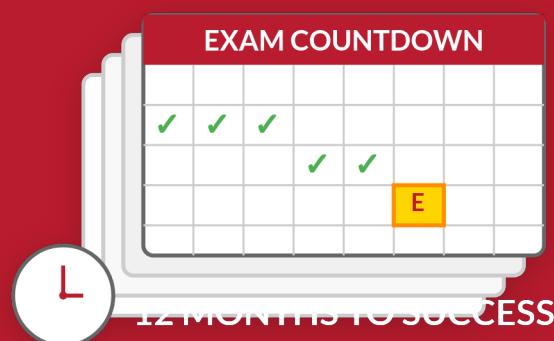


12-MONTH EXAM COUNTDOWN PLANNER

From "We should probably start"
to "We're ready for test day"



WHAT THIS PLANNER DOES

This planner gives families a clear, structured roadmap for the 12 months leading up to major high-stakes exams such as:

- **NSW Selective High School Placement Test**
- **Opportunity Class (OC) Test**
- **Private school scholarship exams (Years 4–7 entry)**

It answers:

"What exactly should we be doing at 12, 9, 6, and 3 months before test day – and how hard should we push at each stage?"

The focus is on:

- **Phased preparation** (not last-minute cramming)
- **Balanced workload** (academic, wellbeing, sleep)
- **Objective checkpoints** (so you can see if preparation is working)

You can adapt this planner whether you have 12, 9, 6 or only 3 months to go.

HOW TO USE THIS PLANNER

1. **Identify** roughly how many months remain before your child's main exam(s).
2. **Start** at the relevant phase (12, 9, 6 or 3 months out).
3. **For each phase, follow:**
 - **Main goal** (what this phase is for)
 - **Weekly structure** (approximate hours and focus areas)
 - **Key actions** (specific tasks for parents and students)
 - **Checkpoint** (a simple way to see if you are on track)

PRINT OPTIONS

You can print this as:

- A **one-page summary** for the fridge, and
- A **detailed version** (one section per page) for reference

Getting Started

Begin with a realistic assessment of your current situation. If you have less than 12 months, don't panic – start with the phase that matches your timeline and adapt the intensity accordingly.

PHASE 1 – 12 TO 9 MONTHS BEFORE EXAM

FOUNDATION AND DIAGNOSIS PHASE

If you have less time, treat this as your first 4–6 weeks.

Main Goal

Build a secure foundation and a clear picture of current level before heavy exam practice begins.

Approximate Weekly Structure

Total: ~3–5 hours per week

Breakdown:

- 1–2 hrs: core reading + vocabulary
- 1–2 hrs: maths fundamentals (fractions, decimals, word problems)
- 1 hr: writing (one task per week)
- Light general ability / reasoning exposure where relevant

Key Actions

DIAGNOSTIC TESTING

- Sit one full diagnostic paper (selective/OC/scholarship style) in timed conditions
- Record marks for each section: Reading/English, Mathematical reasoning, Thinking skills/General ability, Writing
- Note specific error types (misread questions, time, concept gaps)

COLLECT ALL EXISTING DATA

- Most recent school report (grades and teacher comments)
- Latest NAPLAN or standardised tests
- Any ICAS results or similar competitions
- Place these in one folder (physical or digital)

PHASE 2 – 9 TO 6 MONTHS BEFORE EXAM

CORE SKILLS AND HABITS PHASE

Main Goal

Systematically close the main gaps identified, and develop strong study habits before ramping up full exam papers.

Approximate Weekly Structure

Total: ~4–6 hours per week

Breakdown:

- 1.5–2 hrs: Reading + vocab (complex texts, inference)
- 1.5–2 hrs: Maths reasoning (problem sets targeted to gaps)
- 1–1.5 hrs: Writing (one full script and one shorter drill)
- 0.5–1 hr: Thinking skills / general ability drills

Key Actions

TARGETED PRACTICE CYCLES (4–6 WEEK BLOCKS)

Choose 2–3 priority areas per block. For each area:

- Explicit teaching / explanation
- Guided examples
- Independent practice
- Feedback and redo

BUILD EXAM-RELEVANT HABITS

Teach your child to:

- Underline key words in questions
- Show working clearly
- Estimate before calculating
- Plan writing pieces in dot points before starting⁴

MINI-TIMED SECTIONS

PHASE 3 – 6 TO 3 MONTHS BEFORE EXAM

EXAM SKILLS AND FULL PAPERS PHASE

Main Goal

Transition from skill building to exam performance: timing, stamina, and strategic answering.

Approximate Weekly Structure

Total: ~5–7 hours per week

Breakdown:

- 1.5–2 hrs: Full or half papers (alternating weeks)
- 1.5–2 hrs: Error analysis + re-attempts
- 1–1.5 hrs: Skill drills (targeting persistent weaknesses)
- 1–1.5 hrs: Writing (mix of timed exams and focused feedback)

Key Actions

START REGULAR FULL-LENGTH PRACTICE

- One full paper every 2 weeks at first
- Rotate between different paper types
- Build stamina gradually

STRUCTURED ERROR ANALYSIS

After each paper, categorise errors:

- **Misread question / skimmed**
- **Concept not understood**
- **Ran out of time**
- **Careless arithmetic / spelling**

For each category, choose 2–3 follow-up drills or a mini-lesson.

REFINE TEST STRATEGIES

- **Reading:** Decide passage-first vs questions-first approach

PHASE 4 – 3 TO 1 MONTH BEFORE EXAM

REFINEMENT AND SIMULATION PHASE

Main Goal

Optimise consistency, confidence and exam routine; avoid overloading.

Approximate Weekly Structure

Total: ~5–8 hours per week (depending on child's capacity)

Breakdown:

- 1–2 full papers per week (or equivalent sections)
- Focused target drills on persistent weak areas
- Weekly writing exam
- Light review of strong areas to keep them sharp

Key Actions

INCREASE FULL EXAM SIMULATION

- One full "exam day" simulation every 2–3 weeks
- All relevant papers in sequence with realistic breaks
- Practice packing materials, arriving at "venue", starting on timer

REFINE TIMING TARGETS

- **Reading:** Monitor average time per question
- **Maths:** Practice stopping and moving on when stuck
- **Writing:** Finish with 3–5 minutes for quick edit

STABILISE ROUTINES

- Fix bedtime and wake time similar to exam day
- Keep diet, hydration and exercise routine consistent

MENTAL PREPARATION

PHASE 5 – FINAL MONTH TO FINAL WEEK

POLISH AND CONFIDENCE PHASE

Main Goal

Maintain performance, protect sleep and confidence, and avoid "peak too early" or burnout.

Approximate Weekly Structure

Total: ~4–6 hours per week

Breakdown:

- 1 full paper or combined section per week
- 1 writing exam
- Short, targeted drills (10–15 minutes) on weak areas
- Light review of vocab, formulas, and key strategies

Key Actions

SWITCH FROM "MORE" TO "BETTER"

- Shorter, higher-quality sessions rather than long marathons
- Emphasise reviewing mistakes from recent papers
- Avoid starting new booklets

REHEARSE EXAM-DAY LOGISTICS

Confirm:

- Venue and travel route
- Arrival time
- Allowed materials, identification, etc.
- Do at least one practice trip if venue is unfamiliar

POSITIVE FRAMING

- Shift from "must get in" to "we will do our best"
- Remind child of progress made over the year

FINAL 3 DAYS AND EXAM DAY

FINAL 3 DAYS

Avoid new topics or heavy full papers.

Do:

- 1–2 short, mixed sets of questions (to stay warm)
- Quick writing prompts if helpful
- Very light review of key formulas and strategies
- Prepare bag, materials, and comfortable clothing

EXAM DAY

Morning Routine:

- **Normal breakfast** – avoid too much sugar or caffeine
- **Aim to arrive early** and keep pre-exam talk calm and supportive
- **Bring water, snacks** (if allowed), and all required materials

During the Exam:

Remind your child to:

- Read instructions carefully
- Start with questions they know
- Manage time using practiced strategies
- Stay calm if they encounter difficult questions

AFTER THE EXAM

Do NOT over-analyse every question with your child.

Focus on effort: *"You followed your plan; that's what we wanted."*

Post-Exam Guidelines:

- Let your child decompress

ONE-PAGE SUMMARY

Quick reference guide for your exam preparation journey

TIME TO EXAM	MAIN GOAL	PRACTICE FOCUS	CHECKPOINT QUESTION
12–9 months	Foundations & diagnosis	One diagnostic, light weekly routine (3-5 hrs/week)	Do we know key gaps and have a sustainable routine?
9–6 months	Skills & habits	Targeted drills, mini timed sections, weekly writing (4-6 hrs/week)	Are core gaps closing, and can child handle timed tasks calmly?
6–3 months	Exam skills	Full/half papers, error analysis, strategy development (5-7 hrs/week)	Do we know typical score ranges and remaining weaknesses?
3–1 months	Simulation & routine	Full exam simulations, timing strategies, wellbeing focus (5-8 hrs/week)	Is performance stable and routine established?
Final month	Polish & confidence	Light focused practice, logistics preparation, rest (4-6 hrs/week)	Are we maintaining performance without burnout?
Final days	Calm execution	Light warm-ups, mental preparation, exam day logistics	Does child know the plan and feel supported?

Key Principles Throughout:

- **Quality over quantity** – focused practice beats endless hours
- **Regular checkpoints** – adjust approach based on progress
- **Wellbeing first** – protect sleep, health, and family relationships
- **Multiple pathways** – this exam is one opportunity, not the only one

Remember: Consistent preparation over time beats last-minute cramming every time.