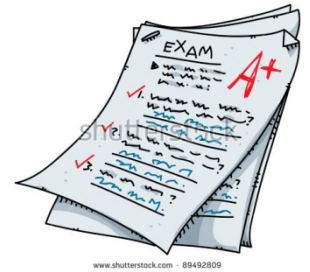


11 Plus CEM Verbal Reasoning Preparation Guide



Who is this guide for?

- Pupils in year 5 and year 6
- Those looking to improve their Verbal Reasoning skills for an 11 Plus exam
- Pupils sitting: CEM style tests

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) which includes 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 CEM Verbal Reasoning (VR) using structured courses

If you have chosen to prepare using a structured course you won't 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 [CEM VR 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 vocabulary and VR **alongside** the additional subjects (e.g. a numerical reasoning and non-verbal reasoning, etc.). For this reason they should only be purchased if you are proposing to use a structured course as your **main** preparation.

- 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, are good value for money and remove much of the organisational hassle.
- 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 also 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.

Alternatively if you finish early you could do some more papers to ensure your skills stay sharp. We have a range of CEM papers on our site that can be accessed [here](#).

2. Subject specific structured courses

From the available courses we have suggested two subject specific courses.

- These cover vocabulary and verbal reasoning (it is common knowledge that a wide vocabulary is essential if pupils are to do well in Verbal Reasoning tests).
- The first course ([vocabulary and verbal reasoning enhance](#)) is 20 parts long.
- The second course ([vocabulary and verbal reasoning boost](#)) is 10 parts long.

- Use the Enhance course if you have 20 weeks plus to go until the exam and use the Boost course if you have less than 20 weeks to go.
- Watch out because these courses are pretty intensive. They include lots of timed test exposure along the way.
- Courses include full coverage of the CEM question types including lots of comprehension.

3. Special advice for families preparing for mixed tests

- Some schools use a CEM Verbal Reasoning Test and then use their own Maths and English tests. In this scenario you could still use either one of the full structured courses or the standalone verbal reasoning and VR course.
- Some schools have a pre-test and use CEM VR for this. The structured courses also work very well in these situations.



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: **skills development and practice**, **CEM verbal reasoning question types** and **exam technique development and practice**.
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.

Step One – Skills Development and Practice (Week 1 - Week 30)

The CEM VR exam covers their VR questions together with a great deal of comprehension based work. We need to help children prepare by boosting their skills in the relevant areas.

Below we have highlighted the areas that we recommend should be focussed on for excellent skills development and have noted the resources we believe will best aid achieving this. The links will take you to our resources webpage where you can find the recommended books under these same headings.

General English Skills

If starting with ample preparation time then do two pages a week starting with the first book in the series from either [Bond No Nonsense](#) or [Schofield and Sims English Skills](#). Continue doing two pages a week throughout the whole process. The skills children develop here will help with lots of the CEM questions. If starting late then start with the [second book of the same series](#).

Additional English

These are great books and unique in the market. If you have the time we'd also urge you to use these. Start with [Springboard 7](#) and then do [Springboard 8](#). Do two to three pages per week. Children love these books and it's important to have a mix of work with some things they really enjoy.

Grammar and Punctuation

CEM don't currently ask many if any questions on these topics but they can do without notice and have done so before. It's why we include this [Letts Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling book](#). We suggest one page per week until you finish it.

Vocabulary and Spelling

This is the single most important development area. Our recommendation is to use the [structured course](#) that suits the time you have available. We recommend this course because it is much better than any of the books that are available.

If you would prefer to use books then we suggest the three [CGP Spelling Question Books](#), work through them doing three or four pages a week. Remember that you will also need to be reading every day and working on revising and developing knowledge of new words along the way.

You should work on this area throughout your preparation until exam day.

Comprehension

Remember CEM Verbal reasoning includes lots of comprehension work. We suggest you work through [two Schofield and Sims books](#) doing two comprehensions per week. Again this should be done throughout the preparation process.

Step Two - CEM Verbal Reasoning Question Types (Week 3 - Week 20)

- This work should be started after the first three or so weeks of general work. [The CGP CEM Verbal-Reasoning Study Book](#) introduces you to the main CEM question types. We suggest you use this, covering two or three question types per week, alongside [The CGP CEM Verbal-Reasoning 10 Minute Tests book](#) and do one test per week.
- Some people struggle with topics such as shuffled sentences. Please allocate additional time for technique work where this is an issue

- Alternatively, you could use one of the subject specific courses which combine vocabulary and VR. We recommended this solution as it covers the topics well and takes the pain out of deciding what to do when and organising the weekly work schedule. The two relevant courses are either the [CEM Vocabulary and VR Enhance course](#) (if you have 20 weeks or more) or the [CEM Vocabulary and VR Boost course](#) (if you have less than 20 weeks to go).

Step Three - Exam Technique development and Practice (Week 20 - Week 30)

- We recommend you start this roughly ten weeks before the exam. You will by now have covered the core literacy work needed. If not, this should be continued until it is completed. Remember to keep working on vocabulary all the way through your preparation.
- We have identified an editor's pick set of [practice papers packs from CGP](#). These in our view will give you a good flavour of how the exam will feel.
- Don't overdo the papers; try to do one VR paper and one Numerical reasoning/NVR paper each week alongside finishing off the core work and working on your vocabulary.
- Guidance on how to help with some of the problems children experience with papers is included below.

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. three 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.
- Important - spend lots of time going over mistakes. At this stage the score is irrelevant, focussing on knowledge gaps through mistakes is essential.

When doing papers remember this checklist

- 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 it.

- 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. one paper followed by a half hour break before doing a second paper. 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.

Scores reach a plateau

Often we find children reach a plateau in their scores with verbal reasoning. Where this is the case and there are no obvious issues such as technique faults the cause is often simply that their vocabulary is not wide enough. Sadly where this happens just before the exam it is really too late to fix it properly which is why we urge all pupils to start work on their vocabulary at the beginning and then continue working on it through the process. Vocabulary development is the single most important thing you can do.

Step Four (non-essential but nice to feature during preparation)

- If you have time, and we stress; **only if you have time**. CEM can change their question types whenever they like without warning so it's a good idea to build in some flexibility in question types. The books in this section are GL VR questions, CEM could produce questions which look like this at any moment.
- For choice we'd recommend the [CGP GL Verbal Reasoning Study book](#) as it covers the main question types with example questions.
- This is the icing on the cake and only there to help with flexible preparation.



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 and on the question types (Steps 1-2). 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 [Numerical Reasoning](#) and Non-Verbal reasoning before proceeding. They will all work together to give you one unified approach whether you are using books or the new structured course approach.

