

Useful Strategies for Taking the Stage 2 English Language Assessment Exam (ELAE)

This document provides information on specific exam strategies you can use in each section of the Stage 2 ELAE. Please read this document *before* you do the online Practice Test and most importantly before you take the Stage 2 ELAE.

There are 3 Sections in the Exam:

Section 1 - Writing (30%)

Section 2 - Listening (30%)

Section 3 - Reading (40%)

For full details about each section, please click on [‘Information on changes to the English Language Assessment Exam’](#)

Section 1 - Writing (30%)

Question - you have to write one essay. In the essay, you will be asked to write about one of the following:

- the causes of something
- the effects of something
- the similarities between two things
- the differences between two things
- the solution to a problem.

To answer the question, you do not need to have any specialist knowledge about the subject. Instead you can use your background knowledge. You will be graded according to:

- how clearly you explain your ideas
- how fully you develop your ideas
- your use of language.

For more information about the expectations for the Writing Section, please click on [Writing Criteria](#) in the online Practice Test.

Purpose - in your Freshman year, you will need to write different types of academic text in English. The question in this section is designed to test some of the academic writing skills that you will need later, especially language and organisation of ideas.

Exam Strategies for Writing

Read all the instructions before writing anything - even though you have read all the exam information, you may not remember exactly what you have to do.

Read the question and underline key words - this will help you to decide what the question is asking for.

Read the ideas in the box - they are provided to help you generate and develop points for your essay. But remember, their use is *optional*. You may have your own ideas and if you want, you can use them.

If you want to use an idea from the box, make sure you develop it - the ideas in the box should be used as a basis for a more developed point. Often they are ‘neutral’ points, and your job is to give them a clear controlling idea, or, you may be able to use the idea as part of a supporting point. Some of the points may also relate closely to each other and you can develop them in the same paragraph.

Don’t use all the ideas from the box - there are too many ideas in the box for one essay. If you use all the ideas, you won’t be able to develop them in enough detail. You are being tested on how clearly you explain and *develop* your ideas. If you have a list of ideas with little or no development, you will lose points. See **Writing Criteria**

Use your 15 minutes’ planning time efficiently - before you start writing your essay, you have 15 minutes to plan your work. During this time, brainstorm some ideas and write a plan, do *not* try to start writing your essay (you cannot open the essay page during this time anyway). Good essays are nearly always supported by a well-organized and developed plan. Similarly, essays without a plan are often difficult to read and get a lower score.

You don’t need to follow a set organisational pattern in your essay - some exams require a particular pattern or style of essay e.g. argumentative or persuasive. For this exam, there is no such ‘formula’. However, the exam does require a coherent or ‘unified’ piece of writing. In other words, in a good essay, the ideas should be easy to follow, relevant to the question and consistent throughout.

Don’t waste time counting the number of words you have written - with normal handwriting, it is enough to write 1.5 to 2 pages. You will only lose points if you have written far too little or far too much.

Spend 5 minutes at the end of the exam to check for language - when you are writing your essay, it’s very easy to make mistakes in your language (e.g. with prepositions, articles, tenses, word usage etc.). As the **Writing Criteria** indicate, language is an important part of the Writing Section. Usually, when you go back over an essay, there are opportunities for you to improve your language. Good essays have usually been checked at the end in this way.

Section 2 - Listening

Part 1 – While Listening (13%)

Text – “Listening One” is a discussion between a lecturer and a student, talking about a current assignment for a content course. The theme relates closely to some of the major subject areas you will study in your Freshman year - a major aspect of history or science. However, you will be able to answer all the questions without any specialist knowledge. The length of the discussion is 14-16 minutes. You will listen to it only once.

Questions – there are 10-12 questions which may need a short answer or require you to fill in gaps in a sentence. They will address the content of the topic, and the lecturer’s/student’s views/attitudes/reactions to the topic. You will have 3 minutes to read the questions before the discussion begins. The order of the questions will be the same as the order of the information in the discussion.

Purpose – this part of the exam tests how well you can identify and extract main ideas and important details from a discussion in an academic context, as well as how well you can follow a discussion. This skill is necessary because in your Freshman year and afterwards, you need to be able to participate in discussions with your tutors and teaching assistants on academic topics, trying to understand main points and supporting examples.

Exam Strategies for While Listening

Read the instructions as the speaker says them on the tape – find the part of the instructions which tells you the topic of the listening (“You are going to listen to a student and a university tutor talking about ...”). This will help you to understand exactly what you have to do, as well as the topic of the discussion.

Use the 3 minutes at the beginning effectively – read all of the questions before the discussion begins and underline the key words in all the questions. This will help you to prepare for what you have to listen for and give you an understanding of the main ideas of the discussion. Also, use this time to think of what you may already know about the topic you are going to listen to, for example, if the topic is “Ancient Sumerian Civilization”, try to remember what you may already know about this topic. This will increase your understanding of the discussion.

Study the diagrams/charts/tables/pictures – not all ‘While Listeners’ will have these features but if there are any diagrams/charts/tables/pictures for the discussion, make sure you spare a little bit of time to study those. A picture may clarify certain details about one of the main points or a chart may explain a process.

Listen for key words and synonyms – as the discussion progresses, listen for the key words you have underlined or their synonyms. You need to be aware of the fact that the words in some of the questions will be different from the words you hear.

If you miss an answer, move onto the next question – this is very important. Even if you miss the answer to one of the questions, do not get stuck on that question. Move onto the next one and go back to it during the last 5 minutes when you have time to check your answers.

Be careful with the length of your answers – most questions can be answered in fewer than 10 words. With some questions, only a few words or a key phrase is expected. If you are writing long sentences, you may be including irrelevant information and you may lose points.

Use the 5 minutes effectively – you will have 5 minutes to check your answers at the end. Make use of this time to think again about the questions you may have missed during the discussion. You may also use this time to:

- read through all of your answers and improve the content of your answers;
- check the spelling and grammar of your answers;
- erase any information from your answers which may not be relevant to the question.

Part 2 - Lecture and Note-taking (17%)

Text – “Listening Two” is a lecture, related closely to some of the major subject areas you will study in your Freshman year - a major aspect of history or science. However, you will be able to answer all the questions without any specialist knowledge. The length of the lecture is 15-18 minutes and you will listen to it only once.

Questions – there are 8-12 questions, which may need a short answer or require you to fill in gaps in a sentence. They will address the content of the topic and the lecturer’s views about the topic. You will have 1 minute to read the note-taking headings before the lecture begins. After the lecture, you are given 15 minutes to answer the questions by using the notes you have made. The order of the questions will be the same as the order of the information in the lecture.

Purpose – this part of the exam tests how well you can identify the main ideas and important supporting information in an academic lecture. This skill is necessary because in your Freshman year and afterwards, you need to be able to follow your tutors’ lectures in English and take notes from them, trying to understand main points and supporting examples.

Exam Strategies for Lecture and Note-taking

Read the instructions as the speaker says them on the tape – find the part of the instructions which tells you the topic of the listening (“You are going to listen to a lecture about ...”). This will help you to understand exactly what you have to do, as well as the topic of the discussion.

Use your 1 minute at the beginning effectively – read all of the note-taking headings before the lecture begins. This will help you to prepare for what you have to listen for. Also, use this time to think of what you may already know about the topic you are going to listen to, for example, if the topic is “the wind as an alternative form of energy”, try to remember what you may already know about this topic. This will increase your understanding of the lecture.

Study the diagrams/charts/tables/pictures – not all the ‘Lecture and Note-takings’ will have these features but if there are any diagrams/charts/tables/pictures on the note-taking sheets, make sure you spare a little bit of time to study those. They may help you to understand the content of the lecture better. Remember, many “real” lectures may be accompanied by visual information, i.e. pictures, charts, power point slides, etc.

Listen out for main points and important examples – listen out for the lecturer’s signaling words which indicate the importance of a certain point, e.g. “there are two important facts here ...”, or “the most significant aspect of XXX is that ...”, etc.

Use abbreviations – use any abbreviations and signs you know to make note-taking easier and less time-consuming, e.g.  instead of “leads to/is the result of”, “e.g.” instead of “for example”, and so on. Be careful! Do not abbreviate words which you won’t be able to remember later on.

Do not write full sentences – don’t lose time trying to take notes in full sentences, except when it is a definition. To save time, do not write articles (a/an/the), prepositions (on, in, at, etc) and so on. You can always add these later when you are answering the questions.

Watch out for synonyms – you need to be aware of the fact that the wording of some of the questions will be different from the words you hear. Watch out for those.

If you miss an answer, move onto the next question – this is very important. Even if you miss the answer to one of the questions, do not get stuck on that question. Move on to the next one and go back to it later.

Be careful with the length of your answers – most questions can be answered in fewer than 10 words. With some questions, only a few words or a key phrase is expected. If you are writing long sentences, you may be including irrelevant information and you may lose points.

Section 3 - Reading

Part 1 - Skimming (15%)

Text – the topic of the text is an aspect of history or science from a textbook, academic journal or serious magazine. The length of the text is between 5 and 6 pages. However, you will be able to answer all the questions without any specialist knowledge.

Questions – there are 7-9 ‘questions’. These are headings which you match with the paragraphs in the text. There are usually 20-30 short paragraphs in the text. Each ‘heading’ is a short description of the paragraph topic.

Purpose – this part of the exam tests how well you can find the main ideas in a text quickly. This skill is necessary because in your Freshman year and afterwards, you need to be able to locate relevant ideas in long texts so that you can use them later in an essay or as part of a discussion.

Exam strategies for Skimming

When you *skim* a text, you try to find out quickly *what* the main ideas of the text are, and *where* these main ideas are. You do not have enough time to read the whole text so you need to concentrate on some parts of the text which will help you to see where you can find different information.

Before Answering the Questions

Before you start trying to answer the questions, it’s usually useful to *preview* the text to find out the general topic and how the text is organised. This should only take you a few minutes but it will make it easier to find specific paragraphs later on.

Read the instructions – find the part of the instructions which tells you the topic of the whole text (“The text is about....”). This will help you to understand the more specific topic areas in the text more quickly.

Look at the title – this may give you a better idea of the general topic. It may give you a clue about the author’s opinion or attitude to the topic so that you will know what to expect later.

Look for diagrams/charts/tables/illustrations – not all texts have these features. But if you see them, they could give you more clues about the text. A diagram may show you that experiments are explained. Or a table might show in which section the results of a study are analysed.

Read the subtitles in the text – there are usually subtitles (in bold) at different points which divide the text into different sections. The subtitles often tell you what the topic of each section is. You can look at certain sections first when looking for a specific paragraph.

Quickly read the introduction and conclusion – just like the subtitles, the introduction (almost always the first paragraph) might give the different areas of the topic which are discussed in the text. In some texts there are sentences in the introduction which give an outline of the text. In the same way, the last paragraph is often the writer's conclusion and could contain a summary of the main points in the text.

While Answering the Questions

Read through the headings on the question paper and underline key words – this will help you to focus on the most important ideas as you look through the text. Remember that the headings are not in the same order as the paragraphs that match them in the text.

Underline key parts of the text – this helps you to identify which sections may be useful in matching a paragraph with one of the headings. It also helps you to remember which parts of the text you have already looked at. You can find these parts again later if necessary.

Use your time sensibly – if it is taking you a long time to find the paragraph that matches one of the headings, leave it and concentrate on another heading. You can come back to the difficult one at the end or you may find the answer while looking for something else.

Read the first two sentences of each paragraph – this is very important. Very often the first or second sentence of the paragraph introduces the main idea which will be explained in the paragraph. You will at least get an idea of whether the paragraph is relevant and whether you should continue reading it.

Read the last sentence of each paragraph – this is also very helpful. The last sentence often contains a summary of the paragraph as a whole or a comment from the author. Be careful, it might also look forward and introduce the paragraph that follows it.

Search for key words – sometimes certain words and their synonyms are repeated in the paragraph. If many of these words are related to each other, they will give you an idea of the main topic.

Search for visual clues – there may be other visual clues in a paragraph or section of text. For example, a lot of dates might show that the paragraph contains a history or chronology; citations might show that the writer is discussing the literature of a topic. Also look for specific names and words that may match those in the heading.

Read some parts of a paragraph in detail – it may sometimes be necessary to read more of the paragraph than the first two sentences if you are unable to work out the main idea using the strategies above. Or, if you have time, you may need to check an answer to a question. However, remember that because of the time limit, you will not be able to read large sections of text in such detail.

Part 2 - Detailed Reading (25%)

Text - you will read two texts (Text A and Text B) which have a similar theme. Each text deals with a different aspect of that theme. In the online Practice Test, for example, the theme is the 'industrial revolution'. In this case, the 'industrial revolution in Britain' and the 'industrial revolution in France'.

Questions - there are 3-5 questions on each text (Tasks 1 and 2). Task 3 asks you to complete a short gapped text based on some of the important information from Text A and Text B.

Purpose - the themes and the types of text in the Detailed Reading part are similar to some of the major themes and texts that you will study in your Freshman year, especially on the Science of Nature (NS) and Humanity and Society (SPS) courses. However, it is important to stress that this is a *reading test* and you will be able to answer all the questions without any specialist knowledge of these areas. The main subject areas are:

- major events in history (the causes / effects of social, political and economic change e.g. the family, the Renaissance, wars, revolutions, etc.; comparative history e.g. industrialization in two different countries)
- science (e.g. biology, psychology, and environmental issues)

Exam Strategies for Detailed Reading Tasks 1 and 2

When you read a text for details, you are interested in establishing the relationship between the main ideas of the text and the important supporting information. Unlike Skimming, where you don't have time to read the whole text, here you need to read most or all of the text, and you are given 60 minutes to do this.

Again different from Skimming, Detailed Reading is *linear*. In other words, to understand the text, you read from the beginning until the end. For this reason, it is important to try and answer each of the questions in the order in which they are presented.

Read the instructions carefully and remind yourself of the tasks - even though you have read all the exam information you may not remember exactly what you have to do.

Very quickly look at the titles, the sub-headings, the introductions and the conclusions of both texts - this will help you get a general idea of the topic of the texts.

Read all the questions in the task before reading the text - this will guide you to some of the main ideas in the texts before you read them, and give you a greater understanding of the organisation of the texts. Remember that the questions are in the same order as the answers appear in the text.

Underline key words in the questions - this will help you to decide what the question is asking for. Remember that the words that are used in the question may be different to words in the text, for example a synonym may be used for a word in the text.

Use your time sensibly - organising your time properly will help you to answer all the questions. It's recommended that you spend no more than 25 minutes on either task.

If you have problems answering a question, come back to it later - it's very easy to get stuck on a question. If you spend too much time on one question you may not have enough time for the other ones. Perhaps you can't see the answer at that moment, but if you have a break from it, or you review all your answers at the end, the answer may become much clearer.

Try to identify the relationship between different ideas/information within or across paragraphs e.g. cause/effect, differences/similarities - in order to understand a text, it is very important to establish the relationship between its different parts. The topic sentence, which contains the main idea of the paragraph, is often the first sentence of the paragraph, but it can be in the middle or at the end of the paragraph as well. It usually signals the type of relationship that exists between different parts of the text, and it will help you to distinguish main ideas from supporting information and details.

Underline key parts of the text – this helps you to identify which sections may be useful in matching a paragraph with one of the headings. It also helps you to remember which parts of the text you have already looked at. You can find these parts again later if necessary.

Write clear and concise answers - most questions can be answered in no more than 10-15 words. With some questions, only a few words or a key phrase is needed. You can use either your own words or words from the text. However, if you are writing out long sentences from the text, you may be including irrelevant information, and you may lose points. Most importantly, is the answer you give *meaningful* to you?

Exam Strategies for Detailed Reading Task 3

Many of the strategies for answering Tasks 1 and 2 can be used for answering Task 3, but here are a few extra points to consider.

Read the instructions and the whole of the gapped text *carefully* before answering the questions - the gapped text in Task 3 will have a main idea related to both Text A and B. Usually this is at the beginning of the text. If you understand the main idea, it will be much easier to locate the relevant information in Text A and B.

Be careful when searching for key words in the texts using key words from the gapped text - some words used in the gapped text will be the same as the words in the texts. But be careful, the same word may appear in different parts of the texts, or different forms of the word may be used. It is better to search for *ideas* in the text and use the key words in the gapped text as an initial guide.

Spend no more than 15 minutes on Task 3 - organising your time properly will give you a chance to answer all the questions.

The questions are not always in the order that the information appears in the texts - Task 3 aims to test whether you can make connections between ideas in different parts of the two texts, and these ideas may appear anywhere in the texts.

A Final Reminder - leave enough time at the end of the Detailed Reading part to go back and look at all your answers again. After doing all three tasks, you will be much more familiar with the texts and their ideas. At this point, you may be able to improve the content of your answers, make them clearer or answer a question that you previously could not answer.