

English Composition

Word limit

- If you are asked to write “at least 150 words” then make sure you write at least 150 words. The best thing would be to write about 180 words, at most 200 words.
- If you are asked to write “not more than 150 words”, then don’t write more than 150 words!

Planning

- Always plan your composition!!!
- Use a **MIND MAP**. This will help you to write with strong structure.

Checking

- Always check your writing after you have finished.
 - Tense
 - Agreement
 - Article
 - Spelling
 - Long sentences

The following is a checklist of what you should and should not do:

Do's	Don'ts
Read the topic, and write what the topic asks for.	Stray away from the main theme.
Write a plan / use a mind map.	Jump into writing immediately.
Use shorter sentence structures whenever possible.	Write long sentences with lots of commas. This is called a ‘running sentence’ and should be avoided. People will easily lose track of what you want to say.
Write a conclusion or ending no matter how rushed you are.	End abruptly without a conclusion. Compositions without an ending give an unfinished feeling and will be severely penalized.
Leave 5 - 10 minutes to check your work	Move on to the next task without checking.

Different types of writing:

- Descriptive / narrative writing
- Story
- Argumentative writing
- Letter

Descriptive Writing

- A descriptive essay is one in which students are asked to describe:
 - A person
 - A place
 - An object
 - An incident
 - An experience
 - A memory, etc

- The objective of descriptive essays is to give readers a vivid picture of what you want to tell them. Therefore, one of the keys to good descriptive essays is vocabulary.

- Compare the following examples:
 1. That night, I walked back home after work and slept immediately.
 2. It was a rainy and windy night. I strolled back home after work, fed up with loneliness and tiredness. My body was aching all over and all I could do was stretch and yawn and finally pass out on my warm and cosy bed.

- In the first example, you are only reporting to readers a fact. However, in the second example, you are giving readers a picture of the scene and your emotions.

- Example topics:
 - A storm in a summer afternoon
 - The person I respect the most
 - My favourite movie
 - A dragon boat race
 - Hong Kong during the winter

Sample essays:

“A storm in a summer afternoon”

Write about 150 words.

So I went out of my house, expecting a relaxing and sunny afternoon with my friends. All was good until I stepped out of the door – just as the storm dropped by, pouring down on me like a waterfall.

The possibility of an outdoor lunch was ruined, but I still decided to take a stroll around. “Beautiful!” I told myself. The normally busy road was already empty, and led to a blurred spot at the far end. It looked stunning, especially with the trees waving with the wind, like a row of tree-spirits asking you to join them in their dance.

The sky kept getting darker, as if it were approaching evening – without a sunset – and I could

see the streetlights turn themselves on one by one.

I turned my head around to take a glimpse at my house, only to find it consumed by the rainstorm. "Perhaps it is time to look for a shelter", I thought. (160 words)

"The person I respect the most"

Write about 150 words.

Jean Henri Dunant is in my opinion one of the underrated historical figures who deserves more respect and attention. To me, he remains one of the most respected persons ever.

Dunant was generally remembered by people for founding the Red Cross. Yet, less known was his personal commitment to save the sick and the injured on the battle fields. He was a businessman and was the first to initiate a movement to save injured soldiers from starvation and death regardless of which country they were fighting for. He was also the first to urge countries to spare the innocent as much as possible. To him, there was nothing more important than saving the lives of others in war.

Without these efforts of the Noble peace laureate, millions more lives would have been lost in crude wars and under blind bullets. His ideas and humanitarian ideals are far-reaching and still save countless lives today. (154 words)

Story

- A story is a passage that has a **plot**. It is usually presented in a more dramatic way in order to tell readers about a chain of events.
- Very often, the **past tense** is used.
- The key to writing good stories is **creativity**. The climactic part(s) of the story should be interesting. It will even be better if the ending is one which is out of readers' expectation. **A twist**.
- **Vocabulary**, **metaphors** and **perspective** will also help you in writing stories.
- You may add in dialogues in the story to make it livelier.
- **Structure** is also very important. The following is a good structure that you can follow:
 - Beginning / background
 - Development
 - Twist
 - Ending
- Example topics:
 - An adventure story about space exploration
 - An story about a spooky old house
 - A story about your neighbour's dog
 - A story about your school picnic
 - A story about winning a marathon

Sample essays:

Imagine you are an astronaut. Write an adventure story about space exploration.

Write no more than 250 words.

"Five, Four, Three, Two...", the control tower announced, "One!" The Adventurer shuttle is fired up into the blue sky, travelling through the atmosphere towards unexplored space.

Before being ejected from the shuttle, Angus, the other astronaut, warned me that I must be very careful. "Yes, Boss," I said. I did not pay too much attention. I was too excited.

I regretted this soon afterwards. The minute possibility of malfunction came down to my spacesuit. There was an explosion, and then I was absorbed into dark space....

I woke up in an unknown room. "Where am I?" I shouted. I was shocked to see creatures surrounding me. Apparently they were very interested in me. I tried to untie myself, but it was in vain.

One of them finally spoke, unfortunately, in a language that I did not understand. They did not

seem to be hostile and seemed to be talking to me in a friendly way. They smiled at me, and put a stone in my hand. I lost my consciousness immediately.

I opened my eyes again, hearing the sound of the life saving machines of my own shuttle. Angus nervously told me that some mysterious spaceships he saw after I was ejected literally shot away from the shuttle when it exploded. I was glad that I survived. In my hand was the mysterious stone, which I will treasure forever. (229 words)

“A story about a spooky old house”

Write no more than 400 words

It was another normal school day. The sky was dull and grey, as if it was going to rain soon. After the school bell rang, I left immediately because I wanted to go back home straightaway. Little did I know that something was waiting for me...

I didn't take my usual route back home and decided to take the road less travelled. There were tall strange trees and dark bushes along the path, and the grass looked as though no one had touched it for years. All of a sudden I noticed a large derelict house at the end of the road. Out of curiosity, I decided to enter the house. “Perhaps I'll find something interesting,” I thought to myself.

The house was very spooky and dark inside. It smelt of acid and old wood. There were broken armchairs and old paintings which looked like they were from the last century. I touched one of the dusty old silver plates on one of the gothic-styled tables, and it broke into pieces immediately.

“Bang!” Where did the noise come from? There shouldn't be anyone in this house. “Bang!”, another loud noise came from the end of the hollow corridor. It was too dark inside for me to see anything. When my eyes were adjusted to the darkness, I was horrified to see what was in front of me. It was a moving figure in armour! The knight-like figure was moving by itself, as if it were living and chasing after me. “My son, why are you in my house? I order you to leave immediately or I will...”

I was so terrified that I instantly turned back and ran for my life. The next moment I was back on the shaded path and ran straight to the main street.

The next day, I told my friends about this ghostly experience. They did not believe me, and so I decided to take them to the house. When we passed through the road less travelled, I was shocked to see that the house was no longer there. All that was left at the end of the road were bushes and trees. Tim poked me, and whispered, “Let's get out of here.” I have never mentioned the house since then as I could never be absolutely certain if it ever really existed. (387 words)

Argumentative Writing

- An argumentative essay is one which students are asked to comment on a certain topic, and to persuade readers to agree with the view of the writer.

- The most important tips are:
 - Structure
 - Logic
 - Making two-sided arguments (pros and cons)

- **Structure**, divide your essay into the following parts:
 - Cite your stance
 - Give reasons to support your views
 - Raise opponents' views
 - Refute their views
 - Reiterate your stance

- Some useful phrases:
 - First of all, let us look at what...means
 - I believe that it is...
 - In my view / opinion...
 - In order to support my argument, I wish to make the following points...
 - It may be useful to illustrate the above argument with the following examples...
 - The advantages / pros are...
 - I am in favour of...
 - There is no doubt...
 - To take this point further...
 - The disadvantages / cons are...
 - People may argue that...
 - There is no evidence to suggest that...
 - I strongly object to...
 - I can hardly agree with...
 - The benefits outweigh the drawbacks...
 - In addition / furthermore / moreover...
 - Considering it from another perspective...
 - Necessary evil...
 - Devil's advocate...
 - In comparison...
 - As an alternative...
 - No sensible mind will agree to...

- Example topics:
 - Single-sex schools are better than co-educational schools.
 - Students in Hong Kong should be given 12 years of free education, rather than 9 years.
 - Should secondary school students engage in more extra-curricular activities or focus more in their academic study?
 - Should we be allowed to carry guns in Hong Kong?
 - To what extent should the use of the internet be limited by law?

Sample essays:

“Single-sex schools are better than co-educational schools.” Do you agree?

Write about 150 words

Hong Kong has many secondary schools, and among them there are co-educational schools, boys' schools and girls' schools. On the question of which is better, I think that single-sex schools are to be preferred on the whole. I have two reasons to support this.

The first reason is that single-sex schools give students a better environment in which to learn. They can be more focused on their studies, without being exposed to a different sex at an early age. They may be distracted easily, which is natural for young persons.

The second reason is that it makes it easier for the school to organise student classes and activities, since there is no need to consider sexual differences. One example is in sports classes. Another is the smaller chance of group bullying by one sex against the other.

Although co-educational schools have their good sides, on the whole I would prefer single-sex schools. (152 words)

Do you agree that students in Hong Kong should be given 12 years of free education, rather than 9 years?

Write no more than 200 words

In Hong Kong, there has recently been hot debate regarding the length of free education for students. Should it be 9 or 12 years? I believe that it should be 12 years for the following reasons.

First of all, we all know that education is an essential part of the comprehensive growth of a person. Education is needed for many aspects of life such as employment and enriching one's own character.

Secondly, 9 years free education is not sufficient. Completing Form 3 in Hong Kong does not give a person enough advantages over others. Many employers require a high school (Form 5-7) qualification at the least. If we only have 9 years free education, many of those who cannot afford education beyond Form 3 will not be able to compete with others fairly.

Lastly, 12 years education will enable more disadvantaged people to be educated to a further level and thus give Hong Kong more strength to compete with other major cities.

Therefore, I believe the period of free education in Hong Kong should be extended to 12 years long instead of 9. (184 words)