

11 Plus 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: 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) 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, but have begun to see a number of specialised structured courses being produced. We believe these courses, which combine many aspects of books into a 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 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 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.

The main distinction is between a full course and a subject specific course:

1. Full structured courses

We recommend three full structured courses from Learning Street, depending on the time you have available. The full courses offer coverage of all elements tested in the 11 Plus exam (English, Verbal Reasoning, Maths and Non-Verbal Reasoning, including additional work on core skills and vocabulary development). For this reason they should only be purchased if you are proposing to use a structured course as your **main** preparation method.

- If you have approximately 40 weeks to prepare, [The Complete 11 Plus Programme](#) is ideal. It offers all the work you need, comprehensively set out to gradually build core skills and exam technique over 40 parts.
- If you have approximately 20 weeks to prepare, try the [Enhance Course](#). It contains 20 parts, covering approximately 60% of the material of The Complete 11 Plus Programme, and therefore offers a more condensed option.
- The [Boost Course](#) is recommended if you have less than 20 weeks for your preparation. It contains 10 parts.



If you finish the course early and want to do some more they do produce intensive [Revision Courses](#) which would be really useful to do over the summer holidays.

2. Subject specific structured courses

From the available courses, the most comprehensive is the 40 part [Vocabulary, English and Verbal Reasoning](#) course. However, we also suggest considering two other courses if you have less time available.

- 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) and include everything from the full courses mentioned above except the Maths, NVR and English sections.
- 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.

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

- If schools have a VR test then they will either buy this in (often from GL) or they will write some questions themselves. Essex (CSSE) includes some vocabulary based questions.
- NB Essex (CSSE) tests do include non-multiple choice questions and these are included within the structured courses we recommend.



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: vocabulary development, technique development, familiarisation, exam skills development and full timed tests.
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 section.
4. The advice takes into account that children need spare time for other subjects.

Step Zero - Vocabulary Development (Week 1 - Week 30)

We cannot stress that vocabulary development is the key to getting high marks in verbal reasoning. Children without very strong vocabulary skills can work as hard as they like on technique but they will find their scores reach a plateau defined by how strong their vocabulary is.

We recommend the [11+ Vocabulary in Context books](#) for vocabulary development. However, you may want to consider using a subject specific course as comparatively these offer better coverage than any book we have seen.

To develop you will need to:

- Work through the structured vocabulary course or do two to three pages a week from the [11+ vocabulary in context books](#).
- Read every day - see our [recommended reading list](#).
- Try to find and learn twenty new words every week and revise them until they sink in.
- Keep your vocabulary fresh by regularly playing a game like Boggle or Scrabble.

Remember: vocabulary development must be done **throughout the whole process** all the way up to the exam. Children with a very wide vocabulary are much more likely to succeed.

Step One - Technique Introduction (Week 5 - Week 15)

- We have given you three books to choose from.
- Our preference is the [CGP - Verbal Reasoning Study book](#) on verbal reasoning as the book is produced by a very reputable publisher and is easier to work through than others. The other books do have their merits and are also worth considering.
- For the test there are 21 main question types. We suggest doing two or so question types and some example questions every week for ten weeks. Don't rush; focus on the technique, work through the example questions slowly as that is how you will learn most effectively.

Step Two - Familiarisation (Week 15 - Week 22)

Once you have completed all the 21 question types the next step is to become familiar with each question type so that you're able to recognise the question on sight.

- To do this we recommend the [CGP - Verbal Reasoning 10/11 - The 11 Plus Practice book](#) which breaks down the range of questions into tests.
- We suggest using a daily approach until you are familiar with all the question types.
- If at any point children struggle with the technique (which they can do with some question types such as codes) then go back to the technique book you chose originally.

Step Three - Initial Testing and Exam Technique (Week 22 - Week 26)

Having learnt the question techniques and embedded them with lots of practice questions, the next challenge is to get used to the speed requirements.

- Use easier tests to begin to build confidence and exam technique.
- We suggest using the [Bond 11 Plus Verbal Reasoning Assessment Papers books](#) or the [Letts Verbal Reasoning](#)



[Assessment Papers](#) and doing at least four tests (note these are the books we specifically recommend, not the harder ones).

- Use these first four tests as a marker for progress. If scores are high then move onto tougher tests.

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 other factors.
- 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.

Step Four - Final Preparation using 11 Plus Standard Tests (Week 26 - Week 30)

- We suggest the [GL Multiple Choice Packs](#).
- As the tests are produced by the exam board they offer accuracy in terms of how many questions a child is expected to complete during the time limit.
- Do not use tests too early in the preparation process
- Building vocabulary and question technique gives the best chance of scoring highly.

When doing papers remember this checklist

- ✓ Always set a room aside for this work. Practice papers must be done under exam conditions to get the most benefit.
- ✓ 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, 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.

Scores reach a plateau

Often we find children reach a plateau in their scores. 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.

Special notes for those taking an Essex (CSSE) exam

- While the ESSEX (CSSE) exam includes a few vocabulary based verbal reasoning questions it is worth keeping in mind that there are often some pretty tricky vocabulary based questions in the comprehension test.

Special notes for those taking different School Written Verbal reasoning tests

- Where schools write their own Maths and English tests they, more often than not buy-in their verbal reasoning (if they have a VR test) from publishers like GL or CEM. If your target school buys in a GL test then the advice above will serve you very well as a guide for 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 (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 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, English 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.

