

Suggestions for Writing “Part B: Reading” of the ELA 30-2 Diploma Exam

Machine-scored questions on the ELA 30-2 Part B Reading examinations are developed to assess students’ knowledge and thinking skills. Following are a few suggestions to help you capitalize on your knowledge and skills.

- **Be sure to read the selection and think carefully about it before you answer any of the machine-scored questions associated with the reading selection.** Each set of multiple-choice questions is designed to take you back through the reading selection in a systematic way. The first questions in the set (usually questions about straightforward elements of the selection) will establish the context for the entire set of questions. The next questions will ask about specific elements of the selection (meanings of words or phrases or figures of speech, effects of rhetorical elements of style or writer’s technique, characterization, character traits or attitudes or motivations, relationships between characters, writer’s tone, etc.). The last questions in the set will ask about more global elements that are best answered through a consideration of the reading selection as a whole (main idea or theme or thesis, writer’s purpose, etc.)
- **Take the time to reread the sections of the reading selection that are indicated in the questions as you work through the set of questions.** Many questions contain quotations from the selection with line references indicated. It is always worthwhile to reread the lines that are referenced and consider the meanings of these lines in their immediate context in the selection and in the context of the selection as a whole.
- **When answering “best answer” questions, be sure to read carefully all four alternatives (A, B, C, and D) before choosing the answer that you think is best.** Some of the questions on the exam are designed to test your powers of judgement. These questions will always include in their stems a bold-faced qualifier such as **best, most strongly, or most clearly**. All of the alternatives (A, B, C, and D) are, to some degree, correct, but one of the alternatives will be **“best”** in that it takes more of the reading selection into account or can be supported most strongly by reference to the reading selection.
- **Work from partial knowledge when it is appropriate to do so.** If a correct or best answer does not become obvious to you fairly quickly, you may want to eliminate the answers that seem most wrong and then use your powers of judgement to select an answer from those that remain.
- **Aim to extend your vocabulary over time.** Some of the reading skills tested on Part B relate directly to the ability to decode word meaning through the implications of context, prefixes, suffixes, derivatives, etc. Since no dictionaries are allowed in the writing of Part B, you will have a distinct advantage if you develop your knowledge and skills in this area.

General Strategies for Answering Multiple Choice Questions:

- Do not choose an answer containing terms you have never heard before. Always choose the more inclusive answer when several answers are correct.
- Cross out answers you know for certain are incorrect. Use the process of elimination.
- Read the question carefully and underline key information. Try to answer the question without referring to the choices.
- If an option does not grammatically follow the stem, it is probably incorrect.
- Correct options tend to be longer than the incorrect options, and they sometimes repeat some of the terms in the stem.
- Incorrect options tend to be more vague than correct options.
- When one option means essentially the same thing as another option, both are probably incorrect.
- If an option appears to be a direct quote from the test, it is probably correct.
- Read ALL answers before you choose one.
- If you have no idea of the correct answer, fill in faintly your best guess and mark the question on your question booklet. Then go back later. This will prevent you from getting on the wrong line on the answer sheet which will be catastrophic!!
- Unless you are positive what you are doing, do NOT go back and change answers. Your first reaction will most likely be correct.
- Do not look for patterns of any kind on your answer sheet. There are none!
- The computer cannot distinguish between a smudge and a correct answer. If you must erase, do so completely.
- Carefully check your paper for extraneous marks.



PART B: READING COMPREHENSION

OVERVIEW

The Reading Comprehension component of the Diploma examination consists of 70 multiple choice questions on a total of five types of literary works. These are classified as fiction, non-fiction, modern drama, and poetry. The readings on the exam are chosen for their literary merit and the breadth of the cultural backgrounds that they represent. The readings are consistent with a level of challenge appropriate for graduating ELA 30-2 students.

We will approach the Reading Comprehension section through four categories. First, you will be given a brief outline of the exam. Second, you will go over the specific types of questions that comprise the Reading Comprehension section so you will know how to deal with each question type. In the third part, you will examine strategies that can be applied to the exam in general so you can develop an overall approach. Fourth, you will look at the different genres and the information that relates to each. If you become familiar with the structural elements of each genre, you are more likely to understand how writers convey their thoughts and ideas.

EXAMINATION OUTLINE

The examiners have developed four main categories that organize the questions they set for the ELA 30-2 examination. These categories include: 1) Meanings; 2) Relationships Between Form and Content; 3) Human Experiences and Values; 4) Knowledge of Revision and Editing. The exam questions for each reading tend to shift their focus as they proceed, beginning with several that establish the context for the questions that follow, continuing with some that test

the students' knowledge of detailed literary features of the text, and concluding with more global elements. To explain your understanding of a particular passage, the contextual questions could ask you to infer meanings based on the text, or apply information that you already know before reading the text. The next few queries could ask you to define literary terms or express the meanings of specific words or phrases. The last questions based on a reading could test your understanding of broad elements of the passage. These could include questions about themes, values, relationships that are represented in the reading.

QUESTION TYPES

To do well on the Reading Comprehension portion of the Diploma Examination, you should familiarize yourself with the particular question types so that you will clearly understand the intent of the question. If you are able to incorporate this with a thorough understanding of the literary work, you should be in a position to do well on this test.

COURSE CONTENT QUESTIONS

1) *Meaning Questions*

Questions on meanings are the most common questions across all genres. Regardless of the selection, questions in this category examine your knowledge of

- purpose
- theme
- thesis
- figurative and literal statements.

Meanings can be drawn from a range of information that test your reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Questions drawn from this category are constructed so that information is available in the literary work itself. Depending on your own reading style, it might be a good idea to read each passage with a pencil handy. You could make reference marks in the text to which you could return later. Quickly underlining a word or phrase that explains an aspect of meaning serves as a landmark when you are searching for answers to the questions that follow.

A question that seeks to define the purpose of a literary work could be phrased in one of the following ways. The main purpose of a literary work is to:

- Illustrate - Describe
- Explain - Analyze
- Question - Criticize
- Prove - Persuade

You may be able to come up with some of your own to add to this list. Knowing why a particular piece was written, may help you comprehend what is written. For example, we could say that if an author uses florid, melodramatic language his intention is to persuade us, instead of to convince us through scientific proof

Thematic concepts may also be tested through Meaning Questions. You might ask yourself the following questions to discover one of the themes of a passage:

- What major issue or conflict is presented?

- Why does the author write on this particular issue or topic?
- What feelings has the passage evoked in you?
- How does the writer treat the subject matter?
- Which theme do you think predominates?

2) Critical Response Questions

This type of question will ask you to display your understanding of:

- Form
- Structure
- Style
- Form and Content

Critical Response questions ask you to give a disciplined response to the author's use of language. This language use involves techniques with which you should be familiar, such as imagery, metaphor, paragraph or verse breaks, viewpoint. These questions take you up to a more sophisticated level of reading than do questions in the Meaning category. They assume you basically understand the information provided in the passage. Now these questions test your ability to relate this information to your knowledge of literary techniques. For example, here are some typical questions from the Critical Response category:

- "Contrasting images in this poem are connected by what lines?"
- "An example of irony is..."
- "The dramatic effectiveness of these lines..."
- "The literary device that most enhances the dramatic effectiveness..."
- "The metaphor that best reveals what the character sees as his purpose..."
- "The narrator's overwhelming sense of doom is most comprehensively conveyed..."

A quick second glance at this list can draw your attention to the many literary terms used in this category. These terms can put you in a difficult position if you forget what they mean. Although you may be intelligent enough to make many inferences based on information in the reading passage, you will have a difficult time understanding the role of a metaphor, for example, if you do not first recall the definition of a metaphor. You may have an easier time remembering the terms if you think of them as tools that allow you to discuss the many elements of good creative writing that you enjoy. Literary terms provide you with a common ground on which to begin conversations about stories, poems and dramas. They may seem like a 'drag' to remember now, but these terms actually make it easier for someone else to understand what you are trying to say about a piece of writing.

3) Human Experiences and Values Questions

This type of question requires that you understand and interpret:

- Motives
- Personalities
- Setting

Some questions that illustrate the human experience and values are given below:

- "According to the author, happiness is mainly the result..."
- "In his final speech, the character asks God . . . because he associates his state of mind..."
- "The way this character is depicted in this poem can best be described..."
- "The character acknowledges the basis for his downfall..."

How can you approach Human Experiences and Values questions? Try this:

1. Consider the stem of the question, specifically the human element that is the focus. In the first two examples above, “happiness” and “state of mind” would refer to the human element in the question.
2. Once you have narrowed down the specific human experience referred to in the question, you can refer back to the passage and find the information that best relates to this experience.
3. Select the answer that best describes this human experience from the list.
4. Diploma questions often bold an adverb, such as best. Noting this word helps you recognize that some of the responses given maybe almost correct, but not as ‘correct’ as the best answer. Therefore, you should carefully evaluate all the answers before you, therefore, before settling on a final selection as your answer.

THINKING SKILLS

1) *Literal Understanding*

All ELA 30-2 students are expected to read and understand at least at the very minimal literal level. Since the exam is composed with this basic assumption, Literal Understanding questions appear on the examination. When this question does occur, however, most of the time it does so as a Meaning Question. Questions that ask for simple information from the passage are potentially easy marks. You should avoid the danger of assuming you know the correct answer without returning to the passage to confirm that this is in fact correct. A quick turn of the page to the passage in question can solidify the answer for you.

Another kind of Literal Understanding question that often turns up in the exam is one that asks for the definition of a term based on its context. You could be asked to respond to a statement such as, “The context of these lines indicates that ‘assuage’ means”. Although you may feel pressure to complete the exam as fast as possible, you still should pause a moment over the context in which the term occurs. Highlight the line(s) mentioned, and re-read them in context. The careful comparison of answer selections, with the meaning you infer from the context, can help guarantee a correct answer. Your approach to the exam should comprise a balance of efficient speed and caution. Too much speed hinders our result with unnecessary errors; too much caution may hinder our result with an unfinished exam

2) *Inference*

Inference activities are those that require students to think beyond the information in the reading selection and infer information which, though un-stated, can be supported by information that is stated in the reading selection.

The questions that routinely occur on the Reading Comprehension test relating to inference may be recognized by certain keywords.

- conveys - foreshadows
- compares - suggests
- contrasts - implies

To improve your chances of correctly answering this type of question, you may want to use the following approach.

- i) Look at the stem of the question and see if you notice any of the keywords mentioned above that will test your inferential thinking.
- ii) Go to the section of the passage referred to in the question, and deduce the information that reasonably flows from that which is presented

- iii) Examine the mood, point of view, and irony of the section.
- iv) Extend this information to the question, and see if your response is present in one of the answers.

The examination also tests your ability to make inferences by asking you to predict outcomes. You cannot bring a crystal ball with you into the examination room. How can you successfully answer this type of question? You must begin with your own understanding of the writer's message. Once you have a clear sense of what the writer is saying, tentatively suggesting what you can reasonably expect is less difficult than what you might initially imagine.

3) Evaluation

Evaluation questions tend to have a noticeable stem, such as one of the following:

- Mainly conveys...
- Best explains...
- Strongest example...
- Least likely...
- Most effectively...

Unlike the other questions, these ask you to pick from options that range in degree. For Evaluation questions, you should carefully respond to the entire question, instead of just one part of it. How could you successfully approach one of these questions?

- i) Understand what the question is asking and which element is being evaluated
- ii) Be aware that there are answers of varying degrees of correctness, and the selection you make needs to correspond to the limitation of the question.
- lii) You should understand that the question asks for a judgement from you that is based on your examination of the literary work
- iv) Apply your decision making skills to systematically choose the best alternative.

STRATEGIES

GENERAL STRATEGIES

A full term of work and learning culminates in the diploma exam. This exam gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your competence and understanding of the material covered throughout the course. If the exam tests your ability to regurgitate facts or figures, then memorization alone can be the key to success. The challenge arises when you have to read a selection of literature that you probably have not seen before, and answer questions that focus on a range of topics. Since each passage is distinct, with its own set of problems, you need to start with general strategies that can be applied to a variety of writings. You must be able to read passages of varying degrees of difficulty and understand what is written.

Since you know that thorough understanding of the literary selections is vital to scoring well, you can ask: how can I improve my reading skills while preparing for a test of reading comprehension? The obvious answer is to practice. Throughout your academic year, try to read as many different literary works as you can.

Regardless of the exact nature of the reading presented, you should follow a general procedure to increase your comprehension.

1) Read the questions for that set first.

The reason for this approach is that it allows you to read the passage with a more discerning eye. Knowledge of an impending question directs your focus as you read the passage. Your motivation for reading the passage shifts from simply understanding the material, to purposefully seeking answers to the questions you have read. Reading the questions beforehand should provide you with sound clues as to what part of the selection has extra importance. If you do not find your interpretation in the question, look for other possible interpretations. Your interpretation of a selection should be consistent.

2) Read the passage actively.

Active reading is the process readers use to circle, underline, mark or highlight the parts of a text that they judge to be important or relevant. Reading actively enhances the comprehension process by stressing elements that are deemed noteworthy and allows for rapid recognition of information that is set off from the rest of the passage. You can further your reading comprehension by asking some elementary questions as you read (possible exploratory questions are discussed in the next section). With some questions already in your mind, you can approach the reading selection with some idea of what you should be looking for in the literature.

3) Consider sources of information aside from the passage itself.

Reading becomes more interesting when you bring your experiences and insights into your habit of reading. You can ask yourself whether you have ever been in a similar situation as one that's represented in the passage. If so, how was your response similar to that of a character in the story. If not, how do you think you would respond to this situation?

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

Every reading selection will have some basic shared elements. You could say that generally, a writer states an idea, supports it with detail, and then brings it to a logical conclusion. To better understand the writing, you must first attempt to define the writer's idea. From the supporting information that the writer provides, you should be able to establish the purpose for the author's use of this idea. The final step is to make reasonable inferences from the conclusions that the writer has drawn.

This section deals with strategies designed to elicit this information from any type of literature. When you are confronted with a reading selection from the examination booklet, it is important that you have a clear idea of how to approach it. This basic focus should be the same regardless of the genre selected.

You are reading to find out the main idea. You continue to read to find details and supporting information. From the conclusion that you draw, you must be able to make a logical extension of the writer's ideas.

Here are some techniques to help you.

1.) To arrive at the main idea of a passage, poem, or dramatic piece, ask yourself some basic questions.

a) What is the title of this work? Why was this piece given this name? The answer to this question may point you to the main idea of the passage.

b) Why did the writer create this text? Understanding the author's purpose can provide

insight into other features of the passage, such as figurative language, metaphors, and characterization.

c) What main idea is the writer conveying through the characters and the actions they take? Often a character will speak opinions held by the author.

d) What ideas are expressed at key points in the text? We can often discover these ideas in the topic sentences of paragraphs, recurring phrases, or characters' motivations.

2.) You can now find clues that support the main idea through additional details or developments. Consider these questions:

a.) What information does the writer offer to support his or her position? Your interpretation of the author's ideas should closely follow the argument developed by the author.

b.) What specific details does the writer offer to expand on the initial statement of the idea? This factual detail will provide us with clues to author's intent.

c.) Does the author use comparisons with other situations to validate his or her writing? These comparisons give us clues about some of the more subtle implications of the author's position.

d.) What information does the author provide that harmonizes with his or her view? What information does the author provide that contradicts this view? Writers often offer a range of alternative viewpoints as a way to more clearly establish where they themselves stand.

3) The third step is to combine the information at hand with what is also implied to reach a conclusion that is a logical extension of these ideas. While watching a movie, you may find yourself wondering about what will happen next. You are using your interpretative skills to infer possible outcomes and scenarios. Readings can also be approached the same way. Ask these questions to heighten your innate skills.

a) From the information the author has presented, what outcomes could I expect?

b) What information is offered in the passage, either implicitly or explicitly?

c) Could this information be applied to another scenario not described by the author?

d) What other implications relate to the author's position?

All of these questions should lead to logical conclusions, drawn from the information provided directly by the author or through dialogue and actions.

The three kinds of questions outlined above will aid you in improving your comprehension of the literary selection. You may find yourself thinking of some of these questions while you are reading. Others may be best answered after you have had a chance to read the selection thoroughly.

UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

The "comprehension" in the Reading Comprehension section of the exam applies to both the reading selection and the question. Misinterpreting either one could lead to a wrong answer. A test of Reading Comprehension spans a broad range of possible questions. From an analysis of previous exams, there are several areas which are repeatedly tested.

You will be required to:

- Understand the focus of each question
- Know abstract ideas and relationships
- Recognize human values and their importance within the reading selection

- Understand the writer's attitude and style
- Evaluate literary styles, structures and ideas and how they are related.
- Go beyond the literary level, and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the work.

You may also need to:

- Notice keywords apart from the words that may be highlighted.
- Work only with the information that is provided unless the question asks you to do otherwise.
- Know literary concepts such as metaphor, irony, theme, symbolism, and point of view.
- Know literary devices such as juxtaposition, foreshadowing, etc.
- Know literature that is of varying degrees of difficulty

GENRES

It is important for you to understand the various genres as this will lend itself to a stronger understanding of the reading. The ELA 30-2 exam will test your knowledge of four types of literary works: poetry, modern drama, fiction and non-fiction. As a review, we have provided the following outline of each genre, and the related elements that have been tested on past diploma exams.

A) POETRY

There are several elements that are unique to poems and thus are keys to a more complete understanding of this genre. What follows is a discussion of the terms and definitions that are basic to the composition of poems. As mentioned earlier, questions on past diploma exams have assumed that the student has some technical knowledge of poems.

A poem is a composition of lines, thoughtfully constructed in some form involving rhythm, rhyme, and/or verse structures, to express ideas and feelings.

A poem can take one of several forms.

Once you are able to recognize the type of poem you are reading, you can identify the word usage. A poem tends to be much shorter in length than other literary works, but this does not mean it lacks depth or detail.

Words in poems are often used at a figurative level, evoking imagery and sound through use of metaphor, simile, rhyme, and rhythm.

For example, "whispering pines" does not necessarily mean that the trees were talking to each other, but rather that the wind blowing through the pines creates vibrations that may sound like whispers. The above example of a metaphor requires use of imagination to get an exact sense of what the poet is trying to convey. Poets achieve an economy of words by condensing their ideas or thoughts into as small a phrase as possible. A simile is another tool used by poets to achieve this result. Here is one such example: "Like a lark" This phrase does not mean that the subject was a bird, but rather shared several features of one. She may have been "Happy like a lark," as cheerful and carefree.

Poets lend extra meaning to their words through the calculated use of rhyme and rhythm.

Rhythm is created by the careful use of words in sequence that match a particular pattern. This pattern is defined by the number of accented or unaccented syllables and how they are strung together. An accented syllable is the one which is stressed when the word is read aloud.

Rhythms can also appear in the repetitive use of certain consonants (consonance) or of certain vowels (assonance) or the repetition of a letter as the first letter in every word (alliteration). Rhyme schemes are determined by the pattern of rhyming words at the end of each line or there may be medial rhymes which occur internally in a sentence. Reading a poem with attention to the rhyme and rhythm will aid in understanding mood, atmosphere, feelings and emotions, and thus will increase your comprehension. "Hear" the poem!

On past exams, of those poetry questions that were most poorly done, over 50% were questions that combined critical response and inference and application. When faced with this type of question on poetry, remember:

- Look to the figurative meaning of the word or passage
- Understand the stylistic devices in use, e.g. imagery, symbolism, etc.
- "Listen" to the rhythm and rhyme that the poet has created.

B) MODERN DRAMA

One of the keys to understanding what happens or exists in a play is found in the dialogue and the stage directions. There may be a lot of information available from these two sources. The playwright does not speak directly to the reader nor does he/she provide descriptions of characters or events. All this is to be inferred from the conversations between characters, their attitudes toward each other, and their actions.

To grasp the full extent of the dramatic piece presented in the examination:

- i) You will have to imagine the setting, and how the characters move and act in this setting.
- ii) Accurately determine a character's personality.
- iii) Understand their motives and feelings so that you can make reasonable inferences as to their future behaviour. This understanding can develop through "hearing" the dramatic dialogue as expressing human emotions.

The controlling element of any dramatic work is the nature of the conflict. This may be the central conflict of the whole play or a secondary conflict between characters. Nevertheless, conflict is what moves a play along. This is true whether it is a comedy, romance, drama, or tragedy.

The bulk of the questions on the reading comprehension examination that deal with drama will be on inference and application and meaning. Though this genre is handled fairly well by students, the questions that relate to human experiences and values, are areas of concern. Well over 40% of the poorly done questions tested this particular element. When trying to determine the prevalent values, you must ask yourself some basic questions.

- i) Do I understand the setting and how the characters interact with each other?
- ii) From the dialogue and action, can I determine the personalities of the characters?
- iii) Do I understand the motivations and the ongoing conflicts in the scene?

Answering the above questions accurately will elevate your understanding of the scene and help you in tackling questions on human experiences and values.

C) PROSE

Fiction and non-fiction readings are grouped together since they share many of the same characteristics. Non-fiction works tend to be more issue-based or expository, and thus structured in some form that is accessible to the reader. Fiction by definition can encompass topics from the fantastic to the sublime yet still be readable. In either case, there are certain basic elements to prose which serve as a basis for analysis. Reading selections from fiction and non-fiction pose their own set of problems for the reader. Normally, literal knowledge is fairly easy to ascertain so these passages will test other areas of comprehension. A reading selection on prose will most likely be divided into smaller units, and it is in these paragraphs that the student can begin scanning for the required information.

The first paragraph of a passage usually contains the topic sentence or describes the author's purpose for the whole work. You may be able to quickly locate this statement because the ones that follow are built to support or illustrate the thesis statement. Another possible placement for the topic sentence is at the end of the first paragraph, after the author has led up to it with a succession of points or arguments. In some writings, the author may not explicitly state a thesis statement but will make a series of statements that imply a main idea. Once you have determined the central focus of the writing, you will be better prepared to answer related questions, or questions that ask you to make inferences and extrapolate to other ideas or situations.

The author's use of these literary devices will disguise the true meaning of the text if the student does not perceive the subtle nuances. When reading a passage, ask yourself questions that will help you determine if the information is to be interpreted at more than the literal level. Problems may arise if you fail to recognize that other elements are in play, and these will substantially alter meaning.

Here are some things to consider while reading the text.

- What is the author's point of view?
- Is the writer appealing to your emotions or to your logical side?
- Am I supposed to make assumptions based on this information or is the information incomplete?
- Is my personal bias affecting my perception of this work?
- If the writer is being satirical or ironic, what is the opposite view that is his/her real belief?
- What does the writer's tone do to the literal meaning of the sentences, verse, or dialogue?

Questions on prose in the reading comprehension examination tend to focus on meanings, inferences and applications.

When dealing with questions on prose that test meanings or inference and application, there are certain points to remember.

- i) Recognize irony, sarcasm, or satire and how each will affect the literal meaning of a word or phrase.
- ii) The tone, mood and viewpoint of the author may also obscure the correct interpretation of the passage.
- iii) Understand the theme of the writing so that you are able to make proper inferences from the material.