

# Zimsec Exam Free Composition Section RAG Document

On the ZIMSEC Examination, a student is tasked with writing two compositions, one that is free and another that is guided.

## **Free Composition**

Section A of the paper consists of the free composition. The student is tasked with choosing one topic or prompt and writing 350-450 words in response to the question. This composition is marked out of 30 and can either be one of 6 types.

Here are some strategies for writing the different types of compositions:

### **1. Narrative Compositions**

- Understand the prompt you choose. Read it carefully to make sure you understand what's being asked and what you're required to write about. Your story should align with the given statement.
- Plan your story, you don't have to do this on paper but have an idea of the main events of the story you want to write. This can help you to stay organised and ensure that your story has a clear beginning, middle and end
- Ensure that your story is original
- Incorporate elements of a short story such as characterisation, atmosphere, suspense, pace and a well controlled plot structure.
- Plot structure refers to the arc of the story i.e the flow from exposition → rising action → climax/ turning point → falling action → resolution/ ending
- Include a climax. Build up to a key moment in the story where the main conflict or problem reaches its peak. This is where the excitement is highest and the outcome is uncertain.
- Resolve the story. After the climax, bring the story to a satisfying conclusion.
- Characterisation means your characters should be interesting and engaging to the reader. Remember, fictional people and events don't have to be real but they have to be balanced and plausible
- One word topics fall under this category, be careful not to use the word as a noun
- Ensure that your tenses are consistent and avoid contractions
- It helps to start with an engaging opening that hooks and engages the reader in your composition
- Describe things to create a vivid picture for the reader, include sensory details, things like the weather, the smells, the emotions of characters etc can help establish the setting
- When writing about a specific event, it helps to create contrast with the impending disaster or event that'll happen, for example if you're tasked with writing about a flood that hit your town or village, having a calm ordinary day contrasting the impending disaster can be good.
- Always proofread especially if you have time. Check for errors
- Use descriptive language and vary your sentences, alternate between long and short.

**Example :** "This time, she felt she was going to succeed."

- Plan: Think about the character's past failures and what has changed this time. Maybe she has practised more, received help, or found a new strategy.
- Characters: Develop a main character who has faced challenges before but is now more determined and prepared.
- Setting: Describe where the event is taking place, such as a sports competition, a school exam, or a business presentation.
- Plot: Show the preparation, the moment of tension, and finally, her success.

**Marking scheme:** Narratives where appropriate, should show merits of structure, characterisation, description, suspense and pace.

## **2. Descriptive compositions**

- Essays must have atmosphere, observation and sensitivity
- Use of adjectives and vocabulary is highly recommended
- Focus on using descriptive sentences. What characteristics make the family admirable? Pay attention to your use of vocabulary, sentence structure and avoid repetition of subjects
- Adjectives will come in handy when describing nouns which you'll likely be doing in this case
- TO BE CONTINUED....

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**Marking scheme:** descriptive essays must have atmosphere, observation and sensitivity.

## **3. Discursive/ Factual expository topic**

- Choose this option only if you understand the topic and have a fair amount of knowledge on the topic being asked.
- Plan the composition. Every composition has an introduction, body and conclusion. For discursive compositions, it helps to actually jot down the points you'll address and outline them into paragraphs.
- List the arguments for and against the topic, you'll have to provide a balanced view. Focus on facts and explanations, avoid expressing personal opinions.
- Use each paragraph for similar or like minded points
- If possible, include facts, statistical evidence and relevant, real life examples to enrich your composition
- Use formal language and format speech, if any at all appropriately
- Use discourse markers to connect ideas and smoothen transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Words such as however, furthermore, on the other hand can be useful when writing this type of essay
- Meaning and facts are important in this essay so it's important to ensure that the reader understands what you're trying to communicate. One way to do this is to always write clear and concise sentences that do not confuse the reader
- Briefly summarise your points in the conclusion

- If you have time, proofread your work, check for grammatical errors amongst other things
- Staying updated with current events and issues in Zimbabwe helps you prepare for this kind of essay as it provides up to date examples and arguments for your essays.

**Marking scheme:** Discussions must present complex, cogent arguments with force and economy.

#### **4. Argumentative**

- Before choosing the topic, make sure you have a fair amount of knowledge on it. Once decided, pick a side and explore the points
- Similar to a discursive topic, always jot down a list of points for the side you're going to agree with. Be sure to come up with a few for the other side as well
- In the introduction, clearly state your side and briefly mention the main points you'll be addressing in your composition
- Your body paragraphs should explore the points you would have briefly mentioned in the introduction in depth or detail
- Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that introduces the main idea of the paragraph
- Support the topic sentence/ point with specific examples, statistics, or historical events that are relevant to back up your points.
- Counterarguments- address opposing views and refute them with evidence. Your opposing points should not be more than the main argument you're making.
- Summarise your main points and restate your argument in a way that reflects the arguments you've made
- End with a strong concluding statement that reinforces your position.
- Avoid using slang and non informal speech
- Even though you're arguing for a specific opinion, avoid emotional language and stick to facts or logical reasoning (maintaining objectivity)
- It's also important to use discourse markers (words such as nevertheless, furthermore, etc) to help structure your argument

#### **5. Informative, expository topic**

## **General Grading Scheme for All Types of Free Compositions**

The following are the ranges for grading a student's response to a prompt out of 30.

### **(25-30)**

Ample material, fully relevant, high interest value/ persuasiveness; originality; merit of form and arrangement/ paragraphing; unity of tone/ approach; fluency; very good to excellent linguistic ability. Wide variety of apt vocabulary, sentence structure and linking devices

VERY FEW( LESS THAN 6) GROSS/ MAJOR ERRORS; very few slips or minor errors;

NB: All the following are gross/ major errors;

- a. Errors of agreement, number
- b. Serious tense errors, wrong verb form
- c. Elementary errors of sentence construction
- d. Misuse or confusion of simple words e.g they, their, there
- e. Spelling errors
- f. Punctuation causing serious lack of balance or misunderstanding or affecting sentence boundaries
- g. Ridiculous idiom
- h. Misuse of pronouns, prepositions, articles
- i. Confusion of key parts of speech

All work in this grade must show awareness of significant detail, wide information or apt illustration

### **(21-24)**

Ample material, fully relevant, interesting and sustained theme/ approach; well arranged and paragraphed; very good linguistic ability; vocabulary and sentence structure varied and appropriate; few gross/ major errors; some slips and minor errors.

Some essays may be long, well arranged, but without much originality; others will be original, but not so well sustained/ balanced as A class scripts.

### **(18-20)**

Ample and competent subject matter; less originality than B grade, quite well arranged, properly paragraphed; good linguistic ability, varied vocabulary and sentence structure; free from monotonous repetition; more major/ gross errors than in B class, some slips and errors

### **(15-17)**

The language for these scripts is fairly correct; rambling and rather repetitive. Compositions in this class may have the following characteristics: flat content, proper arrangement of ideas and few gross elementary errors. Though the composition may be shortish, with limited vocabulary, the meaning must not be in doubt. Sentences may be short and stereotyped, but there must be some complex sentences. Sentences should be correctly separated, except for occasional slips.

**(12-14)**

Dull but sensible content not explored in depth, some repetition; ideas fragmentary or vague, lack of sustained development, some attempt to arrange; clear evidence of relevance but perhaps occasional short digressions; expression flat, limited, uncertain; some serious faults of sentence construction, punctuation, vocabulary and tense; paragraphs short or run together; sentence and paragraph linking inappropriate or haphazard.

These types will fall into this classification:

- a. Scripts with enough competence for a limited range of simple points to be expressed unambiguously, with fair clarity, but with little vocabulary and few, if any, complex sentences
- b. Short, trite/ ordinary content: mainly correct language because no risks taken
- c. Long, racy scripts with interesting content but so much carelessness and inaccuracy that the writer cannot be employed even in simple clerical tasks; inability to punctuate consistently, especially in the separation of sentences.

**(9-11)**

Compositions in this class show clear limitations of content and arrangement digressions, confused thought; flimsy development, poor links, repetitive ideas and constructions; many errors of all kinds. Despite the obvious failings, scripts here have something relevant to say and manage to communicate without too much effort on the part of the reader.

**(0-8)**

Through this grade, we find the following:

Vague, confused ideas, with little sense of the following:

Vague, confused ideas with little sense of development

Communication impeded by heavy error incidence

Errors in basic voluntary and simple idiom

Gross errors of all kinds

**(6-8)**

Countless grammatical and syntactical errors, fair spelling sense mostly decipherable but some passages necessitating re-reading and the exercises of the reader's deductive powers. Content flimsy, ideas disconnected.

**(0-5)**

"Multiple gross errors" i.e mistakes not easily definable or separable whole passages not making sense; chaotic word order, gross mis-spelling of basic words