

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/04  
Coursework Portfolio

## Key messages

In this component, candidates should aim to:

- reflect in their writing their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them;
- choose assignments that challenge them to write at the highest standard of which they are capable;
- write independently of undue guidance from published materials or from teachers;
- demonstrate variety of style, use of language and genre in the three assignments;
- write in fluent and varied sentences separated by full stops and clarified by the appropriate use of commas and other punctuation;
- revise, edit and correct first drafts in their own handwriting;
- proof-read their work carefully, as marks are deducted for typing errors.

## General comments

There was a wide range of varied task setting, some of it carefully linked to candidates' interests and enthusiasms. There was also a wide range of ability in English, from those who used language to think and imagine at a high level to those who were still imperfect in English grammar and aspects of style. Much of the work was typical of good practice in coursework.

For some re-sit candidates the process of completing new tasks ahead of the entry deadline was a hurried one and it was difficult for them to demonstrate a higher standard of achievement from that of the summer session in such a short time. Some of the marks were too generous, both for reading and writing, and the range of marks too narrow. However, teachers worked hard to assess the work, in many cases annotating it effectively, and to complete the necessary forms. There was adequate evidence of internal moderation.

### **Good practice:**

In task setting, good practice was demonstrated when centres set a wide range of tasks for Assignments 1 and 2 in an attempt to meet the interests of as many candidates as possible. It was even better to encourage candidates to choose their own topics and titles in conjunction with their teachers' advice.

It was also good practice to encourage candidates to write from their own experience and to express their own views.

Finally, some candidates were taught how to set out a first draft and to edit and revise (as well as to correct) it. More detail about this is given later in this report.

However, in some cases, where candidates were set a narrow range of tasks, there were those who did not respond well. In addition, some tasks were accompanied by too much teaching, where candidates were advised what to write or how to structure their work. Some stimulus material offered them a pattern to follow in their writing instead of suggesting ways in which they could think imaginatively for themselves to create original and exciting pieces of work.

Too many drafts showed that teachers had corrected specific inaccuracies or made specific suggestions for improvement, instead of giving general advice at the foot of the work. The indicating of errors in the margin or in the body of the work was not allowed because it gave the candidate an unfair opportunity to increase the mark.

## Task setting

The setting of appropriate tasks by teachers of 0500 for Assignment 1 was generally good, except where the topic was factual and academic and where there was no evidence of personal involvement and thought. There was more variety, and fewer candidates lost marks by attempting tasks that gave insufficient challenge.

For Assignment 2, there was a tendency to write stories that contained so much violence that they lost their effectiveness and, ultimately, credibility. This was also true of the large number of haunted house stories. There were some good descriptions of towns and holiday haunts as well as accounts of experiences that stood out in the minds of the candidates.

Assignment 3 was often problematical, and a full account of the work is given below.

## Assessment of coursework

### Writing

The balance between content/structure on the one hand and style/register/accuracy on the other was not observed. Candidates assessed in Band 1 are expected to demonstrate almost perfect accuracy, and there should only be rare errors in work assessed at the marks of 34 and 35.

Coursework offers excellent opportunities for candidates to draft and to check their work for errors. They have time to proof read their responses and are allowed to use electronic devices to help them with spelling and to identify stylistic shortcomings. Therefore, the expectation is that there should be fewer errors in Coursework.

The aspects of writing that were not always given their proper weighting were:

- **Punctuation, especially sentence separation:**  
candidates tended to link sentences with commas rather than with conjunctions, for example: '*The next day the mist had vanished, I had breakfast and set off for the bus station.*' Some candidates used far too many semi colons, many of them inappropriately, and also confused colons with semi colons. In some pieces of work exclamation marks were used where there were no exclamations and this was sometimes true of question marks.
- **Sentence structure:**  
this was connected with incorrect sentence separation. Some candidates wrote simple sentences throughout an assignment and punctuated them correctly. Others did the same but used very little punctuation. At a higher level there was sometimes little variety in sentence types and lengths. Some candidates wrote excessively long and poorly organised sentences that convoluted meaning and failed to communicate ideas clearly.
- **The range of vocabulary:**  
some candidates had a limited range of language, which resulted in the repetition of key words and difficulties in expressing exact or subtle thoughts and ideas. Where language was very limited, even where it was correctly used, the mark was typically in Band 4. Some candidates used over-elaborate language so that meaning was sometimes difficult to follow, or where words were used inaccurately.

Some candidates had problems with spelling. There were some examples of United States spelling. Moderators have always been instructed to allow either UK or US spelling but to demand that it should be consistent. There were also many examples of candidates misusing the spell check. Not only was the spelling of some words not known, but when given alternatives, some candidates made the wrong choices.

Examples were:

Components for opponents; par annoyer for paranoia; revelling and reviling for 'revealing clothing'; *Students feel self-contours; heading towards familiar tertiary; Friday 8th December 2010 hornets me till this day.*

These are examples of words that should have been proof read. Proof reading was not always carried out and accounted for many errors.

Some centres did not indicate or annotate every error within a portfolio, and this can lead to an overestimation of the level of competency in written accuracy.

The marking of content and structure was much more accurate except where the content of Assignment 1 was not demanding enough. The assessment of register was also good. Many candidates were able to write in three distinct registers.

### **Assessment of reading**

This tended to be lenient and will be dealt with later in the report. Candidates were given high marks even when they had not selected relevant ideas and opinions from the text or had not evaluated them in any depth.

### **Administration by Centres**

Moderators complimented Centres on their filling in of forms and presentation of the folders. Most Centres enclosed the CASF (WMS) form and indicated which of their candidates were included in the sample. The CASF was required for all entered candidates, and all changes to the marks at internal moderation should have been shown in the right hand column. This was not always the case and Moderators had to search for evidence of moderation in the folders themselves.

There were few examples where the text(s) used for Assignment 3 was missing from the folders. It was useful for each candidate to have a copy which showed which parts had been selected for evaluation in the response.

One draft per folder was almost always enclosed. It was not necessary for there to be a draft of all three assignments.

The general standard of annotation was high except that it was rare for all errors to be indicated, and some scripts bore no such indication at all. There were some Centres that did not annotate their work so that it was impossible for the Moderator to understand how marks had been awarded.

Folders were very well presented, but Centres are asked to ensure that the work is firmly fixed together. Folders are frequently moderated more than once and are handled by several people, so that loose papers may easily go missing. Centres are asked not to enclose folders in plastic covers because of the extra time required to handle the work.

### **Drafts**

Some candidates used their drafts well, revising sections and editing language. The following procedure was looked for by Moderators:

- The draft is produced. This may be partially completed, a set of ideas that may be changed radically at the next draft, or a completed version.
- The teacher reads the draft and writes general advice about editing, revising, and correcting at the foot of the work. There should be no marks in the margin or the body of the work.
- The candidate uses a different colour to indicate what changes are needed, either altering wording or stating what is intended in the final version that is different from the draft.

It was not acceptable that first final versions were exact copies of the first draft with no indication of advice or changes to be made.

### **Internal moderation**

Centres are reminded that the function of internal moderation is to bring the work of different sets into line with each other. Enough folders from each set need to be scrutinised to ensure that it has as a whole, or in part, not been leniently or severely marked. The marks of the set should be scaled accordingly so that the rank order of all candidates in the Centre is sound.

There were some cases of disagreement with rank order, but these were not too great for moderation to take place without changing the Centre rank order.

## Assignment 1

This assignment was well done. There was a general understanding that there needed to be evidence of a personal viewpoint or experience. Most responses were argumentative and were well structured. Where they were not, paragraphs appeared to be placed randomly with little thought for how a reader would progress through the assignment.

Tasks that were not successful included rants on topics such as cyclists in lycra and public buses. These lacked challenge and there were structural problems and some inconsistent register. There were a number of film reviews that contained too much retelling of plot and which followed an unstructured template. There were a very large number of tasks set on video games, mobile phones, Facebook, and technology in general. These essays were remarkably similar in their argument and mostly lacked any personal input. The topics were not bad, but they needed a lot more thought about how to present content in an interesting way. Leaflets were rarely successful as examples of writing, although attractive to look at.

The great variety of interesting tasks included the following:

*My ideal education*  
*How to apply makeup*  
*Scouting*  
*Should students grade teachers?*  
*Corruption, mother of all crime*  
*Yorkshire terriers*  
*Misconceptions of Islam*  
*A guide to surviving Hogwarts*  
*Prison reform (a fine piece, worthy of a prime minister's attention)*  
*A speech about freedom*

## Assignment 2

These assignments were either descriptive (particularly of places that were home or which had been visited), narrative, or accounts of personal experience. Topics for personal experience were nearly all engaging either because they were unusual or because they were so vivid in the writer's memory. The descriptions were also realistic and nearly always worked well for the candidates who chose them.

Narratives varied. Many of them were so-called 'Gothic' stories, and some were 'dystopian'. The latter varied from the imaginative and clever to the frankly silly, with hordes of zombies wreaking vengeance on lonely survivors. The secret of this type of narrative is to make it credible, and the only way to do this is to proceed with caution, carefully building up atmosphere until the reader believes in what is being related. The problem was that the events of the haunted house stories, the 9/11 tragedy and the plane crashes were outside the experience of the writers. Most of the stories were not credible and it took a really good writer to make them work. It was a pleasure to find those that were based on knowledge of what happens in a good short story, and there certainly were some examples.

For the same reason, the stories that contained gruesome violence did not work because the violence took over from the story as a whole. The story became an excuse for describing flowing blood whereas the description of the blood should have served the needs of the story. Whether it was safe to encourage young writers to create such violent stories is another matter.

Monologues rarely worked because they tended to be expressions of emotion that repeated itself, so that the content was limited and there was no clear structure. As usual, those that did work were very good.

The following is a selection of topics that elicited good writing:

*The bell boy*  
*The monster under my bed*  
*The jump*  
*Voluntary work in Cambodia*  
*Before the big game starts*  
*Elephant ride*  
*My first tattoo*  
*City at night*  
*Arrival in Manila.*

The descriptive topics, *the beach*, *the fairground*, *the storm* and *the park*, have now been popular for a very long time and centres may find candidates produce better work with alternative titles.

Despite these problems, the writing of the second assignment was often good. Candidates attempted to demonstrate a range of vocabulary and there was often a strong sense of relevant detail.

### Assignment 3

There were several problems with this assignment. The choice of text was not always successful because there were not enough ideas and opinions with which candidates could engage. It was quite common for candidates to mistake the text for a stimulus instead of a text set for reading study. As a result, many responses were to the topic rather than to the text. This did not affect the writing mark which was separate from the reading, but it did affect the reading mark where marks of 8, 9, and 10 were given too readily. There was a lack of selection of ideas and opinions from the text and some of the comments were very straightforward and not true evaluations. Those Centres that understood the nature of the task did noticeably well, as follows:

- The text (about one to one and a half sides long) consisted of a writer putting a case for a controversial topic, with which the candidates could agree (partly or completely) or disagree.
- The response started with an overview. This could include elements of summary, particularly making clear the writer's attitude and stating the reasons for agreeing or disagreeing. This overview could be extended perhaps to half a side.
- The response then picked out a series of ideas and opinions from the text that supported points made in the overview. Each of these was evaluated as an argument. The candidates might define fact from opinion, explore the consistency of the argument, or give reasons why the writer was being biased. It was not enough to agree or disagree without reasons. It was wrong to attack the writer instead of examining and destroying the arguments.

Very good candidates were able to write an overview and then produce a coherent response which assimilated quotations both short and long from the text to create a strong argument. In these responses the evaluation often came first and was supported by the quotation.

Some Centres used texts by Katie Hopkins. While these were appropriate, the arguments used in the articles were often rather unchallenging and they tempted candidates to respond with personal attacks instead of patiently demolishing the attitudes that were expressed. Articles by Jeremy Clarkson were more difficult because he tempted the reader to disagree violently. However, his comments were not as superficial as they first appeared and needed taking apart with considerable care.

The best topics were those that were within the sphere of candidates' experience and included:

*Should school start earlier in the day?*  
*A world without work*  
*Syrian refugees*  
*A teenager writing in favour of school uniform*  
*An attack on teenagers' behaviour and attitudes*  
*Teenage sleep patterns*  
*An article proposing to ban the hijab*  
*Using ex-army soldiers as teachers*  
*Left to die on Everest*  
*Article about closing a local youth centre.*

### Final comments

The Moderators thank Centres for the efforts they made to complete what were often very worthwhile and readable folders.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/05  
Speaking and Listening

## Key messages

### Administration

Most centres were conversant with the required procedures and carried them out professionally and effectively. Where there were issues the following applies:

- It is important for a centre to choose **either** Component 5 or 6 **before** planning the schemes of work through which this examination is to be delivered. Component 5 is a test taken within a specified window, being suitable for centres who wish to assess their candidates on one topic, on one chosen date. For Component 6, three separate tasks are required that can be assessed at any time during the course. A small minority of centres continue to misunderstand this difference. It is not, for example, possible for centres to use what were originally intended as Component 6 tasks for an entry for Component 5.
- Having chosen Component 5, centres should refer closely to both the current syllabus and Speaking and Listening Handbook to ensure the requirements for the administration and conduct of the component are met in full.
- Cambridge requires a centre to provide **three different items** in the package sent to the Moderator. These are a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive, the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered and a **copy of the marks** that have already been sent to Cambridge. Each one of these items is very important in the process of assessing a centre's performance. Centres are urged to ensure all these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process, or in the worst scenario, an inability on the part of the moderator to complete the process until the relevant items are received.
- It would be appreciated if centres would use **digital recording equipment** to generate audio files, which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a recognised common audio file format. This allows for easier access for moderators when playing the recordings back. Appropriate file types are mp3, wav and wma but not AUP as moderators struggle to open these using standard computer software. Please **check the quality** of the recordings before despatching to Cambridge. Please collate recordings onto either one CD or USB drive unless the cohort's size prevents this.
- Please check the recordings at regular intervals during the testing process to ensure their quality. Please also check the CD or USB before despatching to Cambridge. Faulty recordings continue to delay the process of moderating a small minority of centres.
- It would be very helpful if, for each candidate, a **separate track** is created and its file name is the candidate's name and examination number.
- Where total marks for a candidate have been altered because of internal moderation, please indicate on the Summary Form which of the three marks have been changed.
- The examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. A separate introduction is required for each candidate's test.
- Almost exclusively, the tests were conducted within the specified time window. Centres should note that it is not possible to re-submit the same work from a previous series for Component 5, as the test for each series must take place within the specified test window. Instead, marks should be carried-forward from a previous series.

## Conduct of the test

Generally, there were few problems with how the tests are conducted but there remain some issues that do affect candidates' performance.

When considering candidates' marks, the importance of **timings** must be appreciated.

- Part 1 should be a minimum of three minutes. Please note this does not include the examiner's introduction. Where a Part 1 response is short, please consider whether the **assessment criteria can be adequately met** and assess accordingly. It is difficult to see how a response can meet higher level criteria such as 'sound' or 'full and well organised use of content' and 'employs a wide range of language devices' in a performance lasting significantly less than three minutes. Equally, a response which is significantly overlong cannot be regarded as fulfilling the criteria for Band 1.
- Given that both speaking and listening are assessed in Part 2, it is important that the discussions last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. In Part 2 a minimum of six minutes of discussion is expected. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation is met.

Candidates can take into the test one cue card containing prompt notes. These notes should not be written in full sentences or be read verbatim. A reliance on written material in Part 1 is counter-productive and only leads to a lack of natural fluency which affects performance.

The use of pre-prepared responses to known questions in Part 2 is not permitted. When they plan and prepare their responses, candidates are encouraged to consider what questions they may be asked during the discussion, but there should be no collusion between the examiner and candidate. Candidates who prepare long and unnatural monologues in response to anticipated questions penalise themselves. The discussions should evolve naturally, with room for spontaneity and responses which have not been preconceived.

The test should only be attempted once in any examination series. Once the test has begun it should not be re-started or interrupted.

## Accuracy of assessment

In most cases, centres had applied the criteria accurately, appropriately and fairly whilst underpinning this through successful internal moderation procedures. Where there were issues the following applies:

- Examiners sometimes ignored the reliance on notes in Part 1 and compared candidates who relied on notes/memorisation favourably with candidates who were more spontaneous but still gave a good performance.
- The main cause of inaccuracy in assessment was a lack of consideration of the length a candidate's response. Those that were too short or overly-long were unlikely to meet all of the criteria necessary to secure the higher bands.
- Articulate, confident candidates tended to be over assessed where the content was factual rather than demonstrating higher level thinking.
- Some assessors seemed reluctant to give full marks, or even Band 1, where the candidate obviously merited such an assessment.
- Under marking was also more evident at the bottom of the mark scheme where candidates needed to be credited for what they did do, despite some areas of obvious weaknesses.

## Approaches to Part 1

The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates took ownership of a topic, had a strong base knowledge of the subject and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Well planned and prepared responses are generally more successful but responses do not benefit from an over-reliance on notes or over-rehearsal. Seemingly 'artificial' performances where a natural fluency is missing do not benefit the candidates. For weaker candidates, as with any other examination, more tuition from centres in preparation, technique, and confidence, is required.

The focus for many candidates was just to get the material delivered, with fewer candidates also thinking about tone and rhetorical devices to support their talks. The best candidates often had a passion for their topic, and therefore the use of language devices came more naturally.

Moderators reported a wide range of topics being undertaken although the tasks generally took the form of an individual presentation. More successful centres allowed candidates to choose their own topics as opposed to dictating a generic theme. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when choices are made. To achieve the higher bands, the presentations should move beyond the descriptive to include elements of reflection and analysis.

Some examples of productive **Part 1** topics include:

- A significant moment in my life
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- Being a teenager in the 21st Century
- Body shaming and the role of social media
- Gaming – where it was well constructed
- Travel
- Driving and mobile phones
- Discrimination focusing on a social issue, i.e. disability
- Bermuda Triangle
- Topical world events
- Experience of other cultures- moving countries/other education systems compared/anime/Korean pop music
- Overcoming challenge
- Technology

## Management of Part 2

Most examiners were supportive in their questioning to encourage and to settle nervousness. This helped students to achieve their best. Most examiners conducted the discussions effectively and when faced with reticent candidates they asked pertinent questions which enabled candidates to extend and develop their presentations.

Many examiners showed genuine interest and enthusiasm in the candidates' topics and provided appropriate encouragement. This helped to put candidates at ease and subsequently a more natural, relaxed discussion ensued.

Good discussions gave ample opportunity to allow candidates to develop their ideas as fully as they could, providing questions that helped them to explore ideas which demonstrated development of explanation and thinking. Some appropriate evidence of sensitivity by the listener was also noted when the topic was personal and potentially upsetting.

Some candidates were hindered through the listener cutting into a discussion when it may have been more advantageous to allow the candidate to continue. Where both candidate and examiner ask each other a series of questions, with the examiner's answers dominating the discussion, a mark in the higher bands is unlikely.

Some discussions fell into 'limited' or just 'adequate' because the examiner ran out of questions to push the discussion to the required minimum length, thus the candidates were disadvantaged. In a similar vein, where the examiner did not extend the discussion, candidates were not given the opportunity to really show what they could do.

## Advice to centres

- Prepare for this examination as any other, i.e. techniques/research/thought about appropriate topics. Practise methods of presentation and discussion in other situations before preparing for this exam.
- Give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills through effective discussion and appropriate timings for both parts of the test. Keep to the time limits in the syllabus to avoid candidates being adversely limited in the mark scheme.
- Follow the instructions on how to present the recordings and documentation efficiently and concisely. Please check everything before sending it to Cambridge.



- Encourage candidates to choose topics that they know well through personal experience, and are passionate about. Issues and ideas work better than factual topics unless the candidate has an individual flair or interest.
- When conducting the discussions in Part 2, examiners should have plenty of questions to ask to push candidates to fill the time for the discussion. Examiners should ask questions strategically to encourage and help the candidates to think for themselves and show off what they can do. Examiners should avoid saying too much or interrupting too early, which can affect the candidates developing their own ideas.
- At the lower end of the mark scheme especially, focus on crediting what is there and do not penalise what is missing.
- At the top end, Band 1 responses should be the required lengths and include evidence of higher level thinking skills being applied by the candidates.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/06  
Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

## Key messages

- It is important for a centre to choose **either** Component 5 or 6 **before** planning the schemes of work through which this examination is to be delivered. Component 5 is a test taken within a specified window, being suitable for centres who wish to assess their candidates on one topic, on one chosen date. Component 6 is more flexible in that three separate tasks are required that can be assessed at any time during the course. This flexibility allows a broader range of topics and skills to be assessed but requires centres to fully embrace the concept that the speaking and listening tasks are an integral part of the overall course.
- Having chosen Component 6, centres should pay close attention to both the current syllabus and Speaking and Listening Handbook to ensure the requirements for the administration of the component are met in full. In particular, the **Individual Candidate Record Cards** should be treated as 'living' documents that are completed when each task is undertaken. It is permissible for candidates to fill out these sections themselves but please check the accuracy and amount of detail given. **Specific** information about the choices made for each task is required by the Moderator and not just generic statements that are unhelpful. For Task 1 a comment reading 'a talk about a hobby of your choice' is not helpful but 'my interest in (explain specific hobby)' is useful for the Moderator.
- Cambridge requires a centre to provide **four different items** in the package sent to the Moderator. These are a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive, the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered, a **copy of the marks** that have already been sent to Cambridge and the **Individual Candidate Record Cards** for the candidates included in the sample. Each one of these items is very important in the process of assessing a centre's performance. Centres are urged to ensure all four of these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process, or in the worst scenario, an inability on the part of the Moderator to complete the process until the relevant items are received.
- It would be appreciated if centres would use **digital recording equipment** to generate audio files, which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a recognised common audio file format. This allows for easier access for moderators when playing the recordings back. Appropriate file types are mp3, wav and wma but not AUP as moderators struggle to open these using standard computer software. Please **check the quality** of the recordings before despatching to Cambridge.
- It would be very helpful if for each candidate a **separate track** is created and its file name is the candidate's name and examination number.
- The teacher/Examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. For paired activities, it would be helpful if **candidates introduce themselves and the roles they are playing** before beginning the task so the Moderator can clearly distinguish who is speaking and when.
- Although there is no formal requirement that activities should be of a minimum length, please consider whether the **assessment criteria can be adequately met** if the activity is very short. It is difficult to see how both candidates in the Paired-Task activity can meet higher level criteria such as 'responds fully', 'develops prompts' or 'employs a wide range of language devices' in a performance lasting less than two minutes. Given that both speaking and listening are assessed it is important that the activities last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums.

## **General comments**

Centres are reminded that there are specific forms provided by Cambridge for use with Component 6; namely the Individual Candidate Record and the Summary Form. Please use these documents. It is worth noting that the Component 5 Summary Form is different and it is not interchangeable with the Component 6 equivalent.

For Component 6, centres are encouraged to be creative in the choice of tasks but the assessment criteria should always be used as a guide to the skills being assessed. The integration of literature into the activities is encouraged.

## **Comments on specific tasks**

The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates took ownership of a topic and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Well planned and prepared responses to tasks are generally more successful but responses do not benefit from over-scripted and seemingly 'artificial' performances, where spontaneity is missing, often do not meet the requirements of the top band.

### **Task 1**

Moderators reported a wide range of topics being undertaken although the task generally took the form of an individual presentation. More successful centres allowed candidates to choose their own topics as opposed to dictating a generic theme. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when choices are made.

*Some examples of productive **Task 1** activities include:*

- A significant moment in my life
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- Why I love anime
- My participation in ...
- My favourite band
- Being a teenager in the twenty-first century

### **Task 2**

The Pair-Based Activity works best between two candidates of similar ability discussing a topic they have prepared and that they feel strongly about or engaging in a lively role play that allows them to demonstrate their discursive strengths. A clearly defined focus is better than a general exchange of views. 'Football' remains a popular topic amongst boys but where there is no sense of audience or specific focus there will be little evidence of the higher order thinking skills expected for those wishing to attain a mark in the higher bands. Where candidates have clear viewpoints that lead to persuasive argument the resulting task will be more successful than when candidates are unsure of their opinions. Generally, entirely scripted responses, be they discussions or role plays, do not allow candidates to access the higher attainment bands.

*Some examples of productive **Task 2** activities include:*

- Planning a school celebration
- Arguing for and against the use of social media
- Discussing a text or author both candidates know well
- The effects of Body Image
- Comparing the merits of two famous people where each candidate acts as a champion
- Acting as employers choosing who should be given a job from a list of prospective candidates (and variations on the theme)

### **Task 3**

Task 3 may take the form of a group discussion debating an issue which is topical and or a role-play where each candidate plays the part of a character. Both can be successful as long as the assessment criteria for the group work are met. It is most important that each candidate in the group is allowed sufficient scope within the activity to demonstrate their strengths without being dominated by others. To this end, it is advisable to create groups of similar ability levels so that weaker candidates are not disadvantaged and to consider the group dynamic so that each member has the opportunity to contribute to the best of their ability.

*Some examples of productive **Task 3** activities include:*

- A trial scene based on a literary text, e.g. George Milton, Arthur Birling
- A discussion of a topical issue with each candidate having their own viewpoint
- A Jeremy Kyle style role play possibly with literary figures as the central characters
- Balloon debate – who to include/discard from a list of famous people where each candidate champions the cause of their chosen celebrity

### **General conclusions**

The general standard of assessment by centres is at the correct level. Generally, centres have become very efficient in the administration of the component and in the choice of topics. Candidates undertaking speaking and listening activities continue to be enthusiastic about the experience and clearly benefit from careful planning and practise.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/11  
Reading Passages (Core)

## Key Messages

- Candidates should take careful note of the line numbers stated in the questions to ensure that their answers are taken from the appropriate section of the passage.
- For **Question 1 f(i)** (and equivalent questions in future papers) candidates should note that they should give a synonym that relates to the underlined word only and not to the whole phrase. When responding to 1 **f(ii)** they should comment on the whole phrase and not just repeat the answer given to 1 **f(i)**.
- **Question 2 Reading.** Candidates are expected to develop the third bullet in some detail and not just mention it in one sentence at the end of their account. It is also important to understand the third bullet point is intended to assess how well the inferences of the passage have been understood and that a successful response to this bullet should go beyond the explicit story but remain true to the original's content, genre and register.
- **Question 2 Writing.** When proof reading their responses, candidates should focus on consistency of tenses and sentence separation (comma splicing).

## General Comments

In general, candidates were well prepared for this paper and responded well to the subject matter of the reading passages. Overall, the sub-questions that constituted **Question 1** discriminated successfully with those who had focused on close reading of both the passage and the questions scoring high marks. **Question 1(f)**, as with similar questions in previous sessions, proved the most difficult although there was evidence of a generally improved performance in responses to **f(i)**. **Question 1 f(ii)** was less well answered and candidates are reminded that it is important when answering this question to relate their comments specifically to the terms of the rubric – in this instance they were asked to comment on how the language used by the writer conveyed the difficulty of driving down the mountain road. In some cases, candidates gave lengthy explanations in **f(i)** that would have been more appropriate to **f(ii)**.

There were a large number of atmospheric and imaginative narratives in response to **Question 2**. Many of these, however, despite containing convincing and detailed developments of the first two bullet points, ended somewhat anticlimactically as they failed to develop the reason for the appearance of Richard's friend Geoffrey or of the help he needed, or simply ended at the same point as the original passage and, consequently, denied themselves the chance of gaining a Reading mark that was higher than low Band 2.

**Passage B** proved to be accessible for nearly all candidates and the standard of responses to both parts of **Question 3** was of a high level with much evidence of confident summary writing techniques.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### Question 1

- (a) **Using your own words, give two reasons why the narrator decides to drive carefully (paragraph one, 'For a little time...').**

Most candidates gained at least one mark on this question with the most common answer referring to the fact that the road contained many twists or curves. A large number of candidates went on to gain the second mark by explaining that the narrator's view of the road was made more difficult by the snow. In the passage the writer used the phrase 'the snow was confusing to the eyes' and it was necessary to make the point that the 'confusion' was about seeing clearly. Some candidates simply put that the snow was confusing or that the snow made driving difficult and these comments were not sufficient to gain the second mark. The majority of candidates took the information for their answer from the relevant section of the passage

- (b) **Which one word in line 7 suggests the narrator wants to drive more quickly?**

Most candidates answered this question correctly and wrote the word 'restlessness' which was all that was required to gain the mark available.

- (c) (i) **Using your own words, give two details that make driving easier for the narrator (lines 14 – 16).**

It is important to make the general point that **Question 1(c)** (both parts) and **Question 1(d)** cover a similar section of the passage and that each question requires slightly different material in response – hence the need for careful and accurate reading is essential here. The key to answering **(c)(i)** is that it is looking at the changes in the conditions through which the narrator is travelling and not about his feelings. A large proportion of the candidates identified this and most gained at least one mark. This was gained by commenting that the road was now straight (allowing him to accelerate). The other mark was gained by commenting on the change in the weather. However, candidates who put only that the weather 'changed' did not explain it sufficiently to obtain the mark – it was necessary to explain that the weather improved or that the sky was now clearer or the climate was fresher.

- (ii) **State two ways in which the narrator's feelings change (lines 16 – 22).**

Many candidates successfully answered this question and gained both available marks. The most popular explanation, and the one that tended to appear in answers that gained only one mark, was that the narrator was more positive or less anxious. The second point was gained by those who went on to give more detail – either that the sight of the new conditions was wonderful or that he felt a sense of victory having got this far (and now thought that he might survive). The emphasis in contrast to **(c)(ii)**, as noted above, is different – here it is upon the feelings of the narrator rather than the external conditions.

- (d) **Using your own words, explain what the narrator means by '...and surely, in this clean air, my fears that had arisen in the night would be defeated' (line 21 – 22).**

The more successful responses to this question focussed upon the effect upon the narrator of reaching a better place, and of how fears that might be magnified in the dark could seem less threatening in the day time. It is important for candidates to read the questions very carefully in order to be aware of subtle differences between one question and another. The key to a question of this kind is to respond to the language and for the candidate to do this in their own words. Some candidates found difficulty in finding synonyms and gave explanations that repeated the use of words like 'fears', 'night' and 'defeated' without indicating the candidate clearly understood the meaning of those words.

(e) **Give two details that the narrator suggests led to his crash (paragraph five, 'I had grown...').**

The great majority of candidates gained two marks for this question. There were various details that were relevant to a successful response – that the narrator had grown careless; that he wasn't looking at the road (but at his friend's house); that he didn't see the landslide (and/or didn't brake) until it was too late, or that he swerved too far to avoid the obstacle. Those candidates who failed to obtain either one or both marks did so because they wrote about what happened after these contributory factors – hence the need to read carefully and note the words 'led to' in the question.

(f) (i) **Re-read paragraph two ('In spite of my...I ever spent'). Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words underlined in three of the following phrases:**

There were many candidates who gained three marks for this part of the question by giving a brief explanation, or a synonym, for the underlined word in the phrase taken from the passage. However, there were some candidates who attempted to relate the word to the driving conditions and giving answers that were more relevant to part (ii) of the questions. It is worth emphasising that the key to success in this type of question is in giving a synonym or short phrase that explains the underlined word and to keep the focus just on that word.

(a) **'skidded and side-slipped' (line 9)**

*Answer:* sliding or moving from one side to another (or from left to right).

Many responses gained a mark here with the most popular explanations being 'took over' and 'overwhelmed'.

(b) **'grazed the edge of the gorge.' (line 10)**

*Answer:* just touching

The key to gaining the mark here was in the explanation of just touching. It was not enough to put 'touching' as the implication was of being very close to something.

(c) **'it was far more exasperating' (line 10)**

*Answer:* annoying or frustrating

Many candidates were able to explain the word, although one error was where candidates suggested 'exhausting' which was more appropriate to (d).

(d) 'the wariest hours I ever spent' (line 13)

Answer: most tiring

Many candidates understood that this meant 'tiring' but some did not qualify the extent of that feeling. Some put 'worst' but no more which was too general as a response to this word.

(ii) Explain how the writer conveys the difficulty of driving down the mountain road through the use of language in each of the phrases you have chosen in Question 1(f)(i).

It is important that candidates do not merely repeat their answer from (f)(i) and that they also refer to the whole 'phrase' and relate it to the question focus which in this case is the difficulty of the driving conditions. Some candidates merely attempted to paraphrase the selected quotation, which tended to result in partial lifting, rather than comment on the effect of the language employed by the writer. Some candidates did lose marks by not identifying the 'phrase' which had been selected, as it was not always clear which one had been chosen. This lack of identification was also to be found in (f)(i) but less frequently.

## Question 2

Imagine that you are the narrator in Passage A. When you return home you are interviewed by a local radio station about your experiences on the journey to help your friend.

Write the words of the interview.

In your interview you are asked the following three questions only:

- What was particularly difficult about your journey through the mountains?
- Can you explain how the car crash happened?
- What did you do to help your friend?

Begin your answer with the first question: Interviewer: Can you tell us....

Virtually every candidate followed the instruction to write the words of an interview and managed to establish an appropriate register. Even where candidates did not use the three questions as part of their answer there was still an effort to respond to each of the three bullet points and to include relevant material. Almost all candidates made relevant responses to the first two bullet points, many finding their own means of expressing the key features rather than merely repeating detail from the passage. The most successful responses showed an awareness that the friend's problems had not occurred immediately before the narrator's arrival, but had required him to drive through the night to offer help. They also gave convincing and credible explanations of the problems and the help that the narrator was able to offer. A few responses spent far too long on the journey and the crash at the expense of the third bullet.

Most responses clearly expressed the writer's feelings about his situation and about the difficulties experienced. There were convincing accounts of driving in bad weather, on a winding and narrow road and of the relief of reaching a better climate and a better road. There were also candidates who addressed the third bullet with very moving accounts of the importance of friendship and the sacrifices that it required when help was needed. Successful responses also developed the third bullet by including a wife for the friend – sometimes this involved difficulties experienced with childbirth. Candidates who successfully developed this third bullet point also showed awareness that emergency services might not have easy access in such a remote area while the narrator had at least some previous familiarity with the conditions and the roads in the area.

Most candidates gave their accounts in the chronological order of the passage and the bullet points may have assisted with the sequencing of the responses. It is worth re-emphasising to candidates that their responses should develop from the original passage but also be rooted firmly in it. Awareness of this was shown particularly well by candidates who recognised the hints that the friend's problems had started sometime in the past and where they were aware that there was need to explain why they had contacted the narrator rather than the rescue services. It should be remembered that developing the material which is there is key for the Reading mark for this question, as opposed to writing an imaginative piece which bears little or no relation to the original.



In general, candidates seemed to engage well with the passage, although some of the less successful responses had very abrupt endings or made only limited attempts to go any further than the ending of the original passage. More successful responses gave a balanced response, ensuring as much attention was paid to the last bullet as the first two

### Question 3

- (a) **What do you learn about the characteristics of hurricanes and how to protect yourself against them, according to Passage B?**

A very large number of candidates scored marks of 8 or above with very few scoring below 6 and many scoring all 10 marks. A small number of candidates did not follow the instruction to write one point per line and some just wrote lifted sections from the passage on each line hoping that within those sections they would gain marks by inclusion. There was a good range of detail for candidates to identify, however, trying to cram too much information into each line in the answer space does seem to lead to repetition or to perfectly valid points not being credited.

- (b) **Summary**

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the characteristics of hurricanes and how to protect yourself against them.**

The key to a successful summary is a combination of the use of own words where appropriate, conciseness, and if possible, synthesis. Many candidates were able to answer this question with some degree of conciseness and many also tried hard to use own words although at times, this attempt led to a lack of concision with unnecessary personal commentary or linking phrases. The most successful responses managed to synthesise points related to related aspects of the passage such as the power of winds and their destructiveness and connecting points about rain, flooding and high waves. Generally speaking, the majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the importance of selecting relevant information and presenting it concisely.

Only a small number of responses were of excessive length and a similarly small number were very short. Nearly all responses were well focused on the topic. The most successful were well organised and fluently written. Most candidates understood the requirements of the writing section, but there were some list-like responses.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/12  
Reading Passage (Core)

## Key Messages

- Candidates should take careful note of the line numbers stated in the questions to ensure that their answers are taken from the appropriate section of the passage.
- For **Question 1 (f)(i)** (and equivalent questions in future papers) candidates should note that they should provide a meaning that relates to the underlined word only and not to the whole phrase. When responding to **1 (f)(ii)** they should comment on the whole phrase and not just repeat the answer given to **1 (f)(i)**.
- **Question 2 Reading.** Candidates are expected to develop the third bullet in some detail and not just mention it in one sentence at the end of their account. It is also important to understand the third bullet point is intended to assess how well the inferences of the passage have and that a successful response to this bullet should go beyond the explicit story but remain true to the original's content, genre and register.
- **Question 2 Writing.** When proofreading their responses, candidates should focus on consistency of tenses and sentence separation (comma splicing).

## General Comments

In general, candidates were well prepared for this paper and responded well to the subject matter of the reading passages. Overall, the sub-questions that constituted **Question 1** discriminated successfully with those who had focused on close reading of both the passage and the questions scoring high marks.

**Question 1(f)**, as with similar questions in previous sessions, proved the most difficult although there was evidence of a generally improved performance in responses to **(f)(i)**. **(f)(ii)** was less well answered and candidates are reminded that it is important when answering this question to relate their comments specifically to the terms of the rubric – in this instance they were asked to comment on how the language used by the writer conveyed Isaac's feelings.

There were a large number of atmospheric and imaginative narratives in response to **Question 2**. Many of these, however, despite containing convincing and detailed developments of the first two bullet points, ended somewhat anticlimactically as they failed to develop on the reason for the appearance of the woman with the knife and, consequently, denied themselves the chance of gaining a Reading mark that was higher than low Band 2.

**Passage B** proved to be accessible for nearly all candidates and the standard of responses to both parts of **Question 3** was of a high level with much evidence of confident summary writing techniques.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1**

#### **(a) Give two reasons why Isaac needs to find somewhere to stay for the night.**

The most common answer for this question referred to the fact it was getting dark. Some candidates referred to the rain starting, but they omitted reference to wind and therefore did not gain a mark for the response. If a candidate referred to rain against one bullet point in the answer booklet and wind in the second bullet point, however, then the mark was awarded. Responses that referred to Isaac being lost did not gain a mark because, strictly speaking, he was in unfamiliar territory and not lost, and even knew he was about 20 kilometres away from his home.

A number of responses said that Isaac was hungry, thirsty, wet, and had sore feet and this was why he needed to find somewhere to stay for that night. Such comments were not credited as the question specifically directs candidates to reread lines 1 to 3 and these reasons, although in the first paragraph, are not to be found in the lines referred to. Candidates should take care to answer the question set.

#### **(b) State two reasons why Isaac thinks the hotel is a suitable place to stay (paragraph one, ‘Just as it was ...’).**

Most candidates answered this question quite well, gaining at least one mark either for referring to the reasonable cost of the room for the night or to the fact that the landlord appeared polite and respectable. A good number of candidates were able to identify both points either in the words of the passage or in their own words using acceptable synonyms. Responses which did not gain marks on this question often failed to identify the focus of the question. Some candidates answered that the hotel was suitable because Isaac was hungry and tired and so on, which may have been true but does not answer this question. Responses which described the landlord as nice, or friendly, were not credited because these words are not acceptable synonyms for polite and respectable.

#### **(c) Re-read paragraphs three and four (‘When the hotel ... Goodnight’).**

##### **(i) Explain what Isaac thinks is unusual about the landlord’s behaviour.**

To answer this question correctly candidates needed to focus on the landlord’s over concern or obsession with the security of the hotel as is evidenced by the strong bolts, bars and iron shutters on all of the hotel doors and windows. Candidates should be aware that locking up a property in itself is not unusual and such responses did not gain the mark for this question. However, if a response qualified this with a comment on the isolation of the hotel then the mark was awarded. The position of the hotel could be used to cite unusual behaviour in two equally acceptable ways. First, the locking up of the hotel, when it is so isolated, could be deemed unusual behaviour because there is likely to be no one around to break into it. Second, and conversely, the fact that the hotel is so isolated is a very good reason to lock up the hotel because there is no one around to raise the alarm about a break-in. Some candidates made very good use of own words to answer this question, such as ‘the landlord was paranoid about security’.

The second reason given in the mark scheme for the unusual behaviour of the landlord is that he mentions to a guest that he is worried about the hotel being broken into. He also mentions his concern for his wife and daughter’s safety. This admission would be likely to unsettle any guest – especially a new one – who is staying at the hotel. It is perhaps even more unusual given there never has been a break-in at the hotel. This alternative answer, focusing on unusual behaviour, was rarely picked up by candidates.

##### **(ii) What reasons does the landlord give for his actions?**

Many candidates successfully answered this question and gained both available marks. The most popular reason given for the landlord’s actions in securely locking the hotel and voicing his fears about burglary and his family’s safety was that it was better to be safe than sorry which was expressed in a variety of ways and duly credited. Some responses picked up on the isolation of the hotel and the fact it was a lonely place; some identified the sparse number of people in the hotel. Again, the latter was expressed in a variety of acceptable ways such as there being only the landlord, his wife, and daughter, or that Isaac was the only guest.

**(d) What does the phrase ‘solemn surging moan’ suggest about the wind?**

The majority of candidates found this question, with its focus on language and its effect, to be demanding. Quite a number attempted to paraphrase ‘solemn surging moan’ and some merely lifted the phrase with answers such as ‘the wind moaned and was solemn’. Other responses commented on the wind being loud and/or strong which, although probably correct, does not convey the meaning of words such as ‘solemn’, ‘surging’ and ‘moan’, or their effect. Candidates who attempted to describe the word ‘moan’ with words such as ‘howl’, ‘groan’ and ‘whistle’ were awarded a mark. Candidates who commented on the metaphorical effect of the phrase with, for example, its eeriness or its ‘unsettling’, ‘disturbing’ effect on Isaac’s mind gained the second mark.

**(e) Why does Isaac keep the candle lit when he goes to bed (paragraph five, ‘Isaac locked ...’)?**

Candidates gained one mark for this question by correctly identifying that Isaac feels depressed about lying awake in the dark. Very few responses went on to explain why this was linked to ‘the ceaseless sound of the wind’. A few mentioned ‘the wind’ but did not explain it fully – lying awake in the dark listening to the wind outside may not be, in itself, depressing.

Some responses gained the second mark by referring to the wind ‘blowing all night’, suggesting its endless nature. Some candidates used their own words for ‘depressing’ such as ‘sad and lonely’.

**(f)(i) Re-read paragraphs five and six (‘Isaac locked ... clear and alert’). Explain using your own words, what the writer means by the words underlined in the following phrases:**

Nearly all candidates attempted to explain or provide a synonym for the underlined word in the phrase taken from the passage. However, there were some candidates who attempted to explain a word in the quotation which was not underlined. The most common error relating to this was focusing on ‘exhaustion’ as opposed to ‘overcame’ in (a). A few candidates managed to couch their explanation in a circular manner by ‘lifting’ the word to be explained. For example, “‘overcame’ means Isaac was very tired and sleep overcame him”. A large number of responses did not gain the mark for (d) as ‘aware’ or ‘awake’ were not adequate definitions of alert, unless they were qualified by ‘fully’ or ‘wide’.

**(a) ‘exhaustion overcame him’ (line 26)**

Answer: took control of/overwhelmed

Many responses gained a mark here with the most popular explanations being ‘took over’ and ‘overwhelmed’.

**(b) ‘dreadful sinking pain’ (line 29)**

Answer: something terrible or terrifying

This was successfully answered with words such as ‘awful’, ‘horrible’, and ‘unbearable’.

**(c) ‘shivering only disturbed his sleep’ (line 30)**

Answer: interrupted

Candidates were able to explain in the main how ‘bothered’, ‘restless’ Isaac was because of his interrupted sleep. A few, however, especially in (f)(ii) mistakenly thought that his ‘shivering’ was because he or the room was cold rather than a sense of fear or unsettling atmosphere.

**(d) ‘his mind was suddenly clear and alert’ (line 32)**

Answer: wide awake/watchful/vigilant/fully aware/ ready for action

This was reasonably well answered although the extent to which he was watchful was often not emphasised with ‘fully’ awake or ‘fully’ aware. Some candidates referred to him as being ‘conscious’ but of course he could be so but far from alert.

**(ii) Explain how the writer conveys Isaac's feelings during the night through the use of language in each phrase.**

You should refer to the whole phrase in your answer and not just the words in italics.

It is important that candidates do not merely repeat their answer from **(f)(i)** and that they also refer to the whole 'phrase' and relate it to the question focus which in this case is Isaac's feelings during the night. Some candidates merely attempted to paraphrase the selected quotation, which tended to result in partial lifting, rather than comment on the effect of the language employed by the writer.

**Question 2**

**Imagine that you are Isaac in Passage A. The day after these events you write a letter to a friend in which you explain about what happened on that night.**

**In your letter you should comment on:**

- **your feelings about the hotel**
- **your difficulty in getting to sleep**
- **the landlord's explanation of who the woman is.**

Virtually every candidate followed the instruction to write a letter to a friend and managed to establish an appropriate register. Some candidates failed to introduce the topic of the letter to the friend reading it and assumed that the scenario of the poor weather, being away from home, and the isolated hotel were known to the friend. More successful responses gave sufficient, clear detail about why Isaac had arrived at the hotel and gave his reasons for his spending the night there. A few responses spent far too long on his travel to the hotel at the expense of the three bullets in the question. Candidates should think carefully about how they structure their responses to the question so they can fully cover the guidance given.

Most responses clearly expressed the writer's feelings about the hotel, making it known that they were rather troubled about the landlord's obsession with security and hinting that there was something strange about either him or the hotel itself. Some commented wryly on the food given to them and on the character of the landlord who variously appeared in a range of guises from a cheerful mine host to a miserable, unfriendly, begrudging jailer. Only the more successful responses were able to link the thread of the landlord's paranoia about security with the lack of guests and the subsequent appearance of the woman with the knife.

Most clearly covered Isaac's difficulty in falling asleep although there was quite a lot of lifting in accounts especially from the phrases included in **1(f)(ii)** and the depression felt by Isaac as he lay awake in the dark. These events were often brought to a sharp focus with the appearance of the woman with the knife in Isaac's room. Relatively few responses were able to offer a credible account of who the woman was and her motive for standing at Isaac's bedside with a knife in her hand. Explanations ranged from the more convincing 'spirit or ghost' of a woman to either the landlord's wife or daughter sleepwalking or looking to prepare a meal for Isaac. There were also Halloween explanations, April Fool type jokes/pranks, and so on, of varying levels of credibility.

Many responses ended their letters with the woman with the knife appearing in the room but with no further comment or explanation about her. Such responses were lacking in conviction in terms not only what happened, but also for the reason why Isaac chose to write to his friend to describe what happened to him. Few candidates ended their letters with the landlord's explanation about the knife-wielding woman and her reason for appearing in Isaac's room. A significant number of responses simply lifted all the facts from the passage and ended with the woman and knife, and then signed off the letter with an incongruously cheery farewell.

Most candidates gave their accounts in the chronological order of the passage although there were some which merely focused on the third bullet. Equally, there were some responses which wrote about Isaac in the third person. It is worth re-emphasising to candidates that their responses should develop from the original passage but also be rooted firmly in it. Some responses consisted of letters containing details which did not reflect, for example, the nature of the hotel and its occupants, and managed to transform the mysterious woman into a gun carrying assassin. It should be remembered that developing the material which is there is key for the Reading mark for this question, as opposed to writing an imaginative piece which bears little or no relation to the original.

In general candidates engaged well with the passage, but many opted for very abrupt endings or made only limited attempts at the third bullet, which limited their mark for Reading. More successful responses gave a balanced response, ensuring as much attention was paid to the last bullet as the first two.

### Question 3

- (a) **What are the effects of cold weather on the human body and how you should protect yourself, according to Passage B?**

This was a successful question for the majority of candidates. However, a small number of candidates did not follow the instruction to write one point per line; some lifted sections from the passage on each line, hoping that within those sections they would gain marks by inclusion. There were many responses that lost marks by repeating the same point two or three times, in particular, point 10 in the mark scheme with 'socks', 'gloves' and 'hat' being separated frequently.

Some responses which stated that extremely cold weather can pose serious health risks (paragraph 1) did not gain a mark because they did not mention specifically that it 'can be fatal/life threatening'. Similarly, responses referring to the effect of cold weather on the brain did not gain a mark unless they explained what that effect was, such as 'confusion' or 'slurred speech' or 'the inability to think clearly'. The attention to specific detail is key in a summary and is evident in the mark scheme in point 8, with its 'exposed skin', point 11, with boots which are properly fitted or insulated, and point 13 with its focus on 'outdoor activity'. A number of responses included the point about boots gripping onto the ice but, indirectly in terms of the question, this constitutes protection from falling and not the direct issues arising from extreme cold weather. In contrast, seeking medical attention might be deemed to be a little late but it does offer some degree of protection even if one has already got frostbite or hypothermia.

- (b) **Summary**

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the effects of cold weather on the human body and how you should protect yourself.**

Many candidates were able to answer this question with some degree of conciseness and a few tried hard to use own words although at times, this attempt led to a lack of concision with unnecessary personal commentary or linking phrases. The most successful responses managed to synthesise points related to the same area such as the protective clothes and boots, or the physical and mental suffering caused by extreme cold. Generally candidates adopted three approaches to writing their summaries: firstly, the chronological listing of their points from **3(a)**; secondly, the mixing up of points about effects and their related protective strategies; thirdly, the effects of cold weather followed by the protective measures which can be taken.

Some responses included the candidates' own comments based on personal knowledge or personal opinion about the topic and did not simply summarise the passage related to their points in **3(a)**. Others lost marks by not attempting to organise their points into a coherent outline of what we learn about the effects of extreme cold weather and how we should go about protecting ourselves as a result of this.

Only a small number of responses were of excessive length and a similarly small number were very short. Nearly all were well focused on the topic. The most successful were well organised and fluently written. Most candidates understood the requirements of the writing section but there were a lot of list-like responses, resulting in an average of 3 marks for this question.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/13  
Reading Passage (Core)

## Key Messages

- Candidates should take careful note of the line numbers stated in the questions to ensure that their answers are taken from the appropriate section of the passage.
- For **Question 1(g)(i)** (and equivalent questions in future papers) candidates should note that they should give a synonym that relates to the underlined word only and not to the whole phrase. When responding to **1(g)(ii)** they should comment on the whole phrase and not just repeat the answer given to **1(g)(i)**.
- **Question 2 Reading.** Candidates are expected to develop the third bullet in some detail and not just mention it in one sentence at the end of their account. It is also important to understand the third bullet point is intended to assess how well the inferences of the passage have been understood and that a successful response to this bullet should go beyond the explicit story but remain true to the original's content, genre and register.
- **Question 2 Writing.** When proof reading their responses, candidates should focus on consistency of tenses and sentence separation (comma splicing).

## General Comments

In general, candidates were well prepared for this paper and responded well to the subject matter of the reading passages. Overall, the sub-questions that constituted **Question 1** discriminated successfully with those who had focused on close reading of both the passage and the questions scoring high marks. **Question 1(g)**, as with similar questions in previous sessions, proved the most difficult although there was evidence of a generally improved performance in responses to **(g)(i)**. **Question 1(g)(ii)** was less well answered and candidates are reminded that it is important when answering this question to relate their comments specifically to the terms of the rubric – in this instance they were asked to comment on how the language used by the writer conveyed the narrator's feelings about the situation he was in.

There were a large number of atmospheric and imaginative narratives in response to **Question 2**. Many of these, however, despite containing convincing and detailed developments of the first two bullet points, ended somewhat anticlimactically as they failed to develop the reason for the old man's initial unfriendliness towards the narrator or simply ended at the same point as the original passage and, consequently, denied themselves the chance of gaining a Reading mark that was higher than low Band 2.

Passage B proved to be accessible for nearly all candidates and the standard of responses to both parts of **Question 3** was of a high level with much evidence of confident summary writing techniques.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### Question 1

- (a) **Give two reasons why the narrator is worried about his situation (lines 1 – 5).**

Most candidates gained at least one mark for this question with the most common answer referring to the fact it was getting dark. Some candidates gained a second mark by referring to the snow and/or the wind, or to the snow beginning to fall. An alternative point that a reasonable number of candidates identified was about the narrator having lost his way (or that it was not a pleasant place to be). A large number of candidates gained two marks on this question. The main cause of

candidates missing either one or two marks was where they had taken details from outside the specified area of lines 1 to 5 – chiefly from later in paragraph one.

**(b) Why does the narrator decide he has to keep walking (paragraph one, ‘The wind was...’)?**

Many candidates gained the one mark available for referring to there being no signs of life, or that he hoped to find shelter somewhere further on. Responses which did not gain the mark on this question often focussed on details from the first part of paragraph one. The key for this question is that the narrator’s comment about carrying on comes from later in the paragraph and that those who referred to the opening part of the paragraph were duplicating material from question 1(a) such as the fact that it was snowing or getting dark.

**(c) Which two details suggest the weather conditions are getting worse (paragraph two, ‘Meanwhile, the snow...’)?**

A large number of the candidates gained two marks for this question by identifying the two words which suggest the weather is getting worse – ‘ominous’ and ‘intense’. There was no requirement to use own words or to offer any further explanation. Many candidates who were not successful in gaining marks on this question referred to details from later in the paragraph.

**(d) Why does the narrator think his wife will be concerned if he does not return that night (paragraph two, meanwhile, the snow...)?**

The most frequently identified point was that the narrator’s wife had begged him to return before dark and/or that he had promised to do so. The second mark could be gained by either explaining that they were recently (or happily) married, or by explaining the narrator anticipated his wife staying up all night worrying about him. A frequent reason for candidates gaining only one mark was that they wrote about the wife begging him to return and the narrator promising to return as separate points – whereas they are, more correctly, different aspects of the same point.

**(e) Using your own words, explain what the narrator means by: ‘...my prospects darkened with the darkening sky’ (line 11 – 12).**

The great majority of candidates gained one mark for this question by correctly explaining the change to night-time and/or a black sky which is the literal part of the quotation. Candidates were also able to go on to gain the second mark by offering an explanation for the less straightforward idea of the narrator’s chances of surviving reducing. A frequent error, leading to candidates not gaining the marks for this question was where they repeated the terms ‘darkening sky’ or ‘prospects darkened’ – the use of own words is essential in this type of question in order to demonstrate understanding of the key words in the quotation.

**(f) What is unexpected about the old man’s response to the narrator’s greetings (lines 32 – 34)?**

A large proportion of the candidates gained the two marks available for this question by making two of the following points: that he growls sulkily; asks ‘What for?’ in an unfriendly manner or that he frowns.



- (g)(i) **Re-read paragraph three ('All this time...carrying a lantern'). Explain using your own words, what the writer means by the words underlined in three of the following of the following phrases:**

Generally, the standard of responses to this question showed an improvement on those in previous sessions. There was a good number of candidates who gained three marks for this part of the question by giving a brief explanation or a synonym for the underlined word in the phrase taken from the passage. However, there were some candidates who attempted to relate the word to the driving conditions and gave answers that were more relevant to part (ii) of the questions. It is worth emphasising that the key to success for this type of question is in giving a synonym or short phrase that explains the underlined word and to keep the focus just on that word.

- (a) **'seemed only to make the silence deeper' (line 21)**

*Answer:* more noticeable/more ominous

This proved to be the most challenging of the four options with candidates frequently distracted by explaining the phrase as whole as opposed to focusing on the word underlined.

- (b) **'a vague sense of uneasiness' (lines 21 – 22)**

*Answer:* uncertain/scared

- (c) **'my limbs must fail, and my resolution give way' (line 25)**

*Answer:* will/determination

- (d) **'I shuddered' (lines 25 – 26)**

*Answer:* shook/trembled

- (ii) **Explain how the writer conveys the narrator's feelings about the situation he is in through the use of language in each of the phrases you have chosen.**

Some candidates merely attempted to paraphrase the selected quotation, which tended to result in partial lifting, rather than commenting on the effect of the language employed by the writer. Where candidates gave explanations in the first part of this question, which would have been more successfully given in response to the second part, they did not gain a mark.

## Question 2

Imagine that you are the narrator of Passage A. Eventually, you are offered accommodation for the night by the old man and the following morning you write an entry in your journal.

Write your journal entry.

In your journal entry you should comment on:

- the situation you found yourself in before you met the old man
- your reaction to the old man and how he treated you when he first met you
- what happened at the old man's house.

Begin your journal: 'Last night I had a very strange experience...'

Virtually every candidate followed the instruction to write a journal entry and managed to establish an appropriate register. Similarly, almost all candidates covered the detail for the first bullet point very thoroughly. Many candidates went on to give a believable account of meeting the old man and what followed. In some less successful responses candidates did not provide any sense of the old man's lack of politeness at the first meeting, whereas some candidates, more successfully, presented him as unfriendly at first, but then becoming more welcoming when they arrived at his house. This latter approach worked effectively – however, candidates who change details from the passage, especially in responding to the second bullet point, tended to achieve lower marks for Reading. It is the third bullet where the candidate is asked to develop ideas taken from the passage – thus a change in the personality on the part of the old man could be effective if it was handled with some skill by the candidate. A small number of responses ended with violent outcomes at the house; this was not necessarily an error as they could justify this outcome on the basis of the old man's initial treatment of the narrator.

The majority of responses clearly expressed the writer's feelings about his situation and many gave sensitive accounts of his concerns for his wife and reflections on their being recently married. Many of these also carried the thoughts about his wife over into their response to third bullet and the narrator's need to get word to her and this made for a very effective development.

In general candidates seemed to engage well with the passage, although some opted for very abrupt endings or made only limited attempts to do anything with the third bullet which limited their mark for Reading. More successful responses gave a balanced response, ensuring as much attention was paid to the last bullet as the first two. It should also be remembered that developing the material which is there is key for the Reading mark for this question, as opposed to writing an imaginative piece which bears little or no relation to the original.

## Question 3

- (a) **What are the problems caused by extreme winter weather and how should people stay safe, according to Passage B?**

Candidates generally scored well on this summary question. A small number of candidates did not follow the instruction to write one point per line and some just wrote lifted sections from the passage on each line hoping that within those sections they would gain marks by inclusion.

A frequent loss of marks was caused by putting together point 5 and point 14 – hypothermia is both a problem and reason for keeping an eye on elderly neighbours and illustrates how it is important to begin thinking about organising material at an early stage in the process.

- (b) **Summary**

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the problems caused by extreme winter weather and how people should stay safe.**

The key to a successful summary is a combination of the use of own words where appropriate, conciseness, and if possible, synthesis. Many candidates were able to answer this question with some degree of conciseness and a few tried hard to use own words although at times, this attempt led to a lack of concision with unnecessary personal commentary or linking phrases. The most successful responses managed to synthesise points related to the same area such as the travel

problems or the need for various articles in preparation for the weather like emergency supplies and the various items to have stored up. Generally speaking candidates adopted three approaches to writing their summaries: firstly, the chronological listing of their points from **3(a)**; secondly, the mixing up of points about problems and their related protective strategies; thirdly, the effects of cold weather followed by the protective measures which can be taken.

Only a small number of responses were of excessive length and a similarly small number were very short. Nearly all were well focused on the topic. The most successful were well organised and fluently written. Most candidates understood the requirements of the writing section, but there were a lot of list-like responses, and of a briefer rewriting of the original, resulting in an average of 3 marks for this question.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/21  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both passages thoroughly, and considered the questions carefully
- planned the content, structure and sequence of their response before writing
- adapted their writing style to suit the task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose
- avoided repetition
- allowed time to address fully each section of each question
- avoided copying whole sentences or sections from either passage
- used their own words in **Questions 1** and **3(b)** and when exploring and explaining choices in **Question 2**
- ensured that ideas were fully developed in **Question 1** and **Question 2**
- checked and edited their responses carefully to correct errors of spelling and grammar affecting meaning
- used a range of appropriate, precise vocabulary.

## General comments

Candidates' responses to this paper generally indicated familiarity with the demands of each task and the need to select and use relevant material from the passages to answer the questions. Most candidates attempted all parts of the three questions and most responses were an appropriate length. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible and the majority were able to finish the paper within the time allowed. Most candidates had been entered for the appropriate tier, though some clearly would have benefited from being entered for the core tier.

Most **Question 1** responses were focused on the question and in the main all parts of the task were attempted. **Good** responses displayed a sound understanding of the ideas in Passage A by including a range of relevant ideas that were often developed effectively and supported by appropriate detail to draw conclusions about the events leading up to the marooning incident, Selkirk's survival on the island, and the degree of blame that could be apportioned to the various protagonists. Less effective responses tended to describe the events of the incident and the survival techniques, but were unable to use the information to develop points. Some of the least successful responses displayed little modification of the material and/or lost sight of the task in hand. Candidates are reminded that lifting or copying from the text, even of relatively short phrases, can be an indicator of less secure skills and understanding, and should be avoided.

For **Question 2** candidates needed to make specific, detailed comments about their choices from the two paragraphs. To gain marks in the higher bands candidates need to demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and consider the connotations and associations of the language used. Most responses included at least some attempt to explain appropriate examples from the relevant paragraphs. Fewer answers included the clear explanations of effects and images that are required for marks in the higher bands. Many contained some accurate explanations of meanings and the identification of some linguistic devices but only partially explained effects. Weaker responses tried to explain the selected language in the same words as the language choice – for example, suggesting that 'the mountain darkened' means that it is getting dark on the mountain, or that 'a croak, a howl' means that a frog is croaking or a wolf is howling. Some candidates missed opportunities to consider individual words within longer choices and demonstrate understanding at higher levels, giving instead rather broad and vague comments such as 'this shows that he feels afraid or trapped' and/or simply labelling devices without exploration of how the example was working within this particular context.

In **Question 3** many candidates managed to achieve over half the marks available by finding a reasonable number of points. Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 3(a)**, though some did to good effect. In **Question 3(a)** short notes, identifying each separate idea precisely, are required, rather than whole sentences or imprecise selections from the passage. In **Question 3(b)** own words need to be used and some responses missed opportunities to target higher bands by relying on lifted phrases from the passage to communicate ideas. Candidates should use their own words as far as possible in this summary task, otherwise it suggests that they do not understand the wording of the original and limits the evidence of their own writing skills. It is not a requirement that every word is altered – more technical terms or names for example are unlikely to have suitably precise synonyms, and words such as ‘recycled’ and ‘steel’ did not need to be replaced or explained. Some candidates attempted to write a persuasive piece rather than the required informative response, often including unnecessary comment and additional information, and prejudicing their ability to summarise the key aspects of the passage effectively as a result.

Although Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and editing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression. While writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, candidates should be aware that unclear or limited style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to check and edit their responses.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

**You are a newspaper reporter. Following Selkirk’s rescue from the island, you investigate the events surrounding his abandonment and the sinking of the ship. You interview Stradling, Selkirk and other surviving members of the crew, in order to write a newspaper report.**

**Write your newspaper report.**

**In your newspaper report you should:**

- **describe the events leading to Selkirk being left alone on the island and the ship setting sail**
- **explain how Selkirk managed to survive for so long alone and how his feelings changed**

**Begin your newspaper report with this headline: Castaway found alive!**

The majority of candidates read the question carefully and engaged with the task of writing a newspaper report on the events surrounding Selkirk’s abandonment and the sinking of the ship. Responses written in the wrong format were relatively rare, though some did struggle to recreate the voice of a news report. A few candidates confused the characters of Selkirk and Stradling. A small number paid insufficient attention to the passage introduction, which provided the historical context as 1703, and described Selkirk’s rescue by helicopter for example. Others reproduced the introduction to the passage verbatim.

In relation to bullet one, most candidates were able to select details such as ‘pirate’, ‘a remote island’ and ‘the ship was infested with woodworm’. Some missed out on searching for treasure as a talking point. A few candidates did not appear to know what pirates were, which made the passage difficult. A lack of understanding regarding ‘mutiny’ resulted in the phrase ‘Stradling accused him of mutiny’ being lifted. An equally troublesome phrase for some was ‘Selkirk responded with fists and rage’, as candidates did not see this as a physical altercation.

The second bullet provided many candidates with an opportunity to offer some straightforward ideas, though some candidates focused on Selkirk’s initial feelings when the ship left, rather than focusing on the question which was to explain how his feelings changed. Many students spent a long time detailing the first night or week of Selkirk’s abandonment and his fear, including the conditions on the island and the weather, and subsequently spending little time on how he manages to survive. Often there was too much reliance on the original words, such as ‘he lumbered over the stones’, ‘all courage left him’, ‘he stayed by the shore, scanning the horizon’ or terrors of the night. Frequently, candidates chose to lift the phrase ‘he resolved to build a dwelling and gather stores’. There was also frequent lifting with ‘activity dispelled depression’ and ‘he chose a glade in the mountains a mile from the bay’. Some mid-range answers missed opportunities to develop and interpret the material, replaying the passage, albeit in their own words, and often producing uneven responses. A mechanical use of the passage demonstrates at best a reasonable level of

understanding – those displaying a competent or thorough reading of the passage were able to go further, adapting and modifying the material in the passages.

The more straightforward elements of the first two bullets were generally treated equally, but the rigour of apportioning blame beyond basics proved more difficult for some candidates in relation to bullet three. Many were only able to give simple statements as to who was responsible. Better answers went on to develop the reasons and explain why. A number did not refer to the sinking of the ship, therefore missing opportunities to incorporate details from the passage as evidence of their Reading skills. There was some misreading regarding Selkirk deliberately having sabotaged the ship, or Selkirk being rescued at the same time as the sinking of the ship, which was only a month later, even though Selkirk is described as spending months on the island.

Good responses focused on all three bullet points and displayed the ability to select material relevant to each part of the task. The best contained a range of ideas that were developed and closely related to the passage, and a good range of integrated detail. Some less successful responses relied on working back through the passage repeating and replaying events and limiting their focus on the task. Where responses were less successful in targeting higher bands, there was often the sense that rather than returning to the text to identify and plan content for their answers in advance of writing, some candidates had attempted to write a more general newspaper report from what they remembered of the passage. The least successful answers were often very thin, simple or short. They offered at best a very general view of the situation with few ideas or details in response to the bullet points.

The Writing mark reflected the clarity, fluency and coherence of the response. The majority of candidates showed at least some familiarity with the required form of a newspaper report and many made some effort to address their audience and purpose, sequencing ideas and structuring their response helpfully. In some less successful responses, an awareness of audience was prejudiced by weaknesses in expression arising from a restricted range of secure vocabulary and/or grammatical errors such as mistakes with tense/agreement affecting meaning. Occasionally, in otherwise stronger responses, awkward expression and/or weaknesses in structure detracted from the overall effect. Most candidates chose to follow the order of the bullets to structure their response, though needed if doing so to guard against the danger of repetition – for example, where ideas could be used in relation to more than one bullet. Efficient planning allowed the strongest answers to address this and consider at the same time how to present the angle of their report from the start – some had clearly decided in advance of writing who was to blame and set out to prove it from the beginning of the piece. Lapses into narrative, often relating extended conversation as part of an interview, indicated an inconsistency of style in less assured responses, whilst copying directly from the text was often the most frequent feature of the weakest writing.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 1:**

- read the whole passage carefully, including any information given in the introduction
- pay equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- maintain attention to the audience, form and purpose of the response throughout your answer
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- do not copy from the passage
- plan your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- develop and extend your ideas by considering the perspective of the given persona at the time of writing
- answer clearly, in your own words, creating a suitable voice and tone for the persona of your response
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

#### **Question 2**

**Re-read the descriptions of:**

- (a) **Selkirk's surroundings and how they make him feel in paragraph 4, beginning 'All courage left him...'**
- (b) **The island at night in paragraph 5, beginning 'The sun dipped down...'**

**Select four words or phrases from each paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase selected is used effectively in the context.**

Responses to **Question 2** are expected to take the form of continuous prose in order to allow candidates to explore their choices fully and consider how language examples are working in context. Using a grid or table format is not advised as this often results in duplication of material and forces responses to be expressed very briefly or in note form. Likewise, brief notes jotted under each choice are unlikely to allow for full consideration of the subtleties and complexity of the language being discussed. Answers which made no attempt to discuss or explain choices and consequently offered little or no evidence of understanding were rare, though a few offered only a little relevant comment and a number repeated the language of the passage or task. Analysis in both halves of the question needs to be sufficiently precise and extended to allow candidates to unpick each word within a chosen phrase and consider how the language is contributing to and affecting the reader's understanding and reactions.

The most successful responses to **Question 2** showed precise focus at word level and were imaginative and assured in their handling of their appropriate choices. They selected carefully, considered the choices in context, and answered both parts of the question equally well. They were able, for example, to explain how the infiniteness of the sea represents Selkirk's isolation or how the night-time manifestations mock Selkirk's fear of the night. A few candidates picked up on Selkirk's romanticised view of the sea and his sense of helplessness without his ship. Many candidates were secure on meanings and could explain words such as 'billowing sail', 'hostile presence', and 'surged'. Some effects were explained well; many candidates could comment on the destructive power of the wind as it 'swished and crashed'.

The best responses considered meaning and effects throughout the response. The weakest responses had very few language choices, or offered few explanations beyond the very general. They sometimes adopted a 'technique spotting' approach by identifying literary techniques. This approach often led to rather generic comments about the effects of the techniques rather than the words themselves and limited the response. Other candidates repeated the same explanation after each choice, for example that Selkirk was afraid in **part (b)**. Less successful responses sometimes attempted a commentary on the entire paragraph for each half of the question, offering only slight evidence of understanding as a result. Some candidates offered single word choices only, and did not always select the most appropriate words for discussion, for example, offering 'moon' rather than exploring and explaining the image of how the 'moon cut a path'. Occasionally candidates offered an extremely sparse number of choices or simply lifted whole sections of the paragraph and offered a generalised assertion related to fear or loneliness. These responses sometimes offered insufficient evidence of understanding for band 5.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out whole sentences
- make sure your choices are complete – do not offer only one word if it is part of a descriptive phrase or image
- do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle
- avoid general comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase'
- to explain effects, think of all that word might suggest to a reader - the feelings, connotations and associations of the language
- use your own words to explain your choices rather than repeat the words from the choice itself
- try to explain both how and why a particular word or image might have been used
- treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them
- if you are unsure about effects, begin by offering a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- do not just label literary devices you notice, consider how each example is working in context.

### Question 3

(a) Notes

**According to Passage B, why are ships broken up, and what makes the process so dangerous?**

(b) Summary

**Now use your notes from Question 3(a) to write a summary of why ships are broken up and what makes the process so dangerous, according to Passage B.**

To answer **Question 3** successfully, candidates needed to first identify 15 points from Passage B that were relevant to the question and to list them clearly, one numbered per line in note form in the grid for **part (a)**. Candidates can only be credited with a maximum of one point per line and any points added after line 15 are not credited unless replacing an answer crossed out earlier on. Most candidates understood that in a question testing their ability to 'select for specific purposes' they should not go beyond line 15, or include groups of ideas on each line. Most responses were able to identify between 5 and 10 relevant points; relatively few offered more than 10 rewardable points. The second part of the task requires candidates to use their notes, adapting and organising them to write a summary in their own words. There were very few cases of wholesale copying in **part (b)**.

The question had two strands: why ships are broken up *and* what makes the process so dangerous, and the best responses organised their points to clearly acknowledge these two aspects. Weaker, less-focused responses, did not fully address the task. A number relied on working through the passage in **part (b)** – often with limited modification of the original – repeating ideas and/or offering incomplete ideas as a result. Others simply transferred their answers from **part (a)** still in the words of the passage, using (sometimes inappropriate) connecting phrases. Better responses were careful to be precise and unambiguous in the ideas they presented – for example, being clear that it is old or ageing ships that are expensive to maintain, as opposed to any ships.

Where candidates had not engaged fully with the task and/or attempted a more mechanical approach, paraphrasing the material, repetitions were common – for example, repeating the dangers of 'explosions' and 'fires'. Similarly, mechanical answers often missed over-arching ideas – for example, missing the danger of a (range of) serious injuries and consequently offering "scars", 'missing fingers' and 'blindness' as separate points. Where candidates had not focused precisely on the text, they often presented incomplete or inexact ideas – for example, the danger of workers falling needed to include a sense of height. Where points were imprecise and/or unclear in **part (a)** they could not be credited. One word answers such as 'toxic materials' were insufficient to communicate an understanding that the ships were constructed using these, rather than simply containing them.

There are no marks to be scored for Writing in **3(a)**, however, checking responses for accuracy in spelling and grammar is clearly essential if candidates are to avoid the potential danger of negating points through careless errors. Candidates should pay particular attention, for example, to correct any slips that might change meaning; for example, some candidates wrote that less than 90% of the ship's materials are recycled, whereas it is described as being 'more than' in the passage.

**Question 3(b)** responses that did well had used their points from **3(a)** carefully – organising them purposefully into a concise, fluent prose response rather than relying on repeating points in the order or language of the passage. There was some suggestion that answers at the top end had revisited points in **3(a)** during the planning stages of **3(b)** in order to edit and refine points in this part of the question – leading to clearer more distinct points in **3(a)** and an efficient and well-focused response in **3(b)**.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- read the question carefully to identify the focus of the task and underline key words
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify precisely relevant content points
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to establish and select 15 distinct points
- list your points – one complete idea per numbered line – using as few words as possible
- plan your response in **3(b)** to re-organise and sequence content helpfully for your reader
- write informatively and do not comment on the content or style of the passage
- do not add details or examples to the content of the passage



- you can choose to use your own words in **3(a)** and must use your own words in **3(b)**
- do not add further numbered points in **3(a)** past the 15 required
- avoid repetition of points
- when checking and editing your answers **to Question 3(a)**, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/22  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the passages thoroughly, and considered each of the questions carefully
- planned the content, structure and sequence of their response before writing their answer
- adapted their writing style to suit the task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose
- avoided repetition
- allowed time to address fully each section of each question
- avoided copying whole sentences or sections from either of the passages
- used their own words in **Questions 1** and **3b** and when analysing and explaining choices in **Question 2**
- ensured that ideas were clear and fully developed in **Question 1** and **Question 2**
- checked and edited their responses carefully to correct errors of spelling and grammar affecting meaning
- used a range of appropriate, precise vocabulary.

## General comments

Candidates' responses to this paper largely indicated familiarity with the general demands of each task and at least some understanding of the need to adapt and use relevant material from the passages in order to answer the questions. Most had paid attention to the guidance regarding word limits and there were very few indications of any difficulty in finishing the paper within the time allowed. It was rare to find a candidate who had not at least attempt all parts of all three questions, though on occasion answers were not sufficiently well focused on the detail of the task to target marks effectively. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible, though over-reliance on the language of the text and/or lifting was a feature of a number of less successful answers to all three questions.

The majority of **Question 1** responses were focused on the broad demands of the question and had attempted all parts of the task. Responses covered a wide range of achievement, with a number of candidates going beyond the expectations of Band 1. There were a small number of candidates who were unable to provide the evidence of skills and understanding necessary for Band 5. Good responses displayed a sound understanding of the ideas in Passage A by including a range of relevant ideas and kept the purpose of the letter in mind. Less effective responses tended to lapse into narrative and/or lifted from the text, with some of the least successful responses displaying little understanding of the need to modify the material and/or losing sight of the task in hand. Candidates are reminded that lifting or copying from the text, even of relatively short phrases, can be an indicator of less secure skills and understanding, and should be avoided.

The vast majority of candidates had read the question carefully and began their letter from Nick's perspective, though it was not unusual to find that they had signed their own name at the end – indicating at least some loss of focus. Responses written entirely from the wrong perspective were relatively rare, though there were instances of candidates who wrote to Jack. Some mid-range answers missed opportunities to develop and interpret the material, replaying the passage mechanically and often producing uneven responses which were largely concerned only with the most straightforward ideas for the first and third bullets. A common feature of such mid-range answers was repetition. Those displaying a competent or thorough reading of the passage were able to go further, adapting and modifying the material in the passages and choosing to

evidence implicit understanding in several ways: for example by indicating how Nick saw himself on the actual trip, his reaction to Jack and maintaining a sense of himself as the complainant. Many candidates did well to reflect these considerations, producing answers which conveyed a sense of purpose along with some sense of personality and voice.

For **Question 2** candidates needed to make specific, detailed comments about their choices from the two paragraphs – for example, exploring the precise meanings, connotations and associations of individual words and considering how these combined to create a particular image and/or contributed to a particular phrase in context. To gain marks in the higher bands candidates need to demonstrate understanding of precisely how the language is being used and there were a good number of responses at this level. Most responses had attempted at least some comment in relation to appropriately chosen examples from the relevant paragraphs, though fewer answers included consistently clear explanations and might well have been improved through careful editing. Many contained some accurate explanations of basic meanings and a number were able to offer some general or basic suggestion of effects, though most needed to go further in considering and explaining the specifics of the examples they had chosen. Weaker responses tried to explain the selected language in the same words as the language choice or question. A number of answers repeated similar, often generalised, explanations when attempting to deal with different choices, diluting the evidence of understanding.

In **Question 3** many candidates managed to achieve a good number of the marks available through identifying a reasonable number of points, though some indiscriminate lifting and/or less precise communication meant points were on occasion not made sufficiently clearly to be credited. Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 3(a)**, though on occasion some did to good effect. In **Question 3(a)** short notes, identifying each separate idea precisely, are required, rather than whole sentences or imprecise selections from the passage. In **Question 3(b)** own words must be used and ideas need to be organised to address the focus of the question and not simply offer a paraphrase or precis of the original text. A number of responses missed opportunities to target higher bands by relying on lifted phrases and sections from the passage. Candidates should use their own words as far as possible in this summary task, otherwise it suggests that they do not understand the wording of the original and limits the evidence of their own writing skills. It is not a requirement that every word is altered, though ideas need to be communicated clearly and fluently – the best responses had undertaken to respond in the spirit of the task, showing competence in the real-life skill of selective summary. They were able to produce informative, assured writing helpfully organised for the benefit of their reader. The least effective responses attempted a cut-and-paste approach, working through the passage to lift and then reassemble phrases – an approach indicating little focus on the task.

Although Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression. While writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, candidates should be aware that unclear or limited style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to edit and correct responses is advisable.

### Comments on specific questions

#### Question 1

**You are Nick. Following your night time expedition to spot crocodiles you decide to write a letter of complaint to Jack's boss about your experiences.**

**Write your letter.**

**In your letter you should comment on:**

- **explain your feelings about the safety of the expedition**
- **describe your impressions of Jack and how he treated you on the trip**
- **suggest how you think the company might make such expeditions a better experience for the customer in the future.**

**Base your letter on what you have read in Passage A, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullets.**

**Begin your letter:**

**'Dear Sir/Madam,**

**I would like to raise some concerns about my recent trip to spot crocodiles ...**

To demonstrate their Reading skills in this question, candidates were required to engage with the ideas in the text and interpret the details of Nick's experience as narrated in the passage in order to write a convincing and appropriate letter of complaint in relation to the trip. The task required candidates to reflect on the trip itself, considering the behaviour and reactions of the two men in order to identify likely areas of complaint and make relevant suggestions for how Nick might feel these issues should, or could, be addressed. Good responses were able to decide to what extent the trip was really dangerous, with the best keeping their decision in mind throughout their whole answer. Most candidates produced what at least started and ended as a letter of complaint, though formal letter protocols were sometimes overlooked, and many forgot to sign off as Nick and used their own names instead; a few did not sign off at all. There were a pleasing number of outstanding responses from candidates meeting and/or going beyond requirements for Band 1. These responses showed evidence of close reading, moving beyond surface meaning, with many taking opportunities to work in detail from the text in an evaluative response, with the sense of Nick having reviewed his experience before writing his letter of complaint. Where responses were less successful in targeting higher bands, there was often the sense that, rather than returning to the text to identify and plan content for their answers in advance of writing, candidates had either attempted to write a more general letter of complaint with limited focus on the details of the passage, or had undertaken to work back through the passage repeating and replaying events and limiting their focus on the task. Some of the weakest responses drifted from the task set, or were too basic and/or confused to offer evidence of more than a very general grasp at best.

There were few cases of misreading or misunderstanding of key points. The majority of candidates also understood how function and audience would direct selection of material and style. The first bullet was generally well covered. Nearly everyone picked up on the wobbly canoe, the limited equipment and the absence of life jackets, though many relied on simply repeating details rather than identifying the specific concern created – missing for example the opportunity to raise the criticism that they would be defenceless in the case of attack by a crocodile mistaking the vessel for competition and/or in danger of drowning in the event the boat should capsize. There were comparatively few examples of significant misreading in relation to bullet one, but it was a shame to see some candidates lifting phrases such as 'lurching dangerously', 'eaten alive' or 'craft of choice' where they clearly did not need to. A small number of candidates suggested that the boat was in bad condition as evidenced by its 'uncomfortable splinters' – a misreading of Nick's imaginings in relation to the effects on the vessel of a crocodile attack. Where candidates had not selected ideas for the first bullet in advance of writing and simply relied on replaying the text, repetition in relation to the unsuitability of the boat was common – often at the expense of the inclusion of more subtle ideas connected to the wisdom/necessity of undertaking such a trip in the dark and the potential dangers of the wilderness through which they were travelling.

Many candidates found the second bullet the most challenging of the three, since Nick's view of Jack is implicit. Some candidates assumed Jack was helpful, then struggled to explain his casual attitude to danger and/or why he had frightened Nick. The evidence in the passage was open to interpretation with events having been presented through the filter of Nick's (possibly irrational) fear. Was Jack as expert as he was meant to be – and indeed did he really see a massive crocodile as he claimed? Was he brave or foolhardy? Where candidates presented a consistent interpretation of Jack and his behaviour drawing on close reading and evaluation of the evidence in the passage they were usually able to demonstrate at least competent understanding. There were various successful interpretations for example based around the idea that Jack's blasé attitude was the product of his expertise and experience regarding crocodiles – he simply no longer feared them as any rational fear had been replaced by a fascination with the animal (the concentration on the sweeping torch being taken to support the idea he was only focused on one thing and had thus inadvertently neglected his less experienced customer). Other, equally successful answers, judged that the likelihood of spotting a crocodile during the trip had been particularly slim and attributed Jack's behaviour to showmanship - a theatrical performance for the benefit of the customer and/or his own amusement. Less common, but equally valid were those which decided that Jack's 'lack of interest' in the client's questions and constant sweeping of the swamp with the torch were because he was only too aware of the dangers of the swamp and/or was not in fact the expert he claimed to be. Some were able to make a successful case that the company were treating Jack badly in expecting him to run such a poorly resourced and ill-conceived

excursion for tourists. Candidates less secure in their understanding often presented confused and contradictory views of Jack, at times the result of slipping into narrative in this second bullet, tracking the passage and paraphrasing the text. Such answers were often uneven at best, with some only able to evidence a more general grasp of events.

The end of the passage contained a number of ideas potentially relevant as suggestions for how the expedition and experience might be improved for future tourists. Most candidates were able to suggest at least the need for better boats, advice beforehand and some form of defence; there were relatively few examples of unsupported speculation. Suggestions around staffing were usually linked to the need to replace or (re)train Jack, and some offered convincing argument for reconsidering the timing of the trip and/or providing some means of improving visibility. Better responses had often chosen to deal with suggestions during the course of the letter, synthesising ideas and information as part of the overall argument/complaint and in doing so were able to avoid repetition. A number of responses were able to indicate at least some grasp of a wider range of core ideas through selective use of detail, supporting their more general understanding. Less effective responses relied on just replaying detail, missing opportunities for interpretation and providing less convincing evidence of understanding as a result. The weakest responses simply copied the ideas verbatim. Common lifts at the end of answers included citing that a 'gun might be handy for a start' and the need for 'a nippy boat with a large engine enabling a fast getaway'. Failure to modify the language here weakened the ending of a number of otherwise more effective responses. Candidates need to remember to stay focused on the task throughout the response.

The Writing mark reflected the clarity, fluency and coherence of the response. Many candidates were able to adopt and maintain a suitable formal style for the given purpose, producing clear and often fluent responses. Most had at least some awareness of the need to address an audience, though often this was prejudiced by weaknesses in expression arising from a restricted range of secure vocabulary and/or unforced errors which affected meaning. Occasionally, awkward expression and/or weaknesses in structure detracted from the overall effect. Most candidates chose to follow the order of the bullets to structure their response, though needed if doing so to guard against the danger of repetition – for example, where ideas could be used in relation to more than one bullet. Efficient planning allowed stronger answers to address this and consider at the same time how to build their argument from the start. Convincing and consistently appropriate style followed on naturally from the given starter in these well-planned responses, whose measured and politely insistent tone was often used to good effect. Lapses into narrative, often relating chunks of conversation, indicated an inconsistency of style in less assured responses, whilst copying directly from the text was often the most frequent feature of the weakest writing.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 1:**

- read the whole passage carefully, including any information given in the introduction
- pay equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- maintain attention to the audience, form and purpose of the response throughout your answer
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- do not copy from the passage
- plan your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- develop and extend your ideas by considering the perspective of the given persona at the time of writing
- answer clearly, in your own words, creating a suitable voice and tone for the persona of your response
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

#### **Question 2**

**Re-read the descriptions of:**

**(a) Nick's fear of crocodiles in paragraph 3, beginning 'It sounded distinctly possible ...'**

**(b) The swamp in paragraph 5, beginning 'We glided along for some time ...'**

**Select four powerful words or phrases from each paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase selected is used effectively in the context.**

Responses to **Question 2** are expected to take the form of continuous prose in order to allow candidates to explore their choices fully and consider how language examples are working in context. Using a grid or table format is not advised as this often results in duplication of material and forces responses to be expressed very briefly or in note form. Similarly, brief notes jotted under the choices as a sub-heading are unlikely to allow for full consideration of the subtleties and complexity of the language choice being discussed. Answers

which made no attempt to discuss or explain choices and consequently offered insufficient evidence of understanding were rare, though a few offered only a little relevant comment. A number repeated the language of the passage or task – for example suggesting an example might be seen to ‘show Nick’s fear’ or help ‘the reader to understand Nick’s fear’ without explaining how or why. Any of the choices in **part (a)** could have been considered as an expression of ‘Nick’s fear’, but the intensity of that fear and how it is shown in each choice needed to be explored. Similarly in **part (b)**, some talked at length about how the descriptions ‘brought the swamp to life’ and ‘helped us imagine being there’ without any indication of how the author might be achieving this and/or any suggestion of the particular impression of the swamp being created in this instance. Analysis in both halves of the question needs to be sufficiently precise and extended to demonstrate understanding. The best responses were able to unpick each word within a chosen phrase and consider how exactly the language chosen might be contributing to and affecting the reader’s understanding and reactions.

Candidates appeared to have little difficulty in their selection of generally appropriate choices from each paragraph to write about, though not all were able to focus in on the most interesting aspects of their choices when offering explanations. Answers in higher bands moved beyond the obvious more general effects in **part (a)** to recognise how the imagery was being used as a potential indicator of Nick’s exaggerated, even irrational, fear – either child-like in its vision in examples such as ‘gobble us up’, or darkly comic in the image of the crocodile removing leftovers of Nick and Jack using what is left of the boat as ‘giant toothpicks’. In the highest band, it was clear that candidates were paying attention to the subtleties of language in context and exploring the nuances and connotations of words. Mid-range answers often recognised and explained references to the potential size of the crocodile, though tended to repeat the language of the original in explanations of the monstrous creature of his nightmares. Encouragingly in a good number of answers, there was understanding of techniques beyond mere labelling, particularly helpful when coming to explain why and how ‘sudden snap’ might be effective.

Maintaining a clear sense of context and/or building to an overview was often a feature of higher band scripts whereas less convincing responses lifted examples clear from context and presented interpretations ill-fitting with the general mood. For example, from some there was the suggestion that ‘floating wilderness’ provided a peaceful, calming image. In more successful scripts, there were some interesting and ingenious explanations and descriptions of this image – often suggesting the surreal nature of the experience evoked. In both parts of the question many candidates had tried to go beyond meanings with some success, though were not always sufficiently clear in their explanations. Many would have benefitted from reading back and editing their response to ensure that they had communicated more precisely any understanding they had. At times explanations were limited by less specific choices in their own vocabulary - even when describing basic meaning some limited their explanation of words such as ‘gigantic’ to the assertion that the crocodile was ‘big’. Similarly, candidates often recycled the idea of fear or the size of the crocodile without specifying the degree of fear or the actual size they had in mind and needed to tease out nuance in order to give each response an individual twist. Weaker answers often showed some difficulty in demonstrating a valid response to effects, interpreting reader reaction in ways detached from the passage itself (as in ‘the effect of this image for me as a reader is that it makes me shiver with fear and be afraid to go out’).

### **Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out whole sentences
- make sure your choices are complete – do not offer only one word if it is part of a descriptive phrase or image
- do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle
- avoid general comments such as ‘the writer makes you feel that you are really there’ or ‘this is a very descriptive phrase’
- to explain effects, think of all that word might suggest to a reader – the feelings, connotations and associations of the language
- use your own words to explain your choices rather than repeat the words from the choice itself
- try to explain both how and why a particular word or image might have been used
- treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them
- if you are unsure about effects, begin by offering a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- do not just label literary devices you notice, consider how each example is working in context.

### Question 3

#### (a) Notes

According to Passage B, what physical and behavioural characteristics have enabled crocodiles to survive?

Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line. You do not need to use your own words.

#### (b) Summary

Now use your notes from Question 3(a) to write a summary of what physical and behavioural characteristics have enabled crocodiles to survive, according to Passage B.

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.

To answer the summary task successfully, candidates must first identify fifteen points from Passage B relevant to the specific focus of the question and list them, one per numbered line, in note form on the grid in **part (a)**. Candidates are reminded that they are only credited with a maximum of one point per line and similarly that each point needs to evidence their understanding clearly. Any points added after line 15 are not credited unless replacing an answer crossed out earlier on. The majority of candidates understood that in a question testing their ability to 'select for specific purposes' they should not go beyond line 15, or include groups of ideas on each line. There were a small number of candidates who did not offer 15 ideas and left one or more lines blank. The second part of the task requires candidates to use their notes, adapting and organising them to write a summary in their own words.

The question had two strands: the physical *and* behavioural characteristics that have enabled crocodiles to survive and the best responses organised their points to clearly acknowledge these two aspects. Weaker, less-focused responses, did not fully address the task. A number relied on working through the passage – often with limited modification of the original – repeating ideas and/or offering incomplete ideas as a result. Others simply transferred their answers from **part (a)** still in the words of the passage, bolting them together with (sometimes inappropriate) connecting phrases. Better responses were careful to be clear and unambiguous in the ideas they presented – for example avoiding the suggestion that crocodiles had an 'excellent smell' or 'superior sound' and being clear that it was their *senses* of smell and hearing which were remarkable.

Where candidates had not engaged fully with the task and/or attempted a more mechanical approach paraphrasing the material, repetitions were common. Where candidates had not focused precisely on text, they often presented incomplete or inexact ideas – for example, a crocodile's ability to avoid dangerous situations is not in-built but a learned behaviour. Where points were imprecise and/or unclear in **part (a)** they could not be credited. One word answers such as 'jaw' were insufficient to communicate an understanding that the crocodile's exceptionally powerful jaw was a physical characteristic that had contributed to its survival.

There appeared to be more candidates this session who lifted excessively from the passage, limiting their Writing mark in **part (b)**. Own words needed to be used where appropriate, recasting, reorganising and representing ideas helpfully for the benefit of the reader. It is not though necessary to change every word – the idea needs to be clear to the reader and there may not be a suitable replacement for the word in the text. There was no need for example to replace the word 'stomach' and attempts to do so, such as 'acidic food chamber', were often awkward and unclear.

There are no marks to be scored for Writing in **3(a)**, however, checking responses for accuracy in spelling and grammar is clearly essential if candidates are to avoid the potential danger of negating points through careless slips. Candidates should pay particular attention, for example, to correct any slips that might change meaning; for example, some candidates wrote 'body' instead of 'bony' plates.

**Question 3(b)** responses that did well had used their points from **3(a)** carefully – organising them purposefully into a concise, fluent prose response rather than relying on repeating points in the order or language of the passage. There was some suggestion that answers at the top end had revisited points in **3(a)** during the planning stages of **3(b)** in order to edit and refine points in this part of the question – leading to clearer more distinct points in **3(a)** and an efficient and well-focused response in **3(b)**.

**Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read the question carefully to identify the focus of the task and underline key words
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify precisely relevant content points
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to establish and select 15 distinct points
- list your points – one complete idea per numbered line – using as few words as possible
- plan your response in **Question 3(b)** to re-organise and sequence content helpfully for your reader
- write informatively and do not comment on the content or style of the passage
- do not add details or examples to the content of the passage
- you can choose to use your own words in **Question 3(a)** and must use your own words in **Question 3(b)**
- do not add further numbered points in **Question 3(a)** past the 15 required
- avoid repetition of points
- when checking and editing your answers to **Question 3(a)**, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/23  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the passages thoroughly, and considered each of the questions carefully
- planned the content, structure and sequence of their response before writing their answer
- adapted their writing style to suit the task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose
- avoided repetition
- allowed time to address fully each section of each question
- avoided copying whole sentences or sections from either of the passages
- used their own words in **Questions 1** and **3(b)** and when analysing and explaining choices in **Question 2**
- ensured that ideas were clear and fully developed in **Question 1** and **Question 2**
- checked and edited their responses carefully to correct errors of spelling and grammar affecting meaning
- used a range of appropriate, precise vocabulary.

## General comments

Candidates' responses to this paper generally indicated a familiarity with the demands of each task and the need to select and use appropriate material from the passages to answer each question. Most candidates attempted all parts of the three questions and most responses were an appropriate length.

For **Question 1** most responses were focused and all parts of the task were addressed. Good answers displayed a sound understanding of Gant's plight and his attempts to survive and adapt in a harsh and alien environment. They included a range of relevant ideas that were modified and developed effectively and supported by well integrated details. Less effective responses did not use the more implicit ideas from the passage to address the third part of the task successfully. Some contained quite general ideas about modern life that did not refer specifically to Gant's experiences. There was some copying of phrases and a reliance on the wording and structure of the passage which indicated a less than secure understanding.

For **Question 2** candidates are expected to select a sufficient number of appropriate examples from the relevant paragraphs and to explain their meanings and intended effects. Not all responses contained specific or complete choices and clear explanations of effects. Good responses were focused on exact quotations and went beyond literal meanings to consider the connotations of key words within the context of the paragraph, rather than general definitions. Stronger answers analysed words and phrases carefully and included some clear explanations of images.

For **Question 3** few responses secured over 10 marks in **part (a)** as some information was not presented with sufficient clarity or precision. Some points consisted of only one word which was too ambiguous to be rewarded, and others contained long phrases copied from the passage that did not always convey the meaning intended in the passage. For **part (b)** there were attempts to use own words and to reorganise and plan the material. Good summaries contained clear explanations of different types of misuse and their consequences that could be easily understood by anyone that had not read the original passage. Less effective responses included copied phrases and sentences indicating that the information in the passage had not been fully understood.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, 20% of the available marks are awarded for Writing. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing and plan and edit their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meanings and awkward expression. Whilst writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, unclear or limited style will limit the achievement of high writings marks, as will over-reliance on the language of the passage. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to check and edit their responses.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

**You are Gant. Following a successful rescue attempt and your return to your home city, you give a talk for your colleagues and students at the university about your experiences in the past.**

**Write the words of your talk.**

**In your talk you should:**

- **describe the challenges and dangers of life in the past and how you adapted**
- **explain the efforts you made to improve the lives of your family and the people around you**
- **suggest some things you have learned from the experience and how it has changed you and your attitudes to modern life.**

**Base your talk on what you have read in Passage A, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.**

**Begin your talk, ‘Colleagues and students, my life in the last ten years has been a strange one...’**

Most candidates showed an engagement with the passage and the task, writing in the first person from the perspective of Gant addressing an audience, with an appropriate opening and conclusion to his talk. Most responses contained a suitable introductory paragraph with brief details about the time travelling experiment that had transported him back half a million years into the past. Less effective responses included unnecessary details about the project that were often copied from the passage, or invented scenarios about the fate of his colleagues. Although Passage A stated that Gant was the sole survivor, some responses referred to his wife and family accompanying him in his experiment, displaying a misreading of his situation.

For the first part of the task most responses included a good number of relevant points about Gant’s adaptation to the challenges and dangers of his new situation. References were made to the cold, dark cave, the need to hunt for food, the importance of fire for warmth and light, the threat from wild animals and the problems of finding fresh, clean water. These points were sometimes developed and effective comparisons made to Gant’s previous lifestyle in a modern society, for example, his comfortable bed, the modern appliances in his apartment, and being able to shop for a range of foods and bottled water. Some referred to the difficulty, and necessity, of keeping track of time and the hostility of other humans. In less effective responses the details from the passage were used mechanically and some included copied phrases from the passage when referring to the noises outside the cave and the carving of a calendar on the wall. Some mentioned that the family ate dried snake but missed the opportunity to comment on the requirement to preserve food for the times when hunting and foraging were not possible. Good responses showed a greater understanding and degree of empathy for the plight of Gant and his family, for example, their need to keep silent for fear of being attacked and their constant vigilance when hearing strange noises. Some included the difficulties for Gant hunting in a hostile terrain and having to leave his family on their own because it was too dangerous for them to accompany him. Good references were made to the threats from other humans, the need to carry a weapon and the difficulties of learning to communicate without using his language skills. There were some excellent responses that conveyed clearly the harrowing experiences of day to day living and the challenges of learning the new skills and behaviours necessary to survive in such a radically different environment.

For the second part of the task, most responses included several of Gant’s innovations and improvements to his family’s well-being. Many referred to the moss-packed platform that made sleeping more comfortable, the log barrier to deter intruders, the importance of boiling and sterilising water, and his introduction of greens and nutrients to their diet. They also included his attempts to grow penicillin and to comfort the little girl. Less effective responses drifted into a narrative version of these two events that were very close to the

wording of the passage and not focused fully on his desire to use his medical knowledge to help treat illnesses. In some responses the references to penicillin relied on copied phrases from paragraph 5, for example, 'fleshy, plump berries', and 'lifesaving marshmallowy green mould'. These descriptions did not fully convey his perseverance and determination to provide a medicine that he knew could save lives, or his disappointment when the experiment failed and he knew that people would continue to die. Similarly, the description of Gant's visit to the sick girl often focused on her appearance and symptoms, and relied heavily on phrases from paragraph 7 of the passage to describe them. Some did include Gant's efforts to make her feel more comfortable and these displayed a focus on the question. There were opportunities to comment on the attitude of the girl's family to her illness, for example, their behaviour was not only an indication of their hostility towards him but possibly their fear of her illness, their lack of knowledge of how to comfort her and their apparent acceptance that her death was inevitable. There were some comparison between Grant's modern day approach to sickness and that of a past era. Good responses included some effective development and comments about Gant's frustration and sadness in knowing that her pneumonia could have been cured with penicillin. Less effective answers relied on the structure of the passage and some followed the visit with details of his journey home where he killed an animal and collected shoots. These points were not included to show his need to hunt or provide greens for his family but were included as part of the narrative and were not developed or focused on the task. It is important for candidates to select details and ideas that are relevant to each part of the task; this involves modifying and adapting the structure and wording of the passage. Responses that relied too heavily on the original did not display a full understanding of the passage or the requirements of the task.

In most responses the final part of the task was the least developed though nearly all candidates attempted this section and there were some good responses that were insightful and reflective. Most included comments about being more appreciative of modern life and valuing what Gant now regarded as luxuries, for example, easy access to varieties of food, clean water and the comforts of home. Most included references to technology, healthcare and modern day medicines that should not be taken for granted. Less effective responses included general comment about the benefits of modern society without specifying what they are or making references to ideas in the passage. Similarly, some commented on the importance of family though only a few developed this point and references to the loss of his family and having to leave them behind, were rarely included. Some referred to the relative safety of modern life and not having to protect oneself with weapons, and to the skills that he had been required to learn such as hunting and making a fire. Several referred to his resourcefulness and his ability to adapt and survive in a more primitive society, and that his experiences had made him more confident and resilient. Although many responses contained relevant development of ideas and displayed a good understanding of Gant's experiences, most were a little understated. Few conveyed the trauma or feelings disorientation that would result from such an experience, or the psychological implications and the difficulties of re-adjusting to modern society.

A few answers contained elements of creative writing with ideas that were not fully related to the passage. It could not be inferred, for example, that Gant was welcomed openly and became a leader of the community who taught everyone his language, and was called upon to heal people. These ideas could not be rewarded as the passage clearly indicates that other humans were capable of violence towards him and his attempts at medical care were not welcomed. The idea that he successfully grew penicillin and was able to cure people is inaccurate, and overlong details of his early attempts to adapt and how he met his wife were not focused on the task and not rewarded as development. It was reasonable though to infer from the passage that Gant learned a lot about the flora and fauna of the time which would be scientifically useful in the present time, or that he found difficulty re-adapting to the use of speech to communicate.

Good responses focused on all three bullet points and displayed the ability to select material relevant to each part of the task. They contained a range of ideas that were developed and closely related to the passage, and a good range of well integrated detail.

The Writing mark reflected the clarity and fluency of the response and how well language was used to convey Gant's thoughts about his experiences. Higher writing marks were awarded for a range of effective and interesting vocabulary. Good responses were well structured, displayed a good sense of audience and created a strong and convincing voice for Gant. Less effective responses relied on the wording and structure of the passage and displayed a limited range of appropriate vocabulary, and some inconsistency of style.

### Advice to candidates on Question 1:

- read the whole passage carefully, including any information given in the introduction
- pay equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- maintain attention to the audience, form and purpose of the response throughout your answer
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- do not copy from the passage
- plan your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- develop and extend your ideas by considering the perspective of the given persona at the time of writing
- answer clearly, in your own words, creating a suitable voice and tone for the persona of your response
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

### Question 2

#### Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) Gant's attempts to grow penicillin in paragraph 5, beginning 'In the marsh that lay beyond the underbrush...'
- (b) the girl in paragraph 7, beginning 'She sat leaning against the rock...'

**Select four words or phrases from each paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase selected is used effectively in the context.**

Candidates were advised to include four appropriate examples for each part of the question and most responses contained a sufficient number of choices. Less effective responses often included only one or two examples in each part which did not allow candidates to display a full understanding of the writer's use of language and to secure marks in the top bands. Responses to this question are expected to take the form of continuous prose in order to allow candidates to explore their choices fully and explain how they are working in the context of the passage.

In **part (a)** not all responses contained complete examples, and explanations were not always focused on the most interesting words. Several included the phrase 'monument to his vanities and failures' without explaining the meaning of 'monument' or commenting on the ironic use of the word as a constant reminder of Gant's unsuccessful attempts. Most focused on the word 'failures' and provided simple explanations, commented on the use of the plural, or repeated the words of the original. Several answers gave accurate meanings for 'clumsily-carved receptacle' and better responses commented on Gant's lack of skill and his optimism in trying to use unscientific and basic equipment to produce modern medicine. The phrase 'jagged rocks and stunted tree stumps' was often accompanied by accurate explanations of meanings and some commented that the harshness of the landscape did not provide ideal conditions for cultivating medicine. Few responses explored the connotations of 'pulpy blood-red juices' and many repeated the word 'pulpy' in an explanation of its meaning, or commented that the juices were the colour of blood. Some commented on the contrast between the 'fleshy plump berries' and the 'slimy grey mass' but this contrast was not always fully explained. The phrase 'rapidly rotted at the sun's touch' was often given as an incomplete choice and accompanied by literal meanings of the word 'rapidly' and 'rotted'. The use of personification was often identified though its effectiveness was not fully explored. The naming of literary devices can only be rewarded when accompanied by a clear explanation of its effects. The idea of the sun as a destructive and malign force, rather than a life-giving element, was rarely considered.

The **part (b)** responses often contained clearer explanations of effects and images. Not all of the choices were appropriate; some included the words 'snarled', 'whirled' and 'frantic grunts' which were not relevant to the description of the little girl and could not be rewarded. Not all of the choices were complete, for example, 'lifeless' was often selected without the word 'limp' which limited the explanation given. Several responses gave clear explanations for the phrase 'onyx black and empty' though not all commented on the use of 'onyx' which implies the hard, cold and unnatural appearance of the eyes. Clear explanations were often given for 'wild-eyed', and the effects of the description 'like a frightened rabbit' showed an understanding that the girl was being compared to a timid, harmless and often vulnerable animal. Several candidates also displayed a good understanding of the use of 'solid concrete sound' explaining that the heavy, painful breathing was not only unnatural but an indication of the severity of the girl's illness. Less effective responses lacked precision and contained quite general comments about lifelessness, lack of energy and closeness to death that could have been applied to several of the chosen examples. Good answers selected exact quotations and focused

on the analysis of key individual words and their collective effects. They went beyond literal meanings and explained how the writer's use of language evoked feelings of sympathy and conveyed the hopelessness of the girl's situation.

**Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out whole sentences
- make sure your choices are complete – do not offer only one word if it is part of a descriptive phrase or image
- do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle
- avoid general comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase'
- to explain effects, think of all that word might suggest to a reader - the feelings, connotations and associations of the language
- use your own words to explain your choices rather than repeat the words from the choice itself
- try to explain both how and why a particular word or image might have been used
- treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them
- if you are unsure about effects, begin by offering a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- do not just label literary devices you notice, consider how each example is working in context.

### Question 3

#### (a) Notes

**According to Passage B, how are antibiotics being misused and what are the consequences of this for human health?**

**Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line. You do not need to use your own words.**

#### (b) Summary

**Use your notes from Question 3(a) to write a summary of how antibiotics are being misused and the consequences of this for human health, according to Passage B.**

**You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.**

To answer **Question 3** successfully, candidates needed to first identify fifteen points from passage B that were relevant to the question and to list them, one numbered point per line in note form in the grid in part a. Candidates can only be credited with a maximum of one point each line and any points added after line 15 cannot be considered unless they replace an answer crossed out earlier. Most responses were focused on the question and did not go beyond 15 lines though some did include several different points on the same line. Most responses were able to identify between 5 and 10 relevant points, relatively few offered more than 10 rewardable points.

Although candidates are required to use note form, points need to contain enough information and need to be written with sufficient clarity and precision to convey the meaning intended in the passage. Some responses included one word answers which in some instances was not enough to communicate the meaning accurately, and to secure a mark. The focus of the question was how antibiotics are misused and the consequences of this for human health, so it was important to state precisely the nature of this misuse and its results. For example, 'treating animals' could not be rewarded as the misuse results from 'treating healthy animals'. It was also necessary to make clear that the resulting resistance, not the antibiotics, might then be passed on to humans. It was not always made clear that 'more potent and more dangerous' referred to bacterial infections. Candidates are not required to use their own words in this part of this question though there was some evidence that candidate attempted to use suitable alternatives where appropriate and this was useful in clarifying points and avoiding repetition. The copying of phrases from the passage often led to information being repeated several times in different forms which indicated that it had not been fully understood. Several responses included the phrases 'drug resistant bacterium', 'a form of tuberculosis resistant to most drugs' and 'rise of superbugs' as separate points. These are similar points and could only be rewarded once. Similarly, the references to the use of less conventional drugs which are more expensive and have more side effects were often presented as three separate points but only one mark was awarded for this information. Phrases copied from the passage without clear focus were too general to be credited, for example, 'a train wreck in slow motion' and 'the world loves antibiotics to death'. These points do not explain examples of misuse or to their consequences so could not be rewarded.

Most candidates were aware of the appropriate style and form for a summary and many **part (b)** responses were factual and informative, and most were an appropriate length. Only a few candidates did not attempt this part of the question or wrote only a few lines. Many summaries were focused and concise though some included an over-long introduction containing information taken from the first paragraph of the passage that did not contain any points relevant to the question. Some also included their own opinions about antibiotics and how the misuse could be addressed, resulting in a lack of focus and succinctness. Candidates are rewarded for writing in their own words as far as possible. In less effective responses words and phrases were copied from the passage and this often displayed a weak understanding of the text. Passage B contained some medical terms for which suitable alternatives could not be used without altering the specific meanings of the words. Despite this, some summaries did contain appropriate alternatives that communicated the intended meanings quite clearly, for example, the phrases, 'sold over the counter', 'regulatory practices', 'minor ailments' and 'less conventional treatments' were replaced with own words. Summaries that contained a consistent attempt to use own words displayed a better level of understanding and a wider range of vocabulary than those reliant on the original wording. Not all of the responses were written fluently. Higher marks are awarded where candidates use varied and fluent sentence structures. Less effective responses were often list-like with points expressed in a series of short sentences. Better responses

re-organised the points in **Question 3(a)** linked similar points together and explained the main ideas of the passage coherently.

**Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read the question carefully to identify the focus of the task and underline key words
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify precisely relevant content points
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to establish and select 15 distinct points
- list your points – one complete idea per numbered line – using as few words as possible
- plan your response in **Question 3(b)** to re-organise and sequence content helpfully for your reader
- write informatively and do not comment on the content of the passage
- do not add details or examples to the content of the passage
- you can choose to use your own words in **Question 3(a)** and must use your own words in **Question 3(b)**
- do not add further numbered points in **Question 3(a)** past the 15 required
- avoid repetition of points
- when checking and editing your answers to **Question 3(a)**, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/31  
Directed Writing and Composition

## Key Messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively, keeping the reader in mind
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct sentences accurately and vary sentence types to create specific effects
- select appropriate and wide-ranging vocabulary and use language with precision.

## General Comments

Examiners found that in most cases a secure understanding was shown of what was expected in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Most responses, regardless of achievement, were sustained and there were few very brief scripts. Only a handful of scripts were found by examiners to have had more than one composition question attempted, showing that the great majority were familiar with the rubric of the examination. A few scripts had only the composition question attempted, perhaps showing some uncertainty about how to use the passage in a response.

Most responses showed a committed engagement with the topic in **Question 1**, often with a sound grasp of the benefits and risks of their Share-Shack scheme addressed in the passage and usually with some attention paid to the style and format of a letter. The majority of candidates approached the topic in their own language rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage. Better answers here tended to structure their responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive point of view. Weaker candidates tended to reiterate the ideas in the passage, often in the same sequence rather than selecting and regrouping points. Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response. Occasionally, insufficient use was made of the reading material or there was only a tenuous grasp of the task itself. The implied informality of expression between friends was usually successfully applied. In weaker responses there was often some general commentary on the Share-Shack scheme, with one or two points from the passage addressed, but opportunities to discuss, weigh-up and evaluate the ideas in the passage were missed.

Better responses paid attention to the audience and style required for a letter asking for the views of a friend. These were persuasive in purpose, using the passage to create and structure arguments with some sense of audience and rhetoric. Some, in the middle range of marks, showed an insecure register, often ending with 'Yours sincerely' or becoming overly colloquial in style and vocabulary. In other weaker responses, valedictions were frequently forgotten; a feature symptomatic of an insecure grasp of audience and purpose, and at this level the points made about the Share-Shack scheme followed the sequence of the passage with less selection and reordering to create a point of view.



In the compositions, the descriptive and narrative genres were attempted in fairly equal numbers although for this paper the narrative questions were generally more popular. Better responses in the composition section as a whole were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected and the particular ways in which the reader's interest could be engaged.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and although there was some narrative content in the middle range, most responses gave a range of descriptive detail. Most responses to the first descriptive question, about an occasion where a group of people were eating together, were well-organised and paragraphed, with sections about the venue, the members of the group and effective description of the meal itself. As is usually the case, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created a clear sense of atmosphere. There were some engaging descriptions of characters in the workplace described in the second question, with some very focused and credible description of different types of working environments. Weaker responses here tended to fall into narrative with limited descriptive detail.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with credible and interesting characters and scenarios. Weaker narrative writing was often characterised by inconclusive or unsatisfying endings, sometimes with simple storylines which were largely a series of events with limited awareness of the reader. In some cases there was limited narrative progression, even where the characterisation was quite effective. Stories involving the words, 'Nothing could have prepared him for what he saw ...' were often suitably dynamic and dramatic. The second narrative question elicited a wide range of situations and locations where a character was new to an area. Composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. Descriptive writing was usually but not always focused on detail and evoking atmosphere and could have been improved by the use of fewer clichéd ideas and expressions. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of characters to stimulate the reader's sympathy were features understood by effective writers here.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Section 1: Directed Writing**

**Imagine that your friend, Louis, is considering setting up a Share-Shack in your community, and has asked for your views on whether this would be a good idea.**

**In your letter you should:**

- **evaluate the benefits of a Share-Shack to your community**
- **explain what risks you think might be involved.**

**Begin your letter, 'Dear Louis, I've heard about Share-Shack ...'**

High marks were awarded where there was some challenge and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing of the points made in the passage. Where the letter was also both accurate and appropriate in style, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished style, Examiners could award very high marks indeed. Better responses here tended to pick up the implied points made by the at times doubtful author of the magazine article and develop a detailed evaluation of it. While the more straightforward aspects, such as the claims made for the scheme being good for encouraging sharing or being eco-friendly, were readily identified in most responses, Examiners awarded the highest marks where the benefits and risks of setting up such a scheme were teased out and examined.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some listing of the claims made by the manager of a Share-Shack in the article and an acceptance of these claims at face value. These details were an accurate reflection of the ideas in the passage but there was limited comment on or examination of them.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the main features of the scheme although there was also some misreading of some points. A thin use of the detail or weaknesses in organising ideas coherently was characteristic at this level.

### **Marks for reading**

The best responses, as always in this task, adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage to provide a subtle critique of the Share-Shack scheme. At this level, for example, the dependence of the whole notion on being able to trust complete strangers with what might be your most valuable possessions was addressed, often with some expression of disbelief and worry. Some of the details in the passage were probed and challenged effectively: for example, the Share-Shack manager accepting that they did 'lose' some items actually meant that they might get stolen; or the vested interest implied in the objections to the scheme made by the retailer of electrical goods. The claims made that this scheme was as successful as the manager stated were also examined with some insight. As some candidates pointed out, Louis would be at substantial financial risk if anything went wrong and there were already some people moving in and trying to make money out of the scheme who would object if he offered a scheme which was without charge. While most agreed that the scheme was likely to be good for the community as a whole and would develop social relationships, some questioned the overall safety of the scheme and viewed the project as being naively optimistic.

The best responses also examined the idea of potential danger and the risk of uninsured losses in terms of both property and personal injury. At this level, there were also some thoughtful reactions to the role of the volunteers. Responses showed some insight into the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of an unpaid and probably unqualified Share-Shack volunteer. In this way, better responses used thoughtful inferences drawn from the passage rather than making straightforward expressions of opinion or preference.

This kind of consistently evaluative approach to the material in the passage was required for marks in Band 2 and above. A mark of 7 was given where there were glimpses of evaluation, often offering a reason as to how the Share-Shack would benefit the environment, but a more consistently evaluative stance was required for higher marks. Where responses reproduced the points made in the passage with limited comment on it or discussion of the ideas in it, Examiners could not award marks above Band 3.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 3 where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above. Responses at this level showed a sensible understanding of the specific claims made in the passage about the Share-Shack scheme and some of the drawbacks as described in the magazine article. Such responses tended to list the benefits and risks of the scheme, usually in the sequence in which they appeared in the passage. Where there was some commentary on these issues, these remarks were not really evaluative at this level and could not be credited as such by Examiners. For example, Band 3 responses often stated that the scheme was good for the environment and the community, or that sharing was a good idea for an adult as well as for children and left the ideas at that point. While such arguments were a valid response to the task, they did not make use of the implications and inferences that better responses could tease out of the passage. Examiners could award a mark of 6 where there was straightforward but wide-ranging coverage of the points in the passage but responses with more limited selection could be given 5 marks.

Weaker responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passage or addressed the material thinly. Some were hampered by a misreading of the task and a difficulty in understanding the concepts of lending and borrowing. Where a mark of 4 was awarded, some firmer links with the passage were needed, whereas 3 was generally given for very thin or brief responses in which such misreadings appeared. Marks below 3 were rarely given but in these cases the response was often a general commentary with very little connection with the passage.

## Marks for writing

### Style and audience

An informal but apt tone was required for a letter of this kind and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. Some high scoring responses combined a familiar tone with some effective rhetorical devices. Candidates developed some points about Louis' character and generous nature and offered warnings concerning his possible naivety.

In the middle range, the style was often appropriate although there were sometimes lapses in candidates' awareness of the intended audience. Letters sometimes started informally but ended with 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully', showing some insecure understanding of the appropriate style for the task.

Weaker responses sometimes failed to address Louis at all and offered little adaptation of the style and tone of the passage for a different audience and purpose. Valedictions were often missed at this level.

### Structure

Some accomplished responses, awarded high marks for writing, handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined into a persuasive overall argument which was clearly derived from the ideas in the passage but was not dependent on its structure and sequence. At the highest level, an overview of the issues involved was given rather than a list of the features of the Share-Shack scheme.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the passage but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed to meet the demands of the task. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of the purpose of the letter. At the lower end of Band 3, responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passage whereas higher Band 3 responses usually organised and re-sequenced ideas more selectively.

Some weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were less coherent in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the points in the passage but without the re-ordering of them which was needed to give the letter a sense of purpose and audience. These responses showed a lack of awareness of the conventional structure of a letter.

### Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 1. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. While these responses were friendly and informal in tone, the range and precision of vocabulary used allowed for some quite complex arguments about trust and safety to be made with clarity and style.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. Although the style was usually appropriate, a range of quite basic errors was made which marred the overall impression given. The nature and focus of the task exposed many simple grammatical errors, such as the very frequent use of 'could of' and 'would of' and the confusion of 'your' with 'you're' or 'their' with 'there'. The use of capital letters where they were not needed, even where there was otherwise general accuracy in the writing, was also noted by Examiners. Apostrophes were very often not used appropriately and sentence demarcation by commas rather than full stops began to creep in at the lower end of Band 3. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in many responses. These included words used in the passage such as 'environment' and even 'Share-Shack' and 'sharing' ('shearing' sic) and frequent errors with homophones and grammar errors such as 'you was' and 'we was'. These errors, particularly in grammatical agreement created a jarring note sometimes in responses which were otherwise accurate and appropriate in style.

**Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:**

- Be prepared to criticise or question the ideas in the passage.
- Look for, and use in your response, inferences made indirectly by the writer.
- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.
- Be aware of the audience for your writing and adapt your style accordingly. Think carefully about the kind of style the recipient of your letter would expect.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops, missing or wrongly used capital letters, weaknesses in grammar or key words mis-spelt.

**Section 2: Composition**

**Descriptive Writing**

**2 Describe an occasion when a group of people are eating together.**

**OR**

**3 Describe what you notice, think and feel as you sit in a busy workplace observing others go about their daily activities.**

Both descriptive writing questions were similarly popular for candidates across the mark range. In the first task, there were some strongly evocative descriptions of many different types of occasions and locations for the group to meet. In the second question, candidates were able to describe a range of workplaces with a considerable degree of conviction and reality. Generally, the best responses included some combination of physical description alongside some description of the narrator's thoughts and feelings. As in previous series, some inexperience in tackling descriptive writing tasks was seen by Examiners in responses which became narratives or which contained limited descriptive detail or only rather mundane levels of detail.

The occasions described in the first descriptive task were, in the best responses, areas which possibly had some personal meaning for the writer, often infusing the writing with a sense of nostalgia and engagement. There were descriptions of restaurants serving a vast variety of cuisine, family gatherings such as Christmas or Thanksgiving, barbecues on beaches as well as expensive meals in sophisticated venues, but at the highest level the description often focused on the power of the occasion to provoke deep feelings in the narrator. Candidates wisely avoided too much narration concerning the reason why the group of people had come together to eat.

Middle range responses to this question were characterised by more straightforward, often more physical descriptions of places. There was some clear descriptive detail although the way in which it was organised was less varied and the approach more repetitive. Each detail was described with less subtlety and effectiveness overall. In many cases, there was an extended list of ingredients and dishes being served to the group, losing the range of descriptive opportunities offered by the title such as describing the individuals within the group and the location itself.

Weaker responses were often characterised by over-long narrative preambles explaining the gathering of the group or the journey to the restaurant without really describing the key elements in the title. There was also some generalised, rather clichéd description at this level.

For the second question, the best responses often included particular moments where the description of a workplace developed but the piece as a whole was focused on the variety of the workers' daily activities and their impression on the narrator. Better responses opened with engaging, well-realised pictures of the busy workplace and the striking characters that were observed. There was some structure implied by the wording 'daily activities' of the question which was adopted sensibly in higher level responses, so that there was a clear picture of the narrator's impressions at different points in time in the working day.

Responses given marks in the middle range were more straightforward in their approach to the task, including some rather more general qualities and attributes of the workplace and its characters. The quality and effectiveness of the writing varied but the structure of many average pieces relied on this straightforward approach. Examiners were often able to reward some description even where the overall structure and focus was more discursive or narrative. Examiners gave marks below Band 3 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus, where there was limited organisation of the details described or where strings of details were listed rather than described. Here, the purpose and intention of the writing was not primarily descriptive. The story of why the narrator was going to the workplace and the journey there was a common approach at this level and in some Band 4 responses a narrative focus dominated at the expense of description. In some at the top of the Band, some general impression of the workplace and the people there was given but with limited detail or elements which brought the environment to life for the reader.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were sometimes lower than those for Content and Structure, even in some original and interesting responses. In the best responses, precise and varied vocabulary and controlled complex sentences with secure punctuation within and between sentences were used. Images, words and phrases were employed to create specific effects and to bring the scene or character alive or the reader. In weaker responses, as is often the case in descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences, and incomplete or verbless sentences were common, even in scripts where responses to **Question 1** showed a secure grasp of sentence structure.

**Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:**

- Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content.
- Remember the key features of descriptive writing and keep your focus on details.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Choose your vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects.

## Narrative Writing

### 4 Write a story that includes the words, 'Nothing could have prepared him for what he saw...'

OR

### 5 Write a story that involves a character new to the area.

Both narrative questions proved more popular choices than the descriptive questions on this paper, with the first narrative task being completed by the largest number of candidates. Marks were awarded across the range for both. The first question elicited some engaging stories, often written in the first person, which included some interesting characterisation and setting. Many responses involved settings familiar to the narrator where they were suddenly shocked by a sometimes positive, but usually negative, development. Other scenarios included a number of confrontations and meetings with criminals, aliens and long-lost relatives. In better responses there was a clear resolution to the narrative as well as some control of tension and suspense to shape the reader's reactions. Better responses also focused attention on characterisation and setting before the moment the given line happened, and were also able to conclude the story from that moment forward. This control of chronology required some skill in story-telling which was often evident in good responses.

Middle range stories were characteristically straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases, although the characterisation was effective and credible, the piece overall lacked narrative progression and drive. One feature noticed by Examiners was the tendency to evoke quite convincingly the state of mind of the characters but without a real story. These responses were effective descriptions but little happened to the characters and there was no real plot or narrative cohesion.

Weaker responses tended to involve less well drawn characters as well as some simple ideas, usually about discovering a body, or that a friend was in fact a vampire or a zombie. These responses often relied too heavily on dialogue without narration and the plotlines were simple, linear accounts with less awareness of the needs of the reader shown.

For the second narrative question, the variety of locations covered was very wide with varying success and credibility. Amongst the re-locations to new towns, first days at school and (yet again) aliens visiting Earth, the best were those which had a ring of authenticity about them and the build-up or preparation was crucial in creating a believable and effective narrative.

Average and weaker responses were characterised by less effective, more contrived narratives or by less control over the material. Responses given marks in Band 4 were particularly dominated by events, some of them rather unlikely, while Band 5 marks usually reflected very brief accounts with very little to engage the reader in terms of characters and setting. Some stories became a series of events which did not really cohere and some scenarios lacked credibility and in a few cases there was little sequencing or clarity overall. High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was lively and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. Punctuation within sentences, in dialogue and for effect was characteristic of responses in the higher Bands and where coupled with a sophisticated palette of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. For 10 and above, a degree of fluency was needed as well as a clarity and accuracy of style.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, if persistent, limited even competently told stories to Band 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. In many scripts, the punctuation of direct speech was insecure, even when the story itself was quite well-structured. Again, basic punctuation errors with misused or omitted capital letters, the mis-spelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes so frequent as to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 3 and even where candidates wrote in a fairly pedestrian style but punctuated sentences accurately, Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were still errors but the style had more ambition and variety, a mark of 9 was awarded. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 3. A common error was the misuse of gender pronouns as in: 'she was the perfect girl with many curls in his hair'. A few responses were very brief and faulty in style, making it difficult to follow the meaning. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:**

- Plan how to resolve your story in an interesting way before you start writing.
- Think about how to create tension and a climax in your story
- Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader.
- Check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/32  
Directed Language and Composition

## Key Messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively, keeping the reader in mind
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct sentences accurately and vary sentence types to create specific effects
- select appropriate and wide-ranging vocabulary and use language with precision.

## General Comments

Examiners found that in most cases a secure understanding was shown of what was expected in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Most responses, regardless of achievement, were sustained and there were relatively few very brief scripts.

Most responses showed a committed engagement with the topic in **Question 1**, often with a sound grasp of the ideas addressed in the passage and usually some attention paid to the style and format of a letter. The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage. Better answers here also tended to structure their responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive argument of their own. Weaker candidates tended to reiterate the ideas in the passage, often in the same sequence rather than selecting and regrouping points. Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response. Occasionally, insufficient use was made of the reading material or there was only a tenuous grasp of the task itself. The implied informality of expression between cousins was sometimes missed and the second bullet point occasionally ignored so that the role of the writer as a tour guide was not addressed. In weaker responses there was often some general commentary on holidays, with one or two points from the passage addressed but opportunities to discuss, weigh up and evaluate the ideas in the passage were missed.

Better responses paid attention to the audience and style required for a letter to a family member. These were persuasive in purpose, using the passage to create and structure arguments with some sense of audience and rhetoric. Some in the middle range of marks showed an insecure register, often ending with 'Yours sincerely' or becoming overly colloquial in style and vocabulary. In other weaker responses, valedictions were frequently forgotten, a feature symptomatic of an insecure grasp of audience and purpose, and at this level the points made about the Home-from-Home scheme followed the sequence of the passage with less selection and reordering to create an argument.

In the compositions, the descriptive and narrative genres were attempted in fairly equal numbers although descriptive questions were generally more popular at all levels of achievement. Better responses in the composition section as a whole were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected and the particular ways in which the reader's interest could be engaged.



Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and although there was some narrative content in the middle range, most responses gave a range of descriptive detail. Most responses to the first descriptive question about a once beautiful area which is now spoilt were well-organised and paragraphed and made use of the implied structure in the question, with a section about the area's beauty first and then a description of it after some event which marred its beauty. As is usually the case, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere specific to the particular place described. There were some engaging descriptions of character in responses to the second question, again using the structure suggested in the question to organise observations into 'first impressions' and ways in which these impressions changed. Weaker responses here tended to be more discursive than descriptive, or fell into narrative with limited descriptive detail.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Weaker narrative writing was often characterised by inconclusive or unsatisfying endings, sometimes with simple storylines which were largely a series of events with limited awareness of the reader. In some cases there was limited narrative progression, even where the characterisation was quite effective. Stories involving characters who did not fit in were often moving, personal and effective. The task was interpreted both literally and metaphorically to create interesting narratives. The second narrative question elicited a wide range of responses with varying content and Examiners awarded marks across the range here. Composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. Descriptive writing was usually but not always focused on detail and evoking atmosphere. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of characters to stimulate the reader's sympathy were features understood by effective writers here.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Section 1: Directed Writing**

**A cousin of yours, Vincent, who travels a lot, is thinking of signing up for Home-from-Home Holidays. He has asked for your opinion of the scheme and whether you'll agree to be a guide for any visitors staying in his home. Write a letter to Vincent.**

**In your letter you should:**

- **evaluate the claims made by Home-from-Home Holidays about the benefits of this kind of holiday**
- **explain whether or not you think joining the scheme would be a good idea for Vincent and for you.**

**Begin your letter, 'Dear Vincent, I've heard about Home-from-Home Holidays ...'**

High marks were awarded where there was some challenge and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing of the points made in the passage. Where the letter was also both accurate and appropriate in style, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished style, Examiners could award very high marks indeed. Better responses here tended to pick up the implied criticisms made by the rather sceptical author of the article of the Home-from-Home scheme and develop a detailed evaluation of it. While the more straightforward aspects, such as the claims made for the holidays being cheaper or more eco-friendly, were readily identified in most responses, Examiners awarded the highest marks where the dangers and risks of participating in the scheme were teased out and examined.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some listing of the claims made by the holiday company in the article and an acceptance of these claims at face value. These details were an accurate reflection of the ideas in the passage but there was limited comment on or examination of them.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the main features of the scheme although there was also some misreading of some points. A thin use of the detail or weaknesses in organising ideas coherently was characteristic at this level.

### **Marks for reading**

The best responses, as always in this task, adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage to provide a subtle critique of the Home-from-Home Holiday scheme. At this level, for example, the dependence of the whole notion on being able to trust complete strangers with your most treasured possessions and your home was addressed, often with some expression of incredulity or ridicule. Traditional travel agents' safeguards against disappointment, also mentioned in the passage, were used to undermine the basic premise of the company that these holidays were fail-safe as well as inexpensive. Some of the details in the passage were probed and challenged effectively: for example, the claim that some simple details entered online by people across the globe would be sufficient to match an individual's interests and outlook was highlighted as doubtful. The claims made that these holidays were cheaper and more eco-friendly were also examined with some insight. While most agreed that the scheme obviated the need to use up the earth's resources by building hotels, some questioned the quality of experience offered by the company compared with the guaranteed cleanliness, orderliness and care of most resort hotels.

The best responses also examined the idea of risk and the potential for uninsured and upsetting losses in terms of both property and holiday experience. At this level, there were also some thoughtful reactions to the role of guide for Vincent's visitors. Responses showed some insight into the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of an unpaid, inexperienced and unqualified family member and some made use of the forum-users' comments which were included in the article to highlight the dangers implicit in this idea. In this way, better responses used thoughtful inferences drawn from the passage rather than making straightforward expressions of opinion or preference.

This kind of consistently evaluative approach to the material in the passage was required for marks in Band 2 and above. A mark of 7 was given where there were glimpses of evaluation, often a comment on the dangers and risks inherent in the scheme, but a more consistently critical stance was required for higher marks. Where responses reproduced the points made in the passage with limited comment on it or discussion of the ideas in it, Examiners could not award marks above Band 3.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 3 where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above. Responses at this level showed a sensible understanding of the specific claims made in the passage about Home-from-Home Holidays and some of the drawbacks as described by the forum-users. Responses tended to list the reasons why the scheme was good, usually in the sequence in which they appeared in the passage. In this Band, there was also comment on factors such as the low financial cost of the scheme and the idea that the 'planned schedule' offered by the host may be more interesting and authentic than excursions offered by hotels/travel companies. Also, responses made valid comments about the idea of being a tour guide, such as the fact that they felt equal to the task because of their local knowledge, despite lack of 'formal qualifications'. Some middle band candidates made brief comments about the idea that strangers would be living in Vincent's house, but did not explore the implication of this in much detail; these remarks were not really evaluative at this level and could not be credited as such by Examiners. While such arguments were a valid response to the task, they did not make use of the implications and inferences that better responses could tease out of the passage. Examiners could award a mark of 6 where there was straightforward but wide-ranging coverage of the points in the passage but responses with more limited selection could be given 5 marks.

Weaker responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passage or addressed the material thinly. Some were hampered by a misreading of the task and the voice required, often not addressing Vincent or not understanding their potential role as a guide. Some weak responses misunderstood the idea of swapping homes and Home-from-Home Holidays was seen rather as another travel company who provided the traveller with activities and tour guides, rather than the hosts themselves being responsible for this. Another common misunderstanding was that the home would be 'rented' out in the manner of a holiday let, thereby earning Vincent money, rather than the 'modest fee' being charged by the company for their 'matching' service. In some cases the idea of joining the scheme was equated by candidates to running their own business. Another misconception evident occasionally was that Vincent had asked his cousin to travel with him, rather than become a tour guide. Where a mark of 4 was awarded, some firmer links with the passage were needed, whereas 3 was generally given for very thin or brief responses in which such misreadings appeared. Marks below 3 were rarely given but in these cases the response was often a general commentary on foreign holidays with very little connection with the passage.

### **Marks for writing**

#### **Style and audience**

An informal but apt tone was required for a letter of this kind and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. Some high scoring responses combined a familiar tone.

In the middle range, the style was often appropriate although there were sometimes lapses in candidates' awareness of the intended audience. Letters sometimes started informally but ended with 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully', showing some insecure understanding of the appropriate style for the task.

Weaker responses sometimes did not address the right recipient or there was little adaptation of the style and tone of the passage for a different audience and purpose. Valedictions were often missed at this level.

#### **Structure**

Some accomplished responses, awarded high marks for writing, handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined into a persuasive overall argument which was clearly derived from the ideas in the passage but was not dependent on its structure and sequence. At the highest level, an overview of the issues involved was given rather than a list of the features of the Home-from-Home Holiday scheme.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the passage but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed to meet the demands of the task. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of the purpose of the letter. At the lower end of Band 3, responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passage whereas higher Band 3 responses usually organised and re-sequenced ideas more selectively.

Some weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were less coherent in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the points in the passage but without the re-ordering of them which was needed to give the letter a sense of purpose and audience. These responses showed a lack of awareness of the conventional structure of a letter.

## Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 1. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. While these responses were friendly and informal in tone, the range and precision of vocabulary used allowed for some quite complex arguments about trust and safety to be made with clarity and style.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. Although the style was usually appropriate, a range of quite basic errors was made which marred the overall impression given. The nature and focus of the task exposed many simple grammatical errors, such as the very frequent use of 'could of' and 'would of' and the confusion of 'your' with 'you're'. The use of capital letters where they were not needed, even where there was otherwise general accuracy in the writing, was also noted by Examiners. Apostrophes were very often not used appropriately and sentence demarcation by commas rather than full stops began to creep in at the lower end of Band 3. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in many responses. These included words used in the passage such as 'experience' and 'accommodation' and frequent errors with homophones and grammar errors such as 'you was' and 'we was'. These errors, particularly in grammatical agreement created a jarring note sometimes in responses which were otherwise accurate and appropriate in style.

While some of these minor errors could be compensated for by secure sense of audience or a varied vocabulary, faulty sentence structures often kept writing marks for **Question 1** in Band 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Band 3 where mostly correctly structured sentences are required. Persistent 'comma-splicing' was perhaps the most common reason Examiners were unable to award clear, coherent responses marks in Band 3. Some whole paragraphs were actually strings of simple sentences with commas rather than full stops to separate them.

### Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Be prepared to criticise or question the ideas in the passage.
- Look for, and use in your response, inferences made indirectly by the writer.
- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.
- Be aware of the audience for your writing and adapt your style accordingly. Think carefully about the kind of style the recipient of your letter would expect.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops, missing or wrongly used capital letters, weaknesses in grammar or key words mis-spelt.

## Section 2: Composition

### Descriptive Writing

**2 Describe an area that was once beautiful but is now spoilt.**

OR

**3 Impressions of people can change over time. Describe your first impressions of someone you now know well.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range although the first question was more often chosen. In the first task, there were some strongly evocative descriptions of places of all types. In the second question, some candidates found the description of character quite difficult although some recreated their first impressions of a friend or family member with real effectiveness.

Generally, the best responses included some combination of physical description alongside some description of the narrator's thoughts and feelings. Some responses became narratives or contained limited descriptive detail or only rather mundane details. Responses to the second question were also sometimes discursive rather than descriptive in focus, where some general commentary about the nature of friendship or the dangers of pre-judging people were offered rather than detailed observation.

The places described in the first descriptive task were, in the best responses, areas which had some personal meaning for the writer, often infusing the writing with a deep sense of nostalgia and regret for its loss. Many different areas were chosen, such as parks, beaches, schools and cities or towns in general. Some responses explored how scenes had changed after a long absence, whereas others described the scene after a destructive event had taken place, such as a war, a flood or a hurricane. Many candidates were able to evoke scenes with varying degrees of clarity by appropriate choice of the specific details which had been spoiled. Generally, the approach taken was to describe the scene as it was in the past, and then to describe the scene as it now appeared. Responses which referred back to details which had already been described were effective in suggesting the changes which had taken place between past and present. For example, details such as the rusting of colourful playground equipment which had previously caused much enjoyment for the narrator were explored. Even more effective was the juxtaposition of details from past and present throughout the response, interweaving images which allowed a more dramatic contrast between past and present. Another effective approach was to foreground the present, leading to memories of how the scene used to be and consequent feelings such as nostalgia, regret or outrage.

Middle range responses to this question were characterised by more straightforward, often more physical descriptions of places. There was some clear descriptive detail although the way in which it was organised was less varied and the approach more repetitive. Each detail was described with some attempt to show its significance for the narrator although with less subtlety and effectiveness overall. In many cases, the same details which were beautiful in the opening section were described again in the second section and in some cases this became something of a predictable list although still descriptive in focus. Occasionally descriptions were vague and general, or rather hyperbolic, when responses lamented the loss of a beautiful place rather than describing specific details.

Weaker responses were often characterised by over-long narrative preambles explaining the significance of the place without describing it. Narrative accounts of how the place came to be spoiled tended to overwhelm the description.

For the second question, the best responses often included particular moments where the impressions of an individual changed but the piece as a whole was sustained and focused on the qualities of the person described and their impact on the narrator. The reasons for the change in impressions was usually not dwelt on but often in better responses was brought about by closer friendship or in some cases by falling in love with the character or falling out of love with him or her. The structure implied by the wording of the question was adopted sensibly in higher level responses, so that there was a clear picture of the narrator's impressions at different points in time.

Responses given marks in the middle range were more straightforward in their approach to the task, including some rather more general qualities and attributes for the person described. The quality and effectiveness of the writing varied but the structure of many average pieces relied on this straightforward approach. Examiners were often able to reward some description even where the overall structure and focus was more discursive or narrative.

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus, where there was limited organisation of the details described or where strings of details were listed rather than described. Here, the purpose and intention of the writing was not primarily descriptive. The story of the development of a relationship between the narrator and a friend was a common approach at this level and in some Band 4 responses this focus dominated at the expense of description. In some at the top of the Band, some general impression of the character was given but with limited detail or elements which brought the character to life for the reader.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were sometimes lower than those for Content and Structure, even in some original and interesting responses. In the best responses, precise and varied vocabulary and controlled complex sentences with secure punctuation within and between sentences were used. Images, words and phrases were employed to create specific effects and to bring the scene or character alive or the reader. In weaker responses, as is often the case in descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences, and incomplete or verbless sentences were common, even in scripts where responses to **Question 1** showed a secure grasp of sentence structure.

#### **Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved**

- Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content.
- Remember the key features of descriptive writing and keep your focus on details.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Choose your vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects.

#### **Narrative Writing**

**4 Write a story in which the main character feels they do not fit in.**

**OR**

**5 Write a story that begins, 'She watched them leave and realised she could be there for a long time ...'**

Both narrative questions proved popular choices and marks were awarded across the range for both. The first question elicited some engaging stories, often written in the first person, which included some careful characterisation and setting. By far the most common theme was anxiety about fitting in after moving to a new school in a rural area to a big city or country due to parents relocating for work. Typically, the narrative focused on initial anxiety, alienation or excitement and then explored what the first day at the new school was like, followed by an exploration of how things did not improve, or went downhill. Another approach was a reflective approach in which the narrator looked back over their life and wondered why they had never felt like they fitted in at any point, taking each stage chronologically. Such responses could become rather repetitive, with repeated assertions by the narrator that they cannot, and will never, fit in.

Narratives which dealt with a specific scenario in more detail, e.g. the first day at a new school or a typical day at school for the narrator, were more effective than general reflections about not fitting in and allowed more scope for development. Stronger responses used features such as metaphors or description of surroundings to explore the character's feelings of alienation. In these better responses there was a clear resolution to the narrative as well as some control of tension and suspense to shape the reader's reactions.

Middle range stories were characteristically straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases, although the characterisation was effective and credible, the piece overall lacked narrative progression and drive. One feature noticed by Examiners was the tendency to evoke quite convincingly the state of mind of the character but without a real story. These responses were effective descriptions but little happened to the characters and there was no real plot of narrative cohesion.

Weaker responses tended to involve less well drawn characters as well as some simple ideas, usually about friendship groups and how these were affected by new people or new influences on old friends. These responses often relied too heavily on dialogue without narration and the plotlines were simple, linear accounts with less awareness of the needs of the reader shown.

For the second narrative question, the variety of topics covered was very wide with varying success and credibility in the inclusion of the title phrase. Typical scenarios for this question involved the main character/narrator being left by family at a boarding school, or a character being locked up in prison or, in some cases, a psychiatric hospital, the best were those which had a ring of authenticity about them and the build-up or preparation was crucial in creating a believable and effective narrative. Better responses focused attention on characterisation and setting before the moment in the first line happened but were also able to conclude the story from that moment forward. This control of chronology required some skill in story-telling which was often evident in good responses.

Average and weaker responses were characterised by less effective, more contrived endings or by less control over the chronology. Responses given marks in Band 4 were particularly dominated by events, some of them rather unlikely, while Band 5 marks usually reflected very brief accounts with very little to engage the reader in terms of characters and setting. Some stories became a series of events which did not really cohere and some scenarios lacked credibility and in a few cases there was little sequencing or clarity overall. High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was lively and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects.

Punctuation within sentences, in dialogue and for effect was characteristic of responses in the higher Bands and where coupled with a sophisticated palette of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. For 10 and above, a degree of fluency was needed as well as a clarity and accuracy of style, although for 10 there was not the range and sophistication of style and vocabulary.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, if persistent, limited even competently told stories to Band 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. In many scripts, the punctuation of direct speech was insecure, even when the story itself was quite well-structured. Again, basic punctuation errors with misused or omitted capital letters, the mis-spelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes so frequent as to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 3 and even where candidates wrote in a fairly pedestrian style but punctuated sentences accurately, Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were still errors but the style had more ambition and variety, a mark of 9 was awarded. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 3. A few responses were very brief and faulty in style, making it difficult to follow the meaning. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:**

- Plan how to resolve your story in an interesting way before you start writing.
- Think about how to create tension and a climax in your story
- Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader.
- Check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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**Paper 0500/33**  
**Directed Writing and Composition**

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively, keeping the reader in mind
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct sentences accurately and vary sentence types to create specific effects
- select appropriate and wide-ranging vocabulary and use language with precision.

## General comments

The great majority of responses showed confident awareness of what was expected in both the Directed Writing and Composition sections of the paper. There were very few responses which were unacceptably brief or undeveloped, and rubric infringements where more than the required number of questions were attempted were rare, with one question from each composition genre occasionally being seen. A few scripts had only the composition question attempted, perhaps showing some uncertainty about how to use the passage in a response.

At all levels of achievement, clear understanding was shown of the reading material and the task in **Question 1**, and responses usually demonstrated strong engagement with the topic, while paying appropriate attention to the style and format of a letter. Many excellent answers, which interrogated the advantages and disadvantages proposed or suggested in the reading material about Workplace Choirs, showed an impressively mature and sophisticated knowledge and awareness of the rights and relationships within a workplace and the possibilities of exploitation for the employer's ends. Some strong responses enthusiastically supported the proposed involvement in the reality TV show, but were still able to develop their views in a suitably evaluative manner.

At all levels of achievement, the proposal was supported—albeit with reservations—more often than it was simply opposed. The direction in the question that there should be an explanation of how the concerns of the staff might be overcome resulted, at higher levels of achievement, in significant developments of the evaluation which had gone before; elsewhere, simple solutions were offered which were not firmly grounded in the text. The best responses combined an assured grasp of the content and attitudes of the material with an independence of thought reflected in the structure of their writing: rather than a methodical consideration of the points in the same sequence as the original. They were evaluative of the whole thrust of the discussion from the outset, selecting and commenting on its details to support their views and aware of the sceptical attitude of the speaker in the text.

In the middle Bands, responses often simply presented the case both for and against the proposal, then gave their conclusion in a final paragraph the tone of which was often at variance with what had gone before. Although, even at the lower levels of achievement, there was very little simple reproduction of the material, many responses made one or two valid points but showed such limited coverage of the material that Examiners could not award marks in Band 2.

Almost all responses paid attention to the audience and style required for a letter to an employer; most were persuasive in purpose, using the passage to create and structure arguments with some sense of audience and rhetoric. Occasionally, style and language were inappropriately casual, or the response was not written in the voice of an employee of the firm, or referred to Mr Hsu in the third person.



In **Section 2**, there was usually a clear awareness of the differing requirements of the two genres. The best responses were typified by careful planning and structuring, a wide-ranging and precisely employed vocabulary, and a high level of technical accuracy. **Question 2** evoked many excellent descriptive pieces but some narrative framework for the purposes of cohesion was more apparent than in responses to **Question 3**, where conscious crafting for effect which did not drift into narrative, was more often seen. Weaker responses to both questions in the descriptive genre were typically dominated by simple, sequential narrative and limited vocabulary.

Strong responses to **Questions 4** and **5** frequently engaged the reader's interest from the beginning, and also provided a satisfactory and believable resolution to the story. Too many responses to **Question 4**, however, failed to utilise effectively the opening sentence supplied in the task, adding it on to their stories in an unbelievable or inappropriate manner, and sometimes forgetting it completely after the first paragraph. In **Question 5**, 'someone losing their way' was treated in a metaphorical sense as often as a realistic one, both approaches producing excellent narratives. In the middle Bands of narrative responses, often well-written stories were let down by weak unconvincing endings: there needs to be more awareness of the distinctive requirements of the genre in this respect. A small number of engaging and promising narratives stopped very abruptly without any meaningful conclusion.

Weaker responses in both **Section 1** and **Section 2** sometimes struggled to find the correct register and tone for their intended audience, and were marred by the frequency of basic errors in punctuation and syntax. The use of commas where full stops or semi-colons were required and uncertain control of tense were evident at varying levels of achievement, and there appeared to be a considerable number of compositions which were unparagraphed, especially in the setting out of dialogue.

### Comments on Specific Questions

#### **Section 1: Directed Writing**

**Imagine that you work for a traditional, family run business. The owner, Mr Hsu, is keen on taking part in the next series of Workplace Choirs. Not all of the 45 staff are happy about the idea.**

**Mr Hsu has asked you to give your honest opinion on whether the business should take part or not.**

**Write a letter offering your opinion and advice.**

**In your letter you should:**

- **Evaluate the benefits and problems for the business if it takes part**
- **Explain the concerns staff may have about taking part and how these concerns may be overcome.**

**Begin your letter, 'Dear Mr Hsu, taking part in this TV show could be ...'**

High marks were awarded where the views expressed in the article were subjected to rigorous examination and there was an overview of the benefits and problems for the business of taking part in the TV show, rather than a straightforward listing of the points made in the text; where the style of the response was both appropriate and displayed a high level of accuracy, and points were selected to support views in a cohesive and balanced argument, Examiners could award very high marks indeed. Here the letter format was followed at the beginning and end of the response and the mode of address was consistently appropriate; the underlying assumptions and implications of the speaker in the text were recognised, and more contentious claims from various sources were scrutinised and challenged.

Marks in Band 3 were awarded when reasonable understanding of the issues was shown, albeit while accepting claims at face value, and some points were subjected to more extended discussion and development. Responses here were typified by often enthusiastic support for the benefits of choirs in the workplace and anxious concern about the effects on the workforce of endless rehearsals and shift-changes: Mr Hsu was then invited to make his own decision.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the main issues although there was also some misreading. Very thin use of the detail and weakness in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level.

## The marks for reading

The best responses were evaluative throughout, commanding the issues from the beginning, and demonstrating the ability to assess objectively the views expressed in the article and adopt a wider view. These respondents often showed a remarkable ability to write in the voice of an adult, long-serving employee of Mr Hsu, and an understanding of the pressures such a venture would place on employer and staff alike: 'Mr Hsu, while participation in Workplace Choirs would undoubtedly offer many benefits, both social and physical, to our staff, the cost in reduced productivity, employee exhaustion and increased interdepartmental conflict could be inexcusably high for our small firm.'

Better responses seized upon the important clue in the question that this was a 'traditional, family-run business' with 45 employees not all of whom were happy about the idea of taking part: the impact of many aspects of the long-drawn out procedure would be greater on a small firm than a large one such as the 'retail giant' referenced in the article which had won the last series. In responses which took note of the relatively small size of the business and the number needed to make up a choir, the difficulty of choir practice and keeping the business running productively with an exhausted work force was pointed out. These responses also challenged the necessity for bonding and teamwork in a small family run business, often extending their opinion to state that the bickering and rivalry induced by a competition and encouraged by a production team could destroy workplace relationships. Personal reputation and business reputation were popular areas of discussion, with one response going as far as suggesting that choir members should sign a non-disclosure agreement before filming began.

Some noted that the choir would feel proud to represent the business and this would promote a sense of loyalty, which would prevent bickering and any production team's effort to misrepresent the business. In one response Mr Hsu was warned that in his apparent eagerness for team work and working with staff from different levels of the business, the disruption of the customary hierarchy might lose him the respect of his employees in the process. The issue of reputation, both of the firm and of individuals, was discussed at several levels of achievement. There was often a sophisticated awareness of the exploitative nature of reality television, and the possible devastation of organisations and individuals when the media circus had moved on. Sometimes, in otherwise well-argued pieces, the sense of audience faltered when the possible loss of employees to careers in show-business was offered as a benefit for the firm.

Marks in Band 2 were awarded when there was more than simple agreement or disagreement with the claims and reservations expressed in the article. In responses at all levels the incongruity of the vaunted inclusivity of the recruitment poster: 'Anyone can join' alongside a requirement that employees must undergo auditions, failure at which could be distressing, was noticed; although variously well-developed, the point about pressure being put upon unwilling staff members to enter the competition to satisfy the employer's desires for fame and free advertising was held up to scrutiny. Balanced argument sometimes offered the point that while success in the competition could increase the firm's reputation and market share, failure and ignominy would have just the opposite effect. Responses often began by reproducing and agreeing with both the claimed benefits and the expressed reservations, but went on to offer a more balanced evaluation which considered the damage to leisure time and family life, while recognising the increased job security that the firm's possible expansion, consequent upon success in the competition, could provide. In this range there was sometimes seen an ability to discuss the fairness or otherwise of employers' expectations, making appropriate distinctions between rights and responsibilities.

Marks in Band 3 were awarded where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the reading material but less recognition of implicit meanings or faulty or illogical reasoning. A mark of 6 could be given where the key points were reproduced with some appropriate development, such as the intrusion into family life or leisure time of being 'rehearsed mercilessly'. Where there was clear understanding of the main thrust of the debate but only a very limited selection of points discussed a mark of 5 was given. The typical pattern of the responses awarded a mark of 5 or 6 was to offer a few advantages and disadvantages of workplace choirs without much exploration of the issues, often concluding with a simple injunction such as 'Go for it!'

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 where there was some misunderstanding of the main thrust of the article – although this was quite rare – or a lack of focus on the reading material, or overlong anecdotes which failed to express a clear view on the topic. Firmer links with the material and a wider range of points could be awarded a mark of 4, but where coverage of the material was very flimsy a mark of 3 was more appropriate. A few responses did not mention choirs at all but were largely diatribes about the evils of reality television or the exploitation of workers. Only a very few responses were given marks below 3, which were applied when very little had been written and connection with the text and task was only peripheral.

## Marks for writing

15 marks were available for style and a sense of audience, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

### Style and audience

An appropriately formal tone and style of address was required for a letter to an employer, and most candidates achieved this. Almost all candidates began with the provided salutation and concluded with an appropriate valediction.

The best responses demonstrated considerable authority and confidence. The great majority were written in the required voice of an employee of the firm: a very small number adopted another persona, such as that of a member of staff from a firm previously involved in the competition, although this did not necessarily detract from the value or quality of the evaluation within. The most accomplished, evaluative responses demonstrated their stance from the start, the direction the argument would take being immediately signalled.

In the middle to lower mark range, responses were usually appropriate in tone and form, but they often followed and reproduced the wording of the passage quite closely; while there was very little wholesale copying of clauses or sentences from the material, close paraphrase was often seen. In weaker responses the relationship with the addressee was sometimes forgotten, and the letter concluded 'Love from ...', or the valediction was omitted.

### Structure

The most successful responses framed their arguments in a coherent, cohesive response, prioritising their points in a fluent and authoritative manner independent of the order and structure of the passage. Ideas were supported with cogent detail, and often showed a sophisticated, wide-ranging awareness of the commercial and social implications of entry into the competition. Responses in Band 2 were clear in their stance, and supported their argument with carefully selected points leading to a lucid conclusion.

In the middle range, there was often an attempt to order the response to support the thesis, but a majority followed the structure of the article and the bullet points in a straightforward manner, sometimes at the expense of their argument. Marks at the lower end of Band 3 were awarded when there was a simple reproduction of the points either in the order of the passage, or in consecutive summaries of the vaunted benefits and feared disadvantages of entering the process of becoming a workplace choir in the reality show, the two opposing views being followed by a brief paragraph or concluding sentence which stated a personal view or gave advice in a simple manner, or asked for consideration and a reply. At this level too, responses sometimes showed a clear relationship to the passage but consisted only of disconnected points about choirs or reality television. Responses given marks below Band 3 were sometimes only partly relevant to the task or were comprised of only a couple of confused or contradictory remarks or of largely copied material.

### Accuracy

Responses in Band 1 combined a fluent and authoritative style, typified by sophisticated, precisely employed vocabulary and a wide range of sentence structures, with a very high level of technical accuracy. An impressive number gained high marks for this element. Responses given 8 or 9 were often clearly and competently written, but their vocabulary lacked ambition and indeed would often have been deemed quite limited had it not included many words from the passage. What was evident was the frequent and widespread incidence of errors of sentence separation, the misuse of commas being the major fault at the lower end in this band. This, and a lack of paragraphing, often restricted the writing mark to a Band below that awarded for reading. Two types of writing typified responses awarded marks in Band 4 and below: the first, more common one lacked any evidence of controlled shaping, and simply followed the patterns of speech. The second type was often characterised by secure spelling and quite ambitious vocabulary, but marred by serious structural faults in sentences and syntax, errors of agreement and tense, and an uncertain use of prepositions. Here, articles were sometimes omitted or 'the' was used rather than 'a' or 'an'. Meaning was sometimes blurred by the levels of error.

### Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Consider the underlying attitudes of the speaker/s in the passage as well as those explicitly expressed, and how those affect their opinions.
- Try to identify the key arguments in the passage.

- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well as some depth in evaluating them.
- Be prepared to challenge the views expressed in the passage.
- Be aware of the audience for your writing and adapt your style accordingly. Think carefully for example about the correct style for a letter, an article or a speech.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops and capital letters.
- Check your spelling, especially of key words from the passage.

## Section 2: Composition

### Descriptive Writing

**2 Imagine you are just about to face a major challenge. Describe your thoughts and feelings as you begin.**

OR

**3 Describe the atmosphere and your thoughts and feelings at the end of a final performance.**

This genre was chosen across the range of abilities, with both choices being equally popular. At all levels of achievement many felt it necessary to provide some context for the required scene, weaker responses, especially to **Question 2**, sometimes developing their writing too far along the path of narrative, thus forgetting the requirements and intent of this type of writing. Stronger responses framed their descriptions in a much more controlled manner, providing just enough context to introduce their writing and to provide cohesion, but the most successful responses to both questions involved the reader immediately in the designated situation. In the middle range some responses were more narrative in manner than is usually desirable for this genre, but included much vivid detail and developed images.

**Question 2's** 'major challenge' was interpreted in many ways including high dives, parachute and bungee jumps and talent competitions, but the most frequently described situation was preparing to sit for an examination, upon the result of which often depended the writer's future career in education. Interpreting familiar situations with surprising variety and ingenuity however, the best of these responses avoided both the familiar cliché and over-exaggeration seen elsewhere, but were typified by an emerging picture of almost paralysing tension and fervent hope. Almost without exception, the responses awarded marks at the top of Band 1 employed an extremely restricted time scheme, focusing on the last moments of preparation to face the challenge; within those moments however skilful flashback often provided the context from which the hopes and fears derived.

Responses given marks in the middle Bands approached the task more straightforwardly, with varying degrees of accomplishment. These more usually employed an extensive degree of narrative, and a tendency to over-exaggeration or to the employment of confused metaphors. Many responses which described situations with which they were familiar, such as examinations, theme park rides or representing their school in a race were able to create, albeit with rather workaday images and ideas, the 'impression of reality' required for marks in Band 2. There were, at this level, many effective pieces which demonstrated a grasp of the intent and requirements of the genre. In some of these, there were touching evocations of the families whose hopes and expectations were very much part of the challenge. There were some engaging pieces awarded marks in Band 3, but often a higher mark was precluded by a certain lack of clarity in the picture created. At the lower end of the Band and below it, the writing often became driven by narrative, even though some relevant descriptive details were included.

Examiners gave marks in Band 4 where responses were entirely narrative in focus rather than descriptive, or where details were scarce or ineffective. There were very few responses awarded marks below Band 4: these usually lacked coherence or awareness of what constitutes descriptive writing.

The second option was equally popular, and elicited responses across the mark range, including some of the strongest responses in the descriptive genre. Here was found far less dominance by narrative than in **Question 2**, or overly elaborate backstories. The 'final performances' were mostly instrumental, dramatic or of solo ballet dances, and across the levels of achievement a striking degree of verisimilitude was created. Responses awarded marks at the top of Band 1 were richly descriptive and conveyed a remarkable, euphoric intensity of experience. Some images, of blinding spotlights, obscured audiences, tenebrous stage areas and dusty stage curtains recurred in many responses but usually were skilfully drawn enough to avoid cliché: many well-developed tactile and aural images convincingly recreated the isolation of the performer in the drawn-out moments between the final step or note and the response of the often-unseen audience. The

evocation of external reality in these strong responses often took second place to the internal drama experienced by the performer. Some most effective responses never revealed the nature of the performance, focusing entirely on the emotions of finishing it.

In Band 2 there was an occasional tendency to extend the description to the anti-climax of the later evening, or the celebrations of the cast party, undermining the effect of the whole. In this range, descriptions were often interesting and created a feeling of reality. The exultant reaction of the narrator to the audience's praise and applause was frequently effectively conveyed, although sometimes the experience was belied by inadequate vocabulary, with too much dependence on non-specific adjectives such as 'fantastic', 'amazing', 'unbelievable' and 'unreal'.

At the lower end of the range lengthy narrative passages sometimes intruded, recounting every detail of the performance, and were often typified by weaker vocabulary such as 'scary' or 'humungous'. Common also in this range was weakness in concluding the description: while some wisely left the reader with the exultation of success, or some reflection on the lessons of the experience, others tailed away with plans to get home, to meet the family, or simply stopped. Responses given marks below Band 3 were often simple accounts, narrative in intent, with little descriptive detail or evocation of feeling or atmosphere.

Marks in the top Band for style and accuracy were awarded to those responses the writing of which not only demonstrated a wide-ranging and ambitious vocabulary in the creation of images and effects but was also controlled and crafted to produce a harmonious whole virtually free of error. In the middle ranges, vocabulary was plainer or less-precisely applied, and images less striking. Weaker responses were sometimes limited to unelaborated accounts of supposedly personal experience, especially in response to the first of the two questions.

#### **Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:**

- Remember the key requirements of descriptive writing: you are not writing a story.
- Try to be original, in both the scenarios and the images you create.
- Make deliberate choices in your vocabulary to create atmosphere.
- Write complete sentences with proper verbs: the same rules of grammar apply to all types of writing.
- Remember that the majority of available marks – 15 – are awarded for style and accuracy.
- Be prepared to describe thought and emotion as well as what can be seen and heard.

#### **Narrative writing**

**4 Write a story that begins, 'The figure moved swiftly and noiselessly, as if not wanting to be observed....'**

**OR**

**5 Write a story which involves someone losing their way.**

Narrative writing was the choice of almost two thirds of the candidature, with both options almost equally popular. Marks across the range were awarded to responses to both questions. Examiners were able to award marks at the top of Band 1 in a number of cases, but at all levels of achievement engagement with the tasks was evident, with both titles eliciting some lively and often intriguing narratives. Responses to both titles included interesting descriptive detail, which enhanced the narratives. The difficulty evident in many responses of creating satisfactory conclusions to the stories was noted, underlining the need to have the end of the story in mind in the process of writing it.

Responses to the first of the narrative options employed a wide variety of interpretations of who or what the 'figure' was, and metaphorical, supernatural or symbolic approaches were as frequently found as realistic ones: very often the figure was a stalker, burglar, hired assassin or other with criminal intent, especially in the middle and lower ranges, although a few very entertaining and well-plotted 'heist' narratives were awarded much higher marks. In the middle ranges too were found a considerable number of long-lost fathers coming to claim their offspring, and also the planners of surprise birthday parties. Responses awarded marks in Band 1 employed some most original and ingenious interpretations in engaging and well-plotted narratives.

Narratives displayed a very wide variety of subject matter, although the popular crime stories were inclined to be over-packed with event and lacking in effective characterisation. Sometimes in the middle and lower ranges the given introduction maintained only the most tenuous connection with what followed it; occasionally none at all could be found. Across the range of achievement were found stories in the style of

fable or folklore; occasionally these were most imaginative and engaging, but those awarded marks at the lower end of Band 3 or in Band 4 did not present emblematic figures or settings in such a way as to engage or convince the reader.

In the middle ranges were many clear and competently told stories. These often had original concepts and engaging characters which might have qualified their narratives for inclusion in the top Band of marks, but these were frequently let down by precipitate or ill-planned and unconvincing endings. In this range too candidates often spent too long on preambles to the main story and then finished hurriedly. Included in these were 'ghost-busting' tales of pursuit of the figure through endless streets and strange buildings to which the youthful protagonists had apparently unfettered access. Responses given marks below Band 3 tended to be undistinguished series of events without any effective characterisation or convincing detail, weaker examples sometimes limiting their settings to the identification of a location.

The second narrative question was equally popular, and elicited a very wide range of subject material. 'Losing their way' was often literal, the characters involved in some camping trip which went wrong or wandering round a strange city. In the lower ranges these picaresque adventures petered out very quickly because the characters had no substance and there was no climax to the narrative other than finding their way back to a familiar place.

In the middle ranges there were very many 'life stories' in which young people lost direction—usually through no fault of their own—and turned to crime, drink or drugs before 'seeing the light' and finding their way back. A significant number of these were typified by a lack of any narrative drive or shaping other than the chronological, despite recounting horrific or spectacular events. Very many of these read like a section of biography or a curriculum vitae, and were quite uninvolved, without climax or resolution in the narrative sense, or characterisation beyond the things the characters did. Some stories of quite close focus and effective narrative drive could have achieved marks in the top band but for a failure to supply a satisfactory ending. There were also many action tales and police chases, variously convincing, in which a loss of literal direction was a plot feature. These were often fast-paced and exciting, sometimes using flashback to contextualise the events, but usually had too many events, twists and turns packed in to the narrative for any to be satisfactorily developed. Sometimes the narrative drifted over lengthy periods of time then ended abruptly. In a number of responses at the lower end of Band 3 little happened other than the protagonist(s) getting lost and then finding their way home again.

Responses below Band 3 were usually simple series of events undifferentiated in importance and were often packed with unlikely combinations of events and characters. The weakest responses were usually very brief or aimless, offering little to engage the reader.

Examiners were able to award high marks for style and accuracy to many candidates whose vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and effective, and whose writing was free of repeated error. In the top bands syntax and sentence structure were often effectively manipulated for effect, especially in the creation of narrative tension. Marks in Band 4 were given when writing was marred by misuse of commas, weak punctuation, and faults in tense control and agreement. The frequent misuse or omission of capital letters inevitably reduced the marks given for otherwise sound writing. Occasionally only a mark in Band 5 could be awarded because serious errors in sentence structure and syntax impeded communication.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives could be improved:**

- Plan your story so that you do not run out of ideas for the plot, and you can bring it to an interesting conclusion.
- Remember that you can use your own interpretation of the titles.
- Make your story believable by creating realistic characters and settings.
- Leave some time to check through your work for errors which will seriously affect your mark, such as basic errors in spelling, capital letters and punctuation.