



Independent Schools
Examinations Board

COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATION AT 11+ AND 13+
COMMON ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP EXAMINATION AT 13+

ENGLISH SYLLABUS

(Revised January 2012 for first examination in Autumn 2013)

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INTRODUCTION

The Common Entrance English syllabus for examination at 11+ and 13+ has been devised in accordance with the reading and writing elements of key stage 2 and key stage 3 of the National Curriculum for English. At 11+, candidates take two papers: a reading and a writing paper. At 13+, candidates take two papers which test both reading and writing.

AIMS

A course leading to these examinations should:

- (i) give candidates opportunities to take part in a broad range of speaking and listening activities, so that oral work becomes the basis for written work;
- (ii) develop the skills of reading to allow study of multi-cultural factual writing and literature suitable for the age ranges;
- (iii) enable candidates to use various kinds of written language effectively for creative expression and practical communication by extending their grammatical and syntactical skills;
- (iv) provide a base for continuing study of language and literature, and encourage independent study and learning, including the use of libraries, reference books and ICT;
- (v) give candidates opportunities to work with a wide variety of poetry, prose, plays and factual material;
- (vi) provide enjoyment and stimulation to encourage a positive attitude towards every aspect of the subject.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

AT 11+

By the time candidates sit the examination, they should be able to:

AO1 read a substantial passage unaided and give independent written responses to questions involving a range of comprehension skills;

AO2 write unaided at reasonable length on one topic selected from a choice of work suitable for the age range.

AT 13+

Candidates should be able to:

AO3 read substantial passages unaided and give independent written responses to questions requiring a range of comprehension skills;

AO4 show evidence of independent literary work both with an unprepared text and with texts studied during their time in junior school;

AO5 show evidence of original creative work in the form of their choice within the limitation of a timed examination.

SYLLABUS CONTENT

11+

COMPREHENSION

Factual or fictional passages for the examination are taken from material appropriate in language, style and content to the age/interest range. These are selected at the setters' discretion without any standard pattern, to encourage a variety of approaches to the development of comprehension skills. An introductory line of explanation precedes the extract. Certain words may be glossed.

The questions are worded as simply and unambiguously as possible. Candidates are expected to be able to:

- give information which can be obtained from a careful reading of the passage
- say how or why a writer is using language in a particular way
- demonstrate an understanding of this by continuing a piece of writing in the same or a different mode
- summarise part of the given information
- supply answers involving reasoning, personal opinion/experience or prediction
- use the text as evidence for answers
- explain vocabulary in context
- display a working knowledge of syntax, punctuation and the main parts of speech

COMPOSITION

Candidates are invited to show that they can organise their ideas effectively and convey their feelings or opinions in accurate, continuous writing. The choice of essays covers the following range:

- imaginative/story writing
- factual/personal description
- writing involving discussion/opinion/memory
- a book review
- a picture stimulus

At least one of the essay titles offers a range of content suggestions. The titles are worded as simply as possible, with the rubric using such terms as: *essay, piece of descriptive writing, composition, diary entry, letter, story, write in any way you choose about ..., use this picture as a starting point/basis for ...*, with the intention that candidates should feel able to start writing freely without anxiety about the form.

Book review: personal reading/response

Candidates may write about any book they have read in or out of school and they should start their work by writing the title and author of the chosen book. 'Book' includes poetry and plays. The book question is a general one without a theme, to encourage schools to teach the literature they wish by the methods they wish; literary essays are most useful to receiver schools when they are as personal and as individual as possible. Candidates may be asked to summarise a book or an episode or give a personal response to a book, author, character or episode which they find particularly striking. Within this broad question there is scope for opinions, comparisons and preferences.

Syntax

Candidates should be able to:

- demonstrate a basic competence with syntax, such as make a phrase or a clause into a sentence
- work with questions, commands, statements or exclamations
- write in the first person (a diary extract or letter) or the third person (a summary or account of events in sequence)

Punctuation

Candidates should be able to:

- explain the function in context of various punctuation marks
- use speech marks/new paragraphs for a few lines of conversation
- set out a discussion in play dialogue

Grammar

Candidates should be able to:

- demonstrate the difference between easily-confused words (such as their/there/they're; it's/its)
- select or comment on the use, in context, of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions or conjunctions
- give the correct part of a verb to accompany a noun

Technical language is avoided as far as clarity permits. The emphasis throughout is on grammar in use, of the sort which represents good practice in language work for pupils aged 9–11.

13+

READING

Literary Prose

Candidates are given a passage of literary prose from a novel, a play, a biography or travel writing. This is followed by questions to test understanding as well as powers of analysis and evaluation. Passages are selected at the setters' discretion without any standard pattern, in order to encourage a variety of approaches to the reading of quality fiction. An introductory line of explanation may precede the extracts. Certain words may be glossed.

Skills to be tested at the appropriate level include the following:

- basic understanding and vocabulary
- use of text to illustrate answers
- drawing of inferences
- evaluation of style, language and purpose
- delivery of opinions/judgements/arguments based on given material
- awareness of how grammar, syntax and punctuation affect meaning
- capacity to make comparisons and evaluate contrasts

Candidates are encouraged to read widely, to acquire and develop the skills of discriminating reading and to express their responses to what they read.

Poetry

Candidates are given one piece of unseen poetry which may be an entire poem or an extract. This is followed by questions – a literary comprehension, in effect. Candidates are expected to show awareness of how language is used and to support opinion by reference to the text. Questions ask for candidates' responses to literature via an understanding of how writers achieve their effects, reveal their feelings and make readers more aware. This assumes knowledge of metaphor, simile, personification, symbol, irony, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm and metre.

WRITING

Response to writing task

Candidates are required to answer two questions from a range of options. Some options require the use of prose for a practical purpose: to argue, persuade, explain, advise, inform. Other options provoke imaginative, descriptive or narrative responses. In addition, there is the option to write on one or more texts which candidates have studied in class or read for themselves. Questions are general and not related to any specific text. They offer candidates the opportunity to deal with moments of drama, transition, contrast and various other ideas in their chosen texts. Texts studied should range across genre and period. Candidates should be encouraged and helped to discuss their reading and analyse their ideas closely.

SCHEME OF ASSESSMENT

11+

PAPER 1: COMPREHENSION (25 marks; 40 minutes, plus 5 minutes' reading time)

The paper will usually contain one extract, followed by one set of questions. Marks for each question will be shown in brackets to assist candidates with time allocation. A maximum of 10 marks will be allotted for simple comprehension and 17 marks for deeper understanding and open-ended interpretation of aspects of the text. The rubric will ask candidates to use their own words, write in full sentences and take care with handwriting, spelling and punctuation.

PAPER 2: COMPOSITION (25 marks; 40 minutes, plus 5 minutes' reading and planning time)

The paper will contain a choice of subjects from which candidates select one on which to base a piece of original written work. They will be expected to demonstrate the full range of their writing ability. Their planning sheet will not be sent to the senior school. Marks will cover content, purpose, style, organisation (so a story would have a beginning, middle and end; a debate would look at both sides of the question and draw a conclusion; the content of a letter would suit the purpose and cover the areas requested by the paper, and so on), as well as quality and breadth of language. Senior schools will have the option of allotting a further 10 marks: up to 5 marks for the standard of spelling and a further 5 marks for the syntax/punctuation used throughout the paper. The purpose of these extra 10 marks is to ensure that the accuracy of a candidate's script is assessed separately from the content.

13+

Candidates will be required to take two papers, both comprising a reading section and a writing section. The reading sections will be divided into two levels: **Level 1** and **Level 2**. The passage and the poem will be the same for both levels, although the passage will sometimes be abridged for Level 1. For both the prose and poetry sections, questions will be easier on the Level 1 paper. The writing sections are common to both Level 1 and Level 2 candidates.

PAPER 1 (50 marks; 1 hour 15 minutes which includes reading and note-making time)

The paper will be divided into two sections.

Section A: Reading (25 marks)

This section will contain a passage of literary prose followed by about five questions which seek to test understanding as well as powers of analysis and evaluation.

Section B: Writing (25 marks)

Candidates will be asked to select one of four essay titles. Three essay titles will require the use of prose for a practical purpose; the fourth essay title will be a choice of literary topics. Their planning sheet will not be sent to the senior school.

PAPER 2: (50 marks; 1 hour 15 minutes which includes planning time)

The paper will be divided into two sections

Section A: Reading (25 marks)

This section will comprise about five questions on an unseen poem to test both understanding of poetic technique and personal response.

Section B: Writing (25 marks)

Candidates will be asked to choose one of four essay titles which provoke imaginative, descriptive or narrative responses. Their planning sheet will not be sent to the senior school.

SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship papers are based on the 13+ syllabus. They are designed to challenge the best students in the close analysis and imaginative interpretation of a variety of literary texts drawn from any genre and period. There are no set texts.

The Common Academic Scholarship Examination (1 hour 45 minutes) will consist of two or more unseen, thematically-related passages with questions on content, style and structure. While inviting sophisticated answers, questions will be sufficiently open-ended to encourage imaginative and personal responses.

APPENDIX I
WRITING TASK ASSESSMENT AT 13+

Paper 1 Essays 1-3 and Paper 2 Essays

Mark	Descriptors
1 – 11	Not relevant to the chosen task; clarity weak owing to poor and technical inaccuracy; very short and undeveloped with little attention to detail.
12 – 15	Generally relevant to the task; ideas clearly communicated and organised into paragraphs; some attention to detail; style and tone generally appropriate for the chosen task; spelling sufficiently accurate.
16 – 19	Mainly relevant to the task; ideas clearly communicated and well structured in an effective and interesting way; good attention to detail; style and tone adapted well for the chosen task; spelling generally accurate; a good range of vocabulary and expression.
20 – 25	Consistently relevant to the task; ideas developed fully and well structured in an original and stylish way; excellent attention to detail; essay much enhanced by style and tone; spelling consistently accurate; a wide range of vocabulary and expression.

Paper 1 Essay 4 (Literary Topic)

Mark	Descriptors
1 – 11	Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) not relevant to the task; not clear in terms of organisation; technically very inaccurate; very short and undeveloped.
12 – 15	Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) generally relevant to the task; some reference to the text made to support ideas; ideas clearly communicated and organised into paragraphs; spelling sufficiently accurate.
16 – 19	Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) mainly relevant to the task; good reference to the text to develop ideas; ideas clearly communicated; well-structured essay; spelling generally accurate.
20 – 25	Knowledge and understanding of the text(s) consistently relevant to the task; sound insight shown; close reference to the text to develop ideas fully; ideas clearly communicated; detailed and well-structured essay; spelling generally accurate; a good range of appropriate vocabulary.

APPENDIX II

LEVEL 1 READING SKILLS

- **Basic understanding and vocabulary**

Candidates will not be expected to explain difficult words.

- **Use of text to illustrate answers**

Candidates will be directed to specific sections of the passage rather than expected to scan the whole text.

- **Drawing inferences**

Candidates will be expected to recognise feelings/tones/moods by finding examples but will not be expected to infer the mood for themselves. If the writer is angry, this will be stated in the question and candidates will be expected to support this view.

- **Evaluation of style/language/purpose**

Grammar/syntax/punctuation

Capacity to make comparisons and evaluate contrasts

Candidates may be encouraged to think about such features of the text. Questions, however, will identify the use of these features in a specified section of the passage and ask candidates to find examples, explaining briefly why they chose their examples. Alternatively, examples will be identified and candidates may be asked to think about why the writer may have chosen those particular words. If candidates are expected to evaluate contrasts, questions will be structured so as to lead the candidate through the process, e.g. choosing an example, then choosing a contrasting example, then commenting on the difference.

- **Delivery of opinions/judgements/arguments**

Candidates may be encouraged to give their views on themes and ideas dealt with in the passage but, while reflecting a general understanding of the main concerns of the passage, answers will focus on the candidates' own ideas/experiences.

- **Knowledge of poetic techniques**

Candidates may have to identify examples of simile, metaphor and personification. Questions may identify an example and ask what the technique is, or may explain a technique and ask candidates to find an example. Similarly, they may be asked about onomatopoeia, rhyme and rhythm. They may also have to comment on why a poet might have chosen to use the technique. Candidates will not have to comment on the effectiveness of language in general and will not have to comment on a number of techniques which they have noticed independently.

APPENDIX III

RESOURCES

There are several useful course books and resources available, including those published specifically for Common Entrance by ISEB/Galore Park Publishing and Hodder.

Teachers should feel free, however, to use a wide range of materials in preparing candidates for Common Entrance. The focus should be on close analysis of the texts/extracts which they use in order to encourage pupils to evaluate how language and literary techniques are being used and to what effect.

There is no book list for the study of literature; teachers should feel free to select texts which they believe will be appropriate and successful with their classes.