

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

In this component, candidates should aim to:

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

General comments

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

There were some good examples of careful internal moderation and standardisation during the course. The mark ranges were often realistic, covering the low forties to the middle twenties. Forms were generally fully completed and marks were carefully transferred to the submitted mark forms.

There were few major issues in the completion of coursework. However, there were a number of difficulties in the setting of texts for Assignment 3 and in the understanding of how candidates should respond to what was intended as a test of reading.

Good practice:

In general the requirements of the syllabus were carefully carried out.

The best coursework involved the setting of assignments that were original and which involved candidates in the desire to argue at some length and with personal conviction. Tasks set for Assignment 2 were those that elicited imaginative responses that never lost sight of being written for a reader who needed to be engaged in both content and expression.

In most cases it was better that candidates invented their own topics and titles rather than being given a set of what sometimes resembled examination questions.

An increasing number of drafts bore evidence of the candidates' own revisions, editing and corrections. This illustrated a concerned involvement in the process of writing and was of high educational value.

Many teachers annotated final versions of assignments in detail and also noted errors in the writing. They correctly gave general advice at the ends of the drafts.

Less good practice:

The same tasks were sometimes set to large numbers of candidates who responded with similar content and little personal engagement. It was likely that some candidates would have been at a disadvantage by being set a task that did not concern them greatly. In Assignment 1, writing on social media was rarely original and in Assignment 2 the frequent setting of ‘scary stories’ produced too many simple and barely credible narratives that followed similar lines.

Some folders bore little evidence of teacher assessment and in some cases there were no obvious differences between the drafts and the final versions of assignments. Moderators need to understand how marks have been awarded. The drafting process is intended to support the process of preparing the best possible version of a piece of writing.

Task setting

Some Centres gave their candidates as much choice as possible in their assignments. This was most apparent in Assignment 1 where candidates were at an advantage if they tackled issues that really concerned them or about which they were enthusiastic. Where the Centre set one or a limited number of topics, the result was often competent but not a great deal more. The same was true of Assignment 2 where several Centres told their candidates to write ‘scary stories’, which resulted in large numbers of similar tales of haunted houses and fairgrounds, leading to unconvincing endings. For Assignment 3 it was sometimes acceptable for all candidates in a set or a Centre to tackle the same text for reading because teachers could ensure an appropriate standard of difficulty.

A number of candidates attempted tasks that were not challenging enough for the award of high marks. An example of such a task was a rant against people who eat with their mouths open. While the writing was stylistically witty, the quality and standard of the argument was significantly lower than that of a well-argued examination of, for example, home schooling.

Most candidates wrote three contrasting assignments which were different in genre and register. However, there were rare cases where the first assignment was closely related to a reading text and there was no real difference between it and the response to Assignment 3. Similarly, some candidates addressed the issue raised by the text in Assignment 3, so that their responses resembled those of Assignment 1 too closely. Assignment 3 is meant to be primarily an exercise in evaluation and analysis. Where the contrasts in the three assignments were marked, this contributed to the final, overall mark for writing.

There were a number of cases where it was apparent that candidates had been given unfair guidance as to what to write. This was evident in Assignment 3 where sometimes the selection of points from the texts and the order in which they were presented was the same or very similar. In rarer cases the responses to the points were also similar and had apparently come from the candidates’ teacher. This limited the marks that could be awarded for reading. The best candidates were those who thought for themselves and reacted personally and originally to the text.

Assessment of coursework

The Moderators were encouraged by the number of assessors who noticed the change in the numbering of the mark bands, and there was ample proof that the mark scheme was carefully and fully used. On many occasions teachers gave a summary list, showing outcomes in relation to the writing objectives, at the end of each assignment. Fewer assessments were made on the less reliable evidence of marginal comments. This was less common in the award of the reading mark where the mark scheme was often referred to in less detail.

Writing

The main problem in the assessment of writing was that there was too much trading of strands in each mark band: there was too much emphasis on content, structure and register and not enough on style and accuracy. Candidates whose range of vocabulary was comparatively limited were sometimes over rewarded. The most frequent problem was of sentence construction. There were candidates who wrote almost entirely in brief, simple sentences. Some hid the fact by using commas instead of full stops between sentences while others used no punctuation at all. Others used slightly more complex forms, but most of their sentences were of similar length and were generally pairs of joined sentences. The best candidates were those who used vocabulary with assurance and who joined their sentences in a variety of patterns, so that the effect was of fluency in conveying meaning.

It was of some concern when comments at the ends of assignments stated that SPAG was generally correct even when several errors were made. There were many occasions where sentence separation errors were not annotated and had apparently not been taken into consideration.

A number of candidates wrote very long sentences, with little control over the structure. Where this happened, the sense of the sentence was often lost and meaning became confused.

The use of the spell check was often inaccurate and underlined the importance of proofreading. This was often not carried out, although some candidates clearly took care in checking their first proofs. The following are given as examples of avoidable errors:

Your faulty, floored and fictitious article...
It was a rainy day due to the condescension...
You must not let self-coincidence get in the way...

The most common reason for adjusting the writing marks concerned style and accuracy. An addition was made to a Centre's marks where teachers had been very exacting about candidates' use of language and the presence of errors, but usually the adjustment was lower. In the award of a mark band it was essential that all strands met the description. Where there was a discrepancy the mark awarded should have been significantly lower in the band.

Assessment of reading

Too many candidates were mistakenly awarded marks in the top band. At this high level it is important that the text set is of a significant reading standard and that candidates are able to demonstrate an understanding of the text and the writer's attitude as a whole. Some overview is needed as well as the evaluation of a number of ideas and opinions of some depth selected from the text. A number of marks given in the top band were more appropriate as a mark of eight.

Conversely, there were some excellent responses where candidates gave an overview and developed a structured argument in which ideas and opinions from the text were effectively assimilated.

Some of the marks given as seven were also too lenient. This was due to the quality of the responses given to the selected ideas and opinions from the texts. There was no justification for a mark above six for candidates who did little more than to express agreement or disagreement with the writer.

Candidates who attacked the writer instead of evaluating ideas and opinions from the text received little credit.

Writing parallel arguments that bore only general relation to the text, or addressing the issue rather than the text, received little credit for reading although they might be marked highly for writing.

It is important to remember that this is a test of reading as well as of writing, and that candidates are required to demonstrate understanding at some depth and to respond to what the writer has put forward.

Administration by Centres

Moderators complimented Centres on their filling in of forms and presentation of the folders. Most Centres enclosed the CASF(WMS) form and indicated which of their candidates were included in the sample. The CASF was required for all entered candidates, and all changes to the marks at internal moderation should

have been shown in the right hand column. This was not always the case and sometimes Moderators had to search for evidence of internal moderation in the folders themselves.

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

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

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

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

Drafts

The draft/redraft process gives the candidate an opportunity to improve work through editing (eg words and phrases), revising (eg sections) and correcting. Teachers should offer general advice about how to improve written at the end of the draft.

Some candidates used drafting process well, revising sections, making corrections and editing language. There were still some cases where teachers made specific corrections on drafts. It was in order to make general comments to the candidates about searching for errors and correcting them, but it is strictly forbidden to do the work for them.

Internal moderation

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

Comments on specific tasks

Assignment 1

This assignment was generally well done. There was a very wide range of topics and many of these were well argued with a good deal of personal conviction, whether as speeches or as formal arguments.

Some of the work was extremely long and Centres are advised against this unless the candidates are able to sustain their arguments effectively over the length. Sometimes the argument was less strong near the end, paragraphs became noticeably shorter, and there was a tendency to repetition. Sometimes the quality of the style was better near the beginning and less fluent and accurate nearer the end.

Some of the research essays lacked personal conviction. Candidates using a number of sources appeared to have effectively gathered their material and reconstructed it into a new form. There were some cases where whole sections of a text were copied, and this was a malpractice.

Some Centres still offered writing under the generic title ‘Don’t get me started’. While some topics worked well because they were properly structured and the content was appropriate, others offered little challenge, the ranting style was ineffective, and there was a tendency to repetition. Topics such as ‘Buses’, ‘Dog walkers’, ‘People who suddenly stop walking’, and ‘Spots’ were unlikely to offer suitable challenge.

One Centre offered some excellent book reviews of The Great Gatsby, Lord of the Flies and Ethan Frome, which examined themes in some depth as well as characters. These were much more effective than film reviews which were often quite superficial and not very well structured.

Some of the topics were school based, and no less effective for that. Others explored a good range of important issues. Some of the topics were as follows:

*Human rights
Using CCTV
University Fees
The Santa Claus myth
The dark side of selfies
Is sugar the new cocaine?
Single sex or coeducational schools?
Safety in Formula 1
No homework for post-16
Are spirits real?*

Assignment 2

There were some good accounts of personal experiences which blended original and engaging detail with credible and appropriate emotional responses. The best of these avoided the ordinary and shed new light on the type of experiences that are common to all. Topics even included readable accounts of football matches.

Stories of visits to exciting and unusual places all over the world were also done well. Candidates were careful in their selection of details and events that would interest the reader. They were often well structured.

Fiction varied in its effectiveness. Simply instructing candidate to write a story did not usually work. Where candidates had experience of reading and studying short stories and understanding how they are structured, results were often excellent and in one or two cases, outstanding. There were many good endings and devices such as drip feeding of information, double narrators, and time lapses were often used. The best stories were the products of candidates' own imagination, but sometimes a Centre would offer guidance that was effective. One outstanding example was simply to write a story that was based on a conversation between two people. Candidates responded imaginatively in their choice of who were conversing and the reason for the encounter, and the result was entertaining and intriguing fiction.

There were very few good examples of what was variously set as a spooky story or a haunted house. These, and the common story of the fairground at night that suddenly came to life, were stereotypical, following the same inevitable course with similar details. They often degenerated into incredible narratives about dead bodies, people dressed as clowns, and zombies. This genre originated a few years ago as a gothic story and was often related to the study of real examples. However, it has become watered down and most of the examples were unconvincing and on the immature side.

There were a large number of First World War stories and accounts of 9/11, some of which were done quite well. However, it was difficult for many candidates to write convincingly on topics that were part of history and thankfully clearly outside their own direct experience.

There were a large number of descriptions, commonly of parks, forest clearings, beaches, waiting rooms and storms. While these were often competent and usually quite well structured (for example, covering morning, noon and night), they were sometimes a little unoriginal in their presentation of detail and indeed in the topic itself. The best were those that used language appropriately and effectively. Some candidates attempted to use language that was too complex and poetic, so that the picture in the reader's mind was often crowded out by the display of words.

Whatever the nature of the task or the genre, this assignment succeeded insofar as the reader felt that what was being described or recounted was real.

Some excellent work was written in response to:

*A fresh start
What was that noise?
Climbing Devil's Tower
I don't want to see you...
A teen pregnancy diary
Station clock (the clock 'writes' the description)
Scuba diver
The cartographer
The beloved harmonica
My grandmother's silk dress*

Assignment 3

Some of the problems of the assessment of reading have already been described. The selection of an appropriate text is not easy. It needs to be one that can be argued with at least partially. Candidates did best either with texts they disagreed with or partially agreed. The writer's attitude towards the topic needed to be clearly argued and the text need to be of the right difficulty.

There was a good variety of texts used for this assignment, often related to the country of origin. These texts tended to be the right standard of difficulty although some were far too long. Centres are reminded that two sides of A4 is the maximum length that candidates can be expected to handle in any detail.

Topics dealt with by the texts included:

Climate change deniers

Your favourite drink can ruin your body (about a well-known drink said to be able to melt a dead mouse!)

Produce waste

Are students lazy?

Two days without a smart phone

Fracking

Gender equality

Self-driving cars

Wearing a poppy (Fifa rules)

The Calais crisis

A word of warning: articles like the favourite drink above are attractive because they are very funny, but candidates commonly do not see the humour, so such texts should be set with care.

Final comments

As usual, on many occasions the standard of work was very high and Moderators enjoyed the originality of thought and the interest of the work. The standard of assessment varied at times, but Centres interpreted the syllabus well and much of the work was refreshing and interesting.

It is important to consider how coursework can be of great educational value and not just to be a pathway to an examination result. Much of the work seen by Moderators demonstrated this educational value.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/05
Speaking and Listening

Key messages

Administration – General Points

- Cambridge requires a centre to provide **three different items** in the package sent to the Moderator: a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive, the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered and a **copy of the marks** that have already been sent to Cambridge. Each one of these items is very important in the process of assessing a Centre's performance. Centres are urged to ensure all these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process, or in the worst scenario, an inability on the part of the moderator to complete the process until the relevant items are received.
- Centres are asked to use **digital recording equipment** to generate audio files which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a recognised common audio file format that can be played by standard computer software, such as mp3, wav and wma. The AUP file type is not universal, and should not be used. Please collate recordings onto either one CD, DVD or USB drive, unless the cohort's size prevents this.
- Where total marks for a candidate have been altered because of internal moderation, please indicate on the Summary Form which of the three marks has been changed.
- Where candidates have been entered but fail to take the test they should be recorded as 'absent' and not awarded a mark of zero. A mark of zero should only be awarded to a candidate who is present for the test but whose contribution does not meet the required standard to be awarded a mark when assessed against the marking grids.

Most Centres were conversant with the required procedures and most tests were carried out professionally and effectively.

Where there were issues, the following applies:

- Centres should recognise at the planning stage which of Components 5 or 6 the cohort is to be entered for. These two distinct paths are not interchangeable later in the process. Code errors, where candidates undertake one component but are entered for the other, remain a serious issue for a small but significant number of Centres. In such cases, the moderation process is problematic and inevitably leads to delays.
- The Centre does not choose which recordings to send. Recordings **for every candidate in the entered cohort** should be sent as part of the sample.
- The examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. This must include the date on which the recording is made to confirm the test has been carried out within the specified window. **Each candidate's test must begin with this introduction.** It is not acceptable for one generic introduction covering the whole of the centre's cohort to be included with the sample recordings.
- Please check the recordings at regular intervals during the testing process to ensure their quality. Please also check the CD, DVD or USB before despatching to Cambridge. Faulty recordings continue to delay the process of moderating a small minority of Centres.

Conduct of the test

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

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

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

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

The use of pre-prepared responses to known questions in **Part 2** is not permitted. When they plan and prepare their responses, candidates are encouraged to consider what questions they may be asked during the discussion but there should be no collusion between the examiner and candidate. Candidates who prepare long and unnatural monologues in response to anticipated questions penalise themselves. The discussions should evolve and to do this an element of spontaneity must be apparent.

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

It is important that the tests are undertaken within the prescribed test window published by Cambridge for each series. Tests taken outside this window are problematic. Centres are reminded that as part of the examiner's introduction to every individual test undertaken the full date should be quoted.

Accuracy of assessment

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

- **Part 1** should last for a minimum of three minutes and a maximum of four minutes. Examiners should not interrupt or halt candidates within this time. Examiners should only interrupt to move the candidates into **Part 2** if they show no signs of reaching a natural conclusion after five minutes.
- One prominent cause of inaccuracy was generosity in the awarding of marks in **Part 2** for short discussions which did not demonstrate the qualities of the higher bands. Where a candidate does not meet the advised minimum length of 6 minutes, they are unlikely to have responded fully to questions, and details may be lacking.
- Articulate, confident candidates are best served with topics which lead towards higher level thinking including analysis and reflection rather than those where the content is predominantly factual.
- It is important that the examiners do not dominate the discussions in **Part 2**. 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.

Approaches to Part 1

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

The focus for many candidates was just to get the material delivered, with fewer candidates also thinking about tone and rhetorical devices to support their talks. Often, this involved candidates memorising and over-rehearsing their talks to the detriment of the actual delivery. A sense of audience was lost leading to less engaging performances. The best candidates often had a passion for their topic so the use of tone came more naturally.

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

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

- A significant moment in my life
- My passion for a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- Being a teenager in the twenty-first century
- Cultural change and the issues it raises
- Gaming (where it was well constructed)
- Trap shooting
- Discrimination focusing on a social issue – i.e. disability, gender inequality
- My hero
- Topical events – e.g. afforestation, global currency, feminism, space travel
- Experience of other cultures – moving countries/other education systems compared
- Overcoming challenge
- Extreme sports

Some examples of less successful **Part 1** topics include:

- My Family/Friends/Pets (where there is little substance and no attempt to move beyond the descriptive)
- The Celebrity I Admire (where the talk is purely descriptive and a series of regurgitated facts and rumours)
- Footballer's Wages and Social Media (becoming cliché ridden and repetitive)
- Gaming (where there is limited planning and very little beyond the descriptive)
- Future Plans (where the talk is generic and unfocussed)

Management of Part 2

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

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

Good discussions gave many opportunities to allow candidates to develop their ideas as fully as they could, providing questions that helped them to explore ideas which demonstrated development of explanation. Some appropriate evidence of sensitivity by the listener was also noted when the topic was personal and potentially upsetting. (It should be noted that candidates should be dissuaded from choosing topics which could cause an intense emotional reaction under test conditions.)

Some candidates were hindered by the listener cutting into a discussion when it may have been more advantageous to allow the candidate to continue. Detailed and developed responses are required if marks in the higher bands are to be awarded for Listening.

One example of a weaker discussion was where both candidate and examiner asked each other a series of questions, with the examiner's answers somewhat dominating the discussion.

Some discussions fell into 'limited' or just 'adequate' because the examiner ran out of questions to push the candidate to develop their ideas, thus denying the candidate further opportunities to demonstrate their ability. **It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure each candidate is given the opportunity to extend their discussion to the advised time of 6 minutes.**

Advice to Centres

- Prepare for this examination as any other – i.e. techniques/research/thought about appropriate topics. Practise methods of presentation and discussion in other situations before preparing for this exam.
- Give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills through effective discussion and considering the advised timings for both parts of the test. Keep to the time limits in the syllabus to avoid candidates being adversely limited in the accurate application of the mark scheme.
- Follow the instructions on how to present the recordings and documentation efficiently and concisely.
- Please check both documentation and recordings before sending to Cambridge.
- Encourage candidates to choose topics that they know well through personal experience, and are passionate about. Issues and ideas normally work better than factual.
- When conducting the discussions in **Part 2**, examiners should have plenty of questions to ask to push candidates to fill the time for the discussion. Examiners should ask questions strategically to encourage and help the candidates to think for themselves and show off what they can do. Examiners should avoid saying too much or interrupting too early, which can affect the candidates developing their own ideas.
- At the top end of the mark scheme, Band 1 responses should be the required lengths and include evidence of higher level thinking skills being applied by the candidates. This requires the examiner in **Part 2** to ask more challenging questions and keep the discussion on task throughout.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/06
Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

Key messages

Generally, the standard of administration and accuracy of assessment continue to be of a high standard.

Where there are issues, the following guidelines are relevant:

- It is important for a centre to choose **either** Component 5 or 6 **before** planning the schemes of work through which this examination is to be delivered. Component 5 is a test taken within a specified window, being suitable for Centres who wish to assess their candidates on one topic, on one chosen date. Component 6 is more flexible in that three separate tasks are required that can be assessed at any time during the course. This flexibility allows a broader range of topics and skills to be assessed but requires Centres to fully embrace the concept that the speaking and listening tasks are an integral part of the overall course.
- 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. It is permissible for candidates to fill out the title sections themselves but please check the accuracy and amount of detail given. **Specific** information about the choices made for each task is required by the Moderator and not just generic statements that are unhelpful. For Task 1 a comment reading ‘a talk about a hobby of your choice’ is not helpful but ‘my interest in (explain specific hobby)’ is useful for the Moderator.
- Cambridge requires a centre to provide **four different items** in the package sent to the Moderator. These are a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive, the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered, a **copy of the marks** that have already been sent to Cambridge and the **Individual Candidate Record Cards** for the candidates included in the sample. Each one of these items is very important in the process of assessing a centre’s performance. Centres are urged to ensure all four of these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process, or in the worst scenario, an inability on the part of the Moderator to complete the process until the relevant items are received.
- Centres are asked to use **digital recording equipment** to generate audio files which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a recognised common audio file format that can be played by standard computer software, such as mp3, wav and wma. The AUP file type is not universal, and should not be used. The **quality** of the recordings should be **checked** before despatching to Cambridge.
- It is helpful if for each candidate, a **separate track** is created and its file name is the candidate’s name and examination number.
- The teacher/examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. For paired activities, it would be helpful if **candidates introduce themselves and the roles they are playing** before beginning the task so the Moderator can clearly distinguish who is speaking and when.
- Although there is no formal requirement that activities should be of a minimum length, please consider whether the **assessment criteria can be adequately met** if the activity is very short.

General comments

Centres are reminded that there are specific forms provided by Cambridge for use with Component 6; namely the Individual Candidate Record and the Summary Form.

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

Comments on specific tasks

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

Task 1

A wide range of topics were undertaken although the task generally took the form of an individual presentation. Centres allowing candidates to choose their own topics as opposed to dictating a generic theme is viewed positively. 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 these choices are made. More able candidates should be encouraged to choose more exacting and mature topics that extend their abilities to construct a compelling argument within a time frame of approximately 3–4 minutes that includes an element of introspection and reflection.

Some examples of productive Task 1 activities include:

- A significant event in my life
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- Why I love a particular text/movie/work of art/etc.
- My passion for
- My favourite place
- Feminism in the twenty-first century
- My hero – who and why

Some examples of less successful Task 1 activities include:

- Should cannabis be legalised?
- Football (Too generic and unfocussed)
- 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 2

The Pair-Based Activity works best between two candidates of similar ability discussing a topic they have prepared and that they feel strongly about or engaging in a lively role play that allows them to demonstrate their discursive strengths. A clearly defined focus is better than a general exchange of views. 'Football' remains a popular topic amongst boys but where there is no sense of audience or specific focus there will be little evidence of the 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 rely heavily on description or recitation of facts.

Generally, entirely scripted responses, be they discussions or role plays, do not allow candidates to access the higher attainment bands.

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 use of GM crops
- Discussing a text or author both candidates know well
- Planning a special event – either at school or for a more personal function
- The effects of social pressures on teenagers

- Comparing the merits of two famous people where each candidate acts as a champion for one of the celebrities
- Acting as employers discussing who should be given a job from a list of prospective candidates (and variations on the theme)

Some examples of less successful Task 2 activities include:

- Should cannabis be legalised?
- Interviews where one of the candidates acts solely as the interviewer (This is limiting for the candidate)
- 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 and or a role-play where each candidate plays the part of a character. Both can be successful as long as the assessment criteria for the group work are met. It is most important that each candidate in the group is allowed sufficient scope within the activity to demonstrate their strengths without being dominated by others. To this end, it is advisable to create groups of similar ability levels so that weaker candidates are not disadvantaged and to consider the group dynamic so that each member has the opportunity to contribute to the best of their ability. 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 accurately.

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
- Planning a celebration or community event

General conclusions

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/11
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 **Question 1(g)** candidates should remember that they cannot repeat the same word in their answer to (ii) as they used in (i). They 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 three 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 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 nearly 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 many 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. There was very little evidence of candidates not working within the paper time limit and fewer examples of No Response answers compared with previous papers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) **The crew of the Fairwind are described as being 'angry and disturbed'. Explain why they felt angry and why they felt disturbed (paragraph 1, 'On the night of...December 20th.'). [2 marks]**

Most candidates gained one mark by correctly identifying that the crew of the Fairwind were angry and disturbed that the lighthouse was not in operation/had a dead light/light was not working. Fewer noted that 'nothing had been done about it'. Only a small number appreciated the more implied point that the crew felt disturbed because the absence of light from the lighthouse could have increased the likelihood of their ship being wrecked on the rocks of the island during the storm.

- (b) **Why is it thought that the authorities did not act straightaway (paragraph 1, 'On the night of...December 20th.')? [1 mark]**

Many candidates correctly answered that 'the relief ship ... was due to sail out to the islands on December 20th', by lifting the phrase from the passage. In order to secure the mark, it was important to show understanding that the Hesperus (or the 'relief ship') was a different vessel from the Fairwind and to refer to the short timescale.

- (c) **Why was Joseph Moore on the Hesperus and why was he restless (paragraph 2, 'Bad weather delayed...any breakfast.')? [2 marks]**

Most candidates gained at least one mark here by explaining that Moore was 'disturbed ... that the light wasn't working' but many apparently misunderstood his role and stated that he was 'on watch duty' on the Hesperus and not that he was the 'relief lighthouse keeper' – a mark that could have been gained by lifting the relevant phrase directly from the passage. The most frequent misunderstandings were to claim that Moore's restlessness was related to the poor quality of his 'breakfast' or the fact that the three lighthouse keepers had gone missing – something he would not have known until he visited the lighthouse.

- (d) **State two unusual things that the crew of the Hesperus noticed when they landed on Flannan Isle and before they entered the lighthouse (paragraph 3, 'Things were mysterious...the island.'). [2 marks]**

This straightforward retrieval question about what was strange when the Hesperus crew landed on Flannan Isle was correctly answered by nearly all candidates who identified the absence of a flag, the absence of empty provision boxes awaiting restocking, and the absence of a traditional welcoming committee. Most candidates gained two marks with many responding with all three possibilities.

- (e) **Explain why the crew of the Hesperus were so concerned about the missing clothing and the one set of oilskins that they found in the lighthouse (lines 22–24). [2 marks]**

Most candidates noted that 'one of the crew had put himself in danger by not wearing his protective gear', adding that it was 'virtually unheard of'; fewer wrote that the men 'had broken the rules' by leaving the lighthouse unattended and hardly any commented on 'the missing gear indicated that at least two of the keepers...not come back'. More successful responses picked up on the point that the keeper had broken the rules by not wearing his protective clothing. Only the most successful deduced that the concern about the missing clothing arose from the conclusion that two of the keepers had not returned and were, therefore, also at risk.

- (f) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by: 'So much myth and folklore has grown up over the mystery of Flannan Isle' (line 27). [2 marks]**

Few candidates fully explained 'myth/folklore' in their own words, but a significant number suggested that 'rumours'/'made-up'/'exaggerated' stories had 'grown up' over the mystery of Flannan Isle and by doing so gained one of the available marks. Some went on to complete their explanation by pointing out that the effect of the increasingly mythical accounts was that it was very hard for later researchers to work out the truth of the events on the island.

(g)(i) Re-read paragraphs two, three and six of **Passage A**. Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words in **italics** in the following phrases:

- a 'filled with **foreboding**, pacing the deck and refusing any breakfast' (line 12)
- b 'the **eerie** silence that enveloped the island' (line 17)
- c 'Iron railings were bent **grotesquely** out of shape as if by some unearthly force' (lines 32–33). [3 marks]

Not all candidates appeared to understand the precise requirements of this task. The question asked them to explain in their own words what the writer meant by the **words in italics**. Many candidates produced 'catch all' phrases which were more akin to a (g)(ii) type explanation of the whole phrase. Only the more successful responses showed real understanding of the italicised words and only a small number of candidates gained all three available marks for this question.

- (a) For 'foreboding' many candidates were able to convey the sense of dread or anxiety experienced by Joseph Moore about the problems with the lighthouse. Some, however, misinterpreted the word as signifying 'anger' or 'excitement'. A few responses merely rephrased the words thus producing a circular answer which was not focused on the underlined word.
- (b) 'Eerie' was usually explained correctly with answers such as 'spooky', 'scary' and 'weird' proving to be very popular. Again, as with (a) some candidates gave explanations which focused on the whole phrase rather than the underlined word, pointing out the suffocating silence which enveloped the island but not satisfactorily explaining the meaning of the underlined word..
- (c) 'Grotesquely' presented a problem for many candidates but it was usually the absence of intensity which stopped some candidates getting a mark here. Words such as 'ugly', 'bent' or 'misshapen' really do not capture the full force of something being 'grotesque' with its implications of unnatural monstrosity. Again, some candidates managed to comment on 'force' rather than the appearance of the railings. As noted above many candidates struggled particularly with explaining the word, 'grotesquely' for 1(g)(i) but, nevertheless, successfully scored a mark or two in discussing the use of language in that quotation in their answers to 1(g)(ii).

(g)(ii) Explain how the language in each of the phrases in (g)(i) helps to suggest the atmosphere of mystery on the island. [6 marks]

Many candidates achieved marks on this question by showing some understanding/offering a partial explanation of individual phrases (as a whole). Most commented successfully on Moore's 'apprehension' or 'anxiety' concerning what might greet him on the island; the 'eerie silence' creating an 'unnatural atmosphere', and the 'powerful' force required to bend the railings 'grotesquely out of shape'. Only a small number showed any real appreciation of how the vocabulary/imagery was used to contribute to the writer's purpose.

Less successful responses made general comments about ‘adding to the mystery’, or ‘making things more mysterious’, without demonstrating a clear understanding of the individual phrases. Responses which showed a misunderstanding of ‘foreboding’ explained the whole phrase in terms of excitement or anger. A small 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. For example, instead of attempting to find own words for ‘unearthly force’ candidates merely repeated it. It is worth pointing out 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 ‘the atmosphere of mystery on the island’ but many responses did not relate their explanations to the focus of the question.

Question 2

Imagine that you are Joseph Moore from Passage A. You decide to stay on at the lighthouse and investigate what has happened. It is the next morning.

Write your journal entry for the events of the previous day and night.

In your journal you should:

- **describe your thoughts and feelings on the way to the island**
- **describe what you found when you landed and entered the lighthouse**
- **say what you think might have happened to the previous keepers and why they cannot be found.**

Base your journal entry 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 journal entry: ‘This was the most disturbing experience...’.

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.

Only a few responses followed the requirement to view the situation in hindsight and most merely described the events of the ‘actual’ day as it unfolded. Often candidates wrote responses which addressed the three bullet points, although not always in ‘journal entry’ register.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three prompts in a balanced approach but a significant number, having described Joseph Moore’s feelings and thoughts in some detail, as well as describing the scene at the lighthouse, then rather abruptly concluded the journal entry with the final sentence of Passage A about the damage, and, indeed, the loss of the lighthouse keepers, arising from the ‘terrible storm’. Such accounts often did not speculate on how the storm had led to their demise. In contrast to these responses, others enthusiastically speculated about the lighthouse keepers’ disappearance with some claiming the men had been eaten by a Kraken, had been whisked away to outer space by aliens or simply got washed into the sea while coming back from the local pub. It is important that candidates attempt to develop ideas related to the three prompts which are grounded in the passage, and such development should be predominantly in their own words as opposed to frequent lifting of phrases and even sentences from the original. Less successful responses either contained almost word for word accounts of what was found in the lighthouse together with a brief reference to Joseph Moore’s apprehension and a passing reference to the fate of the missing men or they focused on Joseph Moore’s worries with virtually no indication as to what was found in the lighthouse. A very small number of candidates answered this question in the third person, and a similar number wrote responses which had no relevance to the passage whatsoever.

A significant number of responses confused the events involving the Fairwind and the Hesperus when writing in response to bullet point 1. Only a very small number picked up on the passage’s hints of supernatural possibilities (the ‘grotesquely’ bent railings and the mysterious three birds) in their responses to bullet 3.

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 1 marks for both Content and Language.

Question 3

- (a) **What do you learn about the appearance and behaviour of the kraken and the explanations given for what it was, 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 was answered well with many candidates 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. The most frequent limitations included the repetition of the 'size' of the Kraken (Point 1) as separate points; confusion between Points 10 and 11 – with many responses incorrectly referring to a 'whirlpool' being created when the Kraken 'surfaced' – and the inclusion of 'historical' (and irrelevant) references to the Kraken. The key was avoiding repetition and answering the question by selecting points relating to the Kraken's appearance and its behaviour, as stated in the question.

- (b) **Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the appearance and behaviour of the kraken and the explanations given for what it was.**

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

Your summary should include all 10 of your points in Question 3(a) and must be 100 to 150 words.

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

Although some candidates were able to achieve Band 1 for clear, concise and fluent summaries the majority of candidates' responses were Band 2 (points were 'mostly focused' and made 'clearly') or Band 3 ('some areas of conciseness'). The least successful responses were marred by personal comments and unselective 'lifting'. The most successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. Middle range responses tended to be list-like with a series of loosely connected statements about the Kraken's behaviour and appearance.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/12
Reading Passages (Core)

Key messages

- Proofreading is essential. Marks were lost through avoidable mistakes which could have been corrected by candidates checking over their work.
- In 1(h) 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 go 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 nearly 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 many 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. There was very little evidence of candidates not working within the paper time limit and fewer examples of No Response answers compared with previous papers. Overall, the standard of performance of most candidates was of a satisfactory to very good level, with only a very small number performing at a less than satisfactory standard.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) **Using your own words, explain why the writer says ‘There was a small grain of truth’ in the rumours about the existence of El Dorado (line 2).** **(2 marks)**

There was a common error with this task that affected the marks awarded to a great number of the candidates. These candidates assumed that they were being asked to explain the words quoted in the question whereas a full answer required them to read on to find an explanation. For those who did follow this procedure there were two details to identify: (i) gold was being mined in the area (a small number of candidates identified this) and (ii) gold was used to decorate their chief (very few candidates identified this point). For those who attempted to explain the quoted words 1 mark was awarded for a response that explained that there was a mixture of fact and fiction in the rumours. A reasonable number of candidates gained this mark.

- (b) **What is the meaning of the Spanish phrase, ‘El Dorado’?** (1 mark)

The great majority of candidates correctly answered that ‘El Dorado’ means the ‘gilded one’ or the ‘golden one’.

- (c) **Give two details about the Spanish exploration of South America (paragraph 2, ‘The Spanish explorers...not yet ventured.’).** (2 marks)

A large number of candidates gained one mark here by explaining that there were 5 expeditions carried out by Spanish explorers in the period of five years. Fewer candidates obtained the second mark available. For this it was necessary to make the point that the explorers did not reach the northern part of South America. This was a question that highlighted the need to read the wording of the question carefully to identify the material required from the passage.

- (d) **Explain why Juan Martinez was punished by his companions (paragraph 3, ‘Meanwhile...on his way back.’).** (1 mark)

Many candidates gained the mark on this question by explaining that Martinez was punished because the gunpowder exploded and that he was responsible for it. The matter of his responsibility was essential to being awarded the mark – a reasonable number of candidates missed getting the mark by only mentioning the explosion.

- (e) (i) **Which two-word phrase in paragraph 3 (‘Meanwhile...on his way back.’) suggests that the writer questions the truth of Juan Martinez’s account?** (1 mark)

This was a relatively straightforward question and required only that the candidate quote the words ‘He claimed’ to get the mark. That said, a number of candidates did not choose these words, or choose to quote a lengthy section of text without clearly highlighting these words.

- (ii) **Which piece of evidence later in the passage suggests that at least some of his story was true?** (1 mark)

Many candidates noted that it was discovery of the ship’s anchor by Sir Walter Raleigh that offered some evidence of the truth of Martinez’s story. This mark could be gained by a succinct quotation from the text and quite a few candidates gave long quotation. However, providing there was some evidence of their selecting material rather merely lifting a large section in the hope of finding something relevant, they were awarded the mark.

- (f) **Explain what is meant by ‘potential investors’ (line 34).** (1 mark)

A large number of candidates gained the mark for this question. The key element in a correct answer was in showing that there was understanding of the word ‘investors’. Any answer which found an alternative means of expressing this (for example by referring to ‘money’ or ‘finance’) was successful.

- (g) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by ‘it is most likely that El Dorado was an excuse used by the European adventurers who were eager to discover the quickest path to riches.’ (line 38 – 40).** (2 marks)

Many candidates gained one mark for this question by giving some sense of the phrase with an attempt at using their own words. Overall, though, there were few candidates who gave a sufficiently clear explanation to get both marks. This tended to be because candidates relied too closely on the wording of the quotation, thus not demonstrating a full understanding.

- (h)(i) Re-read paragraphs one, two and seven of Passage A. Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words in italics in the following phrases:

- (a) 'and in its retellings, the tale became embellished' (line 8)
- (b) 'assumed that this fugitive empire was flourishing somewhere' (lines 12 – 13)
- (c) 'a place of fabulous wealth and has fed the romantic imaginations of writers throughout the centuries' (lines 37 – 38).

(3 marks)

Not all candidates appeared to understand the precise requirements of this task. The question asked them to explain in their own words what the writer meant by the **words in italics**. Many candidates produced 'catch all' phrases which were more akin to a g(ii) type explanation of the whole phrase. Only the more successful responses showed real understanding of the italicised words and only a small number of candidates gained all three available marks for this question.

- (a) For 'embellished' a reasonable number of candidates were able to explain that this meant the story had been altered or added to in some way. There were quite a number of candidates who gave explanations involving the story being repeated and passed on from one generation another that might have been more relevant in (ii).
 - (b) 'Fugitive' was explained correctly by a reasonable number of candidates who made comments about it meaning 'hidden' or 'lost' – some clearly seeing that it was connected to the use of 'fugitive' to mean someone who is evading discovery
 - (c) 'Romantic' proved, in many ways, the most difficult of the three words as candidates were distracted by its use to refer to love and romance. A smaller number of candidates gained a mark by suggesting that this meant something fanciful or a fantasy or dreamlike
- (ii) Explain how the words and language in each of the phrases in (h)(i) help to suggest how the writer presents the story of El Dorado.

(6 marks)

Many candidates achieved marks on this question by showing some understanding, offering a partial explanation of individual phrases (as a whole). Most commented successfully on the way the stories had been repeated and been added to, or had started as something true but had become more like a story from myth or legend.

Less successful responses made general comments about the content of the stories or repeated the contents of their answers to (i) without demonstrating a clear understanding of the individual phrases. As in previous sessions, the marks gained from this question often totalled fewer than for g(i). Sometimes this was because answers to g(ii) did, as noted, no more than repeat those given for g(i) or because a misunderstanding was carried through from g(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 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 'the writer's presentation of the story' but many responses did not relate their explanations to the focus of the question. A very small number of the more successful responses detected a hint of irony or disbelief in the writer's choice of wording and hence the writer's purpose of both relating the story and expressing his own opinion of its worth.

Question 2

Imagine that you are Juan Martinez from Passage A. You are interviewed by an official about your experience.

Write the words of your interview.

In your interview you are asked three questions:

- ***Tell me exactly why you were cast adrift in the jungle?***
- ***Explain what happened to you before you mysteriously reappeared?***
- ***Why should I believe anything that you are telling me?***

***Base your interview 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 bullets.***

Remember your interview is formal; you should begin with the first question: ‘Tell me exactly why you were cast adrift in the jungle...’.

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 Juan Martinez's experiences from his point of view. The majority also understood the interview format and gave answers that directly address the three set questions offering an appropriate register and voice for Martinez.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three prompts 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 was not extensive lifting of material there was often little sense of candidates putting themselves in the position of the character and giving life to his experiences. A very small number were a little muddled about the sequence of events.

More successful responses were able to give some explanation for the explosion of the gun powder and suggest why Martinez might have felt he was harshly or unfairly treated. Most candidates dealt reasonably successfully with the journey to and from Manoa. Again, the more successful responses gave some credible details about the local people and Martinez's thoughts and feelings about them.

The great majority of candidates made some attempt to answer the third question. Some simply insisted that as an officer Martinez would not lie; others gave quite convincing explanations such as the fact that he had obviously survived a long time in the jungle and was left there without food or that there was evidence in the form of the remains his ship (e.g. the anchor).

Overall, the responses showed a very good understanding of the passage, the predicament of Martinez when he was left behind and the difficulty of his being believed when he returned.

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 1 marks for both Content and Language.

Question 3

(a) **Notes**

What do you learn about the appearance and behaviour of unicorns and of the qualities they possessed, 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 gave candidates the chance to boost their total score by appropriate selection. It was answered very well with many candidates making one point per line as instructed, 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. Sometimes candidates included more than 10 marks worth of relevant points, but by putting them more than one point on each line gained fewer than 10 marks. 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. Only a small number of candidates gained full marks, although many achieved seven or above.

(b) **Summary**

Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the appearance and behaviour of unicorns and of the qualities they possessed.

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

Your summary should include all 10 of your points in Question 3(a) and must be 100 to 150 words.

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

On the whole, although some candidates were able to achieve Band 1 for clear, concise and fluent summaries the majority of candidates' responses were Band 2 (points were 'mostly focused' and made 'clearly') or Band 3 ('some areas of conciseness'). The least successful responses, of which there were only a few, were marred by personal comments and unselective 'lifting'. The most successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. Middle range responses tended to be list-like with a series of loosely connected statements about the unicorn's behaviour and appearance.

Concluding comments

Most candidates completed the paper in some detail and the responses to **Question 2** in particular were of a generally good standard. It is clear that the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared for these questions and were confident in their approach and, overall, this seemed to an accessible and engaging paper. Those who have marked the paper over the years have generally been impressed with the seriousness and competence with which candidates of all levels have approached the questions and hope that similar candidates in future years will continue with this seriousness of purpose in whichever syllabus they attempt.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/13
Reading Passages (Core)

Key messages

- Proofreading is essential. Marks were lost through avoidable mistakes which could have been corrected by candidates checking over their work.
- In 1(h) 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 go 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 nearly 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 many 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. There was very little evidence of candidates not working within the paper time limit and fewer examples of No Response answers compared with previous papers. Overall, the standard of performance of most candidates was of a satisfactory to very good level, with only a very small number performing at a less than satisfactory standard.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) **Using your own words, explain why the writer says ‘There was a small grain of truth’ in the rumours about the existence of El Dorado (line 2).** **(2 marks)**

There was a common error with this task that affected the marks awarded to a great number of the candidates. These candidates assumed that they were being asked to explain the words quoted in the question whereas a full answer required them to read on to find an explanation. For those who did follow this procedure there were two details to identify: (i) gold was being mined in the area (a small number of candidates identified this) and (ii) gold was used to decorate their chief (very few candidates identified this point). For those who attempted to explain the quoted words 1 mark was awarded for a response that explained that there was a mixture of fact and fiction in the rumours. A reasonable number of candidates gained this mark.

- (b) **What is the meaning of the Spanish phrase, ‘El Dorado’?** (1 mark)

The great majority of candidates correctly answered that ‘El Dorado’ means the ‘gilded one’ or the ‘golden one’.

- (c) **Give two details about the Spanish exploration of South America (paragraph 2, ‘The Spanish explorers...not yet ventured.’).** (2 marks)

A large number of candidates gained one mark here by explaining that there were 5 expeditions carried out by Spanish explorers in the period of five years. Fewer candidates obtained the second mark available. For this it was necessary to make the point that the explorers did not reach the northern part of South America. This was a question that highlighted the need to read the wording of the question carefully to identify the material required from the passage.

- (d) **Explain why Juan Martinez was punished by his companions (paragraph 3, ‘Meanwhile...on his way back.’).** (1 mark)

Many candidates gained the mark on this question by explaining that Martinez was punished because the gunpowder exploded and that he was responsible for it. The matter of his responsibility was essential to being awarded the mark – a reasonable number of candidates missed getting the mark by only mentioning the explosion.

- (e) (i) **Which two-word phrase in paragraph 3 (‘Meanwhile...on his way back.’) suggests that the writer questions the truth of Juan Martinez’s account?** (1 mark)

This was a relatively straightforward question and required only that the candidate quote the words ‘He claimed’ to get the mark. That said, a number of candidates did not choose these words, or choose to quote a lengthy section of text without clearly highlighting these words.

- (ii) **Which piece of evidence later in the passage suggests that at least some of his story was true?** (1 mark)

Many candidates noted that it was discovery of the ship’s anchor by Sir Walter Raleigh that offered some evidence of the truth of Martinez’s story. This mark could be gained by a succinct quotation from the text and quite a few candidates gave long quotation. However, providing there was some evidence of their selecting material rather merely lifting a large section in the hope of finding something relevant, they were awarded the mark.

- (f) **Explain what is meant by ‘potential investors’ (line 34).** (1 mark)

A large number of candidates gained the mark for this question. The key element in a correct answer was in showing that there was understanding of the word ‘investors’. Any answer which found an alternative means of expressing this (for example by referring to ‘money’ or ‘finance’) was successful.

- (g) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by ‘it is most likely that El Dorado was an excuse used by the European adventurers who were eager to discover the quickest path to riches.’ (line 38 – 40).** (2 marks)

Many candidates gained one mark for this question by giving some sense of the phrase with an attempt at using their own words. Overall, though, there were few candidates who gave a sufficiently clear explanation to get both marks. This tended to be because candidates relied too closely on the wording of the quotation, thus not demonstrating a full understanding.

- (h)(i) Re-read paragraphs one, two and seven of Passage A. Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words in italics in the following phrases:
- 'and in its retellings, the tale became embellished' (line 8)
 - 'assumed that this fugitive empire was flourishing somewhere' (lines 12 – 13)
 - 'a place of fabulous wealth and has fed the romantic imaginations of writers throughout the centuries' (lines 37 – 38).

(3 marks)

Not all candidates appeared to understand the precise requirements of this task. The question asked them to explain in their own words what the writer meant by the **words in italics**. Many candidates produced 'catch all' phrases which were more akin to a g(ii) type explanation of the whole phrase. Only the more successful responses showed real understanding of the italicised words and only a small number of candidates gained all three available marks for this question.

- For 'embellished' a reasonable number of candidates were able to explain that this meant the story had been altered or added to in some way. There were quite a number of candidates who gave explanations involving the story being repeated and passed on from one generation another that might have been more relevant in (ii).
 - 'Fugitive' was explained correctly by a reasonable number of candidates who made comments about it meaning 'hidden' or 'lost' – some clearly seeing that it was connected to the use of 'fugitive' to mean someone who is evading discovery
 - 'Romantic' proved, in many ways, the most difficult of the three words as candidates were distracted by its use to refer to love and romance. A smaller number of candidates gained a mark by suggesting that this meant something fanciful or a fantasy or dreamlike
- (ii) Explain how the words and language in each of the phrases in (h)(i) help to suggest how the writer presents the story of El Dorado.

(6 marks)

Many candidates achieved marks on this question by showing some understanding, offering a partial explanation of individual phrases (as a whole). Most commented successfully on the way the stories had been repeated and been added to, or had started as something true but had become more like a story from myth or legend.

Less successful responses made general comments about the content of the stories or repeated the contents of their answers to (i) without demonstrating a clear understanding of the individual phrases. As in previous sessions, the marks gained from this question often totalled fewer than for g(i). Sometimes this was because answers to g(ii) did, as noted, no more than repeat those given for g(i) or because a misunderstanding was carried through from g(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 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 'the writer's presentation of the story' but many responses did not relate their explanations to the focus of the question. A very small number of the more successful responses detected a hint of irony or disbelief in the writer's choice of wording and hence the writer's purpose of both relating the story and expressing his own opinion of its worth.

Question 2

Imagine that you are Juan Martinez from Passage A. You are interviewed by an official about your experience.

Write the words of your interview.

In your interview you are asked three questions:

- ***Tell me exactly why you were cast adrift in the jungle?***
- ***Explain what happened to you before you mysteriously reappeared?***
- ***Why should I believe anything that you are telling me?***

***Base your interview 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 bullets.***

Remember your interview is formal; you should begin with the first question: ‘Tell me exactly why you were cast adrift in the jungle...’.

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 Juan Martinez's experiences from his point of view. The majority also understood the interview format and gave answers that directly address the three set questions offering an appropriate register and voice for Martinez.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three prompts 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 was not extensive lifting of material there was often little sense of candidates putting themselves in the position of the character and giving life to his experiences. A very small number were a little muddled about the sequence of events.

More successful responses were able to give some explanation for the explosion of the gun powder and suggest why Martinez might have felt he was harshly or unfairly treated. Most candidates dealt reasonably successfully with the journey to and from Manoa. Again, the more successful responses gave some credible details about the local people and Martinez's thoughts and feelings about them.

The great majority of candidates made some attempt to answer the third question. Some simply insisted that as an officer Martinez would not lie; others gave quite convincing explanations such as the fact that he had obviously survived a long time in the jungle and was left there without food or that there was evidence in the form of the remains his ship (e.g. the anchor).

Overall, the responses showed a very good understanding of the passage, the predicament of Martinez when he was left behind and the difficulty of his being believed when he returned.

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 1 marks for both Content and Language.

Question 3

(a) **Notes**

What do you learn about the appearance and behaviour of unicorns and of the qualities they possessed, 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 gave candidates the chance to boost their total score by appropriate selection. It was answered very well with many candidates making one point per line as instructed, 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. Sometimes candidates included more than 10 marks worth of relevant points, but by putting them more than one point on each line gained fewer than 10 marks. 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. Only a small number of candidates gained full marks, although many achieved seven or above.

(b) **Summary**

Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the appearance and behaviour of unicorns and of the qualities they possessed.

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

Your summary should include all 10 of your points in Question 3(a) and must be 100 to 150 words.

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

On the whole, although some candidates were able to achieve Band 1 for clear, concise and fluent summaries the majority of candidates' responses were Band 2 (points were 'mostly focused' and made 'clearly') or Band 3 ('some areas of conciseness'). The least successful responses, of which there were only a few, were marred by personal comments and unselective 'lifting'. The most successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. Middle range responses tended to be list-like with a series of loosely connected statements about the unicorn's behaviour and appearance.

Concluding comments

Most candidates completed the paper in some detail and the responses to **Question 2** in particular were of a generally good standard. It is clear that the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared for these questions and were confident in their approach and, overall, this seemed to an accessible and engaging paper. Those who have marked the paper over the years have generally been impressed with the seriousness and competence with which candidates of all levels have approached the questions and hope that similar candidates in future years will continue with this seriousness of purpose in whichever syllabus they attempt.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/21
Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the text carefully before considering the task
- read each task carefully, paying attention to key words and instructions
- considered the evidence of the skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate in each response
- planned and organised their ideas before beginning their answer
- gave equal attention to all sections of each question
- selected only the material appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- used their own words carefully, appropriately and precisely
- avoided copying and/or lifting whole sentences or sections from either text
- edited their response to amend any careless slips, incomplete or unclear ideas
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

General comments

Candidates' responses generally indicated familiarity with the format of the paper and the demands of each task. Most showed at least some awareness of the need to use, not repeat, the material from the relevant passage in order to answer the questions. The most successful responses demonstrated that candidates were able to adapt and modify the material in the original text whilst remaining focused on the specific demands of each task. Other less successful responses were over-reliant on both the wording and sequence of the passage(s) and/or paid limited attention to the details of the question as set, providing less-convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a consequence.

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible and engaging, and most were able to finish the paper within the time allowed. There were a good number of excellent responses where candidates had clearly addressed the different requirements of each task and demonstrated skills and understanding at an impressively high level. Very occasionally, achievement was limited by a failure to follow the rubric and/or complete all aspects of a task – for example, by not providing 15 answers in **Question 3(a)**, selecting examples from the wrong paragraph in **Question 2** and/or offering an incomplete response to **Question 3(b)**.

There did not appear to be many significant misunderstandings of the content of either passage. More successful answers were able to demonstrate purposeful reading, interpreting and using details effectively in **Question 1**, and ensuring that selections from the text in **Question 2** and **Question 3(a)** were accurate and addressed the question.

Most **Question 1** responses showed some familiarity with the form of the task – a letter from a character involved in the text. The majority of candidates were able to respond appropriately, many with real engagement and some subtlety, to provide convincing and thorough replies. Responses across the cohort covered the full range of achievement, with stronger answers able to reflect upon recent events in both Harrold's personal and professional life and to draw inferences about his options concerning the job offer made to him. Good answers interpreted a range of detail which helped to anchor responses in a close reading of the passage and show engagement with attitudes and viewpoint. Less successful responses often included insufficient reference to ideas from the passage and/or relied on the language of the text to communicate ideas. Along with unselective copying, lifting phrases from the text 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 paragraphs and make specific, detailed comments about these choices. Many candidates showed they were able to explore and explain in some detail the effects of those choices, demonstrating sound understanding of the writer's purpose. Most were able to identify relevant examples, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently precise in their examination of these choices or concentrated on one word within a longer choice missing potential opportunities to explore the image as a whole. Some repeated the language of the choices in their explanations, offered the same explanation for more than one choice and/or repeated generic comments which could be argued to apply to any author's use of language – diluting evidence of understanding as a result.

In **Question 3** many candidates were able to find a good number of points in part **(a)**. Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 3(a)** and most understood that they should use short notes rather than whole sentences taken from the passage. Many had considered both aspects of the question and identified ideas that addressed both sides of the argument efficiently. Where responses were most successful in part **(b)**, candidates had used their own words consistently and organised their ideas helpfully. A few of the least successful responses were over-reliant on copying from the text with minimal/no rewording of the original. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in part **(b)** and do not need to replace every word of the original, they should not however lift whole phrases and/or sentences from the passage. Similarly, indiscriminate copying, repetition and comment should all be avoided.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to be aware that 20 per cent of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and reviewing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression. Whilst writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, candidates should remember that unclear style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to read back through and edit responses is advisable. The best responses considered their intended audience, for example by ensuring that their writing was sufficiently well-organised and controlled to be clearly understood by a reader who had not read the original passage.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Following his successful presentation, Harrold is offered a specialist sales and managerial position as 'Birdbrain' in the Birdland section of the company's brand new megastore. The megastore will replace all three existing local stores which will close next month. Staff not leaving the company will remain on full pay until the new store opens in six months' time.

Unsure if he should accept, Harrold writes a letter to a friend.

Write Harrold's letter to his friend.

In your letter you should:

- **describe your feelings about the various events at home over the past few months**
- **explain recent changes at work and the factors you are weighing up regarding the proposed position**
- **discuss the options you are now considering.**

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

Most candidates were able to offer at least the basics of a letter from Harrold asking for advice, picking up on the tone and cue of the given starter. However, in some responses, a failure to sign off in character was symptomatic of a loss of focus as the response progressed. The task invited candidates to demonstrate their skills and understanding by using and modifying ideas to present them from Harrold's point of view as he reflected on the events in the passage and considered his future. Harrold had new possibilities to consider and respond to, and candidates needed to frame his letter in the light of what they already knew or could judge about Harrold having read the passage. The question encouraged candidates to show that they could do more than just repeat or retell the narrative.

Successful answers demonstrated close reading and some sense of purpose, indicating they had taken account of the whole passage and key details in the question before beginning their response. They had shifted perspective to respond from Harrold's point of view at some point after the events of the passage. Less successful responses tracked the passage in real time and often fell into sequencing errors as a result – or suddenly 'found' Beryl towards the end of the letter. Stronger answers had often traced through threads in the narrative, for example those details and hints linked to Beryl and/or the re-application process, and interpreted them convincingly.

The best answers included integrated details and developed interpretations of Harrold's thoughts, feelings, attitudes and concerns rooted in the passage. The majority of answers recognised at least his interest in birds, his concern for the welfare of any animals in his charge and his dislike of the changes at work. Most were able to respond to all three bullets of the question though a number would have benefitted from more careful planning to widen the range of ideas they included. Opportunities for development were missed on occasion where details needed more careful attention – for example, Harrold's flat was not a new, empty flat but a 'newly empty flat' suggesting he may well be lonely rather than have recently moved house.

The first bullet of the question allowed candidates to offer a number of more explicit ideas as well inviting them to go on to evidence understanding of some of the more subtle, implied points when dealing with events at home over the past few months. For example, a candidate writing as Harrold who explained that his neighbour had died and then supported that by mentioning when it happened would have made a straightforward point and supported it with detail. Going on to suggest that Harrold felt saddened by the death is evidence of closer reading skills – picking up on the affection in Harrold's recollection of old Mrs F and going further by developing the idea. Mention of Beryl – explicit in the text – was included in almost all answers. Beryl coming to live with Harrold, her leaving and her return were each distinct ideas and better responses went on to support these with details – for example that Beryl had previously lived downstairs with Mrs F and whistled tunes. Developments to fill in gaps convincingly such as Harrold meeting Beryl through Mrs F or Beryl popping in to visit him beforehand were all reasonable suggestions in line with the text and could be credited.

It was comparatively rare for an answer not to include reference to Beryl and/or birds, though not all responses showed evidence of having planned the route through their answer carefully and so missed opportunities to evidence understanding clearly from the start. The fact that Beryl was a bird becomes obvious by the end of the passage and where candidates had reflected back on the passage in the light of that information they were able to capitalize on a wider range of opportunities for development – for example by suggesting that Beryl had flown out through an open window (an idea only hinted at in the passage) or going further in evidencing close reading by picking up on implications to suggest that Beryl is a yellow headed amazon and citing detail such as her affinity for learning song to support that. A number of answers referred to Beryl as male despite the indications to the contrary – at times this was a weakness in Writing skills rather than Reading and might have been addressed at editing stage.

When addressing bullet two most answers were able to make some mention of the changes in relation to the nature/ethos of the shop and of the application process leading up to the offer of a promotion. Better answers teased points out, considering implications rather than relying on simply repeating detail, and were able to broaden the range of ideas they included as a result – for example by talking separately about the rebranding/updating of the business and the emphasis on hard selling as demonstrated by the publicity campaign or considering the contrast between Harrold's approach and view of the job to that of the new staff and/or new owners. A number of answers at the lowest levels appeared to be attempting to write their response as they read the passage for the first time relying on the language and order of the original to communicate ideas – the timescale and structure of their response often became muddled as a result and evidence of understanding was less secure. The weakest responses relied on repeating snippets or sections of the original text with limited modification and were unable to demonstrate more than very general understanding at best.

In the third bullet candidates were able to identify in broad terms a number of options for Harrold to consider – some related to accepting the job offer, postponing his decision, and/or finding an alternative income and others discussing the possibilities for what he might do in the time before the new store opened or if he left. Taking a trip or doing something to improve life for Beryl were possibilities considered by some candidates – for example some picked up on adverts on tv for tropical breaks coupled with Harrold's mention that he'd never seen yellow heads in the wild to suggest that he may take the opportunity to do just that in the months before the shop opens and/or the free time he has if he decides to leave his job. Some candidates had made decisions about Harrold's age – some suggesting he might retire, others having envisaged him as much younger suggested that having been at the pet shop for a number of years it was time Harrold considered his future career prospects more carefully and accepted the promotion.

Some answers included and supported a number of ideas in relation to the third bullet, others selected two or three ideas and developed them more fully – either approach had the potential to evidence thorough reading. Most understood and exploited at least in part Harrold’s moral dilemma in relation to the job offer. Many were able to offer some well related, and in the strongest responses, sustained development. Answers in the mid-range often missed opportunities in this third bullet. They tended to limit their response by just opting for a basic expression of the need to decide at the end of the letter without suggesting the factors to consider and/or did not address the third bullet directly, simply asking their friend to tell them what they thought. A number of answers signed off in the candidate’s own name rather than as Harrold suggesting some loss of focus, whilst other more successful responses were careful to create and sustain a convincing voice for Harrold with a number choosing to imitate to good effect a certain, old-fashioned formality in their responses.

A feature of good responses was the evidence of careful and close reading of the whole passage and the question. Candidates had clearly read and understood the material and had been able to arrive at judgements about Harrold’s viewpoint and the ways in which his attitude towards events was presented and developed in the passage. With these candidates there was a strong sense of purpose indicating that they had arrived at an overview and understanding of Harrold’s character before writing up their responses. There were a number of subtle cues in the text which prompted candidates towards such an understanding, for example, his wanting to avoid Lisa when arriving at Head Office, his raising of an eyebrow at the promotional signs, his response to the nickname – ‘even smiled’. Strong answers had arrived at a holistic overview of Harrold’s experiences, being able to draw connections between his personal life (bullet one) and professional life (bullet two), using both areas to help shape predictions for the future (bullet three). Such responses were often more sophisticated when considering the future for Harrold, avoiding the more straightforward two option approach (accept the job or not), and saw how the two areas of his life could overlap, perhaps drawing lessons from Beryl’s escape and bright-eyed return, linking this to the detail listed in the last paragraph (the content of the adverts and ‘dreams of better things’) and/or seeing a symbolic value in Harrold leaving the window open at the end.

Advice to candidates on Question 1:

- read the passage carefully, more than once, and think about how to use key details before you begin your answer
- take account of the given persona, audience and purpose for your response
- give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- plan a route through your answer to ensure that ideas are sequenced logically for the response
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- answer in your own words and check that you have explained your ideas clearly
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct any errors in your writing which might affect meaning
- consider details of both the text and task carefully to help relevant development of ideas.

Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) the pet shop and Harrold in paragraph 2, beginning ‘Pet shops had changed...’
(b) people and presentations in paragraph 8, beginning ‘Increasingly animated presentations...’.

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.

Write about 200 to 300 words.

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

Responses in **Question 2** need to identify relevant examples of language for discussion and to provide sufficiently focused and clear analysis of these evidence understanding of how the writer was using language in each case. Many candidates evidenced understanding and skills in the higher bands and, across the cohort as a whole, very few could make little or no ‘appropriate’ comment based on their choices. A good number of candidates profited from a willingness to engage with choices and tease out meanings, producing solid answers in Band 3. Some choices invited some subtlety of thought, for example ‘mild surprise’, and where candidates had recognised this they were often able to comment on tone and/or consider levels of interpretation, including Harrold’s mockery and humour.

Where the precise meaning of words was considered in context, candidates were often able to suggest something of the effect. Better answers remembered to consider all key words within choices, arriving at a more complete understanding of the overall impact. There were plenty of potentially useful choices relating directly to both the pet shop and Harrold in paragraph 2 and the people and presentations in paragraph 8. Where candidates had not paid close attention to the detail of the task less relevant choices were occasionally considered resulting in more general comments.

Responses to **Question 2** often began by offering a meaning for a word or phrase and then considering its connotations and associations, in order to suggest effect. For some candidates this approach proved profitable though on occasion opportunities to connect ideas between choices and arrive at an overview were missed. The majority of candidates understood something of Harrold's disapproval of the commercialising 'marketing magicians' and desire to escape the excitable applicants/staff at the presentation evening. They were able to focus on how the associations that a word or phrase might have could shape the insight they get for instance, into character and situation, or the pictures that are created in the reader's mind. While some candidates remain unhelpfully focused on simply identifying literary devices, there were responses which more profitably used that knowledge as a starting point to discuss a specific effect being created. It was evident that some candidates who had missed opportunities to demonstrate an interpretation of Harrold's attitudes in **Question 1** did a better job in **Question 2** when considering how they were communicated via language choices.

Some words were clearly very familiar to the majority of candidates and most had chosen carefully those examples about which they felt able to offer comment: the majority offered a clear picture of what the effects of a 'splatter-gun' would look like, 'wincing' and 'excruciating' were understood as being associated with pain, 'loud' taken to mean 'brightly coloured' and, surprisingly perhaps, many chose and commented effectively on the idea that an emporium was a large shop containing many products. Not all candidates showed that they knew that 'animated' could mean 'lively' or full of movement or actions, jumping straight to the connection to cartoons and/or the graphics that could be inserted into a PowerPoint slide presentation and missing some opportunities as a result. Others missed opportunities to evidence understanding by attempting to simply offer the explanation of a word via another form of the same word – for example asserting only that 'digitalised emporiums' revealed how digital the shop had become.

Partial or imprecise choices sometimes limited explanations as the subtlety of the full idea was lost – for example those who settled for 'animated presentations' lost out on the chance to comment on the building sense of competition that 'increasingly' added. Similarly, though many noted and dealt efficiently with 'captive' relatively few took the chance to consider what 'still' might add. Opportunities were also missed in some answers 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. 'Batch' was considered comparatively rarely alongside 'excruciating', despite being included in many selections. 'Pampered poppets' was a popular selection and allowed most to suggest the idea of 'spoiled' or indulged pets, a few candidates reading less carefully took poppets as referring to the children, rather than the animals. Care is needed both when explaining and when copying choices from the text – for example 'adored' rather than 'adorned' resulted in inappropriate comment in a few answers.

A good number of candidates were able to provide evidence of skills and understanding in Band 1. Others struggled to offer evidence of understanding at Band 5. For the most part, candidates were able to show that they recognised at least some potentially interesting examples of language use and could offer some sense of the meanings and/or effects of their selections, even if only in a generalised way. 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 quality of analysis rather than feature spotting.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- focus on the question carefully to ensure that all your choices are relevant
- re-read the whole paragraph before making selections; choose the best and not those which happen to come first
- ensure you copy choices accurately – avoid careless errors with spelling which change meaning
- once you have identified the potentially relevant choices from each paragraph , select your strongest four from each to explore and explain
- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out lines of text

- remember to put quotation marks around your choices – it makes it easier for you to focus on the exact wording
- if you are unsure about effects, try to begin by giving a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- avoid empty comments such as comments praising the writer for good use of language or using lots of similes and metaphors
- show your understanding in full – consider all the key words within your identified choice.

Question 3

According to **Passage B**, what are the arguments some people offer for not keeping parrots as pets and how do responsible owners of pet parrots ensure the well-being of their birds?

To address the task successfully, candidates needed to first identify points from the whole passage that were potentially relevant to the question, then select 15 distinct clear ideas and list them in part **(a)** – one per numbered line. Candidates are reminded that they are only credited with a maximum of one mark per line and should spend time identifying their strongest points rather than simply offering ideas as they occur in the passage. Candidates are not required to use their own words in part **(a)** of the question, though better answers had often chosen to do so for clarity, for example where points were implied and/or exemplified more than once in the original text. There was more than one way in which points could be logically grouped and these options were reflected in the mark scheme. Most candidates were able to identify a good number of points from the passage. Better, more focused, answers typically scored two thirds or more of the available content marks.

Almost all candidates had understood the need to identify just 15 points in **3(a)** and only a few tried to add additional points after the grid – additional answers cannot be credited unless replacing a crossed out answer earlier on. The need to select and identifying points to answer the question meant that candidates had to read and plan their answers carefully, both to avoid repetition and to organise their ideas sensibly. Weaker responses indicated some difficulty in distinguishing rhetoric from argument – for example including the reference to Long John Silver as a point, or suggesting that parrots are like toddlers. Content could be selected as arguments against keeping parrots as pets and/or presented as a counter-argument in the form of measures that responsible owners use to ensure the well-being of their birds. Where candidates lost sight of the question and attempted to answer by simple cut and paste from the passage they ran the risk of missing key details of points and/or distorting the idea in hand. ‘Liberating pet birds born in captivity is not a viable option’, ‘(they) don’t understand weather patterns’ and ‘think all cats are friendly and fluffy’ were examples of lifted phrases offered in weaker answers which did not stand as either an argument against keeping parrots as pets or an example of what responsible owners did. Similarly, a number wrote that parrots were ‘used to being cleaned’ rather than ‘cleaned for’ which changed the meaning.

When approaching **Question 3(a)**, candidates who focused on what the question was asking were best placed to offer relevant, distinct ideas for their answers, avoiding overlap and repetition of aspects of the same idea. The most successful responses had recognised where argument and counter argument might helpfully be combined into one umbrella point and arrived at a useful overview of the material over the range of their fifteen answers which they were able to take through into the second part of the task. Occasionally incomplete or imprecise communication in part a blurred the point in hand – a few candidates offered note form without considering that those notes needed to make the point clearly. The best answers had been written as if to communicate each idea to someone who had not read the passage – taking account of advice offered in previous examiner reports.

In **Question 3(b)**, many candidates demonstrated an awareness of an appropriate style for a summary, though a number relied on the language or order of the original passage. The most successful responses re-ordered and re-grouped the relevant information from the text, connecting ideas with some skill – often having organised their points around arguments against keeping parrots as pets and those counter arguments made by responsible owners detailing their actions and approach. The least successful copied wholesale from the text with minimal or no modification, or offered a response which communicated very few relevant ideas. Candidates producing answers at the top end often showed signs of having revisited points in **3(a)** when planning **3(b)** in order to edit and further refine points in this first part of the question and plan their route through their prose answer. This resulted in clearer, more distinct points in **3(a)** and an efficient and often well-focused response in **3(b)**.

Successful responses were written in a concise and fluent style, and expressed using the candidate’s own words. Occasionally in otherwise good scripts there was some conflict between maintaining concision and the use of own words, with candidates attempting to substitute unnecessarily every word in the passage with

their own phrasing, and in doing so becoming overly verbose. When trying to avoid ‘purpose-built aviary’ some wrote along the lines of ‘have more spacious accommodation which has been built especially for them where the birds can fly around’. Candidates are reminded that it is not necessary to replace every word from the text with a synonym, and should be aware that sometimes by attempting to do so they can lose focus on both the task and the sense, obscuring the idea. However, it is also clear that some other candidates still need to be reminded that they will not gain credit for Writing skills when relying on lifted or copied material. Lifted material remains a feature of the least successful answers. Responses that tried to simply lift from the passage in **3(a)** and then string those phrases together with an (often) indiscriminate choice of a connecting phrase were rarely able to produce answers which were better than ‘sometimes focused.’

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/22
Reading Passages (Extended)

Key Messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the text carefully before considering the task
- read each task carefully, paying attention to key words and instructions
- considered the evidence of the skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate in each response
- planned and organised their ideas before beginning their answer
- gave equal attention to all sections of each question
- selected only the material appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- used their own words carefully, appropriately and precisely
- avoided copying and/or lifting whole sentences or sections from either text
- edited their response to amend any careless slips, incomplete or unclear ideas
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

General Comments

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

For **Question 1** most responses showed at least some focus and had attempted all parts of the task, though in some scripts the third part of the task was only briefly addressed. Good answers included even coverage of all three bullet points and contained a range of relevant ideas that were modified and developed effectively and supported by well integrated details. Less effective responses did not use the more implicit ideas in the passage and displayed only a general understanding of the reasons for the unexpected car journey. There was some copying of phrases and a reliance on the wording and structure of **Passage A** which indicated a less than secure understanding.

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

For **Question 3**, stronger responses included a range of facts and displayed the ability to discern and select points that were likely to be true, rather than opinion and conjecture, securing a good number of the marks available in part a. In some responses points were not expressed with sufficient clarity and there was some repetition. For **3(b)** there were attempts to use own words and to reorganise and plan the material. Good summaries contained a range of clear points that were expressed succinctly using own words. Less effective responses included copied phrases and sentences indicating that the information in the **Passage B** had not been fully understood.

Though **Paper 2** is primarily a test of Reading, 20% of the available marks are awarded for Writing shared equally between **Questions 1** and **3b**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing and plan and edit their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meanings and awkward expression. Whilst writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, unclear or limited style will limit achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passage. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to check and edit their responses.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

Imagine you are Mama. Later that same day you write your journal entry reflecting back on the day's events.

Write Mama's journal entry.

In your journal entry you should explain your feelings and concerns about:

- **what you had to do that day**
- **how each of your children behaved and their reactions that day**
- **the future for yourself and your family and what will happen now.**

Base your journal entry 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 entry,
'Today has not been an easy day ...'**

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 5 marks for the quality of your writing.

Most candidates showed an engagement with the passage and the task, writing in the first person from the perspective of the mother, using an appropriate voice and register. The best responses were evenly balanced, focused on all three parts of the task and contained some effective development and well integrated detail. They displayed a sound understanding of the ideas in the passage and through careful reading were able to infer that the mother needed to escape quickly with her children and find safety because the family were under threat and their lives were about to change significantly. Less good responses did not demonstrate a secure understanding and failed to pick up on the clues in the passage that suggested the family were fleeing from potential danger. The reference to the father's court case and his obsession with justice, the mother turning off the news on the radio, and her anxiety at the roadblock were intimations that their hasty getaway was due to something more serious than a recreational trip. Insecure understanding through less careful reading often led to an uneven focus on the bullet points with more attention given to the car journey and the behaviour of the children than on the possible future outcomes for the family.

For the first part of the task most responses included the mother's actions of leaving work and picking up the children from their schools. Some included effective development when describing her feelings at interrupting the lesson and making excuses to the teacher, and her perceptions of how her ten year old responded to her unexpected appearance in the classroom. There was also a range of details with references to her car, the documentary film and the game of Hangman with the friend, B. Most referred to meeting her husband later at the friend's house, and some mentioned the husband's court case. Good responses developed these points and conveyed the mother's anxiety about the outcome of the case, her sense of urgency, the need to drive to somewhere safe and to keep any bad news away from the children. There was an understanding that she was lying to protect them and some expressed feelings of guilt about this and also at the disruption to their routine. In less effective responses this part of the journal was brief and undeveloped with little sense of the mother's fears for the safety of her family.

The responses to the second bullet point were often the most detailed of the journal and there was often some effective development, for example, the children's lack of empathy and understanding and the

importance of the B's friendship. Most were focused on the boys' annoyance at the loss of their possessions and Mama's unsatisfactory response to their questions, and on her feelings of frustration about their behaviour and reactions. There was emphasis on the stress caused by their continuous arguing and nagging, her annoyance that they did not want to go on the 'trip' and some expression of self-doubt about her parenting skills and failure to control her children. There were opportunities to refer to less explicit details in the passage and to comment on why they were probably causing her the most anxiety and stress. For example, the father's obsession with justice may have serious consequences for them, the son's question about catching up at school would cause her concern about their future education, and the references to the school shoes and the pre-school uniform would remind her of the loss of their possessions.

She might also be unsure whether Papa would actually turn up and be able to explain everything to the boys. Most journals made reference to the road block though its significance was not always made apparent. In some responses the traffic jam that it created was included as passing detail or regarded by the mother as an inconvenience that added to the frustrations of the car journey. In better responses it was made clear that the roadblock was a threat and a source of fear for Mama because the men in the limousines were probably looking for her family. Less effective responses relied on the wording of the passage and in some cases parts of the conversation between the mother and the boys were copied from the original.

The third part of the task was often the least developed. A misunderstanding of the potential danger inferred in the passage limited the range of possible future scenarios and outcomes for the family. Some included thoughts about the trip, or hastily arranged holiday, and how it would bring the family together again and provide some well-earned rest and relaxation. These ideas could not be rewarded as evidence of close reading. There were also reflections on the difficulties of parenting, and how the children should be encouraged to improve their behaviour, become more respectful and obedient, and react in a more mature manner. References to future parental relationships could be rewarded as they were relevant to the rift that had developed during the car journey and which would be a cause of concern for the mother. Better responses commented on the uncertain future of the family after they had left everything behind and referred to the children's schooling, and their loss of friends and social routines. Practical problems such as finding a new home and ways of earning a living were also relevant and rewarded.

Good responses considered the nature of the threat(s) to the family and the possible consequences. Mama's fears about her husband's safety, the possibility of always living in hiding, finding new identities, constantly being pursued, having to disappear all displayed a sound level of reading and understanding of the passage. Several explanations were given for the family's situation that were not wholly credible or tethered to the ideas in the passage and some responses contained elements of a creative writing task. Suggestions that the family were being pursued by a criminal gang or government agencies were credible interpretations of the references to the court case, an obsession with justice and the unmarked limousines.

The Writing mark reflected the clarity and fluency of the response and how well language was used to convey the mother's thoughts about her experiences. Higher writing marks were awarded for a range of effective and interesting vocabulary. Good responses were well structured, displayed a good sense of audience and created a strong and convincing voice for Mama. Less effective responses relied on the wording and structure of the passage and displayed a limited range of appropriate vocabulary, and some inconsistency of style. Although the task did not require a formal style of writing, the use of colloquial language was not always appropriate.

Advice to candidates on Question 1:

- read the passage carefully, more than once, and think about how to use key details before you begin your answer
- take account of the given persona, audience and purpose for your response
- give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- plan a route through your answer to ensure that ideas are sequenced logically for the response
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- answer in your own words and check that you have explained your ideas clearly
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct any errors in your writing which might affect meaning
- consider details of both the text and task carefully to help you develop relevantly the ideas you include.

Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) the car in paragraph 5, beginning ‘If Mama’s lime-green car ...’
- (b) the atmosphere inside the car and feelings of its occupants in paragraph 20, beginning ‘At some point in the silence that followed ...’

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.

Write about 200 to 300 words.

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

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

Part (a) contained some clear and imaginative explanations about the boy’s description of the car. Some responses included overlong choices with comments that were not focused on all of the key words. A number of responses quoted the whole first sentence of paragraph 5, which included the words ‘lime-green’, ‘marshmallow’ and ‘crumpled like an accordion’. Not all of these words were addressed and often general comments were made, for example, that the car was flimsy or unsafe, without explaining how this impression was created. Good responses were able to explain the characteristics of marshmallow as a soft and squidgy substance that should not present any threat to a strong car. They also considered the qualities of an accordion that is able to be compressed, suggesting that the car lacked any robustness and would fold up or concertina on impact with anything soft. Better responses avoided repetition of the word ‘crumpled’ in the explanation and commented on the cartoon-like image and the sound effects that might be produced by such a crash.

In some responses it was not always explained how effects were created. Only a few responses commented on the child-like images created throughout the paragraph or that the descriptions were that of a young child and were sometimes naïve or humorous. The effects of ‘bit savagely’ and ‘lying on a bed of nails’ were often quite general or under-stated; some commented that the car was uncomfortable. Good responses suggested that the car seats were like a wild animal trying to devour and inflict pain on the occupants, and that lying on a bed of sharp metal objects was dangerous and torturous. Many answers gave effective explanations for ‘control panel of a flying saucer’, focusing on the alien or other-worldly quality of the gearstick. The meanings and effects of ‘squealing’ were often explained with clarity, suggesting that the engine was struggling or in pain because of its age and poor state. Several candidates were able to recognise the use of personification, metaphor and simile though they did not always comment on their effectiveness. The naming of literary devices can only be rewarded when accompanied by clear explanations of their effects. Candidates are advised not to use long examples with ellipses that do not show clear choices of words. Examples should be brief and exact with explanations that are focused on the most interesting and relevant words or phrases.

Part (b) contained some precise explanations and often a useful overview of the tense atmosphere inside the car. Not all of the choices offered were appropriate. Several included the phrase, ‘Mama endured our litany of complaints in suspicious silence’ without explaining the effects of individual words. There were some clear explanations of ‘tapping the wheel’ and ‘on the brink’ that showed a good understanding of the mother’s anxiety and her efforts at controlling her feelings. There were few clear explanations of ‘counterpoint’ and ‘litany of complaints’ though most candidates attempted to give meanings for these choices. The best responses explored images and explained them with precision.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- focus on the question carefully to ensure that all your choices are relevant
- re-read the whole paragraph before making selections; choose the best and not those which happen to come first
- ensure you copy choices accurately – avoid careless errors with spelling which change meaning
- once you have identified the potentially relevant choices from each paragraph , select your strongest four from each to explore and explain
- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out lines of text
- remember to put quotation marks around your choices – it makes it easier for you to focus on the exact wording
- if you are unsure about effects, try to begin by giving a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- avoid empty comments such as comments praising the writer for good use of language or using lots of similes and metaphors
- show your understanding in full and consider all the key words within your identified choice.

Question 3

According to Passage B, what are the facts about Houdini and his life?

Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line.

You do not need to use your own words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer.

To address the task successfully, candidates needed to first identify points from the whole passage that were potentially relevant to the question, then select 15 distinct clear ideas and list them in **3(a)** – one per numbered line. Candidates can only be credited with a maximum of one point for each line and any points added after line 15 cannot be considered unless they replace an answer crossed out earlier. Most responses were focused on the question and did not go beyond 15 lines though some did include several different guesses at points on the same line. Most responses were able to identify a range of relevant points, and better answers secured marks of 10 and above.

Although candidates are required to use note form, points need to contain enough information and need to be written with sufficient clarity and precision to convey the meaning intended in the passage. Some facts were not able to be rewarded because of lack of precision. Not all responses made clear that he wanted to prove that mediums were fake, that he could hold his breath for over a minute, and that he told his audience about their dead relatives, not his own. The important point about his skill of swallowing keys was that he could then regurgitate them afterwards in order to escape; this was not always made clear. Some responses included very short answers which in some instances were insufficient to communicate the meaning accurately, and to secure a mark – for example, ‘movies’ and ‘Ehrich Weiss’ were too vague. The focus of the task was facts about Houdini and some answers missed opportunities to demonstrate careful reading by listing speculation about possible causes which were not presented as fact in the passage, for example that he was punched in the stomach and so died from a ruptured appendix, or had been poisoned with arsenic. Only one point could be awarded for a factual reference either to his ill health or his appendix operation.

Candidates are not required to use their own words in this part of this question though there was some evidence that candidates attempted to use suitable alternatives where appropriate and this was useful in clarifying points and avoiding repetition. For example, ‘he pretended to be a medium, and ‘he was involved in the film industry’. The copying of phrases from the passage often led to information being repeated several times in different forms which indicated that it had not been fully understood. Often phrases copied from the passage without clear focus were too general to be credited, for example, ‘he was no ordinary entertainer’ and ‘famous escape artist and illusionist’.

Most candidates were aware of the appropriate style and form for a summary and many **Part (b)** responses were factual and informative, and most were an appropriate length. Only a few candidates did not attempt this part of the question or wrote only a few lines. Many summaries were focused and concise though some included an over-long introduction and conclusion with some general comments about Houdini’s career that were opinion rather than fact and therefore could not be rewarded.

Candidates are rewarded for writing in their own words as far as possible. In less effective responses phrases were copied from the passage and this often displayed a weak understanding of the text and resulted in some repetition of points, particularly when referring to his impersonation of a medium or the attention of the police to his activities. Summaries that contained a consistent attempt to use own words displayed a better level of understanding and a wider range of vocabulary than those reliant on the original wording. Not all of the responses were written fluently. Higher marks are awarded where candidates use varied and fluent sentence structures. Less effective responses were often list-like with points expressed in a series of short sentences. Better responses re-organised the points in **3(a)** and linked similar facts together, for example, Houdini’s background and personal life, his skills and achievements, and the less positive aspects of his career. A few responses were written as the original letter, in an informal and persuasive style rather than a factual account and this often led to some loss of focus and succinctness.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/23
Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the text carefully before considering the task
- read each task carefully, paying attention to key words and instructions
- considered the evidence of the skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate in each response
- planned and organised their ideas before beginning their answer
- gave equal attention to all sections of each question
- selected only the material appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- used their own words carefully, appropriately and precisely
- avoided copying and/or lifting whole sentences or sections from either text
- edited their response to amend any careless slips, incomplete or unclear ideas
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

General comments

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible and the majority were able to finish the paper within the time allowed. There did not seem to be many significant misunderstandings of the content of the passages. Candidates' responses to this paper demonstrated an understanding of the need to select and adapt relevant material from the passages to answer the questions. All parts of the three questions had been answered by most candidates. Generally, responses were an appropriate length, although shorter responses provided less opportunity to demonstrate understanding.

More successful answers were able to demonstrate purposeful reading of the passages, interpreting and using details effectively in **Question 1**, and ensuring that selections from the text in **Question 2** and **Question 3(a)** were accurate and addressed the question.

Most **Question 1** responses were focused on the question. Good responses displayed a sound understanding of the ideas in Passage A by including a range of relevant ideas that were often developed effectively and supported by appropriate detail to explain the reasons for Marc's career move. Less effective responses tended to neglect the idea that Marc was writing to his parents attempting to persuade them that his new business was worthwhile and were unable to select relevant information to develop points. Copying was sometimes evident, especially in response to the second bullet point: there is a significant difference between using textual detail in support of points and lifting whole sections of the text or key phrases. The concerns of Marc's employers were often copied in their entirety, for example, 'you're' too immature', 'no one wants to work with you' and 'you don't know the first thing about business'. The majority of candidates read the question carefully and wrote the letter from Marc to his parents using an appropriate style, therefore demonstrating a good sense of audience. Responses written from the wrong perspective were rare, though a small number of candidates paid insufficient attention to task instructions – for example writing the letter prior to resigning, rather than a month later. This resulted in a limited response to the third bullet point. Some mid-range answers missed opportunities to develop and interpret the material, and often produced uneven responses which included the addition of extraneous material related to Marc's first day of work as a result.

For **Question 2**, candidates needed to make specific, detailed comments about their choices in the context of the two paragraphs. To gain marks in the higher bands candidates need to demonstrate understanding of

the writer's purpose and consider the connotations and associations of the language used. Most responses included a sufficient number of appropriate examples from the relevant paragraphs. Fewer answers included the clear explanations of effects and images that are required for marks in the top bands. Many contained some accurate explanations of meanings and the identification of some linguistic devices but only partially explained effects. Weaker responses tried to explain the selected language in the same words as the language choice – for example, suggesting that 'rainbow-coloured smoke' means that the smoke is the colour of the rainbow, or that 'cinematic fantasy' means that it is a fantasy. Some candidates missed opportunities to consider individual words within longer choices and demonstrate understanding at higher levels, repeating instead rather broad and vague comments such as 'this shows that they are old' and/or simply labelling devices without exploration of how the example was working within this particular context.

In **Question 3**, many candidates managed to find a reasonable number of points in **part (a)**. In **Question 3(a)**, short notes that clearly identify the point are required, rather than whole sentences. Candidates should be aware that these notes are for an audience, so single words that fail to address the point should be avoided. Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 3(a)**, though some did to good effect, which clearly benefitted their summary writing in **part (b)**. In **Question 3(b)** own words need to be used and some responses missed opportunities to target higher bands by relying on lifted phrases from the passage to communicate a range of ideas. Candidates should use their own words as far as possible in this summary task, though it is not a requirement that every word is altered – more technical terms or names for example are unlikely to have suitably precise synonyms, and words such as 'caesareans' and 'deadlines' did not need to be replaced or explained.

Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading: 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1 and 3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing in terms of planning their responses to avoid repetition between sections, awkward expression, and to ensure that each question is dealt with in sufficient detail. Whilst writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, candidates should be aware that undeveloped language or inconsistency of style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to check and edit their responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

At the end of his first month at the new surgery, Marc decides to write a letter to his parents explaining his career move and persuading them it was a good idea.

Write Marc's letter to his parents.

In your letter you should:

- **explain what it was like working at your previous job and why you felt you needed to leave**
- **answer the concerns you know your parents will have about you, your decision and your ability to run your own business**
- **outline how things have been going so far and your plans for the new surgery in the future.**

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

Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line.

You do not need to use your own words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer.

Stronger responses to this question selected and condensed the events in the passage, modifying and adapting the ideas to create a suitable style for a letter to Marc's parents, including a convincing voice for Marc. They offered reassurance about Marc's recent career move, whilst also demonstrating that they were adults who were capable of directing their own lives. Many candidates had a secure appreciation of the frustrations of working with the 'elderly wizards' and appeared to enjoy taking revenge on them by making a success of the out-of-hours clinic. They were able to sustain the use of supporting detail throughout the

response, firmly tethering any development to details in the passage. There was also evidence of some fictional development at the expense of factual material from the passage, for example considering pets that had been treated, such as an alligator. The best responses firmly linked their ideas for each bullet to details in the passage, but developed them by explaining why Marc planned to leave his previous job, addressed his parental concerns and his plans to make improvements and develop his business in the future.

In response to the first bullet, most candidates were able to identify details such as the age difference between Marc and his employers, including their refusal to listen to him, their rejection of his ideas and how they were set in their ways. However, some focused purely on the meeting where Marc resigned and missed points related to the dress code and communication. There was also some confusion between where Marc previously worked and his current out-of-hours practice. Some mistook him for a doctor treating human patients and described a hospital setting.

The second bullet was sometimes addressed thinly, or relied heavily on lifting the views of the partners, as opposed to identifying that they share similar views to Marc's parents, gauged through the subtlety of reading such details as 'a ball of tumbleweed had rolled past'. A few candidates resorted to a general approach choosing to pick on the human element of relations between parents and children or individuals and employers. Some became too focused on a dialogue between Marc and his parents about family, whilst others lost focus on their audience, for example referring to how the partners were like Marc's parents, when the audience was Marc's parents. Some candidates did not evidence an understanding that Marc was already a fully qualified vet and that he was going to open his own practice. There was also some lack of precision in the use of details from the passage, particularly relating to time-scales, such as how long the out-of-hours practice had been running. There was also a considerable amount of directly lifted material such as: 'serve all practices in a forty kilometre radius', 'a few filing cabinets, a kettle and a nurse', 'well-travelled, impulsive, energetic' and 'word was quickly spreading'. Additionally, a few candidates included material from Passage B in their response, commenting on the gruelling training to become a vet, which was not relevant and not credited.

In the third bullet, some candidates focused on the initial visit of a single client in significant detail, but did not progress to fully address the requirements of the question which was related to how the practice had become busier and Marc's plans for the future. A mechanical use of the passage demonstrates at best a reasonable level of understanding, whereas those displaying a competent or thorough reading of the passage were able to adapt and modify the material in the passage. Good responses focused on all three bullet points and displayed the ability to select material relevant to each part of the task. They contained a range of ideas that were developed and closely related to the passage, and a good range of integrated detail. Where responses were less successful in targeting higher bands, there was often the sense that rather than returning to the text to identify and plan content for their answers in advance of writing, candidates had either focused on generic points, such as how a parent might react to their child's resignation with a more limited focus on the details of the passage, or had worked back through the passage repeating events and limiting 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, and often did not move beyond the first bullet.

The Writing mark reflected the clarity, fluency and coherence of the response and how well it used language to respond in the required form of an informal letter, and how successfully it addressed audience and purpose. Occasionally, awkward expression and/or weaknesses in structure detracted from the overall effect. Efficient planning allowed stronger answers to address the bullets and interweave details from all aspects of the text. Lapses into narrative indicated an inconsistency of style in less assured responses, whilst copying directly from the text was often the most frequent feature of the weakest writing.

Advice to candidates on Question 1:

- read the whole passage carefully, including any information given in the introduction
- think carefully about audience and purpose
- answer all parts of the question, covering each of the three bullet points in reasonable detail
- answer in your own words and adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response written in the required style
- plan your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- use relevant details from the passage to demonstrate close reading
- develop and modify some of the ideas relevantly
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) waking up on the morning of the resignation in paragraph 1, beginning ‘Unusually, the day I resigned...’
- (b) the partners and their reactions to Marc in paragraph 6, beginning ‘The partners were sitting...’.

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.

Write about 200 to 300 words.

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

Responses to **Question 2** are expected to take the form of continuous prose in order to allow candidates to explore their choices fully and consider how language examples are working in context. The use of a grid or table format is not advised as this often results in duplication of material and forces responses to be expressed very briefly or in note form. Pleasingly, these were extremely rare. Similarly, brief notes jotted under the choices as a sub-heading are unlikely to allow for full consideration of the subtleties and complexity of the language choice being discussed. Some candidates readily appreciated the references to ‘wizards’. Most appreciated the unrealistic vein of the choices in **part (a)**, but few could clearly explain the significance of the theatrical/filmic allusions, nor grasp the gently humorous tone, which resulted in simple, often inaccurate meanings of the selection of choices, such as ‘fade’ rather than ‘fade in’ or ‘revealing rays of sunlight’ instead of ‘curtains part, revealing’. Many selected ‘alarm clock slowly fades in’, and therefore focused on the alarm clock rather than the scene coming into focus as in a film or on stage. As a result, many candidates performed better on **part (b)** than **part (a)**. Generally, vocabulary in these passages was understood by candidates, though there were some frequent misinterpretations, particularly with ‘whizzes’, ‘warbles’ and ‘imperceptibly’, and ‘council’ was sometimes taken literally rather than developing meanings that were rooted in the text. Choices that were most commonly well explained were ‘rainbow-coloured smoke’, ‘spring in my step’, ‘one grey partner to another’ and ‘hailed from different planets’.

The most successful responses to **Question 2** showed precise focus at word level and were engaged and assured in their handling of their appropriate choices. They considered meaning and effects throughout the response. Additionally, they selected carefully, including imagery, put the choices in context, and answered both parts of the question equally well. They were able, for example, to link some examples such as ‘cinematic fantasy’ and ‘curtains part, revealing’ to the idea of it being unrealistic and dramatic whereby linking it to the theatre. A few candidates picked up on the partners being old and wise, but ineffective in ‘like a council of elderly wizards on comfy chairs’.

The weakest responses had very few language choices, or offered few explanations beyond the very general. They sometimes adopted a ‘technique spotting’ approach by identifying literary techniques. This approach often led to rather generic comments about the effects of the techniques rather than the words themselves which limited the response. A feature of less effective responses was a list of choices at the beginning of the answer, followed by a general comment. Candidates, therefore, were not able to show how language works, as they were not writing about specific examples. A few misread **part (b)** and chose to focus on Marc, rather than the partners, which resulted in inappropriate choices, such as ‘well-travelled, impulsive, energetic’. Other candidates repeated the same explanation after each choice, for example, that the partners were old or surprised at Marc’s resignation. Some candidates offered single word choices only, not always selecting the most appropriate words, for example, offering ‘eyebrow’ instead of ‘his eyebrow curling imperceptibly upwards’ and did not explain it in the context of the passage. Occasionally candidates offered an extremely sparse number of choices or simply lifted whole sections of the paragraph without comment, therefore offering insufficient evidence of understanding for Band 5.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- focus on the question carefully to ensure that all your choices are relevant
- re-read the whole paragraph before making selections; choose the best and not those which happen to come first
- ensure you copy choices accurately – avoid careless errors with spelling which change meaning
- once you have identified the potentially relevant choices from each paragraph , select your strongest four from each to explore and explain
- make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out lines of text
- remember to put quotation marks around your choices – it makes it easier for you to focus on the exact wording
- if you are unsure about effects, try to begin by giving a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- avoid empty comments such as comments praising the writer for good use of language or using lots of similes and metaphors
- show your understanding in full – consider all the key words within your identified choice.

Question 3

According to Passage B, what challenges and difficulties might a young person wanting to qualify as a vet face, both in terms of training and the job itself?

Candidates appeared to find this task accessible with the majority scoring more than half marks. Most were clear that they needed to identify fifteen points from Passage B that were relevant to the question and to list them clearly, one numbered per line in note form in **part (a)**. Candidates can only be credited with a maximum of one point per line and any points added after line 15 are not credited unless replacing an answer crossed out earlier on. Selecting and identifying points meant that candidates had to read and plan their answers carefully both to avoid repetition and to organise their ideas sensibly. Better, more focused, answers typically scored two thirds or more of the available content marks. The second part of the task requires candidates to use their notes, adapting and organising them to write a summary in their own words. There were very few cases of wholesale copying.

The question had two strands: the challenges and difficulties a young person wanting to qualify as a vet might face in terms of training and in the job itself. The best responses organised their points to clearly acknowledge these two aspects. The best responses in **part (a)** were able to use the information in the passage and write the list mainly using their own words and without changing meaning. Weaker responses offered partial information, so could not be credited, such as 'draining' or 'competitive' without elaboration. Similarly, they listed 'fear of mistakes', rather than focusing on the element of professionalism that was also required to evidence clear understanding and secure the mark. Where candidates had not engaged fully with the task and/or attempted a more mechanical approach paraphrasing the material, repetitions were common, such as 'physically draining', 'long work shifts' and 'on call all night too'. In these examples, candidates needed to identify the essence of the idea rather than offer more than one example of the same idea. One word answers such as 'litigation' were insufficient to communicate an understanding that the challenge was a fear of such consequences.

Many responses confused the entrance criteria, training requirements and tribulations of training and in doing so struggled to provide a coherent, cogent summary. Weaker responses tended to copy chunks from the passage, with little realisation that they had to use their own words where appropriate. Often their summaries were unfinished. A few summaries were written in an incorrect form, with some more like a persuasive text, asking questions within the response. Exceeding the word count was a feature of weaker responses; this lack of concision was self-penalising.

There are no marks to be scored for Writing in **3(a)**. However, checking responses for accuracy in spelling and grammar is clearly essential if candidates are to avoid the potential danger of negating points through careless slips. Candidates should pay particular attention, for example, to correct any details that might change meaning; for example, some candidates wrote that just five years at vet school was required, whereas it was specified in the passage as needing to be at least five years.

The most successful responses in **Question 3(b)** used the notes from **3(a)**, re-ordering and regrouping the relevant information with a clear focus on the question. The best answers had considered carefully both the content and organisation of their answer, writing in fluent sentences, within the guidance for length and using their own words as far as possible. They avoided writing introductory statements and making comments, and concentrated on giving a factual objective summary.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- read the question carefully to identify the focus of the task
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify precisely potentially relevant content points
- select 15 distinct points that relate to the task
- list one relevant point on each numbered line in as few words as possible
- be very specific if referring to amounts, dates or acronyms, for example 'RCVS'
- when checking and editing your answers to **Question 3(a)**, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage
- check that there are no repetitions or very similar points
- plan the structure of your response in **3(b)**, to organise and sequence content logically
- write informatively and do not comment on the content of the passage
- be careful to give only information from the passage that answers the question

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- you can choose to use your own words in **3(a)** and must use your own words in **3(b)**, although you do not need to change every word
- do not add further numbered points in **3(a)** in addition to the 15 required
- if using a word-processor, number your points for **Question 3(a)**
- pay attention to the guidance for length in **3(b)**.

.FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/31
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

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

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

- Use an appropriate form and style in both questions
- 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.

Most responses showed a committed engagement with the topic in **Question 1**, often with a sound grasp of the ideas addressed in the passage and usually some attention paid to the style and format of a letter. The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage. Better answers here also tended to structure their responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive argument of their own.

Weaker candidates tended to reiterate the ideas in the passage, often in the same sequence rather than selecting points and commenting on them.

Most made good use of the bullet point 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 between the writer and headteacher was well understood by the majority of candidates, even where technical weaknesses were apparent. In weaker responses, there was often some general commentary on school uniform, 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 Headteacher. 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 discursive style and there was less focused argument about whether school uniform should be introduced or abolished. Valedictions were frequently forgotten - a feature symptomatic of an insecure grasp of audience and purpose, and at this level the points made about the radio programme followed the sequence of the passage with less selection and regrouping of ideas to create an argument.

In the compositions, the descriptive and narrative genres were attempted in fairly equal numbers, although descriptive questions were generally more popular at all levels of achievement. Better responses 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 first descriptive question about standing at the top of the highest building for many miles were original and engaging in the kinds of scenarios described. As is usually the case, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere specific to the particular place described. Some responses focused on the sights and sounds observed by the narrator while others evoked the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as they surveyed the scene below.

There were some engaging descriptions of landscape, nature and wildlife in responses to the second question, as well as some which focused on more human scenarios. Weaker responses here tended to rely on rather clichéd images or there was a lack of focus on detail and the description remained rather generalised and stereotypical.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Stories involving an argument were very varied and often, at the highest level, moving and effective. The second narrative question also elicited a wide range of responses with varying content and Examiners awarded marks across the range here. Weaker 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 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 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 you are a pupil in a school where a decision has been made either to abolish or to introduce compulsory school uniform.

You have been invited by the headteacher to write a letter to him/her, giving your views and advice on the topic.

In your letter you should:

- **select the relevant arguments in the transcript to support your views**
- **develop and evaluate those arguments to make a convincing case about whether school uniform should be abolished or introduced in your school.**

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

Begin your letter, ‘Dear Headteacher...’.

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.

High marks were awarded where there was some challenge and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing of the points made in the passage. Where the letter was both accurate and appropriate in style, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished style, Examiners could award very high marks indeed. Better responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the passage. These responses scrutinised and probed those arguments which did not support the stance adopted and developed those which did.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward with some listing the advantages and disadvantages of adopting school uniform. 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 were hindered because a clear stance on the question to be addressed was not adopted.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the ideas presented about compulsory school uniform but less use was made of the range of ideas in the passage. A thin use of the detail and the inclusion of ideas which did not appear in the passage or 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 judgments about whether compulsory school uniform was a good idea in the specific circumstances of the candidate’s school or college. In higher Band responses the question itself had been carefully read and a decision made about which of the scenarios – the introduction or the abolition of compulsory school uniform – was to be argued for. Perceptive responses often went to the heart of the debate in the conversation between the presenter and the school teacher: the extent to which individual freedom of expression should be respected above the collective aims of a school establishment. Many at this level argued convincingly that the ways in which different countries and cultures interpreted ideas about compulsory school uniform suggested that different values and priorities were reflected in their different traditions. There was some thoughtful probing of the idea that school uniform could prevent bullying; the reasons why bullying occurs were often felt to be much more subtle and varied, for example, than the clothes young people wore to school. The idea that school uniform reduced the discrimination of poorer students by those who could afford more fashionable and expensive clothes was sometimes conceded but with the mitigation that poverty was always visible and that these attitudes themselves should be challenged

rather than masked by compelling students to wear the same clothes. Many effective responses also addressed the inference in the passage that originality in a student's dress could reflect an original mind, with some arguing that a global economy needed creative - rather than conformist - thinkers.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 3 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 passage. There was often less argument either in favour or against compulsory school uniform here, with responses reflecting the ideas in the passage but not always commenting on them evaluatively. While the points made were given in candidates' own words, simple opinions on them were offered rather than evaluation of them.

Weaker 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 argument. Ideas about school uniform in responses at this level were not always rooted in the passage: one common diversion involved the cost of school uniform or of suitable non-uniform clothes which, although a valid argument, was not derived from 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 maintained a suitably respectful tone but at the same time challenged the ideas and attitudes the headteacher was assumed to have made.

In the middle range, the style was often appropriate although there were sometimes lapses in candidates' awareness of the intended audience, showing some insecure understanding of the appropriate style for the task. Most often at this level there was limited argument to give the response shape and purpose, even where the passage was adequately reflected.

Weaker responses sometimes had limited overall cohesion and there was less adaptation of the style for the recipient of the letter. 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, an overview of the principles underlying the discussion of the school uniform in the passage was given rather than a list of the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory school uniform.

Responses given Band 2 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the passage but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed to meet the demands of the task. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of the purpose of the letter. Weaker responses 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 weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the points in the passage but without the re-ordering of them which was needed to give the letter a sense of purpose and audience. These responses showed a lack of awareness of the conventional structure of a letter.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 1. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error.

Responses given marks in Band 1 were authoritative and subtly argued with a range of well chosen and complex vocabulary and very few technical errors. Sentence structures varied and were consciously used to create specific effects.

Band 2 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 apt, a range of quite basic errors was made which marred the overall impression given. Homophones were insecurely used, especially your/you're and their/there and apostrophes were omitted or used where not necessary, even where the writing was otherwise accurate. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in responses at this level. Adverbs such as 'appropriately' and key words for the task such as 'opinions' and 'appreciate' 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 3 where mostly correctly structured sentences are required. Persistent use of commas where full stops were needed was perhaps the most common reason Examiners were unable to award marks in Band 3 for otherwise clear, coherent responses. Sometimes whole paragraphs were actually strings of simple sentences with commas rather than full stops to separate them.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Be prepared to criticise or question the ideas in the passage.
- 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.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops, missing or wrongly used apostrophes, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words.

Section 2: Composition

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 Imagine you are standing at the top of the highest building for many miles around. Describe what you see and hear below you, and the scene around you at the top.

OR

3 Describe the scene from your position on the bank of a river.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range although the first question was more often chosen. In the first task, there were some strongly evocative descriptions of scenes from the specific vantage point given in the question, along with some exploration of the thoughts, reactions and feelings of the narrator.

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

Some successful responses to the first question gave startling and original descriptions of dystopian landscapes or post-apocalyptic scenes of war-torn regions which showed an unusual and interesting interpretation of the task. A number of descriptions at this level also focused on the effect a particularly beautiful skyscape had on the narrator or the ways in which a troubled mind was soothed and calmed by the experience of looking at the world from such a vantage point. Some responses described effectively the sense of omnipotence or alternatively of insignificance evoked by the scene and where both physical details and the impact on the observer were included the description as a whole was given credibility and immediacy.

Middle Band responses were characterised by rather more obvious images and ideas such as references to people as 'ants' and vehicles as 'toy cars'. The sound of the traffic or the calmness of the narrator tended to be asserted rather than evoked and sometimes rather clichéd details dulled the effect of the description as a whole, although few responses lapsed into narrative or lost the main features of descriptive writing.

Weaker responses were characterised by a tendency to list details rather than effectively develop them and although there were only a few very brief responses those given marks below Band 3 were typically less cohesive or they included rather unlikely panoramic views encompassing cities, mountains, oceans which lacked detailed focus. Sometimes the details used were not well judged, such as the wafting of food smells from a street stall or the sound of one person's voice when the rest of the piece suggested such sensory impressions would not be experienced from such a high vantage point.

The second question was the least popular of the composition tasks although there were some effective descriptions here which focused on more unusual kinds of river landscapes or were sustained and evocative pieces which conjured up the atmosphere of a gentle, relaxed scene. Some successful responses contained highly original images to describe the movement of the river water which sometimes mirrored the turbulence of the narrator's emotions while others given high marks were wide-ranging but cohesive in their use of the river as a central idea.

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 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 mostly focused on the actions of the characters in the scene or on rather ordinary details, such as the green grass or the swaying trees, and the scene lacked life and vibrancy. Sometimes a rather formulaic, mechanical listing of sensory impressions limited the effectiveness of the description at this level.

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.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

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

Narrative Writing

4 Write a story entitled, ‘The Argument’.

OR

5 Write a story which involves breaking a rule.

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, 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. Arguments of all kinds were in evidence; some were rooted in family life, some based on school friendships and others on a wider scale including narratives written in fantasy or science fiction genres. There were various structures employed in these better responses rather than straightforward chronological recount. Stories sometimes began with the outcome of an argument or the reflections of the narrator afterwards and where some details were withheld from the reader to provide an interesting and intriguing denouement. Examiners often awarded marks for Content and Structure from Band 1. There were some moving accounts of arguments culminating in the breakdown of families which had a ring of bitter truth about them. Other responses at this level were characterised by a less literal interpretation of the task, where the idea of the argument centred on feuds and divides between people which were sometimes resolved in interesting ways.

Middle range narratives were usually more straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases, although the characterisation and setting were effective and credible, these responses overall sometimes lacked pace and variety. Responses in this range, whilst often more predictable, were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution or lesson learned from the argument.

Weaker responses were often recounts of personal experience which were more limited in their use of narrative features such as scene setting or characterisation. 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 evident – family or marital breakdown, sibling quarrels or disputes between friends – 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.

For the second narrative question, many responses focused on breaking school rules or parental rules of breaking the law. The best responses were often quite light-hearted and humorous in content, such as the consequences of failing to look after a younger sibling or an attempt to steal some coveted item or to cheat in an examination. While these ideas featured across the mark range, better responses prepared the reader and shaped the narrative in an entertaining way. Some different genres were used to good effect in responses to this question, such as a citizen of a distant planet returning to a destroyed and ravaged Earth or the reconciliation between warring factions in a fantasy world.

Band 3 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 with stories about wearing the wrong uniform or entering some forbidden room at school or at home.

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. The idea of breaking a rule was sometimes a tangential pretext for a haunted house story or a story about being followed in a dark street or getting lost in a forest, scenarios which can quickly become clichéd and unengaging.

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, 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 a number of responses out of Band 3. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling 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 3 and even when written in a fairly pedestrian style. Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were still errors but the style had more ambition and variety, a mark of 9 was awarded. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 3. A few responses were very brief and faulty in style, making it difficult to follow the meaning. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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 numbers 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.

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 an article. The great 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.

Many excellent answers which interrogated the views expressed by the writer of the passage and the cited research findings about the effects of noise showed a mature awareness of the difficulties and strains of the urban environment and the contradictions in youth culture but challenged the assumed dichotomy between young and old in their attitudes. Some strong responses enthusiastically supported the findings of the researchers and accepted their warnings of dire health consequences, but were still able to develop their views in a suitably evaluative manner. Others recognised the truths of their findings but with thoughtful reservations. Some denied the validity of the research without providing any but the most simplistic explanations for doing so. Those responses which offered some challenge to the findings of the research or the claims of the writer more readily achieved evaluation of the material when they justified their objections.

The direction in the question to write an article for a young audience resulted, at higher levels of achievement, in significant, youth-focused development of the evaluation which had gone before; elsewhere, simple or over-idealistic solutions were offered which were not firmly grounded in the text. The best responses combined an assured grasp of the content and attitudes of the material with an independence of thought reflected in the structure of their writing: rather than a methodical consideration of the points in the same sequence as the original, they were evaluative of the whole thrust of the discussion from the outset, selecting and commenting on its details to support their views and sensitively aware of the attitudes of the speaker in the text. In the middle Bands, responses often simply reproduced the research findings with some, often 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 weight to the evidence of both short – and long-term harm caused by excessive noise, the question also required the candidate's own views, based on the lecture purportedly attended, to be given, and frequently these responses failed to develop a clear stance on the topic. Although even at the lower levels of achievement there was very little undeveloped reproduction of the material, many responses made one or two valid points but showed such limited coverage of the material that Examiners could not award marks in Band 2. Here, the writing was sometimes of a fluency and accuracy typical of higher Bands, and in these scripts originality of thought and invention was sometimes demonstrated in **Section 2** compositions that was absent in the handling of the reading material.

Most responses paid attention to the audience and style required for an article for a school/college magazine; most were evaluative in purpose to some extent, using the passage to create and structure arguments with some sense of audience and rhetoric. Quite frequently however, style and language were inappropriately descriptive or formal, or the response was not written in the voice of a young person.

In **Section 2**, there was usually a clear awareness of the differing requirements of the two genres; in this examination series there was a fairly even balance seen of the narrative and the descriptive options, and there was much writing of a high standard 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** evoked many excellent descriptive pieces but some narrative framework for the purposes of cohesion was more apparent than in responses to **Question 3**, where conscious crafting for effect which did not drift into narrative was more often seen. Weaker responses to both questions in the descriptive genre were typically dominated by simple, sequential narrative and limited vocabulary. Strong responses to **Questions 4** and **5** frequently engaged the reader's interest from the beginning, and also provided a satisfactory and believable resolution to the story. The topic of **Question 4**, 'A Second Chance', produced often excellent narratives encompassing a very wide range of scenarios, although often simple recounting of events in an autobiographical style without the desired elements of fiction was produced. Some responses to **Question 5** did not utilise effectively the opening sentence supplied in the task, adding it on to their stories in an unbelievable or inappropriate manner, and sometimes forgetting it completely after the first paragraph. In the middle Bands of narrative responses, 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.

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

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

Write an article for young people to be published in your school/college magazine with the title, ‘Is your life too noisy?’.

In your article you should:

- **Evaluate what the researcher said about young people and noise**
- **Give your own views about young people and noise, based on the lecture you attended.**

**Base your article on what you have read in the passage, but be careful to use your own words.
Address each of the two 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 Bands were awarded where the views expressed and cited in the passage were subjected to rigorous examination and there was an overview of the issues especially with reference to young people. Here, there was more than a straightforward listing of the points made in the text; 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 an article format and style were maintained throughout the response and the mode of address was consistently appropriate, the underlying assumptions and implications of the speaker in the text were recognised, and claims from various sources were scrutinised and challenged. Examiners could award very high marks indeed.

Marks in Band 3 were awarded when reasonable understanding of the issues was shown, albeit while accepting claims at face value, and some points were subjected to more extended discussion and development. Responses here were typified by often enthusiastic support for a change in societal attitudes to noise or and more recognition of the needs of young people: the high value placed on educational success was frequently demonstrated.

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

The marks for reading

The passage proved accessible at all levels of ability, although there were some common misunderstandings. The best responses were evaluative throughout, commanding the subject from the beginning, and demonstrating the ability to assess objectively the views expressed in the lecture and to adopt a wider view. Here there was an implicit understanding of the subtleties and nuances of the passage and a realisation that ‘noise’ is not a totally negative concept: distinctions were made between noise and sound, and between hearing involuntarily and listening. Some responses awarded marks in the top Band challenged the presented research not in its accuracy or relevance but in its limitations: ‘Two studies are not a lot to go on: there have been many others which clearly demonstrate the soothing effect of classical music on young children.’ There was a strong belief that music of their own choice relaxes anxious teenagers. Responses at this and sometimes at lower levels also differentiated between desirable and undesirable noise in classrooms: ‘I concede that a cacophony of yelling teens would be counterproductive, but in most classrooms there is a will to learn and interact, not a will to disturb.’ While the contentious topic of studying while listening to loud music through earphones was discussed in responses at all levels, those in the top Band usually subjected claims that it aided concentration to some analysis.

The research findings regarding the damage to health of long-term exposure to noise were taken seriously, responses in the top Band usually recognising the theme in the passage that these effects are cumulative, and that we are usually unaware at any given time of the extent of damage to ourselves and others. Some responses challenged what they viewed as an unacceptable stereotype of young people 'craving' loud noise, and also the lazily assumed division between different generations in their attitudes.

Marks in Band 2 were awarded when there was more than just simple agreement or disagreement with the claims of the passage material, and some of the qualities of Band 1 responses were evident if employed with less assurance. Responses often began by reproducing and agreeing with both the claimed short-and long-term effects of exposure to noise, covering the material with reasonable thoroughness, and with some degree of evaluation. Here too some distinction was made between types of noise, and there was usually an appropriate focus on the needs and wishes of young people, with the possibility of long-term damage linked to their present exposure and behaviour. In this Band personal anecdotes about practices within families and schools were often included, although some were not relevant and did not contribute to evaluation of the material. Commonly, the article concluded with advice to young people. Where this was thoughtful and clearly rooted in the text, Examiners could often award marks for evaluation. In this Band and below, (although it was not entirely absent from responses awarded marks in the top Band) there was a widespread misunderstanding that the researcher was calling for a return to 'deathly silent classrooms' and then often the response veered away into denigration of the researcher and the undermining of other claims in the lecture. In this range there was sometimes an ability to offer a wider view about the inevitability of societal change and the disadvantages which accrue as well as the benefits. Here too the responsibility of young people for protecting themselves and their interests was often discussed.

Marks in Band 3 were awarded where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the reading material but less recognition of implicit meanings or faulty or illogical reasoning. A mark of 6 could be given where the key points were reproduced with some appropriate development, such as the need for young people to appreciate that long-term damage from exposure to noise could result from their own habits as well as from external factors. At this level however responses often did not distinguish between the short-term effects of noise such as irritation, poor sleep, etc. and the much more serious long-term damage to health. Where there was clear understanding of the main thrust of the lecture but only a limited selection of points discussed a mark of 5 was given. The typical pattern of the responses awarded a mark of 5 or 6 was to offer a selection of the research findings, perhaps with some of the technological remedies mentioned by the researcher without much exploration of the issues, and conclude with a personal or admonitory comment. At this level and below there were a number of misunderstandings evident, such as the assertion that a single exposure to aircraft noise could cause reading impairment, or that young people were commonly suffering heart attacks. Some responses attempting to challenge the material denied the validity of the research, sometimes citing their own experience in simplistic analysis: 'I live near a busy road and my hearing's fine!' Such responses often continued, without supporting evidence, to deny or devalue the research findings.

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 where there was some misunderstanding of the main thrust of the lecture—although this was quite rare—or a lack of focus on the reading material, 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

The most effective responses took into account their intended audience—young people in a school or college—and maintained an appropriately direct and informal tone and style of address throughout. While almost all responses began with at least some recognition of audience—if only, 'I am going to tell you about...' and employed second-person or first-person plural address, a considerable number appeared to forget their intended audience after the first paragraph and continued in a too formal and descriptive a style, sometimes turning to third-person or occasionally concluding with a valediction in the style of a letter.

The best responses demonstrated considerable authority and confidence, one in the top Band beginning, 'Noise has quickly become a part of daily life, whether you have noticed it or not. Silence nowadays has become one of the rarer experiences, but this begs the question: is silence really as golden as they say?' The great majority were written in the required voice of a young person who had attended the lecture; a very small number adopted another persona, such as that of a parent whose child had suffered the ill-effects of excessive noise. Although this did not necessarily detract from the value or quality of the evaluation within, the writing marks were affected by the lack of a sense of audience. The most accomplished, evaluative responses demonstrated their stance from the start, the direction the argument would take being immediately signalled.

In the middle to lower mark range, responses were mostly 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 material, close paraphrase was often seen. In weaker responses the requirement to write an article was forgotten, and the material in the passage merely described. A few responses were in the form of a letter to the writer of the speech.

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, an overview of the principles underlying the discussion of excessive noise in the passage was given rather than a list of the ill effects and possible remedies.

Responses given Band 2 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the passage but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed to meet the demands of the task. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of the purpose of the article. Weaker responses 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 weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the points in the passage but without the re-ordering of them which was needed to give the article letter a sense of purpose and audience. These responses showed a lack of awareness of the conventional form of an article.

Accuracy

Responses in Band 1 combined a fluent and authoritative style, typified by precisely employed, informal vocabulary and a wide range of sentence structures, with a very high level of technical accuracy. Responses given 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. There were frequent errors of sentence separation, the misuse of commas being the major fault at the lower end in this Band. This, and a lack of paragraphing, often restricted the writing mark to a Band below that awarded for Reading. Two types of writing typified responses awarded marks in Band 4 and below: the first, more common one lacked any evidence of controlled shaping, and simply followed the patterns of speech. There were very frequent basic errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar; however, it was not only the weakest responses that used capital letters randomly and inaccurately. The second type was often characterised by secure spelling and quite ambitious vocabulary, but marred by serious structural faults in sentences and syntax, errors of agreement and tense, and an uncertain use of prepositions. Here, articles were sometimes omitted or 'the' was used rather than 'a' or 'an'. Meaning was sometimes blurred by the levels of error.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Consider the underlying attitudes of the speaker/s in the passage as well as those explicitly expressed, and how those affect their opinions.
- Try to identify the key arguments in the passage.
- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well as some depth in evaluating them.
- Be prepared to challenge the views expressed in the passage.
- Be aware of the audience for your writing and adapt your style accordingly. Think carefully for example about the correct style for a letter, an article or a speech.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops and capital letters.
- Check your spelling, especially of key words from the passage.

Section 2: Composition

Descriptive Writing

2 You open the door to a surprise visitor. Describe the visitor and your thoughts and feelings when they first begin to speak.

OR

3 Describe the moment when you encounter an animal.

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.

This genre was chosen across the range of abilities, with both choices being equally popular. At all levels of achievement many felt it necessary to provide some context for the required scene, weaker responses, especially to **Question 2**, sometimes developing their writing too far along the path of narrative, thus forgetting the requirements 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. In the middle range some responses were more narrative in manner than is usually desirable for this genre, but included much vivid detail and developed images. Here, Examiners were able to award marks in the middle Band. The best responses to both questions produced writing of a very high order, earning marks at the top of Band 1. These were highly evocative, often creating overall pictures of considerable clarity and employing a wide-ranging and ambitious vocabulary.

Responses to **Question 2** offered many kinds of surprise visitors, although the arrivals were dominated by long-lost friends and family, mainly errant fathers and mothers, or brothers back from the wars. Some of the most interesting descriptions were of mysterious strangers, beggars, the dangerous, including a mass murderer, or the merely eccentric, although explanation of a visitor's bizarre appearance was not always forthcoming. Most responses awarded marks at the top of Band 1 employed a restricted time scheme, focusing on the moments immediately before and after the door was opened, and, as required by the question, the moment the visitor began to speak; within this tight focus however skilful flashback often provided the context from which the feelings and response of the narrator derived. The narrator of one response awarded marks at the top of Band 1, opening the door to an alarmingly tattered, exhausted and bearded individual, was immediately disarmed when he smiled: 'The smile was still the same. "Nice to see you Sis." His voice caused an instant wave of nostalgia, and a lump in my throat large enough to keep me from speaking. It had been three years since the war ended, three years since he'd been presumed dead.' When the visitor was of remarkable appearance, the description was most effective when it was connected with his or her circumstances or explained the effect on the narrator.

Responses given marks in the middle Bands approached the task more straightforwardly, with varying degrees of accomplishment: these more usually employed an extensive degree of narrative, both as preamble to the arrival of the visitor or in lengthy tales of what occurred after they had been admitted. These narratives often included enough descriptive detail to create the ‘impression of reality’ required for marks in Band 2, and were clearly intending to describe, but lacked the intensity of gaze upon the subject apparent in the top Band responses. While some context was required to explain the feelings and response of the narrator to the visitor, lengthy descriptions of the furniture and other accoutrements, and detailed accounts of the day’s incidents prior to the arrival of the visitor were less effective. At all levels of achievement, the writer was usually alone in the house when the visitor arrived. This situation of course often heightened the intensity of anticipation and emotion: here again, better responses briefly indicated it while weaker responses wrote lengthy explanations of the absence of various family members. In both Band 2 and Band 3 very many responses described unnecessary details of the house which did not add to the atmosphere. 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 the top Band responses, were interesting and original. In some of these, there were touching evocations of the poignant reuniting of family and friends. There were some engaging pieces awarded marks in Band 3, but often a higher mark was precluded by a lack of clarity in the picture created. At the lower end of the Band and below it, the writing often became driven by narrative, even though a few relevant descriptive details were included. Another wrote one and a half pages factually recounting the events and casualties of a tropical storm and the relocations these required before any description as required by the question was given. Sometimes responses which successfully eschewed narrative were formulaic—‘I could see...I could smell...’ and did not engage the reader. At this level also, there was often a lack of appropriate vocabulary with which to articulate thoughts and feelings, and some reliance on clichés such as pulses racing as fast as a cheetah chasing its prey. Examiners gave marks in Band 4 where responses were entirely narrative in focus rather than descriptive, or where details were scarce or ineffective. There were very few responses awarded marks below Band 4: these usually lacked coherence or awareness of what constitutes descriptive writing: one response was an entirely factual account of the arrival of some cousins from Australia description beyond, ‘They looked like a respectable family.’

The second option was equally popular, and elicited responses across the mark range, including some of the strongest responses in the descriptive genre. The animals encountered were often lions, tigers or bears, but across the range there was a wide variety to be found, including monkeys, spiders, sharks, various types of raptors, stray pets and once, unforgettably, a snake which dropped from a branch and became entangled in the narrator’s hair. In responses awarded marks in Band 1 there was some very sophisticated writing, with richly detailed sensory description. A key discriminator here was the originality of the images, and the sophisticated precision of the vocabulary which conveyed them. These vivid portraits were grounded in reality and at the top of the Band the writing sometimes conveyed a euphoric intensity of experience. Some images, of blood-stained fangs, magnificent manes and fetid breath recurred in many responses but those awarded marks in the higher Bands were skilfully enough drawn to avoid cliché. Elsewhere many well-developed tactile and aural images convincingly recreated the tension of the situation in the drawn-out moments between hearing or seeing the animal and its seeing—or often springing at—the observer. The evocation of external reality in these strong responses often took second place to the internal drama experienced by the observer: ‘There was an almost imperceptible noise. Uncertainty began to creep into my blood. I heard it again, now louder and stronger. Realising I was no longer alone, uncertainty catalysed into an acidic trepidation.’ Some most effective responses did not identify the species of the animal encountered, but allowed the detail of its behaviour or the sounds it made to reveal that to the reader. In less assured responses in Band 2 and Band 3 this device was not always effective. At this level also there was more time spent on narrative explanation such as inspiration and preparations for a trek or expedition, or there was an occasional tendency to extend the description to the aftermath of the encounter, the lessons learnt or the journey home, undermining the effect of the whole. Although at this level the excited or terrified reaction of the narrator to the animal was frequently effectively conveyed, the experience was sometimes belied by inadequate vocabulary, with too much dependence on non-specific adjectives such as ‘fantastic’, ‘amazing’, ‘unbelievable’ and ‘unreal’. At the lower end of the range lengthy narrative passages sometimes intruded, recounting every detail indiscriminately of the encounter, and were often typified by weaker vocabulary such as ‘scary’ or ‘humongous’. Common also in this range was weakness in concluding the description: while some wisely left the reader with the exultation of wonder and intense experience, or some reflection on the lessons of the experience, others tailed away with plans to get home, to tell their friends, or simply stopped. Responses given marks below Band 3 were often simple narrative accounts with little descriptive detail or evocation of feeling, setting or atmosphere.

Marks in the top Band for style and accuracy were awarded to those 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. Weaker responses were sometimes limited to unelaborated accounts of personal experience, especially in response to the first of the two questions. Consecutive sentences beginning with 'I' (often lower case) typified these responses.

The most frequent issue in awarding style and accuracy marks for descriptive writing was the significant number of responses in which many sentences 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. Responses awarded writing marks in Band 2 or 3 for **Question 1** often earned lower marks for the compositions. Uncertain control of tense marred many responses, especially to **Question 2** where an initial context or a narrative preamble was provided, and then referred to in the body of the composition. Although flashback was often effectively employed, weak control of tenses was often exposed. 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. Sometimes 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.

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.**
- **Make deliberate choices in your vocabulary and sentence structures to create effect.**

Narrative writing

4 Write a story with the title, ‘A Second Chance’.

OR

5 Write a story which begins, ‘It sounded like a straightforward request’.

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.

Narrative writing was the choice of rather more than half of the candidature, with **Question 4** being far more popular. Marks across the range were awarded to responses to both questions. Examiners were able to award marks at the top of Band 1 in a number of cases, but at all levels of achievement engagement with the tasks was evident, with both titles eliciting lively and often intriguing narratives. Responses to both titles included interesting descriptive detail, which enhanced the narratives. The difficulty evident in many responses of creating satisfactory conclusions to the stories was noted, underlining the need to have the end of the story in mind in the process of writing it.

Responses to the first of the narrative options employed a wide variety of interpretations of the second chance, although trying again after educational, romantic or sporting failure, or after some misdirection in life, was by far the most frequently-seen subject. The title allowed for both factual and metaphorical interpretations, and a number of responses were ghost or fantasy stories featuring returns from the dead to live a better life, or time machines—in one case allowing the revenant to subvert the National Lottery! There were crime and adventure stories adapted to the title more or less effectively: these were often over-packed with event and lacking in characterisation. In the middle ranges too were found a considerable number of long-lost fathers—and occasionally mothers—coming to claim their offspring. Sometimes in the lower ranges only the most tenuous connection with the title was maintained; very occasionally none at all could be found. Frequently however the response seemed like a section of autobiography without any narrative shaping or development of tension other than the achievement of the desired examination or sporting success.

There was often effective description of feeling in these responses but more is required to constitute a successful narrative. Across the range of achievement were found stories in the style of fable or folklore; occasionally these were most imaginative and engaging, but those awarded marks at the lower end of Band 3 or in Band 4 did not present emblematic figures or settings in such a way as to engage or convince the reader.

A number of responses were awarded marks at the top of Band 1: these narratives were closely focused in time and space, employing a few well drawn characters and spare but telling setting detail. One most ingenious example concerned a virtual reality game, ‘The Second Chance’, which ‘when it first came out, was seen as a therapeutic miracle for broken hearts and distressed souls. People were able to relive the moments they regretted most and change their course of action in its hyper-realistic virtual run-through.’ Similarly concise and tightly structured, was a convincing and moving narrative about regaining sight after a catastrophic accident, the cause of which was not explained but briskly dealt with so that the real business of the narrative could be proceeded with. In the middle range there were often stories with original concepts and engaging characters which might have qualified their narratives for inclusion in the top Band of marks, but they were frequently let down by precipitate or ill-planned and unconvincing endings. In this range too candidates often spent time on preambles to the main story and then finished hurriedly. Responses given marks below Band 3 tended to be undistinguished series of events without any effective characterisation or convincing detail, weaker examples sometimes limiting their settings to the identification of a location, e.g. ‘It was a stormy night in France’ when neither the weather nor the country had any bearing on the action of the story. Here too characters were entirely undeveloped or even un-named, being only a ‘lonely young boy’ or an ‘old man’.

The second narrative question was much less popular, but elicited some highly effective narratives and a wide range of subject material. A clear majority of the responses to this question involved the carrying through airports or across continents of drugs or other stolen or illicitly acquired materials at the request of a third party, sometimes but by no means always with considerable financial inducement. There were many narrators or protagonists who most unconvincingly agreed to this extremely high-risk activity at the ‘request’ of a perfect stranger without promise of reward at all. Frequently, these lacked credibility. In the lower ranges these adventures petered out very quickly because the characters had no substance and there was no climax to the narrative other than delivering the goods or being arrested.

Responses awarded marks in Band 1 included some tightly plotted, assured narratives: one memorable and most engaging story concerned a request from a terminally ill patient to have his life support withdrawn, while another was a sophisticated and complex narrative of slavery, where an overwhelming flood of memory and family history was evoked by the sight of a particular shade of blue in a tailor's shop.

In the middle ranges a significant number of responses lacked any narrative drive or shaping other than the chronological, despite recounting horrific or spectacular events, and were thus quite uninvolving, without climax or resolution in the narrative sense, or characterisation beyond the things the characters did. Some stories of quite close focus and effective narrative drive could have achieved marks in the top band but for a failure to supply a satisfactory ending. Some of the smuggling and crime stories were fast-paced and exciting, sometimes using flashback to contextualise the events, but often had too many events, twists and turns packed in to the narrative for any to be satisfactorily developed. Sometimes the narrative drifted over lengthy periods of time then ended abruptly.

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 and sentence structure were often effectively 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. The frequent misuse or omission of capital letters inevitably reduced the marks given for otherwise sound writing.

Occasionally only a mark in Band 5 could be awarded because serious errors in sentence structure and syntax impeded communication.

Ways in which the writing of narratives could be improved:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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.

Most responses showed a committed engagement with the topic in **Question 1**, often with a sound grasp of the ideas addressed in the passage and usually some attention paid to the style and format of an article intended for young people. The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage. Better answers here also tended to structure their responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive argument of their own.

Weaker candidates tended to reiterate the ideas in the passage, often in the same sequence rather than selecting points and commenting on them.

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 style and register for an article intended for young people was understood by the majority of candidates, even where technical weaknesses were apparent. In weaker responses, there was often some general commentary on developments in technology, 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 were developed and relevant, using ideas from the passage to create and structure a point of view and often employing rhetorical devices and showing a strong sense of audience which was targeted towards young people. Some in the middle range of marks wrote in a more discursive style and there was less focused argument about whether ‘Keeping up’ with technological change was ‘worth it’. Less successful responses followed the sequence of the passage with less selection and regrouping of ideas to create a point of view.

In the compositions, the descriptive and narrative genres were attempted in fairly equal numbers, although descriptive questions were generally more popular at all levels of achievement. Better responses 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. Some responses to the first descriptive question about a holiday resort at a quiet time were original and engaging in the kinds of scenarios described. As is usually the case, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere specific to the particular place described. Some responses focused on the sights and sounds observed by the narrator while others evoked the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as he/she surveyed the resort.

There were some engaging descriptions of characters and setting in responses to the second question, as well as some which focused on more human scenarios. Weaker responses here tended to rely on rather clichéd images or there was a lack of focus on detail and the description remained rather generalised and stereotypical.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Stories involving ‘The Painting’ were very varied and often, at the highest level, evocative and effective. The second narrative question also elicited a wide range of responses with varying content and Examiners awarded marks across the range here.

Weaker 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 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 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

Write an article intended for young people entitled ‘Keeping up: what’s it worth?’.

In your article you should:

- **select the relevant arguments in the article to support your views**
- **develop and evaluate those arguments to make a convincing case, based on what you have read.**

**Base your response on what you have read in the passage, 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.

High marks were awarded where there was some challenge and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing of the points made in the passage. Where the article was also both accurate and appropriate in style, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished journalistic style, Examiners could award very high marks. Better responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the passage, scrutinised and probed those which did not support the stance adopted and developed those which did.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some listing the advantages and disadvantages of technological changes. 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 were hindered because a clear stance on the question to be addressed was not adopted.

Weaker responses showed some understanding of the ideas presented in the magazine article but less use was made of the range of ideas in the passage. A thin use of the detail, the inclusion of ideas which did not appear in the passage or weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level.

Marks for reading

The best responses, as always in this task, adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage, drawing inferences and making judgements about whether keeping up with the changes in technology, because of the practices detailed in the source material, was a good idea or not. Perceptive responses often went to the heart of the question and developed and evaluated the balance between the ‘cynical’ practices used by some manufacturers and the benefits accrued from advances in technology. Many at this level argued convincingly that the ways in which different age groups and countries held ideas about technology and the environment suggested that different values and priorities were reflected in these different communities. Many effective responses also argued that a global economy needed creative technological progress as well as a strong moral code.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 3 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 passage. There was often less argument either in favour or against keeping up with technological advances, with responses reflecting the ideas in the passage but not always making evaluative comments. While the points made were given in candidates’ own words, simple opinions on them were offered rather than evaluation of them.

Weaker 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 argument. Ideas about technology in responses at this level were not always rooted in the passage: one common diversion involved giving substantial details of the latest computer games, although a valid argument was not derived from the passage.

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 which were only tangentially connected with 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 journalistic tone addressed to young people was expected for an article of this kind and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak.

In the middle range, the style was often appropriate although there were sometimes lapses in candidates’ awareness of the intended audience, showing some insecure understanding of the appropriate style for the task. Most often at this level there was limited argument to give the response shape and purpose, even where the passage was adequately reflected.

Weaker responses sometimes had limited overall cohesion and there was less adaptation of the style for the reader of the article.

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, an overview of the principles underlying the discussion of technological changes in the passage was given rather than a list of the changes.

Responses given Band 2 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the passage but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed to meet the demands of the task. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended with a concluding paragraph which showed a clear sense of the purpose of the article. Weaker responses 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 weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the points in the passage but without the re-ordering of them which was needed to give the article a sense of purpose and audience.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 1. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error.

Responses given marks in Band 1 were authoritative and subtly argued with a range of well-chosen and complex vocabulary and very few technical errors. Sentence structures varied and were consciously used to create specific effects.

Responses in Band 2 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 apt, a range of quite basic errors was made which marred the overall impression given. Homophones were insecurely used, especially your/you're and their/there and our/are and apostrophes were omitted or used where not necessary, even where the writing was otherwise accurate. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in responses at this level. Adverbs such as 'appropriately' and key words for the task such as 'obsolescence' and 'technology' 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 3 where mostly correctly structured sentences are required. Persistent use of commas where full stops were needed was perhaps the most common reason Examiners were unable to award marks in Band 3 for otherwise clear, coherent responses. Sometimes whole paragraphs were actually strings of simple sentences with commas rather than full stops to separate them.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Be prepared to criticise or question the ideas in the passage.
- 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 reader of your article would expect.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing full stops, missing or wrongly used apostrophes, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words.

Section 2: Composition

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 Describe a holiday resort at a quiet time.

OR

3 Imagine you have just started a job in a café or a restaurant. Describe the place, its customers and your thoughts and feelings as you do your work.

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 scenes in the resort mentioned in the question, along with some exploration of thoughts, reactions and feelings.

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

Some successful responses to the first question gave a developed description of what would usually be a popular and crowded location, being attractive and engaging for very different reasons in its solitude. Some developed the idea of contrast and changes in expectations and moods.

Middle Band responses were characterised by rather more obvious images, ideas and sometimes rather clichéd details of fairground rides and swimming pools which dulled the effect of the description as a whole. Few responses lapsed into narrative or lost the main features of descriptive writing.

Weaker responses were characterised by a tendency to list details rather than effectively develop them and although there were only a few very brief responses those given marks below Band 3 were typically less cohesive or they included rather unlikely panoramic views. Sometimes the details used were not well judged, such as the wafting of food smells from busy vendors and the laughing of children in what had previously been described as an empty location.

The second question was the most popular of the composition tasks and there were some effective descriptions here which focused on the ideas helpfully provided in the question. Some successful responses contained highly original images to describe the thoughts and feelings while others given high marks were wide-ranging but cohesive in their use of the café or restaurant as a central idea.

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 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 mostly focused on the actions of the characters in the scene or on rather ordinary details, such as the variety of the food items, and the scene lacked life and vibrancy. Sometimes a rather formulaic, mechanical listing of sensory impressions limited the effectiveness of the description at this level.

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.

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.

Section 2: Composition

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.

Narrative Writing

- 4 Write a story with the title ‘The Painting’.

OR

- 5 Write a story which begins, ‘A silver moon rose silently into the dark sky, its beauty unnoticed by the lone figure below’.

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, 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.

‘Paintings’ of all kinds were in evidence; some involved paintings which revealed love stories or lost relatives, some were based on the creation of the work itself. There were various structures employed in these better responses rather than straightforward chronological recount. Stories sometimes began with the details of the painting or the reflections of the artist or owner and where some details were withheld from the reader to provide an interesting and intriguing denouement. Examiners often awarded marks for Content and Structure from Band 1. Other responses at this level were characterised by a less literal interpretation of the task, where the idea of the artwork centred on heists and criminal activity.

Middle range narratives were usually more straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases, although the characterisation and setting were effective and credible, these responses overall sometimes lacked pace and variety. Responses in this range, whilst often more predictable, were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable conclusion.

Weaker responses were often more limited in their use of narrative features such as scene setting or characterisation. 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 evident, 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 development.

For the second narrative question, many responses focused on the lone figure. The best responses were often engaging in their creation of atmosphere and character. While these ideas featured across the mark range, better responses prepared the reader and shaped the narrative in an entertaining way. Some different genres were used to good effect in responses to this question, such as using romantic or historical fiction.

Band 3 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 with stories about the strange lone figure.

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. There were a number of werewolf or vampire stories, scenarios which can quickly become clichéd, generic and unengaging.

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, 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 a number of responses out of Band 3. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling 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 3 and even when written in a fairly pedestrian style Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were still errors but the style had more ambition and variety, a mark of 9 was awarded. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 3. A few responses were very brief and faulty in style, making it difficult to follow the meaning. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

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