

The 1.5-minute rule

Twenty-seven questions. Forty minutes. A pacing plan that treats banking, elimination and approximation as real methods.

THE SHORT ANSWER

$40 \times 60 / 27 = 88.9$ seconds per question. That is a **budget**, not an instruction to spend exactly 89 seconds on every item. Win the fast marks, bank expensive questions early, and reserve two minutes so every box contains an answer.

Checked against the sources named in this guide, August 2026. British English. Free to share.

1 Why the average lies to you

The arithmetic is clean:

$$\frac{40 \text{ min} \times 60 \text{ s}}{27} = 88.9 \text{ s per question.}$$

The paper is not. One item may take 25 seconds; another can swallow four minutes and still give the same single mark. If you force every question into a 90-second box, you either leave easy work unfinished or abandon a nearly solved hard item because a timer beep told you to.

The published 2024–25 timing data show the pressure is real. The median candidate used the full 40:00 in Mathematics 1, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics 2. Biology's median was 39:53. More than 90% of candidates used 35–40 minutes. Running out of time is not evidence that you are uniquely slow; it is the design problem the test gives everyone.

1 The tell

Your clock problem is not “I cannot do 27 questions”. It is usually “I donated four minutes to two questions before seeing the final six”. Track the longest three attempts in every set. They are where the paper disappears.

2 A pacing plan you can actually remember

Use four checkpoints:

Clock	You should have seen	What the checkpoint means
13:00	Questions 1–9	Three blocks of three. Bank anything that has not produced a route.
26:00	Questions 10–18	You are on average pace with the back third untouched.
38:00	Questions 19–27	Every question has been read and every fast mark has had a fair chance.
40:00	Every answer box filled	Use the last two minutes for blanks first, then one flagged check.

This plan spends 38 minutes reaching every item, about 84 seconds each on average, and protects two minutes at the end. You create that margin by allowing several 30-second wins, not by trying to shave exactly five seconds off every question.

2.1 When to bank a question

“Bank” means choose your current best option, flag the item, and move. It is not surrender. Return only after the whole module has been seen.

Bank when any one of these is true:

- After roughly 35 seconds, you still cannot name an executable first step.
- At 80–90 seconds, the answer is not within one clean operation.
- Your working branches into several cases and the options do not collapse them quickly.
- You have repeated a calculation without learning anything new.
- The next checkpoint is due and unseen questions remain in the block.

Stay when the route is clear and one short piece remains. Leaving $12\sqrt{P} = 60$ because 89 seconds has arrived is clock worship, not pacing.

2 Try it

On your next 27-question set, draw three boxes labelled 13, 26 and 38 minutes. Tick each checkpoint only if you have reached questions 10, 19 and 27 respectively. Your score matters; your reach matters too.

3 Elimination is a solution method

Multiple choice lets you solve the question that was printed, not the longer textbook exercise hiding behind it.

1. **Check scale.** If a speed rises slightly, an answer ten times larger is probably dead before algebra.
2. **Check sign and units.** Negative mass, metres instead of square metres, or joules where watts are required can remove options immediately.
3. **Substitute options.** When the stem asks for a parameter, testing two strategically chosen answers may beat solving a full equation.
4. **Use boundary cases.** What happens at zero, at one, or as a variable becomes very large?
5. **Stop when only one survives.** Completing a beautiful derivation after the answer is forced is donating time.

Elimination also improves a banked guess. Crossing out two impossible answers before moving takes seconds and converts a blind choice into a reasoned one. With no penalty for wrong answers, an empty box is never strategically superior to your best remaining option.

4 Approximation is not sloppy arithmetic

Approximation is controlled: you know which quantities moved, in which direction, and whether the options are far enough apart for the movement not to matter.

Worked example Estimate before you calculate

Without a calculator, which is the best estimate of

$$\frac{39.8\sqrt{63}}{2.01\pi}?$$

Suppose the options are 5, 20, 50, 100, 500.

Round to friendly nearby values:

$$39.8 \approx 40, \quad \sqrt{63} \approx 8, \quad 2.01 \approx 2, \quad \pi \approx 3.$$

Then

$$\frac{39.8\sqrt{63}}{2.01\pi} \approx \frac{40 \cdot 8}{2 \cdot 3} = \frac{320}{6} \approx 53.$$

The only plausible option is

$$\boxed{50}.$$

Correct: The options are widely separated, so a deliberately rough estimate is decisive.

Trap: Trying to find $\sqrt{63}$ to three decimal places creates work the question never asked for.

Notice the direction check. Replacing 39.8 by 40 lifts the numerator slightly; replacing 2.01 by 2 lowers the denominator slightly; replacing π by 3 lowers it more. The estimate is likely a little high, but it is nowhere near 20 or 100. That is enough.

5 Two passes, with a job for each

Pass one, 0:00–38:00: coverage. Take direct routes, eliminate aggressively, bank on the rules above, and protect the checkpoints. Mark a flag only when a return could plausibly change the answer.

Pass two, 38:00–40:00: risk control. First fill blanks. Then return to the flagged item with the highest chance of resolution, not the one that offended your pride. Check units, sign and copied numbers before restarting algebra.

Do not use pass two to reread all 27 answers. Two minutes cannot audit a whole module. A focused check catches more than a panicked tour.

5.1 A better practice scorecard

After a set, record four numbers:

score, question reached at 38:00, blanks at 40:00, attempts over 150 s.

The last three explain the first. If your score rises while long attempts fall, pacing is becoming a skill. If you reach question 27 but accuracy collapses, your banking rule is too aggressive or your arithmetic floor is not ready.

6 The seven-day timing reset

1. Day 1: one untimed mixed set; label every slow step.
2. Days 2–3: three blocks of nine questions in 13 minutes each, a 39-minute training drill rather than the 38-minute exam coverage target.
3. Day 4: approximation and option-substitution drills only.
4. Day 5: a full 27-in-40 set with checkpoint recording.
5. Day 6: rework every banked question untimed; decide whether the bank was correct.
6. Day 7: another full set, aiming for fewer 150-second attempts, not frantic clicking.

Banking well requires content knowledge. The goal is not to abandon hard questions faster forever; it is to recognise quickly which hard questions you can finish now and which belong to pass two.

7 Sources

UAT-UK ESAT Technical Report 2024–25

Module timing, medians and the share using 35–40 minutes, section 5.2 and Table 19 on page 35 of the PDF; test design on page 5. [Read the report.](#)

UAT-UK ESAT Content Specification

Twenty-seven multiple-choice questions in 40 minutes per module, separately timed; no deduction for a wrong answer; calculators not permitted. [Read the specification.](#)

The checkpoint plan is UniGenius strategy, not a rule issued by UAT-UK. Adapt it during practice before using it in a live test.