure of success is if your child copes with the time well and scores highly (think over 80%).

Problems with timing during papers and what to do about them

- The solution to timing issues is simply to help children pace themselves effectively.
- Issues with timing can be caused by: fear of getting a question wrong, slow reading, lack of timing experience, tension and stress, amongst others.

- We believe dividing up a paper beforehand using lines to indicate time divisions and allocating a set reading time for any text, is a useful technique to help children work through papers at the right pace.
- Set a time period for each division (e.g. six minutes per six questions) and indicate when the set period has elapsed whilst going through the paper.
- This should give the child an indicator of the speed they need to be working towards.

Problems with accuracy

- It's important to understand whether children are just working sloppily or whether they really don't know how to tackle questions.
- Accuracy tends to be less of an issue in English than it is in Maths. One way to help children to focus on accuracy is simple bribery! Don't reward children for high marks, instead have a chat about accuracy and help them to see that the expectation is that they should focus enough to get 100% (it's important to set the bar high) on those questions they themselves think they should have got right.
- One idea is to put £5 on offer and take off £1 for each answer they gave which they themselves admit they should have got correct (you could do £1 and 10p off each time if you wanted to).

Problems with vocabulary

- We emphasise the need to focus on vocabulary and to read and to use new word lists throughout as it's just so important, unfortunately sometimes it hasn't been done and parents get to the testing stage and only then see why it is so important.
- Even if time is limited there are still ways to improve vocabulary. You won't have time to make great steps towards building a wide vocabulary but reading will help whatever stage of the build-up to the exam you are at. We recommend at least half an hour a day.
- You can also help your child to use what vocabulary they do have to the best of their ability by helping them to think about words and bring those words to the front of their mind. You can do this by playing the games Boggle or Scrabble with them – they are enjoyable and in the short term are one of the few ways you can really help a child with this predicament.



Step Three – Full timed English papers (Week 24 - Week 30)

You really need to start this with four to six weeks to go.

We recommend using [GL Assessment packs](#) as these are written by one of the major exam boards. Concentrate on the following:

- Always set a room aside for this work, it must be done under exam conditions to get most benefit from it.
- Always try to mark work quickly and then spend enough time going through the answers.
- If timing is still an issue keep using the separation technique to set up time blocks and help children work to pace through the whole test.
- If accuracy is still an issue keep talking about it and perhaps keep the accuracy rewards system going.
- Keep encouraging your child - their confidence will be a crucial factor in the test, if they are confident they will do better.
- Keep things light-hearted and do not overwork - Children who are tired and or stressed or worried will underperform, better to stop work altogether than have a worried child go into an exam and underperform by 30%.
- Keep going with the reading and vocabulary work throughout.

Finally, try to understand the structure of your child's exams. Knowing this means you're able to replicate the test format at home e.g. English followed by a half hour break before doing verbal reasoning. Many children go into the test without realising that it will be a test of stamina to some degree so it's a good idea to get them used to this beforehand.

Special notes for those taking an Essex (CSSE) exam

- Essex (CSSE) tests are in our view amongst the most difficult of English tests. The structured courses we have suggested are pretty good for these exams as they use lots of classic text work (it is highly likely that the Essex test will include a classic text comprehension).
- If you are using [books](#) that's also fine, you just need to make sure there is exposure to classic texts (try some paired reading with classic texts). The Essex test tends also to have more complex vocabulary testing in it so please make sure enough focus is given to this area.
- Finally don't forget that the Essex test regularly includes a short creative writing section and some vocabulary based VR type questions. The structured courses cover the VR elements well but if you are using books then you will need to do some additional VR work. If you haven't much time then look at this example [Essex paper](#) and you can see the type of VR questions they ask.
- For the writing side we recommend you look at our [Creative writing advice](#).

Special notes for those taking School Written English tests.

School written English tests tend to also use classic texts and provide more difficult English comprehensions than standard grammar school exams. The advice we provide for Essex schools applies:

- The structured courses cover the ground well but if using books then make sure there is exposure to classic texts perhaps through paired reading
- Vocabulary is even more important than it is for standard tests
- See our advice on [creative writing](#) to see if the school you are trying for has a creative writing test.

What happens if you have more or less than 30 weeks for preparation?

If you have more than 30 weeks the temptation is to do more papers at the end. We'd suggest that the more successful approach is to spend longer on core skills work (Steps 1-3). If you do finish early and have used books then you may want to consider using a [structured revision course](#) at the end for variety. Otherwise just doing some more papers can help although you will need to really focus on the feedback and marking to ensure you are not just going through the motions and scores haven't just reached a plateau.

N.B. This guide has been developed recognising that most students will need to spend time on other areas of preparation. Please ensure you read our general guide and our guides on Maths, Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal before proceeding. They will all work together to give you one unified approach whether you are using books or the new structured course approach.

