

PSLE

PRINCIPAL EXAMINERS' REPORT

ENGLISH

2023

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ENGLISH



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ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND LETTER

1. INTRODUCTION

This report submits the Principal Examiners' observations on the responses of the 2023 candidates in the composition and letter-writing tasks. The report shall highlight the strengths and weaknesses revealed by the work of the candidates about the assigned topics for the writing skill. It is therefore important to take into consideration issues outlined in the report during the teaching and learning processes. It is assumed that the information contained in this report would be useful if used appropriately in the attainment of effective learning outcomes for future candidates.

2. GENERAL COMMENTS

Generally, the candidates' performance this year was bit different from that of the previous year (This year's candidates struggled a bit to deal with the demands of the guidelines and the marking key respectively. The assumption is that both questions {composition and letter were suited more to high achievers and left many average and less gifted candidates with a challenge to properly respond to the questions {elaboration on the candidate s struggles to be discussed further in the report}. Some areas need to be addressed by the instructional processes. It is worth stating that some of the weaknesses pointed out previously are still evidenced in the responses of the current candidature. This could be an indication that some of the issues that were raised in the previous report were not taken into consideration during the teaching and learning process which then impacted on the learning outcomes. There is need to underscore the importance of putting into practice recommendations in this report as this will contribute towards an improved performance of learners.



At the beginning of the marking process, it was established that both the essay and letter-writing topics were clear and accessible. The expectation, therefore, was that almost all candidates would have something to write about within the bounds of their academic abilities. As per expectation, almost all candidates attempted to address the topics except those whose writing skills were extremely limited. However, creativity continues to pose a challenge in both the composition and letter-writing tasks. It is therefore vital that candidates are guided on the skill of creative writing, especially the key one that demands building a story by substantiating and elaborating on ideas.

The other issue of concern is handwriting. Learners need to write neatly and legibly including the shaping of letters to try and differentiate capital letters and small letters effectively. Candidates continue to produce writing that is not legible suggestive of the tendency not to take work seriously. Candidates must be made aware of the fact that poor handwriting impedes the comprehensiveness of a piece of work. Some candidates wrote in very small letters and others cluttered many words in a line as was observed with the previous year's cohort. The advice is to make the students recognize the value of planning in advance as to what they are going to write about. For instance, they can be advised to quickly put down their points on a rough paper before the main script for easy reference and logical flow of ideas in their work.

As observed from the previous years, candidates' performance in letter writing was far better as compared to the performance in composition. Below is a sum up of how candidates performed on the questions:

3. COMPOSITION WRITING

The composition topic this year was “**HOW A BAD THING THAT HAPPENED TO ME TURNED OUT TO BE SOMETHING GOOD AT THE END**” Candidates were expected to address the topic about the following guidelines:

- a) Where and when it happened?
- b) What bad thing happened to you?
- c) How the bad thing ended up being good.
- d) How you felt in the end.

THE TOPIC

The general observations about the topic for this year as compared to the previous year’s topic are that:

- 1) The topic statement was too long for some candidates to easily comprehend.
- 2) The topic contained two main aspects both requiring a high level of comprehension.
- 3) Transition from the bad thing to the good thing was a challenge for many candidates.
- 4) The topic was mainly favorable to high achievers and somehow inaccessible to low achievers (candidates must always be exposed to all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy when asking questions for practice at the class level). Blooms once alluded that 95% of questions asked by teachers, fall under the low level of cognitive development. This year’s topic somehow serves as an eye-opener to teachers when preparing candidates for national examinations. Teachers are expected to expose candidates to other levels of cognitive development such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation and not limited to knowledge only.



This year's topic proved to be a challenge to many candidates particularly the part where candidates had to talk about how a bad situation turned out positive/good. Most candidates were able to mention the bad incident part correctly but could not transition to the good part. Because of this, guideline **C**, which required candidates to explain how the bad thing ended up being good, was done poorly by most candidates. On the positive side, however, most candidates were able to reveal how they felt in the end.

That being the case, high-achieving candidates handled all guidelines fairly well. A good number of them were able to address guideline **c** as per the demands of the laid criterion. The observations relating to composition writing are laid forth under each profile:

A) PROFILE 1: COMMUNICATION

Communication could be understood as a two-way process that involves encoding and decoding. Therefore, under this section, candidates were expected to explicitly communicate to the reader about the given topic. Candidates' responses were guided by the guidelines mentioned above and judged as per the following criteria:

Stating where and when the bad thing happened to them.

Most candidates did very well on this criterion by clearly stating where and when the bad thing happened. Most of them also managed to come up with a date and place.

Clearly stating the bad thing that happened to them.

Most candidates were able to state the bad things that happened to them. In rare cases though, candidates stated the bad things they did instead, indicating that they did not decode the guideline properly. This should be addressed in class by emphasizing to candidates, the importance of taking time to read the tasks.



How the bad thing turned out to be good in the end.

Most candidates either failed to express themselves or did not understand the transitional phase of clearly demonstrating how the bad thing turned out to be good in the end. Nonetheless, though minimal, some high-achieving candidates took the opportunity to showcase their creativity by portraying brilliantly how a bad thing turned into the good thing in the end.

Stating how they felt at the end.

Most candidates did well on this criterion by clearly stating their feelings about what happened. For instance, feelings such as relief, gratitude, happiness, and guilt came out. There was a slight challenge though, where some candidates threw their feelings without relating them to the topic example “I was so happy after meeting my friend at the party” without really rounding the feeling towards how they felt at the end when the bad thing turned good”. Generally, candidates did well on criterion 4.

Creativity and originality

The topic demanded a high level of creativity. Candidates were expected to coin their own stories which could be based on real-life experiences or just a work of fiction and sustain the attention of the reader. Unfortunately, only a few candidates managed to do that from the beginning to the end of their stories. Creativity remains the major challenge for most of the candidates in composition writing in that a lot of them continue to respond to guidelines as if they were just questions instead of using them as a prompt to jolt their line of thought. Most candidates failed to expand and elaborate on their ideas. This is an indication of lack of resourcefulness which is also evident in the inappropriate use of adverbs and adjectives. To fulfill the expectation of employing adverbs and adjectives in their writing to paint a vivid picture, some candidates employed these structures out of context (For example, “I met my beautiful



friend at the party”. This does not relate to how the bad thing turned bad. Descriptive vocabulary used in creativity must be related to the guidelines). Therefore, more practice in the use of these is required. Guideline 3 which asked for transition from the bad thing to the good mainly contributed to candidates failing to deal with this criterion satisfactorily.

B) PROFILE 2 : COMMAND OF LANGUAGE

Under this profile, candidates were expected to display an understanding of the different aspects/rules of the English language and use them appropriately. Therefore, the following attributes were considered:

Descriptive vocabulary should be used correctly.

Descriptive Vocabulary- any part of speech that addresses the questions such as

Where, when how- be it:

- **Similes**
- **Metaphors**
- **Adjectives**
- **Adverbs**
- **phrases**

It is worth noting that candidates know descriptive words but have a problem in contextualizing them. Correct usage and spelling were their main downfall. In some cases, Figurative language was used haphazardly hence derailing the message intended.



Capitalization and Punctuation

A considerable number of candidates showed an awareness of the implications of punctuation even though the use of a comma seemed to be a challenge to some.

There is therefore a need for teachers to reiterate instances in which a comma can be used.

For example:

- Separate words and word groups in a simple series of three or more items. E.g., Book, pen, and ruler.
- To separate a statement from a question e.g. She likes to dance, doesn't she?
- When starting a sentence with a dependent clause. e.g., Because he eats too much, he is gaining weight fast.

However, the same cannot be reported about capitalization since some of the candidates seem to be challenged by the differentiation between capital and small letters. Candidates need to be aware of when to use capital or small letters within their writing instead of employing them haphazardly as was the case. There is a need for them to note that capitalization is required in the following instances:

- For the first word in a sentence: e.g. **You** can use my jacket if you are feeling cold.
- For the pronoun "I." e.g. Every night **I** call my mother before going to bed.
- For **proper nouns**: i.e. names of specific people, places, organizations, and sometimes things. E.g. Lebogang, Botswana, Gaborone, SADC,
- For **family relationships** when used as **proper nouns** e.g. Are you happy with your gift **Grandpa**?
- For titles that come before names, e.g. Mrs., Mr, Doctor, Reverent



In some instances, candidates knew where capital letters were to be used but did not shape them appropriately and they looked like small letters. It would be helpful for emphasis to be placed on the mastery of shaping letters during instruction. Such challenges have implications for their sentence openings which did not comply with the rule of starting a sentence with a capital letter.

Varied Sentences Openings

Candidates are expected to vary sentences when writing, especially the opening sentences. A lot of candidates have mastered this except for a few who tend to use the same sentence opening over several sentences. This leads to monotonous pieces of work which affects the creative aspect of writing. Candidates should be advised not to use the same sentence opening more than twice in their composition.

C) CONTENT MANAGEMENT

In this section, candidates were expected to display an understanding of the critical aspects of composition writing and use them to produce a congruent piece of writing. This was assessed through:

Coherence and Fluency

There has been a significant decline in the use of run-on sentences even though a few candidates still grapple with punctuating the sentences. However, the main challenge is the candidates' inability to substantiate the main idea within a paragraph. This ends up introducing incoherence. In some instances, supporting sentences brought in new ideas, and this hampered fluency. More practice is needed to close this gap.

Introduction and Conclusion

A sizeable number of candidates displayed an improvement in composing introductions that set the scene of the composition. However, conclusions still pose a challenge as in some instances new ideas were brought in at the conclusion instead of reflecting on certain aspects of the composition or simply summarizing the general ideas in the composition.

4. LETTER WRITING

For this task, candidates were required to write a letter to their area Member of Parliament, inviting them to attend a fund-raising event. This was a formal letter and therefore the expectation was that it should reflect formality and constrain candidates to abide by the conventions of a formal letter.

In addition, it was not just a formal letter but an invitation, in which the exact venue, date, and time should be provided. Some candidates struggled with the features of an invitation. They were not precise with the venue of the event, date, and time. The following were the aspects that guided the letter writing:

A) LAYOUT

Address and Date

Though a great improvement is evidenced in as far as the writer's address should be laid out, it is just a few candidates who wrote the sender's address as:

P O Box 110

Gaborone

05 November 2023



Instead of:

P O Box 110

Gaborone

5 November 2023

Recipient address

The recipient address should have four aspects. These are the position of the recipient, his or her office, the box number, and where the post office is located. In this case, candidates were expected to mention the office or constituency since they were addressing the Member of Parliament who is the leader of a constituency. Almost all candidates did not perform well in this area. Here are a few from a lot of addresses that were written incorrectly by candidates:

The Member of Parliament	Member of Parliament	The Parliament
Bobonong	Bobonong	Mabele Primary School
P O Box 3211	P O Box 3211	Private Bag 003
Bobonong	Bobonong	Orapa

Member of Parliament

P O Box 2011

Molepolole

The following are examples of the recipient addresses which were expected from candidates.

The Member of Parliament	The Member of Parliament
Bobonong Constituency	Bobirwa Office
P O Box 3211	P O Box 3211



Bobonong

Bobonong

Opening and Closing salutations

The opening salutation should match with the closing salutation. It was partially achieved by candidates. Some candidates endorsed their signatures thereby veering off the convention of a formal letter. The table below shows the salutations that were incorrectly written by candidates and the proper ways of matching the opening and closing salutations.

INCORRECT	CORRECT
Dear Sir/Madam Yours Sincerely	Dear Sir/Madam Yours faithfully
Dear Mr John Yours faithfully	Dear Mr John Yours Sincerely
NB: some candidates lost marks in the opening salutation by leaving out the word DEAR before Sir/Madam and also using the capital F for faithfully instead of a small f in the closing salutation.	

There is a need to give more practice on the format of the different letters during the teaching and learning process.



B) COMMUNICATION

This section demanded candidates to display their understanding of the topic and communicate clearly to the recipient the message they aspire to hear. In extension, communication stresses that the message sent should be free from ambiguity which compromises the intention of the sender. Candidates were guided by the following guidelines to communicate the message:

Stating where and when the event will be held.

Most of the candidates managed to state the place and the date but were not precise about the time since this was an invitation. For example,

“The event will be held at Monang Primary School on the 12th of December 2023.”

This leaves the invited person wondering when exactly he or she should come to the event.

However, for those who did well in this guideline, they wrote it as:

“The event will be held at Monang Primary School on the 12th of December 2023. The program will start at 1000 am.”

Stating what activities will take place during the event.

In terms of stating the fundraising activities, most candidates did exceptionally well. It is just a few whose activities were not about raising funds. For example:

*“We will be eating rice, chicken, and bread **instead of** we will be selling food in stalls”*



Stating why they wanted the Member of Parliament to attend.

This guideline required candidates to explicitly give the reason for inviting the Member of Parliament to the event. For most of those who attempted, shallow reasons which in most cases mismatched with the purpose of the invitation were given. Example of the reason given

“I would like you to come and see how the standard ones are doing in our school.”

This statement has nothing to do with fundraising but something like this would have been better:

I would like you to come so that you can help our school to achieve its goal of having a library

OR

Our school needs a library so that we can use it for our studies/research OR

It would really be great for our school to have a library as it will contribute to better results from us students

Demonstrating the correct tone used in a formal letter

This year’s letter-writing task was a formal letter, the expectation was that candidates should be careful in terms of which vocabulary to use. They were not supposed to be casual. The causality was evidenced using the verb “**want**’. Want sounds more like they were commanding the Member of Parliament to respond as per their wish. The sentence below was captured from a candidate’s work:

*“I **want** you to attend this event because I **want** you to help us donate money to access our wants.”* Instead of

I humbly request you to attend.....OR



I kindly request you to attend OR

I cordially invite you to this event

Still, under the use of correct register, some candidates used figurative language which distorts the formality of such a letter. For example:

*“At the fundraising event there will be sweets **“as sweet as honey”**”*

Such examples highlight the gaps that need to be addressed when teaching about formal letter-writing.

COMMAND OF LANGUAGE

Consistent use of the correct tense

Candidates were expected to display mastery of different aspects of language such as spelling, tense, and variation of sentence structure. Even this year several candidates were found wanting in this area. Only the highflyers did well in terms of command of the English language.

Variation of Sentence Structure

Candidates were expected to vary sentences within the letter. Most of the candidates can coin and use simple and compound sentences correctly but only a few did similarly well with complex sentences. Others lacked in the syntactic aspect of a correct and meaningful sentence. For example:

*“I will be happy if you **will** agree to take part in this event.”*

This sounds like a complex sentence because of the use of the subordinate conjunction **if**, but it lacked the syntactic aspect of a correct sentence using **will** as bolded above.



It would be helpful if learners could be given more practice in using different types of sentences in continuous writing. This is one area where candidates are generally challenged. Examples of sentence types are given below:

Simple Sentence

A **simple sentence** is a **sentence** that consists of just one independent clause. **Example;**

“The event will be held at our school on the 18th of October 2023.”

Compound Sentence

A **compound sentence** refers to a sentence made up of two independent clauses (or complete sentences) connected with a **coordinating conjunction**. Coordinating conjunctions are easy to remember if you think of the words "FAN BOYS":

- For
- And
- Nor
- But
- Or
- Yet
- So

Here is an example of a compound sentence taken from one of the candidate’s scripts:

Very important local artists like Vee Mampeezy and Charma Gal will be performing.

Complex Sentence



A **complex sentence** is made up of an independent clause and one or more **dependent clauses** connected to each by a subordinate conjunction. For example:

*"I am inviting you to this event **because** your presence will help to pull a large crowd."*

These are the list of subordinating conjunctions commonly used by candidates.

- **after**
- **although**
- **as**
- **because**
- **before**
- **even though**
- **if**
- **since**
- **though**
- **unless**
- **until**
- **when**
- **whenever**
- **whereas**
- **wherever**
- **while**

Spelling

Candidates showed some improvement in this area. Nevertheless, some indicated that they still have not developed a culture of proofreading their work after writing. This was indicated by silly mistakes that could have been corrected had the candidate gone over their work. For example, the omission of letters in a word:

Saterda instead of **Saturday**

nd instead of **and**

Correct use of tense



Candidates were able to use the correct tense that was demanded by the topic area with a few exceptions. In this case, the tense was fairly observed by the majority of candidates.

Correct use of conjunctions

Most candidates demonstrated that they knew conjunctions. The main challenge was their use. For instance, some would just pick any conjunction they remembered and use it to connect parts of sentences. This would often result in the derailing of the message. For example,

*“I will be happy **but** you are coming to donate money to our school”*

An effort should be made therefore to get candidates to understand which conjunctions are used, when and how. The table below shows some of the conjunctions.

Coordinating Conjunctions	Subordinating Conjunctions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For• And• Nor• But• Or• Yet• So	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After• although• as• because• before• even though• if• since• though• unless• until• when



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• whenever• whereas• wherever• while
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5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, candidates should be exposed to a lot of creative writing throughout the course of their learning. It will enhance their originality and creativity in writing. A thoughtful effort should also be made towards the development of a reading culture which would broaden candidates' vocabulary base. For instance, candidates should be encouraged to read for fun i.e., pick materials on topics that interest them such as their favorite sports celebrities, music icons, movie stars OR areas of interest like cooking, astronomy, fashion, etc., and read for general knowledge instead of reading only school materials. This would enhance their creativity and imaginary skills which are likely to translate into improved expressions and descriptions as well as an improvement in sentence structure.