

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11

Writing

## Key Messages:

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about its particular focus.
- In **Section 1** tasks it is important to develop the bullet points as evenly as possible.
- Register and tone are important aspects of Directed Writing and need consideration.
- Candidates should pay particular attention to commonly confused words, for example, they/there, this/these.
- Candidates could usefully focus on correct use of possessive pronouns.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.
- Candidates should ensure that they develop their writing in both sections, taking careful note of the suggested word lengths.

## General Comments:

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most candidates but some underestimated the demands of the task in terms of adopting an appropriate written style for a school magazine. There was a more even spread of responses in **Section 2** with many candidates choosing the discursive or descriptive options. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements which demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing. Few prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. There were very few instances of prepared essays which either were not wholly relevant to the set questions or which could not include a prescribed sentence in a natural way. Candidates are advised that the inclusion of text messaging language, abbreviations and expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' can sometimes suggest the wrong register and are best avoided. Candidates should also avoid using offensive language in **Section 2**, even in direct speech.

## Comments on specific questions:

### **Section 1**

The Directed Writing task is assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write an article for their school magazine to persuade other candidates to contribute to a class project aimed at assisting a group of people in their community. In particular, the candidates had to identify a group of people to help, and outline the nature of the class project aimed at helping them. This was not a scenario that was within the everyday experience of many candidates, but allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

**Section 1** is Directed Writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing an effective article for their school magazine, aiming it at their peers, but being aware of a potentially wider readership of teachers and parents. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year, responses needed to include:

- the details of the people being helped in the community and why they had been chosen
- the details of the class project
- what other candidates could do to assist with the project.

In the first bullet point it was essential to clearly identify a group of people in the community who were being targeted for help **and** justify why they had been singled out for assistance. The second bullet point required

a reasonably developed explanation of what the project entailed, and Bullet 3 required developed suggestions of how other candidates in the school could get involved to assist the project.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged on:

- clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience
- a correct format for the piece of writing
- appropriate tone and register
- the use of information to justify personal opinion
- the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points.

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks were awarded to responses which kept their focus on the context and purpose of the magazine article and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point posed few problems and the majority of candidates identified a clear group of people who were in need of help and offered a number of compelling reasons to explain why they particularly deserved assistance. The most popular suggestions were orphans from the local children's home, or families who had been affected by a natural disaster, such as flooding. Occasionally candidates did not identify a group of people but instead suggested a community project involving cleaning up an area; this was not fully in keeping with the demands of the question. The best responses did not just identify a group of people to help, but also developed why it would be so beneficial for the whole community, often citing improving the infrastructure of the area, or improving community relationships as a welcome by-product. Many went into detail about the suffering of their chosen group and why it was so appropriate to help them above others. Occasionally the word 'community' was interpreted rather widely and the project involved a group of people from a different country.

The second bullet point invited a wide variety of responses: many candidates based the project on fund-raising activities, such as fun-days or bake sales simply to raise money to help the identified group of people, whereas others outlined highly ambitious projects involving re-building homes, or providing fresh water to local villages. Either approach was completely acceptable in response to Bullet 2 as all of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question, either overtly or by strong implication, but the second approach, where the identified project in Bullet 2 led to fund-raising events by candidates in Bullet 3 allowed more coherent development. A few responses offered very little development in this area, sometimes limited to raising money through donation boxes or parental contributions. Clearly such responses did not have sufficient development of this aspect of the task.

When addressing the third bullet point sensible suggestions were made as to what other candidates could do to help. The strongest responses offered a choice of activities such as designing and distributing leaflets and posters, or baking cakes for sales, or visiting areas of the community to offer direct assistance. These candidates appreciated that there may be differentiated levels of assistance offered. Weaker responses tended to simply invite the wider candidate body to attend fund-raisers and bring their families, rather than get directly involved in the activities themselves. This limited scope for development of this bullet. At times Bullets 2 and 3 were rather similar – a bake-sale as the project where candidates should bake cakes, or come along and buy them, for example. This approach led to the bullets being rather meshed together and did not offer clear scope to develop them independently, often leading to a less successful response in terms of task fulfilment. Therefore, the stronger candidates usually were able to amplify all three bullet points well and the best responses were those which included additional material while using the clues in the task.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and candidates were comfortable with the concept of writing for their school magazine. However, some candidates missed the opportunity to use persuasive techniques in their writing, making the tone rather factual, rather than appealing to the readership for help. In some cases the project became too personal with no acknowledgement that this was a class project. The register was kept suitably formal in most responses, recognising that the magazine is likely to attract both teachers and parents, as well as candidates. The vast majority of candidates employed an appropriate format by adopting a purposeful and persuasive tone. The best responses were able to balance their ideas for the project and its beneficiaries with the need to persuade others to assist in its delivery, often citing that without extra help the project could not succeed. Some less successful responses were written in a letter format and included an inappropriate ending for an article such as 'Yours sincerely' or began the article with, 'Dear Classmates' or 'Dear candidates'. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to improve performance.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the informative/persuasive tone very well. Other responses were rather short only just reaching the lower word limit. Candidates need to ensure that they address the word length requirements in their responses. Linguistically, candidates were at ease with school-related vocabulary and writing about a class project: most found little difficulty in addressing the task to produce a convincing piece of work.

## **Section 2**

### **Question 1**

**Describe how you are like and unlike one other member of your family. (Remember that you are describing yourself and not just telling stories.)**

This was a reasonably popular title. Most candidates chose a sibling or parent to compare themselves with, although occasionally a cousin or grand-parent featured. Planning and organisation were quite straightforward with this title and most candidates coped well with the need to describe both physical and behavioural similarities. Weaker responses tended to focus more on superficial considerations, often listing similarities such as eye-colour, length of hair, height and build, for example. This clearly limited the responses in terms of descriptive writing. However, there were some highly sensitive character explorations, often citing their own faults and foibles and using the opportunity to analyse how traits can be shared and passed on by family members. The best responses were those which embraced the need to describe in detail rather than simply list a series of similarities and differences. Most candidates found it helpful to be reminded of this requirement in the wording of the question and there was a good range of vocabulary deployed in detailing the different ways that people look and behave within a family. Occasionally responses lapsed into narrative accounts of family disputes, particularly when siblings featured in the response.

### **Question 2**

**Should all school pupils be taught to cook? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was a very popular title and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who clearly had a strong opinion on the subject. Therefore, there were a great number of responses which agreed with the suggestion in the title and were extremely critical of young people who leave home and go to university unable to cater for themselves. Many responses cited the tendency of young people to rely on take-aways and fast food and the associated health issues that result from such an irresponsible approach to eating. They often suggested that schools have a responsibility to teach children about nutrition and healthy eating, and supported the notion of cookery lessons for all candidates. Other responses offered equally strong opinions that cooking should not take up valuable space on a busy school curriculum, but should be a skill passed on at home rather than in school. A number of responses thought that cookery was a 'girls' subject', sometimes suggesting that it was linked to achieving a good marriage, but a larger number of candidates thought that it was essential for boys to learn to cook as well as girls. A large number of responses looked at the career opportunities available in the culinary industry, referring to famous television chefs and authors of cookery books. There was an admirable sense of passion about such writing in the best essays which presented admittedly one-sided views in a persuasive way with a lot of illustration from their own experiences. Less successful responses lacked conviction and tended to include rather repetitive points without offering developed consequences or examples. The most successful responses overall were those which presented a balanced view, seeing the advantages of cookery lessons, but also citing that some candidates may not want to take the subject throughout secondary school. These candidates often suggested that basic cookery should be taught to younger candidates before the subject becoming optional for older students. Again, it was impressive to see how many personal experiences could be successfully utilised by candidates and most candidates could sustain their arguments rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view.

### **Question 3**

**Write a story which includes the sentence: 'Although I knew what I wanted to say, at the important moment I could not open my mouth.'**

This was a very popular title. Many candidates set their essay in a school situation involving a disciplinary case where they were an unwilling witness, or had been accused of breaking a rule unfairly. Another popular scenario was a public speech where despite careful preparation and rehearsal, the speaker was overcome

by nerves on the day. Other candidates explored family weddings, disputes between friends, involvement in serious crimes, or disappointment following huge expectations. The best essays were those that built up tension and expectation, and embedded the specified sentence naturally and fluently. The most sophisticated responses did not end with the sentence but dealt sensitively with the ensuing feelings of disappointment and the overwhelming sense of confidence lost in a single moment. Less successful responses spent a great deal of time building up to the required sentence in their narrative, failing to really explore the potential in terms of losing the confidence to speak at an important moment. The weakest responses were those which simply told a narrative story which lacked an adequate sense of reflection. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well the majority of candidates integrated the given sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness.

#### Question 4

##### Good friends

This was a reasonably popular topic inviting a wide range of responses. Any approach to this question was possible. The best responses treated it as a discursive title and dealt with the topic in a philosophical way, often exploring the notion of friendship and the distinction between a friend and a 'good friend'. Most suggested that really good friends are hard to find and included accounts of false friendship and betrayal, as well as heroic accounts of friends sacrificing their own reputation or honour to save a good friend's name. It was noticeable that many candidates used anecdotal evidence in their discursive essays, which often led to lively and sensitive writing. Clearly this was a topic that enabled the candidates to use their own experiences. Weaker responses tended to simply list rather repetitive sentences beginning 'A good friend will never....' Or 'A good friend will always...', often becoming very gushing and emotive without really developing their ideas at all. There were many really good narrative stories about friendship, not always based on human friendships but sometimes featuring pet dogs. Another popular approach was to explore friendship within families with candidates often concluding that a better friend than a mother or father can never be found.

#### Question 5

##### Write about an occasion when you worried about a mistake you made but everything turned out well.

This was a slightly less popular title, possibly because candidates had seen an attractive title early in the list of options. Stories usually involved complex narratives, building up tension effectively then exploring the complete relief of realising that their fears were unfounded at the end. The better responses were measured and thoughtful in their approach, often featuring a failure to revise for an important examination, or a huge organisational failure when asked to get involved in a complex project. Such situations were treated in a number of ways with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama of it all. Some of the responses were deliberately humorous, often involving weddings where everything goes wrong in the build-up to the big day. Weaker responses tended to spend too much time describing the mistake and then brushing over the relief when things turn out well after all, often not really explaining the change in events clearly enough. The best responses made it clear that the anxiety was often completely unfounded hence the relief at the end.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Composition

## Key messages

- The proper punctuation, and especially the layout, of speech continues to give problems and yet it is such a useful inclusion, in small amounts, in written work of all sorts.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would bring about major improvement for most.
- Candidates are advised that the proper use of full stops (not just commas) is a crucial part of the descriptor for Language Band 3 and above.
- The use of 'And', 'But' and 'So' as repeated sentence openings is best avoided.
- Candidates should pay attention to the word limits required for Sections 1 and 2, and ensure that they stick closely to them. Essays that are too long or too short tend to penalise themselves.
- In magazine (or newspaper) headlines, candidates should pay attention to the use of capital letters. Candidates are advised that headings do not need inverted commas.
- Candidates often confuse 'said' and 'told' and 'brought' and 'take'. Also, they rely too heavily on "got" as in 'I got so happy' and 'Our team got scored'.
- Candidates are advised that the inclusion of text messaging language, abbreviations and expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' can sometimes suggest the wrong register and are best avoided.
- Greater focus on correct use of possessive pronouns would pay dividends, particularly the his/her difference.

## General comments

The general standard of the examination this year seemed to be at least as good as that of previous years. Having said that, the requirements of a magazine article as a text type seemed to be less understood and practised compared to, for example, a letter. The narrative questions in **Section 2** continue to be the most popular choices but candidates also need to ensure that given sentences are included realistically and accurately, rather than merely tagged on to any story. Overall, there were very few rubric infringements of any sort and very few examples of candidates not attempting questions. The strengths and weaknesses of linguistic ability were very similar to those of previous years: some of the work is outstanding in its creativity and in its accuracy and also there are now very few candidates who fall into the very lowest bands linguistically. Other trends noticed this year were the increased insertion of the words 'like' and 'that' into sentences as in 'I was like meeting my friends' and 'As you know that we are coming to see you'. Such insertions are best avoided, as is especially, the insertion of the word 'that' in front of direct speech – for example 'he said to me that "I am going out"'. The omission of articles is also a serious error and can lead to considerable confusion in reading.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1**

This year, candidates had to write a school magazine article about the visit of a foreign student to their school. This topic obviously had a wide appeal and very few candidates misinterpreted what they had to do. The scenario allowed candidates to use information about their school and locality which was familiar. As is always said with this question, **Section 1** is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Section 2**. Candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on a one month visit by someone from overseas, a visit

which had been both productive and beneficial to a number of people, and one which they wanted to write about for a school-based audience. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to have:

- the name of the student and some details which would give a personality to the student;
- precise details of what activities or achievements the student had inside school but also outside in the wider community;
- an explanation of the benefits for the foreign student and the writer's school.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged under headings of clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience; a correct format for the piece of writing; appropriate tone and register; the use of information to justify personal opinion and the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the **development of the ideas** that will gain most marks. In this particular task, it was absolutely essential not to turn the whole piece into a narrative essay. Therefore, the most successful responses explained clearly who the student was and gave his or her background and reasons for visiting the school. Often the student was visiting because of the parents moving to the country for work purposes or the student wanted to learn about the background of his or her family. Sometimes it was because the student was part of an educational exchange programme. All of these details were clearly linked to the focus of the question which was to learn more about the country.

What the student did inside and outside school largely centred on good behaviour and cleverness in class. It involved visiting local tourist attractions and restaurants (after school hours or during a school trip) as well as cleaning up 'littered' streets. Stronger candidates were able to amplify the first and second bullet points with personal details of where the student came from (Canada was very popular) or his or her sporting prowess, as well as facts about the locality, spicy food and visits to students' homes, pertinent details of which added enormous interest. Much time was given to saying how attractive and popular the student was. A large number of candidates wrote about more than one student visiting which clearly made it difficult to see this as a proper understanding of the situation.

Bullet point 3, about the benefits, proved to be the most challenging point and became something of a discriminator. The benefits were usually to do with the exchange of cultural awareness, the completion of a project about the country or the rise in reputation of the school. A significant number of candidates were less successful with this latter point because they thought that benefit to the student meant benefit to the students of the school rather than the foreign student and so were effectively repeating information when talking about the benefits for the school. Less successful responses were often unrealistic in their claims, possibly because they wanted to be original. Many suggested that the student had visited so much of the country and eaten at so many food outlets it would have taken a year to do so. Some claimed that the student's family would make a massive financial donation or that a school had completely reinvented its syllabus and teaching methods because of what the student said. Some even claimed that the student visited communities giving financial advice to the poor. The least successful simply relied on the wording of the question: 'The student learned a lot about our country and we learned a lot about his' and so left it vague.

Generally, there was a good awareness of **audience** throughout the task. Successful answers showed a clear awareness of their readers, sometimes by direct address: 'You are all aware..' or 'We will all remember for a long time..' or sometimes candidates rightly referred to 'our country' and 'our school'. Some, unfortunately, referred to 'my' country and school, thus showing they had forgotten their audience was all around them and sometimes even named the country as if their classmates would not know. In a similar way, a lack of awareness was displayed when the candidate explained something which needed no explanation to the audience such as 'he learned Urdu, which is the language of Pakistan'. 'Dear readers' was acceptable at the start of the article but 'Dear Editor' followed by a request to print the article was not as good. The majority had a good general sense of the **situation** but a few got the timescale wrong with the student staying for a fortnight or even the whole school year or still being in attendance, even though the question suggested otherwise. The **tone/register** was kept formal by most which was acceptable and most candidates employed a satisfactory **format**, mainly by ensuring that they used a headline as requested, either a routine one (such as 'The Foreign Visitor') for the average candidate or something with more energy (like 'East Meets West')

for the better candidates. Unfortunately, too often in these areas there was a lack of liveliness about this strictly formal tone whereas a very occasional informal touch would have been far more suggestive of a school magazine for one's peers. Generally, this was the least successful aspect of the whole exercise because candidates seemed less sure about what would make a good magazine article and most pieces of writing, even the better ones, were effectively straightforward biographies or accounts which could have appeared in many other publications apart from a magazine. A significant number of candidates mistakenly wrote a letter to their classmates, obviously thinking that Directed Writing was usually in this format. **Opinion and justification** were easy to cover in explaining, as most did, something about benefits for both parties. Organisation varied only occasionally with virtually everyone following the logical structure of the bullet points.

Overall, the vast majority had no difficulty in writing full answers for **Section 1** and captured the informative approach very well. Linguistically, candidates were at ease with this vocabulary, being well versed in it. For the same reason, spelling was generally good. Tenses could be uncertain, especially with the first bullet point, where there was too much use of the present tense, given that the visit was over. Usually, tense use stabilised and become consistent as the other points were worked through. 'Foreigner' used as an adjective, as in 'a foreigner student' was a common error. A weakness in some responses was a lack of paragraphing which is as essential here as in **Section 2** but this had improved a good deal over last year. The advice still remains that a useful rule for this section is one paragraph for each bullet point plus a brief introduction and conclusion.

## **Section 2**

### **1. Describe some of the passengers and the atmosphere in a crowded bus or taxi. (Remember you are describing the people and the atmosphere, not just what happens on the ride.)**

This was quite a popular question and generally worked well across the ability range as candidates were able to draw on their own experiences. The vast majority of those who attempted it did in fact approach it as a descriptive piece of writing. A few resorted to narrative and were at a disadvantage but the question overall produced some very good pieces with candidates showing excellent knowledge of the conditions inside a local bus (taxis were mentioned very rarely). Most candidates used a sensible, short narrative introduction explaining how they came to be travelling by bus (although most normally would not have done so) and then gave very interesting, lively descriptions of crowded conditions, rickety buses, exhausted passengers, unruly children and resigned elders. The strongest responses concentrated on carefully selected detail to evoke the sense of the unpleasant heat, humidity and consequent body odours in the poorly maintained bus. Candidates who described the interaction, or lack of it, between passengers as well as describing the range of clothing added another dimension. The antics of the drivers and conductors were often depicted with some nice comic touches as they attempted to deal with arguments, sick children and the occasional pickpocket. Often, the essays concluded with a determination to avoid public transport as much as possible in the future. Some very good answers demonstrated the ability to use adjectives vividly; invoking the five senses, nearly all created a vivid picture of public transport. This was also one descriptive question where the inclusion of some appropriate dialogue in small amounts helped enormously to reflect the mood of the passengers. It is usual now to add to the descriptive question, advice about ensuring that the response is descriptive and candidates would do well to heed this before they start because sustaining a descriptive essay of this length is a real skill. Weaker responses spent too long on the narrative opening, beginning with waking up, showering, having breakfast, leaving home and arriving at the bus stop before writing about what was relevant.

**2. Should all school pupils give up some of their free time to help the local community? Give reasons and examples to support your view**

This title was not a particularly popular one. Candidates seemed to accept the advice of previous Reports that only those with a special aptitude for discursive writing should attempt such a question. Those who did attempt it tended to start with a quick definition of the 'local community' together with a survey of how students nowadays do have some time that they waste in what were called 'trivial' ways, such as surfing the internet and texting friends. The best answers were then clearly structured and referred to social problems in their own communities, such as poverty, lack of education, the need for child care, run down areas and dirty streets. They then suggested how groups of student volunteers could be organised to help to ameliorate these conditions, often pointing out the need for adult supervision or direction to ensure that what was done was effective. Mostly this was seen as a voluntary act but a few candidates knew of more organised schemes run by local groups and at least one candidate referred to such organised help being part of their school curriculum. Giving a balanced view in a discursive essay is often a persuasive approach and there was often the opinion that giving such help might take time away from a student's work or revision time. Nevertheless, nearly everyone was in favour of doing it and for a number of reasons. It would help the poor and underprivileged; it would prevent students becoming lazy and obese from staying at home and it would be character forming because young people would learn to appreciate what they had. Much of this was idealistic, (some candidates even suggesting school pupils should give their possessions and money away in large amounts) but there was no denying the enthusiasm and conviction with which it was said. Weaker responses, as always in discursive essays, were short of ideas and repetitive in their vocabulary. The least successful answers were generalised and went little further than expressing a wish to help but lacking specific reference to either problems or solutions.

**3. Write a story which includes the sentence: 'When I was at last alone, I felt surprisingly happy.'**

This narrative question was very popular but not always successfully handled. The best answers responded fully and credibly to the key words 'at last' 'alone' and 'surprisingly'. Various scenarios were developed based upon the writer finally achieving some time 'alone' following a well-described stressful or traumatic event or even simply following the arrival and departure of noisy relatives with boisterous young children. These scenarios usually involved the approach of exam time or assignment writing, the illness of a close relative or an argument with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Although facing several hours' work, or the consequences of illness or upset, the writer explained that it was surprising how happy he or she felt at being able to get on with things. These scenarios worked well but, inevitably, a significant minority relied on a familiar essay and contrived to slot in the topic sentence, occasionally with little or no relevance to the given narrative. These produced barely believable stories where, despite a catalogue of unhappiness, the writer still managed to feel happy but did not explain why. Equally, some described a great achievement or victory and said they were 'surprisingly' happy whereas it was obvious why they were. Also, some did not give enough weight to the word 'alone' because they were often congratulated or rewarded in a group and yet were supposed to be alone. It became clear that such candidates were mistakenly using the word 'alone' as meaning 'the winner' or the only contestant left. It must be said that some of the least convincing stories here were those about the 'surprise' birthday party which come up every year. Sometimes they can work but in response to this topic it was unconvincing to be told time and again that the writer was completely unaware that it was his or her birthday or that in the midst of friends and family wishing the writer a happy birthday, they felt 'alone' as well as 'surprisingly' happy.



**4. Tidiness.**

This particular one-word topic was far more popular than is usually the case but 'Tidiness' was still the least popular topic and responses to it were generally less successful than others. A few stronger candidates chose a narrative approach based on family situations, either having to share a bedroom with an untidy sibling or the writer's response to a mother's constant exhortations to be tidier. This introduced both humour and exasperation and the narrative worked well. There were a few excellent responses which dealt with tidiness as a mental illness and a few stories when a life was in danger because an important medicine could not be found in an untidy room. Others linked tidiness to cleanliness and sometimes explored, briefly, the link to religion and how one should conduct one's life; it was tidiness linked to spiritual cleanliness. There were a few attempts to explore the consequences of untidiness in both one's home or working environment in a discursive manner but these tended to peter out or become repetitive.

**5. Write a story in which someone takes responsibility at a difficult time.**

This narrative title was not quite as popular as Question 3 but was more successful overall given that there was very little irrelevance. It was popular across the ability range and elicited some excellent answers from the best candidates. At all levels, there was a sense of genuine engagement. Responsibility was seen as synonymous with maturity and, in the widely varying range of situations which the writers described, it was made evident that young shoulders had to bear adult responsibilities. This applied especially to family situations where sudden death, serious illness, loss of employment or marital disputes made it imperative for the teenager to care for younger siblings or elderly grandparents or find a part time job to supplement the family income or to pay hospital bills. Other scenarios included taking responsibility in the workplace or in cricket or football matches when a team captain fell ill. In school, a friend might take responsibility for some misdemeanour to prevent the real culprit from being expelled at a crucial time in his studies. The narratives were clearly structured and the outcome was nearly always positive and happy. With weaker responses, some problems were experienced in trying to use the words of the question. Ungrammatical statements such as 'he took my responsibility' or 'took the responsibility of his family' were common.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21

Reading

## Key Messages

For **Question 1**, the summary, candidates are advised to focus on the main ideas of the subject as presented in the text rather than introducing material from their own knowledge. To answer the two parts of this question appropriately, candidates are encouraged to practise differentiation between the 'note' style suggested for **Question 1(a)** and the 'continuous writing' suggested by the instructions for **Question 1(b)**; this will enable them to focus on and fulfil the requirement of each rubric in the most efficient way.

While the overall standard of written English was generally good, and in some cases impressive, there is a general need for more practice in sentence structure, particularly the accurate separation of sentences by full stops. Use of the definite article, its omission as well as its unnecessary intrusion, could also be improved upon.

Candidates need to develop greater skills in answering those questions which require a response in their own words. While many showed an ability to identify the key words in such questions, there remains a need for candidates to substitute these key words with their own.

Certain answers require some distillation of the text; that is, answers which are derived or extracted from the ideas in the text. In order to do this, candidates need to read carefully the whole of the paragraph to which the question directs them, ensuring that all relevant material has been considered, before answering. Great care is also needed in reading the questions and in considering precisely what is demanded by them.

Most candidates attempted all the questions and completed the paper without any issue with time, showing themselves to have been well prepared for the types of questions which might be asked. The majority responded neatly and carefully, within the guiding parameters of the answer booklet. The practice - especially in **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)** - of writing draft answers in pencil, before going over them in pen, is one which can cause problems with legibility and is best avoided.

## General Comments

Questions were to be answered on two passages, the first being non-narrative and the second, narrative. Both appeared to engage the candidates' interest and the variety of subject matter provided the opportunity for questions which stretched and discriminated amongst candidates, allowing the best responses to demonstrate an ability to deal with the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. This was reflected in a wide range of scores.

The first passage, 'The Internet', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas; the second, the story of Miles and his extraordinary discovery, tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'The Internet', and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas; in this case to distinguish fact from opinion and a true statement from false ones. The last question in **Section 1** gave the opportunity to respond to the text by drawing on their personal knowledge and experience.

The second passage tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.

The answer booklet's writing-frame format for the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess or copying verbatim at length. The best responses avoided irrelevance and adhered to the rubric.

In **Question 1(a)** those candidates who followed the bullet point style of the first (given) point in each answer box produced a clear list of selected ideas. The two boxes, with their clear headings, are intended to guide candidates to separate the two different aspects required in the summary, and very few put content points in the wrong boxes. Candidates are advised to aim for a single clear point per bullet to avoid confusion, with no point relying on a previous one unless a clear contextual link is made. Those few candidates who continued the question on a separate sheet sensibly made clear to which box these extra points related.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose; there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures. Others needed to include greater originality of expression in order to gain high marks. Many candidates attempted to rework the relevant details from the passage, with the substitution of their own words here and there where possible. Those who lifted randomly selected patches of text sometimes encountered difficulty in linking them and the result made only fractured sense.

### Comments on Specific Questions

#### **Section 1 Reading for Ideas**

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet, as described in the passage. The summary had to be based on all but the first and final paragraphs, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, choosing to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration; there was no advantage in repeating them as these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding those provided, there were a further 20 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates listed the points either in note form or in short sentences, usually under bullet marks, which allowed them adequate space to record all their responses. Others copied whole sections of the passage, reducing their ability to isolate the points while increasing the potential for including irrelevant text and running out of space.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 referred to various benefits provided by the Internet and there were 11 points which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 3 content points, all linked to the information available from the Internet and how using it compares with the use of books. Almost without exception candidates recognised the wide variety of such information, the fact that it is generally free to the recipient and that it is easier to store than books. Paragraph 3 suggested 2 advantages of online courses, the essential element being 'online'. The first could be expressed either as the fact that they allow studying from home, or in terms of the saving in travel cost or time to get to an educational establishment. The majority offered one or other form of this point, realising that the essential element was the 'online' nature of the courses; a few volunteered both forms, though only one mark was available. The second advantage concerned the potential for candidates throughout the world to follow a course together. The best responses recognised this as a benefit and talked about the possibility of 'global' or 'international' education. In Paragraph 4 there were 4 content points which dealt with the various forms of communication available via the Internet and their specific merits. That emails can be sent without any interruption to the recipient was almost unfailingly noted; that such messages can be sent at any time, day or night, was less frequently picked up. While mention was usually made of Skype, its unique benefit - that of allowing *visible* as well as audible contact, over long distances - was not always considered. The final 'communication' advantage was the making or maintaining of friendships through social networking sites. Reference to the example of Facebook alone, instead of to the generic term, was not sufficient to score. Paragraph 5 concerned online shopping and candidates could find 2 points there: that online shopping saves time and that e-books are cheaper than 'real' books. The more successful responses recognised the importance of the time-saving element in the first and, in the second, the necessity to complete the comparison between conventional and e-books rather than writing: 'E-books are cheaper'.

The second section of the rubric required the disadvantages of the Internet and a further 9 points were available in Paragraphs 6, 7 and 8. Paragraph 6 continued the online shopping theme of the previous paragraph, suggesting 3 disadvantages of this facility: that it removes the social aspect of shopping, or reduces the opportunity to meet friends while shopping; that browsing or shopping for books in this way denies one the pleasure of handling real books; and that browsing for books also reduces the chance of finding a special book by accident. In each of these three points it was essential to define precisely which aspect of Internet use causes the disadvantage. The best answers differentiated between 'it', i.e. the 'Internet' of the rubric, and 'online shopping' for the first point; 'browsing' or 'shopping for books' in the

second; and 'browsing for books' in the third. Responses which suggested that 'the Internet' as a whole causes these disadvantages could not score. There were another 5 points in Paragraph 7: the first 2 suggested that people become slaves to their email and have lost the art of letter writing because of it; the next raised the concern of Internet addiction; the last 2 focused on the presence of both inappropriate and inaccurate material. The last available point was to be found in Paragraph 8: where candidates avoided the example of computerised shop tills 'crashing' and concentrated on the main point i.e. simple transactions have been made more complicated, the mark was awarded. The better responses achieved this.

A small number of candidates were awarded maximum points and a large number scored half marks and above. While points can be made by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form, as indicated above, rather than in continuous prose, all points nevertheless need to be fully made; they should be clear enough to be fully understood by another person. Where marks were lost it was often because points were incompletely made, e.g. referring to 'courses' being done from home, without the defining 'online' adjective, or suggesting that 'emails can be sent', with no mention of the lack of interruption to the recipient. Use of the correct agent or context for each point should be clearly indicated. Thus, for example, it is specifically 'online shopping' which removes the social dimension of shopping and that had to be stated; 'browsing' or 'shopping' for books online had to be identified precisely as denying the pleasure of handling books. The general pronoun 'it' would otherwise refer inaccurately to the agent of the rubric: here, 'the Internet' in general.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, stating the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet, as outlined in the passage. They were to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

The vast majority of candidates completed the exercise, and most did so comfortably within the given space. All candidates engaged readily with the subject matter of the text and this encouraged the use of own words, which a good number of them used in a sustained or noticeable manner. The best candidates competently and confidently re-cast and re-shaped the text, using complex sentences with a variety of structures, gaining many, or full marks for style. Others selected appropriate areas of text, restructuring and editing it without innovation or originality in their use of English. Weaker responses were those which directly copied blocks of text; in the attempt to link these, it proved difficult to control sentence structure fluently.

Commendably, very short answers were extremely rare; candidates are advised that such brevity can never justify a high mark because sustained use of own words or completely accurate English cannot be demonstrated. Most candidates adhered to the rubric by attempting to use their notes to summarise the contents of the passage; very few included additional material from outside the given parameters. Because the Internet as a topic was one with which all candidates were familiar, a small number of responses strayed from the content of both their own notes and of the text itself; personal views on the subject were included, or material which was only obliquely relevant. Candidates are advised to focus carefully on the task of summarising material in accordance with the rubric: 'as outlined in the passage'. A high mark for use of own words which are irrelevant to that passage will not be possible.

A number of the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet referred to in the text were compared with other, non-technological methods of doing things; as such, relative adjectives were common. Whether writing in note form or in continuous prose, candidates need to ensure that their version of a comparison is complete. To say that 'The Internet is faster and cheaper', or that 'Computers take up less space' make neither complete points, for **Question 1a**, nor complete sense, in **Question 1b**. Candidates also need to work on the use of the definite article, as in '*The* Internet helps people...' and 'It removes *the* social dimension of shopping', and on sentence separation, i.e. using full stops rather than commas. Emphasis on the use of appropriate verb forms will improve style and help to avoid any awkwardness of construction, as in 'Computers *make* the house *to have* more space' and 'Online shopping *makes* the shoppers *not to go* to real shops. Learning the spelling and uses of basic, similar-sounding words will avoid confusion between words such as *their* and *there* (as in '...when *their* is Internet access people can do *there* shopping online'; between *to* and *too* (as in '...people spend *to* much time surfing'); and between *lose* and *loose* (as in '...shops *loose* business'.

In **Questions 2, 3 and 4** candidates were tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. **Question 2** asked for 2 opinions from Paragraph 2. Candidates could select any two of three observations which were subjective rather than objectively verifiable: that 'people never cease to be amazed at the range of facts available' (on the Internet); that 'No-one wants their house cluttered with books'; and that the Internet is beneficial. The most perceptive candidates, who looked for observations from the writer which could not be proved true, usually selected the first and second options to score both marks. A number of others selected one or other of these two but did not recognise a second opinion; the third was rarely

offered. Many candidates selected indisputable facts rather than opinions e.g. 'candidates can use computers instead of books...' or 'information is easily stored'. Practice is needed in recognising the difference between fact and opinion. It was necessary to understand that opinions were to be selected 'from paragraph 2'; candidates' own opinions could not score. When a few candidates misread '...opinions from paragraph 2' as '...opinions from *Passage 2*', responses were equally invalid and showed, again, that careful reading of the rubric is always essential.

**Question 3** asked which one of three statements, based on the passage, was true. The majority ticked the third box, correctly, recognising that the writer thinks the Internet can be a force for good in the world and ignoring the other two statements offered, as they were distortions of the text. Very few ticked more than one box and could not score.

**Question 4** asked for two examples of ways in which the Internet can be used. Almost all candidates accepted the personal nature of the response required and offered, as instructed, examples from their own very wide knowledge or experience. There were many fascinating, successful uses suggested. Just occasionally the context of the use was inappropriate: 'To apply for a job' was a sensible suggestion; 'to provide jobs for Internet repair men' was not. Other responses confused use of the Internet with use of computer software such as spreadsheets and could not score. Only a small minority did not read the rubric carefully enough and offered generalised references to research or to keeping in touch with people, both of which came from the text.

## **Section 2 Reading for Meaning**

Candidates found this text more challenging than the first. Questions on the writer's craft require that candidates learn how to recognise and decode figurative language; inferential questions demand that they focus on what lies beneath a literal interpretation.

**Question 5** required two features of Miles's bedroom which meant that he could live untroubled by adults and candidates could choose from three possibilities offered by the text: that it was detached from the house, or over a detached garage; its low ceilings; and that there was an outside stairway to exit the room. The 'low, slanted ceilings' were explicitly referred to as something 'which kept the adults away' and many candidates recognised this, though a large number tried to make two reasons from one: '(i) the low ceilings; (ii) the slanted ceilings'. The slant of a ceiling does not, necessarily, cause the taller adults a problem; a 'low' ceiling does. Thus, only the first of these could score for one mark. The other two reasons had to be deduced from the fact that his room was over a detached garage and inferred from the fact that he was 'unnoticed' when he used the 'outside staircase'. A fair number of candidates successfully noted the 'detached' position; fewer offered the third alternative.

**Question 6** directed the reader to a fairly short paragraph 2 which explicitly gave the three sources from which Miles got money by selling sea creatures; all three were needed for one mark. While the majority of responses were successful through direct lifting, others appeared to be the result of a misread question and listed the types of creatures he sold, rather than to whom he sold them.

**Question 7(a)** was a discriminating question which required, for two marks, two ways in which the snail resembled a bulldozer. There were four possible ways from which to choose, one being straightforward mention of the snail's 'massive' size, and this was a popular first answer. The next way was couched in terms of a simile which could be directly lifted from the text: '...its undersized shell riding high on its body *like the cab of a bulldozer*'. While this was commonly attempted, many candidates stopped short of completing the comparison, ending their quotation at 'body' and omitting the necessary link to 'bulldozer'. Another way of expressing this was by capturing the idea of the comparative sizes of the two parts of the snail's body e.g. that it had a small section on top of a large / larger one. The last possibility was to decode the metaphorical comparison between the huge snail hunting for crabs in its path, and the personified bulldozer destroying anything in its way; both images of great power. The few attempts to suggest this did not usually score because they mentioned only the destruction of clams; this was too specific to the moon snail and not something that a bulldozer is likely to destroy. A small proportion of candidates succeeded in offering two complete comparisons; a few more gained one of the two marks.

**Question 7(b)** was in two parts and necessitated candidates understanding the meaning of 'alibi'; there were those who did not, despite the textual indication that it was something Miles would need if he were to be caught at the judge's oyster farm. It was not the farm itself which would be the alibi, but that he was tending the oysters; something which he hoped might be a valid excuse as he was paid to help in this way. Once the alibi was given, candidates then had to say why it was a 'rather weak' one. The best responses scored both marks, while many others gave only 'The judge's farm' as an imprecise alibi, frequently offering

no explanation of its weakness. Still others failed to score because their expression was confused. Responses such as 'His alibi was the judge's oyster farm and it was weak because he was tending the oysters' muddled the two parts of the answer. Where two pieces of information are required, candidates are advised to treat each in a distinctly separate way. Misreading the question as 'What is an alibi?' rather than 'What was Miles's alibi?' resulted in a definition, occasionally followed by a correct reason for the weakness of this particular one which scored one of the two marks.

**Question 7(c)** was an inferential one, candidates having to deduce what people's attitude towards the judge was from their actions in his presence. Most responses offered ideal words or phrases such as 'respectful' or 'in awe of him', suggesting that candidates had learnt how to approach such inferential questions.

In **Question 8(a)** candidates had to answer in their own words, after first identifying the key words which described the writer's two contrasting attitudes to crabs. There were two marks for this question and the two attitudes were clearly to be recast separately under (i) and (ii) in the answer booklet. There was apparently no difficulty in identifying the key phrases: 'crabs amused me in small numbers, but...crowded together like this they unhinged me'. More often than not, however, candidates found paraphrasing extremely challenging; the text words, or some of them, were used as the responses, with very little attempt to offer synonyms. 'Amused' was often correctly recast as 'were funny' or 'entertained', while 'in small numbers' was left as it stood and the 'attitude' was thus incompletely expressed. The best responses to the second attitude cleverly substituted 'in large numbers' for 'crowded', and offered such words as 'unnerved', 'scared' or 'disturbed' for 'unhinged'. 'In a group' did not adequately convey the large number of crabs, while 'hated' and 'made him unhappy' were weak alternatives for 'unhinged'. Sometimes, as here, an 'own words' question may demand that a complete phrase, rather than individual key words, be expressed in an original way.

**Question 8(b)** looked for the two consecutive words which suggested an attack on the oyster beds by the crabs. The majority of candidates understood the metaphorical use of 'under siege' and quoted the words correctly. A common alternative which did not score was 'pincers clasping'. Clearly the word 'consecutive' was usually understood, though there were a number of responses which offered, for example, 'clasping and siege' – neither 'two' nor 'consecutive' words.

**Question 9(a)** required candidates to distil their answers from the text, avoiding the wording of Miles's internal question and replacing it with an explanation of the event which he was remembering. This was succinctly done by most candidates, either by explaining that the minke whale had been stuck or stranded, or that it had been rescued or freed on a previous occasion. When either the word 'again' or the word 'out' was added to 'It was stuck', the situation was obviously not understood.

**Question 9(b)** was the second one in which candidates had to answer in their own words to explain why Miles knew he had to avoid 'stepping into the mud'. The key words to be identified were separated from those quoted in the question by some distracting detail: that he was experienced enough with the conditions to know the danger, and that there was a general rule not to step there if the tide was coming in. The crucial words to explain exactly why this was so came next, suggesting that, if you did not follow your experience and the general rule, you were in 'mortal danger'. It was a demanding question, requiring careful scrutiny of the text to pinpoint those key words, especially as the word 'danger' appeared twice in the paragraph. Its first use implied a lack of safety; its second carried the rather different meaning of 'chance', 'risk' or 'possibility'. It was this latter use, coupled in a phrase with 'mortal', which might have suggested that here were the two words which, if adequately recast, would warrant the two marks available. The strongest responses clearly recognised the key words and some impressive idiom was seen to substitute for them, even without a direct synonym for 'mortal', such as 'death' or, here, 'drowning': e.g. 'You would be in a *life-threatening* situation' or 'You were *risking your life*'. Other creditable efforts included the more obvious synonyms, such as 'the fear of death', or 'The chance you might drown'. The conditional idea that 'You *could* have died' was also perfectly acceptable, suggesting as it does the sense of a 'possibility'. Candidates know that a question which asks for 'own words' must be dealt with in two stages: locate the key words or phrases and then recast them. Many weaker answers did not follow this technique: some quoted verbatim that he knew the danger and what the rule was, without expanding on this; others suggested that the mud would 'trap him', that he would 'be in big trouble', or that he must not 'take dirty mud into the house'.

In **Question 10(a)** candidates had to show that they understood how Miles was feeling, given 'the roaring of blood' in his ears. This was generally well answered, with a range of sensations from fear and anxiety to excitement and tension. Only a few responses were unable to gain the mark; these focused on the physical reason for the 'roaring' – that his heart was beating fast – rather than the implicit emotional reason. A few responses incorrectly interpreted the figurative 'roaring' as meaning that Miles was in pain, or deaf.

**Question 10(b)** was another inferential question, necessitating that candidates looked for any links in the text which would provide two reasons why Miles was uncertain of the squid's exact size. In fact, there were three possible reasons from which to select two. The creature was described in various ways, only two of which meant that he could not be sure of its size: first, it was difficult to tell where its body began and ended; second, he could not take his eyes away from its tentacles. This 'tentacles' reason could equally have been given by reference to their being jumbled up. Some stronger responses offered one or other of these reasons, and a few went for the third reason, distilled from the fact that Miles carried a flashlight: it was dark. It was a demanding question and, because the irrelevant triangular shape and flat, wing-like fins were regularly offered, one mark was awarded more frequently than two for responses here.

**Question 10(c)** asked for the single word in the paragraph to which the pronoun 'its' referred, when Miles wondered whether he 'was within its reach'. About half of the candidates carefully traced the text back, through another 'its', to find the original noun 'creature' (or 'creature's'); some showed an even more confident understanding by replacing it with 'squid'. Those who read the question less carefully spoiled their answers by including more than one word and could not score.

**Question 10(d)** looked for what, in particular, convinced the writer that this was a giant squid. All responses came from the right area of the text, focusing on the 'disc in the rubbery mass' which was the creature's eye. The strongest candidates recognised that there had to be something special about this eye, rather than that of any other sea creature, which convinced Miles; they read on to see that it was the huge size of that eye. 'It had an eye, thirty centimetres across' was a popular lift; others paraphrased to offer 'Its huge eye' or 'its eye was so big'. Many weaker responses spoke only of the 'shiny disc in the rubbery mass' or that 'it had an eye'; such answers did not adequately define the special nature of the feature.

**Question 10(e)** While simile and metaphor were to be considered in earlier questions, the ability to respond further to the writer's craft was tested here, by asking what the writer achieved by the final short sentence of the extract. There were a number of candidates, clearly well prepared to consider how and what effects can be created by an author, who gave a correct and succinct answer: 'suspense' or 'a cliffhanger'. Others wrote about 'readers wondering what will happen next'. 'The danger that he was in' was another possible correct answer given by a very small minority. Those who offered 'fear', alone, needed to be aware that Miles's fear had already been shown; the effect of this short sentence was to *heighten* or emphasise that fear. Other frequent, incorrect answers suggested that the short sentence showed how unusual it was to find a giant squid or that Miles could sell it for a high price. Neither of these saw this final sentence as a stylistic device.

**Question 11** was the customary vocabulary question. Candidates were required to show their understanding, in context, but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or phrases from a choice of eight. Many candidates achieved at least 3 marks and a fair number scored 4 or 5. Few found themselves unable to paraphrase only one or two words and the practice of using the given words in a sentence, rather than defining them, was seen even more rarely.

*Detached* was a popular choice, almost invariably recast correctly as 'separate' or 'not connected', though 'disconnected', when offered, could not score. *Faintly* was also seen in many scripts, usually defined, for a mark, as 'softly', 'difficult to hear' or, from the stronger candidates, 'barely audible'; 'slightly' and 'silent' were among the inaccurate attempts. Fewer candidates attempted *reek*, and while a number of those which attempted it knew that there had to be a suggestion of unpleasantness, others gave the single words 'smell', 'odour' or 'scent' which were insufficient. The best candidates correctly added such adjectives as 'bad', 'foul' or 'nasty' to the idea of 'smell' while others knew the words 'stench' and 'stink'. *Haul* appeared frequently and was a successful choice with 'finds', 'catch', 'collection' and 'harvest' all giving the right meaning. Equally popular was *clasping*, with its numerous possible synonyms such as 'holding', 'gripping', 'grasping' and 'clutching'; possibly the only imprecise answer seen was 'pinching' – presumably suggested by the 'pincers' which were *clasping*. Perhaps the most difficult word which could be selected was *relatively*; fewer attempted this than any other word. The best synonyms, showing the greatest understanding, were 'mostly', 'quite', 'more or less', and 'fairly'; 'comparatively' was seen infrequently. 'almost' and 'compared to' were common attempts which did not score. *Exhaling*, chosen by the majority of candidates, was recast precisely, in most cases, as 'breathing out', though 'breathing' alone was accepted; distortions such as 'gasping' or 'breathing heavily' were not. The last word, *prise*, was seen less frequently than most of the others and the best substitutes were 'drag', 'wrench', and 'force'; 'take', 'remove' and 'move' were all acceptable alternatives and those who were confident enough to attempt it usually scored.

Some responses offered two or more synonyms for a word; candidates are advised that only the first word offered as an answer will be credited (unless, of course, it is the first word in a phrase of definition). Responses should therefore be decided on with care.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22

Reading

## Key messages

Candidates in general performed better than in the past with questions in which they were required to answer in their own words. Moreover, there were fewer instances of candidates couching their synonyms of key words in note form, as in 'shift -- move, never breathe again – death' in **Question 7(b)**.

Some candidates wrote the content points in **Question 1(a)** in pencil, before writing over the pencil in pen, although the incidence of this was not so high as in previous years. This often led to writing which was difficult to read. Another occasional difficulty with layout was that some candidates, in order to show work they did not wish to be assessed, indicated this with a cross on either side of it, rather than putting a line through it. These are practices which candidates are advised against using.

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised that content points cannot be scored if they are spread over two bullets with no obvious link, or if they are put in the wrong boxes, although there were fewer instances of this than in the past. Candidates should also focus in this question on making the *whole* point; it is possible not to gain marks because details have been omitted.

In a few cases in **Question 1(a)**, the use of ellipsis, as in ....., instead of writing out the points in full led to the loss of such points and it is important that teachers draw their candidates' attention to the fact that this is not an acceptable form of communication, even in note form, in an examination.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates can improve accuracy with noun-verb agreements, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, or intrusive use of the article where none is required. They should learn the appropriate use of the apostrophe and ensure they do not use it to denote plurals. There is room for improvement in the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' to ensure that these are used appropriately.

## General Comments

Candidates were to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet. Candidates seemed to find Passage 1 more accessible than Passage 2, as Passage 2 required understanding of implied meanings and some aspects of imagery and writer's craft.

There were very few incomplete scripts and even the weakest candidates engaged with the tasks and the texts. Most candidates appeared to have been well prepared, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked. In general they coped well with the layout of the answer booklets.

Both passages, the first entitled 'Pandas' and the second contextualised with an introduction rather than a title, seemed to engage the interest of the candidates and to stretch and discriminate amongst them, and this was reflected in a very wide range of scores. The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Pandas' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish true statements from false ones and those which could not be identified as either true or false from the passage, to answer a multiple choice question based on vocabulary comprehension, and to distinguish fact from opinion.

The second passage tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.



The format of the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or producing both fair and rough copies. There was very little irrelevance noted or evidence of candidates diverging from the rubric.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures. Others needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks. It was not uncommon for candidates to begin by re-casting and then lapse into lifting text.

Both spelling and punctuation were good. The overall standard of written English was in some cases impressive, although more errors were reported this session. As indicated in 'Key Messages', candidates can improve on the accuracy of noun-verb agreements, (as in 'female pandas produces few cubs'), the omission of definite or indefinite articles, even by the best candidates, e.g. 'panda loves bamboo' or intrusive use of the article where none was required, e.g. 'the pandas love bamboo'. A particular feature of responses to this paper was the intrusive use of the apostrophe to denote plurals, e.g. 'panda's eat bamboo' and 'zoo's borrow pandas': careful reading of the text would have shown correct usage. There was some confusion over 'conserve', 'reserve' and 'preserve', with pandas at times being reserved, or conservations being set up. There was also much confusion over 'fewer' and 'less' in connection with cubs and the varieties of bamboo, and also a problem with 'bamboo' as singular (which could have been avoided with careful reference to the text). There was also a tendency to add 'furthermore', 'hence' etc. liberally with no clear idea of their usage; in some cases there was little sense in what had been written because of this.

### **Comments on specific questions:**

#### **Section 1**

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the reasons why the panda is an endangered species and what is being done to protect it. The summary had to be based on all but the introductory paragraph of the text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied it was usually because key words were missing. Some responses were able to reach the maximum 15 marks; the exercise was fully discriminating as the whole range of marks could be found.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 22 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences; few responses presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point. There is little evidence to suggest that such a strategy yields more marks. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, most candidates used bullet points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 referred to the ways in which the panda is an endangered species, and there were 11 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 5 content points, (excluding the provided first point) outlining ways in which the panda is an endangered species. Its habitat is destroyed for agriculture or deforestation, for housing, and to make way for industrial development. Some skilful candidates were able to synthesise 2 or even all 3 of these points under a single bullet, although outlining them in separate bullet points scored all available marks in any case. Paragraph 2 also explained that pandas were killed for food, or hunted, in times of famine, and that panda habitat is fragmented or broken up by roads or railways or infrastructure. Many failed to make this last point because they suggested that habitat was destroyed rather than fragmented or broken up. There were 2 content points to be found in Paragraph 3, both concerned with the panda's diet. One point was either that they ate a lot of bamboo, or a kilo per day, or that it was difficult to find such a large amount of bamboo. A mere reference to 'food' or 'fish, bananas or eggs' was insufficient. The other point in the paragraph was that pandas have fewer types of bamboo available to them as their habitat is destroyed; thus the first point was concerned with amount and the second point was concerned with variety, and there was some confusion and conflating of ideas here. In Paragraph 4, there were 4 content points, the first 2 of which were very often made by candidates. Female pandas produce few cubs, pandas are not keen to breed in captivity, staff in nature reserves often lack either knowledge or experience, and conservation is expensive.

In the second section, which candidates found more challenging than the first section because of the stronger possibility of making incomplete points, the rubric asked what is being done to conserve the panda, and there were 9 available content points, (excluding the first, which was given.) In Paragraph 5, candidates could make 3 points (excluding the provided first point): the number of nature reserves is increasing or has increased, gun laws have been passed to prevent poaching, and people who live on reservations, or land reserved for pandas, are removed. Many candidates who attempted the point about the increase in reserves failed to make it because they wrote something like 'there are more of them' without supplying the agent, 'nature reserves'. In view of the amount of help, or scaffolding, that candidates receive in this question, each point has to be 'stand-alone', i.e. separately made. If that means repeating agents (as in 'reserves' in this area, or 'habitats' in the earlier area) then it must be done. Many omitted the reference to 'guns' in the point about laws to prevent poaching, or omitted the reference to 'laws'; many confused 'habitat' of the first section of the question with reservations, and referred to habitat rather than reserves in the point about removing people from reserved panda territory. Similarly, many candidates made incomplete points in Paragraph 6, where it was possible to find 3 content points, 2 of which were that there are campaigns to increase panda habitat under legal protection and campaigns to create green corridors to link isolated pandas. Although there was no insistence on reference to conservation organisations or WWF, where these points were incompletely made it tended to be because the reference to legal protection was omitted in the first, or that the reference to campaigns was omitted in either or both of the points. Very many candidates made the more accessible point in this paragraph, which was that patrols have been set up against either poaching or deforestation.

Paragraph 7 outlined a further 3 ways in which the panda is protected. Zoos borrow pandas to increase awareness of the panda's plight, and some zoos insist they will pay the loan fee only if China spends some of it on panda conservation. Often the reference to the plight of the panda was omitted, and sometimes the word 'fee' was missing, which altered the meaning and therefore was not sufficient to be rewarded. The final point, that the panda is used as a logo, was frequently made by candidates.

There was a small number of candidates who were awarded maximum points and a large number scoring 9 marks and above. Candidates are advised to avoid reproducing the given content points. Although points could be made by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form, as indicated above, rather than in continuous prose, these points nevertheless need to be fully made with, as indicated above, appropriate agents and extensions which affect the meaning or fullness of the point.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the reasons why the panda is an endangered species and what is being done to protect it. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

It appears that the task set in **Question 1(a)** of reading to seek out the most relevant information proves helpful to candidates when they set about writing their summaries in **Question 1(b)**. There were few instances of irrelevances. Examples of responses which strayed from the details of the original text into comments of their own on the topic occasionally occurred.

Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were a number of candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. The general use of own words was noticeable, with many candidates being innovative or original in their use of English; many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, while others moved blocks of text around rather than re-wording detail, or copied from the text. There were occasional examples where attempts at use of own words proved unwise in that the over-ambitious vocabulary did not entirely match the meaning of the original.

Encouragingly, nearly all candidates attempted the question and adhered to the rubric. Candidates are advised that very short answers cannot justify a high mark, since they cannot demonstrate a sustained use of own words or completely accurate use of English.

Although Examiners were not checking the number of content points in **Question 1(a)** against the number produced in **Question 1(b)**, if many fewer points were made in **Question 1(b)** than in **Question 1(a)**, this would be reflected in the language mark. Writing only, for example, 6 content points would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words, whereas, conversely, writing 15 content points might be sustained use of own words, though not necessarily. The best responses came from candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentences, and therefore able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

**Questions 2, Question 3 and Question 4** were the questions testing the new assessment objective in the revised syllabus, Assessment Objective 4, Reading for Ideas, where candidates are being tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. This section in general was well done.

**Question 2** asked candidates to tick the correct box against each of three statements based on information given in Paragraph 1; they were to decide whether each of the statements was true, false or not known in the text. The first statement – the panda was an important creature in Ancient China -- was true; the second statement – a Chinese emperor gave two pandas to Japan as a sign of friendship -- was false; the third statement – the first pandas to be seen in America were loans from China – was not known in the passage. A significant number of candidates ticked all three correct boxes. Where a box was incorrectly ticked it tended to be Box 2.

In **Question 3**, candidates were asked to tick the correct box from a choice of three, and most candidates answered this successfully by ticking the third box: The People's Republic of China lent pandas to the Japanese and Americans to establish good relations.

In **Question 4** candidates were to select and write down one opinion from Paragraph 5, and there were 2 opinions to choose from. The key to answering this type of question is to focus on words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and these were 'universally loved' and 'adorable'. Correct answers had to be put into a context which made sense, while at the same time not including so much information that the opinion ceased to be an opinion and became a statement. Answers therefore were 'pandas are adorable creatures', or 'pandas are adorable', and 'pandas are universally loved.' Re-casting in own words was also permissible, as in 'everyone loves pandas'. The addition of 'we might be encouraged by what is being done to protect' to 'this universally loved animal' was incorrect, as it turned the opinion into a statement. This was a very popular incorrect answer. Likewise, the addition of 'remove people living on territory which has been reserved for' to 'these adorable creatures' turned the opinion into a statement and was therefore incorrect. A few candidates assumed their own opinion was required, rather than an opinion from the text.

### **Comments on specific questions:**

#### ***Section 2***

Most candidates seemed to find this text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1. Nevertheless, in general they coped better with many of the comprehension questions and vocabulary than in some previous years

**Question 5(a)** asked what Miles warned Phelps about when he first went into the sea and was designed to be a fairly straightforward opening question. The vast majority of candidates wrote, correctly, that he told him that the mud softened the further out you went. Those who failed to gain the mark generally did so because they omitted the distance element.

In **Question 5(b)**, correct answers had to focus on 'Dad' in the question and not 'Thanks'. The answer was either that Miles was treating Phelps like a child, or as if he was his father, or that Phelps was being sarcastic. Answers which merely said 'he was like a Dad' without linking it to treatment or warning were not sufficient to score, and neither was an answer which focused merely on gratitude, as in 'he thanked him' or 'he was grateful to him'. Some weak candidates assumed that Miles was in fact Phelps' father.

**Question 5(c)** asked why the narrator did not say anything when Phelps went into the water above his knees. As this was an inferential question, there were several acceptable inferences, such as 'he knew he would not listen' or 'he was afraid he would get another sarcastic remark'. Answers which were not sufficient to score were those which said Phelps was not in danger at that point, or that he had already warned him. A popular wrong answer was that he was wearing waders, while others felt Miles' silence indicated he shared Phelps' confidence that he could cope, or that he had already warned him. About a third of the candidates made an appropriate inference.

**Question 6** asked what had happened to Phelps when it looked as if he'd stepped on a staircase. This was a question on simile and as such proved to be challenging for all but all but the very best candidates. Correct answers lay in being able to decode the image and see that Phelps was going or plunging or sinking vertically, and that this was happening suddenly or unexpectedly. Weaker answers were 'he fell', with no reference to 'sudden' or 'he tripped', which seemed like a horizontal movement and not a vertical one.

**Question 7(a)** asked candidates to decode another image, this time personification, and write that it was as if the mud was a person, or human, or a monster, or had appropriate contextualised features, such as being malicious or spiteful. Identification of the figure of speech being used, i.e. personification, was not sufficient in itself because this merely labelled the expression rather than give its effect, which was what the question was asking for. Many candidates offered a noun as the effect as in 'panic' or 'fear'. As with **Question 6**, this was answered correctly by only very able candidates and in this respect tuned out to be a very discriminating question.

**Question 7(b)** was the first of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, the key words being either 'shifted' or 'extricated' and 'never breathe again'. For the first available mark, acceptable synonyms for 'shift' were 'move' or 'struggle' and for 'extricate' acceptable synonyms were 'take out' and 'escape'; although the context showed that it was Miles' foot that was removed, candidates were rewarded for the idea simply that Miles escaped or got free. For the second available mark, acceptable synonyms for 'never breathe again' were 'die', 'drown', 'perish' or 'be killed.' Candidates were generally quite successful in this question, with most giving at least one correct answer; although there were instances of the key words being copied, this was not as prevalent as it has been at other times.

Another simile had to be de-coded in **Question 7(c)**, the correct answer being that Miles was weak or helpless. A popular wrong answer was to say that he was small or that he was weightless, and another popular wrong answer was to repeat the text without attempting to get behind the image, by writing that Miles was grabbed by the hair or neck, which was merely the way in which Miles was picked up and said nothing about Miles himself.

Most candidates answered **Question 7(d)** correctly by writing either that the water was up to Phelps' breastbone, or that Phelps had sunk deeper into mud, although some answered, incorrectly, that the water was beyond his breastbone, or specified some other, inaccurate, part of the body.

In **Question 8(a)**, candidates were asked to pick out and write down the single word which showed that other people had got stuck, the correct answer being 'typical'. Candidates generally found this challenging. There were several common wrong answers, the most popular being 'rescue' and sometimes 'crawl'. 'They' was also, incorrectly, sometimes offered. Some candidates spoiled their answer by infringing the rubric and offering two words, 'typical rescue' being the most commonly occurring incorrect response in this category.

**Question 8(b)** was another discriminating question. Candidates were asked why Phelps' rescue would be particularly difficult. The most common answer was by far that he was more than knee deep in mud. However, close examination of the paragraph shows the necessity of making the connection between the fact that Phelps was more than knee deep in mud with the fact that in typical rescues people were not knee deep in mud, because they were crossing exposed mud and therefore could crawl free, or be rescued by wooden planks. Therefore, what made Phelps' rescue particularly difficult was that he could not crawl free, or be rescued by wooden planks, or that the mud was not exposed. Candidates who came close to this answer spoiled it by writing that there were no wooden planks, which was a distortion of the correct answer and so was not rewarded.

**Question 9(a)** asked candidates to give the two ideas which Miles had to save Phelps. This question was well answered, with a majority of candidates making the two points that Miles gave Phelps, or went to get, a piece of piping for him to breathe through, and that he went to get someone to help. Where the first point was not correctly made, it tended to be because the pipe was mentioned without its purpose, i.e. for breathing, and where the second point was not correctly made it tended to be because the idea of 'screaming' or 'calling' for help was made. Close reading of the text showed that it was Phelps, not Miles, who was screaming.

**Question 10(a)** was the second of the questions on the paper where candidates were asked to answer in their own words. They were asked why it was impossible to tell that anything horrific was happening, and were to focus on 'tranquil' water and 'reassuring daybreak', the link being established by the words 'impossible to tell' in the text. Acceptable synonyms for 'tranquil' were 'peaceful', 'calm' and 'still', and there was a reasonable degree of success with this. However, 'reassuring daybreak' proved to be too challenging for all but the best candidates, as they were required to give synonyms firstly for both 'reassuring', with acceptable answers being 'comforting' 'hopeful' or 'soothing' and secondly for 'daybreak', with acceptable answers being 'sunrise', or 'dawn'. A large number of candidates attempted only one of these words and, as there were no half marks, a correct synonym for 'daybreak' scored no mark if the word 'reassuring' was repeated or not attempted. Some candidates thought that 'daybreak' meant sunset and not sunrise. Many candidates offered an answer which was then the answer for **Question 10(b)**, that he could see no sign of

Phelps, which was to show misunderstanding of the idea of ‘nothing horrific happening’, interpreting the question as asking how Miles knew that something horrific was in fact happening.

Most candidates offered the correct answer to **Question 10(b)**, the answer being that Miles panicked because he could not see Phelps, or he thought that Phelps had drowned. Likewise, most candidates offered the correct answer to **Question 11(a)**, the answer being that Miles saw the plastic pipe and Phelps’ head, or the top of Phelps’ head. Both elements had to be correctly given for the mark. **Question 11(b)** proved to be more challenging in that, in order to explain why the shore was shrinking, candidates had to focus on the meaning of ‘shrinking’ and link it to the idea of the tide coming in, although less exact explanations were accepted, such as ‘the shore was covered with water’ or ‘the water level had risen’. Many candidates merely defined ‘shrinking’ rather than offer a reason for the shrinking by writing that the shore was lessening in size, or that the water was decreasing; others thought that the shore was shrinking because Miles was a long way away from Phelps.

**Question 12** asked what Miles did to save Phelps and what the old man did to save him. Precise reading and explanation were required here, and many marks were lost through imprecision. Miles dropped the rope over Phelps, or over Phelps’ shoulders; ‘putting’ or ‘throwing’ the rope were incorrect, as were dropping the rope over Phelps’ waist or hips, or putting the rope on to Phelps. Reference to the raft was regarded as a neutral extension which neither gained nor denied the mark. The old man did two things; he tied the rope around his hips and he walked or strode up the beach or away from the sea. Reference to him telling Miles to make sure the rope was round Phelps’ chest was not an action, and as such was regarded as a neutral extension which neither gained nor denied the mark.

**Question 13** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or phrases from a choice of eight. Candidates scored much better here than in previous examinations, and there were no particular favourite choices, as all words or phrases seem to be equally attempted. Most candidates who attempted ‘inflated’ scored the mark for synonyms such as ‘blown up’ or ‘filled with air’. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered ‘madly’ for ‘insanely’, ‘a little’, or ‘just’ for ‘slightly’, and ‘for a short period of time’ or ‘momentarily’ for ‘temporarily’, although there were many popular wrong answers too, where the shortage of the period of time was not sufficiently stressed, as in ‘for a while’ or ‘for the time being’. For ‘clenched’, candidates scored a mark for writing ‘clutched’, ‘gripped’, or ‘held tightly’ although a popular wrong answer was ‘grabbed’. Correct synonyms for ‘sickening’ were ‘horrifying’, ‘dreadful’ and ‘terrible’; words which connoted fear were not sufficient to score, as in ‘worrying’ or ‘frightening’; correct synonyms for ‘fill him in’ were ‘told’ or ‘informed’ or ‘explained’. Correct synonyms for ‘burst’ had to include the idea of speed as in ‘hurried’ or ‘went quickly’ and there was much success here, although weaker, incorrect, answers were also offered, such as ‘went’ or ‘arrived’. Many marks were lost for lack of qualifiers, as ‘short time’ for ‘temporarily’; ‘tight hold’ for ‘clenched’; ‘ran quickly’ for ‘burst’. Because understanding only is being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form was not insisted upon. Candidates can improve their performance by ensuring that they select five words only and explain the meanings of those words. Only one synonym for each word or phrase should be offered as, where more than one is given, only the first will be considered.