

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/01

Passages for Comment

General comments

Candidates in this session produced some creditable work and the paper offered a clear sense of differentiation. Analyses, at the higher end of the range, offered some thoughtful and detailed understanding, especially where comments on specific words and phrases and their connotations were engaged with. At the lower end of the range, a number of candidates resorted to feature spotting or focusing on matters such as the number of commas or full-stops in the passage. Directed writing tasks produced some highly effective responses across all three questions of this type. Less successful approaches were let down by technical inaccuracies and a less secure command of the language necessary at this level. Indeed, Centres should note that the standard required at this level assumes that candidates have a strong degree of accuracy not only in terms of selecting appropriate registers but also in terms of grammatical and syntactical fluency. Markers were disappointed at times by the amount of inaccurate work they were faced with: issues such as agreement of nouns and verbs, the accurate and sustained application of appropriate tenses and careful selection of sentence structures were matters that concerned them. The rubric of the questions seemed clear but a few candidates in the directed writing tasks rewrote a version of the original passages. Use of time was generally very good and few candidates ran out of time.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

- (a) Effective answers here focused on a serious and relevant topic and shaped the speech for an appropriate audience; they employed a wide range of rhetorical devices in a knowing way. Less effective responses tended to address a generalized audience without reference to a specific situation; they tended to use one or two rhetorical devices and repeated phrases from the original passage. Technical inaccuracies let some candidates down here and impeded understanding of the material.
- (b) There were some strong comparative responses here, especially where candidates not only explored the rhetorical devices in both passages but also the uses and effects of imagery and diction, some, for example, noting the uses of light and dark imagery in the set extract and in their own directed writing. Less successful answers tended to adopt no analytical method, relied on listing and labelling and seemed to use a pre-planned 'key terms' approach without adapting it to the context of the material.

Question 2

- (a) Effective answers grasped the humour and tone of the passage well, sensing the surreal qualities of the hotel and the puzzled reactions of the central character; they also explored the structure of the extract effectively. Such answers also engaged with the figurative language successfully and distinguished the writer's viewpoint; indeed, some even commented on the fact that the hotel, for all its apparent heavenly qualities, seemed to be a soulless fabrication. Some candidates picked up on subtle points such as the false and robotic nature of the employees. Less successful answers tended to identify the narrator with Henderson and produced literal and descriptive commentaries. Some candidates had been taught a sophisticated list of techniques and devices used by writers – such as anaphora and synaesthesia – but could not explain why these might make the writing effective.

- (b) There were some genuinely imaginative responses here, especially where candidates went beyond the original phrasing of the extract and selected their material carefully and precisely. There were many entertaining brochures created and the form was captured well. Less successful responses rewrote the material as a travel account, missing out the reference to potential customers, perhaps a reminder to candidates to keep a clear sense of the target audience in mind.

Question 3

- (a) This was generally well done by a large number of candidates who appreciated the subtle techniques and sympathetic writing. Many selected appropriate examples to support their analyses. The cultural references seemed to strike a chord with candidates and the emotional content of the passage seemed to offer an anchor too. Good answers built on this engagement and selected features of the writing which achieved the sensation of empathy and a re-creation of location. They also explored the change in tone in the second half of the passage well. Less engaged answers tended to write a paraphrase of the passage or a narrative commentary on it.
- (b) There were some very sensitive responses here with effective writing blending the mother's joy and her simultaneous concerns concisely and imaginatively. Less successful answers tended to omit the sense of 'concern' required and tended to borrow words and phrases from the passage to a large degree.

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Paper 8693/02
Composition

General comments

The paper this session attracted a wide range of ability and offered a strong sense of differentiation. Examiners noted that, whilst there were plenty of strong and imaginative responses, there were some candidates whose English language skills were not sufficient for the task in hand. They displayed so many technical errors – such as tense confusion, sentence structure and subject-verb agreement – that understanding of their essays was impeded and they struggled to produce effective and successful pieces of writing.

In a few cases some potentially strong candidates did not attain the highest marks because they produced short work. The rubric on the paper clearly states that candidates are required to produce responses between 600 to 900 words but some candidates seemed to ignore this: short answers are self-penalising and candidates who might have been destined for grades at the top of the range too often fell into the middle bands because of this practice. In general, most candidates managed their time effectively and rubric infringements were minimal except for the short work noted above.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

- 1 This was a popular and generally well-attempted question. Imaginative, whimsical and structured essays were produced with the best ones having a masterly control of cohesive use of detail between sunrise and sunset and fresh and startling use of imagery. They possessed a freshness about them that brought life to their selected locations. Some answers seemed over-written, relying a little too much on 'purple prose': others tended to focus on a narrative at the expense of description. Technical issues here tended to be centred on the inconsistent use of tenses, often in the same piece: this is an area where candidates lose marks and an area that could be worked on.
- 2 This was a less popular question. The best answers brought out clear contrasts between the two reactions. However, answers were sometimes quite predictable: a lot of former lovers were "bumped off" or there were disagreements over a visitor to the household. Yet the concept of revealing the reason for a course of action was quite well understood.
- 3 There was a varied range of good to competent answers here. Effective answers utilised the power of slow revelation and contained a light touch and dramatic use of sentence variation. They managed to bring out a sense of tension and suspense. Less engaged answers seemed happy to offer an outpouring of sorrow following an action which induced guilt such as flirting with a friend's partner. Moreover, the question clearly indicated that the narration should be first person but many candidates produced self-penalising work because they wrote in the third person. Examiners were concerned with the nature of some of the violent and sexual content of some of the essays.
- 4 This was a very popular choice and in general was answered well. There were many effective responses which combined description, setting and dialogue and an awareness of the genre skillfully. Such answers created a futuristic world, often marked by an air of loneliness, desolation and alienation, imaginatively and used sci-fi terminology skillfully. Some less effective answers tended to be too derivative of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* material.

Section B

- 5 The best answers here demonstrated an informed attempt to show an awareness of the complexities of Eastern and Western society and culture and how globalization made it necessary for mutual understanding to develop. They displayed awareness of political and economic issues and the primary drive for enlightened self-interest. Less engaged answers resorted to stereotyping or generalizing; others – instead of making reference to a historical event and using it to support an argument – lapsed into lengthy expositions on history.
- 6 This was covered well on the whole. Candidates were able to draw on their own knowledge and experiences and many offered up to date and informed examples and well-reasoned arguments. These outlined matters such as time wasting, obesity, sexual vulnerability, celebrity victimization, eating disorders and social isolation as the debit side of media and technology. Some good candidates even masqueraded as the mother or father complainant. Format and tone were usually appropriate for purpose and audience.
- 7 This was generally well-answered with most candidates having a reasonable range of ideas to offer. The most effective answers showed a mature knowledge of the world and of themselves. A number drew on their own cultural experiences and related their ideas to the areas in which they lived. However, some candidates, many of them quite capable ones, tended to produce some rather self-indulgent material which was creative/descriptive rather than discursive/argumentative, the focus of this section of the paper.
- 8 Most responses to this question were measured and interesting, particularly from Centres where students were aware of the continuing repression of women in certain areas. There were some very mature and incisive – even amusing – compositions. These tended to select historical examples and then use them as a foundation to explore contemporary progress on those issues. Less secure answers tended to offer less informed and more fanatical answers where the tone of voice was not always apposite for the task.