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Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination
English Language Practice Papers
Students' Performance from the Research Study

The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) collected about 2,800 students' scripts of the English Language Practice papers from 20 schools for the Research Study. Seminars will be held for school teachers on 21, 23 and 27 February explaining the marking guidelines for the Practice papers as well as the general performance and common mistakes made by the students in order to assist teachers to help their students better prepare for the HKDSE Examination. It is estimated that about 1,350 teachers will attend the seminars.

There are 4 papers in the English Language public examination:

- Paper 1: Reading (20%)
- Paper 2: Writing (25%)
- Paper 3: Listening and Integrated Skills (30%)
- Paper 4: Speaking (10%)
(School-based Assessment: 15%)

* The graded approach is adopted in Papers 1 and 3 in order to cater for the wide range of abilities among the HKDSE candidates. Candidates have to choose to answer either the easier Part B1 or the more difficult Part B2. Candidates attempting Part B2 will be able to attain the full range of possible levels, while Level 4 will be the highest level attainable by candidates attempting Part B1.

Paper 1 : Reading

The percentage of candidates attempting the different parts is as follows:

- Part A: Compulsory
- Part B1: 50%
- Part B2: 50%

We found that candidates handled the multiple-choice questions in Part A better than those in Parts B1 and B2.

This paper tests a range of reading skills outlined in the syllabus, such as identifying main ideas, identifying specific information, inferring ideas and information, skimming, scanning, etc. For B2, candidates will have to demonstrate a higher language proficiency, such as understanding the main *theme* of the text, understanding the relationship of ideas *across paragraphs*, inferring *implicit* ideas and information, deducing the meaning of words in unfamiliar contexts. A range of text-types and genres will be used as reading texts. The passages are generally based on authentic texts, which are modified or abridged if necessary.

Marking: the guiding principle for marking the reading open-ended questions is to make a judgment of whether candidates demonstrate their understanding of the reading passage on their answers.

Advice for candidates

Candidates are advised to decide before the exam which part (B1 or B2) is most suited for them so that on the day of the exam, they won't be faced with the stress of making a big decision. They should also get advice from their teacher. They should consult the descriptors and samples of performance in the standards-referenced reporting (SRR) information package and compare them to their own work before deciding which part to attempt. Given an extended time limit, or indeed on two separate occasions, they could also attempt both Parts B1 and B2 of the Practice Papers and see which one they can handle better.

The time allowed for this paper is 1.5 hours. Candidates should evenly divide their time in completing both parts. In the live exam situation, candidates should not waste time trying to read through both Parts B1 and B2.

Paper 2: Writing

Marking: In the marking guidelines, there are three domains: Content, language and organisation. They carry equal weighting. Candidates should pay attention to all these aspects when attempting this paper.

Part A

Candidates who scored good marks are those who understood the requirements of the question. Candidates were given a guided task and asked to write about 200 words. Most candidates were able to use the information given in the rubrics to complete at least 2 out of the 3 sections of an information poster. The second section, 'The route of the Walk' posed problems for some candidates who did not know what the word 'route' meant, and this affected their performance. Some candidates wrote an essay-type answer which did not fit the text-type, tone and register required for a poster.

Part B

Theme	Percentage of candidates attempting	Performance of candidates in content
Drama	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger candidates addressed the question in a sophisticated way by taking into account <i>the role of director</i> they were supposed to play and giving more comprehensive responses on how the actors and actresses performed, as well as other technical aspects such as props, lighting and sound. More average work tended to lack such a level of detail, often focused on more banal mishaps such as the performers' negative attitudes towards rehearsing, their being rude to each other, or their refusal to

		<p>co-operate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Weaker candidates did not seem to understand the question and produced <i>irrelevant</i> responses such as what happened to them on their way to the rehearsal venue and how drama could help improve one's language proficiency
Short stories	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Apart from relating what the authors at the Hong Kong Book Fair said about what made a good short story with sound, feasible criteria (e.g. the presentation of a theme or an experience that the reader could identify with, the effective use of techniques such as characterization and plot twists), they also explained why the event was so interesting as well as what could be learnt from it. ● The average answers tended to focus more on the author's perceptions and less on the event's appeal. ● The yardsticks that weaker candidates cited for gauging the effectiveness of a short story were often flimsy and less convincing, e.g. a good short story has to be funny, it has to be short, it needs to have a beginning, a middle and an end.
Poems & songs	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The letters to the editor which candidates produced were mostly mediocre in quality. ● Some made a few relevant points in defending the use of foul language in songs but they failed to substantiate these ideas with specific examples or details. ● In the work of some weaker candidates, foul language and informal language were treated as synonymous.
Popular culture	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quite a number of candidates did not address the question adequately as they seemed to have a problem understanding the term 'reality TV show'. They mistook it to mean the same as television show in general and this greatly detracted from the overall effect of their writing. ● The better candidates demonstrated some awareness of the features of reality TV, made largely considered plans as to what type of show would be appropriate, discussed the rationale behind them and explained how to make the first episode appealing to students.
Sports comm.	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This was a question that elicited a number of effective responses. ● The stronger candidates argued with conviction for the need to retain the subject of P.E. in the curriculum by providing a range of valid reasons

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The weaker candidates also had some fair points about the subject.
Debating	12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overall, candidates clearly presented their stance on whether 'Power is the best source of energy for the future' ● The majority did not discuss their perspective in depth. ● Little effort was made in developing views into a convincing argument with appropriate supporting details or examples. ● The impressive responses demonstrated a firm grasp of the topic and the critical ability to manipulate details to bear on the question.
Workplace English	30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Candidates were in general able to address the requirements of the question competently. ● The stronger responses showed familiarity with the topic and offered a variety of suggestions on how to prepare for the job interview as well as how to make a good impression during the group interview and steer it to one's advantage. ● Some of the weaker responses, however, overlooked a key aspect of the question, i.e. that the friend is going for a <u>group</u> interview, and thus produced advice that was more general and pertinent to individual job interviews.
Social issues	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The richer responses approached the topic from not only a local point of view but also a global perspective. ● The insubstantial responses, however, consisted of little more than cursory discussion combined with lists of entertainment and leisure activities for young people in Hong Kong. ● Weaker candidates missed the question by discussing the joys of being a teenager in general, the problems confronting young people in the 21st century, and how they should prepare themselves for employment.

Advice for candidates

Candidates should pay attention to the skills assessed, rather than spending time memorising stock phrases. They should pay attention to the assessment guidelines in the SRR Information Package. They should read the questions carefully so that they can meet all the requirements of the questions. All writing questions aim at testing candidates' writing skills, not the content of the elective modules.

Candidates have two hours for two writing tasks: about 200 words for Part A (which carries 10% of the subject total) and 400 words for Part B (worth 15% of the subject total). They should allocate

some time to reading the questions, and plan and proofread their work. As candidates are advised to write about 400 words for Part B, they are advised to allocate more time for this Part.

Candidates are advised:

- to read more and increase their exposure to authentic texts and genres
- to learn vocabulary in context and familiarise themselves with the different meanings of words
- to master basic sentence structure, and increase the range of structures available to them
- to spend adequate time planning and proofreading their work
- to read the questions carefully and avoid misinterpreting the questions
- to expand on their ideas with examples and supporting details
- to avoid using their real names when answering questions. Unless otherwise specified, an alias such as 'Chris Wong', 'Mary', 'Peter' etc. should be used.
- to avoid inserting prepared sentences, paragraphs and stock phrases. Memorised paragraphs / essays will be disregarded and not awarded any marks. Zero marks will be given to totally memorised essays.
- to avoid wasting time counting the number of words written. As a general guide, + or – 10% is acceptable (so between 360 to 440 for 'about 400 words'). Quality is more important than quantity. Markers won't count the number of words written.

Candidates who write significantly LESS than the suggested number of words will inevitably fall short of fulfilling the task requirements and are unlikely to display a sufficiently wide range of language. Candidates who write significantly MORE than the suggested number of words may not have time to complete both tasks satisfactorily or sufficiently plan or proofread their writing.

Paper 3: Listening & Integrated Skills

The percentage of candidates attempting the different parts is as follows:

- Part A: compulsory
- Part B1: 47%
- Part B2: 53%

Part A

- Four tasks
- Generally from less to more challenging: Task 1 generally pitched at Levels 1 and 2; Task 4 generally pitched at Levels 4 and 5

Parts B1 and B2

The tasks in Parts B1 and B2 may be similar in terms of format. They both require candidates to understand the situation in which they are placed and they both require candidates to create their own texts. They will also be judged on similar criteria, such as including the relevant content, their grammatical accuracy, adapting materials from the Data File, how appropriate the text is to the situation, etc.

They differ in various ways. The tasks in B2 will generally be more demanding in terms of the reading materials in the Data File and in the type of tasks they are required to do. In Part B1 candidates were asked to complete an Incident Report Form whereas Task 8 (the equivalent task in Part B2) was to write a letter of reprimand to a manager. Task 8 is obviously more demanding in that candidates have to create their own text; have to show a much more sophisticated control of language; and demonstrate an ability to phrase the text appropriately.

Tasks in B2 may also be more demanding in terms of what candidates are expected to do with the Data File materials. For example Task 10 in Part B2 included the interpretation and summarising of information from the Data File rather than simply relaying information.

Performance in Part A showed a very wide range of candidates' abilities. The paper was designed to cater for lower level candidates in Task 1 and to discriminate between higher level candidates in Task 4. Candidates generally did better in items near the beginning of Part A than near the end. This was to be expected.

In Part B1, as expected candidates did better in Task 5 than Tasks 6 and 7 as the demands of this task were lower, being the completion of an incident form as opposed to writing a complete text. However, there were a wide range of scores awarded in all three tasks.

In Part B2, Tasks 8 and 9 proved to be of approximately the same difficulty with Task 10, which was designed to be the most demanding task of all proving to be the most difficult. Again there was a range of candidate's performances, with some candidates approaching full marks on each of the tasks.

Advice for candidates

In Part A, candidates should listen carefully to the instructions on the recording. Candidates will be given some time before Part A begins to look at all tasks. Candidates can make good use of this time by:

- Reading the situation and thinking about who the speakers are and their roles in the recording;
- Looking at the theme of each task and thinking about the type of vocabulary that may appear in the recording;
- Looking at individual questions and trying to predict the type of answers that will appear;
- Thinking about what they know about the subject from their experience of the world.

In Part B the candidates should also make use of the time given before the recording to familiarise themselves with the situation and the Data File. To do so they should ask themselves such questions as:

- Who am I and what is my role?
- What is the situation?

- What tasks am I being asked to do?
- What kind of information should I include in my texts?
- Where in the Data File or the recording am I likely to find such information?

To prepare for listening to the recording, candidates should look at the note sheet and ask themselves:

- What type of information is likely to appear under each heading?
- How is this information relevant to each task?

When they start writing their text candidates should ask themselves:

- Who is the intended audience of the text?
- Will this affect the type of information I am to include?
- Will it affect the style of language that I should use?
- How should I organise what I have to write?
- Is what I've written understandable for someone who has not read the Data File?

Candidates should note that the Language mark includes two aspects: 1. Data File Manipulation. A good candidate is expected to be able to take certain phrases from the Data File and make necessary changes in grammar, register, etc. so that it fits into their text. Candidates who simply copy large chunks from the Data File and ignore issues relating to style and grammar will receive a low score in this aspect.

The second aspect in the Language mark is the candidate's own language. Obviously if the candidate copies almost everything from the Data File the marker will not be able to award many marks here as there will be little or no language produced by the candidate to make any sort of judgment. So the candidates should take the opportunity, just as in the writing paper, to demonstrate the level of English that they have.

Candidates should also pay particular attention to the Appropriacy mark. To do this they should think about the relationship that they the writer have with who's going to read it and the effect that they want to create with their text. For example, in Task 8 it was important to be reasonably formal and let the manager know that you were unhappy. However, the candidate was in a work situation and so would still want to maintain a cordial working relationship with the manager. Many candidates' emails were simply rude or so abrupt that it would have caused offence.

In Tasks 6 and 9, candidates were expected to make the event they were describing interesting and appealing to their readers. Simply repeating factual information from the Data File was not enough in this case to 'sell' the event. They were expected to do more to encourage the reader attend and to do this throughout the text.

Candidates should divide up the time that they have based on how demanding they think the tasks

are. A word guide will normally be provided in the instructions to help them judge this.

Paper 4: Speaking

Advice for Candidates

Before the examination

- Candidates are advised to go through the assessment guidelines carefully to see the requirements for each level in each of the four domains
- They should be familiar with the exam logistics and bring appropriate documents and stationery needed for the exam and go to the exam centre they are assigned to on time

What to do during the examination

- During preparation time, they should read the reading input and the questions carefully.
- When taking notes, they should adopt appropriate note-taking strategies.
- **Speak up:** if the examiners or other candidates cannot hear you, you will not receive good marks, regardless of how fluent or accurate your English is or how well-organized your thoughts are.
- **Be confident:** show the examiners what you know and how well you can express yourself in English.
- **Listen to your fellow candidates:** you should pay particular attention to the other candidates during the group interaction, as you are expected to respond to and interact with them, and not just to express your own isolated ideas. If your ideas are irrelevant to the ongoing interaction, you will not receive good marks.
- **Speak naturally:** use of features of speech like hesitations and short pauses is quite normal in spoken English. However, you should avoid overuse of hesitations, very long pauses or silences. You should be careful not to make too frequent use of particular phrases which are largely without meaning, such as 'you know', 'et cetera', 'I guess', or 'O.K.', which can be very distracting and irritating to listeners (and to the examiners!).
- **Ask for repetition or clarification:** if you do not understand something that a group member has said or a question that the examiner has asked, you may politely ask for a repetition or an explanation. Asking for repetition or clarification will not be regarded as a weakness, but rather as a normal strategy in oral communication. If you can ask appropriately, this will be taken as evidence of your ability to communicate successfully in English.

In collaboration with RTHK, relevant subject managers also discussed the assessment standards, overall performance of candidates and common mistakes made by candidates in the practice papers on Chinese Language, English Language and Liberal Studies in a special radio programme. The episode on English Language will be aired at 10:00pm to 10:30pm on 24 Feb 2012.

The practice papers and provisional marking schemes for the 2012 HKDSE are also available at the HKEAA webpage: www.hkeaa.edu.hk/tc/hkdse/Practice_Papers/ .