

FREE
E-BOOK

HOW TO GET YOUR CXC SUBJECTS

A Guide For People Seeking
*Further Education, Career
Advancement & Personal
Development*
in Trinidad & Tobago

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A T. GARCIA EDUCATION PUBLICATION

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INTRODUCTION

A problem that has bothered me for a very long time is that there are many willing and capable people seeking job opportunities but they do not have the necessary academic qualifications to be considered. What bothers me even more, is when such people are forced to settle for jobs that don't allow them to use their real gifts and God-given talents and then they end up living unfulfilled lives, all because they don't have a piece of paper saying that they are "qualified" or "educated".

I believe that everyone should be able to do good and honest work that allows them to adequately take care of themselves, their families and contribute in some positive way to society. Maybe I'm unrealistically optimistic and I "naively" believe that we can all learn anything and that we all have something special which we can use to serve humanity. But this shapes my whole philosophy of education and it has allowed me to bring out the best in myself and in all the students I've ever had the tremendous privilege to work with.

In an ideal world, people's ability to access better jobs and improve their standards of living wouldn't be based on one-dimensional academic achievements.

Education would be viewed as a life-long process and not just something that you “get” when you’re a kid. People would be encouraged to develop their natural abilities and develop themselves holistically. But we have not yet reached there as a society.

In Trinidad and Tobago, by extension the Caribbean (*and even the wider world*), we wrongfully measure people’s level of education AND their intelligence based on academic achievements rather than true ability and common sense. For instance, to get entry-level jobs across many industries, five or more CXC CSEC (*O’Level*) subjects or even university degrees are basic requirements. And in many such instances, those same subjects or degrees are not directly related to the jobs.

The whole education system is flawed and quite frankly I can write an entire book on the many ways that it is. But the fact remains that the system continues to reign supreme. And we can either complain or become so capable that we can skillfully manipulate it, and use the very thing that seems to oppress so many, to advance ourselves and live our absolute best lives. Just like I have done. And just like I’m going to help you to do.

The first step: get your CXC CSEC subjects.

If you're reading this, it means that you are seeking further education, career advancement and personal development and in some way or another, not having your CXC CSEC subjects is standing in the way of that.

Read on.

This is for you.

In this short guide, I am going to try to give you all the information there is to know about the CXC CSEC exams, and provide you with actionable steps on how to go about getting your subjects, so that you can start living the life that you know you deserve.

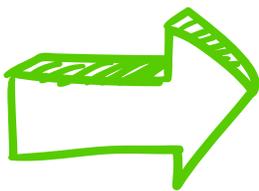
Disclaimer

I do not provide subject-specific information in this guide. My objective is to help you figure out exactly where to start and what you need to embark on this journey. Some of the things won't apply right away, for example the chapter on Registration won't be necessary until the registration period comes around. The good thing is that you can always come back to it. Think of this book as your trusted little guide that you can always check. Since I am writing this in November 2023, things might also change over time, so I urge you to keep up with updates from CXC and the Ministry of Education around the time that you choose to write your exams.

Facts about the CXC CSEC Exams

To begin, let's talk a little bit about CXC in general. For the purpose of this guide, I'm only going to be talking about CXC CSEC exams, not CAPE exams.

There are many misconceptions and just plain out misinformation when it comes to the CXC CSEC exams. Thankfully, now you can go directly to the source to clear up any questions and queries that you may have. The CXC website is very easy to use and has much of the information that you need. And whatever information you cannot find, you can always request the information by filling out a simple form on the website.



Use this link to visit the official CXC website for more Frequently Asked Questions about CXC:

<https://www.cxc.org/%e2%80%8bfaqs/>

Is CXC and CSEC the same?



No, CXC is not the same as CSEC. CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council) is the name of the organisation that is responsible for setting the CSEC exams.

Previously known as O' Level Exams, the CSEC (Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate) Exams are typically taken at the end of form 5.

2

Is there an age limit for CSEC exams?

There is no age limit to take the CSEC exams - Learners of ALL ages can sit the CXC CSEC exams.

3

How many times can you write CXC exams?

There is no limit to the number of times that you can write the CSEC exams - You may write CXC CSEC exams as many times as you wish. However, all Trinidad nationals are entitled to ONE free chance to take CSEC exams as a private candidate.

4

Who is a private candidate?

A private candidate is anyone who is registering to write exams privately. This may be a student who is in school but is writing extra exams outside of the regular ones that he/she is registered for with his/her school. A private candidate can also be someone who is rewriting CXC or someone who has never written any CXC exams.

5

What is a distinction?

There are no "distinctions" in CSEC exams - This is probably one of the most common misconceptions about CSEC Grades. The highest grade that a student can receive in any CSEC exam is a Grade 1. However, the word "distinction" has been widely used to refer to receiving all As in profile areas. It's just what people say to highlight their accomplishment but it is not an official award from the CXC. A student with a "distinction" may not have gotten 100% in the exam - CSEC Grades are not awarded merely based on the percentage a student receives. In fact, a student with a Grade One with all As in the profile areas may not have necessarily scored higher than another student with a Grade One but not all As.

6

Can you write CSEC and CAPE at the same time?

Yes, you can write CSEC and CAPE at the same time - Once the dates of the exams do not clash, a student is allowed to write both CSEC and CAPE exams.

7

Who can register for CXC CSEC exams?

Anyone can register for CXC CSEC exams. There is no age limit and you can write the exams as many times as you like.

You do not need to be a current student in secondary school to write CXC exams. In Trinidad and Tobago, everyone is entitled to write CXC CSEC exams as a private candidate.

8

Which subjects can you write for CSEC?

Here is a list of all the CXC subjects that I know of: Additional Mathematics, Agricultural Science, Biology, Caribbean History, Chemistry, Economics, Electronic Document Preparation and Management (EDPM), English, French, Geography, Home Economics, Human and Social Biology, Industrial Technology, Information Technology, Integrated Science, Literature, Mathematics, Mechanical Engineering Technology, Music, Office Administration, Physical Education and Sport, Portuguese, Physics, Principles of Accounts, Principles of Business, Religious Education, Social Studies, Spanish, Technical Drawing, Theatre Arts, Visual Arts.

Every year, CXC releases the timetable for the next year's exams some months before the exams.



All full list of CXC CSEC subjects can be found here:

<https://www.cxc.org/syllabus-downloads/#1687885738874-b1da68f7-bd27>

9

How many CSEC subjects can you write?

You can write as many subjects as you want once the days and times of the exams don't clash with each other.

10

What is considered a pass in CXC CSEC exams?

Generally, Tertiary Institutes for example universities, and places of employment, accept Grades 1 to 3 in CSEC subjects.

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What are the compulsory subjects?

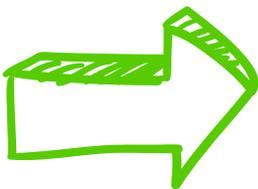
The compulsory subjects are only Mathematics and English. But it is recommended to do 5 to 6 subjects.

Registering as a Private Candidate



A very important thing to note is that the only authorized body to register students for the CXC CSEC and CAPE Examinations is the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago. There are absolutely NO private organisations that are officially affiliated with the Ministry of Education to register students OR collect payments on its behalf.

Registration for CXC CSEC exams usually takes place in August and September the year before the exams. For example, if you want to write exams in January or June 2024, the registration period would have been around August and September 2023.



The link below is usually used for online registration for private candidates in T&T:

<https://exams.moe.gov.tt/>

Once the registration period is closed, you can no longer register for the exams. The Ministry of Education (MOE) usually posts on their Facebook page or their website when the registration period opens.

 FOLLOW

At this point, pause reading and go follow the MOE on Facebook so you can see updates:

<https://www.facebook.com/MoEduTT>

As previously mentioned, Trinidad and Tobago nationals are entitled to one free opportunity to register as a private candidate. If this is your 2nd time as a private candidate you will be required to pay the following fees:

CSEC Fees	
Candidate Fees	\$137.00
Administrative Fee	\$8.00
Subject Fee (<i>per subject</i>)	\$140.00
Orals (For Foreign Languages)	\$3.00

Taken from: MOE Instructions for Private Candidates

You need to visit any District Revenue Office in Trinidad or the Victor E Bruce Building, Market Square, Scarborough, Tobago to make your cash payments.

Now for the registration process:

Gather your documents



To register for the exams, you need to have:

- your electronic birth certificate,
- photo ID (passport, national ID or Driver's Permit) and
- Receipt of Payment if necessary.

2

Take CLEAR photos or Scan your important documents

As part of the registration process, you need to upload EITHER JPG (picture) or PDF versions of your important documents.

You will also need to upload a passport sized photo. You do not need to go to a professional photo studio to take passport sized photos. Stand in front of a plain background with good lighting and have someone take a photo of you, which you can then crop as needed.

There are free apps such as CamScanner and AdobeScan that allow you to take pictures with your smartphone and convert them to PDF documents.



PRO tip: Save these PDF documents with proper names such as J.DoeBirthCert.pdf and save them in a folder either on your computer or a drive so that you always have them handy.

3

Complete online registration

I recommend using a laptop or PC instead of your smartphone. Visit <https://exams.moe.gov.tt> and select the exam that you wish to apply for from the Drop-down menu.



Ensure that any email address and contact information that you enter are up to date and easily accessible to you. The email address that you use is extremely important because this is how the Ministry will contact you. The form is rather easy to fill out. Take your time, read and follow all the instructions.

Preparing for Exams

Before we get into the details of the things that you need to prepare for your exams, I need to tell you that you do not need to write all your exams in one sitting. Actually, I don't recommend doing so either. You have the flexibility to write your exams in a manageable way that would give you enough time to prepare yourself properly and not cause you to feel overwhelmed.



My recommendation is to give yourself at least a year to prepare for your exams. If you're writing more than one exam, I also suggest writing the easier ones in January and then the more difficult ones in the May/June sitting. I will discuss study plans and routines later on and I will also provide you with a tentative timeline.

Once you've decided that you want to write CSEC exams, you need to start gathering the resources that you need. Here is a list of must-haves:

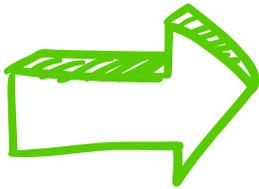
The Syllabus for each subject



The Syllabus is like your holy grail when it comes to preparing for exams. It is the most reputable source for important information about your subjects such as the actual structure of the subject exam, the grading scheme and the learning objectives.

This is the ultimate guide for your studying. It helps you to gauge where you are at and what you still need to cover to be fully ready for exams. You can find the Syllabus with Specimen Papers on the official CXC website.

The best part: this is all FREE. You would need to make an account on the cxc store if you want to purchase past papers but you can download any Syllabus for all the subjects for FREE.



Click the link below to find your Syllabus:
<https://www.cxc.org/syllabus-downloads/>



Learning Materials

So you have the syllabus, now what? It's time to start gathering all your learning materials.

Here are a few to get you started:



Google Drive with Various CSEC Subject Resources

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1COT5ntdRI_ZUm_bC0nXIKOSzS-uKuDeJt



Google Drive with CSEC Math Past Papers

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1v70nMHAtGPa7h_xF64QzP-InNHbwfvPs1?usp=sharing



Free CSEC Math Text (Solutions to all the exercises are at the end of the book)

https://www.csecmathtutor.com/uploads/1/1/4/4/11440199/caribbean_mathematics_for_csec_second_edition.pdf



Official CSEC Math Study Guide

https://www.csecmathtutor.com/uploads/1/1/4/4/11440199/caribbean_maths_for_csec_study_guide.pdf



Very Useful Websites for Math:

<https://www.csecmathtutor.com/>

<https://kerwinspringer.com/>

<https://faspasmaths.com/>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/>

P.S. I am a Math teacher so generally I have more Math resources.

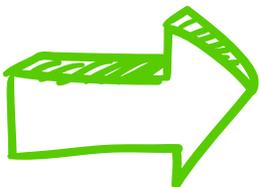
I know that many people prefer physical books but I encourage you to take a hybrid approach to your studying. Not only does this provide you with so much more resources but you need to adapt to a hybrid style of work as well.



Past Papers

Past Papers are an absolute must in your exam readiness. You should aim to have at least 10 years of past papers for each subject.

Using past papers to study helps you to identify trends and get you familiar and comfortable with the types of questions that typically come in exams.



You can purchase CXC exam past papers on the official CXC website here:

<https://cxc-store.com/>

However, if you cannot afford these, please do not be ashamed to ask people around you. Current students and teachers are your best bet.

There are several ways to approach doing past papers:



By Topics

When you're finished with a topic, you can go through your past papers and look for all the questions on that topic and do them.



By Section

Complete section by section. For example, working on Section 1 for a period of time before moving onto Section 2.



Entirely

At least 2 months before your exam, you should be able to complete an entire past paper.



A Study Timetable

In order to complete the entire syllabus for each subject and do enough practice, you have to make the time to do so. And this will not happen by chance.

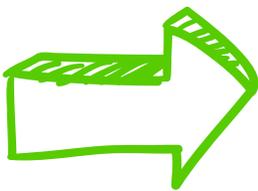
You need to be deliberate, so making a study timetable to help you to get in your study time is a great idea. Dedicate more time to the subjects that you need more work in, but make sure to schedule all your subjects.

Try to aim for at least 2 hours per week for each subject. This does not need to be 2 hours altogether. It can be broken down into smaller periods. The important thing here is that you commit to getting your work done.

Setting Goals

The first and most important thing about setting goals, not just for your CSEC exams but in life in general: Be realistic.

The key to getting anything done is to make it easy for yourself. Start by being realistic. For example, if you have a very demanding job and a family and home to take care of, setting a goal of writing 8 CXC CSEC subjects all at once might be out of reach. You might want to do 4 subjects at a time. You might choose to do some exams in January of one year and then the rest in May/June in that same year. What I'm getting at is that you need to be realistic with yourself based on your own unique situation. And set goals that are within reach. This is how you build your confidence in yourself - by setting and accomplishing goals and stacking up these small wins over time.



P.S. If you have kids, here are two articles that I've written about setting goals with your kids:

<https://www.tgarcia.education/post/how-to-set-smart-goals-with-your-kids>

<https://www.tgarcia.education/post/teaching-kids-how-to-set-goals-boosts-confidence-and-fuels-ambition>

SMART Goal-Setting

Let's talk about one of the most tried and true methods of setting goals: The SMART Method. SMART is an acronym which stands for **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant** and **Time-bound**. Whenever you set a goal, it should have all of these features:

Specific

You need to be specific about what you want to achieve. Use simple but precise language.



What exactly do I want to achieve?

Measurable

Measure your progress towards the goal. It is proven that when people are able to see their progress, motivation and engagement increase.



How will I know how far I've come?

When will I know that I've achieved my goal?

Attainable

In developing healthy goals, we must make honest assessments of our abilities. Yes we want to set high expectations of ourselves, but we need to make sure that our goals are indeed attainable with **reasonable effort, discipline** and **consistency**.



Can I achieve this goal once I apply myself properly?

Relevant

Discuss the relevance of the goal to your life. Think about the reasons that you want to achieve this goal. Ask questions about how the goal will make your life better and how it will you in the long term



How will this goal make my life better?

How will it benefit me in the long term?

Time-bound

You need to put a deadline on your goal. This is how a goal becomes an actual plan. Make sure that your deadlines are realistic.



How long do I really need to achieve my goal?

Study Strategies and Tips

Preparing for your CXC CSEC exams requires effective study strategies to make the most of your study time. Here are some tips to help you succeed:

1

Active Learning

Instead of passive reading, actively engage with your study materials. Take notes, ask questions, and discuss topics with peers to reinforce your understanding.

2

Break It Down

Divide your study sessions into manageable chunks. Short, focused study sessions (e.g., 25-30 minutes) with breaks in between are more effective than long, grueling sessions.

3

Past Papers

Regularly practice with past papers to familiarize yourself with the exam format and types of questions. Review your mistakes to understand and correct your weaknesses.

4

Flashcards

Create flashcards to help you memorize key terms, formulas, and concepts. This is particularly useful for subjects with a lot of terminology.



5

Study Groups

Join or form study groups with peers. Explaining concepts to others and discussing topics can deepen your understanding.



6

Use Online Resources

Take advantage of online platforms, educational websites, and video tutorials to complement your textbook resources.



7

Self-Assessment

Periodically assess your progress by taking practice quizzes or mock exams. Adjust your study plan based on your performance.

Time Management and Productivity

Effective time management is crucial for balancing your study schedule with other commitments. Here's how to manage your time wisely:



Create a Schedule

Develop a study schedule that outlines when and what you'll study. Include breaks and leisure time to prevent burnout.



Prioritize Subjects

Focus on your weaker subjects but don't neglect your strengths entirely. A balanced approach is essential.



Use Technology

Utilize calendar apps or time management apps to help you track your study schedule and deadlines.



Set Goals

Define specific, achievable goals for each study session. Having clear objectives can keep you motivated.



Limit Distractions

Find a quiet, distraction-free study space. Turn off notifications on your devices, and use website blockers if needed.



Pomodoro Technique

Consider using the Pomodoro Technique (25 minutes of focused work followed by a 5-minute break) to boost productivity.



Review and Adjust

Regularly review your study schedule and productivity methods. Adjust as needed to optimize your efficiency.

Setting Up a Suitable Study Environment

Your study environment can greatly impact your concentration and productivity. Here's how to create an ideal study space:



Quiet and Well-Lit

Choose a quiet, well-lit area for your study space. Natural light can be energizing and reduce eye strain.



Ergonomics

Invest in an ergonomic chair and desk to maintain good posture and prevent physical discomfort during long study sessions.



Organized and Clutter-Free

Keep your study space organized and clutter-free. Have all your study materials within reach.



Personalized

Customize your study space with inspirational quotes, photos, or artwork that motivates you.



Comfortable Seating

Ensure your chair and desk are comfortable to minimize distractions caused by physical discomfort.

Managing Exam-Related Stress

Exam stress is common but manageable with the right strategies.

Here's how to cope with exam stress effectively:

Deep Breathing



Practice deep breathing exercises to relax your mind and body. Inhale deeply for a count of four, hold for four, and exhale for four.

Positive Self-Talk



Replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations. Believe in your abilities and focus on your progress

Exercise and Nutrition



Maintain a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise and a balanced diet. Physical activity can reduce stress levels.

Sleep



Prioritize quality sleep. Aim for 7-8 hours of rest each night, especially during the exam period.

Practice Relaxation Techniques



Try meditation, yoga, or mindfulness to manage anxiety and calm your nerves



Seek Support

Reach out to friends, family, or a counselor if you're feeling overwhelmed. Talking about your stress can provide emotional relief.

Remember that a well-rounded approach to studying, time management, and stress management can enhance your performance during your CXC CSEC exams. Be consistent, stay motivated, and believe in your capabilities. You've got this!

CONCLUSION

I hope that you found this guide useful in some way. I tried my best to keep it very short but as comprehensive as I possibly can so as to not overwhelm you with too much information. I know that this might be an intimidating thing to do - to rewrite or even write CXC CSEC exams, but I want to encourage you to take a chance on yourself. I truly believe that you can learn anything and accomplish anything that you set your mind and heart on. That's not to say that it will be easy. But I can guarantee that it will be worth it.

Embarking on this journey will teach you new things about yourself. It will remind you what you are made of. I can speak from experience. I've never ever said that I regretted learning. I don't think anyone has ever really said that. And as much as I have many problems with the education system in general, I, and so many others have still benefited from it. My academic qualifications have opened many doors for me. And the pursuit of further education has contributed tremendously to who I am today. I believe it can do the same for you. I believe in you.

If you have any further questions or queries about the steps to take to get your CXC subjects please reach out to me either via email or on social media. I would be happy to help you!

If you found this guide was useful, share with someone else who you think can also benefit.

Also, don't be a stranger! Reach out to me and let me know how your journey is going.

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I'm rooting for you.

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