

EXPERT'S OPINION


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ZNO

in questions and answers

Question 1. *There are three parts to the ZNO — reading, use of English and writing. Which of these should students start with?*

Answer. Each student will have his / her own preference. I would recommend starting with an area in which you feel confident. For example, the very first reading section consists of 5 texts, which students match to the correct heading. These texts are quite short, and I think the reason for this is that it gently warms up students for the rest of the exam. Therefore, this might be a good place to start.

Question 2. *Students have 120 minutes to complete the test. What's the best way to distribute the time?*

Answer. It is important that students know the length of the exam and how long they have to spend on each part. As teachers, our job is to give guidelines on this area. For the reading section, I would recommend spending about 45—50 minutes, 30—35 minutes on the use of English part, and 40 minutes on the writing section. Of course, this will vary from student to student, depending on their preferences, strengths and weaknesses. However, in class, teachers can recommend these guidelines, and as the exam comes closer, it is a good idea to give students timed practice in class. That way, they will experience the pressure that time creates, and will have a better idea of what to expect on exam day. Students should also be advised to time themselves doing whole sections at home. The last thing that a student needs is to be unable to finish the ZNO exam in June because of a lack of time. This is something that we can really prepare them for.

Question 3. *My students find the use of English part the hardest. What way would you recommend that they do this section?*

Answer. The use of English part can be the hardest. Each gap has got four options, and at times all of the options are similar; they could be the same verb, but in different tenses, or in the vocabulary section, the four options could be from the same lexical field, which can also confuse students. Students should not forget to pay

attention to the context — the use of English part consists of full texts — therefore, read the title, quickly read the text to get an understanding of the overall topic. They should also carefully read what comes before and after each gap and look for clues to help them; for example the word 'yet' might indicate that the present perfect is missing. Similarly in the vocabulary part, verb-noun, or adjective-noun collocations are commonly tested, as are adjectives and verbs followed by prepositions.

Question 4. *The minimum number of words in the writing part is 100. What is the maximum?*

Answer. The task doesn't actually state the maximum number of words. However, students have to write on the lined paper given in the exam task. They may not write outside the margins or they are not allowed to write on any extra paper. Their answer must fit into the space provided by the paper. Also, each of the paragraphs shouldn't be very long. Sometimes, only three detailed sentences is enough to cover the topic. Writing too much in each paragraph will mean that the student is probably providing unnecessary information, which is not a good thing. In general, I would recommend writing not more than 180 words.

Question 5. *What grammar and vocabulary should I use to get a better mark?*

Answer. I would say "play it safe". The assessment criteria say that grammar mistakes shouldn't interfere with communication. In order to make sure that you don't lose marks for this, I think it is a good idea to use grammar and vocabulary that you are sure is correct. Even if you use fairly basic forms, if it is correct, you can't lose marks for it. I would also strongly recommend re-reading the letter at the end of the exam to check for small mistakes, like *he go, *she should to do, and so on. Don't forget that students are also expected to use linking words, so they should try to naturally use phrases like 'in my opinion', 'first of all', 'however', and they get points for this too.

