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Choosing Subjects in CBSE: A Guide for Parents (Grades 9–11)

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Most CBSE families treat Grade 11 as a choice between three boxes: Science, Commerce, Arts. CBSE's own rulebook has no such boxes. It asks for five subjects, gives a list, and leaves the combination to the student and the school.

That freedom matters, because a few choices made at 14 or 15 can close doors later: Basic Maths in Grade 10, Applied Maths in Grade 11, a subject missing for an entrance exam. This guide covers those rules, checked against CBSE's and the exam bodies' own documents in November 2026.

The rules only tell you what is allowed. Which combination is right depends on a different question: who is your child, and what keeps them curious?

How CBSE Grade 11–12 subjects work

CBSE treats Grades 11 and 12 as one two-year course. A student takes in Grade 11 only the subjects they mean to continue, studies at least five, and keeps the same subjects in Grade 12 (CBSE Curriculum 2026–27, Section 3).

Subject	What it must be
1	Hindi or English (Core or Elective)
2	A second language, or any academic elective
3 and 4	Any academic elective or skill subject
5	Any academic elective
6 (optional)	One more elective or language

Health and Physical Education, Work Experience and General Studies are assessed in school for every regular student.

What parents often don't know:

- **Streams are a school's timetable, not a CBSE rule.** Physics with Economics, or History with Maths, is allowed if the school offers it. Ask your school which combinations its timetable can run.
- **Some pairs can never be taken together:** Mathematics and Applied Mathematics; Business Studies and Business Administration; and only one of Computer Science, Informatics Practices and Information Technology.
- **A sixth subject is a safety net.** If a student fails one of the main five, the sixth replaces it, provided Hindi or English stays among the five. The first five subjects entered on the registration form count as the main ones, so the order matters.

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- **The marksheet shows no overall percentage.** Each college or exam body calculates it by its own rules.

If your child is in Grade 9 now: a new scheme

Children who started Grade 9 in 2026–27 are the first batch on CBSE's new scheme, with their first board exams in 2028. Children in Grade 10 this year stay on the old one.

	Grade 10 in 2026–27	Grade 9 in 2026–27
Maths	Basic or Standard (the last batch with Basic)	One common course, plus an optional Advanced paper
Science	One common course	One common course, plus an optional Advanced paper
Third language	Not compulsory	Compulsory up to Grade 10

The Advanced paper is 25 marks and one hour of harder questions, taken on top of the normal 80-mark paper (Careers360). It does not change the child's total; a score of 50% or more is noted separately on the marksheet (school summary of CBSE's scheme).

On 29 October 2026 CBSE also dropped "Individuals in Society" and the computational thinking and AI modules for this batch (Circular Acad-70/2026, reported by UNI).

CBSE has not yet said whether the Advanced paper will count for Grade 11 subject choice. Until it does, treat it as a stretch for a child who enjoys the subject.

Grade 10 Maths: Standard or Basic

If there is any chance your child will want Maths in Grade 11, choose Standard. No Grade 10 choice decides more.

- **The standing rule.** A student who took Basic Maths (241) can take Applied Mathematics in Grade 11, but "may not be permitted" to take Mathematics (041) (CBSE registration circular, September 2025).
- **The relaxation.** CBSE's circular of 27 May 2025 lets a Basic student take Mathematics (041) in Grade 11 from 2025–26 onward, but only if the school head is satisfied the child can cope (report). That is the school's call, not the child's right.
- **This applies only to children in Grade 10 now.** Basic Maths ends with this batch.

Next step: if your child is on Basic and might want Maths later, talk to the school before the Grade 10 board exams, while a switch to Standard may still be possible.

Grade 11 Maths: Mathematics or Applied Mathematics

These are two different subjects, and CBSE does not allow a student to take both.

	Mathematics (041)	Applied Mathematics (241)
Built for	Engineering, physics, maths-heavy degrees	Commerce, economics, data, social sciences
Engineering entrance (JEE)	Yes	Don't count on it: the exam rules ask for Mathematics and do not say Applied Mathematics qualifies

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	Mathematics (041)	Applied Mathematics (241)
CUET	One combined Mathematics/Applied Mathematics paper	Same paper
Economics, B.Com (Hons), BBE at Delhi University	Accepted	Accepted
Maths-based courses abroad	Accepted	Not accepted by some, such as Edinburgh and Warwick in the UK, and Toronto, Waterloo and Alberta in Canada

If engineering, architecture or a pure science degree is even a possibility, choose Mathematics. If your child leans towards commerce, economics or psychology and finds maths heavy going, Applied Mathematics keeps those doors open in India with a more practical course. If a university abroad is possible, check its India entry page first, because some UK and Canadian universities don't accept Applied Mathematics where a course needs maths.

Entrance exams: what each needs in Grade 12

Engineering and medicine are where subject choices close doors fastest.

Route	Grade 12 subjects needed	Marks condition
JEE Main (B.E./B.Tech)	Physics and Mathematics, plus one of Chemistry, Biology, Biotechnology or a technical vocational subject	None to sit the exam
NITs, IIITs and other central institutes	As for JEE Main	75% in Grade 12 (65% SC/ST), or the board's top 20 percentile
JEE Advanced and IITs	Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics	75% (65% SC/ST/PwD) or top 20 percentile, to take an IIT seat
NEET (MBBS, BDS)	Physics, Chemistry, Biology/Biotechnology and English	50% in PCB (40% OBC/SC/ST)

- **IITs need Chemistry.** A child with Physics, Maths and Computer Science can sit JEE Main but cannot take an IIT seat.
- **NEET accepts Biology as an additional subject.** Physics, Chemistry and Maths with Biology as a sixth subject keeps both medicine and engineering open, at the cost of a heavier two years.
- **Grade 12 marks still count.** The 75% rule means a child pushed into subjects they don't enjoy can clear the entrance exam and still miss the seat.

These rules come from the 2026 and 2027 exam cycles (JEE Main, JEE Advanced, NEET). NTA and the IITs reissue them every year, so check the current bulletin before Grade 11 choices are final.

CUET and university choices

Delhi University and most central universities admit through CUET-UG, and Delhi University expects students to take CUET papers in subjects they studied in Grade 12 (Careers360 on DU's 2026 policy). So the Grade 11 combination decides which CUET papers will count three years later.

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- Economics (Hons) and the Bachelor of Business Economics at DU need a Maths paper, Mathematics or Applied Mathematics (PW on DU combinations).
- B.Com (Hons) at DU has needed Maths since 2025 (Careers360), which surprised many commerce students without it.
- Most humanities courses accept a wide range of subjects alongside a language.

Next step: before Grade 11 subjects are final, look up the CUET requirements for two or three courses your child might want, at the universities you'd actually consider.

Five mistakes we see every year

1. **Choosing Basic Maths to protect the Grade 10 percentage.** A few marks gained can cost the Maths option in Grade 11. If you're unsure, choose Standard.
2. **Picking PCM because "science keeps every option open".** It does on paper. A child with no interest in it often scores lower, and the 75% rule then shuts the doors PCM was meant to keep open. Choose for the child, not for the option count.
3. **Treating the school's streams as CBSE's rules.** Ask the school which cross-stream combinations its timetable can run before deciding something isn't possible.
4. **Ignoring the sixth subject.** It is a safety net for marks and a second route, such as Biology for NEET. Put the five subjects that matter most first on the registration form.
5. **Deciding on result day.** The Grade 10 result arrives weeks before Grade 11 starts. Have the conversation in Grade 9 or early Grade 10, while every option is still open.

Talking it through at home

Parents worry about security. Teenagers worry about being judged, or letting you down. When a child senses a verdict coming, they go quiet or agree to whatever ends the conversation.

A few questions that open the conversation up:

- "Which subjects make you curious enough to keep going when a chapter gets hard? Which ones drain you?"
- "If your friends' choices and the relatives' opinions were off the table, which two or three subjects would you pick?"
- "Which two courses or careers shall we read up on together this month, so we can check which subjects keep them open?"
- "What's the heaviest pressure on you right now?" Then listen, without comparing them with anyone.

None of these needs an answer tonight. The aim is a decision you make together in Grade 9 or 10, rather than one made for them on result day.

Free help from CBSE, and what your school must provide

- **Tamanna** is CBSE and NCERT's free aptitude test for Grades 9 and 10. There is no pass or fail, and it must not be used to impose a subject on a child (NCERT).
- **My Career Advisor** is the Ministry of Education's free career app, launched on 29 July 2025 (CBSE Circular Acad-66/2025).
- **Your school must have a career counsellor.** Since 19 January 2026, every CBSE school needs one career counsellor for every 500 students in Grades 9 to 12, alongside a counselling and wellness teacher (Education World). Ask the school who yours is.

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Where Rosemounts helps

The rules tell you which doors a subject combination keeps open. They can't tell you which one fits your child.

That is what the VIP+™ Career and Life Design Program is for. It looks at your child's Values, Interests, Personality and Skills together, and a counsellor talks the results through with your child and with you. The choice then starts from who your child is, rather than last term's marks or what friends are picking.

What we won't promise: no assessment predicts a rank, a job or a salary, and no subject choice guarantees an admission. If you ask about fees, you'll get the full fee and what it includes, straight away. This guide is yours to use on its own, with no obligation to book anything.

To talk it through, WhatsApp us on +91 73022 22330 with one line: which class is your child in?

Sources

Checked 14 November 2026; the row on universities abroad was added on 18 November 2026 and extended to Canada on 19 November. CBSE rules are from CBSE's own documents; exam and university rules are from published summaries of the 2026–27 bulletins and should be rechecked against the official bulletins each year.

- CBSE Senior Secondary Curriculum 2026–27, Section 3: Scheme of Studies
- CBSE circular on registration data, Classes IX and XI, September 2025
- CBSE circular of 27 May 2025 on Basic Maths and Class XI Mathematics (report)
- CBSE 2026–27 Grade 9 changes, including Advanced papers (Careers360)
- CBSE Circular Acad-70/2026, 29 October 2026 (UNI report)
- Tamanna (NCERT) and My Career Advisor (CBSE Circular Acad-66/2025)
- CBSE counsellor mandate, 19 January 2026 (Education World)
- Applied Mathematics at UK universities: University of Edinburgh and University of Warwick
- Applied Mathematics at Canadian universities: University of Toronto, University of Waterloo and University of Alberta
- Official bulletins to check each year: JEE Main (NTA), JEE Advanced, NEET-UG (NTA), CUET-UG (NTA), JoSAA

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