

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/12  
Reading Passages  
(Core)

## Key messages

- When responding to sub-questions in **Question 1**, it is important that candidates follow the instruction to use their own words when doing so if this required by the question wording.
- It is important that candidates distinguish between what is required by **Question 1(g)** and equivalent questions in future sessions. **Part (i)** of this question asks for a straightforward definition of a *single word or short phrase* as used in the passage and **Part (ii)** asks for a comment about the effect of *the writer's use of language in the whole phrase* quoted on the Question Paper.
- Candidates are advised to take careful note of the wording of questions and to respond to their precise instructions.

## General comments

The Reading Passages and Questions appear to have been accessible to nearly all candidates, and there was clear evidence that candidates had been well prepared for this paper. Overall, the standard of responses was of a good standard for this level and only a very small number of candidates failed to attempt at least most of the questions on the paper. It is noted that there were very few rubric infringements.

## **Question 1**

In general, candidates coped well with most of the sub-questions and very few responses were entirely lifted or expressed in such a way that the candidate's understanding was obscured by limitations of linguistic expression. As mentioned in the 'Key Messages' section of this report, **Question 1(g)** proved a challenge for many candidates and teachers could profitably focus on advising candidates on how best to approach the equivalent task in future sessions.

## **Question 2**

The majority of candidates responded well to this task and wrote answers of at least adequate length which attempted to address the three main elements of the question. Many responses achieved Band 2 marks for both Reading and Writing and a small minority demonstrated the ability to select and develop appropriate material with the fluency required for a top Band 1 mark.

## **Question 3**

Nearly all candidates appear to have been well prepared for the Summary question and most achieved relatively high marks for both elements of the question. When answering **Part (a)** of this question it is important that candidates select the overarching points for their notes rather than listing the examples that illustrate these points (e.g. 'take warm clothing', rather than giving different examples of warm clothing, as discrete points). It is also important for candidates to keep in mind that the key requirements for the Writing mark are how well the response is focused on the wording of the question and how well understanding of the material is conveyed through the candidate's use of own words.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) The question asked for 'two details about the style of building in Ladakh', from paragraph 1. There was no instruction for the candidates to use their own words, so a direct lift of the relevant phrases from the passage was acceptable. The vast majority of candidates gained 2 marks here for 'stone walls' and 'flat roofs', or 'roofs covered with bushy undergrowth'. The most common incorrect response came from those who answered with 'rugged houses' which describes the *appearance* of the houses but not their *style* of building and consequently could not be rewarded. As mentioned earlier, it is imperative that candidates consider the wording of the question very carefully.
- (b) The rubric for this question stated that candidates should use their own words and it was, therefore, expected that responses should show some attempt to rephrase the wording of the passage in order to show a clear understanding of its content. Consequently, those candidates who lifted the two possible uses for the 'hair pieces' verbatim from the text, by answering with 'fuel stores or a form of insulation', did not gain the mark. Responses which comprised selective lifting of either point or attempted to shape their explanations did gain the mark, however, even if they described the 'hair piece' as a 'store for fuel' rather than being the fuel itself. Those who referred to the purpose of the 'hair pieces' as being 'to keep out the cold' or 'to keep the house warm', showed clear understanding through the use of own words. Answers which referred to keeping the houses cool also gained the mark because they indicated an understanding of the concept of insulation.
- (c) This proved to be a demanding question and many candidates failed to gain the available marks, largely because they apparently misread the instructions as to what they were being asked to do. The question asked for a full explanation in own words of one of the three warnings to drivers quoted in the passage. A significant number of candidates attempted to explain the 'Peep peep...the Late Mr' as if the whole phrase was one of the warnings rather than acting as a boundary indicator as to where the warnings could be found in the passage. As a result there was much paraphrase and much confusion in many responses. Those candidates who did focus their responses on just one of the warnings were usually able to gain one mark by giving a partial explanation of what was intended and those who gave a more detailed explanation which referred to the likelihood of dying as a result of dangerous/fast driving were rewarded with both available marks. Overall, the majority of candidates showed understanding of the gist of the warnings (including some who attempted a blanket explanation of all three phrases) and gained one mark for a partial understanding. There were, however, a number of answers which failed to identify which warning was being explained, which made it very difficult to judge the appropriateness of the explanation. Also, a few which apparently misunderstood the point of the warnings and stated that they were exhorting drivers to drive more quickly so they wouldn't be late, or that drivers should keep driving until they reached 'hell', their 'destiny'. Again, as stated above, it is crucial that candidates identify precisely what is being asked of them by the question.
- (d)(i) The majority of candidates were able to identify the reason behind the writer's surprise about the good condition of the road surface arising from its remote area, and 'remote' was not penalised as a lift from the passage. A few candidates were able to find a suitable synonym, such as 'isolated' or 'rural'. Some candidates, however, fell into the trap of merely paraphrasing the question by stating that the writer was surprised by the road surface because it was good.
- (ii) Virtually all the candidates who answered this question about the road being well-maintained correctly identified the 'army' or 'mountain tamers'.
- (e)(i) Nearly all candidates were able to identify the purpose of the stupas and there were very few verbatim lifts of 'contains...possessions'. There were a small number of answers that omitted a key point and stated that the stupas were just monuments, without offering any explanation of what they were for and others claimed that they held monks/the royal family rather than their respective remains and/or possessions. Others thought, mistakenly, that stupas were places of prayer.
- (ii) This question required the identification of the writer's *thoughts* and *feelings* as he wandered among the stupas. Only a small number of candidates successfully explained each element in order to secure two marks on this question. Most identified the writer's thoughts about the poor state of the stupas as in being 'cracked' or about their symbolic purpose, but most candidates who referred to the whitewash/maintenance of the stupas did not register the writer's feelings of surprise or intrigue about this incongruous modern day care.

- (f) The majority of candidates were able to identify the ‘silk route’ as being the detail of location mentioned in the opening and closing paragraphs although there were also references to the stupas/hills/mountains or to Ladakh itself which were not relevant.
- (g)(i) In general, candidates answered (g)(i) better than (g)(ii). It is vitally important that candidates understand that (g)(i) focuses primarily on vocabulary, whereas (g)(ii) focuses on the linguistic effect achieved by the writer in the whole phrase. Misunderstanding of this distinction results in mere repetition of the (g)(i) explanation in (g)(ii) answers, and therefore no marks can be awarded for (g)(ii). It should be emphasised to future candidates that all that is required for (g)(i) is to explain the word(s) in italics.
- (1) *‘dominates’*: the sought for answer here was the palace’s ‘eye-catching’ nature and how it is the ‘main’ building which ‘stands out’ above the rest. Some candidates correctly identified the building as ‘ruling over’ or being ‘superior to those around it.
  - (2) *‘low-tech way’*: successful responses came from those who chose synonyms such as ‘undeveloped’, ‘traditional’ and ‘old fashioned’. ‘Less technical’ was not credited because it was thought to be too close to the original. Answers which identified less ‘complex’ methods, however, also gained the mark.
  - (3) *‘cultivation’*: this word was a popular choice and was usually answered accurately with references to farming, growing crops and so on. However, there was occasional confusion with the word ‘civilisation’.
  - (4) *‘gaunt’*: this was the least popular choice of (g)(i) and was very rarely answered correctly although a small number of candidates did focus on its ‘dismal’ connotation. No mark was awarded for the synonym ‘thin’ which is relevant to a person’s appearance and not that of the landscape. A few candidates attempted to explain ‘gaunt’ and ‘minimal’ and some just ‘minimal’. A few candidates misread ‘gaunt’ as ‘giant’.
- (ii) The most obvious preparation which can be undertaken by candidates for this question is to keep in mind that their explanation of the words and language within each phrase should be related to the wording of the question – in this instance, how the writer conveys the landscape of Ladakh. The point about not repeating answers from (g)(i) has already been made but equally, candidates should avoid using words from the phrase in their answers. The most common examples of this paraphrasing arose from Phrase 1 with ‘dominates the centre’; from Phrase 2 with ‘the streets of Leh are busy’; from Phrase 3 ‘slim green band’; and Phrase 4 ‘minimal beauty’. Candidates once again should be encouraged to respond in their own words.
- (1) Many responses did no more than repeat the point about the run down palace dominating the centre. Those which were more successful attempted to relate the eye-catching nature of the building being enhanced by the fact it is a ruin.
  - (2) Responses to this phrase were generally more successful with quite a number of candidates at least attempting to explain how the words of the phrase conveyed the traditional nature of what was happening in the streets. Occasionally such references were too narrow or specific by focussing on one element of technology such as the absence of cars or modern shops, or by not making reference to the ‘busyness’ of the streets in the town.
  - (3) As noted above, because many candidates were successful with the word ‘cultivated’ in (g)(i), they were less successful with (g)(ii) because they merely repeated their answers rather than focussing on the whole phrase which conveyed the narrowness of the band of cultivation that runs closely beside the River Indus.
  - (4) It would appear that most candidates found this phrase difficult to explain and did not choose to attempt to do so. Those who did, made generalised and incorrect points about its showing outstanding beauty, although a few did pick up on the suggestions of dullness, desolation and bleakness.

## Question 2

Overall, candidates responded well to this question with many scripts gaining Band 2 marks for Reading and Band 2/3 marks for writing. The most successful responses were both linguistically accurate and sophisticated and contained creative development of themes from the passage, such as comments on the geography, architecture and history of the region. Only a very small number of candidates either omitted or offered little comment in response to the third bullet point as to who might enjoy visiting Ladakh and why they should visit, although occasionally the latter prompt was not elaborated on.

The majority of responses showed understanding of the need to refocus and reshape material from the passage in order to meet the specific requirements of the task and, as a result, there was generally very little indiscriminate lifting from the original. Most candidates used details from the passage selectively and made some attempt to shape the lifting into their own commentary showing that they had a good overall understanding of the requirements of the question.

The passage was clearly within the knowledge base of many candidates and this enabled them to imagine the scene and describe it with confidence. Less successful candidates tended to include a range of details about the journey in response to bullet point 1 but without structuring them into a clearly developed narrative. For example, a comment about the warning signs might be sandwiched between two comments on the houses. There was also a tendency from candidates in the middle range to describe the journey at length only to repeat points when dealing with bullet point 2 as to what was memorable. The least successful responses (for Reading) came from candidates who wrote accounts which had little bearing on the passage or, indeed, the question – although some of these responses, nevertheless, scored highly for the Writing mark.

The vast majority of responses gained marks for Writing in Band 3 and above. Although sentence separation was sometimes a problem, the overall structure of accounts together with the use of an appropriate register was of a generally high standard. It was clear that candidates had been taught to think about their choice of vocabulary and to use effective figurative language, and that they were quite adept at adopting an appropriate register both to evoke interest and to make the account credible.

## Question 3

### (a) Notes

This part of **Question 3** was answered well overall with most candidates identifying at least 6 correct points although only a small number successfully identified all 10. The main cause of marks being lost was repetition of points, especially in relation to which clothing to take and an unnecessary reiteration of individual training activities after the cardiovascular training point had been made. Less successful responses included points which were either irrelevant – ‘the world’s highest peak’ – or lacking precision in terms of advice – ‘omitting ‘watch for’ from the altitude sickness’ point or ‘good’ from the ‘sleeping bag’ point. Only a very small number of candidates wrote answers containing more than 10 points. There were some responses where candidates ran all the points made from one line to another which made it very difficult to assess and future candidates should be advised to ensure that all points are listed discretely.

Listed below are the relevant points that could have been made for this part of the question:

- people with average fitness can do this trek
- ‘slow and steady’ is the key
- prepare with regular cardiovascular training (practise climbing – hills, stairs etc./weekly 5 hour walk)
- pack lightly/aim to take between 10–15 kg in your luggage / consider the porter
- remember that at altitude the Himalaya are cold throughout the year
- so warm /protective clothing (a fleece jacket/ thermal underwear) is essential
- footwear requires lightly broken-in boots/trekking socks
- bring a raincoat / gloves / woollen / sun hat / polarised sunglasses
- and good sleeping bag / (rated to –20 C)
- watch for (signs of) altitude sickness
- bring a supply of suitable medication for treatment
- be aware that meat will not be fresh / is carried up by porters from below
- so eat freshly prepared *dal bhat* / lentil soup with rice
- use a good sunscreen / reapply regularly and keep covered.

**(b) Summary**

It is important that in answering this part of the question candidates should attempt to expand their own **3(a)** points in their own words rather than going back to the original passage and attempting to summarise its whole content. The most successful responses remained focused on relevant material from the passage and used the points listed in **3(a)** as a sound basis for concision, synthesis and own words when writing the summary. As mentioned earlier in this report, one of the main criteria for the Writing mark is how well a response is structured and it is, therefore, important that candidates bear this in mind and attempt to organise their points coherently rather than writing them in the order that they had listed them in **3(a)**. The most successful responses included a brief introduction about advice and then commented on fitness/training, clothing, diet and medicine/sun cream.

Overall, nearly all summaries were of at least Band 3 standard and demonstrated that candidates had been well prepared for this task – a statement that, in fact, can apply to the performance of candidates in this paper as a whole.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/22  
Reading Passages  
(Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read each passage purposefully, more than once
- read the questions carefully, identifying key words and instructions
- revisited relevant sections of the text to identify and consider implied meanings
- gave equal attention to all sections of each question
- spent time planning the structure and sequence of their response in **Questions 1** and **3b**
- avoided lifting whole sentences or sections from either passage
- selected the material that is appropriate for the response to the question, avoiding repetition
- checked and edited their response to amend any careless slips, incomplete or unclear ideas
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose
- used their own words carefully, appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas.

## General comments

Candidates' responses to this paper indicated familiarity with the basic demands of each task and the format of the paper, along with some awareness of the need to use, rather than simply repeat, the material from the passages to answer the questions. There were a number of responses which were over-reliant on both the wording and/or sequence of the passages, providing less-convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a result. Centres are reminded that candidates are expected to adapt and modify the material in the passages for higher band marks, and that copying from the text is to be avoided.

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible and engaging, and were generally able to finish the paper within the time allowed. Very occasionally, achievement was limited by a failure to follow the rubric and/or complete all aspects of a task – for example, by not providing 15 answers in **Question 3a** or not offering a response to part b of **Question 2** or **Question 3**. Word counts in the margin every few lines of some responses suggested a small number of candidates might have focused unwisely on quantity at the expense of quality – ending their answers when a given number of words had been reached, rather than when the task had been fully addressed. Counting exact numbers of words used is not necessary, and is unlikely to be a profitable use of time. There did not seem to be many significant misunderstandings of the content of either passage, though purposeful reading is essential to ensure that details are interpreted and used effectively in **Question 1**, and selections from the text in **Question 2** and **Question 3a** are accurate.

Most **Question 1** responses were generally focused on the question and attempted all parts of the task. Less successful responses often did not pick up on implicit ideas from the passage and offered little modification or development of the material. Candidates are expected to adapt the material in the passages, with a clear sense of purpose, for higher band marks. A mechanical use of the passage demonstrates at best a reasonable level of understanding. Copying from the text is an indicator of less secure understanding and to be avoided. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passages, some with real engagement. Responses covered a range of levels of achievement.

For **Question 2** candidates need to offer appropriate choices of words and phrases from each of the two paragraphs and make specific, detailed comments about these choices. To target higher bands, candidates needed to explore and explain in some detail the effects of those choices, demonstrating sound understanding of the writer's purpose. Though most were able to identify relevant examples, a number of candidates were not sufficiently precise in their choices. Some copied long phrases/sentences from the text,

often resulting in vague comments that did not refer to specific words, or repetitions of a similar explanation for a number of choices. Many would have benefitted from offering more precise explanations of their chosen examples, teasing out connotations and associations of the words they had identified.

In **Question 3a** many candidates were able to find a reasonable number of points. Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 3a** and most understood that they should use short notes rather than whole sentences taken from the passage. Copying chunks of the passage, or listing several possible points on one line, will not be rewarded. Each point offered needs to be precisely identified and clearly communicated. The majority of candidates did attempt to use their own words as appropriate in **Question 3b**, and some organised their ideas helpfully. Candidates are not expected to change all key words and terms in 3b and do not need to replace every word of the original. They should not though lift whole phrases and/or sentences from the passage and/or rely on simply listing ideas in the order of the passage. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and comment should all be avoided.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1 and 3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and reviewing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression. Whilst writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, candidates should be aware that unclear or limited style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to edit responses is advisable

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

**In the final paragraph of Passage A, the narrator explains that he read a magazine article about Sun Ranch, which persuaded him to apply for the job as Assistant Grazing Technician/Livestock Manager.**

**Write the magazine article that the narrator might have read.**

**In your magazine article you should:**

- **describe the attractions of Sun Ranch and its surroundings**
- **explain the activities and appeal of daily life as a worker at Sun Ranch**
- **suggest the challenges of working in that environment and the opportunities for personal development a job there might offer.**

**Base your magazine article on what you have read in Passage A, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.**

**Give your magazine article a suitable headline and begin with, ‘The Sun Ranch is located ...’.**

Most candidates understood the need to write a persuasive magazine article and attempted to use an appropriate style and suitable language, though some lapsed into a first person narrative that was very similar to the passage. The most convincing responses to **Question 1** took into careful account that the article was described in the passage as ‘hypnotic’ and devised a headline which both reflected the persuasive nature of the piece and interpreted or evaluated the appeal. The best responses demonstrated a constant drive to manipulate facts from the passage, often evidencing thorough reading through an impressive grasp of detail and consideration of implicit ideas. They maintained throughout a sense of audience and purpose.

Not all responses included a headline and some wrote an advertisement for the position which was not in the form of an article. Those who took account of the detail in the text that the advertisement itself was ‘beneath’ the article were often best able to recognise the opportunities for some subtlety in their interpretation of the material, and more convincing as a result. Those answers which restricted their response to a simple, factual advertisement missed opportunities to go further.

Few candidates had difficulties with presenting at least some of the main events and ideas in the passage as positives, though some drifted away from the evidence in the text in doing so, inventing unlikely details rather than interpreting those that were there. Some were inventive in their use of potentially unappealing detail. For example, some of the stronger responses reworked details of the log cabins to suggest an opportunity for experiencing the raw experience of ranching in 'authentic lodgings' or 'traditional accommodation', and made much of the 'natural' light. Others made a feature of eco-friendly lodgings in relation to the commitment to conservation it might show. Some emphasised the negatives as challenges and adventure – scars as badges of honour, remoteness as an opportunity to escape busier lives in the city – and developed the notion of 'living the dream' of a modern day cowboy to good effect.

Those who attempted to simply paraphrase the passage in chronological order rather than identify and then use relevant ideas and detail to address the task were less likely to produce convincing, well-crafted articles. Details in relation to the potential negatives were often not carefully reworked in the context of the piece. Where the overall sense of the text and task had been lost, own words substituted on a case by case basis for those of the original often lacked precision and diluted evidence of close reading as a result. For example, the cabin described as a 'house' lost the sense of its size and rustic nature. Where the structure of the passage was relied on heavily for the structure of the answer, the language of the response was often awkward and/or drifted into reproduction of the original. Successful responses were often those where ideas and useful details had been planned beforehand in the candidate's own words, using the bullets as reference to help identify areas of focus, and then a route through the answer decided.

Describing Sun Ranch and its surroundings offered opportunities to interpret descriptions in the text. Most responses chose to follow the order of the bullets and included fairly detailed descriptions of the area in their opening paragraphs; most made references to the sunset, to some landmarks and to the wild animals. In less good responses, details were included but their significance was not made clear by any development. For example, some references were made to the town being 30km away or the altitude of 3000m, without going on to consider implication in relation to the remoteness of the area or the range of the view. Many responses included the wild animals and the 'tall, drying bunch grasses' but did not always consider what these features told us about the area. In other instances, some weaker responses did not include many relevant or accurate details from the passage at all, making only general, if enthusiastically repeated, comments about the beauty of the area and the idyllic surroundings. Some candidates did not seem to understand the importance of selecting specific, relevant details and then developing and interpreting these to explain why they might make the area so attractive to anyone reading the article.

The best responses were able to distil the images in relation to the landscape and sunset, continuing the essence of an idea without resorting to repetition of each twist and turn in the original. Whilst a number of responses were able to express something of the magnificence of the view and nature of the light, others lifted phrases and lost the sense of the picture they were trying to create for their reader. Some responses missed opportunities to develop ideas in the first bullet by mechanically listing landscape features without comment or interpretation. Others attempted to describe the features of the area using very ambitious, and rarely precise, vocabulary. Whilst range is a positive when the vocabulary employed is appropriate, answers which relied on repeating partially-understood vocabulary or set phrases could be awkward and lack clarity.

Many mid-range answers missed opportunities to extend and develop ideas in the second bullet particularly. Most answers included riding on horseback, mending fences and ploughing as some of the activities; few mentioned the pleasures and difficulties, and fewer mentioned the actual herding of the cattle. Some included overlong descriptions of the log cabin focused without purpose on the negatives, and often using the words of the original. Several included references to conservation and referred to the use of the trigger on the rifle but did not expand on either. Several responses simply mentioned living the life of a real cowboy without capitalising on the idea.

Ideas related to the third bullet were often the most developed. Many candidates were able to display some understanding of the physical and mental hardships of working on the ranch. References were made to the loneliness of working in such a remote area, the extreme weather conditions and the injuries involved. Good responses often included a range of opportunities for personal development implied in the passage. Less good responses only referred to the points at the end of the text: 'common sense, adaptability and gumption', without taking the opportunity to suggest or explain why these might be needed. Some responses missed opportunities to demonstrate understanding at a higher level by only including quite general comments about discovering oneself, survival, hard work and toughness without linking them to ideas or details in the passage.

Forgetting that the task was assessing their own Reading skills, a number of responses drifted away from the evidence in text, particularly in the third bullet. Others invented detail at odds with the passage, for example,



beaches and wild monkeys. A few responses did not consider sufficiently carefully the purpose or form of the article and wrote a journal entry or an advertisement for an adventure holiday. Less successful responses were often those which attempted to simply replay or cut and paste, sections of the passage.

### Advice to candidates on Question 1:

- read the passage carefully and think about how to use key details
- give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- plan ideas for inclusion before you begin writing your response
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- plan a route through your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- take account of the given persona, audience and purpose for your response
- answer clearly, in your own words
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response
- extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include – do not just repeat them.

### Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) The sun setting and the light in paragraph 1, beginning, ‘When the sun dropped...’
- (b) The log cabin in paragraph 5, beginning ‘My house on Badluck Way...’

Select four powerful words or phrases from each paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase is used effectively in the context.

Responses to **Question 2** which take the form of continuous prose allow candidates to explore their choices in some detail and consider how language examples are working in context, making connections where appropriate. Using note form is not advised as this often results in the same material being repeated or ideas being only partially explained. Brief notes jotted under lists of choices used as sub-headings are unlikely to allow for full consideration of the subtleties of the language being discussed and are not a substitute for developed analysis of carefully selected examples. Analysis in both halves of the question needs to be sufficiently precise and extended to allow candidates to unpick each word within a chosen phrase and consider how exactly the language is contributing to and affecting the reader’s understanding and reactions.

Marks are given for the relevance of words and phrases purposefully selected for discussion from each paragraph, and for the overall quality of the analysis. Responses that select words and phrases with some precision and then attempt to explore and explain meanings of individual words are often better able to evidence understanding than those where the examples offered are less carefully selected and/or identified. Responses that explore the effects that the use of particular words and phrases have on the reader can score up to the highest mark of ten.

In a number of scripts, the response to **Question 2** was the least successful, though over the cohort as a whole each of the choices identified in the mark scheme were explained to good effect by at least some candidates. Within a number of answers there were often hints of ideas, not fully explained or explored, which might have been developed to provide more convincing evidence of understanding had the guidance offered in the rubric been taken into account. Some answers missed opportunities to demonstrate their understanding at higher levels by including significant numbers of extra, often less effective, choices, meaning explanations became stretched and more superficial. Typically, such responses were often only able to offer fairly simple and/or partial explanations of meanings. Identifying potentially relevant choices during planning stages, before selecting the best of those for identification and discussion in the answer, might have allowed some candidates to use their time more efficiently.

Inexact choices in part (a) blurred meaning on occasion. For example, selection of ‘heat poured across the western horizon in a torrent’ resulted in an unhelpful focus on heat in some answers, at the expense of meagre. Such imprecise choices often also meant nuance and subtlety was missed – for example, with ‘poured’ and ‘torrent’ being glossed together as typical of liquids, without consideration of how exactly in each case. Opportunities were missed in many answers to go beyond attempts at literal meaning. Some gave fairly accurate explanations of ‘winked’ and ‘quit’ and might well have gone on to explain and explore the use of image further. Better answers suggested the cheeky playfulness of the sun or that the daylight

had given up having 'had enough'. Some commented on the speed in 'fled westward', which was suggested in the text, but comparatively few went on to comment on the idea of escaping. Responses which arrived at an overview after careful exploration of their choices – for example, linking the images of the movement of liquids in 'poured', 'torrent' and 'eddy', and making references to stones bouncing over water – were often able to suggest something of the particular nature of the language in use and touch on effect. Those which offered a general comment initially, or tried to impose an overview from the start, did not always go on to examine how individual words and images might contribute to that, often restricting the range and nature of their comments in relation to choices to a repetition of their general point. A number of responses touched on the sense of artistry implied by 'hues' and the various colours listed.

The inclusion of some examples from the text with less potential for useful discussion, such as 'drafty brick fireplace', 'never intended to live in it' and 'crevices between the wall logs', limited a number of answers in part (b). Few gave accurate meanings of choices such as 'flecked' or 'slivers', and whilst many knew the meaning of 'cramped', some confused it in context by suggesting it indicated congestion – thinking in terms of there being too many objects inside the cabin, rather than recognising the sense of the cabin having been designed as too small in the first place. Not all responses addressed the significant words that were chosen. Few attempted to explain 'incandescent' or explored the use of the simile 'like candy'. Others skipped over meanings, suggesting 'gobbled' was 'like children eating candy' without saying how or why. Candidates often accurately identified some linguistic devices, but could not go on to explain how they were effective. Many recognised the suggestion of snakes and menace in 'hissed', though few went further. A number recognised the greed or enthusiasm for the foodstuff implicit in 'gobbled', with some connecting it to fairy-tales or ideas around monsters. Many candidates tried to explain the feelings evoked in the person in the cabin, suggesting he would feel miserable, often leading to generalised comments about the overall atmosphere at the expense of precise analysis of specific words and images.

**Question 2** requires a wide vocabulary, close reading, and an ability to relate to subtleties of language beyond explicit meaning. At times, candidates in mid-range answers moved on too quickly to the next example, suggesting in passing that there may be layers of meaning/alternative interpretations to consider but offering incomplete explanation. The most successful responses to **Question 2** showed precise focus at word level and there were some strong answers. These were engaged and assured in their handling of their appropriate choices. They included images, considered in context, and answered both parts of the question equally well. Many consistently identified devices, especially the use of personification, and simile, and were able to fully explain the effect. More often though answers were less successful, containing imprecise clumps of choices which meant that the explanations which followed were too general and comments not carefully attributed to any specific word/phrase. Failure to consider words within a choice separately limited some explanations. Other opportunities to evidence understanding were missed where words were misread/misquoted. 'Slivers' was sometimes listed incorrectly as 'silver', resulting in inappropriate comments.

**The following example, taken from a candidate's response in this examination session, is given as an indication of what constitutes an appropriate type of response to the question. It is not intended to be a model answer and the precision of explanations might well have been improved further had the answer focused on four choices in each half:**

**(a) The sun setting and the light in paragraph 1**

*Paragraph one creates a picture of Sun Ranch during a sunset. 'Winked out of sight' suggests that the sun is only temporarily leaving and will be back again soon. It associates the sun with playfulness. This contrasts with the 'hard, pale light' which suggests that the day was tough and contained a lot of work. The day was exhausting and the energy has faded, making way for the night. 'Meagre heat' also suggests that the day is fading and the temperature is falling. Is it no longer hot. Meagre makes the heat sound weak, almost dead and barely existing. 'Balling up in an eddy of red, orange and ochre' creates the image of a bright reddish clump in the sky which is just above the horizon line. It contains all the sunny and warm colours of the day which are just on the verge of slipping away from sight. 'Flowing across' compliments the rivers near the valley and connects the colours in the sky to the water, almost like water paint. It suggests movement. 'Fled westwards' suggests that the colours are fleeing from the coming night and trying to escape the sky above Sun Ranch.*

**(b) The log cabin in paragraph 5**

*Paragraph five creates the image of the log cabin. 'Gobbled incandescent light like candy' made me feel that the crevices between the logs are evil. Gobbled suggests they are hungry and merciless, chewing up everything and anything, 'like candy' shows that they absorb the light very quickly and greedily, the same way a child eats candy. 'Soaked up most of the glow' creates a similar image, suggesting that the crevices*

*despise the light reaching the room and instead want to keep it to themselves. It shows that the room is dull and lacks lustre. 'Glowing slivers of sunlight' suggests the small amount of light that does manage to enter the hut covers the walls with 'flecks' and lights the room up. However the word 'slivers' shows that there is still very little light which somehow manages to creep inside.' Wind hissed in ' makes me feel that the wind is evil. This personification characterises the wind as a snake, connecting it to danger and deceit. The wind is an unwanted element which sneaks into the hut and becomes a potential danger.*

For the most part, candidates were able to show that they recognised at least some potentially interesting examples of language use and could offer at least some sense of the meanings and/or effects of their selections, even if only in a generalised way at times. For marks in the top bands, candidates need to be careful to select and interpret choices accurately, considering examples in context and demonstrating that they understand some of the subtleties of how the language is working. Quality of analysis rather than feature spotting needs to be the emphasis.

### Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- take time to revisit each of the two paragraphs to first identify the potential choices, then select the strongest four from each for your answer
- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out whole sentences
- make sure your choices are complete – do not offer only one word if it is part of a descriptive phrase or image
- do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle
- to explain effects, think of how the reader's understanding is enhanced by the use of language when reading the word or phrase, because of its connotations and associations.
- when offering a phrase as a choice, discuss how each of the words within it is working
- try to explain both how and why a particular word or image might have been used
- treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them
- if you are unsure about effects, begin by offering a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- do not just label literary devices you notice, consider how each example is working in context.

### Question 3

#### (a) Notes

**According to Passage B, what attracted audiences to Wild West shows?  
Write your answer using short notes.**

**You do not need to use your own words. Write one point per line.**

**Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer.**

#### (b) Summary

**Now use your notes from Question 3a to write a summary of what attracted audiences to Wild West shows, according to Passage B.**

**You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.**

Pleasingly, the majority of candidates had understood that in a question testing their ability to 'select for specific purpose' they needed to identify just 15 points in **3a** and that further answers added on after the 15 would not be credited unless replacing a crossed-out answer earlier on. A few candidates however carried on well beyond 15 or did not complete the grid, offering fewer than 15 responses.

The need to select and identify distinct points meant that candidates had to read and plan their answers carefully both to avoid repetition and to organise their ideas sensibly. Most were able to identify a good number, with the better, sharply-focused answers typically scoring two thirds or more of the available content marks. Candidates are reminded that the question instructions ask for short notes, one per line. Long copied sections of text and/or lists of possible ideas on one line are unlikely to demonstrate the focus required to identify clearly the point to be credited.

Where points appeared more than once in the passage, they were often repeated in answers too. For example, significant repetition was evident in relation to the rodeo point, in both parts of the question, with some answers also missing the implication in the punctuation that, in the opinion of the speaker, such activities were not as 'dangerous' as they were meant to appear to the audience at the time. Similarly, repetition of points in relation to shooting and hunts limited the success of responses for some candidates and suggested a reliance on mechanical lifting rather than deliberate selection. Where a number of distinct points appeared in close proximity in the text, but were lifted as one long section, understanding of ideas was not clearly evidenced and could not be credited. Not all responses were sufficiently focused on the attractions of Wild West shows; some included the history of the events and some unhelpful biographical details. This resulted in less focused summaries in **part b**.

To address the task successfully, candidates needed to first identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question, listing them clearly – one per numbered line. Candidates are reminded that they are only credited with a maximum of one mark per line. Candidates are not required to use their own words in part a of the question, though better answers had often chosen to do so for clarity, for example where points were implied and/or exemplified more than once in the original text. Reflecting on potential answers during planning stage would have helped a number of mid-range candidates to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point, identify implied points and/or avoid repetition of ideas.

In **Question 3b**, most candidates demonstrated at least some awareness of an appropriate style for a summary, though a number were list-like and/or relied on the order of the original passage. The most successful responses re-ordered and re-grouped the relevant information from the text, connecting ideas with some skill and avoided repetition, long introductory statements and/or unnecessary biographical detail. There was clear indication that candidates producing answers at the top end had revisited points in **3a** during the planning stages of **3b** in order to edit and refine points in this part of the question. This resulted in clearer, more distinct points in **3a** and an efficient and often well-focused response in **3b**.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read the question carefully to identify the focus of the task
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify potential content points
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to establish and select 15 distinct points
- list your points – one complete idea per numbered line – using as few words as possible
- plan your response in **3b** to organise and sequence content helpfully for your reader
- write informatively
- do not add details or examples to the content of the passage
- you can choose to use your own words in **3a** and must use your own words in **3b**
- do not add further numbered points in **3a** past the 15 required
- avoid repetition of points
- when checking and editing your answers to **Question 3a**, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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**Paper 0500/32**  
**Directed Writing and**  
**Composition**

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively, developing ideas in a balanced way
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct sentences accurately and vary sentence types to create specific effects
- select appropriate and wide-ranging vocabulary and use language with precision.

## General comments

Examiners found that in the majority of scripts a sound understanding was shown of what was expected in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Most responses, regardless of achievement, were developed and there were relatively few very brief scripts. Examples of scripts where candidates attempted too many questions, showing a lack of familiarity with the examination's requirements, were very few indeed.

Most responses showed a committed engagement with the topic in **Question 1**, often with a sound grasp of the issues addressed in the passage and usually some attention paid to the style and format of a letter. The great majority of candidates approached the topic in their own language rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage, although there were a few very weak scripts where the passage was almost entirely copied. Better answers here also tended to structure their responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive argument of their own. Weaker candidates tended to reiterate the ideas in the passage, often in the same sequence rather than selecting and discussing the points made in it. Some made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response. In some cases, insufficient use was made of the detail in the reading material or there was only a tenuous grasp of the task itself, leading some to argue in favour of the new homework policy rather than against as the task required. Even in quite fluent scripts, the material in the passage was sometimes discussed in general terms at this level or there was drifting from the main focus of the passage to education in general. In weaker responses there was often some general commentary on homework but opportunities to discuss, weigh up and evaluate the ideas in the passage were missed.

Better responses paid attention to the audience and style required for a letter to a person in authority. These were persuasive in purpose and challenged some of the assumptions made in the passage. In the middle range of marks, scripts often showed some insecurity in grammar, particularly in the use of definite and indefinite articles and grammatical agreement. Valedictions were frequently forgotten in weaker responses, a feature symptomatic of an insecure grasp of audience and purpose, and at this level the points addressed were not always grouped coherently.

In the compositions, the descriptive and narrative genres were attempted in fairly equal numbers although there were more answers to the narrative question, 'The Challenge', than the alternative narrative title. Better responses in the composition section as a whole were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected and the particular ways in which the reader's interest could be engaged.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and although there was some narrative content in the middle range, most responses gave a range of descriptive detail. Some of the responses to

the first descriptive question, about finding a box of items belonging to a previous owner of a house, were highly evocative. In some cases, the objects found were described in such a way as to bring alive the characters and history of the people who had owned them. In both descriptive questions, weaker responses tended to be more straightforward accounts which listed more than described the details observed. Most responses avoided entirely narrative accounts, for the most part, but often the preamble to the main descriptive focus of the question was too long.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Weaker narrative writing was often characterised by inconclusive or unsatisfying endings, sometimes with simple storylines which were largely a series of events which showed limited awareness of the reader. Question 4, which asked for a 'pleasant and unexpected revelation', was often addressed in a straightforward way but the ending was occasionally contrived or dislocated from the rest of the narrative. Composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of characters to stimulate the reader's sympathy were features understood by effective writers in this series. Many descriptions would have been improved by the inclusion of well chosen, closely observed details which created an overall picture and engaged the reader's interest and emotions.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Section 1: Directed Writing***

**Question 1: Imagine you are the parent of an IGCSE student in the Headteacher's school. You do not agree with what he has said.**

**In your letter, you should:**

- **identify the Headteacher's views about homework**
- **evaluate how you think his proposals might affect you, your child, and other students and parents.**

**Base your letter on what you have read in the passage, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the two bullet points.**

**Begin your letter, 'Dear Headteacher...'**

**(25 marks)**

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of writing and 10 for the understanding and use of the content in the passage.

High marks were awarded where there was some challenging of the Headteacher's views or the contradictions in his arguments were exposed, as well as some discussion of the more explicit points made. Where the letter showed a high degree of accuracy and fluency, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished style, Examiners could award very high marks indeed. Better responses here tended to challenge the Headteacher's view by shedding doubt on his assumption that students were mature or experienced enough to take responsibility for their homework. While the Headteacher's arguments about homework and the impact of students' home backgrounds on their completion of homework were readily identified in most responses, Examiners awarded the highest marks where his role as an educator was probed and the inherent contradictions in his argument were highlighted and explored.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward selections of the points in the passage which referred to the new homework policy. In most cases, there was a reasonable grasp of the Headteacher's main arguments and some rebuttal of them. For example, the Headteacher's ideas about the students' freedom to choose the kind of homework to be undertaken, and deadlines to adhere to, were often considered to hold risks that students would become lazy. These responses, while accurately identifying such points as the need for parental involvement or acknowledging that students' backgrounds varied, typically showed a less subtle grasp of the inferential points in the passage.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the passage but wrote in more general terms and covered fewer points in the passage. At this level, the range of ideas was narrower and candidates often relied more on the wording of the passage. Conversely, some responses were weakened by drifting away from the main focus of the passage, which was the Headteacher's new homework policy, and towards a

general discussion of the balance of homework and schoolwork or the competing demands on students' time. These lacked a clear focus on the particular task in this question.

### Marks for reading

The best responses adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage to show a more sophisticated understanding of the ideas in it. At this level, the Headteacher's attitudes and assertions were addressed together in a consistently evaluative answer. The Headteacher's plans to mitigate the effects of the different home backgrounds of students and how these affected their learning were sometimes challenged effectively as contradictory. Some responses expressed outrage that poorer students with less time for homework should be helped and encouraged rather than 'abandoned to their fate', as one script said. The role of the Headteacher and his staff was analysed and probed, often effectively, to show that the new homework policy was a betrayal of their duty as educators because the policy would not challenge or stretch students or allow them to reach their potential. There was also some discussion of parental responsibilities and the need for parents to be able to trust teachers to guide their children, especially if there was little opportunity at home for parents to oversee their children's work. The natural inclination for many teenagers to do the least possible work was used in many arguments against the policy but some also highlighted the risk that those same 'automatons' who did nothing but work would have even more incentive to do so than before. Comparisons with the outside world, particularly the workplace, were made to show that students needed to learn that workloads were not chosen by employees and that deadlines had to be met. The inherent risks of allowing students to navigate their own way through a set curriculum were discussed by many at the highest level. Whatever their ability or the time available at home for homework, all students had to cover the same curriculum for the examinations and it was the responsibility of the teacher, not the student, to chart their progress. The teachers' workload, mentioned in the passage as potentially greater as a result of the new policy, was examined evaluatively at this level to show that there would be less, not more, class cohesion in terms of progress. Some sympathy was shown for hard-pressed teachers who would have to set more homework with varying deadlines although some responses carefully suggested that this increased workload would impact detrimentally on students' progress.

Where the claims made by the Headteacher were discussed critically and the contradictions in the passage were highlighted, a mark in Band 1 was awarded. Where some of these evaluative points were made but were not wide-ranging or the evaluation was sporadic in a response which mostly reproduced ideas from the passage, marks were a little lower.

Marks in Band 2 were given where the ideas were evaluated to some degree. A mark of 7 was awarded for many responses where some thoughtful inferences were made from the passage. At this level, responses tended to include some discussion of teenagers' attitudes to homework and how the new policy allowed them to do the minimum of work and would inculcate lazy or complacent habits in them. In other responses, some evaluative ideas were given about the role of busy parents in supervising children's homework or the need for students to work hard to meet their potential in a competitive world. These inferred ideas, even where other, more surface points were reproduced, were often enough for Examiners to award a mark of 7, but a more sustained probing of the attitudes in the passage was needed for a higher mark.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 3 where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above. Responses at this level showed a sensible understanding of the new homework policy and its main tenets, such as the benefits of making students more responsible for their learning and academic progress or the lack of time and support in some students' home backgrounds. Responses tended to list aspects of the new policy, often expressing some fairly simple or assertive rebuttals, such as 'homework is important and all students should have to do it', or 'teachers are paid to make sure students pass the exams'. Examiners noted that responses were often structured so that there was some focus on summarising or reproducing the Headteacher's arguments, with only a shorter closing section where some disagreement with the new policy was expressed. Where there was enough range and discussion, Examiners could award a mark of 6. Responses with more limited selection could be given 5 marks if there was sufficient understanding of what the new homework policy aimed to do. Some responses were given 5 where there was some understanding of the homework policy shown but there was also some drifting from the task. In these cases, responses lost focus on the policy and became discussions about the balance between schoolwork and homework or the principle of homework itself rather than the specific proposals. Here, and in some weaker responses too, alternative suggestions were offered which did not really address the new policy, such as the idea that all work should be done in school to ensure that students had the help of their teachers.

Weaker responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passage or task, or addressed the material thinly. Some at this level did not really understand the main ideas in the new homework policy or

focused on more tangential aspects such as the punishments to be given for non-completion of homework. Another approach which sometimes limited the mark for reading was where homework in general was discussed with only occasional links with the passage. There were some responses which argued in favour of the new homework policy and therefore had very limited opportunities for evaluation. Where a mark of 4 was awarded, some firmer links with the passage and a wider range of points were needed, whereas 3 was generally given for very thin or brief responses. Marks below 3 were rarely given and usually applied when the task was not understood, the passage largely copied or only a few lines were written.

### **Marks for writing**

15 marks were available for style and a sense of audience, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

### **Style and audience**

A formal tone was required for a letter to the Headteacher and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. The best responses were often quite subtle in the tone of the writing, always respectful and challenging the recipient by careful explanation rather than direct confrontation.

In the middle to lower mark range, the style was often appropriate although there were sometimes lapses in candidates' awareness of the intended audience and although most started in an appropriate way valedictions were frequently forgotten. A clear sense of purpose and audience was needed for marks in Band 3, even though some of these responses relied on reproduction of points in the passage. Most at this level adopted the voice of a concerned parent although not consistently. Some given marks lower than Band 3 showed less awareness of the intended audience and made straightforward statements rather than addressing the Headteacher specifically.

### **Structure**

Some accomplished responses, awarded high marks for writing, handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. At the highest level, the bullet points were addressed in an integrated way, showing an assimilation of passage within a skilful evaluation of it. At the highest level, an overview of the issues underlying the passage, such as the role of teachers, parents and students in ensuring that young people are well educated and have responsible attitudes, was evident, rather than an outline of what the Headteacher said in the speech.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the article in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended formally with a concluding paragraph and a suitable valediction. Many at this level were straightforwardly but clearly organised with an introduction which often expressed respect and gratitude towards the Headteacher and a clear statement disagreeing with the new policy. At the lower end of Band 3, responses sometimes structured their responses too closely to the sequence of the passage, resulting in some lack of cohesion and purpose overall. Some reproduced the points made by the Headteacher without rebutting them until the final paragraph which made for an unbalanced structure for the letter.

Some weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were less coherent in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the passage, often using some of the language in it, with a rather peremptory rebuttal at the end.

### **Accuracy**

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 1. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. Precision in the control of a subtle and ambitious vocabulary resulted in some very high marks in this component. In some otherwise quite accurate responses, lapses in the selection of appropriate vocabulary or sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary precluded Examiners from awarding marks in Band 1.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. The style was usually appropriate and the level of formal language was sustained, but at this level a range of fairly straightforward words was misspelled and there were errors in punctuation, though rarely very serious ones. The spelling of words included in the passage was sometimes faulty such as 'academic' or 'curriculum' and apostrophes were often omitted or misused.



Sentence demarcation by commas rather than full stops began to creep in at the lower end of Band 3 and there were mis-selected homophones. Expression and grammar errors also sometimes reduced the mark available for writing here. Agreement between pronouns and verbs sometimes became insecure or tenses varied. Some responses were affected quite badly by these errors which, although not necessarily damaging to the style, were too frequent to allow for marks in Band 2.

While some of these more minor errors could be compensated for by a secure sense of audience, or a varied vocabulary, faulty sentence structures, or frequent lapses in grammar, often kept writing marks for **Question 1** in Band 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation, spelling and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award in Band 3. Key words in the passage, such as 'homework' and 'deadlines' were often mis-spelled, for example. Similarly, a simplicity of expression and language, limited in range and complexity, sometimes resulted in a rather immature style which could not be given marks in Band 3. Sentences and paragraphs began with 'Well' in some responses and indefinite and definite articles were omitted or there was mis-agreement within sentences.

#### **Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:**

- consider the writer's ideas and the attitudes underlying them
- make sure you understand the task and which point of view you should adopt
- check you understand whose voice you should adopt and who the intended audience is
- look for, and use in your response, inferences made indirectly by the writer
- aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them
- think carefully about the kind of style which is expected for the task
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors such as sentence demarcation and for the spelling of key words which appear in the passage.

#### **Section 2: Composition**

##### **Descriptive Writing**

**Question 2: Imagine you have recently moved house. In the attic you find a box containing some objects which belonged to the previous owners. Describe some of the objects you discover and your thoughts and feelings when you find them. (25 marks)**

OR

**Question 3: Describe a town or village after a heavy rainstorm. (25 marks)**

##### **Content and Structure**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range. The best responses to **Question 2** were sustained, with a strong focus on describing the items but linking them to the previous owners in engaging and often emotionally charged ways. In **Question 3**, Examiners noted some very graphic and interesting descriptions across the mark range and responses were often enhanced by poignant details of the destruction wreaked by storms. There were some unusual and often moving depictions of monsoon rains which were at first welcome but which became frightening and descriptive. Responses which described the destructive aftermath of a storm, as suggested by the question, were generally more successful than those which focused on the storm itself.

Responses to the first question were wide-ranging in content, approach and in the marks they were given. The best were strongly evocative descriptions which were focused and effective. At this level, the objects described were chosen to give cohesion and a sense of emerging revelation to the response. The objects found in the box, and sometimes the box itself, were described in considerable detail but there were often cohesive devices used and which gave responses shape and interest. In quite a few, across the mark range, diaries or photographs were among the objects found. In better responses, glimmers of insight into the previous owners were given by each object, building up the narrator's, and the reader's, interest and engagement. The narrator's own reactions to the discovery helped to lend atmosphere and emotion to what could otherwise have been a list of disparate objects.

Weaker responses were rather prone to narrative and some focused more attention on the new house or the attic than on the objects discovered. In quite a few, the response ended with a brief list of the contents of the

box after a long section on other less relevant and interesting ideas. There was also a tendency for the objects to be a little crudely manipulated to tell a story. Diaries, for example, often simply recounted some gruesome tale of murder and photographs of children as they grew up were used as simple devices for narration. Most, however, had some descriptive details and some overall cohesion, even where the response was narratively framed, which Examiners could reward with marks high in Band 2 or just into Band 3. The weakest responses to this question were usually simple narratives with little description and which lacked cohesion, consisting of a list of rather unlikely events.

In the second question, there were some highly original and thought-provoking responses which Examiners rewarded with very high marks for Content and Structure. The storm was often effectively personified as a monster or furious dragon which devoured all in its path and the different senses were used to evoke with immediacy the scene after the storm. Images were effective and original: in one response, for example, the denuded trees were described as 'shadows of witches' fingers in grotesque positions. It was also surprising how frequently the smell of wet mud was mentioned or the sound of raging rivers. A wide range of small and sometimes poignant details of objects swept away by the rain was also noted by Examiners, such as the crops washed away by rains which left villagers destitute or a child's shoe clutched by a grieving mother, as in one effective piece. Occasionally, the rainstorm was seen as a joyful event, bringing much needed fertility to parched land. In the best responses, the reader became fully engaged by the plight of the inhabitants of the flooded town or village as a result of some well chosen detail and a highly evocative and clear overall picture was created. One excellent response began with a striking image: 'The brutal relentless pummeling of the thundering raindrops slowly eased ... calming itself to a harmless patter peppering the asphalt', and continued in a sustained and detailed description which was moving and engaging.

Responses given marks in the middle range were more straightforward in their approach, often rather narrative in focus but with enough descriptive detail to address the task. The quality and effectiveness of the writing varied but the structure of many average pieces relied on the narrator making a journey through the stricken town, listing some detail without quite evoking the atmosphere. While the content was relevant, responses tended to be more factual accounts than descriptions and there were weaknesses in cohesion and structure where observations were listed rather haphazardly and eventually stopped when the material ran out.

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus or more general than specific. The aftermath of heavy rain became part of a story rather than the main focus of the response and the town or village was described in general terms with fewer distinct details for the reader to engage with.

The highest marks for Style and Accuracy were awarded where a precise and varied vocabulary and secure, varied sentence structures were used. Images, words and phrases, as well as varied sentence lengths, were employed to create specific effects in the best responses in order to capture and sustain the reader's interest. Middle range responses were generally secure in style with some lapses in expression or imprecise vocabulary. Sometimes, an over-ambitious style in which the meanings of words used were not always well understood spoiled responses which were relevant and interesting in content. In weaker responses, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences, and incomplete or verbless sentences were common. Grammar errors, usually in agreement, were also common at this level.

#### **Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:**

- try to include a more individual and original selection of descriptive details
- remember the key features of descriptive writing and keep the timespan of your writing short
- think about the kind of atmosphere you want to evoke in your description
- choose your vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects.

#### ***Narrative Writing***

**Question 4: Write a story which includes a pleasant and unexpected revelation about a friend or relative. (25 marks)**

**OR**

**Question 5: Write a story entitled, 'The Challenge'. (25 marks)**

Both narrative questions proved popular and a wide range of interpretations of the titles was evident. Question 5 was the most popular composition question. In the first question, better responses were carefully

structured to make the revelation a vital and integrated element of the story as a whole. The best were those which had a ring of authenticity about them. Successful stories were written about unexpected marriage proposals from best friends, returned parents, unexpected discoveries of lost siblings. There were some ambitious narratives which involved events over very long periods resulting in a final revelation and where these were well-managed and controlled Examiners could award high marks for Content and Structure. Other successful responses worked well because the content was more manageable or dealt with subjects closer to home, such as secrets shared between friends and siblings. Characteristics of higher band responses were the creation of credible and well-drawn characters and the management of a suitable revelation which was prepared for but not completely predictable.

Middle range stories offered many different versions of the revelation but the stories were more straightforward accounts or the revelation itself was predictable or, conversely, was inadequately prepared for. One feature noticed by Examiners was the lack of satisfactory endings after reasonably effective beginnings and narratives in which the revelation seemed forced. This weakness often kept marks in Band 3 for Content and Structure where there were some features of Band 2 at the start, such as the creation of credible characters and settings. Some stories were also too reliant on speech in places and lacked a controlling, cohesive narrative voice.

Weaker responses tended to be series of events rather than shaped narratives or, in some cases, the storyline was very simple and the characters lacked development. Even where the plot itself was credible and had some shape and sense of purpose, a mark of 6 was often given where there was insufficient preparation and characterisation was weak. These narratives showed less awareness of the needs of the reader and tended to give limited or factual details about character and events.

The second narrative question was very popular and elicited a very wide range of interpretations of the title. Some very effective responses addressed the idea of 'challenge' in quite subtle ways, such as rising to a spiritual challenge or the challenge to become a different kind of person. Other narratives were based on more physical interpretations such as a challenge to do well in an examination after many setbacks or to climb a mountain. In some, a task which had to be performed within a time limit helped to give shape and pace to the narratives. In one, for example, the narrator had to overcome grief and shock quickly enough to donate the dead relative's organs and save another life. In the middle range, stories tended to be cohesive overall but were more straightforward in their interpretation of the 'challenge' and there was often some rather clichéd content. Quite a few responses recounted a 'truth or dare' game which resulted in the narrator having to stay in a haunted house overnight and while some stories were quite successfully told, others relied too much on stereotypical and clichéd content. One resorted to simply telling the reader to 'imagine a horror movie' rather than developing a credible setting and plotline. Where there was some credibility in the characterisation and setting and the story had some engaging features, Examiners were able to award 7 or 8 for Content and Structure.

Weaker narrative responses to this title tended to be less well developed and cohesive. There were quite a few where the premise was a challenge to climb Everest or which involved war scenarios which lacked some credibility and perhaps suffered from being too far from real experience to be convincingly told. Characters were often not really described except cursorily and there was over-reliance on dialogue to tell the story.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was lively and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The highest marks were given where the style used was both polished and striking and where there was a conscious control of language in varied way to engage and intrigue the reader.

Errors in grammar and lapses in expression, as well as inadequate control of sentence structures, if persistent, limited some otherwise quite competent recounts to Band 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation. In many lower level scripts, the punctuation of direct speech was insecure, even when the story itself was quite well-structured. Speech marks were sometimes not used at all and the omission of new paragraphs for new speakers made for rather confusing dialogue at times. Basic punctuation errors with misused or omitted capital letters, the spelling of simple words, mis-agreement between verbs and pronouns and wrongly selected homophones affected the mark for Style and Accuracy at this level. A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 3 and even where candidates wrote in a plain style but punctuated sentences accurately, Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 3. A few responses were very brief and grammatically weak in style. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:**

- plan how to resolve your story in an interesting way before you start writing
- make sure that the characters and setting are credible and developed
- remember it takes more than events to keep your reader interested
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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**Paper 0500/04**  
**Coursework Portfolio**

## Key messages

In this component, candidates should aim to:

- reflect in their writing their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them;
- choose assignments that challenge them to write at the highest standard of which they are capable;
- write independently of undue guidance from published materials or from teachers;
- demonstrate variety of style, use of language and genre in the three assignments;
- write in fluent and varied sentences separated by full stops and clarified by the appropriate use of commas and other punctuation;
- revise, edit and correct first drafts in their own handwriting;
- proofread their work carefully.

## General comments

A small number of 126 candidates from six Centres entered for this component. They chose a wide selection of topics for all three assignments and for the most part, these reflected individual interests and concerns. While some of the work for Assignment 1 was derived from reference to websites, there was no evidence of copying. There were some problems associated with the choice of texts and the nature of responses to Assignment 3. These are described below.

The marking was generally accurate and, except for rare individual cases, the rank order of candidates was sound. There was some slight leniency in both reading and writing, but also, in two Centres, some severity in the marking of writing.

The paperwork was accurate apart from three minor exceptions, and there was only one infringement of syllabus requirements. There was evidence of satisfactory internal moderation.

This coursework was generally of a high standard and clearly met the educational needs of all candidates.

## **Approach to coursework: suitability of tasks and reading test**

Most of the tasks chosen for Assignment 1 were appropriate to the abilities and interests of the candidates. Some of these tasks are listed later in the report. The exceptions were: (1) where the tasks were unduly academic, so that the writing appeared subject-specific rather than an account of candidates' own views and experience; (2) where candidates wrote about information technology and social media and rehearsed lists of advantages and disadvantages which lacked originality and individual thought.

The topics and titles for Assignment 2 were well chosen and were often based on interesting personal experience.

There was a problem with several texts chosen for Assignment 3 because they did not contain ideas and opinions which candidates could evaluate and develop. Some texts were informative and only lent themselves to summaries.

## **Compliance with syllabus requirements**

Two candidates wrote informative pieces in the guise of letters for Assignment 2. These should have been submitted as Assignment 1 as there was no evidence of expressive writing in the two folders. There were no other infringements.

## Drafting

Early drafts were submitted as required, but there was very little evidence of changes being made between the draft and the final version of the assignment. Teachers are asked to comment at the ends of drafts and offer general advice so that candidates can make improvements by editing (for example changing vocabulary and deleting unnecessary words), revising (for example rewriting sections that are not effective) and correcting. Teachers are not allowed to indicate specific corrections in the text. This infringement was noticed by the Moderator on two occasions, but the practice was not widespread. The Moderator expected to see clear differences between the drafts and the final versions as part of the educational process.

## Annotation of coursework

Final versions carried some teacher comments, although these did not always make clear the balance between strengths and weaknesses. There was no annotation of errors in the final versions. Since accuracy is an important part of the assessment of the work, it is important that these errors should be noted, and are factored into deciding the final mark for a folder.

## Administration: documentation

All documentation was complete and clear to the Moderator. There were only three errors. In one case two candidates' marks appeared differently on the folder/Candidate Assessment Summary Form and the mark sheet submitted to Cambridge. This was resolved with the Centre. In another case there was an extra candidate on the CASF, whose folder was sent to the Moderator but who did not appear on the mark sheet.

## Internal Moderation

There was evidence of internal moderation on the CASF. This helped to confirm the rank order.

## Application of Assessment Criteria

It appeared that all Centres understood the need to balance content, structure, style (including register) and accuracy equally. Where there was under/over balancing of one of the criteria, this led to a slight leniency or severity in the marks for writing. However, the discrepancy was generally on average only one or, more rarely, two marks.

**Content** was well assessed, although some of the narratives for Assignment 2 were slightly ordinary in the events they included.

**Structure** was also well assessed except where Assignment 1 was presented as a list of under-developed arguments.

**Style** was less well assessed on account of the simplicity of some sentence structures, occasionally where the range of vocabulary was comparatively narrow, and where candidates attempted to use too ambitious vocabulary, or where the phraseology was awkward. However, much of the work was clear and fluent.

Work was often **accurate**, but some candidates made large numbers of errors including those of sentence separation, and this shortcoming was not always properly applied to the final mark. Candidates marked at 34 and above are generally not expected to make many errors at all.

## The marking of reading

This was frequently, but not always, lenient. Centres should remember that this is a test of reading and that marks are given for an accurate understanding of a text as a whole, the writer's attitude, and individual ideas and opinions that the candidates select from the text. Where the text is chiefly informative it is not possible to carry out these reading requirements.

Some candidates wrote summaries of their texts and were not eligible for a mark of more than six. Others responded to a media text and wrote about headlines, graphics and features such as alliteration and rhetorical questions. Writing about style is not relevant to this test of reading, which is about the evaluation of ideas.

## Comments on specific questions

### Assignment 1

Most of the responses to this assignment suggested the candidates' personal views and thinking. The use of content from the Internet was effective where it contributed to personal thinking, not where it replaced it. However, the wide choice of topics suggested to the Moderator that some individual thinking was included in the work. Topics included:

*The experience of surviving a disaster (written factually and not as a narrative)*

*Selfies*

*Ghosts*

*A letter about the facilities in a hostel*

*The journey of an Indian girl*

*Landscape photography*

*Gay rights*

### Assignment 2

Many of these accounts were apparently from personal experience, and some of them were engagingly written. Whether real or fictitious, it was necessary to choose interesting and, if possible, unusual detail. Some of the stories were quite plain in content and, where the language was simple, not very effective. Only one story read by the Moderator was unrealistic, and this was an unwise story of a dream with details that were so out of the ordinary as to become laughable. The accounts from own experience were much more mature.

Several stories included unexpected turns of event, particularly at the end. One even had two such surprises for the reader. Register was usually good with some engaging narrative style. Only one story was over balanced by its excessive use of dialogue.

Titles included:

*Riding a bicycle*

*My first crush*

*My first drive*

*A parent-teacher meeting*

*The outsider*

*The lost boy*

*Why? I am just a girl*

*Tonight, when I almost didn't reach home*

### Assignment 3

Some texts were appropriate for use. *After the waters recede* was an article about the floods in Chennai, was quite philosophical and not particularly easy. However, some candidates were able to understand the arguments of the text and to develop and to comment on them satisfactorily. Another task in which a director answered a critique of a controversial documentary film was also successful, and one candidate was able to achieve a mark in Band 1 for the response. *Dumb city and smart people* (about Mumbai) was a third example of an article that had enough controversial ideas to evoke a satisfactory response. A final example of a good choice was an article about inflated examination grades, which had plenty of ideas to discuss. It was unfortunate that the candidate who chose this article only presented a summary.

News articles such as *Vege prices drop* and *Train hits buffers* had only information, and candidates were unable to achieve the standard expected in the mark scheme for Band 2. The article *Beef ban* was too short and lacked ideas. A survey concerning *TV and young adults* gave only the results and relevant data without suggesting conclusions with which candidates could argue. The comparison of two advertisements relied too much on describing the graphics, so again the mark was low.

Most of the poems were satisfactory choices because the candidates in the one Centre that set them responded to the ideas and content rather than the choice of words and images which would not have been relevant to their answers.

In summary, to gain high marks for reading, candidates should avoid writing summaries and analysing literary effects. They should confine themselves to writing about the ideas in the text and not write parallel texts of their own that do not refer closely to the original.

### **Final comments**

The Moderator appreciated the variety of choice of topics in these folders and the effort that had gone into the work. If the advice in this report were applied, then it would be possible to award even higher marks. The six Centres are thanked for their submissions.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/05  
Speaking and  
Listening

## Key messages

The main messages:

- **A broader range of approaches in Part 1:** Generally, candidates should try to make their **Part 1** presentations more lively, by perhaps incorporating more creative presentational styles, but certainly by relying less on reciting factual information. There is scope for further creativity in **Part 1** – e.g. taking up a ‘voice’ or presenting a dramatic monologue. Presenting empathic work using literary texts often leads to quality work.
- **Preparing for Part 1:** It is permissible for teachers to work with their students (once the student has decided upon a topic) to advise upon the approach taken for the delivery. Differentiation by task setting is encouraged for this component. A more capable student is likely to attempt a more ambitious presentation and to engage with more sophisticated content – and such a student should be encouraged to do this. Moderators recommend more teaching of general speaking and listening skills in the context of a topic-based presentation and a subsequent, follow-up discussion. Over-rehearsal with students is not encouraged, but broad-based coverage of useful methodologies is encouraged.
- **Preparing for Part 2:** In **Part 2**, Moderators would like to hear stronger evidence that candidates are aware of their expected role in the discussion. The candidate's role should not be that of a passive interviewee, but should be one which is more proactive and seeks to engage with the listener in a collaborative manner.
- **Timings:** Please try to ensure that **Part 1** stays within the suggested 3 to 4 minutes, and **Part 2** between 6 and 7 minutes – as specified in the syllabus. It is difficult to justify the awarding of high marks to **Part 1**s which are short (less than 3 minutes) and it is counter-productive to allow **Part 2** to run over 7 minutes. The timings for the two parts of the test are distinct – i.e. short **Part 1**s cannot be compensated for with longer **Part 2**s (or vice versa).
- **Warm ups and other opening questions:** Some centres are reminded that it is not necessary to conduct or record an introduction for this examination. Students should begin speaking by delivering their **Part 1** oral presentation. Indeed, at no point during the whole test should there be discussion of general matters.

Messages relating to assessment:

- In **Part 1**, Moderators advise Examiners to be sure that a candidate has met the criteria for Band 1 fully before awarding 9 or 10 marks. If an individual presentation is of the standard, factually-based, reportage style, even if well done, then a low Band 2 mark is likely to be the highest available, and a Band 3 mark perhaps more appropriate.
- Over long **Part 1**s do not satisfy Band 1 requirements, as they lack the required control, structure and poignancy. An over-long **Part 1** is one that runs for beyond 5 minutes.
- More mundane and pedestrian presentations should be placed in Band 3.
- Examiners are reminded not to award marks for content per se – it is the *development* of the content which is being assessed; in both Parts 1 and 2 of the test. For example, "How I spend my free time..." could achieve a Band 1, or indeed, a Band 5, depending on how the content has been planned, is introduced, is organised, and then presented and developed.

A message relating to preparation by the teachers/examiners

- It would be a good idea for examiners to obtain a list of the topics that candidates are planning to talk about in advance of the examination, perhaps the day before. This would allow the examiner to 'think ahead' and consider areas which might be productive in **Part 2**. However, these must not be shared with the candidates prior to the examination. The aim in **Part 2** is for both parties to be involved in an

organic discussion – if scripted or practised material is found to be present in this part of the examination, this is likely to result in maladministration of the test.

### **General comments**

The more interesting and successful individual tasks were from candidates who spoke from brief notes rather than scripts, and about a topic they felt passionately about and which they had researched thoroughly. Some successful tasks included some kind of visual presentation to the Examiner, such as sharing a presentation program slide or some photographs. Other interesting presentations were done in the form of a 'muse' or monologue – sometimes in the form of a conversation with an invisible character.

The most successful standard presentations were given by candidates fired by a passion who also utilised a variety of devices to maintain their listener's interest. In all the best examples there was a real sense of engagement with the topic. Where candidates chose well, prepared thoroughly and were fully committed to the task the results were usually good.

#### *Materials required by the Moderator*

As a reminder to Centres, Cambridge requires three different items in the package sent to the Moderator: **1** the recordings **for all candidates** on as few CDs/DVDs as possible (or preferably, on a single USB drive) and using separate re-named tracks for each candidate; **2** the Summary Forms for the entire entry; and **3** a copy of the Mark Sheet that has already been sent to Cambridge confirming the final marks. In addition, any letters relating to the work undertaken by the students or regarding issues experienced by the Centre should also be placed in the package for the attention of the external Moderator.

- 1) Please note that without the full set of recordings, Cambridge is unable to moderate the work from a Centre and this could affect the results issued to candidates.
- 2) The Summary Form is the form that records the separate marks awarded to the two parts of the test, in addition to the total mark. The Examiner who conducts the examination is responsible for filling out the summary form. They should sign the form and date it as this is the working record of the examining undertaken, and is therefore of most use to the external Moderator. Please list the candidates on this form in candidate order.
- 3) The Moderator needs a copy of the mark sheet in order to verify the accuracy of the transcription of the marks from the summary forms.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Part 1 – The Individual Task***

Where the chosen topic relates directly to the candidate's personal situation or their country or location, there is usually scope for more engaging content. Personal experiences and interests are a common focus and these kinds of presentations vary in their degree of success, with less successful tasks simply describing likes, dislikes and experiences without further exploration, depth or insight.

Candidates sometimes attempt to use techniques such as addressing the listener and using rhetorical devices, but care needs to be taken so that these approaches are effective and not just a gesture.

Centres and candidates are of course free to focus on topics which lend themselves to standard presentations. If so, Moderators encourage topics *with a specific focus* rather than a general theme.

Some examples of productive **Part 1** tasks from this session:

- the many aspects of talent
- safety in the modern world
- greed
- happiness
- the current obsession with gadgets
- can we be tolerant with intolerance?

- planning for a long future
- the internet – a double edged sword
- the power of the tongue
- e-books versus traditional books

### **Part 2 – Discussions**

Moderators are happy that in many cases, Examiners were very much part of the discussions, entering into the spirit of the occasion, and that the conversations were generally productive extensions of the individual tasks. This is clearly a strength of this examination.

It was clear in some cases that candidates had planned for further discussion. The best way to do this is to imagine being the Examiner and to draw up a list of probable questions, or areas of interest that might be appropriate for further discussion given the scope of the topic.

However, where this had not occurred, Moderators felt the discussions were lacking. It is not the sole responsibility of the Examiner to work hard to sustain discussion – the candidate needs to plan for this and this element of **Part 2** has indeed been built into the assessment criteria for both listening and speaking. It is, however, the responsibility of the Examiner to move the discussion along and to ensure that a six to seven minute conversation occurs. Ideally, this would be a scaffolded discussion, and more challenging ideas and content would be introduced as the discussion develops.

The most effective examiners clearly took notes as the candidates completed their presentations, and then based the discussions very closely on what the candidates had actually spoken about. This usually led to conversations which arose naturally from the individual task. More work is needed, however, for candidates to take a greater part in developing the discussions. In some cases, there seemed to be an understanding that the candidate would deliver his or her talk and then wait to be formally questioned by the Examiner. This clearly led to a more stilted and less effective discussion. In the stronger **Part 2** performances the candidates were encouraged to take control of the discussion and there was a genuine feeling that it was a two-way conversation based on an equal footing between the candidate and the Examiner.

Examiners should therefore avoid adopting a very formal 'interview' approach in **Part 2**. The aim is to be supportive of the candidate; to share an interest in his/her topic, and to share views, ideas and to work with the candidate to develop the conversation. It is important that the spontaneity of discussion is maintained.

In general, candidates and examiners stayed on task, though there were a few instances of examiners using the allotted time to involve candidates in discussions about broader issues – for example, their future plans – when this was not part of the candidate's talk. Such transgressions are likely to result in lower marks as the assessment criteria assume that content in **Part 2** relates directly to content in **Part 1**.

### **Concluding Comments**

There were many cases where Moderators reported refreshing and lively work, where it was clear that the students had enjoyed taking control of their own learning and had responded well to being allowed to be active in the skills of research, oral presentation and subsequent discussion.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/06  
Speaking and Listening  
(Coursework)

## Key messages

- Component 6 is flexible as three separate tasks are required that can be assessed at any time during the course. This flexibility allows a broad range of topics and skills to be assessed but requires centres to fully embrace the concept that the Speaking and Listening tasks are an integral part of the overall course.
- Centres are recommended to use both the current syllabus and *Speaking and Listening Handbook* to guide them through the course. All the relevant information is contained within these documents.
- Please be aware that **four different items** need to be included in the sample package sent to the Moderator. These are: a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive; the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered; a **copy of the marks** (the MS1) already sent to Cambridge and the **Individual Candidate Record Cards** for the candidates included in the sample. Centres are urged to ensure all four of these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process.
- The **Individual Candidate Record Cards** should include specific information about the choices made for each task and not just generic statements.
- Please **check the quality** of the recordings before despatching to Cambridge and ensure that the CD, DVD or USB is securely packaged to avoid damage in transit. A jiffy bag is recommended.
- We encourage the use of digital recording equipment to generate **audio** files which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a **recognised common audio file format** that can be played by standard computer software.
- For paired activities it is essential that the Moderator is **able to distinguish between the candidates in the activity** so that successful moderation can take place. The simplest way of achieving this is for the candidates to introduce themselves and their roles in the activity at the beginning of the recording.
- Any candidate who is absent should be recorded as such on the relevant documentation and only those who attempted the activity but who failed to contribute should be given a mark of 0.
- There is no specified time duration for Component 06 tasks but for both candidates in the Paired-Task activity to meet higher level criteria such as 'responds fully', 'develops prompts' or 'employs a wide range of language devices' the performance should last at least four minutes. Given that both speaking and listening are assessed, it is important that the activities contain enough depth for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. Planned, rehearsed and developed performances will normally justify higher marks in the same way written examination practise encourages more successful outcomes, as long as they are not scripted.

## General comments

- Through the syllabus, Cambridge provides specific forms for use with Component 6; namely the **Individual Candidate Record** and the **Summary Form** that are available online.
- For Component 6, centres are encouraged to be creative in the choice of tasks as long as the assessment criteria are used as a guide to the skills being assessed.

## Comments on specific tasks

Well planned and prepared responses to tasks are generally more successful but Tasks 1 and 2 should have an element of spontaneity. Over-scripted and seemingly 'artificial' performances do not benefit the candidates, particularly for those aspiring to the higher band criteria. It is very difficult to achieve band 1 if the performance is heavily scripted.

## Task 1

Generally these took the form of an individual presentation. This is a perfectly sound response but this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when topics are chosen. The candidate and teacher should work together to choose suitable topics.

*Some examples of productive **Task 1** activities include:*

- A special holiday
- A personal experience that is relevant, thought-provoking and developed beyond narrative
- A productive and beneficial work experience placement
- The role of women in society
- A review of a film, book, concert or sporting event where the candidate is thoroughly engaged and able to develop the presentation beyond a literal re-telling of the events.

## Task 2

There should be only two participants in Task 2. Where there is an extra candidate, a teacher or a pupil who has been assessed may make up the pair. In effect, any Task 2 activity comprising of more than two candidates becomes a Task 3 Group Activity.

The Pair-Based Activity is more successful when **two candidates of similar ability** work as a pair. With regard to role-plays, it should be borne in mind that this is an assessment of language skills rather than drama skills so the language requirements should always drive the assessment criteria.

Responses to Task 2 that are teacher-led, either with a teacher interviewing a candidate or with two candidates being led by a teacher, are less successful than a developed discussion between two candidates. It is recommended that this approach is only considered where it is deemed the candidates are too weak to initiate the discussion without external assistance.

A popular Task 2 vehicle is the 'interview' where one candidate acts as the interviewer and the other is the interviewee. This can work well but there is an inherent weakness in the activity if the interviewer does little more than ask a set of pre-prepared questions. This restricts the level of performance, particularly for the Listening element. One way to counteract this problem is for candidates to swap roles halfway through so each has the opportunity to demonstrate a wider range of relevant skills.

*Some examples of productive **Task 2** activities include:*

- Are modern teenagers too pressurised?
- A topical news item
- Inequality
- Planning a prom or formal social occasion
- Role play situations that are developed beyond superficial arguments
- X-box versus Playstation
- A moral dilemma such as what to do with a wallet that has been found
- What motivates teenagers?

## Task 3

Task 3 may take various forms but it is most important that each candidate in the group is allowed sufficient scope within the activity to demonstrate their strengths without being dominated by others. A group made up of candidates of similar ability levels is often more successful. The role of a group leader should be considered as a more successful outcome usually results from having one of the candidates directing the focus of the discussion.

*Some examples of productive **Task 3** activities include:*

- Characters participating in a radio debate
- Performing an extra scene from a play that has been written by the candidates
- Any discussion of a topical issue with each candidate having their own viewpoint
- What to include in a time capsule/ school newspaper, etc.

- Championing a character from a film or book where each candidate chooses their favourite
- A balloon debate

### **General conclusions**

It is gratifying to report that the general level of assessment by centres is in line with the expected standard.

All the documentation asked for in samples is used to check and cross-check as part of the rigour that underpins the moderation process. In the end this is of benefit to centres and their candidates. It is important to remember that every centre is moderated in every session and that this process is conducted rigorously to protect the reputation of the component and to maintain the standard so that centres may have continued confidence in the product they have chosen.