APEX ACADEMIC · FREE STUDY GUIDE

A parent’s guide to school exam courses

A practical guide for choosing and supporting your child’s exam course.

EXAM-STYLE questions written by Apex tutors

Clear methods, marked working and the mistakes that commonly cost marks.

Start with the exam board

An exam board is the organisation that publishes a course specification, sets its assessments and awards the qualification. The specification describes the material a student is expected to learn and the ways it may be assessed. It is the best reference for checking what belongs in a course. A school chooses which board and qualification its students enter; a tutoring plan should follow that choice rather than assume that two courses with similar names have identical content.

A course title on its own may not be enough to identify the right syllabus. Ask the school for the full qualification name, board and course code. If you have a recent school report, timetable, exam entry statement or past paper, check those details against the official specification. The board's own site is the source to use when a detail matters, because course arrangements can change between exam years.

- Record the full course name, exam board and code for each subject.
- Keep the specification or official course page with your study notes.
- Check that practice material matches the qualification and the student's route or tier.

IGCSE, International GCSE, GCSE and O Level

These names describe related school qualifications, but they do not identify one interchangeable course. IGCSE and International GCSE generally refer to qualifications designed for international schools and students. Cambridge International offers IGCSE and O Level qualifications, among others; Pearson Edexcel offers International GCSE and International A Level as well as UK qualifications. The exact course, assessment and grading depend on the particular syllabus and code.

GCSE usually refers to a UK qualification. In England, schools can enter students with different exam boards, including AQA, OCR and Pearson Edexcel; WJEC serves Wales and Eduqas is its brand for qualifications taken in England. A subject can have different specifications across boards. O Level is a separate qualification name used by Cambridge International and is taken in a number of countries. Do not choose a revision guide only because its subject title looks familiar: compare the course code and specification first.

- IGCSE, International GCSE, GCSE and O Level are course labels, not a guarantee of identical content.
- The board and course code narrow the course down to the right specification.
- Use the school's entry information to confirm the qualification being studied.

Tiers and routes

Some qualifications divide assessment into tiers or routes. The labels and rules vary by subject and board. Cambridge IGCSE Mathematics 0580, for example, has Core and Extended routes. Pearson Edexcel International GCSE Mathematics A 4MA1 has Foundation and Higher tiers. UK GCSE Maths qualifications may also use Foundation and Higher tiers. These examples come from the course records in this guide; they should not be taken to mean that every subject offers the same choices.

A tier can affect the papers a student sits, the material assessed and the grades available. The school normally advises which route fits the student's preparation and goals and makes the exam entry. Parents should ask how a decision is reached, when it becomes final and what evidence the school considers. A tutor can help a student practise the material for the confirmed route, but should not change an entry decision without the school.

- Ask whether the subject has tiers or routes and which one the school has selected.
- Confirm that worksheets and past papers are for the student's tier and current course.
- Treat the school's exam entry as the reference for the route being prepared.

Find the course code on a school report

Look for a code printed beside the subject name in the report, exam entry statement, timetable or course information sheet. It may also appear on the cover or first page of a school-issued practice paper. A course code is often short and may combine digits with letters. For example, the course records used in this guide include Cambridge IGCSE Mathematics 0580 and Pearson Edexcel International GCSE Mathematics A 4MA1. Those examples are useful identifiers, not a complete list of courses.

If the report shows only a broad subject name, such as Mathematics, ask the school office or subject teacher for the board, qualification and code. A report may use an internal school label instead of the exact examination title. If a student studies more than one mathematics course, check each entry separately. When contacting a tutor, share the exact code and, if known, the tier or route; avoid sending sensitive school records unless they are needed and you are comfortable sharing them.

- Check the report, timetable, exam entry statement and school course handbook.
- Ask the subject teacher or exams office if the code is missing or unclear.
- Share the code with a tutor and confirm the tutor's resources match it.

Exam series and planning

Exam series are scheduled assessment periods. The months available depend on the board, qualification, subject and syllabus. The board records represented here list examples such as June and November for Cambridge IGCSE, and the Cambridge 0580 record also lists March for India only. The AP entry in the board information says its exams are sat in May. These are examples from the courses described here, not a promise that every subject can be taken in every series.

Use the school calendar and the student's official entry to plan backwards from the actual exam date. First note the deadline for completing course content, then reserve time for practice papers, review and rest. Ask the school which papers and components the student will sit. A course may have several papers, and their timings, marks and routes can differ. Where the board publishes an updated specification, check which exam years it covers.

- Confirm the exam series and dates with the school; do not infer them from another subject.
- Check the current specification and the papers or components on the entry.
- Plan time for learning, timed practice and review of mistakes.

Ten questions to ask any tutor before paying

A first conversation should make the course, teaching plan and practical arrangements clear. Ask direct questions and listen for answers that relate to your child's situation. You do not need to decide during the first conversation. Compare what the tutor says with the school's course information, and ask for clarification wherever a claim is difficult to check.

- Which exam board, qualification and course code will you teach?
- How will you confirm that the lesson follows the student's current specification?
- Does this subject have a tier or route, and how will you align practice with the school's entry?
- What would you ask the student before planning the first lesson?
- How will you identify which topics or skills need attention first?
- Will the student practise explaining working and showing a clear method?
- How do you mark practice and explain where marks were gained or lost?
- What feedback will the parent and student receive after a lesson?
- What are the lesson length, schedule, payment terms and cancellation arrangements?
- Can we discuss a lesson before deciding whether to continue, and what happens next?

APEX ACADEMIC

Give your child a clear next step

Book a free demo, request a free marked test, or message our team on WhatsApp.

https://apexacademictutors.com/free-test/

WhatsApp: +92 336 391 7958