

Aga Khan University Examination Board

Notes from E-Marking Centre on SSC Part I English Compulsory Examination May 2012

Introduction

This document has been produced for the teachers and candidates of SSC Part I (Class IX) course in English Compulsory. It contains comments on candidate responses to the 2012 Secondary School Certificate examination, indicating the quality of the responses and highlighting their relative strengths and weaknesses.

This document should be read along with the AKU-EB English syllabus based on the National Curriculum (2006).

General Comments

Teachers and candidates should be aware that examiners may ask questions that address the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in a manner that requires candidates to respond by integrating knowledge, understanding and application skills they have developed by studying the course.

Candidates need to be aware that the marks allocated to the question are related to the answer space (where this is provided on the examination paper), is a guide to the length of the required response. A longer response will not in itself lead to higher marks. Writing far beyond the indicated space may reduce the time available for answering other questions.

Candidates need to be familiar with the Command Words in the Student Learning Outcomes which contain terms commonly used in examination questions. However, candidates should also be aware that not all questions will start with or contain one of the key words. Questions such as 'how?', 'why?' or 'to what extent?' may be used.

The paper comprised of total three questions. Question no. 1 is the constructed response question containing a reading passage that is followed by subsequent questions divided in sub-parts. Question no.2 and Question no.3 are the extended response questions where candidates are supposed to write letter (formal or informal), essay (types mentioned according to the paper specifications) respectively.

SSC PART I

Question 1

It is a constructed response question. Candidates are required to understand the reading passage and accordingly answer the questions asked on various aspects of the narrative.

The reading passage was a story 'More Than You Wish For' which narrates the journey of a young girl from naivety to jealousy to profound understanding of happiness and contentment. There were five parts in this section; a, b, c, d and e:

Part a

Better responses correctly 'described' five distinctive features of Sara's personality. Mostly, candidates mentioned each suitable feature (sometimes by giving an adjective) which was followed by the description of that feature with reference from the text.

However, average responses, reflected a superficial understanding of the text. The positive features of Sara's personality were mentioned; however, such responses failed to look deeper into Sara's personality and hence, couldn't describe her vulnerability to greed and luxuries. Such responses mentioned that Sara saved her pocket money and shared it with the needy; however, their responses did not reflect the motive behind Sara's generosity. Hence, the average responses usually elaborated on the positive aspects of Sara's personality repetitively. The points were not distinctive from each other.

Weaker responses demonstrated lack of understanding of Sara's personality; usually such responses just copied the initial lines of the text.

Part b

Better responses reflected the correct understanding of the reasons behind Sara falling prey to jealousy. Such responses, gave three clear points.

Average responses only mentioned that Sara had rich friends and she wanted to enjoy like them. Hence, such responses lost 1 mark for not describing clearly the luxuries and temptations that got the better of Sara. In weaker responses candidates misunderstood the question. They just wrote that 'Sara was a victim of jealousy'; a statement which was already mentioned in the question. Such responses failed to supply any supporting reason for the statement they referred to in their question.

Part c

Most of the students fulfilled the requirement of this question. Better responses mentioned the reasons why Anum cried (she had eaten lunch with a classmate who later demanded money from her, and as Anum didn't have any money nor could she ask her parents for any money she became worried and cried). They also mentioned that Sara helped Anum by giving her the pocket money which she had saved.

Average responses only mentioned that 'Anum was crying because she did not have money and Sara helped her.' Such responses, failed to mention the context of why Anum needed money and also the fact that she did not conceive her parents to be understanding of the situation she was being thrown in to, which made her terrified and worried.

Part d

Better responses stated their understanding of Sara's realization that 'genuine appreciation/ inner satisfaction' which comes by helping someone in need is more precious than money or material needs. Such responses highlighted that this understanding reflected the transformation of Sara's attitude which was the result of helping someone in need.

Weaker responses failed to highlight the transformation of Sara's attitude. Some of them quoted the phrase, 'when you give someone something, fate rewards you with twice as much' without any supporting references.

Part e

The question demanded explanation of a statement (when you give someone something, fate rewards you with twice as much) from the given text and also required to support the explanation by quoting a personal experience.

In better responses there was an appropriate explanation of the given statement. They mentioned the literal meaning along with the deeper meaning “if we do good to others, good things will happen to us” and “by being generous / helpful towards others we gain genuine satisfaction either materially or morally.” Such responses also quoted a personal experience which reflected the understanding of the statement. Usually, candidates quoted experiences which reflected a good deed resulting in a reward which was usually material.

In average responses, the entire focus of the candidates was on quoting the personal experience. Such responses, either totally missed the explanation or just quoted the literal meaning of the statement, i.e. “if we give money to someone we will soon find more money.” Hence, such responses lost those marks which were allotted for the explanation.

In weaker responses candidates just quoted the literal meaning of the given statement without quoting any personal experience. In some worst cases, the candidates completely ignored the requirement of the question and just copied the text from the passage.

Question 2

In this question, candidates were encouraged to use their thinking and language skills and assuming a situation, they were supposed to write letters showing their insight and understanding of the stimuli.

Part a

In better responses for Question 2a the candidates:

- showed a clear understanding of the stimuli.
- elaborated on the idea of bullying and focused on one incident of bullying.
- mentioned the effect of the incident on a child.
- used the correct format of informal letters.
- wrote relevant content without much repetition.
- used appropriate vocabulary and connective devices.
- displayed logical progression of ideas within context.
- displayed correct use of subject-verb agreement.
- used accurate spelling and punctuation.

In average responses for Question 2a, the candidates:

showed lack of understanding with the term ‘bullying’. The question also mentioned ‘suffering of a child because of bad treatment by a bully’ which could have served as a revealing hint; however, these candidates could not decipher the term.

- the incident mentioned was about a personal conflict rather than being bullied by someone stronger / senior.
- The format of letter writing was appropriate but language had errors.

In weaker responses for Questions 2a, the candidates:

- showed limited understanding of the stimuli.
- used an incorrect or incomplete format of informal letters.
- wrote irrelevant personal experiences which were not reflective of any ‘bullying’.
- used clichés, slangs or internet language.
- used language inaccurately that does not prove the articulation of the stimuli.
- wrote incorrect sentence structure with serious grammatical errors.
- used incorrect spelling and punctuation.

Part b

In better responses for Question 2b, the candidates:

- understood the word ‘hazard’ and mentioned the hazards of ‘heavy rain’ and mentioned its effects on people, property and animals etc. However, even some of the better responses, could not use the sequence of a letter and turned out to be stale.
- used appropriate connectors and cohesive devices; the effect of which was coherence in their writing.
- used appropriate language, adjectives were used to describe the difficulties and problems.
- displayed correct use of subject-verb agreement.
- used accurate spelling and punctuation.

In average responses for Question 2b, the candidates:

- understood the phrase ‘hazards of heavy rain’ but did not present the ideas effectively; there were run-on sentences about problems caused due to heavy rain.
- failed to maintain internal consistency within the essay: ideas did not flow in a logical or orderly manner.
- displayed appropriate use of grammatical knowledge.

In weaker responses for Question 2b, the candidates:

- were unmindful of the structure of the essay: there were too many details in the introduction which were mentioned on the entire page.
- were not able to understand the prompt and hence could not elaborate on it.
- lacked grammatical accuracy in their writing. The writing reflected serious and persistent grammatical errors.

Question 3

The candidates were directed to write an essay on any of the three choices given. Most of the candidates attempted 3a, probably because they found this option easier than others.

Part a

In better responses for **Question 3a**, the candidates:

- showed a clear understanding of the stimuli.
- elaborated the importance of parents as ‘teachers’.
- mentioned an event where a lesson was learnt because of parents.
- used appropriate reasons and examples from general or personal context.
- reflected original ideas and created appropriate answers within context.
- wrote relevant content with a complete focus on what had been asked within a question.
- used relevant vocabulary, connectors and cohesive devices.
- showed progression of ideas within their essay.
- displayed correct use of subject-verb agreement and tenses, except for occasional slips.
- used correct spelling and punctuation.

In average responses for Question 3a, the candidates:

- elaborated on the importance of parents; however, they failed to throw light on parents’ role as teachers which was the requirement of the prompt.
- used appropriate grammatical structures, however some occasional slips / errors were present in the writings.

In weaker responses for Question 3a, the candidates:

- showed a limited understanding of the stimuli.
- did not have effective structure; beginning, middle and end.
- rephrased the stimuli repetitively.
- wrote irrelevant content.
- used clichés, slangs or internet language.
- ideas presented lacked originality or focus.
- most of the ideas were randomly presented, which lacked any organization.
- wrote incorrect sentence structure with serious grammatical errors.

Part b

Question 3b required the candidates to narrate an incident when they faced disappointment elaborating on how they handled it.

In better responses for Question 3b the candidates:

- mentioned an incident which was disappointing: the details of the incident were clearly elaborated.
- mentioned how they were able to handle the situation.
- used appropriate adjectives and adverbs to describe their actions and feeling.
- displayed moderate language accuracy.

In average responses for Question 3b the candidates:

- elaborated profusely on the phenomenon of getting disappointed, mentioned one incident when they felt disappointed; however, most of them failed to elaborate how they handled that situation.
- displayed lack of coherence in their writing.
- displayed inconsistency in the use of grammatical components: tenses and subject-verb agreement.

In weaker responses for Question 3b the candidates:

- showed a limited understanding of the stimuli.
- displayed lack of knowledge of the mechanics of essay writing.
- left the responses incomplete or copied the question verbatim repeatedly.

Part c

Question 3c was a descriptive essay regarding organizing a school reunion.

In better responses for Question 3c the candidates:

- began the essay by outlining a context which was appropriate and relevant to the prompt.
- clearly mentioned the steps or stages of planning a reunion.
- displayed coherence and appropriate organization of the essay
- used appropriate tenses and accurate subject-verb agreement.

In average responses for Question 3c the candidates:

- were not able to display an impressive organization of their essay contents.
- missed few important details like the venue of the party / reunion.
- displayed knowledge of syntax but some occasional errors were present too.

In weaker responses for Question 3c the candidates:

- failed to address the requirement of the prompt. They mentioned having a reunion, however did not elaborate on their planning.
- displayed serious errors of grammar and spelling.