

a free guide for UK parents

TARA & TMUA: your prep schedule.

Skills built early, not crammed. From Year 11 to test day.

For Oxford courses that use the **TARA**, and for Economics at Cambridge, LSE, Imperial, UCL and Warwick that use the **TMUA**. These tests reward reasoning built over time, so starting in Year 11 is a genuine advantage.

before you start:

Your child won't sit these tests until autumn 2027 (for 2028 entry). That's the point of this schedule: these tests assess thinking skills built up over time, not knowledge you can cram. A few hours a week from now puts them well ahead.

Best free starter resources

For TARA (critical reasoning): "Critical Reasoning for Beginners" by Marianne Talbot, a free 6-part Oxford lecture series (YouTube / Oxford Podcasts), covering arguments, premises vs conclusions, deductive vs inductive reasoning and common fallacies. **For TMUA:** start with the official TMUA specification plus the Notes on Mathematics and Notes on Logic and Proof at esat-tmua.ac.uk. Begin in the Year 11 summer.

The two tests

TARA (Oxford)

Format: 3 modules, 40 min each. Critical Thinking (22 MCQs), Problem Solving (22 MCQs), Writing Task (1 essay from 3, 750-word limit). The Writing Task is not scored by UAT-UK but is sent to the universities.

Knowledge: none needed. Tests reasoning, with GCSE-level maths at most.

Used for: PPE, Economics & Management, Psychology and others. Check the current UAT-UK list.

Cost: currently £78 for UK / Republic of Ireland candidates, £133 elsewhere. Fees may change for 2028 entry.

TMUA (Economics)

Format: 2 papers, 75 min each, 20 MCQs each, no calculator. Paper 1: Applications of Mathematical Knowledge. Paper 2: Mathematical Reasoning.

Knowledge: deep mathematical thinking, not curriculum recall.

Used for: selected maths, economics and computer science courses. See the breakdown below.

Cost: currently £78 for UK / Republic of Ireland candidates, £133 elsewhere. Fees may change for 2028 entry.

Which courses require the TMUA? (2027 entry; confirm for 2028 on the course page.) **Compulsory:** Cambridge Economics, Imperial EFDS, UCL Economics, LSE Economics / Econometrics. **Recommended:** several other LSE quantitative courses, and Warwick Economics (not compulsory). Durham currently lists TMUA as recommended for Maths/Stats, not Economics.

the schedule:

Year 11 Summer (Jul-Aug 2026)

3-4 hrs / week

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- **Critical thinking (TARA):** read 3 opinion articles a week (Guardian Opinion or The Conversation). For each, write one sentence on the argument and one on its strongest evidence.
 - **Reasoning foundations:** watch one Marianne Talbot lecture a week (6 weeks).
 - **Maths reasoning (TMUA):** try 2-3 UKMT Intermediate or Senior Maths Challenge papers (free, ukmt.org.uk). Focus on reasoning, not speed.
 - **Orientation:** browse esat-tmua.ac.uk to see the TARA and TMUA formats and specimen questions.

Year 12 Autumn (Sep-Dec 2026)

3-4 hrs / week

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- **Critical thinking:** 3-4 opinion articles a week, writing short argument summaries.
 - **Wider listening:** one podcast a week - "Talking Politics", "More or Less" (BBC), or "The Briefing Room" (BBC).
 - **Maths reasoning (TMUA):** weekly, work through Underground Mathematics problems (undergroundmathematics.org) plus UKMT Senior questions.
 - **Problem solving (TARA):** Nov-Dec, do 10-15 TSA critical-thinking and problem-solving questions untimed (free at exams.ninja/tsa). Same skills as TARA sections 1 and 2.

the schedule (continued):

Year 12 Spring (Jan-Mar 2027)

4-5 hrs / week

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- **Keep going:** continue the weekly reading and podcast.
 - **Writing task (TARA):** fortnightly, write one timed argument essay (40 min, then 10 min reviewing it).
 - **Maths reasoning (TMUA):** weekly, work through one section of a TMUA specimen or past paper untimed (esat-tmua.ac.uk). Keep an error log.
 - **First specimens:** in January, try the official Pearson TARA practice tests untimed to see the real thing.

Year 12 Summer (Apr-Aug 2027)

5-7 hrs / week

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- **Timed TARA:** Apr-May, start TARA and TSA papers under timed conditions (one a week, review mistakes).
 - **Timed TMUA:** May-Jun, start full TMUA papers timed (fortnightly, building to weekly).
 - **Build rhythm:** Jul-Aug, 2 timed papers a week, alternating TARA and TMUA. Write 2 timed TARA essays a week. Review every mistake.
 - **Hold some back:** save the official Pearson TARA practice tests, plus selected BMAT Section 1 / TSA-style questions, and 2-3 TMUA past papers, for the final weeks in September.

the schedule (final stretch):

Year 13 Sep-Oct 2027 (final prep)

6-8 hrs / week

- **Daily:** read one opinion article critically (15-20 min).
- **3x a week:** full timed practice papers (alternate TARA and TMUA).
- **2x a week:** timed TARA essay practice.
- **Week before the test:** one final timed paper, then rest. Sleep and condition matter more than last-minute cramming.

Free resources

- **esat-tmua.ac.uk** - official TARA and TMUA specimen and past papers, plus the format and dates.
- **exams.ninja/tsa/past-papers** - TSA papers (TARA-style critical thinking and problem solving).
- **undergroundmathematics.org** - Cambridge mathematical-reasoning problems (TMUA).
- **nrich.maths.org** - Cambridge problem-solving resources.
- **ukmt.org.uk** - Maths Challenge past papers.
- **Marianne Talbot, "Critical Reasoning for Beginners"** - free Oxford lectures (YouTube / Oxford Podcasts).
- **theguardian.com/commentisfree and theconversation.com/uk** - free articles for argument analysis.
- **Podcasts:** "Talking Politics", "More or Less" (BBC R4), "The Briefing Room" (BBC R4).
- **Book:** "Thinking Skills" by John Butterworth and Geoff Thwaites.

If your child leans Engineering or physical sciences: check **ESAT** requirements. ESAT is used by Cambridge, Imperial, Oxford Engineering/Physics routes and some UCL engineering routes (esat-tmua.ac.uk). The maths-reasoning practice above partly transfers, but ESAT also needs subject-specific module prep.

Need a personalised plan for your child?

A prep schedule tells you what to do. A plan tells you what is right for your child: the courses, the tests, the shortlist, the timeline.

Book a 1:1 Education Advice Call. 30 minutes. Your specific situation. A clear plan forward.

uniplan.me/shop

Follow @EduStrategyCaroline for data-driven education strategy for parents.