

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Reading

Key messages

Candidates performed well in the assessment when they:

- read both texts closely
- read the questions and followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills targeted by each question, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension and **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language
- used textual details to make valid inferences about a character's feelings and opinions, particularly in **Question 1(f)**, **Question 1(h)** and **Question 3(b)**
- based their responses on the texts, only offering their own opinions or inferring opinions of the characters in the texts as required by the tasks
- quoted the text directly when asked to provide a *feature* in **Question 1(c)**, *details to support an answer* in **Question 1(f)** and **Question 1(h)** and their chosen *example* in **Question 2(e)**
- used their own words carefully where appropriate, avoiding unselective copying from the text
- attempted all parts of all questions, paying attention to the marks and answer space available which indicate the length of response expected
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(c)**, **Question 1(f)** and **Question 2(e)**
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses

General comments

This was the first examination for the new syllabus. There was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper, with only a few not attempting questions. For the most part, responses were clearly written although occasionally illegibility hampered reading. If a response is incorrect, a line should be drawn through it. Rubbing out a response and then writing over it is strongly discouraged. A line should also be drawn through any rough work. If a response needs to continue beyond the designated space, it is better to use additional pages, ensuring that the original question number is identified. Candidates should avoid writing in margins or at the bottom of the page, as these are not always visible. They are advised not to write more than is required by the task.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. The first text, **Text A**, was a narrative text called '*The north shore*' which tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect in **Question 2**. Questions were divided into short response sub-questions. 16 marks were allocated to **Question 1** with nine marks allocated to **Question 2**. Candidates seemed to find the text accessible with some vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

Following the chronology of the narrative caused some issues, particularly with **Question 2**, as **Text A** was not entirely linear. The first half of the passage described the writer arriving at his camping place, his first night there, then being stranded for another day or two. This caused the writer to think back to an earlier time before the trip when he was planning for it to show why he decided he now needs to leave this camping spot. He later walks, carrying the canoe, until he arrives exhausted at the next place to stop. The following day he canoes into the *fairy-tale landscape* and travels on past the ancient rocks etc. Stronger responses showed evidence of careful reading.

There was more success in answering **Question 1** than **Question 2**, particularly with understanding of explicit ideas. Stronger responses successfully used own words where specified.

While candidates successfully identified explicit details in the text, making inferences proved more challenging in **Question 1(e)**, **Question 1(f)** and **Question 1(h)**. To improve further, candidates should practice reading literary texts, including those without a chronological structure, and answering questions about aspects of those texts, considering the feelings and opinions of individual characters at specific times and places. As a general rule for comprehension questions, 'explanations' should be in candidates' own words, but 'details', 'features' or 'evidence' are most effectively given as quotations from the text. Where a candidate chooses to paraphrase instead of quoting, the same key details must be included. Quotations chosen by candidates should be written out in full, without the use of ellipses or line or paragraph references.

Often, **Question 2** sub-questions were answered as comprehension questions rather than looking at the effect of the language used. This question requires candidates to go beyond the narrative and literal details and consider the suggestions and implications of words and images, for example, what is being *suggested* in **Question 2(a)**, *an impression* in **Question 2(c)** and **Question 2(e)**, or *an effect* in **Question 2(d)**. Stronger responses recognised that repeating the words from the extracts would not allow candidates to demonstrate understanding of the writer's craft. These included explanations in own words which used the text to support an argument. Candidates who use language terminology to analyse imagery and words used, for example *metaphor*, *rule of three*, need to explain how the writer uses them effectively and not just identify them. For **Question 2(e)**, candidates are required to choose which words and ideas to focus on.

The shorter second text, **Text B**, '*Plogging*', assessed candidates' ability to select and use information. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write an effective summary with only those key ideas relevant to the task, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. 10 marks were available for this *Reading* skill. For *Reading* levels 4 and 5, there needed to be a good range of points demonstrating skilful or careful selection, avoiding the inclusion of candidates' own views; these are not relevant to the task. A further 10 marks were awarded for the quality of writing. For *Writing* levels 4 and 5, ideas need to be communicated clearly without stretches of copied text. A number of responses seemed to select a good range of points by lifting large sections of text, but this limited evidence of their own writing skills; while others paraphrased the text to inject originality of phrasing and style, but to such an extent that responses became imprecise and general. To improve, candidates need to practice rephrasing key ideas clearly, concisely and in their own words. Texts should include elements which are unrelated to the task specified, with plenty of misleading details for students to practice distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant details.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task designed to assess understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the task with reference to the relevant details in the text; the perspective had to be inferred and developed. This proved a very challenging question with only a small number of responses giving the correct perspective, writing from Anna Ruiz's point of view, not their own, and not repeating the overall viewpoint of the text in support of plogging. Candidates should recognise that the '*Question from the audience*' may not reflect the viewpoint of the given character. As a new question to the paper, additional practice is essential here. Further work on non-fiction texts should include texts with differing opinions for students to improve the skill of inferring connotations and outlooks which may not be initially obvious.

Comments on specific questions

Text A – extract from a contemporary narrative text

Question 1 – Explicit and implicit comprehension

- (a) This was a literal comprehension question which proved very accessible for the vast majority of candidates who recognised that the difficulty lay in the *fierce wind* or *gusts ... growing too strong* from lines 1 and 2. Most responses recognised the need to specify the type of wind and avoided the distraction of the icy water.
- (b) This question was generally well answered. Successful responses went back to the context given in the text: the North Shore which the writer had been *generally* or *barely following* or *tracking*.
- (c) This question asked for one feature from several available. Many responses ensured that important words were not omitted, for example *vast heaps* of *boulders* or *rocks* rather than just rocks. A few successful responses saw the limitations of the *tiny patch of grass*. Careful reading of the text avoided incorrectly focusing on the frost. Candidates must use the designated answer spaces to correctly place their chosen feature in the 'feature' space and explain it in the space below.

Sensible explanations included the *vast boulders leaving little space for a tent, or not allowing it to be pitched at all*, with the accompanying idea that the *patch of grass was tiny, so only gave a limited space for camping*. An alternative, more commonly used, explanation was that *the wind would blow the tent away, or the tent would not stay up for long if unanchored in the wind*.

- (d) Responses gained both marks for this question when they showed an understanding of the precise nature of the additional precautions that were necessary: *he secured his tent*, or *used extra guy lines to peg down his tent* and *he overturned his canoe*.
- (e) This was the first inferential question, which was fairly well answered, with many candidates looking back at the context of the extract in the question to see that the *friend* being personified is the *canoe* or *vessel*. The canoe needed to be specified in the response. Success involved looking at the words spoken and inferring from the text why the writer had said them. Clues lay in the poor state of the canoe from paragraph 3 to allow a sensible deduction that *the writer was worried the canoe would not last much longer or make it to the end*, or the more general inference that *the writer was being encouraging, sympathetic or empathetic, and felt sorry for the state of the canoe*, as indicated by the words *my old friend*.
- (f) The first task here for one mark was to infer how the writer *felt* and write the answer in the designated space; a single word answer is sufficient. Finding the specific details from paragraph 4 linked to the *weather conditions* was the key to success here. Successful responses recognised that the writer is *scared* or *worried* by the weather. These avoided additional feelings he might have had about the campsite or his tent which often contradicted his fear, for example, he thought the *patch of grass was inviting*, and was *thankful* to have found his camping place.

The second task for two marks was to provide supporting *details* from the text. Most candidates provided a quotation to support *fear* or *worry* about the weather: either directly about the weather – *the wind howling/whipping up the waves* or in terms of the writer's reaction – *hiding in the sleeping bag*. Two marks required both ideas to be stated.

- (g)(i) This proved a much more challenging literal question and required careful reading of the question to identify key words, in this case *particular*, alerting candidates that they needed to search beyond the general. The context here is that the writer is stuck due to the weather and is worried about being delayed. More skilled responses indicated that the *particular* problem involved having to navigate the rapids when the weather was *at its worst*, rather than stating the broad issues of *being windbound* or of the rapids causing *unlucky travellers to get into trouble there*.
- (ii) Successful responses worded the writer's solution carefully – did he want *to wait*, or did he want *to leave* in the morning? Secure understanding of the narrative at this point showed that he wanted to *escape* as *early* as he could. Strong responses avoided lifting the exact words from the text, realising that *pinned my hopes* did not indicate what the writer directly wanted to do.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g):

- read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words
- check how many marks are allocated to each question
- read all of the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer
- if there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to unpack meaning
- avoid lengthy copying from the text
- carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question
- write answers in the designated spaces.

- (h) This was an ‘own words’ question. The first task was to explain the writer’s *different* feelings about the place where he camped. Successful responses avoided lifting language from the text to explain the writer’s feelings, for example *anxious* or *thankful*. Some feelings were more straightforward, for example the writer said the patch of grass *looked inviting*, showing he was *happy* or *relieved* to be there, others required more inference, for example in line 17, the writer describes the geese as *emphasising the emptiness of the landscape* indicating that he felt *lonely there on his own*. Feelings could come from any point from when he first arrived to when he wanted to leave: from being *hopeful* initially when he saw the grass, his *awe* at the mountains, to his *fears* on his first night due to the weather and subsequent *impatience* and feelings of *despair* when he couldn’t leave. The second task was to find three textual details to support the three feelings. Feelings had to be rooted in the text and credible.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences and seemed unclear as to what the task entailed. These responses were characterised by lifting, narrative and paraphrase rather than own word explanations. Some gave details alone, for example, he was *thankful to have found this spot among the rocks or trapping me*. Others listed feelings without supporting details, for example *he felt relieved he finally found a place among the rocks* gives a valid feeling but the rest is narrative, not evidence of his relief. Paraphrases should make it clear how the candidate has arrived at a feeling, for example *the writer was scared of the fierce wind blowing his tent so he hid in his sleeping bag or the writer was worried when he thought about previous travellers getting stuck by the weather on the shore*.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):

- re-read the relevant sections of the text, highlight appropriate sections which are about the character or writer’s feelings
- use own words to describe three different feelings
- choose evidence to support each feeling; this means a quotation or text detail
- look at the question wording: *different feelings*, could the writer’s feelings change over time?
- ensure supporting detail is clear and relevant and is directly quoted from the text
- prepare for this question by reading literary texts and describing the feelings of characters
- build up a vocabulary bank to describe these feelings.

Question 2

- (a) This proved a challenging question. Successful responses recognised that the writer’s feeling was particularly captured at the end of the extract in the word *possibilities*, evidence that he wants to do this. These responses demonstrated that the writer’s choice of language shows he is *excited*, *anticipates he will enjoy himself*. A significant number of responses saw the first line as indicating difficulty rather something more positive; an *amazing challenge*.
- (b) The superlative *most* is used here to show that there really isn’t an efficient route, but the writer chose the *best* route possible, or the *safest*, *simplest*, or even a *better* route than any of the others. The majority of responses identified this effectively.
- (c) In order to gain two marks for this question, responses needed to include two things. Many responses discussed the *labyrinth* image, explaining the waterways as a *maze*, and that the writer felt *it would be easy to get lost or mistake one bit of water* for another. Strong responses avoided repeating words from the text, principally *puzzling*, *challenge*, *confusing*, thereby demonstrating understanding of the impressions conveyed. Less confident responses frequently focused solely on the difficulty and complexity of the prospect, missing the inferred excitement the writer felt about facing this challenge, that he felt the difficulties and complexities would be intriguing.

- (d) This question required two different ideas and proved challenging. Successful responses pinpointed two different effects linked to the given words such as *strength*, *energy*, *power*, *violence* or *constant motion*. Many candidates successfully gave one suitable effect, often focusing on *roaring* to create the image of the water being *dangerous*. Some candidates generalised ideas of it being *scary* for the effect which did not really focus on the specific words highlighted by the question, it may have been *scary*, but how did the language used by the writer create this feeling? Some candidates repeated or rephrased the extra detail from the sentence about maintaining balance which also did not concentrate on the effects of the three particular words in the question. Where key words are highlighted from an extract in a question, candidates should respond to those words rather than the whole sentence.

Some strong responses dealt with each word separately. For *roaring* they recognized the *wild beast-like nature* of the verb, or more specifically that the noise was *loud* or *threatening*. For *swirling* they captured the image of the *relentless motion*, *surrounding* the writer, or *going in every direction in a chaotic manner*. For *foaming* they saw the water as *boiling* or *bubbling* around the writer.

- (e) The first task was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates were designated a single line in the answer space to write the example and they should not exceed this line. The key to success in this question is the choice of example, since it needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two impressions to be confidently explained. Sometimes a single word, such as *fairy-tale*, might work, but generally selecting a short sentence, part of a sentence or a phrase is advisable. The example must be the words from the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as personification, metaphor or imagery.

Choosing *the haze cleared to reveal a fairy-tale landscape* or just *fairy-tale landscape* alone, was a fruitful decision as the impression created by the writer can be made in multiple ways: *it was unreal, from a story book or a film, magical, beautiful, peaceful or too good to be true*, for example. It is important to avoid using words from the text, for example *surreal*, when explaining the impression as this does not demonstrate understanding of either the vocabulary or the connotations and associations.

Many weaker responses repeated other parts of the extract instead of explaining the impression created. This was particularly noticeable with examples depicting the age of the landscape: *old as time, drifting into this timeless world, dinosaurs roaming about, eons older and a land time forgot*. As an illustration of successful approaches to explaining an impression, a response choosing *old as time* as the example might say that *it emphasised the rock's permanence or showed they had been there since the beginning of time*. Impressions of *going back in time* or *time travelling* could explain *drifting into this timeless world or the land time forgot*. The idea that the writer felt *separated from the modern world* could explain *in a world untouched by humans, or older than before people appeared on the planet*.

Advice to candidates on Question 2(e):

- select the example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly
- consider the meaning of a word before explaining what it suggests and its effect
- think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words in your example
- zoom in on individual words within a quotation or extract rather than making general comments
- only explain the image you have chosen, not other parts of the extract
- use your own words to explain effect, do not repeat words from the text
- if a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things
- practise by looking at the effect of language in different fiction and non-fiction texts including advertisements and song lyrics.

Text B – extract from a non-fiction article about a contemporary issue

Question 3

- (a) **Summary task**

In the summary task, 10 marks are available for Reading and 10 for Writing.

Reading

The Reading mark was awarded for both the range of relevant content points from the text included, and for how effectively these points were selected and combined to address the question. Key to success in terms of the Reading mark was careful focus on the task: *the benefits and attractions of plogging*. Those who achieved higher marks focused on the task and only included aspects of the text which were about plogging, rather than about swimming or about what environmental campaigners' views. Successful responses did not describe what plogging means, where it comes from or what it involves, as the task did not require this. The most effective summaries began with the main point from the end of the text, about plogging being a *combination of looking after the environment and exercise*, thus making a relevant content point whilst presenting plogging to the reader. The best responses did not exceed 150 words, as advised, avoiding irrelevance, repetition and examples. Most candidates found the text accessible although there was confusion about the swimming idea.

A number of candidate responses showed high level reading and selection skills by re-working more difficult content points to create the correct focus for the task – for example taking the initial expression of concern for how litter can cause the *natural scenery to look unpleasant*, or even *harm wildlife*, and writing that *plogging can make the natural environment look more beautiful and help protect wildlife*. The strongest responses combined two or more key points concisely, for example *plogging is a fitness trend which keeps you healthy*, or *benefits mental and physical health or you can do it as a group or as a family and these joint efforts will make a huge difference*.

Many candidates made a smaller number of content points, filling their summaries with either repetition of the same ideas or lengthy explanations. To improve, candidates should check which of the points they have identified are effectively saying the same thing, for example the *groups* idea is expressed in several different ways throughout the text: *community action groups plogging together; get your whole community involved and plogging group*, but it only needs to be said once.

A successful summary should be concise, so candidates should focus on the key element of each point, for example saying that *plogging is beneficial to your health* without giving the examples of *heart rate, blood pressure or immune function*. There are times when the words in the text are the most efficient way of expressing an idea, for example *human body mechanics are emulated by plogging*, avoiding the unnecessary details of *our ancestors picking up food on their long walks*, whilst still re-working the text. Candidates should avoid generalising and they should replicate the precision in the original text, for example *a noticeable difference* in the text, not just *making a difference*.

One attraction of plogging identified in the majority of responses is that *plogging can be done in families*. More skilled responses indicated, in own words, that *plogging can help with family bonding* and continued succinctly with the accompanying point that *children would learn about caring for the environment*. A less frequently given attraction was that *eco-minded influencers recommend plogging*, which supports the idea of it as a popular *trend* – more thoughtful organisation could have tied this into the *fusion* idea mentioned above.

Writing

The most effective responses used candidates' own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Less successful responses re-phrased the text to such an extent that ideas were imprecise and vague. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those isolated words or collocations which are difficult to substitute economically, such as *eco-minded influencers* or *blood pressure*, but they should not copy sentence structures or complete sentences. Successful responses also re-structure the text to show understanding. For example, *do it as a family* could be reshaped as *families can plog together*. An active verb *tackle a massive problem* could be made passive: *big problems can be tackled*. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be discouraged, as these do not allow candidates to demonstrate an ability to select ideas.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas. Avoiding lengthy introductions, conclusions or explanations also helped achieve succinctness.

The strongest summaries showed an impressive clarity and fluency achieved through the use of varied original sentence structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions, as well as punctuation that was accurate and helpful. The use of linking devices in these summaries aided organisation, for example *furthermore*, *nevertheless* or *moreover*. However, where these were overused or placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, organisation was not aided.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(a)

Reading

- First read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content.
- Read the question carefully and make sure you understand the task focus.
- Re-read the text, underlining or highlighting only the ideas relevant to the task.
- Ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations and examples.
- Look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways or examples; these could be included in the summary as one main idea.
- Be aware that there may not be a relevant point in every paragraph in the text.
- There is no need to invent additional material, give your own ideas or expand on the text points.

Writing

- Organise your ideas logically so that they flow for the reader from one point to the next, this may be in a different order from the original text.
- Explain ideas in a way that someone who has not read the text themselves would understand.
- Avoid extended explanations or adding personal comments.
- Use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary.
- Do not lift whole phrases or sentences.
- Do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail.
- Write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures, avoiding errors which affect meaning.
- Use a formal writing style appropriate for the task.
- Write no more than 150 words.
- Do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

(b) Short response task

In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They have to demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question asks candidates to take the perspective of Anna Ruiz, an *environmental campaigner*, whose attitudes can be inferred from **Text B**. She gives her opinion in the fourth paragraph, beginning *However* to indicate that she feels plogging is not the answer to the *problem of litter*. There is additional material in paragraph 2 which gives the opinion of general *environmental campaigners* that we need a *multipronged effort*.

Having worked through **Question 3(a)** and already familiarised themselves with **Text B**, the strongest responses shifted perspective away from the attractions and benefits of plogging to Anna's viewpoint. To reach Level 3, responses had to identify the correct perspective supported by detail from the text, such as *the role of businesses and their customers, how and what we consume, that we shouldn't rely on other people to clear up our mess in their free time, and* develop this with inference, for example, *businesses should take more responsibility by providing bins and using more recyclable products*. A single idea or detail from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each could have some development. Many successful responses did this, developing the ideas of *businesses and their customers* alongside our need to *cut down on the amount we consume, or tougher penalties for those who litter*.

The task asked candidates to reply to a question from the audience at a talk. The question supported plogging, however, Anna's view, given in **Text B**, is that there are other *ways to improve the situation*. This is where candidates should have focused. The majority did not do this, instead

simply restating information from **Question 3(a)** in support of plogging, thus gaining no marks. Others identified Anna's words and used them to support plogging; again this could not be credited.

Less successful responses demonstrated some understanding of the correct perspective with limited inferential support, whilst the weakest responses offered either textual references by paraphrasing or lifting Anna's views as expressed in the text, or they made general inferred comments with no textual support, for example *people should clean up after themselves* demonstrating limited awareness of the appropriate attitude.

Candidates should read the question carefully, then look back through the passage, and highlight relevant sections, to help them deduce the opinion of the person they have been asked to write as. Successful responses started with Anna's views and used their own understanding to infer how she would alleviate the problem of litter, giving a consistent and relevant perspective. Full marks can be achieved with one or two ideas developed with sensible and thoughtful inference written within the designated answer space.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(b)

- Read the question carefully to locate the person whose view you need to give.
- Highlight or underline the relevant section(s) in the text where the person is mentioned, or where the task perspective is found – this may be in one or two paragraphs or spread throughout the text.
- Decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if that person would agree or disagree with the statement.
- Do not invent completely new ideas, focus on how the character would feel, give only their plausible reasons and explanations.
- Extend and develop the ideas with inference.
- Focus on the quality of your argument.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both texts closely
- read the questions and followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills required by each question, recognising that **Question 1** assesses reading comprehension and **Question 2** assesses understanding of the effect of the writer's language
- avoided unselective copying from the texts
- paid attention to the marks and space available for each question which indicate the detail needed
- made valid inferences about a character's feelings and/or opinions based on textual details for **Question 1(h)**
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(c)** and **Question 2(e)**
- used their own words when instructed
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses.

General comments

This was the first examination for the new syllabus. Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for the most part, were clearly written although occasionally illegibility hampered reading. If a response is incorrect, a line should be drawn through it. Writing over an answer which has been erased results in illegibility. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page and not write their answers on any blank page or in any blank space in the question booklet which may be easily missed.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. The first text, **Text A**, a narrative text called *Where it all began*, tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and 16 marks were allocated to this question. **Question 2** tested understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect and nine marks were allocated to this question. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each sub-question. Candidates seemed to find the text accessible with some vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

There was more success in answering **Question 1** and several candidates performed very well here, particularly for their understanding of explicit ideas. Where marks were lost it was often because own words were not used where specified, notably in **Question 1(b)** and **Question 1(h)**.

While candidates were successful in identifying explicit details in the text, making inferences often proved more challenging. This was particularly evident in **Question 1(h)**. Candidates could identify details from the text about Ahmad, but making sensible inferences about his character and how the writer felt about him based on these details proved more difficult. Candidates would benefit from further practice of reading literary texts and considering the feelings and opinions of individual characters.

Question 2 was less successfully answered. Often **Question 2** sub-questions were answered as comprehension questions rather than being considered for the effect of the language used. Candidates should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal details and consider the suggestions and connotations of words and images. **Question 2** asked for an *effect* (**Question 2(b)**), an *impression* (**Questions 2(d)** and **2(e)**) and what is being *suggested* (**Question 2(a)**). This means that

repeating or paraphrasing the words from the specified extract is insufficient for an explanation of how language works. No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective.

Question 3 was based on the shorter second text, **Text B**, *The Authentic Travel company*. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words in candidates' own words. This selective summary required candidates to gather only those key ideas relevant to the task and to do so efficiently, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)**. This meant that to reach Writing Levels 3, 4 and 5, ideas had to be communicated clearly. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. In terms of their Reading mark, candidates needed to separate irrelevant content from content which helped them fulfil the task.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. To achieve a high mark, these ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that candidates do not give lengthy introductions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 Comprehension

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A, a narrative text. These are short answers worth a total of 16 marks which test understanding of both explicit and implicit meanings.

- (a) In paragraph 1, what did the writer enjoy the most about moving the ice blocks the first time he did this?**

In **Question 1(a)**, several candidates were prompted by the key word in the question 'most' and could locate the corresponding word in the text, 'best of all...', giving either of the two possible answers: shooting the ice blocks at the kitchen wall or watching the ice blocks shatter. This first question is evidence that candidates must read the question and the relevant paragraph carefully; several responses gave the initial details about sliding or riding the slabs of ice, failing to read on to locate the correct answer.

- (b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by 'I neglected my other duties.' (line 4)**

In **Question 1(b)**, use of *own words* was necessary to evidence understanding of 'neglected' and 'duties' in context. Effective answers offered creditworthy synonyms for both words, such as 'he forgot his tasks' or 'he did not pay attention to his jobs'. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was usually the result of having explained just one aspect of the phrase, notably a meaning for 'neglect' and repeating, rather than explaining, the word 'duties'.

- (c) In paragraph 3, how did the writer feel at first about being in the ice house?
Give two details from the text to support your answer**

The first task for one mark was to infer how the writer *felt* when he was first in the ice house. Numerous responses were acceptable provided they captured a sense of enjoyment, satisfaction or relief, and a single word answer, such as 'happy', was sufficient. Not all 'positive' feelings were valid with adjectives such as 'euphoric', 'jubilant' and 'victorious' being too extreme. Several candidates lifted 'pleasant' from line 9 but while 'he was pleased' made sense, 'he was pleasant' changed the meaning. Careful reading of the question was necessary since the word 'first' was often missed by candidates who went on to state that 'he felt cold' or 'he lost confidence' – both describing how he felt later on.

The second task for two additional marks was to provide supporting *details* from the text about the outside heat and avoiding the cleaning task. These details could be copied, such as 'in pleasant contrast to the stifling heat outside', or precisely paraphrased as 'it was hot outside'. Several candidates scored full marks. If two correct supporting details were given with an incorrect feeling, only one mark was awarded since this did not evidence sufficient understanding.

(d) Explain what the writer was thinking when he leant against the door and it ‘surprisingly swung open’. (lines 13 – 14)

This inferential question required understanding of what went through the writer’s mind when the door opened. Key here is the word ‘surprisingly’, alerting candidates that this was unexpected. Thus, ‘he did not expect the door to open’, ‘he thought he was trapped’ and ‘he believed the door was locked’ were all acceptable responses. Several responses shifted the focus from ‘thinking’ to ‘feeling’ but ‘he was cold’ or ‘he was losing confidence’ were not creditworthy. Responses which focused on text details *after* the door swung opened – ‘he was surprised to see Ahmad there’ – were also incorrect.

(e) From paragraph 5, identify two techniques used by the palace kitchen cooks that the writer thought could be useful to improve the flavour of the ices he is making with Ahmad.

Candidates made use of the two bullets in the response space to present their answers efficiently and many candidates scored full marks here. Own words alternatives were also acceptable as long as they clearly conveyed the same meaning as ‘pureed fruit’ or ‘extracting the perfume of flowers’. This meant that ‘took out the scent of flowers’ was creditworthy but ‘took’ alone was not.

(f) Give two reasons why the secrets of ice had remained ‘known to few’. (line 22)

Another explicit comprehension question, **Question 1(f)**, was fairly well answered with the majority of candidates scoring at least one mark. Candidates commonly recognised that the secrets were ‘passed down between *two* families’. It was not enough to state that ‘two families supplied ices to the royal court’ since this had no relevance to ‘secrets’ so did not answer the question. Some responses went too far from the text suggesting that the suppliers kept them secret because they wanted a monopoly in frozen ice production but this was speculation not based on the text.

The second mark was often scored with a reference to Ahmad – that most of the secrets were in his head or were memorised by him. It was not enough to write ‘the secrets were known to Ahmad’ since there is no distinction here between the secrets written in his notebooks and the inaccessible secrets in his head. ‘Not all the secrets were in the notebooks’ could score, but this answer, requiring some reworking of the text, was more challenging.

(g) In paragraph 7, the writer asked Ahmad what the ices they made tasted like.

(i) What reason did the writer give Ahmad for wanting to know?

This was fairly well answered with candidates correctly identifying what the writer said to Ahmad – ‘tasting the ice would help him *better* understand ice making’, or ‘he would be able to *improve* the ices’. The additional detail from the start of the speech about cooks tasting their food was unnecessary.

(ii) Suggest the real reason the writer was asking about the taste of the ices.

To answer **Question 1(g)(ii)**, it was necessary to go back to the beginning of the paragraph to read that the writer had been making ices for two years but had never tasted one. Responses which recognised that he must be curious or simply wanted to taste an ice were correct. Some candidates noted the word ‘tempting’ in the penultimate line of the paragraph and stated that ‘he had been making ice with a *tempting* syrup’ or ‘he was *tempted* by the ice’ which were also acceptable. At this stage in the narrative, there is no evidence that the writer wants to innovate and experiment independently, nor that he wants to know all the secrets; therefore, answers which focused on these ideas were not creditworthy. It was not unusual for the answers to **(i)** and **(ii)** to be reversed. Candidates need to be very clear as to what each sub-question is asking and carefully select the appropriate text details.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g):

- Read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words.
- Check how many marks are allocated to each question.
- Read all the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer.
- If there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to unpack meaning.
- Avoid lengthy copying from the text.
- Carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question.
- Write answers in the designated spaces.

- (h) Explain using your own words the writer's different feelings and opinions about Ahmad while he was working for him.**

Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer.

Question 1(h) was a three-mark question which focused on the character of Ahmad as he is presented throughout the text. The first task was to explain in candidates' own words the writer's feelings and opinions about Ahmad. Candidates provided a range of sensible adjectives to describe him, such as 'cruel', 'boring', 'strict' and 'proud', demonstrating secure understanding. Responses could also include how Ahmad made the writer feel, such as 'scared', 'humiliated' and 'annoyed'.

The question then directed candidates to find three supporting textual details to provide evidence for three opinions and feelings about Ahmad. These details could be copied from the text or precisely paraphrased. Some examples follow:

Ahmad is proud when he says 'We are engineers, not cooks'.

Ahmad is boring because he follows the rules for making ices and does not change the recipes.

The writer is scared of Ahmad because he says 'before I dared to ask'.

Some candidates displayed an impressive range of vocabulary to describe Ahmad and the writer's feelings, supporting each one with appropriate detail from the text. To gain full marks, three different feelings and opinions had to be inferred with two or three supporting details selected from the text.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences and seemed unclear as to what the task entailed. These responses were characterised by lifting, narrative and paraphrase rather than own word explanations. For example, a response which reads 'Ahmad punished the writer by putting him in the cold ice house' is paraphrasing the events and makes no observation about the writer's feelings and opinions. The addition of 'Ahmad is strict' or 'cruel' would have made this a successful explanation.

The feelings and opinions inferred about Ahmad had to be both rooted in the text and credible. There is no evidence that Ahmad is 'competitive', that the writer 'admires' him or that Ahmad is 'kind', so these ideas were not creditworthy.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):

- Identify the parts of the text and character/s which are relevant to the question.
- Consider the different feelings/opinions of the character.
- Use own words to describe three different feelings/opinions.
- Find evidence to support each feeling/opinion; this means a quotation or text detail.
- Make sure the supporting detail is clear, relevant and not overlong.
- Prepare for this question by reading literary texts and describing the feelings of characters.
- Build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

Question 2 Use of Language

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A worth a total of nine marks relating to the author's use of language and the effect this has.

- (a) Read this sentence from the text: 'Ice crystals cracked and crunched against my teeth, dissolving on my tongue with a sparkling sensation.' (lines 38 – 39)**

What effect does the writer suggest about the sensation of the crystals dissolving on his tongue by using the word 'sparkling' to describe it?

Candidates who performed well on this question provided two effects of the use of the word 'sparkling', noting that two marks were available. The focus was on the 'sensation', that is the feeling and not the taste, and candidates needed to consider the connotations of this single word in context. Answers included the physical feeling of the ice in his mouth – the way it 'tingled', 'tickled', or 'fizzed' – or the general effect of 'pleasure', 'enjoyment' or 'astonishment' caused by experiencing something so unfamiliar, even 'magical'. However, words like 'stung' or 'prickled' suggested discomfort so were not appropriate for describing an enjoyable experience. References to images of electricity or fireworks were not clear enough. Most

responses which failed to score marks recycled the words in the extract or provided a general paraphrase describing the coldness and the ice dissolving. In such questions where the effect of a single word is required, candidates need to consider the connotations and associations of that *one word* in context.

- (b) Read this extract from the text: ‘But, once I’d got over the initial strangeness, I found I could not forget that extraordinary flavour, nor the cold, frozen grittiness. It was as if the ice itself was enticing, daring me on. From then on, without Ahmad knowing, I tasted every ice confection we made.’ (lines 43 – 46)**

What does the writer want to suggest to the reader at this point in the story

The *effect* of this extract is not that the writer is growing to like the ices or that he cannot forget them and is tasting them in secret since these are narrative details. Significantly, ‘at this point in the story’ the narrative is changing: it is a turning point; the writer is becoming more rebellious, taking risks and acting independently; he is becoming addicted to the ices so there is no turning back; if Ahmad finds out, the consequences will be serious and the writer will be in trouble.

The most common correct answer came from candidates who identified that the writer was ‘obsessed’, ‘addicted’ and ‘could not resist the ices’. A few candidates also noted that there was a ‘rebelliousness’ appearing and that the writer was ‘no longer under the control of Ahmad’. While some candidates scored with acceptable structural terminology recognising it as a ‘turning point’, it was incorrect to describe ‘this point in the story’ as a ‘climax’. Marks were often lost when responses tended to paraphrase or recycle the extract.

- (c) Explain why the writer uses the word ‘creature’ rather than ‘boy’ in the expression ‘a creature incapable of reason.’ (line 48)**

Nearly all candidates recognised the negative connotations of ‘creature’ as opposed to ‘boy’. Some explanations correctly stated that the writer felt he was no more than ‘an animal’ to Ahmad. That he was ‘inhuman’ or ‘lacking rational’ or ‘intelligent thought’ were also correct. The suggestions of ‘inferiority’ and ‘worthlessness’ as well as Ahmad’s ‘scorn’ for the writer could also score. However, answers which described the writer as ‘just a worker’ or ‘a tool’ had moved too far from the creature image, as did general responses which stated that the writer ‘was treated badly’.

- (d) What two impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader in the sentence:**

‘And so I learnt the subtle art of more complex water ices: ‘sorbetti’, in which the syrups themselves were frozen, transforming magically to mounds of glittering crystals; and ‘sherbets’, the most difficult and enchanting of all, expertly infused with fragrant cardamom, and resembling refrozen snow.’ (lines 50 – 53)?

Two different ideas drawn from anywhere in the extract could score. For example, the extract tells us that ice making is an ‘art’ and is ‘complex’, reinforced by the detailed description of the way ices are made. Successful candidates recognised the ‘skill’ and ‘mastery’ needed to create the ice and gave this impression in their own words, thus demonstrating secure understanding. ‘Ices were hard to make’ was another way to capture this idea. Similarly, the extract tells us that the ices are ‘enchanting’ and look like ‘glittering crystals’. The impression created by these words is that ‘the ices are beautiful’, ‘fascinating’ or ‘mesmerising’. Candidates are advised to read the extract carefully and consider words or phrases which create an idea or an impression. This means looking at the effect of these words and phrases rather than narrating what is happening in the extract or repeating the words of the text.

- (e) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to convey his feelings once he begins his double life, in this extract from the text:**

‘So began a period in which I lived a double life. By day, I followed Ahmad’s instructions dutifully. But by night I was a kind of alchemist, the kitchen my laboratory as I experimented wildly, without method or purpose, trying increasingly outlandish and ridiculous combinations of flavours and ingredients. I froze soft cheeses, vegetable juices, even soups, hoping to chance on something – some method, some key – something that could unlock the deepest, frozen secrets of ice cream.’ (lines 61 – 66)

Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.

Example

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write this example and quotations should not exceed this line. Many examples were carefully selected, such as 'By night I was an alchemist' or 'unlock the deepest frozen secrets', but too often the example selected was excessively long. An example must be carefully chosen since it needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two ideas to be confidently explained. For example, not much could be said about the quotations 'flavours and ingredients' or 'I froze soft cheeses' so these would be unwise choices. Sometimes a single image, such as 'alchemist', might work, but generally selecting a short sentence, part of a sentence or a phrase is advisable. Ellipses and line references were sometimes offered but these are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be the words in the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as personification.

Explanation

There were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected examples and two marks were available for this part of the question. An explanation had to be written in candidates' own words to demonstrate secure understanding. Many candidates scored at least one mark for the explanation.

Successful explanations focused firmly on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the quotation. For example, some candidates who selected 'I was an alchemist' likened the writer to a scientist hoping to create something new – thus concisely providing two ideas for two marks. Understanding the meaning of a key word is an effective starting point for understanding an effect of that word. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very good explanations was 'as I experimented wildly' with candidates commenting on his zeal and enthusiasm as well as his freedom from the rules – again, two clear observations scoring two marks. Both these examples demonstrate the effective practice of candidates zooming in on individual words ('alchemist' and 'wildly') and thinking about what each one suggests. It is this close analysis which is key to success.

There is no credit for naming technical language features such as 'metaphor', but credit can be given for an explanation which successfully describes the effect of a feature. For example, one candidate noted the repetition in their chosen example – 'something – some method – some key – something' – and went on to explain that 'the repetition shows he's really desperate and keeps trying until he discovers the answer'.

Less successful explanations were characterised by a repetition of the language from the extract or by narrative details such as 'the writer is like an alchemist working in the kitchen trying combinations of flavours'.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- Select the **Question 2(e)** example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly.
- Consider the meaning of a word before considering how to explain what it suggests and its effect.
- Think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words.
- Zoom in on individual words within a quotation or extract rather than making general comments.
- Use your own words to explain effect.
- If a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things.
- Practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

Section B

Question 3

(a) Summary task

Summarise what Bob Hunter thinks would appeal to customers booking a holiday with his travel company, according to Text B.

You must use continuous writing (not note form).

Use your own words as far as possible.

Avoid copying long sections of the text.

Your summary should be no more than 150 words.

In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for Reading and 10 for Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: what would appeal to customers booking a holiday with Bob Hunter's travel company. Successful responses focused on the task and selected a wide range of relevant points and *used* these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material and sensibly ignored the details about Bob Hunter's early life, black-hole resorts and a cruise to Antarctica – all of which were irrelevant to the task. Candidates appeared to find the text accessible although some confused the details about cruising and a trip to Borneo, presuming that Bob Hunter's company offered these. An unnecessary amount of space was devoted to what the travel company did *not* offer – 'dingy' places to stay, being off-grid, sitting by a hotel pool and unreliable water supply – and these responses lost focus on the question resulting in irrelevance and making a mark at Level 4 or Level 5 difficult to achieve. The details in the text needed to be *used* carefully.

Some content points were easily identified by most candidates. These more accessible points included clean hotels, the opportunity to experience different cultures, the choice of global destinations and the provision of food-focused holidays. Some points challenged candidates but a number of responses demonstrated high level reading and selection skills. For example, the text tells us about things which prohibit people from travelling: concern about safety and organising healthcare; however, these ideas needed to be reworked to correctly state that Bob Hunter's company prioritised safety and organised healthcare. Careful reading was also needed to differentiate between solo travel and Bob Hunter's group travel. No credit could be given to candidates who discussed the appeal of solo travel. Instead, focus needed to be on the advantages Authentic Travel provides the solo traveller – that the company's flexible timetable allows them to join a group when they wish.

Stronger responses demonstrated attention to detail, recognising that it was not just the provision of guides which would appeal since guides are often a part of group tours, but the appeal was that these guides were *local* so would be knowledgeable about the location. Similarly, many tour companies offer group tours but it is the appeal of being in a *small* group which makes Authentic Travel stand out.

Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as 'local guides' or 'special interest holidays', but they should not be copying sentence structures or whole sentences. 'Own words' also means restructuring the text to show understanding.

Some candidates copied significant stretches of the text and occasionally there was little which could be assessed as original writing or reworking. This meant that they could not achieve above Level 1 or Level 2. However, most candidates were aware of the need to use their own vocabulary where possible and candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives such as 'quality accommodation' for 'hotels and guesthouses that are clean and comfortable'. Ornate and obscure vocabulary choices are to be avoided. Phrases such as 'entranced by the ethereal charm of the hotel' lack the formality and clarity needed for a concise summary style.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas such as in 'small group travel in many countries...' or 'activities requiring a group are cheaper'. Avoiding lengthy introductions and conclusions also helped achieve concision.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, achieved by the use of varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions and punctuation that was accurate and helpful. These summaries were well-crafted and well organised with appropriate linking devices such as 'moreover', 'nevertheless' and 'likewise' correctly used to guide the reader through the summary. Candidates should aim to write formally in **Question 3(a)**. This means avoiding phrases such as 'in the same vein', 'on the flip side' or 'on top of that'. Level 3 responses also demonstrated use of adverbial connectives such as 'furthermore' and 'in addition' to shape the content, though when overused

and placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, these did not necessarily aid organisation. At the lower levels, summaries lacked clarity due to errors in grammar, awkward expression and little evidence of shaping the content.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(a):

Reading

- First read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content.
- Read the question and make sure that you understand the task.
- Re-read the text, underlining or highlighting the words and phrases which are relevant to the task.
- Ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations and examples.
- Do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content.
- Look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways or examples; these repeated ideas or examples could be included in the summary as one main idea.

Writing

- Organise your ideas logically so that they flow for the reader from one point to the next, this may be in a different order from the original text.
- If points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision.
- Use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary.
- Do not lift whole phrases or sentences.
- Do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail.
- Write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures.
- Use a formal writing style.
- Write no more than 150 words.
- Do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

(b) Short response task

Imagine you are someone who lives in a city and has recently been on holiday at a 'black-hole resort'. You really enjoyed your stay.

You are asked to give feedback about your holiday in a survey.

Give your answer to the survey question, using information from the text.

The survey question: Some people think that a holiday at a 'black-hole resort' would be boring.

What is your opinion and why?

In this short opinion-based task candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They have to demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question makes it clear *whose* perspective the candidates are to take: someone who lives in the city and has recently been on holiday at a black-hole resort. The question also informs candidates of the perspective of this person: they *'enjoyed (their) stay'*. This means their opinion about black-hole resorts is *positive*.

This question is testing reading skills. It is about black-hole resorts and not a holiday with Authentic Travel, Bob Hunter's company. The relevant information about black-hole resorts is confined to paragraph 6. Here we read that black-hole resorts are aimed at 'busy city people' like the individual in **Question 3(b)**. Candidates who performed well on this question returned to the text and considered what a city person might enjoy about a black-hole resort. In paragraph 6, we are given several negatives about a black-hole resort, such as it is 'off-grid', there is 'nothing' to do and 'mobile phones rarely work', but successful candidates reworked and developed these ideas to give positive opinions: 'not using my phone was a digital detox and improved my mental health'; 'being off-grid made it more of an adventure and made me appreciate what I take for granted in the city'.

To reach Level 3, a response had to include the correct perspective supported by detail from the text, such as 'at a black-hole resort I did nothing for a week' and develop this with inference: 'it was a relaxing break from my chaotic city life. It brought me close to nature and I could just slow down'. A single idea or detail

from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each one could have some inferential development.

Level 2 responses were characterised by some understanding of the positives of a black-hole resort and two or three marks could be scored by identifying details in paragraph 6; for example: 'It was great not to have my phone working and I enjoyed doing nothing for a week. Being off grid was not a problem either'. Level 2 responses were not always fully secure in their understanding of the text, often including details about experiencing different cultures or taking part in activities – clearly getting mixed up with an Authentic Travel group holiday and forgetting that key to a black-hole resort is doing 'nothing'. Thus, these responses, while being generally relevant, lacked the consistent viewpoint needed for Level 3.

Level 1 responses showed some awareness of why a city person might enjoy staying at a black-hole resort, for example, 'it was relaxing', but many of these responses described an activity-based holiday or touched on the idea that a black-hole resort was boring.

Many candidates misread the question, omitting to read 'you really *enjoyed* your stay' and that the survey was asking for feedback 'about *your* holiday'. Opinions which agreed that a black-hole resort was boring gained no marks. Similarly, responses which confused a black-hole resort with another type of holiday throughout, were awarded 0.

Seven lines are designated for answering this question. Full marks can be achieved with one or two ideas developed with sensible and thoughtful inference written within the designated answer space. Introductions are unnecessary.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(b):

- Read the question carefully to locate the person whose perspective you need to identify with.
- Highlight or underline relevant section(s) in the text where the person is mentioned.
- Decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question.
- State an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text.
- Extend and develop the ideas with inference.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21
Writing

Key messages

- In **Section A**, candidates should read both of the given texts thoroughly, evaluate the arguments made and respond to the views expressed, taking care to use their own words when selecting ideas from the texts.
- In **Section A**, candidates should pay close attention to the required format and ensure that they show awareness of this throughout their response, adopting a suitable tone and register for the given audience and purpose.
- When responding to their chosen **Section B** question, candidates should ensure that they use features appropriate to the type of writing selected and be mindful of organising their writing for deliberate effect.
- In **Section B**, when choosing **Questions 2 or 3**, candidates should maintain a focus on description, avoid slipping into narrative, and should consider using present tense to make descriptions more immediate and immersive. If **Questions 4 or 5** are chosen, candidates should ensure plots are fully developed using a narrative structure.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- Candidates are advised to check that tenses are consistent and to be careful with spelling and punctuation.
- Candidates are encouraged to proof-read their work for meaning and accuracy.
- Candidates are advised to adhere to the suggested wordcounts for each section.

General comments

- This was the first examination for the new syllabus. Short or incomplete responses were extremely rare.
- The best responses demonstrated highly accurate writing and a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Candidates' use of vocabulary was impressive, with many responses featuring a wide range of lexis appropriately employed.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors include confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and a lack of full stops and commas to punctuate sentences.
- Performance on **Section A** was strong overall, but more practice on developing arguments would be of benefit to candidates.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section B** questions; all candidates seemingly found a topic they were interested in writing about.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Directed Writing

Question 1

This question required candidates to respond to two texts which gave different opinions on the value of homework. The task assessed candidates' Reading skills, for which they could achieve a maximum of 10 marks, and their Writing skills for which 15 marks were available.

Candidates were asked to write a letter to their school principal about whether or not they thought that homework should be banned. The context was clearly a familiar one to candidates, all of whom will have had experience of doing homework as part of their school education.

Almost all responses showed an awareness of the conventions required of a formal letter, including an appropriate salutation and valediction. Most letters were appropriately formal in tone and register and ended with a polite request that the principal consider their views when making a final decision. Candidates were not required to include addresses in their letters.

The question bullet points required candidates to:

- evaluate the ideas and opinions in **both** texts
- give their own views about the proposed ban, based on what they have read in the texts.

A strong performance on Reading was characterised by evidence of engagement with the ideas in each text and an evaluation of these ideas. In order to achieve marks in the higher levels, a range (Level 4) or wide range (Level 5) of ideas from the texts must be considered, as instructed in the first of the question bullet points. Responses needed to refer explicitly to several ideas made by both Hazeema and Jianyu in order to achieve marks in the higher levels for Reading. While there does not need to be a balance across the two texts, consideration of ideas from **both** texts is a requirement of the question. Some candidates clearly favoured the arguments made in one of the texts and so only touched on those made in the second text. A few candidates chose one idea (e.g. access to the internet being a problem) and wrote about this at great length rather than considering a range of ideas. Both approaches limited performance on Reading.

Most responses did include a range of ideas with responses typically including ideas from Hazeema about homework taking up time and it being unhealthy to study for too long as well as the points made by Hazeema that some students do not have a quiet space to work, parental support or access to the internet. From Jianyu's text, responses commonly referred to the fact that homework is helpful for teachers and students to check understanding, that it helps parents to know what their children are learning and that it can help children to develop vital life skills. The pure listing of ideas without any expansive detail, however, was not a successful approach; the best responses developed each idea referred to and included some evaluation of those ideas.

A large majority of responses included development of at least some ideas in the texts and so achieved Reading Level 3. Development was often achieved by referring to a candidate's own experience of doing homework or by offering solutions to some of the problems raised by Hazeema, e.g. doing homework in her bedroom if the living room was noisy. The idea of students not having access to the internet was typically developed with the suggestion that this would make it difficult for them to complete research tasks. The idea of how homework helps parents support a child's learning was developed by explaining how it could strengthen the bond between parent and child.

Although it was acceptable for candidates to lift isolated words from the texts, it was important that they used their own words as much as possible to demonstrate understanding of the meaning of the ideas presented in the given texts. There were some good examples of candidates putting the ideas from the texts into their own words, with the use of synonyms and effective paraphrasing. However, some responses included phrases or whole sentences which had been directly lifted from the texts. As well as affecting the Reading mark, this could also impact on writing performance as it meant missed opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their linguistic range and be credited for this in the Writing mark.

The key factor in whether or not candidates achieved Level 4 or Level 5 for Reading was whether or not they evaluated the ideas in each of the given texts. Evaluation meant offering judgement on the validity of the ideas expressed by Hazeema and Jianyu. This sometimes came in the form of an agreement or disagreement with an idea and a justification. In other cases, evaluation took the form of an explanation of why one idea was the most important, or a statement of how one idea outweighed another, e.g. writing 'While Hazeema is correct that homework takes a lot of time, it is still valuable as it teaches important skills, as Jianyu points out.' Another valid approach to evaluation took the form of signalling potential bias in the ideas of the two writers, e.g. pointing out that Hazeema was younger and so might be less mature than Jianyu and so less likely to see the importance of homework.

It was important that candidates rooted their responses in ideas from the given texts. Some candidates gave their own ideas about whether homework should be banned but did not include many (or occasionally any) ideas from the texts. This had a significant impact on the mark that could be awarded for Reading. While the second bullet point in **Question 1** asked for candidates' own views, the first bullet point required an examination of the views expressed in the texts. Candidates would benefit from reading each of the two texts very carefully and taking time to note down or underline the points they wish to refer to from each text.

The most successful responses offered evaluative comment and development throughout, often comparing and contrasting the ideas in the texts, e.g. 'While homework may be time-consuming, it's an excellent way for teachers to know how students are doing.' Many responses expressed an opinion on the proposed ban in the conclusion only and in so doing provided little evaluation, though this was successfully achieved where the opinion was explicitly linked to ideas from the text(s), e.g. 'I do not agree with Jianyu that homework helps candidates to improve their skills as many students will copy from the internet.'

Most responses demonstrated good writing skills and included relevant content that was often developed and effective. Structure was generally secure with responses considering the advantages and disadvantages of the ban in turn and the strongest among them combining and assimilating ideas effectively. Sentence structures were generally accurate and this included the use of complex sentences. There were sometimes issues with sentence separation in weaker responses with commas being used instead of full stops.

Candidates usually managed to write in a suitably formal tone for a letter to the school principal although there were a few responses that used inappropriately informal expressions such as 'wanna' and others that used exclamation marks that were not appropriate for this task.

With reference to spelling, punctuation and grammar, spelling was generally strong, with confusion of homophones being the most common error. Errors were commonly seen in words like *there* and *their*, *too* and *to* and *your* and *you're*. By contrast many responses included a wide vocabulary and demonstrated an impressive ability to spell difficult words correctly. There was often appropriate use of idiomatic expression, though this was overused in some cases, thus reducing overall coherence and flow of the response. Some responses over relied on words from the given texts and so could receive little credit for range of vocabulary.

Grammar was often the weakest area and there were frequent errors in the use of tenses and articles. These errors made some responses difficult to understand. Punctuation was generally accurate, and paragraphing was a strength in most responses. Some responses included errors of capitalisation, in particular using the lower case 'i' when referring to the first-person pronoun.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to proofread their work carefully to help them identify and correct errors. Spending five minutes checking their writing after each task would increase the Writing mark for most candidates.

Section B: Composition

Two marks are awarded for **Section B** responses. The first mark is for Composition, Content and Structure; how effectively the candidate responds to the task, including the use of descriptive and narrative features and the clarity of the structure and how this is organised for effect.

There is a wide range of descriptive and narrative features that candidates can be credited for. Descriptive features include the use of the senses, contrast, use of figurative language such as similes and metaphors and the use of sound devices such as onomatopoeia and alliteration. Narrative features include a clearly established setting, development of character, control of time frame through, for example flashbacks, and an effective climax to a story.

It is important to note that responses which include numerous descriptive or narrative features will not necessarily achieve a high mark. The key point is how effectively these features are used to add detail and to bring descriptions or narratives to life.

The second mark awarded in **Section B** is for Style and Accuracy. This mark is awarded for the quality of a candidate's writing in terms of their use of sentence structure and vocabulary and the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Candidates are rewarded for using a wide range of sentence structures accurately, the effective use of a wide range of vocabulary and for accuracy in their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The vast majority of candidates wrote complete **Section B** responses. A few candidates did write very brief responses though and this suggested that they had perhaps spent too much time on **Question 1**. There were also some candidates who wrote very long responses that went far beyond the recommended 350 to 450 words. It often proved difficult for candidates to sustain linguistic control of their responses and this could lead to a lack of cohesion and an increased error count.

Question 2

Describe two different places where you and your family like to go, one of which is exciting and one of which is relaxing.

This descriptive task proved fairly popular, with responses demonstrating a level of engagement with the topic. There were a wide variety of locations described, including beauty spots such as Victoria Falls, tourist destinations such as Dubai and leisure facilities such as spas and restaurants. A few responses included a description of only one place and as such missed the opportunity to demonstrate skills in describing contrasting locations.

The best responses employed the full range of senses to give accounts of the surroundings of the candidate's choice of places and made effective use of detail to bring the places they were describing to life. Stronger responses included detailed appropriate description of the venue, people, clothes, entertainment, and food. Vocabulary was often very impressive and included words like *adrenaline*, *luxurious* and *tranquil*. Successful use of contrast between the places was also a feature of strong responses.

Less successful responses typically listed what visitors could see or do in a place, rather than describing them. The focus of this task should be on description, rather than on listing possible activities or facilities or on a narrative about what the candidate and their family do there. The control of tenses was a weakness in some compositions. The present tense was used well by most but in some cases, the present and past tenses were used inconsistently.

Question 3

Describe the scene at a market or bazaar just before it opens and during the busiest part of the day.

The second descriptive task was addressed well in many responses: Indeed, there were some very memorable descriptions of busy markets that seemed to descend into chaos as the day went on. A strong response included precise and appropriate language to describe the market in the early morning, usually showing how quiet and peaceful it was before the traders and customers arrived and contrasted this with a description of the market in the afternoon at the busiest time.

Some candidates produced very strong responses, using evocative adjectives and detailed descriptions. They included people's reactions to the market and zoomed in on descriptions of individual stalls and sellers. As with **Question 2**, weaker responses tended to be quite general, listing information about what was sold in the market, or narratives about what the candidate did there without offering much in the way of actual description. A few responses omitted to write about the market at two different times of day and so missed the opportunity to bring contrast into their responses.

Question 4

Write a story in which a message was not given to the correct person.

There was a very wide range of responses to **Question 4**, and some imaginative reasons for a message being given to the wrong person and its consequences. Romantic misunderstandings were common, with love letters being delivered to the wrong person, as were crime stories where a crime went wrong due to a message being given to someone who was not supposed to know about it.

Stronger responses established a solid scenario as well as a strong sense of the characters in the story and how they were affected by events. A strong ending typically featured a logical consequence and reaction. The best responses were often rooted in the candidates' direct experience of school or home life, rather than being about rather more abstract, unrealistic or fanciful scenarios.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'It was clear that time was running out, so we had to try something different.'

This was the most popular of all of the **Section B** tasks. Candidates were able to use the sentence in a variety of ways and many wrote well-crafted stories which engaged the reader. The sentence could be added at any point in the story, with most candidates using it to provide a plot twist at the end.

There were lots of stories about bank robberies, parents coming home unexpectedly during an unauthorised party or health-related emergencies, for example where someone had an accident during a hiking trip. Many of these narratives were very well-constructed, with candidates often making effective use of narrative features such as flashbacks, and of a deliberate repetition of details from the start of the narrative at the end. A number of responses included excellent use of dialogue and some candidates managed to provide an effective plot twist at the end of their story.

Less successful responses could be confusing as the narrative structure was sometimes difficult to follow. Another feature of weaker responses was a lack of development of character and weak narrative beginnings and endings.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22
Writing

Key messages

- In **Section A**, candidates should take care to use their own words when selecting ideas from the given texts.
- In **Section A**, candidates should pay close attention to the required format and ensure that they show awareness of this throughout their response, adopting a suitable tone and register for the given audience and purpose.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the majority of responses.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and more varied punctuation (colons, semi-colons, brackets, question marks and exclamation marks) would raise the level of most responses.
- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible and that where material is crossed out, a line should be drawn through it neatly.
- Candidates should be encouraged to plan their responses using, for example, bullet points or mind maps, rather than writing and then rewriting the whole response.
- When responding to their chosen **Section B** question, candidates should ensure that they use features appropriate to the type of writing selected and be mindful of organising their writing for deliberate effect.
- Candidates should ensure that they number their **Section B** response appropriately to indicate which question has been chosen, rather than using a number 2 to denote movement to the second section of the exam.
- In **Section B**, when choosing **Questions 2 or 3**, candidates should maintain a focus on description, avoid slipping into narrative, and should consider using present tense to make descriptions more immediate and immersive. If **Questions 4 or 5** are chosen, candidates should ensure plots are fully developed using a narrative structure.
- When writing dialogue, care should be taken to ensure that this is punctuated and formatted correctly.

General comments

This was the first examination for the new syllabus. Short or incomplete responses were extremely rare. Presentation continued to be an issue for some candidates, particularly with regards to multiple crossings out, which made assessment more difficult. Some responses far exceeded the indicative word count; this must be discouraged as it frequently leads to less focused (and therefore less successful) pieces. Rather than using their time to produce over-long responses, candidates should be encouraged to focus on crafting a response which shows control and accuracy.

Candidates responded well to the requirement of Reading in **Section A**, with the vast majority selecting at least a sufficient range of relevant ideas from the given texts and offering some development of these. A significant number of candidates moved beyond this, producing a developed and effective response which combined ideas from the texts and showed very good understanding of purpose and clear awareness of the situation, while some produced content which was complex, well-organised and assimilated a wide range of ideas which were thoughtfully and consistently developed and evaluated. While most candidates followed the instruction to base their speech on what they had read in **both** texts, some limited the mark they were able to achieve by considering the ideas from just one of the two texts.

In **Section B**, the Narrative titles (**Questions 4 and 5**) proved the most popular, with **Question 5** the most frequently attempted. **Question 2** (the first of the Descriptive titles) was the least frequently attempted by candidates this session.

Candidates were able to produce responses which, in terms of length, were close to, or surpassed, the increased indicative word count for the new syllabus, indicating that time management was not an issue. However, candidates should ensure they focus on the quality of their response, rather than producing over-long pieces which lack the necessary features of structure and organisation.

Section A

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The vast majority of candidates responded well to the topic of the paper which linked to environmental issues with which they were clearly familiar. Candidates clearly had the necessary vocabulary (such as ‘extinction’, ‘habitat’, ‘life span’, ‘breeding programmes’) at their disposal.

The given ‘Good morning, everyone,’ was used by the majority of candidates to signal awareness of the required text type from the outset, with variations such as ‘My dear classmates’ and the addition of an exclamation mark to the given phrase (‘Good morning, everyone!’) helping to convey an enthusiastic tone. Many provided an introductory paragraph outlining the purpose and referencing the audience through phrases such as ‘We have all been on a visit to the zoo’, ‘Do you remember the last time you visited the zoo?’ or ‘I am here today to talk to you all about whether or not zoos should be banned’. Some responses sustained this awareness of audience through the use of rhetorical questions inviting the audience to consider/empathise with the animals’ experience, for example ‘How would you feel if you were taken away from your family and confined to a cage for the rest of your life?’, or by beginning paragraphs with phrases such as ‘My dear fellows’ or ‘Respected classmates’. The majority of responses adopted a suitable level of formality for the given context, however less formal and less appropriate phrases such as ‘you guys’ crept into some responses.

In an attempt to signal a speech format, some responses included bracketed directions such as ‘(taking a sip of water)’, ‘(pause for applause)’ or ‘(adjusts mic)’; these are not necessary. It is also not necessary for candidates to use speech marks at the beginning and end of their responses. A number of responses ended with inspirational quotes such as ‘If animals could speak, mankind would cry’ and ‘Always an angel, never a god’ which were not entirely relevant to the task.

Awareness of the specified situation was good, with most responses offering an introductory paragraph which outlined the reason for the speech – and some acknowledging that this was part of the class debate specified in the question – before picking out a range of ideas from the texts and then providing a conclusion with their personal opinion on the issue of whether or not zoos should be banned.

Development tended to come in the form of additional information provided on individual ideas as the candidates moved through their response, while some offered a penultimate paragraph of development, often considering an alternative to zoos which would address some of the issues raised by Text B.

Different approaches to organisation were seen with some responses dealing with the ideas in one text, then the second text before offering a conclusion, while others paired ideas from the two texts side by side, setting linked ideas against each other. Some stronger responses synthesised the different viewpoints as a way of providing counter arguments when evaluating – this was often effective.

Some responses adopted the approach of mentioning the blog posts specifically, for example, ‘Santina says ...’ and ‘On the other hand, Raj suggests ...’ with some prefacing their discussions by outlining which side of the debate each writer is on: ‘Santina focuses on the positives of zoos’; ‘Raj looks at the negatives’. Other responses went beyond this, mentioning the fact that Santina is more focused on the positives for humans while Raj is more concerned with the perspective of the animals. An alternative approach was not to directly reference the blog posts, but rather use phrases such as ‘Some argue that’ and ‘On the other hand, some people believe’. Both of these approaches produced successful responses.

There were some responses in which the key question, as to whether zoos should be banned, was not answered, but in the majority of cases, a firm conclusion was given.

Section A: Reading

In **Section A**, candidates were required to read the given texts from which ideas and opinions were to be selected and subsequently developed and evaluated within a speech to their peers about whether or not zoos should be banned. The majority of responses selected a sufficient number of relevant ideas from the texts and offered development of some or all of these, however, there were a number of responses which did not offer any evaluation and, as such, were precluded from attaining marks in Levels 4 and 5.

There were some good examples of candidates putting the ideas from the texts into their own words, with the use of synonyms. However, some responses included short phrases or whole sentences which had been directly lifted from the texts. A small number of candidates copied wholesale the two texts 'bookended' with a brief introduction and a conclusion offering their opinion on whether or not zoos should be banned. While these cases were rare, candidates should be reminded that they must follow the instruction of the paper and use their own words when selecting ideas from the given texts.

Responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the content of the two texts, though there was some confusion over the use of 'overcrowded' in Text B, with some having understood this to relate to the number of visitors to the zoo, rather than the number of animals kept in close confinement.

It was clear that many candidates had understood that evaluation required offering judgement of an idea present in the texts either by suggesting prioritization of one idea over another, or dismissal of an idea. A significant number of responses featured effective evaluative phrases such as 'In my opinion', 'one of the biggest issues', 'the most important concern', 'It is certainly true', 'I cannot deny', 'we cannot completely ignore the fact' and 'It is claimed'. A large number of responses featured evaluative rhetorical questions ('How would you feel if you were imprisoned without having committed any crime?') and emotive vocabulary, which implied evaluation, (for example, 'in this endless **torture**, animals prefer death than to keep dreaming of the vast lands of Africa', 'little do they know that their money pays for the tears of **innocent** animals, '**horrendous** conditions' etc.) to good effect.

Development was offered in the form of an example or information additional to an idea from one of the given texts. This often took the form of a viable alternative to zoos, such as a safari park, or personal experience to support an idea, for example, 'My grandfather and my baby cousin both loved our recent visit to the zoo' (developing the idea of the zoo as a great day out for all ages). We also saw examples of development of an evaluation, for example, 'The daily routines of animals in zoos and animals in nature are completely different, actually. According to the documentary 'The Green Planet' filmed by the BBC, wild animals are awake four more hours than animals in zoos on average.' or 'Good zoos whose main goal is to protect animals have trained professionals taking care of the animals, but bad or unqualified zoos do not. So, instead of banning all zoos, let's ban the unqualified ones.' In the first example, we have evaluation of the idea that zoos affect animals' behaviour, with the use of 'actually' signalling evaluation. The evaluation is then developed with the mention of a documentary which proves that animals' behaviour is changed when in a zoo. The second example picks up on the idea of staff who lack specialist knowledge from Text B and suggests that this is not true for all zoos. The development here is an alternative to banning all zoos, the point brought out by the evaluation.

A number of candidates, despite clearly being adept at evaluation, focused on only one or two ideas from the texts and, as such, limited the Level they were able to access. Candidates should be reminded that to achieve marks in the higher levels, a range (Level 4) or wide range (Level 5) of ideas from the texts must be considered and while there does not need to be a balance across the two texts, consideration of ideas from **both** texts is a requirement of the question.

A number of responses listed all the points from each text followed by a brief summary at the end, usually prefaced with the phrase 'in a nutshell'. Candidates would benefit from some guidance in blending and combining points with development and evaluation. The most successful responses evaluated specific ideas throughout the speech, for example, 'Zoos give scientists the opportunity to study animal behaviour. However, as these animals are not in their natural environment, how valid can their findings be?' In this example, the response would have been improved with some development, for example, a personal experience or a specific animal affected by zoos.

Candidates should be encouraged to avoid repeating points from given texts but rather to interpret and expand on these points with personal insights and original thought. Approaching the question using a clear structure (for example: Point, Development, Evaluation) will support candidates in achieving this. Development of points (extracted from the texts) could be enhanced by including examples from wider reading on, or personal experience of, societal issues.

Section A: Writing

Candidates are strongly encouraged to check their work thoroughly as marks are frequently lost through carelessness, particularly in the use of verbs, tenses, articles and agreement. A wide range of vocabulary was in evidence in some responses, however, there is a lack of precision in the use of this more ambitious vocabulary. The use of inappropriate idiom was widespread with popular examples including 'Zoos are not all sunshine and rainbows', 'Every rose has its thorn' and idiomatic phrases such as 'Let's dive into the issue of

zoos'. Frequently observed grammatical errors included the incorrect use of the apostrophe for the plural 'zoos' (written as 'zoo's'), the omission of definite/indefinite articles when using the word 'zoo' ('A trip to zoo is educational', 'I have visited zoo where lots of animals were kept together in one cage and they were obviously unhappy.') and omission of the definite article when using the word 'majority' ('Majority of zoos are overcrowded.').

Paragraphing was generally good in **Section A**, with most candidates producing as a minimum an introduction, a paragraph on the ideas in each text and a conclusion. There was effective use of enumerators ('Firstly', 'secondly', etc.) and a range of accurately used connectives ('However', 'moreover', 'in addition' and so on) to signal movement through the argument.

Performance on spelling was generally strong, although a significant number of responses misspelled 'whether' and 'environment' despite these words being in the question and Text A respectively. A number of candidates used invented words, for example 'conflictional', 'ethicality', 'capitalistic' and 'exhausperated' among others, or made the wrong vocabulary choice with empathic/empathetic/emphatic, ethnic/ethic/ethical, distinction/extinction and providence/provision/provincial proving particularly problematic. An error often observed was the pluralised 'staff' with the inflectional s morpheme ('staffs') added. Correct use of 'there'/'their'/'they're' is a source of difficulty for some candidates.

With regards to punctuation, many responses accurately used full stops, although comma splicing was widely observed. Commas were generally accurately used following conjunctive adverbs at the start of paragraphs, however, they were often missing when the conjunctive adverb was in the middle of the sentence. A significant number of candidates used commas accurately within a list. Very few candidates used semi-colons and, where these were seen, their use was often inaccurate. Candidates should be encouraged to ensure that they include the full range of punctuation marks, as well as a range of simple, compound and complex sentences in their responses as this will help them to access marks in the higher levels for Writing.

Section B

Comments on specific questions

Question 2

Describe the scene at an important cultural event both before it starts and during the event.

Eid and weddings were popular topics, with some lively and engaging responses using vivid descriptions of the food, noise, colours, costumes etc. to bring the occasion to life. However, some responses were not specific and referred simply to 'a cultural event' throughout.

There were some very effective and enlightening descriptions with candidates vividly describing the scene before and during the event, using well-crafted images and sensory details to create a rich atmosphere. In these responses, there was clear progression from anticipation to the unfolding of the event. Stronger responses focused on the description of the surroundings rather than just the candidate's thoughts and feelings about the cultural event, zooming in on details and senses and offering original angles for example, considering different people's roles in the event. Less successful responses narrated stories which did not offer a range of vocabulary or punctuation. Listing of activities and repetition was also an issue in some weaker responses which provided a written account of the event, but at only a surface level, without conveying a sense of atmosphere.

Question 3

Describe the scene at a local park or public garden both early in the morning and in the afternoon.

This descriptive question was the most popular of the two Descriptive tasks among candidates, producing interesting responses from a wide range of abilities. The best responses were evocative, utilizing sensory language and a range of literary devices to bring descriptions to life. The task's structure, which required describing the park in the morning and afternoon, allowed candidates to focus on different events and activities, such as jogging, yoga, and chess, and describe various people using the park. The shift in atmosphere from morning to afternoon was effectively portrayed in stronger responses, with good use of semantic markers and paragraphing.

The most successful responses effectively portrayed the park's transformation highlighting contrasts in atmosphere and activity between morning and afternoon. More successful responses employed a range of imagery, vocabulary and descriptive writing techniques, such as metaphors and similes, to enhance their descriptions. These descriptions were marked by a clever shift in atmosphere, well-structured paragraphs, and precise vocabulary, making them almost poetic. Less successful responses included some descriptive elements but were less detailed and focused. While they described the scenes, they often failed to fully capture the shifts in mood and activity between morning and afternoon. Some responses did not differentiate between the morning and afternoon scenes, often repeating similar descriptions or lacking specificity.

Candidates often described the environmental details of the park, followed by the activities of a range of people, in both early morning and late afternoon. There was a clear structure in many responses, with descriptions of sunrise or sunset 'bookending' responses and enriching the descriptive value. Descriptions of hardworking park keepers, quietly going about their day, harassed mothers, and elderly keep-fit enthusiasts added realism to the scenes described. Most responses avoided drifting towards narrative and many successfully conveyed contrast beyond that specified by the question, focusing on old versus young, calm versus busy, and light versus dark. The descriptions often began quietly, showing promise of development and excitement before winding down to a peaceful conclusion.

Question 4

Write a story in which someone unexpectedly receives a very nice gift.

This was the second most popular question. Popular scenarios included receiving luxury cars or other dream gifts, often involving birthdays, making the gift not truly unexpected. However, some stories effectively utilized lived experiences, and these narratives stood out for their originality and emotional depth. For example, one candidate wrote movingly about her deceased cat and the subsequent gift of a couple of kittens, concluding with a reminiscence of the departed pet, producing an emotionally engaging response. Other responses focused on overcoming challenges such as bullying, loneliness, and reconciliation with friends, with the best responses integrating an abstract interpretation of the gift, such as the arrival or visit of a beloved relative or friend, rather than material presents. These narratives were often marked by an effective structure, engaging plot, and thoughtful use of descriptive language to support character or plot development.

The most compelling narratives developed a clear storyline with a structured beginning, middle, and end. Many more successful responses framed the narrative with a moral message or demonstrated how the gift impacted people's lives. They included an impressive range of narrative features, building up to a climax and incorporating plot twists. The most impactful stories were those where the gift was emotionally fulfilling, such as the return of a relative or the gift of a family heirloom.

Less successful responses were simplistic with underdeveloped plots and characters. Commonly, these stories involved birthdays with expected gifts, such as iPhones and PS4s, which diminished the element of surprise. Additionally, these stories often included lists of preparations for an event, with little development of the plot. These stories were straightforward and lacked suspense or significant emotional impact.

Some candidates incorporated modern concepts, such as dropshipping, providing a unique perspective on the prompt. Creative comparisons and vivid imagery were notable in some responses, with examples such as 'my face dropped low like a wilting flower' demonstrating effective use of figurative language techniques.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'We opened the door and excitedly stepped inside.'

This narrative prompt was the most popular with the given sentence serving as a trigger for a variety of imaginative responses, ranging from well-crafted horror and adventure stories to more formulaic narratives. Some responses featured compelling stories, with the best incorporating suspense, emotional depth, and vivid descriptions as well as effective use of a range of narrative features.

The most successful narratives effectively embedded the given sentence at pivotal moments, creating suspense and excitement. These responses utilized a range of narrative features, such as speech, characterisation, foreshadowing, flashbacks and unexpected plot twists. The use of appropriate vocabulary heightened the grisly, ghostly, or eerie atmosphere, allowing readers to visualize the scenes vividly.

Less successful responses included the given sentence awkwardly, with minimal development of the surrounding story. These narratives often featured underdeveloped plots and characters. Common themes included haunted houses, psychotic killers, and monsters, which were frequently handled in a rather formulaic manner. These often-straightforward narratives missed opportunities to build significant suspense or emotional impact. The simpler, more realistic narratives tended to work best as the candidates were referring to actual experiences and feelings which came across in a convincing and often emotional way.

A significant number of responses drew inspiration from video games and/or dark themes from streaming channels. Protagonists often encountered bloody corpses, zombies, or axe murderers upon opening doors. While these compositions were often reasonably well-structured, candidates should consider carefully whether the content they have chosen is fully appropriate for the exam.

Common motifs in responses to this question included mustering courage, fast-beating hearts and sparkling or widening eyes as characters made their way through a variety of exciting or surprising situations. Popular plots ranged from the exploration of haunted mansions to football matches, and even trips to other dimensions, usually accessed through a hitherto unseen doorway in an attic or basement. There was frequent use of idioms and figurative language, though sometimes to excess. Dialogue was often used to help develop plot and aid characterisation.

As was the case with responses to **Question 4**, some candidates' stories ended rather abruptly or were left on an ineffective (and clearly unintentional) cliffhanger, indicating that they had run out of time. Candidates should be encouraged to adopt a stricter approach to time management to ensure they are able to bring their response to **Section B** to an effective conclusion.

Section B: Content and Structure

Successful responses to the Descriptive questions employed a wide range of descriptive features including shifts in focus and/or direction (for example, from close at hand to in the distance, or opposite views from an elevated viewpoint), discriminating and effective use of sensory writing, focusing not just on visual, but also auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile imagery. These responses also created a sense of contrast beyond that given in the question, including young/old, light/dark, and quiet/loud. Figurative language techniques were in evidence in responses at all levels in the Descriptive writing tasks. Similes were the most frequently used, with personification also frequently employed. Sound devices were also popular, particularly in response to **Question 3**, where they were frequently employed to describe water features, insect life or the movement of various trees/plants.

With regards to the Narrative questions, successful responses often established the scenario at the outset, or provided a descriptive outline of the setting, before carefully building tension towards an effective climax. The use of flashback was a popular structural choice, often employed effectively. Characterisation was often developed through the use of direct speech and, in some cases, through the use of the technique of 'showing' rather than 'telling'. Again, figurative language techniques were used effectively in response to the Narrative questions, with often inventive examples such as 'We tried lighting a flame of hope in a sea of dismay' and 'with a voice like that of a dying bird's'. Pathetic fallacy was also often used to good effect in the opening paragraph to establish atmosphere.

It is important that candidates understand that *how* they write is as important as *what* they write and that, as such, they must craft their responses to include a range of Descriptive and Narrative features, as well as considering organisation and clarity of structure if they are to access marks in the higher levels. Candidates would also benefit from greater understanding of how to manipulate structure at a sentence, paragraph and whole text level for deliberate effect. Ensuring that responses are close to the indicative word count, rather than extending beyond this, will help produce a more focused response and secure the best possible mark.

Section B: Style and Accuracy

In more successful responses, clear paragraphing made the writing more coherent and structured. In less successful responses, paragraphing was somewhat random, with many temporal links crammed into stories and little development of ideas between them.

Sustaining tense throughout the **Section B** response was a common challenge. Responses which were strong in other areas often struggled with this. Missing articles were also an issue for some, and candidates should remember that clear and appropriate use of articles is essential for coherence and clarity in writing.

Confusion with plurals and possessive apostrophes was observed in many responses. In addition, punctuation was not always clear, with some responses using two punctuation marks together (for example, a question mark followed by a full stop). Punctuation of speech was generally flawed. Candidates are encouraged to use a wide range of punctuation marks, including colons, semi-colons, brackets, exclamation marks, question marks and speech marks, and to use these accurately.

There were many examples of impressive vocabulary in the responses to **Section B** and the spelling of this vocabulary was generally accurate. However, candidates sometimes sacrificed clarity for the sake of demonstrating a varied vocabulary, often using words inappropriately or out of context. Candidates should avoid unacceptable vocabulary choices which are not suitable for this exam. Also, slang words like 'gonna' and 'wanna' should be avoided unless they are part of character dialogue.

In more successful responses, a wide range of well-crafted sentences, including simple, compound, and complex, were used for effect. However, many responses predominantly featured simple, and only occasionally compound, sentences. As well as employing greater variety in sentence structures, candidates would be more successful if they planned their writing carefully and adhered to the suggested word count. Writing too much often led to less effective responses. It is better to write concisely and allow time for editing to ensure the best mark possible is secured.