

How to get a grade 9-9 in AQA Combined Science: Trilogy

A 9-9 is the top grade on the double scale, and because it comes from your total over all six papers, it demands consistency: almost every accessible mark, nearly all of the Higher-only marks, and the hardest questions (the last parts of long calculations, unfamiliar contexts, top-level extended answers) done with precision. The students who get it rarely know more obscure facts than everyone else; they almost never drop a mark they could have earned.

What a 9-9 asks of you

- Precise recall of the whole Trilogy specification, Higher-only content included, in the exact terms mark schemes look for.
- Multi-step calculations that are right every time, with units, standard form and significant figures.
- Explaining unfamiliar situations by linking ideas across topics, for example using structure and bonding to explain a property, or energy ideas in a forces question.
- Critical evaluation of methods and data: validity, control variables, repeatability, sample size, and correlation versus cause.
- Extended answers at the top of the top level: complete, in a logical order, with nothing wrong or irrelevant.
- No weak science. A 9-9 needs strong totals on all six papers, not an excellent physics score hiding weak biology.

Where the top marks are

- The last parts of long questions, where two equations are chained: energy from power and time, then specific heat capacity; gravitational potential energy converted to kinetic energy to find a speed; moles and a limiting reactant to find the mass of product.
- Graph work that feeds a further calculation: a tangent gradient used as a rate, or a value read off and then used in an equation.
- Suggest and explain questions about organisms, materials or devices you have never met, where you must pick the right idea from the specification.
- Evaluations that need data from both sides and a justified judgement.
- Extended answers, where precision decides between 5 and 6 marks.
- Practical questions that ask you to find a flaw in a method, explain an anomalous result, or propose a better technique.

Precision that earns the last marks

- Biology: in osmosis, water moves from a dilute solution to a more concentrated one through a partially permeable membrane. Enzymes are denatured, not killed: the active site changes shape, so the substrate no longer fits.
- Chemistry: a faster rate means more frequent successful collisions. Simple molecular substances melt when weak intermolecular forces are overcome, not covalent bonds; giant covalent structures need a lot of energy because many strong covalent bonds must be broken.
- Physics: energy is transferred or dissipated to the surroundings, never 'lost' or 'used up'. Current flows through a component; potential difference is across it. A hotter gas at constant volume has a higher pressure because its particles move faster, so they hit the walls more often and with more force.
- Always use comparatives when there is a comparison: higher, faster, more frequent, less dense.
- Concentration in Combined Science is in g/dm^3 . If you revise from separate chemistry material, leave out mol/dm^3 and titration calculations, which this course does not test.

Your revision, week by week

- All through Year 11: within a week of finishing a topic in class, read its notes, do the worksheet and a Hard custom paper on it. It is much easier to aim for 9-9 when nothing has to be learnt from scratch at the end.
- Weeks 1 to 6 of the final 14: one paper a week. Hard custom papers on each subtopic, then an Extreme mixed paper on the whole paper at the end of the week. Fix every mark you lose.
- Weeks 7 and 8: all 21 required practicals in depth (methods, errors, improvements, expected graphs), plus a second pass through every HT-only point.
- Weeks 9 to 11: two timed mocks a week, alternating sciences. After each, redo in Progress the questions you dropped marks on and rewrite any extended answer below 6 marks.
- Weeks 12 and 13: real AQA past papers under strict timing, marked by the mark scheme. Look for the kind of mark you still drop: precision, reading or slips.
- Week 14 and the exam season: short Hard and Extreme papers on your lowest subtopics, your mistakes list, and flashcards for exact definitions.

How to use this website

- Sit Mock exams at full time, then aim to finish in about 65 minutes, leaving 10 for checking.
- Custom papers at Hard, then Extreme, which goes a step beyond grade 9, for a real stretch on each paper's topics.
- Use Progress weekly: work down the weakest-first list until every subtopic is secure, and redo every dropped question.
- In Notes, use the grade 8 and 9 skills in the grade-by-grade lists and tick them off; read each subtopic's list of mistakes, because at this level they are your main risk.
- Keep the Daily 5 going and hold yourself to 5 out of 5. Use Flashcards to make definitions and key phrases word-perfect.
- Use the Whiteboard to practise extended-answer plans against a one-minute timer.
- A tutor who marks your extended answers and pushes you on the hardest questions can make the difference at the top: Chhetri Academy offers 1-to-1 lessons, starting with a free 30-minute trial.

Timing in the exam

- Aim to finish your first pass with about 10 minutes to spare, then check every calculation by re-entering it.
- Don't rush the early questions. They are where strong students drop the careless marks that cost a 9-9.
- Plan every extended answer, however confident you feel; a plan keeps it in a logical order and complete.
- Use spare time to reread every explain and evaluate answer against the question, not just the calculations.

Traps at grade 9-9

- Writing more than the question needs and adding a wrong or contradictory statement that costs the mark.
- Bringing in ideas from beyond the course that don't answer the question asked.
- Misreading a graph scale or a unit on an easy question.
- Answering the question you expected instead of the one printed, especially when a familiar practical appears with a twist.
- Extended answers that are long but miss part of the question, such as comparing only one of the two things.
- Leaning on the equations sheet in the exam instead of knowing the equations well enough to spot which one a question needs.
- Neglecting working scientifically. Questions on method, error and evaluation can appear on any paper and include some of the hardest marks.

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