

Frequently Asked Questions - IGCSE First Language English (0500)

Are there any changes to the syllabus?

There are no changes in 2003 and 2004.

Changes are being introduced to the scheme of assessment in 2005. These are advised in detail in the syllabus booklet for 2005. A set of specimen papers illustrating the changes is also available from CIE. Teachers must consult these documents for full details.

Are the 2005 changes drastic and will they mean I have to plan my course in a radically different way?

No. There are no major changes to task types and skills that IGCSE First Language has always assessed, but you will need to be aware of adjustments to:

- the layout and wording of Assessment Objectives
- the duration and numbers of tasks on question papers
- the weighting of components
- coursework portfolio requirements (if you are doing this option)
- oral tests (if you are doing this option)

Core/Extended tiering and the availability of different combinations of components remain unchanged.

Changes have been made to the duration and weighting of all components, and to the numbers of tasks within the written components. But in effect the balance of Reading and Writing assessment overall remains the same as before: the directed writing section from Papers 1 / 2 is now moved to Paper 3; Centres taking the coursework alternative will now use one of the assignments to assess reading as well as writing. Adjustments to the titles of the different components have been made to reflect this.

If you are doing coursework you will need to think about assessment of reading in one of the assignments; that is one area where it might be important to review the nature of the course.

Can you give me a quick overview of the changes in 2005?

The key changes are summarised below:

component	exams in 2003 and 2004	exam in May/June 2005 and thereafter
1 (core)	Reading & Directed Writing 60% 2 hours Questions relating to 2 text passages	Reading Passage 50% 1 hour 45 mins Questions relating to 1 text passage
2 (extended)	Reading & Directed Writing 60% 2 hours 15 mins	Reading Passages 50% 2 hours

3	<p>questions relating to 2 text passages plus directed writing task based on 1 or more short text passages</p> <p>Continuous Writing</p> <p>40%</p> <p>1 hour 15 mins</p> <p>1 composition</p>	<p>Questions relating to 2 text passages</p> <p>Directed Writing & Composition</p> <p>50%</p> <p>2 hours</p> <p>1 directed writing task based on 1 or more short text passages plus 1 composition</p>
4	<p>Continuous Writing Coursework</p> <p>40%</p> <p>3 assignments</p>	<p>Coursework Portfolio</p> <p>50%</p> <p>3 assignments: 1 of these now assesses both reading and writing</p>

The three other key changes are:

- Grade criteria for assessing coursework portfolio assignments and optional orals have been revised, and are printed in the syllabus booklet.
- Role Play cards will no longer issued by CIE as part of the optional oral component 5. Instead the oral will involve an individual task (e.g. a presentation or talk by the candidate on a topic of her/his own choice) followed by a discussion with the teacher.
- Introduction of Reading Objective (R4) 'Understand how writers achieve effects'. Consulting the mark scheme for Question 1(i) in Specimen Paper 1 and Question 2 in Specimen Paper 2 will clarify how this objective is assessed in these papers.

Does this mean that textbooks we are using now will be redundant for candidates taking the exam in 2005?

No. You may continue to use existing textbooks and support materials, but should take care to check references to length of papers and numbers of tasks. (Publishers of endorsed texts are aware of the changes, and are updating materials to reflect them.)

What about 're-take' candidates in 2005?

Candidates re-sitting the exam in June or November 2005 will take the new style of question paper(s). They will be able to carry forward a component 4 coursework mark from June or November 2004 without teachers needing to reassess the coursework. (The carried forward coursework mark will be scaled automatically so that it fits in with the new component weightings in 2005.)

What guidance is there for the revised coursework component?

CIE has produced a new *Coursework Training Handbook* for the syllabus. This supersedes the 'Distance Training Pack' and gives advice about course requirements and planning, and the different types of assignment. It includes examples of marked work. There is also a section of sample portfolios for you to assess if you are seeking accreditation to conduct internal assessment.

I'm accredited to conduct internal assessment (coursework) for the syllabus at the moment; do I need to re-apply for accreditation for the 'new' syllabus?

No – your accreditation is still valid. But you may like to get hold of the Coursework Training Handbook in any case because of its advice. (The fee for accreditation processing is separate to the cost of the booklet – you could buy that without planning to seek further accreditation.)

What resources are available to support the syllabus?

The following are available from CIE Publications:

- _ Coursework Training Handbook
- _ Standards Booklet
- _ Past Papers
- _ Mark Schemes
- _ Principal Examiner Reports

See also CIE's list of recommended textbooks for First Language English.

What set texts are there for the syllabus?

There aren't any! IGCSE First Language doesn't have questions on set texts. (This need not preclude using literary material as stimulus for coursework, or in classroom preparation for the Reading Paper, of course. Candidates benefit from exposure to a variety of types of writing, and literary texts have a part to play in First Language.)

What effect does the Speaking and Listening component have on the "main" grade?

Are my candidates at a disadvantage if they don't take it?

Speaking and Listening is optional, and is separately endorsed (on a scale of 1(High) to 5 (Low)). In other words, the "main" grade is not affected by it in any way.

HELP! I have to teach the syllabus from scratch to my candidates in one year (not two years), AND I have to combine it with a course for 0486 IGCSE Literature.

Although most of our Centres have a two-year teaching timetable for the syllabus, you should rest assured that you are not alone.

First of all, time constraints mean that you will almost certainly need to avoid coursework or speaking/listening. In other words, under the circumstances it probably makes best sense to offer a scheme as follows: 0500 First Language: Paper 1 / 2 PLUS Paper 3. 0486 Literature: Paper 1 AND Paper 3. (Or alternatively 4 texts by taking 0486/04).

One possible overview timetable for a three term year might then be as follows:

Term 1: Literature prose text to be read in sections at home with up to two periods of work per week (supported by work/information sheets) and one period per week covering a poem from Literature poems text at a time. One piece of exam length writing per week, in turn practising text-based questions, essay questions, and empathetic questions, with occasional practice for Language Paper 3 (Composition). Up to two periods per week using paired language texts to practice (a) summary techniques, concision and focused writing and (b) selection of main ideas and developing them in other contexts.

Term 2: Literature drama text to be studied as far as possible in class with simple movement (and use of a video if possible). Study for character, theme, language, humour and dramatic effect (i.e. anything that is likely to involve the audience's attention). Use one period per week to cover the rest of the poems. Continue to set examination style writing as needed. In Language ensure that you have

covered principles of writing in the different styles offered in Paper 3, and in class give practice in the types of question set in Part 2 of the Reading Paper (including evaluation of reading material).
Term 3: Revision of literature texts and practice for Literature Paper 3 (Unseen), making it clear that the techniques necessary for success are the same as those required for text based questions in the main paper. Link the need to read methodically for gist and for detail in this paper, and in Papers 1 or 2 in Language. Practice of papers/examinations in examination conditions. Instruction in exam procedure: rubric, focus, plans, timing.

My students are taking coursework options in both IGCSE First Language and Literature. Can a Literature essay be used in both the Literature portfolio and the Language coursework?

Yes. But a 'straightforward' literary critical essay seldom makes the best assignment for a Language portfolio. NB *It needs to be assessed twice*: once against Language criteria and once against Literature criteria. It does not inevitably follow that an assignment marked high for Language will be at the same level for Literature (and vice versa). If you are submitting a folder with an 'overlapping' essay, you will need to keep the original in the Literature folder, then put a photocopy of it in the Language folder. You will then have to re-mark the photocopied essay. A note for the Moderator should be clipped to the latter to explain that the original copy of the work can be found in the Literature. This should happen even if the folder is not being included in the external moderation sample, just in case it is subsequently required for any purpose.

Can students take dictionaries into the examination?

Not for 0500 First Language.

A new candidate is joining my class who has arrived with a partially complete First Language coursework folder. However, we don't do the coursework option at my Centre. Can the candidate still enter for coursework? What should I do?

You need to bear in mind that if the candidate is entered at your Centre (and entered for the coursework option) you (or a colleague in your department) will be responsible for authenticating and moderating the work. If you have not received accreditation to assess coursework this could be a problem, and you will need to write to CIE to request a Coursework Handbook, or to seek exemption on the basis of prior relevant experience. Much will probably depend on which stage of the course the student has reached (is the coursework portfolio complete or would you need to supervise the production of further work?) and its standard. You should consider whether the candidate might actually be better served by shifting to the Continuous Writing Paper instead.

Is the issue of American/Australian (etc) 'vs.' British English spelling a problem in IGCSE 0500? I have candidates in my class from different usage backgrounds!

No. Examiners are used to receiving answers in both BrE and Am/AusE (etc). What is important is that candidates aim at consistency. In extended writing, for example, candidates should not be using different spellings for the same word (e.g. using 'flavor' and 'flavour' in the same piece).