ICSE Class 10 English Language Specimen Paper 1

Written by the Future Topper subject team on the CISCE examination pattern. Not an official CISCE paper.
Found a mistake? Write to contactfuturetopper@gmail.com

Maximum Marks: 80 | Time Allowed: Two hours | Reading Time: 15 minutes

All five questions are compulsory. Where alternatives are offered inside a question, attempt only one of them.

General Instructions

Write your answers on the separate answer paper provided. The first 15 minutes are for reading the paper, and you may not write during that time. Marks for each question, or part of a question, are shown in brackets. Attempt all five questions. Where alternatives are offered inside a question, choose only one of them and write its number clearly at the top of your answer. Keep to the word limits given, since work that is much shorter or much longer than the limit loses marks. Neatness, correct spelling and correct punctuation carry marks throughout the paper. Do not use short forms such as can't or didn't except inside dialogue, and do not use abbreviations in a formal letter.

Question 1 [20]

Write a composition of between 300 and 350 words on any ONE of the following subjects. Write the number of the subject you have chosen at the top of your answer. You are reminded that marks are given for the ordering and development of your ideas as well as for the language you use.

(i) Write an original story with the title The Last Bus.

(ii) Describe a market street early in the morning, before the shutters go up and the first customers arrive. Write about the sounds, the smells and the people at work, and try to make your reader see the place as you saw it.

(iii) Mobile phones should be kept out of school altogether. Express your views either for or against this statement.

(iv) Write a short story that begins with the following sentence. The envelope had been pushed under our door some time in the night, and nobody in the house would admit to having seen it.

(v) Give an account of an occasion when you had to look after somebody younger than yourself. Say what happened, what went wrong and what you learnt from it.

Question 2 [10]

Select ONE of the following and write a letter of about 120 words. Do not write your own name, the name of your school or your address anywhere in the letter.

(a) Your cousin, who lives in another town, has written to ask how you spent the long holiday. Write a letter telling your cousin about the days you spent helping at a relative's shop, the work you were given and the one customer you are not likely to forget.

(b) The street that leads to your school has been without working lights for several months and is unsafe after dark. Write a letter to the Municipal Commissioner of your town describing the condition of the road, explaining how it affects students who stay back for games and asking for the lights to be repaired.

Question 3 [10]

(a) Your school is collecting used story books for the library of a village school nearby. As the Head Girl or Head Boy, write a notice of about 50 words for the school notice board, asking students to bring books and giving the place, the dates and the condition the books should be in. **[5]**

(b) Using the information in the notice you have written, draft an email of about 50 words to the secretary of the village school, telling her about the collection and asking when the books may be delivered. Set out the email in the proper form. **[5]**

Question 4 [20]

Read the passage given below and answer all the questions that follow. Your answers to parts (a) and (b) must be in your own words as far as you can manage it.

The halt at Birwa was not a station in any proper sense. It had no ticket window, no bell and no signboard with the name painted on it in three languages. There was a strip of raised earth beside the track, a tin shelter about the size of a cupboard and a sheet of iron nailed to a post with the word BIRWA stamped into it. Trains were not meant to stop there at all. One did. A slow passenger train came up the branch line every afternoon, and it stopped only because a man called Harbans Lal stood on the earth with a green flag and waited for it.

Harbans Lal had been put in charge of the halt as a young man and was never moved from it. He lived in two rooms behind the shelter with his wife, a goat and a succession of cats. Nobody had asked him to make a garden, but he made one, and in time it became the only thing at Birwa worth looking at. Marigolds ran the length of the platform in two straight rows, and behind them stood a hedge of jasmine that he watered from a bucket every evening. In the hot months he laid wet sacking over the roots. Passengers leaned out of the windows to see the flowers, and some of them called out to him, and he would lift one hand without smiling and go on watching the engine.

I was sent to Birwa for two summers as a boy, to an aunt who lived a mile from the line, and the coming of the train was the whole business of my day. I got there early and sat on the platform edge with my feet hanging over, and Harbans Lal let me hold the flag, though never where the driver could see. He talked very little, and what he said was mostly about the line itself: which rails had been changed, where the ballast washed away in the rains, how the wires hummed before anything could be seen. Once he said that in thirty-one years the train had failed to appear on only four days, and he gave me the reason for each of the four.

The branch was closed the year I left for college. A bus route had been opened through the villages and the railway decided the line did not pay for itself. My aunt told me in a letter. I remember being surprised at how little I felt about it. It was only a halt, and the train had been a poor one.

I went back years afterwards, on my way elsewhere. The rails had been lifted and sold, and the embankment had sunk into a low ridge of grass that a person could walk over without noticing. The shelter was gone, and where the two rooms had stood there was a new brick wall belonging to somebody's cattle shed. But the marigolds had got out. They had seeded themselves along the ridge for a hundred yards in both directions, ragged and thin and far brighter than anything else in that flat brown country, and a woman cutting grass told me that they came up every year and that nobody knew who had put them there.

(a) Give the meaning of each of the following words as it is used in the passage. One word or a short phrase will do.

(i) proper (paragraph 1) **[1]**

(ii) succession (paragraph 2) **[1]**

(iii) ragged (paragraph 5) **[1]**

(b) Answer the following questions briefly, in your own words.

(i) What three things were all that marked Birwa as a stopping place? **[2]**

(ii) Why did the afternoon train stop at Birwa, although trains were not meant to stop there? **[2]**

(iii) What did Harbans Lal do to keep his garden alive in the hot months, and how did the passengers on the train behave towards it? **[2]**

(iv) What sort of thing did Harbans Lal talk about to the boy, and what does his talk tell us about him? **[2]**

(v) Why was the branch line closed, and what surprised the writer about his own feelings when he heard the news? **[2]**

(vi) What had happened to the halt by the time the writer returned, and what was the one thing that had survived? **[2]**

(c) Using the material in paragraphs 2 and 3 only, summarise in about 100 words what Harbans Lal did at the halt and the kind of man he was. Begin your summary with the words: Harbans Lal spent his whole working life at Birwa... **[5]**

Question 5 [20]

(a) Fill in each blank with the correct form of the verb given in brackets, or with the correct preposition. Write only the word or words needed.

(i) Neither of the two boys _____ (know) the way to the river. **[1]**

(ii) By the time the guests arrived, my mother _____ (finish) all the cooking. **[1]**

(iii) He insisted _____ paying for the tickets himself. **[1]**

(iv) The watchman was accused _____ taking a bribe. **[1]**

(v) She has been unwell _____ last Monday. **[1]**

(b) Join or rewrite the following sentences as directed. Do not change the meaning.

(i) The road was blocked. We took a longer route. (Rewrite as one sentence, beginning: Since...) **[1]**

(ii) The box was very heavy. I could not lift it. (Rewrite as one sentence, using too ... to) **[1]**

(iii) He had very little time. He answered every question. (Rewrite as one sentence, beginning: Although...) **[1]**

(iv) That is the woman. She found my wallet. (Join into one sentence, using who) **[1]**

(v) The match had hardly started when it began to rain. (Rewrite, beginning: No sooner...) **[1]**

(c) Rewrite the following sentences as directed.

(i) The gardener waters the plants every morning. (Change to the passive voice) **[1]**

(ii) The letter was posted by my brother yesterday. (Change to the active voice) **[1]**

(iii) Somebody has stolen my cycle. (Change to the passive voice) **[1]**

(iv) The teacher said to Ravi, "Why are you late today?" (Change to indirect speech) **[1]**

(v) She told me that she would meet me the next day. (Change to direct speech) **[1]**

(d) Choose the correct word from the brackets, or correct the error in the sentence, as the instruction requires.

(i) The news of their victory (was / were) received with great joy. (Choose the correct word) **[1]**

(ii) Each of the students (was / were) given a certificate. (Choose the correct word) **[1]**

(iii) She is senior than me by two years. (Correct the error) **[1]**

(iv) I am looking forward to meet you. (Correct the error) **[1]**

(v) The two brothers divided the sweets (between / among) themselves. (Choose the correct word) **[1]**

ANSWER KEY AND MARKING SCHEME

Questions 1 and 2 are marked on the bands given below. The notices, emails, comprehension answers and summaries printed here are models, not the only acceptable answers. Accept any answer that is accurate, relevant and expressed in the candidate's own words. In Question 5 accept only the answer given, unless the key says otherwise.

Question 1 [20]

(i) The Last Bus. Look for a single clear line of events rather than a string of incidents, a reason why this bus matters to the characters and an ending the story has earned. A dream ending, or an ending in which the writer wakes up, is weak and should not score in the top band.

(ii) The market street. This is a description and should not become a story. Reward the use of more than one sense, particular detail of the kind only an observer would know and a sense of order in the way the street is taken in. Lists of nouns without shape score in the middle band at best.

(iii) Mobile phones in school. Either side may be argued. Reward a clear stand taken early, three or four developed reasons rather than many undeveloped ones, some recognition of the opposite view and a conclusion that follows from the argument. Unsupported assertion stays in the lower bands.

(iv) The envelope under the door. The given sentence must be used as it stands and must be the first sentence. Reward a story that grows out of the envelope and out of the fact that nobody will admit to seeing it.

(v) Looking after somebody younger. This is an account of a real experience and should be written in the first person. Reward honesty of detail, a clear sequence and a closing reflection that is drawn from the events and is not merely tacked on as a moral.

Content 8. Expression 8. Accuracy 4. Within Content, award the top band only for relevant, well ordered and fully developed matter that keeps to the subject throughout. Within Expression, judge vocabulary, sentence variety and the handling of the chosen form. Within Accuracy, deduct for errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation, grouping repeated errors of the same kind as one fault. Deduct up to 2 marks from Content for work well outside the limit of 300 to 350 words.

Question 2 [10]

(a) Informal letter to a cousin. Correct informal form: the writer's address at the top, the date, a greeting such as Dear Ratna, three or four short paragraphs and a close such as Yours affectionately or With love. The content should cover the holiday at the relative's shop, the work the writer was given and one memorable customer. The tone should be easy and personal, and contracted forms are allowed here.

(b) Formal letter to the Municipal Commissioner. Correct formal form: the writer's address, the date, the receiver's designation and address, the salutation Sir or Madam, a subject line, three paragraphs and the close Yours faithfully. The content should state where the road is, describe the state of the lights, explain the risk to students leaving after games and make a clear request. No abbreviations, no contracted forms and no complaint of a personal kind.

Content 4. Expression 4. Accuracy 2. Within Content, give 2 marks for covering every point the question asks for and 2 for the form of the letter being right throughout. Within Expression, reward a register that suits the reader, and penalise a formal letter written in a chatty tone or an informal letter written stiffly. Within Accuracy, deduct for errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Deduct 1 mark from Content for a letter very far from 120 words, and deduct 1 mark if the candidate has given a real name, school or address.

Question 3 [10]

(a) Model notice. THE HIGH SCHOOL, BIRWA ROAD. NOTICE. 14 March. BOOK COLLECTION FOR THE VILLAGE SCHOOL LIBRARY. Students of all classes are asked to bring used story books for the library of the village school at Nagla Khera. Books will be received in the Junior Library between 8.30 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. from Monday to Thursday next week. Please bring only books that are complete, clean and without torn pages. Textbooks are not needed. Anita Verma, Head Girl.

Format 2, which is 1 for the name of the school, the word NOTICE and the date, and 1 for a heading and the signature with the writer's post. Content 2, which is 1 for the appeal itself with the name of the receiving school and 1 for the place, the dates and the condition of the books. Expression and accuracy 1, for a notice in impersonal language and within about 50 words. A notice written as a paragraph of continuous prose without a

heading loses the second Format mark.

(b) Model email. To: secretary@nkheraschool.org. Subject: Books collected for your library. Madam, Our school has collected used story books for the library at Nagla Khera. Collection closes on Thursday, and we expect about four hundred books, all of them complete and in good condition. Please tell us which day next week would suit you for delivery and whether we should send them to the school or to your office. Anita Verma, Head Girl.

Format 1, for a To line and a subject line. Content 2, which is 1 for reporting what the notice announced and 1 for the request about the date and place of delivery. Expression 1, for a polite and businesslike tone with no text message spellings. Accuracy 1, for correct grammar, spelling and punctuation within about 50 words.

Question 4 [20]

(a) (i) proper: real, true, in the full sense of the word. (ii) succession: a series of them, one after another over the years. (iii) ragged: untidy and straggling, uneven in shape.

(i) 1. (ii) 1. (iii) 1. Accept any wording that carries the sense the passage requires. Do not award the mark for a dictionary meaning that does not fit the passage, such as succession explained as the taking over of a throne.

(b)(i) A raised strip of earth along the track, a tin shelter no bigger than a cupboard and a piece of iron on a post with the name BIRWA stamped on it.

Any two of the three features 1. The third feature 1.

(b)(ii) The stop was not in the timetable and depended entirely on one man. Harbans Lal stood beside the track each afternoon holding out a green flag, and the driver brought the train to a halt for him.

Not a scheduled stop 1. Harbans Lal signalling with the green flag 1.

(b)(iii) He covered the roots of his plants with wet sacking so that they would not dry out in the heat. The passengers leaned out of the carriage windows to look at the flowers and some of them shouted a greeting to him, though he did no more than raise a hand and keep his eyes on the engine.

Wet sacking over the roots 1. Passengers looking and calling out 1.

(b)(iv) He spoke almost entirely about the railway line and its upkeep, such as the rails that had been replaced, the places where the rains had carried away the ballast and the sound in the wires that warned of a train before it could be seen. It shows a man whose whole attention and pride were in the small piece of track he was responsible for, and who measured his life by it rather than by himself.

The subject of his talk, with one example 1. What it shows about him 1.

(b)(v) A bus service had been started through the surrounding villages, and the railway worked out that the branch no longer earned what it cost to run. What surprised the writer was that the closing of the halt moved him so little at the time, and he explained it away by telling himself that Birwa was only a halt and the train a poor one.

Bus route and the line not paying 1. Surprise at feeling so little 1.

(b)(vi) The rails had been taken up and sold, the embankment had settled into a low grassy ridge that was easy to miss, the shelter had disappeared and the two rooms had been replaced by the wall of a cattle shed. The one thing left was the marigolds, which had spread themselves wild along the ridge for about a hundred yards each way.

Any two signs that the halt had gone 1. The marigolds surviving and spreading 1.

(c) Model summary. Harbans Lal spent his whole working life at Birwa, in charge of the halt from his youth and never transferred. He lived in two rooms behind the shelter with his wife, a goat and a string of cats. Unasked, he planted two rows of marigolds the length of the platform, set a jasmine hedge behind them, watered it nightly from a bucket and covered the roots with wet sacking in the heat. He acknowledged admiring passengers with no more than a lifted hand. He said little, and what he said was about the line, its rails, its ballast and its signals, which he knew in detail.

Content 3, awarded for the points drawn from paragraphs 2 and 3: his long unbroken charge of the halt, his household, the garden he made without being told to, the way he cared for it, his manner with the passengers and his silence except on the subject of the line. Award 3 for five or six of these, 2 for three or four, 1 for one or two. Expression 1, for connected prose in the candidate's own words and in the third person, with no dialogue, no quotation and no personal comment. Accuracy 1, for correct grammar and spelling and for keeping to about

100 words. Deduct the Expression mark for a summary made of material taken from paragraphs 1, 4 or 5.

Question 5 [20]

(a) (i) knows. (ii) had finished. (iii) on. (iv) of. (v) since.

(i) 1. (ii) 1. (iii) 1. (iv) 1. (v) 1. No mark for a correct verb in the wrong form or tense.

(b) (i) Since the road was blocked, we took a longer route. (ii) The box was too heavy for me to lift. (iii) Although he had very little time, he answered every question. (iv) That is the woman who found my wallet. (v) No sooner had the match started than it began to rain.

(i) 1. (ii) 1. (iii) 1. (iv) 1. (v) 1. In (v) the mark depends on both the inversion after No sooner and the use of than, not when. In (ii) accept too heavy for me to lift it only if the candidate has not written the object twice.

(c) (i) The plants are watered by the gardener every morning. (ii) My brother posted the letter yesterday. (iii) My cycle has been stolen. (iv) The teacher asked Ravi why he was late that day. (v) She said to me, "I will meet you tomorrow."

(i) 1. (ii) 1. (iii) 1. (iv) 1. (v) 1. In (iii) accept My cycle has been stolen by somebody, though the agent is better left out. In (v) accept shall for will.

(d) (i) was. (ii) was. (iii) She is senior to me by two years. (iv) I am looking forward to meeting you. (v) between.

(i) 1. (ii) 1. (iii) 1. (iv) 1. (v) 1. In (iii) and (iv) the mark is for the whole corrected sentence written out, and no mark is given for the corrected word on its own.