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# Learner Guide

Cambridge IGCSE<sup>®</sup>  
First Language English  
**0500**

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## How to use this guide

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The guide describes what you need to know about your IGCSE First Language English examination.

It will help you to plan your revision programme for the examinations and will explain what we are looking for in your answers. It can also be used to help you to revise by using the tick boxes in Section 4, 'What you need to do', to check what you have covered.

The guide contains the following sections:

### Section 1: How will you be tested?

This section gives you information about the different examination papers you will take.

### Section 2: Examination tips

This section gives you advice to help you do as well as you can. Some of the tips are general advice and some are based on the common mistakes that learners make in exams.

### Section 3: What will be tested?

This section describes the areas of knowledge, understanding and skills that we will test you on.

### Section 4: What you need to do

This section shows the syllabus in a simple way so that you can check that:

- You have practised each skill
- You can understand and respond, in English, in a variety of contexts and situations.
- You are well prepared for the level of examination (Core or Extended) you will be taking.

### Section 5: Revision

This section gives advice on how you can revise and prepare for the examination.



## Section 1: How will you be tested?

There are up to three components to your IGCSE course:

**1. A final examination**

Paper 1 Reading Passage (Core)

**OR**

Paper 2 Reading Passages (Extended)

**2. A further examination**

Paper 3 Directed Writing and Composition

**OR**

you will submit a **Coursework portfolio** Component 4

**3. PLUS You may take**

EITHER a Speaking and Listening **test** (Component 5)

**OR**

Speaking and Listening **coursework** (Component 6).

Your teacher will assess your skills during the IGCSE course and will discuss with you which papers and which level of examination (Core or Extended) you should take for your version of the syllabus. Extended gives grades A\* to E; Core gives grades C to G.

Check with your teacher if you are unsure which components you are taking.

| Paper title and level of examination                               | How long and how many marks?  | What's in the Paper? Which skills are being tested?  | What's the % of the total syllabus grade? |
|--|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Paper 1<br>Reading Passage<br>(Core)                               | 1 hour 45 minutes<br>50 marks | Questions 1 and 2 – Reading<br>Question 2 – Writing  | 50%                                       |
| Paper 2<br>Reading Passages<br>(Extended)                          | 2 hours<br>50 marks           | Questions 1, 2 and 3 – Reading<br>Questions 1 and 3 – Writing  | 50%                                       |
| Paper 3<br>Directed Writing and Composition<br>(Core and Extended) | 2 hours<br>50 marks           | Section 1 – Reading and Writing<br>Section 2 – Writing   | 50%                                       |
| Component 4<br>Coursework Portfolio<br>(Core and Extended)         | n/a<br>50 marks               | 3 Assignments: informative, analytical and/or argumentative; imaginative, descriptive and/or narrative; response to a text | 50%                                       |

In addition, you may EITHER take an optional Speaking and Listening test OR Speaking and Listening coursework.

## Section 1: How will you be tested?

| Paper number and level of examination                                      | How long and how many marks? | What's in the Paper? Which skills are being tested?                                 | What's the % of the total examination? |
|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| Component 5<br>Speaking and Listening Test<br>(Core and Extended)          | 10 minutes<br>30 marks       | Part 1 – Individual Task<br>Part 2 – Discussion                                     | An additional reported level           |
| Component 6<br>Speaking and Listening<br>Coursework<br>(Core and Extended) | n/a<br>30 marks              | Task 1 – Individual Task<br>Task 2 – Pair-based Activity<br>Task 3 – Group Activity | An additional reported level           |

For some versions of the syllabus the Speaking and Listening Components count towards the final grade as 20% making the other two components 40% each.

For other versions of the syllabus Speaking and Listening does not contribute to your overall result, and is marked as a separate examination, for which you will be given a separate result as a level 1 to 5.

**You should check with your teacher whether you will be taking Component 5 or 6 and whether Speaking and Listening is separate for you or included in your overall mark.**



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## Section 2: Examination tips

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This section gives you advice to help you do as well as you can. Some of the tips are general advice and some are based on the common mistakes that learners make in exams.

### General advice

Whichever examination(s) you are taking for your IGCSE course, there are some things you can remember to do in order to give you the best chance of success:

- Work through the paper in the order set – there is nothing to be gained by going to the final question first and in fact often it will work against you as some tasks build up.
- Make sure that you plan your time in the exam to allow for you to edit your answers – leave time to CHECK and CHANGE. You will almost certainly have made a mistake somewhere or be able just to add in a detail – those changes could make all the difference to your final answers. Use carets (^) or asterisks (\*) to add extra material above the line or at the end of the piece.
- Do not be afraid to make corrections, using a line through the word(s) and making a clear substitution above or with an asterisk below.
- Pay close attention to the marks available to make sure that you are spending the right amount of time and effort on each part of your exam.
- Look out for the key words in a question and underline them – what exactly is the question asking you to do? Watch out too for any help being offered to you in the question itself. We want you to do as well as you can, so the questions are worded carefully to help you to focus your attention in the right area.
- Do not write rough drafts. You cannot afford the time to write out every answer twice, and it is neither required nor desirable that you should do so; plans are sufficient.
- Have a pen and a spare with which you can write neatly – we need to be able to read your answers!
- Suggestions for length are given as a number of pages and are there to help you understand what is expected and what is possible within the time limit. Don't write much more as you will not have time to check it and may lose marks. If you finish the exam early, go back and check your answers again; you may have missed something.
- Use commas to separate clauses in a sentence. It is sometimes difficult to follow meaning where they have not been used and should have been. Watch out though that you are not using commas as substitutes for full-stops - this is called 'comma-splicing' and will lose you marks.
- Keep up your concentration to the end of the examination. Often students start well and then their writing declines in quality as they get tired. Sentence structure, as well as tidiness of handwriting, tends to deteriorate as time passes. Try to keep producing mature vocabulary even when you'd rather take the easy option and write on auto-pilot; the last questions carry as many marks as the first.

The tips which follow contain useful advice for each question on each examination paper. Make sure that you are reading tips only for the papers you are taking (you may be sitting one or two – ask your teacher to check you have the right one(s) before you go any further).

There is also some advice about common mistakes made by learners to help you to avoid making the same errors yourself.

## Reading Paper 1 (Core)

### Paper 1 question 1

- Skim read the passage for the gist of it before you look at the different parts of the question. Then scan the passage to find the answer to each part of the question in turn.
- Each part of the question will tell you where to look in the text to work out your answer – for example it may say to look at certain lines, certain words or the whole passage.
- Generally, the questions will get more challenging as you work through, so watch out for instructions designed to help you – for example if you are told to use your own words or give a certain number of reasons.
- Notice how many marks there are for each question. This will help you to judge how much to write for your answer and the number of points you will need to include. For example, a question with 6 marks is expecting you to offer more than a question with only 1 mark.
- There is no need to repeat the whole of the question before beginning your answer. ‘He means that...’ or ‘It is because...’ are enough to provide a grammatical introduction to your sentence. This will save you time.
- Where you are asked to give a word or words you do not need to answer with a full sentence – more time saved!
- If you are asked to write a paragraph though, make sure you answer in continuous writing (using proper sentences). For example, you will need to write a paragraph for the summary question and should not use lists or bullet points.

### Paper 1 question 2

- Remember that in this question your reading *and* writing skills are being tested so you need to be using both – picking out ideas from the passage and reworking them to write a convincing response.
- You will need to use and develop the ideas contained in the passage, and add original details of your own. Don’t forget that your ideas should remain based on the passage and not stray too far from it.
- Remember that the quality and accuracy of your writing are being judged in this part of the examination paper. The question may give you bullet points to help you structure your piece of writing.
- You will need to check your answer when you finish and correct any mistakes you notice. Look out especially for things you might not have noticed as you were writing – like missed full-stops and careless spelling errors.
- You will be rewarded for showing a wide range of vocabulary, so aim to avoid using the same word too often and try to choose more precise vocabulary rather than always the first word you think of.
- Try if you can to “hear” your answer read out in your head – this will help you to check that you are using an appropriate register (that it sounds right). For example, a news report is going to differ in style from a magazine article. Reading your answer back to yourself will also help you to spot slips in punctuation and check your sequencing of ideas.

## Reading Paper 2 (Extended)

### Paper 2 question 1

- The passage for this question will probably contain a description of a person or place or both. To do well, you will need to be sensitive to the atmosphere being created and show appreciation of the feelings of any characters in your response. This means watching out for details and picking up on clues in the passage as you read.
- In this question, you are going to be rewarded not only for identifying relevant material in the passage but also for development of those ideas and use of supporting detail. Some ideas might be quite subtle and implied. This means that you will need to use any clues and details you noticed when you were reading in order to write a convincing response.
- If you are aiming to score the full 15 marks available for Reading in this question, it will not be enough to just repeat details you have read. The more you can adapt the details from the passage to suit the task you have been set, the more likely you are to score well for reading.
- When you are preparing to write your answer, it will really help you to highlight the material in the text you are going to use – using a pencil so that you can change your mind if you need to. Next, draw up a quick plan in order to organise the ideas you've found into a logical structure, before you start writing your response.
- If you are given bullet points to remind you of what should be included, use them to check you have covered what is required. These bullet points can also help you to structure your answer. The material from the passage should be put into the appropriate section and not repeated.
- Do not be tempted to add extra sections. For instance, where you are given the questions to ask in an interview, stick to those questions only and develop the responses to them. It can make your answers too fragmented or less focused if you add more.
- If a detail is relevant, use it! Make sure that you are using as much of the material as it is possible to do. However, there may be some parts of the passage which you can ignore because they are not covered by the question.
- Do not drift away from the text. Everything you write must be directly connected to the passage and be supported by references to it.
- Using words or phrases from the passage here and there when you are giving details within your answer is fine. Watch out though that you do not copy big chunks of text as that is not going to be showing your understanding, just your handwriting! You should try to use your own words as far as possible.
- Before you start writing, you will need to decide on the appropriate tone to use – you will decide this based on your audience and why you are writing. You might even be writing in character. You can expect that you will have to write in a reasonably formal style – this is after all an English exam! It is rarely going to be a good idea to use slang for example. Even if the task is to write a letter to a relative, it will be someone distant or older, such as an uncle whom you haven't met recently. If a task asks for report to your fellow learners, it will be official or for publication in the school magazine. It is really important to remember who you are writing for and to address them directly – imagining this is a real situation (as far as possible).
- For the full marks out of 5 for Writing you need to show that you have structured your answer, sequenced your ideas, and used 'a wide range of original and appropriate language'. Thinking about the way your answer would sound if it was read out loud will help you to check if you are getting this right.
- If the question has several parts to it, you can either deal with them in the order they are written in the question or you can deal with them together. You can decide on your own structure for your answer, but what matters is that there should be a structure of some kind which is clear to your reader.

- Obviously, it is important that we can read your work so you need to make sure that your writing is legible. You won't get any marks for how it looks in terms of layout though. For example, it is wasting time to divide a newspaper report into columns or add drawings and extra advertisements to try to make it look similar to real life. This cannot be rewarded and it will distract you from the real task of providing appropriate and accurate content for your response.
- Don't forget that you are writing in continuous prose so should be using paragraphs.
- Checking and correcting your answer at the end is essential. You will need to make changes to correct slips and perhaps words or phrases which don't sound quite right in context.

### Paper 2 question 2

- This question will be in two parts. You need to give equal attention to each part and provide at least half a page for each. Make sure that you concentrate on the sections of the passage which you have been told to look at.
- You should aim to find relevant quotations to support each of your points. Give the quotation, in quotation marks, explain its meaning, and then explain its effect in the passage.
- Spend some time thinking about which choices you will explain – choose the strongest examples rather than necessarily the first ones you come to.
- Make sure that it is clear which word(s) you are discussing. If you choose more than three or four words together it is not clear which one(s) you are selecting, so try to keep quotations short.
- Avoid clumping words together or listing them – again you need to focus on each word individually as you explore and explain the effect the writer wanted them to have on the reader.
- You need to do more than label literary features – saying that something is a metaphor is a starting point but to show understanding of effect you need to explain why and how the author has chosen that particular image in the context of the passage.
- Do not select a quotation which you do not understand as you will not be able to explain either its meaning or its effect.
- When you are explaining a quotation, do not repeat the words used in it. You need to use your own words to show that you are understanding what you are reading.
- Do not repeat quotations; you cannot get credit more than once for the same choice.
- You need to give a full range of explained effects and link them into an overview which shows understanding of what the writer was trying to achieve in the passage as a whole.
- Try to avoid generalised and 'gushing' comments such as 'The writer makes me feel as though I am there' and 'The passage is cleverly written'. These will gain no marks and give the impression that you are failing to find things to say. You need to explain HOW this is the case.
- When you have some ideas for your comments, think about how they fit together before you start writing your answer – in that way you can avoid contradicting yourself in the effects which you are suggesting.
- There are alternative answers possible in this part of the exam, so think in some detail about the way the language is being used and explain those ideas clearly in your answer.
- When you are planning your answer, things to look for could include:
  - use of the five senses – including colour, noise or sound effects
  - use of contrast or links between the subject and the environment
  - surprising or unusual words in the context of the description
  - imagery ( similes and metaphors )

To score marks though you will need to explain HOW they work, not just find them.

- Though there are no marks for writing in this question, if the examiner is not able to follow what you are saying then it will be hard for you to show your understanding. Try to keep the examiner in mind as you write – explain your points fully so that we know exactly what you are suggesting.

### Paper 2 question 3

- Though this question is called “Summary”, it is not a general summing up of each of the passages. Instead, you will need to focus just on the specific ideas or details relevant to the question set.
- You should treat the passages separately and focus on the exact wording of the question.
- Do not attempt to synthesise the two passages. This is not required and is not rewarded; trying to do so also makes your task more difficult as they may not be directly comparable.
- Both halves of the question are equally important and you should give them each about half a page. (Summaries much longer than half a page are no longer summaries and will be penalised in the Writing mark.)
- Make sure that your points count – they need to be clear, not vague.
- Don’t repeat points.
- You do not need to introduce or conclude your summary – this will waste time and words. Start by using the wording of part of the question e.g. ‘The features of the desert were...’
- Find all the points you can for each part of the question. Do not stop when you get to 15. The only way to be sure of getting all 15 Reading marks is to use everything relevant.
- To get all 5 Writing marks you need to show evidence of clear and concise summary style throughout, precise focus and the use of your own words.
- You will lose marks if your summary is in the wrong form - for example you should not use bullet points or a list. Don’t write in the first person or write a narrative and don’t use quotation. Don’t comment on the content of the passages.
- Use your own words whenever possible, but you do not have to find synonyms for technical objects e.g. solar heaters.
- You should aim to use complex sentences containing more than one point in each to score well for reading *and* be concise enough for summary style.

## Writing and Composition Paper 3 (Core and Extended)

### Paper 3 Section 1

- For this question, you will need to put yourself into role, and address your audience directly. The opening needs to introduce clearly the situation and purpose of the task, and will be rewarded if it puts the reader in the picture.
- You need to be clear and often persuasive in tasks like these, so imagining that you are addressing someone in front of you might help you to keep that in mind. Do not be overly casual though - this is a formal piece of writing. Even if it is for your peers in a school magazine, written language for publication is less colloquial than spoken language.
- Your answer will not be in the same genre as either of the texts, and should therefore be in a different style from both of them.
- You should try to use as many ideas from the passages as possible as they will all be relevant, but you will have to change the way you express them; all the material you use from the passages must be modified to suit the new genre.
- Do not write as yourself unless you are specifically told to do so and keep in mind why you are writing – for example are you meant to be persuading someone or offering advice?
- There will almost certainly be two texts, perhaps in different genres e.g. a letter and a dialogue. The question will require you to assimilate information from both texts so you must not ignore one of them, but don't just lift from the text(s) word for word. You need to find the ideas and use them.
- The recommended structure for the response will be offered in the wording of the question, and you should follow this.
- There will be at least two factors to focus on – for example advantages and disadvantages. You will need to make two lists before you start in order to make sure you have enough material for both sides of the question.
- The third element of this question is evaluation; you will have to decide which of the options is better, present reasons why you have formed this opinion and justify it.
- Keep your focus on what the question is asking you to do. Do not get distracted by peripheral issues; for instance if you are asked how money should be spent, don't discuss the fund-raising methods.
- Make strong transitions between points/paragraphs e.g. 'Yet another reason to support this proposal is...' You need to link your ideas together logically so that if someone in real life was reading this response they would follow what you are saying step by step.
- Though you cannot make up things which are not in the passages, you should try to use your own ideas in the way that you extend those of the passages, provided that they are 'based on the reading material'.
- The ending needs to be definite and provide an effective and satisfying conclusion to the piece.

### Paper 3 Section 2

- It is essential that out of the six available you choose a question which you understand and which suits your writing abilities.
- Though the three different genres are marked according to the same mark scheme for Style and Accuracy, they are marked differently for Content and Structure. The three genres are different from each other, so you need to be aware of the characteristics of each.

- Whichever type of essay you choose, it should be planned first. If after 5 minutes you have managed to collect only a few ideas for your choice of title, switch to another one. The plan should contain between 6 and 10 points or ideas which can be developed into paragraphs, if the essay is going to be of a suitable content and length. Aim for about 8 paragraphs and 400 words.
- Openings to compositions are important as they either engage the reader or they don't. Try to grab your reader's attention from the start.
- Take the opportunity to show off your range of vocabulary – find precise words to use and vary your choices.

## Argumentative/Discursive compositions

- Be clear about the difference between an argumentative and a discursive essay. When asked directly to give your own opinion you should commit yourself to a line of argument. When asked to give a range of possible views then you may or may not choose to say what you personally believe.
- Mention counter arguments – and dispute them. A strong argument includes refutation of the other point of view. In this way you can show that you are not purely being ignorant or prejudiced in your response. It is important to show balance in presenting the argument.
- If you are having difficulty finding enough points to support your stance you should consider arguing the opposite view – it might be easier!
- Aim for an effective introduction which captures attention and makes the topic and context clear.
- You should end on the side you are arguing for; structure your essay so that you deal with the other side first and end strongly to clinch your argument with a final convincing point. Do not repeat yourself – 'To sum up' and 'In conclusion' are not strong endings as you won't be saying anything new to convince your reader.
- It is generally advisable to argue your own personal viewpoint as it is likely to sound more convincing. It is however possible to argue effectively for or against an argument which you have never considered before, provided that you can marshal some evidence from the media, facts, statistics and experience. These are the areas from which you draw your supporting detail and illustration.
- Do not get too passionate about the topic as this will make your essay sound too emotional and subjective, and therefore less persuasive.
- Sometimes there is a single word in the question which alters the emphasis of the argument, for instance the word 'compulsory'. Make sure you pay attention to the key words in questions when you are planning and answering – it is worth underlining key words to remind you.
- Try using personal pronouns – 'I', 'you' and 'we' can make your argument seem more authentic and inclusive.
- Do not start each paragraph with a numbered point - firstly, secondly, thirdly and so on - as this can become tedious for the reader and sound quite artificial if the ideas are not in fact sequential. Use other paragraph linking words, the ones which show whether your argument is continuing in the same direction (e.g. 'furthermore', 'in addition') or changing direction (e.g. 'nevertheless', 'on the other hand'). The key is to make sure that your argument is "building" as you go. Use your connectives to help you take your reader with you so that they can follow your train of thought all the way through.
- Three-point structures (sometimes called tricolons) can sound authoritative, e.g. 'involving the learners, the teachers and the parents'. More than three of anything becomes a list; fewer lacks persuasive impact. Be selective though - overuse of tricolons is rarely effective.



## Descriptive compositions

- It is difficult to write interesting descriptions, so this type of composition should not be attempted unless you have had practice and success at this type of writing. To write a strong descriptive answer you will need to use a wide range of vocabulary and even use imagery to engage reader interest. Unless the readers can see the picture they will not be able to relate to the experience.
- You will need to use a variety of sentence structures. All forms of repetition should be avoided – unless you are deliberately using it carefully for effect.
- You will need to evoke all five senses to create an environment and atmosphere, as well as details of size, shape and colour. Make colour precise, e.g. 'scarlet', 'azure', 'off-white', 'bluish-grey'.
- Try to avoid common, overused, vague, short and childish vocabulary, such as 'nice', 'big', 'little', 'a lot of', 'good', and 'bad'.
- Each noun probably needs one or more adjectives in front of it to give sufficient detail.
- Don't let your description become static – give structure and progression to your description e.g. moving towards or through something, such as a street market or busy shopping mall, or going through a period of time, an hour or a day for instance, and recording the changes.

Descriptive compositions must not become a narrative, which means character and event should not take over or be dominant. (You can have lots of description in a story but you should have as little "story" in a description as possible.)

## Narrative compositions

- Decide on a tense and then stick to it; do not jump between present and past. The normal narrative tense is past and those who try to write in the present usually forget to do so after a while, so it is safer to start off in the past.
- Know what your last sentence is going to be before you write your first. A narrative has to build up to a climax and lead towards a conclusion which is planned before it starts or it will end lamely or incomprehensibly, or the pace will be too slow or too fast.
- Don't try to do too much; you can't cover many events and many years in one short composition. Select key moments and skip over the rest, changing the pace according to the intensity of the moment.
- Don't try to include too many characters (generally no more than three is best). Don't try to give them all speech.
- For the top band, complexity of narrative and structure is required e.g. framing the story; flashback or forward time jump; two parallel strands being brought together. However, do not attempt these devices unless you are sure you can manage them.
- Use dialogue by all means (if you can punctuate and set it out correctly) but don't overdo it. You shouldn't turn your story into a play, nor should you dilute the effect of occasional and significant moments of speech by giving the characters trivial things to say throughout. Save speech for important moments.
- If you do use dialogue, find synonyms for 'he said/she said'.
- Even narrative needs description. You need to help your reader imagine characters and places by adding significant details to bring them alive.
- Choose to tell your narrative in first or third person and stick with your choice; do not switch viewpoint accidentally, as this is confusing for the reader.



- Don't use a first person narrator if you want to die at the end of your story! It is generally safer to use third person narration as it gives you more flexibility and a wider viewpoint.
- Don't end your story with 'And then I woke up in hospital', or 'It was all a dream'. Try to avoid clichés of any kind, including stereotypical characters and predictable outcomes.
- Use similes, but avoid obvious ones such as 'as red as a rose'. Make comparisons unusual, but still apt, by giving them a moment's thought and making them more specific e.g. 'as red as a matador's cape'.
- Use plenty of interesting details to engage your reader and make them want to read on.
- Don't exaggerate; too much blood or too many unlikely events become ridiculous, and fear is more believable when it is mental rather than physical.
- Use your own knowledge and experiences as inspiration. It is better to think of something that actually happened to you, or someone you know, or which you read in a book or saw in a film, than to try to make up something entirely from scratch. It will sound more convincing. You will need to adapt, embellish and exaggerate the original idea to make it relevant, fresh and memorable – just retelling the plot synopsis or giving a factual account is not likely to interest your reader.
- Keep a balance in the different parts of the narrative. An over-long introduction reduces the effect of the middle section where things build up to a climax, and you need to leave yourself time to create a memorable ending.

End your narrative deliberately. Stories need a conclusion, where things are either resolved or purposely left unresolved as a cliff-hanger (though on the whole readers prefer to know how a story ended). You must not give the impression that you just stopped writing because you ran out of time, ink or ideas.



## Section 3: What will be tested?

The syllabus sets out the skills which will be tested in the examination papers. In First Language English, there are four main skills – two which test how well you understand and receive information, and two which test how well you are able to convey, or pass on, information. This information might be information you have just received, or it might be new and original information.

The skills are as follows:

| Assessment objective | Core  | Extended  |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Reading              | demonstrate understanding of words within extended texts                                    | show a more precise understanding of extended texts   |
|                      | scan for and extract specific information   |   |
|                      | identify main and subordinate topics, summarise, paraphrase, re-express                     | recognise the relationship of ideas   |
|                      |   | draw inferences, evaluate effectiveness, compare, analyse, synthesise                             |
|                      | show some sense of how writers achieve their effects  | show understanding of how writers achieve their effects   |
|                      | recognise and respond to simple linguistic devices including figurative language            | recognise and respond to more sophisticated linguistic devices                                    |
| Writing              | express thoughts, feelings and opinions in order to interest, inform or convince the reader | show a wider and more varied sense of different styles to interest, inform or convince the reader |
|                      | show some sense of audience   | show a clear sense of audience  |
|                      | demonstrate adequate control of vocabulary, syntax and grammar                              | demonstrate a sophisticated use of vocabulary and structures                                      |
|                      | exercise care over punctuation and spelling   | demonstrate accuracy in punctuation and spelling  |
|                      | write accurate simple sentences   | write accurate complex sentences  |
|                      | attempt a variety of sentence structures  | employ varied sentence structures   |
|                      | recognise the need for paragraphing   | write in well-constructed paragraphs  |
|                      | use appropriate vocabulary  | use imaginative and varied vocabulary   |

### Section 3: What will be tested?

| Assessment objective   | Core  | Extended   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Speaking and Listening | understand and convey both simple and detailed information                                | understand and convey more complex information in an interesting and authoritative way           |
|                        | present facts, ideas and opinions in an orderly sequence                                  | consciously order and present facts, ideas and opinions for a particular audience                |
|                        | make relevant comments on what is heard, seen or read                                     | evaluate and reflect on what is heard, seen or read  |
|                        | describe experience in simple terms and express intelligibly what is thought and imagined | describe and reflect on experience and express effectively what is thought and imagined          |
|                        | recognise and give statements of opinion and attitude                                     | discuss statements of opinion and attitude, discerning underlying assumptions and points of view |
|                        | speaking audibly and intelligibly with appropriate tone, intonation and pace              |  |

The Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening Objectives to be tested are divided as follows:

Reading:

- R1 Understand and collate explicit meanings
- R2 Understand, explain and collate implicit meanings and attitudes
- R3 Select, analyse and evaluate what is relevant to specific purposes
- R4 Understand how writers achieve effects

Writing:

- W1 Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined
- W2 Order and present facts, ideas and opinions
- W3 Understand and use a range of appropriate vocabulary
- W4 Use language and register appropriate to audience and context
- W5 Make accurate and effective use of paragraphs, grammatical structures, sentences, punctuation and spelling

Speaking and Listening

- S1 Understand, order and present facts, ideas and opinions
- S2 Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined
- S3 Communicate clearly and fluently

- S4 Use language and register appropriate to audience and context
- S5 Listen to and respond appropriately to the contributions of others

In addition to the main skills outlined above, you will also be tested on how accurate and consistent your usage of English is. We will assess your usage of English according to:

- How well you can control your grammar and structures. This applies to writing as well as speaking.
- The range of vocabulary you use. You will be tested on your understanding and whether you are able to use words accurately and/or appropriately, in both writing and speaking.
- How accurately you spell.
- Your use of sentences, paragraphs and punctuation in longer pieces of writing.
- Your awareness of 'register' in formal and informal situations – for example, whether you are aware that you should not write a letter to a friend in the same tone and style as a letter to your Head Teacher, and also that spoken English is generally less formal than written English. You will be expected to give most of your responses in formal English.

### Section 3: What will be tested?

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## Section 4: What you need to do

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The First Language English course doesn't cover content in the same way as most other IGCSE courses do. In Science, for example, you might need to learn how a particular process works. This means understanding and being able to recall all the steps involved in the process in a logical way. Once you have reached a certain level of knowledge, you can move on and extend that knowledge base.

English is quite different. The best way to approach the 'content' of your First Language English course is to make sure that you have practised English in a wide variety of contexts and that you understand the different ways that English can be used and can respond appropriately.

First Language English teachers in different parts of the world use different textbooks and teaching materials. This is because there is no single 'correct' textbook that should be used. It is generally agreed that the best approach to learning First Language English is to use a variety of books, articles, newspapers, magazines, as well as the internet; also to use recordings (to develop listening) and oral activities (to develop speaking). Success in learning First Language English is linked to using a variety of different resources that will enable learners to practise all the skills that they will be tested on.

The table below – containing the checklist – is therefore simply a guide to the types of activities which are useful. However, you should not think of the table as a list of activities that you must do, or as a list of contexts that you must cover. If you do not tick some areas, it does not mean that you have not completed the whole course!

| Skill:  | All learners should be able to:   | Those taking the Extended examination should also be able to:   | Ways in which the skills might be practised (appropriate contexts)  | Checklist – tick if you have worked on something similar |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Reading.<br>Locating specific information as quickly as possible = Skimming       | Read short non-fiction texts, such as leaflets, news reports and advertisements                 | Cope with more detailed and extensive informative texts   | <input type="checkbox"/> Looking at leaflets, reports, guidelines<br><input type="checkbox"/> Analysing brochures   |  |
| Reading.<br>Locating more detailed information; looking more carefully = Scanning | Read longer non-fiction texts, such as articles from newspapers and magazines                   | Cope with longer and more challenging articles  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading similar articles (in style and in length) to those seen frequently in past examination papers<br><input type="checkbox"/> Reading factual articles<br><input type="checkbox"/> Extracting relevant information from articles |  |
| Reading & Writing.<br>Integrated reading and writing                              | 1. Read a text which contains information and respond using the relevant material from the text | Convey a thorough understanding by writing a lengthy response in a different genre from the original text | <input type="checkbox"/> Practising using the same material in different genres<br><input type="checkbox"/> Practising writing formal letters   |  |
|   | 2. Understand descriptive texts and select relevant information and phrases from them           | Select, explain and analyse the effect of the usage of certain phrases in the text                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading passages from literary texts and identifying the ways in which feeling or atmosphere has been created  |  |
|   | 3. Adopt an appropriate voice in which to express a response to a text                          | Adopt a sophisticated or official persona   | <input type="checkbox"/> Practising using different registers and styles for different aims according to specific tasks   |  |



| Skill:  | All learners should be able to:  | Those taking the Extended examination should also be able to:  | Ways in which the skills might be practised (appropriate contexts)   | Checklist – tick if you have worked on something similar |
|---------|--|--|--|--|
|         | 4. Show awareness of audience  | Target your audience   | <input type="checkbox"/> Practising using devices which show ability to address your audience directly and manipulate its response   |  |
|         | 5. Write short summaries   | Summarise two passages which have similarities   | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing a summary based on a set of notes of between 7 and 15 points<br><input type="checkbox"/> Practising the use of own words<br><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming familiar with the concise and precise language of summary style   |  |
| Writing | 1. Describe, discuss, argue and narrate  | Carry out longer writing tasks on a range of topics, paying attention to structure, sequence and style   | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing descriptions of events, places, people using all five senses and imagery<br><input type="checkbox"/> Planning openings and endings to stories<br><input type="checkbox"/> Structuring and supporting points for an argument   |  |
|         | 2. Use language for a specific purpose, e.g. to persuade, to consider, to evaluate, to inform, to entertain, to convey an impression | Create sustained and cohesive responses to continuous writing tasks, showing an awareness of the generic characteristics of different types of writing | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing (and performing) debate speeches<br><input type="checkbox"/> Balancing ideas for and against a discussion topic<br><input type="checkbox"/> Analysing the devices used in letters, articles and editorials stating a point of view<br><input type="checkbox"/> Writing stories which have gripping openings, pace, dialogue, climax, strong endings |  |

| Skill:               | All learners should be able to:                               | Those taking the Extended examination should also be able to:      | Ways in which the skills might be practised (appropriate contexts)   | Checklist – tick if you have worked on something similar |
|----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Speaking & Listening | 1. Understand and respond to questions and instructions       | Construct a sustained speech on a chosen topic                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning and delivering a talk<br><input type="checkbox"/> Explaining a viewpoint and supporting it with evidence |  |
|                      | 2. Understand the speech of others and the views they express | Listen to and respond appropriately to the contributions of others | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to recordings of interviews on news or chat shows and differentiating between fact and opinion          |  |
|                      | 3. Describe a personal experience                             | Use detail and example to engage the listener                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Role-playing dialogues and interviews   |  |
|                      | 4. Engage in discussion                                       | Develop a topic into wider issues                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking part in and contributing to group discussions  |  |

## Section 5: Revision

Here are some of the ways in which you can prepare for the examination.

### 5.1 Reading

- You should read as widely and as often as you can – all sorts of texts, from magazines to short stories, from leaflets to letters sent out by businesses or schools. The aim is to know what as many different forms of written English might sound like.
- You should try to learn the meanings of common prefixes so that you can guess meanings of words.
- You should practise summarising passages. This is a specific and almost scientific skill which, once gained, makes it easily possible to get full marks.

Practise using the right approach – it is best to follow a 5-step process:

- read and underline the relevant material in pencil (so that you can change your mind easily if needed)
- transfer the points into a plan, whilst changing them into your own words
- group the points logically (using arrows/brackets); put them in order (using numbers), and decide which ones can be combined into one sentence
- write the summary in two paragraphs (one for Paper 1) using complex sentences
- check the summary for accurate expression; adapt the length and improve if necessary by adding material overlooked or by removing repetition.

- Don't write too much – you are meant to be summing up, not adding to the original ideas.
- In an examination summary there will be at least as many points as marks available, so count how many you have made and check against the marks for the question.
- Remember that summaries never include:
  - examples
  - repetitions
  - direct speech
  - figurative language
  - minor details.

All these must be removed from the passage, and then you use only the facts, which are what you have left.

- You can practise turning passages into news reports; they have a particular style and structure which are different from any other kind of writing. You will need to think about:
  - style – short paragraphs; short sentences; dramatic vocabulary; statistical information; stacking of adjectives and descriptive phrases before the noun (e.g. 'The Japanese-owned lightweight racing yacht Sunshine II...'; 'Divorced former model and mother of two, Susan Smith...')
  - using impersonal expression (do not use 'I' or 'We' and do not give any opinions)
  - using interview material and direct speech as well as reported speech – don't quote straight from the passage though; write your own to show that you understand what you have read
  - structure – unlike normal chronological sequence, news reports begin with the very recent past (usually yesterday); go on to fill in past background prior to the event; return to the immediate present and how things are developing; then finally speculate about the future.

- Practise writing formal letters; it is highly likely you will be asked to write a letter on either the Reading or Writing paper. Letters to people in official positions and people you don't know well typically adopt a formal style and polite tone, and they are structured in three sections:
  - i) the topic of the letter/reason for writing it
  - ii) background information, arguments and factual details
  - iii) request or suggestions for future action.

## 5.2 Writing

**Your teacher will keep telling you that each question should be answered in a different style.**

What is style? It is about:

- i) matching the expression to the type of speaker/writer – writing in role
- ii) matching the expression to the recipient – writing for audience
- iii) matching the expression to the aim – writing for purpose
- iv) choosing appropriate structure and devices – writing in genre
- v) choosing appropriate vocabulary and syntax – writing in register.

As you read different types of texts in English, try to notice how they sound different from each other and how they compare.

In your own writing you can:

- Practise joining simple sentences into complex sentences, using a range of connectives and participles. Above all avoid using 'and', 'but' and 'so'.
- Practise varying your sentences to develop your own style. You don't want your sentences all to follow the same formula and start in the same way. Try writing some of the sentence types here:
  - i) main clause followed by one or more subordinate clauses e.g. 'The cat fell asleep, after it had eaten, although someone had switched on loud music.'
  - ii) subordinate clause(s) followed by main clause e.g. 'After it had eaten, the cat fell asleep.'
  - iii) subordinate clause followed by main clause followed by another subordinate clause e.g. 'After it had eaten, the cat fell asleep, although someone had switched on loud music.'
  - iv) main clause containing embedded subordinate clause e.g. 'The cat, which had been sleeping all day, fell asleep again.'
  - v) main clause containing embedded subordinate clause, followed by another subordinate clause e.g. 'The cat, which had been sleeping all day, fell asleep again, even though there was loud music playing.'

To improve your own writing you should also:

- Learn the correct version of commonly misspelt words which you know you are likely to need to use e.g. separate, definitely, business, opportunity, surprise, privilege. The best way to learn them is to:
  - i) stare at them and try to 'photograph' them; cover them while you write them from the imprint on your memory; check back to see if you were correct. This is the Look, Cover, Write, Check method. Copying words letter by letter does not fix the 'letter-strings' in your mind successfully.
  - ii) remember the rule: 'i' before 'e' except after 'c', if the sound you are making is long double 'ee'. (The only known exception, apart from in names, is 'seize'.)
  - iii) if in doubt whether a word has a single or double consonant apply the generally sound rule that if the vowel is short the consonant is double, but if the vowel is long the consonant is single e.g. 'hopping and hoping', 'sitting and siting', 'dinner and diner', 'writing and written'.

- iv) create mnemonics, little sayings and rhymes which, however silly, actually work e.g. 'necessary' is spelt with one c and two s because 'one coat has two sleeves'; 'possesses' possesses five esses
- v) be aware of prefixes, so that you can work out which words have double letters and which don't e.g. 'dis-satisfied' as opposed to 'dismay', and the spelling of words like 'extra-ordinary' and 'con-science'.
- vi) be aware of suffixes, so that you can work out which adverbs end in 'ly' and which in 'lly' (i.e. only those which already have an 'l' at the end of the adjective, like 'beautiful – beautifully').
- vii) think about how the word is spelt in other languages you know e.g. the French verb 'separer' will remind you of how 'separate' is spelt in English.
- viii) break difficult words down into syllables in your mind, so that you can hear how 'in-ter-est-ing' must be spelt.

- Revise direct speech punctuation. It is likely that in one or more parts of the examination you will be required to or will wish to use dialogue. Remember in particular that a change of speaker requires a change of line, and that all speech needs a final punctuation mark in addition to the closing inverted commas. Remember also that exclamations and questions which fall inside the speech are not followed by a capital letter if the sentence continues, and that commas not full stops are used to end speech unless there is no continuation to the sentence. e.g.

'Really?' she asked.

'Really,' he answered.

When you are practising your writing:

- You should try to broaden the range of the connectives you use.

Be aware that there are over thirty connectives available in English for joining parts of sentences (clauses) together. Challenge a friend to see how many you can think of without looking them up.

In addition, present and present perfect continuous participles ('arriving', 'having arrived') can also be used, with or without prepositions ('after arriving', 'after having arrived'). For fun, practise having a "conversation" with a friend using a different connective each time each of you speaks – see how long you can keep going.

- Try redrafting a piece of writing to use all three types of parenthesis rather than just one. They all separate a group of words from the rest of the sentence in which they are not grammatically necessary, but see if you can hear that they create subtly different effects in the degree of separation:
  - i) a pair of commas is the weakest way e.g. 'A dog, which was huge, approached.'
  - ii) a pair of dashes is stronger e.g. 'A dog – which was huge – approached.'
  - iii) a pair of brackets is the strongest e.g. 'A dog (which was huge) approached.'
- Practise persuasive writing. The exam is weighted towards this life skill in both the reading and writing papers. Support all points with proofs and think about how you might persuade your reader – for example the use of tricolon, rhetorical questions, direct address perhaps.

- Read lots of openings to stories and practise beginning the same story in different ways. You could start:
  - i) by setting the scene, referring to place and time, season and weather
  - ii) with description of the main character
  - iii) in the middle of the action
  - iv) in the middle of dialogue
  - v) with an intriguing or shocking statement
- Try writing a plan for a story, then experimenting with different ways to end it. There is a range of ways to end a narrative including:
  - i) ironic comment in direct speech
  - ii) an unexpected twist
  - iii) a return to the beginning
  - iv) a happy ending
  - v) a sad ending
  - vi) a 'cliffhanger'

DON'T end the story by waking up from a dream - that just means that as a writer you couldn't think of an ending to explain what had happened in your story in any other way – a sure sign of poor planning!

- You also need to consider and practise the ways of beginning an argumentative essay:
  - i) an unexpected claim
  - ii) a provocative statement
  - iii) a summary of a situation
  - iv) a famous quotation
  - v) a direct question

To improve your writing further:

- Learn, finally, those little things you've always got wrong and never bothered to work out why e.g. the difference between it's (it is/it has) and its (belonging to it); who's (who is/who has) and whose (belonging to who); continuous (without stopping) and continual (with stops); uninterested (without interest) and disinterested (without prejudice); lay (with object) and lie (without object).
- Remind yourself of any punctuation marks of which you have never been sure.
- You could revise the rules for the use of the apostrophe (missing letter or possession) or the hyphen (using two words as one) or starting a new paragraph (change of time, place or topic). Lack of paragraphing is particularly detrimental to your mark as it is evidence of lack of planning and/or inability to sequence material.
- Even if you've always had trouble knowing where to put full-stops, it's never too late to learn and now is the time, as your writing marks will be seriously reduced if you are unable to form proper sentences use commas where you should use full-stops. If there is no connective you must use either a full-stop or a semi-colon at the end of a group of words containing a verb, before starting another one.

- Commas are also important, as they aid the meaning of the writing and the understanding of the reader. Their function is to separate parts of a sentence (phrases and clauses). A test you can apply as to whether a group of words needs commas around it is to try saying the sentence without it. If it still makes sense, then 'scissor' the phrase or clause with a pair of commas to show it can be removed, but if the group of words is necessary to the grammar of the sentence, then do not put commas around it.

**Finally – use the internet!**

There are websites you can use to improve your skills and you can use search engines to help you find examples of different types of writing too.

Here are a couple of sites you might like to try if you have not already visited them:

[www.englishbiz.co.uk](http://www.englishbiz.co.uk)

[www.topmarks.co.uk](http://www.topmarks.co.uk)

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