



Cambridge O Level

COMBINED SCIENCE

5129/32

Paper 3 Experimental Skills and Investigations

May/June 2026

MARK SCHEME

Maximum Mark: 40

Published

This mark scheme contains the instructions and marking guidance that our examiners used to mark candidate responses for this component.

Before they start marking, examiners complete a standardisation process. They review a range of candidate responses and discuss the mark scheme in detail to agree which answers can and cannot be accepted. Examiners award marks where it is clear that candidate responses have met the requirements of the mark scheme. These requirements may vary between different components or different versions of the same component, depending on the exact requirements of the question and the candidate responses seen during the standardisation process.

Sometimes, our mark schemes may allow marks to be awarded to responses which contain elements that are factually incorrect or for content not covered by the syllabus. We do this in response to the demands of a specific question to support candidates and make sure that our assessments are fair. However, these allowances should not be used as a guide for teaching and learning.

We cannot discuss the mark scheme with schools, and we recommend that schools read the mark scheme together with the assessment material and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

This document consists of **12** printed pages.

General marking principles

All examiners must apply these marking principles when marking candidate responses.

1	Examiners must award marks for each response in line with: - the specific content defined in the mark scheme - the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the level descriptions - the standard of response required as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.
2	Examiners must award whole marks (not half marks, or other fractions).
3	Examiners must award marks positively . This means that: - marks are not deducted for errors or omissions - marks are awarded for correct/valid answers as defined in the mark scheme and also for other valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme referring to your team leader as appropriate - the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar are judged only when the mark scheme indicates that these features are specifically assessed in the question. However, the meaning of all responses must be unambiguous.
4	Examiners must consistently apply the requirements of the mark scheme and any rules for what to do when candidates have not followed instructions correctly.
5	Examiners must use the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme, unless limited by the quality of the candidate responses seen.
6	Examiners must award marks according to the mark scheme and must not award marks with grade thresholds or grade descriptions in mind.

Science-Specific Marking Principles

1	Examiners should consider the context and scientific use of any keywords when awarding marks. Although keywords may be present, marks should not be awarded if the keywords are used incorrectly.
2	The examiner should not choose between contradictory statements given in the same question part, and credit should not be awarded for any correct statement that is contradicted within the same question part. Wrong science that is irrelevant to the question should be ignored.
3	Although spellings do not have to be correct, spellings of syllabus terms must allow for clear and unambiguous separation from other syllabus terms with which they may be confused (e.g. ethane / ethene, glucagon / glycogen, refraction / reflection).
4	The error carried forward (ecf) principle should be applied, where appropriate. If an incorrect answer is subsequently used in a scientifically correct way, the candidate should be awarded these subsequent marking points. Further guidance will be included in the mark scheme where necessary and any exceptions to this general principle will be noted.
5	<u>'List rule' guidance</u> For questions that require <i>n</i> responses (e.g. State two reasons ...): • The response should be read as continuous prose, even when numbered answer spaces are provided. • Any response marked <i>ignore</i> in the mark scheme should not count towards <i>n</i>. • Incorrect responses should not be awarded credit but will still count towards <i>n</i>. • Read the entire response to check for any responses that contradict those that would otherwise be credited. Credit should not be awarded for any responses that are contradicted within the rest of the response. Where two responses contradict one another, this should be treated as a single incorrect response. • Non-contradictory responses after the first <i>n</i> responses may be ignored even if they include incorrect science.

6 Calculation specific guidance

Correct answers to calculations should be given full credit even if there is no working or incorrect working, **unless** the question states 'show your working'.

For questions in which the number of significant figures required is not stated, credit should be awarded for correct answers when rounded by the examiner to the number of significant figures given in the mark scheme. This may not apply to measured values.

For answers given in standard form (e.g. $a \times 10^n$) in which the convention of restricting the value of the coefficient (a) to a value between 1 and 10 is not followed, credit may still be awarded if the answer can be converted to the answer given in the mark scheme.

Unless a separate mark is given for a unit, a missing or incorrect unit will normally mean that the final calculation mark is not awarded. Exceptions to this general principle will be noted in the mark scheme.

7 Guidance for chemical equations

Multiples / fractions of coefficients used in chemical equations are acceptable unless stated otherwise in the mark scheme.

State symbols given in an equation should be ignored unless asked for in the question or stated otherwise in the mark scheme.

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
	Unclear response
	information missing or insufficient for credit
	benefit of the doubt given
	contradiction in response, mark not awarded
	incorrect point or mark not awarded
	error carried forward applied
	highlight
	point on graph seen or blank page seen
	incorrect or insufficient point ignored while marking the rest of the response
	power of ten error

Annotation	Meaning
R	incorrect point or mark not awarded
RE	rounding error
SEEN	point has been noted, but no credit has been given or blank page seen
SF	error in number of significant figures
T	Answer outside the tolerance of the mark scheme
	correct point or mark awarded
 1  2  3	Correct awarding one mark from marking point/group 1, 2, 3, 4 etc.
TV	response is too vague or there is insufficient detail in response

Mark Scheme Abbreviations:

;	separates marking points
/	alternative responses for the same marking point
R	reject the response
A	accept the response
I	ignore the response
ecf	error carried forward
AVP	any valid point
ora	or reverse argument
AW	alternative wording
<u>underline</u>	actual word given must be used by candidate (grammatical variants excepted)
()	the word / phrase in brackets is not required but sets the context
max	indicates the maximum number of marks that can be given
mp	marking point
cao	Correct answer only

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
1(a)(i)	(celery) 25 (potato) 30 ;	1	I units in body of table. I numbers in header
1(a)(ii)	(celery) 5 (potato) 6 ;	1	both values correctly calculated for 1 m ecf from 1(a)(i)
1(a)(iii)	cm ³ ;	1	must be in both headings for 1 m
1(a)(iv)	measuring cylinder ;	1	
1(a)(v)	water bath ;	1	I check temp I do it at room temperature
1(a)(vi)	take more than 1 reading and compare / average ;	1	A repeat / average (experiment)
1(b)	chemical : biuret ;	1	R burette
	initial colour blue and final colour purple ;	1	both blue and purple needed for 2nd mark A other tests for protein e.g. Millons. ecf for incorrect initial test. Millons colourless final colour red (precipitate) R other test and results / no ecf for different food test
1(c)(i)	cut away from body / on a flat surface / use a chopping board / white tile / do not use a blunt scalpel / AVP ;	1	I use gloves I use gloves to stop cutting fingers AVP keep fingers away from blade / make sure fingers / hand are not in the way / keep hand holding the scalpel cutting away from rest of body I handle with care / slowly / carefully
1(c)(ii)	90 (mm) ;	1	± 1 (mm) A 90.5
1(c)(iii)	3.3 ;	1	ecf from 1(c)(ii) to 1 dp

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
2(a)(i)	(Leibig) condenser ;	1	R condensation tube
2(a)(ii)	to turn gas / water vapour / steam to liquid / water / cool the gas ;	1	A condense the gas I condense unqualified A to turn steam to liquid to cool the water vapour
2(a)(iii)	stopper / cork / bung / lid missing from (round bottom/distillation) flask ; gas will escape / lost / AW ;	2	R put a bung / stopper conical flask / any reference to conical flask I references to insulation / condense unqualified / condense water A heated air / heated water / water vapour escapes / lost evaporated ink I ink escapes / air escapes
2(a)(iv)	temperature before heating = 19.0 ; highest temperature = 99.7 ;	2	A 19 for 1st marking point
2(a)(v)	99.7	1	ecf from a(i)(v)
2(b)(i)	2 dots vertically above the original dot ;	1	I any solvent front R any other dots to the side of the central region R more than / less than 2 dots A 2 dots within the designated area from the overlay
2(b)(ii)	prevent / reduce evaporation ;	1	A to stop the experiment / it drying out
2(b)(iii)	place the 3 known dyes on the base line (and run the chromatogram) ; compare the height of the dots with the ink ;	2	A repeat the experiment for each of the compounds I use a different solvent

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
3(a)	(r =) 50 ± 1 (mm) ;	1	

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance																				
3(b)	7850 (mm ²) ;	1	ecf from 3(a) A value of 7853.98 from n A value that rounds to 7900 (2 s.f.) A gives 51 8167.14 / values that round to 5200																				
3(c)(i)	0.24 (A) ;	1																					
3(c)(ii)	0.18 (V) ;	1																					
3(c)(iii)	0.0432 (W) ;	1	ecf from 3(c)(i) and 3(c)(ii) <table><tr><td></td><td>0.22</td><td>0.23</td><td>0.24</td><td>0.25</td></tr><tr><td>0.17</td><td>0.0374</td><td>0.0391</td><td>0.0408</td><td>0.0425</td></tr><tr><td>0.18</td><td>0.0396</td><td>0.0414</td><td>0.0432</td><td>0.045</td></tr><tr><td>0.19</td><td>0.0418</td><td>0.0437</td><td>0.0456</td><td>0.0475</td></tr></table>		0.22	0.23	0.24	0.25	0.17	0.0374	0.0391	0.0408	0.0425	0.18	0.0396	0.0414	0.0432	0.045	0.19	0.0418	0.0437	0.0456	0.0475
	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.25																			
0.17	0.0374	0.0391	0.0408	0.0425																			
0.18	0.0396	0.0414	0.0432	0.045																			
0.19	0.0418	0.0437	0.0456	0.0475																			
3(d)	A axes labelled with quantity ; S suitable linear scale starting at 0,0 that covers half the grid or more in both dimensions – points occupy at least 4 large squares vertically and at least 3 large squares horizontally ; P all plotted points accurate to $\pm$ half small square ; L best fit <u>straight line</u> with even spread of points above and below ;	4	R awkward scales e.g. 3,7,11 and 15 for S I axes back to front																				

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
3(e)	error: difficulty blowing with same (force each time) ; improvement: use a fan (to produce a constant air flow) ; OR error: difficulty in reading the meter if the reading changes quickly ; improvement: set a fan to produce a constant air flow or video the meters and use freeze-frame ;	2	A the strength of how the student blows A the pressure of blowing can be different each time A power of person's blow / how hard they blow A use a blowing machine I blowing the turbine unqualified I read both meters at the same time the improvement must be linked to the identified source of error

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4	One from each section and then any other two points <u>apparatus</u> metre ruler ; stopwatch / timer; <u>method</u> vary the distance (between plant and light source) ; counting the number of bubbles / volume of oxygen ; measure the distance / 5 different distances / repeat (at each distance) ; <u>control variables</u> size of aquatic plant / species / age / number of leaves of aquatic plant / same aquatic plant ; temperature of water ; length of time ; <u>details of table :</u> distances (in heading) AND number of bubbles / volume of gas / oxygen released (in heading) ; <u>how results will be used :</u> draw a graph of distance and number of bubbles / look at table and compare number of bubbles produced at each distance ; if the student is correct the number of bubbles released will be more when the light source is closer to the aquatic plant / AW ;	7	A ruler / rule / measuring tape I measuring cylinder / syringe I ideas of heating water A measured distance e.g. 20 cm A measure distance and count number of bubbles when light is further / closer = 2 m A seen in table A same time (check method) I same volume of water