

The 2026 OC Exam

What's Changed, What to Expect & How to Prepare

A free resource from Scholarly Training

For parents of Year 3 students in NSW

INSIDE THIS GUIDE:

- The complete 2026 OC test format (all 3 components broken down)
- What has changed from previous years (and why it matters)
- Competitive score benchmarks for placement
- Key dates, registration timeline, and what to expect on test day
- Where students lose the most marks (and why)
- What the top 10% of OC students do differently in each section
- Why knowing the format is not enough to prepare

The Test Is Next Year. This Year Decides the Outcome.

If your child is in Year 3, they will sit the OC placement test in Year 4. That means you have roughly 12 months to prepare. That sounds like a lot of time, but the families who get the best results are the ones who use Year 3 to build genuine skills, not the ones who leave everything to a last-minute sprint in Year 4.

The test your child will face is not the same test older siblings or friends sat in previous years. The format has changed. The question styles have changed. This guide gives you the complete picture: exactly what the 2026 OC test looks like, what has changed, what score your child needs, and where most students lose marks. Understanding the test now gives you a full year to prepare properly.

"The families who start in Year 3 with a clear plan outperform the ones who cram in Year 4. Every time."

Section 1

The 2026 OC Test: Complete Format Breakdown

The OC placement test consists of three components, all completed on a computer. There is no paper-based option. Students answer on screen, and the total testing time is approximately 100 minutes.

Component	Duration	Questions	What It Tests
Reading	30 min	40 questions	Comprehension, inference, vocabulary in context, authorial purpose
Mathematical Reasoning	40 min	35 questions	Number, algebra, patterns, spatial reasoning, multi-step problems
Thinking Skills	30 min	30 questions	Abstract patterns, analogies, logical deduction, sequence completion

What Each Component Actually Looks Like

Reading (30 minutes, 40 questions)

Students read multiple passages of varying length and genre, then answer questions about each. Passages may include fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and persuasive text. The 2026 format includes collocation-style texts where students must understand how words and ideas connect across a passage. Questions test literal comprehension, inference, vocabulary in context, and authorial purpose. Speed matters: that is roughly 45 seconds per question.

Mathematical Reasoning (40 minutes, 35 questions)

This is not a maths test in the traditional sense. It tests whether your child can reason through a problem, not whether they can perform calculations. Questions cover number and algebra, measurement and geometry, statistics, and pattern recognition. Many questions are multi-step and require reading carefully. The most common reason students lose marks is misreading the question, not getting the maths wrong.

Thinking Skills (30 minutes, 30 questions)

Thinking skills questions do not rely on learned content. They test abstract reasoning: pattern recognition, spatial reasoning, analogies, sequence completion, and logical deduction. These questions look like puzzles. Some students find them intuitive. Others find them completely unfamiliar. The critical factor is prior exposure. Students who have practised this style of question consistently outperform those seeing it for the first time on test day.

Section 2

What Has Changed in the 2026 Test

The 2026 OC placement test is not the same test that was administered in previous years. Several significant changes have been introduced. If your child is preparing using older materials or outdated advice, they may be practising for a test that no longer exists.

Fully computer-based

The entire test is completed on screen. Students who are not comfortable reading on a screen, scrolling through passages, and clicking answers under time pressure are at a significant disadvantage. Paper-based reading and computer-based reading use different skills. Your child needs to practise both.

New collocation text format in Reading

Reading passages now include collocation-style questions where students must understand how words relate to each other within and across sentences. This is a step beyond simple comprehension. It tests whether your child understands the structure of language, not just the meaning of individual words.

Heavier emphasis on inference

Across all three components, the 2026 test places greater weight on inference-based questions. Students are not just asked "what happened" but "why did the author choose this word" and "what can you conclude from this pattern." Literal recall is no longer enough.

Digital stamina required

100 minutes of focused, on-screen work is a significant cognitive load for an 8-to-9 year old. Students who have only practised in short bursts or on paper may struggle with fatigue, eye strain, and focus in the second half of the test. Building digital stamina is now a real part of preparation.

Section 3

Competitive Scores and Placement

There is no single "pass mark" for OC. Placement depends on your child's score relative to other applicants and your school preferences. However, historical data gives us a clear picture of what competitive looks like.

Score Benchmarks (Approximate)

- **Top-tier OC schools** (Chatswood, Artarmon, Hurstville): scores typically in the 90+ range (78%+)
- **Mid-tier OC schools:** scores typically in the 85-90 range (74-78%)
- **Lower-demand OC schools:** scores may be accepted from 75-85 range depending on year

These are approximate ranges based on historical patterns. Actual cutoffs vary year to year depending on the applicant pool. The key takeaway: your child does not need a perfect score. But they do need to perform comfortably above average across all three components.

How Preferences and Allocation Work

Parents nominate up to 2 preferred OC schools. The allocation algorithm processes your first preference first. If your child's score meets the threshold for that school, they are placed. If not, the system tries your second preference. If neither works, your child may be offered a place at the nearest OC school with availability.

Strategic implication: your preference order matters. Listing two highly competitive schools with no realistic backup can leave your child without a place at a school you would have been happy with.

Section 4

Where Students Lose the Most Marks

After years of coaching OC students, we see the same patterns. The students who miss out are not unintelligent. They are unprepared for specific, predictable challenges. Here is where marks are lost most often:

1. Reading: inference and vocabulary-in-context questions

Students who read fluently often assume they are strong readers. But the OC test does not reward fluency. It rewards depth. The questions that separate top scorers from average ones are inference questions ("what can you conclude?") and vocabulary-in-context questions ("what does this word mean in this passage?"). These require a different skill than simply reading quickly.

2. Maths: misreading multi-step word problems

The most common maths errors are not calculation mistakes. They are comprehension mistakes. Students misread the question, skip a step, or answer a different question than the one asked. The students who score highest are the ones who read maths questions as carefully as reading passages.

3. Thinking skills: freezing on unfamiliar patterns

Students who have never seen abstract reasoning questions before can freeze on test day. The questions are not harder than other sections, but they are unfamiliar. This is entirely preventable with consistent exposure and practice. The students who score well here are the ones who have seen this question type before.

4. Time management: running out in the final third

100 minutes sounds like a long time. It is not. Many students spend too long on difficult early questions and then rush through the final third of each section, where questions are often worth the same marks. Practising under timed conditions is essential.

5. Digital fatigue: losing focus after 60 minutes

Students who have only practised on paper or in short sessions are not prepared for the sustained on-screen focus the test demands. Performance drops in the second half are extremely common among underprepared students.

Section 5

Why Knowing the Format Is Not Enough

You now have a complete picture of the 2026 OC test: the format, the changes, the scoring, and where students lose marks. That puts you ahead of most Year 3 parents. But here is the honest truth:

Understanding the test does not prepare your child for it.

Knowing that the reading section has 40 questions in 30 minutes does not improve your child's inference skills. Knowing that thinking skills matter does not build your child's abstract reasoning ability. And knowing where students lose marks does not tell you whether YOUR child has those specific weaknesses.

The Real Question Is Not "What Is on the Test?"

The real questions are:

- Where does my child currently sit against OC-competitive benchmarks?
- What is their single biggest weakness across reading, maths, and thinking skills?
- How much ground do they need to cover over the next 12 months?
- What should we focus on first to make the biggest impact?

These are questions a PDF cannot answer. They require someone who has assessed hundreds of students against these exact benchmarks and can give you an honest, specific answer about your child.

Your Next Step

Your child will sit the OC test in Year 4. You now understand exactly what they will face. The question is: where do they stand right now?

Not "are they smart enough" (they probably are). But are they building the specific skills the OC test demands? Are they strong across all three areas, or is there a hidden gap? And are you using this year to close it, or will you discover it too late in Year 4?

Free Year 3 OC Strategy Call

In a free 15-minute strategy call, we will:

- Discuss your child's current level across all 3 OC test areas
- Identify the #1 area to focus on this year for maximum impact
- Map out a personalised Year 3 preparation plan leading into the test year
- Answer any questions about the test, scoring, or school preferences

This is not a sales pitch. It is a genuine conversation about your child's OC options. If Scholarly is the right fit, we will explain how. If not, we will tell you that too.

BOOK YOUR FREE STRATEGY CALL

Limited spots available each week. Year 3 is the best time to start. Do not wait until Year 4.

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