

ENGLISH ESSAY: FEEDBACK FROM SUBJECT EXPERTS/ EXAMINERS

Writing an essay is a crucial component of the C.S.S. Competitive Examination. *Syllabi for C.S.S. Competitive Examination 2016 & Onwards* in its *Scheme of CSS Competitive Examination* provides the following instructions relating to the Essay Paper:

“Candidates will be required to write one or more Essay in English. A wide choice of topics will be given.

Candidates are expected to reflect comprehensive and research based knowledge on a selected topic. Candidate’s articulation, expression and technical treatment of style of Essay writing is examined.”

2. Last few years performance of candidates in *English Essay* paper under CSS Competitive Examination has not been as satisfactory as in other papers. Some of the extracts from the examiners’ reports, highlighting the weaknesses and common mistakes in essay writing, are reproduced below for the general information and guidance of the candidates;

CSS CE-2014: Question paper was set to evaluate the performance of the candidates in terms of their conceptual, linguistic and writing competencies, but common trends observed were lack of conceptual clarity, shallow knowledge of subject, grammatical mistakes, and inappropriate choice of vocabulary and stereotype answers. Majority of the candidates did not follow the norms of confrontational discourse and wrote isolated sentences rather than in cohesive paragraphs. The ability required in CSS is extensive reading, holistic and appreciable performance approach in the subject but majority lacked these characteristics.”

CSS CE-2016: The performance in English Essay was unsatisfactory. A significant majority failed in the subject. Ideas presented were random. The argument was without any logical reasoning or research based facts. There was neither coherence nor creativity. The candidates were neither able to build an argument from multiple angles nor substantiated it with facts. The outline of Essay was not properly structured. In many answer scripts, aspects mentioned in the outline were not discussed in the Essay.

CSS CE-2017: The standard Essay was examined on footing of argumentation, content, language and intellectual signifier. The quality and level of critical argumentation on the whole was very poor. Most of the candidates were unable to identify the dormant contention in topics. In most papers content were inadequate and irrelevant. Most worrying aspect of Essays was the wrong use of English language. The sentence structure was glaringly flawed. Moreover grammatical and spellings mistakes were rife. The intellectual level of essays was mediocre and candidates were unable to even grasp the topic of the essay.

CSS CE-2018: Candidates were at their best in topics involving critical and subjective approach i.e. in topics like Democracy in Pakistan: Hopes and Hurdles, Rule of Law, Safeguarding Human Rights & Civil Liberties during Fight against Terrorism and Corruption etc. On the other hand, in topics that were of objective nature (Global Warming / CPEC), reliance on crammed knowledge, dull monotony and repetition of stereotypical information was observed. A significant number of the candidates did not have a clear sense of the essentials of a comprehensive essay or the features which differentiate an essay from other forms of writing. Candidates must know about the qualities of a standard Essay and the standard expected by the Commission in the Competitive Exam.

3. For facilitation and guidance of the CSS aspirants, some highly reputed educationists/examiners were asked to share opinions regarding what is expected of a good essay and what mistakes are to be avoided. Some of the guidelines provided by these experts are reproduced in the next paras. It should be noted that these observations/assertions are views of the individual educationists and not the official prescription of FPSC. It is the sole discretion of the candidate to follow these guidelines. The same cannot be quoted as a set of standard at any forum.

Subject Expert/Examiner - I

- a) Proper beginning with a compact and elaborated topic sentence that must reflect the candidates clear understanding of the topic.
- b) Correct and flawless language.
- c) Use of appropriate vocabulary
- d) Literacy and idiomatic expression
- e) Use of relevant terminology if needed
- f) Selection of relevant thoughts
- g) Logical organization of ideas.
- h) Coherence in arrangement of material/paragraphs
- i) Cohesion in development of argument reaching the conclusion
- j) Clarity in language, ideas, debate and finish.
- k) Comprehensiveness
- l) Logical presentation of the argument
- m) Standard sizing as per requirement
- n) Avoidance of too much scholarship
- o) Through acquaintance with the nature of question i.e topic
- p) Quotation, when used, must be well placed and relevant
- q) Impressive finish

Subject Expert/Examiner - II

- a) A good essay is not supposed to reflect crammed information or bookish knowledge about the topic. It should rather tell us about the writer's personal feelings or thoughts about it, and his ability to convert these feelings and thoughts into arguments for convincing the readers.
- b) It should be self-contained and self-explanatory: not depending on any outside source for its essential comprehension.
- c) Its basic stance should be creative, critical and analytical rather than narrative or descriptive.

- d) It should contain a unified and coherent discussion on a particular topic (strictly in accordance with the wording of the title), with no digression or overshadowing.
- e) It should work through establishing the writer's personal stand about the subject, and substantiating that stand with convincing arguments.
- f) It should be compact and concise, with no loose constructions or unnecessary attachments.
- g) It should have a balanced body, with a beginning, middle and end—each one serving its own distinct purpose.
- h) It should work as a unit of impression in the sense that the impact of the beginning is still fresh when the reader reaches the end.
- i) It should be a fluent text with natural linkage among parts and paragraphs, with no disjointed or segregated parts.

Subject Expert/Examiner III

- a) Relevance
- b) Structure
- c) How to handle an argument or to be argumentative
- d) Counter-viewing the argument
- e) Avoid superfluity
- f) English – figurative and metaphoric
- g) How to pitch your bias
- h) How to avoid spurious ideas
- i) How to show difference between specific and general ideas
- j) Paragraph transition (most important)

Subject Expert/Examiner IV

- a) Answer the exact inquiry set, instead of displaying data that is comprehensively important to the theme.
- b) Have a reasonable contention or point of view, so the examiner knows from the start what the candidate means to state, and can follow the advancement of his/her contention all through the essay.
- c) Be critical and analytical clarifying why something is critical, instead of basically depicting what scholars have said.
- d) Provide reasons, in view of sound proof, to help the primary contention.
- e) Have good paragraphing: the primary concern of each passage is presented unmistakably, and sections pursue sensibly from one another.
- f) Evaluate alternate point of view: it weighs up the relative worth or importance of various perspectives or speculations, assessing the key contentions and proof for these, and clarifying why one lot of contentions, reasons or proof is more persuading than others.
- g) Refer to speculations and ways of thinking important to the inquiry, showing a comprehension of the criticalness of these to the subject.
- h) Include references: where applicable, careful references (names and dates).
- i) Be particular: it incorporates only the data and detail that is most applicable to responding to the inquiry, and forgets about less important material.
- j) Be composed unmistakably and to the point, without waffle, reiteration, stupendous speculations, bombastic language, superfluous language, or individual tales.
