

Cambridge IGCSE Guide

# *First Language English (0500):*

56 Excellent Narrative and Descriptive Compositions

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## Foreword

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As a student who once struggled with the English language, I can personally attest to the transformational power of perseverance, guidance, and a deep understanding of marking criteria in learning how to achieve good grades, and I am now proud to present this book, a labor of love and learning, as a resource for students facing similar challenges as part of my efforts in creating [EnglishFirstLanguage.net!](http://EnglishFirstLanguage.net)

Let me tell you about the structure of this book.

Divided into two sections, the first part focuses on Descriptive Composition, while the second part delves into Narrative Composition.

Within each section, you will find carefully crafted sample essays that exemplify the highest standards of English writing as per the IGCSE marking criteria from W1 to W5.

But what truly sets this book apart is the inclusion of detailed comments based explicitly on the marking criteria. These comments dissect the essays, highlighting the specific aspects that make them exceptional, and provide invaluable insights into the thought process and techniques behind the writing. As you read through the essays and comments, you will gain a deep understanding of what it takes to achieve top marks in your compositions, and also receive specific recommendations on directions to progress in your writing.

Through the examples and insights provided, I hope to inspire you to believe in your potential and hone your skills to reach your own pinnacle of success. As someone who has walked this path, I am confident that the treasures within this book will serve you well in your own journey toward mastery in English composition.

Do use it in combination with some good guidance, and I hope you'll come to love reading and writing as much as I have come to; good luck, and here is to your success!

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**Descriptive Essay 4**

**Describe the moment you receive some welcome news.**

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The languid afternoon sun cast its honeyed glow upon my bedroom, drenching my worn-out study desk in a warm embrace. Amidst the scattered papers and books, a small silver laptop blinked with an unassuming notification, a beacon of hope in the sea of academic debris. With trepidation, I reached out, my fingers hovering above the touchpad, hesitating. The weight of anticipation and dreams hung heavily in the air, suffocating me as I steeled myself to face the outcome.

As I clicked the email, my heart thundered in my chest, threatening to burst out of its cage. The words "Cambridge University" blazed across the screen like a brilliant constellation. My mind raced, a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions, as I searched for the elusive verdict within the meticulously crafted message. Then, there it was - the phrase I had yearned for: "We are pleased to inform you..."

A tidal wave of euphoria surged through me, lifting me to the celestial heavens. The moment felt surreal, as though I were cradled in the gossamer embrace of a dream, too fragile to hold, too precious to release. My eyes stung with unshed tears, a kaleidoscope of gratitude, pride, and relief.

The room seemed to burst into life, as if sharing in my joy; the sun danced merrily on the windowsill, the leaves outside rustled in excited whispers, and the warm air hummed with the promise of a thousand possibilities. I leaped up, my laughter bubbling over, intertwining with the vibrant melody of the world outside.

With every heartbeat, my future unfurled before me - the hallowed halls of Cambridge, the scent of leather-bound books, the animated discussions echoing in lecture rooms, and the chance to shape a more just world. My journey to study Law at Cambridge had begun, and my spirit soared, ready to embrace the challenges and triumphs that lay ahead.

The prospect of studying Law at Cambridge held a profound significance for me. As a child, I had witnessed the transformative power of justice and the importance of equality in society. I dreamt of becoming a catalyst for change, of fighting for those who could not fight for themselves. With this acceptance, I had taken the first step towards realizing that dream.

I imagined the countless hours I would spend delving into the intricacies of legal systems, dissecting case studies, and engaging in spirited debates with my peers. This was my chance to learn from the brightest minds, to grow and hone my skills as an aspiring lawyer, and to forge a path that would enable me to make a tangible impact in the world.

My thoughts drifted to the formidable challenges that awaited me, from the rigorous academic demands to the inevitable moments of self-doubt. Yet, I found solace in knowing that I was prepared to embrace these obstacles, to learn and grow from each experience. The road ahead was daunting, but I welcomed it with open arms, eager to embark on this extraordinary journey.

**Comment:**

The essay demonstrates excellence in content (W1) and structure (W2) by creating a complex, engaging, and effective narrative. The rich descriptions and vivid imagery ("honeyed glow," "beacon of hope," "brilliant constellation") create an emotional impact on the reader, while the storyline is well-developed and unfolds progressively.

The essay also delves into the personal significance of studying Law, providing a more profound connection to the writer's aspirations and dreams. This aspect contributes to the complexity and effectiveness of the content (W1).

The language used is precise and well-chosen (W3), with varied sentence structures that contribute to the overall impact of the essay. The consistent and appropriate register (W4) is suitable for the context, while the spelling, punctuation, and grammar are almost always accurate (W5), ensuring clarity and a smooth reading experience.

The structure (W2) of the essay is carefully managed, creating a balanced and deliberate effect. The essay begins with a captivating introduction, setting the scene and building anticipation. It then transitions smoothly into the revelation of the welcome news and the emotional response, followed by an exploration of the personal significance of studying Law and the future challenges. This structure allows the reader to connect with the writer's emotions and aspirations on a deeper level.

In terms of improvement, the writer could potentially delve deeper into specific aspects of their passion for Law, sharing more personal anecdotes or experiences that led them to pursue this field. This would further enhance the emotional connection with the reader.

Additionally, the writer may consider learning from authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, known for his evocative descriptions and captivating prose. Studying Fitzgerald's work, such as "The Great Gatsby," could offer valuable insights into creating vivid imagery and further refining the writer's descriptive skills.

In conclusion, the essay effectively meets the criteria (W1 to W5) and deserves a high grade due to its engaging content, well-managed structure, precise language, appropriate register, and accuracy in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The vivid descriptions and the exploration of the personal significance of studying Law at Cambridge create a profound emotional impact on the reader, making this essay a compelling and memorable piece.

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Narrative Essay 20

**Write a story that involves looking after a child.**

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The sun was setting, casting a warm golden glow over the modest suburban home as Sarah reluctantly accepted the task of babysitting her six-year-old nephew, Timmy, for the weekend. Her sister, Emma, and brother-in-law, Jake, were attending a destination wedding and had requested Sarah's help.

Sarah was not fond of children, but she adored her sister and couldn't refuse. She put on a brave smile as Timmy arrived, dragging his suitcase adorned with superhero stickers. They exchanged shy greetings before Emma and Jake left, assuring Sarah everything would be fine.

Timmy's high-pitched giggles filled the house as they played board games and watched animated movies. Sarah gradually warmed to the boy, discovering his vivid imagination and infectious enthusiasm. She marveled at how he found wonder in even the most mundane things, like a bird perched on the windowsill or the pattern of clouds in the sky.

As night fell, Sarah tucked Timmy into bed, reading him a bedtime story about a brave knight and a fierce dragon. Timmy's eyelids grew heavy, and Sarah found herself softly humming a lullaby her mother used to sing, something she had not done in years. She finally understood her sister's love for this little being, who was equal parts innocent and inspiring.

The following day, they ventured to the nearby park, where Timmy's laughter echoed as he soared on the swings and climbed the jungle gym. Sarah captured the moments with her camera, a newfound appreciation for the simple joys of life growing within her.

That evening, a storm rolled in. Lightning illuminated the sky, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Timmy, terrified, clung to Sarah, tears streaming down his cheeks. Sarah held him close, comforting him with soothing words and the promise of protection. They curled up under a blanket, watching the storm from the safety of the living room, and she felt an unexpected surge of love for the boy.

When Emma and Jake returned, they were greeted by a transformed Sarah, one who had discovered the profound joy in nurturing a child. Timmy hugged Sarah tightly, not wanting to let go, as she whispered a heartfelt farewell. The weekend had left an indelible mark on her heart, teaching her the power of connection and the value of caring for someone else.

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**Comment:**

The essay demonstrates excellence in the criteria W1 to W5. The content is complex, engaging, and effective (W1), with a well-defined and strongly developed plot involving looking after a child (specific – narrative). The structure is secure, well balanced, and carefully managed for deliberate effect (W2). For example, the progression from Sarah's initial reluctance to her eventual love for Timmy provides a satisfying character arc.

The essay exhibits precise, well-chosen vocabulary and varied sentence structures (W3), such as "The sun was setting, casting a warm golden glow over the modest suburban home." The register is consistent and appropriate for the context (W4), and the spelling, punctuation, and grammar are almost always accurate (W5).

To further improve, the writer could explore Timmy's character in more depth, incorporating additional details and dialogue to enhance the connection between Sarah and Timmy. A book the writer might consider learning from is "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee, as it masterfully portrays complex relationships and character development.

Overall, the essay effectively tells a heartwarming story that involves looking after a child, showcasing the writer's skill in narrative writing and fulfilling the criteria for a high-scoring essay.

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## About the Author



**Victor Tan** is the founder of EnglishFirstLanguage.net, the world's best resource for preparation for the IGCSE 0500 English exam! He is tremendously passionate about helping students become proficient in the English language. He serves as a tutor to students from schools such as Garden International School, Chengdu International School, the Sevenoaks School, Brighton College, and many more!

Victor graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics on a full scholarship from the University of Chicago on a Public Service Department (JPA) scholarship from the government of Malaysia, has a perfect score on the English section of the SAT, and an 8.5/9.0 on the IELTS. Contact him at [victortanws@gmail.com](mailto:victortanws@gmail.com)!

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