

WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(For Candidates in The Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone Only)

## **THE SCOPE OF THE SYLLABUS**

This examination sets out to test the different basic skills of communication in English using the mediums of speech and writing. The examination will test the receptive and productive abilities of candidates. These abilities will be demonstrated in the following forms: Reading Comprehension, Summary, Vocabulary, Lexis and Structure, Listening Comprehension and Recognition of different aspects of English speech.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the syllabus is to measure the extent to which the aims of the teaching syllabuses of member countries have been realized in candidates' Secondary School career. The examination sets out to examine candidates' ability to

- (i) use correct English;
- (ii) write about incidents in English that are appropriate to specified audiences and situations;
- (iii) organize materials in paragraphs that are chronologically, spatially and logically coherent;
- (iv) control sentence structures accurately;
- (v) exhibit variety in the choice of sentence patterns;
- (vi) comply with the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation;
- (vii) comprehend written and spoken English;
- (viii) recognize implied meaning, tones and attitudes;
- (ix) use an acceptable pronunciation that can be comprehended by others;
- (x) isolate and summarize relevant information from set passages.

## **OUTLINE**

Candidates will be required to take three papers. Total marks for the three papers will be 220 marks for The Gambia and Sierra Leone and 200 for Nigeria.

PAPER 1: 2½ hours - Essay Writing, Comprehension and Summary - 120 marks

PAPER 2: 1 hour - Multiple Choice questions (Lexis and Structure) - 50 marks

PAPER 3: 45 minutes - Oral English – 50 marks (for the Gambia and Sierra Leone)

PAPER 3: 45 minutes – Test of Orals – 30 marks (for Nigeria only).

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**DETAILED SYLLABUS**

**PAPER 1:** This paper will be divided into three sections (A, B and C).

**SECTION A: ESSAY WRITING (50 marks)**

Candidates will be required to spend 50 minutes on this section. There will be five questions in all and candidates will be required to answer only **one** question.

The questions will test candidates' ability to communicate in writing. The topics will demand the following kinds of writing:

- (i) letter;
- (ii) speech;
- (iii) narrative;
- (iv) description;
- (v) debate/argumentative;
- (vi) report;
- (vii) article;
- (viii) exposition;
- (ix) creative writing.

Credit will be given for

- (i) Content: relevance of ideas to the topic and its specified audience and purpose;
- (ii) Organization: formal features (where applicable), good paragraphing, appropriate emphasis and arrangement of ideas;
- (iii) Expression: control of vocabulary and sentence structure;
- (iv) Mechanical Accuracy: grammar, punctuation and spelling.

The minimum length expected will be 450 words.

**SECTION B: COMPREHENSION (40 marks)**

Candidates will be required to spend 50 minutes on this section. The section will consist of two passages each of about three hundred (300) words. Candidates will be required to answer questions on the two passages.

The questions will test the candidate's ability to

- (i) find appropriate equivalents for selected words and phrases;
- (ii) understand the factual content;
- (iii) make inferences from the content of the passages;
- (iv) respond to uses of English expressions to reveal/reflect sentiments/emotions/attitudes;

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- (v) identify and label basic grammatical structures, words, phrases or clauses and explain their functions as they appear in the context;
- (vi) identify and explain basic literary terms and expressions;
- (vii) recast phrases or sentences into grammatical alternatives.

The passages will be chosen from a wide variety of sources all of which will be suitable for this level of examination in terms of theme and interest. The passages will be written in modern English that will be within the experience of candidates. The comprehension test will include a total of three questions based on (vi) above in any one paper.

**SECTION C: SUMMARY (30 marks)**

Candidates will be required to spend 50 minutes on this section. The section will consist of one prose passage of about five hundred (500) words and will test the candidate's ability to

- (i) extract relevant information;
- (ii) summarize the points demanded in clear, concise English;
- (iii) present a summary of specific aspects or portions of the passage;
- (iv) avoid repetition, redundancy and extraneous material.

The passage will be selected from a wide variety of suitable sources, including excerpts from narratives, dialogues and expositions of social, cultural, economic and political issues in any part of the world.

**PAPER 2:** This is an objective/multiple choice paper comprising 100 questions: 40 lexical and 60 structural items. Each question/item will have four options lettered A to D.

**A. LEXIS**

In addition to items testing knowledge of the vocabulary of everyday usage (i.e. home, social relationships, common core school subjects) questions will be set to test the candidate's ability in the use of the more general vocabulary associated with the following fields of human activity:

- I.
  - (a) Building;
  - (b) Plumbing;
  - (c) Fishing;
  - (d) Finance – commerce, banking, stock exchange, insurance;
  - (e) Photography;
  - (f) Mineral exploitation;
  - (g) Common manufacturing industries;
  - (h) Printing, publishing, the press and libraries;
  - (i) Sea, road, rail and air transport;
  - (j) Government and politics;
  - (k) Sports and entertainment;

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- (l) Religion;
  - (m) Science and Technology;
  - (n) Power production – hydro, thermal, solar;
  - (o) Education;
  - (p) Transport and Communication;
  - (q) Military;
  - (r) Journalism and Advertising.
- II. Idioms, i.e. idiomatic expressions and collocations (e.g. “hook, line and sinker”, “every Tom, Dick and Harry” etc.) the total meaning of which cannot be arrived at simply by consideration of the dictionary meanings of the words in the structures in which they appear.
- III. Structural elements of English e.g. sequence of tenses, matching of pronouns with noun referents, use of correct prepositions.
- IV. Figurative usage

By “more general” vocabulary is meant those words and usages of words normally associated with the field of human activity in question which are generally known, used and understood by most educated people who while not engaged in that field of activity may have occasion to read, speak or write about it. Thus, for example, in the vocabulary of transportation by sea, one would expect knowledge of terms such as “bridge” and “deck”, which most educated people understand, but not “halyard”, “dodge”, “davit” or “thrust block”, which are specialized.

All items will be phrased in such a way as to test the use and understanding of the required lexis, rather than dictionary definitions and explanations. In practice, the test of lexis will be so designed as to explore, not merely the extent of the candidates’ vocabulary but more importantly their ability to respond to sense relations in the use of lexical items e.g. synonyms, antonyms and homonyms.

In the testing of figurative language, candidates will be expected to recognize when an expression is used figuratively rather than literally.

**B. STRUCTURE**

Structure here is used to include:

- (i) The patterns of changes in word-forms which indicate number, tense, degree, etc.;
- (ii) The patterns in which different categories of words regularly combine to form groups and these groups in turn combine to form sentences;
- (iii) The use of structural words e.g. conjunctions, articles, determiners, prepositions, etc.

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**PAPER 3 ORAL ENGLISH (50 marks)**

This paper will test candidates' knowledge of Oral English. There will be three alternatives for this paper: Alternative A for School Candidates in The Gambia and Sierra Leone, Alternative B for Private Candidates in The Gambia and Sierra Leone and Alternative C for Nigeria Candidates only.

**ALTERNATIVE A: LISTENING COMPREHENSION**

This paper will be a Listening Comprehension Test.

This will be made up of 100 multiple choice objective items:

Recognition of consonants, consonant clusters, vowels, diphthongs, stress and intonation;

Understanding of dialogues and narratives.

**Section 1:** Test of word final voiced-voiceless consonants in isolated words mainly, but other features such as consonant clusters may also be tested.

**Section 2:** Test of vowel quality in isolated words.

**Section 3:** Test of vowel quality and consonant contrasts in isolated words.

**Section 4:** One of three alternatives below will be used in different years:

(i) test of vowel and/or consonant contrasts in sentence contexts;

(ii) test of vowel and consonant contrasts in isolated words – to be selected from a list of at least four-word contrasts;

(iii) test of vowel and consonant contrasts through rhymes.

**Section 5:** Test of rhyming.

**Section 6:** Test of comprehension of emphatic stress.

**Section 7:** Test of understanding of intonation through short dialogues.

**Section 8:** Test of understanding of the content of longer dialogues and narratives.

**NOTE:** 1. Tape recorders will be used for the administration of this Listening Comprehension Test.

2. Features to be tested:

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**I. CONSONANTS**

- (a) **Single Consonants** - Candidates should be able to recognize and produce all the significant sound contrasts in the consonantal system of English. For the guidance of candidates, a few examples of such contrasts are given below.

	<b>Initial</b>	<b>Medial</b>	<b>Final</b>		
they	- day	buzzes	- buses	boat	- both
ship	- chip	parcel	- partial	breathe	- breed
fan	- van	sopping	- sobbing	wash	- watch
pit	- fit	written	- ridden	leaf	- leave
pit	- bit	anger	- anchor	cup	- cub
tuck	- duck	faces	- phases	cart	- card
card	- guard	prices	- prizes		-
gear	- jeer		-		-

- (b) **Consonant Clusters** – Candidates should be able to produce and recognize consonant clusters which may occur both initially and finally in a syllable. They should also be able to recognize and produce the consonant sounds in a consonant cluster in the right order. For the guidance of candidates, a few examples are given below.

<b>Initial</b>	<b>Final</b>		
play	- pray	rains	- range
sting	- string	felt	- felled
scheme	- scream	sent	- send
crime	- climb	nest	- next
flee	- free	ask	- axe
three	- tree	lift	- lived
true	- drew	missed	- mixed
blight	- bright	seats	- seeds
tread	- thread	hens	- hence
drift	- thrift	lisp	- lips
glade	- grade	coast	- coats
		marks	- masks

**II. VOWELS**

- (a) Pure Vowels
- (b) Diphthongs
- (c) Triphthongs

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Candidates should be able to recognize and produce all the significant sound contrasts in the vowel system of English. For the guidance of candidates, a few examples of such contrasts are given below.

seat	-	sit				
sit	-	set				
peck	-	pack				
pack	-	park				
cart	-	cat				
load	-	lord				
pair	-	purr				
park	-	pork				
hard	-	heard				
word	-	ward				
let	-	late				
cheer	-	chair				
pet	-	pat	-	part	-	pate
hat	-	heart	-	height	-	hate
part	-	port	-	pot	-	pat
caught	-	cot	-	cut	-	curt
pool	-	pull	-	pole	-	
bird	-	bed	-	bared		
but	-	bat				
						hut

### III STRESS

- (a) **Word Stress** - Candidates should be able to contrast stressed and unstressed syllables in words which are not otherwise distinguished. In addition, they should be aware of the possibility of shifting stress from one syllable to another in different derivations of the same word with consequent change in vowel quality. For the guidance of candidates, a few examples of changing word stress are given below.

‘increase	(noun)	in’crease	(verb)
‘import	“	im’port	“
‘rebel	“	re’bel	“
‘convict	“	con’vict	“
‘extract	“	ex’tract	“
‘record	“	re’cord	“
‘subject	“	sub’ject	“

- (b) **Sentence Stress** – Candidates should be aware that stress in sentences in English tends to occur at regular intervals in time. English is therefore called a stress-timed language. They should also be aware that in most sentences, unless some sort of emphasis is introduced, only nouns, main verbs (not auxiliaries), adjectives and adverbs are stressed. Final pronouns

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should not be stressed, unless some kind of contrast is intended; relative pronouns should not be stressed, nor should possessive pronouns. Thus, for example, the following sentences should be stressed as indicated:

He 'went to the 'town and 'bought some 'oranges.

I 'told him to 'go to the 'station to 'ask when the 'train would 'leave.

Did you 'ask him?

I 'read it but I 'didn't understand it.

They ar'rived 'yesterday.

The 'man who 'came.

I 'fetched his 'book.

**NOTE:** There are a few words in English that are pronounced differently depending on whether or not they are stressed in the sentence. These are usually called strong and weak forms.

- (c) **Emphatic Stress** – Candidates should be aware of the use of emphatic stress, most commonly to indicate a contrast, which is realized partly as a change in pitch within the intonation pattern. The falling pitch illustrated below is one of the common ways of indicating this:

He borrowed "my newspaper (ˈː~ˌ) (i.e, not hers)

He "borrowed 'my newspaper (ˈ~ˌː) (i.e, he did not steal it).

He borrowed my "newspaper (ˈː~ˌ) (i.e, not my book).

"He borrowed my 'newspaper (ˌ~ˌː) (i.e, not someone else).

#### IV INTONATION

Candidates should be made aware of the different forms English intonation takes in relation to the grammar of the language and the attitudes conveyed by the speaker. There are two basic intonation patterns or tunes: the falling and rising patterns. They should also realize that whereas the normal place for the changing pitch in an intonation pattern is on the last stressed syllable of the utterance (as indicated below), placing the changing pitch elsewhere implies a contrast to the item on which this changing pitch falls. For example:



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(a) **Falling Pattern**



(b) **Rising Pattern**

Did he 'see the 'principal? (.-/ ) Yes/No question

When the 'train arrived (.-/ ) Incomplete

They arrived to'day? (./.../ ) Question

Note that (i) the two patterns indicated above may be combined in longer sentences,  
e.g: When the 'train ar'rived, the passengers were on the platform.  
( ./.../.-.../ )

(ii) candidates should note, in addition, that any unstressed syllable following the last stressed syllable of the sentence is said on a low level pitch when the pattern is falling, but continues the rise if the pattern is rising. The same rule applies to tags following quoted speech.

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**ALTERNATIVE B**

Alternative B is a multiple-choice paper of 50 items testing the content of the syllabus as outlined for Alternative A.

The 50 items will cover the recognition of the following:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| (1) pure vowels        | (5) word stress                                   |
| (2) diphthongs         | (6) sentence stress                               |
| (3) consonants         | (7) emphatic/contrastive stress                   |
| (4) consonant clusters | (8) vowel and consonant contrasts through rhymes. |

**ALTERNATIVE C: TEST OF ORALS (For School and Private Candidates in Nigeria)**

A Test of Orals format is a multiple-choice paper of 60 items testing a wide range of areas or aspects of Orals as contained in the syllabus.

The Test of Orals will cover the following areas:

- (1) Vowels – pure vowels and diphthongs;
- (2) Consonants (including clusters);
- (3) Rhymes;
- (4) Word Stress/Syllable Structure;
- (5) Emphatic Stress/Intonation Patterns;
- (6) Phonetic Symbols.

The items to be tested in the specified areas are in accordance with the following blueprint:

SECTION	AREA/FEATURE	NO. OF ITEMS
1.	Test of Vowels	15 (10 pure vowels, 5 diphthongs)
2.	Test of Consonants	15
3.	Test of Rhymes	5
4	Test of Stress (4 – Syllable word)	5
5.	Test of Stress (2/3 – Syllable word)	5
6.	Test of Emphatic Stress/Intonation Patterns in Sentences	5
7.	Test of Phonetic Symbols	<u>10</u> (5 vocalic and 5 consonantal)
		<b>60</b>