

Decoding the Mark Scheme

Learn the examiner's language to maximise your score, even when you don't know the final answer.

The Anatomy of a Math Exam

Many students believe that GCSE and A-Level math exams are simply about getting the "right" answer. In reality, modern mark schemes are designed to reward **mathematical communication and logic**. If a question is worth 4 marks, the final correct answer is usually only worth 1 mark. The other 3 marks are awarded for the journey.

The 4 Types of Examiner Marks

Mark	Meaning	How to earn it
M1	Method Mark	Awarded for writing down a valid mathematical step. You get this mark <i>even if you make a calculation error later</i> , as long as the examiner can clearly see what you were trying to do.
A1	Accuracy Mark	Awarded for the correct numerical or algebraic answer. Importantly, A marks depend on M marks . You cannot get an A mark if your method is completely missing or wrong.
B1	Independent Mark	Awarded for stating a fact, drawing a correct graph feature, or writing a standalone correct value. It does not require a method to be shown.
C1 / QWC	Communication Mark	Awarded for reasoning. You must write out the "why". E.g., writing "Alternate angles are equal" rather than just writing the number on the diagram.

The "Bald Answer" Trap

A "bald answer" is a correct final answer written on the dotted line with absolutely no working out shown above it. On modern Edexcel, AQA, and OCR papers, examiners are explicitly instructed **not** to award full marks for bald answers on multi-step questions. Always show the numbers you typed into your calculator.

Error Carried Forward (ECF)

This is the most powerful safety net in the mark scheme. If you make a mistake in part (a) of a question, you will lose the A1 mark for part (a). However, if you are forced to use that incorrect answer in part (b), the examiner will apply *Error Carried Forward*.

They will use your wrong number, run it through the correct formula for part (b), and if your method is right, you will get **full marks** for part (b). Never leave a follow-up question blank just because you couldn't solve the first part. Invent a plausible number for part (a), state clearly "Assuming part a = 5", and use it in part (b) to pick up the Method marks.