

The Parent's Guide to IGCSE & A-Level Portfolios 2026

Why portfolios replaced exams in 2026

Have you heard that Cambridge, Pearson Edexcel and OxfordAQA have cancelled traditional IGCSE and A-Level exams for June 2026 across the UAE and wider Gulf? Instead of sitting papers in exam halls, students' grades will be decided using a **portfolio of evidence**. This change has left many parents confused and anxious. This guide explains what changed in 2026, how portfolio grading works, what schools are looking for, and—most importantly—what you can do now to help your child secure top grades.

How students are graded now

Under the portfolio-of-evidence system, a student's grade is determined by a collection of **exam-style work completed under controlled conditions** rather than a single written paper. Each subject's portfolio must contain **three substantial pieces of evidence**. These pieces are usually **mock exams or timed assessments lasting about an hour** and they must follow strict rules set by Cambridge:

- The work cannot be the actual June 2026 exam paper or a multiple-choice paper.
- Students are **not allowed to redo tasks** to improve their score.
- Each piece must be completed under proper exam conditions and will represent the candidate's genuine level of performance.

Teachers select evidence that reflects a student's **consistent standard**, not just their highest marks. Each piece counts equally (one-third of the grade). Teachers mark the evidence first and then Cambridge examiners review and apply the same mark schemes used in written exams. Grade boundaries are set separately for portfolio candidates and written-exam candidates, so students submitting portfolios are graded independently. Cambridge's process ensures students still receive a Cambridge qualification; universities treat portfolio-awarded grades like traditional grades.

What schools look for in the portfolio

Schools build each portfolio using a combination of **coursework, mock papers, internal tests, topic assessments and teacher comments**. This evidence should show what the student has learned and demonstrate their ability to apply knowledge. Cambridge's guidance emphasises consistency; schools must avoid cherry-picking only the highest scores. Evidence must be gathered fairly and under exam-style supervision.

Key points schools consider:

- **Authenticity:** Work must be completed under controlled conditions; unsupervised homework will not usually qualify.
- **Coverage:** Evidence should come from different points in the course (e.g., mid-year, mock exams, end-of-topic tests) to show sustained performance.
- **Balance:** Portfolios should contain varied types of evidence – coursework or practical components for science/arts subjects and timed exam papers for theory subjects.

- **Integrity:** Teachers must follow Cambridge's rules; re-sitting a test just to improve a mark is not allowed.

Common mistakes parents and students make

Many families misunderstand how the portfolio system works. Key misconceptions include:

- **Thinking portfolios are the same as predicted grades.** They are not. The final grade is based on actual exam-style work, not teacher-estimated scores.
- **Assuming teachers will pick a child's best work.** Schools must submit three pieces that reflect real performance; one weak performance can significantly affect the final grade.
- **Taking mock exams lightly.** Because mock exams will form the portfolio, students who treat them as practice may underperform when it matters most.
- **Neglecting coursework or internal assessments.** Coursework, topic tests and teacher commentary contribute to the portfolio; incomplete or poor-quality coursework can lower the overall grade.
- **Relying on social media rumours.** Schools receive weekly updates from Cambridge; parents should talk to their school's exams officer instead of relying on WhatsApp groups.

How to improve scores under the portfolio system

Although exams are cancelled, students can still influence their grades. Encourage your child to:

1. **Treat every assessment as an exam.** Past paper questions and mock exams may end up in the portfolio, so practise under timed conditions and follow mark schemes strictly.
2. **Complete all coursework to a high standard.** Coursework counts towards the portfolio; unfinished tasks or sloppy work can reduce the final grade.
3. **Stay consistent.** Since teachers choose evidence that shows consistent performance, students should aim for steady results across assessments rather than one-off high scores.
4. **Seek feedback.** Ask teachers which areas of evidence have been collected and how to improve; targeted feedback helps strengthen future submissions.
5. **Use past papers and revision resources.** Practising a range of past paper questions helps build familiarity with exam-style tasks and ensures evidence covers different topics.
6. **Stay calm and organised.** Students who manage their time and revision schedule are better positioned to perform well under mock exam conditions.

Study plan for the next 30 days

Below is a suggested four-week plan parents can adapt to their child's subjects and schedule. Adjust as needed for different curricula.

Week	Focus	Actions
Week 1	Diagnose & plan	Identify which topics need improvement. Review recent test papers and mark schemes. Create a revision timetable allocating daily blocks for each subject.
Week 2	Intensive revision & coursework	For each subject, revise challenging topics using textbooks and reliable online resources. Work on any outstanding coursework or practical assignments to ensure they meet the criteria for portfolio evidence.
Week 3	Mock exams & feedback	Sit full past papers under timed conditions in each subject. Mark using official mark schemes and, if possible, ask a teacher or tutor to grade and provide feedback. Identify weak areas and revise them again.
Week 4	Consolidate & polish	Re-attempt difficult questions from past papers. Complete any incomplete coursework. Practise smaller timed assessments or topic tests to reinforce learning. Ensure notes and evidence are organised ready for submission.

Consistent revision and exam-style practice build confidence and improve performance. Encourage breaks and sleep to prevent burnout.

How tutoring can help

Professional tutoring offers structured support at a time when students need clarity and guidance. Experienced tutors can:

- Provide **personalised revision plans** that target weak areas and align with the exam board's mark schemes.
- Conduct **timed mock exams** under exam-style conditions, offering immediate feedback and strategies to improve.
- Help students **understand mark schemes** so their answers meet assessment objectives.
- Ensure coursework and internal assessments meet the expected standard before submission.
- Boost motivation and confidence, particularly for students who feel uncertain without a traditional exam date.

If you are seeking additional support, our tutoring service offers IGCSE specialists who understand the portfolio process and can help students maximise their performance during this unusual assessment year.

Next steps and free consultation

Confused about how to assemble your child's portfolio or worried about their current evidence? We're here to help. Bring your questions to our inbox and get expert advice tailored to your child's situation. Our consultants specialise in Cambridge IGCSE and A-Level portfolios and will guide you through the process.

- **Call or WhatsApp:** +971 561 507 946
- **WhatsApp Link:** <https://wa.me/971561507946>
- **Website:** ssf.h.co

Send us a message or book a **free consultation**—we'll work with you to create a plan that helps your child secure top grades.