

Aga Khan University Examination Board

Notes from E-Marking Centre on SSC Part I English Examination May 2013

Introduction

This document has been produced for the teachers and candidates of SSC Part I (Class IX) course in English. It contains comments on candidate responses to the 2013 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 which 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 a letter (formal or informal), or 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 an extract from 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' which reflects the life of the protagonist Harry and specifically focuses on the relationship between Harry and his aunt's family. There were four parts in this section; a, b, c and d.

Part a: What do you know about Dudley from the given passage?

Most of the students fulfilled the requirement of this question. Better responses correctly mentioned five distinct features of Dudley's (Harry's cousin) personality as reflected from the passage. These responses not only mentioned the obvious aspects of Dudley's personality but also referred to the behaviour of Dudley which revealed important aspects of his personality.

However, average responses, reflected a superficial understanding of the text. In such responses only those aspects of Dudley's personality were focused that are mentioned clearly in the initial part of the text. Candidates scoring average marks were not able to grasp the conversation between Dudley and Harry in its entirety. Some of the average responses referred to the conversation but failed to mention what that conversation depicts about Dudley.

Weaker responses demonstrated lack of understanding of Dudley's personality. They just copied the initial part of the text verbatim from the passage which reflected only one attribute of Dudley's personality.

Part b: The treatment Harry received from Dudley's parents was unfair. Elaborate the given statement and provide FOUR evidences.

Better responses enumerated four distinct evidences from the text which reflected the injustice done to Harry by his aunt, uncle and Dudley. Some of the candidates who wrote best answers presented their interpretation of various incidents in the text to substantiate how that event was unjust to Harry. Other candidates elaborated the statement of the question and wrote four evidences that were clearly reflected in the text to substantiate their answers.

Average responses only mentioned about Dudley bullying Harry, Dudley's gang and his old uniform. Mostly, in average responses, candidates failed to recount the fact that Dudley was sent to Smeltings which was a well-reputed school whereas Harry was sent to a public school.

In weaker responses candidates mentioned about the bullying of Harry by Dudley and his gang only.

Part c: Who was Mrs. Figg? What do you understand about Harry's experiences with her?

Better responses mentioned about Mrs. Figg by elaborating Harry's experiences with her. Candidates mentioned why aunt Petunia left Harry at Mrs. Figg's home, and how Harry's current visit was different from past visits. In connection with this information, the candidates also mentioned about her unpleasant past behaviour with Harry. Some of the candidates even mentioned the relevant details that Mrs. Figg loved cats, the stale cake that she gave to Harry and

what it revealed about her and that her leg was broken, hence she couldn't be very troublesome even if she wanted. Teachers should train students to understand and interpret the events in a narrative text for gaining better reading proficiency.

Average responses only elaborated about Harry's experiences of having cake and watching television for the first time at Mrs. Figg's home. They failed to connect this information with the unpleasant experiences of the past. Some of the responses did not mention anything about Mrs. Figg's personality.

Weaker responses just reflected some copied lines from the text where Mrs. Figg's name occurred. Those lines (though connected to Mrs. Figg) were still not well-connected to the two aspects of the question and hence such responses did not score good or average marks.

Part d: Why was Harry trying to suppress his laughter when Dudley was parading in his uniform?

Better responses stated the situation: Dudley wearing knickerbockers and marching proudly and connected it to the emotionally charged reactions of his father and mother. The situation was then connected to Dudley's usual stupidity and obesity which made the situation funny to Harry. Such responses also elaborated the consequences which Harry could have faced if he had not suppressed his laughter.

In average responses, candidates managed to write about Dudley parading in his uniform and about the reactions of Dudley's parents but they could not connect it visibly as to why Harry found the situation so funny. Teachers should train their students to formulate connections between what is narrated and what happens in a narrative text in order to enable them to gain maximum marks.

Weaker responses failed to grasp the requirement of the question. Such responses quoted the text that Harry felt that his ribs would be broken due to his attempt to suppress his laughter but they did not mention the reasons of why that situation was so funny.

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: A cousin of yours has recently moved to another city. He has never been very social or popular. It is difficult for him to settle in his new neighbourhood and form new relationships. All this has been causing him a lot of distress. Write a letter to your cousin advising him to deal with this situation. Your letter should be comforting and focused on few easy tips for settling down and making new friends.

In better responses for Question 2a the candidates:

- showed a clear understanding of the stimuli.
- elaborated useful tips to be socially amiable in a new situation.
- mentioned the specific personal attributes of the cousin they were addressing and advised on how those attributes could be manipulated for a better social life.
- used the correct format of informal letters.
- wrote relevant content without much repetition.
- used appropriate vocabulary and connective devices.
- displayed organized paragraphing (one tip was given along with its potential benefits in each paragraph).
- displayed correct use of subject-verb agreement.
- used accurate spelling and punctuation.

In average responses for Question 2a, the candidates:

showed lack of understanding of the social issues that a person could face in a new situation.

- they mentioned how the cousin can benefit from going to school and meeting new people.
- failed to give handy tips as to what should be done after meeting new people
- 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 the requirement of stimuli. Some of them just mentioned one tip about social networking at new places
- used clichés, slangs or internet language.
- wrote incorrect sentence structure with serious grammatical errors.
- used incorrect spelling and punctuation.

Part b: A friend of yours is involved in many disciplinary issues in the school. The school administration has issued a letter of warning to him. Write a letter advising him to improve his behaviour.

In better responses for Question 2b, the candidates:

- understood the requirement of the question; hence, they suggested how behaviour could be improved at school and rapport with teachers could be built.
- referred to at least one past incident that made the inter-textual connection relevant to the suggestions given in the later part.
- used appropriate connectors and cohesive devices and this achieve coherence in their writing.

- used appropriate language, specially adjectives were used to add texture to the difficulties and problems.
- displayed correct use of subject-verb agreement.
- used accurate spelling and punctuation.

In average responses for Question 2b, the candidates:

- elaborated in detail the events that led to issuing of warning letter for the addressed friend.
- failed to provide for their hypothetical friend more than two useful tips to improve the behaviour at school.
- displayed appropriate use of grammatical knowledge with occasional slips.

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 list down relevant tips for their hypothetical friend.
- lacked grammatical accuracy in their writing. The writing suffered from serious and persistent grammatical errors.

Question 3

The candidates were directed to write an essay on any of the three choices given. Candidates attempted the three choices almost equally.

Question 3a required the candidates to narrate an incident when they faced disappointment elaborating on how they handled it and in what ways they would like to change the said incident.

Part a: Each one of us commits mistakes. While most of them can be ignored, there is at least one regrettable event in each of our lives that fills us with such remorse and regret that we wish that we could turn back time and change what happened.

Write about any such event in your life which you want to change.

Your answer must include:

- details of the situation;
- your action/ reaction to it;
- in what ways should you change the event.

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

- showed a clear understanding of the stimuli. This was evident in the event mentioned by them and the elaboration of how it could be reversed.
- mentioned and elaborated the lessons learnt in that event (most of the students mentioned recent events, which was evident in the detailed description). Some of the best responses used beautiful descriptive language to elaborate the event in form of a story.
- 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 an event where they committed a mistake. However, couldn't focus much on how and in what way they could change that event.
- focused on writing about feelings of disappointment and anger more than the elaboration of the event.
- used appropriate grammatical structures. However some occasional slips / errors were present in the writings.

In weaker responses for Question 3a, the candidates:

- did not have effective structure; beginning, middle and end.
 - elaborated on a hypothetical situation (sometimes with extremely dramatic consequences and sometimes a completely irrelevant situation) without much detail or description.
 - did not focus on why and in what ways they wanted to change what happened. Some of them ignored this aspect totally.
 - rephrased the stimuli repetitively.
 - used clichés, slang 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.
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Part b: Think about a time when your friends did something very special for you which made you realize how important and close you are to them. Describe how you can make an occasion memorable for your friends. What will you do to make that occasion different in a pleasant way?

Question 3b required candidates to refer to a memorable event organized by his / her friends. The students were supposed to think and write about what they would do to make an event memorable for their friends. Mostly students scored average marks in this question.

In better responses for Question 3b the candidates:

- referred to a special time organized by friends which provided a context in the introduction as to why they want to make an event memorable for friends.
- mentioned how they would like to make an event (birthday / get-together) memorable for their friends.
- 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 ‘surprise birthday parties’ organized by their friends for them. Mostly, the students did not focus much on what they would like to do to make an occasion / event memorable for friends which should be the actual focus of the essay and hence lose marks. Teachers should tell their students to read questions carefully and try to focus more on the more important parts of the question.
- 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:

- displayed lack of knowledge of the mechanics of essay writing.
 - left the responses incomplete or copied the question verbatim repeatedly.
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Part c: You have been given the role of the manager for organizing the farewell party of Class X. You have to plan the proceedings of the entire day. What new things you want to do in this one day? Describe your plan detailing what types of activities you want your classmates and teachers to do.

Question 3c required to students to elaborate on what they would like to do as a Manager of the team which wants to organize a farewell party for Class X.

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 and activities that would make the event interesting. Many of the better responses displayed an understanding of their managerial responsibilities by writing about forming different groups of students which will be responsible for different aspects of function, some examples were ‘creative committee’, ‘logistics committee’ etc
- 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. Teachers should advise students about organizing their essay in a better way to avoid repetition of information which is not very fruitful in a space-limited examination.
- missed mentioning a few important details like the venue of the party.
- 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 about having a farewell party and that they have to manage it but did not elaborate on specific details about planning. Some of them confused their roles with the role of their teachers and thought that only teachers could make important decisions like what activities could be planned in a farewell party.
- displayed serious errors of grammar and spelling.