

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01
Reading Passage (Core)

General comments

In general, candidates responded well to this paper; they found the stimulus material accessible, and many showed evidence of having enjoyed the paper, in particular **Question 2**. It should also be mentioned that the reports received from Examiners indicated that they, too, enjoyed marking the candidates' efforts.

Overall, the presentation of scripts was of a high standard with answers being neatly written and sensibly laid out, ensuring that Examiners were able to focus clearly on what had been written. However, some candidates' handwriting was very poor indeed and at times, almost completely illegible. It needs to be pointed out that although handwriting, as such, is not a criterion for assessment in this examination, words which are indecipherable are classed as spelling errors. For Question 2, the illegibility of some words has inevitably resulted in communication being seriously impeded. Centres should advise candidates of the implications of producing work that cannot be read and encourage them to take steps to deal with this problem in advance, such as printing answers, rather than using cursive script.

Most candidates successfully completed the paper within the allotted time and there was no evidence of time constraints although a very small minority may not have noticed the instruction to 'Turn over', printed at the bottom of page 3 of the question paper.

Nearly all candidates performed to the best of their ability and many produced responses of a good standard. There was consistent evidence that they had been prepared well for the examination. Advice for those taking the examination in future sessions would be to ensure that in those questions where explanation of words and phrases is required, they should concentrate on explaining the effects of the language rather than just attempting a paraphrase of it.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most responses answered this question correctly, clearly stating that Mma Ramotswe was concerned that she did not damage the *underside* of her car; those which did not gain the one mark available usually failed to do so because they were not sufficiently precise and omitted to mention exactly which part of the car she was afraid would be damaged.
- (b) This question asked for an explanation of Mma Ramotswe's thoughts as to why anyone would want to live in this part of the country. There were two reasons given in the passage: she thought that the surrounding area was barren and desolate, and that it was a long way from civilisation and contact with other human beings. Most candidates successfully identified one of the two reasons but fewer expressed their responses sufficiently clearly in their own words to demonstrate that they had appreciated the distinction between the two reasons.
- (c) Candidates were asked to explain the effect the writer achieved by writing the phrase 'Dead country' as a separate sentence. The straightforward response was that this technique emphasised for the reader the emptiness of the surroundings and such a comment was rewarded with one of the two marks available. Those candidates who developed further on this comment by either saying that the phrase also suggested a sense of foreboding or that it created tension gained the second mark; those who made a sensible comment about the phrase being repeated from earlier in the paragraph were similarly rewarded. However, a significant number of candidates failed to appreciate that this question was about the writer's technique and understood it to require them to simply explain the meaning of the words with the result that they achieved no marks.



- (d) Answers to this question showed that candidates had a clear idea of how this project took Mma Ramotswe into uncharted territory. However, it appeared that not all had noticed that there was a two mark allocation for the question and made only perfunctory comments about her going to interview a murderer; there were, in fact, three points which could have been made to achieve full marks:
- in her previous cases she had dealt only with ordinary people/criminals;
 - this time she was dealing with something evil;
 - she had never met a murderer/he was a murderer.
- (e) This question required candidates to choose three words or phrases from the passage that the writer used to explain the effects of the heat and to explain how each of the phrases helped the reader to imagine the surroundings. Most candidates successfully identified at least two appropriate words or phrases and many identified three. Again, however, this question required some comment on the effects achieved by the writer through his use of words and these were at times less well explained. It was not enough simply to say that the phrase chosen told the reader that it was hot – it was necessary to comment on *why* or *how* the words used conveyed that impression. Those responses which used the same explanation for all three choices were rewarded only once for the quality of their explanations.
- (f) This question proved challenging for many candidates. Most understood that the beetle was carrying/pushing along a dead insect (although some failed to see that the insect was dead, and assumed that the two were fighting). However, an explanation of Mma Ramotswe's philosophical interpretation of this event proved much harder to express. Those who did no more than repeat lines 25-26 from the passage could not be rewarded; those who showed some awareness that Mma was thinking about the insignificance of individual human lives when viewed against the great scheme of things and/or showed an awareness of the religious connotations of her thoughts were awarded one or two further marks depending on the clarity of their explanations.
- (g) This question proved to be straightforward and nearly all candidates stated correctly that the husband would return on Saturday.
- (h) As has been the case with previous papers, this question discriminated well. Most candidates identified the 'heart of darkness' as the murderer, but fewer dealt fully with the metaphorical implications of the phrase, not mentioning evil, but preferring to refer to the lack of light and loss of feeling.
- Only a small number of responses coped successfully with the idea of customary or traditional behaviour when attempting to explain the phrase 'in accordance with custom', although some responses did show that there were some who clearly understood what it meant. This part was most often omitted by candidates.
- Similarly, only a few candidates understood what was meant by 'disconcerting' and many were confused as to who was looking at whom. Those who gave a convincing explanation for the meaning of 'peering', however, were able to gain one mark and it is worth reminding candidates that in questions of this type there are often two words in each phrase which require explanation, with one mark for each.
- (i) As long as candidates focused on the correct area of the passage, then they succeeded in scoring well on this question despite, in some cases, excessive lifting from the original text with the result that the suggested word limit was exceeded. However, a surprising number of candidates miscued and wrote generally about the area surrounding Mma Notshi's house rather than concentrating on details. It was apparent from some responses that not all had a clear idea of the details of the house as there was much confusion between the mud walls of the house and the wall surrounding the yard with its faded paintings. The points which could have been made were:
- the house was behind trees/in the shadow of a hill/isolated
 - made of earth/in a traditional style
 - mud walls
 - windows without glass
 - yard surrounded by a wall
 - faint designs on the wall
 - no gate

- small room
- contained rickety/old furniture/tin trunk
- (traditional grain) bin.

Question 2

This task produced some very pleasing results. Nearly all candidates clearly understood what was required and responded to the situation with enthusiasm. The most successful responses showed lively imaginations and developed the stimulus material into an interesting and sustained narrative which convincingly caught the speech patterns of the two protagonists. Less successful responses were nearly always able to use material from the passage without being overwhelmed by it but tended to take a more pedestrian approach to the situation and were not always fully convincing – for example, it was hard to believe that Mma Notshi's husband would freely confess to being a mass murderer and that, having done so, his wife would accept the fact with equanimity and then calmly suggest that they should pack their bags and catch the next plane to Australia (a scenario produced by more than one candidate!). A further feature of responses in this range was candidates' inability to imagine themselves into the setting of the story and instead to describe the home life of the Notshi's as if it was that of their own family and friends. The overall performance of candidates on this task was of a sufficiently high standard for these points to be mentioned.

There were very few scripts indeed in which the linguistic expression was so limited that the reader had no understanding of what was being described and most responded confidently to the requirement to write a dialogue. In general the written expression was usually accurate with an at least adequate vocabulary, and the most successful responses used some more sophisticated structures competently.



FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/02
Reading Passages (Extended)

General comments

Candidates who had evidently been trained to read the passages thoroughly and methodically did well in this paper.

The shortcomings were as follows:

- In answers to **Question 1**, many candidates located relevant content from the passage and transferred it to the report without any comment or development. In some cases the content was lifted word for word.
- In answers to **Question 2**, many candidates did not pay attention to the meanings of the words in order to define the writer's effects in using them.
- A larger number than usual of the answers to **Question 3** were not summaries. Rather than give evidence of the two teachers' abilities, candidates commented on them as teachers.

In preparing their candidates for this paper, teachers may find it useful to remember that the three questions involve different purposes for writing. The first question requires, on the whole, writing to comment or explain; the second, writing to analyse; and the summary, writing to inform. These types of writing are not only stylistically different but involve different thinking processes.

Candidates rarely showed signs of difficulty in completing their answers to the paper in the time allotted. However, in some cases it was evident that less time than was necessary was spent in reading Passage B. Candidates are reminded that success in this paper is dependent on how carefully they read the two passages and assimilate the detail. Some responses suggested that candidates had read both passages superficially and this would mean that the candidates inevitably could not be rewarded as high as responses showing clear understanding of both passages.

Responses did not always indicate when to start new paragraphs. This was not relevant to the summary since one paragraph per passage was correct, but in the answer to **Question 1**, candidates who wrote in only two paragraphs did not present their work clearly. There were frequent examples of paragraphs that lasted for more than a side. For **Question 2** although it was often appropriate to answer in one paragraph per section, more complex answers benefited from the use of an extra paragraph to split up the analysis. Generally, the right length for a paragraph was half a side.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1: Imagine you are a schools inspector and you have recently visited the school described in Passage A. You are not pleased with what you have observed. Write your report, in which you outline and explain the reasons for your dissatisfaction and make some recommendations to improve matters.

Candidates often spent a good deal of time on this question and it was generally done well. Although there was some variety of expression, it was understood that the tone had to be formal and appropriate to a wider audience than just the principal. Hence the marks for aspects of writing were often high.

There were no expectations as to the appearance of the report. Candidates who used sub-headings were given no more marks than those who presented their findings in continuous prose. However, Examiners did reward those responses which regrouped the evidence from the passages to comment on the buildings and classrooms, the candidates and the staff (either separately or together) and the curriculum.

It was surprising that comparatively few candidates had much to say about the curriculum. They needed to link the principal's ideas about children doing what they wanted to the gaps in maths, science and language. To this they could add comments on the poor PE teaching and the use of DVD's in the classroom. Some answers did well to extend the discussion of the contention that children could choose what they wanted to do with the result that nothing ever got done.

This was the question that allowed candidates to select and use ideas and details from the passage and to develop them within the context of the report. Candidates were specifically asked to explain reasons for the inspector's dissatisfaction, and the section on recommendations allowed them to relate these to what they had read.

However, many candidates took the easy option and transferred information from the passage to the report without making the effort to adapt it. This was particularly evident where they failed to write in their own words but simply copied from the text. It was insufficient to copy 'medieval fortress' and 'sandy deserts' as many did. Even more used 'slouching' and the line about the walls 'pitted with holes and spattered with sticky substances'. It is important that candidates do not copy key words from the text unless they are asked to do so, as in **Question 2**.

The quality of the recommendations in the responses varied. Most responses placed them at the end of the report. Some were very short and not explained or sufficiently related to the passage. Others were very long and drifted outside the immediate realms of the passage. Most had to do with decoration of the premises, and the best of these involved the help of the candidates. The gardens were to be replanted, and the teachers retrained. Mr Raj and the principal were to be sacked. Some responses urged the use of severe discipline, but more competent responses used the description of Ms Jhabvala's methods to establish a better atmosphere in the school. There were references to lining up outside classes, taking a register and planning lessons based on a sensible curriculum. It was strange how little use responses made of Ms Jhabvala. Those which did often thought more inventively and contrasted her achievements with those of Mr Raj.

A few candidates went outside the scope of the passage and invented all sorts of details of their own. For example in one answer, the candidates attacked the inspector. Answers were expected to give evidence of reading. Candidates were free to extend ideas into arguments and comments and to use information implicitly, but not to invent material that could not easily be justified from the text.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of the school and its surroundings in paragraph 1 and Mr Raj's classroom in paragraph 3. Select words and phrases from these descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

This question was answered less well than **Question 1**. One concern was that responses did not relate the comments to the exact meaning of the words. In several cases, responses suggested that candidates did not know what the words meant, yet there was little here that could be said to be outside the experience of first language users.

A second concern was that while candidates might be able to recognise an image, there was little understanding of how the image worked. For example, in paragraph 1, 'sandy deserts' was a much-quoted image. Good responses started by saying that the flowerbeds were not really sandy deserts at all. The writer had said this because he wanted his readers to understand how arid the area had become and to react to the contrast between what it used to look like and what it was now. By using the word 'deserts' he made you think that the area of aridity was big and that there was nothing else around to alleviate the monotony. It could also be seen as a symbol of the school and the education that it offered. Thus the image was in some ways nonsensically untrue but there were links that helped the reader understand what it was applied to. The same was true of the image of the mountain. There could never be a mountain in a classroom, so in what way did it add to what the writer was saying?

Candidates had mostly learned that there was nothing to be gained by making general statements such as 'it makes you feel as if you are really there'. There were still many responses which identified literary devices without explaining why the writer used those devices. Many answers made such general comments that they added little to simply writing down the words they had selected. Some answers persisted in repeating the same effect for each chosen word. The commonest of these was 'messy', the supposed effect for the whole of the description of Mr Raj's room. Some candidates quoted whole sentences or long phrases, ignoring the need to comment on individual words within the longer unit.

The best responses started out by demonstrating understanding of the unique meaning of each word or phrase. Then they considered what the intentions of the writer were in choosing that word and no other. This then ensured they considered the effect of the choice.

The following is an answer to the question. It is not a definitive answer, but it exemplifies some of the ways of accessing the highest marks. In particular it shows how the images may be explored.

*The description of the school in paragraph 1 compares what should be a happy place of learning with an old castle dedicated to war. The **medieval fortress** suggests darkness, a place fortified against an enemy, difficult to enter or escape from. The writer uses **cruel** and **forbidding** to characterise it, **cruel** in the sense that this school treats everyone badly and **forbidding** in the sense that no one would want to enter. Inside the passages of the fortress are **miserable**. Like **cruel**, this is more a characteristic of a person, so the passages are bare and unattractive, and if you belong to the school, you are miserable as well. The word **echoing** gives a lonely, ghostly effect, suitable for a fortress, but suggesting the feelings of a person unlucky enough to go to that school. These passages also give a scary effect, and the **creaking** door is reminiscent of a mystery or horror film. All these words contribute to the idea of a fortress and the paragraph culminates in the idea of a **prison** where **torture** takes place. In a fortress this would be physical, but in this school it is emotional.*

*Mr Raj's room is presented as the worst you could imagine, but the images, like that of the fortress, are exaggerations. The reader would not expect a **wild beast** to be loose in a classroom, but if it were then one could imagine the scope of the damage as it lashed about, smashing everything to pieces. Its clumsy, uncontrolled movement is what is meant by **blunders**. The beast is of course, the children. The other image is that of the **mountain**. No mountain could be in a classroom, but this gives a visual picture of the shape and of the height in relation to the room. The irony is that in a place that has been entirely trashed, this symbol of destruction is neatly, nearly humorously, piled up. The holes in the walls are described as **pitted**. This gives a notion of depth but also of number, as if someone has been at work with a machine gun. Much of this description is left undefined, to allow the reader to react to the revolting **sticky substances** and to imagine what horrors they may consist of.*

Part 2

Question 3: (a) Summarise the evidence that Mr Chappelle was not a very good teacher, from Passage B and (b) the evidence that Ms Jhabvala was an excellent teacher, from Passage A. Use your own words as far as possible. You should write about 1 side in total, allowing for the size of your handwriting.

There were twenty-two answers in the mark scheme and candidates had to identify fifteen to score full marks for content. Some candidates found it necessary to explain their answers at great length at the expense of including enough points. However, the only points in the mark scheme that were not commonly identified were the point about not involving Dicey in the lesson, Ms Jhabvala's use of computers (as distinct from switching them on) and the peaceful atmosphere in her classroom. Some candidates grouped the points from Passage B well.

There were a number of faults in the writing of the summaries. These have all been mentioned in previous reports to centres, and although they had been addressed previously, they were beginning to creep back into responses.

- There should be no introductions or summaries. It is enough to say 'The evidence that Mr Chappelle was not a very good teacher was...'
- Summaries are factual. Although there has to be a little explanation to make answers clear, there is no place for comments.
- Individual points should not be explained and exemplified at any length.
- It is inappropriate to copy out whole phrases and sentences from the original passage.
- Summaries must be concise, and the total length of a page should not be exceeded. For someone writing between eleven and thirteen words to a line, the summary should be shorter than a page.
- All parts of the summary should answer the question.

In answers to the summary question, the most important areas to address are excessive length (some responses ran to two sides) and the reduction of commentaries after a point had been made.

The following is a sample specimen summary that makes all the available points and would fit on one side.

The evidence that Mr Chappelle was not a good teacher was that he allowed his class to get bored and that he did not involve Dicey, who was bright, in the discussion. He had annoying habits such as playing with the chalk and not writing straight on the board. He was a static, undynamic teacher. When he asked questions he was not clear and kept on adding bits to them. He wrote all the answers on the board whether they were good or bad or even stupid. When he did get a good answer he did not seem bright enough to understand it.

Ms Jhabvala seemed an excellent teacher as she always prepared her lessons and came to school early to set up her work. She used computers and displayed children's work in her neat, bright classroom. She made sure her class was well behaved and gave them plenty of varied work to do. She gave bright children special tasks and always gave rewards. She registered the class and always had a smile on her face. As a result the children wanted to be in her class. This happy state of affairs had only been achieved through perseverance, since life in the school had not been easy.



FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/31
Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

This paper consisted of a directed writing question and a choice of composition topics. Candidates answered two questions in all, sometimes at considerable length. The advice to write between one and a half and two sides for the first question allowed candidates to complete all that the question asked of them. Time spent on the question was best used in reading the passage and planning out their answer. Few candidates appeared to run out of time when writing their compositions. In the rare cases where the writing was unfinished, it made very little difference to the final mark, provided that there was enough writing for the Examiner to make the necessary judgements. Some candidates, however, wrote very long compositions and sacrificed quality for quantity by hurrying to finish in the time available.

The use of paragraphs was not always satisfactory. As a rough guide, for this type of work, paragraphs should generally be a third to a half page in length. Obviously there are exceptions, usually for special effects. Some responses included paragraphs that were too long, so that the structure and the sequence of the thought were not clear. Others included brief paragraphs, often consisting of a single sentence, so that the candidate failed to establish a sequence of thought and their work tended to become disconnected jottings. It was important to plan both answers, to **Question 1** and to the composition, in paragraphs.

As in previous sessions, a large number of candidates chose the argumentative/discursive writing task for **Question 2**, and this was sometimes unwise when they only had a limited number of ideas to offer. Centres should ensure that their candidates make the right choice of genre when answering the composition section of the paper.

The amount of error varied greatly, but as usual, the main problems were in punctuation, particularly the use of the full stop and the comma and in the correct sequence of tenses. Some responses gave evidence of a limited vocabulary, while a few revealed candidates attempts to overuse language for effect.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed writing

Question 1: You are the editor of a local weekly newspaper. A national charity is planning to open a residential home for troubled teenagers in your area. You have viewed the homepage of the organisation that is opening the centre and one of your colleagues has conducted interviews with a range of local people. Some local people have objected to the residential home. Write an editorial in which you argue strongly in favour of opening the home and persuade your readers that their fears are mistaken and their objections are groundless.

The reading material consisted of the homepage of the charity, which contained information about the charity and (separately) the local home, and an account by Max Rylance, a charity worker, of his involvement with the organisation. In addition there were four objections by local people.

Ten marks were available for reading. Candidates had to identify relevant details, re-order them for the purposes of the editorial and use them to counter the objections.

Good answers were those that identified the two main intentions of the charity – to serve the community and to further the lives of the young people through education and opportunities in the world of work. They also developed the idea that the young people were not a threat but had become the victims of hard times through circumstances often not of their own doing. The most important discriminator was the ability to explain the fears of local people using material from the homepage. For example, to the girl who did not want the teenagers to spoil her school, a good answer explained that in the first instance, lessons would take

place in the home using teachers and the residents would be assessed to decide when they were ready to return to mainstream education.

Average answers included a good deal of detail about what the charity offered and the reasons why the young people needed the accommodation. They made references to the objections and were able to answer at least one of them from the passage.

Weak answers used very little from the passage and gave scant evidence of the candidate having read it carefully. Others used the material but largely copied it, often indiscriminately.

The Examiners would like to point out that copying from the reading passages reveals little about the candidates' reading ability. It only demonstrates that a candidate can locate information and write it out, often without proof of understanding or even relevance. This problem is widespread and gains very few marks.

In this question the passages most likely to be copied were:

- The third paragraph from *Our Services* (in the left hand column of the homepage).
- The objections raised by the local people. Good responses did not do this, but referred to them in summary form or even obliquely before discussing them.
- Parts of Max Rylance's account (either directly or in indirect speech). There was valuable evidence in this section, for example about the maths lessons or about what happened to the boy who was bullied, but it had to be detached from the account and used as a part of the editorial, not as a copy of what Max Rylance wrote.

There were fifteen marks for the quality of candidates' writing. The Examiners were looking for the structure of the answer and the sequence of sentences within paragraphs. Consideration was also given to the accuracy of the spelling, punctuation and grammar. The style of the writing, suitable for publication to a local readership, was important, and the writing had to be persuasive.

Candidates understood the style that was expected of them. Examiners were instructed to allow styles that were not quite typical of an editorial, but to expect consistency within the response. There were some rare examples where the style was too colloquial to be effective, and there were quite common instances where the editor launched a violent attack on those who dared to object to the home. Clearly, the persuasion could be achieved by the effective use of information from the passage. In general, however, the writing mark for many candidates was enhanced by the editorial style and tone.

The writing mark was also enhanced when the response was persuasive. Some responses made a good job of being firmly in favour of the home and persuasive throughout the editorial. Others chose to establish their position in the introductory paragraph and more particularly at the end. This was perfectly acceptable and provided useful structuring. A few responses were so persuasive that they forgot to refer to the passage. In these instances, although the reading mark was low, the response sometimes scored highly for writing. However, a surprising number of scripts were not persuasive at all.

For the reasons given above, it was sometimes possible for a candidate who made a number of errors in each of the two questions to receive a better mark for writing in **Question 1** than for style and accuracy in the composition question. However, the Examiners did not expect errors in the scripts of candidates who were considered for a mark in Band One.

Some scripts were poorly paragraphed, some not at all. Most candidates provided an introduction, a main section and an extended ending. In a piece of this length it was wise to split the main section into two or three paragraphs.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

Of the two options, the statement **Television is a dangerous influence on teenage behaviour** was by far the more popular. Candidates were asked whether they agreed or disagreed. The best answers were balanced, stressing how television could educate, keep people in vivid touch with what was happening in the world and, of course, entertain. These answers took a cautious view about how people could be badly influenced by what they saw, although they did suspect that it led to a 'stay-at-home' mentality and even obesity. Good candidates ensured that they had plenty of ideas, and they took care to develop their thoughts at some length. Less good answers tended to be those that agreed with the statement and were uncritically written, blaming television for everything from drug taking to car accidents. These answers either ran out of varied material, or the sequencing of sentences within paragraphs was poor. However, because this question did not involve complex abstract thought, most of the writing was clear and easy to follow.

Fewer candidates attempted the second option: **Should young people have more influence on what happens in their lives? How does your country treat its young people?** This was a pity since the idea behind the question was interesting and important. It took some thought to prepare, and there was some evidence that candidates, disappointingly, did not give themselves time to think before writing. Examiners reported that responses lacked focus and that they were sometimes vague. Some answers looked like a prepared essay about parents giving their children more freedom, which was not the point at all. One excellent script, however, was about the nearness of young people to adult responsibility and the necessity of preparing for it. The script then went on to describe how the candidate's country arranged for a youth representative to take opinions on a wide range of issues to the national parliament and how this was effective. As with the first option, weak answers either ran out of varied material, or the sequencing of sentences within paragraphs was poor. However, because this question did not involve complex abstract thought, most of the writing was clear and easy to follow.

Centres should advise candidates about the difficulties of writing argumentative/discursive essays. There are important matters of style and structure and of handling content that many responses failed to take on board, matters which are apparent from the mark scheme.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

There has been a marked improvement in the writing of description in the last few sessions. It was rare for candidates mistakenly to write narratives and it was only rarely that they ran out of content to complete the tasks.

Of the two options, the second was the more popular: **Describe four members of your family to the production team of a 'Reality' TV show, making each person sound interesting to the viewers.** The series was to be called 'Meet my family' and much was made of the context of the television show. The difficulty of this topic lay in the use of the context, and it was a difficulty that most candidates chose to ignore. However, they did for the most part, bring out the differences in personality of the four family members, and often wrote engagingly. One candidate presented the first three as lively eccentrics and then painted a picture of the mother as the person who kept these people on the straight and narrow. This gave an extra touch of structure to the writing. Weaker responses did not make the family sound interesting and concentrated far too much on what the family wore and how they looked.

The other topic was **Describe the features of the landscape or town which would form the setting for your ideal interactive computer game.** Again, candidates were able to describe the features as requested, but chose to ignore the more difficult context of the computer game. A few responses sounded as if the candidate had thought of one of their computer games and were attempting to describe the background to it. Nevertheless, as description, some of the answers were very detailed and there was some variety within the writing.

Question 4: Narrative writing

For narrative, it is important to try to think about content that has some originality and that will engage a reader's attention.

The subject **Forgiveness** was extremely popular, and the responses varied from simple, formulaic, moral tales to moving stories that concentrated on credible emotions. One was a sad story about a girl who read her book while her little brother was drowning in the pool outside. The reader was made to share her

feelings as she took the body out of the pool, the confrontation with the parents, the aftermath as for days she sat at table with the empty chair opposite, and the reconciliation when the mother and the daughter were finally able to share their guilt. Another story was about a happy family relationship that turned sour when the loving parents revealed that the child had been adopted. Another example is a story about a person who revealed to the whole class that her best friend was pregnant. The reconciliation that eventually followed was very delicate and was expressed with originality. These three examples show how candidates could invent details and happenings that could arrest a reader's attention.

The other topic was about how ***a character discovers something vitally important that people need to know about, but nobody will listen.*** Good responses wrote about credible events. Common misjudgements were to make the events apocalyptic or to include so many events that the story became almost amusing. The best were quite simple. One candidate wrote about a beautiful lake which she visited frequently and loved dearly. One day she noticed polluted water flowing into the lake and knew that it came from a factory. She went to the council who would not listen to her, so in desperation went to the mayor's office, knowing he was a mafia boss. The story ended with his derisory smile. A similarly effective story was about someone working in the engine room of a tall cruise ship. When he saw water entering the ship, he set off on a run that took him up many floors to the captain himself. Again, they laughed at him and the reader was left to imagine what might happen when it was too late. Both these stories were better for having no finality, although they both ended well.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/32

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Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed writing

Question 1: You are the editor of a local weekly newspaper. A national charity is planning to open a residential home for troubled teenagers in your area. You have viewed the homepage of the organisation that is opening the centre and one of your colleagues has conducted interviews with a range of local people. Some local people have objected to the residential home. Write an editorial in which you argue strongly in favour of opening the home and persuade your readers that their fears are mistaken and their objections are groundless.

The reading material consisted of the homepage of the charity, which contained information about the charity and (separately) the local home, and an account by Max Rylance, a charity worker, of his involvement with the organisation. In addition there were four objections by local people.

Ten marks were available for reading. Candidates had to identify relevant details, re-order them for the purposes of the editorial and use them to counter the objections.

Good answers were those that identified the two main intentions of the charity – to serve the community and to further the lives of the young people through education and opportunities in the world of work. They also developed the idea that the young people were not a threat but had become the victims of hard times through circumstances often not of their own doing. The most important discriminator was the ability to explain the fears of local people using material from the homepage. For example, to the girl who did not

want the teenagers to spoil her school, a good answer explained that in the first instance, lessons would take place in the home using teachers and the residents would be assessed to decide when they were ready to return to mainstream education.

Average answers included a good deal of detail about what the charity offered and the reasons why the young people needed the accommodation. They made references to the objections and were able to answer at least one of them from the passage.

Less competent answers used very little from the passage and gave scant evidence of the candidate having read it carefully. Others used the material but largely copied it, often indiscriminately.

The Examiners would like to point out that copying from the reading passages reveals little about the candidates' reading ability. It only demonstrates that a candidate can locate information and write it out, often without proof of understanding or even relevance. This problem is widespread and gains very few marks.

In this question the passages most likely to be copied were:

- The third paragraph from *Our Services* (in the left hand column of the homepage).
- The objections raised by the local people. Good responses did not do this, but referred to them in summary form or even obliquely before discussing them.
- Parts of Max Rylance's account (either directly or in indirect speech). There was valuable evidence in this section, for example about the maths lessons or about what happened to the boy who was bullied, but it had to be detached from the account and used as a part of the editorial, not as a copy of what Max Rylance wrote.

There were fifteen marks for the quality of candidates' writing. The Examiners were looking for the structure of the answer and the sequence of sentences within paragraphs. Consideration was also given to the accuracy of the spelling, punctuation and grammar. The style of the writing, suitable for publication to a local readership, was important, and the writing had to be persuasive.

Candidates understood the style that was expected of them. Examiners were instructed to allow styles that were not quite typical of an editorial, but to expect consistency within the response. There were some rare examples where the style was too colloquial to be effective, and there were quite common instances where the editor launched a violent attack on those who dared to object to the home. Clearly, the persuasion could be achieved by the effective use of information from the passage. In general, however, the writing mark for many candidates was enhanced by the editorial style and tone.

The writing mark was also enhanced when the response was persuasive. Some responses made a good job of being firmly in favour of the home and persuasive throughout the editorial. Others chose to establish their position in the introductory paragraph and more particularly at the end. This was perfectly acceptable and provided useful structuring. A few responses were so persuasive that they forgot to refer to the passage. In these instances, although the reading mark was low, the response sometimes scored highly for writing. However, a surprising number of scripts were not persuasive at all.

For the reasons given above, it was sometimes possible for a candidate who made a number of errors in each of the two questions to receive a better mark for writing in **Question 1** than for style and accuracy in the composition question. However, the Examiners did not expect errors in the scripts of candidates who were considered for a mark in Band One.

Some scripts were poorly paragraphed, some not at all. Most candidates provided an introduction, a main section and an extended ending. In a piece of this length it was wise to split the main section into two or three paragraphs.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

Of the two options the statement ***The existence of the internet means that we can now communicate more easily than ever before. This can only be good*** was the more popular. Candidates were asked whether they agreed or disagreed. The best answers were evenly balanced between agreement and disagreement. They often started by reminding the reader how slow communication was before the advent of the internet, and described how we could now hold conversations and even see each other across the globe. This was cheap and invaluable to business. Candidates who thought all this out found no problem in developing their ideas, sometimes in an imaginative way. Against these arguments they discussed such matters as the threat to socialising, the death of letter writing and the health implications of staring at a computer for too long. Candidates who did not consider both sides of the statement had less to say, and some did not have the skill to extend their ideas in an interesting or convincing way. Weak answers either ran out of varied material, or the sequencing of sentences within paragraphs was poor. However, because this question did not involve complex abstract thought, most of the writing was clear and easy to follow.

The second option was ***Should the vast amount of money that is used to host major sporting events such as the Olympic Games be spent in this way?*** This was answered equally as well as the first option, only here the content consisted more of opinions than facts. Candidates took both sides, although a surprising number condemned the waste in a time of world recession. Some candidates knew enough about economics to weigh the expenditure against the various forms of income and the status that would be afforded to the host country. As in the first option, good answers developed and explained these and other points in well-sequenced paragraphs. Less good answers concentrated on the other things that the money could be spent on and sometimes lost track of the original idea of the Olympic Games and other sporting activities. Again, weak answers either ran out of varied material, or the sequencing of sentences within paragraphs was poor. However, because this question did not involve complex abstract thought, most of the writing was clear and easy to follow.

Centres should advise candidates about the difficulties of writing argumentative/discursive essays. There are important matters of style and structure and of handling content that many responses failed to take on board, matters which are apparent from the mark scheme.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

There has been a marked improvement in the writing of description in the last few sessions. It was rare for candidates mistakenly to write narratives and it was only rarely that they ran out of content to complete the tasks.

Of the two options, the first was by far more popular: ***Imagine you have shrunk to only a few centimetres high. Describe what you see, hear and feel as you attempt to cross a room.*** Many of the answers to this question were particularly good. For instance some candidates imagined themselves in bed and described the well-known features of their own rooms seen from a fascinating perspective. Maybe they remembered from their past what it was like to be small, and this sometimes allowed a remarkable focus on detail. Other candidates used the room they were sitting in at the time, although these tended to be less interesting. One candidate set the description during a party and had to dodge the feet of the moving dancers. There were some excellent details, such as the victim who settled in the mouthpiece of a tuba, hoping to make enough noise to attract the attention of his mother. There were some first-rate insect descriptions, and occasional images of dogs and cats. Most candidates tried to describe the texture of the carpet. Some were very successful in describing furniture as skyscrapers. The weaker answers did not describe a convincingly realistic place and tended to create a list of features with little development. The journey across the room being limited in time and space did not make this task a narrative, and candidates kept their minds on the need to describe rather than to narrate.

The other topic was ***Describe the minutes before and after a person receives some very important news.*** Few candidates attempted this interesting task, but those who did sometimes wrote imaginatively. One good answer sustained a deliciously cruel tone while watching a work colleague being 'dumped' by a girlfriend. Another successful description was about hearing of a death in war. Candidates were asked to pay attention to the emotions involved, but Examiners found that weak answers did not supply enough detail to help the reader imagine the scene.

One of the commonest errors in the descriptions was the failure to sustain tense. Many started in the present but then drifted backwards and forwards between past and present. A few candidates still thought that descriptive writing meant that sentences did not have to have verbs.

Question 4: Narrative writing

For narrative, it is important to try to think about content that has some credibility and that will engage a reader's attention. Some candidates mistakenly believe that highly eventful stories are better than narratives that reveal something important about humanity.

The first of the two options, ***Write a story, or part of a story, about disobeying an order***, illustrated the above. Many of the answers were based on military scenarios, and some of these lacked credibility, simply because the candidates had not experienced anything similar in their lives. For example, one story was about a man who was ordered to shoot his brother and was unable to do so. This narrative was quite long and was not consistent, so that the reader's attention was lost. Candidates who wrote about situations closer to their experiences generally did better. For example, there were stories based on disobeying an order to stay at home and look after a brother or sister, or more simply, going to a party when the order was to stay at home. Either of these scenarios was within the experience of the candidates who wrote about them, and gave opportunities to imagine plenty of consequences that might appeal to a reader.

The second option, ***Write part of a story in which a character has to overcome an obstacle***, was open to interpretation since the obstacle could be anything from emotional to physical. It attracted the attention of people who had been on outward-bound expeditions or who enjoyed rock climbing. There were plenty of good answers expressing some psychological depth, though weak stories were again based on unlikely or incredible scenarios.



FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

The quality of the work undertaken for the portfolios was satisfactory and met the requirements of the syllabus. There were only very rare instances of individual candidates who did not write three pieces of work in varied styles and for different purposes.

Assessment

The marking was satisfactory with the usual slight differences from the standard, which were as follows:

- The marking of writing was slightly severe where candidates as a group had used a wide range of vocabulary or had structured and sequenced original ideas well.
- The marking of writing was slightly generous where candidates had made errors. This was especially so in the top band, where the Moderators did not expect to see any but the rarest of errors. However, in Centres where teachers did not expect candidates to make errors, there was a tendency to be severe at the bottom of the range.
- The marking of reading was inconsistent where teachers misunderstood the aim of the assignment. Marks were generous where candidates used the articles as a stimulus for their own writing and did not engage with the ideas and opinions expressed by the writers. Marks were also generous where candidates did little more than to summarise the content of the original article.

Where marking of writing and reading were both slightly generous or severe, the tally of discrepancies was sometimes higher than when this component was limited to writing, and the Moderators were more likely to make an adjustment of two or three marks overall.

Annotation

Teachers provided valid comments on the contents sheet of each folder, but the marking of individual pieces was inconsistent. Some of the assignments bore no indication of the teacher's assessment, and some of the comments at the ends of individual pieces of writing were uncommunicative. In particular, some teachers had not indicated errors, and this affected their judgements. For example, some candidates were careless about using full stops to separate sentences, and it was important that this was brought to their attention.

Drafts

There was an early draft of one assignment in nearly every portfolio. One Centre provided a draft of all three pieces, which was not necessary. The function of the draft was to indicate the nature of the work in progress. Some candidates provided a copy of the final draft without any indication of changes that were to be made. There was, however, some good practice, where candidates had edited and revised their work. One candidate completely rewrote the beginning of their story with considerable effect on the final version. The refinement of writing through editing and revision is part of the teaching of writing, and Moderators hoped to see evidence of it in the portfolios.

Most of the drafts bore the teachers' comments and here again there was much good practice. Teachers indicated areas of the writing that were poorly expressed or where there was some error, encouraging candidates to re-read their work and to improve it. This was considered an essential part of the coursework in that it put the onus on the candidate to be critical. However, there were still a few examples of teachers who had made the corrections for the candidate. They should remember that this is not allowed and that the advice must not constitute the correction. The Moderators hope that there will be further improvements in the practice of drafting and redrafting.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

It is important to remember that the style and purpose of Assignments 1 and 3 should be different, so that candidates demonstrate variety in their writing. Assignment 3 at its best is critical: it evaluates ideas and opinions. That means that Assignment 1 can be argumentative or discursive and read differently.

Responses to Assignment 1 do not need to be dull. The best writing in this category was personal – that is what the candidate thought and felt about something that was important to him or her. Many candidates wrote research essays that consisted of facts and arguments borrowed from the Internet. Paraphrasing did not disguise the fact that these essays were not original. Writing about a topic which was outside the experience of the candidates was unhelpful.

One Centre astutely discovered that an essay on abortion had been copied from a biology textbook and that another on skin cancer was not original. Other essays on abortion, capital punishment and the death penalty used the same arguments that the Moderators had read in portfolios over the years. Nearly every essay on euthanasia began as always in the same way, a definition of the word.

However, there was a greater variety of topics this year. Candidates wrote about shark slaughter, video games, dependency on the computer, 'Too young to drive', online gaming, twenty-first century women, and The Simpsons. All these topics were within the understanding of the candidates who chose them, and there was a possibility of some original opinions. Even some of the common topics such as an introduction to the School for the benefit of new candidates, or a guide to a town, work experience or the account of a hobby had the spark of originality which was the start of good writing. Copying from the Internet should not be assessed as candidate's writing.

Some candidates were able to transform their topic into something interesting by making it the words of a persuasive speech, and the Moderators thought that there were other forms in which this assignment could be cast such as a letter. No candidate has yet tried to write the transcript of a discussion between two people for this assignment or even more interesting, the transcript of a commentary to a documentary film.

Assignment 2

This assignment was either fiction, a childhood memory or a description. On the whole the choice of assignment was sound, although candidates were not always at their best in writing expressively. It was a chance for them to show their range of vocabulary and to express feelings and what they perceived in the world about them. Much of the fiction had a rather violent twist to it – many people suffered and died. Perhaps candidates should be taught about fiction whose point is to show how we learn truths about ourselves and the people about us. Candidates often structured their stories well or had clever ideas upon which to build them. A title 'To die for' turned out to be drily amusing and to be about a desirable pair of shoes. However, candidates who thought that a story was merely a succession of events or who grew tired of their writing before it reached its climax did less well.

The childhood memories were good. There was much value in writing that was about looking back and which compared the life of a sixteen-year-old with feelings and events that happened much earlier. Here there was some nice detail, personal feelings and cameos of parents and siblings. Descriptions were also successful. Candidates understood that the best descriptions were not static, but consisted of such features as a short distance, a short time span or even the same feature seen through very different eyes. Candidates who attempted this type of writing had obviously considered how descriptions differed from stories and what might make them interesting to a reader. Both the descriptions and the childhood memories had the element of personal viewpoint that should help them to become good writers.

Assignment 3

Some Centres allowed candidates to choose their own articles, but did not always monitor the choices effectively. Others chose one, two or three articles with care and set them to all their candidates. Some only used one article. Some Centres taught the article, and in effect told candidates what to write. A better strategy was to read the article with them and to let the class or small groups discuss what had been read for a short time. Finally, the teacher would introduce the task, making it clear that the article was not a stimulus but a test of their reading. Candidates could engage with the ideas and opinions and would either show their understanding by developing them with some of their own interpretations and evaluations, or more easily, disagreeing with the argument of the writer.

Candidates who did not go beyond a summary of the points made in the article, scored approximately half marks for reading. Those who demonstrated a command of the passage by opening up and evaluating the arguments were worth between eight and ten marks. Those who drifted away from the article and ignored its argument were only worth one to three marks. The marks that were given sometimes suggested that there was a misunderstanding of what constituted a thorough reading of the article.

Some articles were unsuitable.

- News items that reported an event briefly: There was nothing to argue with except the event itself, and not the reporting. These reports were short and too simple.
- Factual items from the Internet, for example twenty facts about global warming: The Internet is full of lists and these do not constitute arguments that can be engaged with. They can be identified by the extreme shortness of their paragraphs.
- Articles on important issues that are so well developed in themselves that one cannot find anything further to say, and it would not be right to disagree.
- Whole books.
- Multiple articles, because the candidates do not know where to begin and nearly always miss out essential ideas. The best length was approximately one side of A4 paper.

As usual the choice of article was wide, much wider than the topics chosen for Assignment 1. One candidate chose to write about saris for Assignment 1 and used an article that was against the use of red pen to correct candidates' work for the third piece. A very good choice was an article about racism in an unlikely part of the world. The task was to imagine that you were a candidate in that country using the article to illustrate your own experiences. There was also a very good article about how one group of people overworked until they were suicidal, though there was not much to disagree with here. Another article attacked the concept of female boxing from the point of view of the people who went as spectators. One candidate debated the immigration policy in his country, arguing that it was the backbone of the history of the nation. There were also some good articles about Facebook, skinny models and same sex classes, all topics that candidates could understand and with which they felt familiar. Not surprisingly, some of the best writing was in response to Assignment 3.

The best candidates were those who enjoyed language and used it to express themselves as writers. The coursework portfolio is not intended as a series of hurdles, but to promote good writing. Academic writing is rarely the right path.



FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05
Speaking and Listening

Comments on specific aspects of the Test

Part 1 - The Individual Task

Moderators continue to report that the most common format remains the fact-based informative 'talk' or presentation. Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches, such as monologues, dramatic performances and role play media/news/documentary reports, these are still uncommon.

Centres and candidates are free to focus on topics which lend themselves to standard presentations – we are not discouraging this. However, Moderators would like to see such presentations using a greater range of presentational and language devices.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or a common, perhaps pedestrian topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out to explore, to challenge, to be creative is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will probably result.

Part 2 – The Discussion

Moderators are pleased that in almost all cases, Examiners were very much part of the discussions, entering into the spirit of the occasion and that the conversations were generally productive extensions of the Individual Tasks. It was clear in many cases that candidates had planned for focused discussion.

Choice of topics

Moderators report a similar range of topics as in previous sessions – largely of the informative type.

Good topics are those which contain a judicious mix of research and personal involvement, and those which are well-defined and focused. For example, 'health' as a topic is probably too broad, while 'the effects of fast food on well-being' is likely to result in more focused and pertinent discussion.

Assessment

For **Part 1**, Centres are reminded that "lively delivery sustaining audience interest" is necessary, and that "a wide range of language devices" should be present for Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian informative talk, which is secure and safe, is likely to satisfy the criteria for Band 3. For higher reward, the candidate needs to be attempting something more challenging, more creative, more ambitious perhaps. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.

For **Part 2**, we are assessing listening skills using an independent set of descriptors. The essence of a good listener is that he/she will choose the right moment to respond and will respond accurately and in some depth, hopefully adding to the conversation. If a candidate responds to most of the Examiner's prompts soundly, this is likely to result in a Band 2 mark. For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward. This involves the integration of speaking and listening skills.

Moderators noted continued leniency in awarding higher marks for **Part 1**. In **Part 2**, however, Examiners were generally accurate.

Moderators would again like to emphasise the possibility of differentiating tasks according to candidates' interests and abilities. For example, it is permissible for a weaker candidate to select a more straightforward topic and to aim for a safe, competent presentation, perhaps accepting a Band 3. It is advisable, on the other hand, for a stronger candidate to select a topic which is more complex and is likely to result in a deeper level of discussion. More challenging topics will also require more sophisticated presentational skills and a wider deployment of language devices – required if Band 1 is to be attained.

Advice to Centres

- Moderators would again like to point out that a greater variety of approaches to **Part 1** is encouraged.

Final comments

Moderators do enjoy listening to samples and recognise the amount of effort put in at many Centres by candidates and teachers in researching and presenting interesting and appropriate work.

CIE is very grateful to have received a greater number of samples on a CD. Moderators welcome this as it makes the task of external moderation more efficient. The use of modern, digital recording equipment is strongly recommended (as opposed to cassette recorders), as this tends to produce higher quality recordings, but also allows the easy transfer of an appropriately collated sample to be burned onto a single CD. Centres should ensure that the CDs can be played at normal speed on a regular, portable CD-player and that they are carefully labelled.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/06

Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

General comments

There was a very small entry for this component on this occasion.

Moderators report that the Centres who chose this option completed appropriate coursework tasks. Indeed, in all cases the tasks were interesting and resulted in stimulating speaking and listening activities which the candidates clearly enjoyed. Candidates and teachers worked together to design and implement a wide range of tasks which illustrated the candidates' speaking and listening skills fully.

Comments on specific aspects

Centres are reminded that three specific tasks are required: an individual presentation, a paired activity and group work. A wide variety of content is encouraged – from creative 'authentic' Role playing of real life situations, to activities which are drawn from literary texts. Teachers and candidates are encouraged to be as creative as possible in the activities undertaken for each task, ensuring of course that speaking **and** listening skills are demonstrated and are able to be assessed using the criteria.

Centres who offered additional annotation (written on the candidate Record Cards), accompanying each task/activity undertaken by each candidate, helped to make the process of external moderation efficient. Many thanks for full and explanatory notes relating to the work undertaken.

Assessment was applied by all Centres with a good deal of accuracy.

Advice to Centres

A Moderator is seeking to fulfil two main duties while listening again to a Centre's coursework: initially to confirm the Centre's interpretation and application of the assessment criteria, but also to confirm that a variety of appropriate activities have been conducted.

Please remember to send in the candidate Record Cards – these are the only means by which the Moderator is made aware of the tasks/activities which have been undertaken at the Centre.

For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres need only submit **recordings of the Task 2 activity**. It is not necessary to send in recordings of group activities or talks/speeches from individual candidates.

CIE encourages sample work to be sent in using CDs. Moderators welcome this as it makes the task of external moderation more efficient. The use of modern, digital recording equipment is strongly recommended (as opposed to cassette recorders), as this tends to produce higher quality recordings, but also allows the easy transfer of an appropriately collated sample to be burned onto a single CD. Centres should ensure that the CDs can be played at normal speed on a regular, portable CD-player and that they are carefully labelled.