LATE STARTER RESCUE VS SLOW & STEADY PLAN

Two Preparation Models for OC / Selective / Scholarship Exams

1. Purpose of This Guide

Many families ask two related questions:

"Have we started too late?"
"Are we pushing too much or too little?"

This guide presents two clear preparation models for OC, selective and private scholarship exams:

Slow & Steady Plan – lower weekly load over a longer runway
Late Starter Rescue Plan – higher focus and intensity when time is short

The aim is to help you:
• choose the model that best fits your child, your calendar and your stress levels
• avoid swinging between panic cramming and under-preparation
• understand the likely trade-offs of each approach

2. Quick Self-Check

Tick the statements that sound most like your situation.

Timing
■ We have 9–18 months before the main exam.
■ We have 6–9 months before the main exam.
■ We have less than 6 months before the main exam.

Current preparation
■ We already have a basic routine (reading, maths, some writing).
■ We have done very little structured preparation so far.
■ Marks are volatile and we are not sure where our child stands.

Wellbeing
■ Our child is generally calm, sleeping well, and can tolerate some extra work.
■ Our child is often tired or anxious, or has a very full schedule.

Rough guide:
Mostly longer timeframes + stable wellbeing → Slow & Steady Plan
Shorter timeframe or 'we need to catch up' → Late Starter Rescue Plan

3. Model 1: Slow & Steady Plan

(9–18 Months to Go)

3.1. Core idea
• Treat preparation as a long-term training program, not a last-minute sprint.
• Prioritise habits, foundations and confidence over constant test papers.
• Keep weekly workload modest but consistent.

3.2. Who this model suits
• Students with at least 9–12 months until the main exam.
• Families who want to protect sleep, co-curricular activities and family time.
• Children who respond better to routine than to pressure.

3.3. Typical weekly load (guide only)
Total: 3–5 hours per week spread across 4–6 days in small blocks.

Example breakdown:
• 1–2 hrs: Reading + vocabulary (challenging texts; discussion)
• 1–1.5 hrs: Mathematics fundamentals and reasoning
• 0.5–1 hr: Writing (one full task per week)
• 0.5–1 hr: Thinking skills / general ability exposure

3. Model 1 (continued)

3.4. Suggested phases

Phase A – Foundations & Diagnosis (first 2–3 months)
• One full diagnostic paper
• Identify 3–5 key gaps
• Set simple weekly timetable

Phase B – Skills & Habits (middle 4–6 months)
• Focus on closing specific gaps
• Introduce short timed sections
• Build a weekly writing habit

Phase C – Exam Skills & Simulation (final 2–4 months)
• Introduce regular full papers
• Focus on timing, stamina and strategy
• Maintain wellbeing and sleep

3.5. Strengths of Slow & Steady
• Lower risk of burnout and exam fatigue
• More time to build deep understanding
• Easier to fit around existing commitments
• Suitable for children with higher anxiety

3. Model 1 (final)

3.6. Limitations

• Requires discipline over many months; easy to drift if not monitored
• If the starting baseline is much lower than the target, you may still need
  a brief 'mini-rescue' phase closer to the exam
• Some families underestimate how much needs to be done and stay in
  'too gentle' mode for too long

4. Model 2: Late Starter Rescue Plan

(0–9 Months to Go, Especially 0–6)

4.1. Core idea
• Accept that time is limited and narrow the focus.
• Prioritise highest-payoff skills and question types.
• Increase intensity, but with clear limits to protect wellbeing.

4.2. Who this model suits
• Families with less than 9 months, especially 3–6 months to go.
• Students who already have reasonable foundations but limited
  exam-specific preparation.
• Situations where the family is comfortable with a short, more intensive push.

4.3. Typical weekly load (guide only)
Total: 5–8 hours per week (depending on child and stage)
Spread across 5–6 days.

Example breakdown:
• 2–3 hrs: Exam-style question sets and full/half papers
• 1.5–2 hrs: Error analysis + targeted drills
• 1–1.5 hrs: Writing exam practice
• 0.5–1 hr: Top-up reading and vocab / reasoning

4. Model 2 (continued)

4.4. Structure of a 3–6 month rescue

Month 1 – Rapid Diagnosis & Prioritisation
• Two different full practice papers in timed conditions.
• Map errors by type: misreading/rushing, specific maths concepts,
  weak inference, low writing structure.
• Choose no more than 4–5 key targets for the entire rescue period.

Months 2–3 – Intensive Target Blocks
• Rotate focus each week
• Week example: Reading + Thinking skills focus
• Next week: Maths reasoning focus
• After each full or half paper: Immediate correction, error coding,
  2–3 targeted drills within 48 hours.

Final 1–2 Months – Simulation & Stabilisation
• 1–2 full papers per week (max; quality > quantity).
• Emphasis on: maintaining score range, refining timing strategies,
  ensuring sleep and mental state are stable.
• Reduce new content; concentrate on execution.

4. Model 2 (final)

4.5. Strengths of Late Starter Rescue

• Acknowledge reality: something is better than giving up because start was late.
• Can produce visible gains quickly if the child already has latent ability
  and decent core skills.
• Provides a sense of momentum and focus.

4.6. Risks and Safeguards

Risks:

• Higher load can trigger fatigue, resistance or anxiety
• Parents may over-react to each practice paper, driving stress up.
• Temptation to chase too many practice papers without proper feedback.

Safeguards:

• Cap preparation to a fixed number of hours (for example, no more than
  90 minutes on weekdays, 2 hours on one weekend day, with at least
  one rest day).
• Schedule non-academic breaks deliberately (sport, play, quiet time).
• Focus on one main metric per section instead of chasing a perfect score.

5. Side-by-Side Comparison

Which Plan Fits Us Better?

Aspect: Time to exam

Slow & Steady Plan: Best with 9–18 months
Late Starter Rescue Plan: Typically 0–9 months, especially 3–6

Aspect: Weekly study load

Slow & Steady Plan: ~3–5 hours
Late Starter Rescue Plan: ~5–8 hours

Aspect: Main focus

Slow & Steady Plan: Building foundations, habits, confidence
Late Starter Rescue Plan: Rapid gap-closing, exam skills, timing

Aspect: Ideal student profile

Slow & Steady Plan: Can benefit from gradual growth; may be sensitive to pressure
Late Starter Rescue Plan: Has reasonable foundations; can tolerate short-term intensity

Aspect: Risk if mismanaged

Slow & Steady Plan: Under-preparation due to drifting or being too comfortable
Late Starter Rescue Plan: Burnout, stress, 'over-testing'

Aspect: Key parent job

Slow & Steady Plan: Protect routine, avoid complacency, track slow progress
Late Starter Rescue Plan: Protect wellbeing while increasing focus, avoid panic decisions

6. Model Choice Worksheet

You can include this as a tick-and-decide page.

1. Time Remaining
■ More than 9 months
■ 6–9 months
■ Less than 6 months

2. Child's current stress level
■ Generally calm; copes well with current school load
■ Sometimes anxious or tired, but manageable
■ Often overwhelmed, tearful, or negative about schoolwork

3. Family capacity
■ We can realistically supervise a long-term routine over many months
■ Our schedule is crowded; a short, focused period might be easier to manage
■ We have limited capacity; any plan must be very simple

Interpreting:
More 'longer time + calm + can supervise routine' → lean towards Slow & Steady Plan.

More 'short time + reasonable resilience + need quick gains' → lean towards
Late Starter Rescue.

If stress is already high, regardless of time frame, start with a milder
Slow & Steady structure, then adjust intensity only if your child is coping well.

7. Switching or Combining Models

You can tell parents explicitly:

• It is acceptable to start Slow & Steady, then adopt a short rescue phase
  in the last 2–3 months.

• It is also acceptable to begin with a brief rescue push (for example,
  to sit one particular exam), then return to a lower-load, long-term plan
  for high school or future goals.

The goal is not to force every child into the same timetable, but to ensure that:

• preparation is intentional,
• expectations are realistic for the time available, and
• academic goals are balanced with sleep, health and genuine enjoyment of learning.