

O Level Physics (5054) Frequently Asked Questions

Can my candidates take a dictionary / calculator into the examination?

Calculators can be used in all science papers and students should take a calculator, ruler, pencil, protractor and set of compasses into all science exams. Dictionaries are not allowed.

What equipment should we have in our laboratories?

A CIE booklet entitled Planning Science in Secondary Schools is available from CIE Publications.

My candidates are doing the Alternative to Practical paper, so they don't need any laboratory experience, do they?

Yes, they do. The ATP paper is an alternative to the Practical Paper, not an alternative to doing practical work. The syllabus makes it clear, in both the Aims and the Assessment Objectives, that the course should be taught practically and that candidates should have experience of doing (rather than merely seeing) experimental work. The Alternative to Practical paper assesses their practical skills, including both data handling and familiarity with standard laboratory equipment. Any candidates without experience of doing practical work will be disadvantaged in this paper.

Is there an option available which doesn't involve any assessment of practical skills?

No. Practical skills are an integral part of Physics. A Physics qualification without a practical component would be a second-rate assessment of the subject, and CIE aims to provide valid qualifications acceptable in all areas of the world.

I am in the middle of setting up the practical examination, and I need to look at the question. Am I allowed to look at a copy of the question paper?

No. You should be preparing the examination using the Confidential Instructions, which are issued to Centres in confidence well in advance of the examination. These instructions tell you all you need to know about the apparatus requirements, how the apparatus is to be arranged, and what it will be used for. If you have a problem which cannot be resolved using the Confidential Instructions, please telephone our Customer services line on +44 1223 553554 or e-mail International@ucles.org.uk.

I haven't got the exact equipment specified in the Confidential Instructions, but I do have something similar. Am I allowed to adapt the experiment at all?

Yes, you are allowed to make minor adaptations to the apparatus, providing that the apparatus still works as specified in the Confidential Instructions. You do not need to seek our approval for these minor adaptations. However, you must report the adaptations in detail to the examiners, by completing the Supervisor's Report form on the back of the Confidential Instructions. The Supervisor's Report should be enclosed with the candidates' completed scripts. More substantial adaptations, which require changes to the experiment or which cause the apparatus to work in a different way from that described in the Confidential Instructions, are not allowed.

Which option makes it easiest for my students to achieve high grades?

They are the same difficulty, and in every examination we use some robust statistical methods to make sure that the options really are all the same difficulty.

Which is the correct textbook for the course?

We don't require Centres to use any one particular textbook for our courses, and we would hope that wherever possible teachers would make use of a variety of different resources, drawing from the best bits of each. We do provide a list of books that we believe teachers may find helpful, and you can find this on our [website](#).

Do I need to teach the course in the order given in the syllabus?

No, and we don't particularly recommend it. The syllabus outlines what may be assessed in the examination, but we would normally expect teachers to follow their own scheme of work based on the syllabus.

Is the syllabus going to change?

There are no plans to change the syllabus in the short term. In the longer term, we do try to improve our schemes of assessment and keep our syllabus contents up to date, so syllabuses change from time to time. There is usually consultation with customers before any significant changes are introduced.