What are Adaptive, Computer-based Tests?

How to prepare on Atom

Atom Learning

What are adaptive tests?

Adaptive tests adjust the level of difficulty throughout the test based on individual students ability.

- Unlike traditional exams, questions aren't pre-selected but determined on the spot based on a students' response to the previous question.
- Put simply, when a student gets a question correct, the next question will be pitched at a more challenging level of difficulty. If a question is answered incorrectly the difficulty will stay the same until the child can demonstrate that they can answer a number of questions at this level correctly. It will then start to increase again.
- This means that each student gets a unique experience. In order to make this possible adaptive tests are always online as they need to use an adaptive algorithm.

The most common adaptive entrance exam is the ISEB Common Pre-Test.
The London Consortium 11+ exam is also partially adaptive.

Benefits of adaptive tests

More accurate

Adaptive exams are considered to be a better gauge of individual students ability and potential as they can identify the full range of each student's ability.

Quicker

As adaptive tests adjust to students' ability this also means that less questions need to be asked overall in order to gauge potential. As a result adaptive tests are typically shorter.

Better experience

Adjusting based on ability means that students do not need to struggle with questions that are too difficult or spend time on questions that are too easy. This means that more time is spent in each child's 'learning zone' where questions are challenging but not overwhelming. Overall this leads to a more student-friendly testing experience.

You may be wondering, if adaptive tests are better, why isn't everyone using them?

In order to facilitate adaptive tests each student needs access to their own device as adaptive tests must be taken online. Unfortunately this isn't a possibility for lots of schools which is why you will mainly see adaptive exams used in Independent schools.

Features of adaptive tests

Adaptive tests will always be taken online

In order for a test to adapt, questions need to be marked immediately so that the adaptive algorithm knows what question to ask next, based on each child's ability. This means that adaptive tests are always taken online.

There is no 'skip' button

The answer to each question, and if it is correct or not, is used to determine what will be asked next. This means that it is not possible to skip a question and come back to it later. Students need to answer every question in the order they are presented before moving forward.

No 'back button'

Similarly, because each answer determines what will be asked next, once an answer is submitted and a child moves onto the next question it is their final answer. They cannot go back and change it.

The exact number of questions may be unknown

As adaptive tests tailor to each child's ability it means that not as many questions are needed in order to determine each students' ability. This means that in some adaptive tests students that are doing very well may finish early because it does not take as long to gauge their ability.

What does this mean for my child?

Adaptive exams require specific exam technique that in many ways is the opposite to traditional exam technique. For this reason, it is extremely important for students to be aware of the features of an adaptive exam & the methods they need to use before the real test. This will allow your child to demonstrate their full potential.

The most important factor in adaptive tests is accuracy, particularly at the start of the exam! Students should aim to get as far through the test as possible, without getting a question incorrect. This will allow them to unlock more challenging questions earlier in the test that are worth more marks!

If your child does make a mistake early on, don't worry, they will still get a chance to reach harder questions once they have shown they can answer a couple of questions at the current level correctly in a row but ideally encourage them to be as accurate as possible right from the get go.
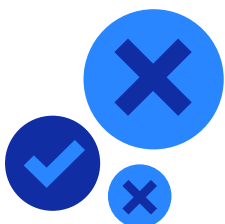
Features of adaptive tests

Double check throughout

Encourage your child to get into the habit of double checking each answer as they go. As previously mentioned, students can't go back and double check previous answers so it is important that they re-read each question and answer to make sure that they are happy before clicking the 'next' button.

Maximise the full time limit

In adaptive tests accuracy is more important than speed. Students may not know the exact number of questions so there is no point in rushing to try and answer as many as possible. As we know, students also aren't able to go back to previous questions so if they rush and reach the end of the test early then any remaining time is effectively wasted. Remind your child to take their time, slow down and double check throughout and not at the end.

Use a process of elimination

An advantage of adaptive exams is that all questions will be in a multiple-choice format. This means that if your child comes across a question where they are unsure they can utilise the process of elimination to help narrow down the number of possible answers and make an educated guess. This is important as students aren't able to skip questions in adaptive exams and so when faced with a question that they don't know techniques such as the process of elimination will help increase the chances of selecting the correct answer.

Finally, reassure your child that it is okay for the test to become more challenging throughout and that actually, this is a good sign! It is important to prepare your child with this knowledge so that they don't become discouraged as the exam becomes harder or disheartened if they begin to find the questions more challenging. Before exam day, make sure your child is confident with what an adaptive exam looks like in terms of it being easier at the start and harder at the end, to ensure they feel prepared and confident ahead of their test.

Adaptive Tests on Atom

Atom is an adaptive learning platform meaning that the entire time your child is preparing on Atom they are working in an adaptive setting where questions will adapt based on your child's individual ability. If they answer a question correctly then the next one will be more challenging and vice versa. This will familiarise your child with what to expect in their real exam.

Alongside the learning features on the platform atom's has unlimited adaptive mock tests that mirror the ISEB and other adaptive entrance exams. This will allow your child to practise adaptive exam technique.

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