A PARENTS’ GUIDE TO

COMMON ENTRANCE
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HISTORY OF COMMON ENTRANCE

In 1903 HMC set up the Common Entrance Examination Committee and the first Common Examination for Entrance to Public Schools was in 1904. Twenty-five Senior Schools participated; today some two hundred and fifty Senior Schools use Common Entrance.

The first examinations comprised papers in English Grammar, Composition and Literature, French Grammar, Composition and Translation, Greek Grammar, Composition and Translation, Latin Grammar, Composition and Translation, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, English History and Geography. Scripture was added in the 1930s and a general Mathematics paper in 1954. Science was not included until 1969, although during the Second World War naval candidates borrowed a Science paper from the Board of Admiralty as an alternative to Latin.

Common Entrance for girls was introduced after the Second World War and was run by a separate committee, the Common Entrance Examination for Girls’ Schools. Entry to girls’ schools was normally at 11+, sometimes at 12+ and occasionally at 13+, when papers were borrowed from the boys’ committee. At 11+, papers were taken in English and Arithmetic, later replaced by Mathematics; Verbal and Non-Verbal Reasoning papers were introduced later. At 12+, as well as English and Mathematics, there were French papers, a General paper and eventually a Science paper.

The boys’ and girls’ committees amalgamated in 1989 and in 1990 the Common Entrance Board (later renamed the Independent Schools Examinations Board) was born. A number of changes ensued. Most significantly, Common Entrance was brought into line with the National Curriculum. At 13+, the irreducible core was established as English, Mathematics and Science with optional papers in Classical Greek, French, Geography, German, History, Latin, Religious Studies and Spanish. At 11+ Science was introduced and Verbal and Non-Verbal Reasoning papers were dropped at the end of the 1990s.

The year 2003 marked the introduction of non-prescriptive mark schemes for all subjects and the demise of the 12+ examination. A year later the Common Academic Scholarship Examination (CASE), based on Common Entrance syllabuses, was introduced. Since then, there has been a constant refinement of all Common Entrance syllabuses and papers. In most subjects there are different levels to encourage weaker candidates and to help identify stronger ones. Both knowledge and skills are tested in all papers.
GENERAL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

NOTES FOR GUIDANCE ON THE COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

The Common Entrance examinations are used for assessing boys and girls who transfer to Senior Schools at the ages of 11+ and 13+. The syllabuses are devised and regularly monitored by the Independent Schools Examinations Board (ISEB), composed of representatives from The Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference (HMC), the Girls’ Schools Association (GSA) and The Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS). The papers are set by examiners appointed by the ISEB, but the answers are marked by the Senior School for which a candidate is entered. Candidates may normally be entered only if:

- they have been offered a place at a Senior School subject to their passing the examination, or
- they are entered for a trial run, in which case the papers are marked by the junior school concerned

Where candidates are at schools in membership of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools and at certain other schools and tutorial centres regularly entering candidates, they are entered by their school online.

ENTERING CANDIDATES

Candidates are entered for the examinations according to age at entry to Senior School. Examination papers are set for entry at the ages of 11+ or 13+ and candidates should take the papers for their correct age group unless otherwise arranged with the Senior School.

It is expected that most candidates will take the examination at their own school in the UK or overseas. Where it is not possible for a candidate to take the examination in his/her present school, it is the responsibility of parents to make an arrangement with a private invigilator. Such a person should be either a head or teacher at a local school or a person of such professional standing as to ensure the integrity of the examination. Sometimes the Senior School for which the candidate is entered can provide invigilation.

The 13+ examination may be taken in the autumn, spring or the summer school term. The 11+ examination is taken in the autumn or spring term.

A candidate may be registered at a second Senior School. It is important that the parents have previously obtained the agreement of that school to be second choice. If a candidate fails to gain entry to the first-choice Senior School, the scripts will be forwarded by that Senior School to the second-choice Senior School.
Subjects

All candidates take English, Mathematics and Science.

At 13+ they may offer any of the following:
French, Geography, German, Greek, History, Latin, Religious Studies and Spanish.

Queries about options and levels should be addressed to NPS who will ask the Senior School for which the candidate is registered.

Examination dates
Papers must be taken on the dates fixed by the Board. See the Dates section of this website.

Head's Report
A Headmaster’s report is required; it should be sent to the Senior School two weeks before the first day of the relevant examination.

CANDIDATES WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The needs of a candidate with any specific learning difficulty should be discussed with NPS who will liaise with the relevant Senior School. Computers may be used by candidates certified as having specific learning difficulties. In exceptional cases, a reader or an amanuensis may be used. For visually-impaired candidates, the Board will arrange for enlarged or Braille copies of the examination papers to be printed; a year's notice is required.

INTERNATIONAL CANDIDATES

Common Entrance candidates whose mother tongue is not English are allowed to use bilingual dictionaries in Mathematics, Science and Humanities. They are also allowed up to 25% extra time if they have studied in the medium of English for less than two years.
Religious Studies

Content:

Stories from Old and New Testament and related contemporary issues.

World Religions – Christianity and Islam

No coursework
1 hour long exam (3 sections – Old Testament, New Testament, World Religions)
All sit same exam (no different levels)

Top Tips: Encourage your child to listen to the news on tv/radio and discuss current issues with them. They will be asked to draw on examples from modern life in classwork and exams, so it will help them if they have a broad knowledge and understanding of events and people in the news (e.g. conflict, world leaders, any controversial or moral issues).

Science

**Level 1** is one paper (60 minutes) with equal numbers of questions allocated to biology, chemistry and physics. The paper will have a mixture of multiple choice questions as well as more open questions worth up to 2 marks. 10% of the paper will be on plotting graphs or simple calculations (means or using formulae). Calculators and protractors are allowed.

**Level 2:** 3 papers - biology, chemistry and physics, each exam is 40 minutes long. Mixture of questions with some questions being divided into parts requiring answers in sentences with a mark allocated for correct punctuation and grammar with an acceptable level of spelling.

At least 25% of each paper will be testing how science works where experimental investigative abilities will be tested. The investigation may or may not have been carried out by students since it is testing their ability to use the information provided to evaluate and communicate scientific evidence, using the evidence to support scientific ideas. This may include how to work safely, plotting graphs correctly or analysing data using formulae to carry out calculations.

How Science works may also include questions relating to strengths or limitations to social and cultural activities relating to science.

Children should try to keep up to date with science in the news. Parents may also wish to encourage children to watch scientific programmes on television which could enhance their children’s learning.

Look at topics previously covered, and try the practice questions in the revision guides.

Useful websites:
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks3bitesize/science/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks3bitesize/science/)
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/science/aqa/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/science/aqa/)
[http://www.ntscience.co.uk/science-mindmaps/index.html](http://www.ntscience.co.uk/science-mindmaps/index.html)
History

The syllabus is based on key stage 3 of the National Curriculum. The course develops their knowledge and understanding of chronology, causes and consequence of historical events and historical interpretation. We develop their skills of historical enquiry through studying a range of sources, and organising, analysing and communicating their opinions, using the appropriate historical vocabulary.

The syllabus covers three time periods: Medieval Realms, Britain 1066-1485; The Making of the United Kingdom, 1485-1750; Britain and Empire, 1750-1914. As the course is so contend laden, we are at liberty to select two of those time periods and therefore the students study medieval history in Year 7 and then we move onto the second time period in Year 8.

For the two time periods there are 5 common themes: war and rebellion; government and parliament; religion; social history; general topics. In the examination, the students are given 60 minutes to answer one evidence question and one essay question (split into a and b).

The evidence question is worth 20 marks and consists of three sources, one of which is pictorial. The written sources may be primary or secondary or a combination of both. The question will begin: ‘Using ALL the sources and your own knowledge, ...’ Students will be expected to: demonstrate their skills of comprehension, comparison and differentiation between first-hand evidence and hindsight; their understanding of provenance; their ability to present an overview, supported by their own knowledge. This particular method of questioning is brand new this year as in previous years there were 4 questions based on the three sources.

The essay question is still worth 30 marks but there will only be ten essay choices from which students must select one. Each question will be generic and open-ended. (eg) a. Choose a war or rebellion you have studied and explain its most important consequences. B. Explain the importance of the role of a commander in a battle won by England/Britain. Up to 50% of the marks may be awarded for a good narrative essay; able students will be expected, however, to express opinions and use their analytical skills.

I encourage background reading of each topic as there is a vast amount of historical fiction out there. Anything to fire their imagination and put events into context will enhance their understanding of each topic so please do allow them to read (or watch) as much as they can around the subject. (That includes historical dvds such as Elizabeth I: The Golden Age, etc.)
Modern Languages

The candidates will be tested on their oral, listening, reading and writing skills. The oral and listening will take place in May. The written and reading exams in June with the other subjects.

There are tiered papers: Level 1 and Level 2. Level 1 is aimed at candidates who have studied French for between 30 and 40 hours, or who find the language difficult.

At Level 1, the past tenses are not required in any paper and in the Writing component, candidates are expected to produce basic language only in the last section. In Level 2, exercises in the Speaking and Writing components offer open-ended tasks which allow candidates to show knowledge of a range of tenses, should they choose to use them.

LISTENING (25%)
This will be based on a number of short passages recorded on a CD. There will be 20 questions (usually arranged in four sections) in Level 1 and 25 questions (usually arranged in five or six sections) in Level 2. There will be a range of test-types in English: these might include multiple choice, true/false, table/grid etc…

WRITING (25%)

READING (25%)

SPEAKING (25%)
I will assess the candidate’s performance and will submit recordings of all candidates for moderation.

Level 1
There will be discussion on two prepared topics.

Level 2
There will be a role-play situation and discussion on two prepared topics.

Role-play situation (9 marks)
Only for level 2 candidates
I will give each candidate, at random, one situation from the three which are
Set. The candidate will be required to carry out six tasks in the target language which have been given in English. One of the tasks will be unpredictable and will require the candidate to respond, unprepared, to my question. The role plays may be based on any area of the syllabus.

Prepared topics
Part A
The candidate will choose any topic covered by the syllabus or a topic in connection with a country where the target language is spoken

• a town or region
• a regional or national celebration
• an artist (painter, sculptor, writer, composer etc.)
• an historical figure
• a sportsman/sportswoman
TOPICS

- language of the classroom
- house, home, daily routine and chores
- life and work at school
- time, dates, numbers and prices
- personal description
- family, friends and pets
- meeting people
- free-time activities
- holiday activities
- visiting a café or restaurant
- simple health problems
- description of a town or region
- finding the way and using transport
- understanding tourist information*
- shopping (e.g. for food, clothes, presents)
- pocket money*
- weather
- local environmental issues

GRAMMAR

- Level 1 Level 2
- verbs
  - present tense:
    - (i) regular and common irregular
    - (ii) common reflexive
    - (iii) future tense
    - (iv) conditional
  - *imperative forms
  - interrogative forms
  - *past tense
  - *imperfect tense
  - negative expressions
- nouns
  - genders and plurals of common nouns
  - definite and indefinite article
  - partitive article
- adjectives
  - agreement and position of regular and irregular adjectives
  - comparison
  - possessive
  - demonstrative
  - superlative
- adverbs
  - common adverbs
- pronouns
  - subject personal pronouns,
  - relative pronouns:
  - direct and indirect object pronouns
  - reflexive pronouns
- prepositions
- conjunctions
- numerals
  - cardinal numbers: 0–100
  - ordinal numbers
Marks will be awarded as follows:-

**INDIVIDUAL FIELDWORK ENQUIRY (20 marks)**

Usually completed in the Autumn Term

- Introduction (4 marks)
- Methods of data presentation (8 marks)
- Results/presentation of data (8 marks)
- Data analysis (12 marks)
- Fieldwork expertise (8 marks)

**WRITTEN EXAMINATION (80 marks; 60 minutes)**

**Section A: Global location (10-15 marks)**

The questions are to be answered with reference to a given map. The questions will be confined to the features and places listed in Appendix I. The pupils have a copy of this in their files.

**Section B: Ordnance Survey mapwork (10-15 marks)**

This section will comprise Ordnance Survey mapwork questions. Ordnance Survey maps to the scale of 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 will be used and a key to conventional symbols will be provided.

**Section C: Thematic studies (10-15 marks for each of the five themes)**

This section will comprise five questions on the five themes. Candidates will be required to answer all questions. Photographs, maps, diagrams, graphs and data tables may be used as stimulus material. Questions will include a mix of data response, multiple choice, short and more extended answers.

The five themes are:-

1. Rivers and Coasts
2. Environmental Issues
3. Earthquakes and Volcanoes
4. Weather and Climate
5. Economic Activity

**How Can You Help?**

- World map poster on bedroom wall.
- Keep Ordnance Survey maps in car – encourage your child to follow routes.
- Watch the news with your child and discuss where the major events are taking place.
- Encourage your child to look at newspapers. “First News” is an excellent newspaper for young people.
- There are some good “Apps” that can be downloaded onto smart phones or tablets that the pupils might enjoy using – e.g. “What’s The Capital?”, “Tap Quiz Maps” “Barefoot Atlas”, “Earthquake”.

NPS Guide to Common Entrance
English

Candidates will be required to take two papers, both comprising a reading and a writing section. Both papers will be 1 hour 15 minutes in length and carry 50 marks.

The reading sections will be divided into two levels: Level 1 and Level 2.

The writing sections will be common to both Level 1 and Level 2 candidates.

Paper 1

The reading section of Paper 1 will comprise a passage of unseen literary prose followed by about five questions which seek to test understanding as well as powers of analysis and evaluation.

For the writing section, candidates will be asked to select one of four essay titles. Three essay titles will require the use of prose for a practical purpose rather than for an imaginative composition; the fourth essay title will offer a choice of literary topics.

Paper 2

The reading section of Paper 2 will consist of about five questions on an unseen poem to test both understanding of poetic technique and personal response.

For the writing section, candidates will be asked to choose one of four essay titles which provoke imaginative, descriptive or narrative responses.
Mathematics

The Exam
Common Entrance Maths is comprised of 3 exams.

1. The mental maths exam – All children take the same exam. There are twenty questions; the first 6 are straightforward arithmetic, followed by some more complex word problems and the final 4 are designed to challenge the more able pupils.
2. A non-calculator paper – the pupils are not allowed to use calculators in this paper. The exam lasts 1 hour and there are 100 marks available.
3. A calculator paper – for this exam the pupils may use calculators. It also lasts 1 hour and there are 100 marks available.

The Course
This is a 2 year course. There are in fact very few topics that the children will not have studied before. Over these two years the children will be introduced the topics not covered in year 6, for example prime factors, elements of algebra and angles within regular polygons, but most of the work involves going to greater depths of understanding of familiar topics such as fractions and data handling. The questions tend to be more ‘real life’ and thus they require an ability to apply their knowledge and understanding rather than just to be able to ‘number crunch’.

The main topic areas can be broken down into

1) Number and Algebra
2) Shape, Space and Measure
3) Data Handling

Levels
The exam can be taken at 1 of 3 levels.
Level 2 is the generic Common Entrance level to which all children are expected to aspire; a number of schools set level 2 as their minimum expectation, for example King’s Canterbury and Sevenoaks.
If a child is not expected to achieve 40% at level 2, they can be entered for the level 1 exam. Thus exam covers all the topics laid out at level 2, but the questions are less complicated.
Level 3 is reserved for those children who are consistently scoring above 80% at level 2. Level 3 is often referred to as pre-scholarship.
Equipment
Make sure that you have a large and comfortable working space, pens, pencils, paper, blank postcards, clock / watch, drinks / snacks.

Planning your revision
Create a timetable of all the days in the holiday.
Find out on which days you are away and cross them through.
Work on four revision sessions per day.
Decide which subject you are going to revise in each session.
Copy the timetable, agree it with your family and stick a copy on the fridge.
Ask if they can help you in the process. They might even think up some rewards for your hard work!

A daily revision routine
You should aim to work for approximately 3 hours a day during the holiday. You can fit all of this revision into the morning, leaving yourself the lunch, afternoons and evenings free, but you have to be up, washed, dressed and read to start by 9am!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session No</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 – 9.45am</td>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 – 10.45am</td>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 – 11.45pm</td>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 – 12.45pm</td>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUNCH, AFTERNOON &amp; EVENING FREE. WELL DONE!</td>
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Revision Notes.

- During your break get up and walk around. Get a drink, a change of air and even some light exercise.
- Try to vary the type of revision you do in each session.
- Work in a silent room or with light background noise only and not with loud music or television.
- Sit somewhere with a good natural light, at a desk or table and not lying on your bed (unless learning vocabulary or doing some reading)
- Keep a written track of your revision programme so that you see the hours build up – it will give you confidence.
- Always write notes / cue cards as you revise. Reading is not enough to push the details into your memory.
- If you stick to this regular plan, you should be able to take a couple of days off and still be very well prepared for your exams. You also have time to relax and enjoy yourself so you should be able to balance your holiday well.
• Remember: you can never make up for not doing enough revision at the last minute.
• The time is now, the place is here, there is no second chance at a single moment.
• Enjoy revision. It is your chance to show how bright and hard working you really are.

ACTIVE REVISORS
Complete their coursework before it is time to start revising.
Know which the best way to learn.
Are in control of their learning.
Concentrate well.
Discuss their revision with other pupils, teachers and friends.
Draw up a revision timetable.
Can pay attention for longer.
Recognise that ‘little and often’ is the most effective revision.
Know that ‘starting’ revision is the most difficult bit.
Understand that more effort means better attainment.
Read around the subject.
Spent equal time on all subjects.
Have asked their teachers about good ways to learn.
Reduce their notes to key words.
Use a variety of different revision techniques
Use any opportunity to revise; (unexpected absence, long journeys).

PASSIVE REVISORS
Are bored by revision.
Are easily distracted.
Avoid topics that they do not like.
Constantly re-write their notes in full.
Do not discuss their revision with anyone.
Have a short attention span.
Make excuses as to why they did not revise ‘today’.
Learn the first topic well.
Leave revision until the last minute.
Need to be told what to revise.
Never think about the material that they are revising.
Put off revision.
Read through their notes repeatedly.
Revise material that they do not understand.
Revise only their favourite subjects.
Revise what they are told to revise – nothing more nor less.
Don’t keep to timetables and agreements.
Start to panic.
Think that reading through material the day before the exam counts as revision.
Use revision time as a chance to catch up with their coursework.
Write out a model answer on a topic in full and attempt to learn it off by heart