

E2.3 Algebraic fractions

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 15 marks

KEY WORDS algebraic fraction • factorise • common denominator
 • difference of two squares • simplify

Objective

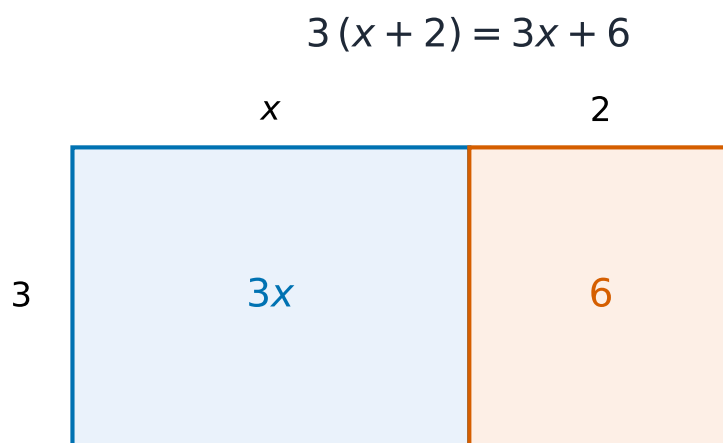
Build the skills to answer Extended exam questions on **algebraic fractions** –
simplifying by **factorising** first, and adding or subtracting two fractions
 over a **common denominator** .

You must be able to:

- simplify an algebraic fraction by factorising the numerator and the denominator
- add or subtract algebraic fractions, writing the result as a single fraction
- cancel only a whole factor, never a single term

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

- Factorise first – only a whole bracket can cancel



$a(b + c) = ab + ac$ • area model of expansion

Factorising turns a sum into a product, and only products cancel

- **Simplify:** $\frac{x^2 - 9}{x^2 + 7x + 12} = \frac{(x - 3)(x + 3)}{(x + 3)(x + 4)} = \frac{x - 3}{x + 4}$ – the bracket $(x + 3)$ cancels because it is a **factor** of both.
- **Never cancel a term.** In $\frac{x + 3}{x + 4}$ the x 's do **not** cancel; they are added, not multiplied.
- **Adding:** use the product of the denominators. $\frac{3x}{4} + \frac{x}{6} = \frac{9x + 2x}{12} = \frac{11x}{12}$.
- **Subtracting:** put the whole second numerator in a bracket, then subtract $-3(x + 1)$ is $-3x - 3$, not $-3x + 3$.

Answer shapes (marked by **method marks** – M1 for a correct method, A1 for the correct answer): each correct factorisation, and the single combined fraction before simplifying, earns a method mark.

2 Practice

2.1 Simplify $\frac{x^2 - 25}{x^2 - 2x - 15}$. [3]

2.2 Write $\frac{x}{3} + \frac{2x}{5}$ as a single fraction. [2]

2.3 Simplify $\frac{6x^2y}{9xy^3}$. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Write $\frac{3}{x-2} + \frac{2}{x+1}$ as a single fraction in its simplest form. [4]

3.2 Simplify $\frac{2x^2 + 5x - 3}{4x^2 - 1}$. [4]
