

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Writing

## Key messages

- **Section 1** – candidates are advised to read the question carefully to ensure that all three bullet points are fully addressed. Responses to **Section 1** during this session often failed to develop the third bullet point.
- Candidates are advised to produce a brief plan to help structure their responses in both sections.
- Candidates are advised to avoid writing an entire first draft for their responses.
- Candidates are advised to avoid memorising sections of responses, 'florid' vocabulary and clichés/proverbs. Inserting elements like these is rarely successful.
- A minority of candidates included sexual assault within responses which should be avoided as this is inappropriate for the task(s).
- Candidates are advised to structure their response(s) in accordance with the question.

## General comments

- The overall standard of responses was similar to previous sessions. There was some high quality writing, evident control of structure, and relevance to task. There were some examples of very weak English which impacted on candidates' ability to respond to questions effectively.
- **Section 1** elicited a range of responses with most satisfactorily covering a visit from relatives. A significant number focused on bullet point 2 with a long section of listed events. Bullet point 3 was frequently undeveloped, with candidates often only mentioning that the relatives enjoyed an event. A significant minority of candidates only commented on what they had enjoyed about the visit.
- Candidates generally addressed both aspects on bullet point 1 with only a very few failing to mention when the visit took place.
- **Section 2** responses were generally relevant, with few misunderstandings of the task. Candidates chose from across the range of questions but **Question 5** was the most popular choice by a wide margin.
- There were very few short answers or unfinished responses, suggesting time management isn't an issue. Candidates should avoid writing very long responses as they are rarely well-structured and often compound errors through loss of focus/tiredness.
- Punctuation is improving with fewer errors seen, even in weaker scripts. Candidates should be encouraged to write clear sentences, varying length for effect where appropriate. More complex punctuation, especially direct speech, should only be used if the candidate can do so correctly.
- Tenses were generally accurate, except in very weak responses. Weaker responses revealed confusion around pronoun use and subject/verb agreement, which can greatly affect clarity.
- Very poor handwriting was seen in some responses which impeded clarity with the very worst cases proving illegible in places. Candidates with weak handwriting should be encouraged to write on alternate lines to aid legibility.
- Inappropriate language was rarely seen but candidates should avoid any use of expletives, even within dialogue. It is inappropriate in the context of a written examination.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1 Directed Writing**

Candidates were asked to write a letter to their aunt who lives in another city. The letter is about two of their relatives who live abroad and their visit to stay with the candidate's family for a week. This was a very happy event for everyone.

**Bullet point 1:** *'who the relatives are and when they came to visit'*

The majority of responses covered both aspects of this bullet point. Almost all included descriptions of two relatives often with names and their relationship to the candidate. Stronger responses included further details about the relatives and the candidate's feelings towards them. A surprising number of candidates wrote about more than two relatives; this didn't necessarily limit the response. Most were able to state either a date or occasion to locate the event in time. A few simply stated that the visit was 'recent'. This was insufficient as the question stated that the visit took place 'recently'. There were several apparent instances of misreading with candidate either writing to invite the Aunt to visit, or describing the Aunt's visit to the candidate. These responses were self-limiting.

**Bullet point 2:** *'details about what you and your relatives did together during the visit'*

Overall, responses addressed and developed this bullet point well, with almost all featuring descriptions of at least one event, often with lively detail and their own feelings about the event(s). Some responses lost focus and included lengthy narratives, or a simple list of each day's events with little opinion or detail. The very few candidates who misread the task in bullet point 1 struggled to address this bullet point, either because they were inviting the aunt to a future visit, or they wrote as if the aunt had been present at the described events.

**Bullet point 3:** *'what your relatives enjoyed most about their visit and why.'*

This was the least well-developed bullet point with many responses merely mentioning that the relatives had enjoyed one previously described event. Explanations as to why they enjoyed this event were often simple such as 'they were pleased to see us after so long' or 'the weather/food/scenery was nicer than in their country'. Stronger responses explored the relatives' opinions more deeply, sometimes adding the candidate's own perception of the most enjoyable event. A significant minority failed to address bullet point 3 at all, and signed off their letter after describing the events of the visit.

Spelling and grammar were mostly appropriate to the task, with paragraphing generally appropriate. Vocabulary was sometimes an issue with candidates using unusual vocabulary incorrectly. Similarly, the use of clichéd idioms and/or memorised sections is rarely successful as it interrupts the flow of candidates' own writing style. Most candidates were able to adopt a suitable register, using a warm and informal tone and including comment on the aunt's wellbeing and life. Most were able to sign off in a suitable manner, although in quite a few responses, overly formal phrases were used, e.g. 'yours faithfully'.

## **Section 2**

### **Question 2**

*Describe the best meal you have ever eaten. (Remember you must describe the place, the atmosphere and the people you were with as well as the food itself.)*

This was a reasonably popular choice and candidates were generally able to describe both the meal and the setting. There were a few particularly strong responses which used evocative and appropriate vocabulary to describe both the ambiance and the meal itself. Some less successful responses lost focus and became narratives of the event. Weak responses were rather repetitive, perhaps due to limited lexis.

### **Question 3**

*Which characteristic in people do you most like and which characteristic do you least like? Give reasons and examples to support your views.*

Very few candidates attempted this question and among those that did, there was a tendency to include several characteristics; thus limiting the depth of their response. The structure of the question and/or development of the topic proved challenging among a number of responses where candidates simply restated their preferences, rather than gave reasons. Better responses selected two characteristics and developed reasons for choosing them, often giving examples to support their discussion. A very few candidates misread the question and discussed two people they knew.

#### Question 4

*Is it better for people to live in the same place all their lives or to live in different places? Give reasons and examples to support your views.*

This choice was not popular and there were very few responses. Stronger responses took a definite position and compared and contrasted opinion with appropriate examples. Weaker responses tended to repeat basic reasons for moving away or not, often focusing on the need to be with family.

#### Question 5

*Write a story which includes the sentence: 'When she tried to open the door, she was surprised that the key didn't fit.'*

This was the most popular question and responses ranged in terms of their effectiveness. Stronger responses were well structured, had an engaging narrative arc and employed a wide range of structures and vocabulary. Punctuation of direct speech was much improved when compared with previous series, even in weaker responses. This question seemed to trigger connotations of kidnap and imprisonment and this sometimes resulted in inappropriate content which centred on sexual abuse and/or incest. Although some of these responses were reported for potential safeguarding issues, the vast majority seemed to be driven by the 'need' to make narratives dramatic. This often resulted in 'soap opera' style events which were rarely successful. Some of the strongest responses were centred on apparently mundane events such as not being able to use a vehicle and the snowballing effect of the key not fitting. As in previous sessions, the phrase was often used as the culmination of the narrative. A very small minority of responses neglected to include the phrase but still focused on a door which wouldn't open.

#### Question 6

*Write a story in which a science laboratory plays an important part.*

This was another popular question and again responses ranged in their effectiveness. This question seemed to capture candidates' imagination and a wide range of scenarios were written about, ranging from science fiction to more quotidian settings such as school Science lessons. There were very few inappropriate responses. There was a clear interest in technology and AI with a noticeable number of candidates writing about robotics, gene manipulation and other cutting-edge technologies. Vocabulary was strong, perhaps due to recycling of lexis from their Science studies.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Writing

## Key messages

- Candidates should ensure they identify the key words in each task so as to satisfy the requirements of the question. This is particularly important in **Section 1**, especially when the word 'and', in bold type, indicates there are two parts to the bullet point.
- Candidates are advised to stay within the word limits for each response and to check their work thoroughly. Similarly, candidates should avoid writing overlong paragraphs.
- Candidates should ensure that tenses are sequential, consistent and that agreement is considered.
- Direct speech helps to improve a narrative, but it needs to be carefully punctuated and paragraphed.
- The use of capital letters should be appropriate.
- Candidates are advised to learn a range of suitable valedictions for when a letter is required in **Section 1**.
- In **Section 1**, candidates are advised not lift sections of the scenario as an opening paragraph or in **Section 2** to copy the essay title at the start.

## General comments

The strongest candidates in this exam continue to demonstrate enormous ability. This year there were very few very short or no-responses. The best essays were fluent, accurate and always interesting. Vocabulary in particular was often a strong point with some impressive words being used, for example, 'cynosure', 'quotidian', and 'incipient'. Tense, number and gender are the main weaknesses in accuracy for many, particularly with confusion between the pronouns 'his/her'. **Section 1** was done well by a large majority, but some were rather casual with the format of their letter. This year, in **Section 2**, all of the titles were attempted, with the descriptive title being the second most popular. Punctuation was also mainly sound, with an improvement in speech punctuation, but there was a lack of sophisticated punctuation, even amongst the very able. The spelling of 'environment' and 'separate' was noticeably better. It was good to see separate paragraphs used for the bullet points in **Section 1**. Sentence separation errors still gave cause for concern with weaker candidates.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1 – Directed Writing**

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that an important person visited their school. They had to write a letter about this event to a friend who had moved away from the school to live in another town. This **purpose** and **situation** proved to be very straightforward for the majority of candidates. A successful answer had to include the following information:

- who the important person was **and** when the visit took place
- details of what happened during the visit
- how the visit was important for the candidate and the school.

For bullet point 1, it was necessary to give **both** the identity of the important person and when the visit took place. The former was achieved by most candidates. They gave either a specific name or gave the job or position held by the person concerned. Visits by 'the Prime Minister or the Sultan' were extremely popular choices. Other visitors were pop stars, ex-teachers, sporting heroes, owners of global companies and quite often a less well-known personality from the locality who set a good example. The candidates were not asked for a fixed date in saying *when* the visit took place. In fact, many gave a specific date, but many referred to 'last Tuesday'/'last week'/'yesterday'/'at the end of the first term' or something similar. Some

candidates gave the name of an event, such as 'Prize Day', and this was perfectly acceptable as the friend would have known this occasion. Where candidates did not gain full credit for this bullet point it was because they did not give an adequate idea of when it occurred. Either they omitted the 'when' entirely or gave a time of day which could have been on any day and so did not help the friend to locate it clearly. The use of the word 'recently' was copying from the question and so difficult to credit. A small number of candidates mistook the visit for one in the future and a small number also thought they had to invite the friend back for the occasion.

For bullet point 2, candidates had to narrate successfully some of the important particulars of the visit. The very important visitor usually gave a motivational speech to the school assembly. Other activities often mentioned were a tour around the school, a look at the teaching in some classes and an inspection of the fabric and the facilities of the school. The visitor often distributed the prizes at an award ceremony. The details of what happened were usually conveyed in an enthusiastic and convincing manner. Pupils were encouraged to work and study hard. They were given tips on exam success or environmental issues and all seemed inspired by what they were told. Those who set the event in the future found it difficult to complete this bullet point effectively and resorted to giving details of the preparation for the event, rather than details of the event itself. Some candidates did too much for this bullet point, a lot of which was about the preparations for the visit which were not required. This seriously affected how much they were able to do for the other bullets. The responses to the bullets do not have to be equally long but some balance is required.

Bullet point 3 required the candidates to be specific about the importance of the visit for themselves but also for the school. The most successful candidates saw the opportunity to write about these separately. For example, the candidate might have prospered from the advice given to succeed in some way whereas the school might have become more well-known because of this success. Alternatively, candidates often benefited from extra resources given to the school by the Minister of Education while the school itself benefited from an increase in pupil numbers as a result. If candidates simply said the visit was motivational or inspiring it was helpful but better candidates gave a reason why it was tied into the nature of the visitor. In fact, most candidates tended to resort to a mutual importance for the candidate and the school, for example, saying that a new computer room was to be built where there was a strong implication that both would benefit. The weakest responses neglected to mention the importance the one or the other. For this reason, bullet point 3 was a good discriminator, as was bullet point 1.

Candidates who were clear about the other requirements for task fulfilment produced appropriate and convincing letters. The **purpose, situation** and **audience** were well within the grasp and experience of the vast majority of candidates and only those who set the event in the future found the task difficult. Most candidates this year coped well with the **format** of this letter. They did this by using a friendly opening and a friendly valediction. Given the informality of the letter, most valedictions were acceptable, although simply signing the letter with 'from' or 'bye' is never seen as adequate. In the same way, an over-formal ending such as 'Yours faithfully' seemed inappropriate. Most set out the letter well, but a number were a little casual about this, especially in the use of capital letters in valedictions. The **tone** in the letters, particularly the warmth between the friends, was very well handled. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the **tone** and approach very well. **Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when bullet point 3 was answered.

Linguistically, candidates needed to remember that they were speaking to a friend, someone of similar age and interests. In fact, most candidates produced a convincing piece of work by writing as accurately and naturally as they could. The better candidates were able to balance successfully the need to demonstrate their linguistic ability in an exam and yet ensure that the letter was natural enough to sound convincing. Candidates are advised that even in an informal letter, the use of slang and 'wanna' and 'gonna' and 'kinda' has no place. Overall, spelling was satisfactory, although a very common error here was to mistake the 'Ministry' of Education for the Minister. Many candidates would improve their accuracy by using capital letters properly, ensuring correct verbs and tenses and avoiding omitting articles. There were some good idiomatic expressions used but candidates must be very wary of using memorised idioms ('in the pink of health') which are rather old-fashioned and rarely used now by native speakers.

## **Section 2 – Creative Writing**

### **Question 2 – Describe your favourite holiday location. (Remember you can describe the surroundings and the local people, as well as the place.)**

Once again, the descriptive title this year was more popular than in previous years, as a holiday location was something the candidates knew very well or they knew an area which would make a good holiday location. The very best responses employed the full range of descriptive devices to give accounts of wonderfully carefree holidays. One candidate wrote of a holiday in the country, surrounded by a sugar cane estate, trees and rivers, and described children playing football, swimming in the river, lunch under the trees, communal dinners and the adults tending gardens and livestock. Another was about staying at Grandpa's 'stilt-style bamboo house...encircled by vegetable fields with cucumbers tender and green'. Activities included 'angling under the shade...going up on to the beacon to watch the evening glow...and the silver moon...as green fireflies spattered light as the night advanced'. This was impressive writing, with scenes fully realised and with the ring of sincerity. Beach holidays were also popular with the water 'glittering invitingly' and seaside meals with 'grilled BBQ wings...sizzled to perfection'. Another one described a 'mini heaven on Earth' at night: from noisy teenagers around their bonfire to quieter moments, gazing at the 'starry sky'. Yet another gave an evocative account of a visit to India, with details of an 'overwhelming welcome, soft-hearted, generous citizens, succulent food, delicious signature dishes; a place that holds many secret stories of the past'. Thus, the best essays evoked the atmosphere and made full use of all the senses when describing. They often demonstrated a range of vocabulary which was truly impressive. Effective similes and metaphors were helpful.

Weaker responses relied more heavily on listing aspects of the location rather than describing it and on repeating the words 'beautiful, happy, colourful, amazing and environment'. Some weaker responses barely reflected the idea of it being a holiday location. Some descriptions were not very convincing; one of London, for example, seemed to have little to do with London other than some clichés of English life and suggested the candidate was not writing from first-hand experience. Another weakness with some was to describe a location for a sentence or two but then turn the essay into a narrative, usually of a past holiday.

### **Question 3 – What helps people to succeed in life: their appearance, their personality or their opinions? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

There were a few extremely thoughtful essays which explored the effects of appearance, personality and opinions and these essays were generally structured by considering each of these in turn. Appearance was seen as both a strength and a weakness in determining success. A pleasant appearance was seen as helpful to people in careers which relied on looks. Models and actors were seen as benefiting in this way, as well as people in the public eye or those whose main role was to interact with the public. Most candidates were well aware that looks can be deceptive and most used the expression 'you can't judge a book by its cover'. Personality was seen as a deeper attribute, with good or bad personality seen as helpful or harmful in all walks of life. Candidates generally found it more difficult to discuss the role of opinions in success. A general weakness in responses to this topic was to see success only in terms of a career and not to range more widely into other aspects of succeeding in life. The sign of a good response was often when the candidate developed alternatives such as education, hard work and perseverance as alternatives to a successful life. This topic was a particularly good illustration of the fact that candidates should be sure they have enough to say before attempting an argument topic. Those who had little to say about opinions should have been looking elsewhere – a short, plan would have helped resolve this.

### **Question 4 – 'Playing competitive sport is the best way to keep fit and healthy.' What is your opinion? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

Again, this argument essay was a less popular choice and largely interested those who played sport themselves. Most who did it were in favour of sport being a very good way to keep fit for all the obvious reasons of exercise, interest and teamwork. Candidates who took this approach largely concentrated on the one aspect, the benefits of sport, and supported their arguments with personal experience. For example, there was one long, moving account in a weaker response, of how, despite a poor academic record, playing sport had helped create a fit and healthy mind and boosted the candidate's creativity in the arts. Some were able to develop this topic because they were not convinced sport was necessarily the best way to keep fit. They introduced healthy eating as an alternative or supplementary regime and thereby deepened the argument. If there was a weakness in the overall response to this task it was that candidates ignored the word 'competitive' in the title and often spoke more about sport and exercise as a hobby. They tended to argue that general healthy living is as effective as taking part in strenuous activity, whereas the title really invited candidates to discuss the benefits of vigorous and competitive activity.

**Question 5 – Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘There were two very different opportunities and he knew he had to choose the right one.’**

This was the most popular choice by far and led to a huge range of interesting, and cleverly devised scenarios. The most popular of these was about the very difficult choice of staying at home to support one’s family or accepting the offer of education or longed-for career, often overseas. On a similar theme, there was a very good story of culture shock about a boy from a small village, experiencing Seattle University and his new room-mate – with ‘inked body, hair dyed red and a face brimming with piercings’. Furthermore, there were the ‘assaulting faces’ of the room-mate’s friends. The student found himself in a quandary as to whether to be friendless or become part of the lifestyle. Equally serious and touchingly told, was a story of an estranged son working at a prestigious city job, who then had to decide whether to accept or reject his ‘country bumpkin’ mother. The candidate made it vivid with telling details, such as her ‘worn-out handbag’. There were also a number of stories of a thief in the house and the lone occupant had two choices – escape or tackle the intruder. This year, there were many more cliff hanger endings, and these were often very effective with the choice of the correct opportunity left to the reader’s imagination. The best answers were those which included the given sentence naturally into the narrative. It should be remembered that there is no need to include inverted commas around the given sentence (unless it is part of direct speech), nor underline it. On the other hand, it is essential to keep the given sentence in its original wording and so the tense and the gender of the person involved must be maintained and planned for.

**Question 6 – Write a story in which a broken light plays an important part.**

This was another popular choice. The ‘broken light’ was very loosely interpreted and included one about a power cut in a shop but it was usually a household light or a torch light. There were many planned trips to the mountains or forests where the candidate was invariably lost without any means of light. One candidate took a humorous approach with a narrative about two young boys who broke a lamp and waited on tenterhooks for the wicked genie to emerge. However, it was just one of their grandfather’s tall stories!

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21  
Reading

## Key messages

- Candidates are encouraged to try to gain a good, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions, before they begin to answer; this is especially important with reference to questions on the second passage. A further close reading of the whole text before tackling the questions in that second text would help to clarify the narrative.
- In **Question 1(a)**, candidates should focus on the general main points to be identified, rather than on detail which exemplifies or extends these points.
- In responding to **Question 1(a)**, candidates should note that 12 marks are available for points identified; indicative of the number of possible points which should be included. By including a number of points which equates to or near to the number of marks, they will not only score more highly in **Question 1(a)** but will also have adequate notes on which to base their summary in **Question 1(b)**.
- In **Question 1(b)**, there should be a focus on clear expression; this will ensure a well-organised piece of writing which is easy to follow. Linking words, though frequently included, were not always used in a logical or sensible way. As candidates' response to this question is marked for relevance and coherence, regular practice in fluent and coherent writing is recommended. This will help to ensure the appropriate use of connectives such as 'moreover', 'therefore', 'nevertheless', and so on, as well as their accurate positioning in a sentence. Words and phrases which are not Standard English, e.g. 'moreso' and 'adding on' (for 'additionally'), should be avoided.
- Responses to **Question 2** revealed that some candidates do not recognise the difference between fact and opinion; further practice in differentiating between the two would therefore be an advantage. A small minority of candidates offered their own opinions, usually on the contents of the paragraph to which they were directed.
- In **Question 8**, the multiple-choice vocabulary question, all of the words from which candidates must choose may be suitable in certain situations, but there is one which is more suitable than the others in the *particular* context of the given passage. Candidates should be encouraged to try out each of the possible words and to decide which is the most appropriate in the passage with which they are dealing.
- In responding to the final question of **Section 2**, candidates are advised to have clear in their minds the difference between the literal *meaning* of and the *effect* suggested by the quoted sentences as they are used in the passage. Giving the 'meaning' is often simpler than candidates expect; in feeling that they should extend their response to the first part, they sometimes include what amounts to the 'effect'; the two should be kept separate in order to gain full credit.

## General comments

No more than a handful of scripts were incomplete and candidates generally coped well with the spaces provided in the answer booklet, very few requiring extra pages for responses. Responses were, for the most part, clearly written, only those few who sometimes wrote to excess – in **Question 1a**, for example – found themselves writing at the side or bottom of the answer space or between lines already written. This can sometimes cause illegibility and should be avoided.

Two passages were to be read, the first being non-fiction and the second, fiction. As in previous sessions, Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 2 and to engage candidates more fully.



Questions on the first passage, entitled 'Silk', explored candidates' ability to read for ideas. 22 marks were available for the summary question, 12 of these being awarded for the selection of the main content points from the text, and a further 10 marks for assessment of the ability to draw these points together in a relevant and coherent piece of continuous writing. **Question 2**, carrying 3 marks, also tested the ability to read for ideas, candidates being required to select 3 opinions from the first paragraph of the passage.

The second text, 'Albert the Lion', proved more demanding than the first, testing candidates' literal and inferential comprehension skills, their understanding of vocabulary, their ability to select appropriate quotations, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. Recognition of the subtleties expressed or implied in some of these questions is what challenges candidates, but virtually all candidates attempted every question.

In **Question 1(a)**, selecting only the essential points, without repetition, unnecessary examples or stretches of redundant material, produced the best results. Such careful selection always allowed for the transfer of relevant ideas to **Question 1(b)**.

In **Section 2**, the vast majority of candidates were prepared to deal with **Questions 9(a)** and **9(b)** on the writer's craft. Although demanding, these questions were generally attempted and not left unanswered by candidates. Continued practice in distinguishing between the literal 'meaning' and the 'effect' of given sentences should be encouraged.

### Comments on specific questions:

#### Section 1

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 24% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify and describe the rise and spread of silk in former times and the reasons why silk is valued in modern times. The summary was to be based on the whole text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, being 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. The given points illustrated the suggestion of the rubric that candidates may find it helpful to use bullet points for clarity and most adhered to this, organising their responses in that way. Most or all of the overarching points were often identified and, where marks were not awarded, it was usually because the focus of the point was lost, sometimes through the addition of unnecessary details: 'Silk blends well with other fibres *to make taffeta*'; here, what is merely an example of what can be produced by blending fibres is attached to the correct, overarching point as if it were the *only* use, and therefore a crucial part of that point; such examples limit the point being made. Alternatively, the point may have been incorrectly made because of the omission of a detail which was essential to make the main point, e.g. 'Silk was reserved for clothing'. Without reference to the clothing being only *for Emperors*, the point was not fully made. Similarly, the idea that 'Silk spread' neglects mention of where it spread to i.e. 'Silk spread to *other countries*', '...to *other parts of the world*' or '*worldwide*'.

Excluding the given content points, there were 15 further points from which candidates could identify any combination to score up to a maximum of 12, for one mark each. Paragraph 1 contained 5 of these: the invention of silk reels and looms; that silk was a 'valued commodity', was reserved for Emperors' clothing or for gifts to their court guests; that ordinary people were eventually allowed to wear silk; that silk was used for manufacturing 'diverse' or other things; and, that it was used as money. Almost without exception, candidates offered the first of these, only denying themselves the mark by mentioning only either 'reels' or 'looms', and not the two machines, both of which were essential to the rise of silk. Many, having stated that silk was a 'valued commodity', went on to repeat the same idea of 'value' with reference to Emperors' clothing and gifts. These did not detract from the main idea and therefore did not spoil the point, but were unnecessary additions. The fact that ordinary people were allowed to wear silk was generally noted correctly. In mentioning that silk came to be further known through manufacturing, no credit could be given where candidates added, inaccurately, that it was used in the manufacture 'of paper, fishing lines and bows for musical instruments'. The passage clearly stated, through the use of 'such as', that these were simply examples of the main point and not a finite list of uses in manufacturing. That silk rose to importance when it 'was used as' money was, almost universally offered.

A further 2 points relevant to the spread of silk in former times were to be found in Paragraph 2: that it spread to other countries, or across the world, and that the trade in silk became extensive as a result. For the first, it was acceptable to say that *silk/it*, *silk worms* or *the secret* (of its manufacture) spread in this way. However, the point was sometimes lost when the idea of *other countries* was not given, as this could mean a limited

spread throughout China alone. The emphasis on the 'long distance' nature of the trade was not always presented accurately, a number of responses stating that '*silk* became extensive', rather than its trade. Others stated that the trade 'became so extensive' – an incomplete statement which was made credit-worthy only these three words were elaborated on by adding '*...that* the major trade route was known as the Silk Road'.

There were 5 more points for candidates to select from Paragraph 3 which moved the information into 'modern times' and into why silk is valued nowadays. The first could be made in any of these four ways: that silk has a smooth/soft texture and is neither stiff nor limp so hangs well and is thus ideal for elegant clothing. While these ideas were essentially part of the same valued aspect i.e. the material's quality, candidates sometimes offered them under four separate bullets while others gave all four under one bullet; either way, they gained the single mark. The 'shimmering' appearance of the fabric or its ability to reflect light was frequently identified and many candidates chose to describe this in their own, perfectly valid words such as 'glittering or 'shiny'. That 'silk blends well', or 'can be combined, with other fibres' was the third point. Either of these concise expressions was sufficient to gain the mark, but where responses were extended to include one or more of the examples given in the passage they had to be acknowledged as such; thus, a correct lift of words from the text might be: 'It blends well with fibres *such as* wool/camel hair/cotton'. Similarly, the lift of 'can be combined with other fibres' could be extended by saying '*...to produce, for example, chiffon/crepe de chine/ taffeta*'. Where examples were included and not identified as such, they could not be credited. That silk 'is suitable for all temperatures', was the next point, and an alternative acceptable expression of this point was 'comfortable to wear in hot climates' or the fact that it also keeps you warm in cold weather. Saying only that silk does not conduct heat easily was not sufficient; the result of that fact was needed. The final reason given in Paragraph 3 as to why silk is valued today was that it is used to make clothing which protects against insects, or insect bites. It was necessary to include the fact that 'clothing' made of silk, or 'wearers' of silk are thus protected, as the passage states, and not that silk fabric in itself does this. Neither was it correct to suggest that silk protects against 'bites' in general; that could clearly not be the case in terms of some large animals, wild or otherwise.

Paragraph 4 contained 3 points which could be made: silk is strong or durable, or has strength or durability; it is worn to show status or professional standing; and it is a symbol of wealth. Some responses included the lift of the explanation of why silk is strong – that it 'is made from long continuous fibres which can bend or stretch without breaking...' but frequently stopped short of the next three or four words, thus missing the actual point: '*...making it (very) strong*'. The lift of information about silk's 'strength' being *particularly* valuable in the manufacture of equipment should suggest that what follows is only one example of an area in which it is valuable. That, and the examples of such equipment, limited the overarching point in numerous responses. In some, the limitation came with inclusion of the lengthy story of a sunken ship which showed the 'durability' of silk. It is always the main point which is required and not something which exemplifies it. The idea that silk is worn to show status was frequently offered, neatly and precisely. This was however the last point made by the majority of candidates, fewer reading on to the end of the passage where, in the last line, lay the final main point: that silk is a symbol of wealth.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes from **Question 1(a)** to write a summary of the rise and spread of silk in former times and the reasons why silk is valued in modern times, as outlined in the passage. They were advised to write between 150 and 180 words (the first ten of which were given), and almost all responses approximated this length, neatly using the available space in the answer booklet. Summaries were assessed according to how relevant, well organised and easy to follow they were. In terms of relevance, most responses included a satisfactory amount of the important material from the text, some even including occasional points which had not been selected for **Question 1(a)**, notably the two final points about silk indicating status and being a symbol of wealth. Those responses which showed evidence of candidates having carefully referred to their **Question 1(a)** notes, comprehensively used most of the relevant material. As the question required a summary of the whole passage, those responses which emphasised only one section at the expense of the other did not fulfil the task as successfully as those which provided a more balanced account. Stronger responses avoided the over-use of supporting details and examples, and of non-specific topic sentences, such as 'We can see that silk is valued a lot in modern times because of the significant and treasurable qualities it has'; or, unnecessary repetition in conclusion, such as: 'To hit the last nail, silk has been considered valuable and appreciated by a number of people and has spread around the world'.

In terms of coherence, the best responses were those where fluent writing served to link the relevant points to move the summary forward in a natural way. Although own words were to be used 'as far as possible', there was no compulsion to do so. Many candidates successfully chose to select relevant sections of text, linking them with a series of adverbial connectives such as 'moreover', 'furthermore' and 'additionally'. Used accurately, these and other words were very useful in synthesising information in the summary e.g. 'Because

silk hangs well it is suitable for elegant clothing. *Moreover* it has a shimmering appearance which ...' To indicate smoothly the move from former to modern times, one word often sufficed, as in: '... it was used in purification ceremonies. *However*, today, there are different reasons for valuing silk, such as...' On occasion, connecting words were applied less appropriately e.g. 'Silk looms and reels spun the threads into fabric *therefore* silk is comfortable to wear in all climates'.

The most commendable responses used a wide variety of linking devices; not only connectives but adverbial phrases and other, more complex structures. Although use of English is not specifically being tested, such fluent and stylish synthesis inevitably produced the most coherent summaries. The following example is of such fluency, incorporating a range of devices and succinctly covering five points:

'Silk reels and looms made silk thread to be spun into fabric *which* was used as clothing for Emperors. *However*, *eventually*, ordinary people started wearing silk *and* it was *then* used to manufacture various products, even *being used* as money in some Chinese dynasties.'

Coherence in expressing the subject matter was improved further by those candidates who recognised, and chose to follow, the change in tenses used between the former (past) times and the modern (present) times, rather than maintaining the past tense throughout.

**Question 2** continued to test 'Reading for Ideas', requiring candidates to write down 3 opinions from Paragraph 1. Once identified, these opinions could be copied directly from the text or put into the candidate's own words; in neither case was it acceptable to include any excess wording which blurred the precise opinion. A few candidates incorrectly offered their own opinions on Paragraph 1, e.g. 'Interesting to read' and 'You learn about the discovery of silk'.

The first came at the opening of the text: 'Silk is an exceptionally beautiful material'; this was the most easily identified, with the implication that this is a truth recognised by everyone; of course, other people may not regard it in this way. The second opinion referred to the legend of the Empress Leizu who, it is said, discovered silk. The writer's opinion that 'It would be fascinating to know if the legend is true' was not offered by many, and sometimes the mark was lost because of the continuation into the next line or two of the passage: '...but what is certainly known is...court guests'. This was an example of an addition which blurred the necessary focus leaving one to wonder just which part of the answer was actually the opinion. The final opinion was frequently given: 'Obviously, all visitors to the royal court who were given gifts of silk would be entranced by its exclusivity'. A common incorrect response was the historical fact, given in the text, that 'At one point it was considered so valuable that it was even used as money'. Its 'uses in manufacturing ... paper, fishing lines and bows for musical instruments' was another incorrect response seen on occasion.

## **Section 2**

Generally, responding to the detailed demands of the questions on the second passage proved more challenging than those in the first, more factual text. These demands, as mentioned in 'General comments', above, are very different from those targeted in **Section 1**. Fostering candidates' personal enjoyment of reading fiction, as well as group reading and discussion of other books, could help them to tackle the types of questions encountered in this section.

**Question 3(a)**, a straightforward literal one, was intended to ease candidates into this second section. The answer was clearly indicated in the first paragraph, to which candidates were directed. The writer was to start his new job by looking after the lion and candidates were asked what kind of animals he had expected to start with. Almost every response correctly identified that he had hoped he would start on 'less dangerous animals'. Equally correct were own words versions such as 'less fierce' or 'tame' animals. The addition of examples, such as monkeys and penguins, was acceptable provided they were sensible and did not suggest any equally dangerous beasts. A very small minority of responses included only the names of other animals; others did not score the point because in copying the succinct answer, they omitted the word 'less'.

**Question 3(b)** was the first question requiring candidates to answer in their own words. The given quotation was: 'I plucked up the courage and displayed an indifference I did not truly feel'. Candidates were to explain in their own way what this meant the writer did. Explanations such as he 'gathered', 'found', 'pulled up', 'summoned' or 'mustered' his courage were frequently seen, while some used the appropriate opposite idea of 'pushing away' or 'holding down' his fear. Phrases which captured the correct idea, such as 'pulled himself together' were equally acceptable. There was less success in rephrasing 'indifference'. While the word 'fear' was rewarded in the above recasting of 'plucked up', candidates often suggested that 'indifference' referred to his fear; that he pretended or acted as if he was not afraid. Only the best responses correctly explained that he pretended to be not bothered or unaffected by the situation; that he behaved as if he were

unconcerned, relaxed or 'didn't mind' about it all. There were very few who offered mere synonyms of the key words without a sensible context. The question is not simply a vocabulary test and, thus, answers such as 'plucked up – gathered up – indifferent – not affected' in isolation of a context did not fully explain 'what the writer did' and were not credited. The best answers were fully contextualised, e.g. 'He gathered up his courage and tried not to look bothered', or 'He summoned his boldness and pretended that he did not care'.

**Question 4(a)** asked candidates why they thought Joe 'rattled a stick along the fence', as he and the narrator approached the relaxing lion. Recognising that this was the writer's introduction to his new charge, the majority correctly inferred that he wanted to get Albert the lion's attention, or to make him react to their presence. There is no mention of the lion, or Albert, in the question and it was necessary to include reference to him in the answer. Responses which said it was to get 'his' attention did not realise that, without such reference, 'he' would relate to Joe himself. Albert could already be seen lying 'picturesquely under a tree' and so those who said that Joe 'wanted to show Albert to the writer' did not offer an appropriate inference here.

**Question 4(b)** required an explanation of the 'lesson' Joe wanted to teach the writer when he said that, while the lion looked tame, he wasn't. Occasionally, responses merely re-structured the question, e.g. 'In as much as the lion looked tame he was not'; others gave generalised sayings such as 'Not to judge a book by its cover' or 'Don't judge / be fooled by appearances'. None of these answered the question; rather, candidates had to say what the misleading 'look' or appearance of tameness implied. Those who made the positive statement that, despite appearances, Albert / the lion was in fact dangerous or fierce or was capable of attacking had recognised that implication. Other approaches which were credited suggested that the writer must be careful or cautious around this or any lion, or that he, or people, should not trust a lion or regard him as a friend or pet. A significant minority thought that the lesson was quite the opposite, and that the writer should *not* be afraid. Such responses showed a lack of understanding of the situation.

**Question 5(a)** was another literal one. Asked why the writer soon had more time to 'learn something about lions', the majority of candidates saw that once he 'had mastered' his 'daily chores' which were 'fairly basic', he had more time to do so. Correct answers said that he had mastered, learned or memorised his work, chores or job; others put it in terms of his getting 'used to the job' or doing the job/chores 'more quickly'.

**Question 5(b)** asked for two things which the writer did in order to learn something about lions. The answers in Paragraph 3 were: he *wrote* down or noted things about Albert/the lion's behaviour and he *read* about lions. Then, we are told in the text, he was able to compare what he saw in Albert with what he learned in general about the lions of the question. In presenting the first thing the writer did, some said that he 'wrote down what he noticed about Albert', alone, without pointing out that it was his 'behaviour' that he noted. It was not just the colour of his pelt, the length of his tail, the size of his mane or any other physical aspect of this particular animal, but his 'behaviour' which taught him about all lions.

Given the wording of the question ('...to try to learn something about lions'), 'He read' was narrowly sufficient as a correct expression of the second of those things he did. Limiting his reading to 'He read folklore' alone shifted the focus of that reading to emphasise legends which he learned about merely in passing and was not credited.

**Question 5(c)** proved challenging. It referred to the title 'King of Beasts', often attributed to a lion, and asked why this name is said in the passage to be 'un-zoological'. Despite mention in the text of the fact that 'no scientist' has ever called the lion by this name, a significant number of candidates appear not to have understood the scientific nature of the word. Instead, there were many who thought it had to do with animals in zoos. The suggestion was that the lion could not be given that title in a zoo: 'It is not evident in the zoo-lion's behaviour' was one such response; or, again, 'The name is un-zoological because it was not used around the zoo'. Other answers displayed a misunderstanding of the term 'beasts', where candidates did not realise that this is a general term for animals. Thus, responses such as 'Beasts are not kept in zoos, only animals' and 'Animals in zoos are not beasts, they are tame' were unsuccessful. However, there were, equally, responses which showed understanding of the difference between writers who have tried to provide 'evidence of the lion's right to this title' and the fact that no scientists have ever tried to do so. With that understanding, correct responses were seen, such as 'That is because no scientist has ever produced evidence of the lion's right to this title'. The answer lay in the lack of any proof or evidence, scientific or otherwise, of the appropriateness of this name. Thus, even more succinctly correct were, for example, 'Because scientists have never proved this true', or 'There is no evidence for it'.

In **Question 5(d)** candidates were asked to describe the way in which, on the writer's first morning, Albert showed that 'he did not have an ounce of pity in his character'. Another example of literal comprehension, the answer was to be found in the sentence immediately following the words quoted: as the writer walked

past his enclosure, Albert ‘suddenly and mercilessly jumped out against the bars’ *and roared at him*. The majority of candidates gained the mark here by including all the details of Albert’s ‘merciless assault. Those who did not include both the jumping and roaring and the fact that these were directed at the writer/him did not score.

**Question 5(e)** was the second question requiring candidates to answer in their own words. On the second day, Albert did the same jumping and roaring, ‘with eyes full of ferocious amusement at my panic’. Candidates had to describe, in their own words, ‘Albert’s reaction to the writer’s panic’. The two contrasting key words here were ‘ferocious’ and ‘amusement’. In correct responses, the first was usually explained as ‘fierce’, or sometimes ‘dangerous’, ‘deadly’, or ‘vicious’. For ‘amusement’, the better responses stated that, as well as being ‘fierce’, the look also showed that the lion found the situation ‘funny’, ‘humorous’, ‘entertaining’ or ‘enjoyable’. Not appropriate were adjectives suggesting that the lion’s eyes were ‘happy’, ‘joyful’, ‘excited’ or ‘satisfied’. As always, there had to be a sensible context for the synonyms chosen, as in: ‘Albert stared at the writer with a deadly enjoyment’, or ‘Albert found the writer’s panic entertaining in a violent way’. A minority only gained both available marks, the rest either repeating the word ‘amusement’ or, unwittingly suggesting that the lion himself was afraid, e.g. ‘Albert’s reaction was full of fearful humour’.

**Question 6 (a)** asked why the writer and Joe placed ‘a huge piece of meat’ inside the cage. This could be approached in one of two ways: either using information from the first sentence of Paragraph 4, which tells us that each week they had to move Albert so that they could clean his enclosure; or, by using the idea which appears a little further on where the writer describes how they would chat outside the enclosure and the cage containing the meat ‘as if there was nothing further from our minds than trapping a lion’. The description of the cage, its position in relation to the larger enclosure and how one could be separated from the other, was detailed. Some candidates chose to answer by focusing on the necessity for cleaning the enclosure, e.g. ‘This was so they could trap the lion and enter the enclosure to clean it’; others focused on the cage, as in ‘They wanted to trap the lion in the cage’, or ‘They wanted to lure Albert into the cage’. Because Albert would obviously always be locked or trapped in his enclosure, it had to be made clear that they now wanted to get him into the *cage* to trap him.

One word which showed that the procedure for ‘trapping a lion’ always followed the same pattern was to be identified and quoted for **Question 6(b)**. The correct word, ‘ritual’, was selected by most candidates, and the instruction to ‘Give one word...’ was generally adhered to. Only very occasionally was a mark awarded when a candidate wrote more than the single word demanded, because they had highlighted it in some way such as underlining, placing it in quotation marks or positioning it unambiguously within a sentence e.g. ‘The word is ritual’ or ‘It had become a sort of ritual’. A smattering of other words, from ‘cage’ to ‘enclosure’ and ‘defence’, was seen among incorrect responses.

**Question 7** required candidates to give the two ways in which the performance to trap the lion was ‘doubly ridiculous’. Once again, the majority of responses accurately explained that ‘Joe and the writer’, or ‘they’ spoke to Albert ‘in childish voices’. For the second part of the answer, candidates had only to read on from the words in the passage, that ‘...it was made doubly ridiculous by the fact that...’ and to quote ‘Albert understood none of it’ as the perfect response; and most of them did so.

**Question 8** tested understanding in context of five words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage to decide which was the most appropriate synonym. This proved to be a challenging question, as is the nature of this style of question where more than one of the given alternatives is close in meaning to the given word, though in a different context. The most successful attempt was with **Question 8(e)** where ‘prize’ was recognised as closest in meaning to ‘trophy’; the most popular incorrect choice was ‘souvenir’.

For **Question 8(a)** the word ‘terror’ was incorrectly selected very frequently; this implies a much greater sense of fear than mere ‘uneasiness’. ‘Reluctance’ also appeared frequently as an incorrect choice.

**Question 8(b)** proved most difficult; the context of ‘withering’ was the look which Albert gave the writer and Joe. The most frequent incorrect response was ‘dying’; that is certainly the meaning of ‘withering’ in the context of plants, but was not appropriate here, where ‘scornful’ summed up Albert’s view of Joe’s attempt to make him move. **Question 8(c)** proved less difficult; the most popular incorrect choice here was ‘agreed with’. In **Question 8(d)**, ‘peacefully’ was incorrectly suggested by the vast majority of candidates as the most synonymous choice for ‘obligingly’. The correct choice was ‘helpfully’, in the context of the two zoo keepers needing the lion to ‘oblige’ or ‘help’ them by going into the cage so that they might clean his enclosure.

**Question 9** was the section dedicated to appreciation of the writer’s craft. There were more instances of no response being offered for this than for any other question on the paper, but fewer than in past series.

Candidates were required to explain both the 'meaning' of sentences given from the text and, quite separately, the 'effect' of these words. As mentioned in 'Key Messages', above, it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the task explaining, under 'meaning', what is actually happening in the given section of text and, under 'effect', what is conveyed by the words, rather than repeating their meaning. Both marks were scored among only a small minority of responses to either **Question 9(a)** or **9(b)**; the 'effect' proving the more challenging task.

**Question 9(a)** directed candidates to the words 'he fixed me with an intense stare'. The rubric indicated that this was telling us about what *Joe* did and thus the subject of the sentence was provided. In giving, first, the meaning of these words, many candidates recognised that *Joe* looked 'hard' at the writer, or looked 'closely', 'severely', or that he 'glared' at him. Others were credited for having understood the meaning of the 'intense' stare with words such as 'looked strongly' or 'deeply' at the writer. It was the direct and focused manner in which *Joe* looked at him which was key to the meaning, and a few suggested this in 'gazed with focus' or 'without looking away.' A noticeable number, however, repeated the question, saying that 'he looked intensely at him'; such repetition does not explain what is meant by the word. Others misinterpreted 'intense' as meaning 'for a long time', 'continuously' or 'scarily'. A small number of responses incorrectly suggested that it was *Albert*, the lion, who was looking fiercely at the writer. Many responses suggested that *Joe's* look was 'serious'; this is not what 'intense' means and was an example of candidates slipping, too soon, into the 'effect' of that stare. The effect was, indeed, one of seriousness, and to explain this fully, candidates could approach this by focusing on any one of these three: how *Joe* was being serious or how he wanted to get the writer's attention; how *the message*, or what would be said, was serious or important; or how *the writer* knows that *Joe* is serious. All were seen in responses such as: 'Joe wanted to get the writer's attention'; 'What *Joe* had to say was very important'; 'The writer knew *Joe* wasn't joking around'. There was greater success in giving the meaning in this question than in the effect.

For **Question 9(b)** the given sentence was 'we would saunter off down the path'. Examples of correct responses to the 'meaning' part of this question were: 'we walked slowly down the path'; 'we strolled' down the path'. As such explanations showed, it was the manner of their moving off which it was important to explain. Other possible expressions were that they walked 'casually' or 'aimlessly' or 'in a relaxed way'. Many responses showed no evidence of candidates having been able to deduce the meaning of 'sauntered' from the context of what the men were hoping to achieve.

For those candidates who were able to work out from context, or who knew, that 'sauntering' means walking *slowly* or *casually*, the next step was to explain the 'effect' of that difference; why were they walking in that particular, obvious way? The answer was that they were 'pretending' to leave, they were not actually going away, or, they were trying to trick *Albert* into thinking that they were leaving (with the result that he would go for the meat without worrying about a trap). An alternative correct response would be that they were pretending to be uninterested in, didn't care about or were not bothered about *Albert*. Some responses included the idea of pretence in their answer to 'meaning', for example 'they pretended to walk away'. This answer could not score under meaning, because they did walk away; the way in which they did so, however, suggested an effect of pretence or trickery and was the basis for correct answers under 'effect, such as 'they would pretend that they are going away when they weren't', or 'to make the lion think they'd given up and were leaving, so he'd dash for the meat and get trapped'. A very small minority of responses were awarded both marks in this question for answers such as:

Meaning: They would stroll off down the path

Effect: They tried to deceive *Albert* into thinking they had gone so they could cage him.

Or

Meaning: They would wander off slowly from the enclosure

Effect: It was a way of convincing *Albert* that they were going whilst they were actually walking only a short distance so they can move back to trap him when he enters the cage.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Reading

## Key messages

- In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised to focus on the selection and expression of only the main, or overarching, points within the text. Irrelevant examples and extensions of those points, if included, often detract from otherwise correct responses in **Question 1(a)**, which then influences the writing of responses in **Question 1(b)**. Candidates should pay close attention to expressions such as ‘for example’ or ‘such as’ in the text and be very wary in working around such expressions. For example, in the point about honey having medicinal properties, many candidates ran on to include ‘cuts and burns’. Examples can be included as long as they are clearly indicated as such.
- Also in **Question 1(a)**, the use of ‘etc.’ and multiple slashes is discouraged, as in ‘medical purposes for Egyptians etc.’ or ‘tombs / food / afterlife.’ Similarly, brackets serve no purpose and often denied the mark, as in ‘vitamins and minerals (Vitamin C, iron, calcium)’.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates need to go beyond reliance on ‘and’, ‘also’, ‘that’ and ‘as’ to produce a response which is stylish or impressive.
- Again in **Question 1(b)**, it seems that many candidates have a mental list of useful words and phrases. They need to be careful not to misuse these and should avoid repetition. Complex sentences are helpful, as is varying the clause structures and using participles.
- Again in **Question 1(b)**, ‘firstly’, ‘secondly’ etc. are best avoided. Some candidates began with ‘firstly’ oblivious to the fact that the first importance had already been given. Similarly, ‘lastly’ was sometimes used near the end of the response only to be followed with one or more additional points.
- In **Section 2** candidates need to be trained to look carefully at the questions and not distort them. ‘In what way...?’ and ‘What two signs...?’ are very different to ‘Why?’ and ‘What?’
- Candidates should read the questions carefully to determine where their own words are required and where they can use a quotation.
- Candidates should take the space given for their response as a prompt. Lengthy lifting in excess of 2 lines will usually be incorrect.
- For **Question 2**, candidates would benefit from practice in identifying subjective words which point to opinions rather than to facts and in avoiding spoiling a correct response by straying into further areas of the text which are factual. There were many issues this session with marks being lost because candidates, having identified a correct opinion, spoiled their response by including excess information in the text.
- In **Question 9**, the multiple-choice vocabulary question, candidates are advised to consider, within the context, each of the alternatives offered. They should also make their choice of response unambiguous. Some candidates changed their minds over some answers, and where the chosen answer was not clearly indicated, no mark could be awarded.
- In the final question of **Section 2**, candidates are advised to concentrate on appreciation of the writer’s craft. Candidates are asked to recognise the literal meaning of a given section of the text, and to comment on the effect on the reader of the writer’s use of particular words or images. Candidates are advised to focus on literal meaning under ‘meaning’ and to avoid presenting effect as if it were meaning.

## **General comments**

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages, the first entitled 'Honey' and the second entitled 'Hortense'. The first passage, 'Honey', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary question, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Honey' and 10 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a continuous piece of writing which was relevant, well-organised and easy to follow. A further question allotted 3 marks to the testing of candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish fact from opinion in the first, sixth and seventh paragraphs of the text.

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

The extracts seemed to be approachable and of a familiar genre for the candidates. Subtleties in the literary text led to some discriminating questions. There were very few incomplete scripts, and in general, candidates coped well with the layout of the answer booklets. Where questions were omitted it tended to be the final question on writer's craft.

Both spelling and punctuation were generally good, as were handwriting and legibility. In **Question 1(a)**, almost all candidates put information into the correct sections.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates were advised to write between 150 and 180 words and most candidates conformed to this limit. There were clear attempts at connecting phrases but many times these became repetitive and failed to enhance the flow of the writing. Some candidates wrote consistently in the present tense; others used tenses randomly. Stronger responses demonstrated an ability to use correct tenses, consistently and to use linking devices with confidence e.g. 'not only is honey good for soft skin, it is also used by athletes', and 'while it helps patients recover from illness, it can even treat the common cough and cold since it is packed with vitamins and minerals.'

Misuse of linking devices was common in weaker responses, where the connection between points was unclear, e.g. 'it improves athletic performance and so it is good for skin' and 'it was used for medical purposes because of references in texts of world religions'. The use of the following linking devices as sentence openers was often insecure or inappropriate: 'however', 'in contrast', 'likewise', 'similarly', 'then' and 'in addition'.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section 1**

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks; candidates were asked to identify and write down the information in the passage which described the importance of honey in former times, and the possible benefits of honey in modern times. The summary had to be based on the whole 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. The test here, as with all summary writing, was to demonstrate an ability to present the overarching points and to separate the overarching points from examples or supporting material.

There were several points in this summary task which contained examples which illustrated or supported overarching points, particularly in the first section of the task. Several responses did not include the overarching points, but instead gave examples or supporting evidence; while others strayed into the examples or illustrations once the overarching point had been made, thereby spoiling an otherwise correct response.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 14 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 12 points, each point carrying one mark. Most responses were expressed either in note form or in short sentences lifted from the text. Although some responses presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point, many responses presented the points in a concise way. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the



rubric suggested that they might find it useful to do so, and the sample points given to assist them used bullets; in fact, most candidates used bullet points.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 gave the information in the passage which described the importance of honey in former times, and there were 8 points (excluding the first given point) which candidates could make. In Paragraph 1, there were 2 content points, (excluding the first given point) which were that honey featured in mythology, or folklore, or legend in many civilisations, and that the texts of many religions, or faiths, or beliefs, contain reference to honey. Merely writing 'mythology' made the first of these points; when it came to the second of these points, some candidates referred to religion rather than texts of religions, and many others went on to make reference to the Bible or the Qur'an, thus presenting an example rather than an overarching point.

Paragraph 2 contained 2 content points. The first of these was that honey was used for medical purposes. If candidates extended this into a mention of the four nationalities given - namely the Egyptians, Chinese, Greeks and Romans - this was acceptable but, if they wrote that honey was used to heal cuts and burns, or to cure diseases of the intestine, they had strayed into examples only and narrowed the focus such that the overarching point was not being made. The second content point in this paragraph was that honey was given as a precious, or special, or valuable gift. As with the previous point, many candidates gave the supporting example as if it were the overarching point, i.e. the reference to honey being presented as a gift to the Pharaoh in Egypt; again this narrowed the focus and meant that the point was not made.

In Paragraph 3, there were a further 3 content points, which were that honey was used as an embalming agent, that it was placed in tombs as food for the afterlife, and that it had a symbolic value. Many candidates made these points sharply and succinctly, but others strayed into offering examples as if they were overarching points. They did this with the first of these points by confining what they wrote to embalming done by the Egyptians, Babylonians and Persians; they would have needed to mention Georgia too for this to be acceptable. They spoiled the second of these points by writing that honey was left in tombs as food for the afterlife in North and Central America; these locations were only examples. They often spoiled the third of these points by failing to notice that the reference to honey having symbolic value came after two examples, one concerning Jewish New year and one concerning Chinese wedding ceremonies; no credit could be given for examples only.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the possible benefits of honey in modern times, as outlined in the passage, and there were a further 7 content points, excluding the given point. From Paragraph 4 candidates could make 2 points (excluding the first given point), the first being that honey is or may be beneficial for patients recovering from illness, or that it may speed up the healing process after surgery. The second point was that honey is a cure for coughs and / or colds, or that the World Health Organisation recommends honey as a cure for coughs and / or sore throats. There was much success in identifying these points, and there were no examples to distract.

In Paragraph 5 there were 2 content points, the first of these being that honey is a source of vitamins and minerals; candidates were free to add that the most common of these were Vitamin C, calcium and iron, but if they suggested that these were the only vitamins or minerals to be found in honey, the point was not made. Another point followed, which was that honey improves athletic performance. The reference to helping to maintain blood sugar levels, or to encouraging muscle recuperation, were supporting evidence for ways in which honey improves athletic performance and therefore did not make the point if presented alone.

In Paragraph 6, there were a further 2 content points, which were that honey helps to create smooth skin, and that honey triggers changes in the body which mean we do not crave other sweet food. If candidates gave the opinion that the best shower gels and shampoos are those containing honey, this was not credited as being a correct point and was ignored so long as it was not presented as being the overarching point. Some candidates interpreted the second point in this paragraph as being that honey makes us lose weight, which was clearly inaccurate; the point was either that honey triggers changes in the body which mean we do not crave other sweet food, or that it can be part of a weight loss programme.

The final content point could be found in Paragraph 7 and was that honey can be a part of our normal diet. Some candidates wrote that honey is delicious but this was an opinion and not a content point.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary of the importance of honey in former times and the possible benefits of honey in modern times, as outlined in the passage. They were advised to write between 150 and 180 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet. They were asked to write up their note form content points into a piece of writing which was relevant, well-organised and easy to follow. The most commendable results came from candidates who

wrote well under relevance and coherence. Such scripts were characterised under relevance by adhering to the points of the text which were relevant to the question, avoiding the over-use of supporting details and examples, and also avoiding non-specific topic sentences, such as 'In this way we can see that honey was important in former times' or 'But there are reasons for the continuing importance of honey in modern times.' As indicated above, irrelevant sections of the text which were frequently included were references to honey healing cuts and burns, to Jewish New Year or Chinese wedding ceremonies, or to specific parts of the world such as Egypt, Greece or Central America, which narrowed the focus and distorted the relevance.

Under coherence, the better responses came from candidates whose writing was fluent, with a possible combination of similar or supporting points, with points linked in a way which aided fluency and moved the answer on in a natural and helpful way. While the best responses used common adverbial connectives such as 'nevertheless', 'however' 'furthermore' etc. appropriately but not excessively, some responses sprinkled them throughout their summaries in ways which were not always logical. Elsewhere, the repeated use of 'and' or 'also' was noticeable to string points together; in the better responses, however, these words were used only now and then for the skilful synthesis of ideas. Weaker responses included simple or compound sentences without linking. Others included long phrases from the original text which inevitably contained unnecessary detail and often led to an 'unbalanced' response as the space available was filled before they got to the benefits of honey in modern times.

In **Question 2** candidates were asked to identify three of the writer's opinions from Paragraph 1. The key to answering this type of question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the words were 'fascinating' for the first opinion, 'best' for the second opinion and 'delicious' for the third.

These words supplied the first opinion that '(the production of) honey has a fascinating history. The key subjective claim in the second opinion was 'the best shower gels / shampoos (are those advertising that they) contain (milk and) honey.' Finally, 'we would all agree that honey is delicious' was the key subjective claim in the third opinion, although the slightly different 'honey is delicious' was also accepted. Many candidates lost marks through including excess text around the correct answer. Candidates need to be aware that an opinion can be closely followed by a fact. This meant that many candidates identified the opinion but, as indicated above, spoiled their response by adding extra information which meant the focus was lost as to what was the opinion and what was additional fact, e.g. 'the production of honey has a fascinating history as shown by a cave painting in Spain of humans foraging for honey.' A small number of candidates offered their own opinions rather than the writer's opinion as required by the rubric.

## **Section 2**

Most candidates seemed to find this narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1.

**Question 3(a)** was a literal comprehension question asking what, as a child, the writer wanted to do when he became an adult, the answer being that he wanted to be a zoologist, or to study animals; this was a relatively straightforward question designed to ease candidates into this section of the Paper.

**Question 3(b)** was another literal comprehension question asking candidates why 'the writer felt he was an exceptionally lucky person' and the answer was that he got the job he always wanted, or that he got the job he had wanted since he was child. Many candidates found this difficult and lifted from the passage: 'a child whose ambition is to have a particular job rarely grows up to fulfil that role' which did not answer the question, although the addition of 'but my dream came true when I got the job I'd always wanted' was sufficient to make the point. Some candidates wrote, incorrectly, that 'his dream came true' without any reference to a job, or 'I got the job I wanted' which was incorrect without 'always' as it did not bring out the timescale required to show the contrast between when he was a child and when he was an adult.

In **Question 4(a)** candidates were asked to identify the phrase in Paragraph 2 which came after 'every conceivable type of creature' and which conveyed the same meaning: '(my) vast assortment of wildlife'. Some candidates were in the correct area but spoiled their responses by including 'harassed by' as in 'harassed by my vast assortment of wildlife'. Others wrote, incorrectly, 'from monkeys to the common garden snail', which was an example of 'every conceivable type of creature' rather than a definition.

**Question 4(b)** was the first of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. They were to explain what was meant by the expression 'was just a phase I was passing through and that I would soon grow out of it.' The key lay in re-casting 'phase' and 'grow out of', although this re-casting had to be done within a sensible context as the question had to be seen as more than a vocabulary test. The reality was, in fact, that almost all candidates attempted a relevant context with very few giving only

synonyms. Acceptable answers were responses such as 'his hobby was temporary', or 'his hobby was just for a time', or 'it would stop'; there were many ways in which this could be done and there was much success with this part of the question. A few misunderstood 'phase' as 'phrase'.

There was less success in capturing the idea of 'grow out of it' as many candidates used the word 'grow' in their responses while this was a question inviting them to use their own words. Correct responses were 'when he was older', 'when he was mature' or 'when he was an adult'. Some candidates used the words 'soon' or 'later' or 'it would pass' to re-cast 'grow out of it', but these words were too unspecific and, in any case, the words 'soon' and 'passing' were in the expression to be re-cast.

**Question 5(a)** was a relatively straightforward literal comprehension question, asking candidates why the writer's school friend could no longer look after Hortense, the answer being that he was moving to an apartment, or to town. The contrast between his living arrangements now and in the future, which would make looking after a deer impossible, had to be stated or at least implied. 'Quitting' and 'shifting' were awkward but acceptable alternatives for 'moving'. Although very many candidates gave a correct response here, some wrote, incorrectly, that the friend was moving to another house or apartment or town; such answers did not bring out the idea of contrast or change.

In **Question 5(b)**, a two-part inferential question, candidates were asked to identify the two signs of the school friend's desperation to be rid of Hortense. One of these inferences lay in the fact that the boy and his father could deliver the deer in twenty-four hours, or immediately, or quickly, or at once. The other inference was more difficult and lay in identifying the fact that the boy lied about Hortense's age, or said he was young, when he wasn't; this could be inferred from lines 13–14 'which he described – wrongly as I discovered later – as young.' This pointed to the fact that the deer was not really manageable, and hence the desperation to be rid of it. Some candidates wrote, incorrectly, that he was unable to keep his pet, even though it was tame and house-trained. There was a gap of logic in such responses; if a pet was tame and house-trained that would be a reason to keep it, not to get rid of it. Other candidates, wrote, incorrectly, that he had looked after it since it was young, a true observation but not one which addressed the notion of 'desperation'.

In **Question 6(a)**, candidates were asked for the two ways in which the writer's decision to take Hortense was not wise. This was a literal comprehension question; the answer to the first part was that he didn't ask his mother's permission, and the answer to the second part was that he had never seen Hortense. In the first part, some candidates confused the way in which his decision was not wise with the reason why he made this bad decision, namely that he was unable to ask his mother's permission because she was not at home. Others wrote, incorrectly, that his decision was not a wise one because he already had a collection of animals, or that the owner was clamouring to be rid of the deer, which again was a reason *why* he perhaps made a hasty decision but not *the way* in which his decision was unwise.

**Question 6(b)** asked candidates how they could tell that the writer wasn't sure if his mother would allow him to keep Hortense, the answer being that he rehearsed, or practised, his story to her, or that he made up, or created, a story that would soften a heart of stone. Incorrect responses were ones which said that he made up a story to convince her. These were incomplete responses because it was necessary to write what kind of story would convince her, namely a story that would soften a heart of stone. Other incorrect responses were that he already had a collection of animals. Some candidates misunderstood 'rehearsed' in the text and took that to mean he repeated the story to his mother – any suggestion that she was at home, when in fact she wasn't, spoiled the answer. Some candidates wrote, incorrectly, that his mother had a heart of stone, a direct contradiction of what the text said; such responses showed a lack of attentiveness in reading the text.

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates were asked for one word in Paragraph 5 which showed a surprising contrast between Hortense's appearance and his behaviour, the answer being 'delicate'. Very many candidates overlooked the word 'contrast' in the question and seemed to be looking for a similar word to 'pair of horns with a forest of lethal-looking spikes' rather than a contrasting word. This meant that the most popular and incorrect response was 'fierce', although 'shock', and even 'wheelbarrow' were offered. This question was a good illustration of the necessity to read a question carefully before beginning to answer it.

**Question 7(b)** was an inferential question asking why 'the writer was in a hurry to thank the boy and his father'. The key to answering this correctly lay in either identifying what would happen after the mother recovered from the shock, or what the writer wanted to happen before his mother recovered from the shock. This meant that correct responses were 'in case his mother changed her mind (about Hortense)' or 'before his mother told the boy and his father to take Hortense away', or 'before his mother said that Hortense was too big / couldn't stay', or 'so that he could take Hortense to the garage before his mother recovered from the shock', or 'so that the boy and his father would leave before his mother recovered from the shock'. Popular incorrect responses were 'before his / my mother could recover from the shock' (alone) or 'he wanted to put

him in the garage / tie him up' (alone). Other incorrect responses were 'so that Hortense wouldn't eat more of his mother's roses' or 'he wanted to put Hortense in the garage before his mother saw him' (she already had seen him), or 'he wanted to put Hortense in the garage before his brother saw him', or 'he didn't want his mother to see Hortense'.

In **Question 7(c)**, candidates were asked to infer how the writer's brother felt about animals. The key lay in lines 31–33, in that he disliked or hated animals. Many candidates wrote that he was afraid of animals, drawing an incorrect inference from 'you know how Larry feels about fierce things', and although it might be reasonable to think that fierce animals would evoke fear, the question asked about animals in general, as referred to in line 33 'fierce or otherwise'. If candidates wrote that Larry hated or disliked animals and was afraid of them, the idea of 'fear' was treated as a neutral extension, but 'he was afraid of animals' (alone) was incorrect as was 'he hated fierce animals.'

**Question 8** was the second of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words and asked 'what the writer means when he describes Hortense as astonished by the havoc he had created', with the key ideas being 'astonished' and 'havoc'. There were very many ways in which the correct answer could be captured, with words such as 'surprised', 'amazed', 'astounded' or 'shocked' capturing the idea of 'astonished', and words such as 'chaos', 'disaster' or 'mess', capturing the idea of 'havoc'. The meaning of 'havoc' may well have been deduced from the context of the disrupted tea party. Incorrect responses were those which suggested that it was the writer and not Hortense who was astonished; however, if such incorrect responses were given, the mark could be given for a correct explanation of 'havoc' even in this wrong context. When answered incorrectly, 'astonished' generated a very wide range of answers: 'guilty', 'innocent', 'embarrassed', 'impressed', 'proud', 'afraid', 'amused', 'unaware' or 'he couldn't believe it' or 'it was unexpected'.

**Question 9** took the form of the multiple-choice synonym question. Strong performance on this question is most likely where each word is taken back to and considered in the light of the context provided. Most success was evident in **Question 9(b)**, where 'dilemma' was correctly chosen as the synonym for 'quandary' and in **Question 9(c)**, where 'settled' was correctly chosen as the synonym for 'clinched'. Less successful were **Question 9(a)** where the correct answer was 'early' for 'formative', **Question 9(d)**, where 'excessively' was the correct synonym for 'profusely' with 'gratefully' being the most common incorrect response, and **Question 9(e)** where the correct response was 'shyly'.

In **Question 9(a)**, the root 'form' perhaps led many to opt for 'growing'. In **Question 9(b)**, the most popular incorrect response was 'confusion', perhaps because of the events in the passage. In **Question 9(c)**, many opted for 'arranged' or 'hugged'. In **Question 9(d)**, many chose 'gratefully', perhaps associating it with thanks. In **Question 9(e)**, many chose 'humbly' perhaps because of the change in Hortense's behaviour.

**Question 10** was the question on writer's craft. In each section, **Question 10(a)** and **Question 10(b)**, candidates were asked to give the meaning of a sentence as used in the text, followed by the effect of the sentence. Many candidates were imprecise with their responses to meaning and often confused meaning with effect.

**Question 10(a)** directed candidates to the sentence 'I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I wanted to be a collector of animals' and asked for its meaning and its effect, its effect in this case being what the sentence shows 'about the personality of the writer'. The key was to focus on the idiom 'without a shadow of a doubt' and refer to the fact that the writer was sure, or certain, or definite, or had no second thoughts, that he wanted to be a zoologist, or to collect animals. It was not necessary to give the meaning of 'collector of animals' although many candidates attempted to do this. Some candidates used the word 'doubt' in their response, which could not be credited as it was one of the words being tested. What this sentence shows about the personality of the writer, namely the effect of 'without a shadow of a doubt' was that the writer was a determined, or a decisive, or a single-minded (sort of person). There was much success with meaning here, but many candidates gave the effect as if it were the meaning as in, for example, 'this means that the writer was determined to collect animals'. Candidates would have been wise to keep the question in mind, where effect was connected to the personality of the writer.

In **Question 10(b)**, candidates were directed to the sentence 'This is the last straw,' roared Larry, 'so get that animal out of here!' They were asked for its meaning and its effect, its effect in this case being what the sentence shows 'about the personality of the writer's brother'. Credit was given here for either the meaning of "'This is the last straw,' roared Larry' or for 'Larry roared, "so get that animal out of here!'", although many candidates attempted to give the meaning of the entire sentence. The meaning of the first part of the sentence required a focusing on the idiom 'this is the last straw', which means that Larry was tired or sick or had had enough (of the animal); alternatively the meaning could be given in another version of direct speech

such as 'this is the end', or 'this is the limit', or 'I can't take or endure any more'. Common incorrect responses for 'this is the last straw' repeated the word 'last', e.g. 'last time', 'last chance', 'last warning'. The meaning of the second part of the sentence was that Larry was saying that the animal had to be removed or taken away; again, the meaning could be given in another version of direct speech. When it came to effect, this was connected to the personality of the writer's brother. Correct responses were that he was a bad-tempered or impatient, or intolerant (sort of person); 'angry' or 'furious' were also accepted.

As indicated above, some candidates did not answer **Question 10** at all, more opting not to answer this question than any other. Perhaps they ran out of time or perhaps they had decided in advance that this style of question would be too difficult for them.