

Benchmarking Examination 2011

Guidelines for the Pre-Writing Task in the Written Component

A. Introduction

Writing is a key learning and classroom activity. Learning how to write well means learning how to communicate, with others as well as with one's own inner world. Writing well is first of all a key to personal fulfilment and success, and this should be the priority in every writing lesson.

These Guidelines refer to another function of writing – as a means to assess learners' educational development at the end of their primary cycle of compulsory schooling, so as to gain both a personal as well as a national picture of learners' strengths and needs for further improvement.

This assessment function does not marginalise the importance of writing primarily for communication with self and others. Indeed, the writing component of the Benchmark exams for Maltese and English has been designed to acknowledge and support the process of writing in the classroom, with appropriate attention to the purpose and audience of a writing task and the implications of this to the writing style. The best preparation for writing during examinations is the immersion in writing, and the complete process of writing, throughout the years of compulsory schooling.

However, these Guidelines recognise that writing to task and with limitations of time and space is a genre in and of itself. Anyone who has had to write a report or a memorandum against a strict deadline and strict regulations as to length and format knows well that this genre is not restricted to examination conditions.

These Guidelines therefore focus on how learners can be best prepared for the written component of the Benchmark exams, with a special emphasis on the Pre-Writing task. Students should always keep in mind that this preparation is, in fact, best accomplished when integrated in good practice of teaching and learning throughout the scholastic year.

B. How is the Written Paper of the Benchmark Examination structured?

The written paper for the end of primary Benchmark examinations for both Maltese and English consists of:

- a short writing task, that carries a maximum of 10 marks, and
- a longer writing task, that carries a maximum of 20 marks.

No prewriting is expected with the short writing task.

The longer writing task includes the use of prewriting. Learners may be awarded up to 4 marks (of the 20 allocated to the longer writing task).

C. Why does the Benchmark Exam include the Pre-Writing Task?

Extensive research and professional practice since the 1970s has shown that writing is not just a product, but a process. The use of pre-writing techniques opens up new creative avenues of memory, thought, and expressiveness. It allows writers to plan more consciously about the purpose of their writing task, its intended audience and therefore how to craft it, how to 'find their voice'.

Giving space for pre-writing in a writing task greatly enhances the quality of the final product.

D. What do the examiners have in mind with respect to the longer writing task?

In the longer writing task examiners will be looking at how learners:

- are using language in order to express meaning and creativity in different ways;
- use the prewriting, drafting, revising and editing process in order to improve their work;
- make use of the main rules and conventions of written language to sustain their writing;
- use the features of a particular form of writing, adapting it where necessary.

Learners are free to choose the prewriting strategy that best suits both their personal style and the writing task at hand. This strategy may be as simple as a list of points, and as complex as a 'squashed spider' or other form of associative web. Drawings may also be used. However, a first draft (the 'rough') of the final writing task is NOT considered a pre-writing exercise.

At the prewriting stage no marks are deducted for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.

The prewriting task needs to be clearly leading on to the writing that is actually attempted, and needs to include relevant details. However, examiners are not looking for full and exclusive concordance between the pre-writing task and the final written text. It is understood that in the course of composing the final written text, the student may revise the pre-writing ideas and develop them further.

Links to various prewriting resources can be found on <http://mwp.skola.edu.mt/category/the-writing-process/prewriting/>

Throughout these Guidelines reference is made to writing process technical terms such as *genre*, *purpose*, *audience* and *voice*, *draft*, *revise* and *edit*. However these terms will not be used in the Benchmark examinations of 2011, nor are students expected to use them.

E. (Addressed to learners) How do you do well in a writing exam?

Train to write for a fixed time. It is important that you complete both exam tasks in the required time. Practise good time management of tasks well before the exam by writing under exam-like conditions.

Read the prompt well. It is a good idea to read the prompt through once and then go back and while re-reading it, to underline key words which will help you to formulate your draft. Check what the prompt is asking you to do. Be familiar with terms like *discuss*, *describe*, *illustrate*, *evaluate*, *define*.

Think about how you will address the prompt. After reading the prompt well, check the *genre (form)* you will be writing in, the *purpose* for your writing, the *voice* and the *audience* the task sets. This will help you to decide on what you should put in your writing.

For example, if the prompt is asking you to draw up an advert for a new toy:

- the *genre* is advert writing;
- The *purpose* is to advertise the new toy in order to get people to buy it;
- The *audience* (the people you want to read your advert) is parents and kids;
- The *voice* is persuasive.

Jot down ideas. Using prewriting strategies will help you to plan your writing, dig deeper for information that you may need, order ideas and add interesting details to your writing.

Step back and look again. It is a good idea to step back and revise your prewriting to see that it is still focused on what the prompt requires of your writing.

Draft. While drafting, be conscious of how much time you have allotted and how much you are writing. Vary your sentence structure and vocabulary wisely. This will keep the reader (the examiner in this case) interested in your writing. Be sure that your handwriting is legible. Look at your organisation of the piece of writing with regards to the genre.

Revise. Choose from a revision strategy which will help you to look closely at your piece of writing from a reader's point of view.

Edit. Once you finish drafting read your writing through. Proof read for punctuation, spelling and grammar. Check also that your writing is readable and presentable.

Malta Writing Programme
Quality Assurance Department
Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education

<http://mwp.skola.edu.mt>
mwp.meef@gov.mt

March 2011