

A Guide for Students

Preparing to Write the Diploma Examination



English Language Arts 30–2

This document was written primarily for:

Students	✓
Teachers	
Administrators	
Parents	✓
General Audience	
Others	

Alberta Education, Government of Alberta

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

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This guide from Alberta Education's System Excellence Division has been prepared by the people who develop the *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examinations*. These individuals have first-hand experience assessing thousands of examinations written by English Language Arts 30–2 students each year. The purpose of this guide is to provide students with information that will increase the likelihood of their success on the examination.

You can find the [diploma examination-related materials](#) referred to in this document on the [Alberta Education website](#). If you require further assistance obtaining information from our Internet site, phone the Information Services Help Desk at 780-427-5318 (toll-free 310-0000, then dial or ask for 427-5318).

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



Understanding the Examination

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

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: Reading* consists of multiple-choice questions, also referred to as machine-scored questions, based on reading selections. You will write these two parts on different days during the January and June administrations and on the same day but at different times during the April, August, and November administrations.

Part A: Written Response	Part B: Reading
<i>Part A: Written Response</i> contributes 50% of the total <i>English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination</i> 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.	<i>Part B: Reading</i> contributes 50% of the total <i>English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination</i> mark. There are 8 reading selections in the Readings booklet and 70 questions in the Questions booklet. 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.

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 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 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 in 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 will help you to feel confident about your writing.

References

Develop the habit of using reference material, such as a dictionary, thesaurus, and 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. Valteau), 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.

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

You may not use any reference books during the administration of Part B of the diploma examination.

Reviewing

Become familiar with the format of the *English Language Arts 30–2 Diploma Examination* by reviewing the [2019–2020 English Language Arts 30–2 Information Bulletin](#) available on the Alberta Education website. 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.

Copies of previous released diploma examinations might be available at your school.

Computers

Some schools or designated writing centres allow for the use of word processors for writing Part A of the diploma examination; speak to your English Language Arts 30–2 teacher or contact a designated writing centre for more details. If you intend to use a word processor, make sure that you know how to use its features effectively. 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 computer’s list of words, the spell-checker 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](#). An understanding of the scoring criteria may help you to fulfill the writing tasks. Experienced English Language Arts 30–2 teachers use these 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, and if you hand write you are not expected to hand count your words.

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.

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 300–700 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 read a short selection of fiction or nonfiction that serves to illustrate one possible dimension of the topic.

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 from more than one literary text. You should use the *Initial Planning* to help you to select a character (or characters) relevant to the assignment and interesting to you from the short stories, novels, plays, poetry, nonfiction, or films that you have studied. You must write in prose.

Provide support and explanation for your response with details regarding the character(s) 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. Use specific examples from the text(s) to support your ideas about the character. Avoid mere plot summaries.

In your writing, you should consider your own prior knowledge and/or experience. 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 refer to the reading selection provided in the examination.

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%).

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

Use the *Initial Planning* page to first consider your answer to the topic question. This answer will become 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 assignment. 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** and **develop the topic** in enough detail to support your controlling or unifying idea logically and convincingly.

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 must reconsider your choice of literature.

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

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 clearly and effectively organize your ideas. 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 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 two pages of 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 Information Bulletin*](#) 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 detail, 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 300–600 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 on the pages that follow 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, which is supported by arguments that contain specific and relevant details. **It is not sufficient to merely restate information provided in the examination booklet.** You should read and consider the source material to determine which pieces of information you wish to use to develop your position. You do not need to use all of the information provided; in fact, you may choose not to use any of it. Specific details that support your argument can also come from your own knowledge and/or outside experience. You must also consider your audience and the appropriateness of the language you choose.

Requirements of *Part B: Reading*

Being able to demonstrate reading comprehension skills without the use of a dictionary or thesaurus is essential for the *Part B: Reading* 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 the Readings booklet, 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.

In a separate **Questions booklet**, you will read and answer multiple-choice questions about each reading selection. 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 booklets.

Multiple-choice questions

Questions for each reading selection focus on content, context, and technique. Each set of multiple-choice questions is designed to progress logically and sequentially through the reading selection. 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 fiction excerpt.

The statement “All those living beings had found places to hide” (line 3) creates the impression that the rain is

- A. cleansing
- B. comforting
- C. suffocating
- D. threatening

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 novel excerpt.

The fact that "They were face to face now" (lines 68 to 69) supports the idea that the relationship between Fine Man and the horse is based on

- A. conflict
- B. equality
- C. courage
- D. eagerness

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 novel excerpt.

In lines 99 to 100, the writer suggests that, like water, the horses are symbolic of

- A. life
- B. death
- C. stillness
- D. confinement

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 an excerpt from a screenplay based on the same events.

The respect evident in Patterson's description in Reading II of Singh as "a fine powerful Sikh" (line 27) is echoed in which of the following quotations from Reading III?

- A. "This is SINGH's funeral pyre" (line 21)
- B. "There is a terrible sense of shock" (line 25)
- C. "he holds his hands out in SINGH's gesture one final time" (line 27)
- D. "THE FLAMES; they continue to rise" (line 29)

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, such as choosing the best possible answer from the alternatives or choosing the one answer that stands out as an exception to the others. All the alternatives (A, B, C, and D) may have a certain degree of correctness. However, the correct alternative is the **best** answer to the question, given 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.

Suggestions for writing *Part B: Reading*

Read the selections in order. The sequential placement of passages in the Readings booklet is intended to help you. Passages are arranged in terms of accessibility, complexity, and genre balance. In addition, reading passages and answering questions out of sequence dramatically increases the possibility of making an error on your multiple-choice answer sheet.

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 limit the possible 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 give clues to 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.

Literary texts

A complete list of authorized texts for English Language Arts 30-2 can be found in the [Authorized Resources Database](#). Search using *English Language Arts* as the curriculum area and 30-2 as the course number.

Many of the short stories, poems, and drama selections are available in anthologies. These and other helpful resources are available through public and school libraries.

Reminders

When writing **Part A: Written Response**:

- You **may** use the following **print references**: an English and/or bilingual dictionary, a thesaurus, and an authorized writing handbook.
- On the *Initial Planning* page of the Literary Exploration Assignment, you must **state your answer** to the topic question, **identify the character(s)** from literature you have chosen, and **name the author(s)**. Space is also provided for you to begin planning your ideas.
- Write the title of the literature you have chosen on the space provided on the back cover of the examination booklet.
- If you have used a **word processor**, you must indicate that you have done so on the back cover of the examination booklet. Be sure that you have **securely attached all your work** to the booklet. If you leave the examination room with hard copies of your work, you will be violating examination regulations. Every school has copies of the [*Diploma Examinations Program: General Information Bulletin*](#), which is also available on Alberta Education's website at education.alberta.ca and includes a section about computer use for diploma examinations.

When writing **Part B: Reading**:

- You may **not** use any dictionaries or reference materials.
- **Read the passages and answer the questions in the order that they are presented.**
- **Read each passage in its entirety** before answering the questions.

For both Part A and Part B, the examination booklets are your working copies. If underlining, highlighting, or making notes on what you are reading is helpful, do so. However, for the *Part B: Reading* component, be certain that your answers are recorded on the multiple-choice answer sheet.

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. You must provide your own pen, HB pencil, eraser, and highlighter. As well, if you wish to use **authorized reference materials during Part A, you must provide your own.**

Rescore Provisions

You may request a **rescoring** of your examination. Before you apply for a rescore, be sure to check your *Diploma Examination Results Statement* to see what marks you have been awarded on both parts of the examination. **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 Examination Results Statement* to apply for a rescore.

If you have questions about the examination that your teacher cannot answer, or if you are a student without a regular classroom teacher, feel free to contact Philip Taranger, at Philip.Taranger@gov.ab.ca; Denise Kissel, at Denise.Kissel@gov.ab.ca; or Deanna Shostak, at Deanna.Shostak@gov.ab.ca. In Edmonton, call (780) 427-0010. To call toll-free from outside Edmonton, dial 310-0000.