

Essay Section B, decoded

One of three prompts, 40 minutes, no spellcheck, and a plan that survives contact with the clock.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Choose the prompt on which you can make the clearest argument, not the one about which you know the most facts. Spend about four minutes choosing, six planning, 26 writing and four editing. Aim near the official ideal of 500–600 words. The official guidance warns that a very long essay puts you at a disadvantage; it does not publish a numeric maximum.

Checked against the sources named in this guide, August 2026. British English. Free to share.

1 What Section B is, and is not

You choose one of three prompts and type one essay in 40 minutes. The test centre does not mark it and it does not change your Section A score out of 42. Universities receive the essay and decide whether and how to assess it.

The official interface has a word count, cut, copy, paste, undo and redo, but no spellcheck. The LNAT advice values economy, a defensible position and a conclusion. Its ideal is 500–600 words, and it warns that a very long essay puts you at a disadvantage. It does not publish a numeric maximum. The essay does not require legal knowledge or a warehouse of statistics.

1 The tell

A factual topic advantage is useful only if it produces reasoning. If one prompt gives you six facts but no contestable line, while another gives you two clear reasons and a serious objection, choose the second.

2 The 4 / 6 / 26 / 4 clock

Minutes	Job	Output
0–4	Read all three and choose	Rephrase the exact question; reject two prompts for named reasons
4–10	Build the skeleton	Stance, two reasons, strongest objection, reply, conclusion
10–36	Write	Four or five controlled paragraphs, each doing one job
36–40	Edit	Missing word, repeated sentence, weak link, final answer to the prompt

3 A paragraph has a job, not a magic acronym

Use this sequence when it fits:

1. **Position and test.** Define the term and state what would justify the policy.
2. **Reason one.** Give the strongest mechanism, then test its limit.
3. **Reason two.** Add a genuinely distinct reason.
4. **Objection and reply.** State the best opposing case, concede its strength, then reply.
5. **Conclusion.** Answer the exact wording, with any necessary condition.

Examples can be hypothetical. Say what you are assuming. “Suppose waiting lists are fixed” is more intellectually honest than inventing a national statistic.

2 Try it

Plan three prompts in 10 minutes each without writing the essay. Score only the skeleton: clear stance, distinct reasons, real objection, answer after reply. Prompt selection becomes calmer when you have practised discarding attractive but thin topics.

4 Worked Section B: the plan skeleton

Worked example Should voting be compulsory?

Prompt. “Voting in national elections should be compulsory.” Discuss.

Position

Voting should not be compelled by a criminal penalty. The state may strongly encourage participation and require a response to the ballot, but it should preserve a lawful option to reject all candidates.

Define the test

Compulsion is justified only if the public benefit cannot be achieved by a less restrictive and reasonably effective measure.

Reason one

Higher turnout can improve the representativeness of government. Mechanism: parties must address groups that currently vote less often. Limit: a forced, uninformed mark may add numbers without adding considered consent.

Reason two

A duty to attend or return a ballot can be defended as a small civic burden, like jury service. Distinction: the state may require participation in the process without requiring support for any option.

Strongest objection

Political freedom includes the freedom not to participate. A fine may fall hardest on people already distant from public institutions.

Reply and concession

Concede that forced endorsement would be wrong. Reply that a “none of the above” option, easy postal voting and non-punitive enforcement reduce that intrusion. If those protections are absent, the case for compulsion fails.

Conclusion

Reject compulsory choice; conditionally accept compulsory ballot response only with a genuine abstention option and accessible voting.

Misreading: Fence-sitting: listing benefits and harms without deciding which principle controls the result.

Misreading: Fact costume: inventing turnout percentages to make an unsupported claim look researched.

Misreading: Prompt drift: writing about whether democracy is good instead of whether participation should be compulsory.

The skeleton is not a script. Its value is pressure-testing the conclusion before prose begins. If the reply forces a condition, update the thesis now rather than contradicting yourself in paragraph five.

5 How universities change the risk

- **Oxford:** the 2024–25 shortlisting rank used an internally marked essay alongside Section A and contextualised GCSEs. Treat Section B as a second assessed performance.
- **UCL:** an admissions tutor marks the essay and UCL says it carries considerable weight.
- **LSE:** for most applicants, the essay is not considered; LSE reserves exceptions.
- **Bristol:** the 2027 statement says staff read and assess the essay for persuasive argument and command of language.

Even if your preferred university normally ignores the essay, complete the required task properly. Your university list may change, and an exception may apply.

6 A ten-essay practice ladder

1. Essays 1–3: unlimited plan, 30-minute write, ruthless structural review.
2. Essays 4–6: 10-minute plan, 30-minute write, then compare conclusion with prompt.
3. Essays 7–8: full 40-minute task in the plain test-like editor.
4. Essays 9–10: Section A first, then Section B immediately, because the live essay begins after 95 minutes of reading.

For feedback, ask four questions: Where did the argument change without notice? Which paragraph repeats rather than advances? Is the objection the strongest one? Does the final sentence answer the original wording?

7 Sources

LNAT Consortium, Test format, practice test and hints

One of three prompts in 40 minutes; interface features; the 500–600-word ideal; the warning that a very long essay puts a candidate at a disadvantage; defend a position and write economically. [Read the official advice.](#)

LNAT Consortium, Sample essays

Official example prompts and sample answers. [Open the samples.](#)

Oxford, UCL, LSE and Bristol

University-specific use is documented in the admissions sources cited in the companion guide *How universities actually read your LNAT*.

The worked plan is original and deliberately not a full model essay. A skeleton should expose the reasoning without inviting memorised prose.