



THE O/L ENGLISH GRADE LADDER



BOOK 1

The Recognition Floor

Thirty-five marks you can take without writing a sentence

Below-S → Safe S (35 marks)

For the student scoring 10–30 who has been told they "cannot do English"

G.C.E. (O/L) English Language · Subject 31

Idasara Academy



How to Use This Book

Seven days. Days 1 to 6 take **fifteen to twenty minutes**. Day 7 is a timed test and needs **forty-five minutes** in one sitting — choose a weekend morning, not a school night.

The three steps, Days 1 to 6

1. **Reading** (about 7 minutes) — a short text. Read it twice.
2. **Writing** (about 8 minutes) — a small job built from what you just read.
3. **Drill** (about 5 minutes) — one real question from a past paper, timed.

Do them in that order. The reading feeds the writing; the writing feeds the drill.

Three rules that never change

- **Write by hand.** The examiner reads your handwriting, so practise with the tool you will use.
- **Never leave a blank.** A blank scores zero, always. A guess scores zero *or more*. Guessing is free, and on this paper it is correct behaviour, not dishonesty.
- **You do not need to understand every word.** You will learn how on Day 4.

What this book does and does not do

It takes you to **35 marks — an Ordinary Pass (S)**. That is what it is built for.

It will not get you an A. That is Books 2, 3 and 4. But nobody reaches an A without first standing safely on 35, and most students who fail have never been shown where 35 actually is.



Your Seven Days

- **Day 1** — The Marks Map: which questions need no writing at all
- **Day 2** — Matching (Tests 1 and 13) — 10 marks
- **Day 3** — Naming What You See (Test 3) — 5 marks
- **Day 4** — Choosing Words Without a Picture (Tests 2 and 4) — 10 marks
- **Day 5** — Read and Choose (Tests 7 and 9) — 10 marks
- **Day 6** — The Notice Formula (Test 6) — 5 marks
- **Day 7** — The Gate



Day 1 — The Marks Map

Today you write almost nothing. Today you find out where the marks live.

The number is 35

The paper is worth **100 marks**. Paper I is 40 marks in one hour. Paper II is 60 marks in two hours.

To pass — to get an **S** — you need **35**.

Not 100. Not 70. **Thirty-five**.

Sixteen questions, six skills

There are sixteen questions, called Tests. That sounds like a lot. But they are only **six kinds of question**, repeated:

- **Matching** — Tests 1 and 13 — **10 marks**
- **Choosing a word from a box** — Tests 2, 3, 4 and 11 — **22 marks**
- **Reading and choosing an answer** — Tests 7 and 9 — **10 marks**
- **Reading and answering** — Tests 5 and 15 — **13 marks**
- **Grammar** — Tests 10 and 12 — **10 marks**
- **Writing something yourself** — Tests 6, 8, 14 and 16 — **35 marks**

Add the first five. **Sixty-five marks do not ask you to write a single sentence of your own.**

READING · Where the Easy Marks Are

The English paper has sixteen questions. Sixty-five of the hundred marks are for reading, matching and choosing. Only thirty-five marks ask you to write your own sentences.

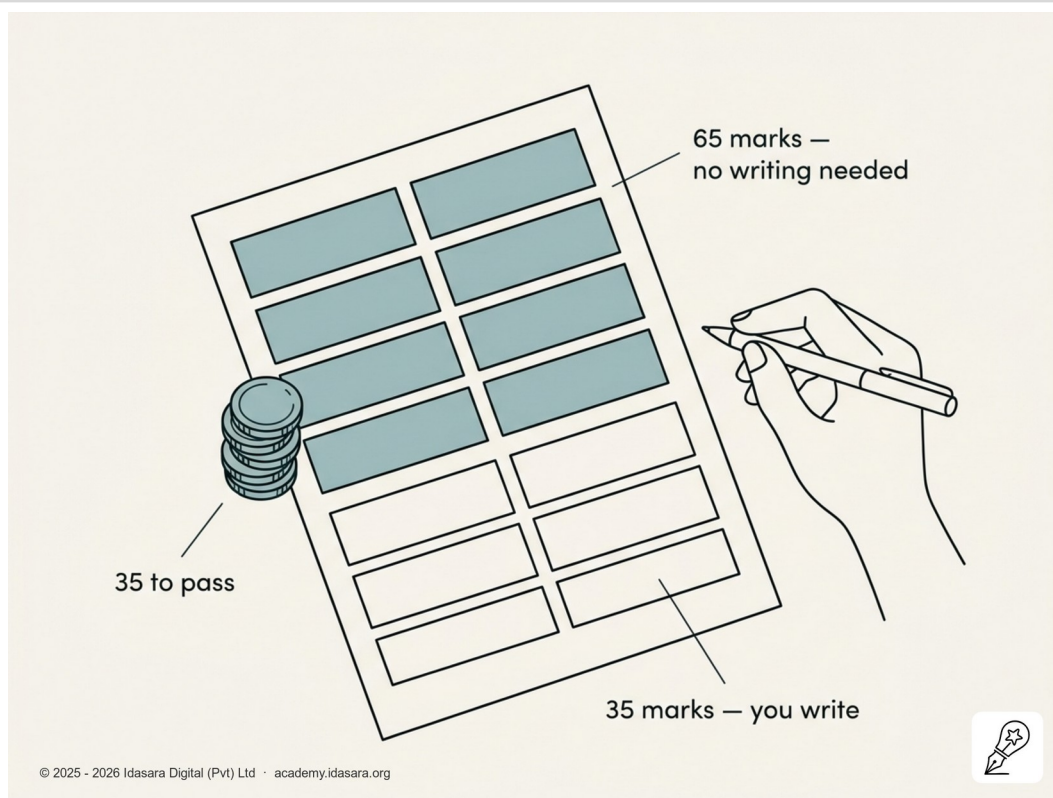
Three kinds of question are the easiest of all.

The first is matching. You are given some pictures and some sentences, and you decide which sentence belongs to which picture. Later in the paper you are given short paragraphs and some headings, and you do the same thing. These two questions are worth ten marks together.

The second is choosing a word from a box. You are given a paragraph with blanks and a box of about eleven words. You write the letter of the correct word in each blank. This happens three times on Paper I. These three questions are worth fifteen marks.

The third is reading and choosing. You read a short text and underline the correct answer from two or three choices. This happens twice. These two questions are worth ten marks.

Ten and fifteen and ten make thirty-five. Thirty-five marks is a pass. None of these questions asks you to write a sentence.



The five questions in this book

Test	What you do	Marks
1	Match pictures to sentences	5
2	Choose words for a text	5
3	Choose words for a picture	5
4	Choose words for a text	5
7	Read and underline the answer	5
9	Read and underline the best word	5
13	Match paragraphs to headings	5

That is **35 marks**, and Day 6 adds a notice worth 5 more.

WRITING ACTIVITY · Your Starting Line

Take a sheet of paper. Write today's date at the top. Then write these two lines and fill them in honestly:

- In my last English test I scored out of 100.
- I need 35 to pass. The gap is marks.

Then copy this sentence exactly, filling in your number:

"Thirty-five marks on this paper do not need me to write anything. I need more marks. I will learn those questions this week."

Keep the sheet. On Day 7 you write your new score underneath it.



PAST-PAPER DRILL · Find the Five · 5 minutes

Open any past paper — 2023, 2024 or 2025. Answer nothing.

Find Tests 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 on Paper I. Write the marks for each in the margin. Then find Tests 9 and 13 on Paper II and do the same.

Add them up. You should get 35.

Look at that number for a moment. It has been sitting on the paper the whole time.



Day 2 — Matching

Tests 1 and 13 · 10 marks · today you win 8

Two questions, one skill

Test 1 gives you six or seven pictures and a list of sentences. You write the letter of the picture that matches each sentence.

Test 13, on Paper II, gives you short paragraphs and a list of headings. You write the letter of the heading that matches each paragraph.

They look different. They are the same job: **read a short piece of text, and find the thing it belongs to.**

What the sentences are actually like

The subject changes every year, so do not memorise topics. In recent papers Test 1 has used:

- **Descriptions of things** — "An instrument for measuring temperature." · "The star that warms the earth."
- **Warning signs** — "Stop! No vehicles are allowed." · "Caution! Elephants are crossing."
- **Instructions for machines** — "Fill with water and add washing powder." · "Collect your cash, card and receipt."

Different topics, identical skill. Each sentence contains **one word that gives it away**: *temperature, star, vehicles, elephants, washing powder, cash.*

The method

1. **Read the sentence and underline the one word that names a thing.** *washing powder.*
2. **Look at the pictures. Find that thing.** Washing machine.
3. **Write the letter. Move on.** Do not read the other sentences first.

For Test 13, the same, with headings: find the word in the paragraph that the heading is about.

READING · Six Machines, Six Jobs

Read each of these and notice the one word that decides it.

A washing machine cleans clothes. You fill it with water and add washing powder. Then you close the door and start it.

A refrigerator keeps food cold. You must keep the door closed, or the food will spoil.

An electric iron makes clothes smooth. You set the heat level properly, because too much heat will burn the cloth.

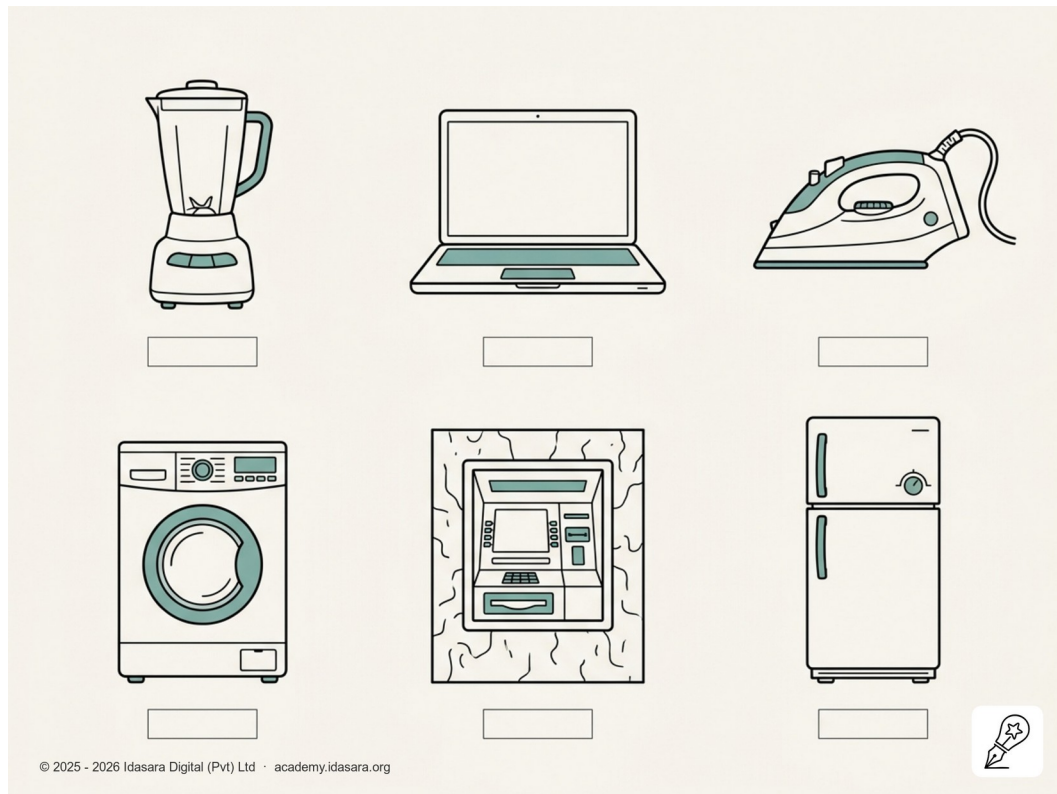
A blender mixes food and makes juice. First you fill the jar with liquid, then you put the lid on tightly.



A cash machine gives you money from your bank. You collect your cash, your card and your receipt before you walk away.

A laptop computer is used for work and study. You should shut down the machine after use.

Six machines. In every sentence there is one word that tells you which machine it is: powder, cold, heat, juice, cash, computer. That word is the answer.



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WRITING ACTIVITY · Find the Giveaway Word

Copy these eight sentences onto your page. Under each one, write the **single word** that tells you what it is about, then write what the thing is.

1. It carries people from one town to another and stops at a halt.
2. You put your letter inside it and the postman collects it.
3. It tells you the time.
4. Farmers use it to cut paddy at harvest.
5. It gives light when the electricity fails.
6. You wear it on your feet when it rains.
7. It holds water and the village uses it in the dry season.
8. It is a book with the meaning of every word.

Example: (1) *halt* → *a bus*.

Then write **three sentences of your own** in the same style, each describing something in your house without naming it. Give them to someone at home and see if they can guess.



PAST-PAPER DRILL · 2024 Paper I Test 1 and Paper II Test 13 · Target 8 / 10

Set a timer for 8 minutes.

For every item: underline the giveaway word first, then look for it. Do not read the whole list before starting.

No blanks. If two look possible, choose the one that shares more words with the text.



Day 3 — Naming What You See

Test 3 · 5 marks · today you win 3.5

The secret of Test 3

Test 3 shows you a picture and a paragraph about that picture. The paragraph has about ten blanks, and below it is a box of eleven words.

Here is what almost nobody knows, and it has been true every year: **nearly every word in that box is the name of something you can see in the picture.**

Look at what the examiners actually used:

- **2023** (a children's park): *branch, book, guitar, distance, seven, drawing, plucking, holding, seated, enjoy, with*
- **2024** (an Independence Day celebration): *gifts, screen, flags, dancers, guests, playground, arm-chair, podium, lines, decorated, open*
- **2025** (a clothing store): *handbag, trolley, ceiling, dolls, customers, pile, clothes, salesman, arrows, smile, mopping*

In 2024, **every single word** is a thing, a person, or a describing word. Not one is grammar.

So Test 3 is not a grammar question. It is a **naming** question. If you can name what is in the picture, you can score it.

The three kinds of word in the box

- **Things and people** — usually seven or eight of the eleven. *branch, flags, podium, trolley, salesman, customers*
- **Actions ending in -ing** — usually one to three. *drawing, plucking, holding, mopping*
- **Describing words** — one or two. *decorated, open, seated*

How to answer it in four minutes

1. **Look at the picture first.** Point at things and name them silently in English. Twenty seconds.
2. **Sort the box.** Write **T** beside each thing or person, **A** beside each *-ing* action, **D** beside each describing word.
3. **Read the paragraph.** At each blank, look at the word just before it. After *a, an, the* → the blank is a **thing**. After *is* or *are* → usually an ***-ing* action**.
4. **Find that thing in the picture.** This is the step people skip. The answer is visible.

READING · Inside the Village Shop

Read this, then count what you met.



The shop is busy in the evening. An old man stands near the counter, holding a cloth bag. Behind the counter a young woman is working. She is the cashier.

Several customers are waiting in a queue. On the left there are wooden shelves, full of carrots, leeks and pumpkins. Two women are choosing vegetables and putting them into baskets.

A shop assistant is selling green leaves to a customer near the door. Above the door hangs a banner. Under a wooden bench, a cat is sleeping. Beside the cashier stand tall glass jars, full of spices. On the counter there is a weighing scale.

Now count. **Things and people:** shop, counter, bag, cashier, customers, queue, shelves, carrots, leeks, pumpkins, baskets, assistant, door, banner, bench, cat, jars, spices, scale. That is nineteen.

Actions ending in -ing: holding, working, waiting, choosing, putting, selling, sleeping. That is seven.

Nineteen things and seven actions. That is a Test 3 word box, hidden inside a story.



WRITING ACTIVITY · Name Ten Things

Part 1 — name ten things. Look around you and write the English name of **ten** things you can see. Just the words, in a list. If you cannot name something, leave it and find another. This is the Test 3 skill in its purest form.

Part 2 — six sentences. Write six sentences, each naming one of your ten things and saying what is happening to it. Use an *-ing* word in each.

Pattern: "The is "

- *The kettle is boiling.*



- *My sister is reading.*
- *The cat is sleeping.*

Part 3 — three fuller sentences. Take any three and add where it is:

- *My mother is standing near the fire.*
- *A boy is waiting beside the gate.*

Ten objects named and nine sentences written. The naming is what Test 3 pays for.

PAST-PAPER DRILL · 2025 Paper I Test 3 · Target 3.5 / 5

Set a timer for 6 minutes.

Order of work, and only this order:

1. Look at the picture. Name things silently. (20 seconds)
2. Sort the box — T, A or D beside each word. (60 seconds)
3. Now read the paragraph and fill the blanks.

Expect most of the box to be T. Mark yourself out of 5.





Day 4 — Choosing Words Without a Picture

Tests 2 and 4 · 10 marks · today you win 7

Same job, no picture

Tests 2 and 4 are word-box questions like Test 3, but with **no picture to help you**. You get a short text — a paragraph, a dialogue, an email, a set of safety tips — with blanks, and a box of words.

Because there is no picture, the words either side of the blank have to do all the work. Learning to use them is today's skill, and it is the skill that carries into Test 11 in Book 2.

The neighbour rule

Look at the word **immediately before** and **immediately after** the blank.

- After **a, an, the** → a **thing** (*the was open*)
- After **is, are, was, were** → an ***-ing* action** or a **describing word**
- After **to** → a **plain verb** (*to the road*)
- Before a thing → a **describing word** (*a road*)
- Between two complete ideas → a **joining word** (*when, because, while, that*)

What the boxes actually contain

Recent Test 2 boxes:

- **2023:** *reach, trip, here, sounds, when, that*
- **2024:** *revise, comfortable, quiet, subject, notes, easy*
- **2025:** *crossing, signals, while, clothes, drivers, right*

Mostly ordinary words, with one or two joining words mixed in. Nothing rare. If a word looks difficult, it is probably not the answer.

READING · Crossing the Road Safely

Read this. It is the kind of text Test 2 uses — simple, practical, full of everyday words.

Every year many people are injured while crossing the road. Most of these accidents can be prevented.

Always cross at a pedestrian crossing if there is one nearby. Wait on the pavement until the traffic signals tell you to walk. Look to your right, then to your left, and then to your right again before you step out.

Never run across the road. Never cross while you are using a mobile phone, because you cannot hear the traffic.

At night, wear light-coloured clothes so that drivers can see you from a distance. If you are walking with small children, hold their hands firmly and keep them on the inside of the pavement.

Remember that drivers cannot always stop quickly. A lorry travelling at speed needs a long distance to stop, even when the driver sees you.



Notice the joining words: *while, until, then, because, so that, even when*. Test 2 usually hides one or two of these among the ordinary words.



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WRITING ACTIVITY · Fill and Explain

Copy this short paragraph and fill the blanks using the box. Then, beside each answer, write the **one word** next to the blank that told you what kind of word was needed.

Box: (a) quiet · (b) revise · (c) notes · (d) because · (e) comfortable · (f) subject

A good place to study should be (1) , so that you can think clearly. Choose a chair that is (2) but not too soft. Keep your (3) on the table in front of you. Start with the (4) you find most difficult, (5) your mind is freshest at the beginning. At the end of every hour, stop and (6) what you have learned.

Example: (1) quiet — the word before is "be", so a describing word is needed.

Then write **two sentences of your own** using *because* and *so that*.

PAST-PAPER DRILL · 2023 and 2025 Paper I, Tests 2 and 4 · Target 7 / 10

Set a timer for 10 minutes for all four questions.

At every blank, cover the box with your hand first. Read the words either side and decide **what kind** of word is needed. Only then look at the box.



Deciding the kind before you look is the whole method. It stops you choosing a word because it "sounds nice".



Day 5 — Read and Choose

Tests 7 and 9 · 10 marks · today you win 7

The examiner is helping you

Test 7 gives you a short text and questions with two or three choices. You underline the right one.

Test 9 gives you a text with words in brackets and asks you to underline the most suitable one.

Here is what nobody tells students: **the question is built from words that are already in the text.**

The answer is not hidden. It sits in a sentence that shares words with the question.

So you do not "understand the whole text and then answer". You **match words, then read one sentence.**

The method for Test 7

1. Underline the important words in the question.
2. Find those same words in the text.
3. Read **only that sentence and the one after it.**
4. Choose.

The method for Test 9

Test 9 is different — you choose between words that all fit the gap grammatically, so you must pick the one that fits the **meaning**.

Read the whole sentence with each option in turn, silently. One will sound wrong. Cross it out. Then decide between the other two by asking which one the rest of the paragraph is talking about.

READING · The Boy Who Found the Box

Pinky was eleven years old. She lived in a small village near Kurunegala. She liked to play behind her grandmother's house, where an old mango tree grew.

One evening, while she was digging under the tree, her stick hit something hard. She dug again. It was a small tin box, brown with rust.

Pinky carried the box to her grandmother. Her hands were shaking. "Open it," said her grandmother, smiling.

Inside there were no coins and no gold. There were seven old photographs and a folded letter. The letter had been written by Pinky's grandfather, many years before he died.

Her grandmother read it quietly and then began to cry, but she was not sad. "I looked for this box for thirty years," she said. "Your grandfather hid it. He always said the best treasure is the one you find with your own hands."

Now watch the matching work.



Question: Where did Pinky find the box? Hunt for *box* — "her stick hit something hard... It was a small tin box". Look just before it: "while she was digging **under the tree**." Answer: under the mango tree.

Question: What was inside the box? Hunt for *inside* — "Inside there were no coins and no gold. There were seven old photographs and a folded letter." Answer: photographs and a letter.

You never needed to understand the ending.



WRITING ACTIVITY · Become the Examiner

Read the passage again. Now write **five questions** about it, as an examiner would.

For each question you must be able to point at the exact sentence holding the answer. Under each question, copy that sentence and underline the words your question and the sentence share.

Use these question words, one each: **Who · Where · What · Why · How old**

This is the most useful exercise in this book. Once you have built five questions yourself, you will never again look at a comprehension question and feel lost — you will see how it was made.

PAST-PAPER DRILL · 2025 Paper I Test 7 and Paper II Test 9 · Target 7 / 10

Set a timer for 9 minutes.

Test 7: underline the question words, find them in the text, read one sentence, choose.



Test 9: read the sentence three times, once with each option. Cross out the one that sounds wrong first.

Never leave a blank.



Day 6 — The Notice Formula

Test 6 · 5 marks · today you write, and today you win 4

The easiest writing on the paper

Test 6 asks for a notice or an announcement — about 40 to 50 words. It has appeared **every single year**: a railway announcement in 2023, a plant-distribution notice in 2024, a library notice in 2025.

Most students score 0 or 1 because they write broken half-sentences and hope. But a notice is not creative writing. It is a **form with four lines**. Only the facts change.

The Notice Chassis — four lines, always the same

1. **The event line** — *A [event] organised by the [group] will be held on [date] at [time] at the [place].*
2. **The audience line** — *All [who] are kindly requested to attend.*
3. **The instruction line** — *Please bring [thing].*
4. **The courtesy line** — *Your kind co-operation is highly appreciated.*

A heading in capitals at the top, your role at the bottom, and it is finished.

The rule that saves you from zero

The official marking scheme says that if your **content** scores 0, you get 0 for everything else as well — even if the English is perfect. Content scores 0 when you write about the wrong thing.

So: **every fact in the question must appear in your notice**. If the question says *dengue*, the word *dengue* must be there. If it gives a date, the date must be there.

Copy the facts across, then wrap them in the four lines.

READING · A Notice on the Board

SHRAMADANA CAMPAIGN

A shramadana campaign organised by the Environmental Society will be held on 15th October at 8.00 a.m. in the school garden.

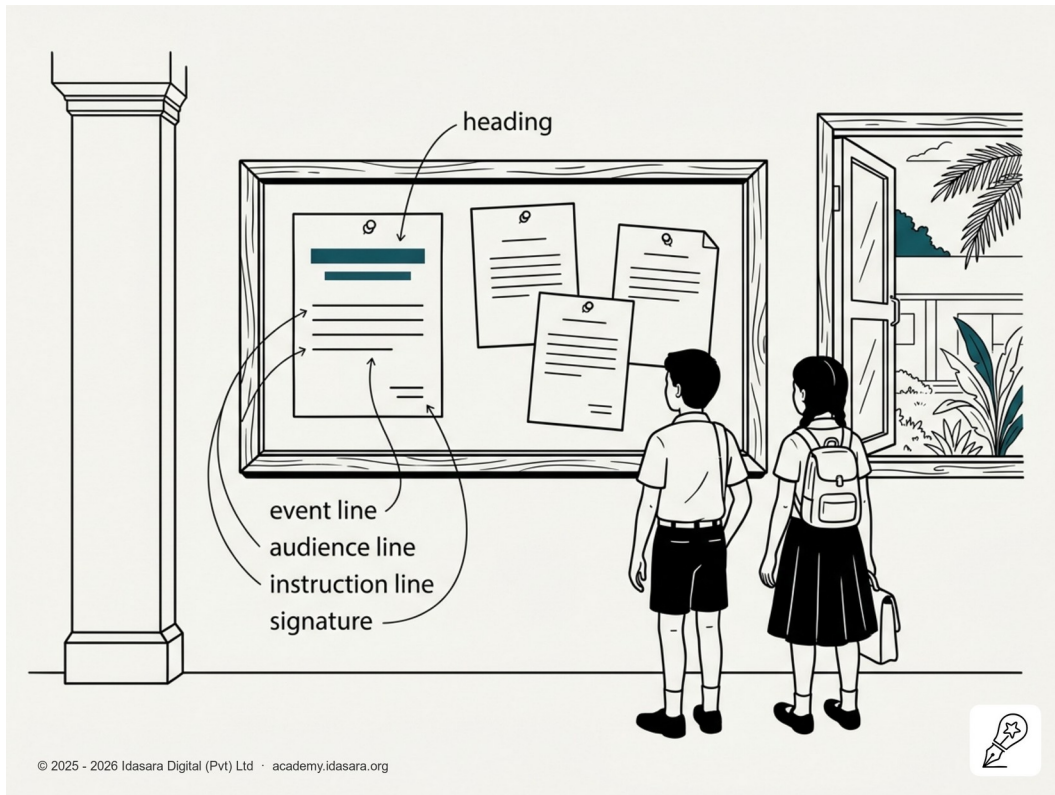
All Grade 10 and Grade 11 students are kindly requested to attend.

Please bring a bucket, a mammoty and a pair of gloves.

Your kind co-operation is highly appreciated.

Secretary, Environmental Society

Count the sentences. Four. It took two minutes to write, and under the official scheme it earns full content marks and strong language marks, because every sentence is complete and every fact from the question is present.



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WRITING ACTIVITY · Write Three Notices

Use the chassis exactly. Change only the facts.

Notice 1 — A cricket match organised by the Sports Club, 20th November, 2.00 p.m., school grounds.
Bring water bottles.

Notice 2 — A book exhibition organised by the Library Society, 5th December, 9.00 a.m., the school hall.
Bring your library card.

Notice 3 — Invent your own: a dengue campaign, a parents' meeting, a New Year festival.

Rules: four sentences each. A heading in capitals. Your role at the bottom. Count the words — you want 40 to 50.

Then check each one: **is every fact from the question inside my notice?** If yes, your content marks are protected.

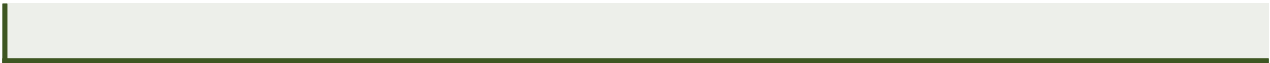
PAST-PAPER DRILL · 2024 Paper I Test 6 · Target 4 / 5

Set a timer for 7 minutes.

Read the question and underline every fact — the event, the group, the date, the time, the place, the thing to bring.

Write the four lines. Put every underlined fact into them.

Count your words. Fewer than 20 and the scheme caps you at 2 marks, however good the English. Write the fourth sentence.





Day 7 — The Gate

Forty-five minutes. One sitting. No help.

What to do

Take the **2024 paper** and sit these seven questions, in this order:

Paper I — Tests 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 · then **Paper II — Tests 9 and 13**

That is **35 marks**, and every one of them is a question this book has taught.

Set a timer for **45 minutes**. No notes, no dictionary. Do not stop in the middle.

Your target

NOTE · The gate you must clear

Score **25 out of 35 or more**.

That is 71% — demanding, but every mark is one you trained for this week.

What 25 out of 35 means

You may wonder why the target is 25 when you need 35 to pass.

Because these seven questions are not the whole paper. On the day you will also sit Tests 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 16 — another 65 marks. Even untrained, a candidate reliably picks up around **10 marks** across those, from the shorter items and partial credit. And you have Day 6's notice, worth up to 5 more.

25 + 10 = 35. That is the pass.

So when you score 25 here, you have not scored 35. You have done something better: you have proved that the marks you *trained for* are now reliably yours.

NOTE · Say the number correctly

Never say "I got 35." Say: '**I got 25 out of 35 on the part I trained.**'

Students who round their own scores up stop improving, because they can no longer see where they are.

Protect your number — it is the only honest instrument you have.

If you scored 25 or more

Write it on the sheet from Day 1, under your starting line. Look at the two numbers together.



Then go to **Book 2 — The Credit Bridge**. A pass is good. A credit is what application forms ask for, and it is fifteen marks away.

If you scored under 25

Nothing has gone wrong. Find your two weakest days and do them again — same reading, same writing, a different past paper for the drill. Then sit this gate again with the 2023 paper.

Almost nobody clears this on the first attempt after one week. The students who pass in December are the ones who sat it twice in September.



Your First 130 Words

Not a list to memorise tonight. A list to **tick** — read down it and tick every word you now know without translating.

Things in a shop or a house

counter · cashier · queue · shelf · basket · bench · jar · banner · scale · trolley · handbag · ceiling · kettle · clock · bucket · lamp · mat · spoon

Things in a village

temple · bridge · gate · well · tank · paddy · garden · pavement · junction · post office · library · hospital · bus halt

Machines and objects

washing machine · refrigerator · iron · blender · cash machine · laptop · mobile phone · dictionary · torch

Actions ending in -ing

standing · holding · waiting · working · choosing · putting · selling · sleeping · carrying · digging · crossing · mopping · smiling

Describing words

open · closed · quiet · comfortable · easy · difficult · busy · fresh · light · heavy · careful · safe

Joining words

when · while · because · so that · until · then · that · but · and · before · after

Notice words

notice · announcement · campaign · society · secretary · organised · held · attend · requested · kindly · bring · co-operation · appreciated · venue

Question words

who · where · what · why · when · how · how old · how many



What Comes Next

You have the floor. Thirty-five marks that are genuinely yours, and a notice formula worth five more.

Book 2 — The Credit Bridge takes you from S to C. Those fifteen marks are hiding in three questions you have not touched: the table you fill from a text, the long comprehension, and the banked cloze — which looks impossible and is really a puzzle about small grammar words.

A credit in English is what employers ask for and what courses ask for. Take one day off, then start.

THE O/L ENGLISH GRADE LADDER

The Recognition Floor

Here is something nobody has shown you: on the O/L English paper there are five questions where you never write a sentence of your own. You match. You choose. You copy a letter into a box.

Those five questions are worth thirty-five marks. Thirty-five is a pass.

This is not a trick and it is not a shortcut. It is simply what the paper is, and it has been the same paper for years. Somebody should have told you.

Six days on those five questions. One more day on a notice you can write from a four-line formula that never changes. Then a timed test that proves it.

Fifteen minutes a day. You are closer than anyone has said.

Book 1 of four. Next — The Credit Bridge, where a pass becomes a credit.



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