

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/11  
Reading

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through the texts and tasks in the order set
- attempted all parts of all questions, paying attention to the marks allocated to each question and organising their response time accordingly
- followed task instructions carefully and based their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- responded appropriately to the command word(s) in the question
- focused on the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each question
- avoided repetition of the same idea within an answer
- used their own words where appropriate, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- planned the ideas they were intending to use in longer answers
- checked and edited their responses to correct any unforced errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

## General comments

Candidates' responses indicated that they were familiar with the format of the Reading paper and the general demands of each of the three questions. There were very few instances where whole tasks had not been attempted, though occasionally responses to part questions were incomplete or missing and/or answers were uneven, limiting the possibility of scoring higher marks. There were some candidates who missed opportunities to target higher marks by offering mechanical answers that simply played back sections of text with little modification and/or by paying insufficient attention to the details of the question as set.

Candidates appeared to find all three Reading texts equally accessible and engaging. There were relatively few examples of significant misreading across the cohort, though opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas were missed by some as a consequence of less careful reading of detail. There were some excellent answers to all three questions, often going significantly above and beyond the demands of Level 5, though candidates do need to ensure that they do not spend too long on one question at the expense of any of the others. For example, it was not unusual for the response to **Question 2d** (worth a maximum of 15 marks) to be longer and/or more carefully crafted than the response to **Question 3** (worth up to 25 marks).

In many of the least successful answers, a failure to complete all aspects of a task and/or a loss of focus on the rubric limited the evidence of understanding and skills offered, or resulted in redundant material – for example, a few candidates offered choices from paragraphs other than 8 and 11 in the language **Question 2(d)** and so included explanations that could not be credited. Similarly, there were some less well-focused responses from candidates who had scored well in the smaller sub questions but missed opportunities to target higher marks in other higher tariff tasks. For example, some wrote considerably more than the maximum of 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)** or wrote their response to **Question 3** in a different form, or from a different perspective, from that specified in the task guidance. Others unwisely focused solely on word count at the expense of other aspects of their answer – spending time counting individual words and/or writing out a full draft version of their answer is unlikely to be an efficient use of time in the context of an examination. Candidates are reminded that the word guidance offered in **Question 2(d)** and **Question 3** is not a requirement of the task in itself – the guidance is offered to help them organise their time efficiently and offer sufficient evidence of their skills and understanding to target higher levels.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in **Questions 1 (a) – (e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates were

careful to follow the line or paragraph references in the questions to help them to move down Text A in order and direct their attention, though several of the least successful responses tried to answer questions based on one part of the text from another and/or by unselective copying. A few candidates had not remembered that in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from Text A to evidence their Reading skills and should not be based on their personal opinion, imagination or experience.

Less successful responses attempted to include extra guesses in their answers to **Questions 1(a) – (e)** taking up valuable examination time by doing so and often diluting evidence of understanding. Others simply copied out sections of text with limited modification – often negating any suggestion of understanding by doing so. Several otherwise stronger candidates offered circular answers in one or more of their responses, repeating some or all the language of the question where own words were specified as required, and/or addressed only part of the question in their answer. Such responses provided limited evidence of understanding therefore, and these candidates missed out on marks they might reasonably have been expected to target – for example in **1(b)(i)** by suggesting ‘this means the types of transport were unusual’. In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on the language of **Text B** and/or copied out chunks of text, limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result.

In **Question 2** candidates needed to identify (in **2a**) and explain (in **2b**) words and phrases from the text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via **Question 2(c)**, and then moved on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. More effective answers were careful to refer to **Text C** to locate specific relevant choices and consider their meaning in context. In **Question 2(a)** those who copied out whole sections or sentences from the text, rather than identifying the exact word/phrase that matched the sense of just the underlined word/phrase in the question, were not providing secure evidence of their understanding. Likewise, opportunities for marks were missed by a few candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify just one example from the text in their explanation and/or attempted to offer a generalised overview of the whole extract. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should ensure that they explore and explain the meaning of each of the words they have chosen in some detail before moving on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most candidates were able to suggest three potentially useful examples for analysis in each half of the **2(d)** task and offer a little basic effect/meaning in context, though several candidates were not sufficiently clear, careful or detailed in the examination of their choices. In less effective responses, vague and general comment, and/or labelling of devices without explanation of how these were working in this instance meant opportunities to target higher levels were missed. A small number of candidates did not address the **Question 2(d)** task effectively, offering little relevant comment, repeating rather than explaining the language of the original and/or identifying few or no clear choices in one or both halves of the question.

In **Question 3** most responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets, though a few candidates lost sight of the task – for example, writing letters back home from Lyn, presenting the words of speeches to those thinking of taking a holiday in Alaska, or scripting TV interviews with Mike. Candidates are reminded that responding to the specifics of task as set for that text will offer them the widest range of opportunities to demonstrate skills at higher levels in any extended Response to Reading question. Responses across the cohort covered the full range of levels of achievement, with top level answers offering responses that used, interpreted and developed a wide range of ideas to address all three bullets equally well, integrating key details from the text. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities as a consequence of uneven focus, a lack of planning beforehand and/or offering a narrow range of ideas from the text overall. Less successful responses either offered only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with limited or no modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and should be avoided.

Candidates should be aware that though Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these two questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity, organisation and register of their writing. Where meaning becomes unclear due to inaccurate writing this is likely to limit achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. When responding to **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**, it is advisable to factor in time to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1 Comprehension and summary task**

##### **Questions 1 (a) – (e)**

Short answer **Questions 1(a) – (e)** required candidates to read and respond to **Text A: Unusual modes of travel**. Stronger responses paid attention to the paragraph references and command words in the instructions to demonstrate efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong or unfocused explanations. The least successful responses often repeated the language of the text where own words were required and/or relied on copying longer sections of text with little or no modification to address the question as set.

Successful responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions to show what they could do and understand. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through Text A from the beginning, picking up on pointers where appropriate to help them to identify relevant material. Occasionally, opportunities to evidence understanding were missed where explanations offered were unclear or partial and/or injudicious selection changed the meaning from that of the original text – candidates are reminded that whilst Writing is not assessed in **Questions 1(a) – (e)**, answers do need to be sufficiently precise and clear to communicate details from the text accurately.

**(a) Give the three ways to travel that we might find ‘more interesting’ according to the text.**

In **Question 1(a)**, most candidates recognised that line 1 referenced the ‘more interesting ways to get around’ which were then listed in the second sentence, though some read on to the specific examples later in the text which could also be accepted. Some candidates made use of the question stem to help focus their answer, whilst others simply wrote the key words of their answer – either approach was acceptable.

**(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

**(i) ‘unusual types’ (line 3)**

**(ii) ‘unforgettable experience’ (lines 3 and 4).**

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was sometimes the result of offering a partial explanation only. For example, in **Question 1(b)(i)** offering a meaning for ‘unusual’ but repeating rather than explaining ‘types’, and in **Question 1 (b)(ii)** suggesting the phrase meant ‘a memory you can not forget’. In **1(b)(i)** successful answers often explained ‘types’ simply as meaning forms, kinds or methods. In **1(b)(ii)** they recognised that in context ‘experience’ referred to the activity or adventure of trying out any of these different forms of transport rather than to a moment in time. Effective answers to both parts of **1(b)** were able to evidence that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of each question, most often by offering straightforward synonyms for each word.

**(c) Re-read paragraph 3 (‘Coco Taxi ... tourists.’).**

**Give two different reasons why Coco Taxi might appeal to tourists.**

In **Question 1(c)** candidates re-reading paragraph 2 closely were able to identify two distinct reasons in the text – most had picked up on at least one of the suggestions that the appearance of the Coco taxi and/or the way it was able to negotiate traffic faster than regular taxis would be likely to appeal to tourists. Many also suggested that being powered by pedal power – a more environmentally friendly option – could well be a further attraction of this form of transport. Only two of the available three distinct ideas were required to score both marks.

- (d) **Re-read paragraph 4 ('Monte Toboggan ... to Monte.').**
- (i) **Identify two features of the Monte Toboggan ride that might particularly appeal to tourists looking for a traditional transport experience.**
- (ii) **Explain why the Monte Toboggan ride might be of concern to more cautious tourists.**

Candidates who paid attention to command/key words in the question were best placed to offer creditworthy responses and make efficient use of their time. Successful answers in **1d(i)** were able to spot **two** features of the ride from the three described in the text that related to the 'traditional' nature of this type of transport. Likewise in **1d(ii)**, candidates paying attention to the word 'cautious' used information from the text, reworking it to offer secure evidence of close reading and score the maximum 3 marks. On occasion, candidates offered suggestions in their answer to one part of the question that would have been more appropriate to the other – for example, suggesting erroneously that tourists looking for a traditional transport experience might have been looking for speed as a feature or that cautious tourists might have been concerned that the toboggan was still in use by locals today. Other missed opportunities by offering incomplete ideas – for example, not explaining clearly the inadequacy of the braking system – or by misinterpreting vocabulary (for example, some misread 'winding' as 'windy' suggesting concerns around weather).

- (e) **Re-read paragraphs 5 and 6 ('DUKW ... disappointment.').**

**Using your own words, explain why some tourists might prefer to avoid using unusual modes of transport such as DUKWs while travelling.**

In **Question 1(e)** the most successful explanations reworked the relevant information from paragraphs 5 and 6 only, using their own words as appropriate, to identify three distinct reasons in their explanation. Many identified fears around safety, reliability and variability of price. Occasionally, candidates offered answers relating to the Coco taxi or Monte Toboggan which could not be credited since neither of these forms were cited in paragraph 5 or 6. Similarly, answers that suggested the DUKW travelled under water or that customers would be in the water themselves (and so susceptible to pollution from the river) were not evidencing close reading of this section of text.

- (f) **According to Text B, what might supporters of the Hyperloop consider to be its advantages and appeal?**

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

Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from **Text B: The Hyperloop high-speed transport system** and some understanding of the requirements of the selective summary task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea, misreading and/or inclusion of extra details meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. A failure to recast information from the passage to address the question sometimes diluted evidence of focus and/or understanding in less successful responses.

Where responses were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words and to keep their explanations concise. Overview was evidenced in some of the most successful answers where relevant ideas had been carefully selected from different parts of the text and organised helpfully for their reader. Less focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy and/or points that argued against the advantages or appeal of the Hyperloop. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to demonstrate their understanding and successfully address the selective summary task.

The strongest responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned a route through the content of their answer before writing their response. Many had produced and followed a useful bullet point plan. There were many extremely effective and well-

crafted responses that demonstrated both concision and precise understanding over a wide range of relevant ideas. In partially effective answers, excess often arose from attempts to comment on the writer's viewpoint and/or there was repetition of ideas as the result of an unnecessary introduction or conclusion to the response.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible – without changing or blurring the original idea – and to organise points helpfully for their reader. However, some candidates overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task and offered lengthy explanation, with a few candidates continuing to write far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others adhered to the advised length of the response but took far too long to explain just a few, sometimes repeated, ideas.

The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to select only those ideas relevant to the focus of the question, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – for example, the suggesting the 'things that could go wrong with Hyperloops' or oil pipelines and/or offering other details in support of the writer's own opinion that 'it's never going to happen'.

More effective responses were not dependant on the structure or language of **Text B** to communicate their ideas and were consequently able to offer more concise explanations. They remembered to keep in mind the dual focus of 'appeal' and 'advantages' only and ignored/recast anything appearing in the original text as a disadvantage or less appealing possibility. Less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer an own words version of the whole text in the order it was presented and often repeated ideas and/or included unnecessary or inappropriate detail as a result. In these answers, excess was often a significant feature. A small number of candidates misread or miscopied details in the text, for example suggesting incorrectly that the Hyperloop would help travellers to be more productive than other forms of transport could as it offered mobile wi-fi. In low to mid-range answers, some candidates simply linked lifted phrases and/or copied sections of text rather than carefully identifying the central idea – for example, asserting incorrectly that one appeal was the 'huge gap between the exciting theory of this futuristic transportation'. Whilst many missed opportunities to target own words and indicate more secure understanding by failing to reword phrases from the text such as 'insane speeds', the least effective responses were almost entirely reliant on the language of the original. Candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text and splicing them together is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task.

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

- after reading the task instructions, re-read Text B to identify just those ideas that are potentially relevant to the focus of the question
- discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the specific focus of the question
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan – check that they are distinct and complete
- check whether there are repeated ideas or examples which could be covered by one 'umbrella' point
- return to the text to 'sense check' any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- organise and sequence your ideas to make them clear to your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the original text
- explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the text themselves would understand
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- check back to ensure that you have included all the ideas you planned to but not repeated anything
- though it is not necessary to count every word, you should keep in mind the guidance to write 'no more than 120 words' and aim for concision.

**Question 2**

- (a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) One of Lyn's dog-team was distracted by what it found to be an overpoweringly attractive smell.
- (ii) The lead dog did not listen to Lyn's commands because its natural urges were to follow the smell.
- (iii) Using the brake did not help Lyn to control the excited rush forwards of the dogs pulling her sled.
- (iv) Lyn's hosts organised their lives to have the smallest possible impact on the environment.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified the correct word or phrase from **Text C: Riding the rails: learning how to drive a dog-sled** to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example in each part – simply and efficiently giving the exact word or phrase only as their answer. Candidates should note that it is not necessary to write answers to **Question 2(a)** in full sentences. Other responses added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire question in each case, substituting the word or phrase from the text and then bracketing or underlining the relevant section of their answer.

Marks were sometimes missed where answers were unfocused – for example, offering responses that covered only part of the meaning of the underlined phrase, or adding in extra words from the text that went beyond the meaning of the underlined words, such as 'consciously' in **2(a)(iv)** or 'wafted' in **2(a)(i)**. Very occasionally, candidates had misread the instruction to 'identify a word or phrase from the text' and tried to explain meaning in their own words.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

As the sky gradually turned indigo in the fading light, the scraping of ice and frantic unheeded commands to my sled dog-team broke the stillness. Thundering down the frozen waterway, I snatched anxious glimpses over my shoulder. Where was Mike, my guide? Would his tracker still pick up my signal with the gap between us increasing by the minute?

- (i) gradually
- (ii) unheeded
- (iii) glimpses

In **Question 2(b)**, some answers offered just one carefully chosen word or phrase as their answer, whilst others offered longer explanations as evidence of their understanding. Either approach could be creditworthy, though candidates should be careful not to dilute evidence of understanding by offering several suggestions and extra guesses of different meanings that are contradictory and/or not in line with the text. Effective answers had considered the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined, recognising for example that glimpses suggested quick, momentary glances rather than simply looking behind as less precise answers suggested. Several candidates were unsure of the meaning of 'unheeded' – for example, suggesting incorrectly that it meant useless, loud, desperate or unprofessional.

- (c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests her feelings when she first arrived in Eagle.**

**Use your own words in your explanation.**

Still spellbound from gazing at the enormity of the Alaskan wilderness, I'd stepped down from the mail-plane into the miniature perfection of Eagle, a fascinating, history-packed hamlet of timber dwellings, home to just 85 residents. I was immediately wrapped in the customary bear hug by Mike's wife, Scarlett, and cocooned in layers of Arctic-grade outerwear.

In **Question 2(c)**, those candidates who had focused clearly on using just one example taken from the text extract as instructed were best placed to demonstrate their understanding. Some underlined their chosen example in the text, others copied it out as a subheading for their explanation – either approach was acceptable.

Effective answers included those which began with an explanation of the meaning of the key word(s) in their example, ahead of going on to explain what those meaning(s) suggested about Lyn's feelings at that point. Many responses centred their answer around all/part of the image of Lyn 'still spellbound from gazing at the enormity of the Alaskan wilderness' and were generally able to exploit their chosen example to good effect, often suggesting something of the magical nature of the vast landscape it evoked. Some who had selected the whole image still missed opportunities to target higher marks by not explaining how 'gazing', 'still' and/or 'enormity' helped to contribute to the sense of awe and/or captivation suggested by 'spellbound'. Relatively few chose the image of Lyn being 'cocooned in layers of Artic-grade outerwear', though those who did were often able to unpack it particularly successfully and score full marks.

The most effective responses had carefully noted the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less effective responses often attempted to discuss more than one example – time that might have been more profitably spent in **Question 2(d)** where there were up to 15 marks available. Some weaker responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted unwisely to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms. On occasion, opportunities were missed to offer evidence of understanding through circular answers that simply repeated the language of the text or misreading of key words – for example, some candidates attempted to explain Lyn's feelings on being 'wrapped in a bear rug'.

**(d) Re-read paragraphs 8 and 11.**

- **Paragraph 8 begins 'In theory lessons, ...' and is about riding on the snow and ice.**
- **Paragraph 11 begins 'The most memorable ...' and is about the writer's feelings that night.**

**Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.**

Successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three relevant selections from each paragraph – often beginning by explaining the literal meaning of the choice and then moving on to explore effect. Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language through detailed discussion of focused choices centred around images, individual words or phrases. Where candidates had considered all the key words in slightly longer choices, they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses, though candidates do need to be careful to choose and explain examples of interesting or powerful language use precisely and deliberately, rather than simply offer whole sentences from the paragraph with a general comment in the hope there will be something useful in there. Occasionally some candidates did not indicate any clear choices for explanation, offering instead a general summary of each paragraph that did not address the task and could not be credited.

Some candidates used each of their choices as a sub-heading for their explanation of it to good effect, though candidates repeating the language of the text within their explanations missed opportunities to target higher marks. The most effective responses considered words within their choices individually, as well as suggesting how they worked within the longer phrase and/or in the context of the description as a whole. Rather than selecting the first three choices in each half they came across, or the most 'obvious' literary devices, successful responses often set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain. Some of the most effective responses spent some time exploring interesting contrasts between how the words were working in this context and their initial expectations of those words – for example, noting that 'cascading' might usually refer to the powerful movement of a waterfall, yet here the bubbles of the frozen lake had been captured mid movement. Responses at Level 5 frequently analysed their choices precisely and offered answers that were balanced across both parts of the question. In the mid-range, answers were often uneven in favour of one paragraph of the other and opportunities were missed where the same or very similar general suggestion was offered for more than one choice

Choices from paragraph 8 often centred around the idea of the potential for conditions on the ice highway to change: 'slam', 'porcelain smooth' and 'oversized ice-cubes' were all popular selections. Likewise, images connected to the nature of the sled's movement in paragraph 8 were identified by many, though fewer considered precisely the nature of that movement – with only the most successful answers explaining precisely how 'winding', 'criss-crossing' and 'tracing' might suggest that the ride through the forest and across the lake was gentle and enjoyable.

Occasionally, limiting their comments to an explanation of just one word within longer choices meant some candidates offered partially effective explanations only – for example, not all considered the word 'drifted' in 'the howling of wolves drifted to us' and so overlooked what it suggested about Lyn's interpretation of the far-off noises of wolves. Many weaker answers dealing with this popular choice did little more than repeat/replay the wording of the text, often going on to demonstrate misunderstanding in relation to Lyn's reaction by suggesting incorrectly that she was terrified of the noise and/or that the wolves were approaching.

More general initial comments around the 'beautiful' scenery in both paragraphs were carefully supported by examination of relevant choices from each in a good number of answers, with some candidates then going on to compare and contrast effectively the powerful artistry of nature with the rough and unsophisticated efforts of humans as they 'shovelled and hacked' to construct their makeshift roof. Others limited their success by simply repeated the idea of beauty and/or art over and over without discussing how, in what way(s) or why the image suggested a particular aspect of the night or sled ride might be considered to be beautiful. Where candidates had selected and connected the images of a ceiling and curtains, many went on to consider how these contributed to the extended image of a house or home. Some added to the sense of being at home in these natural surroundings by linking 'burrowed down' to the actions of a creature native to that environment.

The least effective answers to **2d** offered generic empty comments, such as: 'The writer has created a fantastic description to make it feel like we are really there', or: 'the writer uses lots of adjectives and adverbs to describe riding in the snow'. Comments like these are not helpful to candidates since they do not evidence any understanding of how language is working in a particular given section of the text and can create a false sense of security, meaning candidates move on without saying anything more concrete. Mid-range responses to the task offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each example they had chosen, whilst stronger answers also identified effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, using explanation of precise meaning/what you could 'see happening' in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect. Less effective responses often only labelled devices and/or offered no more than a generic explanation of the writer's reasons for using them.

Repetition of the vocabulary of the text to communicate ideas in the explanations offered was common in less effective responses – in particular, 'smooth', 'precious' and 'contentment' were often repeated. Repetition of the same generalised explanation for each choice by some candidates often meant that they missed opportunities to present more convincing evidence of their understanding. Likewise labelling of devices was offered by some candidates in place of more fruitful exploration and explanation of the language itself, meaning opportunities to target higher levels were missed.

In **Question 2(d)**, it is the quality of the analysis when considering how language is being used which attracts marks. Candidates are reminded that their Writing skills are not being assessed in this question. They should be encouraged to work at the very edges of their vocabulary range as they explore and explain each choice – reaching to find the right words to help explain their choice, rather than limiting their answer to those words they are sure they can spell correctly, could be helpful for some candidates.

Answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are unlikely to be useful and/or result in very thin general comments at best. Opportunities were missed in a small number of answers where choices were from one paragraph only or only three choices were offered overall. The most successful answers were often able to 'talk their reader through' their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different



possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, ahead of arriving at an understanding of how and why these particular words might have been used by the writer in this context.

### Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- make sure that the quotations you select from the text are precise; do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- copy words and choices correctly from the text
- in each part of 2a make sure that your selection is from Text C and is clearly identified; remember you are looking for just a word or phrase to match the sense of the underlined words in the question
- in 2b be careful that your explanation is consistent with how the word is used in context (if unsure, try substituting your answer in the text to check it)
- in 2c try to say three separate things about your one chosen example
- in 2d, choose 3 examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (6 choices in total)
- only offer an overview in 2d if you have spotted that there is a relevant connection between your chosen choices in a paragraph
- where you are trying to explain meaning, read your answer back to check that your explanation makes sense
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as ‘the writer helps us to picture the scene’: you need to say how your chosen example does this to show your understanding
- make sure your explanations deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- when you are unsure how to explain the effect, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) in the choice and work from there
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

### Question 3

**You are Mike. The Ultimate Experience Travel Company which advertises your expeditions has seen Lyn Marshall’s article reviewing her holiday in Alaska and has some concerns about the expedition and about using dogs to pull sleds. The company has asked you for a formal report.**

**In your report you should:**

- **explain exactly what happened during the evening exploration and the measures you take to ensure the safety and comfort of tourists**
- **remind the company of the different things tourists enjoy about the holiday you offer and why**
- **reassure the company that its various concerns about using dogs to pull sleds are unfounded and explain why you think that this form of transport is important to protect.**

**Write the words of the report.**

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with **Text C**, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to adopt the perspective of Lyn’s guide, Mike, in this extended Response to Reading task. The task guidance invited candidates to present a report reassuring the company which was advertising Mike’s expeditions that there was nothing to worry about despite the experience described in Lyn’s article. Some candidates missed the opportunity to offer and develop a range of key ideas appropriately by opting instead to give a speech to a group of tourists about to head out on a trip. A few attempted to answer the question as Lyn and limited the development they were able to offer as a result.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood both the narrative and task in at least general terms. Some in the mid-range though misused potentially useful details and information in their explanation of the events of the evening exploration for bullet one and/or confused timescales – for example, suggesting that Lyn had lost control that evening on a downhill run and fallen sideways off the sled, or that she had made her way back to Mike’s home on foot to be greeted by Scarlett with layer of Arctic-grade clothing and a huge hug. Some moved away from evidence in the text completely to suggest that Lyn had been attacked by wolves and/or had to be rescued by the mail-plane. Where candidates had planned their response beforehand, they were often able to draw on relevant ideas and details from throughout the text to address this first bullet successfully and offer further reassurance to the company: for example, by drawing

attention to the fact that the dog team had eventually slowed and come to a stop, allowing Mike to locate Lyn safely.

In mid-range answers, ideas for bullet two were often only touched on through recounting details of Lyn's visit as a whole, whereas more secure responses were able to offer development by explaining the general appeal of such a holiday. In bullet three, some candidates did little more than repeat the question asserting that the company's concerns about using dogs to pull sleds were unfounded and/or that this form of transport was important to protect, without any indication of how, what or why. Candidates responding to the text and task more carefully were able to pick up on suggestions that this form of transport had been used for years and was environmentally friendly (for example, as it left only a faint trace on the snow) as well as more explicit points in relation to the dogs' evident enjoyment of the task as suggested by 'happy and yappy'. Some reading less closely misread 'team' as referring to humans, missed references to the manner in which the dogs were cared for as a consequence and drifted from the text into long expositions about the benefits of teamwork and opportunities for working together which were not relevant or rooted in the text. The best answers often recognised that the dog sleds offered a practical solution to transport issues in an area of outstanding natural beauty with limited access for other options due to the weather.

Responses that had relied on mechanically tracking back through the text and replaying the passage often offered a more limited range of ideas overall, missing opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas and suggestions. The least successful responses copied sections of text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading of key details and information for example, some suggested Mike had been separated from Lyn and the rest of the (human) team, others suggested that she had survived thanks to her dogs bravely and dramatically fighting off a fanged wolf pack.

The most effective responses showed evidence that candidates had identified relevant ideas and details from the text before writing, considering which bullet the information they had located best suited and how the perspective of Mike, the guide running this eco-friendly business, might differ from/add to that of the narrator Lyn. For example, some answers offering evidence of thorough evaluation suggested politely that Lyn's dramatic version of events might owe more to her desire as a journalist to entertain her readers rather than any real sense of danger.

Overall, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a report, and many were able to write persuasively and reassuringly, using an appropriate register for their imagined audience. Occasionally, candidates wrote a letter or speech rather than a report though still kept in mind the audience and purpose, showing at least some awareness of the writing task in hand. Where candidates lost sight of both the form and purpose for writing, responses were generally less successful; expression often became awkward as a consequence of poor control and/or inconsistencies of style. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to read back through their response to correct any mistakes or inconsistencies in their use of language – for example to ensure that meaning is clear and that the register sounds consistently appropriate. In the least effective answers, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of whole sections of text not uncommon in these responses. This affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills.

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

- remember to base your answer on the ideas and details you find in Text C
- keep the audience and purpose for your response in mind throughout your answer
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain that in your answer
- do not invent information and details beyond the scope of the passage; look for the clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements about characters and situations
- give equal attention to each of the three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas
- plan a route through your answer beforehand: you can choose not to follow the order of the bullet points and/or link ideas from each
- do not copy directly from the text: use your own words as far as you can to express ideas
- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas allows you to better show your understanding: for example, by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

---

<p><b>Paper 0990/12</b> <b>Reading</b></p>
--

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the introductions to the texts carefully
- followed instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question
- considered the marks allocated to each question and developed their response accordingly
- understood the different requirements of the extended response questions
- paid attention to the guidance offered to help them focus their answers – for example, writing no more than 120 words in the summary, using just one example from the given text extract in **2(c)**, and selecting three language examples from each paragraph in **2(d)**
- avoided unselective copying and/or lifting from the text where appropriate
- used their own words where specified in the question
- planned the ideas to be used and the route through extended responses before writing
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition of ideas in all questions
- checked and edited their responses to correct any careless errors, incomplete ideas, or unclear points.

## General comments

Most candidates attempted every question on the Reading paper; examiners reported very few incomplete papers. Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format and question types on the paper. The texts proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates and candidates responded positively to both texts and questions. There were relatively few examples of misunderstanding in terms of task requirements, and time-management was good. Occasionally a failure to follow the rubric, or complete a task fully, limited opportunities to demonstrate understanding. This was most common in **Question 1(d)(ii)** and **1(e)** where some candidates did not attempt to find three points, in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates included a limited range of ideas in their responses or ignored the 120-word guidance, in **Question 2(c)** where a number of candidates did not select a clear example from the text provided, or in **Question 2(d)** where some candidates offered three choices of language in total rather than three choices from each paragraph as specified in the task.

In **Question 1**, the most effective approach taken by candidates was to work through the questions in the order presented, carefully noting the number of marks allocated and the space provided for their responses as helpful indicators of how detailed their answers needed to be. They also referred carefully to the lines or paragraph specified in each question, moving carefully through the text as directed. Less effective responses to **Question 1** tended to lack focus on the text or lacked relevance to the question. At times candidates used the language of the text where they had been asked to use own words – for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** by explaining 'schemes' but lifting the word 'similar' instead of offering an alternative to show understanding of the whole phrase. In **Question 1b(ii)** many candidates found it difficult to explain 'mutually convenient' offering vague explanations such as 'okay' or 'good' for convenient and therefore not showing sufficient understanding. This was sometimes an issue in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates copied phrases (or whole chunks of text) rather than remodelling the language of the text in their response. Even where copying is selective, it should be avoided in **Question 1(f)** to demonstrate evidence of full understanding for the Reading mark and produce an effective response to the task. Many candidates also wrote from the perspective of an older learner rather than in a plain, formal style. This made copying more tempting and often led to some indiscriminate selection of ideas.

In **Question 2** candidates were required to explain carefully selected words or phrases from specified sections of the text. **Question 2(c)** supplied a short section of the text to select from as a preparation for the

longer response in **Question 2(d)**. More effective answers were able to consider meanings in context and as well as the effects of the powerful language identified, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose in a clear overview of the featured paragraphs. Middle-range answers tended to focus on the meanings of the language choices showing mostly clear understanding, although at times they tended to be literal rather than considered within the context of the whole text. Less effective responses struggled to develop viable explanations sometimes repeating the language of the text in the explanations or identifying literary techniques with varying degrees of accuracy but then offering general comments about the techniques rather than focusing on the words themselves. These answers did not always choose appropriate language to discuss or only selected three examples in total.

In **Question 3** the majority of responses addressed all three bullets in the question, although some candidates found it challenging to develop the ideas from the text. Most candidates wrote as Ramesh, although some simply repeated Sonja's experiences from her perspective. The best responses produced a convincing talk, adopting an appropriate voice for Ramesh reflecting on his and Sonja's experiences as well as offering advice. More effective responses developed the ideas and details in the text selectively to work through the bullets logically. They were able to identify both the enjoyable aspects of Sonja's exchange and the challenges she (and future participants) encountered, as well as looking more widely at what the text suggests about the wider importance of international exchange visits such as the one Sonja and Ramesh were involved in. Responses in the middle range tended to use the text rather mechanically, often paraphrasing closely rather than selecting ideas and details to use in their own writing to demonstrate understanding. These responses tended to focus on the first part of each bullet point, thus losing opportunities to develop the ideas in the text through offering more developed explanations and advice. Less effective responses tended to lack focus on the text, covering only the main ideas and sometimes inventing material that moved too far away from the text itself. Some responses copied unselectively (using Sonja's voice) thus providing little evidence of understanding.

Paper 1 is primarily an assessment of Reading, however 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – 5 marks in **Question 1(f)** and 10 marks in **Question 3**. In these questions, candidates need to pay attention to the quality and precision of their writing to maximise their achievement. Candidates are advised to plan and review their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style and to correct errors that may impede communication.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

#### **Questions 1(a)–(e)**

In response to Text A, candidates were asked to answer a series of short answer questions. More effective responses paid careful attention to the command words in the instructions as well as the number of marks allocated to individual questions. These responses demonstrated sound understanding by selecting appropriate details and evidence from the text in concise, focused answers. Less effective responses tended to write too much or failed to follow the instruction to use own words. Some candidates offered several possible answers thus using time inefficiently and diluting evidence of understanding.

#### **Question 1**

#### **(a) What is the aim of 'Bring your child to work day' according to paragraph 1?**

This question required candidates to be selective and focus on paragraph 1 only. The vast majority of candidates identified and selected appropriate material from the second sentence in the first paragraph to get one mark. Occasionally the mark was not awarded because of excess information from the text, mostly from paragraph 3 – gaining insight into the atmosphere of the workplace.

**(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

**(i) 'similar schemes' (line 6):**

**(ii) 'mutually convenient' (line 7):**

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were instructed to use their own words to evidence understanding of the phrases in the question. Where answers failed to achieve both of the marks available for each phrase it was usually due to the candidate's partial use of the words from the text. For example, in **Question 1(b)(i)** a number of candidates used the word 'similar' in their explanation of 'schemes' (such as 'plans which are similar' thus only partially addressing the task. Some offered vague words to explain 'schemes' such as 'ideas' which did not explain the meaning in context clearly enough. In **Question 1(b)(ii)** a number of candidates offered vague meanings of 'convenient' such as 'okay' or 'good' which did not really reveal understanding of the meaning in the context of the text. Candidates should be aware that the 2-marks offered for each sub-section of **Question 1(b)** will always require all parts of the phrase to be explained clearly and precisely in the context of the text.

**(c) Re-read paragraph 2 ('The initiative ... children.').**

**Give two reasons why some companies participating in 'Bring your child to work day' choose not to do it on a set international date.**

To achieve both marks for this question candidates were required to offer two clear reasons. Most candidates were able to pick out the need to avoid crucial deadlines and the need to work around school terms/dates. Some candidates offered a very general reason, lifting the phrase 'mutually convenient' without fully addressing the question.

**(d) (i) Re-read paragraphs 3 and 4 ('Why not ... the fields.').**

**Give two ways in which participating in 'Bring your child to work day' might influence a child's future career according to the text.**

To answer **Question 1(d)(i)** candidates needed to identify the two ways in which a child's future career may be influenced by 'Bring your child to work day'. Most candidates were able to identify that they would learn communications skills and see different work roles or fields. Occasionally marks were lost due to vague answers such as 'see the atmosphere of the workplace' which did not address the question fully.

**(ii) Re-read paragraphs 3 and 4 ('Why not ... the fields.').**

**Identify the benefits for the company of organising a 'Bring your child to work day' for their employees.**

In **Question 1(d)(ii)** many candidates were successful at gaining all three marks available by referring clearly to the staff working harder (to impress their children), being reminded of rules and/or procedures, and viewing or speaking of their role positively. Own words versions of any of these ideas were also acceptable. A smaller number of responses only offered one or two of these points, presumably because candidates did not take note that there were three marks available for this question.

**(e) Re-read paragraph 5 ('Of course ... show.').**

**Using your own words, explain why some people might think that 'Bring your child to work day' is not a good idea.**

This question required candidates to show both explicit and implicit understanding from their reading of paragraph 5. Most candidates were able to achieve one mark, a reasonable number gained two marks, but fewer gained all three. The most common correct idea was that the day would need careful planning or organisation. Many candidates were able to cite the need for careful Health and Safety considerations (or that there may be dangers for children in the workplace). The points in the mark scheme identified by fewer candidates were that children could be distracting in meetings, or that they may get bored, or that arranging special activities would be gratuitous or a waste of time and/or money. Where marks were lost, it was usually because the candidate seemed

unaware that this was a three-mark question so three clearly differentiated points were needed, or they repeated the text without adapting it and therefore did not address the question fully. There were very few examples of candidates copying out the paragraph completely in this session.

**(f) According to Text B, what are the positives for and of older learners returning to university?**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 120 words.**

This question was based on **Text B** and required candidates to select relevant ideas from the text and organise them into a focused summary which addressed the task. Most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of the text and offer some relevant ideas about the positives for and of older learners returning to university. The most effective responses were carefully planned, organised and coherent, focusing sharply on the task by referring to a wide range of ideas from the text, reordering the material where necessary to aid fluency and achieve logical progression, avoiding repetition and re-modelling the wording of the text to use own words successfully. These responses were often preceded by a bullet-pointed plan in which ideas from the text were noted briefly before being included in a fluent own-words response. Responses in the middle range tended to include a more limited range of relevant ideas, the most common being starting a new career, learning about technology, meeting younger people and getting help from them, and being a mature and therefore useful presence in classes. Several candidates failed to read the question carefully and offered the disadvantages of being older at university which did affect the focus and relevance of the response. Some candidates failed to spot similar ideas such as students helping one another and the opportunities to learn from one another or meeting new people and making friends. This led to repetition. There was often inclusion of excess material even where a good range of ideas had been considered, particularly focusing on the feelings and attitudes of the older person about returning to study – often lifting phrases such as ‘terrifying and exciting’ or ‘it felt weird being taught by professors younger than my son’. Some less effective responses closely paraphrased the whole text, resulting in repetition as outlined above but also the inclusion of irrelevant ideas and details.

Length was often an indicator of the level of the response, with some responses being too short due to a small number of relevant ideas identified, and others very long and wordy due to unnecessary information and comments or quotations to exemplify comments. The most effective responses tended to adhere to the advised length through adopting a concise and focused approach to the task while adapting the style to produce a plain, informative text. More effective responses were either very brief due to a very limited number of ideas being considered or were excessively long and unselective. Occasionally less effective responses adhered to the advised word count but took far too long to consider a few ideas by including unnecessary details and/or comments.

In most responses there was an attempt to use own words although a surprisingly large number of candidates did rely on lifting phrases from the text. The most commonly lifted sections of text / phrases were, ‘It wasn’t easy meeting new people’, ‘younger students found that explaining to me helped their understanding too’, ‘Embrace your mature perspective as an asset you bring to class’, ‘speak up, ask questions, make comments’, ‘honed my time management skills’, and ‘give me valuable insights into the younger generations, teaching me greater empathy for the different world that they have grown up in’. Many responses strung together these lifted phrases, so did end up including a range of ideas but their responses were only partially effective due to the reliance on the wording of the text affecting the focus and quality of their response despite selecting some appropriate ideas. These responses often lacked a helpful structure and had limited focus on the positives of returning to university. There was very little evidence of misreading in this task (although many thought time management skills were developed at university), but a bigger issue in the least effective responses was also a tendency to include too much introductory and irrelevant detail through not adapting the style of the original text, as well as too much lifting.

**Advice to candidates on Question 1(f)**

- re-read Text B after reading the question to identify potentially relevant ideas
- plan the response using brief notes to ensure a wide range of ideas from the text is selected
- avoid including unnecessary details which do not address the question

- organise the ideas, grouping them where relevant, to ensure that your response is coherent
- avoid repeating ideas
- avoid including a general introduction or summative conclusion
- use your plan rather than the text as you write your answer to avoid lifting
- write clearly and make sure you express yourself fluently using your own words – avoid lifting phrases
- do not quote from the text
- do not add comments or your own views – use a neutral writing style
- try to keep to the guidance to ‘write no more than 120 words’.

## Question 2

(a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) Initially, Sonja had been keen and excited about the idea of working in Siurung.
- (ii) Sonja knew how to indicate respectfully that she did not want any more food without causing offence.
- (iii) Sonja was curled up beneath the bedclothes to keep warm.
- (iv) The wedding is the last occasion of its type in Ramesh’s family.

The most effective answers to **Question 2(a)** focused on the underlined word or phrase, located the correct version in the text and gave it as the answer. A few responses copied the whole sentence from the question inserting the correct phrase from the text to replace the underlined phrase in the question, but this was a less common approach presumably because it wastes valuable time for the candidates. Answers that used the text more widely than in the equivalent phrase/sentence could not be rewarded even if the correct word/phrase was included, as candidates do need to exercise precision to demonstrate full understanding. Most candidates were familiar with the demands of this question, but a few seemed confused about how to respond, offering own words equivalents of the underlined words instead of locating them in the text. Where marks were lost, it was usually due to partially explaining the underlined phrase, for example ‘huddled’, or more commonly including too much of the text and therefore moving beyond explaining just the underlined phrase, for example ‘malai bhaiyo’ (which signifies politely that I have eaten enough) or ‘the final celebration of its kind’.

(b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

- (i) definitely
- (ii) proposes
- (ii) translating

In **Question 2(b)** the most effective answers considered the meaning of each word paying attention to its context as used in the text. For example, the word ‘proposes’ refers to suggesting or offering rather than simply asking for her hand in marriage – a literal interpretation offered by some candidates. Many candidates were able to explain ‘translating’ as explaining the words in an alternative language, but some candidates simply wrote ‘explaining’ which did not show full understanding. ‘Definitely’ was usually successfully explained as ‘certainly’ or ‘without doubt’. The best answers to **Question 2(b)** thought carefully about meanings in context and offered viable answers which would accurately replace the words in the text without altering the meaning. Some candidates seem to be under the impression that their explanations should only be a single word to replace the original which is not the case.

(c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests her feelings at this family occasion.**

**Use your own words in your explanation.**

**There’s a buffet: mini mountains of curried vegetables, accompanied by copious amounts of rice! The village square teems and fizzes with people eating, drinking, laughing and**

**children of all ages running. Weddings always provide an opportunity for people who live far apart to see each other, catch up, remark on how the children have grown. Everything here's so similar and so different from the world I've left behind.**

In **Question 2(c)** candidates were required to select one example of language from the specified section of the text and explain how it suggested the writer's feelings at this family occasion. A significant number of candidates did not follow these instructions but instead offered a very general response with no focus on the writer's language and no language choice selected. Where a paraphrased version of a language choice was offered, it was occasionally possible to credit an explanation if they lifted a word such as 'teemed', but they often lacked any focus on any specific words used by the writer and therefore could not be credited at all. The most effective responses offered a concise quotation then considered how the writer was able to convey her feelings about the wedding celebration through the language used. The most popular example was 'Everything here is so similar and so different from the world I've left behind' and many responses explored the writer's mixed or confused feelings about nostalgia for such celebrations experienced at home and a strange feeling of unbelonging in Nepal despite the warmth and hospitality experienced. Some responses, however, repeated the words 'similar' and 'different' in their explanations thus limited the opportunities to tackle the language successfully.

The most effective responses also tackled 'teems and fizzes with people eating, drinking, laughing' as emphasising the crowded, lively, excited atmosphere in the village square and linking it to feelings of joy and unity. Other candidates focused on descriptions of the buffet as 'mini mountains of curried vegetables, accompanied by copious amounts of rice' citing the simplicity and authenticity of the food as well as its abundance showing the generous hospitality given and the importance of celebrating through eating together. Some candidates chose to explain rather plain language such as 'an opportunity for people who live far apart to see each other' ignoring the more interesting language choices on offer. Some less effective responses tried to do too much, selecting several examples. Only one example could be rewarded so offering more was a waste of valuable examination time that could have been spent on **Question 2(d)** where more developed responses are expected. A number of responses simply paraphrased the whole paragraph without selecting a language choice at all.

**(d) Re-read paragraphs 6 and 13.**

- **Paragraph 6 begins 'I want to tell them ...' and is about the writer's first impressions on arriving at the village of Siurung.**
- **Paragraph 13 begins 'A family trek ...' and is about the writer's feelings once the wedding festivities are over.**

**Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.**

The most effective responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three appropriate language choices from each of the two paragraphs indicated in the question. The most effective approach was often to consider the meaning of each of the carefully chosen phrases in the context of the text and then consider its connotations, effects and impact. Focused responses were then able to offer a clear overview of the writer's intentions in each paragraph. Less effective responses were sometimes written in note form and offered less developed analysis or repeated the same ideas about effects, often making rather generalised assertions rather than considering specific words more closely. Middle range responses were usually more effective when explaining meanings but struggled to explore the effects fully, and the least effective responses tended to offer quotations (sometimes rather unselectively) but struggled to find anything relevant to say about them. Some candidates chose three language choices in total rather than three from each paragraph as clearly stated in the question/leading to some underdeveloped responses. Some candidates chose inappropriate language choices – sometimes plain language offering limited opportunities.

The most effective responses selected phrases but also considered the individual words within them suggesting how they worked within the context of the whole language choice. Rather than simply identifying literary devices they engaged fully with the language, considering its impact and connotations fully and linking each choice to a coherent and developed consideration of the



paragraph. In paragraph 6 many were able to explore their individual choices within the context of Sonja arriving at an unfamiliar place and her mixture of uncertainty and wonder. They considered her excitement and sense of adventure through 'I want to tell them...', 'narrow and snaking drive up the mountainside', and 'lanes paved with impossible jigsaw puzzles of metamorphic rock' as evidence of the alien world she finds herself in, bombarded by experiences and sights with no one to share them with. Many focused on the warmth and hospitality of the culture as experienced in the 'deeply moving traditional welcome' involving 'exquisite flower garlands' exploring her strong reaction to the cultural conventions of the village suggesting she is treated as an important and prestigious visitor as well as the evidence of beautifully hand-crafted gifts. Others focused on her response to the 'homestay' where the descriptive language such as 'adequate, affordable', 'less sturdy' and 'designed optimistically' suggest an underwhelmed reaction and a feeling that she is worried that she will not be comfortable due to the winter cold. These choices could all be linked to an overview successfully yet considered independently offering candidates a great deal of scope for precise and developed analysis of the language used in paragraph 6.

In paragraph 13 many responses were able to appreciate Sonja's increasing appreciation of the simplicity and beauty of Nepal and its landscape. Many candidates opted to discuss 'the local beauty spot perched higher up in the mountains' as a remote point where the height would give an opportunity to survey the landscape like a bird. Another popular choice was 'the sun pouring out' as evidence of the warm sun drenching the landscape creating a heavenly atmosphere. This was often linked closely to 'the uninterrupted Himalayan sky' and the impression of a clear unpolluted sky as well as the vast landscape suggested in 'stretch shimmering into the distance' which also indicates a magical beauty. Many candidates focused on the fact that the area is 'home to the Bengal tiger' suggesting that the tiger has more right to be there than the humans. The word 'lurking' was often cited as indicating Sonja's fear and uncertainty, but this was often balanced with Ramesh's 'giggles, reassuring me solemnly' as dissipating her fear with light-hearted teasing showing the growth of their friendship. Finally, many candidates explored the sadness felt by Sonja in 'leaving this place isn't going to be easy' suggesting that she has become attached to Nepal's charms and knows that she will leave a part of herself behind when returning to her old life.

Where effects were less successfully explained, it tended to be due to repeating the same idea for all three language choices in the paragraph. In paragraph 6 this tended to be through repeating the idea of the flimsy accommodation through all choices selected without looking at them individually to consider the nuances, and in paragraph 13 it tended to be repeating the idea of the landscape being beautiful. There were also candidates who used the language of the text repeatedly in their explanations: most commonly 'narrow', 'snaked', 'traditional', 'welcome', 'jigsaw puzzles', 'affordable', 'beauty', 'perched', and 'stretch'.

There was little evidence of misreading in the two paragraphs specified in the question, but some candidates interpreted 'snaking' too literally and focused on evil traits or slithering movements rather than the idea of bendy roads around the mountain. There was some confusion about the 'lanes paved' with some candidates suggesting piles of rocks were blocking roads rather than the intricate patterns formed by the paving. Some less effective responses also included very long quotations with general explanations rather than engaging closely with specific words. Very rarely no quotations were included at all with a brief description of the paragraphs offered instead. Such responses did not address the question at all. In a small number of responses, the wrong paragraphs were used so no choices could be credited: candidates are advised to look at the section of text supplied in the question as well as the paragraph number to ensure that they select language choices from the correct paragraphs. They should also be aware of where paragraphs end, especially where there is a page break.

Candidates are reminded that it is the quality of their language analysis which can be credited. Listing of literary devices or the selection of plain language from the text is unlikely to lead to a successful response.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- select three precise and accurate language choices from **both** of the specified paragraphs
- make sure explanations of meanings make sense within the context of the text – avoid literal meanings unless this is the case
- avoid very general explanations such as 'this helps the reader imagine it', 'this creates a strong visual image for the reader' or 'this is an example of powerful language and imagery'

- try to engage with the language at word level by considering meaning in context then connotations / associations of words and why the writer has selected them
- always start with the contextualised meaning then move on to the effect created by the language in terms of how it helps the reader's understanding of the situation, characters, atmosphere etc.
- avoid repeating the same explanations of effects for each language choice: try to be more specific about analysing at word-level.

### Question 3

**Later the same year, Ramesh is returning the exchange: working in Sonja's city centre school and staying with her family. One week into his visit he gives a talk to a group of teachers from Sonja's school who are also considering volunteering for a work exchange in Siurung.**

#### **Write the words of Ramesh's talk.**

**In the talk you should:**

- **outline what Sonja appeared to enjoy most about her stay and why**
- **describe what life in Siurung is like, the challenges they are likely to encounter during their visit to the area and anything they should prepare for in advance**
- **explain why exchange visits like this are important and what Ramesh feels he will have gained from the whole experience.**

This question required candidates to write a talk given by Ramesh while visiting Sonja's city centre school during his part of the exchange programme. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their talk. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and adapt it to fit the requirements of a talk aimed at teachers considering coming to Nepal on an exchange. The third bullet required candidates to infer what Ramesh feels he has gained from the experience as well as the wider importance of international exchanges for teachers.

The majority of candidates were able to show general understanding of the text addressing the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support the response. Many of the responses were also able to develop the ideas by writing in a credible style for a talk, evaluating the ideas in the text and adapting them accordingly. Where candidates had followed the bullets carefully, they were often able to develop explicit and implicit ideas effectively to write a lively and informative talk about Sonja and Ramesh's experiences as exchange teachers. Most candidates addressed the bullet points in chronological order using them to structure the response coherently. Less effective responses tended to be unselective or closely paraphrase the text without adapting the style therefore offering a rather plain narrative account with little sense of the audience. The least effective responses used the ideas in the text thinly, often presenting very general ideas about Sonja's experiences in response to the first bullet, listing some aspects of life in Siurung for the second bullet, and offering an undeveloped response to the third bullet, mostly citing cultural experiences without any further details or trying to develop the ideas in any way. Some less effective responses only addressed one or two of the bullets.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to explain what Sonja enjoyed most about her stay and why. This gave candidates opportunities to look at the positive aspects of Sonja's experiences outlined in the text. The best responses considered the warm welcome she received, as well as the way that Ramesh looked after her through taking her on hikes after school and involving her in important family occasions such as his brother's wedding and the family trek to a remote beauty spot in the Himalayas. They could also consider her positive experience of teaching Class 8 at Ramesh's school and her enjoyment of the food served so generously by her hosts. These responses recognised that in this bullet point they could explore Sonja's growing enjoyment and familiarity with the village and its people, as well as a deep appreciation of Nepal itself. More effective responses usually found only a narrow range of ideas for this bullet and didn't look for ways to develop them. There was little evidence of misreading in response to the first bullet.

The second bullet offered many opportunities to identify the challenges of life in Siurung through a close examination of Sonja's experiences to select the most appropriate ideas to develop. The best responses selected carefully and were able to remodel the material. They were able to look at Sonja's initial loneliness because of her inability to communicate with family due to the lack of an internet connection. They also cited her inability to speak more than a few words of the local language. Issues caused by the remote location were also identified: the dangerous roads, the presence of tigers, and the extreme temperatures all featured

in the most developed responses. Many candidates also examined Sonja's first impressions of her homestay room especially in the colder temperatures. These responses supported the ideas with details from the text such as her lonely birthday, her three blankets, the flimsy design of the accommodation intended for hikers in the warmer seasons, and the winding thin roads providing a scary experience.

When responding to the third bullet, the most effective responses clearly organised the material into the general importance of such exchange visits and Ramesh's personal gains, usually linking both these aspects neatly together. These responses picked out a range of clues from throughout the text to develop appropriate ideas, citing the general advantages of being immersed in a different culture, the benefits to students and teachers of experiencing a different educational approach, the friendships gained, and the personal developments in terms of language and character development. The best responses developed Sonja's reactions to life in Siurung by contrasting them briefly to Ramesh's impressions of city life. Less effective responses tended to lack range in response to this bullet often simply referring to the general idea of experiencing a different way of life. Some responses did not address this bullet at all.

Many candidates seemed comfortable and familiar with the format of a talk with the best responses adopting an appropriately lively and enthusiastic tone and register. Middle-range responses tended to be written as a rather plain narrative, relying heavily on the sequencing of the original text and sometimes written by Sonja herself. The language used was mostly appropriate and some more effective responses were genuinely informative and effective. In less effective responses the language and voice were very plain but rarely inappropriate for the genre, although such pieces tended to lack a sense of purpose or audience. Some more effective responses wrote the piece as a conversation or interview rather than a talk to an audience.

Generally, accuracy was good with some skilfully written responses. Others struggled to maintain fluency resulting in some awkward expression caused by errors in grammar and punctuation. Candidates are advised to check through their work carefully to correct errors where possible. There were few instances of wholesale lifting from the passage, but some more effective responses were over-reliant on lifted phrases and sentences throughout the response.

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

- read Text C carefully to ensure a sound understanding
- do not refer to ideas in Texts B and C
- pay careful attention to the written style adopted – for example, the register required for the purpose and audience of the task
- do not invent information and material that is not clearly linked to the details and events in the text
- give equal attention to all three bullet points
- briefly plan your response to ensure that you are selecting ideas relevant to all three bullets
- remember to look for ideas throughout the text for the third bullet
- avoid copying from the text: use your own words as far as possible
- remember to use ideas and details from the text but to adapt and develop them appropriately to create a convincing voice and new perspective
- leave some time to check through your response
- do not waste time counting the words: the suggested word length is a guide, not a limit.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/21

Directed Writing and Composition

## Key messages

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

To achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence the style adopted
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task.

## General comments

Most examiners were familiar with the format of the examination paper and understood what was required for both the directed writing and composition questions. There were few very brief scripts, incomplete scripts or scripts in which the instructions regarding which questions to answer were not followed. There were some responses to **Question 1** which were entirely copied from the texts and a few scripts contained no **Question 1** response but nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task. Most responses were written in candidates' own words. Some lifting of phrases or sentences was common but where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing. In **Section B**, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were stories submitted for the descriptive writing tasks which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure. **Question 5** was sometimes addressed in a more discursive than narrative style. Some involved biographical accounts of famous sportspeople and again this sometimes limited the Content and Structure mark available because the mark scheme directs Examiners to reward characteristically narrative features.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of food waste in the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for an article with an audience of young people. The register required here was interpreted in different ways with some responses more formal in style while others adopted a conversational tone which sometimes showed an awareness of what would engage a younger readership. Some did slip into a colloquial, less accurate style, using words such as 'kinda' and 'gonna', which became a little jarring and inappropriate in the context of an examination. Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response. Some opinion was usually given about the need for food waste to be reduced in various ways to mitigate its environmental impacts, based on ideas in the texts, with only a minority simply reporting the facts and ideas in the texts with no comment on them. Again, more effective responses tended to comment on specific ideas in the texts rather than offer general impressions about food waste and what can be done about it. Sometimes, responses reflected the ideas in the texts in a more straightforward, practical way without addressing the wider ideas in the texts concerning accountability and inter-generational blame. More effective evaluation tended to probe some ideas in the texts rather than reproduce them and to suggest that blaming particular groups was futile in the face of such potential harm to the planet.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Some salient ideas in the texts were not quite addressed, such as the limits of

individual action in the face of corporate greed or the burden of blame on younger people's shoulders for levels of food waste which there was some assertion rather than argument, often where candidates agreed with some ideas, such as the need to raise awareness of food waste, whilst not accounting for the idea in Text B that such campaigns were of little value. Sometimes, a list of individual actions, such as using up food and not over-shopping, were made with the wider responsibility of businesses and schools not addressed. Some responses reflected the sense of indignation in Text B that young people were unfairly blamed but did not develop and evaluate this idea to make a wider point.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Effective evaluation often addressed ideas about accountability and responsibility being a shared endeavour between different groups in society while less well considered scripts sometimes gave a summary of the ideas in the texts but without the focus on how food waste and its damaging effects could be reduced. The structure and organisation of ideas required in an article, often including some rhetorical sub-headings or clear lines of argument, were used effectively in better responses to persuade and argue a case. Less effective responses were often written in a flat style with less consistent awareness of the audience and purpose of the task.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. There were some imaginative descriptions of different groups of people meeting in various public parks, squares or buildings such as restaurants or churches. Less effective responses to this question were sometimes a little vague in depicting locations and the people gathering there lacked detailed description or the reader was left unsure what the purpose of the gathering was. For the second question, there was a wide range of descriptions of 'special' places, some iconic, some particularly beautiful and some with very personal significance to the narrator. Some responses focused more on the changing landscape during the sunrise while others, equally acceptable interpretations of the question, described how the sunrise evoked memories and emotions in the narrator. Less effective responses here described quite ordinary scenes such as a family home or quickly exhausted a list of different colours in the sky as the sun rose. Questions from previous examinations were sometimes used with only limited focus on the specific task here.

Both narrative writing questions proved popular across the range of abilities. In **Question 4**, although a much less popular choice than **Question 5**, the title was used in a variety of ways, often to help structure a story in which the narrator's actions were based on a fundamental misunderstanding of something said to them or of another character's intentions. Narratives which were constructed around the idea of a misunderstanding which had had profound consequences, and which included credible characters and scenarios were generally more effective than those which used the misunderstanding in a more prosaic way, such as turning up at the wrong venue which was quickly discovered, or misunderstanding an instruction which had significant consequences which were not signalled earlier in the narrative. This sense of jeopardy was often important in the creation of a believable response to this question. **Question 5** elicited some highly engaging and well-constructed narratives. Effective narratives featured 'transformations' which were surprising and well-realised whereas less effective though cohesive responses often focused on transformations undertaken in the gym over a summer vacation when physically weak young men or unattractive young women became more impressive characters who could avoid ill-treatment by their peers. In **Question 5** there was also more of a tendency to write discursively about the various journeys to stardom experienced by sporting stars which in some cases showed insufficient narrative shaping and content for a high mark for Content and Structure.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

**Write an article for young people about food waste and what they can do about it.**

**In your article you should:**

- **evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions given in both texts**
- **suggest how young people can help to reduce food waste in their homes, schools and the wider world.**

**Base your article on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.**

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. Where the article was also accurate and ambitious in vocabulary and style, with a clear understanding of the appropriate style and register for the specific task and audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the ideas about the causes and contributors of food waste in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement. These implicit ideas often involved the shared blame between generations for food waste, the effect of collective action to combat it and the balance between individual and corporate or governmental accountability for addressing it.

Many effective responses, for example, reflected Text B's implied criticism of older generations for blaming the young for the impact of food waste on the environment but better responses saw that inter-generational blame was an impediment to tackling it rather than a genuine insight into who was most to blame. Similarly, the need for collective action was expressed quite often as a challenge to both texts, showing that small actions by everyone was more effective than simply accepting that households, restaurants or young people were responsible for most food waste. Inferences which could be drawn from some ideas in the texts were also used in more effective responses. Some responses, for example, emphasised the role of young people's stewardship of the planet and highlighted the importance of minimising food waste to ensure that their own futures were protected as citizens of the world. One less common but valid inference was the idea that businesses needed to stop putting profit before the planet or hungry people and that ordinary consumers had the option of boycotting or simply avoiding establishments which threw out food unnecessarily. Measures taken by authorities to prevent such waste by businesses was also cited as ways in which pressure could be applied to reduce waste and these ideas could often be credited as feasible inferences anchored in the texts for marks in Level 5 or above for Reading.

In less effective responses where sensible use was made of the texts without such probing and challenging of ideas, there were often suggestions about reducing food waste which were based on the texts. Ideas such as shopping more often, using up food rather than ordering deliveries and eating out less often were given and while these were valid and grounded in one of the texts they sometimes ignored other ideas which contradicted them. For example, many responses advocated shopping more often or every day, or only buying packaged food which lasted longer, but these suggestions sometimes relied on ignoring other ideas in the texts which suggested these were unrealistic.

Where some consideration was given to both sides of the argument, Examiners could sometimes credit comments as evaluative. For example, one response advocated shopping more frequently but justified the judgement with a comment that 'instead of buying a burger between lectures, think about buying some fruit or some fresh food that would require minimum cooking skills. That crop will have taken land, water and time to produce and none of that should go to waste when the planet is in such peril.' In many responses, simple solutions such as buying food that was not perfectly shaped were made with limited reference to the wider point in the texts that such items rarely made their way to the shops in the first place.

## Marks for reading

The most effective responses adopted a consistently evaluative, critical stance and read effectively between the lines of the texts, drawing inferences and making judgements about how podcast listening might benefit the recipient of the letter, the boss.

Most responses included reference to various ways in which different groups in the population wasted food, referring to the statistics cited in the texts. The critique of younger people in Text B was often reflected but more evaluative responses considered more implicit ideas such as inter-generational blame, accountability and the need for collective action in a more thoughtful way. The extent to which these ideas were addressed often determined whether a response could be given a Level 5 mark for Reading and in some cases a range of more evaluative comments merited a Level 6 mark. Some subtle ideas were developed and explored regarding the idea of blame. For example, as one candidate put it, 'We younger people might be more to blame, or we might not. Older people might be blamed for causing climate change obviously over decades and businesses just trying to survive might have encouraged our wasteful ways. But all of us will suffer if we don't change so collective action, not finger-pointing, is what's going to save our world, and it will take all our efforts in small ways to create real change.'

Responses awarded marks in Level 5 characteristically offered one or two more evaluative ideas but sometimes with less development on the wider challenges outside the home. There were often sensible ideas about households or the lifestyles of younger people but corporate or farming interests, as discussed in the texts were not always addressed.

Where some comment or opinion was offered, mostly without specific reference to particular points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks in Level 4 were usually awarded. These comments were usually less selective and included some details which were factually accurate but not evaluative, such as details about the busy lifestyles of young people or the wasteful behaviour of hotels and restaurants. More general, if valid, ideas were also typical at this level with many responses including suggestions about how families should shop more frequently or should use the food they bought.

Examiners usually awarded marks in Level 3 for Reading where there was some coverage of the texts, and some selection of ideas from them, but where these were listed or simply recorded. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but limited comment on them. Where there were some brief opinions, usually at the end of the response, they tended to be more general and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts. The polemic, combative style of Text B was sometimes replicated but without considering its implications and there was sometimes some drifting from the focus of the task from the impact of food waste on the environment to more general environmental issues which did not feature in the texts.

Comments made at this level were given mostly in candidates' own words. Less effective responses tended to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in low Level 3 and below contained much copied material. In a few cases the entire response was copied from the texts. Where a mark of 6 was awarded, some firmer roots in the passages were needed, whereas 5 was generally given for thin or mainly lifted responses in which there was some insecure grasp of the ideas in the passage.

## Marks for Writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## Style and audience

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for an engaging, informative article for an audience of young people. Most responses showed a clear understanding of the required, largely formal but engaging register, even where technical writing skills were less effective, and this allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Some attempted to adopt a style of mediation between conflicting interests, encouraging and exhorting their readership to accept responsibility for their part in reducing food waste while avoiding blaming others. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in a more combative way, asserting that the crisis was urgent and needed all interests to come together before it was too late. These responses made their case effectively and with some impact. At the highest level, responses were pitched at quite a subtle level, challenging young people to lead by example and embrace a difficult but essential challenge to galvanise other groups to act.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks for Writing in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage young people with the arguments worked well. Conversely, some responses were generally accurate but were largely summaries of the reading material rather than adopting the style of an article or the register appropriate for a young audience. Sometimes, in reaching for an engaging, age-appropriate style and register, colloquialisms and slang were used, detracting from the maturity required by the seriousness of the arguments and the circumstances of examination writing.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent style. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for Examiners to reward, though these kinds of responses were rare. Phrases and words such as 'attributable', 'notorious', 'perfectly safe', 'part of the problem', 'tweaks', 'beautifully unblemished', 'rarely consumed' were often used but in some cases several sentences were also copied. More commonly, a range of expressions was lifted to express salient ideas which could then not be credited for either Reading or Writing. In more effective responses, ideas were incorporated into the writer's own style and selected for their usefulness to the overall argument rather than copied.

### Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the texts, but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the introductory paragraph and the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a cohesive piece. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered to some degree in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more dependent on the sequencing of the original texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas, with some contradiction of points taken from each text. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were asserted and imposed on the structure of the original texts rather than argued for.

### Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as subtle in tone and register was given a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were not only engaging in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

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

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There were lapses in the use of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical disagreement, often between plurals and verb forms. Common spelling errors in this mark range included some frequently used words in the texts such as 'environment', 'restaurants', 'banana' and there was some capitalisation of words unnecessarily, such as 'Hotels' use in the middle of a sentence.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept Writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying



meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was quite common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Level 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content or the style of the response was the candidate's own.

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

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts
- look for contradictions in the arguments and point them out
- group ideas from both texts together and discuss them rather than repeat them
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

## Section B

### Descriptive writing

**Question 2 – Describe a group of people gathering in a local public place.**

**Question 3 – Describe the sun rising over a special place.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and Examiners awarded a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions elicited responses describing a wide variety of locations which Examiners could reward appropriately. A sense of place, brought to life in vivid ways, was often key to the success of the description in both questions. In the first task, there were many detailed, organised and effective descriptions of people and places where they gathered. There were some original and engaging descriptions of crowds at unusual locations, such as a gallows scene or a pilgrimage site, often set in the past, with more modern settings such as protest demonstrations or sporting occasions also featuring. Often, candidates made use of the sense of 'special' in the second task to evoke a scene with particular significance to the writer or a setting which held nostalgic or resonant memories of remembered family members or friends, all of which helped to elevate the description from simple, concrete details. Without becoming narrative, effective responses sought to give their descriptions shape and focus, often by returning to a key motif or charting changes in the mood of the assembled people. One description in response to **Question 2** developed the extended metaphor of the city waking up, beginning with an effective image of the crowd emerging slowly from an underground station 'like the first yawn of the city's morning.' The shifting mood of demonstrators in a public square from good-humoured and festive to more menacing and angry was effectively signalled in another response by the use of sound as the voices of the crowd were compared with an incoming storm at sea.

In the middle range of responses, locations described in **Question 2** tended to be predictable or vague, often involving local parks on a sunny day. While these settings appropriately addressed the question, less detailed observations and more stereotypical ideas featured than in more effective responses. There were many picnic blankets set down on green grass, for example, trees waving in the breeze, birds 'chirping happily', children laughing and ice creams being consumed, though the sense of a specific time and place was less clearly established.

**Question 3** elicited a range of different kinds of descriptions of places that were personally 'special' to the writer, though there were opportunities offered by the task to focus on both place and the sun rising. Some unusual settings gave rise to detailed and imaginative ideas and images. In one effective response, for example, the sun rose over a monstrous battlefield, revealing the effects of war on the shattered landscape: 'The sunlight billowed from charred wood, writhing in the dawn, its putrid aura filling the air until it was thick with the smell of death.'

In other high-scoring responses to **Question 3** the sun was personified in interesting ways, linked with the moon as 'fraternal brothers destined to meet only in fleeting glimpses across a wide sky' or images were used to show the impact of the sun rising on the landscape or buildings gradually being illuminated. In one response, the sun rose over a statue: 'Every jewel encrusted within the statue's throne radiated its light across the river, with imperious snow-capped summits of the surrounding mountains donating their tithe of light towards the temple in the heart of the valley.'

Descriptive responses, as is always the case, were more effective if they contained vivid and specific details rather than more general or stereotypical ideas and images. In both questions, some responses lacked specific detail with some reliance in **Question 3** on various colours in the sky as the sun rose and descriptions of the clothes worn by people who seemed otherwise unconnected in **Question 2**. Lower in the mark range, responses to both questions were rather prone to narrative though Examiners rewarded description wherever it appeared. In the second question particularly, a minority of responses included narrative sections about how holiday beach destinations were reached or explanations of why a place was special rather than descriptions which evoked a sense of being special.

In both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created engaging, evocative scenes in the best responses. Where they were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed, convincing overall picture, Examiners could award marks for Content and Structure in Level 6. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's attention by linking the different elements described in an interesting, cohesive response. Level 6 responses were characterised by this cohesive structure, often provided by the narrator's reactions or a specific atmosphere, as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images or extended motifs which held the piece together.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but usually a more predictable. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas, as mentioned above.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to become more narrative in intent, and while most responses at this level were organised and paragraphed, the details included were simple and there was less use of images or a range of vocabulary.

Some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing was evident in responses at Level 3, although they were sometimes accurately written. These were sometimes entirely narrative and often brief and undeveloped.

### **Narrative writing**

**Question 4 – Write a story that involves a misunderstanding.**

**Question 5 – Write a story with the title, ‘The transformation’.**

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range though **Question 5** proved to be a more common option than **Question 4**. There was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses as candidates took the opportunities offered by the open questions to determine the genre, style and content for themselves. Examiners occasionally saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title, which sometimes seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations or were pre-prepared. In some cases this lack of relevance affected the mark for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension, mystery or drama and to vary the pace of the story were essential elements of more effective responses to both questions.

In **Question 4**, better responses often incorporated into the narrative the idea of a misunderstanding which seemed insignificant but had wide-ranging of serious consequences for the characters. Misheard snippets of conversation or misunderstood instructions sometimes worked well as an idea on which to construct an engaging narrative. One narrative involved an accidentally overheard conversation between the narrator’s friends who seemed to be plotting an event designed to humiliate the narrator: ‘My ears strained to hear the rest of Juliette’s sentence but through my gathering tears I realised that their laughter was not benevolent and their delicious anticipation of my birthday party next week was laced with malice.’ Other protagonists misunderstood characters’ motivations and intentions in a contrasting scenario, such as trusting a boss who seemed to be giving signs that a promotion was in the offing when in fact their words of encouragement were based on pity and the knowledge that the narrator would soon be laid off.

Sometimes a scene observed or participated in by the narrator was not at all what it seemed, such as in one quite effective narrative in which a fellow soldier seemed to murder a wounded comrade in cold blood when in reality the killer had unmasked a traitor who had given away plans to the enemy. This betrayal had resulted in the deaths of many soldiers, including the narrator’s younger brother, but was only later revealed after the terrible consequences of the narrator’s misunderstanding were played out on the battlefield in a tragic way. As always, convincing characterisation was often an important element in creating credible narratives in which important relationships between friends, family members or romantic partners were jeopardised by misunderstandings. There was some subtlety in creating characters in the higher mark range. In one response, the narrator was portrayed as a naïve young girl from a rich and powerful family, excited to meet a special guest at what seemed like a lavish event prepared in her honour by her parents. As her maids helped her prepare, the young girl’s frivolous, innocent excitement was contrasted with the reader’s mounting disquiet that she was in fact being duped into a convenient marriage with a much older, rather sinister character chosen by her family.

Most narratives addressing this question were chronological accounts with varying degrees of development, characterisation and shaping although some candidates chose more ambitious structures, telling the story from the vantage point of hindsight. While such structures were more difficult to control, Examiners could often reward these approaches for their ambition and engagement.

More commonly in the middle range, narratives were straightforward accounts in which events tended to dominate and there was more limited attention paid to characterisation and setting. Plotlines often involved more mundane scenarios in which venues for various events were misheard or misunderstood or where the consequences of mishearing simple instructions were explained in less convincing ways. These narratives were often organised and somewhat cohesive but did not really engage the reader.

Examiners saw fewer pre-planned and not entirely relevant narratives in this series and there were a few where the idea of a 'misunderstanding' seemed immaterial to the plot.

For **Question 5**, there were many different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability. In many responses, some sort of 'transformation' was essential to the narrative, helping candidates to create credible, interesting characters who underwent drastic changes of many different kinds. One response, for example, described the transformative effects of a deep depression lifting as winter turned to spring, evoking poignantly the sense of suffering and entrapment experienced by the narrator, using striking images and ideas to cast a revealing light on this crippling condition. Other similarly figurative interpretations of the title included a detailed, evocative account of the transformation of an oak sapling which bore silent witness to events as it grew. Another developed, engaging narrative involved the gradual realisation on the part of the narrator that their much desired and striven-for transformation from poor child to successful, wealthy adult had been achieved at the expense of loved ones and family. The subsequent poignant return to the family home became a transformation of a different, perhaps more significant kind, showing some ability to use the central idea of the question to create an interesting study of character.

One thought-provoking response used the idea of 'transformation' in a subversive way, describing how a dedicated drama student, steeped in 'method acting' techniques, had discovered that their transformation to embody the character they played in a school production had become irreversible: 'I can see them glance as I walk past. Sometimes I have to remind myself that I'm just Penny and that this will all go back to the way it as once the show is over. But it doesn't.'

Less effective responses to this question tended to make more predictable use of the title and although many in the middle range were organised and sequenced fairly cohesively, characters lacked some subtlety and depth compared with the more well-realised scenarios mentioned above. Most 'transformations' at this level involved narrators who were previously overlooked at school or work and decided to take matters into their own hands to improve their standing with their peers. For many this required many hours in the gym over a summer vacation, or weeks of changing their appearance in other ways to create a more attractive, appealing persona. Transformations in academic prospects also featured, in which previously lazy or low-achieving students became diligent and successful, as well as some narratives in which unpopular or ignored students learned to present a more confident, sociable aspect of their personalities to transform their school lives.

Less effective responses to this question were typically simpler versions of these scenarios in which there was some organisation but little sense of character emerged or where brevity and simplicity precluded Examiners from awarding higher marks for Content and Structure.

Examiners awarded marks in Level 6 for Content and Structure for narratives which created convincing, interesting scenarios and characters in responses to both questions. While the events in a story were important in creating such credibility, Level 6 responses paid attention to characterisation and how events were driven by character traits, choices and relationships.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless cohesive and reasonably credible for the reader. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed, relevant story. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying, if not always engaging, resolution. For the first question, this often included some rueful explanation of how the 'misunderstanding' had had consequences for the protagonist and while the narrative progression was clear, it was often a little predictable. For the second narrative question, Level 5 responses often involved a 'transformation' which was significant for the protagonist and was convincing if not always engaging for the reader. Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks, for Level 5 marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be

more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. In the first question, for example, these sometimes involved simple accounts of arriving at a venue for an event only to discover that directions or instructions had been misunderstood. At this level there was a tendency to say simply what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by characterisation and setting. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing credible characters. While most less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative, and the reader was less engaged as a result.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6 and where coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given.

Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate while Level 4 responses were plain in style and there was a more limited range of vocabulary. Speech punctuation was almost always problematic at this level although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 marks, such as disagreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary. Occasionally, the use of obscure, archaic vocabulary, the meaning of which was not well understood, seriously affected the clarity of the writing and resulted in lower marks for both Content and Structure and Style and Accuracy because neither the story as a whole or the meaning of the language was clear.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A common reason for keeping an otherwise clearly written story out of Level 5 was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed but sometimes sentence separation was missing altogether. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these weaknesses also limited the marks available in the narrative writing.

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

- think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative
- consider imaginative ways to tell your story, not just a chronological account
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader: do not rely on actions
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes: accurate speech punctuation will help to lift your mark
- use complicated vocabulary only with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/22  
Directed Writing and Composition

## Key messages

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

To achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence the style adopted
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task.

## General comments

Candidates were familiar with the format of the examination paper and understood what was required for both the directed writing and composition questions. There were few incomplete scripts or scripts in which the instructions regarding which questions to answer were not followed. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements seen. A small number of candidates did not attempt **Question 1** but wrote quite competent responses to one of the composition questions. Most responses were written in candidates' own words although there were a few responses which were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert. Some lifting of phrases or sentences was common, but where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing. In **Section B**, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were stories submitted for the descriptive writing tasks, and discursive or polemical pieces submitted for the narrative tasks which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure. This was more common in **Question 2** and **Question 5**.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of lying to avoid personal inconvenience in the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a letter to a friend. The register required here was generally well understood, with a friendly and persuasive tone and the use of direct address. Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on or employing the ideas in the texts in a coherent response. Even in responses which offered only limited coverage of the ideas in the reading material, some opinion or recommendation was usually given about the recipient's dilemma as given in the task, though not always probing or offering judgements about the ideas: only a small minority simply reported the views and ideas in the texts with no comment on them. More effective evaluation tended to challenge some ideas in the texts rather than reproduce them and to suggest an understanding of the possible long-term consequences of habitual lying for the individual and for society at large.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Here salient ideas in the texts were not quite addressed, such as the morality of lying in different circumstances, while several responses at different levels of writing skills focused on whether or not their friend should attend the event, which was not the point of the task, thus missing numerous opportunities for evaluation which were offered by the task.

Most candidates made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response, and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. The opposing challenges of lying or not lying were often thoughtfully considered, although some responses based their arguments on purely

pragmatic considerations which ignored some salient points in the reading material. The most effective responses selected from and elaborated upon the material as part of an ongoing discussion on the ethics of honesty within different types of personal and professional relationships as well as the possibly detrimental consequences of even 'minor' lies. Less effective responses were sometimes little more than a summary in paraphrase of the two articles in the Reading Insert. The structure and organisation of ideas required in a letter to a friend, such as a friendly opening and a thoughtful and convincing conclusion, were well understood by many candidates, though there were also responses which were quite flat and discursive in style after brief, initial pleasantries, or overly formal and impersonal in a style quite unconvincing between friends.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each. Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were effective, organised and sustained. The first question was much more popular, producing responses across the mark range. In responses to this option there were many convincing and evocative descriptions of underwater worlds, seen most often while scuba-diving in tropical zones, the more effective ones conveying some sense of the writer's awe at the beauty of flora and fauna; quite often these feelings became, at least in part, a meditation on environmental damage. Less effective responses were inventory-like, prosaic or very simply structured. Responses to this question were sometimes weakened by overlong or narrative preambles to actual entry into the water: occasionally the underwater experience was only a minor part of a day at the beach.

The second question, although the least popular of all the composition options, produced some high-level responses which were engaging, evocative and often very well structured, using flash-back and other manipulations of time to evoke the life of a lost loved one to whom the piece of furniture had belonged. The least effective responses to this question were sometimes almost entirely narrative, or described the item of furniture in simple, concrete detail which had little impact on the reader.

Both narrative writing questions proved popular across the range of abilities. In response to **Question 4** there were many stories of abandoned lovers or betrayal by a trusted friend. Candidates choosing the 'disguise' option in the question produced a range of crime and horror stories. Examiners noted that many less effective responses to **Question 4** had only very tenuous links to either deceit or disguise. There were also many scenarios of crime scenes such as bank heists or military raids where the intended deceit or the disguise involved were unconvincing. There were also a small number of stories featuring transgender people. Some inventive responses to this question manipulated narrative perspective to make an unreliable narrator the deceiver.

The title of **Question 5** was often reproduced in the dénouement of tales of pranking or treachery, or early in the narrative as the rebutted, dismissive sentiment to which a narrator responded with great determination to achieve sporting or other victory. This question allowed for a very wide range of scenarios and elicited some highly engaging and well-constructed narratives in various genres, but the dominant theme in this examination session was the world of computer- or video games, with some highly effective narratives involving addiction, entrepreneurship or gaming competition at the highest international level. Responses to both questions which were coherently constructed; they included credible characters and scenarios were always more effective. Less effective responses to both questions were over-packed with incident succeeded by an ambiguous or poorly managed ending. Some highly effective responses created tension and pace, supporting the narrative detail with the deliberate manipulation of sentence length and structure for effect.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

A friend has asked for advice about whether or not to lie to avoid an event that they might find boring or embarrassing.

**Write a letter to your friend, giving your advice.**

**In your letter you should:**

- **Evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions in both texts.**
- **Give advice to your friend about how to respond, giving your reasons for the approach you suggest.**

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

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

**Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.**

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. Where the letter was also accurate and precise in vocabulary, with a clear understanding of the appropriate style and register for the specific task and audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded. More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement.

### **Marks for reading**

The most effective responses adopted a consistently evaluative, critical stance and read effectively between the lines of the texts, drawing inferences and making judgements about whether lying to avoid an event was wise or advisable.

Most responses included the two main ideas about the morality or advisability of telling lies in certain situations, and the source of 'prosocial' lies in child development, although often there was only the most cursory discussion of these concepts. The majority made more use of the material in Text A, especially in its presentation of relatable social dilemmas, although the ideas in its final paragraph about how liars deceive themselves were often ignored or perhaps less easily understood: here opportunities for higher-level evaluation were missed. Most responses used the material in Text B about child development to show that lying is 'natural' and arises from empathy and kindness. Some cited the hypocrisy of parents in educating their children as an excuse for lying in later life. While promoting the case for 'minor' lies told to protect the feelings of others, some strongly argued responses were weakened by their dismissal or ignoring of counterarguments in Text A.

Those responses which managed to synthesise ideas from both texts to craft a fully developed argument in the letter, offering a range of evaluative points, could be awarded marks for Reading in Level 6 or high in Level 5. These showed a mature and thorough grasp of the subtleties of the issues involved: 'Yes, lying shows empathy, but how valuable is empathy if there is a missed opportunity to allow the other person to grow or develop by receiving genuinely constructive feedback? Empathy is then just useless sentiment.' Across the ability range scenarios were created to provide a point of entry to some most effective evaluative comments: an easily offended aunt's birthday; a class reunion; a team-building event. The most effective responses briefly established this idea and then tailored argument and advice to it; while there might be some anecdotal development, these responses never lost sight of the task, the texts and the audience. Some employers of the device created minutely detailed family or work scenarios which were developed in lengthy anecdote, with inadequate attention being paid to the task or the ideas in the texts. In one highly



effective response the writer referred briefly to a 'delicate' family situation but then remarked, '... so it seems that these lies are just inescapable: you need to lie to keep your family together and create mutual trust. Is not this ironic? How would trust blossom out of lies? Can a flower grow in toxic soil?' Some of the most effective responses were those where the writer from the beginning took a strong moral stance on the subject and, while recognising other arguments, succeeded in attacking a key idea from either text, for example Text A's implication that the ubiquity of lying has rendered it acceptable: 'Stealing is also widely done, but I would not dare say it is acceptable!' Where even a single evaluative point was firmly made Examiners could award marks at the bottom of Level 5 if there was otherwise reasonable coverage of the reading material. Where coverage was more extensive and more evaluative points were made the response could move up the mark range in this Level. At this Level evaluation usually centred upon one or more of three areas: the creation of damaging of trust, the dangers or consequences of being found out, and the precedence of kindness over honesty. Examiners noted an increase in this series of brief responses which precluded the awarding of marks in Level 5 or above because they were not 'thorough' or 'developed' responses as required by the marking guidelines, but where some comment on or development of key ideas in the texts was offered Examiners could award marks in Level 4.

Where some comment or opinion was offered, sometimes without specific reference to points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks at the lower end of Level 4 were usually awarded. These comments usually focused more exclusively on the pragmatic: what would follow on the recipient's decision whether or not to lie. Examiners noted a small but significant minority of well-written responses which could not be awarded marks for Reading above Level 3, or occasionally Level 2: these often lengthy and thoughtful responses about lying seemed to be based only the wording of the task and on the writer's own experience, without any reference to the ideas in the Reading material. They were sometimes very well written and employed an effective register, and so had marks in widely differing Levels for the two components of the question. Where the beginnings of evaluation of explicit points were evident marks at the top of the Level could be awarded, while in undeveloped or brief responses, a mark of 7 at the bottom of Level 4 could be given if a comment had some firm roots in the text.

Examiners usually awarded marks in Level 3 for Reading where there was some coverage of the texts, and some selection of ideas from them, but where these were listed or simply recorded, or comments were relevant but simple. A mark of 5 was usually given where answers were thin or partly lifted directly from the texts. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but little comment on them. Where there were some brief opinions, usually at the end of the response, they tended to be more general and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts. There was also sometimes, at this level, misunderstanding of some details in the texts or an unbalanced grasp of ideas: some misunderstanding of the writer's perspective in Text B was evident, with some responses assuming an all-out vindication of all kinds of lying. These responses were obviously muddled but also opportunities for evaluation were also lost elsewhere because of the misreading of the task itself: in a small but significant number of responses, argument was based on whether or not to attend the event, not whether or not to lie to avoid such attendance. This approach usually obviated relevant evaluation.

Less effective responses tended simply to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in low Level 3 and below contained much copied material.

## **Marks for Writing**

### **Style and audience**

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for a letter to a friend, whose specific concerns and point of view could be understood. Most responses showed a clear understanding of the required register, even where technical writing skills were weak, and this allowed Examiners to consider marks in Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many attempted to establish a relationship with the intended audience by reminders of shared family or educational history, recalling 'boring or embarrassing' family celebrations or past incidents involving lying in school. Some high scoring responses used a friendly but slightly more authoritative and rhetorical style, as if the intended reader of the letter needed to be made aware even of the existence of ethics related to the subject. Here the writer sometimes imagined a recipient some years younger than themselves, with limited life experience. In some, sophisticated language use allowed subtle and nuanced ideas to be conveyed while still maintaining a believably friendly style. A smaller number of responses adopted a light-hearted approach and style while still evaluating key ideas: 'Your concern not to offend does you credit and shows your kindness but come on! Lighten up! You are not planning to commit a felony; there's no chance of a life sentence.' Here arguments were presented in an engaging way but made their case clearly and effectively. At the highest level, responses revealed a mature understanding of the subtleties of personal and

professional relationships and the importance of mutual trust. At all levels of achievement having a distinct point of view supported the effectiveness of the writing because it could become impassioned and highly persuasive.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and audience. A clear attempt to engage the audience often worked well, with brief references to past experiences or knowledge of a relevant family celebration, maintaining an effective register without resorting to the overly colloquial slang and expletives of a few responses. In these, expressions such as 'gonna' or overly loose sentence structures were used which were not appropriate for a response in the context of an examination where a range of writing skills is assessed. Sometimes the opening and closing paragraphs were written in a very informal, 'chatty' style but the intervening paragraphs reproduced points from the texts in a style close to the original.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent style or argument. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for Examiners to reward, though this kind of response was quite rare. More commonly, phrases and sentences were lifted and, in some cases, increasingly so as the response developed. At the lower level, awkward paraphrasing was seen with syntactically incorrect insertion of phrases from the text. In this examination fewer instances of inappropriate reference to 'Text A' and 'Text B', which would negatively affect the register, were seen.

### Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts, but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the first paragraph and the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a cohesive piece. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses, apart from the necessary pleasantries and salutations, tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The point of view being developed determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than their sequence in the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed, and usually avoided the repetition of similar ideas which appeared in both. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide coherent judgement or recommendation and were more dependent on the sequencing of the original texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were imposed on the structure of the original texts rather than argued for, and a concluding recommendation was often in apparent contradiction to the weight of selected points preceding it. It was not unusual to see responses which set out all the possible dangers and disadvantages of lying then concluded, 'So just go for it and lie—it'll be fine!'. Some of these less effective responses were very long and involved a considerable amount of repetition. Elsewhere introductory paragraphs were often very laboured and artificial: 'I have received your letter and I am replying to help you decide whether or not to lie to avoid an event which might be boring or embarrassing.'

### Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were not only engaging in style and convincing in their deliberations but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and consciously used to persuade the listener.

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

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually

plain, the language used was generally precise. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There were occasional lapses in the use of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical mis-agreement, often between plurals and verb forms. Words commonly misspelt in this range included 'whether', 'embarrassing', 'awkward', 'vague/vagueness' and 'ambiguity'. Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept Writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Here, the omission of definite or indefinite articles was quite common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Level 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

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

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts
- look for contradictions in the arguments and point them out
- group ideas from both texts together and discuss them rather than repeat them
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience
- ensure that you understand the specific focus of the question to avoid misinterpretation or drifting away from the ideas in the texts
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passages or given in the task
- do not lose marks by using capital letters randomly.

**Descriptive writing**

**Write a description with the title, 'Underwater'.**

**Describe a piece of furniture that is important to you.**

Descriptive Writing was a popular choice for candidates and Examiners could award a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions were interpreted in a variety of ways which Examiners could reward appropriately. In the first task, there were many detailed, organised and effective descriptions of underwater places from diving and submarine viewpoints. The most popular approaches involved writing about coral reefs, glass-bottomed boats, scuba diving, marine life and shipwrecks. The second question, although much less popular, nonetheless elicited a range of objects and some very evocative and nostalgic responses. The piece of furniture was often a grandparent's chair or clock, and in effective responses small details of its physical appearance often conjured up vivid childhood memories and a convincing atmosphere. A small number of responses described objects which were not furniture but sometimes rooms, shops, musical instruments and once, notably, a bicycle. These pieces seemed to be rather awkwardly adapted practice pieces related to previous examination questions.

Descriptions, as is always the case, were more effective if they contained vivid and specific details rather than more general or stereotypical ideas and images. In responses to the first question, a substantial number depicted Disney-style, technicolour scenes and creatures with clownfish, turtles and whales predominating. These were almost always in first person as seen by a scuba-diver and frequently ended with the sudden appearance of a shark. Almost invariably depicted in primary colours, they often lacked the close focus and detailed description that creates the 'convincing picture' and 'developed ideas' of Level 5 or 6, such as: '...the sleek form of an electric eel reveals itself, its eyes crackling with a ferocious, predatory hunger. ...it is sometimes a sword, sometimes a harmless ribbon as it slithers and meanders leisurely around its unopposed territory.'

Less effective responses failed really to evoke the reefs, fish and other life forms they depicted because of a lack of closely focused detail. The most effective responses to **Question 2**, several earning full marks for Content and Structure, often employed the same familiar tropes but created evocative and convincing pictures with 'varieties of focus' using the aforesaid detailed description but also having it narrated in a manner that successfully conveyed the awe of the observer at the fearsome otherness of this world. One response concentrated almost entirely on the intricacies of a coral reef: 'In this miniature metropolis of vibrant stimuli to the eye, lie hundreds of preoccupied inhabitants, moving through the streets of seagrass and past buildings of limestone...'; '...the sideways motion of a crimson crab...'; 'the ghostly white blind fish emerging

from a nearby cavern like spirits from the afterlife, their translucent skin and permeable membranes leaving the structures that support their life exposed and bare...'. It was noted that the description in a significant number of responses portrayed the terrible damage to coral reefs and their ecosystems of the climate crisis: 'On the other end, coral lay dead, greying out like a derelict building, devoid of life. The residents of this and other buildings have long departed or been reduced to rotting carcasses of decaying flesh.' Several responses mentioned the sight of plastic detritus even at great depths of the ocean. Avoiding the marine world, there were several original and inventive approaches to this question: one engaging Level 5 response described life under the frozen surface of a garden pond; there was a most effective conjuring of the terror of a bullied schoolboy having his head flushed down the toilet; another response movingly employed the metaphor of drowning to evoke the experience of severe depression.

The second descriptive writing question, although much less popular than the first, nonetheless produced some very effective responses: these vividly recalled the feelings of the observer summoned up by the chosen piece of furniture. One, awarded marks at the top of Level 5, described a bookshelf in a teenager's bedroom: its well-thumbed contents recording the girl's changing tastes and developing personality. Another was a vivid description of a school desk, its every ink stain, scratch and graffito picturing the travails of the young writer's educational journey. In the middle ranges, some responses evoked the haven-like comfort of a bed or remembered being soothed by the rocking motion of a grandmother's chair. In the lower range of responses to this question, descriptions were often exclusively visual and utilitarian, or lost focus on the individual piece and attempted the description of a whole room or even a shop – again suggesting recourse to a remembered practice piece from another examination.

For both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created convincing, evocative scenes in the best responses. Where they were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed, convincing overall picture, Examiners could award marks for Content and Structure in Level 6. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's attention by linking the different elements described in an engaging, cohesive response. Level 6 responses were characterised by this cohesive structure, often provided by the narrator's reactions or attitudes or a specific atmosphere, as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but usually more predictable. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less-striking images and more stereotypical ideas. In response to **Question 2**, some writers struggled to employ effective structures without resorting to excessive narrative, for example providing lengthy accounts of a journey to the beach, or the first struggles with diving instruction, or the hiring of equipment. After some relevant images of the world beneath the sea the writer often then returned to narrative to convey the journey home, sometimes accompanied by lengthy meditation on the 'amazing' experience. In responses to the second question, there were also some lengthy narrative preambles or accounts of family history.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to become more narrative in intent although Examiners rewarded description where it was found. Here description was often entirely objective and inventory-like, but in responses awarded marks in Level 3, there was evident some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing, even though some were accurately written. These were sometimes entirely narrative, or the details included were mundane and stereotypical.

High marks for Style and Accuracy often reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, similar details were often included but better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to create specific effects. Highly effective responses showed a confident ability to use both simple and complex language, striking images and personification, as well as a range of sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was occasionally wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by its imprecise use and lack of clarity. Occasionally, obscure, even archaic language sometimes revealed a lack of understanding of its meaning rather than a wide range of vocabulary.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. This was more apparent in the second descriptive option. In this examination series rather more than previously, incomplete or verbless sentences affected marks given in the middle range, even where other technical aspects of style were more accurate. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These

included mis-agreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and the omission of definite and indefinite articles was also common and damaging to otherwise quite accurate, if simple, styles.

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

- **try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content; choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus**
- **keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a specific atmosphere**
- **write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses**
- **use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.**

## **Narrative writing**

**Write a story that involves a disguise or deception.**

**Write a story with the title, 'It's only a game'.**

Narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range, **Question 5** being by far the most popular composition choice overall, and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses, numbers of which were awarded marks in Level 6 for both components of the answer. Examiners occasionally saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title and which, on occasion, seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations or were pre-prepared: this was much more apparent in **Question 5**.

An ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension, mystery or drama and to vary the pace of the story were essential elements of more effective responses to both questions. In **Question 4**, some effective responses based the narrative on the personal or professional consequences of deceit, with the narrator sometimes being the victim and sometimes the perpetrator. In a few stories, ideas derived from the reading material of **Question 1** were successfully introduced into the plot or the protagonist's character: 'It was in the summer of 2022 that I finally discovered how much damage a seemingly harmless lie could do. And that lie? It cost me everything.' Responses to this Question often had a theme of betrayal — by a spouse, lover, colleague or lifelong friend. Frequently narrated in the first person, these were often very moving and convincing portrayals of a relationship. In one story awarded marks in Level 6 the narrator's childhood friend used her understanding of her insecurities to steal an essay and submit it as her own. In a doubling of the consequences of the deceit, the narrator was then accused of plagiarism by her college. This was an accomplished and dramatic depiction of the dynamics of a relationship, unusually conveyed mostly in expertly handled dialogue: "Please!", I said again, my hands starting to tremble. Page after page! "I'll rewrite my paper, I'll do it again! Please...just trust me!"

At the lower end of Level 5 and in Level 4, the 'disguise' option in the task appeared far more frequently. Here there were many stories of bank robberies, military raids and espionage. These often had densely action-packed plots with limited attention paid to character development or realistic scene-setting, but could be engaging too, at least initially. However, as was noted by Examiners the response was often too brief or underdeveloped to carry such large and dramatic events. Elsewhere, credibility was a real issue keeping responses out of the upper Levels for Content and Structure: numerous scenarios involved possession by demonic forces or aliens, or unconvincingly disguised operatives smashing crime gangs with careless ease.

Most narratives addressing this question were chronological accounts with varying degrees of development, characterisation and shaping although some candidates chose more ambitious structures, perhaps telling the story from the vantage point of hindsight. While such structures were more difficult to control, Examiners could often reward these approaches for their ambition and engagement.

More commonly in the middle range, narratives were straightforward accounts in which events tended to dominate and there was more limited attention paid to characterisation and setting.

For **Question 5**, there were many different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability, but several themes dominated at all levels of achievement: sporting stories, often on the global stage; addiction to gaming/video games; alternative realities and groups of friends caught up in dystopian worlds. Here, a common trope was the capture and absorption of the players into a mysterious and terrifying world, to be imprisoned alive there. In many of these, at all levels of achievement, the plot was quite credibly managed, but the effectiveness of the response depended upon the care taken with characterisation and scene-setting.

In narratives involving high-level sporting competition, there were many laborious play-by-play accounts, but there were also stories which were enlivened by the passionate enthusiasm of the narrator to prove that their beloved sport was not 'only a game'. Sometimes these responses drifted into the discursive, preventing Examiners from awarding high marks for content and structure. Some responses awarded marks in Level 6 and Level 5 had plots involving young entrepreneurs whose parents had previously lamented the excessive time spent on computer games by their children but were rewarded by their amazing success in the world of design. Others were set around family-time boardgames, where one member of the family took the game too seriously and caused distress and disruption. These were sometimes distinguished by effective characterisation and the depiction of family dynamics.

There were many narratives and plots involving computer games and competitive gaming at all levels of achievement, but Examiners reported the challenge of assessing responses the language of which was sometimes so specialised and even esoteric that it demonstrated a lack of awareness of the general audience. Elsewhere the rapid-fire plot changes and 'levels' of many computer games resulted in plots where all attempts at cohesion or verisimilitude were forgotten.

In Levels 4 and 3 plots derived from television and film franchises saw violent elimination games where friends and members of family were killed but their demise was related with little feeling or concern.

Many responses to both narrative questions began quite strongly but could not be awarded marks in the Level first considered by Examiners because of the weakness of their endings or faults in the plot's resolution. This particularly affected some otherwise engaging and convincing responses to **Question 5**.

Examiners awarded marks in Level 6 for Content and Structure for narratives which created convincing, interesting scenarios and characters in responses to both questions. While the events in a story were important in creating such credibility, Level 6 responses paid attention to characterisation and how events were driven by character traits and choices.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless cohesive and reasonably credible for the reader. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed, relevant story. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying, if not always engaging, resolution. For higher marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level: here there was a tendency to say simply what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by characterisation and setting. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing characters as credible and rounded. While most less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative, and the reader was less engaged as a result.

High marks for **Style and Accuracy** were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6 and, where this was coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate while Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. Speech punctuation and paragraphing were usually problematic at this level although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, faulty sentence separation and grammar errors. Common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in lower Level 4 responses such as mis-agreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. In responses to **Question 4** the misspelling of the words 'deceit' and 'disguise' was ubiquitous, even in some otherwise high-scoring responses. A common reason for keeping an otherwise clearly written story out of Level 5 was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed but sometimes sentence separation was missing altogether. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these weaknesses also limited the marks available in the narrative writing.

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

- think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative
- consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader: do not rely on events
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes, taking special care to avoid misspelling words given in the tasks: accurate speech punctuation and paragraphing will help to lift your mark
- use complicated vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create effects.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

---

<p><b>Paper 0990/03</b> <b>Coursework Portfolio</b></p>
---

## Key messages

*Candidates did well when they:*

- adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and the context for each of the three assignments in their coursework portfolio
- read critically and thoroughly evaluated the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions, and attitudes they identified in a text for **Assignment 1**
- assimilated ideas from a text to provide developed, thoughtful and sophisticated responses in **Assignment 1**
- supported their analysis, evaluation and comments with a detailed and specific selection of relevant ideas from a text in **Assignment 1**
- wrote original and interesting assignments which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of events and situations.
- wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of argument, description, or narrative
- demonstrated a high level of accuracy in their writing
- engaged in a process of careful editing and proofreading to identify and correct errors in their writing.

*The best practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was when:*

- centres followed the guidelines and instructions set out in the Course syllabus and the Coursework Handbook
- a wide range of appropriate texts were used for **Assignment 1**, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond, and were relevant to their interests
- centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience
- teachers gave general advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- following feedback, candidates revised and edited their first drafts to improve their writing
- candidates checked, revised, and edited their final drafts to identify and correct errors
- teachers provided marks and summative comments at the end of the final draft of each assignment which clearly related to the appropriate mark level descriptors
- teachers indicated all errors in the final drafts of each completed assignment
- centres engaged in a process of internal moderation and clearly indicated any mark adjustments in the coursework portfolios, on the Individual Record Cards, and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms.

## General comments

A significant number of candidates produced interesting coursework portfolios which contained varied work across a range of contexts. There was evidence to show that many centres set tasks which allowed candidates flexibility to respond to subjects related to their personal interests or experiences. The majority of coursework portfolios contained writing of three different genres. Moderators reported seeing very few incomplete folders.

The majority of centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. The Moderation Team reported that many centres provided summative comments closely related to the mark

schemes at the end of each completed assignment. These were extremely helpful in helping moderators to understand how and why marks had been awarded and centres are thanked for following the process as instructed in the Coursework Handbook.

The major concern for all moderators was that some markers of the coursework portfolios did not indicate errors in the final draft of each assignment and/or provide a summative comment which referred to the marking level descriptors to justify the marks awarded. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for adjustment of marks.

### **Administration**

Successful administration was when centres:

- used the new coursework checklist to ensure all administration guidelines had been followed
- submitted their sample and documents by the deadline
- carried out a thorough process of internal moderation which was clearly signposted on the assignments themselves as well as all relevant documentation
- indicated all errors in the final draft of each assignment
- supplied marks and specific comments relating to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- accurately completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and ICRC, including any amendments made during internal moderation
- ensured that each coursework folder was stapled or tagged and securely attached to the Individual Candidate Record Card (ICRC)
- submitted their sample of coursework folders without using plastic or cardboard wallets.

### **Internal Moderation**

Moderators reported improvements in the number of centres getting the administration right this session. This can be attributed to the new coursework checklist which when used ensures that centres follow all guidelines in the 0500/0990 coursework handbook.

Centres who followed the instructions for carrying out internal moderation as directed in the Coursework Handbook are thanked for engaging in this important process. There was a general trend of greater accuracy of marking by centres where there was clear evidence of internal moderation than centres where no internal moderation process was evident on the coursework folders and documentation.

Some centres did not record changes made at internal moderation on the candidates' Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRCs) which caused some confusion about the final mark awarded to candidates. Centres are requested to ensure that any changes made at internal moderation are signposted clearly on the work itself then also recorded on the ICRC as well as on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF).

### **Using the coursework handbook**

A cause of concern for all moderators was that some issues persist even though there are clear instructions in the Coursework Handbook, and the same concerns have been raised in previous Principal Moderator Reports. To ensure effective and accurate marking is achieved, and that all paperwork arrives safely for moderation, it is essential that all the instructions given in the Coursework Handbook, and on the relevant forms, are carefully followed.

Below highlights the three most significant issues related to the administration and annotation of candidates' work which led to mark adjustments by moderators:

#### **1 Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment**

- Some of the assignments showed little or no evidence of complying with the instruction in the Coursework Handbook that markers should indicate all errors in the final draft of each assignment. This process helps markers to effectively and accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work and to apply the most appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. If this process does not take place, it is difficult for markers to make a balanced judgement. In several centres there was evidence across all three assignments that markers had awarded marks from the higher levels of the assessment criteria to work containing frequent, and often serious errors that had not been annotated

by the marker. This inevitably led to a downward adjustment of marks by the moderator. It is important for all who mark the coursework portfolios to fully understand the importance of indicating and taking into account all errors in the final draft of each assignment. To avoid adjustment of marks for accuracy, it is essential that centres engage in this process and clearly indicate errors in their candidates' work.

## 2 Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

- A number of centres did not attach the portfolios of work to the ICRC in accordance with the instructions in the Coursework Handbook and point 4 on the electronic version of the ICRC.
- Some confusion was caused when centres included ICRCs for the whole cohort as well as the ICRCs for the sample sent; centres only need to send the ICRCs (securely attached to the coursework portfolio) for the candidates in the sample submitted for moderation.
- A small number of centres provided their own version of an ICRC instead of using the one provided by Cambridge; these had to be requested by the moderator, which slowed down the moderation process.
- On some folders there were errors in the transcription of internally moderated mark changes, or it was unclear which mark was the final one. Where internal moderation has taken place, any mark changes should be transferred from the assignment to the ICRC to ensure that the moderator has a clear understanding of all mark changes.

## 3 Coursework portfolios

- A significant number of centres did not collate the individual assignments into complete coursework portfolios but instead placed loose pages of work into the grey plastic envelopes and despatched them to Cambridge; this caused moderators some difficulties when assembling the coursework folders and increased the risk of work becoming lost or mislaid. Centres should secure each individual coursework folder using tags or staples with the ICRC securely fastened as a cover sheet.
- Moderators reported that several centres used plastic wallets or folders to present candidates' work as an alternative to securely attaching the individual assignments to the ICRC; this caused extra work for moderators and increased the risk of work being mislaid. Centres are requested not to place coursework folders into plastic or cardboard wallets.
- Some centres included more than one rough draft in each folder; this is unnecessary and can lead to confusion. Please ensure that the rough draft included is clearly labelled as a draft.
- Occasionally rough drafts contained annotations and specific feedback; centres are reminded that when markers offer feedback on a rough draft, it should be general advice. No errors should be indicated, and the marker should not offer corrections or improvements.
- Some centres included documentation not required for the moderation process; the only paperwork that should be included in the sample is clearly indicated in the Coursework Handbook.

### Comments on specific assignments:

#### Assignment 1

*Candidates were successful when:*

- they responded to interesting texts of appropriate length which contained engaging content
- they demonstrated analysis and evaluation of the individual ideas and opinions identified within a text
- the form, purpose and intended audience of their writing was clear to the reader
- they wrote in a fluent, accurate and appropriate style.

Moderators commented that many candidates responded to texts which were of an appropriate length and challenge and which appealed to the interests of the candidates. Successful texts included articles exploring issues relevant to young people, for example, single-sex schools, social media influencers, the pros and cons of having tattoos, climate change, the influence of fashion, and issues of local or national interest. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated, texts which were too informative (and often long) or were of limited personal interest to the candidates, or texts which were largely visual, such as adverts. Texts selected for **Assignment 1** should be an appropriate length, explore ideas and offer opinions, and use rhetorical or literary devices designed to provoke or sustain the reader's interest to ensure that the text offers scope for candidates to fully engage and respond to it in a sustained piece of writing. Centres are encouraged to use a good range of relevant and up-to-date texts for **Assignment 1**. Other less successful texts were ones where the candidate fully endorsed the writer's views and opinions because they offered few opportunities for evaluating those ideas and opinions, as required by the mark scheme. It is also crucial to

select texts for their quality of written communication: moderators reported seeing a number of poorly written texts taken from a variety of websites. Many of these were too long and tended to be informative, offering very little scope for rigorous evaluation or analysis. Moderators also reported seeing texts which contained potentially offensive or disturbing material. This may indicate that candidates were allowed to make their own text choices, but centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that all texts used for Assignment 1 are fit for purpose, and this includes avoiding offensive or unsuitable material.

Some centres set one text for a class or sometimes whole cohort. When this approach was adopted by a centre there was usually a tendency for candidates to produce responses which were very similar in content and structure due to heavy scaffolding. This made it difficult for candidates to create the original and sophisticated responses expected of the higher-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments of marks. Centres are advised that teaching a text to a whole class and offering a scaffolded plan for the response may be a useful teaching strategy for developing the necessary skills and knowledge for Assignment 1, but this approach should not be used for the final coursework submission; it is recommended that candidates are offered a choice of texts approved by the teacher.

If centres are unsure about how to approach and set tasks for **Assignment 1**, they can refer to the Course Syllabus and the Coursework Handbook. Both documents provide advice and guidance about task setting and text selection and can be found on the School Support Hub via the main Cambridge website.

## Reading

Although some centres were accurate with their marking of reading, as in the previous moderation sessions, there was a significant trend for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria. Candidates who successfully met the higher-level assessment criteria were those who demonstrated a consistently evaluative approach to most of the ideas and opinions in a text, and provided a developed, sophisticated response which made direct reference or included quotes from the text. Candidates who engaged in a general discussion about the topic or subject of a text, or those who did not thoroughly evaluate a text, tended to produce work which more appropriately met the Level 4 assessment criteria in Table B (reading). The most common reasons for adjustments to a centre's marks for reading were when moderators identified a trend of candidates engaging in a general discussion about the topic of a text/s, or when the number of points covered were 'appropriate' rather than 'thorough'.

## Writing

Many candidates responded to texts in an appropriate form and style. Letters were the most popular choice of form, and many candidates demonstrated some understanding of audience and purpose. When candidates were less successful with writing, it was often because the form, intended audience and purpose of the writing was not clear. This made it difficult for the candidates to meet the highest-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments to writing marks for **Assignment 1**. Successful responses to **Assignment 1** tasks were those in which the writing was highly effective, almost always accurate, and consistent throughout in the application of form and style. Work which showed insecurity with form and style, such as the omission of an appropriate ending to a letter, a limited or inconsistent use of rhetorical devices for speeches, or lack of clarity of the intended audience, tended to meet the assessment criteria for Level 5, Table A (writing), or below. The moderators noted that there was a general tendency for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria.

Another common reason for the adjustment of marks for writing was because of the accuracy of the candidates' writing. When errors impaired meaning, such as the incorrect construction of sentences or use of grammar, typing errors, or the incorrect selection of words from spellcheck, the overall quality and efficacy of the discussion was affected. Errors such as these are classed as serious and make it difficult for candidates to meet the higher-level assessment criteria; this type of writing is more characteristic of writing achieving marks from the middle to the lower levels of the assessment criteria. Moderators also noted a tendency for centres to over-reward vocabulary that had some merit in its selection but was not always used precisely or effectively in the response.

### Advice to candidates for Assignment 1:

- thoroughly explore, challenge, and discuss the ideas in the text
- avoid making general comments about the topic or subject of the text, instead, ensure that comments are specifically related to the ideas, opinions or attitudes identified in the text
- look for, and use inferences made implicitly in the text
- look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the text and comment on them
- develop points to create a thorough, detailed, and clear line of argument or discussion
- make sure that the audience and purpose is clear and adapt the written style accordingly
- proof-read assignments to ensure punctuation, vocabulary choices and grammar are correct.

### Assignment 2 (description):

The majority of tasks set for **Assignment 2** were appropriate and encouraged candidates to write in a descriptive style. Many students wrote engaging and vivid descriptions from experience or their imaginations, which were a pleasure to read. Moderators also noticed that there were fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions, but this is still a relatively common flaw in descriptive writing assignments, sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which invited candidates to describe a specific scene from a play, or chapter from a novel, which tended to lead to unoriginal responses, or tasks more suited to narrative writing. Centres are reminded to set descriptive tasks and remind candidates to avoid using narrative writing techniques in their responses.

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those where the candidates had carefully selected vocabulary to create a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place or person, and which were well sequenced and carefully managed for deliberate effect. Successful responses included descriptions of towns or cities in which candidates lived, important events in candidates' lives, or significant settings or places. Less successful tasks were those which asked candidates to describe events or scenarios of which they had no personal experience, or settings and situations in which the candidate clearly had no interest or engagement. Many of these responses relied on unconvincing descriptive writing which did not engage the reader. This type of writing is characteristic of work achieving marks from the middle to lower levels of the assessment criteria, although it was noticed that many centres awarded marks from the higher-level assessment criteria. This was quite often a reason for adjustment of marks from Table C (content and structure).

Whilst many candidates showed a secure and confident understanding of language, there was still a general tendency by a number of centres to award marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to work which contained ineffective overuse of literary techniques. Some moderators commented that this seemed to be actively encouraged by some centres. To achieve marks from the higher-level assessment criteria, candidates need to demonstrate a confident and secure understanding in the use of language for specific effect. This is difficult for candidates to achieve if they over-use adjectives, include inappropriate images or idioms and/or use obscure or archaic language. The overworking of language was a common reason for moderators adjusting marks.

Another common reason for adjustments to marks was when moderators identified a trend of awarding marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to writing that contained a limited range of sentence structures, incorrectly constructed sentences, or contained frequent errors with punctuation and grammar. Writing that achieves marks from Levels 5 and 6 of Table D (style and accuracy) is expected to be consistently accurate, consistent with the chosen register, and demonstrate an ability to use a range of sentences for specific effect. The moderators saw some writing which displayed these characteristics, but a significant number of the assignments receiving marks from centres from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D more frequently displayed the characteristics of writing expected from Level 4 or below. Many candidates 'told' the reader about the scene being described, rather than engaging the reader with a careful and precise use of vocabulary and images. The moderators also noticed a general trend for candidates to use repeated sentence structures and create almost list-like descriptions.

In addition, the work of a significantly large number of candidates contained frequent and serious errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of the candidates' work. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, tense inconsistencies, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and grammar errors. Quite often, the meaning of sentences was blurred, or meaning was lost altogether. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as 'minor'. As mentioned earlier in this report, the absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult for the moderators to determine whether errors had been considered when marks had been awarded; moderators noted that on some weaker

assignments no errors had been annotated and the summative comment declared a high level of accuracy. Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which ‘best fits’ the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that errors are identified and indicated by the markers. Engaging in this process allows markers to effectively balance the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and apply marks that are most appropriate to their candidates’ work.

Information and guidance on how to apply the mark schemes are given in the Coursework Handbook. Examples of good tasks and exemplification of the standard of work expected at the different levels of the mark scheme are also provided in the Coursework Handbook.

### Advice to candidates for Assignment 2:

- use a range of vocabulary suited to the context and content of the description
- create images appropriate for the context and content of the description
- create an engaging imagined scenario using language designed to have an impact on the reader
- avoid slipping into a narrative style
- proof-read responses to identify and correct common errors such as missing articles and prepositions, switches in tenses and typing errors
- avoid repetitive sentence structures; instead use a range of sentences to create specific effects.

### Assignment 3 (narrative):

Much of the task setting for **Assignment 3** was generally appropriate and moderators saw some engaging and effective narratives which were well controlled and convincing. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which did not invite narrative responses as they were too informative. These included accounts of Jack the Ripper or sometimes descriptions of film or book plots. Successful narratives were those in which candidates created stories characterised by well-defined plots and strongly developed features of narrative writing such as description, strong characterisation, and a clear sense of progression. The narration of personal experiences and events, or responses where candidates were able to create convincing details and events within their chosen genre, tended to be more successful. Candidates were generally less successful when their understanding of audience and genre was insecure, and the resulting narratives lacked credibility and conviction. Moderators commented that this sort of writing was often seen when candidates were writing in the genre of horror or murder mystery stories. Stories such as these, although containing a definite beginning, middle and ending, were often unrealistic and incredible, or lacked development of character or plot. Some responses failed to conclude properly, ending with an unconvincing or unsatisfactory cliff hanger. This sort of writing is classed as ‘relevant’ or ‘straightforward’ and should expect to be awarded marks from Level 4 or below from Table C (content and structure). Moderators noticed that there was a trend with a significant majority of the work sampled for centres to award marks from Levels 5 and 6 to writing which more appropriately fitted the Level 4, or below, assessment criteria. This was quite frequently a reason for marks being adjusted.

When moderators saw very accurate work containing precise well-chosen vocabulary, and which maintained a consistent register throughout, they could agree when centres awarded marks from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D (style and accuracy). As with **Assignments 1** and **2**, moderators noticed a significant trend for centres to award marks from the highest levels of the mark scheme to work which contained frequent and persistent errors and which more accurately met the assessment criteria from Level 4 or below in Table D. This was a common reason for the adjustment of marks. The comments made for **Assignment 2** with regards to accuracy and the annotation of errors are also relevant to **Assignment 3** and should be noted by all who mark coursework.

### Advice to candidates for Assignment 3:

- create stories that are realistic, credible, and convincing
- remember that characters’ thoughts and feelings help to engage the reader
- avoid clichéd scenarios and consider an individual and original selection of content
- carefully proof-read and check assignments for errors such as punctuation, use of prepositions and articles, tenses, and sentence construction.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

<p><b>Paper 0990/04</b> <b>Speaking and Listening Test</b></p>
--

## Key messages

Centre administration was of a high standard with Summary Forms completed accurately and recordings uploaded appropriately.

Timing within the test remains a serious area of concern for a number of centres.

**Part 1** should last for 3 – 4 minutes. A significantly short **Part 1** response will affect the mark that should be awarded. Equally, an overlong response to **Part 1** should also affect the mark awarded.

**Part 2** should last for 7 – 8 minutes and it is the responsibility of the Examiner to ensure the correct timing is adhered to. Conversations that run for significantly less than the minimum 7 minutes required do not allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available because certain descriptors in the higher levels cannot be met.

**Part 2** should consist of a conversation between the candidate and the Examiner. It follows that a **Part 2** that is in essence a series of unrelated questions is not an appropriate model to use for the most successful outcome. Questions should be used to prompt candidates to explore ideas and opinions related to the topic content introduced in the **Part 1** talk but a **Part 2** that consists solely of questions followed by answers is not a natural conversation and cannot be credited as such when awarding marks.

Centres should avoid grouping marks in the top level unless this is strongly evidenced in the candidates' performances. Centres that simply award marks in Level 5 for either **Part 1** or **Part 2**, without recourse to applying differentiation where it is needed, actually disadvantage those candidates who may have performed to a higher level. This was particularly noticeable in **Part 2**. The way that moderation works means that inflating marks for those candidates who do not justify them through performance will almost certainly mean downscaling is applied.

## Administration – General comments

For most centres, administration of the test was diligent and accurate. Summary forms were completed to a high degree of accuracy and samples uploaded to SfA were of a very good sound quality. From a moderating perspective, the introduction of SfA remains a very positive step forward and this seems to be reflected in the way centres have adapted to the system very professionally. It is hoped centres share Moderators' enthusiasm for SfA as it does seem to make the whole process much more efficient.

Where there were issues, the following guidelines may help to clarify administrative requirements:

- Each candidate's test requires a full formal introduction to be made by the Examiner prior to the beginning of **Part 1**. This introduction should include the centre name and number, the candidate's full name and candidate number, the date on which the test is being recorded and the name of the Examiner. This is important information for the Moderator. The overwhelming majority of centres were compliant with this requirement and are to be congratulated for their diligence.
- Whilst it is perfectly acceptable for centres to create their own version of the Summary Form (the OESF), it is important that any such version includes all the same information required on the form provided by Cambridge. A form that does not have a full breakdown of the marks for each candidate in the cohort is not acceptable. All forms should have, therefore, a breakdown of the marks that includes a mark out of 20 for **Part 1**, a mark out of 10 for **Part 2** Speaking, a mark out of 10 for **Part 2** Listening and a total mark out of 40. A form that truncates **Part 2** into one mark out of 20 is not acceptable for the Moderator.

- Centres are reminded that for moderation to take place effectively and efficiently OESF summary forms are required that show the breakdown of marks for the whole cohort of entered candidates and not just those in the sample requested.
- It is the centre's responsibility to check the quality of the recordings being made, preferably as an ongoing process during each recording session, to ensure that the recordings are clearly audible and without interference. On a few occasions, the Examiner was clearly audible but the candidates were not, presumably because of the Examiner's closer proximity to the microphone than the candidates. Any problems with the quality of recordings should be reported to Cambridge immediately so that candidates are not adversely affected by such issues.
- A small percentage of centres uploaded videos of their candidates performing their tests.

### **Conduct of the test – General comments**

Overall, across the component entry, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given plenty of opportunities to express their ideas and demonstrate their range of oratory skills productively. There were centres, however, who did not follow the rubric set out in the syllabus but still awarded highly inflated marks for their candidates. Subsequently, these marks were reduced upon moderation.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the Examiner's formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the Individual Talk. If an examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is done before the recording is started. Examiners formally starting the test then engaging in 'off topic' conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their **Part 1** task is strongly discouraged.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met so that candidates are given the fullest opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills they possess.
- If a candidate has exceeded the maximum 4 minutes for **Part 1** the examiner should not compensate by shortening the time allowed for **Part 2**. Candidates must be allowed the required 7 – 8 minutes to complete a full response to **Part 2**, irrespective of the length of the talk in **Part 1**.
- It is also important that the conversations offer sufficient challenge to allow candidates to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Focused questioning and prompts are needed to move the conversation forward, together with an adaptability on the part of the examiner to absorb the candidate's previous comments and to extend the conversation as a result. A **Part 2** that is merely a question-and-answer session is not a natural conversation and as a consequence is limited in terms of the marks that should be awarded.
- Examiners who rely on a pre-determined set of questions disadvantage their candidates, in particular with regard to the mark for Speaking in **Part 2**. A question from the examiner should lead to an answer from the candidate which then may lead to a comment or prompt from the examiner that is connected to the same content matter. This will in turn lead to another connected response from the candidate; and so the conversation develops naturally.
- Examiners who dominate conversations or who frequently interrupt candidates during the conversation do so to the disadvantage of those candidates. Good examiners prompt candidates then allow them the opportunity to respond in full to develop their ideas before moving the conversation forwards again.

### **Comments on specific sections of the test**

#### ***Part 1 – Individual Talk***

Almost exclusively, all the responses to **Part 1** were in the form of a presentation. This format remains a safe and acceptable one, particularly if an attempt to analyse and reflect on personal experiences is included. For many candidates this choice remains a safe and productive way to achieve a good mark in **Part 1**, but only when well-timed and clearly structured. Less successful responses to **Part 1** tended to meander somewhat because a strong structure had not been created and time constraints had not been factored in. Largely narrative responses that follow a linear path, such as talking through the events of a holiday or simply restating facts about a topic choice, tend to be unimaginative and rarely achieve higher than Level 3. This is why topics such as 'My Favourite Football Team (or video game, K-Pop band, movie, hobby)' do not tend to



be very successful. Generally, these kinds of topics only become more successful if there is an added element that expands the talk beyond adequate. For example, 'How My Hobby Has Been Life-changing' immediately introduces more sophisticated elements into the talk through introspection, analysis and evaluation.

Very strong performances in **Part 1** successfully combined excellent knowledge and development of a topic, a tightly defined structure, timed accordingly, and a confident delivery style. It should be noted that the bullet point descriptor 'lively' in Level 5 does not have to mean that a candidate delivers an animated performance. A candidate who delivers a talk in a confident and assured tone without being overtly 'lively' can perform equally well for the second descriptor in Level 5. Subtle changes of tone can be very effective in fully engaging an audience.

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that worked well include:

The Transformative Power of Cinema  
Why Lions Should Not Be Called Kings of The Jungle  
Impact Of Pesticides  
Fair Trade  
Is Reading Still Relevant?  
The Dark Side Of K-Pop  
A.I. And Emotions  
Street Food and Its Importance for Our Culture  
I Love to Dance  
Living With Purpose  
Black Holes  
The Influence of Taylor Swift  
VAR – Football Less Human  
Absurdism  
Should Billionaires Exist?  
My Guitars and Their History  
How My Hobby Has Made Me A Better Person.

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that were less successful include:

Football (An unstructured and generalised meander through rules, favourite team and history)  
My Favourite Video Game (When simply a description of the game)  
My Favourite K-Pop Band (Limiting and lacking a clear structure)  
My Holiday (Limiting and linear)  
Taylor Swift (Descriptive and without a clear focus)  
Boxing And Chess (Really two topics rather than how one is connected to the other)  
A.I. (When descriptive rather than analytical and evaluative)  
Travelling Experiences (Unfocused and linear)  
Sports (Too generalised and lacking focus)

## **Part 2 – Conversation**

Generally, the **Part 2** conversations were well conducted, and examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions which enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. After initial questioning to stimulate the conversation, the use of prompts, instead of a steady stream of further questioning, was often more effective in eliciting developed responses from candidates.

Unlike in **Part 1**, the examiner can influence the quality of the candidate's performance in **Part 2**. Concise but challenging prompts often led to candidates developing their ideas more successfully than when a question was convoluted or closed. Some examiners struggled to inspire candidates with closed questioning and by offering too many of their own ideas during the conversations. Indeed, where a candidate was moved down a level during moderation, it was sometimes due to a lack of detailed response, caused by uninspired questioning. The use of pre-determined questions or a perfunctory question and answer technique limits the candidate's ability to engage in a real conversation where responses are elicited by what is said immediately before.

Poor timing is also a major contributor to candidates achieving fewer marks than they could in **Part 2**. A **Part 2** that lasts for significantly less than the minimum of 7 minutes required cannot fulfil the descriptors in Level 5, and most likely not in Level 4 either. The descriptors for **Part 2** are assessed on the basis of a full **Part 2**

being performed. Allowing only 2 – 4 minutes for **Part 2** does not provide the necessary evidence of consistent and detailed responses required. In effect, short conversations limit the range of marks that can be awarded.

It should be noted that the ‘changes (alterations) in the direction of the conversation’ descriptor does not mean that examiners should steer the conversation away from the central topic to something completely different. ‘Changes in the direction’ can mean introducing a new perspective on the topic or challenging a previously stated opinion but any ensuing conversation should still be focused on the topic presented in **Part 1**.

### **Advice to centres**

- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful.
- Make sure candidates know the timings of the test. Ensure that their Individual Talk is 3 – 4 minutes long. If necessary, you can help them in the test by interceding before 5 minutes and initiating the conversation.
- When considering the timing of **Part 1**, please remember that **Part 1** begins when the candidate starts speaking and does not include the examiner’s introduction.
- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test. At the planning stage a gentle suggestion to choose an alternative topic may be very beneficial in some cases.
- Try to dissuade candidates from simply reeling off a memorised talk in **Part 1** that may have artificial fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.
- Ensure a full 7 – 8 minutes is allowed for the conversation in **Part 2**. The examiner can control the timing of this.
- Administering the conversation in **Part 2** can be quite challenging for examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the examiner but they should not be restrictive, and the candidate should have no prior knowledge of them.
- Scaffold questions strategically to encourage higher level responses. This will help candidates access the higher mark ranges.
- Do not interrupt too keenly; another prompt given before the previous response is finished, or when the candidate pauses for thought, can affect the candidate adversely by preventing them from developing their ideas fully.
- Be careful not to make judgements based on personal interpretations of a comment made by a candidate. This is a test of speaking and listening not the perceived accuracy of what is said.

### **Advice to candidates**

- Choose a topic you are passionate about and one you can talk about for 3 – 4 minutes then discuss in even more detail for 7 – 8 minutes without repeating yourself.
- Practise your presentation but do not learn it word for word.
- Have bullet point notes to help prompt you in **Part 1** but not the ‘full speech’. You will be tempted to read it or, at the very least, deliver it without appropriate liveliness and intonation. ‘Talk through’ each bullet point in a confident and enthusiastic way.
- Structure your Individual Talk carefully, making sure that it develops points and stays within the 3 – 4 minutes allowed. Long talks do not earn more marks! On the contrary, an overlong talk will be regarded as not being ‘well organised’ (a bullet point required for Level 5 marks).
- Respond to the prompts and questions from the examiner in **Part 2** as fully as possible by developing your ideas, giving examples and leading off into other aspects of the topic, if you can.
- Watch good examples of speeches/presentations/talks to learn how good speakers make their speeches engaging and interesting and how they incorporate effective language devices. Try to copy these techniques.
- Practise simulations of **Part 2**. There are as many marks available for **Part 2** as for **Part 1** so treat each part as equally important.