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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01

Reading Passage (Core)

General comments

This was the first session of the revised IGCSE First Language English Syllabus. The overall impression of all Examiners was that the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared and that the standard of responses compared well with those produced in previous years. Most candidates appeared to have little difficulty in producing adequate and full responses to all questions

Presentation was usually good although there are still those who produce responses where handwriting and general appearance is very poor indeed. Centres should be aware that although handwriting is not a criterion of assessment in this examination candidates can help Examiners (and themselves) if they use dark blue or black ink for writing their responses, and leave a small but visible gap between the answers to the individual questions in **Question 1**.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

In general, candidates responded well to this series of questions. The passage on which they were based proved to be accessible and interesting enough to produce some imaginative re-creations in **Question 2**. There was considerable evidence that most candidates had had time to read it through carefully before embarking on their answers. However, there were some examples of misreading; in particular, in failing to recognise that Spider was the narrator's dog and not a pet insect, which could have been avoided if more time had been spent in close reading. It is also worth mentioning that the identification of Spider had been given in the italicised introduction to the passage printed on the question paper: candidates should be aware that such introductions are put there for their benefit and should be read with as much attention as the rest of the paper.

(a) This question was answered correctly by most candidates; those who failed to identify that the narrator decided to get out of bed to look at the moonlit view from the window had usually failed to note the lines identified in the question and instead took their answers from a different part of the text.

(b) This question caused some difficulty; candidates were asked to give one word or phrase from paragraph 2 to illustrate Spider's being each of the following: *alert*; *nervous*; *ready to attack*. The mark scheme allowed for several possibilities but achieving all three available marks was dependent on linking each of the three words with a specific illustration. Quite often candidates chose the correct part of the text for their answers but simply quoted the whole of the relevant section without making any attempt to make clear which word or phrase indicated which given word. Such responses could receive only limited reward.

(c) Most candidates scored one mark as they understood that the writer got out of bed because the presence of the dog gave him courage; significantly fewer recognised the further point that the absence of any further disturbance was also a contributory factor.

(d) The majority of candidates achieved good or top marks for this question through identifying relevant details. However, a significant number ignored the suggested word limit (60-70 words) and wrote at considerable length and included irrelevant detail. Although there was no penalty for this, it is likely that they wasted valuable time which could have been profitably used later in the paper.

(e) The recognition that the door had no keyhole was understood by nearly all candidates.

(f) The possible reasons for the narrator feeling disturbed on waking were that he could not think what had woken him; everything seemed ominously quiet; Spider was very tense and the narrator could not identify the mysterious noise. Although many candidates identified some or all of these points, not all of them succeeded in providing adequate explanations, using their own words, as to why the narrator was disturbed by them.

(g) This was quite a demanding question since it required very careful reading of the two short extracts and an accurate response to them. Most candidates indicated a general understanding, but far fewer were able to be precise as to their meaning. The key points in **(i)** were that the narrator tried to calm the dog and also to calm himself by doing this. To achieve both available marks for **(ii)** it was necessary to show a clear understanding that both man and dog were feeling very tense and that this feeling was transferred from one to the other.

(h) Most candidates answered this question correctly and understood that the narrator had been woken *by* something, rather than waking naturally. Some candidates apparently rejected this explanation as being too obvious and tried to find some stylistic reason behind the writer's choice of the verb's tense and mood.

(i) Candidates responded quite well to this question but, as with **(g)**, having identified the appropriate words and phrases gave inadequate explanations of them. (It was insufficient, for example, to define a 'rhythmic' sound as one that 'sounded rhythmically'.) A significant minority of candidates ignored the line references given in the question and chose words from other parts of the passage for which they could not be rewarded.

Question 2

Candidates responded to this question with some enthusiasm and produced many interesting responses. Many of these were convincing and built successfully on the suggestions contained in the original passage; others were more far-fetched and developed into gory explanations which failed not only to respond to the subtle sense of fear which the passage contained but also introduced elements which clearly distorted the original passage. However, the main limitation as far as subject matter was concerned was that many candidates failed to respond to the whole of the question, which required some further description of the house as well as details of what occurred after the door was opened.

The overall quality of most candidates' writing was of an at least adequate standard and is continuing evidence of the improvements in this area which have been noticed over the last few examination sessions. The main failings, as always, were in sentence separation, where the overuse of the comma and the absence of full stops, caused serious problems with the understanding of some otherwise promising responses. Candidates should also be aware that they are assessed on the quality of their writing rather than on the quantity. About a side and a half of average sized handwriting (300-400 words) is adequate; Examiners felt that many candidates became carried away in trying to write a complete ghost story and, through over-emphasis on narrative detail, failed to give sufficient attention to choice of appropriate vocabulary which would have gained them higher marks.

Paper 0500/02
Reading Passages (Extended)

General comments

All the questions were accessible to candidates, although a significant number found **Question 2** difficult. There was little evidence of candidates failing to finish the paper, although some answers to **Question 3** were written under pressure of time. In most cases this was due to spending too much time on earlier questions. In particular, some of the answers to **Question 2** were too long and tended to be descriptive rather than analytical. There were a number of candidates who generally wrote far too much in a very wordy and ineffective style; by contrast some very good answers to this question took only one side or a side and a half.

The Examiners ask that candidates should write their answers to the questions in the order in which they are asked. They are strongly recommended not to read the second passage until they have answered **Questions 1** and **2**. Failure to do this may lead to considerable confusion as to what content to use in **Question 1**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

[Passage A from 'The Hound of the Baskervilles] Imagine that you are writing a visitors' guide to the area described in Passage A. Write an introduction which ●describes the attractions of the area and ● persuades people with different interests to spend some time there. Base your introduction on information and ideas found in Passage A.

This question was often answered well. Examiners gave credit for a wide range of answers. For example, many candidates understood that the area would be attractive to a large number of people, such as climbers, painters, archaeologists and those who were seeking peace, without spoiling its nature. Hence, their introductions concentrated on the features of the area described in the passages. Some sensibly invented accommodation in Grimpen village and even went so far as to turn the huts into spartan camping shelters. Some candidates, on the other hand, developed the whole area into a tourist attraction with visitor centre, bird-watching facilities and specific activities for children. This was an equally valid approach and like the first, was persuasively presented while not using a tone and language unsuitable to the sort of area this was. A minority decided to turn it into a theme park and in doing so, invented content that was not related to the passage and tended to use a style of language that was not appropriate. There were occasional understandable misinterpretations that the Examiners did not penalise, such as that the area was tropical and that crocodiles were to be found in the ponds.

The second bullet point was meant to be a signpost to candidates to help them transform what was a rather threatening description into an attractive area. If they thought about the sort of people who might benefit by a visit it would help them to select portions of the material to use in their answer. The best answers were the ones that integrated the two bullet points. For example, they started with a section on active people, such as walkers and climbers and developed what they might find attractive; then they wrote about historians and their interests in the huts and Baskerville Hall; finally, they wrote about romantic couples and families enjoying the peaceful surroundings and viewing the sunsets. This approach invited candidates to visit more of the content of the passage and to treat different ideas more equally. Many candidates wrote about the attractions and then added a paragraph about people with different interests at the end. The result of this was to repeat some of the material that had been used previously.

The question was less complex than the one it replaced from the previous version of the syllabus (Paper 2, Question 2). Candidates had to use one passage only, but they were required to think more creatively, turning an area used by the writer as a background to a fearful story into a desirable place for a holiday and thinking through the sorts of people who might enjoy being there. The question was tied strongly to the passage and weaker candidates were those who made little use of it, and who ignored the second bullet. Other weaknesses were copying from the passage, and running out of ideas and repeating ones used earlier. Some candidates confused Grimpen village with the stone circle and made too much of the huts and of the mysterious stranger.

Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of (a) the sunlight and the approaching evening in paragraphs 1 and 4 and (b) the approach of the stranger in paragraphs 5. By referring closely to the language used by the writer, explain how he makes these descriptions effective.

Many candidates found it difficult to explain the effects of particular words and phrases used in the passage. By 'effects', the question meant the results of using language in terms of the reader's understanding and emotional reactions. Candidates had to think through what words might suggest, and what associations they had. Credit was also given for understanding of the writer's intention.

Candidates who selected words from the passage that were capable of communicating an effect were awarded up to four marks out of ten. If, in addition, they gave the meaning of the words either exactly or in descriptive terms, they were given two more marks up to a maximum of six. This included candidates who identified devices such as metaphor but who did not go on to give the effect of using the devices. Marks from seven to ten were given to candidates who explored the effects on the reader of the words that were used. They could also receive credit for exploring the writer's intentions.

It was not necessary to examine all the appropriate words in the passage. In the future, some passages will have fewer words available to discuss. Candidates were given marks according to the quality of their answer rather than the quantity. A candidate making three good quality comments in both sections **(a)** and **(b)** (six in all) could be given the top mark of ten. Candidates writing concisely could answer in no more than a side, and the Examiners did not envisage an answer that lasted more than one and a half sides. Some candidates, especially those writing descriptively, covered between two and three sides and scored no more marks for doing so.

Some weaker answers included very few or even no words from the passage. A good recipe for each stage of the answer was to make a general statement, provide a supporting word or phrase from the passage, and demonstrate the effect that it makes. Here are two examples:

> 'Throughout paragraph 5, the writer builds up the tension until the stranger finally reaches the opening of the hut. The paragraph starts with the words 'And then at last I heard him.' The words 'at last' reveal the turning point in Watson's long mission and he hears 'the sharp clink of a boot striking upon a stone.' The effect of these words is to destroy the peacefulness and quietness that has been previously described. The reader shares the violent effect of the 'striking' boot and hears the 'clink', a hard metallic sound, made firmer by its 'sharpness', which reminds one of knives and threat.'
>
> 'The writer impresses upon us the peacefulness of the sunset, which he describes as 'all golden-green' and 'all was sweet and mellow and peaceful in the golden evening light'. His use of the word 'gold' makes the reader think of a colour associated with actual richness, and a particularly deep yet bright tone he would not create by saying 'yellow'. However, there is an underlying sense of threat. The sun is 'blazing' which leaves the impression that everything is on fire – yet the writer means that the sun still has extraordinary strength and creates a light, which is so violent ('scarlet') that perhaps we would think twice about looking into it. Finally there is the strange image where the light is 'shot back in ruddy patches by the distant pools', again suggesting a light so intense that it is hard to look straight into it. Is it coincidence that the writer uses the word 'shot' when Watson is carrying a pistol and intends to use it if necessary?'

These two excellent examples would be worth marks above the maximum allocated. Note that technical terms like 'alliteration' do not appear. The candidates in one Centre had all learned to identify anaphora and sibilance, but very, very few tried to explain why the writer was using these effects.

Good candidates explored the idea that the description of sunset indicated danger and most understood that paragraph five was about suspense. Many had the idea that writing in the first person involved the reader closely in the build up of tension. Surprisingly, not many explored the effects of 'sharp clink' and 'striking' and it was very rare to find comments on what the shadow might have seemed like in the reader's imagination as it fell across the opening of the hut.

Weak candidates used expressions such as 'The use of emotive language makes the descriptions very effective', 'The writer uses metaphors to describe the sunset', and 'The sunlight helps us to imagine the scene', all without any support or exemplification. Comments such as these received no credit.

Candidates clearly need practice is appreciating the underlying associations of words and the effects on the reader when they are used in particular ways.

Question 3

[Passage B from The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*] Summarise (a) the features of the lands Dr Watson and Mma Ramotswe travel through and (b) the thoughts and feelings that these characters have on their journeys. You should write about 1 side in total, allowing for the size of your handwriting.*

It is a matter of concern that quite a number of candidates still think that a summary is an opportunity to write at length, descriptively or discursively, despite the previous advice and number of examples given in past Examiners' reports.

A summary is a concise grouping together of facts selected to answer a specific question. There should be no introduction or conclusion, no lengthy explanations, no repetition and no copying of phrases and sentences from the text.

Some candidates wrote comparisons despite the fact that the word 'compare' did not appear anywhere in the question. Better candidates who embarked on this perilous journey understood that not many comparisons would hold up and so referred to the individual passages within their comparisons and were able to score highly despite their error. Weak candidates answered generically and often made invalid comparisons such as the idea that both characters were afraid (Mma Ramotswe had overcome her fear long ago). A few very weak candidates thought that the two characters were both in Mma Ramotswe's van, and one spent a whole paragraph surmising what their relationship might be. Examiners do not ask candidates to make comparisons in this question. It is important that candidates learn about command words in questions and how to follow them.

This was an easy question for candidates who knew what they were doing. There was plenty of evidence that they had taken the reading of the second passage seriously, although not all picked up the more difficult points such as Mma Ramotswe's fear and her feelings about belonging to Africa. Similarly in the first passage, good candidates picked up the complex fears of Dr Watson while weak candidates just thought that he was afraid.

Most candidates obeyed the rubric and wrote one side in total. A sizeable majority wrote much more and received no marks for aspects of writing. Some candidates copied whole phrases and sentences from the passages and thus gave no evidence that they understood the passages.

An example of a top quality answer follows. It contains 27 valid points from the mark scheme. Only fifteen were required to be awarded full marks for content.

> Dr Watson crossed hilly moorland over a barren landscape with rocky paths and distant pools. He noticed a circle of huts and could see the towers of Baskerville Hall and a village in the distance. Mma Ramotswe crossed plains on the edge of a desert with ridges of thin earth and grey rock. There was little vegetation except when the rains came and everything was colourful.
>
> Dr Watson's journey made him react to the loneliness and he had mixed feelings about his task. While he was anxious, he was also excited now the moment had come to fulfil his duty. While he could not enjoy the natural beauty of the sunset, he was quite calm. Mma Ramotswe also felt the loneliness of her journey, but also that she belonged to her country and was a tiny part of it. She was nostalgic, remembering a time when she had felt fear but had overcome it. She was aware of the grandeur of the night sky and felt in awe of it.

Although IGCSE does not set a word count, this specimen has fewer than 175 words, which is less than a side of average handwriting. The Examiners would be grateful if all candidates could be persuaded to summarise in this fashion.

Paper 0500/03

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

Centres will have realised that there was very little new about the styles of questions set in this paper for the revised syllabus. **Question 1** came direct from the old Paper 2; **Question 3**, and the rest of the questions, although reduced to six choices, constituted this paper as it was previously.

The main differences were to do with mark allocations. There were 15, not 10, marks available for writing in the first question, and the marks for writing in the rest of the paper were divided between content and structure and style and accuracy. This rearrangement of the marks caused some changes in the ways in which candidates achieved their final scores. For example, a candidate might well think of good ideas for a narrative, and place them in a sound order, scoring a mark in Band 2. The same candidate might then write in an awkward style and make a number of quite serious errors, scoring a mark in Band 4. The result would be a final mark somewhere in Band 3. The Examiners' advice is to work hard at stylistic matters of clarity, sentence structure and range of language so that the first mark is not too badly affected by the other. It is of course possible that a piece of writing with simple content and faulty structure might be written wholly accurately and in fluent sentences. The second mark would then be higher than the first. The mark schemes that were used in this examination were the same as those published in the specimen papers, and are freely available for Centres to use and to understand these implications.

The other difference was in the amount of work expected from candidates during the examination. There was enough time for both exercises to be completed, but candidates did not, perhaps, always realise that the marks for **Question 1** came to the same total, 25, as those for the composition. There was some evidence that they had not spent enough time studying the reading material and preparing how it was to be delivered as a conversation. Some of the conversations were too short while some of the compositions were too long.

In total, candidates were expected to write somewhat more than in the previous Paper 3. In any paper, tiredness creeps in as time slips away. There were examples of candidates who started their conversations carefully, particularly as far as punctuation was concerned, but who made more mistakes when they wrote their compositions. As usual, long, detailed stories that attempted too much became more hurried as they entered their last quarter, and the number of mistakes increased.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Imagine that you have seen the advertisement printed on the following page and have decided that you would like to take part in 'Bike the Nile'. Write the script of a conversation between you and your parents in which you ask their permission to go on the trip and also ask them to help you raise the £1000 payment required. In your script you should briefly explain what 'Bike the Nile' involves and persuade your parents that it is a safe and worthwhile activity for you to take part in and for them to support. In your script you should: ● briefly explain what 'Bike the Nile' involves; ● persuade your parents that it is both a safe and worthwhile activity for you to take part in and for them to support. Base your ideas on the material found in the advertisement. Add your own details and opinions to make the conversation more persuasive.

Candidates were asked to write about 1½ – 2 sides. There was a difference between those who addressed the topic straightaway and those who exchanged niceties with their parents. Some candidates wrote almost a page before they started to use the material in the advertisement. The easiest part of the exercise was to explain briefly what the trip involved. Weak candidates presented the material printed at the top of the page virtually as a list, without adaptation. Better answers were those that used at least some original vocabulary and added little details of their own. The best answers redistributed the material within the conversation, for example dealing with the issue of safety separately from the basic information. However, it was disappointing that so many candidates were satisfied merely to repeat 'mechanics, medics and guides'.

The most discriminating part of the question was where candidates were asked to persuade parents that the trip was worthwhile. The main section of the material concerned 'Elders First' and, here again, many candidates unwisely reproduced the advertisement in list form. Better candidates selected items from the list and extended them to make them relevant to a relative, usually a grandparent. However, there was also a good deal of extra reasoning to be recovered from the two boxes, particularly matters of fitness, education, making friends, unforgettable experiences and the joy of cycling. Unfortunately, comparatively few candidates made much of this part of the material and, when they did, did little to extend and develop the ideas. Instead they spent a good deal of time working out details on how to raise the money for the trip and the family finances.

Candidates should remember that this exercise involves working from the reading material that is provided. The margin for creative writing is fairly small and as far as the reading mark was concerned, comparatively few candidates scored full marks.

The quality of the writing was quite high. The best candidates gave the parents some character. Some were amusing, some sarcastic and some angry. Many showed touching love for their child. All this came over in the language and was rewarded. There were also some good details of punctuation, such as the use of dots for pauses. Full stops were sometimes a weakness. Candidates attempted to use commas to join unrelated ideas, and a number of question marks were missing.

Candidates should remember that the Setter's choice of a conversation, letter, report or other genre is related to the task and is considered the best vehicle for using the reading material. It is not set as a creative writing exercise.

Section 2 (Composition)

Very often the best expression was somewhere on the first page while candidates' concentration was stronger. This sort of writing needs a careful plan and at least some drafting in the candidate's head. There is not sufficient time, as some candidates thought, to write a first draft and then to copy it out, usually with no evidence of any improvement. It was comparatively rare to encounter work that looked like a final draft, either in terms of paragraphing or punctuation. Writing compositions in examination rooms is a skill that needs its own special strategies and practice.

It may have been that the energy of some candidates was spent on the first question, and it would be wise for Centres to investigate this possibility when preparing for the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) *'In ancient Rome, people enjoyed watching gladiators fight to the death. Two thousand years later what we enjoy watching hasn't really changed.' Using examples of modern entertainment you are familiar with (e.g. television, playstation and computer games, video, sport) discuss this statement.*

(b) ***'If "we are what we eat" then teenagers are sure to become unhealthy, overweight, junk food addicts.'*** *What do* you *think of young people's eating habits today?*

The two essay questions were both popular, and the second was answered with more authority than the first, since diet was of more interest to the candidates and had formed the basis of some of their teaching. The plans for both topics were reasonably sound. The examination paper itself provided a structure for the first. In the opening paragraph most candidates expanded their ideas of Roman entertainment, stressing that people then had a different view of death from now. They then switched to modern entertainment and showed some care over ordering their thoughts. One candidate, for example, started with sport, commenting on violence on the field but showing that it was essentially controlled. Television and film went one step further, but we knew that the deaths were not real and we were mere spectators. The candidate then commented on computer games where it was the player who controlled the violence, and it was at this point that one wondered whether we had progressed much over two thousand years. This was an example of a well-planned essay. The candidate had started with a clear overview of what he wished to argue. Individual paragraphs were not all fully developed, but the whole of the writing was presented as a clear and progressive argument.

The Examiners saw comparatively few essays where candidates over-reached themselves, attempting such abstract and complex arguments that their vocabulary was strained excessively to communicate and therefore sacrificing clarity. Both topics could be addressed with practical, sensible thought, and both were well within the range of candidates' experience.

Question 2

(a) *A song or a piece of music comes on the radio. Immediately the tune reminds you of a particularly happy or sad occasion. Describe in detail the scene you remember (real or imaginary) and your feelings at that time.*

(b) *Describe a person (real or imaginary) who immediately appears to be either sinister or kind and trustworthy. Pay particular attention to her/his physical features and mannerisms.*

In **(a)** there was a thin line between writing description and narrative. All candidates included some narrative events. Those that were legitimate occurred over a very short time span or were descriptive of states of mind related to just one or two moments in time. This was quite a popular choice and was generally done well. Candidates entered into some moving emotional states connected to a variety of events. The topic was addressed with some originality, although there were many accounts of first love or the failure of a relationship. The problem was that the description was often only tenuously related to the music, and the references to the tune at the beginning of the writing were often not taken up subsequently (an obvious way in which candidates could have been credited with ability to structure their work).

There was also some moving writing for **(b)**, particularly where candidates described a real person who was kind or trustworthy. The sinister people were more likely to be from imagination and the description was often stylised. There was a tendency for the writing to be too long, and there were examples of repetition and of running out of interesting material. Some descriptions were meticulously ordered, starting at the feet and gradually working upwards. The topic provided a good opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their wide vocabularies.

Question 4

(a) *You discover an old photograph at home. You ask your parents who the person in the photograph is, and where and when it was taken. There is a tense silence… Make this mystery an important part of a story.*

(b) ***You are writing a story set in the future**. Your main character is a successful businesswoman who has been invited to go to her high school reunion. It is twenty-five years since she attended Marsh Academy but curiosity compels her to go. Write the beginning of the story. Start your story: As soon as the door opened, a familiar face…*

Both topics led to some interesting and often dramatic writing. There were enough cues in each topic to provide a framework for the story. Candidates responding to **(a)** were particularly good at describing the finding of the photograph, and only a few spent too much time on the opening section. Some even started their story as they walked downstairs to confront their parents. The tenseness that greeted the production of the photograph was well handled. Parents stared open-mouthed, tried to change the subject and dropped their food on the floor. There followed some intriguing stories of lost relatives, nearly all worth reading. Although some of the stories were over-dramatised and predictable, there were many opportunities for candidates to show different aspects of their writing ability and most of the work was well structured. Dialogue varied. There was frequently too much of it so that it overbalanced the narrative, and some of it was very uninteresting. For essays at this level, dialogue should always have a purpose, such as demonstrating character or moving the plot onwards.

Much of the good writing made effective contrast of the woman's success with the way in which she was treated when she was at school, and this provided some good opportunities to develop a storyline, for example leaving it at the moment when she confronted her former bullies. Some candidates spent a good deal of their writing in rather pointless conversations with former friends. They were of course only asked to write the beginning of a story. Nevertheless, good writers developed the plot sufficiently to indicate the line that subsequent events might take and also to plan where to leave the story, presumably at a point which would leave the reader guessing.

It has been the Examiners' practice in the past to recommend the topics that worked the best for classroom practice. This year, all the topics worked well although **2 (b)**, **3 (a)** and **4 (a)** were particularly recommended in this connection.

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

From this session the portfolio is worth 50% of the assessment for those Centres who take a coursework option. As before, 40 marks are available for writing, but from this year, an additional 10 marks are available for the candidate's response to a reading passage selected by the Centre. Most Centres wisely ensured that the three assignments made different demands on their candidates in terms of the purposes for writing and the registers in which they were written. They thus gave every opportunity for candidates to score fully against the criteria.

On the whole, the new requirements for Assignment 3 were carried out extremely sensibly and effectively. Despite the different possibilities for choice of text, most Centres chose a single article, often on a controversial topic and sometimes written from an extreme point of view. The Moderators found this the safest and most effective way to proceed. They made specific comments to Centres on their choice of text.

Most candidates understood that to be given high marks for reading, they had to engage with the writer's ideas and arguments. Some, however, merely summarised what they read, and did not extend, analyse or evaluate the content to any great extent. Most Centres realised that such candidates should be given lower marks, but some of the adjustments that Moderators made were in response to over-marking of the reading component.

Before the examination there was a good deal of discussion about the appropriateness of moving image texts for Assignment 3. The problem here was that of providing a copy of the text, which was specified in the syllabus. Individual teachers were advised on how to proceed, but no examples were received. The Moderators have suggested that work based on the moving image would be appropriate for Assignment 1 as analytical writing, leaving Assignment 3 for argumentative writing.

Another new requirement was for an early draft of one piece of work to be included in the portfolio. This is not assessed, but is considered an important part of writing coursework. The Moderators were very interested in those Centres where the drafts included notes written by both the candidate and the teacher, indicating general ways in which the work could be improved. These comments indicated editing, that is improving the wording and expression, revising, that is making structural or content changes, and correction. However, teachers are reminded that they may only make general comments about errors, for example, 'Read this over and add full stops where appropriate'. They are not allowed to mark individual corrections on the draft. The advice must not constitute the correction.

In general the coursework portfolios looked good and read very well. Hard work by candidates and their teachers paid off over and over again. Most of the marking was satisfactory and there were only a few examples where the standards of different teachers' marking within a Centre had not been correctly moderated. However, some Moderators made adjustments where Centres had judged the quality of the language, including accuracy, too leniently. Under the beneficial conditions promoted by coursework, it is assumed that candidates will take every care over style, spelling, punctuation and accuracy. Despite comments by Moderators in the past, there were still many examples of consistently poor proofreading.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

Argumentative and informative writing

The best portfolios were those that expressed the candidate's own thoughts, opinions and style. Personal thought through writing is good, was and this assignment should not serve merely as an opportunity to present a research essay that would be more applicable to other examination syllabuses or school subjects. Abstract essays on abstruse or well-worn themes are beginning to look old-fashioned and not particularly appropriate for the portfolio whose prime aim is to improve each candidate as a *writer*. Moderators were treated to many essays on suicide, anorexia, the death penalty, corporal punishment and drugs which had clearly come from material distributed in class, websites or, worse still, someone else's essay. They would have been better examples of writing had they included a section beginning with the words 'My opinion is…'. There is no reason why 'I' should not appear in the writing.

Some candidates wisely wrote about issues closer to home. There was a series of letters to a Principal about his refusal to allow mobile phones in school. Although everyone in the class did this exercise, there was a good deal of original thought and argument. Teachers avoided the likelihood of plagiarism by getting candidates to write properly structured speeches: some candidates in one Centre, wrote campaigning speeches for their election as head student. There were some excellent accounts of special school events such as Focus week, Discovery week or an International evening. The best of these accounts did not just report but evaluated as well. There were also accounts of school trips and community service. The interest level in these was often very high, and Moderators thought that teachers had prepared their candidates well for writing them.

Some of the topics were a good deal more in the candidates' grasp than others; some seemed too difficult for candidates of this age to tackle. Questions such as 'Are mobiles worth it?', 'Do teachers get paid enough?' 'Do footballers get paid too much?' 'What really is fashion?' and 'Should there be an airport on our island?' all elicited writing that appeared to reflect personal thought and feeling and to encourage an individual voice.

Film reviews, freed from newspaper style, were often done well, and there were some excellent reviews of a concert that candidates had attended; one candidate wrote a letter to a film director rather than a review. There was some good writing about places that candidates had lived in before moving to other parts of the world. These were not descriptions so much as assessments of the qualities and individuality of the places.

Given the sense of trying to vary the nature and style of Assignment 1 and 3, it was a pity that there were not more media assignments. However, one excellent piece was the creation of a front page of a newspaper and a rationale/evaluation by each candidate. The quality of this work was very high, and Centres will realise that it would have been very difficult to mark without the thoughtful and well written commentaries.

There were, of course, many other ways of setting up responses to Assignment 1, but the ones described above often prompted high quality writing at all levels, and the Moderators commend them to Centres.

In the report of Assignment 1 which follows, Centres will note that abstract essays on abstruse or well-worn themes are beginning to look old-fashioned and not particularly appropriate for the portfolio whose prime aim is to improve each candidate as a *writer*.

Assignment 2

Expressive writing

As usual, these were mostly fiction, very often written in a particular genre and, wisely, following some reading experience and teaching about such matters as characterisation, how to start a short story, building up to a climax and finishing neatly.

It is worth repeating that autobiography and personal narrative accounts are suitable both for Assignment 1 and Assignment 2, but that one would expect a more literary style for Assignment 2.

There were some examples of poems written by candidates and these were mostly accompanied by some very interesting and highly personal commentaries that made assessment much easier.

Assignment 3

Writing in response to a text selected by the Centre

Although it had been made clear in advance that almost any text could be used provided it contained facts, ideas and opinions, most Centres opted for informative or argumentative material of a fairly straightforward nature.

The Moderators recommend the following:

- The text should be comparatively short: one to two sides of A4 is sufficient.
- It should be argumentative rather than informative, since it is difficult for candidates to involve themselves with informative content and to satisfy the criteria in Bands 1 and 2.
- The topic should be one that is accessible to the candidates who have to respond to it.
- Strong views on controversial topics are often easier for candidates to deal with.
- Tasks should address the views contained in the article and not merely the topic. Candidates must show that they have read and understood the article as a whole and details of it.

  Examples of tasks that worked well are: 'Write a letter to the writer of the article': 'Respond to the arguments and ideas in the article'.
- Some candidates found more opportunities by explaining both their agreement and their disagreement with ideas in the text and then by giving their own views.
- Many candidates sensibly treated the article as a draft, highlighting sections that they wished to use and by writing notes on their copy of the text.

Only those candidates who 'tangled' with the ideas and arguments, and who analysed or evaluated the text could score easily in Bands 1 and 2. Those who summarised ideas from the text or who paraphrased and stated agreement with them, peaked at Band 3.

Some Centres used the same text for the whole of a class. This was a wise move since the exercise was a new one and it was easier to monitor. Other Centres allowed candidates to choose their own text, usually successfully, although some were too factual, some too long and some too difficult.

It is not recommended to choose long texts, since candidates will probably respond too generally or vaguely.

Moderators also noted:

- Some texts taken from the internet were strongly informative and allowed for quite limited responses. Their style was plain and they lacked development. An example was a fact sheet about the environment where the content was merely a series of bulleted factual points.
- Some news reports from newspapers tended to be far too plain, rather too short, and strictly factual – there was not enough to provide material for a response.
- Text taken from literary books were generally satisfactory provided that they contained facts, ideas and opinions. However, Centres tended to set passages that were too long or too many, and one Centre set the whole of a novel. Texts similar in length to those set in the passage-based questions for IGCSE Literature Papers 1 and 4 were appropriate. However, when setting tasks, Centres often failed to realise that the Literature requirement to discuss how words communicated ideas and effects was different from analysing and evaluating ideas and opinions. In other words, the type of response required in the two syllabuses is not the same. It would therefore seem that for Assignment 3 it is not suitable to use the same piece of work for both portfolios, although the task might be similar.

Some examples of texts seen this session that resulted in good writing:

- '*When the veil means freedom*': This article covered several different events and issues and was illustrated by at least two good anecdotes that significantly added to the ideas. It was an example of good journalistic writing and although challenging, was clearly for the general reader.
- *'Headmaster's ban hits a sensitive button in stylish Italy'*: This was an unusual angle on an age-old topic, school dress, which contained a Head teacher to argue with, several opinions and one or two side issues, all of them thoughtful and original. Although it was from an online newspaper, there was just enough weight to provide enough challenge for brighter candidates.
- '*It plays to learn*': This was a newspaper article about toys. It also contained many useful ideas about parents and children. While the candidate was not very successful in identifying worthwhile material, there was a wide variety of the writer's opinions that made this potentially a good choice.
- *'Last lesson of the afternoon' and 'The best of school': poems by D.H.Lawrence*: These poems are full of ideas about teaching and relationships between children and their teacher. The candidate managed to avoid words and analysed and discussed the content. This choice of literary material was the right length and it worked because of the contrast between the two poems and because the texts were strongly content based.
- *'On Liars' (Montaigne)*: This was a good choice for a group of Band 1 candidates who enjoyed sorting out what would have been very difficult material for the less able. It is a good example of targeting different texts at different students.

Assessment of reading was generally fairly accurate, but there was a tendency to award high marks to those who had either used very little of the text or who did not involve themselves with the ideas and opinions.

Paper 0500/05
Speaking/Listening Option

General comments

CIE Moderators report that the new test format has worked extremely well, with the majority of Internal Examiners managing the new format competently and with a good deal of confidence.

Administrative requirements have been adhered to remarkably well – with not a single case of confusion over the new mark total of 30. Moderators have no issues to raise relating to procedural matters.

It is hoped that teachers reading this report will regard the following comments as reflective advice, intended to refine good practice. Nothing which follows should be read as criticism, but rather as designed to encourage ways in which greater consistency can be achieved.

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: (1) The personal, perhaps anecdotal, autobiographical piece; (2) 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 in this first session of the new format. 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, to provoke, etc. is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will probably result.

Some examples of topics presented: The importance of people's names; Stereotypes of women; Life as an expatriate teenager; The responsibility of world leaders; Impressionism; Asperger's Syndrome; What makes a guitarist great; How money has changed sport; The misuse of television; Discrimination in Indonesia; The impact of a failed marriage on a child; Arthur Miller, the playwright; Do we blame MacDonalds?; Was the 1969 Moon-landing a fake?; The influence of the Mafia on Colombian football… The full list stretches much further than this of course. None of these topics are included here as recommendations *per se* – 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 exam. The new 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 Examiner before – was that discussion was not focused enough. At such Centres, it is important that Examiners meet briefly with the candidates prior to the actual Test – so that there is time for an Examiner to consider each topic that will be the focus of discussion. The poorest tests were certainly those during which Examiners 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 Examiners 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 in a 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**, listening skills are now being assessed 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, 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 (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.

Therefore Moderators noted a degree of lenience in some of the marking. However, it is appreciated that time is needed for all involved to become familiar with the new criteria. In this context, please regard adjustment made to any Centres' internal marks as necessary for establishing consistency in the application of the criteria.

Further 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, for example, on the use of literature – 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 hand-written notes as a reminder is what was imagined here.
- Moderators believe that the criteria/descriptors now make this component less appropriate for candidates for whom English is very much a Second Language, from whom 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 0500/06 submission. In this session, of course, the work would have had to have been completed between 1st March and 30th April.

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.

Paper 0500/06

Speaking/Listening Coursework

General comments

Only a small number of Centres opted to submit coursework for this component.

The External Moderator is pleased to report that in all cases, the new format for coursework was adhered to, with all candidates completing the three required activities: an individual task, a pair-based task and a group discussion.

The new structure appears to have resulted in a wider range of activities being completed, along with more efficient administration. One Centre included a number of interviews with characters from literature (and indeed, authors) as a role playing **Task 2**. This worked very well.

Centres are reminded, though, to include Candidate Record Forms – one for each candidate – and to send in recordings of only **Task 2**: the pair-based activity, for external moderation. Any additional documentary evidence offering more details of the tasks undertaken, or explaining how assessment was arrived at, are most welcome.

Assessment was satisfactory in all cases. It was not necessary to adjust Centres' marks.