

PREFACE

This O level composition guide book has several features which are unique in that they help a student to achieve a much better style of writing in the composition exams.

Writing well is not such a difficult task if you have the correct skills. This book has a few key steps which help one to improve within a short frame of time provided that the student practices these skills patiently.

VOCABULARY

Having a really good grasp of the essay means that you know how to express yourself according to the topic. A sound vocabulary means that you will always use the most suitable phrase, the most descriptive adjectives and the best possible idioms or metaphors.

All the compositions in this book are preceded with a set of vocabulary words which are used in the essay. The vocabulary words have been chosen with care and they fit well into the story line or the arguments which are raised in the essay. Some of the words can be used in various contexts and genres.

Every single composition in this book has an exercise for the student to practice his skills.

The most important composition writing skills are taught at the end of every composition.

The problem in approaching questions from different genres is addressed too. Every genre requires different ways in breaking down the question. The following techniques are examined in the practices following each essay.

- Introduction techniques for narrative
- Introduction techniques for descriptive
- Introduction techniques for reflective
- Introduction techniques for argumentative and hybrid
- How to break down the question
- How to build up the story
- How to write the climax (for narrative)
- How to write the resolution/ conclusion
- How to write the stand (for argumentative)
- How to write the pros and cons
- How to break down the points (for argumentative and hybrid)

COMPOSITION PRACTICE With techniques



**SITUATION
WRITING**
With techniques

There are 7 different genres of Situation Writing which are covered in 15 practices. All of them are accompanied by model answers which follow the latest examination format for the GCE O Levels.

All practices are accompanied with answers to help a student mark his own work. The answers are written with the aim of helping the student perfect the techniques which are taught in the practices. If the student manages to complete some of these practices, there will be a noticeable improvement in his work. Completion of all the practices will mean that the work would have reached the level of excellence.

This book was written with the intention of helping a student to overcome his/ her writing anxieties and faults within a short frame of time. There are no short cuts to achieving excellence but if the correct techniques are learnt and practised, there is no reason why even the poorest student may not climb to the top of the ladder. This book is meant for the student who believes he or she can make it. Believing in oneself is half the battle won. The other half of winning the battle is taught in this book. So get started on that road to excellence.



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For Practices

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COMPOSITION GENRES

- ✓ Descriptive
- ✓ Reflective
- ✓ Argumentative
- ✓ Narrative
- ✓ Hybrid

Select Your Genre

Selecting the correct genre for yourself is of prime importance.

Whether it is argumentative or descriptive, knowing the difference and choosing one accordingly can make all the difference.

First, identify the genre of the essay question. Is it asking you to take a position or stand? Or is it simply about recounting something that goes on in your society? The former is argumentative and the latter is reflective.

Looking out for the type of essay you are more suited for will be the first step in writing an essay. As soon as you have made a selection, move on to thinking about the content. Actually, content planning is a fairly straightforward task. The first step is to organise your facts in point form. All you need would be 4 points in writing an expository or reflective essay. You will need 3 points and 1-2 rebuttals for an argumentative essay. Once you have defined what you want to say, the rest is easy.

Unlike a narrative and reflective essay, you will need evidence to back up your points. The more current your evidence, the better it will be for you. You may start with the most important point first and support it with evidence from a media source or observation. The evidence has to be clear, relevant and accurately written.

For reflective and narrative essays, anecdotal or story form of writing is the norm. Writing clearly is just as important but you will need to think of a strong plot. The plot, which will be explained in the later chapters, has to be watertight. The resolution should offer a way out of the difficulty for the main character or protagonist. There should also be a moral or sense of value being imparted at the end. The narrative or reflective essay will only help a student to score well if both an imaginative plot and value of the lesson learnt is written clearly. If the story is flat and boring, the composition will fail to make its mark. So, choosing the correct genre for your exam is very important.

Every composition is accompanied by a guided practice with answers, notes and vocabulary guide. If you follow the steps outlined for every practice, you will be sure to excel in your writing.

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Section A

Descriptive compositions

1. Describe an artistic performance which greatly impressed you.
2. Travel
3. Describe a difficulty in your life which taught you a valuable lesson.
4. What are the ways in which family members can strengthen their relationships with one another?
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IMPORTANT TIPS FOR WRITING DESCRIPTIVE ESSAYS

1. What is descriptive?

It is the observation of people, places or circumstances and padding it with one's personalised style of describing it.

2. How do you start writing a descriptive essay?

Examine the key words and zoom in on the main word or phrase.

3. How to write the Descriptive Introduction?

The **Introduction** is the most important paragraph as it tells the marker if you have understood the question or not.

Always start by mentioning the location or the time. If not, start with the most personal feeling you have about the subject or happening.

Elaborate slightly on the effect and a general truth or some words of wisdom regarding it. Keep it brief.

Then lastly, write about how you managed to balance it in your life. This will prepare you to write on the good and bad effects of the object or event you are going to describe.

This also means you will not run out of content.

Descriptive compositions

1

Vocabulary

Practice

Describe an artistic performance which greatly impressed you. (contextual meaning)

1. **Intrepid** – *daring*
2. **Felt a rush of adrenaline** – *felt a thrill of excitement*
3. **Maestro** – *someone who is a specialist in his field of music*
4. **Silhouette** – *outline*
5. **Magnetic pull** – *to feel a strong attraction*
6. **Riveted** – *hypnotized, deeply absorbed in*
7. **Enchanter** – *someone who captivates*
8. **Resounding encore** – *thunderous applause*
9. **Token** – *a small gift*
10. **Uprooted** – *destroyed*

Describe an artistic performance which greatly impressed you.

Introduction

My family had always been a group of **intrepid** explorers. We had never balked at anything which came our way in the form of a challenge especially in terms of travel. We were not exactly daredevils but we sought comfort, excitement and the new sensation of learning about something we had never known before. There was once when I was lucky enough to find myself in Munich. My father had taken me along with him for a business trip to Germany as my mother had gone to visit her ailing sister in Australia.

2nd Paragraph

I was literally left on my own as my father was a speaker at a medical conference. It was a wonderful chance for me to catch up with the sights and sounds of that magnificent city and I immediately purchased some tickets for an arts and music show which were due that week. When I seated myself at the plush seat for the concert, I felt a **rush of adrenaline** go through me but it was nothing compared to the **maestro** himself. There was a buzz of excitement as his **silhouette** appeared on the stage when the lights had dimmed. Then there was a soft drum roll and the footlights lit up from his feet. I sat there unable to move a muscle as his face came into view.

3rd Paragraph

The maestro had an unforgettable face. It spoke of a thousand compositions stored in every facial expression. His hair was jet black and his eyes had a **magnetic pull**. His features were strong which had its roots in Ukrainian ancestry but his smile was soft and gentle as an Austrian's. He spoke a few simple words about his thrill at performing for us and he mentioned some compositions which I had never heard of. Then he introduced his star players, the pianist from Paris and the flautist from Florence. He lifted his baton and a hush fell over the audience.

4th Paragraph

The maestro played the most enchanting compositions. As the rhapsodies unfolded over the hushed spectators, I finally began to understand why some people were so passionate about music. It seemed to have a life of its own. The orchestra played on, piece after piece until the maestro as if struck by the depth of his own music, stopped for a while. I expected him to take a break or look tired but he wasn't. His face looked transformed. He was flushed and youthful, a very different picture from the one I saw at the start. He spoke briefly but I could hardly absorb what he said. My eyes were **riveted** on his face.

5th Paragraph

There was a brief 20 minute break for those who wished to use the washroom but I remained where I was. It was as if my getting up would spoil the magic of the evening. The 20 minutes went by in a flash and the maestro returned in a changed light cream suit with an open necked shirt. His hair was let down long and flowing. He looked more like an **enchanter** than a musician. The music played on once again and it came to the last piece. It seemed to be everyone's favourite and there was a **resounding encore**. Finally, even that was over.

6th Paragraph

I made my way to the lobby where countless souvenirs and magazines were being sold. They held no interest for me. To my surprise I felt a tap on my shoulder and saw someone who worked for my father. It was Uncle Sid. He was there with his family and they told me they had stage passes to see the maestro backstage. I couldn't believe my stroke of luck as one of them was a musician too. Within minutes, we were being ushered to see the Maestro Mantovani Schellitti. When I saw him I could hardly speak but he smiled and seemed to understand. He gave me a small **token** which he placed in my hand. Then he said with that European Austrian accent, "For your future dreams." And he laughed gaily.

7th Paragraph – Conclusion

The entire performance had been more than just a show. It had **uprooted** all my previously held notions about music. I realised that there were unexplored areas in my life which I needed to know about. The music which had come to life with the maestro's baton had caused a shift in me. I became restless to know more and decided that I would tour the entire countryside of southern Germany the next week. It would prove to be far more of an education than my conventional studies.

Exercise

How To Write An Introduction for Descriptive Essays

How to use **Where and What**.

The First paragraph should set the pace for the narrator's main experience, in this case, the artistic performance.

Build Up by stating **WHERE** and **WHAT**.

You went to Munich. Your family liked to explore. This answers **WHERE** and **WHAT** briefly. This also allows you to build up to the experience of the artistic performance later.

E.g. A visit to the village.

My family had decided to spend the last part of our holidays at my father's village in Surabaya. (Where) We would always visit my grandmother who was in her seventies. (What) There was nothing much about the village called Ompat at the outskirts of the valley except that it had the most arresting views. Try writing your introduction for "A visit to the village" using the Where and What techniques mentioned above.

■ **Exercise (a) – A visit to the village.**

■ **Exercise (b) – Someone who impressed you**

When you write about someone, the first paragraph should be about **Where** and **Who**. You may include **when**.

Try writing your first paragraph.

Descriptive compositions

2

Vocabulary

Practice

for Travel

1. **Jaunts** – trips
2. **Terrain** – piece of land, area
3. **Unspoilt beauty** – a beautiful area which no one or very few have been to before
4. **Refinement** – high quality of living/taste
5. **Regaled** – entertained
6. **Isolated** – cut off from others
7. **Serenade** – personalised singing
8. **Struck up a great conversation** – started to talk to someone in an interesting way
9. **Connoisseurs** – people who like high quality food
10. **Entrancing** – attractive

With Guided Practice for Descriptive Writing.

Travel

Introduction

The excitement of travel became a part of my life ever since I was fifteen and my step father, an intrepid explorer had taken me on his **jaunts** to nature reserves, settlements and digging sites in obscure places. I had no interest in diggings but loved the thrill of exploring a new **terrain**, discovering native tongues and cultural past times. I suppose I became a travel bug at a young age.

2nd Paragraph

When I reached the age of twenty one and became self-sufficient, I decided that I had enough of the monotony of being a bank teller and felt that my holiday destinations should be revelatory of man's inventive spirit. Every holiday which I chose was to a destination of the most admirable historical wonder or which revealed nature's **unspoilt beauty**. The first time was a visit to Venice from which Marco Polo the bold traveller from Kublai Khan's court had set out with his father on the silk route which brought him the riches of the orient.

3rd Paragraph

Venice was historically rich with the tales of men who had been seafaring merchants or those who had gone on foot to conquer vast riches and sign treaties for this ancient sea port. The people of Venice were used to sophistication and **refinement** which was obvious from the marble and granite courtyards, elegant walkways and balconies which surrounded St Mark's Square. My camera shutter never stopped as I **regaled** myself with the wonders of the ancient spirit which came alive amidst the modern buildings and people.

4th Paragraph

My next destination was the historically rich city of Florence. It was set in a quiet, culturally rich scenic background which sprung to life with yellow ochre and flame orange blossoms. The roads were more winding, elegant pathways which were smooth and white leading me to museums and galleries which looked like castles. I took my time reading every bit of history and understanding the famous painters which the city was known for. My heart longed to meet someone who would explain its rich culture as I felt **isolated** after having travelled alone for so long.

5th Paragraph

As I travelled to the next city which was Rome, I was entranced by the hustle and bustle at the city centre. At the Piazza Navona, I met several street artists and musicians who were ready to paint me and **serenade** me if I had so much as sat for a minute. As I hurried down the street, I caught the eye of a young man who looked like a tour guide. He laughed at me for the way in which I had avoided the artists and when I got over my annoyance we **struck up a great conversation**. Carlos became my guide who introduced me to the Italian food paradise. I found out later that he was an art student and he soon became my constant companion in Rome.

6th Paragraph

As I reached the southern tip of Italy, I found myself in the effervescent southern state of Napoli or Naples. It was the seat of seafood **connoisseurs**. There was a fresh batch of calamari and shrimps everyday for our meal. Carlos and I bid each other goodbye as it was the end of my Italian adventure. The entire trip had been more than just a tour. The excitement of finding something new and **entrancing** in every city had become addictive to me. My heart yearned to expand this travel experience and as I waited to board my plane back home, I knew that it was impossible to bid good bye to travel as long as there was that excitement in my heart.

Descriptive compositions

3

Vocabulary

Practice

Describe a difficulty in your life which taught you a valuable lesson.

1. **Hunched over** – bent over
2. **Audacious** – outspoken
3. **Deceptively** – tending to be dishonest
4. **Tentacles** – branches
5. **Straddled with** – filled with, having a lot to do
6. **Maddening** – annoying
7. **Conspiratorial** – secretive
8. **Riveted** – focussed on
9. **Smirks** – unpleasant smiles
10. **Elated** – overjoyed

With Guided Practice for Building Up the Plot.

Describe a difficulty in your life which taught you a valuable lesson.

Introduction

Where/when-

The usual hectic traffic awaited me as I **hunched over** the steering wheel of the company car. Saturday afternoons were the worst. The traffic was heavy and people tended to speed home in the hope of snatching a few extra minutes with their families.

(The difficulty you are going through-)

I had no one to speed home to; only the errands from my company dogged me as my schedule ran out only shortly before 6pm and only then if I was lucky.

Introduction of someone new-

As the red light was about to change, I noticed Macy from my department running across the pedestrian crossing. He seemed **audacious** enough to wave to me as he ran. I had no time to mull over it and started the car towards Robinson road post office.

2nd Paragraph

(Start with the source of difficulty. Build up)

My life at Interstar Management had been **deceptively** easy at the start but that had only been due to my naivety which prevented me from looking past the potential trouble that lurked beneath the surface. My father had worked at Interstar and had been promoted to an overseas posting in Cairo. It had been my father's word which had got me a footing in the multinational company which had its **tentacles** in Asia, Europe and the Middle East. I had counted myself lucky too soon as no sooner had I delved into the communications role which was my assigned job, I found myself being **straddled with** strange inconsistencies. My office phone would suddenly stop working or my wifi would hang. Though I thought at first that it was all in a day's work, I found that others around me were able to use their phones and computers with ease.

3rd Paragraph

(Someone or a group who is doing something. Create the problem with terrible consequences in view for you.)

I tried to handle it by using my own hotspot from my second phone to do my work which involved speaking to overseas clients and making appointments with them for my boss who was always flying to either KL or Manila. This worked for a while but that was only a temporary lull. Before I could even start exulting at the peace of mind I had, I suddenly discovered that my office passcard would not work at times. This was absolutely **maddening** as everyone else managed to get in. I started to arrive early and noticed that if the pass card did not work, my colleagues simply filed to the back door which had been left open with a door ledge. I had not known of this and had previously waited for someone to open it from the inside. Then my coffee which I had left on my table would have strangely spilled all over my things while I visited the washroom.

4th Paragraph

(The climax begins here. Somehow the target is you. You start suffering the shock of realising that you are in a spot. Try to create some escape.)

I still managed to keep on top of my schedule nonetheless but became apprehensive when I learnt that my boss was due to return from KL for a meeting with the staff which included me. It gave me butterflies in my stomach just thinking of the possibilities which could ensue during the meeting. While I was thinking about this, I had stepped out from the office and that was when I bumped into Macy. Macy gave me a **conspiratorial** wink and edged closer. He told me that he knew exactly what I was going through and told me that I had been targeted by some of the staff who were jealous of my position in the company. He also spelt out the details of the sabotage that they were planning for me at the meeting. Before I could question

him further, he smiled at me and sped off. I stared at his retreating back wondering whether or not to believe him

5th Paragraph – Climax

(You face your challenge at the meeting.)

The next day dawned bright and clear, the day of my meeting with my boss. I put on my best attire, a pin striped skirt suit and combed my hair back into a top knot and gelled it till it looked smooth and shiny. With all my necessary documents at hand, I pushed everything into my well-worn briefcase and set off to work. My pin striped jacket was roomy and I had my ipad in it fully charged. As we sat at the round table in the conference room, our boss asked us for updates and then broke off for a coffee-break after which I was to summarise the results of my communication with 2 people in Malaysia and Auckland. As we left the room, I left my briefcase next to my chair. It was only a brief 30 minute break before we returned. As I sat down to recollect my notes, I noticed that the documents in my briefcase had been sifted through. None of my documents were there. Only some old newspapers. I looked up at my boss and his eyes were **riveted** on me. He smiled expansively and asked me for the updates. There was a hushed silence as I stood up and I noticed that several of them had **smirks** on their faces.

6th Paragraph – Start resolution

(How you get out of the trouble)

I put my hand into my jacket breast pocket and drew out my ipad. "I have the interviews right here," I announced cheerily to my boss and he grinned. I turned on the videos and turned up the volume. It had the skype calls with both agents in KL and Auckland as well as their company department seniors. My boss appeared **elated** at the positive reviews of all the people whom I had interviewed. I quickly added that I had the document file which I could pass on to him later if he wished. He quickly responded by saying that it was not necessary and that the videos would be more than enough. Furthermore, he announced to everyone that he was giving me a promotion for my excellent work. Everyone congratulated me, including the troublemakers.

7th Paragraph – Final resolution

(The final step into the future)

My promotion meant travelling to Auckland, New Zealand where I was to be head of operations. I was over the moon, especially because I could bid a permanent goodbye to the troublemakers. I desperately wanted to thank Macy but he could not be found. I found later that he had returned to Australia. I realised that one needed a helping hand sometimes to get ahead in life and wondered what I would have done if Macy had not been there. Though I felt sad that I could not thank him as he had been

a true friend to me, I packed hurriedly and boarded the plane to Auckland for a fresh new start to my life.

Guided Practice and Tips

What is Descriptive writing all about?

It asks you to describe whatever you observe to the maximum while drawing your own private thoughts and feelings from it.

So, in effect, you will always have a FOCAL POINT in your descriptive essay.

This will always be a Person, Place or Event.

Descriptive essays must reveal your observation skills.

Example 1 – Describe an unusual meeting.

■ Exercise (a)

Ted as usual chose to lounge outside the door instead of going inside the auditorium. His sharp eyes scanned the foyer restlessly and his hand always fidgeted with his mobile phone. His worn -out jeans were a giveaway point but his silk shirt which he wore over it told a different story. He was clearly a kid from an upper-class family who chose to follow the street look which current trends dictated.

This is an introspective look at the character Ted. His character and looks are analysed carefully. It is as if you are actually in front of Ted scrutinizing him.

That is the main point in all descriptive essays. The closer you are to the person or main object, the better.

The description should not just stop with the peripheral look at the face or gait.

There should be one step further which takes you to the personality as well.

■ Exercise (b)

Try answering these questions based on the above example.

What makes him wear that?

What is his objective?

What does his restlessness reveal?

Lastly, the character or the main object of the story must have its own distinctive flavour or character. Though it could be a mundane character, the detailed observation must make it spring to life.

Example 2

Ah Hui sat in the nook at the side of the stairs next to Burger King. His lined hands handled the shoes given to him by working class people from the blocks of flats around him. His legs were folded under him on a shiny wooden platform stool which must have served him well for many years. As his head lay bent over the court shoe which he was carefully gluing, his customer got the \$10 ready for him as payment. It was a paltry sum but when he looked up, his eyes had the brightness of a 16-year-old.

This is a perfect example of a mundane person who comes to life. Ah Hui may have withered in time but his eyes are still young. This denotes his mind which is as agile as a 16-year-old's.

That is the point to this story. Ah Hui is still young inside. That makes him remarkable.

So, the point in any descriptive story is not just to observe and write it as one sees it but it is also to paint that person in a way that it is lively and real.

Once this is done, the descriptive essay would have fulfilled its purpose.

To get a better understanding of descriptive writing, try the following exercises.

■ Exercise (a)

1. What do Ah Hui's lined hands tell us about him?

2. What is the relationship between Ah Hui and the stool? What is the author trying to say?

3. When his eyes shone brightly "like a 16-year-old's," what was he thinking? How valid is this comparison?
