



THE O/L ENGLISH GRADE LADDER



BOOK 1

Teacher & Parent Guide

How to mentor and mark Book 1 — The Recognition Floor

Below-S → Safe S (35 marks)

For the adult sitting beside a student who has been failing English

G.C.E. (O/L) English Language · Subject 31

Idasara Academy



Before You Begin

Who this is for

The teacher wants the marking schemes and the item-level detail. It is all in the day-by-day section.

The parent or guardian wants to know what to do at the kitchen table on a Tuesday evening. That is here too, and it needs less English than you fear.

If you are the parent and English was not your subject, read the next page carefully. It was written for you.

If your own English is weak

You can mark almost all of Book 1, because most of what decides marks here is **countable, not linguistic**:

- Did they name ten objects, or six?
- Is the date from the question actually in the notice?
- Are there four sentences, or two?
- Did they leave anything blank?

None of that asks you to judge English. It asks you to count and to compare against the question — and at this level that is where most of the lost marks are.

NOTE · What you are really providing

The largest single cause of lost marks at this stage is **procedural, not linguistic** — blank answers, answers that are too short, answers that ignore the question. Those are exactly the failures an attentive adult catches without any English at all.

Your presence at the table is not a poor substitute for a tutor. For these marks, it is the thing that works.

What Book 1 does and does not do

It does: take a student from below 35 to a safe Ordinary Pass, by teaching **five questions that need no original writing** (Tests 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 13 — 35 marks) plus one short notice built from a fixed formula (Test 6).

It does not: teach general English, produce a credit, or prepare a student for the essay. Those are Books 2, 3 and 4. Do not let anyone — including the student — measure this book against a standard it never claimed.

NOTE · Why these seven questions

The O/L English paper is sixteen questions but only six kinds of question. Sixty-five of the hundred marks are receptive — matching, choosing from a box, reading and underlining — and need no original sentence.



The three easiest of those families come to **exactly 35 marks**, which is exactly the pass. That is not a trick anyone invented; it is what the paper has been for years. Book 1 simply goes and takes them.

The daily rhythm, and the time it really takes

Days 1 to 6: **fifteen to twenty minutes**. Day 7: **forty-five minutes** in one sitting.

Roughly **two to two and a half hours** across the week. Plan for it honestly — a student carrying eight other subjects cannot absorb a surprise.

Do not run two days in one sitting to catch up. The gap between days is doing work.



The Notice Chassis — Marking Card

Book 1's highest-value writing task is Test 6, and it is marked by checking whether four fixed lines are present. This card names each one.

NOTE · How to use this card

Keep it beside the student's notice. Check the four lines in order, then check every fact from the question appears somewhere in them — that is the content mark. Then count the words: under 20 and the answer is capped at 2, however good the English.



THE NOTICE CHASSIS — FOUR LINES, ALWAYS

O/L English Test 6 · 5 Marks · How to Mark Without English

BOOK EXHIBITION

A book exhibition organised by the Library Society will be held on 5th December at 9.00 a.m. in the school hall.

All students are kindly requested to attend.

Please bring your library card.

Your kind co-operation is highly appreciated.

Secretary,
Library Society

44 words

H HEADING (capitals)

Centre aligned, uppercase. Must state the event directly from the prompt.

1 1. EVENT LINE

What + Who + Date + Time + Venue. All prompt facts appear in this single sentence.

2 2. AUDIENCE LINE

"All students / members are kindly requested to attend." Fixed formula.

3 3. INSTRUCTION LINE

"Please bring..." Tells the participants what to bring or do.

4 4. COURTESY LINE

"Your kind co-operation is highly appreciated."
Standard closing formula.

S SIGNATURE BLOCK

Post / Organisation bottom right. Never write personal student name.

⚠ Every fact from the question must appear here.

🔴 Under 20 words = capped at 2 marks.





The card is A4 and stays legible photocopied in black and white. Photocopy it rather than passing the book around — an adult marking at the kitchen table should not have to share the manual with the student.



How Marks Actually Work

Three rules from the official marking scheme. They decide more marks than anything else in this book, and almost no student has heard them.

Rule 1 — Content is scored first, and it gates everything

> *If 0 (zero) mark is awarded to the content, do not award marks for language, organization and mechanics of writing.*

A student who writes beautiful English **about the wrong thing** scores **zero**. Not a low mark — zero. In Book 1 this applies to Day 6's notice.

MARKING · Applying Rule 1 without judging English

Put the question beside the answer. Underline every fact in the question — the event, the group, the date, the time, the place, the item to bring.

Now find each one in your child's notice and tick it off.

A missing fact lowers the content mark. An answer about something else entirely scores zero content, and **nothing else can then be awarded**.

You have just marked the highest-stakes criterion on the question without reading for grammar.

Rule 2 — There is a word-count floor

Test 6 and Test 8 — under 20 words, the answer is capped at **2 marks**, however good the English. Only Test 6 appears in Book 1, but teach the habit now: **count the words**.

Rule 3 — Never leave a blank

A blank scores zero with certainty. A guess scores *zero or more*. On matching, cloze and underline items, guessing is mathematically free.

Some students leave blanks out of a kind of honesty. Tell them plainly: on this paper an unsure answer is not dishonest, it is correct behaviour.



Day 1 — The Marks Map

Your job today: agreement, and nothing else. Day 1 is psychological. If you undercut it, the rest of the week is harder.

MARKING · Marking — 'Your Starting Line'

Not markable work. Check two things:

- The sheet exists and carries today's date.
- The gap is calculated correctly. Scoring 22 means a gap of 13.

Keep the sheet safe. It is used again on Day 7, and that comparison is the most motivating moment in the book.

WHAT TO SAY · What to say on Day 1

If the student says "*I am hopeless at English*" — do not argue with the feeling. Argue with the arithmetic.

Say: "You do not need to be good at English. You need thirty-five marks, and thirty-five of them are in questions where you never write a sentence. Let us go and get those."

Do not say: "Of course you can do it, you just need to try harder." They have tried. The problem was never effort — nobody showed them where the marks were.



Day 2 — Matching

Tests 1 and 13 · 10 marks · target 8

ANSWER KEY · Model answer — 'Find the Giveaway Word'

1. halt → a bus · 2. postman / letter → a post box · 3. time → a clock
4. paddy / harvest → a sickle · 5. light / electricity → a lamp or torch
6. feet / rains → a pair of slippers or boots · 7. water / dry season → a tank or well
8. book / meaning of every word → a dictionary

Accept any sensible object that fits the clue. The **giveaway word** matters more than the object named.

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 2 writing

Award out of 11:

- **1 mark** per correct giveaway word identified (max 8)
- **1 mark** per original sentence that genuinely describes something without naming it (max 3)

The check that matters: did they underline a *giveaway word*, or just guess the object? A student who names the object but cannot say which word gave it away has not learned the method and will fail on an unfamiliar topic.

Correct only this: a giveaway word that is not actually in the sentence. **Ignore:** spelling, handwriting, whether the object is the one you had in mind.

WHAT TO SAY · If the drill score is under 8

Ask which they got wrong — the pictures or the paragraphs.

Pictures (Test 1): they are translating instead of recognising. Point at objects around the house and ask for the English word, fast, without letting them pause. Speed is the skill.

Paragraphs (Test 13): they are reading all the headings first and getting confused. One paragraph, one heading, decide, move on.



Day 3 — Naming What You See

Test 3 · 5 marks · target 3.5

NOTE · Read this before marking Day 3

Test 3 is a **naming** question, not a grammar question. The word boxes in 2023, 2024 and 2025 were almost entirely concrete nouns with a few *-ing* verbs — in 2024 and 2025 there was **not one preposition**.

So the mark that matters on Day 3 is **can the student name things in English**. Do not be tempted to correct sentence structure here; that belongs to Book 3.

ANSWER KEY · Model answer — 'Name Ten Things'

Part 1 — ten objects, e.g. *kettle, chair, window, bucket, clock, mat, spoon, lamp, door, basket*. Single words are correct and sufficient.

Part 2 — six sentences with an *-ing* action: *The kettle is boiling. · My sister is reading. · The cat is sleeping. · The clock is ticking. · My father is working. · The rice is cooking.*

Part 3 — three extended with a place: *My mother is standing near the fire. · A boy is waiting beside the gate. · My sister is sitting under the tree.*

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 3 writing

Award out of 19:

- **1 mark** per object correctly named in English (max 10) — **this is the part that matters**
- **1 mark** per sentence using an *-ing* action correctly (max 6)
- **1 mark** per sentence correctly extended with a place (max 3)

Correct only this: an object named wrongly in English. That is the exam skill. **Ignore**: article errors (*a/the*), spelling, and whether the sentence is interesting.

If they cannot reach ten objects, that is the finding — the vocabulary is the gap, not the grammar. Repeat Part 1 daily in a different room until ten comes easily.



Day 4 — Choosing Words Without a Picture

Tests 2 and 4 · 10 marks · target 7

ANSWER KEY · Model answer — 'Fill and Explain'

(1) **quiet** — before it is *be*, so a describing word is needed (2) **comfortable** — before it is *is*, so a describing word (3) **notes** — after *your*, so a thing (4) **subject** — after *the*, so a thing (5) **because** — it joins two complete ideas (6) **revise** — after *and*, following *stop*, so a plain verb

Own sentences: any correct use of *because* and *so that*.

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 4 writing

Award out of 14:

- **1 mark** per blank correctly filled (max 6)
- **1 mark** per explanation naming a real neighbouring word (max 6)
- **1 mark** per own sentence using its joining word correctly (max 2)

The explanations are the real deliverable. A student who fills all six correctly but cannot say why has guessed well, and will guess badly on a harder text. Mark those six explanations seriously.

Correct only this: an explanation that names a word not actually beside the blank.

WHAT TO SAY · The sentence that unlocks Tests 2 and 4

Many students believe they must understand the whole text.

Say: "Cover the box with your hand. Read the two words on either side of the blank. What *kind* of word belongs there — a thing, an action, a describing word, a joining word? Decide that first. Then look at the box."

Deciding the kind before looking is the whole method, and students find it counter-intuitive enough to need telling more than once.



Day 5 — Read and Choose

Tests 7 and 9 · 10 marks · target 7

ANSWER KEY · Model answer — 'Become the Examiner'

Five questions, each with the sentence that proves it:

1. *How old was Pinky?* → "Pinky was eleven years old."
2. *Where did she live?* → "She lived in a small village near Kurunegala."
3. *What did she find under the tree?* → "It was a small tin box, brown with rust."
4. *Who wrote the letter?* → "The letter had been written by Pinky's grandfather."
5. *Why did her grandmother cry?* → "I looked for this box for thirty years."

The shared words are the point — *eleven, lived, box, letter, thirty years*.

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 5 writing

Award out of 10:

- **1 mark** per question using a different question word (max 5)
- **1 mark** per copied proof sentence that genuinely contains the answer (max 5)

The check that matters: a question with no findable evidence sentence means the student has invented rather than matched — exactly the habit that loses comprehension marks. Have them replace it.

Ignore: question marks, spelling, word order inside the question.



Day 6 — The Notice Formula

Test 6 · 5 marks · target 4 · the most valuable day in this book

ANSWER KEY · Model answer — Notice 2 (book exhibition)

BOOK EXHIBITION

A book exhibition organised by the Library Society will be held on 5th December at 9.00 a.m. in the school hall.

All students are kindly requested to attend.

Please bring your library card.

Your kind co-operation is highly appreciated.

Secretary, Library Society

Word count: 44. Four sentences. Every fact from the question present.

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 6 (the official criteria)

Mark each notice out of 5, exactly as the examiner does.

Content — 2 marks. Are all the facts from the question present?

- All present → **2** · Some present → **1**
- Off-topic, or the question copied out → **0** — *and the whole answer now scores 0. Apply Rule 1.*

Language — 3 marks. Judge only whether the sentences are complete.

- Four complete sentences, mostly correct → **3**
- Some complete, some broken → **2** · Only a few correct → **1**

Then the floor: count the words. Under 20 → cap the total at **2**, whatever you scored above.

You can apply all of this without confident English. Content is a checklist, Language is "is it a whole sentence?", the floor is counting.

WHAT TO SAY · The three things worth saying on Day 6

If a fact is missing: "The question said 5th December. Where is 5th December in your notice? A missing fact costs content marks — and if content reaches zero, everything else goes to zero too."

If it is too short: "Count your words. You have sixteen. Under twenty, the examiner is not allowed to give more than two marks, even if the English is perfect. Write the fourth sentence."

If they want to be creative: "Not here. This question rewards the formula. Save the creativity for Book 3 — this is four lines and a signature."





Day 7 — Marking the Gate

45 minutes • Tests 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 (Paper I) ♦ Tests 9, 13 (Paper II) • 35 marks available

MARKING • Marking the gate

Mark from the **official 2024 marking scheme**, not from your own judgement. Using the real document matters — students trust a score that came from it.

All seven questions are objective: right or wrong, 5 marks each.

Total out of 35. **The gate is 25.**

NOTE • Report the number honestly

Say: **'You scored 25 out of 35 on the part you trained.'**

Never say "you scored 35" or "you passed". The 35-mark mock is not the 100-mark paper. Twenty-five *projects* to roughly 35 once the untrained remainder is added — a candidate reliably picks up around 10 marks across the other 65, and Day 6's notice is worth up to 5 more.

Students who let their scores get rounded up stop improving, because they can no longer see where they stand. Protect their number.

WHAT TO SAY • If they cleared 25

Say: "Look at the sheet from Day 1. That was seven days ago."

Then stop. Do not immediately talk about Book 2. Let it stand for a day — this may be the first evidence in years that this student can do English, and it should not be instantly converted into a new demand.

WHAT TO SAY • If they did not clear 25

Say: "Almost nobody clears this in the first week. The students who pass in December are the ones who sat it twice in September."

That is true, and it is the most important sentence in this guide. A student who fails the gate and repeats the week is **on track**. A student who fails and quits is not.

Then act: find the two lowest-scoring tests. Redo those two days — same reading, same writing, a different past paper for the drill. Sit the gate again with the 2023 paper.



The Correction Policy

This is where well-meaning adults do the most damage, so it is worth being precise.

Correcting every error in a weak student's writing is **counter-productive**. It overwhelms the learner and teaches them to write less and avoid anything difficult — which lowers marks rather than raising them.

Correct **three things**. Ignore the rest. Not because the rest does not matter, but because a student corrected on everything stops writing.

MARKING · The three errors to correct — and nothing else

CORRECT these:

1. **Subject-verb agreement** — *he go* → *he goes*
2. **Past tense** — *yesterday we visit* → *yesterday we visited*
3. **Singular and plural** — *two book* → *two books*

IGNORE these, deliberately:

- Spelling that does not change the meaning
- Articles — *a, an, the*
- Punctuation beyond the full stop and capital letter
- Word choice, unless the meaning is lost
- Handwriting, unless genuinely unreadable

Always check these, because they are not language at all:

- Missing facts from the question (Rule 1)
- Word count below the floor (Rule 2)
- Blanks (Rule 3)

WHAT TO SAY · How to give a correction

Do not mark the error. Point at the line and ask.

Say: "Read this sentence out loud to me."

Most students hear their own agreement and tense errors the moment they speak them. A correction they find themselves is remembered; one written in your handwriting is not.

If they cannot hear it, tell them once, plainly, and move on. Do not explain the grammar rule — at this level the rule does not help, the example does.



Progress Tracker

Day	Activity	Score	Target	Done
1	Starting line written	—	—	
2	Giveaway words (out of 11)		9	
2	Drill: Tests 1 & 13 (out of 10)		8	
3	Naming + sentences (out of 19)		15	
3	Drill: Test 3 (out of 5)		3.5	
4	Fill and explain (out of 14)		10	
4	Drill: Tests 2 & 4 (out of 10)		7	
5	Become the examiner (out of 10)		8	
5	Drill: Tests 7 & 9 (out of 10)		7	
6	Three notices (out of 15)		12	
6	Drill: Test 6 (out of 5)		4	
7	THE GATE (out of 35)		25	



Warning Signs

- **Sessions creeping past 30 minutes.** The book is failing them, not the reverse. Stop at 20 minutes even mid-exercise.
- **Writing tasks skipped, reading tasks done.** Avoidance, and the commonest pattern in English. Sit with them for the writing — it is eight minutes.
- **Blanks left in drills.** Rule 3 has not landed. Repeat it every day until it stops.
- **Fewer than ten objects nameable on Day 3.** This is the real diagnosis: the gap is vocabulary, not grammar. Repeat Part 1 daily in different rooms.
- **Refusal to say anything in English aloud.** Often shame rather than inability — English in this country carries a weight that has nothing to do with ability. Do not force speaking; Book 1 needs none of it.
- **A sudden good score that does not match the work.** Check whether the drill was done with the answer key open. Say nothing accusatory; simply sit with them for the next one.

NOTE · When to seek a teacher

This guide covers what an attentive adult can do. Some things need a teacher:

- Writing that is fluent but consistently unclear in meaning
- A student who cannot read simple English aloud at all — a decoding problem sits underneath everything in this book
- Any suspicion of an unaddressed reading difficulty

Getting the right help early is not a failure of this book. It is the point of paying attention.



What Comes Next

When the student clears 25 out of 35, they move to **Book 2 — The Credit Bridge**, and you move to its guide.

Book 2 is harder to mentor, because it introduces the first real reading-for-detail work and the banked cloze — a question about small grammar words that most S-band students leave blank. That guide gives you a decision tree you can apply without English.

A pass is worth having. A credit is worth more, and it is fifteen marks away.

THE O/L ENGLISH GRADE LADDER

Teacher & Parent Guide

You do not need good English to use this guide.

That sentence is the reason it exists. The parent of a child failing O/L English was very often failed by O/L English themselves, and has been quietly certain ever since that they have nothing to offer here.

You have a great deal to offer. Book 1 teaches five questions that require no original writing at all, and almost everything in it can be marked by counting and comparing — is the fact present, is the object named, are there four lines where there should be four.

Inside: what to check each day, model answers, the official rules that decide marks, the three errors worth correcting and the many worth ignoring, and the sentences to say when your child gets it wrong.

Companion to Book 1 — The Recognition Floor. One guide accompanies each book in the series.



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