

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/11  
Reading Passages (Core)

## Key messages

- Candidates should read all questions carefully to ensure that their answers focus on the questions.
- In the sub-questions in **Question 1** where candidates are asked to answer in their own words, candidates should avoid lifting long phrases or whole sentences from the passage.
- Proof reading is essential. Marks were lost through avoidable mistakes which could have been corrected by candidates checking over their work.
- In **Question 1(d)**, candidates should avoid repeating the meanings of the underlined words in the second part of the question but should focus their response on describing the effect of the whole phrase.
- In **Question 2**, candidates should read the question carefully to ensure that they adopt the correct ‘voice’.
- In **Question 2**, candidates must remember to deal with all 3 bullet points attempting to develop the ideas in the passage, both factual and inferential. The key message here is to develop the details offered in the text for the third bullet point, using the passage to develop a plausible response.
- Candidates need to ensure that they are writing in the correct style and register for **Question 2**.
- Candidates should avoid copying from the passage in **Question 2**.
- In **Question 3(a)** candidates should only make one point on each line and avoid repeating similar points.

## General comments

Overall, the passages proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates and they responded positively to both passages and questions. Most candidates completed the paper in some detail and examiners reported seeing some high-quality responses to **Question 2**. It is clear that the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared for these questions and were confident in their approach.

Responses to the sub-questions in **Question 1** revealed that the main points in the passage had been clearly understood and many responded well to the more straightforward questions. The majority of candidates were familiar with the requirements of **Questions 3(a)** and **3(b)**. There was very little evidence of candidates not working within the paper time limit and few examples of No Response answers.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

- (a) Reread the second sentence (lines 1–3). Give one word that suggests Rio de Janeiro is an outstanding place to visit.

Most candidates identified either ‘paradise’, ‘wonder’, or ‘world-class’. A good number of candidates thought that ‘famous’ or ‘appeals’ was the correct answer. A few candidates did not gain a mark because they wrote ‘wonderful’ as opposed to ‘wonder’. Where a candidate did not get the mark for this question, they tended to write a full answer explaining what makes Rio de Janeiro an outstanding place to visit, often including one or all of the correct words, but not following the rubric of the question by identifying a single word.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain why the writer did not feel confident about hang-gliding (paragraph 2, 'Paulo was ...').**

Most candidates gained at least one mark here and many gained both marks available. The most common point identified was the writer having had no knowledge of hang-gliding. This was either explicitly stated or implied by it being his 'first time'. The fact that no-one else was hang-gliding that day was also identified.

- (c) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means when he says: 'I looked out over the ledge and saw nothing but a vast carpet of trees ...' (lines 12–13).**

To gain both marks for this question, candidates needed to explain two of the ideas in the given sentence: a sense of the great height, the huge scale of the area and/or the sense that the trees covered or blanketed the area. Some candidates merely repeated the phrase 'carpet of trees' in their answers or wrote about seeing 'lots of trees' without trying to explain the figurative idea of a massive covering from a great height.

- (d) **Give the meaning of the underlined words in the following three phrases as the writer uses them in the passage. Then explain how the phrases help you understand the conditions at the jump site.**

The new layout of **Question 1(d)** has led to more carefully structured answers from the majority of candidates and there were fewer examples of candidates simply repeating meanings when asked for an explanation of the whole phrase. Where candidates did not define the meaning of the individual word in the first part of the question, they were credited with it in the next part where appropriate.

- (d)(i) **'sheer' (line 16)**

Most candidates were able to explain the word 'sheer' as used in the context of the passage. Most offered the phrase 'steep drop' although 'steep' was also accepted. Others offered 'vertical' or a 'straight drop'. Some candidates thought that it simply signified height and did not score the mark.

- (d)(ii) **'This seemed pretty logical: just run and jump off a sheer cliff.' (lines 15–16)**

Quite a number of candidates recognised the sarcastic tone to the given quotation and explained that the writer did not mean that it was logical or easy, but rather that it was dangerous and foolhardy. Some interpreted it literally as something simple to achieve, not picking up on his anxiety about the hang-gliding, or the potential danger.

- (d)(iii) **'buffeted' (line 19)**

The word 'buffeted' caused problems for some candidates. A few did identify the forceful nature of the wind with its connotations of 'hitting' or 'pushing' them. A number of candidates provided answers here explaining the strength of the wind. A few candidates believed that the wind had given the narrator some food associating the word 'buffeted' with a 'buffet'.

- (d)(iv) **'A savage wind buffeted us.' (line 19)**

The references to the violent strength of the wind gained marks, here, as did the sense of danger and immense risk. Some candidates merely repeated their answers from the single word question or paraphrased the given quotation by lifting words from it, particularly the word 'savage'.

(d)(v) ‘perilous’ (lines 21-22)

‘Perilous’ was the least understood word of the three underlined words in this question. A few candidates did recognise it as being ‘dangerous’, but a number believed it meant ‘beautiful’ or had positive connotations. Candidates frequently tried to explain ‘abyss’ rather than the underlined word in this question.

(d)(vi) ‘I found myself on the ramp ready to hurl myself off into a perilous abyss’ (lines 21-22)

Answers which did focus on the endless or unknown nature of the abyss were rewarded here, and quite a number of candidates described the narrator’s uncertainty about what would happen when she/he jumped. Few candidates attempted to explain the effect of the word ‘hurl’. Some repeated their explanation of ‘perilous’.

(e) **Using your own words, explain why the writer asks himself: ‘Why are you doing this, you fool?’ (line 23).**

This question was answered well with many candidates recognising the narrator’s realisation about the predicament he finds himself in. Candidates expressed this in a variety of ways including his uncertainty, his regret, his stupidity, and his realisation of the risk / danger. A number of candidates only offered one point for this 2-mark question.

(f) **Reread paragraph 6 (‘To this day ...’). Using your own words, explain two things that the writer enjoys about his experience of hang-gliding.**

The majority of candidates were able to score two marks on this question although some responses simply lifted whole sentences from the passage and could therefore not be credited. Candidates are expected to make a genuine attempt to remodel the language used in ‘own words’ questions.

(g) **Reread paragraph 7 (‘Half an hour...’). Using your own words, explain what happened when the writer reaches the end of his hang-gliding trip.**

As with question 1f, this question was clearly understood and generally answered well and there was little copying in the responses. Most candidates scored 2 marks, explaining that the narrator was sad to land, that Paulo releases his/her legs and/or that he/she fell backwards. It’s worth noting that precision is important when answering this type of question. The narrator fell on her/his back not on ‘his neck’, or indeed, just ‘fell’.

## Question 2

Imagine you are Paulo, the guide in **Passage A**. The day after these events you write a letter to a friend describing your experience taking the writer on their hang-gliding trip.

### Write your letter.

In your letter you should comment on:

- the place where you take people hang-gliding
- your impression of the writer and what they thought about their hang-gliding experience
- what happened after you landed.

Base your responses on what you have read in Passage A, but do not copy from it. Be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.

Begin your letter: 'I had mixed feelings when I first set out on this tour ...'

Write about 200 to 300 words.

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 5 marks for the quality of your writing.**

For this task, the majority of candidates seemed to understand the need to address each of the bullet points given in the question and to give a credible account of Paulo's thoughts and feelings about the hang-gliding trip with the writer, both before and after the jump. The vast majority of candidates were comfortable writing a letter to a friend offering an appropriately warm and friendly register and tone. The most successful responses used the ideas and details in the passage to address and develop each of the 3 bullet points. They described the journey up the mountain and the position of the jump spot, offered their impressions of the writer's behaviour during and after the hang-gliding trip, and then described what happened after landing on the beach when they showed the writer their favourite spots in Rio. The ability to adapt the perspective from the writer's viewpoint to describe Paulo's impressions of the trip was a key differentiator in this question, as well as how carefully candidates looked for and used the details about the attractions in Rio to address bullet 3. A number of candidates did not read the question properly and wrote the letter as the writer; this tended to produce a more general narrative of the events of the passage without fully focusing on the three prompts given in the question rubric. This made the third bullet very challenging, but also meant that Paulo's viewpoint was not considered. A small minority of candidates merely copied extracts from the passage with very few own words or produced letters which were too close to the original passage.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three bullet points offering a balanced response to the whole task. Some, although they produced promising letters, only focused on the first two bullets in the question, simply addressing the third bullet point by describing landing on the beach and sometimes mentioning showing the writer 'his favourite parts of the city'. There was no attempt to use the details given earlier in the passage about Rio's attractions for tourists. These responses often gave convincing descriptions of the trip up the mountain and the view from the jump site, as well as the writer's lack of confidence after looking over the edge followed by his/her exhilaration during the flight and when landing. Many of the responses developed the ideas in the passage very effectively for these 2 bullets, building up a convincing relationship between Paulo and the writer. However, a significant number of candidates chose to largely ignore the third bullet point, only describing the landing rather than what happened *after* it. This meant that opportunities to develop ideas in the passage about what the writer may have seen and experienced in Rio were lost. Those responses which did address the third bullet wrote effectively about seeing the stunning harbour, attending a carnival, the beauty of the most popular beaches and seeing Paulo's favourite parts of the city (offering development by referring to restaurants and shops etc.).

To gain marks in Bands 1 and 2 for Reading it is essential that candidates develop ideas based on the passage rather than add their own imagined content. Very few responses wrote imagined responses, although there were a few candidates who ignored the hang-gliding trip completely and simply wrote about visiting a city. All development of the ideas in the passage should be firmly tethered to the details given resulting in feasible extension.

The best responses in terms of reading managed to develop all three bullet points using and building on the finer details in the passage. These responses firmly tethered any development to Paulo's experience as a hang-gliding instructor that day.

In terms of writing, many candidates wrote fluently using convincing vocabulary. Others were less convincing but sometimes expressed themselves clearly. The weakest responses were sometimes difficult to follow or relied very heavily on lifted material.

### Question 3

(a) **Notes**

**What do you learn about the appearance of flying squirrels and how they fly (or glide), according to Passage B?**

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

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer.**

This question asks candidates to respond by appropriate selection. It was generally answered well with many candidates making one point per line as instructed and focusing on the topic and the question. There were a small number of candidates who included several points on the same line thereby self-penalising. Sometimes candidates included more than 10 relevant points, but by putting them more than one point on each line gained fewer than 10 marks overall.

There were also some points repeated several times, most notably focused on the outstretched arms and legs or forming a flat surface by stretching their legs. There were a number of instances of the inclusion of irrelevant points that did not address the question, mostly concerned with flying squirrels' nesting materials or eating habits, or the fact that they are nocturnal. The question asked for points relating to their appearance or how they glide, though many candidates selected very generally without considering whether the question was being addressed. It is important that only relevant points are selected from the passage and that candidates focus carefully on the question.

(b) **Summary**

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the appearance of flying squirrels and how they fly (or glide).**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 150 words.**

**Up to 5 marks are available for the quality of your writing.**

A number of candidates were able to achieve Band 3 for clear, concise and fluent summaries mainly expressed in own words. Many candidates' responses were Band 2 (some concision but dependent on the words of the passage). Such responses often had lengthy sections that were irrelevant as they focused on the squirrels' feeding and nesting habits rather than addressing the question. Less successful responses tended to include lengthy lists, unnecessary details, repetition or unselective 'lifting'. Successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. The least successful responses copied unselectively.

Most candidates tried to write with some concision and to use their own words where possible. Stronger responses managed to reorganise points and to stay focused on the two aspects of the question, although a large number did include irrelevant material. Some responses started off well but then became less relevant by listing what flying squirrels like to eat, or the materials used to make their nests. A number of candidates lifted material selectively but comparatively few merely copied from the passage with no recasting. The most commonly lifted phrases were 'tail flips downwards', 'velvet soft fur ranged in colour', 'their tail is broad, flattened and fluffy' and 'large, black eyes dominate the head'. The best responses were organised, concise, with some own words and sustained focus.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/12  
Reading Passages (Core)

## Key messages

- Proof reading is essential. Marks were lost through avoidable mistakes which could have been corrected by candidates checking over their work.
- In **1(c)** candidates should remember that they cannot simply repeat the same word in their answer to the whole phrase that they used in the underlined word question but should elaborate on the definition given in the latter and focus their response on describing the effect of the whole quotation in relation to the question.
- Candidates must remember to deal with all 3 bullet points in **Question 2**, and attempt to develop ideas, both factual and inferential. The key message here is to go beyond the text for the third bullet point.
- Candidates need to ensure that they are writing in the correct register and format for question 2 and follow the bullet points to construct their response to the task. They also need to ensure that they pay attention to their spelling, punctuation and grammar to assist clarity.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) Reread the first sentence. Give two details that suggest there is a problem with the Renault car.

Most candidates gained at least one mark for this two-mark question. Those answers which focused on the Renault car being on the lorry and described it as looking sad or broken-down or in a bad way were awarded two marks. Candidates who simply lifted the whole sentence from the passage did not gain any marks although responses which were selectively lifted were rewarded, given that the question did not explicitly ask candidates to answer in their own words. A few candidates went beyond the question's limit and included details from the rest of paragraph one such as the badly dented bonnet of the Renault because of the heavy sacks of watermelons. A few also believed that the car was being towed by the lorry. It is very important that candidates select material from within the textual limit identified in the question.

- (b) Using your own words, explain what impression you get of Boris, the truck driver, in paragraph 1 ('After a ...').

As with **Question 1(a)**, many candidates gained at least one mark on this question with a significant number scoring two marks. The vast majority of responses described Boris, the truck driver, as bad-tempered, unfriendly, or rude. Such descriptions were described in a number of ways with many candidates using own words to good effect. A good number of responses commented on the lack of care taken by Boris in his treatment of the car as well as the fact that he was unprofessional and heavy handed. The fact that he was also lazy and only likely to work – albeit grudgingly – through 'bribes' or extra money was also clearly understood by a number of candidates. A very small number of candidates, however, thought that Boris was a 'kind' man who was willing to help the writer get the car in working order. The evidence given for this was his attempt 'to press out the dents' on the bonnet, even though such attempts were described as 'half-hearted' in the passage.

- (c) Give the meaning of the underlined words in the following three phrases as the writer uses them in the passage. Then explain how the phrases help you understand the remoteness of the Gobi Desert.

When answering the underlined word questions, it is important that candidates explain the meaning of the word which is underlined, only, and do not extend their answer to the whole quotation or another part of it. A number of candidates, for example, gave an explanation of the 'hazy horizon' as opposed to the word 'interminably' in c(i). One method employed by candidates to answer the single word question was to list lots of possibilities in the hope that one of them would be correct and this approach is not recommended.

The second part of this question was often answered better than the first as candidates were able to look at the whole quotation. The main problem was the same answer was often used for c(ii), c(iv) and c(vi) respectively such as 'it was never ending', or with repeated phrases or words from the respective single word question. The question wanted some clear focus on the phrase in relation to understanding 'the remoteness of the Gobi Desert'. Candidates who looked for a more precise meaning did better, although some did so by using lifted words from the quotation and did not, therefore, gain a mark.

As with previous papers, many candidates simply repeated their answer from c(i), c(iii), and c(v) and therefore gained no mark. Others couched their answers in the words of the quotation as opposed to attempted own words. Such explanations were not rewarded and often were circular in nature. Candidates should have been aware of the overall focus of the question which was 'the remoteness of the Gobi Desert, as noted above', when attempting to explain the selected references. Generally, candidates who failed to understand the implication of the underlined word in the single word question, were unable to gain marks in when considering the quotation. However, those candidates who considered the meaning of the whole quotation from a wider perspective were often able to gain marks even if they had been unsuccessful with the corresponding one-word question.

It is pleasing to note that, in general, candidates gained more marks on this section of the paper than in many previous papers and seemed much better prepared on how to approach both the vocabulary question and the subsequent whole quotation question.

- (i) 'we made a wrong turn onto a sandy road that stretched interminably towards a hazy horizon.' (lines 11–12)

Many candidates successfully explained the never-ending characteristic of the sandy road by providing an appropriate synonym such as 'constant', 'infinity' or 'very long'. Those candidates who wrote the road was 'long' without a qualifier did not gain the mark. Some candidates obviously were unable to explain the meaning of 'interminably' but tried very hard to do so by looking at the context of the quotation.

- (ii) 'we made a wrong turn onto a sandy road that stretched interminably towards a hazy horizon.' (lines 11–12)

In line with crediting responses which had adopted a wider perspective when explaining how this phrase had helped the reader understand the remoteness of the Gobi Desert, those answers which focused on the arid, undeveloped nature of the environment were awarded a mark. Similarly, reference to how vast the desert was with its lengthy road were also credited with a mark. Some candidates who focused on the fact that the horizon could not be seen clearly because of distance or because it was flat, also gained a mark. As always, answers which merely paraphrased the quotation by using selected words from it were not rewarded.

- (iii) 'we were lost in the brooding wasteland of the Gobi Desert' (lines 12–13)

A number of candidates were able to explain the implication of the word 'brooding' in this context although some focused on 'deep thought' and did not link it to the 'wasteland' of the desert. Those candidates who identified the 'menacing' and 'threatening' nature of the word, or its connotation of being 'miserable', 'unfriendly' or 'depressing' were awarded the mark.

(iv) ‘we were lost in the brooding wasteland of the Gobi Desert’ (lines 12–13)

Candidates often focused on the bleakness of the desert with its absence of growth and lack of life and therefore gained one mark. Very few candidates, however, were able to gain a second mark by explaining how ‘lost’ suggests isolation and vulnerability in the context of a hostile and threatening desert environment.

(v) ‘a stony and inhospitable place rutted and scarred by ancient tracks and pathways.’ (lines 13–14)

A significant number of candidates were able to explain the unwelcoming, unfriendly meaning of ‘inhospitable’ in this context. Answers which focused on the hostile or even uncomfortable nature of the desert gained the mark for this question. Many candidates believed, however, that ‘inhospitable’ was synonymous with ‘uninhabitable’ and whereas obviously the desert would be a far from satisfactory place to live for most of us, it doesn’t mean it can’t be lived in at all. A few candidates believed the ‘inhospitable’ meant there was no ‘hospital’ in the desert.

(vi) ‘a stony and inhospitable place rutted and scarred by ancient tracks and pathways.’ (lines 13–14)

Those candidates who believed ‘inhospitable’ meant ‘uninhabitable’ often repeated this in their responses to the effect of the whole quotation. Candidates who identified the rocky and empty nature of the desert, and the fact that it was difficult to drive in such a harsh environment gained two marks. Other answers which commented upon the ugly and uneven nature of the ‘roads’ and landscape were also credited. Very few candidates attempted to explain that the ‘tracks and pathways’ hadn’t changed over a very long period of time.

(d) **Reread paragraph 4 (‘The Americans ...’). Give two details that might concern the writer about spending the night camping in the desert.**

Many candidates scored at least one mark for this question with some managing to score two marks. Candidates had to reread paragraph 4 and give two details that might be concerning as a result of spending the night camping in the desert. By far the most popular answer comprised the possible presence of snakes and/or scorpions. Candidates who identified both or one of these potential dangers were awarded one mark. Candidates who separated them to make two details were not awarded a second mark unless, of course, they had provided another acceptable answer. Some candidates gained the second mark by referring to the coldness of the night. Very few candidates referred to the need for the campers to remain watchful and alert throughout the night because of the probable threat from snakes or scorpions living in the holes of the desert floor. A number of candidates thought that the ‘enormous full moon’ illuminating the desert at night was a potential concern for the writer and the Americans but there is no evidence in the passage to support this. Other responses focused on the fact that the writer and the Americans were probably lost and that the latter were struggling to find their position with their maps and compasses. Such answers did not directly relate to the question focus of spending the night camping in the desert and did not, therefore, gain a mark.

(e) **Reread paragraph 6 (‘I tried ...’) and paragraph 7 (‘By nightfall ...’). What three changes have to be made to the car when the writer reaches Bayankhongor?**

This question was a retrieval question which required candidates to demonstrate understanding of explicit meaning related to paragraphs six and seven. The majority of candidates gained full marks for this question by identifying the changes which have been made to the car: namely, new shock absorbers, a re-installed exhaust system, and changing the wheel arches/ repairing the front suspension. Candidates needed to differentiate clearly the repairs required owing to the rough terrain and the difficulties experienced during the car rally. Conversely, those candidates who expressed their answers in jargon related to cars, such as ‘shocks’, were not penalised. Those candidates who identified the collapse of the front suspension and the problem with the wheel arches as two separate points were only awarded one mark.

- (f) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means when they describe other drivers on the rally ‘leaving a trail of pandemonium behind them.’ (lines 38–39).**

Candidates often focused on the fun or enjoyment experienced by other drivers as opposed to the given phrase ‘leaving a trail of pandemonium behind them’, thus gaining no marks. Those candidates who attempted to explain the ‘trail’ left behind them by referring to factors such as ‘clouds of dust’, ‘smoke’, ‘bits of cars’, ‘their mark’ were awarded one mark, as were answers which identified mess and disorder. Those candidates who successfully explained the **extent** of the problems or disorder with words such as ‘chaos’, ‘havoc’, and ‘mayhem’ were awarded two marks. As implied above, relatively few candidates managed to gain a mark for this question.

## Question 2

**Imagine you are the narrator of the events in Passage A. When you return home, you are invited to write an article for a car magazine giving advice to possible entrants for the rally.**

### **Write your magazine article.**

**In your magazine article you should cover the following:**

- **the preparations someone should make for their journey**
- **the dangers competitors face on the rally**
- **the benefits of taking part.**

**Base your ideas on what you have read in Passage A, but do not copy from it. Be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.**

**Begin your magazine article: ‘If you want to participate in the Mongolian Car Rally ...’**

The most successful responses to this question used details from the passage and adapted them to write a magazine article by the narrator. There was a convincing attempt to describe the overall rewarding experience of taking part in the rally in spite of the many hardships endured and its potential dangers. Less successful responses were more likely to lift sections of the original and did little more than repeat points that were already there without going beyond the more obvious details. Those candidates who attempted to write in an appropriate article register were credited but those who did not were not penalised.

Those responses which did not include some version of the three specified points were unlikely to score higher for Reading than Band 3, but those responses which included additional focus points were not penalised and, more often than not, gained additional credit. The relatively few responses which comprised narrative accounts based on the passage without any reference to the question guidelines did not gain higher band marks. As with previous papers, convincing and relevant development of the third bullet point was usually important to gaining higher band marks. Responses, however, which only touched upon the possible benefits of the rally for drivers, yet contained detailed development of the first two bullet points which was firmly tethered to the passage, were also rewarded with higher band marks. As always, those candidates who attempted to write their articles in their own words as far as possible, were suitably rewarded for both Reading and Writing. Those candidates who mainly lifted phrases from the passage were unlikely to score higher than Band 3 marks for Reading or Writing.

A number of candidates treated Question 2 as purely an imaginative writing task as opposed to a piece of directed writing based mainly on the information given in passage A. Some candidates wrote convincing accounts of the rally but seemed to be more concerned with establishing an appropriate register which emphasised the dangers of the journey rather than developing the given information based on their respective reading and understanding of the passage. Such accounts often omitted the advisory nature of the article for possible entrants for the rally and became mere narrative accounts of the narrator’s journey. It is very important that candidates identify the purpose of the writing task and shape their material to meet that purpose, bearing in mind the stated audience.

Most candidates described in some detail the preparations needed for the Mongolian Car Rally. Candidates focused on the need for accurate maps and a compass, as well as first aid material, warm clothing, and a tent. All of these requirements were grounded on the narrator's experience of getting lost, the coldness of the desert at night, and the threat of injury either through driving or being bitten or stung by snakes or scorpions respectively. Some candidates expanded the latter point to include animals generically or 'wild camels' interpreting the 'wild' as being dangerous as opposed to roaming free in the desert. Another well developed 'preparation' focused on the need to ensure the entrant's car was both sturdy and roadworthy prior to the rally. Some candidates advocated, understandably, the need to carry replacement shock absorbers, front suspension, and exhaust system so that the entrant's car could be repaired en-route. It was not always made clear how these car parts would be carried although a few candidates did draw on Boris's ancient Russian truck as a solution.

Some of the dangers competitors would likely face on the rally have already been identified above and often candidates often developed points one and two as a single entity. A number of successful articles gave advice about less obvious dangers implied by the narrator's account such as the clouds of dust and the rocky terrain affecting health and visibility as well as physical discomfort when driving. Some candidates advised would be rally participants to drive in pairs not only to ease the fatigue of driving in such daunting conditions but also to ensure safety in numbers because of the remoteness of the route, should anything go wrong.

Very few candidates ignored point there relating to the benefits of taking part but a number merely stated that it was beneficial as opposed to explaining the benefits. Most articles drew on material from paragraph eight of the passage and described the 'real sporting challenge' and the incomparable adventure of the rally. The rally was also described as a once in a lifetime adventure. Some candidates alluded to both friendship and teamwork, based on the meeting with the Americans at the Altai Hotel and the subsequent early morning drive into the Gobi Desert. In general, candidates demonstrated a willingness to engage with the task and wrote some convincing and interesting articles for prospective entrants to the Mongolian Car Rally.

### Question 3

**Read carefully Passage B, Why hot-air ballooning is Richard Branson's favourite way to travel, in the Reading Booklet Insert and then answer Question 3(a) and (b) on this Question Paper.  
Answer the questions in the order set.**

(a) Notes

**What do you learn about what Richard Branson achieved and the problems he faced while hot-air ballooning, according to Passage B?**

**Write your answers using short notes. Write one point per line.**

**You do not need to use your own words.**

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer.**

**What Richard Branson achieved and the problems he faced while hot-air ballooning:**

As always, the key to gaining higher marks on Question 3(a) was avoiding repetition and answering the question by selecting relevant points, and therefore avoiding the inclusion of points not related to the question.

Many candidates scored well on this question with many gaining seven marks or more. Some candidates lost marks by failing to include contextual detail in their answers. For example, 'needed to be rescued' did not gain a mark because it was too general and did not state by whom, in this case the navy. The 'balloon system failing' also was not rewarded without specific reference to it being connected to 'ejection'. Candidates must make sure that the context of their answer is clearly stated rather than implied. Similarly, candidates should always restrict their answers to one clear point per line, and never extend the 10 lines to add extra points.

Of the fourteen points identified in the mark scheme, five related to information about Richard Branson's hot-air ballooning achievements and nine arose from the problems he experienced. One 'achievement' which was not credited was Branson's four failed attempts to circumnavigate the world in a hot-air balloon. It could be argued that Branson's obvious determination to do so in spite of his constant failure was an 'achievement' as regards his character but not an achievement in the truest sense of the word. The vast majority of candidates did identify, however, his 'first crossing of the Pacific' in a hot-air balloon' (point 1) and included the all-important 'first' in their note. The references by some candidates to Branson breaking records for flight duration, distance, and speed' (point 3 were noted as separate points and only the first point was credited with the others being marked as repeats. Similarly, some candidates divided their references to the crossing of the Himalayas, Mount Everest, and K2 (point 4) and this was marked in exactly the same way as point 3. Although Richard Branson unintentionally made this crossing as well travelling quickly across the Canadian Arctic courtesy of the jet stream, it was deemed that these were 'achievements' albeit rather fortuitous ones.

Most candidates identified a range of problems faced by Branson while hot-air ballooning.

Only a small number of candidates gained full marks, although many achieved six or above.

- (b) Most candidates tried to use own words when writing the summary although sometimes that meant that the meaning was blurred. Some answers were well written but very long as they had tried to include too much information. Many responses had own words but lacked organisation. The best answers comprised two clear paragraphs, one on Richard Branson's ballooning achievements and one on the problems he faced while hot-air ballooning. A significant number of candidates did not restrict their responses to the question's parameters and therefore included a good deal of irrelevant comment such as Branson's success as a business man and his laudable charitable and humanitarian work. Of course, this lack of focus was carried on from 3(a) where the points were wrongly included in the 3(a) notes. It should also be emphasised once again that Branson's 'four attempts at the most difficult ballooning feat: circumnavigating the world' did not constitute an 'achievement' as such whereas the details of that failure did fall within the 'problems' he faced.

Generally, however, many candidates wrote fairly concise summaries and attempted to answer in their own words as far as possible. The best responses were well focused on the passage and points were expressed clearly and concisely. The weakest responses were often verbose and unfocused comprising either frequent lifting of phrases and sentences or unnecessary personal commentary. Candidates should remember to organise their material so that it does not read like a list of unrelated features, and to ensure that their material is as concise as possible rather than just brief. The inclusion of an assessment strand covering spelling, punctuation, and grammar accuracy did not ostensibly have a significant effect on the marks awarded for 3(b) on this paper compared with marks awarded on earlier papers where there was no such focus in the respective mark schemes.

### **Concluding Comments**

Overall, the paper was accessible to all. There were relatively few 'No Responses' as most candidates completed the whole paper. The question candidates found the most challenging was 1(c). Most candidates completed the paper in some detail and many of the responses to Question 2, in particular, were of a good standard. It was clear that the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared for this paper and were confident in their approach.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/13  
Reading Passages (Core)

## **Key messages**

- Proof reading is essential. Marks were lost through avoidable mistakes which could have been corrected by candidates checking over their work.
- In **1(c)** candidates should remember that they cannot simply repeat the same word in their answer to **(ii)** as they used in **(i)** but should elaborate on the definition given in **(i)** and focus their response on describing the effect of the whole phrase.
- Candidates must remember to deal with all 3 bullet points in **Question 2**, and attempt to develop ideas, both factual and inferential. The key message here is to look for clues within the passage and to develop those ideas, beyond the text, for the third bullet point.
- Candidates need to ensure that they are writing in the correct format for **Question 2** as well as following the bullet points to construct their response to the task. They also need to ensure that they pay attention to their spelling, punctuation and grammar to assist clarity.

## **General comments**

Overall, the passages proved to be accessible to virtually all candidates and they responded positively to both passages and questions. The vocabulary appeared to be within the range of candidates at this level.

Responses to the sub-questions in **Question 1** revealed that the main points in the passage had been clearly understood and the majority of candidates responded well to the more straightforward questions. In general, the questions enabled all candidates to produce some correct answers while at the same time challenging those who were more perceptive to gain higher marks.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Question 1**

- (a) Reread the first sentence. Give one word that suggests the journey is difficult for the bus.  
[1 mark]

The majority of candidates gained the one mark available by choosing 'desperately', 'swerving' or 'died'. The most common misunderstanding of this question was by those candidates who tried to refer to the rain storm. Whilst this could be regarded as a danger on the journey, it was not something that could be referred to by the choice of a single word; thus, candidates who made this mistake generally put 'torrential'. However, 'torrential' required the word 'rain' to complete the sense and could not gain the mark on its own.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means when they say that travelling by bus was ‘The most practical option’ (lines 5–6).** [2 marks]

The key to gaining the two marks for this question was to provide an explanation of ‘most practical’ and ‘option’. The first mark could be explained as, for example, the ‘easiest’, ‘most achievable’, ‘straightforward’ or ‘most suitable’. A number of candidates suggested that this meant the cheapest; whilst this might be the case, it is not part of the explanation given in the passage. The second mark required some attempt to suggest a synonym for ‘option’. Thus; ‘method’, ‘way’, ‘choice’ or ‘means of transport’ are all acceptable synonyms and are examples of successful attempts by a good number of candidates.

- (c) **Give the meaning of the underlined words in the following three phrases as the writer uses them in the passage. Then explain how the phrases help you understand the excitement that the narrator experiences on his trip.**

- (i) **‘every possible type of extreme and sublime landscape.’ (lines 8–9)** [1 mark]

- (ii) **Explanation of the whole phrase:** [2 marks]

A reasonable number of candidates gained the one mark by offering an explanation of ‘sublime’ as meaning ‘very beautiful’ or ‘stunning’. ‘Beautiful alone was not sufficient to gain the mark. The phrase suggested that there was a great variety of landscapes. Where candidates added some reference to this landscape being unique or dramatic, they would gain both marks for part (ii).

- (iii) **‘who drove their rickety contraptions at such speeds that the wheels would sometimes leave the ground.’ (lines 13–15)** [1 mark]

- (iv) **Explanation of the whole phrase:** [2 marks]

The majority of candidates correctly commented that ‘rickety’ suggested the busses were ‘shaky’, ‘unstable’ or were ‘falling apart’. A number went on to get 1 or 2 marks for their explanations of the phrase as a whole. These marks could be gained by commenting that the vehicles were not roadworthy and that they were being driven with no concern for safety.

- (v) **‘observing the gradual transformation from their lush lower slopes to the bleak high-altitude moorland.’ (lines 16–17)** [2 marks]

- (vi) **Explanation of the whole phrase:** [1 mark]

A number of candidates were able to explain ‘bleak’ successfully – ‘barren’ and ‘bare’ are examples of synonyms used by many of these candidates. Fewer candidates were able to gain two marks for an explanation of the phrase as a whole. To do so they had to comment on the slow and contrasting change from the green base of the hills to the isolated and sparse moors higher up. Some candidates gained one mark by an attempt to express the idea of contrast.

Overall, the attempts at this question showed a good focus on the requirements of the task with many candidates getting 3 or 4 marks and doing more than simply paraphrasing the original passage. As in previous sessions, the marks gained from (ii) often totalled fewer than for (i). Sometimes this was because answers to (ii) did no more than repeat those given for (i) or because a misunderstanding was carried through from (i). A small, but significant, number of responses attempted explanations of the phrases by simply re-iterating them or lifting the language from the phrase and simply produced a circular explanation. It is important to note that each phrase requires a different explanation, as some less successful responses gave very similar explanations for all three phrases. It is also worth pointing out, as in previous reports, that the explanations of the phrases should be grounded in the context of the question as opposed to simple interpretations of the words used. The key focus of explanations here was how the writing conveyed the writer’s excitement.

- (d) Give two main differences between travelling on buses in Ecuador and Peru (lines 18–23, ‘It was not ... by tape.’). [2 marks]

Many candidates gained one mark on this question by explaining that Ecuador has better, or better surfaced, roads. The other mark required the candidate to explain that it was possible to catch a bus more easily, or without a long wait. The points could also be obtained by explaining that the reverse was true in Peru. In fact, a good number of candidates gained both marks for this question.

- (e) Why does the writer suggest that reaching the mountain town of Chachapoyas by 10pm would only be achieved through good luck (paragraph 3, ‘It was not ...’). [2 marks]

A successful response could gain two marks by identifying two out of the three following points: that the journey was on a dirt track; that it was made in a battered bus or that there was a long climb over high passes.

- (f) Give two things the writer enjoys when reaching Chile’s Carretera Austral (paragraph 4, ‘The main challenges ...’). [2 marks]

The essential details to identify were that the writer enjoyed the brilliant blue conditions and the ‘forests, fjords and glaciers’.

- (g) Give two details the writer suggests make the journey through Patagonia less interesting (paragraph 5, ‘But, however much ...’). [2 marks]

Marks could be obtained by identifying that the journey through Patagonia was less interesting because it the scenery was ‘unchanging and flat’ and that it had never ending ‘straight roads.’

## Question 2

Imagine you are the narrator of the events in Passage A. When you return home you are interviewed by a local radio station about your experiences on the journey.

Write the words of the interview.

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

- What were the particularly impressive sights on your journey?
- What were the best things about travelling by bus?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the challenges you faced on this trip?

Base your ideas on what you have read in Passage A, but do not copy from it. Be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.

Begin your interview with the first question.

Write about 200 to 300 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 5 marks for the quality of your writing.

For this task the majority of candidates seemed to understand quite clearly the need to address each of the bullets and to give a credible account of the events of the passage from the writer’s point of view. The majority also understood the format and gave answers with an appropriate register and voice. The most successful responses avoided simply repeating the passage and made some attempt to express the ideas in different words.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three bullet points in a balanced approach. However, the less successful responses tended to be those where candidates (albeit in their own words) simply repeated the details from the passage. This meant that although, generally, there wasn’t extensive lifting of material there was often little sense of candidates going beyond the details in the passage which obviously had a bearing on the detail included for the third bullet point.

Some successful responses covered the relevant ideas for the third bullet in the process of dealing with the first two questions. This meant that although they produced short answers to that third question, they had already made sufficient comment about the writer's thoughts and feelings about the challenges faced. This was acceptable in terms of gaining a high reading mark. Overall, the responses showed a very good understanding of the passage, the atmosphere of the place and the writer's thoughts and feelings about the experience of taking the trip with the most successful providing a quite convincing sense of the writer's excitement about the challenges and dangers along the way.

Most candidates wrote correct, though relatively simple, sentences, with an adequate range of vocabulary and tried to use an appropriate register. The most successful responses - a significant minority – achieved Band 6 marks for both Content and Language.

[15 marks]

### Question 3

#### (a) Notes

**What do you learn about the features and the achievements of the first Zeppelin according to Passage B?**

**Write your answers using short notes. Write one point per line.**

**You do not need to use your own words.**

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer.**

[10 marks]

This question was answered very well with many candidates making one point per line and focusing on the topic and the question. However, there were a significant number of candidates who (largely by selective lifting) included several points on the same line thereby self-penalising – only one mark is awarded for each line regardless of the number of points it contains. Sometimes candidates included more than 10 marks worth of relevant points, but by putting more than one point on each line gained fewer than 10 marks. Similarly, only the first 10 lines are marked, so candidates who added further lines and points were still only credited for points included in the first 10 lines. It is essential on this question that the candidate reads the question clearly to enough to ensure that they are picking out the appropriate material and equally that some attempt is made to set out the relevant points one on each of the 10 lines. This also contributes to avoidance of repeating points in the summary that follows.

#### (b) Summary

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the features and the achievements of the first Zeppelin?**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 150 words.**

**Up to 5 marks are available for the quality of your writing.**

[5 marks]

On the whole, although some students were able to achieve Band 3 for clear, concise and fluent summaries the majority of candidates' responses were in Band 2 (a response that may 'lack some clarity and organisation' or where there may be 'frequent lapses in organisation'). A small number were placed in Band 1 where the response might be marred by personal comments and unselective 'lifting' or where there might be a lack of organisation. The other cause of being placed in Band 1 was where the candidate had included irrelevant material, especially regarding the French airship La France. The most successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. The responses placed in Band 2 for writing often tended to be list-like with a series of loosely connected statements.

Concluding Comments

Most candidates completed the paper in some detail and the responses to **Question 2** in particular were of a generally good standard.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/21  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- used their own words appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- avoided copying and/or lifting from either passage
- considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to show for each of the three tasks
- paid attention to the guidance and instructions for each task
- returned to the text when necessary to clarify an idea or reconsider an important detail
- planned their ideas and the route through their answer before writing
- gave equal attention to all aspects of each question
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- edited their responses to correct any careless slips, incomplete ideas or unclear points
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

## General comments

Candidates' responses for the most part indicated a familiarity with the format of the paper and that they had understood the demands of the three tasks in general terms at least. There were relatively few instances where all or part of a task had not been attempted, though opportunities to target higher marks were missed where candidates offered a restricted range of ideas, misread or over-looked details and / or dealt unevenly with each part of the task in hand. Better responses indicated an awareness of the need to use, rather than repeat or replay, the material from the text in order to answer the questions. The most successful answers were able to modify the material in the passages skilfully and use it to demonstrate understanding, paying attention to the specific focus of each task. Less successful responses were often over reliant on the wording and/or sequence of the text(s) and paid limited attention to the details of the question, providing less convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a result. Centres are reminded that simple paraphrasing, lifting and/or copying of the text should be avoided, whilst careful attention needs to be paid to key words in the task instructions.

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible, and were for the most part able to finish the paper within the time allowed. Very occasionally, achievement was limited by a failure to follow the rubric and/or complete all aspects of a task – for example, by writing from the wrong perspective or for the wrong audience in **Question 1**, explaining fewer than eight choices in **Question 2** or writing far more than the maximum of 250 words advised for **Question 3**.

Successful answers were able to interpret and use details to demonstrate accurate reading in **Question 1**, offer explanation of meaning and effect in relation to appropriate selections from both paragraphs in **Question 2** and show understanding of carefully identified, relevant ideas which addressed both aspects of the focus of the task in **Question 3**.

Most **Question 1** responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task and candidates were generally aware of the need to reinterpret Peter's account of his experiences as a trainee guide from the viewpoint of the more experienced Head Guide, Chris, offering advice to new trainees as described. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passage, with the best adopting the role of Head Guide convincingly and demonstrating a particularly strong sense of purpose and approach. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities through more mechanical and/or generalised treatment of the text. Less successful responses either included only brief reference to the passage or repeated Peter's narrative with minimal modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the passage and/or the wording of any introduction in order to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and to be avoided.

For **Question 2** candidates need to consider appropriate choices of words and phrases from each of the two specified paragraphs and offer precise comments in relation to these choices. To aim for higher bands, candidates should explore and explain in some detail the meanings and effects of the examples of interesting or powerful language use they identify, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose. Most were able to suggest potentially useful examples for analysis, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently clear or careful in the examination of their choices. Some had paid limited attention to the focus of each of **parts (a)** and **(b)**, and as a result missed opportunities. A number repeated the language of the choices in their explanations, and/or offered generalised comments, diluting evidence of understanding as a result.

In **Question 3** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas and some understanding of the requirements of the task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of aspects of the same idea from an earlier part of the text and/or inclusion of material not relevant to the focus of the question meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. Some candidates dealt with only one aspect of the question, limiting the range of ideas they could include. Where responses were most successful, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words, to keep explanations concise and to organise their ideas helpfully. Less well focused responses were over reliant on copying from the text, with minimal/no rewording or reorganisation of the original. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response. They should not however lift whole phrases and/or sentences from the text, or rely on simply listing ideas in the order of the passage. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, 20 per cent of the marks available are for Writing – divided equally between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and reviewing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Candidates should be aware that unclear 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 the Head Guide, Chris (Peter's boss). You are responsible for training safari guides. When a group of new trainee guides arrives at the camp, you give a talk to prepare them for what lies ahead.**

**Write the words of your talk.**

**In your talk, you should:**

- describe the range of attractions Idube camp and the area around it have to offer and how these might appeal to guests
- explain what being a trainee guide is like – the kind of activities they will be asked to do and what they should and should not do as trainees
- suggest what makes a good safari guide, the challenges of the job and the personal qualities they will need to develop

**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, ‘Welcome to Idube Camp...’**

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood the passage and task in at least general terms. Many offered extended detailed responses, attempting to rework and develop the material with their audience in mind and engaging with both task and text. Where content had been planned in advance, and the route through the answer considered beforehand, answers were often able to include a good range of relevant ideas – both explicit and implicit – in relation to all three bullets. Where responses relied too heavily on tracking through the text, replaying the passage, answers were less well focused and often simply repeated rather than developed ideas. The least successful responses copied sections of the text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading key details and information.

The most convincing responses to **Question 1** showed evidence of candidates having revisited the passage to reconsider and interpret Peter’s narrative account of events for the audience of new trainees that Head Guide Chris was addressing. Many made good use of the guidance in the bullets to help them identify and then organise the ideas and detail they might usefully include and most had used the prompt offered as a helpful starting point for their response. Others made less effective use of time by offering overlong introductory paragraphs where Chris outlined in general terms what he would include in his speech – often almost verbatim repetitions of the task instructions.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to outline the range of attractions of Idube Camp and to suggest how these might appeal to guests. Better answers had identified the basic information from the introduction to the text and gone on to interpret and support that with useful detail from the passage, extending and developing ideas to consider the nature of the appeal of each attraction. Almost all answers recognised that guests were offered drives, walks and dinner nights though did not always read sufficiently carefully to note that the dinner nights were at a location a little way away from the main camp. Less successful responses misread/misused details, for example to suggest that dinner nights appealed to guests because they were cheap and/or that the guests would be transported for safari drives in an ageing, decrepit truck. Many answers identified the chance to see a range of animals as an appealing prospect, though suggestions of petting zoo opportunities and/or feeding baby lions were speculative/outside of the passage and could not be credited as evidence of reading. Likewise, the suggestion that guests would book a holiday at Idube to sunbathe on the beach could not be supported by the text.

Where candidates had attempted to just paraphrase the passage rather than read purposefully and identify ideas for inclusion before they began their response, opportunities for linking and developing suggestions in the text were often missed. Many candidates however did make good use of the guidance within each bullet to help focus their response and, in bullet two, were able to include a range of potentially relevant ideas. Most had understood that the ‘walking’ trainees needed to learn related to the skills and knowledge needed to lead a guided walk. Where evidence of reading skills was less secure, some answers had tried to link learning to ‘walk’ with the advice ‘don’t run’ – instructing new trainees to slow down around camp.

Rather than consider the nature of the activities trainee guides might be required to undertake, responses in the mid-range often simply repeated Peter’s account of what he had to do and offered long lists of items loaded on to the truck. Where details had been less carefully considered some answers went on to suggest that trainees would have to transport heavy loads of drink by wheelbarrow through to Bush Camp and/or find shortcuts through from one camp to the other – neither of which was trainee Peter supposed to do. More secure responses were able to include suggestions in line with the implications of Peter’s reflective narrative for example that trainees should never walk off into the bush on their own or be tempted to try to find a shortcut, explaining the potential dangers of such actions.

In dealing with ideas related to bullet three, most answers were able to make use of the advice not to run when faced with a wild animal, though many relied on repeating it word for word. Answers tracking the text often included the point in passing more than once and missed opportunities to make explicit other suggestions. For example, the ideas that guides might need to be good communicators, able to deal with excitable tourists and observant/able to interpret the warning signs around them, were picked up in more competent responses. Where answers had taken a mechanical approach to the task and/or relied on lifting from the text with the occasional own word substitution, evidence of any general understanding often had to be balanced with that of misreading. A sense of context and/or some understanding of the whole text was evident in answers that were reasonable or better. On occasion, the words substituted into lifts from the passage in the weakest responses changed the facts – for example, the suggestion that ‘tigers often walked

in the soft sand' was incorrect. Candidates are reminded that they need to work to understand the ideas in the text rather than look to lift and/or copy sections of text with minimal modification.

Some answers moved too far from the text when suggesting what makes a good safari guide – forgetting that they needed to show evidence of their Reading skills by using ideas in the passage. For example, some included suggestions of extreme survival skills they imagined they might need if separated for long periods of time from camp – a possibility not hinted at in the text – and/or offered long lists of general personal characteristics that might, or might not be, relevant without any clear indication of how or why. The best answers had often recognised that the narrator's viewpoint was distinct from that of 19-year-old Peter and were able to suggest that a good safari guide might well have learned from experience (including their mistakes).

In creating a voice for Head Guide Chris, stronger responses had often picked up on the suggestion that he might need to curb the enthusiasm of new trainees a little and caution against over-confidence. Better responses had interpreted the tone of his comment 'You'll need to learn how to walk' and applied their reading of it to the voice they created – with some responses adopting a stern tone. The best had often decided on a more measured attitude, in keeping with the role model position of Head Guide and carefully contrasted with the impetuous and impatient attitude of new trainee Peter. Stronger responses had recognised the suggestion in the narrator's voice that young Peter had had much to learn. On occasion less effective writing contained some awkward expression, often as a result of insecure vocabulary choices and/or a failure to read back to check for the sense of what they had written – for example, suggesting that quests 'can see animals inside vehicles'. In the weakest answers, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of sections of text not uncommon. This affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills. Meanwhile, answers at the top end were often presented in a firm but fair style and able to evidence a strong sense of purpose and approach in their use of ideas from the passage.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 1:

- remember that the response to reading task is asking you to adopt a different perspective to that of the text – for example by writing from the point of view of a character other than the narrator
- consider the audience and purpose for your response and keep these in mind as you write
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain in your answer
- read the whole text carefully, more than once, and return to reconsider any points you are unsure of
- give equal attention to each aspect of each of the three bullet points – the bullet points are designed to help you to identify relevant ideas in the text
- plan a route through your answer beforehand – you can choose not to follow the order of the bullet points and/or link ideas from each
- express ideas from the text which are relevant to your answer using your own words – do not copy from the passage
- try to extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include rather than simply repeat details – for example, by explaining justification or reasons for any advice/ideas offered
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response
- do not waste time by counting the exact number of words in your answer – the number of words suggested by the question is a guide to help you plan your time, not a limit.

#### Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) Wusani and her experience at Bush Camp in paragraph 2, beginning 'Setting up meant ... '
- (b) Peter's journey to the Bush Camp in paragraph 9, beginning 'After struggling ... '

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

Responses in **Question 2** needed to have identified a range of relevant examples of language use for discussion in each half of the task, paying attention to the particular focus of each part of the question: Wusani and her experience at Bush Camp in **part (a)** and Peter's journey in **part (b)**. Where answers were not focused on the task as set opportunities were missed to evidence understanding. Strong answers offered clear analysis of relevant selections, often beginning with explanations of meaning and moving on to

consider effect, and were able to demonstrate understanding of how the writer was using language in each case.

Where candidates considered all of the key words in longer choices they avoided those more general comments of weaker answers which offered only partial explanation of the phrase as a whole. The strongest responses considered words individually as well as how they worked within the phrase and in the context of the description as a whole. Rather than selecting the first four choices in each half they came across or the most ‘obvious’ literary devices, successful answers often set out to identify the relevant selections that they felt best able to explain.

In **part (a)**, some less focused answers attempted to discuss choices that were not related to Wusani, such as ‘cool tranquillity’ and ‘enjoying the shade’ and missed opportunities to target higher bands as a result. In **part (b)**, some answers selected only part of a longer image and/or selected the whole image but only explained one word from it, limiting the evidence of understanding offered. For example, a number of answers offered explanations of ‘sense of peace’ as meaning calm or tranquillity, though fewer went on to explain the image as a whole and many included the word ‘mingled’ in their selections without attempting to explore its meaning and/or effect. Repetition of the vocabulary of the text in the explanations offered in **part (b)** was common in less successful answers, whilst more successful responses were able to offer explanations of precise meaning in their own words that then lead them onto a suggestion of effect. Some for example, considered how ‘met’ and ‘mingled’ were suggestive of a polite social gathering and/or how ‘undercurrent’ might suggest Peter was in danger of being carried away by his sense of adventure.

Where the meaning of words was considered carefully in context, candidates were often able to go on to suggest something of the effect and better answers ensured that they had considered all key words within choices. For example, in **part (a)**, having considered the precise meaning in context of choices such as ‘unpleasantly surprised’ and ‘gravity’s pull resolved the issue’ many candidates went on to suggest both the deliberate understatement in Peter’s description and the cartoon-like humour of the situation. Likewise, in considering how the meaning of ‘improbable’ combined with ‘perched’, many responses were able to suggest the intended humorous effect of picturing the large figure of the chef balanced precariously on a branch like some kind of over-grown bird. Meanwhile, opportunities to target higher marks were missed where meaning was not carefully considered or explained – for example, suggestions that ‘ominous creaking’ meant the approach of something dangerous like a lion or that the truck in which Wusani was travelling was haunted were not accurate and could not be credited.

Candidates are reminded it is the quality of their analysis that attracts marks. Answers that simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks in a language question.

A number of weaker answers relied on simply spotting literary devices and as a result struggled to interpret meaning or effect. For example, whilst many candidates who selected it were able to offer credible interpretations the description of the lourie bird’s call ‘long drawn out hag-like rasp’, others struggled to comment as a consequence of having simply identified it as ‘an example of a simile’. Taking time to select from the full range of potential choices those about which they felt most able to comment, rather than simply trying to spot literary devices, would have helped a number of candidates who offered only thin or inappropriate comment.

Many candidates were able to provide satisfactory evidence of skills and understanding in either one part of the task or the other and might have achieved higher marks by extending their explanations to consider ‘how’ or ‘why’ the words chosen were creating the general or basic effect they claimed. Most candidates were able to show that they recognised at least some potentially interesting examples of language use and could begin to offer some relevant comment. For marks in the top bands, candidates need to be careful to select and interpret choices accurately, considering examples in context and demonstrating that they understand some of the subtleties of how the language is working. Answers offering less careful or considered choices sometimes prejudiced the evidence of understanding they were able to demonstrate in relation to meaning and effect, for example by attempting to discuss selections such as ‘slugging through soft sand’ or ‘improperly perched’.

Better answers focused on exploring and explaining each of their choices in detail, offering some high quality analysis in each half of the question. Selections in **Question 2** need to be clear and deliberate – helping to focus the analysis that follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful and often result in very thin general comments at best. On occasion, candidates selected phrases containing a few words and then went on to unpick the separate elements of these with some success.

Others narrowed the focus down to single words and then reassembled the image. Both were potentially useful approaches where careful explanation was offered and replaying of the language of the original as part of the commentary was avoided.

Opportunities were missed in some answers, such as where a chosen phrase contained more than one word of interest and the answer moved on too quickly – offering a more general explanation of the phrase as a whole and/or only considering one of the words it contained. For example, a number of answers discussed the use of ‘adrenaline’ but missed the chance to consider the effect of ‘fuelled’. Similarly, some candidates having identified ‘branches met overhead, offering cool shade’ limited their discussion to either ‘met’ or ‘offering’ rather than consider each in turn and suggest how they might work together.

Planning of relevant ideas ahead of writing would have helped some candidates to avoid empty phrases such as ‘the writer’s use of language makes the reader want to know what happens next’ or ‘this helps us to imagine the scene’. Unless the answer goes on to suggest exactly how and in what ways the writer is doing this, such comment can offer a false sense of security and take up valuable examination time unprofitably. Stronger responses, offering considered and careful analysis focused on language use in both parts of the question, were often able to build to a useful overview of how the language was working and evidence clear understanding.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- once you have identified the potentially relevant choices to answer **part (a)** and **part (b)**, select your strongest four from each paragraph to explore and explain
- make sure your choices are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice you wish to discuss
- avoid empty comments such as comments that ‘the writer has used lots of great adjectives’
- show your understanding in full – consider each of the key words within your identified choice
- if you are unsure of effect, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) you have identified
- try to explore and explain the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answer – for example to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

#### Question 3

**What were the problems for wildlife reserves and their surrounding communities in 2010 and what was being done to help tackle these problems, according to Passage B?**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 250 words.**

Candidates who addressed the task successfully, often showed evidence of having planned beforehand both the content and a route through their answer. They had identified those points that were potentially relevant to the dual focus of the question (the problems and what was being done to tackle them) and had reflected on their potential answers to refine their ideas and avoid excess. For example, they were able to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point, identify implied points and/or avoid repetition of ideas or inclusion of unnecessary detail. Successful answers did not rely on the structure or language of Passage B to communicate ideas and considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for a selective summary task. Less effective responses had often relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text and/or tried to paraphrase the original or shadow it, substituting (sometimes inappropriate) vocabulary for individual words. The least effective answers adopted a cut and paste approach, copying sections from the original and/or were almost entirely reliant on the language of the text.

On occasion, incorrect and/or incomplete lifting from the text also served to dilute evidence of understanding in potentially stronger answers that would have benefitted from careful editing. Reading back through their answer afterwards to make sure that it would make sense as a piece of informative writing for a reader who had not read the original passage would have helped a number of candidates target higher marks. Often answers began well and showed some understanding of relevant ideas but lost focus, for example by repeating information and/or including unnecessary details such as statistics to exemplify their point. A few less successful answers showed evidence of having misread details of the task – for example by offering

comment from outside the text in relation to African tourism in general rather than information from the text. Misreading of details in the text diluted evidence of understanding in some answers – for example, it was not correct to suggest that ‘wildebeest are moved each year to the Mara plains as a result of tourism’ or that a solution is to ‘pay camp owners depending on how many tourists visit’.

Where candidates had paid careful attention to the task as set, they aimed for concise and well organised answers using their own vocabulary where practicable and appropriate to help clarify meaning for their reader. They demonstrated their understanding of relevant ideas within the context of the whole text and avoiding lifting of more general comment such as that the ‘wilderness is at tipping point’ or that ‘the planet’s most varied mammal and bird population is facing a crucial decade’ and/or repetition of strings of similar examples in favour of clear, distinct points conveying the nature of the problems.

Strong answers did not repeat the separate details related to the effect on animal numbers but rather organised their response to connect and summarise that information. Competent answers showed they had focused on the specifics of the task as set and did not include detailed accounts of Boynton’s trek or the precise numbers of beds added to lodges since the early 80s. Candidates producing the most effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a wide range of relevant ideas, explaining them in their own words and skilfully selecting and organising points to offer an overview. On occasion, potentially effective answers lost sight of the need for concision in a selective summary task and significant excess arose as a result of continuing to write way beyond the maximum of 250 words advised in the task guidance.

Where answers copied wholesale from the text with minimal or no modification, or offered a response which communicated only a few relevant ideas, candidates missed opportunities to target higher marks. The best responses showed that candidates understood the need to be accurate, clear and concise in the use of their own words when summarising relevant material from the passage. Stronger answers were careful to recast information, organise it helpfully, and use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing or blurring the original idea. For example, better answers reorganised the material rather than relying on the order of the text – avoiding repetition by doing so and establishing useful links such as that between the increase in permanent lodges and the permanent settlements of the Maasai. Stronger answers were able to offer their own vocabulary consistently, though in the mid-range some lifting of phrases was common with fewer candidates offering confident alternatives for ‘camp owners guarantee payment every month to local people’, or ‘soaring visitor numbers have severely damaged roads and grasslands’.

In low to mid-range answers, incomplete awareness or understanding of why they might want to avoid lifting meant that some candidates tended to concentrate on substituting words and/or altering word order without careful selection of the central idea – diluting evidence of understanding of both task and text. Candidates need to be aware that simply moving word order around within a sentence or replacing just one word is not a short cut to providing secure evidence of their reading skills and understanding. Candidates need to work to show understanding of ideas rather than simply track the passage making minimal changes and/or slotting in substituted words. The best answers were clear, concise, largely accurate and well organised.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify the potentially relevant content points
- you can use spare pages in your answer booklet to plan your ideas ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to check they are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which need further explanation
- check you understand each idea you use and aim to explain it in your own words
- organise and sequence your ideas helpfully for your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the passage
- write informatively and accurately, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage
- avoid repetition of points
- when checking and editing your answer, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage
- though you do not need to count every word, you should keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 250 words’ as a reminder in the selective summary of the need for concision.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/22  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- used their own words appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- avoided copying and/or lifting from either passage
- considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to show for each of the three tasks
- paid attention to the guidance and instructions for each task
- returned to the text when necessary to clarify an idea or reconsider an important detail
- planned their ideas and the route through their answer before writing
- gave equal attention to all aspects of each question
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- edited their responses to correct any careless slips, incomplete ideas or unclear points
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

## General comments

The majority of candidates were aware of the requirements of each question and were able to demonstrate, at varying levels, the different skills required for each task. The most successful responses displayed a sound level of understanding of both passages and the ability to modify material for the purposes of the task. They also wrote in an appropriate style using a range of effective vocabulary. Less effective responses were often over reliant on the wording and structure of the texts and were not always focused on the details of the question. Most candidates attempted all parts of the tasks and there were very few unfinished or incomplete responses.

The majority of **Question 1** responses attempted all three bullet points and were aware of the need to write from the zookeeper's viewpoint. There were some engaging and convincing answers where their views and thoughts were conveyed to the reader effectively using an appropriate register and interesting language. In the best responses ideas were modified and developed and there was strong sense of purpose and audience. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities for development and used the material from the passage in a mechanical or straightforward way. Less effective responses were not well focused and contained a narrow range of ideas, often repeating the narrative of the passage with little modification.

For **Question 2** most candidates had selected a sufficient number of examples for explanation from both of the specified paragraphs and only a small number selected inappropriate choices or addressed only one part of the task. The best responses selected precise examples and gave focused and clear explanations of meanings, effects and images, demonstrating a clear understanding of the writer's use of specific words and phrases. Mid-range responses were less precise, offering either incomplete or overlong choices that did not always include explanations of significant words. In others, although clear meanings were given, attempts to explain effects were often tentative. Less good responses often repeated the words of the original when attempting to explain choices or were focused on simply identifying literary devices rather than discussing their use or effectiveness.

Many responses to **Question 3** displayed a good or reasonable understanding of the ideas in Passage B. Most had attempted to address all three areas outlined in the question and there were relatively few summaries that went significantly beyond 250 words. The best responses included a wide range of relevant ideas that were effectively organised and expressed clearly and succinctly, in the candidate's own words as far as possible. Mid-range responses contained a good number of relevant ideas though also included some material that was not always relevant, particularly from the introduction and conclusion to the passage. There was also a tendency to re-tell some of the events from the passage in detail instead of explaining what types of challenges they posed for Mee, the novice zoo owner. Less effective responses were often written in the same order as in the passage, often with the consequence that ideas were repeated. The grouping together of similar or related ideas would have resulted in a more cohesive account of Mee's struggles and difficulties and helped to avoid excess. Weaker answers also contained lifted phrases and sometime indiscriminate copying, indicating an insecure understanding of both the passage and the task.

Although Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20 per cent of the available marks are for Writing, divided equally between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing and allow sufficient time to review their answers and correct any inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Unclear expression will limit the mark awarded for Writing, as will over-reliance on the wording of the passage and copying parts of the text.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Question 1**

**Imagine you are the zookeeper. Later that day you write in your journal reflecting on your feelings about life now and how things have changed.**

##### Write your journal.

**In your journal, you should:**

- **describe what you do each day, why you do it and how that makes you feel.**
- **explain what you have noticed about the boy and his father and your feelings about each of them.**
- **consider how things have changed for you and the world around you since you first started working at the zoo and suggest what you think the future may hold for you.**

**Base your journal 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 journal, 'Today was ...'**

The majority of responses were written from the viewpoint of the zookeeper in an appropriate style and genre for a personal journal. Not all candidates demonstrated a full understanding of the main ideas of Passage A and some failed to recognise that the lion, and other animals in the zoo, were mechanised artefacts, or that the boy and his father resembled each other so closely because they were augmented humans/part robots. Such oversights resulted in some straightforward accounts of the zookeeper's day which although containing some relevant details were unlikely to develop ideas effectively or go beyond a basic narrative outline of the day's events. The wording on the plaque, near the end of the end of the passage, provided clues about the artificial nature of the lion. Reflecting on events in the light of this and/or reading back to reconsider details would have provided a clearer understanding of the dystopian nature of the story and allowed candidates to select more details and ideas that were relevant to possible developments in future technology. Most understood that the story was set one hundred years in the future and some titled the journal '2119'.

For the first bullet point most candidates were able to describe the normal routine of the zookeeper and explain his thoughts and feelings about his daily tasks. Most referred to his tiredness and the difficulties of working due to his old age, the ritual of collecting meat in the bucket and his efforts to coax the lion out of the cage to 'eat' his meal. Less effective responses used the detail in a mechanical way sometimes copying phrases from the text, for example, 'attracting a frenzied swarm of flies' and 'the animal shuffled out'. This lifting of phrases and straightforward repetition of ideas displayed a less than secure understanding of the passage. Better responses commented on the zookeeper's despair at the futility of pretending to feed fake meat to a cybernetised animal, and also his sadness that a once majestic creature had been re-animated

and was now a tattered and pathetic shadow of its former self. Less successful responses were not fully focused and sometimes digressed into speculative accounts of the zookeeper's family, an invented history of his life or the qualities required to be a successful zoo worker. There were opportunities to develop ideas that were firmly linked to the passage and some candidates commented that the zookeeper had to continually mop the sweat from his brow as a result of the heat due to global warming and that the meat was synthetic because most animals had become extinct, and that he yearned for the old days when he was a young man and the zoo had a collection of real animals that did not need constant repair.

When addressing the second bullet point most candidates commented that the boy was watchful and curious and that his father appeared unemotional and more reticent and detached. Some referred to their daily visits and expressed the zookeeper's thoughts about why they bothered as these visits usually resulted in disappointment for the boy whose questions were not fully answered. Several included references to their similar appearance, their perfect unblemished skin and dry palms though they did not always explain that they were a result of being programmed/augmented and/or cloned. Some commented on the contrast between the aged features of the zookeeper himself and the likelihood that the boy would never suffer the ailments of old age as he had. Better responses demonstrated an understanding that these visitors were part robots, that the father was transmitting knowledge to the boy's siliconised brain and was able to anticipate his next question. The most successful responses used a convincing voice to convey the zookeeper's thoughts about the couple, for example, 'staring at me as if I were an exhibit', 'they unnerve me with their robotic behaviour and unspoken thoughts'. This section of the journal often contained a good amount of supporting detail, though in less focused answers there were some general comments about the father and son relationship that were not fully relevant to the ideas in the text.

When addressing the third part of the journal better responses focused on all aspects and included reflections on the future of the zoo, the future of the zookeeper and his thoughts on modern life. In less effective responses ideas from the passage were not developed and general discussion was included about how the man might possibly spend his retirement and that someone else would take over the zoo, possibly the young boy as he had shown an interest in animals. Some expressed regret that he was no longer strong enough to continue to work and that repairing the animals had become a futile exercise. In a few responses it was suggested that the empty cage near the exit may one day contain a re-animated artefact of the zookeeper himself – a suggestion that evidenced a careful reading and a sound understanding of the ideas in the passage. Many commented that the zoo attracted fewer visitors and would eventually close, though not all gave suitable explanations for the demise of the zoo, for example, that it no longer contained real animals and feeding time was not such an attraction as in the past.

Some candidates picked up on suggestions in the text to develop very effectively potential ideas related to ecological and environmental issues, voicing concerns about global warming and extinction of animals convincingly from the wholly human perspective of the zookeeper. Many of the responses were reflective and displayed nostalgia for the time when people were not artificially programmed and lions actually roared and devoured real meat. The best responses were carefully planned to avoid repetition of ideas and to ensure that ideas were relevant and focused on each bullet point.

Stronger responses were written in a consistently appropriate and convincing voice and conveyed effectively the ideas of an elderly zookeeper whose non-augmented body and thoughts were out of place in a modern world that he did not fully understand. Views were expressed in a range of interesting and appropriate vocabulary. Less good responses relied on the wording of the passage or contained copied phrases. Most responses followed the order of the bullet points and in some cases this led to repetition of ideas, for example references to the lab grown meat and the physical weaknesses of the zookeeper. Better responses planned beforehand where in the journal details and ideas from the passage would be most effective.

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

- read the whole text carefully, more than once, identifying the key ideas and details you can adapt for use in your answer
- consider how the response to reading task is asking you to adopt a different perspective to that of the passage – for example by writing from the point of view of a character whose actions are described in the narrative
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain in your answer
- consider the audience and purpose for your response before you begin writing
- give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- express ideas from the text which are relevant to your answer using your own words

- do not simply repeat details from the text – try to extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include, for example by conveying the thoughts and feelings of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response
- do not waste time counting the exact number of words in your response – the number of words suggested by the question is a guide and not a word limit.

## Question 2

**Re-read the descriptions of:**

- (a) the zookeeper in paragraph 1, beginning ‘The boy stared ...’
- (b) the animal in paragraph 14, beginning ‘The ancient ...’

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

In response to Question 2 candidates needed to identify a range of relevant examples and give sufficiently focused and clear analysis of these to demonstrate an understanding of how the writer was using language. Candidates are advised to select four appropriate examples for each part of the question and most responses included a sufficient number of choices to allow their explanations to target higher marks. While candidates are rewarded for the quality of their answers rather than the quantity, answers that only include one or two relevant examples do not allow candidates to display a full understanding of the writer’s use of language. Good responses contained precise and relevant choices with clear explanations focused on the key selected words and phrases with an equal focus on both parts of the question.

Whilst many answers discussed a range of relevant examples, some responses to part (a) attempted to analyse choices such as ‘dented metal feed bucket’ and ‘swung ponderously’ which did not refer to the focus of the question – the zookeeper. Some generalised explanations were insufficiently precise to be rewarded – in a number of less focused responses the comments that the zookeeper was old, weak and worn out were repeated as generic explanations for several choices, for example, ‘hobbling’, ‘gnarled knuckles’ and ‘ropy tendons and veins’. These words and phrases each have different meanings, and better responses were able to distinguish these differences to give accurate explanations and tackle imagery with some imagination. For example, candidates were rewarded for explaining that ‘gnarled knuckles’ gives an image of something knotty and rough like an old tree trunk, a result of age or hard work, and that ‘ropy tendons and veins’ suggests a thickening and lack of suppleness due to exertion and physical labour over a period of time. Some explanations repeated the words of the original, for example, ‘tissue-thin skin’ and ‘time-withered muscle’, indicating that the meanings of these choices were not fully understood. Where the meaning of words was carefully considered, for example, ‘withered’, candidates were then able to suggest the effects of muscle that had wasted and shrivelled over the years. The naming of literary devices such as the alliteration in ‘brittle bones’ offered little evidence of understanding without an explanation of how that was working to suggest that the bones were easily broken and fragile and emphasise the frailty of the zookeeper’s body. There were some clear explanations of ‘baggy covering’ and ‘secret stories of wounds’. The most successful answers were those that addressed all of the key words in the choices. For example, the word ‘inhabited’ is a key part of the phrase ‘ghosts of forgotten injuries’ and some answers explored profitably the implications that the zookeeper was haunted or possessed in some way.

In a number of responses part (b) was less successful. Where candidates had not spotted that the lion was cybernetised and partly mechanical this impacted on the quality of the explanations they offered. Some responses referred incorrectly to the damage to the lion’s cage, rather than the lion itself and in the phrase ‘fur rubbed painfully against metal’ some commented that the lion had injured itself by rubbing against his metal cage. The opportunity to discuss the contrast between the natural and unnatural substances of the lion’s body and the image that this evoked was missed. Some choices were incomplete which prevented a full exploration of effects. The words ‘betrayed’ and ‘exposing’ were often not included when explaining the ‘old tears’ and ‘bare spots’ which led to candidates giving basic meanings without explaining that the lion had been let down because its damaged pelt revealed the mechanised parts of its body, showing it that it was not a wholly organic animal.

In better responses there were attempts to explain the effects that the language had on the reader. In less effective responses these effects were repeated and it was not made clear why certain words and phrases evoked feelings such as sadness or sympathy in the reader. The most successful answers included a range of effects with clear explanations of why the writer had chosen specific words to communicate the animal’s suffering and indignity.

Candidates missing opportunities to aim for higher marks did not always make specific choices and in several answers the phrases 'atrophied meat', 'underlying musculature' and 'churning gears' were grouped together as one example without individual explanations of their different meanings and effects. This grouping did not allow candidates to display an understanding of the chosen vocabulary and why the writer had used specific words to convey meaning.

Candidates are advised to avoid making 'empty' comments such as 'the writer has used interesting language to create an image in our minds'. Without an explanation of how and why these particular images were created the comments are very general and cannot be rewarded. There was some clear analysis of 'raggedly sutured gaps' and several candidates successfully explained how the zookeeper had made an effort to stich up the lion's pelt, despite his lack of expertise, by focusing on the meanings of key words then suggesting effects. Strong responses offered careful analysis of well selected words and phrases in both parts of the question. Less good responses gave incomplete choices and offered imprecise or general explanations that were not always focused on key words.

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

- once you have identified the potentially relevant choices to answer part (a) and part (b), select your strongest four from each paragraph to explore and explain
- spend some time considering the exact meaning of each choice in context before you go on to explore effect
- make sure your choices are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice you wish to discuss
- show your understanding in full – consider each of the key words within your identified choice
- avoid general comments such as 'the writer has used great imagery' – try to explain how and why
- avoid repeating the wording of the question as an explanation of effect – for example, 'this suggests just how ancient the animal is'
- try to explore and explain the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the precise effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answer – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

#### **Question 3**

**What were the challenges for Benjamin Mee in buying, saving and running the zoo, according to Passage B?**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 250 words.**

Most summaries had made some attempt to address all three parts of the task and were an appropriate length. Less good responses included material that was not relevant to the task. Some included information from the introduction to the passage regarding Mee's persuasive ability and the family arrangements that he needed to undertake before buying the zoo. Some also included the reflective comments made by him at the end of the passage about loss, the cycle of life and the plans for a Hollywood film. References were also made to the zoo's rustic charm and homemade signs, and the leaflet Mee's sister had sent to him. This loss of focus on the challenges of buying, saving and running the zoo did not demonstrate the ability to select relevant information and key points from the passage and often resulted in less concise responses. Some loss of concision was also the result of including unnecessary detail from the passage and re-telling events at the zoo rather than summarising the information and providing an overview of the main difficulties and challenges.

Several responses relied on anecdotal details from the passage, for example, the incident when the jaguar escaped from its cage was sometimes described in detail, often repeating or paraphrasing the original language. Better responses referred to the challenges of dealing with potentially dangerous animals and the need to ensure public safety. Similarly, the footage of Mee begging the bank manager for money was an indication that he had cash flow problems and was in desperate need of funding for repairs. Most answers included the points that the zoo was in poor condition when he first bought it, that its licence had been withdrawn and it needed to pass an inspection. Less effective responses copied the words 'dangerously rundown' and 'revoked' and also listed the features that were unsafe and needed urgent repair, often replaying the wording from the passage.

The most successful responses were those that showed evidence of careful selection and planning of relevant points before writing the summary. This planning allowed candidates to re-organise the main points and group similar ideas together, resulting in concise and well-structured summaries that avoided repetition and which were focused on the key ideas. The least successful responses were when candidates appeared to have worked through the passage locating any potentially relevant details and then simply presenting them in the same order as the original. This resulted in some repeated ideas and unnecessary material. For example, several responses included the reference, near the beginning of the passage, to Fudge the bear who needed his 13 cm claws trimmed as well as later references to Tammy the Siberian tiger and the actions of her keeper rather than sum up the challenge of caring for dangerous animals. Most responses included some reference to the ‘myriad of expensive tasks’ faced by Mee and to the money for animal feed and workers that should have been paid. Some candidates then later referred to the high costs of running the zoo and referred again to animal feed and staff costs. In some responses the problem of employees was also referred to several times, including the actions of the inexperienced keeper, instead of using staff concerns as an umbrella term for the challenges of having select, train and pay reliable employees. In a number of potentially stronger responses opportunities were missed as a consequence of only hinting at the challenges and difficulties through inclusion of the detail rather than making understanding explicit by referring, for example, to repair, maintenance and running costs and issues of public safety, privacy, and personal challenges and responsibilities.

The best responses were focused on all three areas of the question, they were also concise with clearly expressed ideas using own words. They displayed a sound understanding of the task and of the ideas in Passage B. Weaker responses contained words and phrases copied from the original and even though some words were replaced with suitable alternatives and words were re-arranged within a sentence there was evidence of a heavy reliance on the original wording. This reliance did not demonstrate a good understanding of ideas or the requirements of a summary.

**Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read the question carefully and underline the key words
- re-read the passage after reading the question, to identify potentially relevant content points
- you can use spare pages in your answer booklet to plan your ideas ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to check they are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which need further explanation
- check you understand each idea you use and aim to explain it in your own words
- organise and sequence your ideas helpfully for your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the passage
- do not add details, examples or comment on the content of the passage
- avoid repetition of points
- write informatively and accurately, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- when checking and editing your response, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage
- in the selective summary, keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 250 words’ and the need for concision.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/23  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- used their own words appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- avoided copying and/or lifting from either passage
- considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to show for each of the three tasks
- paid attention to the guidance and instructions for each task
- returned to the text when necessary to clarify an idea or reconsider an important detail
- planned their ideas and the route through their answer before writing
- gave equal attention to all aspects of each question
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- edited their responses to correct any careless slips, incomplete ideas or unclear points
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

## General comments

Candidates' responses indicated some familiarity with the format of the paper and the general demands of the three tasks. On occasion, opportunities to target higher marks were missed where candidates offered a restricted range of ideas, misread details and/or dealt unevenly with each part of the task. Stronger responses demonstrated an awareness of the need to use, rather than repeat, the material from the passages in order to answer the questions. Successful answers were able to modify the material in the passages and use it to show understanding, remaining focused on the specific demands of each task. Less successful responses were often over reliant on the wording and/or sequence of the text(s). Some paid limited attention to the details of the question, providing less convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a result. Centres are reminded that simple paraphrasing and/or copying of the text should be avoided and that candidates should take note of key words in the task instructions.

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible, though there were a few instances where all or part of a task had not been attempted. Occasionally, achievement was limited by a failure to follow the rubric and/or complete all aspects of a task – for example, adopting an inappropriate register or stance in **Question 1**, explaining fewer than 4 choices in each/either part of **Question 2** or writing far more than the maximum of 250 words advised for **Question 3**.

Most **Question 1** responses attempted all three bullets of the task and were aware of the need to interpret the recent events, reactions to the blockade and the incident at the Aljafars' from the wider perspective of a journalist writing the newspaper report. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passage, with the best demonstrating a particularly strong sense of purpose and approach to create thorough and engaging reports. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities through more mechanical treatment of the text. Less successful responses sometimes repeated the narrative with minimal modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text/introduction to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and to be avoided.

For **Question 2** candidates need to consider relevant examples of words and phrases from each of the two specified paragraphs and offer precise, focused comments in relation to these choices. To target higher bands, candidates should explore and explain in some detail the meanings and effects of the examples of interesting or powerful language selected to demonstrate sound understanding of the writer's purpose. Most were able to identify potentially useful selections for analysis, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently clear or careful in the examination of their choices to evidence secure understanding, for example suggesting that "sluggish" means to be like a slug'. Where answers repeated the language of the choices and/or offered generalised comments evidence of understanding was diluted a result. A small number of candidates selected from an incorrect paragraph or focused only on one rather than both paragraphs.

In **Question 3** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas. Though all points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, opportunities were missed to target higher marks, often as a result of repetition of aspects of the same idea from the early part of the text, such as 'people think bottled water is healthier than tap water', and/or inclusion of material not relevant to the focus of the question. Where responses were most successful, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words, to keep explanations concise and to organise their ideas helpfully. Less well focused responses were over reliant on copying from the text, with minimal / no rewording or reorganisation of the original. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, and did not need to search for synonyms for terms such as 'recycled'. They should not however lift whole phrases and/or sentences from the text, or rely on simply listing ideas in the order of the passage. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20 per cent of the available marks are for Writing, divided equally between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and reviewing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Candidates should be aware that unclear style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. It is advisable for candidates to leave sufficient time to edit and correct their responses.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Question 1**

You are a journalist writing for the local weekly newspaper reporting on recent events and reactions to them. Two days after the incident at Aljafar's property, it is announced that the blockade has been lifted and water rationing is no longer required. Meanwhile, Aljafar and his wife have complained to the authorities.

#### Write the newspaper report.

In your newspaper report, you should:

- describe conditions during the blockade and the effect on the population of the island and its economy
- outline how the incident at the Aljafars' came about – what happened and why
- explain the nature of the Aljafars' complaints and how far they are justified.

**Base your newspaper report 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 newspaper report, 'Recent events ...'

The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood the passage and task in at least general terms. Many offered extended responses, reworking and attempting to develop the material with their audience in mind and engaging with both task and text. Where responses relied too heavily on simply tracking through the text, replaying the passage, answers were less well focused and often repeated ideas without development. The least successful responses copied sections of the text, particularly from the italicised introduction in the Reading Booklet Insert, with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading key details and information, such as suggesting that 'the blockade had resulted in a high number of deaths' or 'the residents had left the island'.

The most convincing responses to Question 1 showed evidence of candidates having returned to the passage to select appropriate details to describe the impact of the conditions during the blockade, the circumstances surrounding the incident at the Aljafars', and the extent of the Aljafars' complaints. Many made good use of the guidance in the bullets to help them identify and then organise the ideas they might include and used the prompt offered as a helpful starting point for their response. Some invented useful headlines. 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 focused on more generic points, offering for example extended descriptions of the Aljafars' house, including the cellar, at the expense of other more relevant ideas. This limited their focus on the task. The least successful answers were often thin, simple or short. They offered a very general view of the situation, but few ideas and details in response to the bullet points.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to describe conditions during the blockade and the effect on the population of the island and its economy. Almost all answers recognised that the island was suffering from a shortage of supplies and water rationing. Similarly, most answers included the effects on human health, particularly regarding the tiredness of the children. However, where answers relied on simply paraphrasing the passage rather than reworking ideas to address the task many missed opportunities to show evidence of close reading by developing ideas linked to the conditions during the blockade. Stronger answers recognised implications and were able to develop ideas in relation to a loss of revenue. Less successful answers showed signs of not having read closely or planned out their ideas by using details incorrectly – for example by referring to the blockade as a 'blockage' or reporting that it was still on-going.

Many candidates did make good use of the guidance within each bullet to help focus their response and in bullet two were able to include a range of potentially relevant ideas. Most had understood that the narrator and Marchand had met Aljafar and recognised his non-compliance with the request to conserve water. On occasions, there was a lack of attention paid to the sequencing of events, particularly regarding the two visits to the Aljafars' house and when the blockade was lifted. For example, the second visit to the Aljafars' house was often described as being the night of the first visit, rather than 'days later'. The reference to 'two days' was also often used to refer to the time between the second visit and the Aljafars' complaints being made. Those who relied on mechanical lifting from the text sometimes diluted evidence of reading skills and understanding through incorrect copying, for example by reporting that Marchand and the narrator were laying 'on the dead grass' and pushing their 'lips against the cool water', despite the fact the water had been removed from the pool by Aljafar.

When dealing with the third bullet of the task, most answers focused on the theft, trespassing and damage to the Aljafars' property. These were often covered superficially or misread, with candidates commenting on the questionable morality of the Aljafars' actions, rather than explaining what their complaints were. Some candidates referred to these when addressing bullet two in a narrative style as part of the neighbours' visit to the house, rather than discussing them in terms of the nature of the Aljafars' complaints in relation to bullet three. Weaker responses tended to offer some general justification for the actions of the villagers and Aljafar and his wife, occasionally offering some supporting detail, though were unable to develop their answers beyond this. Conversely, a common feature was for many candidates to adhere to the prompts of the question, but then to continue to offer a judicial review of the case and the merits and actions of both sides, including what courses of action should be taken against them. There was some evidence of confident, plausible development of ideas, such as how Marchand spoke respectfully to Aljafar during his first visit, and that Aljafar had also committed a crime by ignoring the water rationing.

Stronger answers showed evidence that candidates had decided beforehand on a voice for their journalist and kept their readers in mind throughout, although a few candidates wrote as either Marchand or his neighbour, and in both cases, in the first person, so the style and structure of a newspaper report was not consistently maintained. On occasion less effective writing contained some awkward expression, for example as a result of insecure vocabulary choices. In the weakest answers lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of sections of text not uncommon and affecting evidence of both Reading and Writing skills. 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. Efficient planning allowed stronger answers to address this and to adopt a convincing and consistently appropriate style from the start.

**Advice to candidates on Question 1:**

- read the whole text carefully, more than once, identifying the key ideas and details you can adapt for use in your answer
- consider how the response to reading task is asking you to adopt a different perspective to that of the passage – for example by writing from a point in time after the events described
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain in your answer
- consider the audience and purpose for your response before you begin writing
- give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- express ideas from the text which are relevant to your answer using your own words
- do not simply repeat details from the text – try to extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include, for example by reflecting on events and making judgements
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response
- do not waste time counting the exact number of words in your response – the number of words suggested by the question is a guide and not a word limit.

**Question 2**

**Re-read the descriptions of:**

- (a) the city and people in paragraph 12, beginning ‘Days later, ...’  
(b) Aljafar, the cellar and its contents in paragraph 30, beginning ‘We heard him ...’

**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 in Question 2 needed to identify a range of relevant, precise examples of language for discussion and provide sufficiently focused and clear analysis of these in order to evidence understanding of how the writer was using language in each case. Where the meaning of words was considered carefully in context, candidates were often able to go on to suggest something of the effect and better answers ensured that they had considered all key words within choices. Opportunities to target higher marks were missed where meaning was not explained and/or selections had not been carefully considered beforehand. Rather than selecting the first four choices in each half they came across or the most ‘obvious’ literary devices, successful answers often set out to explore those words and phrases they felt best able to explain. Some of the strongest answers showed evidence of candidates having identified many of the potential choices from each paragraph in a planning stage before beginning their response and then selecting from their original list those they wanted to tackle.

Candidates are reminded it is the quality of their analysis which attracts marks. Answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks in a language question.

A number of weaker answers relied on simply spotting literary devices and as a result struggled to interpret meaning or effect. For example whilst many candidates who selected it were able to offer credible interpretations of ‘attached ourselves to lips-first like ticks to a sheep’ and what that suggested, others struggled to comment as a consequence of having simply identified it as an example of a simile ‘because it used the word like’ with little understanding of how the image was working. Taking time to select from the full range of potential choices those about which they felt most able to comment, rather than simply feature spotting, would have helped a number of candidates who offered only thin or inappropriate comment.

Repeating the language of the original in their explanations was a feature of some partially effective explanations. Likewise, potentially relevant comments were offered in general terms rather than linked to/evidenced by precise quotation from the text. The best answers were able to explore connotations and suggestions of words within the choices they had selected as well as go on to consider how exactly those created a particular image/effect for the reader.

Many candidates were able to provide satisfactory evidence of skills and understanding in either one part of the task or the other and might have aimed for higher marks by extending their explanations to consider ‘how’ or ‘why’ the words chosen were creating the general or basic effect they claimed. The majority of candidates were able to show that they recognised at least some potentially interesting examples of language use and could begin to offer some relevant comment. For marks in the top bands, candidates need to be careful to select and interpret choices accurately, considering examples in context and demonstrating that they understand some of the subtleties of how the language is working.

Better answers focused on exploring and explaining each of their choices in detail, offering some high quality analysis in each half of the question. They avoided repetition of very similar comments in relation to more than one choice and did more than simply identify features, with the best recognising and explaining imagery with some imagination. There were various alternative explanations offered for example when dealing with ‘as if its unlubricated gears and belts had seized up’. Comments likened the town to an unoiled machine that was not functioning and the futility of the situation. Many referred to ‘crumbling, turning to dust and salt’ as representing the fragility of the people and linked it to the weakness of the people as ‘a strong wind could scatter them into clouds of dead skin’. Others missed opportunities to profit from their general understanding and go on to explore and explain each choice specifically, instead offering only partial or very weak effects, for example in repeated comments such as ‘this shows they were tired/lacked energy’.

There were plenty of potentially useful choices relating to both the description of the city and people in paragraph 12, and Aljafar, the cellar and its contents in paragraph 30. Where candidates had not paid close attention to the detail of the task less relevant choices were sometimes considered. In relatively rare cases, candidates selected from the wrong paragraph and/or offered only two choices from each paragraph rather than the four from each suggested and consequently offered more limited evidence of Reading skills. At times, potentially useful choices were not fully explored or explained and opportunities missed as a result. For example, ‘ghostly’ was frequently explained in relation to the deserted town, rather than applying it to its inhabitants. ‘Torpid’ was rarely explained, and ‘cavernous cellar’ was commonly simply related to a cave.

Selections in Question 2 need to be clear and deliberate – helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful and often result in very thin general comments at best. On occasion, candidates selected phrases containing a few words and then went on to unpick the separate elements of these with some success. Others narrowed the focus down to single words and then reassembled the image. Both were potentially useful approaches where careful explanation was offered and replaying of the language of the original as part of the commentary was avoided. Repetition of the words of the choice within the explanation offered was a feature of a number of lower range answers – often an indication that the meaning of the vocabulary selected had not been fully understood.

Opportunities were missed in some answers, such as where a chosen phrase contained more than one word of interest and the answer moved on too quickly – offering a more general explanation of the phrase as a whole and/or only considering one of the words it contained. For example, a number of answers discussed the use of ‘fumbling’ but missed the chance to consider the effect of ‘theatrically’ and how Aljafar unconvincingly attempted to deceive the neighbours.

Planning of relevant ideas ahead of writing would have helped some candidates to avoid general phrases such as ‘the writer’s use of interesting adjectives sets the scene’. Unless the answer goes on to suggest exactly how and in what ways the writer is doing this, such comment can offer a false sense of security and take up valuable examination time unprofitably. Stronger responses, offering considered and careful analysis focused on language use in both parts of the question, were often able to build to a useful overview of how the language was working and evidence clear understanding.

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

- once you have identified the potentially relevant choices to answer part a and part b, select your strongest four from each paragraph to explore and explain
- make sure your choices are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice you wish to discuss
- if you are unsure of effect, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) you have identified
- show your understanding in full – consider each of the key words within your identified choice
- avoid general comments such as ‘the writer has used great imagery’
- avoid repeating the wording of the text as an explanation of effect, for example, ‘this shows that the adults were dehydrated’

- try to explore and explain the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the precise effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answer – for example to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

### Question 3

**Why has drinking bottled water become so popular and what problems does the consumption of bottled water cause, according to Passage B?**

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

Your summary should not be more than 250 words.

Candidates who addressed the task successfully, often showed evidence of having planned beforehand both the content and route through their answer. They had identified those points that were potentially relevant to the focus of the question (why drinking bottled water has become so popular and what problems the consumption of bottled water causes) and reflected on their potential answers to refine their ideas and avoid excess. For example, they were able to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point, identify implied points and/or avoid repetition of ideas or inclusion of unnecessary detail. Successful answers did not rely on the structure or language of the text to communicate ideas and considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for the selective summary task. Less effective responses had often relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text and/or tried to paraphrase the original or shadow it, substituting (sometimes inappropriate) vocabulary for individual words. The weakest answers adopted a cut and paste approach, copying sections from the original and/or were almost entirely reliant on the language of the text.

On occasion, incorrect and/or incomplete lifting from the text also served to dilute evidence of understanding in potentially stronger answers which would have benefitted from careful editing. Reading back through their answer afterwards to make sure that it would both make sense as a piece of informative writing for a reader who had not read the original passage and summarised the key information that reader would need to know in relation to the increased popularity and problems associated with water bottles would have helped a number of candidates achieve higher marks. Often answers began well and showed some understanding of relevant ideas but lost focus, for example by repeating information and/or the inclusion of unnecessary detail, such as writing about water being transported from Helsinki to Saudi Arabia, or writing out statistics in full. A few less successful answers showed evidence of having misread details of the task – for example by offering comment from outside the text in relation to environmental issues or effects on wildlife, rather than information from the text. Misreading of details in the text diluted evidence of understanding in some answers – for example it was not correct to suggest that ‘bottled water’ was the cause of every issue, but the bottle itself, rather than the bottled water that was polluting the oceans.

Where candidates had paid careful attention to the task as set, they aimed for concise and well organised answers using their own vocabulary where practicable and appropriate to help clarify meaning for their reader. They demonstrated their understanding of relevant ideas within the context of the whole text, for example avoiding giving a personal response to environmental issues. Competent answers showed they had focused on the specifics of the task as set and did not include polemical discussions of environmental issues and recycling problems, but instead kept their sights clearly on the increased consumption of bottled water and its effects. Candidates producing the most effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a wide range of relevant ideas, explaining them in their own words and skilfully selecting and organising points to offer an overview. On occasion, potentially effective answers lost sight of the need for concision in a selective summary task and significant excess arose as a result of continuing to write beyond the maximum of 250 words advised in the task guidance.

Where answers copied wholesale from the text with minimal or no modification, or offered a response which communicated only a few relevant ideas, candidates missed opportunities to target higher marks. The best responses showed that candidates understood the need to be accurate, clear and concise in the use of their own words when summarising relevant material from the passage. Stronger answers were careful to recast information, organise it helpfully, and use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing or blurring the original idea. For example, better answers reorganised the material rather than relying on the order of the text – avoiding repetition by doing so. Stronger answers were able to offer their own vocabulary consistently, though in the mid-range some lifting of phrases was common with fewer candidates offering confident alternatives for ‘driven by fear’, ‘chic, exotic’, ‘farmers, fishers’, and ‘take over 100 years to bio-degrade’.

Candidates need to be aware that simply moving word order around within a sentence or replacing just one word is not a short cut to providing secure evidence of their reading skills and understanding. Candidates need to work to show understanding of ideas rather than simply track the passage making minimal changes and/or slotting in substituted words. The best answers were clear, concise, largely accurate and well organised.

**Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read the question carefully and underline the key words
- re-read the passage after reading the question, to identify potentially relevant content points
- you can use spare pages in your answer booklet to plan your ideas ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to check they are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which need further explanation
- check you understand each idea you use and aim to explain it in your own words
- organise and sequence your ideas helpfully for your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the passage
- do not add details, examples or comment on the content of the passage
- avoid repetition of points
- write informatively and accurately, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- when checking and editing your response, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage
- in the selective summary, keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 250 words’ and the need for concision.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/31  
Directed Writing and Composition

## General comments

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, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and interest the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct varied sentences accurately
- use appropriate, precise and wide-ranging vocabulary.

Examiners found that in most cases a secure understanding was shown of what was expected in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. A large majority of responses, regardless of achievement, were sustained and there were few very brief scripts. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted Question 1 and either a descriptive or narrative writing task. In **Question 1**, a few responses were mostly or wholly copied from the passage in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the reading passage in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a letter to a website organisation and there was in many a clear attempt to argue and persuade the recipient. The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. Better answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage in a coherent response. In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the passage, sometimes with an opinion given about some of the points made. A substantial number of responses at this range refuted or made simple rebuttals of some of the information in the passage without evaluating or commenting on their validity.

Weaker candidates tended to repeat the ideas in the passage, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some weaker responses, this resulted in a lack of cohesion and some contradiction of competing ideas.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the passages were scrutinised thoughtfully. Sometimes, insufficient use was made of the reading material and opinions on screen use were offered with limited reference to the specific ideas in the passage. The formal, impersonal style required for a letter to an organisation was understood by the majority of candidates although some of the conventions of formal letter writing were not used by candidates across the mark range. For example, appropriate opening and closing sentences for the letter, particularly the valediction at the end, were often not used.

Better responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for a formal letter. These were polite but evaluative in style, using ideas from the passages to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices and showing a strong sense of audience. Some in the middle range of marks wrote in a more discursive style and there was less focus on arriving at a clear judgement based on the passage. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the article with less selection and regrouping of ideas from the original article. This sometimes made for a disjointed and less coherent style and structure.

In the compositions, better responses to the composition questions 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 most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very effective and sustained. There were some imaginative evocations of places which had been significant in various ways to the writer in the first descriptive writing question which Examiners found engaging and effective. A wide range of approaches was employed in the second, with some highly effective and detailed descriptions of the sky and the landscape. In both cases, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene imaginatively. Weaker responses to both descriptive writing questions tended to contain straightforward physical descriptions or some reliance on narrative with less descriptive focus.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and interpretations and Examiners awarded marks across the range here.

Weaker narratives were less credible and there was often less overall cohesion and narrative purpose. Some were more simple, chronological accounts and were under-developed in style and less cohesive in structure. Composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The best descriptive writing was specific, used some original and thought-provoking imagery and effectively evoked the atmosphere of the time and place described. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of credible characters were features understood by the most effective writers who chose narrative writing options.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Section A: Directed Writing***

##### **Question 1**

**Write a letter to the website in response to the ideas in the article.**

**In your letter, you should:**

- evaluate the different arguments given in the article
- explain how far you agree or disagree with the views in the article about the dangers and the benefits of time spent by young people in front of screens

**Base your letter on what you have read in the article, but be careful to use your own words.**

**Address each of the bullet points.**

**Begin your letter: 'Dear Digital Trends ...'**

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 15 marks for the quality of your writing.**

As usual in the Directed Writing question, Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in it. Where the letter was also both accurate and ambitious in vocabulary and style, often with a consistent sense of audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded. Better responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the passage, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The extent to which the inferences contained in the passages were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some listing of the explicitly points in the passage about the health effects of too much screen time and the potential benefits of modern technology for young people. Responses often included some opinion or reaction to the ideas in the passage though without evaluation of them.

At this level, the ideas included showed an understanding of the main ideas in the passage although opportunities to scrutinise their validity were not taken. Responses could have been improved by more thoughtful consideration of the opposing ideas rather than simple reproduction of them.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the details. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level, particularly where contradictory points conflicted with each other. The letter often did not follow the conventions of letter writing or the information in the passage was not adapted in style and purpose.

### 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, drawing inferences and making judgements about the pitfalls and benefits of young people's screen use. Most responses included the evidence in the passage that too much screen time for children and teenagers can be harmful and most showed some understanding of the article's main thesis that these dangers should be mitigated by the imposition of limits. More thoughtful responses went to the heart of the issue in considering whether the results of a 25 year old study of these harmful effects should, or could, be applied in modern society where the use of screen technology was much more widespread than in the past.

The task set did not specify the voice and perspective of the letter and a large number of candidates chose to write as if they were parents of children or young people. Others addressed the task in their own voices, often as young people who had grown up using various devices from an early age. Some perceptive responses explored the ways in which modern screen usage could not have been anticipated 25 years ago and also discussed the curtailment of 'entertainment screen time' suggested by the studies as unfair, since it did not take account of the much increased use of screens for work, school and basic daily life that modern society takes for granted. Many at this level argued convincingly that innovations and changes in how young people spent their time had always been met by disapproval and efforts to control them. This generational divide was seen as unjust when the article itself showed that adults were just as dependent on screens and some responses suggested that parents' use of them could have even worse effects on children and young people, in terms of language and social development and maturity, than children themselves using screens. The assumption of a link between obesity and screen use in the article was also probed and challenged in high-scoring responses. Some counter-arguments focused on the false assumption that, as one candidate put it, 'if we weren't playing video games all evening we'd be outside in the sunshine having a lovely kickabout with our jolly friends on some idyllic village green.' Others saw an underlying value judgement in the correlation between obesity and screen use, pointing out that reading, 'which all parents think is a good way to spend our time' is just as sedentary an activity as using screens and many responses made reference to the ways in which modern technology supported and inspired a more active lifestyle.

Similarly, the inference that mental health conditions, mentioned in the article, resulted from social isolation induced by too much screen time led to some strong evaluation. The kinds of uses young people made of screen technology were often felt to improve the social skills and well-being of young people rather than damage them. Gaming in particular was described sometimes as a social, and sociable, activity which helped young people build their own communities of friends with similar interests all over the world, not just in their own neighbourhoods.

The adverse effects of screen use were sometimes thoughtfully challenged in other ways. A common thread in Band 6 responses was that blaming anxiety, depression and increased levels of aggression on screen use alone was simplistic and misleading. Some responses argued that other factors of teenage life, such as examination pressures and economic hardship, were ignored in the article. Others accepted the distinction between screen use itself and the content being viewed to explain that simply restricting the time allowed on screens would have little effect on mental health. Harmful content was also addressed with some thoughtful evaluations. One candidate noted that 'this kind of content is, no doubt, harmful for young people but they need to learn for themselves that it even though exists everywhere and is easily accessed they should learn to control their impulse to watch it.' Some felt that even though restricting access to such content had been made easy by parental blocks and other technological fixes, teenagers needed to develop their own attitudes

and strategies for looking after their mental health rather than relying on, as one wrote, ‘keeping the real world out of their heads.’

The article’s assumption that there was ‘good’ content available on screens but that young people could not be trusted to find it was questioned and probed in Band 6 responses. The notion was often considered patronising and simplistic in assuming that only educational content was deemed ‘good’ and that using screens for entertainment seemed in the article to be considered wrong or inherently harmful.

Examiners awarded Band 5 marks where there was some evaluative commentary in places but the response as a whole did not offer a consistent critique of the ideas in the passage. In some cases, there was more focus on criticising the article itself than the ideas contained in it. The imbalance between benefits and pitfalls of screen use in the article was sometimes criticised but with limited scrutiny of the actual points made. Bias against screen use was detected and criticised without recognising that this was the angle and approach taken by the writer and without considering the reasons given in the article for the views in it.

Another approach which was not consistently evaluative was where solutions for the health impacts of too much screen time mentioned in the article were offered. For example, various sleep regimes were suggested such as restricting screen use for an hour before bedtime or making children play outside for an hour each day. While these solutions showed some understanding of the ideas in the article, in seeking to mitigate the harmful effects of screen use, they were not always evaluative in challenging or probing the assumptions in the passage in the same way as those described above.

Responses given 7 marks tended to respond more evaluatively to some ideas more than others. Many explored the idea of parental responsibility, suggesting that screen time in itself was not harmful but that parents should be setting a better example with their own screen use or that creating balance and moderation in screen use was a parent’s job. In contrast, responses sometimes concluded with a more evaluative position emerging, that screens were so essential that restricting children’s use of them would damage their job prospects or their social lives.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 4 for Reading where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above or with less scrutiny of the points made in the passages. There was often less argument and focus on using the passages to arrive at a judgement about whether screen use should be restricted for young people, rather than a simple opinion based on personal preference. While the points made were given mostly in candidates’ own words, simple opinions on them were offered rather than evaluation of them. For example, many wrote that they agreed that children under 2 should have no screen time but that teenagers should not be restricted but did not offer a rationale for their judgements. In some responses given 6 marks for Reading the arguments in the passage were regrouped a little but some contradictions or more subtle ideas were not addressed. Sometimes the evidence given in the article for harmful effects was simply refuted and the opposite view asserted rather than justified. One response, for example, claimed that ‘parents shouldn’t restrict teenagers from playing games because it’s not true that these games cause lack of sleep or aggression.’ To score higher marks for Reading, Examiners looked for some scrutiny of the apparent contradictions in the article rather than reproduction of them.

Weaker responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passages or addressed the material thinly. Some tracked through the passages simply but gave a straightforward paraphrase with little reorganisation and often some lifting of words and phrases from the passage so that Examiners were not convinced that the main ideas were understood. Misunderstanding of some ideas, such as the recommendation that entertainment screen time rather than all screen time should be restricted was common. Copying of phrases such as ‘we use them to communicate, to shop, to share’ and ‘kids can stumble on inappropriate content accidentally’ was also very common. Where a mark of 4 was awarded, some firmer links with the passages were needed, whereas 3 was generally given for very thin or mainly lifted responses in which there was some insecure grasp of the ideas in the passage.

## 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

A formal, polite tone was required for a letter to an unknown individual at a website publisher and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. Although not always sustained, most letters began with a straightforward introduction, referencing the article and outlining the purpose of writing. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical, stylistically persuasive style and presented their arguments with some subtlety of tone, always maintaining a formally polite tone but making their case effectively and with some impact. As mentioned above, some responses adopted the voice of a parent in order to argue from a more mature viewpoint, while most were written from the perspective of a young person.

In the middle range, the letter usually began in an appropriate tone and style but there were lapses in awareness of audience. The content and tone of the letter, once the opening sentences were given, became more a report of what was written in the article and often the valediction at the end of the letter was forgotten. Most often at this level there was limited argument to give the response shape and purpose, even where the passage was adequately reproduced. Several points made in the passage were listed and agreed or disagreed with but there was limited overall argument or structured discussion.

Weaker responses sometimes had limited overall cohesion because the different opinions in the passage were simply reproduced as they appeared in the original.

## Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the decision which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the passages but the response was not dependent on the passage for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the first paragraph and the information and opinion in the article were assumed rather than restated. The opening and concluding paragraphs addressed the purpose of the letter clearly and objectively, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case.

Responses given Band 6 marks 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 so that conflicting ideas were addressed separately, often addressing the harmful effects of screen use, then the benefits, with some conclusions drawn in the final section of the letter. Weaker responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passage whereas Band 5 responses usually organised and re-sequenced ideas more selectively. Straightforward Band 5 responses were paragraphed and balanced and followed the conventional structure of letters, though opening and concluding paragraphs were often brief, single sentences and the conventional ending of a formal letter was not used in many responses.

Some weaker responses given marks below Band 5 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passages, often with some lifting and copying. This approach led to some weakness in cohesion and paragraphing was not used securely or was completely lacking.

## Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 7. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used to create specific effects. Rhetorical flourishes, such as the use of contentious, challenging questions or exclamations, were often used at this level, such as 'It's not only Dr Strasburger's grasp of technology which is outdated and old-fashioned but his attitude to young people!' or 'How do parents hope to limit their children's use of screens when they can barely tear themselves away from their own phones to check what their kids are doing?'

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Band 5 responses 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 plain, the language used was apt. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in responses at this level, especially homophones and some words used in the passage such as 'communicate', 'viewing', 'obesity' and 'accidentally'. There were occasional lapses in the use of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical disagreement. Tenses were sometimes problematic: may responses at this level began with statements such as 'I had recently read your article...', for example.

Faulty sentence structures, insecure tense use or weakly demarcated sentences often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Band 5, even where other technical skills such as spelling were more accurate. 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 35 where mostly correctly structured sentences are required. The omission of definite or indefinite articles, tense errors and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the passage was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

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

- be prepared to challenge and disagree with ideas in the passage and always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage
- look for, and use in your response, inferences and assumptions made 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 and think carefully about the kind of style the recipient of your letter would expect as well as how letters should begin and end
- check writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

## **Section 2**

### **Descriptive Writing**

#### **Question 2**

- Describe a familiar place at an unusual time or from a different point of view.**
- Describe what you see, hear and feel when you look up into the sky as day changes into night.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates though the second task was more often selected. Examiners saw a range of different approaches to the tasks. In the first task, there were some strongly evocative descriptions of houses, villages and towns which were revealed anew to the narrator at different times of the day or after a long absence. One fairly common subject was the return of the writer to a much loved childhood space or building, such as the home of a grandparent, a school or park. Another frequent use of the title was to describe a familiar space, such as the writer's street or home, at an unusual time. Description of such landscapes at dead of night or in the early hours of the morning gave candidates an opportunity to recreate a strong atmosphere: some were intimidated by the eerie silence of the scene while others found the transformation of familiar sights enlightening or interesting.

In the second question, a wide variety of details and images was used to describe the changing sky at dusk. Some descriptions focused on the encroaching darkness of the sky while others widened their canvas to include a wider range of details about the surrounding landscape.

Some successful responses to the first question focused on the writer's thoughts and feelings as they approached or looked at a once familiar scene. Dilapidated or abandoned buildings such as a childhood home or the home of a close, much loved relative featured in a number of evocative responses to this question. There were striking images of household objects, toys or pictures, gardens or outbuildings which tapped into long-gone memories of happy times or significant people. Unusual or apparently insignificant but closely observed details created an impression of reality in the best responses. Most were constructed in a

fairly straightforward way, with a paragraph devoted to some aspect of the scene, though many were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed scene which was often emotionally charged. At the top of the mark range, some highly skilled writing took the reader on a journey into the narrator's childhood or past, not always reflecting pleasant memories and creating cohesive responses held together by a single thread or concept of ideas. The sense of looking at mundane, very familiar scenes in a new light also featured strongly in better responses to this question. One effective piece described the narrator walking through a quiet house from bedroom to kitchen at dead of night when some very ordinary, domestic objects became imbued with a sense of threat or danger. Some featured an empty school building to which the narrator had to return after class or at night, finding the classrooms and corridors echoing and empty. These consciously crafted pieces in no way fell into narration but held the reader's interest by linking the different elements described in an engaging way. In a significant number of responses at Band 6 and above, there was some conscious use of personification which was often quite effective. The streetlights of a familiar street 'leered evilly' or the broken rocking-horse in a grandmother's house 'stared accusingly', for example, and where this technique was controlled and not over-used, the effects created were interesting for the reader.

Middle range responses were characterised by rather more obvious images and ideas and the sensory impressions given were more mechanically listed and organised in different paragraphs. Vines or ivy climbing the walls of a childhood home or other once familiar building or the sounds of the narrator's footsteps in an empty corridor featured commonly, and although the images used were less original and striking, they were relevant and apt and some were more effective. Few responses at this level lapsed into narrative with little real description or lost the main features of descriptive writing. At the lower end of Band 5 for Content and Structure, some responses were a little unbalanced and included a long introductory preamble which explained why and how the writer came to be in the place described and this sometimes tended to overshadow an otherwise competent descriptive piece. In some, the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard and lacked the emotional engagement suggested by the title which was evoked in better responses. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses given higher marks.

Weaker responses were characterised by a tendency to list details briefly rather than effectively develop them or a narrative introduction became a series of events rather than a preamble to description. Sometimes there seemed little sense of 'a familiar place' as required in the task or details of the journey to a place and the reasons for it tended to overwhelm the descriptive elements in some responses at this level. Most responses to this question were organised and paragraphed but at this level the descriptions of each feature were brief and general rather than developed and specific.

The second question was more often selected and there were some effective and highly skilled descriptions here. Various scenarios worked well for candidates given high marks for Content and Structure here. While most depicted an awe-inspiring, beautiful skyscape, some effectively evoked the transition from day to night as threatening or used an unusual viewpoint or voice. A few responses, for example, were written as if the narrator were a nocturnal animal, watching and waiting with anticipation for the night to arrive and observing the smallest details from this interesting perspective. One response described in a controlled and oddly chilling way the effect of the darkness on the vampire narrator as the transformation in the night sky was reflected in the transformation of the narrator's mind and body. In similarly effective descriptions at this level, the emotional impact of the changing sky on the narrator was observed. One which described the darkening sky in detail, for example, wrote about 'melting into the stars, as insignificant in this vast universe as a grain of sand in a desert, but part of all creation' and other responses evoked this sense of awe and wonder in different ways.

Some successful responses interpreted the title more widely, with the transition from day to night in busy cities, harbours, beaches and on airplanes giving able candidates opportunities to focus on other details. The While there were some effective responses which interpreted the title more widely, some at Band 5 and below tended to focus more on the landscape rather than the sky, describing the streetlights coming on in the town or people gathering in nightclubs and bars in the city.

Examiners gave marks below Band 5 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus, and where there was limited organisation of the details described or where strings of details were listed with limited overall cohesion. At this level, responses became simple, unengaging accounts of an event rather than a description of the surroundings at the time. In other responses, the description was general rather than specific, usually including some rather cliched ideas such as the whistling of the wind in the trees, the chirping of crickets and birds going home to their nests.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were, in the best responses, reflective of the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, the same kinds of details were often included but better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary and showed an ability to use language deliberately to create a specific effect, such as the nostalgia of childhood in the first task or the sense of wonder in the second. In the middle range, vocabulary was less rich and varied but there was still a fair degree of accuracy in spelling and sentence construction. In weaker responses, as is often the case in descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences were common, even in scripts where responses to **Question 1** showed a secure grasp of sentence structure, and limited control of tenses was quite widespread. A very common weakness here also was the demarcation of sentences with commas rather than full stops. This often meant that Examiners could not award marks in Band 5 where the style was otherwise quite accurate and secure.

### **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; choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus
- keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere
- write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses.
- choose your vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects.

## **Narrative Writing**

### **Question 3**

- (a) Write a story which includes the words, ‘I tried to stay calm’.  
(b) Write a story with the title, ‘It’s Now or Never’.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses. Examiners sometimes saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title or where the given title or the quotation in the question was not used or the story did not really use these ideas. These narratives seemed to be answers to previously set questions rather than those on the current paper.

Better responses, as is often the case in narrative writing, were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used interesting but credible ideas and developed balanced and engaging stories. Both narrative titles implied some build-up of tension or a moment of decision or crisis and most candidates made use of this to help construct their stories.

There were various structures employed in better responses to the first question, rather than straightforward chronological recount. Stories sometimes began with the quotation from the title with some skilful release of significant detail as the story unfolded. One effective story began with the quotation, suggesting some confrontation between the narrator and another intimidating figure whose eyes ‘glittered with venom’. Only as the story ended did the identity of both characters emerge as two young children in a playground and the carefully controlled bathos gave the ending humour and impact. A wide range of scenarios was created in response to this title, often effectively creating tension and some resolution which maintained the reader’s interest. Some high-scoring narratives were written in specific genres, such as fantasy battles between warring peoples or stories about more contemporary battle zones. Better responses showed an ability to create characters that were believable, even if the scenario itself was fantastic or unfamiliar. War stories in which difficult missions were undertaken were often very successful if the characterisation of the main protagonists was credible and rooted in detail and observation. Sports stories centred around football matches or other sporting feats were also sometimes more effective because there was a carefully delineated relationship between players or between a player and a coach. While there were some graphic or violent scenes included in many responses, at the highest level these were written with restraint and control which made them all the more effective.

Middle range narratives were usually more straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases these responses sometimes relied on some over-dramatic and less likely scenarios, such as robberies or kidnappings. Examiners could award marks in Band 5 for Content and Structure, even where the sequence of events was not very credible, provided the narrative was organised and there was some attempt at characterisation. Responses in this range, whilst often more predictable, were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution or conclusion to the story overall. Sporting narratives or school stories were common at this range and were usually told in a straightforward chronological sequence. Some began with the title quotation but resorted to ‘It all began when...’ to relate how this point

was reached, producing clear accounts which were cohesive but without the drama and impact of better responses.

Weaker responses were often more dependent on a simple series of events which led up to a moment of tension, as implied in the task, but which lacked attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Often the same kinds of scenarios as in better responses were used, such as sports matches, but there was less awareness of the needs of the reader. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than creating characters. While the majority of less effective responses offered a simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative style. Occasionally, Examiners found that responses were more discursive than narrative, with some reflections on the need to stay calm but with limited narrative shaping and content.

For the second narrative question, there were varied interpretations of the title. Many narratives made use of the sense of a critical moment implied in the title. Some responses built a narrative around a more concrete moment of danger or threat from an intruder or attacker of various kinds. Others used the 'Now or Never' idea to show a moment of decision or depict a personal journey which reached a climax. Both approaches resulted in some high level, effective and engaging stories. Narrators sometimes reached important moments in their professional or academic lives, or were confronted by other kinds of difficult decisions, and while these ideas featured across the mark range, better responses prepared the reader and shaped the narrative in an engaging way. One thoughtful response featured a deeply troubled narrator whose anxieties and fears were convincingly developed to engage the reader's sympathy and for whom the 'Now or Never' moment involved a simple social event. The care taken to engage the reader meant that the sense of the narrator having overcome some real and credible obstacles was poignant and convincing.

Band 5 responses were generally more straightforward accounts in which the content was ordinary but there was still some organisation and shaping of the narrative and a cohesive story was produced. These tended to be a little less imaginative in their interpretation of the task but with some understanding of how stories create interest for the reader. Clinching moments in football matches or other sporting events were described with varying levels of success in developing credible plots and characters. Straightforward accounts of work undertaken to achieve academic or professional goals were also evident. Some scenarios involved more dramatic events but were less developed and convincing. Robberies or intruders being confronted by terrified narrators were quite common at this level, as were war scenarios in which some important mission had to be carried out. While stories at this level were often cohesive and organised, there was less attention paid to the kind of characterisation and relationships between characters which helps to engage the reader.

Responses given marks in Band 6 were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. Scenarios which quickly became cliched and unengaging were used, such as murders, kidnappings or chases, many of which lacked credible explanation. These responses lacked narrative shaping and interest. Some produced organised and paragraphed pieces which were more discursive than narrative in style and intent.

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 skilfully used in responses in the higher Bands and where coupled with a sophisticated palette of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. Responses awarded marks in Band 6 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still accurate and largely fluent while Band 5 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary but had few errors which damaged the clarity of meaning such as weak sentence control and sentence separation.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Band 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Band 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the mis-spelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. The misuse of capital letters was fairly common from Band 4 downwards. The most frequent reason for keeping an otherwise clearly written story out of Band 5 was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, though the mixing of tenses was also prevalent in the descriptive writing.

A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 5 and even when written in a fairly pedestrian style Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were errors, even quite frequent 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 5. In some cases, despite accurate sentence construction, sentence structures were simple and repetitive and the vocabulary was limited and fairly simple. 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:**

- think about the build-up towards the most important moment in your story
- try to consider alternative interpretations of the titles given
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader; do not rely on retelling events
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/32  
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
- structure ideas logically and organise their writing effectively
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct sentences accurately and vary sentence types to create 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 very brief or undeveloped, and rubric infringements where more than the required number of questions were attempted were rare, with responses to one question from each composition genre very occasionally being seen. On occasions where such infringements did occur, marks were affected by there not being sufficient time allowed to write considered and substantial responses. A small number of scripts had no response to **Section 2**.

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. The majority of responses showed very little evidence of simple paraphrase or indiscriminate copying of material in the passage. Although the reproduction of some key words and phrases was widespread, this was usually where synonyms were not readily available.

Some excellent answers which interrogated the views expressed by the writer of the passage showed a mature awareness of the pressures on headteachers and students in a highly competitive education system. Some strong responses enthusiastically supported the parent's ideas about a more holistic curriculum but were still able to develop the views of a headteacher in a suitably evaluative manner. Others recognised the strength of the writer's feelings but with thoughtful reservations. Some refuted the writer's belief that the school was responsible for the implementation of such skills lessons without recognising the concerns behind its expression. Those responses which offered some challenge to the writer's assertions and attitudes more readily achieved evaluation of the material when they justified their objections.

The best responses combined an assured grasp of the content and attitudes of the passage 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 parent's letter from the outset, selecting and commenting on its details to support their views and sensitively aware of the attitudes of the speaker in the text. In Band 4, responses often simply reproduced the points made by the parent with some, often lengthily anecdotal, development, then gave their conclusion in a final paragraph the tone of which was sometimes at variance with what had gone before.

While it was proper to give due consideration to the writer's belief in the importance of Life Skills lessons the question also required the candidate's own views to be given, and quite frequently responses did not develop a clear stance on the topic. Although even at the lower levels of achievement there was very little completely undeveloped reproduction of the material, many responses made one or two valid points but otherwise showed such limited coverage of the material that Examiners could not award marks in Band 4 for Reading. Here, the writing was sometimes of a fluency and accuracy more typical of higher Bands, and in these scripts an originality of thought and invention was sometimes demonstrated in **Section 2** compositions that was absent in the handling of the reading passage.

Most responses paid some attention to the audience and style required for a letter from a headteacher and were evaluative in purpose to some extent, using the passage to create and structure arguments with some sense of audience. Some less effective responses however struggled to find the appropriate tone and style of address for writing such a letter.

In **Section 2**, there was usually a clear awareness of the differing requirements of the two genres; in this examination series the descriptive and narrative options were almost equally popular, and there was writing of a high standard seen across the different types. As always, the best responses were typified by careful structuring, a wide-ranging and precisely employed vocabulary, and a high level of technical accuracy.

**Question 2(a)** evoked some excellent descriptive pieces, where conscious crafting for effect which did not drift into narrative was often seen, but some narrative framework for the purposes of cohesion was more often apparent in responses to **Question 2(b)**. Less effective responses to both questions in the descriptive genre were typically dominated by simple, sequential narrative, the listing of ordinary details, and limited vocabulary. Strong responses to **Question 3(a)** and **Question 3(b)** frequently engaged the reader's interest from the beginning, and also provided a satisfactory and believable resolution to the story. The topic of **Question 3(a)**, 'Moving On', produced some engaging narratives encompassing a wide range of scenarios, although most chose to write about lost loved ones or relationships, or transitions from one stage of life to another. Many responses to **Question 3(b)**, which required the inclusion of the sentence, 'I smiled when I recalled the events of the day' concerned pleasant experiences with family or friends, or success in sporting or educational challenges. At the lower end of Band 6 and in Band 5, often well-written stories were let down by weak and 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. Notable in this examination session perhaps more often than is usual were the numbers of compositions in both genres, but more frequently in narrative writing, that seemed pre-prepared and often imperfectly adapted to the requirements of this paper's questions, resulting in a lack of cohesion or credibility. A small number of responses were neither descriptive nor narrative writing, but rather discursive: a significant minority of responses to **Question 3(a)** were moralising or didactic in tone.

Less effective 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, even in the setting out of dialogue.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

**Imagine you are the headteacher who received the letter.**

**Write a letter in response to the parent.**

**In your letter, you should:**

- **discuss and evaluate the issues raised by the parent in the letter**
- **give your own views about teaching life skills and whether you think these lessons should replace other subjects in the curriculum.**

**Begin your letter, ‘Dear A. Ifan ...’**

**Base your letter on what you have read in the parent’s letter, but be careful to use your own words.  
Address each of the bullet points.**

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 15 marks for the quality of your writing.**

Marks in the top Band were awarded where the views in the passage were subjected to rigorous examination and there was an overview of the issues. Here, there was more than a straightforward listing of the points made by the parent; 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. Where a letter format and style were maintained throughout the response and the mode of address was consistently appropriate, the underlying assumptions and implications of the passage were recognised, and explicit assertions and requests were scrutinised and challenged. Examiners could award very high marks indeed.

Marks in Band 4 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 teaching of Life Skills, sometimes at the expense of other, more traditional subjects.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the main ideas although demonstrating no clear point of view. Very thin use of the detail and weakness in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level.

#### **Marks for reading**

The passage proved accessible at all levels of ability, with little evidence of widespread misunderstanding except where a lack of language competence prevented clear expression. The best responses were evaluative throughout, commanding the subject from the beginning, and demonstrating the ability to assess objectively the views expressed in the letter to the headteacher and adopt a wider view. Here there was an implicit understanding of the subtleties and nuances of the passage and an ability to distinguish between valid suggestions for change to the school’s curriculum and unreasonable expectations. Responses awarded marks at the top of Band 1 were able to steer a diplomatic course between acknowledging the validity of some of the parent’s points and suggesting that it was not entirely the school’s job to train young people in skills more usually considered domestic and personal: ‘I certainly agree that life skills are vital in living a balanced and healthy life; however, I also want to share some of my views on why having such a programme in school may be problematic.’ Such responses often made useful distinctions between items on the parent’s list of ‘life skills’ and how they might be incorporated into a ‘crammed’ curriculum: understanding of electrics is taught in Physics; financial skills in Maths, Business Studies and Economics; mechanical skills in Engineering. Few could accept that lesson time should be given to the skills of house-cleaning or laundry: ‘These basic processes can be learnt in a very short time – tutorials are readily available on the internet – and we cannot put cleaning and ironing on our applications for university.’

At this and at lower levels of achievement responses were able gently to castigate the writer and her description of her daughter Anna as ‘useless’: ‘The fact that such a high-achieving student was unable to do basic laundry or take the simplest care of her belongings suggests that a culture of independence was not established at home.’ At most levels too there was concession that life skills of different types might be taught as extracurricular activity, either regular or occasional, but not an acceptance that traditional subjects should be dropped in favour of life skills lessons: ‘All subjects contribute to the creation of a well-educated and rounded individual, and what is a despised subject for one student could be the source and inspiration for another’s future career: there is no such thing as an ‘unimportant’ subject.’ It was also regularly pointed out that many students had long since acquired these skills at home, and mandatory lessons would be wasting their time. Mature perception of the fundamental issue was shown in a range of responses, one concluding, ‘Learning skills on the go is in itself a life skill, and learning through trial and error, often in the absence of a teacher or parent, can develop resilience and flexibility in the long run.’

Authoritative and perceptive responses did not always refute the writer’s views but developed and evaluated them in a sophisticated manner, sometimes pointing out that the school’s splendid academic teaching and pastoral care praised in the parent’s letter resulted from a carefully planned and long-established curriculum which should not lightly be altered.

Marks in Band 5 were awarded when there was more than just simple agreement with or reproduction of the proposals in the passage material, and some of its implicit meanings were held up for scrutiny. Responses often began by reproducing and agreeing with the proposed benefits of life skills, covering the material with reasonable thoroughness, and with some degree of evaluation. Evaluation sometimes resided in a single observation which demonstrated understanding of the essential thrust of the passage: ‘I understand that you wish your children to be independent, and the school will do its part in helping them, but your over-indulgence of them is having the opposite effect.’ Some responses were awarded a mark of 7 because of their common-sense approach to the feasibility of the parent’s proposals: who would pay for all the required washing machines and irons, and what of the safety implications? How would the teachers be trained to supply financial and investment advice? What was the point of teaching these skills to younger children as suggested by the parent in order to avoid the ‘crammed’ timetables of the examination years when they would be forgotten long before they were required? Responses awarded a mark of 8 typically evaluated a number of points from the passage, or were evaluative throughout in their approach, often signalling this in the opening paragraph. Some partly evaluative responses maintained too narrow a focus on one area of the reading passage – perhaps the daughter’s domestic disasters or the son’s problems with his credit cards – to the detriment of a fully developed reply.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 4 for Reading where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the reading material but without recognition or evaluation of its more implicit meanings or internal contradictions or with less scrutiny of the points made. Here responses often summarised or repeated in a very painstaking manner the limitations of A Ifan’s children, or sometimes described at length similar problems with their own children. Quite often the purported headteacher capitulated to all the parent’s demands and offered radically to alter the school day to accommodate them in an entirely unconvincing way. Here too the main thrust of a response was to offer a range of solutions or ‘fixes’, which does not constitute evaluation. Elsewhere the response lost focus and rambled into a generalised discussion of the value of education and the importance of family life. A mark of 6 could be given where the key points were reproduced with some appropriate development; responses at this level often uncritically reproduced and supported points in the passage and then offered contradictory views so that no clear stance was discernible. Where there was clear understanding of the main thrust of the article but only a limited selection of points discussed a mark of 5 was given.

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 passage, or overlong anecdotes which did not 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. Only a very few responses were given marks below 3, when very little had been written and connection with the text and task was only peripheral. A small number of responses simply ‘lifted’ material or copied unselectively, thus seriously affecting both Reading and Writing marks for Question 1.

### **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

While almost all responses began with at least some recognition of audience – if only the given salutation and ‘Thank you for your letter’, too many continued by reiterating, almost verbatim, the points made by the parent, and in the same order, as if the original writer might have forgotten what was said: thus some responses were over-long because the task was only addressed after a page or more of writing. Some responses were perceptive and evaluative discussions of the issues but lost sight of their perceived audience except perhaps in the concluding paragraph. It was thus not unusual for Examiners to award marks for Writing in a Band lower than the response had earned for Reading. Sometimes the style was too informal for a letter from a headteacher to a parent: ‘Life Skills – what a great idea!’. These responses were over-friendly and anecdotal with phrases regularly contracted, or were, more damagingly, peppered with colloquialisms: ‘I get where you’re coming from’; ‘First off’ or even ‘gonna’, and once, ‘Oh yeah! Let’s go for it!’ Sometimes otherwise high-level responses mainly couched in authoritative and sophisticated vocabulary employed the jarring ‘kids’ which was ubiquitous in less effective responses. Elsewhere responses were inappropriately hectoring or even hostile, making valid arguments in an inappropriate style. A few intemperate responses attacked the parent from the beginning for their perceived indulgence of their children and abdication of responsibility. A mature awareness of audience was absent here. Many responses at different levels however demonstrated that it was possible to be forthright and courteous at the same time. Responses given marks in the top Band for Writing demonstrated throughout the authoritative control and fluency required by the Mark Scheme.

Responses given marks in Band 6 and Band 5 were often appropriate in tone and form, but they often followed and reproduced the wording of the passage quite closely; while there was little wholesale copying of clauses or sentences from the passage, paraphrase was often so close that the response had no discernible style of its own and was almost entirely dependent on the vocabulary of the original.

## Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the passage confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined into a persuasive overall response which was clearly derived from the ideas in the passage but was not dependent on its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the reading passage was seamlessly incorporated into an authoritative and engaging response.

Responses given Band 6 for writing tended to reflect the priority 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 address to the parent and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of purpose and audience, e.g. ‘Your desire to see your children well-prepared for university is admirable, but I do think you should leave them a little leeway for mistakes. Let them enjoy what little is left of their childhoods.’ Some responses awarded marks in Band 5 were very lengthy, covering all the points in the parent’s letter exhaustively and only offering a brief personal view at the end. Others offered lengthy, personal and inappropriate anecdotal development on the perils of parenting. Less effective responses in Band 4 and below sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passage whereas Band 3 responses usually organised and re-sequenced ideas more selectively.

Some less effective responses given marks below Band 3 were limited in structure and entirely dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage: sometimes the authors of very limited responses only seemed to have read the first two paragraphs of the letter. This often led to some basic reiteration of the first few points but without the re-ordering of them which was needed to give a sense of purpose and audience: conclusions were cursory or omitted. Some responses offered little more than a summary of the passage in exactly the original order with little changed but for the substitution of a few synonyms.

## Accuracy

Responses in Band 7 combined a fluent and authoritative style, typified by precisely employed, appropriate vocabulary and a wide range of sentence structures, with a very high level of technical accuracy. Responses given a mark of 8 or 9 were often clearly and competently written, but their vocabulary lacked ambition or precision and indeed would often have been deemed quite limited had it not included many words from the passage. Inversion was a common error: 'I am going to replace life skills with a school subject.' Errors of sentence separation 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 there were very frequent basic errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar, although the inappropriate use of capital letters seemed less widespread than in previous sessions. 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 occasionally blurred by the levels of error. There was often confusion and inconsistency in the use of person and pronoun.

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

- be prepared to explore, challenge and discuss the ideas in the passage
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from 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 audience for your article would expect as well as how articles should begin and end
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words.

## Section 2: Composition

### Question 2

Write about 350 to 450 words on one of the following questions.

**Up to 13 marks are available for the content and structure of your answer, and up to 12 marks for the style and accuracy of your writing.**

### Descriptive Writing

**2(a) Describe the few minutes just before and after an outdoor event is ruined by the weather.**

**2(b) Imagine you find yourself accidentally locked in a shopping centre or mall after it has closed for the day. Describe what you see and hear, and your thoughts and feelings as you wait to be released.**

This genre was chosen across the range of abilities, with both options being equally popular. At all levels of achievement many felt it necessary to provide some context for the required scene, less effective responses, especially to **Question 2(b)**, sometimes developing their writing too far along the path of narrative, thus forgetting the requirements 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 without preamble. Some responses were more narrative in manner than is usually desirable for this genre but included much vivid detail and developed images. Here, Examiners were able to award marks in Band 5 or sometimes Band 6 for Content and Structure. The best responses to both questions produced writing of a very high order, earning marks at the top of Band 7 for both elements. These were highly evocative, often creating overall pictures of considerable clarity and employing a wide-ranging and ambitious vocabulary.

**Question 2(a)** produced some of the most accomplished responses. The outdoor events ruined by the weather included weddings, beach picnics, garden fetes, sports championships, barbeques and regattas. There was writing of a high order across all these scenarios, the disruptive weather often being a violent storm of tropical intensity; these responses often created the ‘convincing, original, overall picture’ required by the Mark Scheme for marks in the top Band. The majority of the responses awarded marks in Band 7 and Band 6 were clearly aware of the words ‘just before’ and ‘just after’ in the task and restricted the time scale of their descriptions accordingly to great effect. One response awarded marks in the top Band was relatively brief but conveyed absolutely convincingly the few chaotic minutes as wedding guests, women’s stiletto heels sinking in the sudden quagmire, scrambled for cover while waiters attempted to salvage the many-tiered wedding cake in torrential rain. Another included a beautiful description of the magical appearance of fireflies as the ferocity of the storm suddenly abated. Notable in responses to this question was the successful employment of poetic techniques such as simile, metaphor and repetition for effect, but most especially personification, sometimes most effectively sustained throughout the response. Some of these responses pictured the weather phenomenon as a hostile and malevolent invader, and employed militaristic metaphor to great effect: storm clouds were armies massing on the horizon, rain had the force of bullets; events were besieged and victims routed.

Responses given marks at the lower end of Band 6 and in Band 5 approached the task more straightforwardly, with varying degrees of accomplishment. These often focused more on the event than the weather, and thus sometimes lapsed into narrative. Many successfully used the clear structure offered by the task to create convincing sketches of people rescuing the events from disaster and of the effects on the surroundings. These responses often included enough descriptive detail to create the ‘impression of reality’ required for marks in Band 6, and were clearly intending to describe, but lacked the intensity of gaze upon the subject apparent in Band 7 responses. Sometimes the intended effect was diluted by trying to describe too many aspects of the scene, or by spending too much time on lengthy preambles explaining the planning for and circumstances of the event. There were at this level however many effective pieces which demonstrated a grasp of the requirements of the genre; some, if lacking the assurance of Band 7 responses, were interesting and original. There were some engaging pieces awarded marks in Band 5, but often a higher mark was precluded by a lack of clarity in the description created, or it was marred by exaggeration: in some responses describing tornados or tsunamis the difficulty in sustaining the heightened drama and atmosphere was obvious and the temptation of narrative overwhelming: one bride was swept out to sea from her beach wedding and disappeared completely, occasioning protracted rescue attempts and subsequent mourning. At the lower end of the Band and below it, the writing often became driven by narrative, even though a few relevant descriptive details were included. Some simply recounted what happened chronologically with limited attempt to forge a piece of description.

The second descriptive option also elicited responses across the mark range although there were far more responses that were overly narrative, although in all cases Examiners sought to reward the qualities of descriptive writing as detailed in the Mark Scheme. Across all levels of achievement responses to **Question 2(b)** attempted to evoke the contrasting atmospheres of an empty building which was usually bustling with activity, with varying levels of success. The desired ‘impression of reality’ was very often achieved, even where competence in language restricted marks for a response to Band 4 or below. In responses awarded marks in Band 7 there was some very sophisticated writing, with richly detailed sensory description. A key discriminator here was the originality of the images of often mundane and familiar objects and places such as shops, food courts and escalators, rendering them fresh and new to the reader, and the sophisticated precision of the vocabulary which conveyed them. The most assured responses were able successfully to explore how familiar environments can become daunting and even sinister in unwanted darkness and silence e.g. ‘The dim blue of the emergency lights barely illuminated the vast cavernous halls, and shadows lingered in every corner.’ Another, musing on the strange emptiness of a building usually thronged with people, imagined the building itself taking on intimidating life, stairs tilting and doorframes shifting slightly, escalators suddenly clicking into life; another thought of the noise that would usually emanate from the children’s play area, ‘although now, in the darkness, the laughter of a phantom child was the last thing I wanted to hear.’ Others, more prosaically perhaps but just as effectively, focused on the creation of precise and striking images: ‘Suddenly audible, my trainers squeaked on the glittering granite floor’. One most effective response was an exploration of shops and objects entirely by touch in complete darkness.

Most responses to **Question 2(b)** were awarded marks in Band 6 and Band 5: they were competent and often convincing descriptions, offering some well-chosen images, or effectively describing their thoughts and feelings about their temporary incarceration. There were repeated tropes, of failed mobile phone batteries or signals, the sudden extinguishing of light, varyingly sinister mannequins, and surprisingly accessible food and drink supplies, usually quite well executed. Responses awarded a mark of 7 and below often lacked a sufficiently close focus on description and were increasingly narrative in form: here there were often lengthy preambles explaining the journey to or presence in the mall, and interrogation by security staff subsequent to release in the morning. With unexpected frequency, less effective responses became clichéd horror stories, often lengthy and detailed. In one extreme case an ‘undead’ narrative developed, in which the protagonist was pursued by zombies for hours through the mall only to be bitten by his own father who came to collect him in the morning.

Responses given marks in Band 3 or below were often simple narrative accounts with little descriptive detail or evocation of feeling, setting or atmosphere.

### Style and accuracy

Marks in the top Band for Style and Accuracy were awarded to those Descriptive Writing responses which demonstrated a wide-ranging and ambitious vocabulary in the creation of images and effects but were 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. Less effective responses were sometimes limited to unelaborated accounts of personal experience, especially in response to the second of the two questions. Consecutive sentences beginning with ‘I’ (often lower case) typified these formulaic responses.

In previous sessions, the most frequent issue in awarding Style and Accuracy marks for Descriptive Writing was the significant number of responses in which many sentences were without a main or finite verb. Even where there were other qualities which went some way to compensate, Examiners found it very difficult to award a mark higher than Band 4 where this error persisted. While this is still the case in numerous responses, uncertain control of tense now seems more frequently apparent and is equally damaging. This was more often seen in responses to **Question 2(b)**, where varying periods of experience were being described. Responses awarded Writing marks in Band 6 or 5 for **Question 1** often earned lower marks for the compositions. A lack of effective paragraphing, and misuse of commas, also reduced the marks for many responses. Sometimes responses given marks in Band 4 or below for Style and Accuracy demonstrated an extensive range of vocabulary, and accurate spelling, but had poor control of syntax and sentence structure, sometimes to the point where communication was impaired. Occasionally the tendency apparent in some descriptive pieces to pack writing with as many multisyllabic or arcane examples of vocabulary as possible, often mistakenly or imprecisely employed, resulted in low marks for style and accuracy because communication was impaired. This tendency was however less marked than in other recent examination sessions.

### 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, both in the scenarios and the images you create
- write sentences with proper verbs; there are no separate rules for descriptive writing
- ensure consistency of tenses.
- make deliberate choices in your vocabulary and sentence structures to create effect.

### Question 3

#### Narrative writing

**3(a) Write a story with the title, ‘Moving On’.**

**3(b) Write a story which includes the words, ‘I smiled when I recalled the events of the day’.**

Narrative writing was the choice of half of the candidature, with **Question 3(a)** being more popular than **Question 3(b)**. 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 producing some lively and often intriguing narratives. Responses to both titles often 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. A significant number of responses to both questions but most especially **Question 3(a)** concluded with a moral aphorism or injunction.

A majority of responses to the first of the narrative options interpreted the title metaphorically, and this approach most often earned marks in the top Bands. In very many responses the protagonist was ‘moving on’ from bereavement, broken relationships or failure in some area of endeavour. Some very moving responses detailed recovery from the loss of, or rejection by, parents, partners or siblings when the protagonist had been at fault, perhaps by being the cause of a fatal accident. One memorable response detailed an eventual escape from a violently abusive and domineering partner. Their sordid home, its condition crucial to this powerfully engaging story, was conveyed with the most convincing detail: ‘The faint smell of alcohol and cigarettes lingered in the air, a ghost drifting from the half-open bedroom door...’; ‘the battered lime green sofa with dirty clothes trailing over one arm ...’. The tightly structured narrative concluded with the protagonist at last walking out into sunlight and untainted air. This response and others similarly closely focused in time and space and employing a few well-drawn characters and spare but effective dialogue, were awarded marks at the top of Band 1. Another complex and sophisticated narrative told a gripping story of two sisters, the only survivors of a ‘purged’ family in a dystopian society endlessly ‘moving on’ from one safe house to another. Responses to **Question 3(a)** awarded marks in Band 6 often had interesting features but lacked the assurance and ability to engage the reader of those in the top Band or had less convincing plotlines. One such told an interesting story of sibling rivalry with quite perceptive characterisation but the near-miraculous recovery from deep amnesia of their mother brought about by their reconciliation strained credulity. Otherwise the narrative was well-managed and the Examiner was able to award a mark of 9. In the middle range there were often stories with interesting concepts and engaging characters which might have qualified their narratives for inclusion in the top Band of marks, but they were frequently marred by precipitate or ill-planned and unconvincing endings. Responses in Band 5 and below were often touching stories of bereavement or rejection but sometimes the narrator described feelings of pain and grief in such detail and at such length that the momentum of the plot and other qualities of narrative were lost. Elsewhere so much background detail was included early on that the crux of the narrative was rushed or unresolved.

Responses given marks below Band 5 tended to be undistinguished series of events, less effective examples sometimes without any detail or setting or character beyond banal description of clothes or hair colour. These were often dry accounts of moving house or school. Typical of many event-driven responses was an imbalance in their constituent parts, with the crucial recovery or personal renaissance occurring abruptly and often in a final, short paragraph. Most structures too were unvaryingly chronological. There was often effective description of feeling in these responses but more is required to constitute a successful narrative.

The second narrative question, to write a story including the sentence ‘I smiled when I recalled the events of the day.’ was the least popular of the composition choices but it elicited some effective narratives and a wide range of subject material. The stronger responses incorporated reminiscence of a memorable scenario which was reflected upon in an engaging and reflective manner. One very effective Band 7 response told a harrowing and well-plotted story of a family escaping an apartment building fire: the pleasure expressed on recalling it arose from admiration for a brother’s courage in rescuing the narrator and younger children. Another awarded high marks was an account of a first date which had much potential for cliché but managed to convey an entirely convincing picture of the joys and sorrows of the protagonist’s first love. It was rich in telling observational detail: ‘As she reached up to kiss me I glimpsed a flush of pink on her cheek and I thought, for the first time, that she really was going to see me again.’ Many of the responses to **Question 3(b)** however used the given sentence completely inappropriately: tales of unremitting misery concluded, bizarrely, with it; others began with it and then switched to third-person narrative; it appeared, unexplained, amidst narratives over-filled with military or science-fiction action which often lacked cohesion and were difficult to follow. In responses where its meaning was more appropriate it sometimes sat uncomfortably in a story employing a different tense or a more informal register. In a number of responses it did not appear at all. It was the distinct impression of Examiners that many narratives were pre-prepared and then employed despite having little or no relevance to the questions in this examination paper. A significant number of responses resembled diary or journal entries rather than developed narratives. Writing in the first person should not preclude the creation of character and believable settings, or indeed tension and a convincing resolution. A number of first-person responses to **Question 3(a)** were similarly devoid of these qualities and also, markedly, of dialogue. These were given marks for Content and Structure in Band 4 or below.

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.

### Style and accuracy

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, sentence structure and clausal position were often manipulated for effect, especially in the creation of narrative tension. In this genre, any inability to punctuate and paragraph dialogue properly was exposed, and sometimes proved a pitfall for otherwise fluent and accurate writers. In the middle band, where there were a few basic errors of spelling and punctuation and plain, unvaried, vocabulary, the Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8: conversely, clear and accurate sentence structure and straightforward paragraphing could compensate for a lower mark for Content and Structure. Marks in Band 4 were given when writing was marred by misuse of commas, weak punctuation, and faults in tense control and agreement. Confusion or inconsistency in the use of gender pronouns was seen quite often. The 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.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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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
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to engage the reader
- 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. A very large majority of candidates understood the instructions for the examination and completed **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task.

Most responses showed an engagement with the topic of new ideas for the care of elderly people in their area 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 responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive argument of their own. Examiners noted that in many responses across the ability range, the appropriate valediction at the end of the letter was given and most candidates began their letter with the given prompt ‘Dear Editor ...’ but sometimes did take a new line for the main material of the response. Less effective candidates tended to reiterate the ideas in the passage, often in the same sequence rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some less effective responses, the second bullet point, steering candidates towards evaluation of ideas, was not addressed.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response. The nature of the task was better understood in more focused responses. Sometimes, insufficient use was made of the reading material and there was less understanding of the argumentative nature of the task. The required formality of style and register for a letter to an editor was well understood by the majority of candidates, even where technical weaknesses were apparent. In less effective responses, there was often some general commentary on the use of robots to care for old people 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 specific attention to the audience and style required for a letter to a newspaper editor. These were persuasive in purpose, using ideas from the passage to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices and showing a strong sense of audience. Some in the middle range of marks wrote in a more general style and there was less focus on the ways that human interaction cannot be replaced by a robot. Weaker candidates sometimes had an insecure grasp of audience and purpose, and at this level the points made followed the sequence of the passage with less selection and regrouping of ideas to create an independent argument.

In the compositions, the descriptive and narrative genres were attempted in fairly equal numbers; although the descriptive questions were generally more popular at all levels of achievement. Better responses to the composition questions 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 successfully evoked a sense of place and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the first descriptive question about a busy port or harbour were interesting and atmospheric in the kinds of sense impressions included. As is usually the case, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere specific to a port or harbour. Some responses focused on the sights, sounds and often smells observed by the narrator while others evoked the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as he/she surveyed the scene. Some candidates zoomed in on individual people at the harbour whilst others wrote about ships and sea life surrounding the harbour.

There were some engaging descriptions of an overgrown garden or park in responses to the second question, as well as some which focused more on the narrator's thoughts and feelings of returning to somewhere they had not visited for some time. Less effective responses here tended to rely on a simple description of an overgrown plot with some clichéd expressions, whereas stronger responses frequently included the observer arriving at the garden and then leaving saddened by the neglect.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. The story with the title 'A Quiet Life' were varied with many candidates choosing to write about loss of hearing which rendered life 'quiet'. These were generally sensitively written. The second narrative question about the dreaded event turning out differently than expected also elicited a wide range of responses with varying content and Examiners awarded marks across the range here.

Less effective narratives paid less attention to the needs of the reader and sometimes the content was less credible and the characters less well drawn.

Composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The best descriptive writing was specific, used some original and thought-provoking images and effectively evoked the atmosphere of the time and place described. 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 the most effective writers who selected this genre.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

**Imagine that you live in an area in which there are many elderly people.**

**Write a letter to your local newspaper in which you explore how they could be better cared for.**

**In your letter, you should:**

- discuss and evaluate the ideas and the solutions presented in the article
- consider to what extent technology should help in looking after elderly people.

**Base your letter on what you have read in the article, but be careful to use your own words**

**Address each of the bullet points.**

**Begin your letter, ‘Dear Editor ...’**

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 15 marks for the quality of your writing.**

In **Question 1**, the directed writing task, high marks were awarded where there was some challenge and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points. Where the letter was also both accurate and appropriate in style, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished style, Examiners awarded very high marks indeed. Better responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the passage, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different ideas with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The ways in which the elderly community would be affected by proposed changes were sometimes explored more thoughtfully at the highest level.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some facts about the different robotic devices, MiRo and Robear, the solution of the care home in the Netherlands which offered rent-free accommodation to students in exchange for care work and there was often some discussion of the drawbacks of these ideas. These details were an accurate reflection of the ideas in the passage although opportunities to scrutinise them or offer a critique on them were not always taken. Some responses at this level could have been improved by a clear point of view being expressed on whether these solutions were of benefit to old people or not.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but less use was made of the range of ideas in the passage with only some of the points developed. There was sometimes some misunderstanding of the details in the passage or of the task. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level.

#### **Marks for reading**

The best responses adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage, drawing inferences and making judgements about the extent to which technology could and should help in looking after elderly people. In most responses, the advantages of the use of robots were accepted and the potential negative effect on old people was considered. In higher Band responses the question’s requirement that the issues should be discussed from the point of view of a member of the community in which there are many old people gave candidates a clear perspective. Perceptive responses often went to the heart of the debate in the passage: whether elderly people would benefit from the use of robots or if this would cause them to become more isolated and lonely. Many at this level argued convincingly that robots cannot replicate authentic human interaction. There was some thoughtful probing of the idea that a combination of robot and human care was needed and that not all elderly people benefit from the same approach and hence a balance should be struck. In some responses the idea that old people would have problems dealing with the technology was discussed. In arguing against the use of robots in the home, some candidates suggested that the danger of the technology breaking down or malfunctioning was very realistic.

The fact that robots cannot attend to injury but only humans can was considered in these higher scoring responses. The fact that robots cannot take the place of humans as this could result in further isolation for the elderly community leading to possible mental health issues was also discussed effectively.

The issues with students taking care of old people in the Netherlands care home in exchange for free accommodation were discussed. Some found this an inappropriate solution as the students would be motivated by economic savings rather than the desire to care for the elderly. It was discussed how students' studies or social life could make them too busy to sacrifice 30 hours of their time each month.

Band 5 marks could be given where Examiners found some evaluative comments but the response as a whole did not have the consistently critical approach needed for Band 6. Fairly straightforward judgements were made at this level, such as the loneliness and isolation old people would suffer without sufficient human contact and that robots would in fact make old people more isolated. Examiners could also credit as evaluation the view that the data collected and the observation of robots could be used in a way that compromised the elderly person, or indeed the elderly person could try to deceive the robot by perhaps not taking their medicine. An alternate view on how loneliness could be prevented by visits from family and friends or ownership of a real dog not a simulated one was also acceptable.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 4 for Reading where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit evaluations mentioned above or with less scrutiny of the points made in the passage. There was often less argument and focus on the implications of a robotic carer, with responses reflecting the ideas in the passage but not always commenting on them evaluatively. While the points made were given in the candidates' own words, simple opinions on them were offered rather than evaluation of them. For example, there was sometimes a straightforward discussion of how MiRo could help look after the elderly patient rather than discussion of why this was useful or unhelpful in their daily lives. In some responses given 6 marks for Reading the pros and cons of MiRo, Robear and the nursing home in the Netherlands were discussed but their validity or relative importance was not considered, nor was the problem of combating loneliness in old people addressed.

Less effective responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passage or addressed the material thinly. Some tracked through the passage simply but showed limited reorganisation of the ideas or gave a straightforward paraphrase. The counter-arguments against the use of robots for the elderly were not included in responses at this level, showing some selection to arrive at a decision but without reference to areas of the passage which did not fit the premise. Opinions about the use of robots for the care of the elderly in responses at this level were not always rooted in the passage: some reflected on the growth of technology in the modern era, for example, which, although generally relevant, were not mentioned in the passage. Some responses were also effusive in their praise for the editor of the article and how interesting the ideas were rather than evaluating the ideas themselves. In some responses, the reason for using the robots or the financial and social implications of that type of care were not properly understood by the candidate. 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 there was some misreading of the ideas in the passage.

### 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

A formal 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 used a more rhetorical, stylistically persuasive style and presented their arguments politely but with some impact and effectiveness. In adopting the voice of a resident of the area, there was, at the highest level, some sympathetic understanding of what life was like for an elderly person in their area. This carefully constructed tone of a concerned and sympathetic resident, combined with well-constructed arguments, created some authoritative and highly convincing responses.

In the middle range, the style was usually appropriately formal for a letter to an editor of a local newspaper although there were lapses in awareness of that audience so that the style became more of an objective report of differing views rather than a persuasive letter. Most often at this level there was limited argument to give the response shape and purpose, even where the passage was adequately reflected. Valedictions were sometimes omitted at this level and the persuasive style and purpose of the letter was not properly sustained.

Less effective responses sometimes had limited overall cohesion because the ideas in the passage were simply reproduced as they appeared in the original. Valedictions were often missed at this level, sometimes highlighting a limited understanding of the conventions of letter-writing.

### Structure

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, the point of view of the writer gave shape and structure to the response as a whole and the ideas in the passage were assimilated and assumed rather than specifically referenced.

Responses given Band 5 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 air the different ideas in a coherent way. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of the purpose of the letter. Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passage whereas Band 4 responses usually organised and re-sequenced ideas more selectively. Straightforward Band 4 responses were paragraphed and balanced and followed the conventional structure of formal letters.

Some less effective responses given marks below Band 4 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This approach led to some weakness in cohesion and made difficulties for the reader: for example, the description of the robotic dog was often given in the same section of the letter as the description of Robear, and the house in Hatfield was linked to the nursing home in the Netherlands leading to a confused response.

### Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 7. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error.

Responses given marks in Band 7 were authoritative and subtly argued with a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and very few technical errors. Sentence structures varied and were consciously used to create specific effects. Rhetorical flourishes, such as the use of contentious, challenging questions, were often used at this level. Some complex sentences structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Band 6 responses 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 plain, the language used was apt. A range of quite basic errors was made which limited the effectiveness of the writing. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in responses at this level, particularly key words for the task such as 'loneliness', 'accommodation' and 'communication' were frequent errors, for example, although sentence separation and grammatical agreement were usually secure.

While some of these minor errors could be compensated for by a 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 5 where mostly correctly structured sentences are required. Persistent use of commas where full stops were needed was common reason Examiners were unable to award marks in Band 5 for otherwise clear, coherent responses. Sometimes whole paragraphs were actually strings of simple sentences with commas rather than full stops to separate them. This weakness was noted by Examiners as prevalent in many thoughtful responses where the mark for Reading was significantly higher than that for Writing. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was also fairly common, as was mis-agreement between pronouns and verb forms. In rare cases,

material from the passage was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

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

- be prepared to explore, challenge and discuss the ideas in the passage.
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from 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 as well as how letters should begin and end.
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words.

**Section 2: Composition**

**Question 2**

**Write about 350 to 450 words on one of the following questions.**

**Up to 13 marks are available for the content and structure of your answer, and up to 12 marks for the style and accuracy of your writing.**

**Descriptive Writing**

- (a) **Describe a busy port or harbour.**  
(b) **Describe a garden or park which has become overgrown and neglected since you last visited it.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range although the second question was more often chosen. In the first task, there were some strongly evocative descriptions of a wide range of different ports from international ports to small fishing harbours.

In the second question, a wide variety of details and images was used to describe a neglected garden or park, often to good effect, and responses at the highest level to both questions showed that there was a clear understanding of how evocative descriptions are created.

Some successful responses to the first question focused on a range of different aspects of the scene; the activity in the port, the surrounding sea and environment and the effect the atmosphere had on the narrator. There were striking images of the harbor which managed to evoke a sense of place to the reader. This was achieved through effective sensory images. The smell of the salty air, pungent rotting carcasses of fish, the oily fumes of the ships were described. Marine animals such as swooping seagulls, seals and playful dolphins made their appearance. The sounds of foghorns, shouts of the sailors, creaking wooden piers and crashing of waves were effectively described. Some scripts described the activity on the pier such as loading of crates, queues of passengers waiting to board a ferry or sailors mooring their ships. Others described holiday makers buying souvenirs and ice creams, one script described a line of eager boys clutching their buckets and spades outside a bait shop eagerly waiting to buy fishing material. The feelings of the observer were often described sometimes the sensory overload having an overwhelming effect on them. One excellent response used the image of a lighthouse with rusty spiraling stairs to give structure the response as it was described during the day and then its beaming spotlight through the fog was described as night approached.

Band 5 responses were characterised by rather more obvious images and ideas and the sensory impressions given were more mechanically listed and organised in different paragraphs. Sometimes, these rather clichéd details dulled the effect of the description as a whole, although few responses at this level lapsed into narrative or lost the main features of descriptive writing. In some, the thoughts and feelings of the narrator were less developed and the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard. The surroundings described tended to be less specific and detailed and more stereotypical images of a seaside area or clichéd weather descriptions.

There were a few less effective responses for this question, these were characterised by a tendency to list details rather than effectively develop them and there was increasingly a tendency to narrate overlong preambles or to include over-dramatic and more narratively focused details.

The second question was even more popular and there were some effective descriptions here which sometimes focused on familiar parks or gardens which were often significant or important to the narrator. These responses were often poignant with the observer arriving at the garden and leaving saddened by the neglect. The observer often returned to their former home or park they used to go to as a child to find it decayed, overgrown and neglected; some of these responses were sad and evocative of the past. Some successful responses evoked a strong sense of the candidate taking a nostalgic, appreciative view of a significant place and the changes that had taken place there. Once manicured lawns were often replaced by weedy grass, and much loved trees were choked by creeping vines. Parks that had been filled with the songs of birds and the buzz of insects and the laughter of children were now void of life. Gardens at different seasons of the year were described effectively, autumn gardens with damp air and putrid smells of rotting vegetation, winter gardens with lifeless plants and the vibrant colours of summer flowers. There were well observed details of derelict and abandoned parks and poignant memories triggered by the observations.

Examiners gave marks below Band 5 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus, and where there was limited organisation of the details described or where strings of details were listed with limited overall cohesion. At this level, responses became simple, unengaging accounts of a garden which was not always well remembered or which was not very significant to the writer. Some gardens lacked the sense of familiarity implied in the task with ordinary details of the surrounding. A few candidates digressed from the task and described the house attached to the garden rather than the garden itself.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were, in the best responses, reflective of the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the consistent technical accuracy of the writing. In the middle range, vocabulary was less rich and varied but there was still a fair degree of accuracy in spelling and sentence construction. 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. A very common weakness here also was the demarcation of sentences with commas rather than full stops. This often meant that Examiners could not award marks in Band 5 where the style was otherwise quite accurate and secure.

#### **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.

### **Question 3**

#### **Narrative Writing**

- (a) Write a story with the title, 'A Quiet Life'.
- (b) Write a story about an event you dreaded but which turned out differently from how you expected.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses.

Better responses were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used interesting but credible ideas and developed balanced and engaging stories. The first task was the most popular choice. Candidates often wrote about the loss of hearing rendering life 'quiet' and these responses generally showed some sensitivity. Some candidates described a shy narrator who was always quiet and was afraid to come out of their shell. Other responses chose to write more dramatically with some dystopian responses describing a world where it was dangerous to make a sound for fear of being attacked by predators. Sometimes the idea of a 'Quiet life' was used as a setting for a series of dramatic events, for instance the character living an ordinary life until being disturbed by a ghostly apparition.

Middle range narratives were usually more straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases these responses sometimes relied on some over-dramatic and less likely scenarios. An event like a murder which disrupted the persona's quiet life were common at this level and where the characters and setting were established carefully, Examiners could award marks in Band 5 even where the sequence of events was not very credible. Responses in this range, while often more predictable, were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution or conclusion to the story overall.

Less effective responses were often more dependent on a series of events as a first or third person narrative without much attention paid to characterisation and setting. Many involved listing of daily events in a boring life leading to quite pedestrian narratives where the opportunity to develop characters and settings before a sequence of events was not taken. Sometimes these responses tried to pack too many ideas in without sufficient development. Simple content and plotlines rather than weaknesses in organisation were more typical at this level. Often the same kinds of scenarios as in better responses were evident, such as becoming suddenly deaf, but there was less awareness of the needs of the reader and less skill in engaging the interest of the reader in terms of narrative shaping and the creation of credible characters.

In the second narrative question, although not so popular a choice, there were varied interpretations of an event which turned out differently to what was expected. Some responses experimented with structure starting at the end of the plot and then returning to events in the past which sometimes made for a thoughtful narrative structure. Good responses included those that described effectively the thoughts and feelings before appearing on stage for a musical or dramatic performance. One response described the fear of going on stage to give a political speech, dreading the event so much that no words would come out of his mouth, then after realising failure did not matter and conquering his fears, being rewarded with a standing ovation. Some responses had a different take on the question and turned it into something quite dramatic such as the back story in a response where a girl had to break the news of her mother's murder to a younger sibling.

Band 5 responses were generally more straightforward accounts in which the content was ordinary but there was still some organisation and shaping of the narrative and a cohesive story was produced. These tended to be a little less imaginative in their interpretation of the task but with some understanding of how to create a satisfactory experience for the reader shown. At this level, an athletic competition or some other team event that had been dreaded, perhaps because of a previous injury, was often described in the first person with some development of character. Sometimes narratives were centred round a 'prom' or other school event. These were sometimes well organised but were ineffective and lacked interest.

Responses given marks in Band 4 were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. Scenarios which can quickly become clichéd and unengaging were used, such as an examination that the candidate was dreading but which was passed with flying colours.

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. Responses awarded marks in Band 2 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still accurate and largely fluent while Band 3 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary but had few errors which damaged the clarity of meaning such as weak sentence control and sentence separation.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, if persistent, limited even competently told stories to Band 4. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the mis-spelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy.

A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 5 and even when written in a fairly pedestrian style Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were errors, even quite frequent 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 5. 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, although responses at this level were rare.

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

- plan how to resolve your story in an interesting way before you start writing
- try to consider alternative interpretations of the titles given
- 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 (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/04  
Coursework Portfolio

## **Key messages**

Candidates did well when they:

- Wrote original and interesting assignments which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them in a mature and sensible way
- Structured the content of their writing in order to clearly guide the reader from one section of writing to the next
- Sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of arguments or events
- Wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect
- Adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and contexts for each of the three assignments
- Revised, edited, proof-read and corrected the first drafts of each assignment
- Wrote accurately and made few errors with spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## **General comments**

### **Content of folders:**

The majority of centres are working hard to meet the requirements of the syllabus and apply the mark scheme accurately. Moderators reported that, in general, they tended to be more in agreement with centres' marks than in previous moderation sessions. Many centres set a good range of appropriate and varied tasks, which provided suitable challenge and resulted in the production of coursework portfolios containing engaging and thoughtful personal writing in three different genres. Task setting was less successful when candidates responded to a limited range of tasks that offered either too little, or too much, challenge for the range of candidates in the cohort.

### **Administration:**

Administration by many of the centres continues to reflect the improvement commented on in previous Examiner reports. Many centres followed the direction of the syllabus and carried out effective internal moderation, and completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and Individual candidate Record Cards (ICRC) appropriately and accurately. When Moderators experienced difficulty it was often because the marks on the CASF, ICRC and MS1 did not match. It is important to make sure that these marks match, especially if changes to the original marks have been made during internal moderation.

The majority of the samples of work arrived in Cambridge in good time to meet the deadline for the submission of coursework. This was very helpful for the smooth running and despatch of work to the Moderation Team.

A significant number of centres are still submitting work in plastic wallets instead of securely attaching the ICRC to the coursework portfolio with a treasury tag or a staple. Moderators commented that they saw an increase in the amount of centres using paperclips to secure portfolios of work. This is not a secure method of attaching work because the paperclips become loose during processing. Moderators also noticed a small, but significant, rise in the number of centres submitting portfolios in which the individual pieces of paper for the whole cohort had been placed in the despatch envelope; the individual pages of each assignment had not been attached to each other, or to the ICRC. In addition, many of the individual pieces of paper did not indicate which candidate the work belonged to. This is quite a worrying trend because the chances of work

becoming lost or mislaid during the moderation process are significantly increased if the individual assignments are not all securely attached to the ICRC and the owner of the work cannot be identified. It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that folders of work are presented in accordance with the instructions in the syllabus and the Coursework Handbook. Both these documents can be found on the School Support Hub.

### Drafts:

Most centres met the syllabus requirement of including one first draft for each portfolio of work. Teachers are advised to make general comments at the end of drafts as to how a candidate might improve their work. Teachers are not allowed to make specific suggestions for improvement in the body or the margin of the draft. Whilst a significant majority of the centres followed the correct procedures for the annotation of drafts, moderators noticed an increase in centres submitting drafts which contained no evidence of revision or editing of work by the candidates, or too much annotation by teachers. Centres should be aware that too much specific annotation by teachers on candidates' first drafts has the potential to be considered malpractice by moderators. Guidance on the drafting process can be found in the syllabus.

### Assessment:

The moderation team reported that the standard of assessment of writing was generally accurate and an improvement on previous moderation sessions. Many centres had followed the syllabus guidelines with their provision of informative summative comments related to the mark scheme at the end of each completed assignment. These helped moderators to understand how and why marks had been awarded. Where adjustments of marks were made, it was often because centres had not taken into account structural insecurity or inaccuracies in the candidates' work.

It is important that teachers understand that all errors should be indicated in the final version of each completed assignment. These errors, when typing, include: the incorrect use of commas, confusion of tenses and the incorrect word where spellcheck offers an incorrect solution. Where centres had not indicated all errors in the final versions of their candidates' work, a tendency towards leniency was often noted in their marking.

Moderators also reported an improvement on previous sessions with the accuracy of the assessment of reading. When there was disagreement, it was usually because there had been some misinterpretation of the nature of Assignment 3, where the text used was inappropriate, or the candidates engaged in a general discussion about the subject of the text instead of evaluating and commenting on the ideas and opinions found within the text.

### Comments on specific assignments

#### Assignment 1:

Candidates in many centres responded to a wide range of topics and subjects. Successful responses discussed current issues such as plastic pollution, green energy, electric cars, factory farming or whether the football manager of a local team should be sacked. When candidates engaged in topics of personal interest such as these, their engagement and interest was clear and resulted in thoughtful, mature and considered discussion and arguments. Where candidates responded to broad and frequently debated topics, such as the death penalty, legalising cannabis and school uniform, there was less evidence of the thoughtful, mature and considered arguments mentioned above. Moderators noticed that there was a significant reduction in the 'rant' style tasks, such as 'Room 101' and 'Don't get me started'. Moderators also noticed a reduction in the setting of charity leaflets and film reviews for this assignment. Centres seem to have taken note of comments in previous Examiner reports about the limitations and issues related to these types of tasks.

Moderators commented that majority of candidates responding to Assignment 1 tasks presented original ideas and thoughts and used their own words, phrases and expressions. This is welcome and should be encouraged. Where candidates had carried out research in preparation for writing Assignment 1, Moderators noticed that there was a tendency by a significant number of candidates to over-rely on the ideas, words and phrases they had seen in their research. This reliance on using words, phrases and ideas from research documents resulted in loss of originality of thought and of fluency in writing. Sometimes Moderators were not confident that the work presented was a true reflection of a candidate's language skills or understanding of a topic. Guidance on how to approach and set tasks for Assignment 1 is given in the syllabus.

The best Assignment 1 pieces had a strong sense of audience, and the genre and form selected for the writing was clear to the reader. When writing Assignment 1, candidates need to be clear and sure of their intended audience and be consistent in their application of their chosen form and genre throughout the piece.

**Advice to candidates for Assignment 1:**

- write about a subject that is of importance and/or of interest to you
- be aware of the audience and purpose of your response and adapt your style accordingly
- try to develop your points to create a detailed and clear line of argument or discussion
- try to use your own words instead of quoting chunks of text from your sources
- acknowledge your use of quotes.

**Assignment 2:**

Moderators commented on the number of excellent narratives and descriptions they read and that candidates had been allowed to respond to a wide range of topics. Successful writing was when candidates used language carefully and for specific effect, and structured their work to clearly match the requirements of either descriptive or narrative writing.

The most successful descriptive writing was when candidates provided well sequenced and cohesive work which conveyed a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place, or person. Some of the more successful topics for Assignment 2 were descriptions of a place the candidates knew well, a much loved person, or a significant family event or celebration. When candidates responded to events that were beyond their personal experience, such as describing events as a soldier in World War I and World War II, or as a bystander during the 9/11 terror attacks, the writing tended to be less realistic and credible and limited the candidates' opportunity to meet the higher level assessment criteria. There was a tendency with some candidates to try too hard with their descriptive writing, or select vocabulary that did not quite match the context in which it had been used. It is important that teachers and candidates understand that an indicator of successful writing is not the frequency with which high level vocabulary is used, rather, it is the ability to engage the reader by their creation of realistic and credible ideas and images. Moderators noticed that with some centres there was a tendency to award marks from the highest band of the assessment criteria because high level vocabulary had been used, even when the overall effect was not wholly convincing or realistic for the reader.

With narrative writing Moderators reported a continued reduction in candidates producing unrealistic and incredible zombie, gothic and dystopian style stories. Centres seem to have taken note of the comments in previous Examiner reports that candidates often produce their best work when they write about personal interests or experiences. Moderators reported that they read many successful and interesting narratives about important personal events in candidates' lives. Accounts of the arrival of a new sibling, overcoming personal challenges such as illness, or the return to the family of a much loved relative provided some moving and engaging writing. With other narrative writing responses, the concept of a short story seemed to have been well taught and clearly understood by many candidates. Moderators saw a good range of well-structured short stories in which setting, character and plot were developed in order to produce cohesive and entertaining stories.

**Advice to candidates for Assignment 2:**

- when writing to describe, try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of ideas and images
- when writing to describe try to avoid writing in list-like paragraphs which are unconnected
- write about something that you are familiar with, or something that you know well
- when writing narratives remember to structure your writing carefully
- choose vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects
- make sure that the images you create match the context and content of your writing.

### Assignment 3:

The assessment of writing for Assignment 3 was generally accurate. Moderators also noted a reduction in the number of centres over-rewarding marks for the reading part of this assignment. Whilst this is an improvement on previous moderation sessions, there are still some continuing issues related to this assignment. The most common issues are:

- the use of a limited number of texts to which candidates can respond
- candidates write about the subject of the text instead of the ideas and opinions contained within the text
- candidates attack the author instead of evaluating and analysing their ideas and opinions
- candidates analyse the use of language and presentational devices instead of analysing the ideas and opinions contained within the text
- texts are old and outdated and public opinion and technology has changed since the time in which the texts were written
- candidates refer to research they have carried out in relation to the topic of the text instead of referring to the text itself.

Whilst centres are clearly working hard to allow candidates to choose a text that is both suitable in terms of depth of ideas and opinions and on a subject in which they are interested, sometimes this balance proved difficult. With some centres the texts selected were mainly informative, or news reports which contained limited ideas or opinions with which the candidates could engage. Such texts do not offer candidates the opportunity to respond in the depth and detail required to meet the higher band assessment criteria.

Moderators noted that they are still seeing unsuitable texts such as 'I see a killer die', 'Educating Essex' and 'SeaWorld'. Previous Examiner reports have highlighted the limitations of these texts and they should not be used. Moderators also commented on the age and lack of originality of other texts. Articles written up to 10 years ago by journalists such as Katie Hopkins, Jeremy Clarkson and Janet Street Porter are still being used. Ideas, public opinion and technology have changed over time and texts such as these do not necessarily reflect the world in which candidates now live. The most successful texts are ones that are up to date, no more than one to two sides of A4 writing, interesting and relevant to the candidates, and contain ideas and opinions to which the candidates can argue for or against.

To achieve Band 5 marks candidates need to evaluate and analyse a good range of ideas from the text to provide an extended overview, or write an overall, structured response that assimilates many of the ideas and opinions presented within the text. The issues listed above can limit the opportunity for candidates to fully engage with this process and therefore limit their ability to meet the higher level assessment criteria. Guidance on how to select appropriate texts for this assignment is given in the syllabus.

### Advice to candidates for Assignment 3:

- give an overview of the main points or arguments contained within the text
- aim to cover most of the ideas and opinions presented in the text
- make sure that your ideas and responses are tightly linked to the ideas and opinions you have identified in the text
- be aware of your audience and adapt your style accordingly.

### Good practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was where:

- Centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks, which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects that they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience
- A wide range of appropriate texts were used for Assignment 3, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates' could respond and were relevant to their interests
- Centres set tasks which allowed candidates to respond in three different genres of writing
- Candidates' responses were within the recommended 500 to 800 word limit
- Teachers gave general advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- Candidates revised, edited and carefully proof read their first drafts in order to improve their writing checking for errors with:
  - basic punctuation such as missing full stops, the incorrect use of commas and semi colons and the correct use of capital letters

- typing errors
- spelling, especially any words selected from spellcheck
- Teachers provided informative summative comments relating to the mark scheme at the end of each completed assignment
- Coursework portfolios were securely attached and presented as indicated in the syllabus
- The CASF included all the candidates in the cohort and candidates were listed on the form in numerical order, with the candidates in the sample being clearly indicated by an asterisk.

Overall, the majority of the centres entered into the spirit of coursework with candidates of all abilities producing folders to be proud of, and which contained a variety of work across a range of contexts. These folders demonstrated that the candidates had the flexibility and facility to adapt their work for a range of audiences and purposes.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/05  
Speaking and Listening

## Key messages

### **Administration**

Whilst the accurate conduct and assessment of the test remains the most important goal for centres, it should be noted that the correct and accurate administration of the accompanying paperwork is vitally important to the process of moderation. Diligent completion of the Summary Form (the OESF) correlated to accurate transcription of the marks to the Mark form sent to Cambridge International (the MS1) ensures a smooth progression through the process of moderation. Inaccuracies in the completion of either or both forms cause delays and problems that are best avoided.

Where there were issues reported by the moderating team, the following guidelines should be applied:

- The recordings for all the candidates entered for the series should be included in the packet sent to Cambridge International: the centre does not have to select a sample of recordings
- If at all possible, the recordings should be copied onto one CD or USB device: whilst CDs are perfectly acceptable, it should be noted that they are susceptible to damage in transit, so USBs are both more robust and more secure
- Centres should check the recordings at regular intervals during and after the testing process to ensure their quality
- When recordings have been sent on an encrypted device it is important that moderators are clearly appraised of the key in order to access the recordings without issue
- Each examiner at a centre is expected to complete their own Oral Examination Summary Form (OESF), thus providing the moderator with a clear overview of the centre's process
- Please order candidates by candidate number when completing summary forms
- Where there are multiple examiners at a centre involved in the testing, internal moderation is required
- Where the total mark for a candidate has been altered because of this internal moderation, please indicate on the OESF which of the three marks have been changed: it is unhelpful if only the total mark is altered
- Centres are reminded that they should enter the candidates' topics in the relevant column on the OESF
- The total marks given for the candidates on the OESF should match precisely those transcribed to the MS1 sent to Cambridge International and copied into the packet to be moderated.

### **Conduct of the Speaking and Listening Test**

- The tests should be conducted within the window prescribed by Cambridge International for each examination series: details can be accessed on the Cambridge International website
- A separate introduction is required for each candidate's test as it is not acceptable for one generic introduction covering the whole of the centre's cohort to be included with the sample recordings
- The examiner should introduce each candidate's recording by stating the following: the centre's name and number; the candidate's name and number; the name of the examiner and the date on which the test is being conducted
- **Part 1** should run between 3–4 minutes and **Part 2** should last for 6–7 minutes: timings should always be considered when awarding candidates marks.

### **Accuracy of assessment**

Centres applied the marking criteria with a general accuracy that is to very pleasing to note. In most cases it was clear to the moderator as to why particular marks had been awarded and how centres had applied internal moderation, where it was applicable.

Where there was a level of disagreement between the moderator's assessment and the centre's assessment, the following still applies:

- Timings were not adhered to in one or both parts of the test but the marks awarded did not take this into consideration: a very short **Part 1** or **Part 2** will most likely not fulfil the criteria for the higher bands
- Articulate, confident candidates tended to be over assessed in **Part 1** where the content was factual rather than demonstrating more analysis and reflection
- Some centres under-marked candidates at the lower end of their range: the criteria for Band 5 suggests a performance that is so inhibited by the delivery that little sense can be made of what is said
- One prominent cause of inaccuracy was generosity in the awarding of marks in **Part 2** for short responses which were not of sufficient length or challenge to secure the higher bands
- It is important that the examiners do not over-dominate in **Part 2** as candidates should be allowed to talk and their contribution should be dominant, particularly for those being awarded marks in the higher bands where detailed responses to questions and prompts are expected
- Very formal **Part 2** discussions that are of a question and answer nature can inhibit a candidate's performance, particularly when awarding marks for Speaking

### **General comments**

All moderators reported that in the majority of centres they moderated the conduct of the tests was professional, sympathetic to the candidates and appropriately timed. Moderators also reported that centres were diligent in their administration of the tests and the accompanying paperwork.

Assessment was generally accurate to the standard. Where problems with the accuracy of assessment occurred these were generally related to issues with timing (particularly in **Part 2**), too little credit being given to candidates in the Band 4 range and too much credit being given to candidates who produced factually based responses to **Part 1** or responses to **Part 2** that were lacking in consistent detail.

Candidates are to be congratulated for continuing to choose an interesting and diverse range of topics and for preparing thoroughly for the test. Centre advice on the choice of topics is generally sound and helpful for the candidates. Where there were occurrences with candidates struggling to maintain a discussion in **Part 2** the original choice of topic was largely the issue. Very few presentations seemed to rely heavily on notes although some were over-reliant on memorisation. The level of articulacy demonstrated by the majority of candidates in this component continues to be impressive.

### **Comments on specific tasks**

#### ***Part 1 – Individual Talk***

**Part 1** should be a minimum of 3 minutes and a maximum of 4 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 in a performance lasting significantly less than four minutes.

Equally, a response which is significantly overlong cannot be regarded as fulfilling the criteria for Band 1. It is in the best interests of the candidate that the examiner intercedes to halt any **Part 1** talk that exceeds the maximum time allowed. It is not being rude to a candidate for this to happen but is actually a benefit. In terms of assessment, if an intervention is deemed necessary, it should be considered whether the candidate has successfully fulfilled the criteria for Band 1 if this level is to be awarded.

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. Please note that each cue card should include the name of the candidate and be retained by the centre for six months after the date on which the results are published.

Examiners should not interrupt or halt candidates within the time allowed for **Part 1**. Examiners should only interrupt to move the candidates into **Part 2** if they show no signs of reaching a natural conclusion after the maximum time allowed. The role of the examiner in **Part 1** is to be a passive listener throughout.

If candidates falter during **Part 1** (because they have forgotten what they were going to say or lose their flow) the examiner should use prompts without resorting to asking questions.

In a handful of centres, most notably where a peripatetic examiner was involved who did not know the candidates previously, the examiner began the test by trying to engage the candidate in general chatter seemingly designed to put them at their ease. It is not good practice and often has the opposite effect to that intended as candidates are prepared to begin their talk immediately after the formal introduction and are only confused and disadvantaged by having to engage in unnecessary and irrelevant conversation.

It is pleasing to report that once again moderators cited a wide range of topics being undertaken although the tasks generally took the form of an individual presentation. Some examples of monologues delivered in role were evident and these were mostly successful. There were few examples of generic topics this session and it is pleasing to see that centres are giving candidates greater choice in this respect. 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.

More successful topics often had an abstract element to them, addressing a topic or concept which had the capacity to be considered at a mature and sophisticated level. Candidates in these cases were able to engage with their topic at a level which allowed for complex vocabulary and reference points.

Successful topics included:

- Bullet Journals
- Introverts
- Cultural Appropriation
- Self-discipline
- Fairy Tales
- The Power of Words
- What Is A Great Nation?
- Acceptance
- Tiger Parents
- Paradoxes
- The Mimic Octopus
- Mona Lisa – speaking as the character looking out on those studying the painting.

Topics that worked less well included:

- Room 101
- Social media – too broad and often clichéd
- Holidays – too broad or liable to be a list of events only
- Football – too broad
- Bullying
- Technology – too broad
- Video games
- Travel – too broad
- Lebron James (or any celebrity) where it is a descriptive, factual biography
- Work Experience (often little of note is said).

It is important to point out that any topic could be presented successfully, but the list above shows topics that tended not to score highly. This was partly due to candidates selecting topics that had a personal connection to them (which is a good starting point) but not then taking the topic beyond their personal interest into more demanding intellectual areas, either by considering an abstract element or by engaging with an argument or controversy related to the topic. Take, for example, the topic ‘Lebron James’. A better topic title would have been ‘Why Lebron James Inspires Me’. Equally, ‘Travel’ is too broad a topic but ‘Why My Two Weeks Cruising the Mediterranean Has Broadened My Cultural Awareness’ is much more focused and offers the opportunity for much more in-depth discussion in Part 2.

## Part 2 – Discussion

A full **Part 2** should run for 6–7 minutes and be a genuine discussion as opposed to a more stilted question-and-answer session dominated by the examiner. Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the discussion lasts long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner’s responsibility to ensure the prescribed timing is adhered to.

Most examiners are to be commended for conducting the discussions effectively and encouraging candidates to extend and develop the chosen topics. The most successful examiners engaged fully with the topic and corresponding discussion and increased the complexity and subtlety of the questions in order to allow candidates to appropriately demonstrate their ability to deal with ‘changes in direction of the conversation’. Such progressive questioning provides the examiner with the means to find the highest level that the candidate can rise to. It remains a real pleasure to hear candidates talking on equal terms with the examiner where both parties are clearly enjoying the test.

Where the **Part 2** was less successful the following were issues to be avoided:

- Some examiners continue to dominate, believing that their opinions are as important as the candidates being examined, whereas in reality their input is only important as a stimulus for encouraging full and developed responses from the candidates
- Examiners interrupted candidates in ‘full flow’
- There was a trend at a few centres to cut short **Part 2** of the test; perhaps because the candidates were quite weak but even in this case the examiner could have improved the quality of the responses by asking more open questions
- Stilted and rigid questioning led to stilted and under-developed short answers: there should be a natural flow to the discussion in **Part 2**
- Some examiners seemed reluctant to challenge the ideas and viewpoints expressed by the candidates for fear of unsettling them
- The use of pre-prepared questions in **Part 2** is strongly discouraged: examiners should be flexible in their approach to how **Part 2** develops and not rely solely on a list of questions
- When they plan and prepare their responses, candidates are encouraged to consider what questions they may be asked during **Part 2**, but those who prepare long and unnatural monologues in response to anticipated questions only penalise themselves.

## Advice to Centres

- Follow the instructions on how to present the recordings and documentation efficiently and concisely
- Please check both documentation and recordings before sending to Cambridge International
- This is a formal terminal test: prepare for this examination as any other – i.e. techniques/research/thought about appropriate topics
- Practise methods of presentation and response to questioning in other situations as preparation for this test
- The test timings are as important as they are in any written examination, so Examiners, teachers and candidates should plan appropriately and adhere to them
- Ensure that the Examiners know the topic titles in advance of the test day so that they can think about some of the possible areas for questioning
- Examiners should have plenty of questions to ask to push candidates to use the time allowed effectively but also be flexible in the approach to the discussion
- Examiners should use prompts and ask questions strategically to encourage and help the candidates to think for themselves and demonstrate what they can do
- Examiners should avoid saying too much or interrupting too early, which can affect the candidates developing their own ideas
- Candidates should practise their presentations but not learn them by heart.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0500/06  
Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

## Key messages regarding administration

It is most important that centres enter candidates for the chosen component using the correct component code. Entering candidates using an incorrect code causes delays to the moderation process and possible maladministration issues that are best avoided.

Cambridge International requires a centre to provide four different items in the package sent to the moderator. These are:

- All the recordings of **Task 1** and **Task 2** for the whole cohort entered for the series. It is recommended that these are sent on one CD or one USB drive wherever possible
- All the Coursework Assessment Summary Forms for the whole cohort entered. If more than one teacher/examiner is involved in the process then a separate form completed by that teacher/examiner should be included. This allows the moderator to cover within the moderation process the range of teacher/examiners used by the centre
- The Individual Candidate Record Cards for all the entered candidates in the cohort
- A copy of the marks that have already been sent to Cambridge.

It is essential to successful completion of the moderating process that all the required items are present in the packet sent to Cambridge. Of equal importance is that the addition and transcription of marks is accurate and that the marks on the separate forms tally against each other. The moderator will undertake a check of the centre's administration before moderating and any discrepancies found can cause a delay in the process.

The following guidelines may prove helpful in completing the sample successfully:

- Centres should generate audio files in a recognised common audio file format such as mp3, wav and wma (but not AUP) that can be played by standard computer software. It is helpful if, for each candidate, a separate track is created and its file name is the candidate's name and examination number. Where possible, the recordings should be transferred to a single CD or a USB drive. It is highly recommended that the quality of the recordings is checked regularly during the recording sessions. The final CD or USB drive should also be checked before despatching to Cambridge
- The teacher/examiner should introduce each recording 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 as to who is speaking 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
- An Individual Candidate Record Card is required for each candidate entered. These cards should be treated as 'living' documents that are completed when each task is undertaken. 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
- Where there are multiple teacher/examiners in a centre, internal standardisation and moderation is required. If, as a result of this internal moderation, the marks for candidates' tasks are changed, please indicate on the Summary Forms exactly where these changes have taken place. Changing just the total marks is unhelpful for the moderator.

### **General comments**

Generally, across the entry, the standard of administration and accuracy of assessment continue to be of a high standard. Centres and their candidates continue to be fully committed to the component and produce work of a very good quality. A wide range of topics were chosen in response to **Task 1** and some inventive literature-based paired discussions were evident in response to **Task 2**.

Centres are reminded that the Individual Candidate Record and the Summary Form are specific to Component 6 and cannot be substituted by forms from any other component, such as Component 5.

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-based activities is encouraged where it will benefit the candidates' performance.

### **Comments on specific tasks**

Across all three tasks, the most successful examples were those where the candidates enjoyed a personal interest in the topics chosen. Candidates who were genuinely interested in the topics they had chosen often had more to say and in greater depth, leading to more interesting and developed responses.

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.

#### **Task 1**

A wide range of topics were undertaken although the task generally took the form of an individual presentation. This is a perfectly valid response to the task and one candidates often feel most comfortable in performing. Some centres chose to be quite inventive and their candidates responded to this task by delivering dramatic monologues in a chosen character. Again, this is a perfectly valid response to the task.

When preparing a response to **Task 1**, whether it is a presentation or a monologue, candidates should consider the length. It is recommended that a response of 3 to 4 minutes is a reasonable expectation if a mark in the higher bands is being targeted.

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

- An important event in my life
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- An in-depth and evaluative review of a movie, piece of music or work of art
- Being an introvert
- Colours
- The rise of Artificial Intelligence
- Why you should visit my city
- Did we really journey to the Moon?
- My inspiration
- Role models.

*Some examples of less successful **Task 1** activities include:*

- Should cannabis be legalised? (This has potential safeguarding issues)
- Football (Most often too generic and unfocussed)
- Travelling (Where too generic and lacking focus)
- A single topic imposed by the centre for the whole of its cohort in which no individual choice is allowed (Ownership of and commitment to the topic is rarely evident).

## 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. Coupling a more able candidate with one who is weaker normally stifles the stronger one, by not allowing a sufficiently taxing springboard for development of the ideas expressed and limits the contribution of the weaker one because she/he is dominated by their partner.

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 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. The lack of spontaneity usually reflects an adequate response to the task.

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 four minutes. Given that both speaking and listening are assessed for both candidates, it is important that the activities last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums if marks in the higher bands are to be awarded.

*Some examples of productive Task 2 activities include:*

- Arguing for and against a current affairs topic such as the benefits of modern technology or the moral implications of cloning
- Discussing a text or author both candidates know well
- Planning a special event – either at school or for a more personal joint function
- Discussing a favourite painting or other work of art
- ‘Introducing the News’ – a simulated radio broadcast with two presenters
- In-character discussions between two literary personalities focussing on a specific point(s) in the text
- Arguing for and against the existence of zoos
- Discussing a moral dilemma
- ‘High End Fashion Goods’ – Desirable or not?
- How to spend a specified amount of money on school improvements.

*Some examples of less successful Task 2 activities include:*

- Should cannabis be legalised? (This has potential safeguarding issues)
- Interviews where one of the candidates acts solely as the interviewer (This is limiting for the candidate)
- Disagreements between neighbours – a role play that is rarely developed
- Customer complaints regarding faulty service – another role play rarely developed
- A single topic imposed by the centre for the whole of its cohort in which no individual choice is allowed (Ownership of and commitment to the topic is not always evident).

## Task 3

**Task 3** may take the form of a group discussion debating an issue which is topical 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.

A group should consist of no less than three members and it is advised that it does not exceed five candidates. A group consisting of three or four candidates is preferable for the logistical purpose of being able to assess each candidate’s performance more accurately.

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 the 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, possibly based on a literary text – e.g. George Milton, Arthur Birling
- A discussion of a topical issue with each candidate having their own viewpoint
- Balloon debate – who to include/discard from a list of famous people where each candidate champions the cause of their chosen celebrity
- An interview panel discussing potential candidates for a job
- Planning a special event – either at school or for a more personal joint function
- How to spend a specified amount of money on school improvements.

Some topics work equally well for either **Task 2** or **Task 3** but this is not always the case so caution is advised.

### General conclusions

Component 6 remains a successful and enjoyable vehicle for candidates to express their opinions, demonstrate their oral skills and genuinely engage with speaking and listening.

The standard of assessment by centres is accurate and easy to follow.

As in all examinations, candidates clearly benefit from clear instruction, careful planning and thoughtful practise.