



**BOTSWANA
EXAMINATIONS
COUNCIL**

**PSLE
PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND LETTER WRITING
2024**

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ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND LETTER

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the Principal Examiners' analysis of the 2024 candidates' performance in the composition and letter writing tasks. The report highlights the strengths and weaknesses observed in relation to assessment tasks, aiming to provide guidance for future teaching and learning. It is important to consider the issues outlined in this report to achieve effective learning outcomes for future candidates

GENERAL COMMENTS

In comparison to the previous year, candidates' overall performance this year was significantly better, particularly in their responses to both the composition and letter writing tasks. The questions or assessment tasks appeared to be well suited to all levels of achievement, allowing more candidates to properly address the questions than last year. However, some of the weaknesses previously identified remain. This suggests that recommendations from the previous report may not have been implemented in teaching and learning practices, impacting learning outcomes.

Writing Creatively is still a major challenge for candidates. Candidates need to be guided to write creatively, especially on how to develop ideas. Furthermore, hand writing is also still a challenge for candidates. They should write legibly and neatly. They also need to effectively distinguish between capital and small letters. However, the 2024 cohort writing was much better, since they wrote more legibly. Moreover, candidates should plan their work so that it enables them to write logically.

COMPOSITION WRITING

The topic

The composition topic this year, "THE ANIMAL I LIKE MOST," was concise and accessible, allowing for a broad range of responses from candidates. Unlike last year's topic, it was free from ambiguity and appropriate for all levels of cognitive development, enabling candidates to express themselves without limitations. From the topic, candidates had to focus on:

- a) What the animal is and where it lives
- b) What the animal looks like
- c) What people think about the animal
- d) Why they like the animal

In contrast to the previous year topic, the topic for this year, did not discriminate candidates according to moral and religious grounds and was also accessible to all candidates, given their academic abilities.

The guidelines

The guidelines provided were clear, guiding candidates to produce a descriptive piece of work coherent and appropriate to the topic. Most candidates responded to the guidelines, but there were instances of factual inaccuracies and creative or spiritual attachments that limited the descriptive value of some pieces. Some of the examples about inaccuracies include instances where some candidates would write about a cow as their “favorite animal which stays in the river”.

Overall, high-achieving candidates handled the guidelines well, while others struggled with logical flow, coherence, and fluency in their writing. Nevertheless, creativity and elaboration were notable in some responses, highlighting the potential for improvement with continued guidance.

PROFILE 1: COMMUNICATION

Under this section, candidates were expected to effectively communicate about the given topic. Most candidates succeeded in naming their favorite animal and its habitat, but some struggled with the singular focus required and inaccurately stated animal habitats. Candidates either did not know their animals that well or were not familiar with ‘habitats’.

(a) Stating what the animal was and where it lives.

Most candidates successfully named their chosen animal. However, some were challenged to state where the animal lives, to a point that others stated that animals like cows stay in the water.

(b) Stating what the animal looks like.

High-achieving candidates excelled in this area, while those with limited vocabulary struggled. This highlights the importance of emphasizing descriptive vocabulary in classroom instruction

c. What people think or feel towards the Animal

Candidates did well on this criterion. They were able to describe people's feelings towards the animal they chose.

(d) Why do they like the Animal

Candidates did well on this criterion. They were able to express themselves regarding why they liked the animal. They referred to the appearance and that they got the animal as a token or gift.

(e) Creativity and Originality

Just like previous years, creativity remains a 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. Most candidates had ideas but to elaborate using appealing descriptive vocabulary related to the guidelines is still a challenge. Guidelines in this topic did not limit the candidates to build comprehensive stories about a chosen animal. Therefore, more practice on creativity and originality is still needed.

PROFILE 2 : COMMAND OF LANGUAGE

Under this profile, candidates were expected to display an understanding of the different aspects/rules of English language and use them appropriately. Candidates were evaluated on their ability to properly utilize different aspects of English language.

(a) Descriptive Vocabulary

Descriptive vocabulary, including similes, metaphors, adjectives, adverbs, and phrases, were expected to be used correctly and in context. While candidates demonstrated knowledge of these concepts, incorrect usage and spelling detracted from their intended message.

(b) Capitalization and Punctuation

While candidates demonstrated improved awareness of punctuation marks compared to previous years, capitalization remained a notable weakness. Incorrect usage, particularly mid-sentence, was prevalent. Additionally, poor handwriting and letter shaping led to confusion with capital letters.

To address this, teachers should emphasize proper capitalization in instructional delivery, particularly in instances such as:

- The beginning of a sentence
- The personal pronoun "I"
- Days of the week, months, proper nouns
- Names of places and abbreviations

C. Varied Sentences

Variety is the spice of writing, and sentence variation is the key ingredient. While most candidates have mastered this expectation, some still struggle with monotonous openings. Teachers should continue to emphasize the importance of sentence variety to prevent dull, repetitive compositions. Candidates should aim to avoid using the same sentence opening more than twice in their work

PROFILE 3: 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:

(a) Coherence and fluency

While run-on sentences were less prevalent this year, coherence and fluency still posed challenges. Inadequate punctuation and lack of substantiation within paragraphs resulted in disjointed ideas and reduced readability. More practice in these areas is recommended to fully address these issues.

(b) Introduction and conclusion

Candidates demonstrated improvement in composing introductory paragraphs, though some struggled with brevity. Conclusions continued to be a challenge, with new ideas inappropriately introduced. Emphasis on the appropriate length and function of introductory and concluding paragraphs is needed.

LETTER WRITING

For this task, candidates were required to write a letter to their school principal as class monitor, telling him or her how they think pupils could be stopped from doing wrong things in the school.

The Topic

While the topic was accessible, some points could have been more inclusive, such as using "class monitor or monitress" and the word "informing" instead of "telling" to maintain formality. Additionally, the phrase "in the school" was potentially ambiguous, with candidates unsure if they should only mention wrongdoings within the school premises or also include incidents outside of school.

The guidelines

Candidates were provided with three guidelines to guide their responses to the letter writing task. These were: where and when pupils do wrong things, what wrong things pupils mostly do and what action should be taken to stop pupils from doing wrong things.

While they performed well in some areas, there were still instances of inconsistencies and errors that need to be addressed.

PROFILE 1: LAYOUT

(a) Address and Date

Most candidates followed the correct format for the writer's address. However, some candidates made errors with the date format, which should be written as "5 November 2023", not "05 November 2023".

(b) 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. For this year, candidates were expected to mention the position of the officer they are addressing. Compared to the previous year, this aspect posed challenges to a significant candidature.

C. Opening and closing salutations

While most candidates matched their opening and closing salutations correctly, some made mistakes with the use of capitalization and word choice. Here are examples of incorrect salutations and their correct alternatives:

INCORRECT

Dear Sir/Madam

Yours Sincerely

Dear Mr John

CORRECT

Dear Sir/Madam

Yours Faithfully

Dear Mr John

PROFILE 2: COMMUNICATION

(a) Stating where and when the pupils do wrong things:

Candidates were expected to identify the locations and times when pupils engage in wrongdoing. While some candidates successfully identified actions taking place within the school premises, others described incidents occurring outside of school hours. Although these actions were relevant to the class monitor's duties, they did not fully meet the criteria's requirements. Additionally, some candidates specified a specific date for wrongdoings rather than noting that these actions occur frequently. This limitation impacted on their ability to fully address the criterion.

(b) Stating what the wrong things done by pupils are.

While most candidates successfully identified the wrong things pupils do, some limited themselves to a single incident, failing to meet the criterion's requirement for multiple examples. A correct response would have included two or more incidents, for instance, "writing on the walls at the toilets and being rude to teachers when confronted."

C. Stating their suggestions to stop the behaviors:

Most candidates managed to provide suggestions for corrective measures, though some limited themselves to stating generic punishments rather than suggesting specific measures

d. Demonstrate the correct tone in a formal letter:

Candidates were expected to maintain a formal tone in their letters despite the informal instructions to "tell" the principal. Some candidates veered too far into casual language, forgetting the brief, to-the-point nature of a formal letter.

PROFILE 3: COMMAND OF LANGUAGE

Candidates were expected to display mastery of different aspects of language such as spelling, tense, and variation of sentence structure.

(a) Consistent use of the correct tense

Most candidates demonstrated proficiency in using appropriate tenses, although some academically challenged candidates struggled with this criterion.

(b) Variation of sentence structure

Candidates were required to use a mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences to achieve variety in their writing. While simple and compound sentences were generally used correctly, complex sentences proved challenging for most. This is largely due to the misuse of conjunctions, resulting in run-on sentences and convoluted structures. More practice and emphasis on different sentence types in continuous writing could address this.

C. Spelling

While there was improvement in this area, candidates still showed errors in spelling and omission of letters. Proofreading skills should be emphasized to reduce such errors.

d. Correct use of conjunctions

Although candidates demonstrated knowledge of conjunctions, incorrect usage led to derailing of the message. Teachers should highlight appropriate usage of conjunctions for different situations to enhance candidates' writing skills.

CONCLUSION

To enhance creativity and writing skills, candidates should be encouraged to engage in more creative writing throughout their learning. Additionally, fostering a culture of reading for fun could broaden their vocabulary base and improve their creativity and descriptive abilities. By engaging with a wide range of topics that interest them, candidates could develop a more diverse writing style and enhance their sentence structures.