A Guide for Students Preparing to Write the Diploma Examination

English Language Arts 30–2

Alberta

This document was written primarily for	
Students	✓
Teachers	
Administrators	
Parents	✓
General Audience	

A Guide for Students Preparing to Write the Diploma Examination
English Language Arts 30–2

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Please note that if you cannot access one of the direct website links referred to in this document, you can find diploma examination-related materials on Alberta Education and Childcare website.

This guide has been prepared by Provincial Assessment staff at Alberta Education and Childcare. We develop the diploma exams and are involved in the assessment of thousands of high school students each year. The purpose of this guide is to provide students with information that will increase their likelihood of success on the diploma exams in English Language Arts 30–2.

Guides for Students for diploma-exam subjects other than English Language Arts 30–2, as well as additional materials on how to prepare for diploma exams, can be found on the Alberta Education and Childcare website.

This guide and all other diploma examination-related materials produced by Provincial Assessment staff are identified with the following logo:

Understanding the *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination*

Your school-awarded mark is worth 70% of your final course mark, and the diploma examination mark is worth the other 30% of your final course mark.

The *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination* has two parts, each worth 50% of your total examination mark. *Part A: Written Response* allows you to demonstrate reading, thinking, and writing skills in response to three distinct writing tasks. *Part B: Readings and Questions* consists of machine-scored questions (each worth 1 mark), based on reading selections. You will write these two parts on different days.

Part A: Written Response

Part A: Written Response contributes 50% of the total *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination* mark and consists of three assignments.

- **Assignment I: Visual Reflection**
  Value: 10% of total examination mark
- **Assignment II: Literary Exploration**
  Value: 25% of total examination mark
- **Assignment III: Persuasive Writing in Context**
  Value: 15% of total examination mark

Time: 3 hours. This examination was developed to be completed in 3 hours; however, you may take up to 6 hours to complete the examination, should you need it.

Part B: Readings and Questions

Part B: Readings and Questions contributes 50% of the total *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination* mark. There are reading selections and 70 machine-scored questions (each worth 1 mark) in the examination. Machine-scored questions provide students with response alternatives, of which only one is correct.

Time: 3 hours. This examination was developed to be completed in 3 hours; however, you may take up to 6 hours to complete the examination, should you need it.

Special accommodations are available to students. For more information, contact your school administration or counselling department.

Preparing for the *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination*

The most effective way to prepare for your diploma examination is to be actively involved in all aspects of your English Language Arts 30–2 classroom experience. Use every opportunity in your coursework to develop effective reading, writing, and communication skills.

Diversity

In addition to the literary texts you are studying in your English Language Arts 30–2 course, **explore and enjoy a variety of other texts**, such as books, articles, stories, essays, poems, songs, films, theatrical productions, and visual texts. Exposure to diverse reading experiences increases your competence and confidence when responding to reading selections that you will see for the first time in both parts of the diploma examination. Reading challenging material is also one of the most effective ways to increase your vocabulary. As well, hearing, seeing, and experiencing literary texts presented in a variety of contexts, such as audio books or online materials, can enhance your comprehension. Reading a poem out loud to hear the ideas within it may help you to appreciate its meaning. Viewing live stage productions will help you become familiar with the conventions, techniques, and devices of the theatre.

Interpretation

Regardless of the type of text, pay attention to details of content, style, and technique. When you are reading or viewing a text, ask yourself **what ideas has the text creator communicated**? Doing so can improve your ability to identify main ideas or central themes in both parts of the *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination*. In addition, asking this question can help you to identify your own interpretation of the text.

Understanding your own interpretation of a text will help you respond to a given topic on an examination. Ask yourself how the text creator's choice of specific details such as character, conflict, point of view, motivation, setting, and words creates a specific effect in a text and influences meaning. Talking and writing about what details in the text would best support your interpretation and response and will help you to feel confident about your writing.

References

Develop the habit of using reference materials, such as a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a writing handbook. As you extend your vocabulary, you extend your ability to understand and to communicate. Before looking up a word in a **dictionary**, see if you can define it in context through clues in the reading and your knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and roots. After looking up a word, ensure that you understand its meaning before you use it in your writing. In addition to a dictionary, a **thesaurus** can offer you a wide range of word choices. Using an authorized **writing handbook** as a resource throughout the year can also assist you with your writing.

Seven writing handbooks are authorized for use during the administration of *Part A* of the diploma examination:

- *A Canadian Writer's Guide* (J. Finnbogason and A. Valleau), second edition only
- *A Canadian Writer's Reference* (D. Hacker)
- *Checkmate: A Writing Reference for Canadians* (J. Buckley)
- *English Language Arts Handbook for Secondary Students* (Alberta Education)
- *Fit to Print: The Canadian Student's Guide to Essay Writing* (J. Buckley)
- *The St. Martin's Handbook for Canadians* (A. Lunsford et al.)
- *The Writing Process* (Q. Gehle et al.)

With the exception of *A Canadian Writer's Guide*, any edition of these texts is acceptable for use during *Part A*. The *St. Martin's Handbook for Canadians* and *The Writing Process* are out of print but may be available in some high schools.

A dictionary and a thesaurus are available in the *Part A: Written Response* examination on the digital assessment platform for students to use during the administration of *Part A*.

You may also use all three of these **print** references—an English and/or a bilingual dictionary, a thesaurus, and an authorized writing handbook—during the administration of *Part A*. However, you must develop the skills necessary to use these reference tools effectively and efficiently; otherwise, they may be of little assistance to you during the examination.

You may **not** use any reference materials during the administration of *Part B*.

Reviewing

Become familiar with the format of the *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination* by reviewing the *English Language Arts 30–2 Information Bulletin* available on the Writing diploma exams web page. Practising the sample assignments will give you confidence and help you to manage your time during the examination. **However, limit the number of Part A English Language Arts 30–2 examinations that you practise**; you will gain the skills you require through active involvement in your English language arts course and through understanding and acting upon feedback from your teacher. Documents such as *Examples of the Standards for Students' Writing* from previous examinations provide valuable resources. They demonstrate the writing standards expected of you by the end of your English Language Arts 30–2 course. Note that the sample responses in these documents have been provided for **instructional purposes only**. If you use sections from these responses when writing *Part A* of the diploma examination, you will be guilty of plagiarism and will be in breach of examination regulations.

Practice tests for both *Part A: Written Response* and *Part B: Readings and Questions* are available on the Practice Tests web page.

Writing on the digital assessment platform

Make sure you familiarize yourself with the features and tools of the word processor in the digital assessment platform. Do not rely on the word processor to correct your mistakes. For example, on a recent examination, a student wrote "I think that the character showed why it is important to be sweat" when she intended to say "I think that the character showed why it is important to be sweet." Because *sweat* was on the digital assessment platform's list of words, the spell-check tool did not help the student to avoid this unfortunate error.

Requirements of *Part A: Written Response*

Understanding the writing requirements for *Part A* of the diploma examination is an essential part of your preparation. As well, make sure that you are familiar with the **scoring categories and scoring criteria** in the *English Language Arts 30–2 Information Bulletin*, which is available on the Writing diploma exams web page. An understanding of the scoring criteria may help you to fulfill the writing tasks. Experienced English Language Arts 30–2 teachers use the scoring criteria to mark your examination.

Teacher-markers have read the texts in the examination and are knowledgeable about the literary text(s) you choose to discuss. They expect you to write thoughtfully on the topics outlined in all three assignments. Express your thoughts clearly and support them with relevant details.

Becoming involved in the ideas that you want to communicate to the reader will strengthen the overall effect of your writing. Do not think of the writing assignments as work done for someone else: find a way to make them meaningful to you.

Each assignment has a suggested time limit, as well as a suggested word count range. You may use each of these as a guideline when responding to each written-response assignment. The suggested word count range is not a cap.

To improve your writing, be sure to

- **read** the assignments carefully
- **think** about what you are being asked to do
- **plan** your writing so that it will focus on the topic and make sense to your reader
- **reread** your writing and ask yourself if you have communicated clearly
- **revise** your work

Assignment I: Visual Reflection

The Visual Reflection assignment asks you to **reflect upon and support your ideas and impressions** regarding a photograph, illustration, drawing, poster, advertisement, or other visual text. More than one visual text may be presented.

Space for planning is provided in the *Part A: Written Response* examination. You are also permitted to use paper provided to you by the exam supervisor, should you need it.

In your writing, you *must* select a *prose form*, **not poetry**, that is appropriate to the ideas that you wish to express and that will enable you to effectively communicate to the reader. Discuss ideas and impressions that are meaningful to you; respond personally, critically, and/or creatively; and consider how you can create a strong *unifying effect*.

The Visual Reflection assignment is worth 10% of the total examination mark (*Parts A* and *B* combined) and is assessed in two scoring categories: Ideas and Impressions (5%) and Presentation (5%).

The time suggested to complete the Visual Reflection assignment is **approximately 30 to 40 minutes, and the suggested word count range is 300 to 700 words.**

Suggestions for writing the Visual Reflection assignment

Consider all the details of the visual text(s). Then ask yourself which details are most significant to you. Consider any introductory comments, captions, and footnotes that accompany the text(s). This information may help you in your understanding of the text(s) and the context.

The details you select should support your development of the ideas and impressions you choose to discuss. This focus will help you to establish and sustain your unifying effect, which you will make clear by statement or implication. Your observations and conclusions about the visual text(s) may include discussion of emotions, attitudes, situations, and themes presented in, or inspired by, the text(s).

An important point to remember is that there is no "correct" answer or approach to the Visual Reflection assignment. When choosing the prose form that will best communicate your ideas and impressions, consider the ideas and support that will allow you to compose the most effective response.

Organize your writing in a clear, focused manner. Have a plan for presenting your ideas and impressions. Different prose forms, of course, have their own unique characteristics. There is a difference in style between a journal entry and a newspaper article, for example. Likewise, the conventions of a personal narrative are different from those of expository writing. Understanding the conventions and style of the prose form you have chosen is essential. Regardless of the prose form you choose, make sure that you support your ideas with adequate and appropriate details from the text(s) and/or the context you have chosen to use.

Possibly the most important advice we can give you is to have confidence in your ideas and impressions. Trusting your ideas, impressions, and feelings will enhance the creation of your writing voice. Use your time efficiently. If your response is clear, focused, organized, and well supported, you will be successful.

Assignment II: Literary Exploration

The Literary Exploration assignment requires you to consider a specific topic question and use evidence to support the controlling idea you create in response to that question. A short selection of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry is provided on the examination and serves to illustrate one possible dimension of the topic.

In your response, you **must** discuss a character from literature or film that you have studied in English Language Arts 30–2. You may choose to write about more than one character and use more than one literary text. Use the prompts found in the student response area of the examination to help you select a character or characters relevant to the topic question and interesting to you from the short stories, novels, plays, poetry, nonfiction, or films that you have studied. You **must** write in prose.

To begin the task, first consider your answer to the topic question. This answer will form your controlling idea. Then, choose a character or characters from a literary text or texts you know well, that is meaningful to you, and that is relevant to the topic question. Make sure that the character(s) you choose will serve to illustrate your ideas on the topic. As you plan and proceed, be sure that your selection of character(s) allows you to **purposefully reflect on** and **develop the topic** in enough detail to support your controlling or unifying idea logically and convincingly.

You **must provide support** and **explanation** for your controlling idea by using specific details from the literary text(s) you have chosen to discuss. Please remember that teacher-markers have read both the reading selection on the examination and the text(s) that you have studied. They expect you to write accurately and thoughtfully about the character(s) you choose to discuss and how those details illustrate your controlling idea. Be sure to use specific examples from the text(s) to support your ideas about the character(s). Avoid mere plot summaries.

In your writing, you may use your own prior knowledge and/or experience as supporting evidence, along with your discussion of your chosen character(s). These knowledge-based or life-based observations can include examples from personal experiences, the experiences of others, and current and/or historical events. You may also choose to include supporting evidence from the reading selection provided in the examination. Be sure whatever additional details you include support your idea on the topic question.

The Literary Exploration assignment is worth 25% of the total examination mark (*Parts A* and *B* combined) and is assessed in four scoring categories: Thought and Support (10%), Form and Structure (5%), Matters of Choice (5%), and Matters of Correctness (5%).

You will be assessed on your ability to develop a focused controlling idea or unifying effect, your ability to select relevant and specific support, and your ability to organize your ideas clearly and effectively. **Retelling the details** of the provided excerpt, **merely summarizing** a text you studied in class, or **writing on a topic that is different** than the one in the examination will result in a score of zero.

The time suggested to complete the Literary Exploration assignment is **approximately 70 to 80 minutes, and the suggested word count range is 400 to 900 words.**

Suggestions for writing the Literary Exploration assignment

Read the assignment box before you read the selection provided. This can help you to focus your reading of the selection.

As you plan, you may become more confident, or you may decide that your initial choices restrict your ability to explore the topic or will not provide sufficient supporting detail for an effective discussion. At this point, you should reassess and re-explore to find the best way to address the topic. You may also find that your initial choice of character(s) does not provide appropriate support for your ideas and that you should reconsider your choice of literary text(s).

Markers will consider the ideas presented in the planning areas of the examination when considering the effectiveness of your response. The suggested time for this pre-writing reflection is approximately 10 minutes. Budget your time wisely.

It is also important to use words and sentence structures that are clear, correct, precise, and familiar to you. Teacher-markers want to read your ideas expressed in your own words. Use language that you understand. However, do not use inappropriate slang or informal language that may weaken the effect of your ideas.

Assignment III: Persuasive Writing in Context

The Persuasive Writing in Context assignment is a practical writing exercise. The assignment describes a hypothetical, real-world situation involving a proposal that requires a response in the form of a speech or a letter. You must either **accept** or **reject** the proposal.

The assignment also includes source material consisting of a variety of information sources, which may include web pages, excerpts from print and online articles, opinion polls, emails, letters, blogs, meeting minutes, charts and graphs, photographs, and maps. The *English Language Arts 30–2 Part A Practice Test* on the digital assessment platform contains an example of a Persuasive Writing in Context assignment with this type of source material.

In order to use the source material to support your argument, you will need to sort, evaluate, and synthesize the information provided. Some sources can be used to support either position; such a source contains information that may be useful in developing an argument either for or against the proposal. In addition, certain sources may be related to one another. For example, one source may clarify or provide specific details that support the argument made in another source.

Teacher-markers will assess the persuasiveness of the argument you have developed, the specificity and relevance of supporting details, and the quality of your language and expression.

The Persuasive Writing in Context assignment is worth 15% of the total examination mark (*Parts A* and *B* combined) and is assessed in two scoring categories: Thought and Support (10%) and Writing Skills (5%).

The time suggested to complete the Persuasive Writing in Context assignment is **approximately 40 to 50 minutes, and the suggested word count range is 300 to 600 words.**

Suggestions for writing the Persuasive Writing in Context assignment

Read the situation, the assignment box, and the instructions just below the assignment box first. This will help you understand how the source material relates to and develops positions on the situation in question.

Create a clear and specific purpose for your writing by directly responding to the task in the assignment box and by thoroughly considering the complexity of the issue.

You will then need to select the form you will use to present your argument (either a speech or a letter). Make certain that you are familiar with the conventions of the form you choose. For example, the structure and content of the introductory and closing comments in a letter are different from those of a speech.

Effective persuasive writing features a clear position on the issue, supported by arguments that contain specific and relevant details. **Merely restating information provided in the examination is insufficient.** You should read and consider the source material to determine which pieces of information you wish to use, if any, to develop your position; you may use some or none of the information provided. Specific details that support your argument can also come from your own knowledge and/or outside experience. However, you must consider your audience and the appropriateness of the language you choose.

Requirements of *Part B: Readings and Questions*

The ability to demonstrate reading comprehension skills without the use of a dictionary or a thesaurus is essential for the *Part B: Readings and Questions* portion of the diploma examination. *Part B* requires you to draw on the understanding, knowledge, and skills that you have developed as a reader. Your critical reading and thinking skills—understanding of vocabulary, appreciation of tone and literary and rhetorical devices, understanding of the purpose and effect of a text creator's choices, and appreciation of human experience and values reflected in literary texts—will be assessed at the level of challenge appropriate for graduating English Language Arts 30–2 students.

In *Part B: Readings and Questions*, you will read selections from a variety of texts, such as poems or songs, essays, drama (including television or radio scripts or screenplays), short stories, novels, and visual texts. **The reading selections are *not* taken from the reading list for your course of studies.** Visual texts may be present within a text to enhance the reading and help you establish context and/or they may be present as independent reading selections with questions. You may be asked to identify how elements of a visual text convey meaning, relate to the purpose of the text, or contribute to the total effect of the text.

For each reading selection in the examination, you will read and answer machine-scored questions. The questions ask you to form literal understandings; to infer, apply, and analyze; and to assess and form generalizations about the texts provided. Some questions require you to consider more than one reading selection. If **linked readings and questions** have been included, you should read the passages and **answer the questions in the order in which they appear** in the examination.

Machine-scored questions

Machine-scored questions provide students with response alternatives, of which only one is correct. Each set of machine-scored questions is designed to progress logically and sequentially through the reading selection and focus on content, context, and technique. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you **answer the questions in the order in which they appear**.

The **initial questions** in a set will usually address the beginning of the reading and may alert you to important ideas or details that will help you to understand the whole text. For example, such questions may ask about a character's emotions or the impact of the setting or atmosphere. The following is an example of an early question on a nonfiction excerpt.

The reason that the railway workers believed that it was "absolutely useless" (line 12) to attempt to kill the lions is **most clearly** indicated in the quotation

- "perfect reign of terror" (line 5)
- "braved any danger" (lines 8–9)
- "they were not real animals at all" (line 11)
- "their country" (line 15)

The **middle questions** within a set address specific elements of the selection. For example, there may be questions on characters about such things as their motivation, behaviour, relationships, attitudes, traits, conflicts, and feelings. There may also be questions on vocabulary, figures of speech, the writer's attitude or tone, and the effect of the writer's choices. The following is an example of a middle-position question from a nonfiction excerpt.

Patterson's actions in lines 29 to 32 **most directly** establish his

- excitable and hasty personality
- fearless and daring approach
- keen powers of observation
- refusal to accept defeat

The **final questions** in a set often require you to consider the reading selection as a whole. For example, these questions may focus on main idea(s), context, theme, writer's purpose, or intended audience. The following is an example of a final-position question on a nonfiction excerpt.

The last paragraph of the excerpt (lines 89 to 94) **most strongly** suggests that the situation in Tsavo was

- about to get worse
- Patterson's final adventure
- Africa's most famous story
- likely an isolated occurence

Linking questions will ask you to identify similarities and contrasts between two or more passages that are linked thematically. For example, a question may ask you to identify the significance of a quotation from one text in the context of another. The following is an example of a linking question from a set that consisted of a nonfiction excerpt followed by a student draft with teacher feedback comments.

The main idea of the last paragraph of the article (lines 55 to 64) **most strongly** reflects which idea from Jordan's letter to the editor?

- "Do you see teens walking around and judging every adult we see?" (lines 37–38)
- "We teens try our best to give everyone a fair shake" (line 39–40)
- "Lets highlight all the good things teens do" (line 44–45)
- "Remember that teens deserve the same respect as everyone else" (lines 46–47)

Evaluation questions have words in **bold type**, such as **most strongly** or **most directly**. Bold type is used within a question to emphasize how you must evaluate the choice of alternatives. All the alternatives may have a certain degree of correctness. However, the correct alternative is determined by considering the context provided by the directing words in bold type. Always return to the text(s) to consider the specific details in context before you answer an evaluation question.

In lines 7 to 14, the writer suggests that negative perceptions of teens are **most directly** the result of the

- representation of teens as selfish and reckless
- percentage of teens causing conflict in society
- poor choices of teens getting more notice than good choices
- past behaviour of teens attracting more attention than current behaviour

Suggestions for writing *Part B: Readings and Questions*

Read the selections in order. The sequential placement of passages is intended to help you. Passages are arranged in terms of accessibility, complexity, and genre balance.

Read the entire selection before attempting the questions. When you read each selection, consider the title, as well as any introductory comments and/or footnotes. This information will help you understand the reading selection and may also be required to answer one or more questions correctly. For example, the title of a selection may represent its main idea or theme. Introductory comments for a reading selection, written specifically for the examination, provide information regarding the context of the excerpt, the plot, or the relationships among characters. Footnotes can provide contextual information, clarification, or definitions that you need in order to understand the reading selection.

As you answer the questions, be sure that you understand what is being asked. You may want to underline or highlight important aspects of the reading or of the questions to help you stay focused. Certain questions require you to **focus on a key or directing word** to select the correct answer. For example, the question "What is the irony in John's humorous comment?" focuses on *irony*, not humour. As well, a question that asks the meaning of a word, such as *diverged*, may require you to determine the meaning of the word from the context of the lines in which it appears.

Pay particular attention to factors in each question that will lead you to the correct answer. When **direct quotations** are included in a question, use the line references provided and reread the quotation within its context in the reading. Make sure that you understand the significance of the quotations in the context of both the question and the reading. Carefully consider key words that direct the question, such as verbs and terminology, and key words that identify characters' emotions and behaviours.

Try to save enough time to go back to questions that you found difficult or were uncertain about. Use all your acquired reading skills to reconsider the question, its context, and the "answer." However, if you cannot think of a *valid* reason why you should change an answer, do not do so. Trust your instincts and your reading-comprehension skills.

Reminders

You can practise answering questions similar to those used on diploma examinations by accessing practice tests using Alberta Education and Childcare's digital assessment platform.

When writing *Part A: Written Response,*

- you **may** use the dictionary and thesaurus and other tools available in the examination on the digital assessment platform
- you **may** also use the following **print references**: an English and/or a bilingual dictionary, a thesaurus, and an authorized writing handbook
- take time to plan your response to the Literary Exploration assignment by using the planning space available, and be sure that you have addressed the topic question provided in the examination. You must also **state your answer** to the topic question, **identify the character(s)** from the literary text(s) you have chosen, and **name the author(s)**.
- write the title of the literature you have chosen on the space provided in the examination

When writing *Part B: Readings and Questions,*

- you may **not** use any dictionaries or reference materials
- read the passages and answer the questions **in the order presented**
- **read each passage in its entirety** before answering the questions

Be sure that you know the **date**, **time**, and **writing location** of your examination and that you bring the **materials** with you that you will need. As well, if you wish to use **authorized print reference materials during *Part A*, you must provide your own.**

You may wish to use tools available in *Part B* examinations administered on the digital assessment platform (e.g., Highlighter, Draw Line, Arrow, Sticky Note, and Freehand tools) to underline, highlight, or make notes on what you are reading if helpful to do so.

Rescore Provisions

You may request a **rescoring** of your examination. Before you apply for a rescore, be sure to check your *Diploma Examinations Results Statement* available on myPass to see what marks you have been awarded on both parts of the examination. For the written component, all assignments are remarked. The machine-scored component will not be rescored. **Keep in mind that if you do request a rescore, your new mark, even if it decreases, will be your final mark**. Follow the procedures included with your *Diploma Examinations Results Statement* to apply for a rescore.

Mature Students

If you are a mature student, you may write a diploma exam without taking the course. You may write the exam in any writing session, but you must register online with myPass before the deadline. The registration deadline varies depending on the writing session you select. You should also decide where you will write the exam. Then, speak to the principal of the high school or exam-writing centre to reserve a space and make sure that an exam is available for you.

Contacts

If you have questions about the examination that your teacher cannot answer, or if you are a student without a regular classroom teacher, contact Andrew Olasker at Andrew.Olasker@gov.ab.ca, Nathalie Langstaedtler at Nathalie.Langstaedtler@gov.ab.ca, or Corey Baker at Corey.Baker@gov.ab.ca.