

Cambridge O Level English Language (1123): changes

Video Transcript

Hazel Carmichael:

So now I'm going to ask Jo to tell us about the changes to the syllabus and the assessments for first examination in 2024.

Jo Nice:

Thanks Hazel. The content is similar to that of the current O Level syllabus.

The new syllabus provides further detail about engaging ways of studying and practising Reading and Writing skills.

It will encourage learners to read and write a variety of text types with different themes and purposes.

For example, through studying Reading skills learners will better understand the different forms of fiction and non-fiction texts, and other forms of writing, such as blogs, essays, reviews, articles, short stories or extracts from longer works of prose or drama.

Study should focus on key English Language skills, such as understanding explicit meaning, implied meaning and attitudes and how writers use language and style to achieve different effects and influence readers. Learners will develop, analyse and evaluate facts, ideas and opinions. They will select information from passages and use that material for a specific context, such as summary writing. These objectives are present in the current syllabus.

Similarly, in Writing, learners should develop a range of skills, including the ability to create and compose texts with a variety of forms and purposes, for example, descriptive, narrative, argumentative and persuasive.

Encouraging learners to practise reading and writing different text types such as: emails, letters, reports, articles, speeches, and summaries is great preparation for assessment and also for their progression to further education or the work place.

English Language is a facilitating subject as the content and skills studied provide preparation for other subjects that require a depth and breadth of reading and writing, including, but not exclusively, English Literature, Geography or History.

Here is a high-level summary of the changes to the Reading paper.

Please note that the question paper order will change from 2024 onward, so I am referring to Paper 1 as Reading and Paper 2 as Writing.

The Reading paper includes two texts: one narrative and one factual.

There is more integration of skills in the papers now. In the Reading Paper 80% of the assessment will be for Reading and 20% for Writing. We recognise that this reflects how the skills are studied in the classroom and are used outside of the classroom; they are not studied in isolation.

The paper now has separate sections for the assessment of comprehension and for use of language.

We have removed the multiple-choice question and updated the summary task which we will look at in more detail shortly.

To reflect the question paper changes we have increased the overall exam duration by 15 minutes. It will now be a total of 2 hours.

The new Writing paper has a similar structure to the current Writing paper.

It has two sections: Directed Writing and Composition.

Candidates produce two pieces of writing, the same as the current syllabus. One key difference is that candidates must now write in two different styles. In the Directed Writing section candidates write one compulsory argumentative or discursive style response to the task. In the Composition section, candidates write one essay choosing between a narrative or a descriptive title.

Another important difference is that the Directed Writing task now includes stimulus reading text(s).

We are also introducing more integration of skills in the Writing paper. 80% of the assessment is for Writing and 20% for Reading.

We have increased the exam time to 2 hours to allow candidates to read and respond to the tasks effectively.

Here is a summary of the changes with the current syllabus on the left alongside the new syllabus on the right.

As I mentioned earlier, Paper 1 is now Reading, and Paper 2 is Writing.

The exam durations are longer for each paper; and the marks available for the Writing paper have changed from 60 to 50.

Both papers continue to be equally weighted at 50% each.

Kathryn, can you tell us more? What are the changes to task types in questions papers?

Kathryn Davies:

Thanks Jo. We'll start with Paper 1: Reading.

As mentioned earlier, there continues to be two texts in the Reading paper: Text A is a narrative style text and Text B is factual in style. This is similar to the current Reading paper which has the factual, *Reading for Ideas* text and the narrative, *Reading for Meaning* text.

Texts A and B may or may not be linked by a theme.

The narrative text, Text A is used in Section A of the paper. Text A is approximately 900 words long and is from either the twentieth or the twenty-first century.

Section A is divided into two questions:

Question 1 includes a series of sub-questions that assess Comprehension. These questions test explicit and implicit meaning and attitudes. There are 16 marks available for Question 1.

Question 2 includes sub-questions that test Use of Language. There are now 9 marks assessing how writers achieve effects and influence readers. The questions relate to literal and non-literal meaning, the author's use of language and structure, and the effect these have.

Section B of the Reading paper is based on Text B, with 25 marks available. Text B is a factual text and is approximately 550-600 words long.

In this part of the Reading Paper candidates respond to a selective summary task. They write their summary in continuous writing form of no more than 120 words.

The summary task has similarities with the task in the current Cambridge O Level paper but there are some key differences. Candidates responses will be marked more holistically. This means that there are no longer 12 separate marks for selecting discrete points from the text as in the current question 1a. The marking criteria still credits appropriate selection of main points but this is done using levels-based marking criteria assessing performance on both Reading and Writing.

There are 20 marks available for the summary task. There is a separate 5 mark new question following the summary task which requires candidates to give a short opinion-based response using supporting evidence from the text to show their understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes. This is a new style of question for O Level.

Next, we'll look at the Writing paper.

The structure of the Writing Paper is similar to the current paper. The first part is a Directed Writing task and the second part is a Composition.

The Directed Writing task has changed to include greater reading input. Candidates may be presented with one or two texts in the paper. The Reading material has a total of approximately 400-450 words in length.

Candidates are presented with texts on a particular topic which give opposing views. This presents students with the opportunity to evaluate and select pertinent ideas from the texts to formulate an informed opinion on the topic and produce a written response. This is a useful skill in preparation for higher level study or work.

The marking criteria for this task have been updated and there are 15 marks available for Writing and 10 marks for Reading.

The second part of the paper is Composition. The key difference with the Composition task now is that candidates choose between writing either a descriptive or a narrative text.

Argumentative writing is assessed in the Directed Writing task.

There's a benefit to this change. Giving learners the opportunity to practise the important skills needed for producing argumentative or discursive styles of writing helps their study in other subject areas, for example, in History, Sociology or Geography.

The levels-based marking criteria for this task have been also updated.

We've looked in detail at tasks in the Reading and Writing papers. We've also made some changes to the syllabus. Peter, can you tell us more about that?

Peter Johnston:

Thanks Kathryn, yes, let's look at what else has changed in the syllabus.

In updating the **syllabus aims** we hope to continue to enthuse, encourage and excite teachers and learners by showing how we incorporate current educational thinking and practice to offer the best possible educational experience.

We've added further information about the qualities of a Cambridge learner and how we encourage students to be confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged in their studies of English Language.

The Assessment Objectives have been revised with minor changes to the wording. The skills and knowledge being assessed remain the same as those of the current syllabus.

They continue to prepare O Level English Language students to progress well to AS & A Level English Language. In this facilitating subject, learners are also studying vital Reading and Writing skills that will prepare them for a range of further study or for the workplace.

As you can see, there are a number of changes to consider as we move forward with this syllabus. Jo, can you tell us more about how we will support teaching and learning?

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