

EXAMINER TIPS FOR IGCSE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (0510)

How to use these tips

These tips highlight some common mistakes made by students. They are collected under various subheadings to help you when you revise. Many of the tips relate to June 2004 papers.

Reading and Writing (Papers 1 and 2)

Parts 1 and 2

- You should keep your answers short in Parts 1 and 2 of the Paper. Many students write much more than they need to here – Examiners only want to see that the question has been understood, and answered briefly but accurately. Don't give more detail/information than you need to – be precise.
- It might be helpful if you decide quickly on what type of question is being asked. Is it a 'when' question? Or 'where', or 'how'? Getting this right from the start, should make it easier for you to find the information/answer.
- Copying the correct phrase from an article is allowed – but it is also acceptable to use some of your own words to communicate the answer. It's best to check, though, that what you have written can be understood by someone else clearly, and that it doesn't lead to a confusing answer.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, you can attempt a guess by choosing what you think is a relevant section from the article, but you should write down only one point (or more if the question asks for more). Listing a number of possible answers is not a good idea; it will just waste your time.
- Be careful not to offer an inference when the answer is actually stated in the text. You're looking (by scanning and skimming) for information that is there – you are not expected to work out or estimate what an answer might be, or should be.
- Try to make sure that your answer includes all of the required information. Adding two or three words can often make sure of this. Is the answer you have given complete?
- Be clear on how many answers (or points) are required. The questions will state this clearly, so make sure you have provided the number of points asked for.
- Don't look for the answer in the question! Some students think that if they turn the words around in the question, they might find the answer. This is never the case – the answers are always found in the passage that you will have read.
- Where a map, or a chart, or a diagram is included in the article, it is likely that the answer to one of the questions will be found there. Make sure you read through all the resources you are given carefully.

Part 3 Extended writing

- Part 3 requires longer and more detailed responses than Parts 1 and 2.
- The word length is given for Part 3, and you should check (perhaps as you finish each paragraph) that you are keeping within the range allowed. Short responses could lead to marks being reduced; Examiners will not mark any writing which comes after the stated word limit.
- Some students have divided their Papers into columns to answer Part 3, where longer, essay-type responses are needed. This is not a good idea as it might cause you to write too few words.

- Don't just regard extended writing as a chance to show how many linking words and phrases you know. It is important to write fluently, and link your ideas using phrases, sentences, and then paragraphs. But it's also important that your whole piece of writing makes sense, reads nicely and answers the question, addressing each of the prompts.
- Decide straight away on the appropriate tone to use – you can work this out by considering the content and the audience. Is a formal tone needed? Or should the tone be more informal?
- Stick to the task! It's quite easy to wander away from the original prompts. It might help if you look back and read the question/prompts again after you finish each paragraph.
- Don't forget to write in paragraphs.
- Don't miss out one of the prompts (bullet points). You will lose marks if you don't respond to each of the points (there are usually three). Also, make sure that you have the appropriate structure in your longer pieces of writing – a beginning, a middle section (where you perhaps develop your piece by adding examples) and an ending.
- A little bit of general advice: try to grab the reader's attention right from the start, and write in a lively manner.

Listening (Papers 3 and 4)

- Make sure you read the introduction to each question, as this often provides clues as to what will happen in the exercise. Remember, part of the skill of listening is to be able to predict what might be said next (some teachers might call this 'pre-listening').
- If a question is concerned with the cost of an item, the answer is expected to be given in the original currency. A numerical amount alone is not enough.
- You should spend some time practising listening to numbers, particularly numbers which sound alike – e.g. fourteen and forty.
- It's probably more important on the Listening Papers to make sure you supply the exact number of answers required. Each question will state clearly how many points are needed – e.g. Give *three* items which ... - you should check to make sure that you have given the right number. Examiners often say that many students fail to get this right.
- Bear in mind that for many questions on the Paper, you will need to produce more than one point/answer to get a single mark. If you give only one point where two are required (for one mark), the Examiner will not be able to give you the mark.
- Watch out for plurals. Millionss, is not the same as million.
- Remember, you will hear everything twice. There is a chance, therefore, to try and work some answers out. You are allowed to make some notes, and you can use the blank areas on the exam paper to do this.
- By all means, have a guess as a last resort, but be aware that Examiners are looking to see that you really do know the words you are writing down. This means that you can make spelling mistakes, but you will only usually get the mark if your word is close to the correct word, and if it does not form another recognised English word. For example, if you answer 'chance' when the correct answer is 'chants', you will not get the mark. However, if you really do know the word 'chant', but you spell it incorrectly as 'chante', you will get the mark.
- For answers which require longer (sentence-length) responses, try to make sure that you have communicated the point/idea clearly. You can use some of your own words to do this, but remember, the Listening Exam is a test mainly of your

ability to write down what you have heard. In other words, all the details (evidence) you need will have been given by the speakers on the tape. An example of using your own words to convey an answer would be, "*Peter said that he liked to go swimming ...*", in response to a question which asked what Peter did after school almost every day.

Speaking (Papers 5 and 6)

- Remember that the Warm Up part of the Exam is not being marked. The Examiner will start with a general, informal, chat just to get you settled down and comfortable. This should be your aim in the Warm Up – to calm yourself down and get ready.
- It might be useful if you mentioned your particular interests (hobbies, things you like doing, current issues that are on your mind, things you feel strong about, etc.) during the Warm Up. One of the Examination Topic Cards might be a good choice for you – but remember, it's not you but the Examiner who chooses the Topic Card.
- You should know exactly how the Oral Test will run. The Examiner will explain this at the beginning. If not, please do ask the Examiner to explain what will happen during the course of the Test. You will need to ask this before the Examiner gives you the Exam Topic Card.
- You will have some time (2-3 minutes) to look at the Topic Card and think about what you want to say in the conversation. You can't make any notes here, but you can plan to include three or four talking points of your own (i.e. that are not suggested on the Card). This will help to make the conversation more interesting, and it might lead to a higher mark for yourself. In other words, you don't have to stick to the five or six points listed on the Card – you can take the conversation into other areas, although you should remain broadly within the main Topic.
- Don't worry beforehand about the Topics used in the Exam. The Topics are chosen so that conversations can be developed easily – you don't need to have any prior knowledge of any of the Topics. It is not necessary, therefore, to try and revise any Topics which you think might be used. The Test is not about how much you know about a Topic, it is about how well you can have a conversation about it.
- The Test is not about delivering a speech. If you find that you are doing this, something is wrong, and you should seek to involve the Examiner in a genuine conversation. Examiners are trained to avoid and stop speeches taking place. It follows then, that you should not be preparing a script for this examination.
- You should think of the three assessment criteria in this way: 1) Structure – am I using spoken language, sentences and phrases, accurately? 2) Vocabulary – am I using a wide range of words? 3) Fluency – can I take part in a two-way conversation, perhaps extending the prompts/ideas that the Examiner has brought up?
- The key to success in this Test is to be relaxed. If you feel that you have taken part in a 'good chat' with the Examiner - a chat based on and sticking to the Topic - then it's likely that you have performed well.

About the Examiner



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Dean Roberts began teaching in 1990 in northern Thailand. Since that time Dean has taught both in the UK and overseas and has been the Head of English. Dean has examined for CIE for many years and is an examiner for IGCSE E2L and principal moderator for oral tests. Dean continues to teach in the UK.