

دليل توضيحي للتوصيف المعتمد في مادة اللغة الإنكليزية وآدابها  
الشهادة الثانوية العامة

**Secondary Education Certificate  
Specifications for English Language Exam**

**I- Overview**

This document is intended to provide detailed specifications for the English language official examination administered at the conclusion of the Third Secondary. The examination is designed to assess students' achievement of the language skills of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> secondary grades.

The specifications in this document are presented with explanatory notes to accompany the Arabic version of the guidelines. We hope this document will help in making informed decisions on assessing the teaching and learning of literacy in 3<sup>rd</sup> secondary. The purpose is to provide practitioners, teachers and test developers with explanations to ensure valid and reliable assessment as well as proper test preparation, administration, and scoring.

**II-Exam Components**

The English Language Official examination should be comprised of a reading comprehension part and a writing part. Each part is separately scored.

**A) Grade Distribution:**

- Sociology and Economics Section: Reading Comprehension: Score: 24/40  
Writing: Score: 16/40 (7 for content and organization of ideas, 7 for language and style, and 2 for tidiness and legible handwriting).
- Life Sciences and General Sciences Section: Reading Comprehension: Score: 24/40  
Writing: Score: 16/40 (7 for content and organization of ideas, 7 for language and style, and 2 for tidiness and legible handwriting).
- Literature and Humanities Section: Reading Comprehension: Score 42/70  
Writing: Score: 28/70 (13 for content and organization of ideas, 13 for language and style, and 2 for tidiness and legible handwriting).

**B) Duration:**

- Life Sciences and General Sciences Section: 2 ½ hours
- Sociology and Economics Section: 2 ½ hours
- Literature and Humanities Section: 3 hours

### **III- Exam Specifications**

#### **A) Part I - Reading Comprehension**

The reading comprehension part measures students' abilities to closely read, think about what they have read, and fully understand literary and informational passages independently and proficiently.

##### **1) Guidelines for Determining the Appropriate Level of Reading Passages**

Selecting reading passages of appropriate complexity level is essential for assessing comprehension skills and developing testing items. Passages, too basic or too simple for the grade level, will not include the necessary structures, vocabulary, syntax and content development needed for assessing grade-level skills. Passages, too complex for the grade level, will contain characteristics that interfere with the assessment.

Different criteria can be utilized for determining the appropriate level of literary and informational passages. Some criteria can be used to determine a range of different appropriateness levels such as the passage meaning, structure, language features, purpose and knowledge demands. Provided that the passage should be appropriately accessible, not too simple nor too complex, the following criteria are explained to show how they vary in different passages in order to determine the appropriate level of the reading passage. The level of appropriateness can be determined by the number of accessible traits of the passage.

##### *a) Meaning:*

A passage may range from having multiple levels of meaning to be inferred and a theme (or central idea) that is conveyed with some subtlety to a passage that has one level of explicit meaning and a theme (or central idea) that is obvious or revealed early in the passage.

##### *b) Structure:*

A passage may range from using more than one storyline (flashbacks, multiple characters or scenes) and using organization and connections between ideas that are implicit to a passage using one plot explicitly or chronologically organized and using connections between ideas that are explicit.

##### *c) Language features:*

A passage may range from using literary/figurative language, academic words and a variety of sentence structures to a passage using simple and explicit language, familiar vocabulary and simple sentence structures.

##### *d) Purpose:*

A passage may range from having an implicit purpose that is inferred from context and includes multiple perspectives to a passage with an explicitly stated purpose and a singular perspective.

e) *Knowledge demands:*

A passage may range from having multiple themes, allusions, cultural elements, and discipline-specific knowledge to a passage that has a single theme with allusions and cultural elements fully explained.

## 2) Guidelines for Selecting a Reading Passage

The following points should be considered in selecting the reading passage.

The passage:

- a) should be selected based on the themes and skills suggested in the English Language Curriculum of the 1<sup>st</sup> secondary, 2<sup>nd</sup> secondary and 3<sup>rd</sup> secondary.
- b) might be of different genres and types: fiction/nonfiction and literary/informational passage, for example, a short story, myth, biography, autobiography, news or feature article, essay or report.
- c) might be authentic or adapted from sources such as magazines, journals, newspapers and books.
- d) might cover concrete or abstract topics from a wide range of academic content areas such as sciences, social studies and literature.
- e) should be preceded by a preview or statement that introduces students to its content.
- f) should not contain more than eight unfamiliar words that hinder comprehension.
- g) is recommended to be paired with an informational graphic or a photo related to the passage topic.

## 3) Reading Comprehension Levels

Students should be assessed on different levels of reading comprehension:

- Literal comprehension level
- Higher order reading comprehension level

Beyond the literal level, higher order level requires comprehension processes of interpretive/inferential and evaluative / critical reading.

- *Literal comprehension* (or reading the lines) is understanding and locating basic information explicitly stated in the passage. Students go through the passage and retrieve one or more distinct pieces of information. They may identify sequences, stated causes and effects, clearly stated main ideas, supporting details or elements of a story.
- *Interpretive / inferential comprehension* (or reading between the lines) is constructing meaning and making inferences from one or more parts of the passage or deriving implied meaning or idea. Students need to interpret figurative language or symbols used by the author or interpret anaphora (pronoun/adverb referent). They have to use contextual clues to infer the meaning of vocabulary words or technical terms and determine the subtle shades of meaning of words or phrases. Also, students may infer cause-effect relationships that are not directly stated, determine

author's purpose, attitude or mood in a specific section of the passage or in the passage as a whole. Students need to analyze characters, draw conclusions based on explicit and implied information and understand comparisons, contrasts or analogous ideas.

- *Critical / evaluative reading* (or reading beyond the lines) is examining passage content and structure, evaluating evidence and making judgments about characters, author or information. Students consider the passage critically by recognizing language used to present a viewpoint and by identifying facts and opinions. Students draw upon knowledge, ideas, or attitudes beyond the passage in order to relate the information provided in the passage to their own conceptual and experiential frames of reference.

#### **4) Reading Comprehension Testing Items**

- a) The reading passage should be followed by different sets of testing items that assess the language skills. Testing items in each set should assess as many comprehension skills as possible.
- b) Reading comprehension testing items should emphasize use of evidence from the reading passage to respond to extended reasoning of higher order comprehension. Students should be asked to give evidence, including citing specific part(s) of a passage to support their responses.
- c) One third of the testing items should be at the literal level and two thirds at the higher order level of comprehension.
- d) Reading comprehension testing items may use key words and phrases to indicate what is specifically required such as mainly, primarily, only, except, best, most, least etc. For example: What is the most / least important cause of pollution?
- e) Vocabulary-in-context testing items should focus on using contextual clues to infer the meaning of words or phrases and their nuances in a passage such as general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

#### **5) Cognitive Processes:**

Reading comprehension testing items range in difficulty from easy to more challenging based on the demands for cognitive processes. Testing items can be more cognitively challenging in terms of the following points:

- Number of pieces of information needed to identify
- Number of inferences required
- Type of implicit or explicit information to identify
- Depth of understanding needed
- Type of interpretation required
- Familiarity with structure and genre

## 6) Reading Comprehension Questions

- a) Questions should fall in 4-6 sets that cover both content (*major/ minor details , causes/ effects etc.*) and organization of passage (*main idea with supporting details, thematic relationship, pattern of organization, paragraph headings, comparison vs contrast, flashback, problem and solution, conflict and resolution*).
- b) Types of testing items may include wh-questions, completing sentences, multiple choice, filling in the blanks, matching headings with paragraphs, completing a graphic organizer, identifying true and false statements, paraphrasing, expanding a passage, rewriting an improved version of a poorly written sentence or summary, correcting misinterpreted statements, interpreting informational graphics.
- c) Questions may refer students to the number of paragraph that is related to the question.
- d) Questions should focus on both what the passage directly states and implies (implied main idea, mood, theme, message etc.)
- e) Details questions might specify a line in the passage to ask what a sentence means or how it functions within the overall passage.
- f) Questions might be about the writer's purpose in using phrases, words or examples.
- g) Evidence-Based questions should specify when students have to cite textual evidence to justify the answer.
- h) Questions might be about genre (fiction, nonfiction), type (article, story, report, biography), topic, organization of ideas, the way the writer conveys meaning, writer's purpose, writer's techniques, figurative language etc.
- i) Synthesis questions should require drawing conclusions or inferring messages and ideas based on evidence or details from more than one paragraph in a passage.
- j) Questions on expanding the passage can be by adding words, phrases, sentences to paragraphs or inserting paragraphs into the passage or deciding to which paragraph a sentence or an extract belongs.
- k) Vocabulary questions may include (a) figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words using contextual clues and then filling in the blanks with the correct words to complete the meaning of a given sentence, (b) giving synonyms/antonyms to words in the passage, (c) replacing a word in a sentence by a synonym from the passage.
- l) Questions may ask students to make a judgment or comment on what the author mentions in the passage.
- m) Questions may ask about claim, fact, opinion and support.
- n) To connect students' learning in the classroom with real-world skills, questions might include analyzing quantitative info using data reasoning questions. A test may include informational graphics in one form such as a line graph, bar graph, pie chart, or a table. Questions may require interpreting graphs/ charts using evidence in data or revising sentences in order to make them consistent with information in graphs.

**B) Part II - Writing**

- 1) The writing part consists of writing an essay independently in response to a topic or prompt.
- 2) The essay should develop a specified topic related to the theme of the reading passage.
- 3) Students will be given two prompts to choose one. Each prompt should ask students to write a different type of essay.
- 4) Essay should be between 250- 300 words for Sociology and Economics, General Sciences and Life Sciences, and 400 – 500 words for Literature and Humanities Sections.
- 5) The prompt should be about a quotation, a statement etc. with clear meaning.
- 6) Instructions should specify the main ideas the student should develop in the essay.