

The Oxford Higher Practice Book

READING AND
WRITING SKILLS
FOR ADVANCED
STUDENTS

H. A. SWAN



The Oxford Higher Practice Book

READING AND
WRITING SKILLS
FOR ADVANCED
STUDENTS

H. A. SWAN

Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd
Nelson House Mayfield Road
Walton-on-Thames Surrey
KT12 5PL UK

51 York Place
Edinburgh
EH1 3JD UK

Thomas Nelson (Hong Kong) Ltd
Toppan Building 10/F
22A Westlands Road
Quarry Bay Hong Kong

© HA Swan 1989

First published by Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd
1989

ISBN 0-17-555732-2

NPN 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All Rights Reserved. This publication is protected in the United Kingdom by the Copyright Act 1956 and in other countries by comparable legislation. No part of it may be reproduced or recorded by any means without the permission of the publisher. This prohibition extends (with certain very limited exceptions) to photocopying and similar processes, and written permission to make a copy or copies must therefore be obtained from the publisher in advance. It is advisable to consult the publisher if there is any doubt regarding the legality of any proposed copying.

Printed in Hong Kong

891028

B1

Author's Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to Colin Dexter, Pam Murphy, David Hodges and Daphne Woodhouse of the Oxford Delegacy, whose work has contributed so much to the Oxford Examinations.

Contents

Introduction	1
---------------------	----------

Part 1 Accent on Writing

1. Targeted writing tasks	3
2. Functional writing tasks	10
3. Register questions	15
4. Extracting and re-presenting information	20

Part 2 Accent on Reading

1. Comprehension questions	29
2. Dictionary and reference questions	41
3. Extracting information and summarising	47

Part 3 Specimen Papers

Examination 1	63
Examination 2	74

Answer Key	85
-------------------	-----------

Introduction

This book is designed to give you practice in the kind of questions which you are likely to find in the Oxford Higher Examination in English as a Foreign Language. The questions are based on practical aspects of written English and test both your ability to write and to read English at a high level of competence.

The writing and reading skills are sometimes mixed as, for example, in the questions in Part 1.4, and sometimes separate as, for example, in the questions in Part 1.1, where only your proficiency in writing is tested. It is important to remember that the general aim of the examination is to evaluate your ability to perform a task well, and not to test if you can write in a high literary style or understand complex and rarely used vocabulary. You should use a good English/English dictionary at all times during your work with this book since, if you take the examination itself, you will be expected to use one in the examination room. Some suggestions are:

- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (OUP)
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Longman)
- Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (Collins)

At the beginning of each section you will find some brief suggestions on how to tackle the questions in that section. Obviously for most sections, it would be unhelpful to give an answer key since there are often no 'right' answers; however, you will find the

marking notes and guidelines useful. In addition, after some questions you will find specific hints on what to do (or not to do). Suggested answers are given in the Answer Key for reading comprehension questions (Part 2.1), but not for the other sections, in which the questions are more open, and there may be no standard answers.

The last part of the book is given over to two specimen papers of slightly different types. This is to take into account the fact that the examination itself changes and evolves. It is always important to expect the unexpected and not to panic when a variation from the pattern occurs. Remember, too, that the best preparation for this examination in particular is through the normal work which you do in the classroom, or the English you use and work with in your job. It is not a test of your ability to perform unrealistic or needlessly difficult tasks, but an attempt to find out if you are competent and confident in your use of the English language. You will find that some answers are given in the Answer Key to Paper 2 of the Specimen Papers, and also some guidance as to how both Papers 1 and 2 are marked.

Finally, try not to be too 'examination-minded' even when you are using a book of preparatory test material. You can learn from the material and exploit it for your own use. Above all, try to enjoy working with it, for in that way you will get much more out of it. And, if you take the examination, try to enjoy that too. It's not as unlikely as it sounds! Good luck!

Part 1: Accent on Writing

In Part 1 you will find a selection of the tasks which usually appear on Paper 1 of the Oxford Higher Examination. The tests are designed to evaluate various aspects of your writing skills but especially to assess how appropriately you can match your writing style to a task.

1. Targeted writing tasks

These are examples of the longer writing tasks set as question 1 on Paper 1. They carry a high proportion of marks (usually 30 out of 100) and are graded according to the criteria given below.

BRACKET 1 26–30 marks	Well-manipulated, appropriate style. Good range of vocabulary and good control of structure. Well-addressed to the task. Any errors should be unobtrusive. A very competent performance.
BRACKET 2 20–25 marks	A few errors but really a sound control. Nearly in control of style but not fully. OR very accurate but lacking ambition or complexity or style.
BRACKET 3 15–20 marks	Could be any of: More errors, but still clear and comprehensible. Little attempt to choose a suitable style, or lacking control of style. Limited use of structure and vocabulary. Repetitive. BUT — still an adequate performance, making NO demands on the reader.

THIS IS ESSENTIALLY THE BOTTOM LINE OF PASS — YOU MUST STILL SHOW THAT YOU ARE ABLE TO BE 'TRUSTED' TO WRITE IN ENGLISH.

BRACKET 4 10–14 marks	Lacking control. Over-simple — or too simple for the task. Errors begin to make it hard to follow in places. Information not really appropriate to the task.
BRACKET 5 0–10 marks	Too many errors. Inappropriate, insufficient information.

These longer questions require you to write around 250 words. This is a guideline only and it does not matter if you write more (although you may penalise yourself by limiting the time you have available for the rest of the paper). If you write significantly less, you will also penalise yourself because the examiner will not see enough of your work to be able to judge it. The aim of these questions is to test your competence and range of writing and, above all, your ability to perform a specific writing task in a suitable way. So, for example, if a report is asked for, you will be expected to have some knowledge of and feeling for the way a report should be written. If you are asked to give a personal viewpoint, do so; do not 'invent' a personality. Take notice of the parts of a question; if you are asked to give different kinds of

information, make sure that you cover everything you are asked. If you are asked to give the good and the bad points, make sure you do both, even if you feel you can do one less fully than the other. Above all, do not deliberately write off the point or try to turn the question into something which you would rather write about. The examiners are looking for what you can do on **this** question and not on your own choice.

In the examination itself, you will find a choice of two questions; usually, one is more 'business' oriented (or more impersonal) and the other is more closely related to your personal experience. Take a little time to choose the one which you think suits you best. Make a few notes before you start writing so that you know the general direction in which you are going and how you are going to start

and finish. Don't forget that the typical 'academic' introduction and conclusion, using generalisations and starting away from the main point will probably be irrelevant and time-wasting here. Start by showing that you have understood the task clearly and are preparing to tackle it from the very first sentence. It is also important not to waste time in other ways; you will not have time to make a 'clean copy' of what you write, so bear this in mind. No English examiner minds a few erasures and crossings-out, provided they can read the final result with reasonable ease. It is much more

important to spend time on what you want to produce because this, and not perfect handwriting, is what will get you the marks.

You will find the questions in pairs, as they appear in the examination, and you can choose which one is most suited to your experience and abilities. It is a good idea to practise doing both kinds of question in case you find your choice is limited in the actual examination because, by chance, you know little or nothing about one of the types of question.

Important points to remember

- Don't write a set answer. Even if the question is about yourself, or seems to be one you have written before, check what is actually wanted!
- Write about what you know and your own experience, if possible. NEVER pretend to be someone else.
- Write on the question given, not on anything else.
- Include all aspects of the question in your writing.
- Don't generalise.
- Don't be irrelevant.
- Be concise and don't repeat yourself.
- Don't write last year's question in a thin disguise.
- Don't waste time making a 'clean' copy of your answer.
- DO READ THE QUESTION CAREFULLY AND THINK ABOUT IT BEFORE STARTING TO WRITE!

Specimen questions

You are advised to spend about 40–55 minutes on these questions and to write around 250 words.

1. **Either (a)** You have won a scholarship to one of the colleges in the following advertisements. A local English language newspaper has asked you to write about your expectations of what you will get out of your scholarship year and why you applied for the scholarship in the first place.

**KAS
COLLEGE
U.S.A.**

offers you unique opportunities to:

- *gain business qualifications*
- *study new technology*
- *work with computers*

Many other courses

- *in idyllic mountain area*
- *with fine sports facilities*

but . . . within easy reach of NEW YORK CITY

- **REACH** a deeper knowledge of Scottish history!
- **UNDERSTAND** our traditions and culture!
- **LIVE** in beautiful Edinburgh!
- **ENJOY** its cultural and social life!

– STUDY AT –
THE CAIRN ACADEMY

COURSES INCLUDE:

British History
Culture
Literature
The Arts
and many more.

Expert tutors and lecturers!
Wonderful study facilities!

Or (b) An English friend wants to set up a small business in your country. Write to him, giving him advice which will help him to do this. Tell him also what problems you think he might come across.

Note In (a) make sure you really address your answer to the college programme. Don't just enthuse about how delighted you are to have won the scholarship. In (b), remember that your answer will be judged on how helpful it would be.

2. Either (a) This is part of a letter you have received from a pen-friend. Write your reply.

It's really fantastic. I've been offered this job in a family in your country for a whole year. I'll have to look after the kids – there are three, aged seven, eight and fourteen, but the fourteen-year old will be at school most of the time and I suppose the others will go to school too. And I'm to speak a little English to them and generally help around the house. It's a rich family with a house in the country as well as one in town. What problems, if any, do you think I'll face? And have you any hints as to 'do's' and 'don'ts'?

Or (b) You have been asked to write a comparison of two English language text books which you have used and with which you are familiar, for the benefit of the teachers in an English language school. Write your review.

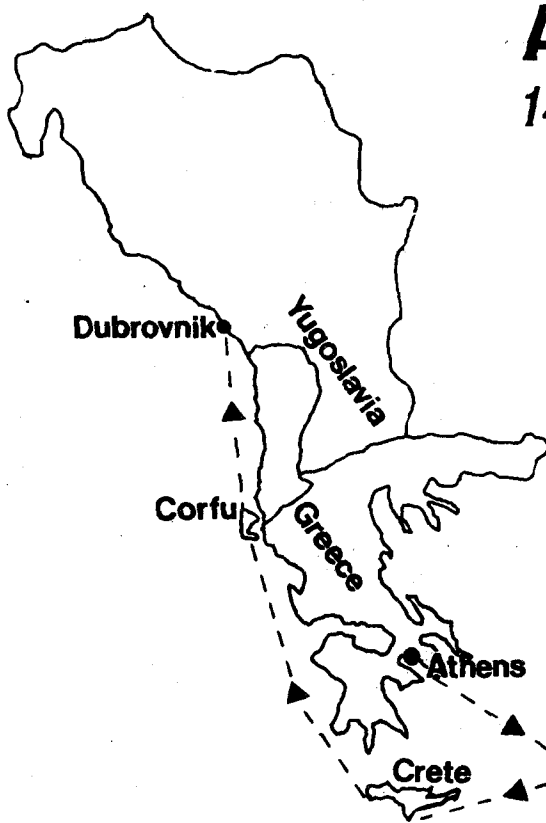
Note In (a) you are given quite a lot of information all of which you should use in your answer. You do not have to set your answer out in letter form but it should be clear that you are writing to a friend. Do not include irrelevant introductions and conclusions. In (b), make sure that you write about two text books, not just one. You should choose two with which you are familiar and point out their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Your style should be that of a review.

3. Either (a) You are organising an English language fair and an article is to be published about you in the brochure. Write it, making it as amusing as possible and stressing your special interest in learning English.

Or (b) A travel firm has asked you to write an account in English of some of the aspects of your country which you consider most appealing to foreigners and most typical. What would you write?

Note In (a), it is perfectly in order to make up your own definition of an English language fair briefly for the benefit of the examiner. In (b), it is important not to write a general appreciation of the wonders of your country. Remember that you are writing it for a travel firm and you must assess what they want to know.

4. Either (a) You have been offered the job of companion on a cruise to a wealthy English friend. There is a choice of two different cruise routes (see below). She has asked you to express a preference. Write a letter to her saying which you would prefer and why.



APHRODITE CRUISES

14 NIGHTS ON A LUXURY LINER

★

- ★ departure from Athens
- ★ calling at the islands of Rhodes, Crete and Corfu
- ★ final port of call Dubrovnik

★

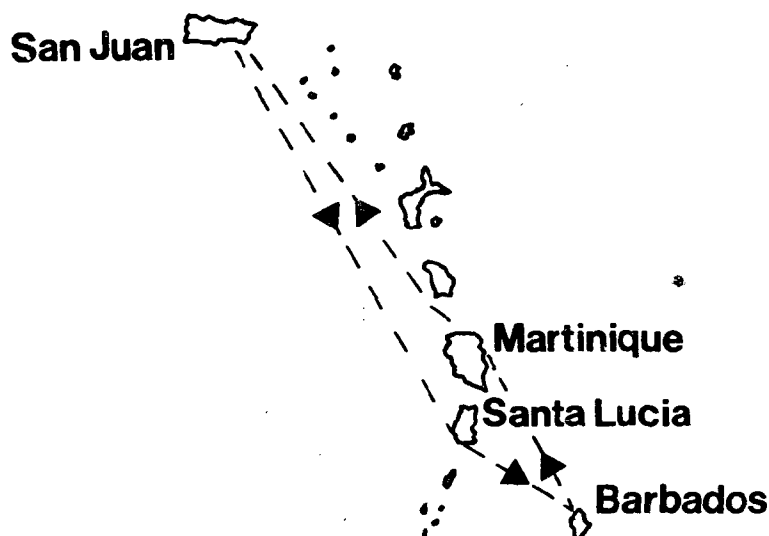
(Outward and return flights inclusive)

★

**RING 01 580 0222
FOR BROCHURE**

THE ISLAND EXPERIENCE

A two-week luxury cruise of the Caribbean



Write to PO Box 4950 for details or phone 800 1690.

Or (b) Write an open letter, addressed to English speaking firms, introducing yourself and your business/firm to unknown prospective clients.

Note In (a) it does not matter which route you choose so long as you mention both and give a definite reason for your choice. You should only choose (b) if you are in a firm or business. Do not invent one.

5. **Either (a)** You have applied for a job in Britain and have already sent a brief account of your experience and qualifications with your application. Now the firm have written back to you. This is the relevant part of the letter you have received:

We must inform you that this job is subject to a good deal of pressure and stress. We therefore ask you to send us some information about how you, personally, react to stress. Actual instances would help us considerably in making our assessment. We would also find it helpful if you could give details of some of your preferred ways of spending your leisure time.

Answer this part of their letter as fully as possible.

Or (b) Write an objective account of a course you have recently attended, assessing its worth to participants, the standard of teaching, seminars and professional information, and the location and atmosphere of the course. Add anything else which you consider someone planning a future course of this type might find helpful. (You may use your English course as an example if you wish.)

Note In (a) you are not expected to write the whole letter, only the parts which refer to your leisure time and to your reactions to stress. It would be a good idea to give examples of stressful situations in which you, personally, have found yourself — but remember who you are writing to and do not become too informal! In (b) make sure you follow the guidelines about writing a report and also make sure that you are objective, by giving both good and bad points.

FOR THE LAST PART OF THIS SECTION, THERE WILL BE NO NOTES TO GUIDE YOU. YOU SHOULD, BY THIS TIME, HAVE GOT THE GENERAL IDEA OF THE 'DO'S' AND 'DON'TS'.

6. **Either (a)** A friend of yours has recently come into a fortune. He has asked you what you would do if you were in his position. He has asked you certain specific questions (given below). Write to him, including your replies to his questions in your answer.

His questions:

- If you were me, would you give some or all of the money to charity?
- If so, which charity would you suggest?
- Should I put the money in a bank or a building society?
- Should I buy a house?
- I want to go on a special holiday. Where would you suggest?
- And what on earth can I buy for my family and friends? Have you *any* ideas?

Or (b) Write a report on a locality in your country which you think would be particularly suitable for a hotel location. You will need to comment on the locality in terms of climate, position, local tourist attractions and the possibility of sports facilities.

7. **Either (a)** You have seen this competition in a travel magazine.

WIN TEN DAYS IN THE STATES!

- **VISIT NEW YORK!**
- **GO DOWN TO SAN FRANCISCO!**
- **ENJOY A TRIP TO DISNEYLAND!**
- **TRAVEL ON CONCORDE!**

**All you have to do is to write and tell us
why YOU would like to win this
fabulous prize and what YOU think of
Americans and the U.S.**

You would like to go to the States. Write your 'winning' entry.

Or (b) Write an article which would be suitable for this children's encyclopaedia:

World Encyclopaedia For Children

This publication is looking for articles with a personal basis on 'How the world's children are educated'. Contributors are asked to write articles from their personal experience on the education system of their own countries and their own reactions to that system. It would be of interest to our readers (mainly aged between eleven and sixteen years old) to know something of the good and bad points of the system. The aim is to make the article lively and readable.

8. Either (a) You have been asked to write a 'profile' of one of your best friends for an English language magazine. What would you write?

Or (b) A book with the title *Great National Achievements* is about to be published. Write an article for inclusion in it about the greatest national achievement of your country, together with the reason why you think it should be included.

9. Either (a) This is part of a letter you have received. Answer it as fully as you can.

Thank you for all your wonderful information about your country. You have a real gift for making one see what the place is like. And thank you so much for the photographs of your family. Now, I'd like to know more about you, and them. Can you do another of your fantastic descriptions for me? Now I've seen pictures of you all, I'm so interested to know what you're all really like!

Or (b) A friend of yours is going into hospital and has asked you to recommend two or three books to read while he is there. He only reads English, but would be interested in reading the English translations of any books in your language or any English books you have enjoyed. He would like some variety in his reading. He dislikes horror fiction and is especially interested in travel, history and biography. Write to him suggesting some titles and giving some reasons why you think he would enjoy them.

- 10 Either (a)** You are leaving your job and your boss would like you to write a description of the kind of person you think would make your ideal successor. He also wants you to write about the pleasures and difficulties of the job. This is for a trade magazine to be published in Britain. What would you write?

Or (b) Write an open letter to a local English language magazine saying why you think **one** of the following should not be built near the place where you live:

football stadium motorway airport

Suggest an alternative location and give your reasons.

2. Functional writing tasks

These are short tasks of all kinds, including notes, notices, informal letters, advertisements, warning signs, etc. Normally these come at the end of Paper 1 and they do not carry many marks (maximum 15, minimum 3). If the task is a relatively simple one, such as you might also find in the Oxford Preliminary Examination, you would be expected to complete it perfectly in order to get full marks. Half marks are given for an answer which is perfectly adequate but has no particularly distinguishing feature. For a more complex task,

how you write and the tone in which you tackle the task is very important. You will find more about this in the next section, which deals with register questions. But remember that an apology should be apologetic etc.

In this section specific notes are given for all questions, due to the varied nature of the tasks which may be set. Once again, the word limit is only a guideline, since people have their own 'length' for writing this type of thing. But if the instruction says 'brief', obey it!

Important points to remember

- Always sign notes and letters.
- Try to keep within the word limit.
- Mention all relevant points.
- Make sure the tone is right.
- Make sure you are clear.
- Keep the recipient of the note or message clearly in mind.

Specimen questions

1. Write a short note to a friend who has borrowed a book from you and has forgotten to return it. Remind him, and ask for the book back. **(About 60–80 words)**

Note This would probably carry 10 marks. The letter **must** be tactful and contain the name of the book. It should contain your friend's name and yours and should be informal and friendly.

2. You discover, to your horror, that you have failed to return a book you borrowed some time ago. Write a brief note to the friend from whom you borrowed it with the book which you are returning.

(About 25–30 words)

Note This would probably carry 8 marks. Make sure you are suitably apologetic. The note must not be a formal letter. If you are asked for a note, it does not matter whether you put your address or not. The note should be dated and signed and your friend's name should be on it.

3. You have lost these items:



Write a notice to go on a notice board at work or in the school where you study.

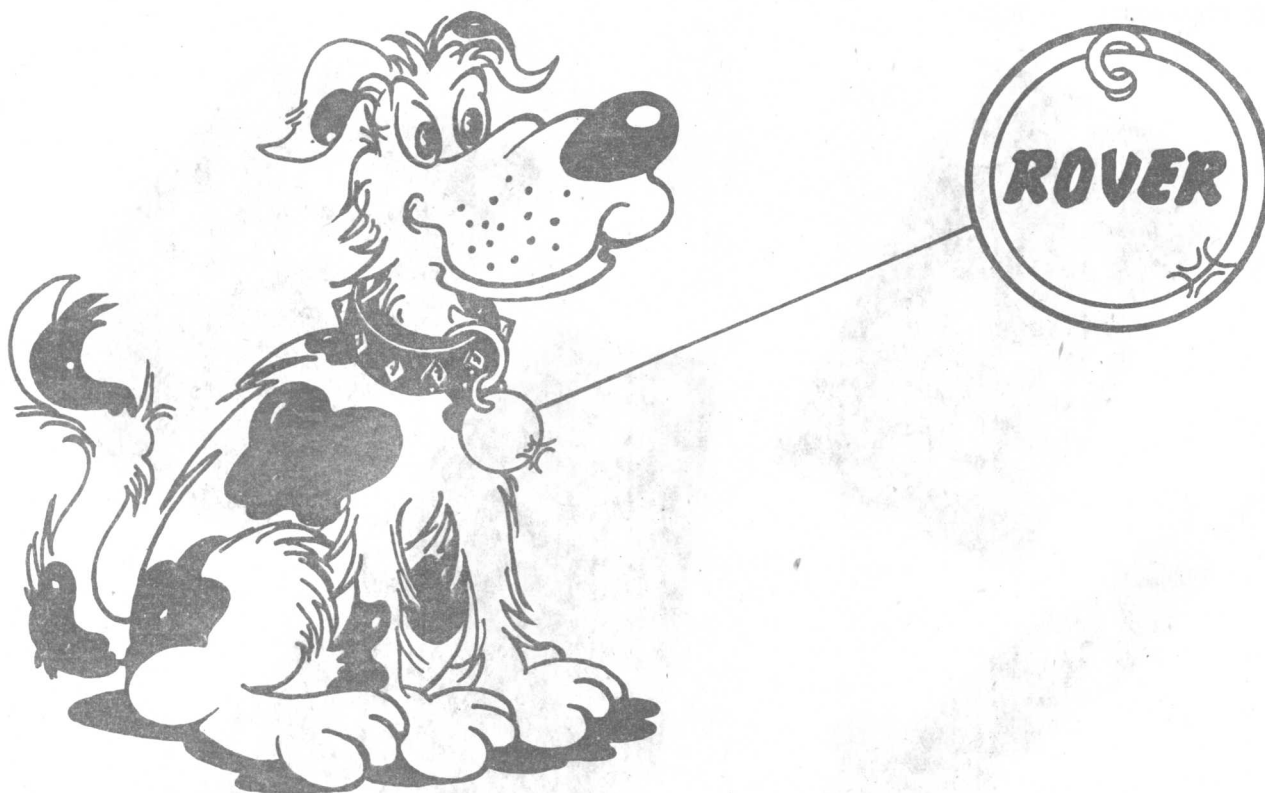
(About 25–35 words)

Note This would probably carry about 6 marks. You should make it clear that this is a notice. (Begin: LOST!) Name and describe the items briefly and clearly. Say where you think you lost them and what the person who finds them should do to contact you.

4. You have been trying to contact Mr Smith of Worley for two days by phone. Normally you work in Geneva but you will be away for the next two days. After that, you will be at your firm's New York branch for a week. Write the telex you send. **(About 20 words)**

Note This would probably carry about 6 marks. There are considerable differences in the way people write telexes so specific telex style is not required. Be brief but not too telegraphic. Make sure your name, the information required and the person to whom you are sending the telex are all mentioned.

5. You have found this dog.



Write an advertisement for a local English language newspaper to go in the 'Lost and Found' column. **(About 30 words)**

Note This would probably carry about 6 marks. Your answer must contain some idea of how to get the dog back, where you can be contacted, and where you found it.

6. You are meeting a friend at the airport. Her plane has been delayed indefinitely so you have gone to have a meal. Write the note that you leave on the airport meeting board. **(About 10–15 words)**

Note This would probably carry about 4 marks. You will need to put where you are going and how long you will be there. Your friend's name and yours are also necessary.

7. You have arranged to meet a client in your hotel room and want to make sure the room is clean, tidy, etc. Write the note you would leave for the chambermaid. **(About 10 words)**

Note This will probably carry no more than 4 marks. It should be short and clear. Make sure you tell her the time you want the room clean for.