

Alleyn's School | 11+ English

Sample Examination Paper 1 | Model answers and explanations

Prepared by Prep Expert from the supplied paper (uploaded as 2025).

Independent study guide; not an official Alleyn's mark scheme. Other well-supported interpretations may be valid.

Section A: Reading | Questions 1-4

1. Buck's two feelings [2 marks]

Buck feels **excited** by the atmosphere around him and **determined to do something great for Thornton**, because he loves his owner and wants to please him.

2. Four details about Buck's appearance [4 marks]

1. His body is lean and in excellent condition, with no unnecessary fat.
2. His coat is glossy and smooth, compared with silk.
3. His thick mane rises along his neck and shoulders, making him look powerful and full of life.
4. His muscles stand out in firm rolls beneath his skin and feel as hard as iron.

Why these work: Each point identifies a different physical feature from lines 1-11. His broad chest and heavy front legs, in proportion to the rest of his body, would also be a valid detail.

3. Six actions used to move the sled [6 marks]

1. He swings to the right and plunges sharply, pulling the harness straps tight.
2. He repeats this movement to the left to help loosen the sled.
3. He launches himself forwards with a forceful pull against the harness.
4. He draws his body tightly together and strains his muscles.
5. He lowers his chest close to the ground and stretches his head forwards and down.
6. He moves his feet rapidly, digging his claws into the compacted snow for grip.

Why these work: These are six distinct actions, retold in your own words and drawn from lines 22-35.

4. Three spectator feelings, with supporting details [6 marks]

Relief: They gasp and start breathing again, showing that their anxiety eases when Buck succeeds.

Joy and excitement: Their cheering grows into a roar, and they throw hats and mittens into the air in celebration.

A sense of togetherness: They shake hands with anyone nearby, showing that the shared achievement makes them feel united and friendly.

Exam technique: Give a feeling and a supporting detail for each point. Keep your evidence within lines 40-46.

Reading | Questions 5-6

Vocabulary in context and character analysis.

5. Definitions and effects [10 marks in total]

“the contagion of excitement” [2 marks]

- a) Contagion:** Something spreading from one person to another, especially an infection.
b) Effect: The metaphor makes excitement seem catching: the crowd’s feelings spread to Buck and draw him into the challenge.

“excess of vigour” [2 marks]

- a) Vigour:** Physical energy, strength or liveliness.
b) Effect: Buck seems to have more energy than his body can contain; even the hairs of his mane appear alive. This emphasises his exceptional fitness and power.

“suppressed eagerness” [2 marks]

- a) Suppressed:** Held back, restrained or kept under control.
b) Effect: Buck is intensely keen to begin but contains his excitement, showing both his enthusiasm and his control while waiting for Thornton.

“like a conjuration” [2 marks]

- a) Conjuration:** A magic spell or the act of calling on magical powers.
b) Effect: Their private exchange seems mysterious and almost magical to the watching crowd, suggesting an unusually powerful bond between dog and owner.

“Thornton’s command cracked out” [2 marks]

- a) Cracked:** Sounded suddenly, sharply and loudly.
b) Effect: The forceful sound cuts through the silence and gives the moment urgency. The comparison with a pistol-shot makes the command startling and explosive.

6. Thornton’s character: exactly four sentences [8 marks]

Thornton is affectionate because he kneels beside Buck and gently holds the dog’s head against his own before the challenge. He is confident in Buck’s abilities because he accepts the challenge and trusts him to pull a sled usually attached to ten dogs. He is supportive because he runs behind Buck and offers cheerful encouragement while the dog works. He is loyal because he refuses a large payment rather than part with the animal he loves.

Why this works: Each sentence gives one character quality and a specific supporting detail, using the whole passage and mainly your own words.

Reading | Questions 7-8

Develop explanations: identify a choice, give evidence, then explain its effect.

7. How the author creates excitement [9 marks]

The author uses forceful movement words such as “plunge”, “jerk” and “lunge” to make Buck’s efforts feel sudden and powerful. The sounds of “crackling” and “snapping” help the reader hear the ice breaking and show that the sled is beginning to loosen. The simile “like live things” makes Buck’s muscles seem to move independently beneath his fur, emphasising the enormous effort he is making.

Short sentences and commands interrupt the longer descriptions. “The sled was broken out.” marks an important success, but the reader still has to discover whether Buck can pull it forwards. The brief command “Now, MUSH!” and its exclamation mark create urgency. In contrast, the longer description of Buck’s body and feet stretches out the struggle, making the reader notice every movement. The comparison of Thornton’s command with a pistol-shot makes it sound explosive against the tense silence.

The action unfolds step by step: first Buck rocks the sled right and left, then he tries to pull it forwards. Thornton’s direct speech puts the reader close to the action, as though hearing the instructions with the crowd. Buck’s slipping foot introduces the possibility of failure just as success seems near, and the spectator’s groan reveals the tension. The ellipses in “half an inch...an inch...two inches” slow the moment down and make each tiny gain important. Finally, the movement becomes steady, releasing the suspense as the sled gathers momentum.

Coverage: This response addresses words and phrases, sentence lengths and types, dialogue, and the order and pace of events in lines 20-39.

8. Thornton’s final actions and words [5 marks]

Thornton gets to his feet to respond to the man offering to buy Buck. His tears show that he is overwhelmed by affection and pride after Buck’s extraordinary effort, as well as relief that the challenge has been completed. He lets the tears run openly because he is not ashamed of how much the dog means to him. His firm refusal makes it clear that Buck is a beloved companion whose value cannot be measured in money. By telling the buyer to go away, he shows that the offer is unwelcome and that he will not bargain over selling Buck.

Reading total: 50 marks. These are model interpretations, not a guarantee of a particular examiner’s allocation of marks.

Section B | Writing choice 1

Describe a visit to a very cold place. [32 marks]

Model composition for study. In the examination, answer ONE writing choice only.

The Frozen Lake

The cold found the narrow gap between my scarf and collar before I had taken three steps from the cabin. I pulled the wool higher, but the wind slipped beneath it again, sharp enough to make my teeth ache. Ahead of us, the frozen lake stretched towards a dark fringe of pines.

At first, everything appeared white. Then I began to notice the colours: blue shadows pooled beneath the trees, silver glittered along the shore, and a pale wash of pink lay across the distant mountains. Snow rested on the branches in thick, uneven cushions. Nothing moved except a few loose crystals racing over the ground.

My boots sank into the fresh snow with a soft crunch. Each step left a deep print, perfectly shaped, until the wind began to soften its edges. Beside me, Dad tested the path with his walking pole. We stayed on the marked trail, close to the bank. Beyond it, the lake looked smooth and inviting, but the warning signs stood half buried in drifts.

Somewhere across the water, a deep crack rolled through the ice.

I stopped. The sound travelled beneath the silence like a door being dragged open in an empty house. Dad rested a gloved hand on my shoulder and explained that the ice shifted as the temperature changed. Even so, I moved a little nearer to him.

By the time we reached the wooden viewpoint, my fingers had become stiff inside my gloves. I tried to undo the strap of my bag and missed it twice. Dad poured hot chocolate from a flask. Steam rose in a delicate ribbon, disappearing almost immediately. I held the cup with both hands, grateful for its small circle of warmth, and tasted the sweetness through lips that felt strangely numb.

On the far bank, a bird shook snow from a branch. For a moment, the falling powder caught the sun and shone like scattered glass. Then the forest became still again.

We turned back when the light began to fade. The cabin's yellow window appeared between the trees, small but welcoming. As I reached for the door, I looked once more at the lake. Its beauty had not made the cold gentler; it had simply made me willing to stand in it a little longer.

What to learn from this model

Follow a clear route through the visit. Use precise sensory details, vary sentence lengths and finish with a reflection. The description stays focused on the cold rather than becoming an unrelated adventure.

Section B | Writing choice 2

Describe an experience which was challenging. [32 marks]

An alternative model composition; pupils do not need to write both pieces.

The First Length

From the edge of the swimming pool, twenty-five metres looked impossibly far. The lane rope ran away from me in a line of blue and white discs, ending at a wall I could barely imagine reaching. I pressed my goggles against my eyes for the third time.

"Take your time," my instructor said. She stood beside the lane, holding the long rescue pole loosely at her side. I nodded, although my stomach had tightened into a small, hard knot.

I could swim a few strokes. I could even float when someone was close enough to catch me. What I had never done was complete a length without stopping. At the shallow end, the floor was reassuringly near. Further along, it sloped away into a blue depth that made me forget everything I had practised.

I pushed off.

For the first few seconds, it was easy. Water slid past my ears, and the noise of the pool became a distant rumble. I stretched one arm forwards, then the other. Kick. Reach. Breathe. The rhythm held until I turned my head too late and swallowed a mouthful of water.

I coughed and grabbed the lane rope. My heart hammered. The far wall had scarcely moved nearer.

"You're safe," my instructor called. "Rest, then start again."

I wanted to climb out. Already I could imagine the towel around my shoulders and the solid comfort of the changing-room floor. Instead, I waited until my breathing slowed. I looked at the black line on the pool floor. I did not need to reach the far wall all at once. I needed to make the next stroke.

This time, I blew bubbles steadily into the water and turned my head before my lungs began to burn. My arms grew heavy. A splash from the next lane struck my cheek, but I kept moving. The tiles passed beneath me, one pale square after another.

Then my fingertips touched the wall.

I held the edge, too breathless to speak. My instructor crouched beside me, smiling, and asked how it felt. I looked back along the lane. It was the same distance, the same water, the same darkening blue towards the middle. Yet it no longer seemed impossible.

"Can I try again?" I asked.

What to learn from this model

Choose one manageable event. Show the difficulty through physical sensations and thoughts, then build towards a believable turning point. Check paragraphing, dialogue punctuation, spelling and tense.