



THE O/L ENGLISH GRADE LADDER



BOOK 3

Teacher & Parent Guide

How to mentor and mark Book 3 — Breaking the Cliff

Solid C (50) → High B (65 marks)

For the adult supporting a student through the hardest book in the series

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

Idasara Academy



Before You Begin

Read this first — it changes how you mark

Books 1 and 2 could be marked almost entirely by checking and counting. **Book 3 asks for a judgement** — but far less of one than you would expect, because of something printed on the paper itself.

Every Test 14 chart question supplies the vocabulary. Underneath the chart the examiner prints a line like *"The following words and phrases will help you:"* followed by six words. In the real papers:

- **2023** — *many, some, a few, most, more than, less than*
- **2024** — *most, many, more than, equal, less than, least*
- **2025** — *lower, higher, youngest, oldest*

Those are not vocabulary support. They tell you which comparison the examiner is looking for.

Counting how many of them appear in your child's answer is a marking action requiring no English at all, and it correlates closely with the mark.

NOTE · What you can check without judging English

On the 10-mark chart question:

1. **Word count.** Under 40 → capped at 4 marks, whatever the quality.
2. **Figures.** Put the answer beside the chart. Is every number the same?
3. **Helper words.** Count how many of the printed words appear. Fewer than four is a weak answer.
4. **Invented content.** Does any sentence explain *why*? The chart never says why. Cross it out.

Those four checks cover Content, Organisation and Mechanics — **7 of the 10 marks**. Only Language needs a judgement.

Why the B band is empty

Nationally in 2025: A 15.41 per cent, **B 9.56 per cent**, C 21.65 per cent. Fewer students score a B than an A.

That is a cliff, not a distribution. It exists because everything up to 50 marks can be collected by matching and sorting, while everything above must be produced. Your student is standing at the bottom of it. Knowing it is a known structural obstacle — not a personal failure — matters. Tell them.

The time it really takes

Days 1 to 6: **fifteen to twenty minutes**. Day 7 is a **full paper — about three hours** with a break.

That session must be scheduled properly: a weekend morning, phone in another room, someone else keeping time. It is ruined by interruption, and it is the most valuable session in the series.



Day 3 is the densest day in the book

Test 12 rotates — reported speech in 2023, conditionals in 2024, the passive in 2025 — so all three must be prepared. Day 3 asks for fifteen transformations. If it runs long, split it across two evenings rather than cutting it.



The Chart Card — Helper Words and the Mark Split

The paper prints the vocabulary it wants underneath every chart question. Counting those words is a marking action that needs no English at all.

NOTE · How to use this card

Upper panel: find the year's helper words and count how many appear in the answer. Fewer than four is a weak answer, almost every time. Lower panel: award the ten marks on the four criteria. You can judge the three solid bars by checking and counting; only Language needs an opinion.



THE CHART CARD — HELPER WORDS & 10-MARK SPLIT

O/L English Test 14 · Parent Marking Diagnostic Tool

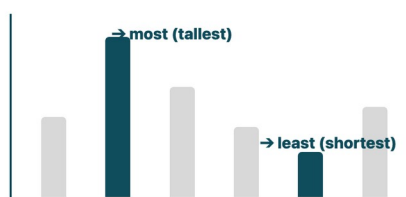
THE PAPER GIVES YOU THE WORDS

2023: *many · some · a few · most · more than · less than*

2024: *most · many · more than · equal · less than · least*

2025: *lower · higher · youngest · oldest*

"Count how many appear in the answer. Fewer than four is a weak answer."



HOW THE EXAMINER SPLITS 10 MARKS

Content (3)

Solid · Facts match chart

Language (3)

Outline Only · Needs Judgement

Organisation (2)

Paragraph

Mechanics (2)

Solid · Spelling & punctuation

"You can check the solid ones. Only Language needs judgement."

⚠ Content scores 0 → Whole answer scores 0.

🔴 Under 40 words = capped at 4 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.



Day 1 — The Cliff Decoded

MARKING · Marking — 'Find the Bullets'

Not scored. Check they actually copied the bullets and helper words from all three years.

The discovery to draw out: every Test 14 option, in every year, tells the student what to include. Most have sat several mocks without noticing.

Ask: *"How many of those bullets did you use last time?"* The honest answer usually explains the grade better than anything about their English.

WHAT TO SAY · What to say on Day 1

Say: "Only nine per cent of the country gets a B. Not because they are cleverer — because there are three rules on this paper nobody tells students, and all three are about following instructions, not about English."

Do not say: "You need to improve your English." At 50–58 marks it is usually not their English failing. It is that they are not doing what the question asked.



Day 2 — The Verb Form Passage

Test 10 · 5 marks · target 4

ANSWER KEY · Model answers — 'Set the Time, Then Fill'

Passage 1 — PRESENT. (1) is (2) makes (3) tell (4) trust (5) come

Passage 2 — PAST. (1) walked (2) bought (3) carried (4) reached (5) started

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 2 writing

Award out of 12:

- **1 mark** for correctly labelling each passage PAST or PRESENT (max 2) — **this is the skill; mark it first**
- **1 mark** per correct verb form (max 10)

The check that matters: did they write PAST or PRESENT at the top *before* filling the blanks? A student who fills first and labels afterwards has not learned the method.

Correct only this: a missing **-s** on he/she/it in a present-tense passage. It is the single commonest Test 10 error. **Ignore:** spelling of the verb, provided the tense is right.



Day 3 — The Question That Rotates

Test 12 · 5 marks · target 4

NOTE · Why this day is long

Test 12 has been a different structure in each of the last three years. There is no way to predict which appears, so all three must be ready. Fifteen transformations is the minimum honest preparation.

ANSWER KEY · Model answers — all fifteen

Reported speech: 1. *She said that she was going to Colombo.* 2. *They said that they had finished the work the previous day.* 3. *He asked where the library was.* 4. *My brother said that he would help me the next day.* 5. *The conductor said that the bus had already left.*

Conditionals: 6. *...you will pass the examination.* 7. *...I would go to school on it.* 8. *...we would have finished the work.* 9. *...we will miss the train.* 10. *...she will improve quickly.*

Passive: 11. *The tank was cleaned by the villagers.* 12. *My umbrella has been taken.* 13. *The road is being repaired.* 14. *This temple was built by a king.* 15. *The papers will be marked by the teacher.*

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 3 writing

Award out of 15, one per transformation.

- **Reported speech:** the mark requires the **tense step back** and, where present, the changed time word (*yesterday* → *the previous day*). A student who changes the tense but leaves *yesterday* is half right — award the mark, note the error.
- **Conditionals:** the mark requires the two halves to match. *If I would have time* is always wrong and is the commonest error.
- **Passive:** the mark requires **be + past participle**. Award it even if the participle is irregular and wrong (*was builded*) — the structure is what Test 12 tests.

Then look at which group scored lowest. That is the one to redo. Do not average the three.



Days 4 and 5 — The Chart

Test 14 · 10 marks · target 7 · the highest-value question in this book

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 4 'Read Four Charts in the Margin'

Award out of 16:

- **1 mark** per correct margin note (4 notes × 3 charts = 12)
- **1 mark** per helper word correctly matched to the comparison it would make (max 4)

No description is written on Day 4, and that is deliberate. A student who cannot say which bar is highest cannot write about it. If they resist making notes and want to start writing, that is the habit to break.

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 5 (the official four-part split)

This is the examiner's actual scheme. Use it exactly.

Content — 3 marks

- Highest and lowest both reported, figures accurate → **3**
- Some data reported, mostly accurate → **2**
- Very little data, or several wrong figures → **1**
- No data at all, or entirely off-topic → **0** — *and Rule 1 zeroes the whole answer*

Language — 3 marks (*the only part needing judgement*)

- Sentences complete throughout, few errors → **3**
- Mostly complete, some broken → **2** · Only a few correct → **1**

Organisation — 2 marks

- A first sentence saying what the chart shows and a last sentence giving the overall point → **2**
- One of the two → **1** · Neither → **0**

Mechanics — 2 marks

- Capitals, full stops and spelling largely correct → **2** · Frequent slips → **1**

Then the floor: under 40 words → cap the total at **4**.

And the helper-word count. Not an official criterion, but the closest thing to a predictor you have. Fewer than four of the printed words used almost always means a weak Content score.

ANSWER KEY · The two benchmark answers

Book 3 Day 5 gives **Answer A (3 marks)** and **Answer B (9 marks)**. Make sure the student can say why.



Answer A loses marks because: no figures at all (Content 1); invented reasons the chart never gave — *the bus service is very bad, students are using phones at night*; unasked-for advice; no opening or closing sentence (Organisation 0).

Answer B scores because: every figure correct and taken from the chart; nothing invented; six of the printed helper words used; a clear first and last sentence.

The lesson to draw out: Answer B is not *better English*. It is more **disciplined** English. A student who understands that distinction has understood Test 14.

WHAT TO SAY · The three sentences that save Test 14

If they explain why: "Show me where the chart says that. If you cannot point at it, the examiner cannot give you marks for it — and enough invented content takes the whole question to zero."

If they write too little: "Count. You have thirty-four words. Under forty, the rule caps you at four marks however good it is. Add the highest and the lowest sentence."

If they choose the letter over the chart: "The letter asks you to invent a person, a reason and a polite ending — three places to lose marks. The chart is printed in front of you, and the paper even tells you which words to use. Take the chart."



Day 6 — Sentence Combining

No marks today. Every mark in Book 4.

MARKING · Marking scheme — Day 6 writing

Award out of 12: **1 mark** per combined sentence that is genuinely a single sentence with a sensible joining word.

Two checks, neither needing English judgement:

- Is it **one** sentence? One full stop, at the end. A student who writes *Because the tank was cleaned. The harvest improved.* has not combined anything.
- Were **six different** joining words used across the twelve?

Correct only this: *although* used where *because* is meant, or the reverse. That reverses the meaning and is the one combining error worth fixing. **Ignore:** clumsiness, length, awkward phrasing. It is supposed to be clumsy this week.

NOTE · Expect Day 6 to look worse, not better

Sentence combining temporarily makes writing clumsier. The student is rebuilding how they join clauses, and rebuilding looks bad before it looks good.

Do not intervene here because the sentences have become awkward. If you correct heavily now, they will retreat to short safe sentences and Book 4 will fail. Let Book 4 be the judge.



Day 7 — Marking the Barrier Gate

A complete paper. 100 marks. The gate is 65.

MARKING · Marking the gate

Use the **official 2024 marking scheme** for both papers, in full. This is a real B measurement, not a projection — do not adjust, encourage or round.

Record the score for each test separately, not just the total. The per-question breakdown is what tells you what to do next.

NOTE · The pacing failure — read this before the gate

More students lose a B to **time** than to weak English. The pattern is always the same: too long on Tests 9 to 13, then Test 16 with fifteen minutes left, forty words written, capped.

Your job on gate day is to be the clock. If the student reaches 1 hour 30 into Paper II and has not started Test 16, tell them to stop what they are doing and start it. Fifteen marks written badly beats fifteen marks not written.

Do this even if they protest. This single intervention is worth more than any correction in this guide.

WHAT TO SAY · After the gate

If they cleared 65: "You are in the top ten per cent of English candidates in this country." Say the number. It is true, and nobody else will tell them.

If they did not: look at Test 14 first, then be fair about Test 16.

Test 16 has **not been taught yet** — that is Book 4. A low score there is expected and is not evidence of anything. Do not let a student conclude they have failed at something they were never shown.

For Test 14, ask one question: "*Did you use the words the paper gave you?*" Count them together. That conversation is usually the whole diagnosis.



The Correction Policy at This Level

Still three error types. One changes.

1. **Subject-verb agreement**
2. **Tense consistency** — now the most important. A description that drifts between past and present inside one answer loses Language marks a C-grade answer never had to worry about.
3. **Sentence fragments and run-ons** — replaces singular/plural as the third priority. Longer sentences make fragments more likely, and the Language descriptor names connected sentences explicitly.

Still ignore: article errors, spelling that does not obscure meaning, punctuation beyond full stops and capitals, word choice.

NOTE · The warning to give before Book 4

Students at this level start reaching for impressive vocabulary, because it feels like what a better writer would do.

Discourage it now. The A-band Language descriptor leads with *almost no errors*. A student who bolts unfamiliar academic words onto a B-grade base misuses them, raises their error density, and scores **lower** than one who wrote plain correct English.

Book 4 addresses this directly. Get ahead of it: *"Write what you can write correctly. Impressive and wrong scores less than plain and right."*



Progress Tracker

Day	Activity	Score	Target	Done
1	Bullets and helper words found	—	—	
2	Set the time, then fill (out of 12)		9	
2	Drill: Test 10 × 2 (out of 10)		8	
3	Fifteen transformations (out of 15)		11	
3	Drill: Test 12 × 3 (out of 15)		12	
4	Chart margin notes (out of 16)		13	
5	Two descriptions, self-marked (out of 20)		14	
5	Drill: Test 14 (out of 10)		7	
6	Twelve combinations (out of 12)		9	
7	THE GATE — full paper (out of 100)		65	



Warning Signs

- **A chart description with no numbers in it.** The single clearest sign of a failing answer, and visible in two seconds.
- **Explaining why the data looks that way.** Invented content. It is the direct route to the Zero-Content Trap.
- **Choosing the letter over the chart, repeatedly.** Usually because the letter feels more like "real writing". Show them the marks split and the helper words.
- **Test 16 answers that stop mid-sentence at the gate.** Pacing, not writing — and Test 16 has not been taught yet. Note it, do not act on it.
- **Sentences getting shorter after Day 6.** Over-correction. Stop marking language for a week and mark only word count, figures and helper words.
- **Suddenly ambitious vocabulary with more errors.** The overreach problem. Address it now — see the note above.

NOTE · When to seek a teacher — Book 3 specifically

This is where an untrained adult genuinely reaches a limit. Get a teacher if:

- **Language sits at 1 out of 3 across several descriptions** despite correct figures and structure. Structure you can fix; sentence-level accuracy usually needs someone who can explain what is wrong.
- The writing is fluent but the meaning is consistently unclear.
- The student has correct content and structure, scores badly, and neither of you can see why. A teacher reading one answer will usually find it in ten minutes.

Everything else in this book — figures, helper words, word count, structure, pacing — you can handle, and it is where most of the marks are.



What Comes Next

When the student clears 65, they move to **Book 4 — The Distinction Crown**.

Book 4 is the shortest road in the series and the least about English. From a B, the A is won by **stopping small losses**: careless slips on Paper I, a missing conclusion, a tense that drifts, ten minutes lost to bad pacing. It is also where Test 16 — the 200-word article or speech — is finally taught.

Guide 4 is mostly about error patterns and the clock. After Book 3, you will find it easy.

THE O/L ENGLISH GRADE LADDER

Teacher & Parent Guide

This is the guide where honesty matters most.

Book 3 asks the student to produce a hundred words of their own about a chart. That cannot be marked by counting alone, and this guide will not pretend otherwise.

But here is what surprised me when I checked the real papers: the examiner prints the words they want the student to use, right underneath the chart, every single year. Checking whether those words appear is counting — and it is worth more marks than any judgement about English you might be nervous to make.

Inside: the official 10-mark split, the helper-word check, the three grammar structures that rotate unpredictably, and the pacing failure that costs more students a B than weak writing ever has.

Companion to Book 3 — Breaking the Cliff. One guide accompanies each book in the series.



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