

QCS Test

A guide for parents and carers



QCAA

Queensland Curriculum
& Assessment Authority

For all Queensland schools

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Introduction

Sitting the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test is a milestone for about 30 000 Year 12 students annually, so it's only natural for parents and carers to want their children to do their best in the test.

This guide explains the purpose of the QCS Test, describes its format and content, answers commonly asked questions, and provides simple tips that will help your child to approach the test with confidence.

While the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) hopes you find this information useful, please remember there are no shortcuts to doing well on the QCS Test. Your child's focus and effort in their studies during Years 11 and 12 is the clearest route to success.

What is the purpose of the QCS Test?

The QCS Test is the tool QCAA uses to compare the achievements of OP-eligible students studying different subjects at different schools across Queensland.

The test contributes scaling data for the calculation of Overall Positions (OPs) and Field Positions (FPs) for tertiary entrance. It also provides an individual result for each student.

The QCS Test is developed and administered by the QCAA, and is held over two days in Term 3 at schools across the state. Most students sit the test at their own school.

What is tested?

Particular knowledge of specific subjects is not tested. Instead, the QCS Test assesses achievement in 49 of the Common Curriculum Elements (CCEs).

The CCEs are generic skills, such as using correct spelling, punctuation and grammar, calculating, analysing and hypothesising, to name a few. Students develop these skills across their senior subjects. This means that students are preparing for the QCS Test all the time and in every subject.

What is the format of the QCS Test?

The QCS Test consists of four testpapers:

- a Writing Task testpaper
- a Short Response testpaper
- two Multiple Choice testpapers.

Each testpaper asks students to respond to a variety of stimulus materials, such as prose passages, poetry, graphs, tables, maps, mathematical and scientific data, cartoons and artistic works.

A test for everyone

While sitting the QCS Test is essential for students seeking an OP, other students can benefit from sitting it too.

- A grade of C or above will ensure they meet literacy and numeracy requirements for the Queensland Certificate of Education.
- A grade of D or above may boost their Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre selection rank. The QCS Test result can only be used to moderate the rank upwards.

Making the grade

QCS Test markers receive intensive training in applying the marking schemes. They mark independently at a single venue. Their judgments are monitored so that every script is marked fairly. Referee marking occurs if required.

Writing Task responses are marked by at least three markers, with at least two judgments being provided for each criterion. Double marking occurs for each of the Short Response items, meaning at least 10 markers are involved in marking that testpaper.

Multiple Choice responses are scanned and marked electronically. Any discrepancies, including blanks and double entries, are investigated.

Table: Test schedule

	Day one	Day two
Morning	Paper 1 Writing Task (2 hours)	Paper 3 Short Response (2 hours)
Afternoon	Paper 2 Multiple Choice I (1 hour 30 minutes)	Paper 4 Multiple Choice II (1 hour 30 minutes)



Tertiary entrance, OPs and FPs

What are OPs and FPs?

A student's OP shows their position in a statewide rank order based on their overall achievement in Authority subjects. OP1 is the highest and OP25 is the lowest. In Queensland, the OP is the primary tertiary entrance rank for school leavers applying to university. FPs are additional rank orders that supplement an OP.

Even if your child is not currently planning to study at university, sitting the QCS Test and remaining OP-eligible is recommended as it will give them more options in the future.

How do students get an OP?

To be eligible to receive an OP, students must:

- complete 20 semester units of credit in Authority subjects
- study at least three subjects for four semesters each
- sit all four subtests of the QCS Test
- attend school until the final day of Year 12.

How are OPs calculated?

A student's individual QCS Test result does not determine their OP. Instead, subject and school group results from the QCS Test are used as part of statistical scaling processes. Using group data enables the QCAA to make a fair and equitable comparison of the achievements of students in different schools studying different subject combinations.

How do students get the best OPs and FPs?

Students get the best OPs and FPs by performing as well as they can in each of the Authority subjects they study in Year 12. Results in Authority-registered subjects, vocational education and training and other recognised studies don't count towards the OP/FP system.

All Authority subjects are treated equally in the calculation of OPs, and students can achieve a high OP, including an OP1, with any combination of subjects.

When do students get their OPs and FPs?

Students receive their QCS Test grade, OP and any relevant FPs with their subject results in December.

There are two ways that students can receive their final results. They can wait for delivery by mail or log into their student learning account via QCAA's Student Connect website (www.studentconnect.qcaa.qld.edu.au). To access results online each student must know their Learner Unique Identifier (LUI) and password.

How can students prepare for the test?

The best QCS Test preparation for students is studying their school subjects.

Students should:

- be familiar with the 49 CCEs that may be tested
- have a sound knowledge of Year 10 Mathematics and a reasonable level of vocabulary
- understand the key terms before they sit the test
- know the test procedures
- know what equipment is needed and what equipment is not permitted
- familiarise themselves with the test format
- apply to QCAA for special provision if relevant to their circumstances.

More information about how to prepare for the QCS Test is provided in the *Student Information Bulletin* available on the QCAA website.

Past testpapers and Retrospectives

Because students work with the CCEs across their senior subjects, students are preparing for the QCS Test all the time and in every subject in the classroom. However, it is sensible for students to sit at least part of a past test, and revise some of the skills and processes that will be tested.

Schools generally organise practice sessions using past testpapers but anyone can purchase hard copy testpapers from the past three years from the QCAA.

An annual *Retrospective*, which provides commentary on the previous QCS Test is available on the QCAA website. This includes:

- a number of Writing Task responses that scored highly
- the keys to Multiple Choice items
- model responses and marking schemes for the Short Response testpaper
- lists of the CCEs tested.

Key terms

A number of key terms are used in the QCS Test. Students should find out the meaning of these key terms before the test.

This will help them understand what type of response to provide and give them a better chance of tackling the tasks effectively and efficiently.

Key terms are listed in the *Student Information Bulletin*.

Writing Task tips

For the Writing Task students are asked to compose an extended piece (about 600 words) of continuous prose in response to the stimulus material provided. Students can write in any genre except poetry.

To do well, students must:

- focus on the overall concept or theme of the testpaper
- read and view the stimulus pieces
- develop their own perspective on the theme
- consider the purpose and audience for their response.

The Writing Task tests students' command of written English. Students should make sure their handwriting is legible and that they write in clear, correct sentences that have a logical flow and sequence.

Students can prepare for the Writing Task by:

- brainstorming ideas for writing using a past Writing Task testpaper or words and images from newspapers and magazines
- practising planning and drafting written responses
- reading widely to develop a strong vocabulary and good language skills
- revisiting what they've learnt at school about:
 - **basic grammar** — students should pay attention to the logical agreement of verbs with their subjects in number (singular, plural) and consistency of tense (past, present, future), antecedent agreement with the related noun or pronoun (who/whom, which/that), etc.
 - **correct punctuation** — students should know when to use full stops and commas, the apostrophe (think of whose and who's), quotation marks, colons, and semicolons
 - **correct spelling** — students should be aware of commonly misspelt words like definitely, lonely, probably, scared, doesn't, pursue
 - **commonly confused words** — students should learn the correct use of words such as to/too/two, there/their/they're, effect/affect, lie/lay/laid, amount/number, less than/fewer than.



Multiple Choice and Short Response tips

The Multiple Choice and Short Response testpapers ask students to respond to a variety of stimulus materials, which are drawn from a wide range of disciplines including literature, philosophy, history, science, art and mathematics.

The Multiple Choice testpapers require students to choose the best response from four possible options.

Items in the Short Response testpaper require students to respond in different ways, such as writing a sentence or paragraph, drawing a diagram, performing a calculation or sketching.

Many of the Writing Task tips in this guide also apply to the verbal items in the Multiple Choice and Short Response testpapers.

In preparing for the Multiple Choice and Short Response testpapers, students should make sure they are familiar with how to approach different tasks, including how to:

- indicate whether a given statement is consistent with another
- refer to specific features of a text to support a judgment
- identify and correct language errors in a text
- read tables and provide evidence about data presented
- examine a photograph and identify or comment on particular features
- compare two texts and show how they differ and/or are similar
- identify and select examples of language devices
- examine how the use of an image contributes to the effectiveness of the writing
- explain how contrast may contribute to the impact of a written or visual text
- justify a personal choice
- explain the comparisons a writer makes in a text.

Number know-how

While all students deal with language in their senior subjects, some students may not continue studying mathematics.

The QCS Test assumes students have a sound knowledge of Year 10 mathematics, so it's a good idea for students to refresh their ability to work with some basic concepts and operations before the test.

During the test, students may be asked to:

- calculate percentages
- interpret ratios — and be able to determine a ratio from a fraction and vice versa
- measure angles using a protractor or estimate the size of an angle without using a protractor
- use power of 10 notation
- work with index (power) notation
- perform simple algebraic procedures and work with variables in a formula
- substitute one or more values into a formula
- use scale to determine distances or relative sizes
- perform calculations involving time
- read information from various types of graphs or diagrams
- estimate or approximate distances or quantities
- give a number to the nearest place value.

To help answer the quantitative test items, students should make sure they:

- are familiar with the calculator they will be taking into the test
- have a ruler that they can use to measure accurately and to draw a straight line
- can use a drawing compass to construct circles or arcs
- can recognise common two- and three-dimensional shapes
- are familiar with common formulas such as those for finding the areas of squares, rectangles, triangles and circles or the perimeter of such shapes
- know an approximate value of π , even if they have a π key on their calculator
- know the difference between rounding and truncating numbers
- can set out mathematical working to show the sequence of steps they used.

Examples of questions that draw on assumed mathematical knowledge are available on the QCAA website.





Final preparations

On the day before the test, students should check their equipment and double-check the starting time and venue. Above all, they should get a good night's sleep.

Hours of intense work the night before the test are unlikely to improve performance, and may make the student feel more anxious.

On the days of the test

Students should arrive at school in good time for the start of the test session.

If a student is too sick to attend, or is prevented from sitting the test by an unavoidable circumstance, they should inform the school immediately and arrange to apply for exemption due to absence. This will require the student to get a medical certificate or other relevant documentation covering the days of the test that gives specific details of the reason for absence*.

Strategies for success

During the QCS Test, students should remember these four strategies for success:

- use perusal time effectively
- manage time
- think and plan before responding
- review what has been done.

* Absence from one or more of the test sessions constitutes absence from the test.

Want to know more?

Useful publications for students and parents on the QCAA website include:

- *Student Information Bulletin* — the key publication for students preparing for the QCS Test. Includes sample test items and responses. The QCAA supplies schools with a hard copy for every Year 12 student in February each year.
- *Preparing for the QCS Test: Examples of questions involving mathematical knowledge* — a 'sample bag' of questions that draw on assumed mathematical knowledge.
- *About the QCS Test* brochure — an overview of the QCS Test for Year 11 students and their parents, distributed to Year 11 students each year.
- *QCS Test: Special provision handbook*
- *Common Curriculum Elements (CCEs)* — lists the generic skills tested in the QCS Test.
- *OP Fast Facts* brochure — answers many of the questions parents and students often ask about OPs.
- *Calculating OPs: The basic principles* — provides information on the calculation and use of OPs, subject achievement indicators and scaling.
- *QCS Test Retrospectives* — provide a report on each year's QCS Test. They can be downloaded from the website.
- QCS Test past testpapers can be purchased from the QCAA. Multiple Choice response sheets can be downloaded from the website.