

# PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT



BOTSWANA  
EXAMINATIONS  
COUNCIL

**BSSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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## **PAPER 1: WRITTEN PAPER**

### **General Comments**

This was the first examination for the BSSE English syllabus. The questions were accessible to all candidates, with varied responses given for the different tasks. Some candidates showed good knowledge of the subject matter, while others were evidently grappling with the language. For Section A, candidates had to answer either question 1 or 2, which were either a narrative or descriptive composition. The most popular was the tasks on the narrative; many candidates felt comfortable narrating stories and their experiences in life.

Section B was a directed writing task with two texts used as stimulus material to provide background information. Candidates were not supposed to copy information wholesale but rather to use the texts as a guide to inspire their creativity. However, some candidates simply reproduced what appeared in the text without creating their own information. Most candidates understood that they were supposed to write a letter and did so. Some candidates wrote very short essays, therefore penalising themselves.

### **Comments on Individual Questions**

#### **Section A**

##### **1 Descriptive Composition**

Candidates who chose this option were expected to expand the given extract into a vivid, descriptive composition. The focus was on the narrator's mother, her appearance, and the emotional impact of the moment as she stepped before a crowd.

The topic was poorly tackled by most candidates as they attempted to respond to this question. They generally lacked descriptive language and proper adjectives to help them paint a proper picture of the scene. Essays lacked creativity and, in some cases, literal translation was observed as candidates translated straight from the vernacular to English, thus exposing their incompetence in using appropriate vocabulary and register. The beauty of the mother and the gorgeous dress were not clearly shown in the description. Most candidates narrated the story, but the descriptive aspects were not fully explored. The candidates failed to create convincing images that would paint a picture of the mother as she stepped into the crowd, as well as the details of the place and the event itself. These limitations resulted in candidates mostly falling in level 6. Another limitation observed from the candidates was the language, which was average; hence, their failure to express themselves. They had challenges in using vivid description, hence their resolve to stick to narration.

Varied competency levels were demonstrated by candidates with level 8 English using all sorts of figurative devices like metaphors and similes. Reported speech was also used dramatically and strategically. They employed powerful, vivid wording, which allowed them to showcase competencies with precision as they used strong narrative and descriptive language to evoke emotions and ideas. Furthermore, they were disciplined in using sophisticated sequencing of events, applying advanced logic and register as well as effortlessly inserting captivating plot twists.

Mid-level candidates also demonstrated a relatively good command of English, with limited creativity. Bottom-tier candidates struggled with expressing themselves and also somewhat failed in convincing the



reader logically. They were prone to using repeated, simple, and monotonous plot scenes with limited vocabulary.

Generally, candidates struggled with basic punctuation, such as proper and effective use of the commas and especially full stops; run-on sentences and poor paragraphing were a significant feature of the essays, even for the higher performing candidates. Direct speech was almost always badly punctuated or inadequately so. Poor spelling across all levels was observed. Several scripts were too short, falling below the expected word count, which in turn limited idea development and affected candidates' overall marks.

## **2 Narrative**

This topic was also lacking in the use of powerful and relevant language to depict the frustration, conflict, betrayal, deception, disappointment and injustice caused. Most candidates wrote about cheating in a relationship, though they could have used other scenarios. The emotions of characters were not vividly brought out due to limitations in language.

1. Paragraphing; most tried to use paragraphs that were properly linked, but some showed a lack of planning.
2. Sentence structure; most candidates failed to vary their sentences, leading to a monotonous effect. Very few did this perfectly.
3. Verb forms; tenses were still problematic for some candidates, particularly tense switching in sentences.
4. Vocabulary; this was a limitation for most candidates. When attempting sophistication, the spelling would also betray them.
5. Punctuation; this was generally accurate except when using direct speech.

## **Section B**

Candidates were tasked with writing a persuasive letter. The assessment of this question is in two parts, being task fulfilment and language, each carrying 15 marks, which makes a total of 30 marks.

### **1 Content and Task Fulfilment (15 marks)**

Although a good number of candidates understood the task, there were many who were also aware of the appropriate text type to use. As such, there was a range of text types used, such as public notice, speech, memorandum, and newspaper report, the latter being mistaken as the appropriate text type required. A lot of candidates managed to address most, if not all, required points, even though some could not amplify them. Some candidates lifted the information from the texts provided without any interpretation whatsoever; incidentally, they could not bring in their own interpretation. Most candidates were let down by the fact that they could not bring out their arguments for persuasion. The appropriate register and strong tone to achieve the same was a serious challenge. They failed to introduce evidence, show certainty, and connect ideas. The work produced did not build an argument using logic, emotion, or create urgency. Candidates failed to make healthy living appealing to the target audience by focusing on the benefits as well as showing what happens if they do not take action, creating a balanced argument.



## **2 Language (15 marks)**

The language used by candidates was mostly flat, with the majority falling under level 6. Punctuation was a problem even for candidates who could express themselves. Many organised their paragraphs, though links were missing; for example, expressions like:

- it is imperative
- research suggests that
- imagine
- now is the time
- and other strong verbs used to persuade or encourage healthy living.

Sentence structures are affected by not observing grammatical rules, especially by not using punctuation marks appropriately and failing to use them for effect. Spelling and tense errors were frequent.



## PAPER 2: WRITTEN PAPER

### General Comments

The candidates' performance was average. The paper was accessible to all candidates, and the topics were about a subject matter that was familiar to them. Passage A was about 'Boosting One's Confidence'. The topic for Passage B was 'Children Need a Routine' and for Passage C, 'Conquering Mt. Kilimanjaro; an experience shared by a Motswana young woman'. The paper was candidate-friendly, hence the average performance by many candidates. The majority of the candidates presented their work well. In addition, not many candidates left blank spaces, as well as in the Summary. The aspect of carelessness on the part of the candidates was also observed, which led to a loss of marks.

### Comments on Individual Items

#### Passage A

- 1 (a) This was a multiple-choice type of question based on an image from the passage. Most of the candidates did not get the answer correct. They selected the first option, which was wrong.
- (b) Candidates were to identify a phrase that carried the same meaning as "A mile away". Most candidates wrote a sentence instead of a phrase, contrary to what the question required.
- (c) This was a 2-part question calling for candidates to explain the phrase. The candidates scored the first part of the phrase. As a result, they got only one (1) mark out of a possible two (2) marks.
- (d) This was an inferential type of question that expected candidates to infer why the author used the expression 'in essence'. It was generally not well done.
- (e) This was a recall question where candidates were to identify a sentence that gives an assurance when one is confident in oneself. Due to its low cognitive demand, most candidates got the correct answer.
- (f) For this question, candidates were to use their own word(s), which was generally **not** well done because the penal words, sabotaging their efforts, bounced back in the answering of the questions.
- (g) This was a multiple-choice question that was not well done. They failed to identify the correct options that served as an explanation for the word "realistic".
- (h) This was a multiple-choice question for which almost all candidates were able to get the correct answer. They managed to explain the word "adversely", as demanded by the task.

#### Passage B

- 2 (a) This was a recall-type question that was generally well done. They successfully demonstrated understanding of the passage to answer the question.



- (b) Candidates were required to identify the phrase that had the same meaning as the word 'sequence'. This question was fairly done. Those who did not get it right did not use quotation marks.
- (c) This proved to be a challenging question. The candidates did not understand the meaning of the exclamation mark used at the end of the sentence. It was meant to show surprise/joy/excitement.
- (d) Candidates were to suggest a reason why parents should consider teaching children while they are young. Although it was an inferential type of question, it was generally well done.
- (e) Candidates had to respond in their own words to this type of question, which assessed higher-order thinking skills. Not many candidates got it right; some gave incomplete attempts, while others left a blank.
- (f) This item was generally well done. Candidates were able to explain why it is difficult to train children, as they managed to give answers such as 'children have their own minds', 'children are independent thinkers', etc.
- (g) This was a 1-mark question testing candidates' understanding of the passage. They were to respond in one word but struggled to get the correct answer.
- (h) For this item, candidates had to respond in their own words, and the task was set as a question assessing higher-order thinking skills. Not many candidates got it right; some gave incomplete attempts, while others left a blank.

### **Passage C**

- 3 (a) This was a recall-type question. Candidates needed to give two reasons. Most only managed to score one.
- (b) This was an item that tested inference, for which candidates did not do well. They failed to capture the idea that 'generally' and 'believed' denoted the same meaning.
- (c) For this item, candidates were required to respond in their own words, which was poorly handled by most of them. They failed to pick the correct penal words, dangerous and cautious, and hence gave the wrong answers.
- (d) This was an inferential type of question, for which candidates performed poorly. They were to infer information from the passage and use it to express their opinion to answer the question.
- (e) For this item, candidates were required to respond in their own words. They had to explain the phrase 'no easy feat'. Most candidates were able to explain the first part as a result, getting one mark out of the possible two.
- (f) (i) Candidates were to explain why the writer needed to undergo intensive training. This was generally well done.



- (ii) Candidates were to analyse the passage and convey the writer's sentiment which had the same meaning as the one used earlier on in the passage. Candidates generally did well as they were able to pick the correct statement from the passage.
- (g) This was a question assessing higher-order thinking skills and therefore called for candidates to give contrasting emotions. Most candidates failed to show the contrast.
- (h) This item was fairly done. The question required the candidates to explain why the author cried. Those who got it wrong had stated that the author cried because she was tired, instead of showing that they were tears of joy.
- (i) This was a question assessing candidates' competence in vocabulary. Items (j) and (k) also assessed candidates on vocabulary, and they were required to give the contextual meaning to words. This was poorly done. Candidates showed a lack of vocabulary and correct diction. Some failed to maintain the form of the word or comply with the RUBRIC. They wrote sentences.
- (l) This was a Summary question. The performance was average. Some candidates were able to pick the relevant points. Candidates who lost marks did not adhere to the dictates of the key question words. There was too much additional information that was not relevant, thus compromising the word count. Attempts to use their own words resulted in a loss of marks because the meaning was fragmented and distorted. Poor handwriting was a serious concern.