



# English

## What is English?

English is a core subject and is compulsory in all schools. At Leaving Cert level, the English course aims to develop:

- The ability to critically analyse information, as preparation for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life;
- A respect and appreciation for language used accurately and appropriately, and a competence in a wide range of oral and written language skills;
- An awareness of the value of literature for widening horizons, for enhancing their sense of cultural identity, and for personal enjoyment.

The exams at both higher and ordinary require students to sit two papers. Junior Cert results are often a good indication of what level a student should choose for English. A large number of students take English at higher level but should not underestimate the amount of work required to obtain a high grade.

Paper 1 is divided into two sections, comprehension and composition, and students are expected to answer questions while considering both their audience and the intent behind the writing. In addition, a range of literary texts is prescribed for study. Students must choose a single text for close study, three or more texts to form a comparative study, and must follow a prescribed course in poetry.

There have been no alterations to the English syllabus since, 2001, so studying the examination papers between then and now is excellent preparation for the test ahead. Generally, students should be aware that (iv) on both papers, sensitivity to language has replaced the repetition of learned material as the essential skill.

## What kind of student might English suit?

Anyone who has ambitions for a career in creative writing, journalism, politics, or entertainment.

Students looking to develop and improve their communication skills.

## **Third Level Entry Requirements**

Universities generally require a student to pass English; however in some cases a pass in English or Irish is accepted (e.g. for most courses in the institutes of technology)

This subject is a requirement for entry into a number of third level courses. Click on the link below to view courses that definitely require, or may require this subject for entry:

### **Subject content**

#### ***Core Elements***

### **Language**

Students are required to study the following five designated areas of language in a wide variety of contexts, functions and styles.

1. The Language of Information.
2. The Language of Argument.
3. The Language of Persuasion.
4. The Language of Narration.
5. The Aesthetic use of Language.

### **Literature**

Students are required to study one literary text from a list of prescribed texts.

Students are required to study three other texts in the Comparative manner, according to the comparative modes prescribed for that year.

Students are required to study at least six poets from the eight poets prescribed at Higher Level. At Ordinary Level 36 poems are prescribed.

Compulsory elements: At Higher Level a Shakespearean Play must be one of the texts chosen for study on its own or as an element of the Comparative study.

Optional Elements: At Ordinary Level the study of a Shakespearean play is optional.

### **Exam Structure**

#### **Paper I**

Higher and Ordinary Level - 170 mins. - 200 marks.

### Section I

Three texts - one which is visual - are presented to students on a general Theme. Two sets of questions, an A and a B follow each text. Candidates must answer a question A on one text and a question B on a different text. (100 marks)

### Section II

(Composing) Candidates must write an extended composition in a specific genre of language from a list of seven choices. (100 marks)

### Paper II

Higher and Ordinary Level - 200 mins. - 200 marks.

Section I The single text (60 marks)

Section II The Comparative study (70 marks)

Section III Poetry (70 marks)

(H.L.)

(i) Unseen poem (20 marks)

(ii) Prescribed poetry (50 marks)

(O.L.)

(i) Unseen poem (20 marks)

(ii) Four poems will be printed on the exam paper and students must answer questions on one of the four. (50 marks)

Parents and students should be aware of the following cautionary points when considering the study of English at Higher Level for the Leaving Certificate exam.

The study of English at Higher Level places significant demands on the Leaving Certificate student.

The syllabus is very broad in its range of prescribed materials and can be quite time consuming.

The Higher Level (course) exam rewards good writing skills and an independent learner.

The extended composition features largely on both papers at Higher Level and students are expected to write between 750-1000 words in the time available, in these compositions.

There is the assumption at Higher Level that students will read widely and independently over the two years.

An interest in social, political and current affairs is vital and highly developed writing skills and critical analyses skills are prerequisite at Higher level.

Conversely at Ordinary Level textual material is printed on the exam paper for students, for example in the poetry sections poems are printed for the students. Less extended pieces of writing are also expected.

Texts at Ordinary Level are less challenging particularly bearing in mind that students at O.L. do not have to study a Shakespearean play.

Texts prescribed at O.L. are very student friendly and aimed at encouraging the more reluctant reader.

There is a vast difference in the study of English at Higher Level for Junior Certificate and the Study of English at Higher Level for the Leaving Certificate.

## **Exam Tips**

### **Paper 1:**

Composing: (100 marks)

Long before the examination, identify the type of composition (short story, personal essay, discussion or descriptive essay) that is likely to gain you the highest grades and practise this. Bear in mind that the personal essay can be written as a narrative or a discussion so it provides an alternative back up for both the short story and the discussion essay.

Short story: a short story is an exploration of a personality caught in a defining situation, indicating that the life of a character must be shown, through appearance, behaviour, and voice, both internal and external. The phrase defining situation means a situation that exposes the essence of that personality. It is useful to reduce the description of your central character to a single word so you know how the character looks, acts and speaks. Read as many short stories as possible to understand how the very best material is written.

Personal essay: the best preparation for the personal essay is to write short, colourful paragraphs that express your own personality. If approaching the personal essay as a narrative - the description of you caught in a defining situation, read the tips on the short story above. Be mindful that correctors are directed to look for reflective elements that capture your thoughts, feelings and judgments and interpretations on your experiences not just descriptions of things that happened to you.

Discussion essay: the key to a good discussion essay is to reduce the topic you are given to the point you wish to make. Using techniques such as exaggeration for effect, colourful illustrations and rhetorical questions influence a good discussion. It is important to read outside the course for example the newspapers.

Descriptive essay: the task is to evoke a mood or atmosphere, the technique of settling on a single scene and bringing it alive with expressive and revealing details.

### **Paper 2:**

The Single text: (60 marks) be guided by the question, not by any standard essays that you may have prepared or learned which cannot offer a relevant discussion of an unseen play or novel. Use your opening paragraph to explore the implications of the given quote, your concluding paragraph to assess its merits, whether you wholeheartedly agree or disagree with it or indeed if you have mixed feelings about it.

Comparative study: (70 marks) in answers to questions in this section students may compare and contrast (address similarities and/or differences) in both the content and style of their chosen texts. The most important things to remember is to understand clearly your modes of comparison, compare your texts in each paragraph you write and do not summarise your texts, rather refer to key moments to support your points.

Poetry: (70 marks) two sections; unseen and prescribed. In the unseen part your ability to engage with a poem you have not seen before is tested. To do this you need to think about what poetry is and why it is different to prose. Remember poetry is compressed communication, you see it, hear it and feel it. In the prescribed section while you need to learn about a poet's work and life from the writings of others, do not underestimate your own honest responses to gain top grades. Be guided by the question not by the responses you have prepared. Discuss both the themes and techniques of your chosen poet, the characteristic images and expressions as well as the recurring experiences and emotions. Demonstrate a good understanding of the poem by providing quotes.

### **Other tips for English exam:**

- answer the question you are directly asked
- always sketch out your ideas on a page first
- plan before you write (arranging points in paragraphs)
- replace commonly used words with less common synonyms (there are many = there is a plethora)
- buy a good dictionary and thesaurus

**Recommendation**

It is recommended that a student has achieved at least a grade (C) at Junior Certificate Higher Level, to continue into Higher Level Leaving Certificate English.