

CONTENTS

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH	1
Paper 0500/01 Reading Passage (Core Tier)	1
Paper 0500/02 Reading and Directed Writing (Extended).....	4
Paper 0500/03 Directed Writing and Composition.....	7
Paper 0500/04 Continuous Writing (Coursework)	10
Paper 0500/05 Speaking/Listening Option	14

FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**



FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01
Reading Passage (Core Tier)

General comments

The reading passage describing Bill Bryson's impressions of Capri proved both accessible and of interest to most and, in general, the responses to both **Questions 1** and **2** indicated that it had been well understood. Nearly all candidates' responses to **Question 1** revealed a good general understanding of the passage although not all succeeded in selecting sufficiently precise details to score highly in those sub-questions which carried more than one mark. For **Question 2** (the directed writing task) there was clear evidence of good preparation in how to select appropriate details in order to write with a particular audience in mind.

Nearly all candidates managed their time well and there were very few cases of incomplete scripts as a result of time difficulties. Likewise there was very little evidence of any confusion resulting from misunderstanding of the question paper rubric.

Most candidates presented their work well although, as in previous years, Examiners report that the handwriting of candidates in a very few Centres is still extremely difficult to read owing to incomplete formation of letters – this proves to be a particular problem in the marking of continuous writing when the effort involved in stopping in mid-sentence in the attempt to decipher individual words, runs the risk of leaving the reader with a sense of confused and muddled expression. Centres are encouraged to alert their candidates to the importance of writing legibly – if cursive script causes some candidates problems, then they need fear no penalty if they choose to write using block capitals, for example.

Centres and their candidates can be congratulated for the way they prepared for and performed in this examination. There were a pleasing number of very good responses and a very large number which were nearly very good: the difference between the one type of response and the other lay mainly in the amount of detail and the precision of focus which the candidates included in their responses.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

- (a) This question asked for three details taken from the first paragraph of the passage as to why people might enjoy a visit to Piazza Umberto 1. It was generally well answered and many candidates achieved all three available marks; many of those who did not failed to do so as they either gave vague, general statements or supplied insufficiently precise details of the features of the Piazza which they selected. There were, in fact, four points which could have been made (the key details are in italic type): the *cream-coloured buildings*; the tables and wicker chairs of the *cafes*; the dignified and white old *church*; the *terrace* with a view to the *sea*.
- (b) This question was frequently incorrectly answered, either because candidates did not state sufficiently precise details (it was not correct to say that ‘there were no roads on Capri’) or because they misapplied details which were more relevant to (f). This confusion may possibly have arisen from candidates failing to distinguish between Capri (the town) and Capri (the island as a whole). There were two reasons given in the passage as to why it was not easy to go from one place to another in Capri and these were that there was ‘only one road’ and that walking was difficult (‘an arduous trek’).
- (c) This question asked what was meant by ‘the upper storeys of the houses completely covered the passageways’ and many candidates found it difficult to provide a sufficiently clear explanation of the words to convince a reader that they had fully understood what it meant. Many of those who produced inadequate answers to this question did so because they did no more than repeat the words of the passage as their answer (‘the upper storeys of the houses covered the passage way because they covered it up!’). Those who explained that the passageways were narrow, and the upper floors of the houses jutted out, almost meeting each other to form a kind of tunnel, were more successful.
- (d) The question asked for two details about the path mentioned in lines 25-26 of the passage. Only a few candidates supplied sufficiently precise details to be awarded both of the available marks. The two points made by the author were that the path was meandering or winding and that it climbed *steeply*.
- (e) This question asked for a summary of what the writer saw as he climbed the path in the last two paragraphs of the passage. Most candidates responded quite well to this and showed a pleasing ability to select relevant details related to what the author *saw*; less successful responses tended to lose focus on the task and include unnecessary description or details of sounds and smells often at the expense of excluding relevant sights. The key points were: the overhanging houses; the villas becoming larger; the villas covered in flowers; the grove of pine trees; the viewing platform; the giddy view of the island; the views of Capri and (the lights of) Anacapri; the moon; the sheer drop; the sea. It is worth mentioning that there was an almost total misreading of one detail of the passage as almost all candidates referred to the *silver* moon rather than the *sliver* of moon; this misreading was also apparent in responses to **Questions 1 (h)** (see below) and **2**.
- (f) This question asked for an explanation of the difficulties that the writer experienced as he walked through the lanes. Merely identifying two difficulties gained only two marks (one for each point mentioned); two further marks were awarded to those candidates whose explanations revealed a clear understanding of how these difficulties affected the writer’s progress. The first difficulty was the physical problems the writer had in passing through the passages (he kept scraping his shoulders) and this was caused by the fact that the passageways were so narrow; the second difficulty was that he kept coming back to somewhere he had just left because the passages were like a maze with so many junctions that they kept turning back on themselves.

- (g) Again, this question asked for candidates to give two details (in this case relating to the visitors to the island) to be stated and then for an explanation of the writer's opinions about the visitors using their own words. Most identified the visitors as having a lot of money and many made the sensible connection between this and the names of the shops which the author mentioned; others mentioned that the visitors came only in the summer (as this was when the shops were open). However, the word 'insufferable' appeared to cause significant problems and the ability to explain it clearly proved to be an effective discriminator. Most candidates simply stated that the visitors were 'insufferable' and went unrewarded as they forgot the injunction to use their own words; others assumed that the visitors did not suffer and were, therefore, happy; such comments could not be rewarded as they did not show understanding; those who pointed out that Bryson considered the visitors to be objectionable and did not welcome them (he used the word 'mercifully') because they spoilt the peace of the island showed a clear understanding of both the passage and the writer's attitude and were rewarded accordingly.
- (h) In general, candidates responded well to this task with the most successful identifying at least two words or phrases used by the writer to describe what he saw, heard and felt while on the viewing platform. However, not all candidates did more than simply identify the words. In order to gain full marks on this task it was necessary to make an attempt to explain how the use of the chosen words (it was important that the actual words were quoted) conveyed what it was that made the experience so special for the writer; consequently, it was necessary for the candidates to show some awareness of the associations of the words rather than just paraphrasing what the words meant. Encouragingly, quite a large number of candidates showed that they were capable of showing this appreciation of the writer's use of language. Examiners are open-minded when marking this type of question and are instructed to reward reference to any word or phrase which is convincingly justified in relation to the wording of the task. Those who referred to the 'silver moon' were not penalised if they produced a convincing explanation of the effect of the moonlit scene on the writer.
- (i) This question asked for an explanation of the writer's use of '- a what?' towards the end of the passage. Those who appreciated that it both conveyed the sense of making an estimation and was involving the reader through the introduction of a colloquial tone by using a direct question clearly achieved both available marks. One mark was gained for giving a partial response, either of the points already mentioned or by stating that the effect achieved was to provide a sense of anticipation or to emphasise the scale of the drop.

Question 2

Candidates were to imagine that they had just visited Capri and were asked to write a letter as themselves to an aunt and uncle explaining what they would and would not find enjoyable about a holiday to the island.

Nearly all candidates used the letter format correctly and attempted to write in an appropriate register. By far the majority used the bullet points in the question to help them in structuring their responses and in selecting and developing upon ideas from the original passage.

The best responses used the details of the passage imaginatively and applied them successfully to suit the characters of the imagined uncle and aunt. These responses contained many carefully thought out additional details such as suggesting that the visitors equipped themselves with sound walking boots, maps and guides which showed a perceptive understanding of the original passage. Many of these candidates showed control of a wide and varied vocabulary which resulted in a convincing and fully appropriate tone although this was occasionally marred by an over-formal valediction to the letter.

Less successful responses tended to adopt an inconsistent tone which was the result largely of over-reliance on copying (at times indiscriminately) passages from the passage and failing to incorporate them convincingly into the letter.

As has been mentioned in previous years' reports, the standard of candidates' written expression continues to be of a very good to satisfactory level; once again, Examiners came across very few scripts where the standard of expression was so limited that meaning was obscured and there were a pleasing number which were written with sufficient technical accuracy and clarity to achieve marks in the highest bands available in Core Tier for written expression. The most common errors noted by Examiners were incorrect agreement between subject and verb, confusions between singular and plural, and, as always, the failure to separate sentences correctly by using full stops.

Paper 0500/02
Reading and Directed Writing (Extended)

General comments

This was the first November session for the revised scheme of assessment. The main change from 2004 was that there was an additional question about the effects on the reader of the language used by the writer. The former second question was now the first and was set on the first passage only, which made it easier for candidates to handle. The summary was now the third question and, as before, it was set on two passages.

Candidates did not show evidence of experiencing difficulty in finishing the paper in the allocated time. They answered **Question 1** and **Question 3** well, but found **Question 2** more difficult. There was some evidence that Passage A was found difficult by some because of the range of vocabulary and the linguistic devices used by the writer.

Despite the clarification about what constitutes a summary available in any of the recent reports on the examination, many candidates still wrote a commentary instead of a summary. They had not understood that the purpose of the type of writing in a summary was *informative*, which meant that it should be clear, concise and that it should not contain views and extensions from the candidate's own thoughts. They also had to understand the differences between this sort of writing and writing whose purpose was to *comment*. If the question asked them for their views on the topic, then they would write in a different style from *informative* writing. To a certain extent, that is what they were asked to do in **Question 1**.

Many candidates wrote comparisons between the two passages. In most cases this did not matter, since there were, as it happened, many points of comparison that could be made. However, some candidates found fewer points when comparing than they would have done without the restriction. It is not the practice to set comparisons in this question, and Centres should tell their candidates not to do so. Centres are reminded that each question has command words. In this case the command word is *summarise*. If a comparison were required, candidates would see the word *compare* as the command word.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1

Imagine that you live near to Gatsby's house where the parties take place. You object to the parties for several reasons, including the lavish display of wealth. Write a letter to the owner of the house, setting out your various objections and justifying each one by developing ideas and details from the passage.

It was important for candidates to remember that while a certain amount of creativity was encouraged by this and other similar questions, most of the fifteen marks available for content would be given for demonstrating that they understood and could use the passage. Hence it was important that the ideas that formed the framework of the answer reflected the passage. In addition Examiners expected that these ideas would be supported by plenty of detail that had been read.

Some candidates adopted the wrong tone and strongly criticised Gatsby on moral grounds. This was obviously acceptable within reason on the grounds of lavish waste, but it was not really appropriate that candidates should attack Gatsby because he was giving his servants unsavoury tasks. There were also some comments about the immoral behaviour of the visitors that were not supported by a reading of the text. Some candidates became very involved in the topic of drug taking, which was not suggested and was not what the passage as a whole was about. Errors were made through misreading 'opera' and 'gypsies'. These were taken literally, perhaps justifiably, and the Examiners were asked to ignore them.

Good candidates selected a number of relevant ideas such as the noise, the lights, the mess and damage caused by the large numbers of people, and the excitable, perhaps drunken behaviour. Some candidates justifiably inferred trespass, such as visitors who finished up the next morning in their garden, not Gatsby's, or the invasion of privacy on their part of the beach. These were examples of the limited amount of creativity that could be allowed, since they were perfectly probable points.

Good candidates also supported what they wrote with reference to detail. For example, the noise was not only that of the orchestra, but also the chatter and of the cars going back and forth. By day the noise was as bad, with the sounds of motor boats and hammering disturbing normal activities. These answers were well structured and showed consistently that candidates had understood and internalised the text. They were also written in an appropriate tone, in this case, strongly but reasonably. Some candidates wrote very angry letters and, provided that they were consistent, were given some reward in the mark for aspects of writing out of five.

Poor candidates made little reference to the text but just took it as a stimulus to write about their suffering families, for instance, their children who were in the middle of revision for their IGCSEs. There was no reason why references such as these should not be made, but their development often took over the letter as a whole, and they were not tied into the content from the text. Answers such as these often ran out of material and were poorly structured.

Candidates were not penalised here for making errors of spelling or punctuation. However, where they communicated badly because of insufficient knowledge of English, it was accounted for in the award of the mark out of five for writing, since the letter would have been ineffective in its purpose.

This question was answered well. Candidates had only one passage to consider, and the situation behind the letter was clear. The chief reason for awarding low marks was the lack of a range of ideas (some candidates dealt with noise and the cars but said little or nothing about lavishness) and more commonly, a lack of supporting detail.

Question 2

Re-read paragraphs 4, 5 and 6, which describe (a) the lights and colours of the party and (b) the sounds of the party. By referring closely to the language used by the writer, explain how he makes these descriptions effective.

It is worthwhile to think through the wording of this question since the second sentence is fairly generic. First, it requires candidates to give examples of the language in the form of quotation. Second, it does not require candidates to say what the examples mean but to say what is 'effective' about them. That means 'Explain why the writer uses an expression' or 'What does the expression suggest to you, the reader?' or 'Why does the writer use this word and not a simpler one?'

Good candidates not only selected a sensible range of quotations and said what they literally meant where that was necessary, but they also explained the effects on the reader of using them and suggested secondary or hidden meanings. If they mentioned technical terms such as alliteration and metaphor, they did not stop at that but explained why that device had been used.

Candidates scoring around half the marks selected appropriate quotations and gave their meanings. They sometimes indicated the use of devices such as an image, but went no further.

Candidates scoring low marks made appropriate selections of quotations, but did not add any comments of any use. Some very poor candidates wrote down quotations injudiciously, and some were not relevant to the question. Some candidates made no reference to the language of the passage but merely paraphrased the description of the party.

Comments such as the following were too general to attract any reward:

- 'The writer uses many interesting adjectives to make the passage really interesting.'
- 'When you read the words the writer uses you feel as if you are really there at the party.'
- 'I think that the language in this passage is really good.'

Sentences such as these were what candidates wrote when they could not think of anything else. They were often used as a collection of similar statements at the beginning of an answer. Candidates also attempted to write authoritatively and produced convoluted sentences of great length and little meaning.

The answers were marked as a whole, although for the highest marks candidates were expected to make a reasonable attempt at both parts.

Candidates who were able to make a sensible overview, such as realising that the sounds and lights/colours actually combined to create the atmosphere of the party were rewarded.

If candidates did what was expected of them, a long answer was not necessary. Several candidates did well when writing approximately one side of effective answer. There were other candidates who wrote two to three sides and scored very few marks.

The following example deals with the first section only and is for Centres to analyse. Work of this quality would attract the full mark. Three examples for each section of the answer, each of them properly explained would be sufficient for full marks.

The descriptions of sound and colour help to create an ever-changing swirl of light and sound as the excitement of the party increases.

An example of this is 'a sea change of faces and voices and colours under the constantly changing light'. Here he describes the visual effects of the artificial lights as everyone moves about. The effect of 'sea change' is to make you think of waves and to compare the movement of light and colour with them.

When the writer mentions 'shawls beyond the dreams of Castile', the reader imagines their exciting and exotic colours. The writer also mentions 'halls...gaudy with primary colours'. He says 'primary' to emphasis their brightness and 'gaudy' to make you think that the colours are garish and perhaps that they clash with each other.

The writer uses an odd image when he says 'the lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun'. 'Lurches' suggests a hurried, clumsy movement, as if the artificial lights have won their battle against natural light. Maybe it just describes the apparent speed of the coming of darkness when the lights go on.

Part 2

Question 3

Summarise the main features of the lifestyles described in each passage.

This summary was marked in the same way as those in previous papers. Up to fifteen marks were given for the identification of fifteen relevant points and up to five for aspects of writing, conciseness, focus on the passage and on the question, and the use of own words. Marks for writing were affected by clearly exceeding the advice to write about a page, since such summaries were not concise.

This summary was relatively easy, particularly in view of the large number of points available from the second passage. The account of life in Rwanda was carefully read and rarely misunderstood. However, some candidates did not understand that they should find fifteen points. Instead, they selected a small number, which they explained at excessive length.

There were few examples of excessively long introductions, although some candidates included irrelevant information about the children's feelings about their lifestyle rather than about the lifestyle itself.

Some candidates wrote their own views about the contrast between rich and poor. Quite commonly what was written was a commentary and not a summary. Candidates must understand the difference between the two types of writing.

Some candidates did not understand that they had to find answers from both passages and only used Passage B. In answering Passage B, they sometimes summarised the party and not the lifestyle.

Although they were not asked to write a comparison, those who did were not penalised. In some cases they were given an extra mark for writing since their sense of focus was particularly good. However, they must understand that they should not write comparisons and that in some questions this will prevent them from making all the points.

This is an example of a summary that would easily be given full marks. Centres are asked to analyse it to understand with their candidates what they have to do. Note that it is introduced by a few words from the question.

The main feature of the lifestyle described in Passage A is great richness. Gatsby can afford to throw lavish parties with quantities of expensive and exotic food, and orchestras to provide entertainment. He enjoys the benefits of a large garden and a private beach and owns motor boats and luxurious cars. His life is made easy by his eight servants and by the latest gadgets.

The main feature of the lifestyle described in Passage B is poverty. This family lives in a cramped, two-room house with a hole in the roof that lets in the rain. Sophia and her sisters have to sleep in the same bed. Their toilet and their bath are outside. They have no electricity and have to go to bed early to save the paraffin that lights their lamp. Sophia does the housework and looks after her sisters. She goes out to buy vegetables and to fetch water from the pump; she also buys paraffin and sells it again in Fanta bottles. The girls have only basic food to eat and they store it in plastic bags and eat out of plastic mugs. Their entertainment is playing cards.

Paper 0500/03

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

This was the first November session for the revised syllabus. This paper now requires candidates to answer two questions rather than one. The question that used to form **Part 2** of the previous Paper 2 became **Section 1** of this paper. The mark distribution has changed so that out of twenty five marks, fifteen are for writing and ten for using the content of the passage. For **Section 2**, a choice of six topics is set and they are clearly labelled as Argumentative/discursive writing, Descriptive writing and Narrative writing. Content/structure and Style/accuracy are separately assessed. Candidates are instructed up to forty marks are available for writing and ten for reading, on this paper.

Most candidates finished their work satisfactorily within the time allocated, although some of the continuous writing was hurriedly brought to an end. This was generally because the writing had not been planned properly and too much time had been spent on activities such as setting the scene at the beginning. At least one Centre had told its candidates to write a lengthy draft of the writing first and then to write a fair copy. There was not really enough time for this and the Examiners do not recommend it. (A draft is not the same as a plan.)

Some candidates attempted to write too much and sacrificed quality to quantity. While some could write three or more sides and sustain the content and the style, there were many whose language and accuracy deteriorated after two or three paragraphs by over a grade in quality. At this level, two sides should be enough for a reasonable piece of writing, using average handwriting of approximately eight words to a line.

Accuracy varied a great deal. An alarming number of candidates used full stops very poorly, assuming that pronouns joined sentences where conjunctions and, for phrases, prepositions were required. Commas were hardly ever used by some candidates, and a number used a non-capitalised *I* for the first person. Apostrophes were sporadic. While many candidates were quite good at spelling, their punctuation left something to be desired.

The other main problem among weaker candidates was that of tenses, especially sequence of tenses, changing without due cause from one tense to another, and not understanding the difference between 'will' and 'would'.

A significant number of candidates need to improve the legibility of their handwriting for their own benefit.

Comments on specific questions**Section 1: Directed writing****Question 1**

Imagine your town council has suggested building a youth centre in the town. Many local people are against this plan and a Mr Pavli has written to the local paper to express his view. You are in favour of the youth centre. Imagine that you attend a public meeting to discuss the proposal. During a refreshment break you find yourself standing next to Mr Pavli. Write the script of part of the conversation which takes place between you.

The reading material printed opposite the question consisted of Mr Pavli's letter and some notes in favour of the centre. The test was whether candidates could assimilate all this material and shape it into a developed argument in the form of a conversation.

Good candidates were able to integrate the three strands of the conversation: these were Pavli's objections (which needed answers), reasons why the centre was needed, and the facilities that the centre would offer. One of these – the provision of counselling and careers advice – could be used as the lever that might persuade Pavli to change his mind. These candidates were able to use the needs for the centre to counter Pavli's objections and to avoid using the facilities as the list format in which they originally appeared.

In answers which managed to represent two out of the three strands, the commonest omission was the material that formed Pavli's letter. Apart from a general attack on teenagers and a comment about vandalism, this was often ignored. Candidates would often use some of the material that expressed a need, and would list the facilities without much consideration of their benefits. There was very little attempt to build them into the framework of the argument.

The weakest answers reproduced the lists from the original. When using the letter, the material was largely copied. Popular phrases for copying were 'The homeless will still be homeless' and 'The basketball hoops will be bent out of shape'. Some candidates ignored the material completely and set off on their own argument, for example about how to deal with other teenage 'crimes', not referred to in the original. While their mark for reading was low, they were sometimes still able to score well for writing.

Good candidates wrote a realistic conversation in which each character came alive through the language that he/she used. The writing was persuasive and the range of language effective. For a high mark it was most important that candidates realised the importance of developed arguments, even if a character had to speak at greater length than might be normal.

Satisfactory answers were written in mainly accurate and clear language. They were often quite plainly and perhaps simply expressed, but the material was presented in original and moderately complete arguments.

Weak responses were often presented as short and undeveloped contributions, and the sequence of question and answer was unadventurous. Sometimes the order of the conversation was not strong, and there were errors of punctuation or frequent stylistic awkwardness.

However, on the whole the standard of conversation was high and nearly all candidates included some language typical of speech and also more formal language as befitted people who had only just met for the first time.

Section 2: Composition**Question 2***Argumentative/discursive writing*

- (a) *We humans are a peaceful species at heart*

This was not a popular choice, probably because of its philosophical and rather abstract nature. However, good candidates who attempted it scored well. They took four or five examples of human behaviour, perhaps on different levels such as the home, the street corner and between countries, and built up a picture of human behaviour that proved that we are not peaceful at all. Even better was the premise that we all had the desire to be peaceful but as soon as the going became difficult, we could not realise our desire. Candidates needed a plan so that they wrote an organised argument. They also needed to keep the thinking as simple as possible, preferably by using specific examples. Those candidates who remained on an abstract level soon ran out of material and wound themselves up in sentences that made little sense and were difficult to follow.

- (b) *Your city or region is being considered as a place to host an international sporting or musical event. Outline the advantages and disadvantages of staging such an event in your area.*

This was an easier piece to write since it was definitely practical in terms of the arguments that were to be used. Some candidates wrote vaguely since they did not make it clear what the event was and where it was going to be held. It was of course arguably a particularly challenging task for candidates who lived in regions that had no infrastructure, such as hotels, or where poverty was normal. However, some of these candidates used the topic as an opportunity to make a case for equality even if in the end, they had to admit that the disadvantages outweighed the advantages. Some candidates argued that their way of life might be changed too much, that after all the expense, there would be no use for the stadiums and the transport systems and all would go to rot. The difficulty here was in finding two or three strong advantages and disadvantages that could be developed at some length on either side. A number of the answers showed up badly on the page, either with short paragraphs or paragraphs of unequal length. Some weak candidates wrote an introduction and two long paragraphs that did little more than list undeveloped arguments. Structure and variety are the keys to success in this sort of work. Some candidates were limited in their approach, writing only about matters of infrastructure, for example, and forgetting themes such as national pride. With a little thought and imagination, there was enough for most candidates to answer the question. There were very few examples where the wrong register was adopted.

Question 3*Descriptive writing*

- (a) *Describe the characteristics of a grandparent or any other elderly person whose company you enjoy.*

Much of this writing was very touching and sometimes emotional. Most candidates were able to make clear the part played by the person in their lives and the best answers gave a series of different characteristics, often supported by anecdotes. However, there were difficulties in planning the content, and it was only too easy to fall into the trap of repeating ideas and running out of anything new to say. The Examiners had the impression that many candidates had started their writing without any clear understanding of how it was going to end. As with all descriptions there was the danger that it became a narrative, for example, charting the whole story of a relationship. Opportunities for narrative are very small in descriptive work. Candidates can allow themselves to describe the events of moments, but not a series of events taking place within a long time scale.

- (b) *It is your birthday. Your friends are playing a trick and have blindfolded you. Describe what your senses of touch, taste, smell and hearing tell you about the place they are leading you into.*

Some of these descriptions were very good. They were like little mysteries, whereby the reader had to put the sensual evidence together to guess where the place might be. In order to do this, candidates had to have good imagination or memory, to be precise in describing impressions and to build up an atmosphere. It was clearly no good just to list a series of touches and smells. Too many responses turned into narratives. The journey became too long for a description, and candidates could not resist the temptation to take the blindfold off and to celebrate the birthday at the end. Good candidates signalled that this was a description by writing carefully in the present tense, though for some it was hard to remember not to change into the past.

Question 4*Narrative writing*

- (a) *The main character in your narrative has accidentally broken a very valuable item at a neighbour's house. Using the title 'The Lie', write the beginning of the story.*

Some assumed that the item had already been broken, so that the story could begin at the point where the lie was either told or conceived. Most candidates went back to the very beginning and told the reader how they came to know the neighbour and the build up to the smashing of the item. The story ended just as the lie was told. Because they were writing the beginning of a story, candidates did not deal with the consequences of the lie. There was a tendency to spend too long on the setting of the scene so that the moment when the accident took place was sometimes not treated with the importance it deserved. Candidates found it difficult to decide which were the most important moments in the story. Most of the stories were competently told, and some of them contained passages of effective description, but many others used inappropriate language/register.

- (b) *Power cut*

This was a very popular choice. The difficulty was to use language in such a way that the stories sounded realistic. The episode of the footsteps running away was hard to handle. There needed to be a reason for this. After all, one would normally have expected footsteps to come nearer when the lights went out. Often nothing much happened as a result. Sometimes all would be silent and a body would be found, or some footsteps would run back again. The instruction 'Make this event an important part of your story' needed to be taken seriously.

A significant number of candidates would have benefited by taking a few more moments to think carefully before laying pen to paper. A short, neat and cleverly thought out piece of writing written in slightly heightened language was always better than a long, poorly structured piece that took up a great deal of space.

Paper 0500/04

Continuous Writing (Coursework)

General comments

This was the first November session of the revised Coursework specification. The first key change from previous sessions was that the third assignment should be set on a short text containing facts and/or ideas and opinions, and that candidates should engage with the content in a piece of writing of their own. A mark out of ten was given for the understanding of the reading and for the ways in which candidates responded to it. The second key change was that an early draft of one of the assignments was to be included in each folder.

Centres responded well to these changes which, as will be seen from this report, helped to improve the quality of the candidates' work.

There were very few examples of folders which did not meet the requirements. Very rarely, some candidates did not include an expressive piece, and one candidate offered a diary as an informative piece. No Centre as a whole failed to meet the new requirements, though.

The quality of task setting was high, although occasionally candidates would have been helped had tasks been less general and more specific.

The variety of writing purposes, genres and styles was well maintained. The greater the variety, the easier it is for teachers to interpret the criteria. If a candidate demonstrates ability to write in three different ways, the range will be greater and the candidate will have more chance of scoring against the writing objectives. For example, some candidates wrote to *comment on* and *analyse* a media text; in their story they wrote to *entertain*; and in the last assignment to *argue* and *persuade*. These different purposes for writing brought with them different registers and different ranges of vocabulary, and the portfolio therefore demonstrated different aspects of the candidate as a writer.

Assessments were generally sound, although there was often some slight over-marking of the reading in the third assignment (see below).

The early draft which was not assessed often made interesting reading. Moderators expected to see some comments from teachers on these. At their best, these indicated opportunities for candidates to *revise* sections, for example where part of the writing was too long or could do with more detail or explanation, where an ending needed more thought, or where the writer had drifted from the topic. Comments on *editing* the language were also useful, for example to urge candidates to use a more complex, precise or, in some cases simple vocabulary, or to be more concise and to write more briefly overall. General advice could also be given, warning candidates to *correct* their work by looking for particular types of error, such as missing full stops, or to carry out proofreading. All these prompts to *revise*, *edit* and *correct* their drafts were perfectly within the rules of teacher assistance.

However, some Centres mistook the point of the exercise and wrote corrections on the drafts for the candidates to write out. This was unfair and not appropriate, since it did not show what individual candidates could do. *It is vital that all the work is the candidate's own: the teacher's advice must not constitute the correction.*

The Moderators hope that Centres will continue to use the draft as a teaching tool. They will continue to look for changes made by candidates between the early and the final draft stages.

Centres are asked to ensure that the candidates' work is original. Comments on copying are included below, but it is through the drafting and redrafting process and also through the relation of the assignments to what is taught in class that teachers can prevent copying. Moderators expect Centres to carry out checks where necessary.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

The research essay is rapidly becoming less appropriate for this type of work. The idea is that the candidate finds source material, makes her or his own notes, and uses them to provide a piece of original writing. However, what normally happens is that the candidate reproduces whole sentences or even sections from websites or makes paraphrases that are very close to the original. Neither the ideas nor the words are original, and there is sometimes evidence that less able candidates do not even understand what they have copied. The worst of these offenders were, as usual, stock tasks on capital punishment and euthanasia and history essays on characters such as Hitler. It was not always clear where the information for such assignments came from, but the language and the ideas behind what was written were not suited to an English language folder. Presumably this was part of work in another school subject, but it did not allow the candidates freedom to write as writers should, and get the best out of them from a language assessment perspective.

The best assignments were those where the candidate had some personal involvement or enthusiasm. Some Centres are unsure about the use of the word 'I', but this is now considered perfectly appropriate provided it does not appear too often in the text. It indicates that candidates are thinking for themselves.

Centres often ensured that the nature of the first assignment was different from that of the third. Hence there were many accounts of school trips and other events. Issues were often presented as the words of a speech, which made them more rhetorical and lively. Many Centres used issues in school, in the locality, at home and among friends, to ensure originality. Moderators noted that more Centres were moving away from what is now the very old-fashioned traditional essay. There were some examples of media work, which should be more difficult to copy from another source.

Here are some actual examples of work received:

- Accounts of various suburbs in Auckland. This was a good assignment because it allowed candidates to give information from a personal perspective. The actual pieces were in the style of traditional leaflets or brochures, which sometimes limited the candidates in the sorts of detail they could give. For example, something more personal, while still informative, would have made these attractive areas come alive more interestingly, for example in the choice of vocabulary. There is no need slavishly to copy a standard style.
- Writing about Botswana. When the Moderator checked up among the websites, he found a number of stock phrases that seemed to appear in each of them, and of course in the candidates' work. This did not mean they were merely copying, but it did again mean that they were fitting their writing into a stereotypical pattern. Without assuming an expressive style, it would have been possible to write about Botswana from a more personal standpoint in more real language. When another Centre in Botswana wrote in response to an article deploring the passing of old ways in the country, the writing was lively and represented strong and interesting personal views.
- A trip to Santubong. This was a school trip to a place which to the Moderators, was exciting and exotic. The most important thing was that no two versions of this assignment were the same. The nature of the work was strongly informative while the language was detailed and gave a clear and interesting picture of the place. All the work read as original and was far more engaging than essays about corporal punishment or clones.
- Writing about farms where the candidates lived. This came from an island school and interestingly, one of the pieces was described by the teacher as 'rather dry'. However, to someone who did not know the island, the writing was fresh and original. It was also highly personal as it represented the candidate's own tradition and the centre of her universe.

Assignment 2

The best stories were those that clearly followed a consideration of how short stories are made. Some of them were longer than was necessary; some did not pay enough attention to building up atmosphere and tension and the proper establishment of a climax. It is important to monitor the writing of these stories just in case they have been downloaded from the Internet. A good way of testing this out is to engineer major changes at the redrafting stage. The fictional story remains an excellent way of achieving variety in writing.

Assignment 3

Although Centres were given the chance of using a wide range of different types of text, nearly all voted with their feet and chose a single article of about a side in length. This was thoroughly suitable, since any greater length made it very difficult for candidates to concentrate on specific ideas and opinions.

The best of these articles were controversial, sometimes written from an extreme point of view, and which naturally invited argument.

Some Centres used literary texts. However, the responses were often more about style and language (as required by Literature, Syllabus 0486, but irrelevant here). Some poems were suitable because they were strong in personal viewpoints and not too long. It was not a good idea to use ideas and themes from a whole book, since the canvas was too wide.

Newspaper reports were often not suitable because there was too little material for candidates to engage with, and because they were almost entirely informative. Informative articles often led candidates to summarise, which attracted comparatively low marks in this exercise.

Media texts were sometimes used, but candidates needed to use ideas when analysing and evaluating graphics and design features. There were no marks for writing about aesthetic aspects of the design.

Here are some examples of articles that were used as a stimulus for the assignment:

- Two articles about teaching (one an advertisement). These were well contrasted since they offered very different viewpoints. However, the candidates needed some guidance as to how to look for ideas and opinions. In the end their work largely consisted of a summary.
- Articles about New Zealand's future as a member of the Commonwealth and its flag. This was an excellent choice, since it was a current talking point of some controversy and the views held in the articles were strong. Candidates could not help themselves from becoming involved and it was easy to pick out the main points.
- An article about the Sinclair car (the answer to congestion, but a failure). The problem here was that there was too little material. The task was good: a conversation between two people, one an enthusiast. However, the dialogue soon left anything to do with the article and proceeded elsewhere. The result was a low mark for reading, but a high reward for writing.
- An article about prisoners who wrote and performed their own play. This was a great stimulus, partly because it made candidates think about the role of drama and also about what prisoners should be doing when they are in jail. The topic was important, highly original, and there was so much that could be said.
- A positive review of Mel Gibson's New Testament film. This also offered two strands, the depiction of Christ on screen and comments about the film industry. Again this was a productive stimulus very rich in ideas and opinions and inviting a response.
- Three brief extracts from a *Harry Potter* book. These were used as the basis for an explanation for Harry Potter's popularity. There was no reference to language and the content matched the criteria.
- An article on liposuction and its dangers. This was successful because of the high interest level among the candidates who responded to it. The article invited a lot of serious thought since it did not wholly take sides.
- An article on the custom of brideprice. This was another example of a social issue that was important to some in its own country, and of considerable interest to those reading of it for the first time.

On the whole these articles proved successful stimuli for interesting and original writing. They had specific ideas with which candidates could tangle and there was none of the high sounding prose of some of the essays in **Assignment 1**. The Moderators applauded these and many other excellent choices. Teachers are asked to consider the difficulty of articles given to candidates who may not fully understand them, and to consider ways of helping them to select appropriate ideas from the articles. Some Centres gave the same article or a small collection of articles to the whole class. Others allowed them to choose individually. The first option did not lead to copied or derivative work. The second option resulted in some candidates making risky choices.

The standard task for Assignment 3 was to address a letter to the writer of the article or to write an article to be published in the next issue of the magazine. Some wrote conversations with people mentioned in the articles and there were also words of spoken contributions to debates. Sometimes it was wise to leave the task open, but in other cases a little help would have shown candidates some directions they could take.

Assessment of reading

This was generally done well or very well. But Centres are reminded that there must be evidence of the selection of significant points, understanding them and developing arguments from them. This is not an invitation to be creative and to write away from the original. Some teachers wrongly gave high marks to candidates who merely repeated information from the article.

Good candidates *analysed* and *evaluated* ideas and opinions.

Average candidates *summarised* and *paraphrased* the main points.

Weak candidates made little reference to the article but wrote their own ideas.

Assessment of writing

Centres are reminded that the writing for this assignment was part of the overall mark out of forty for the written folder. Moderators were agreed that in some cases the third assignment gave evidence of the candidates' best and most lively writing.

Paper 0500/05
Speaking/Listening Option

General comments

External Moderators report that the revised format of the test has worked extremely well, with the majority of teachers managing it competently and with a good deal of confidence.

Administrative requirements have been adhered to well. The new mark total of 30 has been observed in all cases. Moderators have no issues to raise relating to procedural matters.

It is hoped that teachers reading this report will regard the comments herein as reflective advice, intended to refine good practice. None of that which follows should be read as criticism, but rather as suggestions of ways in which greater consistency can be achieved across the Centres at which these tests are undertaken.

Comments on specific aspects of the test

Part 1

The individual task

Moderators reported a very wide range of topics. These tended to be of two main types:

- the personal, perhaps anecdotal, autobiographical piece
- the informative, fact-based talk.

Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches, monologues, dramatic/literary performances and role playing media/news/documentary reports, for example, were rarely seen this session. There was, however, some discussion of plays, novels and poems.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or a piece describing what many would regard as mundane matters is unlikely to result in probing and interesting discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out to explore, to challenge, and/or to provoke is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will probably result.

Some examples of topics presented: the people of Goa, the experience of having malaria, Verdi's operas, why mankind goes to war, the history of the tango, the history of chocolate, the importance of physics, angels, body piercing, Harry Potter, the motor car in society, the Bermuda Triangle, the Da Vinci Code, special effects in film, a visit to Japan, Why I would not be a teacher! The full list stretches much further than this of course. None of these topics are mentioned here as particular recommendations – they are presented merely as a snapshot of a very much larger picture.

Moderators noticed a new possibility for this component: the greater chance for teachers to work with candidates to differentiate tasks and activities according to candidates' interests and abilities. It is permissible for a slightly weaker candidate to select a more straightforward topic and to aim for a safe, competent presentation. 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.

Part 2**Discussions**

It was very pleasing to hear evidence that the majority of candidates had prepared (mainly by researching and practising) for this part of the examination. The revised assessment criteria do place more responsibility on the candidates to play a good part in developing and extending their topics. Moderators are happy that in almost all cases, Examiners were very much part of the discussions, and did their best to place some of the onus for development on the candidates.

A concern in some Centres – those at which candidates were perhaps external, or had not met the examining teacher before – was that discussion was not focused enough. At such Centres, it is important that teachers meet briefly with the candidates *prior to the actual test* – so that there is time to consider each topic that will be the focus of discussion. The poorest tests were certainly those during which teachers fumbled to find appropriate prompts – the weakest of these disintegrated into general chat. Candidates have prepared for this examination; it is only fair to expect all teachers to do also. It is worth noting that this was not a concern at Centres where the Examiner had been teaching the candidates being tested.

On the whole, however, discussions were lively, very focused and, as a result, interesting to listen to. It is this atmosphere, of course, which allows candidates to exhibit their skills fully.

Assessment

Moderators felt that while a large number of the candidates were certainly very capable users of English, there was an assumption that this alone should merit Band 1 performance. There are some new criteria/grade descriptors to consider now for the award of the highest Grade.

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 a mark in Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian informative talk, which is however 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 now 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 in some depth, 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 (7-8). For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward, moving into related but relevant areas.

Speaking skill (in **Part 2**) is perhaps the most difficult aspect of assessment in this component. Moderators certainly noted a lack of conversation 'on equal terms' in many candidates placed in Band 1. However, Moderators are very aware that the two parties involved in the discussion are not sitting in an environment which lends itself easily to achieving this. If we look at a descriptor from Band 3 – 'the listener is generally but not always prominent' – we find what was commonly seen in candidates who had been placed in Band 2, but were not able to take enough control of the discussion to merit Band 2 achievement.

Understandably then, Moderators noted a degree of leniency in the marking, particularly in awarding Band 1. However, it is appreciated that time is needed for all involved to become familiar with the new criteria. In this context, please regard any adjustment made to marks as necessary for establishing consistency in the application of the criteria.

Some more observations

- As previously stated, most of the **Part 1 Individual Tasks** were straightforward informative pieces. While this is acceptable (and in many cases, was done very well), Moderators would like to point out that a wider variety of approaches is possible. There is no restriction on the use of literature, for example – so monologues in character, dramatic performance using original content, etc. is to be encouraged. Indeed, this might offer useful integration with texts being read for IGCSE Literature.
- In a very small number of cases, the interpretation of ‘postcard-sized cue card’ was rather generous! Centres are reminded that candidates must not read from a script in **Part 1** – a few handwritten notes as a reminder is what was imagined here.
- Where second language limitations are present, language is not likely to be used ‘safely and securely’ – expected at Band 3. Centres at which this applies should think very carefully of entering such candidates. There is, of course, an IGCSE in English as a Second Language which comprises a speaking test which assesses structure, vocabulary and fluency alone. Discussion skills per se are not tested there. Neither are presentational skills.

A brief word about integration of the tests

Some of the Centres which opted for this component might like to consider the observation made by Moderators that the new format appears to present more opportunities to integrate and incorporate *the test itself* into regular class work.

Teachers might like to include an assessed speaking and listening activity into a scheme of work for example – and this activity could be the 0500/05 test (or if preferred, three 0510/06 Coursework activities). As literary content is now encouraged, this may be an active way to focus on part of the study of a novel, a scene from a play, or some poetry. If non-fiction is preferred, a presentation (and linked discussion perhaps) may well form part of a unit on the media for example.

In short, it is very likely that oral/aural work which is currently being done as a normal part of an English language course, could be used with very little adaptation as a valid 0500/05 or 06 submission. In this session, of course, the work would have had to have been completed between 1st September and 30th October.

Moderators feel that there is much more scope therefore, for assessing speaking and listening with the new format.

Final comments

Moderators enjoyed listening to samples of the new version of the test. Feedback from one Centre was very positive also.

Centres are invited in the next session to perhaps be a little more creative and ambitious in **Part 1**, but to maintain their approach to **Part 2** of the test.

Moderators would like to receive an additional ‘document’ from Centres if possible: a list of the topics that candidates have chosen for **Part 1**. This should be sent in with the sample tape(s) and other documents.