

## **GENERAL RULES IN COMPOSITION WRITING**

In composition writing, there are some rules that are supposed to be applied

**DON'T USE CONTRACTIONS:** Use of contractions can sometimes be seen as a way of running from writing correct spellings of words.

### ***EXAMPLES***

- i. Can't for cannot
- ii. Don't for do not
- iii. Aren't for are not

**DO NOT USE ABBREVIATIONS:** Acronyms or short forms. Avoid writing "sch" instead of 'school', P.O. for 'Post office', 'sec' for 'secondary' and '11 am' for 'Eleven o'clock in the morning', '11 km' for 'Eleven kilometres'. Like is the case with contractions above, markers are given an impression that you are running away from correct spellings of the words.

This rule however becomes tricky when you look at some abbreviations, like community day secondary school (CDSS). Although exceptions may be given on this one, it is advisable to write it in full when you are using it for the first time in the composition, before you use it in abbreviation form.

**DO NOT USE AMERICAN ENGLISH:** the English at MSCE is British English and it is supposed to be treated like as such. There are several version of English but you have to be aware that on MSCE syllabus we have British English. Candidates are therefore penalized for writing American English, which is more common among candidates.

### **EXAMPLES**

- I. Use programme (British) not program (American English)
- II. Use organise (British) not organize (American)
- III. Use petrol (British) not gas (American)

Can you give more examples of American English and their equivalents.

**DO NOT USE COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSIONS OR SLANG:** Colloquial language is informal language and is normally used in spoken language. Colloquial language should at all costs be avoided in composition writing.

### **EXAMPLES**

- I. Use "father" instead of "dad"
- II. Use "gentleman" instead of "guy"
- III. Use "child" instead of "kid"

**USE OF PROVERBIAL EXPRESSION OR SLANG:** Another problem students face in composition writing is to differentiate English composition from chichewa compositions (chimangirizo).

In chichewa, there is an emphasis on use of proverbs and idioms to embellish the composition. In English however, that is not compulsory hence we encourage to avoid it at all costs because in many occasions, may resort into literal translations of chichewa proverbs, which in the English in language do

not make sense at all. For example a student can use the proverb 'what comes does not bat a drum' (in trying to use Chichewa proverb "chakudza sichiimba n'goma) or 'dust is yourself' for fumbi ndiwe mwini. Just use simple English.

### **WRONG SPLLINGS**

#### **EXAMPLES**

- I. Milennium= millennium
- II. Proffessor= professor
- III. Enroll= enrol

### **WRONG TENSES**

#### **EXAMPLE**

I went to church and sing my beautiful song. = here the tense of the second verb "sing" does not conform to the first one "went". Both verbs must be in present or past tense.

**POOR SUBJECT VERB AGREEMENT** subject verb agreement is the coordination between the doer and the action as shown by the verb. Basic rules of English dictate that a singular verb and a plural subject should take a plural verb.

#### **EXAMPLE**

1. Neither the boy nor the girls have come.

(Here, the correct verb is "have" as it agrees in number with the immediate subject "the girls")

### **REPITITION/ TAUTOLOGY**

1. Young people, who are the leaders of tomorrow, they should guard against bad behaviour. (Here the pronoun "they" after the second comma is not necessary as it refer to "young people" hence, repetition.
2. The beginner who has just started looks bright. (A beginner is of course the one who has just started; don't repetition.
3. The orphan, who does not have parents, is asking for alms. (Here, it is given that orphans do not have parents). Saying it is mere tautology.

**WRONG USE OF FIGURES**: Figures from zero (0) to ninety nine (99) should be written in words; while from one hundred (100) and above should be written in figures.

#### **EXAMPLE**

They bought sixty-five chickens and 150 eggs for the party.

### **WRONG COMBINATION OF WORDS**

- a) Incase= in case
- b) Infact= in fact
- c) Inorder= in order

### WRONG SEPPERATION OF WORDS

- i. Can not= Cannot
- ii. Where as= Whereas
- iii. Some what= Somewhat

### SPECIAL VRBS *Make, let, help.*

These verbs are followed by bare infinitives (verbs that do not take TO)

#### EXAMPLE

Don't say; I will make/let/help him cry

(just say; I will make/let/help him cry).

### USE OF VERNECULAR AND MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE

- i. Don't say; I'm cooking nsima ( say; I'm cooking hard porridge)
- ii. Don't say; He smokes chamba (say; he smoke Indian hemp)
- iii. Don't say; John gave mary pregnancy (say; John impregnated mary)

### MISCELLANEOUS

- A. I can be able to (say; "I can dance" or "I am able to dance", since "can" means "be able").
- B. The reason is because (say; "the reason is I don't know you" or "this is because I don't know you").
- C. The reason why (say; "this is the reason I called you" or "this is why I called you")

### SOME OF THE ELEMENTS THAT YOU MUST TAKE NOTE OF

Some of the things you should avoid to avoid getting a zero in mechanical errors. It has always been observed that in most cases, students get zeros on mechanical accuracy. Not that they write poor English, but because they make at least 20 mechanical errors.

### TIPS

- a. Do not exaggerate facts. As you write composition, make sure that you are realistic in what so ever you say. For example, if you say a person weighed 3000 kilogrammes, that's an exaggeration. It may make sense if you say a person weighed 70 kg.
- b. Use appropriate words for all situations.
  - i. Don't say; I caught flu, say I contracted flu
  - ii. Don't say; I contracted AIDS. Say; I developed AIDS.
  - c. Be sure that you have written a word that you wanted to. In your mind you may be thinking of one word, you end up writing a different one, altogether. Words like; "their, there, and they" are usually used inter-changeably by many candidates in compositions.

### OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

- a. Use simple and straight forward language. Don't write to battle the examiners.

For example

I saw two girls perambulating lackadaisically along the road (right, but language not very simple). Just say; I saw two girls walking weakly along the road

**d. OTHER POINTS TO TAKE NOTE OF**

- If it's a letter avoid writing "dear sir or madam" on salutation. just choose one between the two. It is not difficult to imagine that the recipient will be a man or a woman?
- The title should be capitalized don't underline it.