COUNCIL FOR THE INDIAN SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS (CISCE)

ICSE CLASS 9 ENGLISH LANGUAGE

PAPER 1 • COMPLETE MASTER GUIDE & EXAM BLUEPRINT

Composition • Formal & Informal Letters • Notice & Email Writing
Unseen Comprehension & 50-Word Summary • Functional Grammar Rules & Question Bank

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Paper Component	Marks	Key Requirements & Guidelines
Question 1: Composition	**20 Marks**	300–350 words; Choice of 5 genres: Narrative, Descriptive, Argumentative, Short Story, Picture Composition.
Question 2: Letter Writing	**10 Marks**	Choice between Formal and Informal Letter; strict adherence to CISCE layout standards.
Question 3: Notice & Email	**10 Marks**	Linked 5 + 5 marks pair; Catchy title, event, target audience, precise email address and body.
Question 4: Unseen Passage	**20 Marks**	500-word prose passage; Contextual Vocabulary (3m), Short Answers (9m), 50-word Summary Grid (8m).
Question 5: Functional Grammar	**20 Marks**	Tenses Passage (4m), Prepositions (4m), Synthesis without and/but/so (4m), Transformations (8m).
Internal Assessment	**20 Marks**	Aural Skills (Listening - 10m) and Oral Skills (Speaking Presentation & Discussion - 10m).
TOTAL SCORE	**100 Marks**	80 Marks (Written Examination) + 20 Marks (Internal Assessment).

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CHAPTER 1: COMPOSITION & ESSAY WRITING (20 MARKS)

In Question 1 of ICSE Paper 1, students are given a choice of five topics and required to write an essay of **300 to 350 words**. Examiners assess organisation of subject matter, syntax, punctuation, grammatical accuracy, spelling, and vocabulary.

The Five Composition Genres in ICSE:

1. Narrative Composition: Recounting a personal experience, real or imagined journey, or event. Must follow a chronological sequence with engaging sensory details and personal reflection.

2. Descriptive Composition: Creating a vivid sensory portrait of a place, market, festival, natural scene, or thunderstorm. Focus on sights, sounds, smells, and atmosphere without digressing into plot.

3. Argumentative Composition: Taking a clear, unambiguous stance either FOR or AGAINST the given proposition. Must present 3–4 logical arguments supported by facts and address the counter-viewpoint.

4. Short Story: Crafting an original plot from an opening/closing line or core theme. Must contain clear characterization, conflict, rising action, climax, and a plausible resolution.

5. Picture Composition: Suggesting a meaningful story, description, or reflection inspired by a provided image. Must have a distinct, direct thematic connection to the visual stimulus.

Standard Structure for a High-Scoring ICSE Essay:

• **Introduction (40–50 words):** Hook the reader with a quote, rhetorical question, or engaging opening. Establish the context clearly.
• **Body Paragraph 1 (70–80 words):** Present the first major point with illustrative examples and vivid details.
• **Body Paragraph 2 (70–80 words):** Develop the core conflict, turning point, or second major argument.
• **Body Paragraph 3 (70–80 words):** Deepen the narrative tension, emotional impact, or counter-argument.
• **Conclusion (40–50 words):** Provide a thoughtful synthesis, resolution, or universal life-lesson learned. Avoid abrupt endings.

Model Narrative Essay: *'A Journey that Changed My Outlook on Life'*

The early morning mist still clung to the foothills of Kalimpong when our battered jeep sputtered to an unexpected halt on a narrow mountain ridge. A sudden landslide had blocked the road ahead, stranding thirty passengers miles away from shelter. Panic erupted immediately—passengers shouted at the helpless driver, children wailed, and frustration mounted in the freezing mountain wind.

Amidst the chaos, an elderly Lepcha woman carrying a heavy basket of freshly harvested vegetables stepped forward. Without uttering a word of complaint, she unfastened a thermos of hot butter tea and began serving small earthen cups to shivering travelers. Seeing her quiet composure, two teenage boys put down their mobile phones and volunteered to clear loose gravel, while another commuter shared biscuits with the crying children. Her single act of selfless kindness transformed a tense mob into a cooperative community.

By evening, when road-clearance teams finally arrived, we were not weary stranded strangers, but a bonded group sharing songs and laughter by a small roadside fire. That day taught me that genuine strength lies not in loud indignation when circumstances fail us, but in the quiet courage to help others navigate adversity.

CHAPTER 2: LETTER WRITING (10 MARKS)

Question 2 gives candidates a choice between a **Formal Letter** (to editors, municipal commissioners, school principals, business firms) and an **Informal Letter** (to parents, relatives, friends). Both require strict adherence to the official CISCE block layout.

Official CISCE Layout Standards & Marking Rubric:

Component	Formal Letter Specification	Informal Letter Specification
Sender's Address	Top left corner, 2–3 lines. No comma at the end of lines.	Top left corner, 2–3 lines. No comma at line end.
Date	Alphanumeric format: e.g. *15th October 2026*	Alphanumeric format: e.g. *15th October 2026*
Receiver's Address	Designation & full address (e.g., The Municipal Commissioner...)	**OMITTED** in Informal letters.
Salutation	*Dear Sir,* or *Dear Madam,* (followed by a comma).	*Dear Mother,* or *Dear Rohan,* (followed by comma).
Subscription	*Yours faithfully,* (capital 'Y', small 'f', followed by comma).	*Yours affectionately,* or *Yours lovingly,*
Name / Signature	Signature followed by Full Name (First & Surname).	First name only (e.g., *Ananya*).

Model Formal Letter: Complaint Regarding Irregular Garbage Collection

14/B, Lake View Apartments
Rashbehari Avenue
Kolkata - 700029

15th October 2026

The Municipal Commissioner
Kolkata Municipal Corporation
5, S.N. Banerjee Road
Kolkata - 700013

Dear Sir,

Subject: Urgent intervention required for irregular garbage clearance in Ward 86

I am writing as a concerned resident of Rashbehari Avenue to draw your immediate attention to the worsening civic sanitation in our locality. For the past three weeks, municipal sanitation trucks have failed to collect domestic refuse on a daily basis.

Consequently, overflowing garbage vats on the main crossing have turned into breeding grounds for flies, mosquitoes, and stray animals. The foul stench has made it impossible for residents to keep windows open, and there is a grave threat of an outbreak of dengue and cholera as monsoon showers persist.

I earnestly request your office to instruct the local sanitation inspectors to restore regular morning waste collection and arrange for periodic spraying of disinfectants. Your prompt action will protect public health.

Yours faithfully,
Siddharth Sen

CHAPTER 3: NOTICE & E-MAIL WRITING (5 + 5 = 10 MARKS)

Question 3 is a compulsory paired task. The **Notice** announces an event to students within a school, while the **E-mail** invites an external principal, judge, or chief guest for the exact same event. The details in both must correspond perfectly.

Official ICSE Marks Distribution Checklist:

Notice Writing (5 Marks)	Email Writing (5 Marks)
• **Catchy Heading (1 Mark):** Creative phrase (e.g. *'WAR OF WORDS!'*). • **Event Name (1 Mark):** Formal title (e.g. *Inter-School Debate*). • **Date (0.5 Mark):** Complete date (e.g. *28th November 2026*). • **Time (0.5 Mark):** Clear timings (e.g. *9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.*). • **Venue (1 Mark):** Specific location (e.g. *School Auditorium*). • **Target Audience (1 Mark):** Who can join & contact person.	• **To (0.5 Mark):** Authentic email ID (e.g. *principal.stxaviers@gmail.com*). • **Subject Line (0.5 Mark):** Professional event summary. • **Salutation (0.5 Mark):** *Dear Sir,* or *Dear Madam,* • **Opening Sentence (0.5 Mark):** Clear statement of invitation. • **Event Details (2 Marks):** Date, time, venue, topic, and rules. • **Closing & Subscription (1 Mark):** *Yours faithfully,* + designation.

Model Solved Pair: Inter-School Science Exhibition

[NOTICE FORMAT] ***INNOVATE TO ELEVATE!*** ***Annual Inter-School Science Exhibition 2026*** ***Date:*** *Friday, 20th November 2026* ***Time:*** *9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.* ***Venue:*** *Centenary Hall, St. Jude's High School, Pune* *Students from Classes IX and X who wish to showcase working models on sustainable green energy and robotics are invited to register their team names (maximum three members per team) with the undersigned by 10th November 2026.* *Rohit Varma* *President, Science Club*	***[EMAIL FORMAT]*** ***To:*** *principal.loyolahigh@gmail.com* ***Subject:*** *Invitation to participate in the Annual Inter-School Science Exhibition 2026* *Dear Madam,* *Our school is hosting its Annual Inter-School Science Exhibition, 'Innovate to Elevate', on Friday, 20th November 2026, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the Centenary Hall.* *We cordially invite a team of senior students from your esteemed institution to present projects focusing on renewable energy and automated robotics. A maximum of two working models per school may be entered. A copy of the event itinerary and guidelines is attached herewith.* *We look forward to receiving your school's confirmation by 10th November 2026.* *Yours faithfully,* *Rohit Varma* *President, Science Club* *St. Jude's High School*

CHAPTER 4: UNSEEN COMPREHENSION & SUMMARY (20 MARKS)

Question 4 tests critical reading, lexical deduction, factual recall, and précis condensation from an unseen narrative or descriptive prose passage of approximately 500 words.

Step-by-Step Précis Mastery: The 50-Word Grid Technique:

The summary question carries **8 marks**. Candidates must summarize a specific focus area in **not more than 50 words**. Marks are awarded for both points coverage (content) and grammatical expression.

Step 1 — Identify the Mandate: Highlight the exact question directive (e.g. *'Summarize the measures taken by the villagers to protect their crop from locusts'*). Extract ONLY information relevant to this focus.

Step 2 — Rough Draft: List 5 distinct factual points in concise, coherent phrases. Do not copy long sentences verbatim.

Step 3 — Word Count Discipline: Combine ideas using compound sentences and active voice. Ensure your text has between 45 and 50 words.

Step 4 — The 8x8 Grid Format: Draw a neat grid of columns and rows. Write exactly one word per box. Hyphenated compound words (e.g., *well-known*) count as one word. Punctuation marks sit beside the word in the same box.

Step 5 — Fair Draft: Label the final grid clearly as **'Fair Draft'** and neatly cross out the rough notes with a single pencil line.

Sample 8x8 Summary Grid Representation (50-Word Target):

When	the	locusts	swarmed,	villagers	beat	brass	plates
and	lit	smoky	bonfires	around	fields.	They	shouted
in	unison,	waved	bright	cloths,	and	dug	trenches
to	trap	crawlers.	Finally,	they	sprayed	neem	extract
to	repel	the	remaining	insects,	saving	half	their
valuable	harvest	from	destruction.				

Total Words: Exactly 44 words in fair grid. Perfectly within the 50-word upper ceiling.

CHAPTER 5: FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR (20 MARKS)

Question 5 evaluates structural grammatical competence across four distinct sub-sections.

Section A: Verb Forms & Passage Tense Completion (4 Marks)

Read the whole paragraph before filling blanks. Establish the overall temporal setting (past narrative, historical present, or ongoing dialogue) to avoid illogical shifts in verb tense.

Section B: Prepositions & Phrasal Verbs (4 Marks)

Top 20 High-Yield ICSE Prepositions and Phrasal Verb Combinations:

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Board Exam Example Sentence
Call off	To cancel an event	The strike was *called off* after negotiations.
Break down	Stop functioning / weep	His car *broke down* on the highway.
Look into	To investigate	The inspector promised to *look into* the complaint.
Put up with	To tolerate	I cannot *put up with* such rude behavior.
Give up	To abandon / surrender	He refused to *give up* his scientific research.
Bring up	Rear a child / mention	She was *brought up* by her grandparents.
Carry out	To execute instructions	The soldiers *carried out* the commander's orders.
Turn down	To reject an offer	She *turned down* the lucrative corporate offer.
Run out of	To exhaust supply	The laboratory has *run out of* chemical reagents.
Stand by	To support in crisis	True friends *stand by* each other in hardship.

Section C: Sentence Synthesis Without 'And', 'But', 'So' (4 Marks)

Master the five primary methods of synthesis:

1. **Using Participles:** *He finished his homework. He went to bed.* ➔ **Having finished his homework, he went to bed.**

2. **Using Infinitives:** *He bought a camera. He wanted to photograph birds.* ➔ **He bought a camera to photograph birds.**

3. **Using Noun in Apposition:** *Rabindranath Tagore was a Nobel laureate. He founded Visva-Bharati.* ➔ **Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate, founded Visva-Bharati.**

4. **Using Preposition with Gerund:** *The moon rose. The journey was not over.* ➔ **In spite of the moon rising, the journey was not over.**

5. **Using Relative Pronouns:** *I met a lady. Her courage inspired everyone.* ➔ **I met a lady whose courage inspired everyone.**

Section D: Sentence Transformations (8 Marks)

Transformation requires changing the grammatical form of a sentence without changing its essential meaning. Follow the specific beginning or ending directed in brackets.

1. No Sooner ... Than / Hardly ... When:
• *As soon as the bell rang, the children rushed out.*
➔ **No sooner did the bell ring than the children rushed out.**
➔ **Hardly had the bell rung when the children rushed out.**

2. Too ... To / So ... That:
• *The luggage is too heavy for him to carry.*
➔ **The luggage is so heavy that he cannot carry it.**

3. Unless / If:
• *If you do not submit your application today, it will be rejected.*
➔ **Unless you submit your application today, it will be rejected.**

4. Degrees of Comparison:
• *Mount Everest is higher than all other peaks in the world. (Positive)*
➔ **No other peak in the world is as high as Mount Everest.**

5. Active and Passive Voice:
• *The committee awarded him a scholarship.*
➔ **He was awarded a scholarship by the committee.**

6. Direct and Indirect Speech:
• *The doctor said to the patient, 'Take these medicines twice daily.'*
➔ **The doctor advised the patient to take those medicines twice daily.**

7. Affirmative to Negative:
• *Only members of the club are allowed into the swimming pool.*
➔ **None but members of the club are allowed into the swimming pool.**

Practice Transformation Question Bank with Solutions:

(i) *She is very clever. Nobody can deceive her.* (Begin: She is too...)
Ans: She is too clever to be deceived by anybody.

(ii) *Although it rained heavily, the football match continued.* (Begin: Despite...)
Ans: Despite the heavy rain, the football match continued.

(iii) *He said, 'I have forgotten my umbrella here.'* (Begin: He said that...)
Ans: He said that he had forgotten his umbrella there.

(iv) *Very few metals are as precious as gold.* (Use: 'more precious')
Ans: Gold is more precious than most other metals.

(v) *Nobody will deny that honesty is the best policy.* (End: ...honesty is the best policy.)
Ans: Everyone will admit that honesty is the best policy.