GUIDELINES
NUMBER OF WORDS FOR C3 TASKS

The ESL competency 3 requires students to write or produce texts. To help students become competent writers and producers of texts, it is essential to guide them through the steps of the writing/production process. Just as an outline or other planning tool helps students structure their ideas, a model of the text-type provides guidelines as to the features of the text. In addition, some students benefit from knowing the desired word count.

The chart below provides guidelines as to the number of words for a writing task.

LEVEL	CORE	EESL
Sec 1	50 - 75	100 - 125
Sec 2	75 - 100	175 - 200
Sec 3	100 - 125	200 - 250
Sec 4	150 - 175	300 - 350
Sec 5	200 - 225	400 - 450

The ESL program does not stipulate a set number of words when writing/producing a text. Student exemplars and experience has shown that indicating a number of words can have a negative effect on student performance. Specifying a number of words may shift students' focus from content to length. For example, stronger students may limit themselves to the number of words as opposed to the development of their ideas, whereas others will repeat the same ideas in order to meet the desired word count creating redundancy in their text. Keep in mind, in an evaluation context, the emphasis should be on meeting the expectations set out in the rubric, which focuses on content and formulation rather than length.

Typically, students in secondary one deal with texts such as: a short descriptive text, a letter, an invitation card, a comic strip, a poster, etc. In this respect, 50 – 75 words is the suggested number for a writing task. This suggestion is not necessarily applicable when producing media texts.

In the secondary five MELS uniform examination, where the parameters are constant (text-type, date, time allotted, task requirements, etc.) it is easier to set an approximate number of words. In a classroom situation, where the context varies (time given, resources available, option to complete as homework, etc.) word count becomes a variable requirement.

Finally, preparing to write a 75-word letter differs from preparing for a 400-word feature article; students benefit more from learning how to develop and structure their ideas rather than focusing on the number of words.