

**AQA Computer Science AS Level**  
**4.4.1 Abstraction and automation**  
Intermediate Notes



## **Specification:**

### **4.4.1.1 Problem-solving:**

Be able to develop solutions to simple logic problems.

Be able to check solutions to simple logic problems

### **4.4.1.2 Following and writing algorithms:**

Understand the term algorithm.

Be able to express the solution to a simple problem as an algorithm using pseudocode, with the standard constructs:

- sequence
- assignment
- selection
- iteration

Be able to hand-trace algorithms.

Be able to convert an algorithm from pseudocode into high level language program code.

Be able to articulate how a program works, arguing for its correctness and its efficiency using logical reasoning, test data and user feedback.

### **4.4.1.3 Abstraction:**

Be familiar with the concept of abstraction as used in computations and know that:

- representational abstraction is a representation arrived at by removing unnecessary details
- abstraction by generalisation or categorisation is a grouping by common characteristics to arrive at a hierarchical relationship of the 'is a kind of' type

### **4.4.1.4 Information hiding:**

Be familiar with the process of hiding all details of an object that do not contribute to its essential characteristics.



#### 4.4.1.5 Procedural abstraction:

Know that procedural abstraction represents a computational method.

#### 4.4.1.6 Functional abstraction :

Know that for functional abstraction the particular computation method is hidden.

#### 4.4.1.7 Data abstraction:

Know that details of how data are actually represented are hidden, allowing new kinds of data objects to be constructed from previously defined types of data objects.

#### 4.4.1.8 Problem abstraction/reduction:

Know that details are removed until the problem is represented in a way that is possible to solve, because the problem reduces to one that has already been solved.

#### 4.4.1.9 Decomposition:

Know that procedural decomposition means breaking a problem into a number of sub-problems, so that each sub-problem accomplishes an identifiable task, which might itself be further subdivided.

#### 4.4.1.10 Composition:

Know how to build a composition abstraction by combining procedures to form compound procedures.

Know how to build data abstractions by combining data objects to form compound data, for example tree data structure.

#### 4.4.1.11 Automation:

Understand that automation requires putting models (abstraction of real world objects/ phenomena) into action to solve problems. This is achieved by:

- creating algorithms
- implementing the algorithms in program code (instructions)
- implementing the models in data structures
- executing the code



## Problem Solving

Problem solving is the process of **finding a solution** to a difficult or complex issue.

In an exam, you might be given a **series of statements** from which you have to find the answer to a question.

Example: Given the two statements

*George is a student*  
and  
*All students like chocolate*

which of the following conclusions could be drawn?

**George lives in Finland**



We can't tell anything about where George lives from the statements, so this conclusion can't be made. This doesn't mean that George doesn't live in Finland, we just don't know for sure.

**All chocolate is eaten by students**



This could be true, because we're not told that anyone other than students eat chocolate, but we can't say for sure.

**George likes chocolate**



This must be true. We're told that George is a student and that all students (including George) like chocolate.

Exam questions often contain **more than two** statements, but the process of forming a reasonable conclusion is the same.



## Algorithms

An algorithm is a **sequence of steps** that can be followed to complete a task. Algorithms always terminate rather than going on forever in a loop.

Algorithms can be written in **pseudocode**: a way of describing instructions that is independent of any particular programming language.

### Assignment in pseudocode

Assignment is the process of **giving a value to a variable or constant**. In pseudocode, assignment is represented using an arrow pointing towards the variable or constant that is being given a value.

```
counter ← 27  
name ← "Sarah"
```

The pseudocode above assigns the value 27 to the variable counter and the value Sarah to the variable name.

### Sequence in pseudocode

Sequence is the name given to instructions that **follow on from one another**.

```
counter ← 18  
counter ← counter + 1  
remainingIterations ← 20 - counter
```

In the pseudocode above, the variable counter is **set** to 18 and then **incremented** by one. Following that, the variable remainingIterations is **set** to twenty minus the value of counter. The operations will be executed **in the order that they appear**.

### Selection in pseudocode

Selection is the process of **choosing an action to take based on the result of a comparison** of values.

```
IF name = "Brian" THEN  
    OUTPUT "Hello Brian"  
END IF
```

The pseudocode above compares the value of the variable name to the value "Brian" and outputs "Hello Brian" **depending on the result** of the comparison.

In pseudocode, the statements IF, ELSE IF, ELSE and END IF can all be used.



## Iteration in pseudocode

Iteration is the process of **repeating an operation**. Iteration structures include FOR and WHILE loops.

```
FOR number ← 6 to 12
    OUTPUT number / 2
END FOR
```

```
WHILE number < 18
    Number ← number + (number / 4)
END WHILE
```

The code within an iteration structure is **indented**, allowing for **easy identification** of different loops.

### Synoptic Link

**Indentation** is used in programming languages to identify different structures.

Indentation is covered in the notes for **programming** under **fundamentals of programming**.

## Abstraction

Abstraction is the name given to the process of **omitting unnecessary details** from a problem.

When solving a problem, abstraction can be used to **simplify the problem** which can in turn make finding a solution **easier**.

There are two distinct forms of abstraction: **representational abstraction** and **abstraction by generalisation / categorisation**.

### Representational abstraction

A representation of a problem arrived at by **removing unnecessary details** from the problem.

### Abstraction by generalisation / categorisation

A grouping by **common characteristics** to arrive at a **hierarchical relationship** of the “is a kind of” type.

The definitions of these two forms of abstraction are **often asked for** in exams, so it's worth learning them.



### Information hiding

Information hiding is defined as the process of **hiding all details of an object that do not contribute to its essential characteristics**. For example, if you're designing a program that works out how many cars can fit onto a ferry, information about the manufacturer or the colour of a car can be disregarded and just information about the size and weight of cars retained.

### Procedural abstraction

Procedural abstraction involves **breaking down a complex model into a series of reusable procedures**. The actual values used in a computation are abstracted away and a computational method is achieved.

For example: To calculate the area of a rectangle, this procedure could be used:  
`CalculateArea = width * height`

### Functional abstraction

Procedural abstraction results in a procedure. Abstracting further **disregards the particular method** of a procedure and **results in just a function**.

For example: Abstracting the procedure from the previous example leaves us with a function: `RectangleArea = CalculateArea()`

### Data abstraction

In data abstraction, **specific details** of how data is **actually represented** are abstracted away, allowing new kinds of data structures to be created from previously defined data structures. Data abstraction forms the basis of **abstract data types**.

### Problem abstraction / reduction

In problem abstraction (which is sometimes called **reduction**), **details are removed** from a problem **until it is represented in a way that is solvable**. This works because a simplified problem is often similar to a problem that has **already been solved**, meaning that a solution for the problem can be found.

### Decomposition

When using decomposition, a problem is **divided into a series of smaller problems**. These smaller problems can be **solved individually** until all parts of the original problem have been solved.

## Synoptic Link

An **abstract data type** does not exist as a data type in its own right, but is formed from other data types.

Abstract data types are covered in the notes for **data structures and abstract data types** under **fundamentals of data structures**.



### Composition

When dealing with a complex problem, composition can be used to **combine procedures** to form a larger system. Composition is used in **abstract data types**, where a complex abstract data type is formed for smaller and simpler data types.

### Automation

Automation is defined as the process of **putting abstractions of real world phenomena into action** to solve problems.

