AD5 COMPETITION GUIDE

EPSO/AD/427/26 · ADMINISTRATORS AD 5 · PART 1

The Reasoning Tests Method

Verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning: how the tests are built, the traps they use, and a fixed method for each. With nine hard worked examples and a one-page cheat sheet.

174,922
APPLICANTS

1,490
RESERVE-LIST PLACES

1 in 117
MAKE THE LIST

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How to use this guide

Start with the test you score worst on. Each part gives the method, then three worked examples. Try each example on the clock before reading the solution.

The examples are built to be harder than the real test. Candidates who sat EPSO reasoning tests in autumn 2026 found numerical and abstract much harder than standard practice material, so the bar here is set above that.

Reliability labels

Claims about the competition carry a label. Only the notice and official EPSO communications are presented as fact.

Label	Meaning
OFFICIAL	Notice of Competition EPSO/AD/427/26 (as corrected and amended) or an official EPSO communication.
INTERPRETATION	A reasonable reading of the official text where it does not spell a point out.
ESTIMATE	Own calculation from official figures.
UNVERIFIED	Widely repeated by trainers or candidates, but not confirmed by an official source.
EVIDENCE	Recommendation backed by published research.

CHECK BEFORE YOU RELY ON IT

The legally binding texts are the notice published in the Official Journal (C/2026/711), its corrigendum and the amending notice C/2026/3362. Your invitation letter and the testing platform's instructions override anything in this guide.

PART 1

What actually scores

You know the rules. This is what they mean for your preparation.

Test	Questions	Time	Per question	Pass mark	Weight in ranking
Verbal (L1)	20	35 min	1 min 45 s	10/20	**40 % → 35 %**
Numerical (L1)	10	20 min	2 min	10/20 combined	0 %
Abstract (L1)	10	10 min	1 min	with numerical	0 %
EU knowledge (L2, 2027)	30	40 min	80 s	15/30	30 % → 25 %
Digital skills (L2, 2027)	40	30 min	45 s	20/40	30 % → 25 %
EUFTE essay (L2, 2027)	1	40 min	—	5/10	— → 15 %

OFFICIAL Notice EPSO/AD/427/26, tables 2–6. Weights: preliminary → final score. No penalty for wrong answers is mentioned: never leave a blank.

THREE FACTS THAT DECIDE YOUR STRATEGY

1. Verbal is the only Part 1 test that ranks you. ESTIMATE One verbal answer is worth 2 points out of 100 in the preliminary score: as much as two EU-knowledge answers or almost three digital ones.

2. Numerical + abstract only filter. Any mix reaching 10/20 passes (9 + 1, 5 + 5). Above that, every extra answer is worth zero.

3. Passing is not enough. 174,922 applicants, 1,490 places. The EUFTE is only marked for roughly the top 2,235 of the preliminary ranking ESTIMATE : about the top 1.3 %. Below that line your essay is never read.

Targets

Test	Target	Why
Verbal	17–20/20	Filter and the heaviest weight in the ranking
Numerical + abstract	≥ 13/20, reliably	A 3-point margin covers a bad day; more adds nothing

Time split: ~60 % verbal · ~30 % the weaker of numerical and abstract · ~10 % full timed mocks (65 min in a row, no paper).

EXAMPLE

A candidate with 19/20 in verbal but 9/20 in numerical + abstract is out before Part 2. A candidate with 20/20 verbal and 11/20 numerical + abstract loses nothing. A third with 20/20 in numerical + abstract gains nothing from it.

PART 2

Verbal reasoning

20 questions · 35 minutes · pass 10/20 · 40 % of the preliminary score.

How a question looks

A short informative passage (typically 100–250 words on economics, science, policy, history or technology) and four statements. The usual question is *"Which of the following statements is correct?"*; occasionally the inverted *"Which is NOT correct?"*. One answer only. INTERPRETATION This description comes from EPSO samples and preparation material; the notice does not specify passage length.

> **THE CORE IDEA**
>
> The format is four options, but the mechanism is the classic **True / False / Cannot say**. Every statement is one of the three relative to the passage. In the normal version the answer is the only True one. In the inverted version it is the only one that is not True. The skill being tested is classifying each statement correctly.

The closed-universe rule

The passage is the only universe. What you know yourself does not exist, even if it is true. If a statement is true in the real world but the passage does not cover it, the answer is Cannot say.

Category	Definition	Quick test
TRUE	The passage states it, paraphrases it, or it follows necessarily	Can I point to the sentence(s) that prove it, adding nothing?
FALSE	The passage states the opposite or something incompatible	Can I point to the sentence that contradicts it?
CANNOT SAY	The passage does not settle it	Could it be true and also false without contradicting the passage?

Register and attribution

Passages mix facts, opinions, forecasts and conclusions. A statement must keep the same register and attribution as the passage.

Register	Typical markers	What you can conclude
Fact	figures, dates, “was adopted”, “rose”	The fact as stated
Attributed opinion	“according to X”, “critics argue”	That X holds that view, not that it is true
Forecast / hypothesis	“could”, “is expected to”	That it is possible or expected, not that it will happen
Author's conclusion	“therefore”, “this shows”	That the author concludes it

> **MINIMAL CONDITIONAL LOGIC**
>
> `If A → B ⇔ If not B → not A (valid)`
> `If A → B ⇏ If B → A (invalid)`
> `If A → B ⇏ If not A → not B (invalid)`
> **`Only if A → B ⇔ If B → A`**
>
> The last line causes the most errors: “only if” reverses the direction. It states a necessary condition, never a sufficient one.

The 18 traps

Each trap in isolation, with an original example. In the real test they are combined, often two in one option.

1 Generalisation

The passage covers one case, group or period; the statement extends it to all.

> *In 2024, three of the five ports in the report cut nitrogen-oxide emissions after electrifying their quays.*

Statement: Electrifying quays reduces nitrogen-oxide emissions in ports. → **CANNOT SAY**

Three specific ports, no general rule. Not False either: nothing says it fails elsewhere.

2 Absolutes: all, always, never, only

An absolute needs 100 % coverage. One exception kills it.

> *Except Malta and Cyprus, all participating Member States reported before the deadline.*

Statement: All participating Member States reported before the deadline. → **FALSE**

The exception is written in the passage, so it is False, not Cannot say.

3 Quantifiers

"Some" is compatible with "all"; "most" means more than half. A stronger quantifier is unsupported, a weaker one follows.

> *Most cities surveyed have adopted sustainable mobility plans.*

Statement: Some cities surveyed have adopted sustainable mobility plans. → **TRUE**

In logic "some" means "at least one". Many candidates mark it False because "some" sounds like "few".

4 Correlation vs causation

Two things occurring together is not one causing the other. Look for explicit causal verbs.

> *Regions with more vocational training per worker also have lower youth unemployment.*

Statement: More vocational training reduces youth unemployment. → **CANNOT SAY**

An association only. A third factor (industrialisation) could drive both.

5 Causes shifted or inflated

"One of the factors" becomes "the cause", or cause and effect swap.

> *Higher energy prices were one of the factors that led several chemical plants to cut output.*

Statement: The plants cut output because of higher energy prices. → **CANNOT SAY**

"Contributed" is not "was due to". Tempting because it "almost" says it.

6 Comparisons

Check what is compared with what, on which dimension, at which time.

> *In 2025 Portugal received more asylum applications than in 2024, though fewer than Greece in both years.*

Statement: In 2025 Portugal received fewer applications than Greece did in 2024. → **CANNOT SAY**

Portugal 2025 vs Greece 2024 is never compared. Both exceed Portugal 2024; their order is unknown.

7 Percentages vs absolutes

A higher growth rate says nothing about the final level if the bases differ.

> *Patent filings rose 40 % in Estonia and 5 % in Germany between 2020 and 2025.*

Statement: In 2025 Estonia filed more patents than Germany. → **CANNOT SAY**

No bases given. Outside knowledge (Germany is bigger) pushes you to False. Not allowed.

8 Averages

A rising average says nothing about each individual.

> *The sector's average wage rose 3 % in 2025.*

Statement: Every worker in the sector earned more in 2025 than in 2024. → **CANNOT SAY**

A few large rises can lift the mean while others fall.

9 Time markers

Tenses and markers ("until 2023", "since then") limit when a statement holds.

> *Until 2023, the agency published its annual report in June.*

Statement: The agency publishes its annual report in June. → **CANNOT SAY**

"Until 2023" suggests a change but does not state one. Not False.

10 Conditions and exceptions

Drop the condition and the truth value changes.

> *Applicants may file on paper provided they have no electronic ID.*

Statement: Applicants may file on paper. → **CANNOT SAY**

True for some applicants, false for others. "No applicant may file on paper" would be False.

11 Double negatives

"Not uncommon" = fairly common; "did not rule out" = possible. Rewrite in the positive first.

The auditors did not rule out that the delay could recur next year.

Statement: The auditors considered it likely that the delay would recur. → **CANNOT SAY**

Possible is weaker than likely. The degree is not given.

12 Hidden assumptions

The statement looks derived but needs a step "everybody knows".

The Council approved the proposal in March; Parliament will vote in autumn.

Statement: The proposal will enter into force before the end of the year. → **CANNOT SAY**

Requires assuming Parliament approves and entry into force is immediate.

13 Possibility vs certainty

Keep the modality and the statement can be True; drop it and it is not.

According to the study, the measure could cut water use by up to 15 %.

Statement: According to the study, the measure may reduce water use. → **TRUE**

Modality and attribution preserved. "The measure will cut water use by 15 %" would be Cannot say.

14 Plans vs results

A plan, target or proposal is not an outcome.

The programme set a target of training 20,000 inspectors by 2026.

Statement: The programme trained 20,000 inspectors by 2026. → **CANNOT SAY**

Very common in EU-policy passages. Flag every intention verb: proposes, aims, plans, commits.

15 Absence of evidence

"No evidence of X was found" is not "X does not exist".

The trial found no evidence that the additive affected participants' health.

Statement: The additive does not affect health. → **CANNOT SAY**

A negative result from one trial. Duration, sample and dose may be limited.

16 Aggregates

A total says nothing about its components. A total can grow while most parts shrink.

Total EU wine exports grew 6 % in 2025.

Statement: Wine exports from most Member States grew in 2025. → **CANNOT SAY**

Compatible with growth in many countries, a few, or one large one.

17 Groups vs individuals

A group average does not rank individual members.

Households with children spend more on food, on average, than households without.

Statement: The Novak household, with two children, spends more on food than any household without children. → **CANNOT SAY**

Group means cannot order individuals. The Novaks are not even in the passage.

18 Half-true statements

A two-part statement is True only if both parts are.

The regulation entered into force in January 2024 and applies from August 2026.

Statement: The regulation entered into force in January 2024 and has applied since then. → **FALSE**

First half matches, second contradicts. Read to the full stop.

Logic toolkit: valid and invalid inferences

Valid only if **necessary**: if the passage is true, the statement cannot be false. Probable is not enough.

Type	Passage → statement	Valid?
Paraphrase	"The figure doubled" → "rose by 100 %"	Yes
Weaker quantifier	"All partners signed" → "Some partners signed"	Yes
Implicit arithmetic	"Of 40 experts, 30 were lawyers" → "10 were not lawyers"	Yes
Contrapositive	"If the threshold is exceeded, an alert is triggered" + "no alert" → "threshold not exceeded"	Yes
Reversed conditional	Same rule → "If an alert was triggered, the threshold was exceeded"	No
Probable, not necessary	"Sales fell in every shop but one" → "Total sales fell"	No

The method: 5 steps in 105 seconds

Step	Action	Time
1. Frame	Read the question line: “correct” or “NOT correct”? Skim the passage: topic, structure, where the figures and opinions sit.	10–15 s
2. Options	Read all four options. In each, mark the risky word: absolute, quantifier, causal verb, modality, date, “only”.	15–20 s
3. Targeted check	For each option, go to the sentence that covers it and compare term by term: quantifier, verb, tense, subject, modality. Classify T / F / CS.	50–60 s
4. Decide	One True: mark it. Two candidates: find the smallest difference between them (almost always a quantifier or a modality).	10–15 s
5. Exit	Mark and move on. Do not reread to “confirm” if you already have the proving sentence.	0 s

> **LEGITIMATE SHORTCUT**
>
> In step 3 you can stop as soon as you find an option that is unambiguously True **with a proving sentence**. There is only one correct answer: if yours is proven, the others cannot be. Check the rest only if you have time or your proof is weak. In the NOT-correct version this shortcut does not exist: you must classify all four.

Long passages

- Read the first sentence of each paragraph: it maps the topic.
- Locate the nodes: figures, dates, names, contrast words (“however”, “although”) and causal words. Options almost always aim at them.
- What follows “however” qualifies or cancels what came before. It is where traps live.
- Do not memorise the passage. Treat it as a database you query with a precise question.

Time checkpoints

Elapsed	You should be at
9 min	Question 5 done
18 min	Question 10 done
27 min	Question 15 done
33 min	Q19–20; last 2 min for flagged questions

UNVERIFIED Assumes you can flag and return to questions, as on earlier EPSO platforms. If not: decide and move on.

The four time errors

Error	Why it happens	Fix
Rereading the same paragraph	Reading without a question in mind	Always return to the text with a question: “does it say *most* or *some*?”
Getting stuck	Sunk cost: “I've already spent two minutes”	**2:30 rule:** no proven True at 150 s → eliminate, pick the best, flag, move on
Changing correct answers	Late doubt brings anxiety, not information	Change only if you find a specific sentence that contradicts your answer
Using outside knowledge	Familiar topics (EU, economy) fill the gaps	Before marking True, ask: “where does the passage say it?” “I know it” does not count

EVIDENCE Research on answer changing in multiple-choice tests shows that changes go from wrong to right more often than the reverse (Kruger, Wirtz & Miller, 2005). The lesson is not “never change”, but “change only with a concrete reason”.

V1 Hard example · hidden arithmetic

Target: 1 min 45 s

Between 2019 and 2024, rail's share of inland freight in the EU fell from 18.7 % to 17.1 % of total tonne-kilometres, while total inland freight grew by 6 %. Rail volumes nevertheless increased in eleven Member States, and road haulage expanded faster than any other mode. The Commission's 2021 action plan set the objective of raising rail's share to 30 % by 2030. National infrastructure managers have argued that this target can be met only if cross-border capacity allocation is harmonised. A 2025 evaluation found no evidence that the temporary reductions in track-access charges introduced in 2020 had increased rail's share, although it noted that in most countries the reductions applied for less than two years. Rail operators' associations maintain that, without the reductions, the decline would have been steeper.

Which of the following statements is correct?

A Rail freight volumes fell in most EU Member States between 2019 and 2024.

B Harmonising cross-border capacity allocation would allow rail's share to reach 30 % by 2030.

C The track-access charge reductions had no effect on rail's share of inland freight.

D Measured in tonne-kilometres, the EU's rail freight volume was lower in 2024 than in 2019.

SOLUTION · D

	Class	Why
A	CANNOT SAY	Aggregate vs components. Eleven states grew; the other sixteen could have been stable, with one or two large ones falling. Nothing says a majority fell.
B	CANNOT SAY	Two traps. “Only if” states a **necessary** condition, not a sufficient one; and it is the infrastructure managers' view, not a fact.
C	CANNOT SAY	Absence of evidence. “No evidence of an increase” is not “no effect”; operators even claim the reductions limited the decline.
D	TRUE	Implicit arithmetic. Rail 2024 = 17.1 % × 1.06 × total 2019 = **18.1 %** of the 2019 total, below the 18.7 % rail had in 2019. Rail fell by about 3 %.

Why it is hard: the true statement looks like the riskiest one, because the passage stresses growth in eleven countries and never says rail fell. Candidates eliminate D on instinct and then pick A or C. The fix: when a passage gives a share *and* a total growth rate, the absolute change is always computable. Compute it.

V2 Hard example · the inverted question

Target: 2 min

The Court's review covered 24 EU agencies. None of them lacked a business-continuity plan, although only ten had tested theirs in the previous two years. Of the agencies that had not tested their plan, half reported staff shortages in their ICT units. The Court did not rule out that untested plans would fail in a real incident, but stopped short of describing them as deficient. Agencies with tested plans recovered from simulated outages in under four hours on average; the slowest of them needed eleven.

Which of the following statements is NOT correct?

A Each of the 24 agencies had a business-continuity plan.

B The Court considered it possible that untested plans would fail in a real incident.

C Most agencies that reported ICT staff shortages had not tested their plan.

D At least one agency with a tested plan took longer than four hours to recover from a simulated outage.

SOLUTION · C

A True: "none lacked" = all had. **B** True: "did not rule out" = considered possible. **D** True: the average is under four hours, but the slowest needed eleven, so at least one exceeded four. **C** Cannot say: 7 of the 14 untested agencies report shortages, but the 10 tested ones are never mentioned. If 8 of them had shortages, most agencies with shortages would be tested ones.

Why it is hard: no early stop: three statements must be proven True, two of them behind double negatives. C feels right because the passage links shortages to untested plans, but it gives only one side of the comparison.

V3 Hard example · contrapositive

Target: 1 min 45 s

Under the 2023 regulation, an operator may apply for the simplified reporting procedure only if its annual emissions are below 25,000 tonnes. In 2025, all operators that used the simplified procedure submitted their report by 31 March; in total, 140 operators submitted by that date, 40 more than in 2024. According to the national authority, the procedure has cut administrative costs by a third, a figure that industry associations consider overstated. The Commission has proposed raising the threshold to 50,000 tonnes from 2027.

Which of the following statements is correct?

A In 2025, 140 operators used the simplified reporting procedure.

B An operator that submitted its report after 31 March 2025 did not use the simplified procedure that year.

C From 2027, an operator emitting 40,000 tonnes a year will be eligible for the simplified procedure.

D The simplified procedure has reduced administrative costs, though by less than a third.

SOLUTION · B

A Cannot say: all simplified users submitted by 31 March, but not all early submitters were simplified users. **B** True: contrapositive of "used the procedure → submitted by 31 March". **C** Cannot say: a proposal, not adopted law. **D** Cannot say: the cost figure is the authority's claim; "overstated" is the industry's opinion. Neither is established.

Why it is hard: the right answer talks about late submitters, a group the passage never mentions. Unless you convert "if A then B" into "if not B then not A" automatically, you discard it.

PART 3

Numerical reasoning

10 questions · 20 minutes · pass 10/20 combined with abstract · no weight in the ranking.

How a question looks

A table or chart (sometimes two), a precise question and several numerical options. No advanced algebra or inferential statistics. Difficulty comes from three places: finding the right figure, choosing the right operation, and avoiding the distractor built from the typical error (wrong base, percentage points instead of percent, units, wrong year). UNVERIFIED An on-screen calculator is provided; no physical calculator, paper or pen. Check your invitation.

> **THE CORE IDEA**
>
> With two minutes per question and a calculator, calculation is not the bottleneck. **Setting up the operation is.** Always separate "which operation" from "how much it comes to".

Fractions you should recognise on sight

Fraction	%	Fraction	%
1/2	50	1/8	12.5
1/3	33.3	3/8	37.5
2/3	66.7	1/9	11.1
1/4	25	1/12	8.3
1/5	20	1/20	5
1/6	16.7	1/25	4
1/7	14.3	1/40	2.5

Building blocks

Ratio split. 3:2 of 500 → each part 500 / 5 = 100 → 300 and 200.

Rule of three. 12 inspectors review 300 files; 20 inspectors → 300 × 20 / 12 = 500.

Compound growth. Value after n periods = start × $(1 + r)^n$.

Weighted mean. Σ(value × weight) / Σ(weights). Use it whenever groups differ in size.

Units. Thousands of tonnes → tonnes: × 1,000. Name the result's unit before calculating.

Percentages: the core of the test

#	Operation	Formula	Example
1	Percentage of a quantity	Part = Total × %	18 % of 2,450 = 441
2	What percentage A is of B	A / B × 100	63 / 420 = 15 %
3	Increase	New = Old × (1 + r)	2,400 + 15 % = 2,760
4	Decrease	New = Old × (1 − r)	2,400 − 15 % = 2,040
5	Original before an increase	Old = New / (1 + r)	3,000 after +20 % → 2,500 (not 2,400)
6	Original before a decrease	Old = New / (1 − r)	3,000 after −20 % → 3,750 (not 3,600)
7	Successive changes	$(1 + r_1)(1 + r_2)\ldots$	+10 % then −10 % → 0.99 → −1 %
8	Points vs percent	$\Delta pp = r_2 - r_1 \cdot \Delta\% = (r_2 - r_1) / r_1$	8 % → 10 %: +2 pp, +25 %
9	Relative change	(New − Old) / Old	1,250 → 1,400 = +12 %
10	Base of comparison	"A is x % more than B" → base B	150 vs 120: A is 25 % more; B is 20 % less

> **RECURRING TRAP**
>
> "By what percentage did the rate change?" asks for the relative change. "By how many percentage points?" asks for the subtraction. Read the end of the question twice.

Statistics you will actually need

Concept	Formula	Watch out for
Weighted mean	Σ(value × weight) / Σ weights	Never average percentages of unequal groups
Relative change	(New − Old) / Old	Base = the old value
Average annual growth	$(\text{Final} / \text{Start})^{1/n} - 1$	Not total growth / n (that is only an approximation)
Per capita	Total / population	Compatible units (thousands of t / millions of people = kg per person)
Share	Part / total	If there is an "other" row, the total includes it
Median	Middle value of the sorted list	Sort first; for an even count, average the two middle values

> **WEIGHTED VS SIMPLE MEAN**
> Country A: 10 m people, 80 % vaccinated. Country B: 40 m, 60 %. Combined rate? Simple mean (wrong): 70 %. Weighted (right): (8 + 24) / 50 = **64 %**.

From question wording to operation

If the question says...	Operation
"What percentage / proportion of... ?"	Part / total
"By what percentage did... increase / decrease?"	(New − Old) / Old
"By how many percentage points... ?"	Subtract the rates
"How many more / fewer... ?" (with units)	Subtract
"How many times larger... ?"	Divide
"Per inhabitant / per employee / on average per..."	Total / divisor
"If the trend continues / at the same rate..."	Apply the same factor (or the same difference if "same amount")
"What was the value before... ?"	Divide by the factor

Reading tables and charts

Format	Look first at	Typical error
Two-way table	Title, units, rows vs columns, footnotes	Reading the neighbouring row or year
Bar chart	Axis scale (does it start at 0?), value labels	Eyeballing when exact labels exist, or the reverse
Line chart	Which line is which series; scale	Confusing slope (change) with level
Pie chart	Percentages or absolutes? What is the total?	Applying a share to the wrong total
Stacked bar	Total = bar height; segment = its length	Reading a segment's top from the axis
Time series	Which years; missing years	Miscounting periods: 2020 → 2025 is 5 annual changes, not 6
Mixed units	Unit of each column (thousands, %, € per person)	Combining columns on different scales

Fast, safe reading: read the question before the data; point the cursor at the cell; work in the table's units and convert at the end.

Mental shortcuts

Shortcut	How	Example
10 %, 5 %, 1 %	10 % = move the decimal; 5 % = half of that; 1 % = two places	17 % of 340 = 34 + 17 + 6.8 = 57.8
Swap	x % of y = y % of x	8 % of 50 = 50 % of 8 = 4
Multiplier	+12 % = × 1.12; −12 % = × 0.88	450 × 1.12 = 504
Benchmark fractions	÷ 8 = × 0.125; ÷ 0.25 = × 4	68 / 0.25 = 272
Round with margin	2 significant figures, then compare with the options	4,873 / 6,120 ≈ 4.9 / 6.1 ≈ 0.80
Small successive rates	(1 + a)(1 + b) ≈ 1 + a + b	+3 % and +4 % ≈ +7.1 %
Compare fractions	a/b vs c/d → compare a·d with c·b	7/9 vs 11/14: 98 vs 99 → 11/14 is larger
Ratio direction	If the numerator grows faster than the denominator, the ratio rises	Spending +8 %, GDP +5 % → share of GDP rises
Mean by deviations	Pick a reference, average the differences	98, 103, 101, 94 → ref 100: −1 → 99

WHEN NOT TO ROUND

If the options are close (12.4 %, 12.8 %, 13.1 %), calculate exactly. Look at the spread of the options **before** calculating: wide spread → estimate; narrow spread → calculator.

Eliminate before you calculate

- **Order of magnitude:** the answer is in thousands of euros and an option says 0.3 → out.
- **Direction:** the value fell → positive options are out.
- **Bounds:** a part cannot exceed its total; a share cannot exceed 100 %.
- **Last digit:** 37 × 48 ends in 6. If only one option ends in 6, you are done.

The 2-minute method

Phase	Action	Time
1. Read the question	Which quantity, which unit, which years or categories, which operation	15–20 s
2. Scan the options	Spread (estimate or calculate?), units, magnitude	5–10 s
3. Locate data	Only the cells you need. Check units and footnotes	15–20 s
4. Set up	Write the full operation in your head before typing a number	15 s
5. Calculate	Calculator or shortcut	20–40 s
6. Sanity check	Magnitude, direction, bounds. Does it match an option?	5–10 s

Total: 75–115 seconds. One-step questions take a minute; three-step ones take two and a half. The mix gives you the margin.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Stuck for more than 2:45? Mark your best estimate and move on. Numerical does not count for the ranking; you only need the combined 10/20. One lost question costs far less than the three minutes it steals from the next ones.

N1 Hard example · the missing cell

Target: 2 min 30 s

Population aged 15–64, Member State K: share of each age group and employment rate. The population aged 15–64 grew by 2 % between 2020 and 2025.

Age group	Share of population 2020	Employment rate 2020	Share of population 2025	Employment rate 2025
15–24	16 %	33 %	15 %	35 %
25–54	62 %	79 %	60 %	81 %
55–64	22 %	58 %	25 %	…
Total 15–64	100 %	67.0 %	100 %	72.0 %

By approximately what percentage did the number of employed people aged 55–64 increase between 2020 and 2025?

A	14.6 %	**B**	25.2 %	**C**	27.7 %	**D**	42.2 %	**E**	45.1 %

SOLUTION · E

1. Back-solve the missing rate. The total rate is a weighted mean: 72.0 = 0.15 × 35 + 0.60 × 81 + 0.25 × x → 0.25x = 72.0 − 5.25 − 48.6 = 18.15 → **x = 72.6 %**.

2. Employed 55–64 = population × share × rate. 2020: P × 0.22 × 0.58 = 0.1276 P. 2025: 1.02 P × 0.25 × 0.726 = 0.1851 P. Ratio 1.451 → **+45.1 %**.

Distractors: 14.6 % = change in the rate in percentage points. 25.2 % = relative change in the rate only. 27.7 % = ignores that the group's share rose from 22 % to 25 %. 42.2 % = ignores the 2 % population growth.

Why it is hard: the figure you need is missing, and the question asks about people, not rates. Share, rate and population all move; each wrong option drops one. **Rule:** a blank cell next to a total can always be back-solved.

N2 Hard example · three factors and a currency

Target: 2 min

GDP, population and exchange rate, three non-euro Member States

	GDP 2022 (bn, national currency)	GDP 2025 (bn, national currency)	Population 2022 (m)	Population 2025 (m)	Units per €1, 2022	Units per €1, 2025
X	512	589	10.5	10.6	25.10	24.60
Y	2,140	2,402	9.8	9.6	7.44	7.46
Z	1,840	2,310	37.9	37.4	4.35	4.72

By approximately what percentage did Country Z's GDP per inhabitant, expressed in euros, change between 2022 and 2025?

A	+14.2 %	**B**	+15.7 %	**C**	+17.2 %	**D**	+27.2 %	**E**	+38.0 %

SOLUTION · C

Set-up: GDP per inhabitant in € = GDP ÷ exchange rate ÷ population. Change factor = (2,310 / 1,840) × (4.35 / 4.72) × (37.9 / 37.4) = 1.2554 × 0.9216 × 1.0134 = 1.172 → **+17.2 %**.

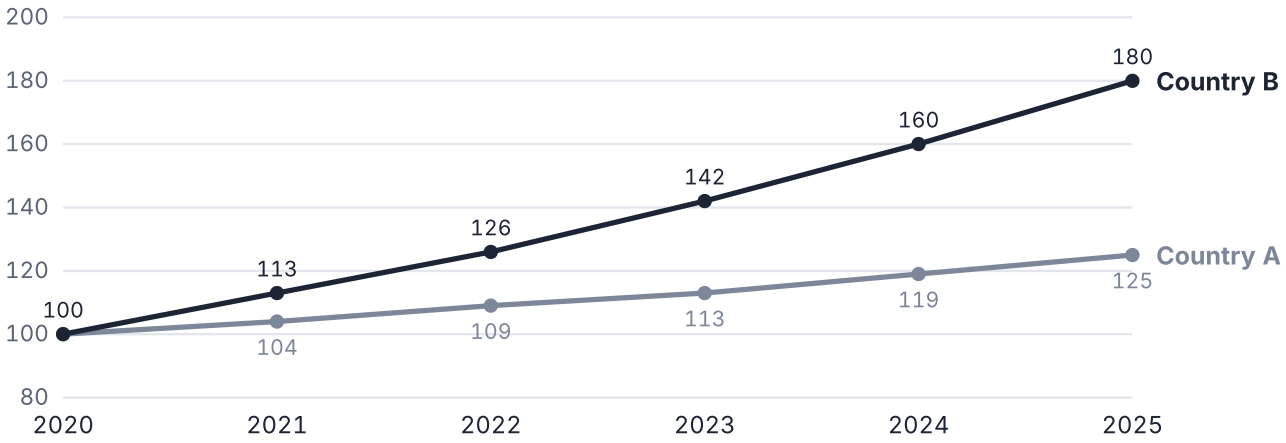
Distractors: 14.2 % divides by the population ratio the wrong way (population fell, so per-inhabitant values rise). 15.7 % ignores population. 27.2 % ignores the exchange rate. 38.0 % inverts it: more units per euro means a **weaker** currency, so euro values fall.

Why it is hard: "units per €1" going from 4.35 to 4.72 looks like growth but cuts the euro value. Fix each factor's direction before typing: GDP up, currency weaker (below 1), population down (above 1).

N3 Hard example · index, projection, crossing point

Target: 2 min 30 s

Installed solar capacity, index 2020 = 100



	Country A	Country B
Installed solar capacity 2020 (GW)	60	30

If both countries keep growing at their average annual rate of 2020–2025, in which year will Country B's installed capacity first exceed Country A's?

A	2029	**B**	2030	**C**	2031	**D**	2035	**E**	2037

SOLUTION · B

1. Convert the index to GW. 2025: A = 60 × 1.25 = **75 GW**; B = 30 × 1.80 = **54 GW**. B is behind by a factor of 75 / 54 = 1.389.

2. Don't compute annual rates: use five-year factors. Over any five years, A grows × 1.25 and B × 1.80, so B gains on A by 1.80 / 1.25 = **1.44** every five years. In 2030 B is ahead: 54 × 1.8 = 97.2 GW vs 75 × 1.25 = 93.75 GW. In 2029 (four fifths of the way) B has gained $1.44^{0.8} \approx 1.34$, less than the 1.389 it needs: still behind (86.4 vs 89.7 GW). First year ahead: **2030**.

Distractors: 2029 uses the simple average rate (25 % / 5 = 5 % a year for A, 80 % / 5 = 16 % for B) instead of the compound one. 2031 is an off-by-one count. 2035 projects from the 2020 GW values as if they were 2025's. 2037 assumes linear growth (+3 GW and +4.8 GW a year).

Why it is hard: the chart shows indices, not capacity, so B's line is "ahead" from 2021 although B never had more GW. And the on-screen calculator is unlikely to have a root key. **Rule:** with "same average rate" questions, work in whole-period factors and check the candidate years directly.

PART 4

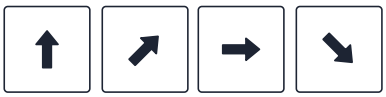
Abstract reasoning

10 questions · 10 minutes · pass 10/20 combined with numerical · no weight in the ranking.

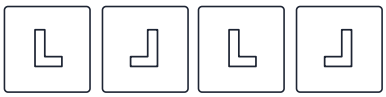
INTERPRETATION Based on EPSO samples and preparation material: five frames in a row, left to right, and you choose the sixth from five options (A–E). Each frame holds one or more elements that change according to rules. Often two or three rules act at once, each on a different attribute: position, rotation, colour, number, shape, size.

> **THE CORE IDEA**
>
> Wrong options are built to satisfy **every rule but one**. Find one rule and two or three options usually remain; find them all and one remains. The method is to find rules and use each one to eliminate, not to "see" the answer. At 60 seconds per question, this is the most time-pressured test in the competition.

Pattern catalogue



Rotation
Turns a fixed angle each step (45°, 90° or 180°). Follow one asymmetric feature, such as the tip.



Reflection
Mirror image. Cannot be obtained by rotating: an asymmetric shape changes "hand".



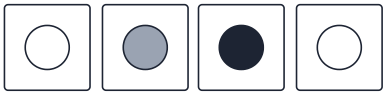
Grid position
Jumps between cells of an imaginary 3 × 3 grid. Number the cells 1–9.



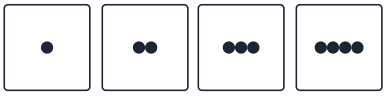
Perimeter path
Moves round the 8 border positions (4 corners, 4 midpoints). Count steps and direction.



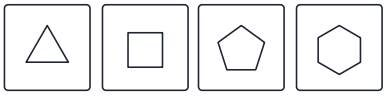
Progressive step
The size of the change grows: +1, +2, +3… or 45°, 90°, 135°. Take differences.



Colour cycle
Fill runs through a cycle: white → grey → black → white. Treat hatching as extra colours.



Count
Number of elements rises or falls steadily. If not, count sides, corners or black items.



Number of sides
Shapes change by number of sides (3, 4, 5, 6) or by total sides in the frame.



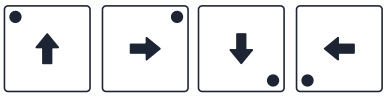
Accumulation
Each frame keeps what was there and adds one element. Ask: what is new?



Cancellation (XOR)
Overlay two frames: shared lines vanish, the rest stay. Frame 3 = 1 XOR 2.



Odd / even split
Frames 1, 3, 5 follow one rule and 2, 4 another. Frame 6 continues the even series.



Independent rules
Two elements, two rules. Solve each as a separate question, then combine.

Also seen: translation (same distance, same direction, wrapping round the edge) · size change (linear or cycling) · symmetry (one half mirrors the other) · superposition (frame 3 = frame 1 + frame 2, more common in matrices) · row/column rules in grids · invariants (a difference or sum that never changes) · number sequences in counts (e.g. each = sum of the previous two).
INTERPRETATION Recent EPSO samples use series, not 3 × 3 matrices.

A fixed checking order

Each step is more expensive than the one before. Start with what takes three seconds and eliminates the most options.

#	Check	Concrete question	Why here
1	**Count**	How many elements? How many black? How many sides in total?	Numbers read instantly, and options often differ in count
2	**Colours and fills**	Which colour is each element in each frame? A cycle?	Just as fast; very discriminating
3	**Positions**	Where is each element? Line, circle, grid?	Needs tracking but still visual
4	**Movement**	How many positions per step? Which direction? Constant or growing?	Builds on step 3
5	**Rotation and reflection**	Where does it point? Has it changed hand?	Most expensive: keep it for the final two options
6	**Shape and size**	Does the shape change? The size?	Fast, but rarely the main rule
7	**Alternation**	Nothing fits step by step? Try in twos (1→3→5, 2→4)	Only when the above fail
8	**Linked rules**	Does one attribute depend on another (colour depends on position)?	The hardest questions
9	**Verify**	Does the rule hold for all four transitions?	A rule that works 3 times out of 4 is wrong

> **THE STEP THAT SAVES MOST TIME**
>
> **Eliminate after every rule.** Find rule 1 → strike the options that break it. One left: mark it, stop looking. Several left: look only at the attribute on which the remaining options differ. The options tell you what to examine in the series.

Advanced techniques

Element cards. Write a mental line per element: “arrow: 90° clockwise; dot: +1, +2, +3 round the edge; arrow colour: black when dot on a corner”. Each line is an independent elimination rule.

Odd/even split. Signals: frame 3 resembles 1, 5 resembles 3, but 2 and 4 look like another series. Then 6 continues 2 → 4.

Rotation or reflection? Mark two features of an asymmetric shape (the tip and the foot of an L). Walk the outline clockwise: in a rotation their order is preserved; in a reflection it is reversed.

Linked attributes. When a colour or size looks random, check whether it depends on another element's position or count.

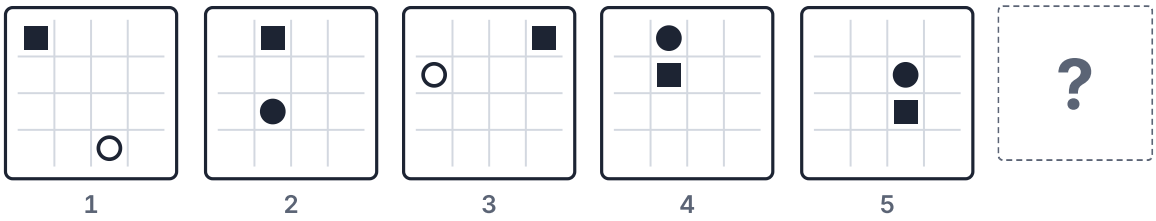
Quick elimination

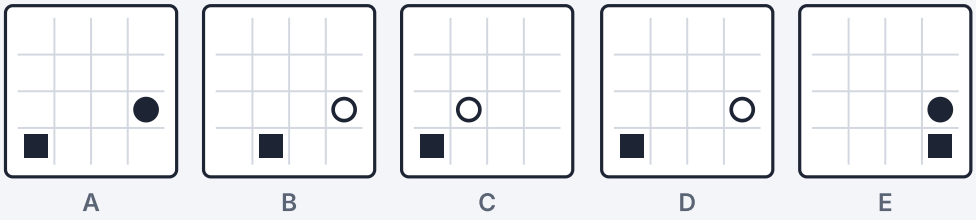
- Strike options that copy a frame exactly, **unless** there is alternation; then frame 6 may legitimately repeat frame 2 or 4.
- Strike the option that changes an attribute that was constant in the series.
- Two options identical except one detail: the answer is usually one of them, and the detail is the rule to check.

A1 Hard example · two movers and a linked colour

Target: 90 s (exam pace: 60 s)

Which figure comes next in the series?





SOLUTION · D

Element	Rule	Frame 6
Black square	Moves along a "snake" path (row 1 left → right, row 2 right → left, and so on) by +1, +2, +3, +4 cells	+5 → bottom row, first cell on the left
Circle position	Moves one cell diagonally each step and bounces off the edges like a ball	Row 3, last column
Circle colour	**Linked:** black when the circle shares a row or a column with the square, white otherwise	No shared row or column → white

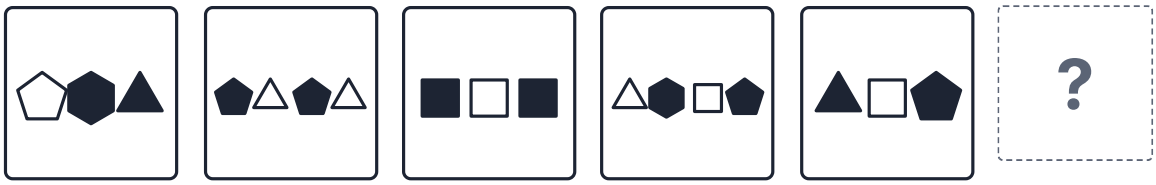
A breaks the colour rule. **B** moves the square by a constant +4. **C** sends the circle down-left instead of on down-right. **E** runs the bottom row left → right (the snake reverses each row); its black circle is consistent with E's own square, which makes it the hardest distractor.

Why it is hard: three rules, none visible from one transition. The circle's colours (white, black, white, black, black) have no pattern of their own, so the alternation you expect breaks at frame 5. The square's path wraps and reverses, and its step grows. **Method:** solve each element on its own; when an attribute has no pattern, test it against the other element's position.

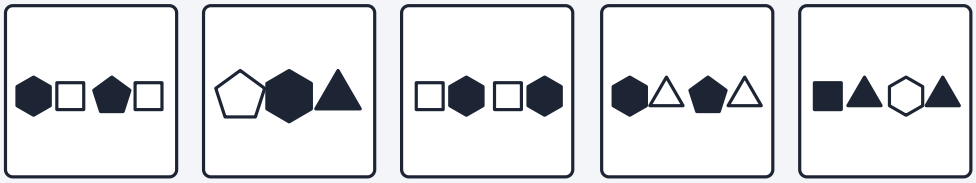
A2 Hard example · the invariant

Target: 90 s (exam pace: 60 s)

Which figure comes next in the series?



1 2 3 4 5



A B C D E

SOLUTION · C

Rule	Frames 1–5	Frame 6
Number of shapes	3, 4, 3, 4, 3 (alternates)	4
Black shapes	Always 2	2
Sides of black shapes − sides of white shapes	9 − 5, 10 − 6, 8 − 4, 11 − 7, 8 − 4: always **4**	4

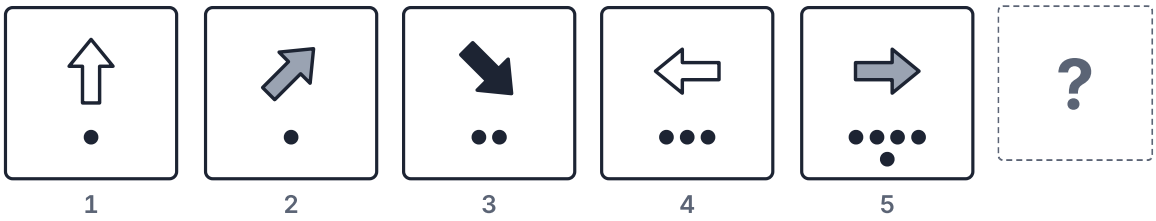
A: 11 − 8 = 3. **B** has 3 shapes (it copies frame 1). **D**: 11 − 6 = 5. **E**: 10 − 6 = 4, but it has three black shapes. Only **C** (12 − 8 = 4, four shapes, two black) fits all three rules.

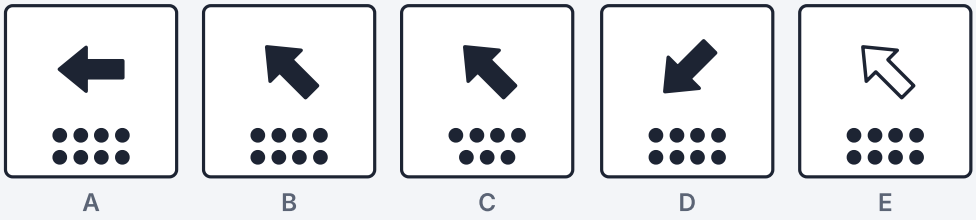
Why it is hard: nothing progresses. Totals of sides (14, 16, 12, 18, 12), shape types and positions all jump around. The rule is a quantity that **stays constant**, which most candidates never test because they look for change. **Tell:** when counts of two groups move erratically, try their difference and their sum.

A3 Hard example · growing turns and a hidden sequence

Target: 90 s (exam pace: 60 s)

Which figure comes next in the series?





SOLUTION · B

Element	Rule	Frame 6
Arrow direction	Turns clockwise by 45°, 90°, 135°, 180°: the turn grows by 45° each step	+225° → points up-left
Arrow fill	Cycles white → grey → black (period 3, not 2)	Black
Dots	1, 1, 2, 3, 5: each count is the sum of the previous two	3 + 5 = 8

A repeats a 180° turn. **C** continues the dots as +2 (3, 5, 7). **D** turns the arrow 225° anticlockwise. **E** assumes the fill alternates.

Why it is hard: each rule is built to fool the first guess. Frame 5 points right after frame 4 pointed left, which looks like a 180° flip, not a growing turn that wrapped past 360°. The fill reads as “white, grey, black, white, grey”: period 3, not alternation. And the dot gaps (0, 1, 1, 2) look irregular, so most people guess +2. **Tell:** when a step is not constant, write the differences; when a count looks irregular, test “sum of the previous two”.

Where candidates lose abstract points

Error	Fix
Inventing complex rules after 10 s of nothing	Go back to step 1: count and colours. Difficulty comes from several simple rules at once
Stopping at one rule	After each rule ask: how many options left? More than one → a rule is missing
Looking only for change	Test what stays constant: a difference, a sum, a total
Checking only 1→2 and 2→3	Verify 3→4 and 4→5 too
Overspending time	Hard limit 75 s. Mark the option that fits most rules found and move on

PART 5

Test day

65 minutes of remote testing: attention, nerves, time limits and set-up.

Attention and nerves

EVIDENCE Anxiety eats working memory: worry competes for the resources you need to hold an option while searching the passage (attentional control theory, Eysenck et al., 2007). High performers are most exposed to “choking” under pressure (Beilock & Carr, 2005).

- **Offload memory:** don't hold the passage in your head; return to it with one question.
- **One option at a time:** classify it, drop it.
- **Expressive writing:** 10 minutes writing about your worries just before the test improved anxious students' results (Ramirez & Beilock, 2011). Do it in another room and leave the sheet there.
- **Reframe arousal:** read a racing pulse as energy, not as a sign of failure (Jamieson et al., 2010).
- **Slow breathing:** about 6 breaths a minute (in 4 s, out 6 s) for 2–3 minutes before starting.

Sleep and fatigue

EVIDENCE Sleep loss hits sustained attention and speed hardest (Lim & Dinges, 2010). Sleep 7+ hours the **three** nights before, not just the last. No new material the day before. Caffeine: same dose and timing as in your mocks.

Hard time limits

Test	Average	Hard limit	At the limit
Verbal	105 s	150 s	Eliminate, pick the best, flag, move on
Numerical	120 s	165 s	Estimate by magnitude and mark
Abstract	60 s	75 s	Mark the option fitting most rules

ESTIMATE With two verbal options eliminated you have a 50 % chance at zero extra cost. Another 90 seconds might lift that to 70 %; spent on a fresh question, it is worth far more.
EVIDENCE Pushing past your natural speed raises errors sharply (Heitz, 2014): set a cruising pace, not a maximum.

Remote set-up checklist

UNVERIFIED Usual EPSO remote conditions: camera and microphone on, clear desk, no paper or pen, no phone, one screen, on-screen calculator. Your invitation prevails.

When	Check
On invitation	Read every instruction. Run the technical test on the same computer, connection and room
2 days before	Valid ID ready; OS updates done; antivirus that won't interfere
Day before	Empty desk, light in front of you, door closed, housemates warned, charger in, stable Wi-Fi or cable
1 hour before	Restart the computer, close everything, notifications off

Protocol on the day

When	Action
T − 3 h	Usual meal, usual caffeine
T − 60 min	Room ready, computer restarted, ID at hand
T − 30 min	Expressive writing (10 min) away from the test desk
T − 15 min	Log in as instructed; slow breathing for 2–3 min
Verbal	Checkpoints: Q5 at 9 min, Q10 at 18, Q15 at 27. Limit 150 s per question
Numerical	Question before data; check the spread of the options
Abstract	Count → colour → position → rotation. Limit 75 s
Last 30 s of each test	No blank answers

Cheat sheet

WHAT COUNTS

Verbal: 20 q · 35 min · **pass 10/20 · 40 % of ranking**

Numerical 10 q · 20 min + Abstract 10 q · 10 min: **10/20 combined · 0 % of ranking**

Target: verbal as high as possible; num + abs ≥ 13/20. No blank answers.

VERBAL: 5 STEPS

1 Frame: "correct" or "NOT correct"? · 2 Mark the risky word in each option · 3 Check each against its sentence: T / F / CS · 4 Two left → smallest difference · 5 Proven True → mark and go (not in NOT-correct questions)

VERBAL: THE TRAPS TO CHECK EVERY TIME

"Only if" = necessary, not sufficient · plan ≠ result · "according to X" ≠ fact · total ≠ components · average ≠ everyone · "could" ≠ "will" · "one of the factors" ≠ "the cause" · "no evidence" ≠ "no effect" · read both halves · outside knowledge = 0

LOGIC

```
A→B ⇔ ¬B→¬A ✓
A→B ⇏ B→A ✗
A only if B ⇔ A→B
none lacked = all had
did not rule out = possible
```

NUMERICAL: FORMULAS

```
Change = (new − old) / old
Before +r: new / (1+r)
Before −r: new / (1−r)
Chain: × (1+r₁)(1+r₂)
pp = r₂ − r₁ · % = (r₂−r₁)/r₁
Weighted mean = Σvw / Σw
Annual growth = (F/S)^(1/n) − 1
```

NUMERICAL: 2-MINUTE METHOD

Question → options' spread → only the needed cells → set up fully → calculate → sanity check (magnitude, direction, bounds). Close options: calculate exactly. Blank cell next to a total → back-solve. Units per € up = weaker currency. Index ≠ level.

ABSTRACT: CHECKING ORDER

1 Count (incl. sides, black items) · 2 Colour · 3 Position · 4 Movement (constant or growing?) · 5 Rotation vs reflection · 6 Shape / size · 7 Odd / even · 8 Linked rules · 9 Verify all 4 transitions. **Eliminate after every rule.**

ABSTRACT: TELLS

Attribute looks random → linked to another element · Counts erratic → try difference / sum (invariant) or "sum of previous two" · Step not constant → take differences · 2 and 4 differ from 1, 3, 5 → split series · Options differ on X → check X

TIME

Verbal Q5 at 9 min · Q10 at 18 · Q15 at 27 · cut at 150 s · **Numerical** 2 min average · cut at 165 s · **Abstract** 60 s average · cut at 75 s · Change an answer only with a new sentence or figure that contradicts it.

THE DAY

Sleep 7+ h for three nights · nothing new the day before · same caffeine as in mocks · T−30 expressive writing away from the desk · T−15 slow breathing · read the invitation's rules on the desk, calculator and ID.

Disclaimer and sources

Disclaimer

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Competition facts were checked against the Notice of Competition EPSO/AD/427/26 as corrected and amended, and EPSO's public communications, as of November 2026. Rules, dates and test conditions can change. The binding texts are those published in the Official Journal of the European Union, together with the instructions in your candidate account and invitation letter. Where this guide and an official source differ, the official source prevails.

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Official sources

- Notice of open competition EPSO/AD/427/26 – Administrators (AD 5), OJ C, C/2026/711, 5.2.2026; corrigendum C/2026/90048, 16.6.2026; amending notice C/2026/3362, 30.6.2026. Consolidated version on eu-careers.europa.eu.
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About

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