

Aga Khan University Examination Board

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

Introduction

This document has been produced for the teachers and candidates of SSC Part II (Class X) 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 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 II

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 passage. The reading passage was a descriptive article regarding the idea / goal behind the creation of the famous ship Titanic. There were five questions asked in parts a, b, c, d and e.

Part a: Explain in your own words the connection between ‘The Wreck of the Titan’ and the ‘Titanic’.

Better responses reflected a thorough understanding of the connection between the book ‘The Wreck of the Titan’ and Titanic. Besides mentioning that both the ships met the same tragic end, the candidates also mentioned that both ships were unmatched in luxury and comfort and were considered the safest transports at that time and that both of them were sailing from England to New York. Hence, such responses were worthy of full marks.

Average responses were not able to mention the four required points. In most cases, the candidates missed out that both ships were headed from England to New York and that both ships were considered ‘unsinkable’.

Weaker responses indicated that candidates have not focused the question. The question asked the connection between ‘The Wreck of the Titan’ and the Titanic.

Part b: What was the goal of the owner of the White Star Line in building Titanic?

Most of the candidates scored full marks on this question. Better candidates mentioned the goal of the owner of the White Star Line in building Titanic. In the best responses, the candidates used their own words to describe the goal.

Most of the average responses copied phrases like ‘to gain a competitive edge’ from the text without any elaboration and hence lost 1 mark.

Part c: Describe the launch of Titanic into the sea.

The question required students to describe the launch of Titanic into the sea. Better responses described all the details (clearly mentioned in the passage) regarding the launch of Titanic.

Average responses mentioned few details like ‘1000s of people were gathered and tons of oil was used’ however, they failed to list the four required points to gain full marks. The only apparent reason could be sheer carelessness.

Weaker responses mentioned irrelevant details like ‘Titanic was the last word in comfort and luxury’ but failed to meet / focus what was asked in the question.

Part d: Why do you think Titanic was given so much importance? How was it different from other ships?

Very few candidates scored full marks for this question. Better responses reflected good skills of focus and prioritizing. Candidates mentioned the importance of Titanic (at that time) i.e. it was a prime project of the White Star Line and was unmatched in elegance and comfort. Such means of safe and luxurious transportation was an important milestone achieved for its makers. This interpretation was followed by specific details about how Titanic was different from other ships. Better responses enumerated the characteristic features of Titanic 'having a eleven-story structure 9 decks and being 882 long (etc) Titanic was unlike any other ship'.

Average responses reflected verbosity; candidates neglected the specific details that were clearly mentioned in the passage and instead of mentioning them they used irrelevant adjectives to describe the magnificence of the Titanic. Teachers should train their students to understand the requirement of each question, and that in the presence of specific information, unusual verbosity to enumerate one point while neglecting all others might not prove fruitful.

Weaker responses did not mention any point about the importance of Titanic. These responses just reflected few run on sentences of how unusual and luxurious Titanic was and yet it sank.

Part e: Mention any TWO names given to Titanic. Why do you think those names were fit / unfit for the ship?

Most of the students scored well in this question. Better responses wrote two names among the following 'the Millionaire's Special', 'the Wonder ship', 'the Unsinkable ship' and stated their opinion of whether this name was fit /unfit for Titanic.

Average responses mentioned three names instead of two (as stated in the question) but failed to comment / opine about the fitness of the name for the Titanic.

Question 2

In this question, candidates were encouraged to use their thinking and language skills and assuming a situation, they were supposed to write formal letters or reports showing their insight and understanding of the stimuli.

Part a: Your classmates have mixed opinions about reading fiction (novel / stories). Some of them think that reading (fiction) broadens mental capabilities and build language skills. While, others think that reading fiction is a waste of time; and the same time could be given to other activities. Your school authorities are planning to reallocate their budget and they need to know if more budgets should be allocated for the library based on students' interest.

Write a report for your school's management about this situation. Your report should include:

- subject of the report;
- sources of your information;
- your findings and suggestions.

In better responses for Question 2 a, the candidates:

- showed an understanding of the difference between a report and a letter;
- presented relevant and specific details about whether or not budget should be allocated for fiction-related books;
- gave at least two specific findings and suggestions;
- used correct format of a report which includes subject of the report, sources of information, findings and suggestions;
- used modal verbs for giving suggestions;
- used appropriate tenses and vocabulary.
- used appropriate punctuation marks.

In average responses for Question 2a, the candidates:

- mentioned the importance of reading books related to fiction but failed to focus more on projecting the different opinions existing in the same school.
- did not mention any suggestion.
- fulfilled the basic requirements of the content but lacked coherence;
- used appropriate tenses but with some occasional errors.
- used appropriate punctuation marks.

In weaker responses for Question 2a, the candidates:

- mentioned details about library / fiction books in the format of a letter. Teachers should elaborate the different purposes of report and letter along with their formats to make the distinction clear to their students.

- did not display language accuracy;
- displayed more than three errors of spelling.

Part b: There is an advertisement in the newspaper of a student welfare centre near your home offering an exclusive scholarship for students. The criterion for the grant of scholarship is your writing skills. Write a letter to the administration of the welfare centre outlining your intellectual / social / sports abilities and talents. Your letter should convince the authorities to grant you the scholarship.

The prompt required the candidates to write a letter to a welfare centre requesting a scholarship. In better responses the candidates:

- mentioned various distinctive intellectual, academic and extra-curricular skills claiming their suitability for the grant of the scholarship.
- used appropriate format of a letter (mostly block format with open punctuation);
- mentioned how the scholarship could be effective in changing their academic path for better;
- organized the information in paragraphs;
- used appropriate tenses and vocabulary;
- used appropriate punctuation marks.

In average responses for Question 2b, the candidates:

- mentioned gaining various scholarships in the past and how academically proven they are without much specific detail;
- used appropriate structure and format of a letter;
- used appropriate tenses and vocabulary except some slips.
- used appropriate punctuation marks.

In weaker responses for Question 2 b, the candidates:

- elaborated the desire for a scholarship without giving evidence of whether they deserved it or not;
- were not able to detail the abilities / skills that make them more worthy.
- did not use appropriate tenses or language structures.
- had many errors of spelling.

Question 3

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

Part a: In many schools, teachers are wary of their naughty students. Out of fear of retaliation, they fail to report problems or ignore them hoping that the responsible students will quit the bad behaviour by themselves. Explain what teachers can do to improve the overall behaviour of those naughty students. What should be done to make the school environment healthy for everyone?

The question required the candidates to give suggestions to teachers about improving the behaviour of naughty students and about how to make school environment healthy for everyone.

In better responses for Question 3a the candidates:

- mentioned at least three suggestions to control / improve the behaviour of naughty / problematic students. Most of the better responses categorized different types of naughty students (rude, disinterested, intelligent but funny) and enumerated doable tips for teachers to control such cases. Others simply enumerated useful tips that could be applicable to all naughty students ;
- used appropriate organization in the essay, information was divided into paragraphs;
- used clear and lucid language which was relevant to the prompt;
- used appropriate tenses and subject-verb agreement;
- used punctuation marks appropriately.

In average responses for Question 3 a, the candidates:

- mentioned situation of teachers being troubled and frightened by the naughty students and elaborated on how it should be tackled. However, the ideas lacked diversity and were merely catering to obvious measures like ‘talking to parents’ and ‘giving detentions’; hence the average scorers failed to present more than two useful long term tips / strategies like ‘involving the problematic students in group work with the responsible students’ etc ;
- lacked organizational skills: information was randomly presented;
- used appropriate sentence structure with some errors.
- used punctuation marks appropriately.

In weaker responses for Question 3 a, the candidates:

- examples of problematic behaviour were mentioned without any tips for the teachers. Such candidates totally missed the focus of the question. Close reading strategies in classrooms can help such students.
- wrote less than one page (hence left out many important points as stated above), which could not suffice with the requirement of the question.

- lacked focus, information was incomplete and did not meet the requirement of the prompt.

Part b: The first step in choosing a career path after school is to know yourself, your interests and preferences. Describe how you approach your upcoming life in college, the career path and subjects you want to pursue. Also elaborate on why you think you will be good at your chosen path.

The prompt required the candidates to elaborate on their career plans and what subjects they want to pursue and reasons for that.

In better responses for question 3 b, the candidates:

- presented their career choice along with reasons for choosing that particular career. Such responses were focused and clear on a certain area. Some of them also presented an alternative career path for themselves;
- presented examples and arguments from real-life situations (personal or observations)
- used cohesive markers for achieving coherence;
- organized the information in paragraphs with a clear introduction, body and conclusion;
- used appropriate tenses, subject-verb agreement;
- used punctuations where required;
- used attractive adjectives to describe teenage life.

In average responses for question 3 b, the candidates:

- presented their career plans and reasons for choosing that career. However, in most of the responses only one reason was given for the choice. It would have been more competitive if at least two reasons (or more) were cited for this question;
- used effective adjectives to describe their choice;
- presented appropriate structure of an essay;
- used appropriate tenses and language structures.

In weaker responses for question 3c, the candidates:

- demonstrated lack of knowledge of sentence structures: tenses and subject-verb agreement;
- wrote many run on sentences without coherence.

Part c: Due to lengthy courses, your school administration often accommodates your sports periods / time for studies of your course subjects. You really want to give some time to sports and extra-curricular activities. Describe why do you think it is important to

allocate some time for sports and other activities besides studies. Give reasons for your answer.

This question referred to a common situation in schools where sports' periods are usually accommodated for extra classes of various subjects to complete the course. Students were asked to argue against it by elaborating the importance of extra-curricular activities / sports.

In better responses for question 3 c, the candidates:

- referred to the relevant situation and elaborated on how they have been deprived of many sports periods ;
- elaborated at least three different points about the importance of extra-curricular activities and sports;
- mentioned clearly how sports are beneficial;
- used appropriate language structures: tenses and subject-verb agreement;
- used relevant vocabulary: adjectives or adverbs describing the situation;
- organized the information in paragraphs with a clear introduction, body and conclusion;

In average responses for question 3 c, the candidates:

- described the importance of sports but did not mention about any other extra-curricular activity. They did not have an effective introduction which refers back to the past events where school has shown a preference for studies against sports /other activities repeatedly. ;
- used appropriate tenses and subject-verb agreement;
- described the feelings at experiencing the situation in detail;
- organized the information in paragraphs: however, the introduction was too long and out of proportion.

In weaker responses for question 3 c, the candidates:

- mentioned the importance of sports (usually one point) but failed to elaborate it. They also did not refer to the context where sports periods have been compromised. ;
- were unaware of appropriate language structures;
- made numerous spelling mistakes.

