

English Chief Examiner's Report
- English Examination -
- Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination into Form 1 - 2001

As in previous examinations, the board of examiners for the Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination English paper targeted the candidate's literacy: the candidate's ability to read and understand a set text as well as the individual's ability to write and give clear and correct answers.

The Specification Grid focused on specific aspects of language learning reflected in the objectives and standards set by the syllabus.

Section I and Section II, where language accuracy and comprehension were targeted, carried 55% of the marks in the Low and Medium levels of difficulty and only 15% of the marks were concentrated in the High level bracket. Section III, which carried the remaining 30% of the marks, had varied composition tasks that addressed the candidate's capability of writing as well as creative potential. The level attained in this section depended on each individual candidate's skill in tackling the task.

In spite of some initial misgivings from immediate feedback after the examination, the paper was judged to be well balanced and candidates who could use the language confidently did well. The average candidates obtained a pass mark while weaker candidates, although working all/or most parts of the set tasks, failed to make the grade.

There was a marked overall improvement with some candidates showing confident language usage and interesting writing, while others showed obvious lack of confidence. This was evident through incorrect sentence structures, lack of idiom and a high number of grammatical and linguistic errors.

Section I Language

The table below gives an overall view of this section of the paper.

Questions	Examiners' Comments
Numbers 1 to 10	<p>As shown in the Specification Grid, the exercise tested the child's ability to use various parts of speech, idiom, as well as a variety of essential vocabulary and grammar items within a given context. It had four items in the low ability bracket, four items at medium level and two items at a high level of difficulty.</p> <p>It was a valid task and most of the questions were within the candidates' capabilities except for questions 4, 5 and 7 that were demanding.</p>

Questions	Examiners' Comments
Numbers 11 to 20	<p>The exercise tested the candidate's ability to read and understand as well as use linking words "Conjunctions and Relative Pronouns" by matching correctly parts of the given sentences.</p> <p>It was a balanced exercise with three items at a low level of difficulty, five at a medium level and two at a high level of difficulty.</p> <p>The response was average for, although many candidates seem well trained in reading and matching skills, there was a number of low achievers who failed to benefit from this exercise.</p>
Numbers 21 to 35	<p>The "cloze" task tested the candidate's ability at logical sequencing and identifying specific vocabulary items linked to the overall context. Reading and understanding played an appropriate part as well as transcribing items correctly.</p> <p>There were seven items in the low ability bracket, five in the medium band and three items targeting the high ability candidate.</p> <p>It was a valid exercise for the age group, but its weighting was high and quite a number of the examiners expressed this in their feedback sheets.</p> <p>There was a number of candidates who failed in sequencing and did not always use the word help correctly. There were transcription errors of spelling besides failure to use words according to punctuation; evident when candidates failed to capitalise the letter after a full stop, or used a capital letter haphazardly. These are important factors in writing accurately and they were taken into consideration while marking.</p> <p>The words given to help understanding made this a somewhat easy task for all the candidates who have a fairly average ability at reading. Markers commented that candidates who showed an obvious weakness in their reading skill still managed to obtain some marks through guessing.</p>
Numbers 36 to 40	<p>This was a valid exercise targeting a specific grammar item: question-tag structures. The distribution of difficulty was well balanced with three items at a low, one at a medium and one at a high level of difficulty.</p> <p>The weighting could have been higher so as to allow markers more freedom in assessing the structures targeted.</p> <p>Quite surprisingly only those candidates who did well in the rest of the paper managed to get full marks. The average and below average candidates only managed to obtain from 20% to 60% of the marks available. It is evident that candidates need more oracy: speaking and listening should be more frequent so</p>

Questions**Examiners' Comments**

as to build up on fluency.

Numbers 41 to 50

The exercise targeted preposition usage within a context and was a valid task for the candidates at this age group. The level of difficulty was well balanced, having four items at a low level, four at a medium level and two at a high level.

Again, the weighting could have been higher so as to allow markers more freedom in assessing the structures targeted for many markers expressed some frustration at not giving a mark because of a spelling error.

Even in this exercise only those candidates who did well in the rest of the paper managed to get full marks. The average and below average candidates only managed a limited percentage of the marks available. It is evident that some candidates lack fluency.

Section II Comprehension

The passage was perhaps slightly inferential in content but the text level was valid and targeted a wide range of students. It was adapted so as to make it as student friendly as possible without spoiling the author's hallmark. Average and below average students did not find it difficult to read and understand as evidenced from their attempting more than 50% of the questions set, with a good number responding positively.

The questions were set as planned in the Specification Grid. Four of the questions partly or wholly targeted the low ability students and carried eight marks. Similarly, another eight questions targeted the medium level students and carried fourteen marks. Another four of the questions, partly or wholly, targeted the high ability candidates and carried eight marks. The relevant information to answer all questions was available in the text.

Some examiners commented that the passage could have put off those candidates not that conversant with the content and reading, but most agreed it was interesting and suitable for the candidates' age group. While the majority of the markers remarked that the questions were well graded and suitable for such an examination, one remarked that Questions 56 and 58 might have confused some candidates. On the whole, the examiners noted that there was some improvement in the candidates' performance, but they also remarked that there is still a lack of confidence in sentence structures, tense usage and spelling, and irrelevant copying from the text. The students need to become more skilled in understanding a question properly: identifying and using the information from the text (not copying it) and using their own words in complete sentences when answering the set question.

The table below gives an overall view of this section of the paper.

Questions	Examiners' Comments
Numbers 51	<p>A multiple choice question testing the candidate's ability to locate specific information as well as identify main ideas and having a medium level of difficulty.</p> <p>Most of the candidates answered correctly.</p>
Number 52 a, b, c, d, e.	<p>True or False statements eliciting direct or inferential information. The level of difficulty was low for "a" and "b", medium for "c" and high for "d" and "e".</p> <p>Most of the candidates responded positively to more than 50% of the set statements.</p>
Number 53	<p>An open-ended question asking for specific information and having a low level of difficulty.</p> <p>A good number of the candidates answered fairly correctly.</p>
Number 54	<p>An open-ended question asking for specific and partly inferential information, and having a medium level of difficulty.</p> <p>Most of the candidates answered the question, but inaccurate sentence structures and/or tense usage distorted communication for many.</p>
Number 55	<p>An open-ended question asking for specific information as well as deducing meaning from context. It had a medium level of difficulty.</p> <p>A good number of candidates attempted the question. Some answered correctly showing ability in understanding the question. Others, having failed to understand the set question properly, used improper sentence structures, and/or irrelevant or quoted information.</p>
Number 56	<p>An open-ended question asking for specific and inferential information with a high level of difficulty.</p> <p>Quite a good number of candidates attempted the question, but irrelevant information was the stumbling block in a number of answers.</p>
Number 57	<p>An open-ended task asking for specific and slightly inferential information with a medium level of difficulty.</p> <p>A fair number of the candidates answered the question.</p>

Questions	Examiners' Comments
Number 58	<p>Incorrect sentence structures and/or tense usage together with irrelevant information spoilt communication for many.</p> <p>An open-ended question asking for specific and inferential information with a medium level of difficulty.</p> <p>There was a good number of valid responses, but there were also many incorrect answers with irrelevant information too.</p>
Number 59	<p>A vocabulary related question with a low level of difficulty.</p> <p>A limited number managed to identify most of the words. Many failed to do so.</p>
Number 60	<p>A vocabulary related question with a low to high level of difficulty.</p> <p>A limited number managed to use the correct vocabulary. Some candidates used wrong tenses, or expression. A good number still find this task a bit difficult, if not beyond them.</p>
Number 61	<p>An open-ended task asking for specific and slightly inferential information with a medium level of difficulty.</p> <p>Quite a good number of candidates attempted the task, but irrelevant information was evident in the answers.</p>
Number 62	<p>An open-ended question asking for specific and slightly inferential information with a high level of difficulty.</p> <p>Quite a good number of candidates attempted the question, but short form answers or irrelevant information made many lose marks.</p> <p>Perhaps more writing space would have guided candidates to use full sentences in this question.</p>

Section III Composition

The titles set targeted a wide spectrum of candidates and ranged from low, to medium and to high levels of difficulty; depending on the candidate's ability. The compositions had help prompts to stimulate the children to react and think about their choice, but at the same time children were free to express themselves creatively.

Although there was evidence of improvement in some of the writing, with some markers stating that there were compositions that were a pleasure to read, there was also evidence of poor levels in the basic use of language in its written form. Spelling errors, incorrect tense usage, lack of

idiom, limited vocabulary, inaccurate sentence structures as well as indecipherable handwriting, brought about loss of marks.

Furthermore, it was noted that some candidates still write at length and are unaware that the probability of errors and irrelevance multiplies. Once again it was noted that there are candidates who deviate from the subject of the set title, either when they try to transpose parts of pre-prepared essays, or because of lack of concentration on the essay titles and prompts. (A case in point being Question 63 where a good number of the candidates evidently wrote about a circus or a visit to San Anton Gardens.)

Future candidates should be made aware of the points raised so as to be more courageous and use their creative inventiveness to improve upon their performance.

The table below gives an overall view of this section of the paper.

Questions	Examiners' Comments
Number 63	This title and perhaps the pictures attracted a wide spectrum of the candidates, but only a limited number managed to write a pleasant essay. The majority who failed in this composition wrote either too sparsely on all the pictures provided showing little inventiveness, and/or had limited vocabulary and/or were unable to keep to a credible or acceptable sequence. A number of the candidates choosing this title seemed to have ignored the prompts given and brought in irrelevant material. It was also evident, in some cases, that the candidates were making use of memorised writing that was not so relevant to the picture sequence in question.
Number 64	Another popular title with the candidates. In spite of some good writing and innovative sequences, the most common obstacle with many was the limited vocabulary and inability to develop a good description of what happened. Many candidates who failed in this composition showed inability to keep to a clear sequence besides their lack of confidence in using the language.
Number 65	Another title chosen by a good number of the candidates. Again there were some good essays with interesting sequences. The limited vocabulary and inability to develop a good sequenced description of how it all ended was the most common obstacle with many of the less able students.
Number 66	One of the least popular of the five titles set. The candidates showed strongly contrasting abilities: some of the more gifted students produced very creative, imaginative writing and made very pleasant and interesting reading; others failed badly.

An unexpected number of the students choosing the essay showed failure at understanding the word “monument”.

Number 67

Another not so popular title. Some of the candidates produced very creative and imaginative writing and made very pleasant and interesting reading; others failed badly.

The limited vocabulary and inability to develop a good sequenced description of how it all ended were the most common obstacles, with the less able students.