

دليل توضيحي للتوصيف المعتمد في مادة اللغة الانكليزية وآدابها  
الشهادة المتوسطة

**Basic Education Certificate/ Cycle III**  
**Grade Nine**  
**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 Cycle III of Basic Education. The examination is designed to assess students' achievement of the language skills at the end of this cycle.

The specifications presented in this document are mainly explanatory notes that accompany the guidelines issued in Arabic. We hope they will help in making informed decisions on assessing the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade 9. The purpose is to provide practitioners, teachers and test developers with details 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. Both sections are scored separately as follows:

- Grade distribution:
  - Total 20: Reading Comprehension =12/20; Writing = 8/20 (2 ½ for ideas and organization, 2 ½ for language and style, 2 for graphic organizer or outline, and 1 for tidiness and legible handwriting)
  - Total 40: Reading Comprehension = 24/40; Writing = 16/40 (5 for ideas and organization, 5 for language and style, 4 for graphic organizer or outline, and 2 for tidiness and legible handwriting)
- Duration: 2 hours

## III- Exam Specifications

### A) Part I- Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension section measures students' abilities to closely read, think about what they have read, and fully understand literary and informational passages independently and proficiently. Students have approximately 60 minutes to complete the reading comprehension part.

#### 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 one level or multiple levels of meaning, theme, or central idea. This means that the idea can be explicit, obvious, or clearly revealed early in the text or it can be inferred and conveyed with some subtlety.

b) *Structure :*

A passage may range from using one plot to using more than one storyline. This means that the plot can be explicitly and chronologically organized where organization and connections between ideas are explicit and clear or it might include flashbacks, multiple characters or scenes in which organization and connections between ideas are implicit and subtle.

c) *Language features:*

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

d) *Purpose:*

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

e) *Knowledge demands :*

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

## 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.
- 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) words that hinder comprehension of the passage should not exceed six unfamiliar words.
- g) is recommended to be accompanied with informational graphics 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 such as characters and setting.
- *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, or attitude 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 4-6 sets of testing items that assess the language skills. Testing items in each set should assess as many comprehension skills as possible.

- b) The testing items should assess the skills of answering literal and higher order comprehension skills, inferring meaning of vocabulary in context, and using and recognize grammatically appropriate and meaningful structures in a context.
- c) 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. 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, their relationships and their nuances in a passage such as general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

#### 5) 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, order of events, paragraph headings, comparison versus contrast, flashback, problem and solution, conflict and resolution*).
- b) Questions vary among wh-questions, completing sentences, multiple choice
- c) **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

#### B) Part II - Writing

- 1) The writing section consists of writing an essay independently in response to a topic or prompt.
- 2) The essay should develop a specified topic connected 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 (narrative, descriptive, or expository).
- 4) Essay should be between 150-200 words.
- 5) The prompt should be about a quotation or a statement with clear meaning.
- 6) Instructions should specify what the essay should be about.