To Robert, for his technical, intellectual and emotional support

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Contents

Introduction to the second edition                                      vi
Objectives of the examination                                           vii
Components of the examination                                           vii

Part 1 Leisure: sport, travel, pastimes

Unit 1: Reading: skimming and scanning, selecting points for summary, making notes using your own words, looking at writers’ language choices 1

Unit 2: Directed writing: diaries, formal and informal letters, considering audience, choosing a style 9

Unit 3: Composition: planning continuous writing, descriptive compositions, using adjectives and imagery 18

Unit 4: Speaking and listening: preparing a talk, conversation skills 28

Part 2 Work: information, education, employment

Unit 5: Reading: understanding, selecting and organising material for summary questions 36

Unit 6: Directed writing: presenting and transforming information, news reports, formal reports 46

Unit 7: Composition: giving an account, organising information chronologically 56

Unit 8: Speaking and listening: role-play dialogues, preparing an interview 64

Part 3 People: society, lifestyles, relationships

Unit 9: Reading: expanding notes, sentence structure, vocabulary building, summary style, collating texts, how writers achieve effects 73
Unit 10: Directed writing: persuasive writing, analysing techniques, writing publicity material, drawing inferences, writing in role, targeting an audience 84

Unit 11: Composition: composing narratives, engaging the reader, dialogue punctuation 95

Unit 12: Speaking and listening: paired and group discussion, facts and opinions 105

Part 4 Ideas: art, science, technology

Unit 13: Reading: collating texts, analysing style, vocabulary building, advanced punctuation 114

Unit 14: Directed writing: expressing and supporting a view, collating and ordering information, reports and articles 124

Unit 15: Composition: making a case, constructing an argument, presenting a discussion, using rhetorical devices, improving spelling 133

Unit 16: Speaking and listening: defending opinions, delivering a speech 142

List of terms 150

Acknowledgements 151
Introduction to the second edition

The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) First Language English syllabus is designed as a two-year course for examination at age 16+ for students whose English is of native, near-native or bilingual standard. It was introduced in 1986 to offer a wide, relevant and accessible curriculum tailored to international needs and a fair assessment scheme which rewards positive achievement rather than penalising errors. First Language English is accepted as a UK higher education entrance requirement equivalent to British GCSE or IELTS 6.5, and is recognised as a suitable foundation for A level and IB studies.

This coursebook covers the whole IGCSE First Language curriculum and contains enough material for the two-year programme of study. The syllabus underwent revision in 2005 and this book prepares candidates for the revised syllabus. Each of the 16 units has a rich variety of activities and tasks sufficient to last for several classroom lessons plus homework. Teachers may wish to be selective in order to target the particular needs of their students. Each unit ends with three further practice tasks for students to do at home. It would be possible for students to use the coursebook without a teacher as the frequent exam tips give support, explication and, in many cases, answers to the questions and tasks. All the experience and advice needed for students to perform at the highest level in the examination is provided and reinforced.

You are advised to work through the units in sequence as the learning guidance and skills development are progressive. Although there is specific teaching of sentence building, vocabulary extension, punctuation and spelling, the book is intended primarily for use as an exam preparation course rather than as a language coursebook. The emphasis is therefore on the acquisition and application of transferable skills, with a mixture of preparatory and exam-type tasks in every unit. A complementary student workbook is available, in the same series and by the same author, which not only gives support and practice, but also contains further exam-type passages and tasks, as well as composition and coursework titles. Advice in the exam tips is based on University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) documents relating to the exam. Question papers and the mark scheme for the IGCSE First Language English examination are available from CIE and on the CIE website www.cie.org.uk.

The coursebook focuses on Paper 2 but it is also suitable for Paper 1 (Reading Passage(s)) since the components have a reading text in common and there is an overlap of skills assessed between the core and extended levels. Although Paper 3 is the focus of the book’s practice in Directed Writing and Composition, there is much advice on types of writing, content, structure and style which would be equally applicable to coursework portfolio pieces, and there are suggestions for possible coursework assignment topics and provision of a variety of stimulus resources in each Composition unit.
The IGCSE First Language Speaking and Listening component – though an optional part of the exam – is more than adequately covered in the book, with numerous opportunities for skills acquisition and classroom practice in a variety of groupings and situations which prepare students for both Paper 5 and Paper 6. Four units concentrate on speaking and listening, and in addition every unit contains aural and oral communication activities. This is consistent with an integrated-skills approach to the teaching and learning of language and an interactive and investigative classroom methodology in line with the good practice implied in the aims of IGCSE.

The book is divided into four themed sections: Leisure, Work, People and Ideas. Each section is sub-divided into units corresponding to the four exam assessment areas: Reading, Directed writing, Composition, and Speaking and listening. The themes were chosen for their international applicability, relevance, variety and intrinsic interest to young people. The majority of texts are authentic and recent; they are also typical of the kinds of passages and tasks set by the exam board. Furthermore, the book draws upon a wide variety of sources, genres, registers and issues, and has been designed to be user friendly as well as academically stimulating. Quotations included in the exam-tip boxes are taken from the IGCSE First Language English syllabus.

Students are expected to have a good-quality dictionary available, and to keep a record of new vocabulary in a personal list as they work through the book. A thesaurus may also be useful, if used sensibly. They will need some different-coloured highlighters and/or pens for selecting material from passages, and an exercise book or supply of file paper.

By the end of the coursebook students should have become more confident in thinking about language, handling and responding to texts, and approaching and fulfilling tasks. They should also have expanded their vocabulary, increased their accuracy, and improved in all the skills areas so that they are fully prepared to sit the exam.
Objectives of the examination

Reading Objectives:
R1 Understand and collate explicit meanings
R2 Understand, explain and collate implicit meanings and attitudes
R3 Select, analyse and evaluate what is relevant to specific purposes
R4 Understand how writers achieve effects

Writing Objectives:
W1 Articulate experiences and express what is thought, felt and imagined
W2 Order and present facts, ideas and opinions
W3 Understand and use a range of appropriate vocabulary
W4 Use language and register appropriate to audience and context
W5 Make accurate and effective use of paragraphs, grammatical structures, sentences, punctuation and spelling

Speaking Objectives:
S1 Understand, order and present facts, ideas and opinions
S2 Articulate experience and express what is thought, felt and imagined
S3 Communicate clearly and fluently
S4 Use language and register appropriate to audience and context
S5 Listen to and respond appropriately to the contributions of others

Components of the examination

Component 1: Reading Passage (Core) (1 hour 45 minutes)
Questions will relate to one passage of approximately 700–800 words that is printed on the question paper.

Question 1 (30 marks) will be divided into a series of sub-questions requiring answers of different lengths. These will be based on the passage provided on the question paper. It will test the following Reading Objectives: R1–R4.

Question 2 (20 marks) will require candidates to respond to the passage printed on the question paper. It will test the following Reading Objectives (10 marks): R1–R3. In addition, 10 marks will be available for Writing Objectives W1–W5.

Component 2: Reading Passage (Extended) (2 hours)
Questions will relate to two passages of approximately 600–700 words each, linked by a common theme. These passages will be printed on the question paper.

Question 1 (20 marks), which may be sub-divided, will require candidates to respond to Passage 1 only. It will test the following Reading Objectives (15 marks): R1–R3. In addition, 5 marks will be available for Writing Objectives W1–W5.

Question 2 (10 marks), which may be sub-divided, will be based on Passage 1 only. It will test Reading Objective R4.

Question 3 (20 marks), which may be sub-divided, will require candidates to write a summary based on Passage 1 and Passage 2. It will test the following Reading Objectives (15 marks): R1–R3. In addition, 5 marks will be available for Writing Objectives W1–W5.
Component 3: Directed Writing & Composition (both Core & Extended) (2 hours)

Section 1 – Directed Writing (25 marks)
Candidates will read one or more short texts, which will be printed on the question paper. They will be required to use and develop the given information in another form, e.g. a letter, a report, a speech, a dialogue of about 250–300 words. The question will test the following Writing Objectives (15 marks): W1–W5. In addition, 10 marks will be available for Reading Objectives R1–R3.

Section 2 – Composition (25 marks)
Two argumentative/discursive, two descriptive and two narrative titles will be set. Candidates will be required to write on one title only. Candidates will be advised to write between 350 and 450 words. This section will test the following Writing Objectives: W1–W5.

Component 4: Coursework Portfolio (both Core & Extended)
Candidates will be required to submit a portfolio of three assignments, each of about 500–800 words. These assignments may be done in any order. The final mark for the Coursework Portfolio will be out of 50.

Assignment 1: informative, analytical and/or argumentative
Assignment 2: imaginative, descriptive and/or narrative
Assignment 3: a response to a text or texts chosen by the Centre. The text(s) should contain facts, opinions and arguments. Candidates will be required to respond to the text(s) by selecting, analysing and evaluating points from the material (Reading Objectives R1–R3). They may write in any appropriate form they wish.

The Coursework Portfolio will test the following Writing Objectives (40 marks): W1–W5. For Assignment 3 only, an additional 10 marks will be available for Reading Objectives R1–R3. Candidates must include the first draft for one of the three assignments submitted.

Component 5: Speaking & Listening (Optional)
There will be two parts to the test:

Part 1 – Individual Task (3–4 minutes) (10 marks)
For example, a presentation, a talk, a speech, a monologue. The candidate will talk for about 3–4 minutes on a single topic or theme which has been selected by her/him prior to the test. The Individual Task will test the following Speaking Objectives: S1–S4.

Part 2 – Discussion (6–7 minutes) (20 marks)
The Individual Task will lead into a conversation with the teacher/examiner about the candidate’s chosen topic. The Discussion will test the following Speaking Objectives: S1–S5.

Component 6: Speaking & Listening Coursework (Optional)
Candidates will be assessed on their performance during the course in three different speaking and listening tasks:

Task 1: an individual activity
Task 2: a pair-based activity
Task 3: a group activity

Tasks will be equally weighted in the final assessment and will test the following Speaking Objectives: S1–S5 ($5 for Tasks 2 and 3 only).