



# The National English Olympiad

A joint project of the Grahamstown Foundation and  
the South African Council for English Education (SACEE)



## 50<sup>th</sup> English Olympiad – 2025

The **50<sup>th</sup> English Olympiad** is due to be written on 4 March 2025. The theme for this Olympiad is, appropriately, CELEBRATION.

The Chief Examiner is Dr Malcolm Venter, who founded the Olympiad in 1976. His co-examiner is Ms Yvette Morgan, an English teacher and former examiner of the Olympiad.

The call for entries will be sent to schools later this year.

If you are aware of any schools which do not receive the call for entries, please contact me.

*Rob Sharman*

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# APPENDIX

## 2024 English Olympiad : Chief Examiner's Report

**Anthology:** *Now & Then*

**Theme:** Resilience

### **Candidates' engagement with the anthology**

This year's genre of memoir and autobiography, with the theme of resilience, was very well received by the candidates and they seemed to enjoy the choice of ten texts in the anthology. Many teachers reported that the learners found the texts both accessible and relatable, and this was evident in their engagement in the literary essays. The anthology was widely referenced by strong and weak candidates alike, and the best candidates found it easy to integrate their quotations into their arguments. It was noted by many of the markers that the overall calibre of literary essay writing has come a long way, showing a significant overall improvement in both structure and style.

### **Study Guide and Examination Paper**

Much time and energy go into the creation of the study guide. I decided to include the suggested answers in the study guide this year, instead of on the website, for convenience. Because the texts were so accessible, Tasneem and I decided not to omit any texts for the FAL studies this year.

The Home Language examination paper included eight questions for Section A and eight questions for Section B. I would still recommend that the parameter at the start of Section B, stating that candidates not address the same text for sections A and B, not be included as it is an unnecessary restriction. Section A followed the usual format of including a quotation from beyond the anthology to link to the topic. I found that the candidates tended to use ideas from the various questions as the main points of their essays. Thus, an essay about catharsis included points about humour and resilience, while an essay about humour included points about catharsis and resilience. Section B focused on creativity, voice, and playing confidently with language. The most popular choices were the speech and the narrative poem. There were very few bad poems, although there were many flat and generic speeches.

### **Olympiad results**

This year there were **165 gold** scripts, and **12 diamonds**, making it **177 candidates** to achieve over 80%. The insight, creativity and intelligent observation from these candidates continue to astound. Without a doubt, the favourite part of the marking process for most markers was the marking of the creative Section B where many a candidate produced poignant poetry or wise speeches in the voice of Magona, humorous Mda episodes in Trevor Noah's voice, and creative journal entries in the voice of Mphahlele, Van Wyk or Fuller. It seems that there were fewer flat and unimaginative transactional pieces this year. A commendable number of the candidates have a clear idea of how to create voice in their writing.

### **Acknowledgements**

As always, Ricky Woods managed the distribution and moderation of the scripts with calm efficiency and the markers engaged their hearts and gut in the first-round marking. Anne Peltason, Dr Di McDermott, and Yvette Morgan are thanked for their astute moderation and their attention to detail in the close-marking process. This year the winning script was marked by Joe Hoosein. I thank Prarochna Rama for her thorough management of the entire administration process and my Deputy Examiner, Anné du Plessis, from St Stithian's Girls' School, who helped me find texts and sat up nights typing them up for the anthology with me. Rob Sharman proved an invaluable support to me, finalising copyright permissions, searching for texts, and sensing when I needed a little more time to finalise the study guide after my car was hijacked late last year. I honestly wouldn't have managed without his kindness, advice, and patience. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Andrew Reynard for inspiring me along my examiner journey, from giving me the idea for the genre and theme, to introducing me to the writing of Alexander Fuller, and to sharing some of his own writing with me.

**Looking ahead**

Although there was a drop in the number of learners who entered the Olympiad this year, we were still 4000-plus candidates strong. It is hoped that we will have an increase in numbers for the coming year's celebratory edition of the anthology by Dr Malcolm Venter and Yvette Morgan. I believe their anthology and study guide are nearly done and wish them well for the year ahead.

Elizabeth Herselman  
Chief Examiner

29 April 2024