

Augustine's English Classes

Where Structure and Challenge Build Confidence.

PSLE ENGLISH 2026

COMPOSITION RESCUE HANDBOOK

A no-fluff system for planning, writing and checking Continuous Writing

THE EXAM-DAY ENGINE

LOCK THE TOPIC → PICK ONE PICTURE → CREATE A PROBLEM → BUILD THE CLIMAX → SOLVE IT → PROVE THE TOPIC

Augustine's English Classes

Student + Parent Edition | September 2026

Important: No formula can guarantee a particular PSLE mark. This handbook is designed to reduce avoidable Content and Language losses and make strong story planning repeatable.

How to Use This Handbook

Students: learn the engine. Parents: reinforce the thinking, not the wording.

The goal is not to memorise a model composition. It is to make sure you can build a relevant, developed story even when the examination topic feels unfamiliar.

STUDENT RULE

Do not ask, "What amazing story can I write?" Ask, "What must this topic make me show?"

For students

1. Learn the 6-step Rescue Formula on page 5.
2. Practise planning in keywords before writing full compositions.
3. Use the Topic Test and Picture Test every time.
4. Spend most of your detail on the Problem and Climax.
5. Leave time for the 2-minute Language Check.

For parents

6. Give your child a topic and 5 minutes to plan. Do not supply the plot immediately.
7. Ask the six coaching questions on page 15.
8. Reject vague plans: "something bad happens" is not a problem.
9. Praise relevance and development before "good vocabulary".
10. Use the marking checklist rather than rewriting the composition for the child.

THE ONE SENTENCE TO REMEMBER

A simple story developed clearly is safer than a complicated story that loses the topic.

What PSLE Continuous Writing Requires

For PSLE 2026, Paper 1 lasts 1 hour 10 minutes. Situational Writing carries 14 marks and Continuous Writing carries 36 marks. The Continuous Writing task requires at least 150 words. The pictures help pupils think about the topic, and the composition must be based on at least one picture.¹

Requirement	What it means in practice
Topic	Your story must clearly be about the exact topic - not merely mention it.
At least one picture	Use one picture meaningfully. More pictures do not automatically mean more marks.
Guiding points	Use them to check that the required parts of the task are covered.
Development	Important events need causes, reactions and consequences.
Organisation	Events should progress logically towards a climax and outcome.
Language	Accuracy, clarity and appropriate expression matter throughout.

A useful target - not a promise

Continuous Writing is marked out of 36. An 80% numerical target is about 29/36. A formula cannot guarantee this. It can, however, prevent the common structural mistakes that make a strong score impossible: irrelevance, weak development, missing task requirements and uncontrolled language.

PRIORITY ORDER

1. RELEVANCE → 2. DEVELOPMENT → 3. CONTROL → 4. STYLE

What 10 Years of PSLE Topics Tell Us

Year	Topic	Story engine
2016	A Secret	Secret → reason → risk of discovery → outcome
2017	A Special Gift	Gift → why meaningful → challenge/event → significance
2018	Teamwork	Goal → difficulty → cooperation → result
2019	A Celebration	Reason → occasion → complication/event → outcome
2020	Something That Was Lost	Loss → search → turning point → result
2021	A Promise	Promise → test/temptation → choice → consequence
2022	A Long Wait	Reason for waiting → difficulty → turning point → outcome
2023	A Change for the Better	Before → cause → change → better after
2024	Trying Something New	New experience → uncertainty → challenge → outcome
2025	Being Thankful	Kindness/help → realisation → gratitude → expression

The topics change. The underlying writing job changes far less. Most can be handled as a VALUE story, EVENT story or CHANGE story - and all three can use the same five-part structure.

THE PATTERN

Situation → Difficulty → Choice / Action / Realisation → Consequence → Meaning

Past-year topic list is compiled from public post-exam resources; SEAB does not publish a ten-year topic list as an official syllabus document.²

The PSLE Composition Rescue Formula

MEMORISE THIS

TOPIC → PICTURE → PROBLEM → CLIMAX → SOLUTION → TOPIC

1. LOCK THE TOPIC

What must my story prove?

2. PICK ONE PICTURE

Which picture can actually cause or affect an event?

3. CREATE A PROBLEM

What makes the topic difficult?

4. BUILD THE CLIMAX

What must the character do, choose or realise?

5. SOLVE IT

What happens because of that climax?

6. PROVE THE TOPIC

How does the ending show why the topic mattered?

If you are completely stuck, skip straight to this question:

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

A problem gives the story movement. It does not need to be a disaster. A temptation, disagreement, misunderstanding, fear, mistake, delay or failure is often better.

Lock 1: Make the Topic Impossible to Miss

A composition can be fluent and still lose Content marks if the topic is only mentioned. The topic must control the story.

Topic	Weak interpretation	What the story must show
A Promise	Someone says, "I promise."	A promise is made and later tested, kept or broken.
Teamwork	Several friends appear.	People genuinely cooperate towards a goal.
Being Thankful	Someone receives a gift.	The character recognises help/kindness and shows gratitude.
A Change for the Better	Something changes.	A clear before-and-after improvement and why it matters.
Trying Something New	A new object appears.	The character experiences something unfamiliar and responds to it.

THE TOPIC REMOVAL TEST

Imagine deleting the topic words from your composition. If the same story still works almost unchanged, the topic is probably not central enough.

The 3 Topic Touches

- Introduction: plant the topic.
- Climax: test or demonstrate the topic.
- Conclusion: confirm its significance.

Lock 2: Use the Picture as a Plot Tool

The safest approach is usually to choose ONE picture that fits naturally. The picture should do work in the story.

Weak picture use	Stronger picture use
"There was a trophy on the table."	The trophy becomes the goal that forces a divided team to cooperate.
"I looked at my watch."	The watch shows there are only twenty minutes left to keep a promise.
"She held a sunflower."	The flower becomes the thank-you gift given after a realisation.
"We saw a queue."	The queue creates the long wait and the character's impatience.

THE PICTURE TEST

Can you explain in one sentence how the picture CAUSES, COMPLICATES or RESOLVES something? If not, your picture may be decorative rather than meaningful.

Do not force all three pictures

Using extra pictures is not a scoring technique. Add another only when it strengthens the same story without creating awkward detours.

The 5-Part Story Structure

Part	Job	Student question
1. Introduction	Normal situation + topic seed	Who? Where? What is about to matter?
2. Problem	Make the topic difficult	What goes wrong?
3. Climax	Big action / choice / realisation	What is the most important moment?
4. Solution	Show the consequence	What happens because of the climax?
5. Conclusion	Return to the topic	What does the character now understand / feel / do?

SHAPE OF A STRONG STORY

SHORT SET-UP → DEVELOPED PROBLEM → DEVELOPED CLIMAX → CLEAR SOLUTION → SHORT MEANINGFUL ENDING

Avoid the upside-down composition

Weak writers often spend too long on breakfast, weather, travelling and background, then rush the actual event. The important middle of the story should receive the most detail.

THE 2-2-2 MINIMUM

When stuck, give the Problem, Climax and Solution at least TWO developed sentences each. This prevents the main event from collapsing into three rushed lines.

How to Create a Problem in 30 Seconds

You do not need an accident, hospital or police report. Choose a problem that naturally tests the topic.

Reusable problem	Works well with...
Disagreement	Teamwork, celebration, group task
Temptation	Promise, honesty, responsibility
Misunderstanding	Secret, friendship, gift
Fear	Trying something new, performance, competition
Mistake	Lost item, responsibility, change
Delay	Long wait, celebration, journey
Failure	Trying something new, teamwork, improvement
Embarrassment	Gift, performance, school event
Forgetfulness	Promise, lost item, responsibility
Wrong assumption	Thankfulness, friendship, secret

PROBLEM FORMULA

GOAL + OBSTACLE = STORY. Example: "I wanted to keep my promise, BUT my friends offered me the chance I had been waiting for."

Practice: choose any topic and complete this sentence: "Everything seemed fine until

_____."

The Climax: Where the Marks Are Won or Lost

The climax is not simply the loudest event. It is the moment when the topic matters most.

Topic	Possible climax question
A Promise	Will the character keep the promise when it becomes inconvenient?
Being Thankful	What makes the character finally understand another person's sacrifice?
Teamwork	When do the characters stop acting separately and cooperate?
Something Lost	What clue/action finally changes the search?
Trying Something New	Does the character retreat or attempt it despite fear?
A Change for the Better	What realisation or consequence makes the old behaviour change?

CLIMAX FORMULA

PRESSURE → DECISION / ACTION / REALISATION → IMMEDIATE RESULT

Slow down here

- Show what the character notices.
- Show one clear thought or emotion.
- Show the decisive action.
- Show the immediate consequence.

Do not add five emotions and ten “powerful phrases”. One precise reaction is stronger than a paragraph of melodrama.

Language That Scores Without Showing Off

Sophistication is useful only when it remains accurate and natural. Under examination pressure, control beats decoration.

Instead of...	Prefer...
walked quickly	hurried / rushed
said loudly	shouted / called
was very scared	froze / my stomach tightened
was very angry	snapped / clenched my jaw
looked carefully	examined / scanned
very tired	exhausted / my legs felt heavy

Use a small range of reliable techniques

- Precise verbs: choose one strong verb instead of verb + weak adverb.
- Specific detail: name what the character sees, hears or notices.
- Dialogue: use it when it changes the situation, not as filler.
- Internal thought: one short thought can show decision or realisation.
- Sentence control: mix shorter impact sentences with normal developed sentences.

LANGUAGE SAFETY RULE

Never use a word or phrase simply because it sounds impressive. If you are not certain of its meaning, grammar or spelling, use a simpler expression accurately.

The 2-Minute Editing System

Do not “read through” vaguely. Check in passes. Each pass has one job.

11. TENSE: Circle mentally through the main verbs. Did you accidentally switch between past and present?
12. SENTENCES: Look for fragments and run-on sentences. Does every sentence make sense on its own?
13. AGREEMENT: Check he/she/it + singular verbs; plural subjects + plural verbs.
14. PRONOUNS: Is it always clear who “he”, “she”, “they” and “it” refer to?
15. DIALOGUE: Check quotation marks, punctuation and new speakers.
16. SPELLING & PUNCTUATION: Check words you know you often misspell; check full stops and capitals.

FINAL CONTENT CHECK

Before stopping, find the topic in your mind THREE times: beginning, climax, ending. If you cannot, strengthen the connection.

Worked Rescue Plan 1: Being Thankful

This is a PLAN, not a model composition. The purpose is to show how little information is needed before writing.

Step	Plan
Topic lock	Show genuine gratitude after recognising someone's effort.
Picture	A flower - used as a thank-you gift.
Introduction	Mrs Lim stays after school each week to help narrator.
Problem	Narrator treats the extra help as normal and complains about staying back.
Climax	Narrator discovers Mrs Lim has repeatedly delayed her own journey home to help.
Solution	Narrator apologises and prepares a small flower/card.
Conclusion	Gives it to her and finally understands what gratitude means.

WHY THIS WORKS

The story is not “about a flower”. The flower is a tool. The real story is about recognising kindness and expressing thanks.

Your variation

Change only ONE element - person, setting or problem - while keeping the same topic logic.

Worked Rescue Plan 2: A Promise

Step	Plan
Topic lock	A promise must be made and tested.
Picture	A watch - creates time pressure.
Introduction	Narrator promises to wait for younger brother after CCA.
Problem	Friends invite narrator to leave for a limited-time event.
Pressure	Brother is late; narrator checks watch repeatedly.
Climax	Narrator starts to leave, remembers promise, turns back.
Solution	Brother appears upset after being delayed by teacher; narrator is there.
Conclusion	Narrator realises a promise matters most when keeping it is inconvenient.

THE KEY MOVE

The problem directly TESTS the topic. Without the temptation to leave, the promise has little story value.

30-second adaptation

Change the promise: care for a pet / return an item / keep a secret / help at an event. Then invent one obstacle that makes keeping it difficult.

Parent Coaching: Ask, Do Not Supply

Parents can reinforce composition effectively without becoming the writer. Use these six questions in order. Stop as soon as the child can continue independently.

17. What exactly must this topic show?
18. Which ONE picture fits your idea best?
19. What does your character want or need to do?
20. What could go wrong and make that difficult?
21. At the climax, what does the character DO, CHOOSE or REALISE?
22. How will the ending prove the topic?

DO NOT ASK

“Why don’t you write about...?” too early. That trains dependence. Ask a narrower question instead:
“What could stop him from keeping the promise?”

Parent feedback language

Instead of	Say
“This is boring.”	“Where is the problem? I cannot see what becomes difficult yet.”
“Use better vocabulary.”	“Can you replace one weak verb with a more precise one?”
“Your ending is bad.”	“Show me how this ending connects back to the topic.”
“Write more.”	“Which important moment needs more development?”

10-Minute Planning Drills

These drills build adaptability faster than repeatedly writing full compositions.

Drill A - 5-minute rescue plan

Choose a topic. Write only: Topic Lock → Picture → Problem → Climax → Solution → Conclusion. Keywords only.

Drill B - Three problems

For one topic, invent three different problems. Choose the one that tests the topic most directly.

Drill C - Climax repair

Take an old composition. Underline the climax. Rewrite only that section using Pressure → Action/Choice/Realisation → Immediate Result.

Drill D - Topic removal test

Cover the title. Ask whether the story could fit five other topics unchanged. If yes, add stronger topic touches.

Drill E - Parent oral planning

Parent gives a random topic. Child explains a complete five-part plot aloud in 90 seconds. No writing required.

WEEKLY MINIMUM

2 quick plans + 1 climax rewrite + 1 full timed composition. Quality of review matters more than volume.

Student Planning Sheet - Copy This

TOPIC - What must I prove?

PICTURE - Which one will matter?

INTRODUCTION - Who / where / topic seed

PROBLEM - What goes wrong?

CLIMAX - What do I do / choose / realise?

SOLUTION - What happens because of it?

CONCLUSION - How do I prove the topic?

Student Self-Marking Sheet

Tick only what you can point to in your composition.

CONTENT CHECK	✓
Exact topic is central, not merely mentioned.	☐
At least one picture is used meaningfully.	☐
Guiding questions are addressed.	☐
Problem directly tests the topic.	☐
Climax is clearly the most important moment.	☐
Problem and climax are developed, not rushed.	☐
Solution follows logically from the climax.	☐
Conclusion reconnects to the topic.	☐

LANGUAGE CHECK	✓
Tense is controlled.	☐
Sentences are complete and clear.	☐
Subject-verb agreement checked.	☐
Pronouns are clear.	☐
Dialogue punctuation checked.	☐
Spelling and punctuation checked.	☐
Vocabulary is precise but safe.	☐

IF YOU CAN FIX ONLY ONE THING

Fix relevance before vocabulary. A beautifully written irrelevant story is still the wrong story.

Final PSLE Exam-Day Card

BEFORE WRITING - 5 TO 7 MINUTES

1. Lock topic. 2. Pick one picture. 3. Answer guiding points. 4. Create problem. 5. Decide climax. 6. Know the ending.

WHILE WRITING

Short set-up. Develop the problem. Slow down at the climax. Show the consequence. Return to the topic.

IF STUCK

Ask: WHAT COULD GO WRONG? Then: WHAT MUST THE CHARACTER DO, CHOOSE OR REALISE?

BEFORE SUBMITTING

Tense → Sentences → Agreement → Pronouns → Dialogue → Spelling/Punctuation → Topic connection.

TOPIC → PICTURE → PROBLEM → CLIMAX → SOLUTION → TOPIC

You do not need an amazing plot. You need a relevant story that is developed and controlled.

Sources, Notes & Teacher Use

Official examination information

1. Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB), 2026 PSLE English Language syllabus. Paper 1: Situational Writing 14 marks; Continuous Writing 36 marks; total Paper 1 duration 1 h 10 min. The syllabus also states the writing assessment objectives, including generating and selecting relevant ideas, organising ideas coherently and cohesively, and using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Official source: https://www.seab.gov.sg/files/PSLE%20Syllabus%20documents/2026%20PSLE/0001_y26_sy.pdf

2. Past-year composition topics (2016-2025) were cross-checked against public Singapore education compilations, including LearningGems, Illum.education and other post-exam resources. These topic compilations are not an official SEAB ten-year publication.

Reference: <https://illum.education/past-years-psle-composition-topics/>

Important marking note

SEAB publicly provides the examination format and assessment objectives, but does not publish a detailed public examiner band descriptor for PSLE Continuous Writing. This handbook therefore avoids presenting tuition-centre mark-band rubrics as official SEAB marking criteria.

For teachers and parents

The Rescue Formula is a planning and self-checking framework. It should not become another script to memorise. Vary the topics, pictures, settings and conflicts. Keep the thinking process constant.

THE PURPOSE

Independent planning under pressure: relevance first, development second, controlled language throughout.

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