



**BOTSWANA  
EXAMINATIONS  
COUNCIL**

**PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**  
**ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND LETTER WRITING**  
**2025**



**Contents**

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. GENERAL COMMENTS .....	3
3. COMPOSITION WRITING .....	4
3.1. THE GUIDELINES.....	5
3.2. PROFILE 1: COMMUNICATION .....	6
3.2.1. When you did not go to school.....	6
3.2.2. Why you did not go to school.....	6
3.2.3. What happened at the end?.....	6
3.2.4. How you felt about it. ....	6
3.2.5. Creativity and originality.....	7
3.3. PROFILE 2: COMMAND OF LANGUAGE.....	7
3.3.1. Descriptive vocabulary should be used correctly .....	7
3.3.2. Capitalization and Punctuation .....	8
3.3.3. Varied Sentence Openings.....	8
3.4. PROFILE 3: CONTENT MANAGEMENT.....	9
3.4.1. Coherence and Fluency.....	9
4. Conclusion .....	9
5. LETTER WRITING .....	10
5.1. THE TOPIC .....	10
5.2. THE GUIDELINES.....	10
5.3. PROFILE 1: LAYOUT .....	11
5.3.1. Opening and Closing salutations .....	11
5.4. PROFILE 2: CONTENT AND LANGUAGE.....	12
5.4.1. Where you are spending your holidays.....	12
5.4.2. What you spend your time doing.....	12
5.4.3. How you feel about the holidays.....	12
5.4.4. Demonstrate use of correct register.....	13
5.5. PROFILE 3: COMMAND OF LANGUAGE.....	13
5.5.1. Consistent use of the correct tense.....	13
5.5.2. Variation of Sentence Structure .....	13
5.5.3. Simple Sentence .....	13
5.5.4. <i>Compound Sentence</i> .....	13
5.5.5. <i>Complex Sentence</i> .....	14



5.5.6.	<i>Spelling</i> .....	14
5.5.7.	Correct use of conjunctions .....	1
6.	SUMMARY .....	2

## ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND LETTER

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This report submits the Principal Examiners' observations on the responses of the 2025 candidates in the composition and letter writing tasks. The report shall highlight the strengths and weaknesses revealed by the work of the candidates in relation to the assigned topics for writing skills. 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 attainment of effective learning outcomes for future candidates.

### 2. GENERAL COMMENTS

Generally, candidates' performance this year was better compared to the previous year (This year's candidates responded to the topics much better than the previous candidates did. Most of them dealt well with the demands of the guidelines and the marking key respectively. Assumption is that both questions {composition and letters were suited to all levels of achievement unlike the previous one which was assumed to be more **aligned** 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}. There are areas that need to be addressed by instructional processes. It is worth stating that even though the topics were more user friendly 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 recommendations into practice 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 are 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.

For the previous candidates, handwriting was an issue of concern but the same cannot be said for this year's candidates. It is important for learners to write neatly and legibly including the shaping of letters to try and differentiate capital letters and small letters effectively. Most of these year's candidates produced more legible writing suggestive that more effort was put at school level- a commendable effort. Candidates must be made aware of the fact that poor handwriting impedes the comprehensiveness of a piece of work. Some candidates. 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 in a rough paper prior to the main script for easy reference and logical flow of ideas in their work.

As observed from previous years, the general performance for this year's candidates is far better than compared to the performances for both letter and composition respectively. Assumption is that both topics were to the writers' level of comprehension, morally right and appealing to all learners. That being the case, there are areas of weaknesses on the side of topic generation to be intentioned to the subject officer. Below is a summary of how candidates performed on the questions:

### 3. COMPOSITION WRITING

#### THE TOPIC

The composition topic this year was **"THE DAY I DID NOT COME TO SCHOOL"** Candidates were expected to address the topic in relation to the following guidelines:

- a) When you did not go to school.
- b) Why did you not go to school.
- c) What happened at the end.
- d) How you felt about it.



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

- 1) The topic statement was brief and good enough for candidates to easily comprehend. The vocabulary used to structure the question was to the level of all primary school learners.
- 2) The topic was free from ambiguity and contained a single main clause accessible to most learners' competencies
- 3) The topic was morally and emotional right, cutting across different religions and cultural backgrounds well
- 4) Unlike the previous topic, this year's topic was favorable not only to high achievers but to almost all cognitive levels. The topic did not limit candidates' scope to express themselves hence all candidates from all corners of the country were expected to critical analyze, synthesize and evaluate the topic sentence without limitations to knowledge level only. Teachers are still encouraged to continue to expose candidates to all levels of cognitive development as elaborated under Blooms taxonomy

### **3.1. THE GUIDELINES**

The following guidelines were used:

- When you did not come to school
- Why you did not go to school
- What happened at the end
- How you felt about it.

Guidelines are used to help candidates to produce a sound piece of work that is well cohered, sequenced and appropriate to the topic. The guidelines were equally fair and guided the candidates to construct a descriptive piece of work cognizant to the topic demands. Most candidates were able to respond to the guidelines and build a story. Although the topic was accessible to most, there were candidates who still struggle to produce a piece of work to the level of a standard seven student. A good number of candidates dealt well with creativity and elaboration of ideas to produce an appealing piece of work.



Minor confusion was observed in guidelines 3 and 4. Guideline 3 demanded candidates to explicitly state what happened at the end. Candidates toyed around what happened at the end of the day and the reason why they did not come eg “At the end we managed to bury our aunt in peace”. Although they were not way off on a tangent, expectations were that they should have based their discussion on ‘what happened at the end of the day eg at the end I missed my final examination’. Similarly, guideline 4 dealt with feelings related to missing school yet some candidates’ feelings circulated around the reason why they did not go to school eg “I felt devastated because I lost my aunt”

That being the case, high achieving candidates handled all guidelines well.

The observations relating to composition writing are laid forth under each profile:

### **3.2. 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 with the reader about the given topic. Candidates’ responses were guided by the guidelines mentioned above and judged on the marking key as per the following criteria:

#### **3.2.1. When you did not go to school.**

Most candidates did very well on this criterion by clearly stating when they did not come to school.

#### **3.2.2. Why you did not go to school.**

Reasons for not coming to school were stated save for a handful of candidates who confused not going to school and late coming

#### **3.2.3. What happened at the end?**

Candidates interpreted differently this criterion. Most of them attached the effects to the reasons for not coming to school. For example, if they stated the reason as ill-health, the results would be taken to the clinic.

#### **3.2.4. How you felt about it.**



They stated feelings attached to the reasons instead of to the entire topic. If they were ultimately taken to the clinic or hospital candidates will demonstrate feelings attached to the their health instead of them attached to them not coming to school

### 3.2.5. Creativity and originality

1.

As usual, topics demand a high level of creativity and originality. For this criterion, candidates were expected to coin their own stories based on real experiences with missing a school day or if it is factious to still sustain the attention of the reader. They were to build a story, stick to and expand the guidelines given through effective communication. Though the topic was that accessible, only a few candidates (as was in previous years) managed to do that from introduction to conclusion of their stories. As was previously stated, creativity remains a major challenge for most of the candidates in composition writing. A good number of them continue to respond to guidelines as if they were just questions instead of using them as a trigger 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 descriptive vocabulary (adverbs and adjectives). Most had ideas but could not elaborate them using appealing descriptive vocabulary related to the guidelines. Guidelines are not supposed to limit candidates to build comprehensive stories but to stimulate discussion. More practice on these is required.

## 3.3. 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. The following attributes were therefore considered:

### 3.3.1. Descriptive vocabulary should be used correctly

**Descriptive Vocabulary-** As guidelines stipulated, candidates were expected to state when they did not go to school, describe the reasons why they did not go to school, deliberate on the effects of not going and finalizing by describing their feelings about missing school: good performance for this criterion was measured through the use of

- **Similes**



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

It is worth noting that candidates know descriptive words but contextualizing them and use of correct spelling were their main downfall. In some cases, Figurative language was used haphazardly hence derailing the message intended.

### 3.3.2. Capitalization and Punctuation

Just like the previous year, a considerable number of candidates showed an awareness on the use of punctuation marks. Using capital letters remains a challenge to candidates who fail this criterion. Most candidates fail to capitalize letters or disregard the fact that it is personal pronoun. Some still use capital letters in the middle of a sentence, write days of the week, names of people and places with small letters. In some instances, shaping letters and handwriting led to failure to use capital letters well. Examples from candidates' work:

- The day **i** did not go to school was on monday
- I was at letsholathebe hospital

There is therefore a need for teachers to reiterate instances in which usage of capitalization appropriately. For example:

- Used at the beginning of the sentence
- When using the personal pronoun I
- Writing days of the week, names of months,
- In proper nouns
- Names of places and abbreviations

In some instances, candidates knew where capital letters are to be used but did not shape them appropriately and they looked like small letters. As was the case the previous report, it would be helpful if emphasis is placed on the mastery of usage of capital letters and shaping of letters during instructional delivery. Such challenges have implications on their sentence openings which did not comply with the rule of starting a sentence with a capital letter.

### 3.3.3. Varied Sentence Openings



Candidates are expected to vary sentences when writing, especially the opening sentences. A lot of candidates have mastered this expectation but on the contrary, there is a growing trend where candidates disregard the rule of a paragraph by writing a single, run on sentence with various key ideas merged. Seemingly failing to punctuate or break well. Failing to punctuate leads to failure of this criterion. The emphasis is to keep encouraging the candidates to master this aspect of continuous writing otherwise it leads to monotonous pieces of work which affects the creativity aspect. Candidates should be advised not to use the same sentence opening consecutively in their composition.

### **3.4. 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:

#### **3.4.1. Coherence and Fluency**

As is stated in the paragraph above, there is a significant increase in the use of run- on sentences. This observation is worrisome considering that in the previous year, same observation was highlighted and centers were advised to take heed of the defect. This then raises doubts as to whether centers give attention to these reports. Run-on sentences distort meaning and spoil candidate's ability to demonstrate coherence and fluency. It is therefore apparent to report that for this year, candidates struggled with coherence and fluency. This seems like one step forward and two backwards. This year's failure to master the criterion is attributed to candidates grappling with punctuating the sentences. Candidates also showed inability to substantiate the main idea within a paragraph. Ideas were thrown haphazardly. In some instances, supporting sentences brought in new ideas and this hampered fluency. More practice is needed to totally close this gap.

## **4. Conclusion**

As was the case last year's indication being that a sizeable number of candidates continue to display an improvement in composing introductions that set the scene of the composition. However, for this year, there were instances where candidates overelaborated the introduction. Aspects of the main body popped up distorting the notion that introduction should be brief and explain the topic in at least two to three sentences. Conclusions still pose a



challenge as in some instances new ideas like the previous year's candidates were brought to the conclusion instead of reflecting on certain aspects of the composition or simply summarizing the general ideas in the composition.

## 5. LETTER WRITING

For this task, candidates were required to write a letter to their friends, telling them how they **are spending** their holidays.

### 5.1. THE TOPIC

This was an informal letter and therefore the expectation was that it should reflect informality and constrain candidates to abide with the conventions of an informal letter. The guidelines for the letter were crafted such that the candidates must respond using present continuous tense. However, most candidates were consistent with past tense. For example,

- **Guideline a) Where you are spending your holidays.**

Most candidates stated that they **spent** their holidays at a place. Instead of, I **spend** my holidays in a place.

This seems to reflect that centers dwell much on topics based on past experiences, that being the case, the topic was accessible to all candidates across the country regardless of geographical location.

### 5.2. THE GUIDELINES

The following guidelines were used to guide the candidates to come up with a formidable piece of work in relation to the given topic.

- a) Where you are spending your holidays.
- b) What you spend your time doing.
- c) How you feel about the holidays.

The aspects above were judged based on the following profiles guided the convention of letter writing:



**5.3. PROFILE 1: LAYOUT**

**2. Address and Date**

The candidates responded well to this criterion. They met the convention’s expectations of the informal address. A few had common errors pertaining to the date: examples

P O Box 110  
Gaborone

**08** November 2025

**Instead of:**

P O Box 110  
Gaborone

**8** November 2025

**5.3.1. 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 which were incorrectly written by candidates and the proper ways of matching the opening and closing salutations.

INCORRECT	CORRECT
Dear friend Thabo Thabo	Dear Friend Thabo Dear Thabo
Yours Sincerely Your Friend	Yours sincerely Your friend
<b>NB: some candidates lost marks in opening salutation by leaving out the word DEAR before name and also using capital F for Friend instead small f in closing salutation.</b>	

But in general, most candidates did well in this criterion. There is still need though to give more practice on the format of the different letters during teaching and learning process.

#### **5.4. PROFILE 2: CONTENT AND LANGUAGE**

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

##### **5.4.1. Where you are spending your holidays.**

Although a good number of the candidates managed to state the place, it was clouded by tense usage. Candidates used mainly past tense instead of present or present continuous seemingly using a wrong tense. This somehow distorted the candidate's piece of work. For example (extract from scripts)

*"We spent our holidays at Maun. I was with my mother and father"*

*"I enjoyed my holidays"*

##### **5.4.2. What you spend your time doing.**

In response to this criterion, most candidates did exceptionally well. Activities were mentioned but like the previous criterion, tense usage was the major challenge. From extract:

*"Most of the time we were playing video games"*

A more correct statement would be *"most of the time we play video games"*

##### **5.4.3. How you feel about the holidays.**

Candidates did well on this criterion. Feelings about the holidays were explicitly executed save for tense usage. Example;



*"I was over the moon"*

#### **5.4.4. Demonstrate use of correct register**

Unlike the previous year, this year's letter was an informal letter. The topic presented an aura of informal approach by instructing candidates to tell his/her friend about the holidays. Expectation was that candidates should be flexible and casual in writing. Candidates did well.

### **5.5. 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. Even this year a few candidates were found wanting in this area. Only the highflyers did well in terms of command of the English language.

#### **5.5.1. Consistent use of the correct tense**

Previous years, most candidates did well on the use of tenses. This year candidates did not do well on this criterion. Only a few academically gifted candidates used the present or present continuous tense. Most used past tense as cited above.

#### **5.5.2. Variation of Sentence Structure**

Candidates were expected to vary sentences within the letter. Majority of the candidates can coin and use simple and compound sentences correctly but only a few did similarly well with complex sentences. Just like the previous year, others lacked the syntactic aspect of a correct and meaningful sentence. This is mainly due to running on sentences where candidates put in more than one idea and use one sentence with many punctuation and conjunction errors.

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:

#### **5.5.3. Simple Sentence**

A **simple sentence** is a **sentence** that consists of just one independent clause. **Example 1. 1**

*"I am spending my time at Moremi Game reserve."*

#### **5.5.4. Compound Sentence**



**Compound sentence** refers to a sentence made up of two independent clauses (or complete sentences) connected to one another 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 **extract** of a compound sentence taken from one of the candidate's scripts:

1. *"my friends like to play football and board games, but I prefer watching movies"*

#### 5.5.5. **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- **extract**:

*"I was very excited because it was my first time going there"*

These are a 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

#### 5.5.6. **Spelling**

Candidates continue to do well in this area. Nevertheless, there were those who indicated that they still have not developed a culture of proof-reading their work after writing. This was



indicated by silly mistakes that could have been corrected had the candidate gone over their work. For example, omission of letters in a word:

- ✓ **Saterda** instead of **Saturday**
- ✓ **nd** instead of **and**

### 5.5.7. Correct use of conjunctions

Most candidates demonstrated that they had knowledge of conjunctions. The only challenge is that candidates seem confined to use only two common conjunctions being “Because and And”. Some just pick any conjunction they remembered and use it to connect parts of sentences. This would often result in derailing the message.

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"><li>• For</li><li>• And</li><li>• Nor</li><li>• But</li><li>• Or</li><li>• Yet</li><li>• So</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After</li><li>• although</li><li>• as</li><li>• because</li><li>• before</li><li>• even though</li><li>• if</li><li>• since</li><li>• though</li><li>• unless</li><li>• until</li><li>• when</li><li>• whenever</li><li>• whereas</li><li>• wherever</li><li>• while</li></ul>



## 6. SUMMARY

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. An intensified 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 sport celebrities, music icons, movie stars OR areas of interest like cooking, astronomy, fashion e.t.c 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.