

Reading

The Higher Reading paper consists of one text of up to 600 words, and is worth **30%** of your overall Higher result. The text has questions worth 20 marks. One of the questions, worth two marks, checks your overall understanding of the passage. This will be a longer answer to write, and you should write in sentences. The other questions require you to write answers, but these do not always have to be complete sentences. You will also be asked to translate a piece of the paper into English. This will be between 30 and 40 words long, and is worth 10 marks in total.

The reading and the directed writing are tested in the same paper, for which you will have one hour and 40 minutes in total, so you should count on about an hour for the reading and translation. You will be able to use your dictionary for this exam, so you should work on your dictionary use.

Reading is a skill, and mastering it will be very useful in the final exam. The key to this skill is finding the correct answer, and missing out the bits you do not need. Take from the text what you actually need for your answers, and ignore the rest: you are being tested on your ability to extract relevant information from the text. That means there is a lot of material which is irrelevant, and which you do not need. This is particularly so for the first set of questions. To help you improve your reading, try the following steps:

1. Read the information in English about the text at the start: this should give you clues as to what the answers are going to be about. Remember the information as you answer the questions!
2. Then look at the questions: this should tell you what to look for your answers in the passage. Clue words in the question can help you see where the answer is to be found. Before each set of questions you will be told which lines to look at for your answers. Take a highlighter and mark down the left hand side the bits you will need.

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3. Next look at the text: read quickly through it to get an idea of what it is about, without using a dictionary!
4. Finally go to the key areas that match the questions, and start looking for the answers there. The questions follow the same order as the text, and you look for the answers in sequence.
5. Look at the number of marks the question gets, and put down enough information for that, but no more. Otherwise, you are wasting time.

An important skill needed for reading exams is using a dictionary: people often spend far too long looking up words, and also often find the wrong answer. Sometimes the answer does not seem to be there! If you are not confident with a dictionary, remember the following things.

- Get used to the dictionary you will use in the exam, as this will help your speed. Make sure your dictionary is good enough: a pocket dictionary may well not have everything you need at Higher level.
- Be confident with the order of letters in the alphabet, not just at the start of a word.
- Know what a dictionary entry means: the first thing after the word in many dictionaries is often the guide to pronouncing it! It might also be a word like *pret*, telling you the word you are looking up is a past tense, or *prep*, telling you it is a preposition. Make sure you know which word actually makes sense.
- Don't jump at the first word you find. There will often be several entries for a word, with different meanings depending upon the context.
- Always keep in mind the context of the passage you are reading: that may well help you find the correct friend in a dictionary.
- Watch for the little bracketed words in some dictionaries like (*sport*) which tell you what context the word is used in.

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- Because verbs have endings, you will often not find exactly the word you are looking for: you need the infinitive. The verb pages at the back of a dictionary are useful for this. You should be able to recognize that a word is a verb!
- Remember sometimes it makes sense to look up words from the question in the English half of the dictionary, to give you a clue as to where to look for the answer to a question. So if you look at the question, and you do not know what the Spanish is for one of the words in the question, it might be worth looking it up to help you identify in the text where exactly to look.

The final question in the reading paper is an overall purpose question, worth two marks. You will be asked to consider the text as a whole, and answer what the author's view is, for instance, if the author is positive or negative in his views, justifying your answer from the text. It is important that you start your answer off with your decision. *'The author is positive/negative in his views: we can see this through....'* If you do not choose the right one, you will lose a mark. Then find some parts of the text which support your answer, and quote them **in English**. Do not try to write too much, the question is only worth 2 marks after all! Three pieces of evidence should be enough.

Once you have finished the reading, you will have to do the translation. Try to make sure you have left yourself ten minutes for this, to do justice to the task. The text to be translated will be marked in the paper, and for marking purposes will be divided into five 'sense units', each of which can get up to two marks.

The translation is not normally too hard, but people can panic if they do not have enough time to do it properly. The most common mistakes in the translation are: getting the verb tense and/or person wrong: making a mistake with the pronouns or words like 'este': missing out a simple little word such as 'siempre', 'mucho' or 'también'. Get in the habit of ticking off every word in the text you are translating when you have finished, to make sure they are all included!