FREE SAMPLE

Online Pre-Test Revision Handbook: revision handbook

A revision handbook for the Online Pre-Tests: 87 lessons teaching the methods for maths, English, verbal reasoning and non-verbal reasoning, with worked examples, practice questions, must-know lists and a 12-week plan.

In this sample

- The contents and how to use the handbook
- About the test, with the schools that use it
- The 12-week revision plan
- The first lessons of a subject chapter
- The first page of the answers

In the full handbook

- A lesson for every topic and question type in the test, with methods, worked examples and practice
- Test skills: timing, answer sheets, checking and test day
- Must-know lists, a 12-week plan and answers with explanations

Original practice material, written for NITU. Not an official paper and not produced by any school, council, consortium or test provider. Where the real test's details are not published, the papers say so and label our choice as an assumption. Practice cannot predict a result and does not guarantee a place.

You may print this sample for use in your own household.

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How to use this handbook

Each lesson teaches one topic or question type on one or two pages:

- **How to do it**: the method, step by step.
- **Worked example**: the method used on a real question, with every step shown.
- **Watch out**: the mistakes that cost the most marks.
- **Practice**: short questions to try, from easier to harder. Answers and explanations are at the back.

Follow the 12-week plan, or dip into the lessons your child finds hardest. Little and often works better than long sessions.

S1–S7	Test skills	7 lessons
M1–M25	Maths	25 lessons
E1–E19	English	19 lessons
V1–V22	Verbal reasoning	22 lessons
N1–N14	Non-verbal reasoning	14 lessons

Every question in this handbook is original. Answers were checked, but if you find a mistake please tell us and we will correct it.

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About the test

This handbook covers the skills tested in the **Online Pre-Tests**, based on the published format where details are published. Each row below says how sure we are: **Published** means the organisers publish it; **Reported** means it comes from other sources and should be checked; **Our assumption** means it is not published and we made a sensible choice.

Reported	The ISEB Common Pre-Test is taken online and is adaptive (questions get harder or easier depending on answers). It has four timed sections: English (reading comprehension, spelling, punctuation and grammar) 40 minutes, maths 40, non-verbal reasoning 30 and verbal reasoning 25.
Reported	It can be sat once per academic year; for 2026–27 the testing window runs from 1 September 2026 to late May 2027. Quest, CEM and GL's CAT4 tests used by other schools cover similar ground, and online tests are multiple choice.
Reported	Of 100 large independent schools we looked at in November 2026, about half use an online first round of this kind, usually followed by their own papers or interviews.
Our assumption	Paper practice cannot copy an on-screen, adaptive test, so we practise the question types and steady working, with 25, 30, 25 and 20 questions per subject and five answer options. Many schools send families familiarisation material for the real test: use it as well.

Always check dates, registration and the latest format with each school's admissions page and any familiarisation material the school sends. Formats and providers change.

Independent schools that use an online first-round test such as the ISEB Common Pre-Test: about half of the 100 large independent schools we researched in November 2026 do so. The Blue Coat School, Liverpool, a grammar school, also uses an online CEM test in two phases (Reported).

This handbook is independent. It is based on the published format of the test where details are published, and it is not an official publication. It is not produced by or endorsed by any school, council, consortium or test provider. Practice cannot predict a result and does not guarantee a place.

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Your 12-week revision plan

Aim for four or five short sessions a week of 20–30 minutes. In each session, read one lesson, do its worked examples together, then try the practice questions and mark them with the answers at the back. Tick the week off when it is done. Move faster or slower to suit your child; start with the test skills chapter in week 1.

Week	Lessons	Done
1	**M1** Place value and rounding; **M2** Negative numbers; **M3** Adding and subtracting; **E1** How to read a passage in a test; **E2** Finding information (retrieval); **V1** Closest meaning; **V2** Opposite meaning; **V3** Closest pair; **N1** The NVR checklist; **N2** Series	
2	**M4** Multiplying and dividing; **M5** Order of operations (BIDMAS); **E3** Inference: reading between the lines; **E4** Vocabulary in context: word meanings; **V4** Odd ones out; **V5** Word relationships; **N3** Arrow series	
3	**M6** Factors, multiples, primes, squares and cubes; **M7** Fractions; **M8** Decimals; **E5** Figurative language and sound effects; **E6** Author's purpose, viewpoint and structure; **V6** Make a new word; **V7** Missing three letters; **N4** Odd one out; **N5** Odd arrow out	
4	**M9** Percentages; **M10** Fractions, decimals and percentages; **E7** Answering questions on a poem; **E8** Spelling rules and tricky words; **V8** Hidden words; **V9** Move a letter; **N6** Reflections (upright mirror)	
5	**M11** Ratio and proportion; **M12** Money; **M13** Time and timetables; **E9** Prefixes; **E10** Suffixes and spelling changes; **V10** Missing letter; **V11** Alphabet tools; **N7** Reflections (flat mirror)	
6	**M14** Measures and unit conversion; **M15** Perimeter and area; **E11** Apostrophes; **E12** Capital letters and commas in lists; **V12** Alphabet positions; **V13** Letter series; **V14** Letter pairs; **N8** Pairs; **N9** Most like these two	
7	**M16** Volume and capacity; **M17** Angles; **M18** Properties of 2D and 3D shapes; **E13** End punctuation and speech marks; **E14** Verb tenses, irregular verbs and plurals; **V15** Letter relationships; **V16** Word codes; **N10** Hidden shapes	
8	**M19** Coordinates, reflection and translation; **M20** Sequences; **E15** Word classes; **E16** Conjunctions and clauses; **V17** Number codes; **V18** Number series; **N11** Grids; **N12** Same shape, turned	
9	**M21** Algebra: missing numbers, formulas and equations; **M22** Averages: mean, median, mode and range; **M23** Tables, bar charts, line graphs and pie charts; **E17** Homophones and confusing words; **E18** Building vocabulary and working out new words; **V19** Missing numbers; **V20** Balance the sum; **N13** Codes	
10	**M24** Roman numerals; **M25** Multi-step word problems; **E19** Cloze: filling gaps in a passage; **V21** Letter sums; **V22** Reasoning; **N14** Cube nets	
11	Mixed practice: redo every practice question you got wrong. Sit a full timed mock test.	
12	Second timed mock test. Revisit the lessons for the question types that still cost marks. Read the test skills chapter again.	

For weeks 11 and 12 you need full mock tests set out like the real test, such as a Online Pre-Tests four-test pack. Use raw mock scores to see progress over time; they cannot be converted into the standardised scores used in the real test.

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Maths

25 lessons: **M1** Place value and rounding; **M2** Negative numbers; **M3** Adding and subtracting; **M4** Multiplying and dividing; **M5** Order of operations (BIDMAS); **M6** Factors, multiples, primes, squares and cubes; **M7** Fractions; **M8** Decimals; **M9** Percentages; **M10** Fractions, decimals and percentages; **M11** Ratio and proportion; **M12** Money; **M13** Time and timetables; **M14** Measures and unit conversion; **M15** Perimeter and area; **M16** Volume and capacity; **M17** Angles; **M18** Properties of 2D and 3D shapes; **M19** Coordinates, reflection and translation; **M20** Sequences; **M21** Algebra: missing numbers, formulas and equations; **M22** Averages: mean, median, mode and range; **M23** Tables, bar charts, line graphs and pie charts; **M24** Roman numerals; **M25** Multi-step word problems.

M1 Place value and rounding

Every digit in a number has a value that depends on its column. 11+ questions ask what a digit is worth and ask you to round numbers to the nearest 10, 100, 1,000 or to one decimal place.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the column headings above the number if it helps: hundred thousands, ten thousands, thousands, hundreds, tens, ones, then tenths and hundredths after the decimal point.
2. The value of a digit is the digit times its column, so the 4 in 34,170 is worth 4,000.
3. To round, find the column you are rounding to, then look only at the digit just to its right.
4. If that digit is 5 or more, round up. If it is 4 or less, round down and keep the column digit the same.
5. Everything to the right of the rounding column becomes zero (or disappears after a decimal point).

WORKED EXAMPLE

What is the value of the digit 7 in 372,815?

Answer: 70,000. The 7 is in the ten thousands column, so it is worth 7 × 10,000 = 70,000.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Round 46,382 to the nearest thousand.

Answer: 46,000. The thousands digit is 6. The digit to its right is 3, which is less than 5, so round down to 46,000.

WATCH OUT

- Look at only one digit to decide which way to round, the one just right of the rounding column.
- Keep the size of the number when rounding: 46,382 rounds to 46,000, not to 46.
- When rounding 3.97 to one decimal place, carry the 1 over: the answer is 4.0, not 3.10.

Quick tip: Underline the rounding digit and circle its right-hand neighbour before you decide.

PRACTICE (6 QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AT THE BACK)

1. Round 3,251 to the nearest hundred. Answer: _____

2. Round 7,519 to the nearest hundred. Answer: _____

3. Round 527,163 to the nearest thousand. Answer: _____

4. Round 680,904 to the nearest thousand. Answer: _____

5. Round 85.64 to one decimal place. Answer: _____

6. Round 60.66 to one decimal place. Answer: _____

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M2 Negative numbers

Negative numbers are numbers below zero. In 11+ tests they usually appear as temperatures, or as sums that cross zero.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Picture a number line, or a thermometer standing upright, with zero in the middle.
2. Adding moves you up (to the right). Taking away moves you down (to the left).
3. To cross zero, split the jump into two parts: down to zero, then on past it.
4. To find the difference between a negative and a positive number, add the distance to zero on each side.

WORKED EXAMPLE

The temperature is −6°C. It rises by 9 degrees. What is the new temperature?

Answer: 3°C. Count up 6 to reach 0, then 3 more to reach 3°C.

WORKED EXAMPLE

At night it was −4°C. By midday it was 7°C. How many degrees warmer was it at midday?

Answer: 11 degrees. From −4 up to 0 is 4. From 0 up to 7 is 7. 4 + 7 = 11.

WATCH OUT

- Remember that −8 is colder (smaller) than −3, even though 8 is bigger than 3.
- When finding a difference across zero, add the two distances; do not take one number from the other.
- Write the minus sign clearly in your answer so −5 is not marked as 5.

Quick tip: Draw a quick number line in the margin. It takes five seconds and stops sign slips.

PRACTICE (6 QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AT THE BACK)

1. The temperature is −8°C. It rises by 12 degrees. What is the new temperature? Answer: _____

2. The temperature is −2°C. It rises by 11 degrees. What is the new temperature? Answer: _____

3. At night it was −7°C. By midday it was 5°C. How many degrees warmer was it at midday? Answer: _____

4. At night it was −4°C. By midday it was 4°C. How many degrees warmer was it at midday? Answer: _____

5. −3 + 4 − 12 = ___ Answer: _____

6. −12 + 6 − 2 = ___ Answer: _____

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M3 Adding and subtracting

You need to add and subtract whole numbers and decimals quickly and accurately, both in your head and with a written column method. Many 11+ questions also have a missing number to find.

HOW TO DO IT

1. For mental sums, use friendly numbers: 498 + 365 is 500 + 365 − 2.
2. For written sums, line up the digits in their columns, and line up the decimal points for decimals.
3. Work from the right-hand column. Carry when a column adds to 10 or more; exchange when the top digit is too small.
4. To find a missing number in ___ + 2,365 = 5,000, take away: 5,000 − 2,365. Or count on from 2,365.
5. Check every answer with the inverse: if 6,005 − 2,768 = 3,237, then 3,237 + 2,768 should give 6,005.

WORKED EXAMPLE

6,005 − 2,768 = ___

Answer: 3,237. Exchange across the zeros: 6,005 becomes 5 thousands, 9 hundreds, 9 tens and 15 ones. Then 15 − 8 = 7, 9 − 6 = 3, 9 − 7 = 2 and 5 − 2 = 3.

WORKED EXAMPLE

12.4 + 3.75 = ___

Answer: 16.15. Write 12.4 as 12.40 so both numbers have two decimal places, line up the points and add: 16.15.

WATCH OUT

- Fill empty decimal places with zeros (12.4 = 12.40) so the columns line up.
- When exchanging across a zero, keep going left until you find a digit you can exchange from.
- Read the question again at the end: ‘how many more’ means subtract, not add.

Quick tip: Estimate first. 6,005 − 2,768 is about 6,000 − 2,800 = 3,200, so 3,237 looks right.

PRACTICE (6 QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AT THE BACK)

1. 546 + 678 = ___ Answer: _____

2. 816 + 376 = ___ Answer: _____

3. 3,468 − 2,964 = ___ Answer: _____

4. ___ + 2,378 = 10,000 Answer: _____

5. 7.37 + 3.28 = ___ Answer: _____

6. 8.52 − 2.78 = ___ Answer: _____

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Answers and explanations

S1 · How to revise

1	**It is better to split it into short sessions of about 20 to 30 minutes across the week.** Little and often helps you remember for longer, and short sessions keep you fresh.
2	**Write it in her mistakes log with the correct method, then try a similar question a few days later.** Spotting a pattern in your mistakes shows you exactly what to practise next.
3	**Stop early, do something relaxing and get a good night's sleep.** Being rested helps you think clearly; last-minute cramming rarely helps.

S2 · Multiple-choice answer sheets

1	**Check back to find where it went wrong, rub out the marks carefully and move them to the correct rows.** One slip can push all the following answers into the wrong rows, so it is worth fixing straight away.
2	**Mark a guess for each one, crossing out any options she can quickly rule out.** In most tests there is no penalty for a wrong answer, so a blank can never score but a guess might.
3	**Rub out the line in box B completely, then mark box D with a single clear line.** A half-rubbed mark may be read as a second answer.

S3 · Timing

1	**45 seconds**	30 minutes is 1,800 seconds, and 1,800 ÷ 40 = 45.
2	**Question 25**	Half the time has gone, so you should be about halfway through: 50 ÷ 2 = 25.
3	**Make his best guess, mark the question to come back to, and move on.** Getting stuck costs time that could earn marks on easier questions later.	

S4 · Checking

1	**50 × 20 = 1,000, which is close to 1,029, so the answer is sensible.** Rounding both numbers gives a quick rough answer to compare with.
2	**Work out 13 × 12, which is 156, so she is right.** Multiplication undoes division.
3	**She added instead of finding the difference. The answer is 15.** "How many more" means subtract: 34 − 19 = 15. Re-reading the question would have caught this.

S5 · Test day and nerves

1	**Take a slow breath, read it again, and if it is still hard, guess, mark it and move on.** Later questions may be easier, and she can come back with a calmer mind.
2	**Two sharp pencils, a rubber and anything else the letter asks for, such as a ruler or a water bottle; no calculator.** Calculators are not usually allowed (check the letter), and spare pencils mean a broken one is not a problem.
3	**A good breakfast, some slow breathing and reminding himself he has prepared.** Food, calm breathing and positive thoughts help settle nerves.

S6 · On-screen tests

1	**Choose his best answer, flag the question, and return to it if he has time.** Flagging means he does not waste time now but does not forget it either.
2	**No. Many tests get harder as they go on, and in an adaptive test harder questions can mean she has been answering well.** Adaptive tests pick the next question based on earlier answers.
3	**His spelling, capital letter and full stop, and that he has answered the question.** Typing mistakes are easy to make and easy to miss on screen.

S7 · For parents

1	**No. It is a raw score; real results are usually standardised and depend on the whole group taking the test.** Use the paper to spot weak topics and track progress over time, not to predict a result.
2	**Stop for the day, reassure them and take a short break before starting again with something easier.** Confidence matters; pushing on when upset rarely helps learning.
3	**Not necessarily. Short, regular sessions that suit your child are usually more effective.** Every child is different, and too much practice can lead to tiredness and lost confidence.

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