

# The 5 Biggest Mistakes Parents Make When Preparing for OC

## And What to Do Instead

A free resource from Scholarly Training

For parents of Year 3 students in NSW

### **INSIDE THIS GUIDE:**

- The 5 preparation errors we see families make every year
- Why each mistake costs marks on test day
- The specific fix for each one (with what to do this week)
- What the top-performing families do differently
- How to tell if your current approach is working
- The one question every Year 3 parent should be asking right now

# You Are Probably Making At Least One of These

Every year, thousands of Year 3 families across NSW prepare for the OC placement test. And every year, we see the same mistakes being made by well-intentioned, hardworking parents who are doing everything they can for their child.

The problem is not effort. It is direction. Most families are working hard. But they are working on the wrong things, in the wrong way, at the wrong time. And by the time they reach Year 4, the gaps are baked in.

This guide covers the five most damaging mistakes we see every year. For each one, we explain why it hurts, and what to do instead. Be honest with yourself as you read. If you recognise your family in any of these, you are not alone. And there is still time to change course.

*"The families who get the best results are not the ones who work hardest. They are the ones who work on the right things."*

**Mistake #1****Over-testing Without Building Skills**

This is the most common mistake we see. Parents buy stacks of practice tests and have their child sit test after test, week after week. The logic seems sound: "The more tests they do, the better they will get." But practice tests do not build skills. They measure them. If your child keeps scoring poorly on reading inference questions, doing more tests does not fix the underlying inference gap. It just measures the same gap over and over.

**Why This Hurts**

Your child learns what they are bad at without ever learning how to get better. Test fatigue sets in. Confidence drops. And because the underlying skills are not improving, the scores plateau or even decline. By test day, your child is exhausted and demoralised.

**What to Do Instead**

Use practice tests sparingly (once every 2 to 3 weeks maximum) to diagnose gaps. Spend the rest of your preparation time on targeted skill-building in the areas where your child is weakest. If they struggle with inference, do inference exercises. If they struggle with pattern recognition, do thinking skills drills. Tests should inform your practice, not replace it.

## Mistake #2

# Ignoring Thinking Skills Until the Last Minute

Thinking skills (abstract reasoning) make up one third of the OC test. Yet many parents spend 80% or more of preparation time on reading and maths because those feel more "teachable." Thinking skills are left for later. Later often means the final 2 to 3 weeks, or worse, never.

### Why This Hurts

Thinking skills questions are unlike anything your child encounters at school. They require pattern recognition, spatial reasoning, and logical deduction. These are not skills that can be crammed. They develop through repeated exposure over weeks and months. A child seeing abstract reasoning questions for the first time on test day is at a severe disadvantage.

### What to Do Instead

Start thinking skills practice now, even if it is just 15 minutes, 3 times per week. Use structured thinking skills workbooks or online resources that expose your child to the specific question types on the OC test: pattern completion, analogies, odd-one-out, spatial rotation, and sequence logic. Consistency matters more than volume.

**Mistake #3****Not Practising on a Computer**

The 2026 OC test is fully computer-based. Yet many families prepare exclusively with printed worksheets and paper-based textbooks. Reading on a screen is a fundamentally different experience from reading on paper. Scrolling through a passage, clicking answers, managing time with an on-screen clock: these are all skills that need practice.

**Why This Hurts**

Students who have only practised on paper often underperform on the actual test due to unfamiliarity with the digital format. They read more slowly on screen, struggle with scrolling between passage and questions, and lose time navigating the interface. Some students experience digital fatigue for the first time on test day.

**What to Do Instead**

At least 30 to 40% of your child's practice should be done on a computer or tablet. Use digital practice platforms or create screen-based reading sessions. Practise reading passages on screen and answering questions without printing them out. Build up to full-length timed sessions (30+ minutes) on screen to develop digital stamina.

**Mistake #4****Spreading Effort Evenly Instead of Targeting the Constraint**

Most parents divide preparation time equally across reading, maths, and thinking skills. This feels fair and balanced. But it is inefficient. Every child has one area that is weaker than the others. That weak area is the constraint that limits their overall score. Spending equal time on all three areas means the constraint never gets the focused attention it needs.

**Why This Hurts**

A child who is strong in maths and reading but weak in thinking skills will not improve their overall score by doing more maths. They will improve it by fixing the thinking skills gap. Equal time allocation feels safe but wastes preparation time on areas that are already strong enough.

**What to Do Instead**

Identify your child's weakest area (this requires a proper diagnostic, not a guess). Then allocate 40 to 50% of daily practice time to that area, with the remaining time split between the other two. Reassess every 2 to 3 weeks and shift the focus if the constraint changes. This is how the top-performing families prepare.

**Mistake #5****Not Managing Anxiety (Yours and Theirs)**

OC preparation is stressful for parents and children. Many families create an environment where the test feels like a life-or-death event. Every practice score is agonised over. Every bad day triggers panic. The child absorbs this anxiety and it directly impacts their performance, both in preparation and on test day.

**Why This Hurts**

Anxious children underperform. This is not opinion; it is well-documented. Test anxiety impairs working memory, which is exactly the cognitive function the OC test relies on most heavily. A child who is anxious on test day will score below their true ability, regardless of how well they have prepared.

**What to Do Instead**

Separate effort from outcome. Praise the process ("I noticed you read that passage really carefully") not the score. Keep practice sessions short (20 to 30 minutes) and positive. If your child has a bad practice day, move on. Do not add extra sessions as punishment. And manage your own anxiety: your child reads your stress. If you are calm, they are more likely to be calm on test day.

## Section 6

# The Pattern Behind All 5 Mistakes

If you look at all five mistakes together, there is a single pattern: **they all come from preparing without a clear diagnosis of where your child actually stands.**

Over-testing happens because parents do not know which skills need building. Thinking skills get ignored because parents do not realise it is a weakness. Computer practice gets skipped because nobody assessed digital readiness. Effort gets spread evenly because the constraint has not been identified. And anxiety builds because there is no clear picture of whether the child is on track or not.

The solution to all five is the same: **start with a proper assessment of where your child sits right now, against the specific benchmarks the OC test demands.** Then build a targeted plan from there.

### The One Question to Ask Yourself Right Now

*"Do I actually know where my child's biggest gap is, or am I guessing?"*

If the answer is guessing, everything you do between now and the test is a gamble. Year 3 is the year to get this right. If you wait until Year 4, you will be trying to fix problems under pressure instead of building from a position of strength.

## Your Next Step

You have just read the five most common OC preparation mistakes. You may have recognised your family in one or more of them. That is not a failure. That is awareness. And awareness, with the right action, changes outcomes.

Your child will sit the OC test in Year 4. That gives you a full year to course-correct. The right action is simple: find out exactly where your child stands. Not a guess. Not a feeling. A clear, specific picture of their strengths and gaps across reading, maths, and thinking skills, measured against OC benchmarks.

### Free Year 3 OC Strategy Call

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

- Discuss your child's current OC readiness and preparation approach
- Identify whether you are making any of these 5 mistakes right now
- Pinpoint the single area to focus on this year for maximum impact
- Map out a Year 3 preparation plan so Year 4 is not a scramble

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 year to get ahead. Do not wait until the test year to start.*

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