

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/11  
Reading Passage (Core)

## Key Messages

- Candidates are advised to take careful note of the marks allocated to each question as these are a clear indication of the number of distinct points that they will be expected to make in their answers.
- In **Question 1 (f)** and similar questions in future papers it is important to note that each component part of the question requires two separate words in the quotation to be explained (1 mark for each explanation).
- In **Question 1 (g)** and similar questions in future papers, it is important for candidates to understand that they are required to explain the effects achieved by the writer's choice of language and not simply to explain the meaning of the words used as this skill is tested elsewhere in the paper.
- **Question 2** is a Directed Writing task; candidates are expected to ensure that their response is firmly grounded in the stimulus passage and that appropriate details from the passage are included in their answers. Elaboration and development of inferences contained in the passage are necessary for answers reaching the top bands.
- There is clear evidence of sound linguistic competence of candidates answering **Question 2**. Many would improve their mark for Written Expression if they ensure that full stops are used consistently to separate sentences.

The above points will be considered in greater detail in the following sections of this report.

## General comments

Many candidates responded well to this paper, and found the reading passage to be both accessible and of interest. There were some very good responses to both reading and writing tasks and, overall, most candidates showed a sound understanding of the content of the passage on which the questions were based. The most successful clearly appreciated and understood its more demanding aspects. There was very little evidence that candidates were under pressure to complete the paper in the time allowed and nearly all wrote responses of at least adequate length to the Writing task (**Question 2**). Presentation and handwriting were generally of a good standard and the vast majority of responses gave clear evidence that candidates were taking the examination very seriously and were trying their very best to do well.

## Comments on individual questions

### Question 1

- (a) Most candidates correctly identified a contrast between what is experienced by the tourist and the train traveller. There were, in fact, three details which could have been mentioned to secure the two marks available: *the train traveller sees the true size of the city; the tourist sees only the more attractive sights (while the train traveller also sees the less attractive side of the city)* and that *there is a contrast between the city centre and the suburbs*.

Less successful responses tended to result from identifying that there was a contrast in views, but did not give specific detail about the nature of the contrast.

- (b) This straightforward question was also answered correctly by the majority of candidates who identified that 'shabby' was the word which suggested that the buildings in Sanganer were in poor condition.
- (c) (i) Many candidates identified correctly that the name 'Superfast' was inappropriate for the train because it did not travel quickly. Candidates who did not gain this mark tended only to identify that the journey took 18 hours; without adding comment about the length of the journey, this answer did not identify the slow speed.
- (ii) Most candidates correctly identified the two reasons that the writer found the trip 'consoling' (despite its length): he was able to *catch up his note taking* and *enjoy the book he was reading*.
- (d) Again, a pleasing number of candidates gained the mark available for this question by identifying that Mr Gupta thought planes were a problem because: *there is too much rushing and then waiting involved* or that *time spent circling is 'ridiculous'*.
- (e) In order to score the two marks available for this question it was important for candidates to extract both of the relevant points from the appropriate section of the passage. Most responses stated correctly that there were fewer tigers in the area near the sanctuary because of the *persistent poaching*. To gain the second mark it was necessary to identify *they had been hunted by (or were part of the game reserve of) the Jaipur royals*. Fewer candidates identified this second point – they tended to refer to use of the dead tigers as decoration in the palace which is a detail from the passage, but not relevant to this question.
- (f) This question was in three parts; each part involved a phrase chosen from the extract and the candidates were asked to explain what the writer meant by the phrase in the candidates own words. As mentioned in the 'Key Messages' section at the beginning of this report, it is important that candidates give explanations for two words in each phrase in order to gain both marks available for it. Consequently, for (i) it was necessary to show an understanding of both the words 'sprawls' and 'horizon'. Many responses gave a clear explanation of the former, recognising that the horizon straggled or stretched across the sight line. Fewer successfully explained 'horizon'. In (ii) the words to comment on were 'peering' and 'ornate' and again many candidates explained 'peering' (looking out) with fewer managing to explain that it was the walls that were decorative – many of those who missed this mark tended to focus on the tigers being there as decoration. Similarly, (iii) also proved a challenging question and only a small number of candidates achieved both available marks; a pleasing number understood that 'panorama' referred to the whole of the view, but fewer successfully explained that what was being identified was a 'part' or an aspect of that view.
- (g) This question referred candidates to a specific section of the passage and asked them to choose three short *phrases* and explain how each created a picture of what the writer saw from the train window of the people and their surroundings. It is important for candidates to understand that this question (and similar questions in future papers) is intended to assess their appreciation of the way writers use language in order to create effects in the reader's mind. Responses are rewarded with one mark for selecting an appropriate phrase and a further mark for convincingly explaining *how* the writer's choice of words furthers this description. A key skill in answering this type of question is to be able to select three phrases which do not all invite the same explanation – thus a response which provided 'people gathered in wheat fields for harvesting', 'bent double' and 'slash at stalks' would score three marks (one for each phrase chosen) but would be likely to score only one explanation mark as it would be difficult to say anything other than 'this phrase shows how hard the people work'. However, if the three choices focused on quite different aspects the view, for example, 'long lumpy hills', 'women in beautiful yellow and orange saris' and 'it all looked ancient' then finding three discrete explanations would be considerably easier. For example, the first of these phrases could be explained by focusing on the description of the surrounding landscape; the second could be explained by reference to the colourful style of dress and the third could mention the overall sense of seeing a way of life unchanged over a long period of time. Many candidates scored all three marks for choosing appropriate phrases; only a small number achieved more than one further mark for their explanations.
- (h) The question focused on the contrast observed between the city of Kota and its surroundings. One mark could be gained by identifying the industrialised nature of the city (with its atomic energy plant) and the second by identifying the primitive or underdeveloped methods of farming and

buildings in the countryside. Most candidates correctly identified this contrast with a pleasing number getting both marks.

- (i) Seven marks were available for this summary question; candidates were required to refer to the whole passage and state what the reader learned about the lives and interests of the writer and the man he met, Mr Gupta. The question produced a very wide range of scores. The most successful responses came from those who were able to infer details about the writer (points 1-4 below) and select the key points about Mr Gupta from the things he talks about during the journey (points 5-11 below). Less successful responses tended to focus more on details about the journey and what the writer saw. Those preparing to take this examination in future years are advised to concentrate on developing their reading and selection skills in order to achieve to their full potential on this question. There were, as noted above, twelve points that might have been made as follows:

**For Paul Theroux (the writer):**

- (1) is a travel writer/curious about people/observant of places
- (2) enjoys travelling/visiting and exploring and learning about new places
- (3) enjoys reading
- (4) wants to travel to Mumbai.

**For Mr Gupta:**

- (5) works for a telecom company
- (6) is being transferred to Mumbai/from the provinces/will live in a hotel for a month
- (7) does not like air travel
- (8) has a wife and children
- (9) is talkative/sociable
- (10) likes to use his mobile phone to reassure his daughter/keep in touch with family/cares for his daughter and family
- (11) works under stress/needs a rest.

**For both:**

- (12) eat vegetarian meals.

Centres should note that **Questions (f), (g) and (i)** described above carry 19 of the 30 marks available for the Reading section of this paper and are advised to ensure that their candidates practise carefully the skills required to answer them effectively.

**Question 2**

As mentioned in the Key Messages section of this report, **Question 2** on this paper is a Directed Writing task and requires candidates not just to demonstrate their linguistic competence but also their understanding of the reading passage and, in particular, of the inferential points contained in it. As has been the case in previous sessions, candidates, in general, produced written work of a good standard in their responses to this question.

Most adopted an appropriate tone for a journal entry by Paul Theroux writing about his experiences on the journey and his reasons for wishing to return to the area. Most candidates wrote with understanding of the writer's feelings about his train journey. They repeated salient points such as the vivid pictures of the lives of the country's inhabitants as seen through the train window and of the writer's enjoyment of his time with Mr Gupta. The most successful responses elaborated perceptively on details from the passage, in particular commenting on the impact these made on a traveller who obviously enjoyed the experience of seeing an ancient civilisation and its juxtaposition with modern industrialised cities. Such responses also picked up convincingly on the friendliness and willingness to help, shown by the local inhabitants and the writer's pleasure in meeting Mr Gupta.

Less successful responses tended either to be over-reliant on the words of the original passage and repeated rather than elaborated and developed on them, or misunderstood the purpose of the question and tended to write in detail about what happened to the writer after reaching Mumbai. Although such responses were not entirely irrelevant to the task, they could not be as highly rewarded in the Content mark; many of them did, however, score well for Written Expression.

In general, Written Expression was at least satisfactory and, in many cases, very good. As well as adopting an appropriate tone (as mentioned above) many candidates wrote stylishly, with carefully chosen vocabulary and secure control of sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. Many candidates showed positive merits of vocabulary and structure but limited their achievement by making errors in tenses, punctuation (especially in the use of the full stop to separate sentences) and the spelling of straightforward vocabulary.

Those taking the examination in future years are advised to concentrate on ensuring that the basics of English expression are secure, as all the evidence suggests that candidates for this paper have the ability to score highly on this section.

In conclusion, this proved to be a successful paper which allowed candidates to produce work of a satisfactory to good quality.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/12  
Reading Passage (Core)

## Key Messages

- Candidates are advised to take careful note of the marks allocated to each question as these are a clear indication of the number of distinct points that they will be expected to make in their answers.
- In **Question 1 (g)** and similar questions in future papers it is important to note that each component part of the question requires two separate words in the quotation to be explained (1 mark for each explanation).
- In **Question 1 (h)** and similar questions in future papers, it is important for candidates to understand that they are required to explain the effects achieved by the writer's choice of language and not simply to explain the meaning of the words used as this skill is tested elsewhere in the paper.
- **Question 2** is a Directed Writing task; candidates are expected to ensure that their response is firmly grounded in the stimulus passage and that appropriate details from the passage are included in their answers. Elaboration and development of inferences contained in the passage are necessary for answers reaching the top bands.
- Examiners regularly comment favourably on the linguistic competence of candidates answering **Question 2**. Many would improve their mark for Written Expression if they ensure that full stops are used consistently to separate sentences.

The above points will be considered in greater detail in the following sections of this report.

## General comments

Most candidates responded well to this paper, and found the reading passage to be both accessible and of interest. There were some very good responses to both reading and writing tasks and, overall, most candidates showed a sound understanding of the content of the passage on which the questions were based. The most successful clearly appreciated and understood its more demanding aspects. There was very little evidence that candidates were under pressure to complete the paper in the time allowed and nearly all wrote responses of at least adequate length to the Writing task (**Question 2**). Presentation and handwriting were generally of a good standard and the vast majority of responses gave clear evidence that candidates were taking the examination very seriously and were trying their best to do well.

## Comments on individual questions

### Question 1

- (a) Most candidates answered this question correctly and clearly understood why the writer claimed that he was a dentist when talking to Rashid. There were, in fact, three details which could have been mentioned to secure the two marks available: the writer was *tired* of people *repeatedly asking him personal questions* and consequently *made up some fictional details*. Less successful responses tended to result from less than careful reading of this opening section and stated that he really was a dentist and wanted to treat Rashid's toothache. A small number of candidates appeared to think that the writer and Rashid were one and the same person which resulted in answers which were somewhat confused.

- (b) This straightforward question was also answered correctly by the vast majority of candidates who identified that the carriage was so comfortable because it was heavily built and, therefore, stable.
- (c) Many candidates achieved both marks that were available for this question by correctly identifying two of the reasons why the writer was disappointed that his trip would be so short. The relevant details were that the train was comfortable; the writer had everything he needed in his compartment; he had the choice whether to be alone or to seek company. The less successful responses illustrated the importance of the need to read questions carefully. Some candidates claimed that he was disappointed 'because the trip was so short' which simply repeated the wording of the question, while others appeared to think that the writer was disappointed with the journey itself, usually giving as the reason that the writer had no-one to talk to which showed some serious misunderstanding.
- (d) Again, a pleasing number of candidates achieved both available marks for this question by correctly selecting the relevant details that travelling on ships requires passengers to be sociable, whereas nothing is required of the train passenger. This ability to select the precise details required by the question is evidence of good comprehension skills and shows that the question had been clearly understood. Less successful responses came from candidates who either gave the first of the points, relating to passengers on ships, but did not mention the corresponding detail about train passengers or from those who, despite identifying the correct area of the passage, obscured their responses by writing about travelling by aeroplane or car without focusing clearly on the specific requirements of the question.
- (e) In order to score all three marks available for this question it was important for candidates both to extract the relevant points from the appropriate section of the passage and also to express them in their own words in order to relate them to the particular focus of the question. Most candidates stated correctly that what the writer found attractive about travelling in a sleeping car was that doing so allowed him complete privacy. Many candidates also understood that another reason for the attractiveness of travelling in this way was to do with the views from the window of the compartment. What discriminated the most successful responses to this question was the ability to explain clearly that one of the pleasures provided by the view from the window was that it was continuously changing as the train moved through different scenery whereas a further pleasure was that the effect of the view from the window was to enhance the life of the person within the sleeper who was looking at it. Although this was a challenging question, there were candidates who successfully gained all three marks for it.
- (f) Most candidates successfully identified one of the two phrases ('getting greener as they rose' and 'pistachio-green') which were used to emphasise the colour of the parrots. Reasons for not scoring the mark were usually either because the candidate chose only one word ('green') or opted to write the whole of the sentence containing the correct phrase without indicating which were the appropriate words.
- (g) As mentioned in the 'Key Messages' section at the beginning of this report, it is important that candidates give explanations for two expressions in each sub-section of this question in order to gain both marks available for it. Consequently, for (i) it was necessary to show an understanding of both the words 'nagging' and 'evasive'. Many candidates gave a clear explanation of the former but fewer successfully explained 'evasive', although those who stated that it showed that the writer wanted to avoid the questions were rewarded. Sub-section (ii) proved to be more challenging as candidates did not focus sufficiently clearly on the requirements of the question and apparently did not realise that it was necessary to explain both 'vehicle' and 'allows residence'. Only a small number successfully stated that the writer felt that he was in 'a conveyance/train in which he could live as if at home'. Similarly, (iii) proved a challenging question; a pleasing number understood that 'edited' had the sense of something that had been revised or cut but fewer successfully explained that a 'travelogue' was a film or television programme related to travel.



- (h) This question referred candidates to a specific section of the passage and asked them to choose three short *phrases* and explain how each created a picture of village life. It is important for candidates to understand that this question (and similar questions in future papers) is intended to assess their appreciation of the way writers use language in order to create effects in the reader's mind. Candidates are rewarded with one mark for selecting an appropriate phrase (it should be noted that description of the parrots, for example, was not appropriate as it was not describing *village* life) and a further mark for convincingly explaining *how* the writer's choice of words furthers this description. A key skill in answering this type of question is to be able to select three phrases which do not all invite the same explanation – thus a candidate who chose 'sorting fruit', 'folding clothes' and 'mending a roof' would score three marks (one for each phrase chosen) but would be likely to score only one explanation mark as it would be difficult to say anything other than 'this phrase shows how busy people are in their everyday village activities' for each one. However, if the three choices were, for example, 'grass huts and cardboard shelters', 'everyone was in motion' and 'preparing rice fields for planting' then finding three discrete explanations would be considerably easier. For example, the first of these phrases could be explained by focusing on the insight given into the living conditions in the village; the second could be explained by reference to the communal working activities and the third could mention the subsistence farming lifestyle of the inhabitants. Many candidates scored all three marks for choosing appropriate phrases; only a small number achieved more than one further mark for their explanations.
- (i) Seven marks were available for this summary question; candidates were required to refer to the whole passage and state what the writer enjoyed about his journey on the Khyber Mail train. The question produced a very wide range of scores. The most successful responses came from those who were able to adopt a clear overview of the passage and select the key points of the writer's experience; less successful responses discriminated less effectively between what was directly relevant to the answer and what was simply elaboration of a point already made. For example, it was fully correct to state that the writer enjoyed the fact that he had everything he needed on the train; it was not necessary, however, to continue by detailing all of the facilities of his compartment that contributed to this. Those preparing to take this examination in future years are advised to concentrate on developing their reading and selection skills in order to achieve to their full potential on this question. There were, in fact, eleven points that might have been made as follow:
- (1) The comfortable carriage/slept well/well upholstered seat
  - (2) The comparative emptiness of the train
  - (3) He had everything he needed/all the features (the list of items from the passage)
  - (4) He could be alone/talk to other people if he wanted
  - (5) The feeling of being at home (in residence)
  - (6) The chance to have dinner on the train
  - (7) The fact that the journey would be prolonged as the train would be late
  - (8) The breakfast/omelette with tea and toast
  - (9) The chance to read a book
  - (10) The ever-changing landscape
  - (11) Seeing the (village) life/views of the countryside

Centres should note that the final three questions described above carry 19 of the 30 marks available for the Reading section of this paper and are advised to ensure that their candidates practise carefully the skills required to answer them effectively.

## Question 2

As mentioned in the Key Messages section of this report, **Question 2** on this paper is a Directed Writing task and requires candidates not just to demonstrate their linguistic competence but also their understanding of the reading passage and, in particular, of the inferential points contained in it. As has been the case in previous sessions, candidates, in general, produced written work of a good standard in their responses to this question. Most adopted an appropriate tone for writing to an older relative and took into account the requirement to make suggestions as to why the recipient of the letter would enjoy visiting Pakistan. The letter format was generally well adhered to, although in some cases the valediction was in an inappropriately formal register ('yours faithfully') and not in keeping with the tone of the rest of the letter.

Most candidates wrote with understanding of the writer's feelings about his train journey and repeated salient points such as the comfort of the compartment and the vivid pictures of the lives of the country's inhabitants as seen through the train window. The most successful responses elaborated perceptively on details from the passage, in particular commenting on the difference between the lives of those observed by the writer and his own circumstances. Such responses also picked up convincingly on the comments about the inquisitiveness of the people the writer met but linked this with comments about their friendliness and willingness to help. They also wrote lyrically about the beauties of the natural world as observed during the train journey.

Less successful responses tended either to be over-reliant on the words of the original passage and repeated rather than elaborated and developed on them, or misunderstood the purpose of the question and wrote in imaginative detail about things such as Lahore night clubs and hotels that were not mentioned by the writer. Although such responses could not be highly rewarded in the Content mark, many of them did, however, score well for Written Expression.

In general, Written Expression was at least satisfactory and, in many cases, very good. As well as adopting an appropriate tone (as mentioned above) many candidates wrote stylishly, with carefully chosen vocabulary and secure control of sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. A substantial minority of responses achieved marks in the top band for Written Expression. Many of those which did not, nevertheless, showed positive merits of vocabulary and structure but limited their achievement by making errors in punctuation (especially in the use of the full stop to separate sentences) and the spelling of straightforward vocabulary. Those taking the examination in future years are advised to concentrate on ensuring that the basics of English expression are secure, as all the evidence suggests that candidates for this paper have the ability to score highly on this section.

In conclusion, this proved to be a successful paper which allowed candidates to produce work of a satisfactory to good quality and Centres are to be congratulated on the performance of their candidates.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/13  
Reading Passage (Core)

## Key Messages

- Candidates are advised to take careful note of the marks allocated to each question as these are a clear indication of the number of distinct points that they will be expected to make in their answers.
- In **Question 1 (h)** and similar questions in future papers it is important to note that each component part of the question requires two separate words in the quotation to be explained (1 mark for each explanation).
- In **Question 1 (i)** and similar questions in future papers, it is important for candidates to understand that they are required to explain the effects achieved by the writer's choice of language and not simply to explain the meaning of the words used as this skill is tested elsewhere in the paper.
- **Question 2** is a Directed Writing task; candidates are expected to ensure that their response is firmly grounded in the stimulus passage and that appropriate details from the passage are included in their answers. Elaboration and development of inferences contained in the passage are necessary for answers reaching the top bands.
- There was evidence of linguistic competence of candidates answering **Question 2**. Many would improve their mark for Written Expression if they ensure that full stops are used consistently to separate sentences.

The above points will be considered in greater detail in the following sections of this report.

## General comments

Most candidates responded well to this paper, and found the reading passage to be both accessible and of interest. There were some very good responses to both reading and writing tasks and, overall, most candidates showed a sound understanding of the content of the passage on which the questions were based. The most successful clearly appreciated and understood its more demanding aspects. There was very little evidence that candidates were under pressure to complete the paper in the time allowed and nearly all wrote responses of at least adequate length to the Writing task (**Question 2**). Presentation and handwriting were generally of a good standard and the vast majority of responses gave clear evidence that candidates were taking the examination seriously and were trying their very best to do well.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) Candidates who read the opening section of the passage carefully and who thought carefully about the scenario being described secured both marks available for this question. In order to do so it was important to explain clearly the different perspectives of both participants in the episode and to realise that the misunderstanding hinged on the ticket clerk's question as to whether the writer *had a family* and not whether he wished to purchase a ticket. The clerk asked the question because she wanted to know if the writer was accompanied by his family as regulations allowed only people travelling with families to travel in a sleeping compartment; the writer, on the other hand, thought that the clerk's question was a general enquiry about his domestic circumstances and did not realise that it applied specifically to his wish to travel in a sleeping compartment. Although a small number of candidates scored both available marks, a pleasing number showed sufficient overall understanding of this section of the passage to be awarded one mark.

- (b) This proved an accessible question and a large majority of candidates identified the correct answer that the writer intended to obtain a sleeping berth by bribing the conductor once he was on board the train. As the question was worth only one mark (and, therefore, any response had to be marked as either right or wrong) it was important that the exact reason was given – the mark was not awarded to responses that said that his intention was to *buy* a ticket from the conductor.
- (c) Nearly all candidates successfully identified the correct section of the passage which provided the answer to this question and correctly stated that the writer’s decision for not having a sleeping compartment was that when he saw the ones on the train he was put off by their unwelcoming condition (for example, they were dirty, ill-equipped).
- (d) There were three acceptable reasons for why the writer ‘had an urge to get off the train’ which were: he was uncomfortable/very hot/the lights were broken; the other travellers were noisy/bad-tempered; he felt that the journey was not worth the discomfort. This also proved to be an accessible question and a large number of candidates achieved both of the marks available.
- (e) This proved to be a demanding question as it too required careful explanation and identification of the writer’s reasons for thinking that he had become a ‘victim’ of his own actions. To gain both marks available it was necessary to explain that his reason for being on the train was simply to get to somewhere else (he was on the train for the sake of being on a train); that having taken the train for this purpose he realised that the journey was lacking in any enjoyment and that, furthermore, he originally had no intention of visiting Bogotá but now that he was on the train he was committed to doing so. Again, careful reading of the passage was required to unravel this chain of thought and thus, only a small number of candidates provided a clear explanation.
- (f) Most candidates correctly answered this question by referring either to the writer’s statement that Bogotá meant nothing to him or, the equally acceptable phrase, ‘I was going there in order to leave it’.
- (g) This question was also answered well and most candidates gained both marks available by making direct reference to the writer’s description of the countryside that the train was passing. The key points that were required for the two marks were that the countryside was becoming more *fertile* and that as the train passed along the Caribbean coast, the countryside was also becoming more *attractive*. It was possible for candidates to gain both marks by quoting the lines in which the writer made these points.
- (h) As mentioned in the ‘Key Messages’ section at the beginning of this report, it is important that candidates give explanations for two expressions in each sub-section of this question in order to gain both marks available for it. Consequently, for (i) it was necessary to show an understanding of both the words ‘squawking’ and ‘irritably’; those who explained that the other passengers were making bad-tempered, chicken-like noises successfully achieved both marks; most, however, gave a general explanation that the passengers were making loud, angry noises and were awarded at the most one mark for showing a partial understanding. More candidates were successful in gaining both available marks for (ii) and showed understanding that the noise made by the other passengers was reduced (‘quieted’) by the din (‘racket’) made by the wheels of the train through the open windows. The main misunderstanding here resulted from the assumption that the passengers became quiet simply because the journey had started although such responses were still awarded one mark if they showed understanding of the word ‘quieted’. Most candidates gained at least one mark for (iii) as they understood that the calm water of the pools reflected (‘mirrored’) the stars in the sky; more would have gained both marks if they had attempted to explain why the stars were described as ‘new’ (because they had only recently come out).

- (i) This question referred candidates to a specific section of the passage and asked them to choose three short *phrases* and explain how each conveyed the unpleasantness of the writer's journey in the train. It is important for candidates to understand that this question (and similar questions in future papers) is intended to assess their appreciation of the way writers use language in order to create effects in the reader's mind. Candidates are rewarded with one mark for selecting an appropriate phrase and a further mark for convincingly explaining *how* the writer's choice of words furthers this description. A key skill in answering this type of question is to be able to select three phrases which do not all invite the same explanation – thus a candidate who chose 'there was no air', 'passengers were so closely packed' and 'the hot steamy car' would score three marks (one for each phrase chosen) but would be likely to score only one explanation mark as it would be difficult to say anything other than 'this phrase shows how uncomfortable it was in a packed, hot train' for each one. However, if the three choices were, for example, 'the train lurched', 'the music like burning in my ears' and 'the dim light bulbs that looked like withered tangerines', then finding three discrete explanations would be considerably easier as it would be possible to explain how each of these phrases described a different sensation experienced by the writer (how the journey was physically uncomfortable; how the music in the compartment affected his sense of hearing and how the inefficient lighting disturbed his reading – comments on the choice of simile in this phrase would also gain credit). Many candidates scored all three marks for choosing appropriate phrases; only a small number achieved more than one further mark for their explanations.
- (j) Seven marks were available for this summary question; candidates were required to refer to the whole passage and give details of the people the writer met and saw on his journey. The question produced a very wide range of scores. The most successful responses came from those who were able to adopt a clear overview of the passage and select the key points of the writer's experience; less successful responses discriminated less effectively between what was directly relevant to the answer and what was simply elaboration of a point already made. For example, it was fully correct to state that the writer saw people on the platform saying goodbye to their loved ones; it was not necessary, however, to continue by giving descriptions of each of the couples engaging in these farewells. Those preparing to take this examination in future years are advised to concentrate on developing their reading and selection skills in order to achieve to their full potential on this question. There were, in fact, eleven points that might have been made as follow:
- (1) the ticket collector asking about his family
  - (2) she smiled/looked doubtful
  - (3) children crying
  - (4) people complaining (about broken lights/crowd/heat)
  - (5) an old man and a boy having a dispute
  - (6) an old man travelling with an elderly wife
  - (7) everyone perspiring/muttering/squawking
  - (8) a woman complaining of heat
  - (9) a cruel-looking man complaining of the smell
  - (10) fond farewells on the platform (families/lovers/husband and wife)
  - (11) fights on the platform

Centres should note that the final three questions described above carry 19 of the 30 marks available for the Reading section of this paper and are advised to ensure that their candidates practise carefully the skills required to answer them effectively.

## Question 2

As mentioned in the Key Messages section of this report, **Question 2** on this paper is a Directed Writing task and requires candidates not just to demonstrate their linguistic competence but also their understanding of the reading passage and, in particular, of the inferential points contained in it. As has been the case in previous sessions, candidates, in general, produced written work of a good standard in their responses to this question. Most responded well to the opportunity to write the words of a radio interview and effectively gave convincing personae to both the writer and to the interviewer.

Most candidates wrote with understanding of the writer's feelings about his train journey and not only detailed the various discomforts experienced by the writer but also picked up on some of the more positive descriptions in the source passage. They commented on the contrast between the scenery being passed by the train and the conditions within the compartment – this was sometimes very effectively introduced by having the interviewer ask if there were any good things the writer felt about the journey which was evidence of thoughtful planning on the part of the candidate. Most candidates also took into account the second element of the question and gave thoughtful practical advice ('make sure that you bring plenty of water, a torch and ear plugs') to future travellers – although the advice 'to bring your family along to ensure that you get a sleeping compartment' perhaps showed less perceptive understanding of the writer's description of this feature of the train.

Less successful responses tended either to be over-reliant on the words of the original passage and repeated rather than elaborated and developed on them, or misunderstood the purpose of the question and wrote in imaginative detail about things such as the night life and hotels of Bogotá that were not mentioned by the writer. Although such responses could not be highly rewarded in the Content mark, many of them did, however, score well for Written Expression.

In general, Written Expression was at least satisfactory and, in many cases, very good. As well as adopting an appropriate tone (as mentioned above) many candidates wrote stylishly, with carefully chosen vocabulary and secure control of sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. A substantial minority of responses achieved marks in the top band for Written Expression. Many of those which did not, nevertheless, showed positive merits of vocabulary and structure but limited their achievement by making errors in punctuation (especially in the use of the full stop to separate sentences) and the spelling of straightforward vocabulary. Those taking the examination in future years are advised to concentrate on ensuring that the basics of English expression are secure, as all the evidence suggests that candidates for this paper have the ability to score highly on this section.

In conclusion, this proved to be a successful paper which allowed candidates to produce work of a satisfactory to good quality.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 0500/21</b> <b>Reading Passages (Extended)</b></p>
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## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading (40 marks), although there were 10 marks available for writing; 5 marks in Question 1 and 5 marks in Question 3. The requirements for doing well were to:

- give equal attention to all sections of the question
- explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show their significance in the context
- use your own words where appropriate; do not copy whole phrases from the original
- be careful to give only information that is focused on the question
- only make a point once
- give thought to the structure and sequence of the material in the response
- adopt a suitable voice and register for the task
- pay attention to length.

Key messages about how candidates can improve their performance for each of the three types of questions will be considered in greater detail below.

## General comments

This paper was similar in difficulty to last year's paper and produced a similar standard of response to all three questions, which covered a wide range. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible. For **Question 1** and **Question 2**, to score marks in the top band, candidates needed to read closely enough for the first and needed to select the strongest choices for **Question 2**, whilst making specific rather than general comments about the words selected. Candidates should work hard to build up a wide, appropriate vocabulary, both to express themselves and to understand the words used in the reading passages.

Most candidates managed to earn a mark in double figures in responding to **Question 3** by finding a reasonable number of points. It is important that candidates use their own words rather than lift, as lifting suggests that the candidates do not understand the wording of the original. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they are writing. There did not seem to be any common misunderstandings of the passages, although only more successful responses could appreciate the humorous tone of the passage or develop in breadth the material for **Question 1**.

While quality is more important than quantity on this paper, there needs to be enough of a response to meet the top band descriptors. Responses to **Question 1** needed to be one and a half to two sides as required of the question, not including any address, date and greetings. Bands 1 and 2 refer to development of ideas. It is difficult to do this in what is essentially one side of a response. The importance of planning cannot therefore be overemphasised.

While there was no evidence that candidates were unable to finish their answers in the time given, those who allowed enough time to prepare their answers to the third question were at an advantage. The second half of that question was often noticeably shorter than the first, and with fewer specific points gained.

Most candidates answered their questions in appropriate English. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' work was affected by unclear or limited style. A good proportion of candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in legible handwriting. Candidates should be encouraged to write with sufficient care as to shaping of letters so that decoding is not required.

**Question 1: Write a letter of protest to the organisers. In your letter, persuade the organisers that the event should be stopped.**

**(20 marks)**

Some candidates wrote persuasive letters, aware that they were writing to the organisers of this event in Cascais which is a 'little beach town', not a large city, and that the event occurs once a year. These answers nearly always focused their first paragraph on the purpose as stated in the question – 'that the event should be stopped' rather than, say, that the event be modified in some way. Even a casual reading of the passage (paragraph two) indicates that the yearly event is directed towards an 'admiring population' and that the Running with the Bulls is not designed to *attract* tourists. The instructions for the response also indicate that the answer should be based on Passage A that 'you attended'; those who diverted from the text, for example suggesting that a bull escaped and ran into the front of the Hotel Baia this year, had not read the information accurately. It is worth noting that a careful reading of the exact nature of the task will reap dividends for the discerning candidate.

Candidates who wrote better answers were aware that there were at least three groups of people affected by the event – the participants, the willing onlookers, and the unsuspecting tourists and were able to say something relevant about all three of them, for example that the participants were trying to show off and that younger men no longer seemed to have the expertise to be successful. The very best answers indicated that by and large the efforts of these fishermen were fruitless and that they looked rather silly. The behaviour of onlookers was criticised for being uncouth, with much jeering and whistling, yet recognised that some of these people were also at risk of being trampled. The most obvious point about the tourists was that no-one had taken sufficient care to give advanced warning of the event, so they were surprised on the beach and had to leave. Sound development of the latter point could have been their disappointment at a spoiled day by the sea, or that they lost possessions in the confusion of leaving so rapidly, or even that children could get separated from parents. It was potentially distressing for visitors away from the beach, for example the tourist surprised at the Hotel Baia during a previous event. The best answers demonstrated an understanding that the whole thing was pointless as – on this occasion – no-one won the prize which in itself was a rather bizarre item. Some good answers focused on the fact that it is a male-only event which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is rather out-dated.

Weaker responses tended to treat the people as one group. Mention was usually made of people being trampled and that tourists had to leave the beach.

Better answers also demonstrated grave concern about the way the bulls were treated. Some noted that five bulls in one truck must have meant they were confined too closely, that they were purposely 'wound up' by much shouting and general hubbub, and that they escaped seaward where they could spend up to four hours before drowning. Many answers picked up on the reference to animal rights organisations. The most competent responses recognised the subtlety of the passage and acknowledged that the bulls were not hugely upset by the event, that they were only 'fairly' menacing and that one got 'bored'.

Weaker answers usually made one or two comments about the bulls, a rather general one that they were badly treated and another that animal rights organisations would be appalled to learn of this event.

There were candidates who took the notion of protesting to the extreme. Whilst exaggeration can be a feature of some persuasive writing, this letter was a test of reading and therefore exaggeration which produced a mis-reading did not gain credit for content. Exaggerations included that people are *always* killed at this event, and that bulls *always* drown. In the same vein, the descriptors for Writing Band 1 indicates the language is 'persuasive [and] expresses feeling ... arguments are firmly expressed'. Many responses adopted an aggressive and confrontational tone with sustained rhetorical flourishes, which went beyond the 'clear and appropriate but comparatively plain' descriptors of Band 3. Band 1 also indicates that the writer has a 'clear sense of audience' and some of the harangues encountered required this.

Developments of points about people and the bulls were quite varied. Some suggested that this spectacle was setting a bad example to impressionable children; others indicated that the young men who spent their time chasing girls would not have impressed them with their unsuccessful attempts to grab the horns. Others made the valid point that whilst the writer saw several people trampled and rushed off in an ambulance, there was a *risk* that someone could be fatally injured. References to specific environmental organisations which might take issue with the good people of Cascais also led to some fruitful developments.

One of the Reading Objectives tested by this question is to 'understand, explain and collate implicit meanings and attitudes'. Better responses, perhaps prompted by their thinking about the tourists, were able



to make sensible comments about the fact that this event would be off-putting to the type of tourists likely to visit this 'genteel' type of resort. There is explicit mention in the passage that the event takes place on the beach to avoid confusion in the town. Thus, by extension, it is clear that if a bull escapes, there *will* be confusion. Even more careful readers deduced that the town described in the first paragraph, with 'quaint, narrow paths' could have its 'stately buildings' damaged should a bull go on the rampage. One answer reflected on the negative impact on business for the beach-front fish restaurants. There were suggestions that law suits could be pursued and that the organisers might find themselves out of pocket. Other implicit developments were based on the cost to the local council of cleaning up the beach after the event, and the impact on the reputation of the town if the event were to continue. Some candidates suggested that the organisers should think up some other way to have an annual spectacle for the community (although, it should be noted again, not to attract tourists – a once-a-year event is not going to provide regular income), perhaps based on fishing and the sea, and there would have been some opportunity here to work in the fishermen's handling of the boats, noted as 'deft' in the opening paragraph.

Weaker answers either ignored these wider implications for Cascais or said merely that it would 'put off tourists'. Some thin answers needed to at least mention the bulls or even to consider their plight. As stated earlier, some responses would have benefited from differentiating between the types of people. Occasionally answers demonstrated the candidates' understanding of animal rights' issues with supplementary information about animal cruelty, from bull running to bear baiting and dog fighting, which lost focus on the text.

Mention has already been made of the style of writing that was appropriate. Many responses did exhibit some fluency and clarity. However, a significant proportion of answers also exhibited some awkwardness of expression.

Finally, here are some ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Read the question carefully to ensure you are doing exactly what it says.
- Plan your answer.
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and use plenty of detail to support your ideas.
- Be aware that evidence of inferential reading is necessary for Bands 1 and 2 for Reading.
- Ensure you have enough material for between 1 1/2 and 2 sides of average handwriting, discounting any 'topping' and 'tailing'.
- Give careful consideration to the audience to whom you are writing, and ensure that your style is appropriate for your purpose.

**Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the town of Cascais in paragraph 1, beginning 'Cascais, along the coast ....' and (b) the atmosphere and the events as the 'Running with the Bulls' is about to begin in paragraph 3, beginning 'The bull run takes place...'. Select words and phrases from these descriptions and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.**

**(10 marks)**

To gain marks in the top band focus at word level was required. Generally the first half of the question was answered better than the second. Nearly all responses said something about the image of the 'picture-postcard perfect little beach town', though this was sometimes limited to saying Cascais is perfect, small and beside the sea. Other popular choices were the image of the roof tiles that 'shone like fire' and the shapes of the walkways and squares that 'look like gentle waves'. Candidates have probably been taught to pick similes and that these contain the word 'like'. Most commented on the motion of the sea being like gentle waves but could have explained that a picture of the town's design was captured in this image. Candidates would do well to consider the literal meaning of the comparison before attempting to consider the effect in the context of the paragraph. It was important that long quotations containing several choices were not provided rather than a clear indication of specific choices, and that the comments that followed were specific to the various choices rather than general.

The first level of approach was to identify words that had an extra layer of meaning, and the second level was to be able to explain why the writer used them. An example from paragraph 2 was the phrase 'gesturing frantically'. Weaker responses simply quoted the phrase (often adding the next phrase of 'shouting 'Touro, touro!') or said vaguely that it meant the men waved their arms around and shouted, or that the men 'gestured' in a fast way. Repeating language of the passage can gain no credit as understanding is not thereby demonstrated. Better responses realised that the effect created was of wild movement suggesting the men either were over-excited or desperate, conscious that the sun-bathers were in danger. It was just one choice of many in the paragraph which indicated confusion and some danger at the event.

It was a noticeable feature of the responses to this question that they were often longer than **Question 1** responses, which should not be the case given the relative weighting of marks. On the other hand, less than a full page of writing is unlikely to produce a range of choices, with their explanatory meanings and effects, for each half of the question. There seemed to be fewer choices offered this time. The mark scheme refers to 'a number of words and phrases ... in both parts' and that these need to include images for the higher bands. Just one or two choices from each paragraph are not therefore sufficient; the response would be considered to be 'thin' and therefore given a mark in band 5. Many candidates seemed to have deliberately limited themselves to only three choices for each section, though there are more than twice as many possible appropriate choices from each paragraph. It is useful when candidates offer a summary overview of the combined effect of the language of the paragraph, but this is not a substitute for analysis at word level. This question does not require or reward a response in the form of a commentary, which simply goes through the paragraph making general comments on everything in it without selection or detailed interpretation of individual words.

Many **section (a)** answers contained lists of choices or long quotations followed by general comments. Candidates needed to select individual words and short phrases, and to treat them separately. Meanings were sometimes attempted, but there were few specific explanations of effects. There were overviews that showed an understanding of the colourful nature of the town and its peacefulness, but often they were not supported by specific words or phrases, or even linked to the examples previously given. Few candidates selected 'gargantuan' or 'reverberated' and only a few others 'stately' and 'resplendent'. The image 'smart coats of colour wash' was more frequently seen, although not as popular as the similes, presumably because the signal word of 'like' was missing.

**Section (b)** responses often referred to the theme of confusion and danger, but selections needed to go beyond this idea to consider the nuances of the individual choices. To repeat that certain words 'add to the atmosphere of confusion' does not demonstrate an ability to analyse the differing effects of the words in the text. A good example of this would be 'fled'. Whilst it is true that the people ran away and that it adds to the confusion, the word is often associated with great catastrophes where people have had to make treacherous journeys to escape danger. If candidates had thought along these lines, perhaps the attitude of the writer would have been realised.

As always, good answers took opportunities to explore words and short phrases while less good answers covered literal meanings.

The following answer includes at least seven selected quotations from each paragraph, and these would be more than sufficient for the award of the top mark, provided that the quality of the explanation was high and consistent enough. These sample answers are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate response to the question.

**(a) The town in paragraph 1**

*The 'picture postcard perfect little beach town' evokes those places that are photographed by professionals in which the sky and sea are blue and the beaches are golden – the idyllic holiday destination. That the roof tiles 'shone like fire' indicates the extreme brightness of the tiles, a range of fiery colours – yellow, orange and red – brought about by the intensity of the sun. The houses beneath the tiles are 'resplendent' and 'stately'. 'Stately' suggests a relatively grand size, maybe homes to the wealthy and powerful, and 'resplendent' suggests splendid or majestic. The houses wear their 'smart coats of colour wash', having chosen proudly the very best side of themselves to present to the public. Rather at odds with these images are the words describing the new shopping centre and the fish market. The former is 'gargantuan', so large that it is fit for a giant, and therefore either exaggerated by the writer, or at least indicating that this modern addition is out of keeping with the older, more traditional part of the town. The noise 'reverberated' round the fish market suggesting it makes the place shake, perhaps indicating it is a very busy place and that, therefore, Cascais itself is still a thriving community.*

**(b) the atmosphere and the events in paragraph 3**

*In comparison with the relatively peaceful and harmonic presentation of the town, the atmosphere at the beach is one of confusion and danger. The writer uses the words 'chaos' and 'confusion' very early on. The latter suggests a scene where people are running hither and thither, unsure of what should be happening where and when. The former word is rather more intense, indicating that control and organisation are so lacking that no order can be restored. Later we learn that tourists are 'baffled' – they are confused by what is happening to the point that their beach activities are brought to a standstill. We are told that they 'fled'. This*

*action was prompted by the bulls' arrival – fleeing suggesting an exodus of almost Biblical proportions, an action undertaken when in fear for one's life.*

*What has brought this about is that men 'descended' on the beach. They did not simply arrive; rather they came from a great height, suggesting a forceful entry; we think of one army pouring down on the encampment of another. These men were 'gesturing frantically'. 'Gesturing' is indicative of big movements without any real purpose, rather than pointing or indicating – the men do not really know why they are making these movements and the 'frantic' way they do so suggests they are either over-excited or panicking, perhaps that they do not really know what they want to achieve, connecting to the overall idea of chaos.*

*Finally the 'fairly menacing bulls' are released. Whilst 'menacing' suggests that they are intending to pose a threat, that their appearance is certainly dangerous, the word that tempers it – 'fairly' – reveals that this whole situation has been exaggerated. They are hefty beasts with horns and broad chests, but their demeanour indicates otherwise, as is borne out by events in the rest of the text.*

Here again are some ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Avoid general comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase'. Such comments will not earn any marks at all.
- Your first task is to choose some words and phrases that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle.
- Plan which choices to deal with first, so as to ensure that the most evocative (usually the imagery) are incorporated appropriately in your answer.
- Treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, try to at least give a meaning for each of your choices. That can give you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to recognise images and explain them (but you do not need to know or to give their technical names). Say what they literally mean, in this context, and then explain why they have been used in the passage.

**Question 3: Summarise (a) how safety and order are promoted at the Pamplona Bull Run, according to Passage B; and (b) the reasons why the local people of Cascais enjoy the 'Running with the Bulls', as described in Passage A.**

**(20 marks)**

To answer this question successfully, candidates needed to identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. They are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. There were twenty-three possible points in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous leeway. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Most candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary, though some were not.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both of the passages. There was evidence that some candidates had made notes, although sometimes these contained items that were so closely linked to each other that the points could not score twice. For example, Passage B mentions various ways runners are monitored before the event (being in place thirty minutes before the start, wearing easily identifiable clothing), but there was only one mark for this. Good summaries avoided repetition, for instance that the fishermen show off their bravery and are courageous. While it was perfectly acceptable to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together. For example, in Passage B the points about the runners themselves could be separated from those about the crowd.

Candidates generally found it easy to identify relevant material in Passage B and all the points were used frequently; the three least often given were 1a, 7 and 12. It is important the the question was properly read. For Passage A, it asked why the *local* people enjoyed the event, not the tourists. Many candidates thus only provided a narrow range of points from 14, 17, 20, 21 and 23.

Weaker responses were list-like and required use of own words, especially in **section (a)**. Candidates needed to avoid long explanations. Some candidates gave unnecessary explanations in relation to points in Passage B, or gave extra information which was not necessary, for example the speed at which the bulls and cattle run. There were few examples of wholesale copying, although some candidates did use lengthy phrases in their choices. Once again, a plan would have proved helpful as some candidates, mindful of the instruction that 'you should write about 1 side in total' found that they had written three-quarters of a side in response to **section (a)** and therefore restricted themselves to a few lines for **section (b)**. Others needed to follow the instruction on length and not to exceed the limit. There were examples of overlong summaries, and therefore of low writing marks for this question. Candidates need to be advised about the reduction of writing marks for excessive length, and that if the response is 'excessively long' (i.e. more than a page and a half of average handwriting), they are likely to score 0 marks for writing. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the material included and to the language in which it is expressed: concision, clarity, focus, fluency and own words are descriptors for the higher writing bands.

Finding suitable alternatives for words from the passage proved challenging for some candidates. From Passage B, for example, the information about the rocket being fired, the specially erected barricades which have small gaps to allow the runners to escape, and the need for appropriate footwear are examples that were often lifted and therefore it was hard to be sure that those candidates had a full understanding; on the other hand, some strove to find alternatives but these need to show an accurate understanding of the word in context. Photographs and rolled-up newspapers are difficult to put into own words successfully and economically and thus were accepted. **Section (b)** asked about the local people, who fall into two groups – the participants and the spectators. This section proved more challenging because the piece was not written from the perspective of someone enjoying the event whereas Passage B was about how safety and order are promoted at the Pamplona Bull Run.

Weaker responses dealt with the material from Passage B in the order it appeared in the text, almost exclusively using phrases from it and often exceeded a notional half a page. They also needed to make more points from Passage A, rather than giving vague comments to do with having fun and a good time. Better responses avoided writing introductory statements and making comments, and concentrated on giving an informative summary. They also obeyed the instruction to write about one side in total. Some candidates with very small handwriting clearly wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be an average of eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting and word-processing can fit as many as fifteen words onto a line, and this must obviously be taken into account.

Higher marks for writing are awarded where the response contains varied and fluent sentence structures, and gives just enough information about the points to convey each one clearly. Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, scored the whole five marks for aspects of writing.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as clearly as possible. They are also translated into the writer's own words, and the answer, if handwritten, would fit onto a side of paper with space to spare.

### **Section (a)**

*A signal warns everyone of the start of the run. Runners, who arrive thirty minutes early to have their credentials checked, wear sensible footwear and carry rolled-up newspapers to divert a bull's attention if necessary. The runners also know they are forbidden to run against the flow of the cattle. There are gaps in the purpose-built barriers, behind which non-participants are protected and through which runners can escape in emergencies. Police and medical assistance are on hand. Spectators must obey strict rules not to go out onto the route of the run, only to take photographs in very restricted areas and not to call out or distract the bulls in any way. Citizens living in houses on the route must keep their doors shut.*

### **Section (b)**

*Local people of Cascais enjoy admiring the appearance of the participants, be they figures of fun or film star look-a-likes. They are entertained by the way the fishermen try to demonstrate their masculinity and the possible involvement of reckless passers-by. They jeer at participants and retell stories of past years' events. There is much drama in people being rushed to hospital and bulls heading off into the ocean. Their enthusiasm is increased by being able to bet on the winner – and the participants look forward to winning some salted codfish. Afterwards the young men proudly display their wounds to each other.*

Here are some ways in which summaries could be improved:

- Explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show what they mean in the context.
- Do not copy whole phrases from the original.
- Write no more than one side of average handwriting.
- Aim to give equal space to both sections of the summary.
- Write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage.
- Be careful to give only information that is focused on the question.
- Make a point only once.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/22  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading (40 marks), although there were 10 marks available for writing; 5 marks in **Question 1** and 5 marks in **Question 3**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- give equal attention to all sections of the question
- explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show their significance in the context
- use your own words where appropriate; do not copy whole phrases from the original
- be careful to give only information that is focused on the question
- only make a point once
- give thought to the structure and sequence of the material in the response
- adopt a suitable voice and register for the task
- pay attention to length.

Key messages about how candidates can improve their performance for each of the three types of questions will be considered in greater detail below.

## General comments

This paper was similar in difficulty to last year's paper and produced a similar standard of response to all three questions, which covered a wide range. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible. Candidates wishing to score high marks should work hard to build up a wide, appropriate vocabulary, both to express themselves and to understand the words used in the reading passages. It is important that candidates shape the material to fit the purpose of the questions. There did not seem to be any common misunderstandings of the passages, but many candidates found it difficult to develop and assimilate the material for **Question 1**.

For **Question 1** and **Question 2**, to achieve marks in the top band, responses should modify both the language and structure of the passage, as called for by the nature of the questions.

In **Question 3** most candidates managed to earn a mark in double figures by finding a reasonable number of points, but many responses contained examples of lifting rather than the use of own words, and there was an increase in the number of candidates who copied whole phrases and sentences from the passages. It is important that they use their own words to demonstrate that they understand the wording of the original. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they are writing.

While quality is more important than quantity on this paper, there needs to be enough of a response to meet the top band descriptors. There were responses which were brief, and much shorter than the specified length. One side of writing is not enough to fulfil the requirements of a three-part question (for example, **Question 1**). It is essential that the skills of selection and modification are demonstrated in all three questions. In addition, there needs to be a strong focus on the actual wording of the questions. The importance of planning cannot therefore be overemphasised; checking is also advisable, as marks can be lost through slips of the pen which suggest basic misunderstanding, e.g. getting the characters' names the wrong way round. On the other hand, candidates need to ensure that the planning has not been overdone, as this can result in a rushed response which does not include the full amount of content as in the original plan. Examiners do not mark the plans but the responses.

While there was no evidence that candidates were unable to finish their answers in the time given, those who allowed enough time to prepare their answers to the third question were at an advantage. The second half of a response to a question was often noticeably shorter than the first, and contained more copying from the



passage. Candidates could be advised to read passage B after answering the two questions on passage A; there was evidence in **Question 1** of use of material from the wrong passage, which could not be credited. It was also again confirmed that candidates who did the questions in a different order from that of the question paper did not gain any advantage.

Most candidates answered their questions in appropriate English. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' work was affected by unclear or limited style. Most candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in legible handwriting.

### **Comments on individual questions**

**Question 1: Imagine that you are James. Write an entry in your journal, intended to be read by members of your family when you get home. In your journal entry you should explain how you feel in this environment; comment on your relationship with Redmond; express your thoughts about the next few days of this adventure.**

**(20 marks)**

Some candidates wrote excellent journal entries. It was clear that they understood the need to give James a convincing attitude, one of grudging tolerance and even admiration for the scenery and his companion, and a suitable and plausible voice for a reader and poet. The most successful responses were able to include subtlety, sarcasm and humour, reflecting the tone of the passage and revealing an understanding of the relationship. Better responses were able to explore the idea of James considering Redmond to be 'absurd', rather than just including the word in their answer. The fact that James had to be persuaded to join Redmond was crucial to an understanding of the situation and the nature of the friendship. It is worth noting that information given in the introduction to passages should be read, and utilised where relevant.

Less confident responses needed to focus on the content of the task and adaptation of the material. In such cases the first section contained either long descriptions of the surroundings, often copied from the passage and written in a narrative style, or said very little about James' feelings. Some were interspersed with comments about being amazed or bored or threatened, but these needed to be integrated with detail or supported by relevant references, and were not therefore convincing. There was generally a lot of mechanical use of the passage, putting the reading mark into band 3. Some first sections required cohesion or organisation of details and thoughts. Most made reference to James being a reader or writer of poetry, but these points should have been developed later. Many of these responses would have benefitted from reflecting on James' annoyance. They often mentioned simple enthusiasm and so made the trip seem to be one of unalloyed pleasure. More sophisticated responses allowed his feelings and tone to change during the course of the entry, so that by the end he was either looking forward to or dreading what was to come. Nearly all candidates were able to at least hint at characterisation and convey some sense of the relationship between the two very different types of men.

Weak answers needed to make greater reference to James' feelings as they simply re-told the stages of the journey and re-iterated the descriptions of the landscape without making anything of them. They needed to maintain focus on the question – instead they drifted away from the passage, in response to bulleted points two and three, into speculations on the history of the men's relationship, and on what they might do during the next few days. In weak responses the voice needed to be convincing, rather than have James using unlikely colloquial language, such as 'having a blast', 'guy' and 'brilliant'. Another feature of weaker responses was the requirement to provide a convincing ending to the entry; this tended to take the form of addressing members of James' family, as if believing that the response was in the form of a letter. There was also a tendency to adopt a narrative style, as if re-telling the journey in its entirety to a listener.

In the judgement on quality of writing, use of voice is an important aspect. Many candidates attempted to use an appropriate voice, though there was opportunity for more candidates to capture the personality of James. Many showed him to be enthusiastic, but few showed him to be irritated or grudgingly admiring. Most responses were organised effectively, but sometimes responses to the first bullet point would have been better not included in the last section to aid clarity. There were some candidates who wrote as Redmond rather than James, or thought that James was the one steering the canoe. Weaker responses needed to have made something of James being persuaded to come along, or of the ambivalent attitude he had towards Redmond – one of irritation at being interrupted and threatened with crocodiles, mixed with admiration for Redmond's knowledge and skills, including his management of the canoe in difficult waters. Though it clearly stated in the task 'You are James', some candidates became Redmond instead, or moved between the two viewpoints, and talked about James sitting doing nothing but reading poems in the canoe. Other candidates changed the context, adding other members of the party and referring to a flotilla of canoes.

Most of the marks for this question were given for showing understanding of the passage and for using ideas within the framework of the response. It was not possible to use all the details from the passage in the space available, but good responses managed to include all the main ones, to do with appearance and behaviour of the environment and of the characters. In good answers, references to what has already happened and has been said were the basis of expectations and views about the future. Points for the three bullets were effectively interwoven in the best responses, although it was logical to leave the third bullet to the end.

In less good answers, they needed to avoid copying whole phrases and sentences from the passage; sometimes several lines were lifted with virtually no changes in the wording. The more the content of the passage was adapted to the genre and focus of the question, the more likely it was that the mark for reading would be high. The task stated that the response should consist of 'an entry', but some candidates took that to mean a series of entries as for a personal diary, which led to some fragmentation of ideas and a lack of development of them. Weaker candidates needed to improve the structure and sequence for their response: for example a response may move without transition from horror to delight, boredom to amazement, fear to relaxation, in response to bullet one; and from annoyance to admiration in response to bullet two; and in response to bullet three they wrote a continuation of a reflection on what has already happened instead of a prediction of the future.

In response to bullet two, responses often made general comments about Redmond being a fine fellow, or said that the men hardly spoke and did not have a lot in common, but required an explanation. Some of the material required modification; Redmond's warnings and James' ritual of going through the rapids were the areas of the passage most prone to lifting. Better responses referred to Redmond's knowledge, skill and enthusiasm, giving examples. They also commented that he was very kind for giving warning of the rapids, or scoffed at his comments about crocodiles. Good candidates made something of the implied difference in character of the two men, one an outdoors and one an indoors type, making it clear how this would affect their perceptions and enjoyment of the experience they were sharing. Effective answers to this bullet often managed to include references to their likely different attitudes to poetry, as well as to rapids and crocodiles. This section required an interpretation of the relationship as demonstrated in the passage. Hypothetical comments about how long they had known each other and to manufactured histories, e.g. that they were friends at university or recently reunited long-lost brothers, could not be credited. The inference is that James was persuaded by Redmond to agree to the trip with the promise of receiving inspiration for his poetry. Although a significant minority of candidates picked up on the word 'absurd' and used it, very few explained what it meant and why James thought it an appropriate description for Redmond.

The response to bullet three was the least well developed, and needed to be addressed in some cases. For a mark in band 1 or band 2 to be awarded, all three sections should be tackled, and in some detail. Better responses commented on being inspired to write poetry, the likelihood of meeting more wild animals, and the need to have a rest. The majority of responses referred to more of the same: getting wet and being bored. Few mentioned the hiding of the petrol can, the return downstream, that the upper level of the river will be much rougher, that they might meet crocodiles, or that James is going to run out of reading material. Some responses referred to an attempt to get on better with each other and the possible development of the relationship. No credit could be given for responses which talked about setting up camp, collecting specimens and meeting the natives as the ideas were not initiated from a reading of the passage.

### Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Answer all parts of the question.
- Answer in your own words and adapt material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing.
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and use plenty of detail to support your ideas.
- If you are writing as a character from the passage, try to create a personality and a voice which shows your understanding of what you have read.

**Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the trees and the undergrowth in paragraph 2, and (b) the monitor lizard and the Brahminy kite in paragraph 4. Select words and phrases from these descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.**

**(10 marks)**

In order to gain marks in the top band, it is important that there is a focus at word level, and to carefully consider the choice of words chosen to fit the specifics of the question. There was evidence of candidates across the mark range sometimes picking wrong choices, for example, those which referred to the river rather than to the vegetation in paragraph 2. Generally the second half of the question was answered better than the first, and nearly all responses said something about the image of the lizard's 'dinosauric eyes', though this was often limited to saying that they were 'scary' rather than exploring the connotations of dinosaurs in the context of a 'primeval forest'. Many candidates did not understand the meaning of 'parasitic', assuming it to refer to animal rather than vegetable matter.

The first level of approach was to identify words that had an extra layer of meaning, and the second level was to be able to explain why the writer used them. An example from paragraph 2 was the phrase 'as thick as legs'. Weaker responses quoted it or said vaguely that it meant the creepers were large, often repeating the word 'thick'. Repeating language of the passage can gain no credit as understanding is not thereby demonstrated. Better responses realised that the image evoked not only the huge and unnatural size of the plants but that there was something dynamic and competitive about the vegetation in the jungle, which 'gripped' and 'sprouted', 'tangled' and 'twined'. The primary effect of the paragraph is one of 'chaos', from which one of dominance and threat can be inferred, and one which could cause a feeling of imprisonment or suffocation in an observer in a tiny canoe in the middle of it.

It was a noticeable feature of the responses to this question that they were often longer than **Question 1** responses, which should not be the case given the relative weighting of marks. On the other hand, less than a full page of writing is unlikely to produce a range of choices, with their explanatory meanings and effects, for each half of the question. There seemed to be fewer choices offered this time. The mark scheme refers to 'a number of words and phrases ... in both parts' and that these need to include images for the higher bands. Just one or two choices from each paragraph are not therefore sufficient; the response would be considered to be 'thin' and therefore given a mark in band 5. Some candidates seemed to have deliberately limited themselves to only three choices for each section, though there are more than twice as many possible appropriate choices from each paragraph. It is useful when responses offer a summary overview of the combined effect of the language of the paragraph, but this is not a substitute for analysis at word level. This question does not require or reward a response in the form of a commentary, which simply goes through the paragraph making general comments on everything in it without selection or detailed interpretation of individual words.

For **section (a)**, a few responses provided individual words and short phrases and treated them separately. Meanings were usually attempted, but there were few specific explanations of effects. There were overviews that showed an understanding of the abundance of trees and the overall visual or psychological effect of this, but often they needed to be supported by specific words or phrases, or even linked to the examples previously given. That the trees are 60-metres high is a factual description and not in itself a worthy choice of evocative use of vocabulary. Few responses explained 'fanned' or 'gripped' or 'tangled' in the context of the passage. It is not likely that the creepers being 'as thick as legs' is an example of exaggeration, though many claimed that it was. Many answers needed to move away from containing lists of choices or long quotations followed by general comments.

**Section (b)** responses often referred to the theme of watching – even mentioning the name of the type of lizard in support of this – but it would have been beneficial if their selections sustained the idea. Some candidates needed to select specific words or phrases; and some needed to make a comment and give an example so that the response could be rewarded for selection.

There was evidence of candidates using a grid format for their response to this question. This is not recommended as it tends to reduce the choices to single words rather than the whole of the phrase, and the effects column often simply repeats the information in the meanings column, rather than taking it the necessary step further. Additionally, the response reads like a list rather than continuous, developed prose.

As always, good answers took opportunities to explore words and phrases while less good answers provided literal meanings. For example, good candidates looked at the word 'soared' in paragraph 4, defined it as flying quickly upwards, and then linked it to the ideas of not only power, pride and majesty, but to the enjoyment of a freedom of space denied to the humans below. They also identified the word 'crowded' in paragraph 2 as indicating not only the large number of trees and their closeness to each other, but as

suggesting a rather overwhelming proximity to the water's edge and to the men in the canoe, as if the trees were moving towards them. This could be connected through overview to the idea of the closing in of the river, although the latter was not accepted as a relevant choice since it referred to the river rather than to the vegetation.

The following answer includes eight selected quotations for each section, and these would be more than sufficient for the award of the top mark, provided that the quality of the explanation was high and consistent enough. These sample answers are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate response to the question.

**(a) the trees and the undergrowth in paragraph 2**

*The writer conveys the idea of chaotic jungle growth, with everything tangled together and in a state of movement. It is not a place which respects order or which leaves any room for humans. The size and strength of everything is intimidating. 'Crowded' is an image of random and concerted movement, evoking a picture of a mob of people, and the idea of lack of control reinforces the reference to 'chaos'. The 'uniform glare' of the sun contrasts with the colour range of 'every kind of green' and suggests that the vivid vegetation cannot be diminished even by the forbidding sun. The weeds and fungi which 'sprouted' and the way the ferns 'fanned out' are movement verbs indicative of the spontaneity and richness of plant life in the forest, and the opportunistic way in which it takes over all available space. There is something rather sinister about the 'parasitic growths' and the creepers 'as thick as legs' which, like the way in which the creepers 'gripped' and 'tangled', suggests a wrestling for position and for the resources of water and light between the different plants, a battle for the survival of the fittest.*

**(b) the monitor lizard and the Brahminy kite in paragraph 4**

*There is a recurring sense of movement and of being watched in this paragraph; both creatures seem to be checking out James and Redmond to see if they are threatening. The lizard 'reared up' in order to get a better look and also to make it look taller and more imposing. Its 'dinosauric eyes' remind us that lizards are reptiles similar in appearance to their much larger extinct relatives, who haunted the forests in prehistoric times and were a cause of fear to other creatures. The fact that it then 'scuttled' away is almost comic in its bathos, as this verb of quick movement is normally associated with small animals and even insects. The 'rush of air' caused by the flight of the kite stresses its nearness to the men, since they are able to hear and feel it, and this idea, coupled with the fact that it 'circled overhead', makes clear that it has them under surveillance, and even that it is treating them as potential prey. It's 'mewing' and high-pitched 'shrill' call would not sound welcoming. There is something dismissive and superior about the way it powerfully and effortlessly 'soared away', with a purposefulness which echoes that of the scuttling of the lizard. The ability of the sun to make its flecked-brown belly appear 'white' is another reference to the power of the tropical sun mentioned in paragraph two, and this time it is able to change the colour of that which its rays fall upon, as if it has a bleaching effect.*

**Key messages**

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Your first task is to choose some words and phrases that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle.
- Treat each of your choices separately and do not either present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, try to at least give a meaning for each of your choices. That can give you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to recognise images and explain them (but you do not need to know or to give their technical names). Say what they literally mean, in this context, and then explain why they have been used in the passage.
- Avoid general comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase'. Such comments will not earn any marks at all.



**Question 3: Summarise (a) the problems that animals have in living in the Amazon rainforest and the ways in which they adapt themselves, according to Passage B; and (b) the description of the river in Passage A.**

**(20 marks)**

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to identify 15 points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. They are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. There were 23 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous leeway. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Most candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both of the passages. There was evidence that some candidates had made notes, although sometimes these contained items that were so similar to each other that the points could not score twice. For example, Passage A mentions various obstructions to be found in the river, but there was only one mark for this item. Good summaries avoided repetition, for instance of the fact that the river was not straight. While it was perfectly in order to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good candidates changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together. For example, in Passage B the flooded forest floor goes logically with the need of birds to perch high up to avoid it.

Responses generally found it easy to provide relevant material from both passages and picked up a reasonable number of marks in both sections, although points 7, 15 and 23 in the mark scheme were rarely offered. Weaker responses were list-like and needed to attempt to use their own words. Candidates needed to avoid long explanations. For example, in Passage B the final paragraph contains only one point within the long description, and all that needed to be said was that monkeys have developed a tail which enables them to swing through trees. There was also a long section in Passage A about the river going uphill which could be simply summarised, using own words to show understanding, that it was powerful. The least good answers were those that simply copied parts of this explanation out, and close paraphrases were slightly better.

Such detailed explanations tended to not only reduce the amount of space available for dealing with other points, but also to make the summary as a whole longer than the permitted length of one side. There were frequent examples of overlong summaries, and therefore of low writing marks for this question. Candidates need to be advised about the reduction of writing marks for excessive length, and that if the response is 'excessively long' (i.e. more than a page and a half of average handwriting), they are likely to score 0 marks for writing. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the material included and to the language in which it is expressed: concision, clarity, focus, fluency and own words are descriptors for the higher writing bands.

One of the weaknesses of the answers this session was the amount of copying from the original passages. From Passage B the information about the pacas and the frogs was often copied word for word, and therefore no understanding was demonstrated; there was also much copying of 'fifth limb' and 'aquatic marsupial', examples of wording that needed to be changed. On the other hand, in Passage A 'rapids', 'whirlpools', 'camouflage' and 'mates', technical terms which have no close synonym, need not have been paraphrased. There were some colloquial interpretations of 'mates', whereby responses explained that the animals were not able to recognise their friends. **Section (b)** asked about the river only, yet many responses included varying amounts of comment on the vegetation on the banks, especially at the beginning. Other extraneous points were sometimes made in **section (b)**, for example that there were lesser fish-eagles flying over the river. This reduced the likelihood of scoring full marks not only for the reading but also for the writing, as the focus was thereby lost. It was also important to distinguish between the different stages of the river, as the characteristics changed as the journey progressed upstream. **Section (a)** was generally better done than **section (b)**; this half of the question was less likely to be either generalised, listed or copied.

Weaker responses were commentaries and narratives, and needed to change at least the persona and tense of the passages, but also their style. Better responses avoided including introductory statements and making comments, and concentrated on giving an informative summary. They also followed the instruction to write about one side in total. Some candidates with very small handwriting clearly wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be an average of eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting and word-processing can fit as many as 15 words onto a line, and this must obviously be taken into account.

Higher marks for writing are awarded where the sentences are fluent and varied, and enough information is given about the points to convey each one clearly. Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, scored the whole five marks for aspects of

writing. Better responses were specific about what exactly the problems were in Passage A, making it clear that camouflage in this context was a negative and not a positive factor, and that the reason why large animals are at a disadvantage is that they cannot move easily, not that they cannot hide. For point 6 to be awarded it was necessary to be precise that it was humans and not other animals which preyed on the pacas. Checking after writing is crucial, as sometimes responses said the opposite of what they intended, for instance by writing about small animals when they meant large ones.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as clearly as possible. They are also transformed into the writer's own words, and the answer, if handwritten, would fit onto a side of paper with space to spare.

### **Section (a), Passage B**

*Large animals cannot move easily through the forest, and for survival they also need access to a water source. Camouflage reduces the ability of animals to recognise their mate, and they have to avoid moving during the day as they may be killed by hunters. At night the animals can communicate by making signalling noises. Because the forest floor is flooded, beetles use their claws to hold on to leaves in trees, and birds have also learned to perch on branches using their long claws. Opossums have developed webbed feet, while frogs lay their eggs in flowers as the river water is too swift-moving. Monkeys are able to swing through the trees by gripping branches with their sensitive tails.*

### **Section (b), Passage A**

*The twisting river seems to close in behind them as they travel upstream. It is fast-moving with a strong current seemingly capable of driving a boat uphill. It is joined by smaller rivers, and contains rocky obstacles of various kinds, as well as whirlpools. Beyond these the water is clear, reflecting the overhanging vegetation. Rapids occur more often as they progress upstream, and the waves become stronger. It is possible that the river contains crocodiles.*

### **Key messages**

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Give equal attention and focus to both sections of the response.
- Explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show what they mean in the context.
- Do not copy whole phrases from the original.
- Write no more than one side of average handwriting.
- Write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage
- Be careful to give only information that is focused on the question.
- Make a point only once.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 0500/23</b> <b>Reading Passages (Extended)</b></p>
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## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading (40 marks), although there were 10 marks available for writing; 5 marks in Question 1 and 5 marks in Question 3. The requirements for doing well were to:

- give equal attention to all sections of the question
- explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show their significance in the context
- use your own words where appropriate; do not copy whole phrases from the original
- be careful to give only information that is focused on the question
- only make a point once
- give thought to the structure and sequence of the material in the response
- adopt a suitable voice and register for the task
- pay attention to length.

Key messages about how candidates can improve their performance for each of the three types of questions will be considered in greater detail below.

## General comments

This paper was similar in difficulty to last year's paper and produced a similar standard of response to all three questions, which covered a wide range. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible. For **Question 1** and **Question 2**, there were few marks in the top band overall because of the reliance of candidates on repeating the language of the passages and their structure when modification of both is called for by the nature of the questions. Candidates wishing to score high marks should work hard to build up a wide, appropriate vocabulary, both to express themselves and to understand the words used in the reading passages.

In **Question 3** most candidates managed to earn a mark in double figures by finding a reasonable number of points, but some responses required greater focus and the use of own words rather than copying whole phrases and sentences from the passages. It is important that they do not do this since it suggests that they do not understand the wording of the original. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they are writing. There did not seem to be any common misunderstandings of the passages, but many candidates found it a challenge to develop and assimilate the material for **Question 1**.

While quality is more important than quantity on this paper, there needs to be enough of a response to meet the top band descriptors. Many responses to **Question 1** were brief, and much shorter than the one and a half to two sides required. One side of writing is not enough to fulfil the requirements of a three-part question. It is essential that the skills of selection and modification are demonstrated in all three questions. In addition, there needs to be a strong focus on the actual wording of the questions. Planning is a critical aspect of responding to the questions; checking is also advisable, as marks can be lost through slips of the pen which suggest misunderstanding. On the other hand, candidates need to ensure that the planning has not been overdone, as this can result in a rushed response which does not include the full amount of content as in the original plan. Examiners do not mark the plans but the responses.

While there was no evidence that candidates were unable to finish their answers in the time given, those who allowed enough time to prepare their answers to the third question were at an advantage. The second half of the question was often noticeably shorter than the first, and contained more copying from the passage. Once again it became apparent that candidates would do better not to read passage B before answering the two questions on passage A; there was evidence in **Question 1** of use of material from the wrong passage,

which could not be credited. It was also again confirmed that candidates who did the questions in a different order from that of the question paper did not gain any advantage.

Most candidates answered their questions in appropriate English. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' work was affected by unclear or limited style. Most candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in legible handwriting.

### **Comments on individual questions**

**Question 1: Imagine that you are Narsingh Singh. You are being interviewed by the Sultanpur weekly newspaper by a reporter who has heard of the arrival of Shamdeo at the children's home. The reporter asks the following questions: What were your thoughts and feelings when you found the boy? How are you so sure that he was brought up by wolves? How do you think he will develop? Write the words of the interview beginning with the first question.**

**(20 marks)**

Some candidates wrote excellent interviews: they understood the need to adapt the narrative into a personal account that was informative and also gave insight into Shamdeo's experiences and Narsingh's thoughts and attitude. Good responses addressed all three parts of the task, selecting relevant detail and modifying it in response to the specific interview questions. When addressing the first question, good responses conveyed Narsingh's initial reaction and integrated his thoughts and feelings with relevant points from the passage. Some articulated his thought processes: shock on first seeing Shamdeo, intrigue at how he came to be there, concern about what might become of him if left there and how he might be rescued. Some acknowledged that Narsingh had adopted stray and abandoned children before and was therefore not completely shocked to find a young child in the wild. However, he was shocked by Shamdeo's wolf-like appearance and the fact that he was playing with, and seemed to be accepted by, the wolves. Some responses expressed sympathy for Shamdeo because of his pitiful appearance and difficulty in keeping up with the wolf cubs. Some expressed Narsingh's concern about Shamdeo's future: the potential dangers that he would face when he grew older and that the mother wolf abandoned him to fend for himself in the wild. Good responses also gave explanations of why Narsingh decided to rescue the boy and why it was the right thing to do. There was some convincing development: Shamdeo was human and needed to be brought up as such; he could not be a wolf all of his life; animals need a different upbringing from humans; he had the right to a normal childhood. Some responses described Narsingh's thoughts on the rescue: his fear that the mother wolf would return and how he could capture and transport Shamdeo home.

Less good responses wrote in a narrative style, sometimes with overlong explanations of the cycle ride in the sweltering heat. Some gave a detailed description of Shamdeo's physical appearance without expressing any feeling or any thoughts on how he came to be with wolves. Some repeated points from the passage about how Narsingh caught the boy, tied him to his bicycle and was bitten; there was little adaptation of the detail. Some responses expressed feelings of shock, horror or sympathy that were not supported by relevant points from the passage. Detail and emotions were not successfully interwoven into a convincing response that would interest the audience or evoke feelings.

The second question asked was, 'How are you so sure that he was brought up by wolves?' Candidates could refer to Shamdeo's appearance when he was first discovered and also to his behaviour when he was at Narsingh's home. There was a good amount of information in the passage and candidates were not expected to use all of it in this section. Some candidates were not selective. There was a tendency to list Shamdeo's physical characteristics and behavioural traits without developing them or explaining why they were particularly wolf-like. There was also some repetition of points. Some detail may already have been used in response to the first question and some was potentially relevant to the third question, in explaining Shamdeo's progress and changes in behaviour. Candidates were expected to select appropriate detail and make judgements about where it could be most effectively used, so that answers to each question were focused and relevant.

Good responses justified the assertions that Shamdeo's appearance was particularly wolf-like by using relevant evidence from the passage. His dirtiness and unkempt appearance suggest that he had been abandoned in the wild, but his sharp teeth and claws, and his ability to smell blood and capture and eat small animals, suggest that he had learned to hunt for food, as wolves do. Some responses explained the significance of the scars on his head and the reason for callouses on some parts of his body, persuasive arguments that he had lived as a wolf. Some explained that he was actually playing with wolves and not being attacked, indicating that he had spent some time with them, whilst his wariness and fear of people indicate that he was not raised by humans. His fear of confined spaces and refusal to sleep in a bed

suggest that he had been raised in the wild, whereas his howling at night and nocturnal habits display an affinity with wolves. Better responses argued convincingly that Shamdeo's traits made it evident that he had been nurtured by wolves and accepted into their community from a young age.

The third question was the least well developed, with some cases at least requiring an attempt to respond. All three sections need to be attempted, and in some detail, for a mark in band 1 or band 2 to be awarded. There were some good responses where candidates developed relevant detail from the passage to speculate on Shamdeo's immediate and long term future. Some cited the progress that he had already made, becoming vegetarian and carrying out tasks around the farm, as evidence that he had the capacity to change his habits and learn to be more human. Some responses contained quite perceptive comments: Shamdeo had learned to behave like a wolf; he was still young and would in time learn to behave like a person; he could copy others and learn from their example. Less good responses needed to go beyond the changes that Shamdeo had already undergone. In several other responses, details from the passage could have been developed to speculate on any problems that he might face. Better responses did express reservations about Shamdeo's future and recognised that there may be limitations to his development. Some stated that he may never be fully accepted in society because of the animal-like appearance and mannerisms that would always stay with him, and that he might need a job that does not require a high level of reading and writing or social interaction.

Most of the replies expressed optimism; some contained confident assertions about Shamdeo's future and seemed to believe that his stay at the children's home would be the final stage in his complete rehabilitation. Few candidates considered that because of his wolf-like appearance, gait and his lack of speech, he might be regarded as strange and may not be accepted by other children, as some might fear for their safety and Shamdeo might be fearful of them. There were some general comments that Shamdeo would develop into a fine human being or that he would become fully integrated into society. These were not always explained or supported by detail from the passage. Overall the range of potential difficulties voiced by Narsingh was quite narrow.

Better responses contained speculation about a wider range of problems rather than just optimistic predictions about Shamdeo's development. The early years are important; his experiences with wolves were a significant part of his childhood so he may never forget his wolf upbringing and may not want to integrate fully with humans; he may never acquire the language competence and social skills of his peers and he may not reach their level of educational attainment. He may always have an affinity with animals, a suspicion of people and a fear of confined spaces; he may always adhere to the wolf-like behaviour that was instilled in him from an early age. Many inferences could have been made from the passage and some responses to this section would have benefitted from Narsingh's use of more tentative language: 'if', 'maybe' 'probably' or 'what if?'

Most of the responses were focused on the three specific questions. Some candidates included additional questions, not all of which were relevant and useful and did not allow Narsingh's character to be fully developed or his thoughts to be fully explained. They sometimes diverted focus away from the question. In some responses the contributions from the reporter were extended and therefore quite intrusive; some contained lengthy comments and detail from the passage that should have been conveyed through Narsingh, allowing him to articulate his feelings and express his views, as required by the task. There was a range of writing marks for this task. Many candidates created a convincing personality and voice for Narsingh, often conveying his compassion, level-headed approach and a determination to help Shamdeo. Many were also well structured and used an appropriate style and language. The best responses were fluent and clear with a strong sense of audience.

Finally, here are some ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Answer all parts of the question;
- Answer in your own words and adapt material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing;
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and use plenty of detail to support your ideas;
- If you are writing as a character from the passage, try to create a personality and a voice which shows your understanding of what you have read.

**Question 2: Re-read the description of (a) the area and its wildlife in paragraph 2, beginning ‘It was the dry season’ and (b) Shamdeo’s behaviour while he was living with Narsingh Singh in paragraph 4, beginning ‘At first Shamdeo’.**

**(10 marks)**

Most marks were in the band ranges of 3 to 5. Few responses were awarded marks in the top bands as specific choices were not always made and precise explanations were not always given. Good answers contained a range of appropriate choices in both sections, explanations of the meanings of words within the context of the passage, and explorations of their effects and why the writer had used them.

It was a noticeable feature of the responses to this question that they were often longer than **Question 1** responses, which should not be the case given the relative weighting of marks. On the other hand, less than a full page of writing is unlikely to produce a range of choices, with their explanatory meanings and effects, for each half of the question. The mark scheme refers to ‘a number of words and phrases...in both parts’ and that these need to include images for the higher bands. Just one or two choices from each paragraph are not therefore sufficient; the response would be considered to be ‘thin’ and therefore given a mark in band 5. Some candidates seemed to have deliberately limited themselves to only three choices for each section, though there are more than twice as many possible appropriate choices from each paragraph.

In **section (a)** candidates were required to select appropriate examples – this was not always the case. Candidates were directed to paragraph 2 and asked to focus on the area and its wildlife. Some responses were not focused on these and candidates selected words from the beginning of the paragraph that referred to the weather: ‘dry season’ and ‘sweltering temperature’. These choices could not be rewarded. Some responses contained lists of choices or long quotations, making it difficult to disentangle the explanations of specific words. In some cases candidates quoted lists of words and made general comments, for example that ‘sliced, carved, spiky and warning evoke a sense of fear’, without making clear why these words had that effect on the reader. Similarly, it needed to be explained why the word ‘blinding’ has ‘negative connotations’. Some comments needed to be more precise and specifically related to the words that were chosen. For example, ‘thickets of stately bamboo show that the area is dangerous’. Candidates cannot be rewarded for general comments such as ‘paints a vivid picture’ or ‘helps the reader to imagine’. These need to be supported by examples of language and explanations of their use. Several candidates identified literary devices, such as the use of onomatopoeia and alliteration. In order to be rewarded these need to be supported by explanations of their effects. Some explanations repeated the words of the original: ‘placed there to pose means that the trees were posing’. Better responses explained that the trees appeared to have been put in a certain position in order for them to display themselves and to be admired, adding to the attractiveness of the area. Many candidates understood that the area had an almost man-made beauty and that there appeared to some human intervention in creating the work of art. Some also stated that the area was threatening and designed to deter strangers. An overview of the combined effects of language in the paragraphs is useful to show the writer’s intentions, but it can only be credited if supported by relevant quotations and is not a substitute for precise analysis at word level.

In most responses, **section (b)** was more focused and contained more appropriate choices; candidates selected words that conveyed Shamdeo’s animal-like behaviour and discomfort, and his fear of humans. Not all of the examples were appropriate; phrases such as ‘hated the sun’ and ‘had to be tied up’ are statements rather than examples of interesting language use. Candidates are rewarded for selecting unusual words and phrases from which deeper meanings, connotations, associations and effects can be explored. Statements about Shamdeo, for example that he was suspicious and would not let his guard down needed to be supported by relevant choices of language. In some responses, comments were made about Shamdeo’s behaviour and predicament required specific reference to appropriate words from the choices. For example, with reference to the phrase, ‘smell the scent of blood and would scamper towards it’, comments were made about Shamdeo’s ability to hunt and capture food and his preference for raw meat. The focus should have been on the use of the word ‘scamper’ to describe his movements, rather than on the reason for his actions. Less good responses tended to explain Shamdeo’s actions without explaining how the writer’s choice of words made these actions seem more animal-like than human. The question does not require or reward an answer in the form of a commentary which selects statements from the paragraph and makes comments without a selection or detailed interpretation of individual words.

Some Centres have advised candidates to use a grid format for their response to this question. This is not recommended as it tends to reduce the choices to single words rather than the whole of the phrase, and the effects column often simply repeats the information in the meanings column, rather than taking it the necessary step further, and the response reads like a list rather than continuous, developed prose.



The following answer includes at least eight selected quotations in each part, and these would be more than sufficient for the award of the top mark, provided that the quality of the explanation was high and consistent enough. These sample answers are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate response to the question.

**(a) The area and its wildlife in paragraph 2**

*The writer has created the effect of man-made beauty, suggesting that the wildlife of the area may not be completely natural and that there may have been some human intervention in the creation of the scenery. 'Sliced through thickets' suggests that a clear and precise cut had deliberately been made to guide people through the area. 'Stately bamboo' gives the impression of grand and imposing plants. The thorn trees are described as 'statuesque', giving an image of them being tall, graceful and rigid. The word 'carved' is used to suggest that they were designed by someone as a work of art. The phrase 'placed there to pose' reinforces this idea, suggesting that someone had put them on display in order for their beauty to be seen and admired, and that they had not grown naturally. Personification is used in 'spiky fingers pointing', giving an image of the trees as slender models. The sky provides the background to show off the trees, as in a painting, and is described as 'blinding blue', suggesting that it is very bright, maybe too bright to be natural. The birds are 'perched on their pinnacles'; this use of alliteration suggests a harshness: the birds are on the highest point, standing tall and proud, protective of their beautiful environment and watching for intruders.*

**(b) Shamdeo's behaviour while he was living with Narsingh Singh in paragraph 4**

*The language used to describe Shamdeo's actions suggests a fear of his surroundings and of people, and it also reflects his animal-like behaviour. He 'cowered' suggests that he cringed in fear as a dog might cringe from humans, expecting ill-treatment. 'Growling' is an aggressive noise often made by animals as a warning or threat. The word 'cuffed' is used to reinforce his fear of humans; animals cuff with their paws when they need to defend themselves. Shamdeo would also 'curl up in dark places', like a dog seeking refuge, and would 'scamper' like a small, excited puppy when he scented blood. These words reflect his animal instincts and the behaviour learned from wolves. To show his fear of his new surroundings, the writer has used the word 'wary'. This suggests that Shamdeo is watchful and cautious, as he feels insecure indoors. The word 'peering' indicates that he is looking intently, and is alert to signs of danger. He also 'lurked in the shadows', suggesting that he needed to be stealthy; he wanted to watch without being seen. This again reflects his animal instincts. The phrase 'tottered unsteadily' gives an image of someone learning to walk and about to fall over. Shamdeo is not used to walking on two legs, and he appears vulnerable and insecure. The writer describes Shamdeo as fearful and exhibiting canine behaviour in order to protect himself.*

Here again are some ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Avoid general comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase'. Such comments will not earn any marks at all.
- Your first task is to choose some words and phrases that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle.
- Treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, try to at least give a meaning for each of your choices. That can give you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to recognise images and explain them (but you do not need to know or to give their technical names). Say what they literally mean, in this context, and then explain why they have been used in the passage.

**Question 3: Summarise (a) the typical behaviour of feral children, as described in Passage B and (b) the physical characteristics of the wolf-boy, as described in Passage A.**

**(20 marks)**

To answer this question successfully, candidates needed to identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. They are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. There were twenty-three possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous leeway. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Most candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary, though many were not.



Candidates did not have difficulty identifying relevant points from both passages and many secured high marks for content, with some achieving the maximum of fifteen points. The writing marks were not always as high, with few responses in band 1 or band 2. Sometimes the material required re-organisation. While it is acceptable to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together, enhancing the fluency and concision of the writing. For example, in Passage B the point that feral children make animal sounds could have been linked to the point in the next paragraph from the passage that they are unlikely to learn enough human speech to communicate effectively. There was evidence that some candidates had made notes from the passages; this allowed similar points to be identified and grouped, and it also made it less likely that points were repeated.

Writing marks are also awarded for focus. Some candidates failed to distinguish between behaviour for part **(a)** and physical characteristics for part **(b)**, leading to some overlap and repetition of points in both parts of the summary, often resulting in a loss of concision. There was some confusion between the points in Passage A and Passage B. For example, in part **(a)** many candidates included 'ran on all fours' as a relevant behavioural trait. Some then added the point about callouses on parts of the body, which is a physical characteristic and should have been included in part **(b)**. Similarly, many candidates stated that feral children are naked and dirty. These are two relevant points, but some also discussed their darkened skin, a point from Passage A, which together with matted hair and pointed teeth relate to physical appearance and therefore are appropriate to part **(b)**.

Candidates are rewarded for writing in their own words and some did attempt to paraphrase. In **section (a)** some used the words 'lack of hygiene' for point 2, the word 'nocturnal' for point 4, and 'claustrophobic' for point 12. Some responses contained words and phrases copied from the passage, including the phrases 'emit animal sounds', 'preferred the company of', and 'carcasses of dead sheep', where opportunities to use alternative words could have been taken.

In **section (b)** candidates included a number of relevant points. These were sometimes presented as a list, making the response stilted and not sufficiently fluent. Some responses included points about Shamdeo that were not relevant to his physical attributes; the fact that he curled up in dark places, hated the sun and had to be tied down could not be rewarded. Good responses adapted points about his behaviour and made them relevant, for example 'keeping to the wall and peering' was used to show that he had peering eyes and the fact that he scampered towards the smell of blood was used to show his strong sense of smell; both of these characteristics were rewarded. Better responses avoided unnecessary explanations about why Shamdeo had scars on his head or why he had callouses. It was sufficient to state that he used sign language without describing the signs and gestures that he used. Long explanations resulted in a loss of concision that influenced the mark awarded for writing.

Better candidates avoided writing introductory statements and making comments, and concentrated on giving an informative summary. They also followed the instruction to write about one side in total. There were only a few overlong summaries. Some candidates with very small handwriting clearly wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be an average of eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting and word-processing can fit as many as fifteen words onto a line, and this must obviously be taken into account.

Higher marks for writing were awarded where the sentences were fluent and varied, and enough information was given about the points to convey each one clearly. Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, scored the whole five marks for aspects of writing

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as clearly as possible. They are also translated into the writer's own words, and the answer, if handwritten, would fit onto a side of paper with space to spare.

**(a) the typical behaviour of feral children, as described in passage B**

*Feral children often do not wear clothes and are unhygienic. They tend to be agile and can run quickly on all fours. They make animal noises as they find it difficult to use human speech. They are often nocturnal, hate enclosed spaces, and would rather sleep on the floor than in a bed. They would prefer to play with, and be in the company of animals rather than humans, to whom they are aggressive. They also eat raw meat.*

**(b) the physical characteristics of the wolf-boy, as described in Passage A**

*Shamdeo had blackened skin and long, tangled hair. His fingernails were long and, like his teeth, were sharp and pointed. He had hardened skin on some parts of his body and scars on his head. He had difficulty walking on two legs and used sign language to communicate. He also had a strong sense of smell and peering eyes.*

Here are some ways in which summaries could be improved:

- Give equal attention and focus to both sections of the response.
- Explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show what they mean in the context.
- Do not copy whole phrases from the original.
- Write no more than one side of average handwriting.
- Write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage
- Be careful to give only information that is focused on the question.
- Make a point only once.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/31

Directed Writing and Composition

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- write with a specific audience in mind and to adapt content and style to that audience
- structure each answer overall and to sequence sentences in well-formed individual paragraphs
- create credible and effective arguments and to write descriptions and stories that were realistic, original and engaging in their content
- write in a variety of well-formed sentence types, including complex sentences
- use a wide variety of effective and appropriate vocabulary.

## General comments

Many of the scripts were well written in an assured and fluent style. Ideas and arguments were presented in paragraphs that were often well sequenced and of an appropriate length. There was consistent evidence of varied sentence structures and a wide range of vocabulary in the best scripts, and only minor and infrequent error was encountered in this range.

At a lower level, there were examples of inadequate punctuation. In particular, sentences, which were often too ambitious and lacking control, were not punctuated. Commas were used instead of full stops and commas were not used within complex sentences. A few candidates rarely used full stops. In general, candidates who did not punctuate correctly lost marks for style and accuracy.

**Question 1** was generally done well. All candidates made an attempt to read the passage and to use some of the material, and the best candidates read accurately and connected with the underlying passion about the subject matter which meant that they were able to provide their own opinions and develop the material appropriately. There were some instances of paraphrasing, rather than direct copying, and often some personal comment was added to show an understanding of some of the points in the passage.

The content of some of the compositions (**Question 2**) varied widely. The best of the arguments were carefully thought out and often original, while descriptions provided a sense of being present in real places or events. Narratives provided some excellent characterisation and occasionally a glimpse into darker, parallel worlds.

At a lower level, candidates needed to be sure that they had enough varied arguments to write their responses to **Question 2**. They also needed to consider that descriptive writing does not need to be embedded within a long narrative frame as too often the narrative became the dominant element in these accounts. Narratives still needed to consist of realistic events and settings for the characters to create engaging pictures in the reader's mind, even if the genre was that of horror or fantasy.

Many candidates managed their time effectively between both sections. However, some answers to **Question 1** were quite long and, in some cases, repetitive. In the best answers it was clear that candidates had found a platform to voice some excellent and pertinent ideas on the topic and the overall effect was that of a complete discursive talk. The most competent responses sustained the quality of their compositions even over an excessive length. It was important that there were not too many events to handle. Some essay writing required an original, less predictable approach or to move beyond providing a maximum of four paragraphs, each highlighting an idea rather than examining, debating or giving a personal view on each aspect.

Many of the scripts were presented in easily readable handwriting. It is important that Examiners can decipher the content and punctuation of responses.

### **Section 1: Directed writing**

**Question 1: Imagine that you are one of the students: Alex, Robina or Hamesh. You decide to talk to your class about ways of promoting awareness of reading among candidates. Write the words of a talk in which you should: suggest ways of encouraging an interest in reading, argue against the reasons some candidates give for not reading, and suggest a programme of events for a Reading Week in your School. Base your talk on the discussion (text provided). Be careful to use your own words.**

**(25 marks)**

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the use of the content of the passage.

It was important to answer the question in the form of a talk and, in order to clearly present the views of the speaker, to read the text carefully. The passage believed in the value of reading and in the joy it brings to all who will allow themselves to try reading, if only for a short time. The focus of this task was to convey aspects of reading that a) already engage the three converted readers (Alex, Robina and Hamesh) and b) understand why many candidates resist reading and c) come up with new incentives to encourage reading. Candidates who picked up on the passion for reading, that in some instances is quite explicit in the passage, found an essential platform for the talk. Whilst the passage itself was straightforward, the better candidates understood that taking on the role of one of the characters implied empathy and a clear knowledge and understanding of the positive power of reading. Weaker responses reproduced how and why reading was useful and reiterated the ideas provided for a Reading Week.

### **The marks for reading**

Candidates were expected to use a sufficient amount of the reading material to develop arguments by suggesting how reading could influence other students' lives for the better. The bullet points of the question were not in place to provide the exact order of candidates' responses but to help them cover the range of views, opinions and facts exchanged in the text. Those who reproduced all of the material in sequence did well to cover the arguments in a logical order but needed to allow time for rhetorical or engaging introductions, independent views of the individual speaking or philosophical conclusions. If responses picked up on the benefits of reading in one section, the arguments raised by candidates who thought reading was boring in another section and an outline of ideas for Reading Week in a third, then a mark of 6 could be given as long as the writing was not paraphrased.

The best answers were those that fully integrated the points and ideas from the passage into a cohesive answer to the task. In these talks, the speaker became the conduit for these ideas and opinions, and candidates considered not only what this person had to say but also the manner in which they said it. A formal address and a considered introduction often demonstrated from the outset that the candidate understood what was essential to the response. For example, one response began: 'Fellow Students, Reading is not a chore, it does not shackle us to desks in dusty libraries or shroud our minds...'. It was obvious that the reading aspect in this answer was assimilated and considered straight away. Responses such as these argued under general categories rather than making disconnected points.

The least good answers were often those that needed to provide an address or an introduction. There were quite a few responses that needed to be written in the form of a talk. Some candidates wrote in a question and answer forum and did not demonstrate that the reading material required assimilating. Candidates should be reminded that the writing mark also takes into account audience and persuasive style.

### **The marks for writing**

Good answers were structured. Many candidates began by establishing a persona through the use of rhetorical and effective introductions in an address to their audience. This also established the form the argument would take and the best responses did well to discuss the ethos of reading before embarking on specific points made by candidates who, for example, found reading boring. There were also quite stirring endings where various ideas for the Reading Week were convincingly grouped, rather than treated one by one, and an impassioned plea to the audience rounded off persuasive and authoritative talks.

Most candidates attempted to write in an appropriate voice, but it is important that the response is consistent in its form. Some responses slipped from a talk into simple outlines or retelling of events in the last section. Those candidates who did not follow the rubric and started to write dialogues or plays lost all sense of audience and persuasion and thus did not demonstrate a consistent style of writing.

Responses in which the emphasis of the talk reiterated the meeting with the author, the reasons why one should read, the reasons why each argument was not true and the ideas suggested in the passage for a Reading Week required a greater sense of audience to avoid a mechanical response and a lack of a speaker's views.

Good answers were written in a clear, authoritative and fluent style. They used a variety of sentence lengths and types, and their language was precise enough to express shades of meaning and recommendations that were sometimes sophisticated, engaging and enthusiastic. A satisfactory writing style, attracting average marks, used a simpler language and format. These responses were less likely to express individual, precise thought, but were nevertheless competent, without undue error or awkward style. Some candidates needed to improve the quality of their writing. They made frequent errors, some of which were serious, and used limited language, often that of the passage. Their work was punctuated by errors, particularly those of tense, prepositions and unclear phraseology.

The most common errors were those of punctuation. There were frequent errors of sentence separation and the same candidates were likely to use commas instead of full stops.

Some candidates had poor spelling accuracy. Occasionally candidates tried to use more adventurous vocabulary but confused words such as 'assure' and 'ensure' or 'whether' and 'weather', but more often words such as 'where', 'were' and 'we're' and 'their' and 'there' were confused.

Many candidates wrongly used 'Also', 'But' and 'And' to start sentences. The same candidates used these words to start paragraphs, an aspect which showed that, in many cases, knowledge of paragraphing needed to be improved.

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

- Make sure that you select ideas and opinions from the reading material and consider them in relation to the context of the task.
- Especially look for arguments that are inconsistent and be aware of the difference between fact and opinion.
- Never copy whole phrases and sentences from the passage. Always use your own words.
- Be aware of the genre you are using for your answer. Think carefully of how you present a talk or a speech or an article, for example.
- Write with a voice. Think of your persona in the task and your audience, and express your point of view firmly and, if appropriately, with conviction.
- As always, end sentences with full stops, put commas in the right places and remember apostrophes.

### **Section 2: Composition**

Candidates are reminded that half of the marks are given for the content of the writing and the way in which it is structured. The criteria vary according to which of the three genres is chosen. The other half of the marks are given for style and accuracy.

#### **Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing**

- (a) **Discuss the various possible influences on a person's choice of career.** (25)
- (b) **'Everything we learn is useful.' Argue for or against this statement.** (25)

There were many cases where all or most candidates in a Centre chose the argumentative/discursive option regardless of whether they were good at writing essays. There was evidence of improvement in responding to **Question 2** from last session, but it is worth reminding candidates that before they embark on writing, that they need to be confident that they not only have the ideas but also the technique necessary to tackle this type of question.



The more popular choice was option **(a)**. The candidates approach to this topic was often in the same manner. Whilst they appeared to be confident in outlining three or four different influences, they could have discussed the question more fully. Candidates wrote predominately about family, friends, School and money, often in that order, with a commentary on each. The essays required proper introductions as they provided a perspective and overview of the topic. Most essays were purely informative and went through the motions of giving some reasons why a family might try to persuade their teenager (or a child from an early age) to follow in their footsteps, for example as doctors. However, instead of considering the ramifications and pressures of this situation in some detail – an entire essay could be developed around this one issue itself – subsequent paragraphs briefly commented on the topics mentioned above. Final paragraphs needed to include more than a reiteration of earlier content.

Candidates had enough to write on the topic and thus reasonable reward was given for content and structure. Candidates aiming for high marks for style and accuracy on this question in the future need to ensure that there is a sense of argument and/or voice, use of rhetorical devices and/or a discursive style. A personal perspective and an interesting beginning and ending are required and paragraphs should be linked – they should not be presented in almost any order. Examiners are looking to reward argument or discussion with a premise, reasons, development and resolution.

Option **(b)** was done well by mature minded candidates who spent time considering what constituted knowledge. They asked if it was an accumulation of facts and figures, or a range of subject matter, or if it was about the lessons life teaches us, such as those to do with common sense or wisdom passed down from others. It was clear that candidates who considered their ideas and had something concrete to write about were able to structure an essay on this topic. Responses needed to have an introduction or sense of direction. They needed to avoid repeating phrases such as ‘this is useful because’ and ‘this isn’t useful because’ with reasons ranging from ‘it’s boring’ to ‘because I like everything to do with this so it is interesting to me’. Although this writing tended to be of lists which required a structure, there were plenty of ideas that could have been sorted, organised and argued for or against.

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

- Make sure you have a variety of ideas at your disposal (but not too many to deal with).
- Build them into a linked structure.
- Develop each idea at sufficient length and sequence your sentences.
- Try to avoid writing abstractly and use specific examples to engage your reader’s attention.
- Use clear and precise English.

### Question 3: Descriptive writing

**(a) Describe a scene from your childhood. Describe the surroundings and your feelings at that time.** (25)

**(b) A travelling circus or show comes to your area. Describe one or two of the acts and include the reactions of the spectators.** (25)

Option **(b)** was the more popular choice and often done well. There were some effective descriptions of a first visit to a circus as a child. Sometimes the child was terrified by the trumpet calls and roars of the animals, and the strong smells of sawdust and face paint. On the other hand many descriptions went into great detail about the sweet smell of popcorn and the beauty and majesty of the creatures they saw for the first time. The best descriptions focused on the sensations leading up to a main act, often that of a snarling lion-tamer whose scarred face and curled lip were picked up in the floodlights. The clever contrast of the swapped roles, such as the snarling tamer and the frightened, emaciated lion, were moving. Elsewhere, some candidates, who may have seen the film ‘Like Water for Elephants’, concentrated on the exquisite and elegant woman who stood and rode on a white stallion. The pictures portrayed in these excellent descriptions provided a convincing and memorable overall picture.

There were descriptions in both options which provide too much dense detail. Circuses in option **(b)** became crowded with too many acts and too much information about the spectators, to the point that sentences were flooded with adjectives and it was difficult to observe one thing at a time. At times, caught up in a frenzy of detail, candidates needed to write in sentences with verbs and to proof read their work. Occasionally there

were some responses that focused too much on getting to the circus, or in option **(b)** to one's grandparents, and these gradually turned into narratives that contained elements of description.

The title for option **(a)** required a little more consideration before writing, but many candidates seemed to have had one particularly memorable occasion in their minds and, with a little imagination, they brought to life episodes of getting into trouble or visiting a favourite relative. There was one evocative piece about buying a puppy. The details of the animal seemed to bring it to life and, as it was brought home in the car, the caramel and black of the puppy took on the appearance of a tiger on a postcard whilst 'its pink, flat tongue was like a highlighter in the black face'. Specific details such as this re-created the memory of the experience and provided a space in time to treasure.

The aim of this exercise was to provide a picture, create an atmosphere and to explore the sorts of feelings that someone in this situation might have. Many of the descriptions were successful because they concentrated on a space in time that re-created the movement, colour and sound of the events remembered or envisaged.

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

- Do not write a static description. Allow for a little movement and a short time span.
- However, do not confuse a description with a narrative.
- Try to make your description as real as possible. You should be able to see and hear what you write.
- It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Be especially careful to use full stops at the ends of sentences.

### Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a)** 'Although they had been forbidden to go, there they were, on the other side of the steel fence, laughing hysterically.' Use this idea as the basis for a narrative. (25)
- (b)** Write a narrative that includes a practical joker as one of its characters. (25)

In general, there were fewer narratives this year compared to last session. Option **(a)** was the most popular and there were some highly original stories. In one, two prisoners, having planned an escape for many years, finally emerge on the other side of the steel fence only to find a world of chaos, mayhem and inescapable noise. The narrative developed into a determined race to commit a crime that would punish them by putting them back into the acceptable environment of prison once again. The two characters were extremely well drawn; one a melancholy pessimist, the other a comedic optimist, and therefore this narrative worked because of their credibility and subsequent actions and reactions.

Some candidates would have benefited from planning option **(a)** carefully to avoid subsequent challenges with back-narrative and characterisation when trying to explain certain aspects of the quotation: why *had* they been forbidden, *how* did they get there, *what* did the steel fence look like and *why* were they laughing hysterically? When a quotation such as this is given as a prompt, it is advisable for candidates to break down the variables and make sure that once they have embarked on their narrative, everything comes together without gaps in the puzzle.

Option **(b)**, which benefited from humour, could be quite challenging. Better narratives had a naïve truth about them and involved, no doubt, a character well known to the candidate who had embarrassed them and himself by behaving outlandishly at School. The essential knowledge of the character and setting, rather than producing a simple outline, provided a realism and attention to detail. Some responses turned the practical joker into the menacing, nasty Joker from 'Batman'. It is recommended that candidates do not write about an already established character in fiction as they can become constrained – nothing original can really emerge from the narrative.

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

- Remember that stories do not consist of events alone.
- Include realistic details, description and the thoughts and feelings of characters in the narrative.
- Try to write a narrative with a sensible time span that is not too long.

- You can improve a narrative by using devices such as time lapses, flashbacks and two narrators.
- Make sure you use a wide range of appropriate language.
- Originality is important. Try to think of unusual approaches to your topic.
- If you write more than you expected, make sure you do not get careless at the end of the narrative.

### **The marks for style and accuracy**

The strengths and weaknesses of style and accuracy were similar to those of **Question 1**.

In **Question 2**, owing to the importance of being able to follow complex arguments, expression needed to be clear. While a good range of vocabulary was essential, candidates needed to be careful not to use words that might confuse the reader. One of the commonest weaknesses was that expression became awkward and confusing when candidates attempted to explain a difficult idea or personal opinion.

In **Question 3** the best responses used a wide range of vocabulary effectively. There were noticeable difficulties with maintaining tense. In the descriptions, the present tense was particularly suitable, but changing to the past tense was awkward and often led to a narrative and a need to explain events. There were also some candidates who wrote sentences without verbs, perhaps because they thought that they were effective in a description or because the phrase sounded poetic.

In **Question 4** there needed to be greater use of sentence structures which were accurately separated by full stops instead of commas. Interesting and engaging language was often used in descriptive essays but in narratives, care needed to be taken to ensure that events did not dominate or detract from potentially clever, fleshed out stories. Particular care was needed to describe climaxes to stories fully and effectively.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/32

Directed Writing and Composition

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing (40 marks), although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- write with a specific audience in mind and to adapt content and style to that audience
- structure each answer overall and to sequence sentences in well-formed individual paragraphs
- create credible and effective arguments and to write descriptions and stories that were realistic, original and engaging in their content
- write in a variety of well-formed sentence types, including complex sentences
- use a wide range of effective and appropriate vocabulary.

## General comments

Many of the scripts were well written in an assured and fluent style. Ideas and arguments were presented in paragraphs that were well sequenced and of an appropriate length. There was consistent evidence of varied sentence structures and a wide range of vocabulary. The best responses made minor and infrequent errors.

At a lower level, there were many examples of inadequate punctuation. In particular, sentences, which were often short, were punctuated by commas instead of full stops, and commas were not used correctly within complex sentences. A few responses rarely included any full stops at all. In general, candidates who did not punctuate correctly lost marks for style and accuracy.

Some candidates were allowed to word process their responses. It was noted that in some cases the number of errors was greater than it would have been in a handwritten script. This was due to typing errors and the lack of proof reading.

**Question 1** was generally done well. All candidates made an attempt to read the passage and to use some of the material, and the best candidates read accurately and were able to deal with some of the seemingly contradictory statements. The bad practice of copying from the passage was far less prevalent than in previous sessions and there were more examples of using and evaluating the information rather than reproducing it.

The content of some of the compositions was very good or even outstanding. The best of the arguments were carefully thought out and often original, while descriptions gave the reader the impression that they were of real places and events. The same was true of the narratives.

At a lower level, candidates needed to be sure that they had enough varied arguments to write their responses to **Question 2**. They also needed to write realistic descriptions and to be careful not to use so much descriptive vocabulary that the effect was one of overloading and the clarity was lost. Stories needed to consist of realistic events and to include enough description of characters and settings to create an engaging picture in the reader's mind.

Most candidates took the advice given about the length of their answers. Some answers to **Question 1** were quite long; there was much that could be argued and evaluated in this task. In rare cases, candidates spent too much time on the question and the quality of their composition suffered as a result. Only the very best candidates were able to sustain the quality of their compositions over an excessive length. This arose in some narratives where there were too many events to handle. Generally, the quality of the story telling and the use of language faltered at the end.

Many of the scripts were presented in easily readable handwriting, but some, even from high quality candidates, required improvement in clarity.

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

**Question 1: Imagine that your aunt and uncle are considering educating your cousin, a spoilt only child, at home and have asked for your opinions. Write a letter to them in which you should explain the advantages of being home schooled, the reasons why home-schooling may not be advisable and why you would or would not recommend home-schooling for your cousin. Base your letter on the fact file and the magazine article. Be careful to use your own words.**

**(25 marks)**

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the understanding and use of the content in the passage.

It was important to answer the question and to enter into the spirit of the task. The whole point was that the cousin was an only child and was spoilt. Candidates who devoted their letters to the specific needs of the child and angled their evaluation of the content of the passage scored high marks. The words 'Base your letter' were also important. They meant that the content was to be used to form the arguments used in the response, not that it should be copied or closely paraphrased.

### **The marks for reading**

Candidates were expected to use a sufficient amount of the reading material to develop arguments and to evaluate whether home schooling would be suitable in the specific case of the cousin. Those who reproduced all of the material left little time and space for explanations and evaluations, although they sometimes did well to place the arguments in a logical order. For example, they considered all the arguments about academic performance and universities in one section, the learning conditions and philosophy in another, and the social implications in a third. If presented in the candidate's own words, a mark of 7 could be given.

The best answers were those that fully integrated the ideas from the passage into an answer to the task. In these letters, the cousin became the central theme of the letter. Candidates considered whether the social needs of an only child would be met outside School and whether the cousin would be prepared to accept the parents' new role, particularly if he or she was wrested away from video games and persuaded to do work in the home environment. The cousin's higher education needs were also considered.

These answers also dealt with the apparently contradictory statements about universities that did or did not accept home schooled applicants and Schools that might or might not allow them to take examinations or to join in activities on their premises. Many candidates did not appreciate that these were not clear issues, and it was common to claim that the cousin would have no trouble in finding an Examination Centre.

Most answers gave evidence of evaluation, if not a great deal. A satisfactory answer dealt with the slightly more difficult second part of the task adequately and made some reference to the final section. The recommendation was the most searching part of the question and was often only briefly mentioned. Some answers just repeated points made earlier in the letter. This was the opportunity for candidates to match the content of the passage to the fact that the cousin was an only child and spoilt. If this were done, a mark of 6 or 7 could be made into 8. Often, no reference was made to the specific nature of the cousin, and 'spoilt' was often interpreted as 'troublesome'. This was an error of reading and of understanding the question.

The least good answers were those that made little reference to the passage, copied sections out or used ideas that were not in the passage at all. There were also examples of misreading. The worst of the copying came from the fact file. This was used by less good readers because it was readily available and the easiest part of the text. Some candidates drifted from the text and started to write their own ideas about the shortcomings of Schools and the general misbehaviour of the cousin.

### **The marks for writing**

Good answers were structured. Many candidates wrote a good introduction, explaining the context and sometimes establishing a persona. For example, they could decide to be the person in the text who was home schooled and who went to Oxford University. Similarly there was a suitable ending. The various points followed on from each other and were convincingly grouped. Letters that presented points in a random order were given fewer marks.



Most candidates wrote in an appropriate voice, bearing in mind that they were addressing an aunt and uncle. This was most apparent in the introduction, at the end and when writing about the cousin. Some candidates wrote in an unduly formal register, and a few used a colloquial style that was unsuitable considering the serious nature of the exercise.

Good answers were written in a clear, fluent style. These candidates used a variety of sentence lengths and types, and their language was precise enough to express shades of meaning and recommendations that were sometimes sophisticated. A satisfactory writing style, attracting average marks, used simpler language less capable of expressing precise thought, but nevertheless competent, without undue error or awkward style. Some candidates needed to improve the quality of their writing. They made frequent errors, some of which were serious, and used limited language, sometimes that of the passage. Their work was punctuated by errors of grammar and unclear phraseology.

The most common errors were those of punctuation. There were frequent errors of sentence separation and the same candidates were unlikely to use commas to indicate internal divisions of longer sentences. There were also frequent errors of apostrophes and a lack of capital letters for proper nouns. Some candidates wrote sentences without finite verbs, or provided subordinate clauses without main clauses. A more common occurrence was to write very long, shapeless sentences with repeated conjunctions, such as 'which'.

Overall, the standard of spelling was good but some candidates needed to improve their spelling. There was a common confusion between 'their' and 'there'.

Many candidates used 'also' to start sentences, some repeatedly so. The same candidates used 'and' inappropriately to begin sentences. There was a common confusion between the use of 'amount' and 'number' and also of 'less' and 'fewer'.

### **Ways in which candidates can make sure this type of answer is improved**

- Make sure that you select ideas and opinions from the reading material and evaluate them in relation to the context of the task.
- Especially look for arguments that are inconsistent and be aware of the difference between fact and opinion.
- Always use your own words. Never copy whole phrases and sentences from the passage.
- Be aware of the genre you are using for your answer. Think carefully of how you present a letter or an article, for example.
- Write with a voice. Think of who your reader is and express your point of view firmly.
- As always, end sentences with full stops, put commas in the right places and remember apostrophes.

### **Section 2: Composition**

#### **Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing**

Candidates are reminded that half of the marks are given for the content of the writing and the way in which it is structured. The criteria vary according to which of the three genres is chosen. The other half of the marks are given for style and accuracy.

**(a) Should we allow ourselves to depend on machines and electronic gadgets? (25)**

**(b) 'Think globally, act locally.' Do you believe this is the right approach to solving the world's environmental problems? (25)**

There were some cases where all or most candidates in a Centre chose the argumentative/discursive option regardless of whether they were good at writing in this style. While the standard of answering **Question 2** continued to improve, it was important that candidates were confident that they had the ideas and the technique necessary to tackle this type of question.

The more popular choice was option **(a)**. Candidates either argued for a life made easy and entertaining by machines and gadgets or considered both sides of the argument. It is important that candidates fully understand the question. Some wrote about a series of machines and gadgets with a little commentary on each instead of arguing about the dangers of dependency. Some only brought in the issue at the end. The best arguments were those that considered whether it was dangerous to be dependent on machines right from the beginning.

Very few candidates scored low marks for content and structure since they had enough to write on the topic.

As usual, the least good answers were the ones where there was no shape to the argument. These generally consisted of a number of examples that could have been presented in almost any order.

Option **(b)** was done well by some candidates who put forward a good argument for both elements of the quotation. Many responses had plenty of content but needed to be clear about the concept and there needed to be a structure to the arguments. There were examples of answers that often switched from global to local considerations and this lack of structure even led to some contradiction about whether individual efforts were ever effective. There was little appreciation of what 'local' might involve, for example setting up environmental schemes in a village or town. Most of this writing was about sorting rubbish. There was nevertheless, plenty of knowledge shown about global issues, though less about how they might be met.

### **Ways in which candidates can make sure this type of answer is improved**

- Make sure you have a variety of ideas at your disposal.
- Build them into a linked structure.
- Develop each idea at sufficient length and sequence your sentences.
- Try to avoid writing abstractly and use specific examples to engage your reader's attention.
- Use clear and precise English.

### **Question 3: Descriptive writing**

**(a) Describe the most disappointing gift you have received and your reactions at the time. (25)**

**(b) You are in a place which you feel may be haunted. Describe the place, and your feelings and reactions. (25)**

Option **(b)** was the more popular choice. The challenge was to ensure the response was realistic and subtle. Many were descriptions of the same sort of house, complete with an old oak door with a rusty handle, a baronial hall full of cobwebs, a set of portraits of no one in particular, and so on. There was so much descriptive detail, sometimes persistently decorated with two adjectives per noun, that the reader's mind became overloaded. Thus candidates had not fully achieved the aim of creating a convincing overall picture.

Another challenge with this option was to focus on description rather than allowing the response to become a narrative. Descriptions that covered a short time span with minor events were good, but some candidates invented various types of ghosts and vampires and allowed events to overcome the descriptive element. The aim of this exercise was to provide a picture, create an atmosphere and to explore the sorts of feelings that someone in this situation might have.

The best descriptions did this well. While it was possible to create atmosphere from a description of an old style haunted house, much better descriptions came from a deserted corridor in one's own School, a garden or a disused fairground. A little imagination in selecting a suitable place that was not the obvious choice provided unusual and original details that were more likely to engage a reader's attention.

Option **(a)** was sometimes done well. There was some good creation of atmosphere concerning the identification of the present among other packets and boxes, and the gradual unwrapping, accompanied by imaginings of what it might be. Strangely, the item itself, except where it was an item of clothing, was not always described at length. Some candidates needed to improve the balance between the thoughts and feelings and the visual description, and so missed the opportunity to demonstrate the range of their vocabulary. Others needed to include description to ensure a lively piece of writing. Some of the choices of

what the present would be were not realistic. Would a loving grandmother ever give such a horrible and thoughtless present to a favourite relative?

### Ways in which candidates can make sure this type of answer is improved

- Allow for a little movement and a short time span. Do not write a static description.
- However, do not confuse a description with a story.
- Try to make your description as real as possible. You should be able to see and hear what you write.
- It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Be especially careful to use full stops at the ends of sentences.

### Question 4: Narrative writing

(a) 'The figure in the long, black cloak.' Use this as the title for a narrative. (25)

(b) Write a story that takes place in extreme weather conditions. (25)

Option (a) was the most popular and there were some highly original stories. In one, the figure in the long, black coat was the neighbour who came to dinner and behaved most strangely, embarrassing the family with his peculiar view on politics until the narrator, the son of the family, could hold his tongue no longer. It was a simple story but it had a strong climax and was gripping throughout. Another excellent story was created when the figure, who had followed some trick or treaters throughout the evening, turned out to be one of their 'friends'. He successfully tricked them out of all their sweets.

Candidates who made the figure some sort of violent criminal wrote less convincing stories. They frequently needed to control their sentences, and rarely handled the amount of blood and the firing of guns well. Such stories lacked originality and credibility. One does not have to be violent to write a good story.

Option (b) was also done quite well, though the best were those where the extreme weather conditions were the central feature of the story. Not all were 'extreme'. The possibility of the weather becoming worse and worse throughout the story provided an easy structure.

### Ways in which candidates can make sure this type of answer is improved

- Remember that stories do not consist of events alone.
- Include realistic details, description and the thoughts and feelings of characters in the narrative.
- Write a story with a short time span.
- You can improve a story by using devices such as time lapses, flashbacks and two narrators.
- Make sure you use a wide range of appropriate language.
- Originality is important. Try to think of unusual approaches to your topic.
- If you write more than you expected, make sure you do not get careless at the end of the narrative.

### The marks for style and accuracy for all questions

The strengths and weaknesses of style and accuracy were similar to those of **Question 1**.

In **Question 2**, owing to the importance of being able to follow complex arguments, expression needed to be clear. While a good range of vocabulary was essential, candidates needed to be careful not to use words that might confuse the reader. One of the commonest areas for improvement was to ensure that expression was clear, particularly when attempting to explain a difficult idea.

In **Question 3** the best candidates used a wide range of vocabulary effectively. There were noticeable difficulties with maintaining tense. In the descriptions, the present tense was particularly suitable, but changing to the past tense was awkward and often led to a narrative. There were also still some candidates who wrote sentences without verbs because they thought that they were appropriate to a description. Many candidates used the word 'engulfed', often without thinking what it meant. There were other examples of the use of vocabulary that was either wrong or inappropriate to a particular usage.

In **Question 4** there were many examples of short sentences, all beginning with the same pronoun and all wrongly separated by commas. Some candidates were so concerned with the relating of events that they forgot to use interesting and engaging language. Particular care was needed to describe climaxes to stories fully and effectively.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/33

Directed Writing and Composition

## Key messages

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

- to write with a specific audience in mind and to adapt content and style to that audience;
- to structure each answer overall and to sequence sentences in well-formed individual paragraphs;
- to create credible and effective arguments and to write descriptions and credible stories, original and engaging in their content;
- to write in a variety of well-formed sentence types, including complex sentences;
- to use a wide range of effective and appropriate vocabulary.

## General comments

Many scripts were written in a fluent, confident style and showed considerable technical accuracy. Better scripts demonstrated an awareness of the need to engage the reader by shaping responses coherently and logically, with some adopting persuasive arguments, using credible plots or adding interesting detail to good effect.

At a lower level, there were many examples of inadequate punctuation. In particular, sentences were often indicated by commas rather than full stops or strings of simple sentence structures were used. A few used very few full stops at all. In general, candidates who did not punctuate correctly lost marks for style and accuracy. In some cases these were candidates who included well-considered content in both answers.

**Question 1** was generally done well. The passage and the task were generally well understood and sensible judgements were based on the details in the text. Better responses gave evidence of close reading with sensitive inferences and developed the arguments.

The content of some of the compositions was excellent. The best of the arguments were assured and persuasive in their reasoning, while good descriptions were characterised by vivid detail and a sound evocation of atmosphere. Better narratives were credible and engaged the reader throughout with well-rounded characters and a clear setting.

At a lower level, the argumentative/discursive questions sometimes lacked a range of ideas or a clear point of view on the topic. Some were not logically sequenced. Some descriptive responses fell into narrative, while the stories were occasionally more a series of events that did not engage the reader.

Most candidates took the advice given about the length of their answers and were quite concise in **Question 1**, allowing them enough time to write developed responses in the compositions.

Many of the scripts were presented in easily readable handwriting, but some, even those of high quality, were untidy and occasionally difficult to read.



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

**Question 1: Imagine that you are a parent governor at a school which needs a new English teacher. You have been asked to attend the interviews. The Headteacher has interviewed Ms Njord and Mr Ling, and transcripts of parts of their interviews are printed below. Write a letter to the Chair of the governing board in which you give your recommendations for the appointment of the new teacher. In your letter you should either give your reasons for appointing one of the applicants and not the other or give your reasons for appointing neither of them.**

**(25 marks)**

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the understanding and use of the content in the passage.

#### **The marks for reading**

The passage offered both a range of details about each applicant and a set of possible inferences that could sensibly be made from the transcripts about their personalities and teaching styles. The task also required the writer to adopt an evaluative stance, weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of each applicant in order to arrive at a decision.

In their responses, candidates were expected to give evidence of using the material in the passage to develop a rationale for recommending the appointment of one or neither of the applicants. Some details given in the text were clear, such as the differing levels of experience of the two applicants and their different attitudes to the use of technology in the classroom. There were, however, opportunities to infer from the transcripts how well each would fare in both classroom and staffroom, as well as how successful each would be in helping candidates to achieve high grades in their examinations. These inferences indicated a more sensitive reading of the passage, and where they were evident, a mark of 7 or above for reading could be given.

Better answers weighed up the strengths and weaknesses of each applicant, often recognising that some strengths compensated for weaknesses or that limitations could be mitigated. For example, Ms Njord's lack of experience was often judged to be readily addressed by extra training in the syllabus, whereas her enthusiasm could perhaps be valued more highly. Mr Ling's weakness and lack of experience with new technology were also often seen as easily remedied, but here, the best scripts addressed his unwillingness to adapt to new conditions, rather than his inexperience. There were also sensitive readings of Ms Njord's enthusiasm, or perhaps excitability, for the job, with some responses linking this idea with her naivety in thinking her teenage siblings could adequately prepare her for a class of thirty adolescents. High marks were given where such inferences led to developed points about each person's teaching styles and how they would meet the demands of the syllabus. Ms Njord's lack of understanding of the syllabus was often noted, but a few suggested that it showed an unwarranted casualness about the interview in that she had not done her 'homework' beforehand – another valid inference. Mr Ling's thirty years' experience was also more closely scrutinised by able candidates: his frequent changes of school, his possible over-reliance on the head teacher for discipline and his pride in good results achieved back in 2008 were mentioned by some careful readers. His stricter teaching style was also analysed in some depth in the better responses. While Ms Njord was often seen as too relaxed and reliant on technology to keep candidates engaged, Mr Ling's emphasis on listening in class was seen as out-dated and his somewhat jaded attitude was picked up. These inferences, properly anchored in the text and evaluated sensibly, were rewarded by the highest marks for reading.

A satisfactory answer was more likely to take the details given in the passage at face value, with some increasing their reading mark slightly in the final section by explaining their rationale for appointing one or neither of the applicants. A straightforward response which made reference to a range of points in the passage but offered limited evaluation of the applicants' strengths and weaknesses was generally given a mark of 5 or 6, depending on the development of the points made.

The least good answers tended to rely too heavily on one or two points in the passage, such as the experience of the applicants, with little reference to other factors which would influence their suitability for the job. Quite a number of responses limited access to the higher marks by only writing about one of the applicants, so that there was little opportunity for each to be measured against the other. A few misunderstood the voice required for the response and wrote as if they were candidates in the school. This approach also tended to restrict the response to the respective teaching styles of the applicants and how they would be perceived by the candidates. It was necessary to read the instructions to the question

carefully to ensure that the appropriate voice was adopted. There was, however, very little copying of sentences or phrases from the passage, even where the reading mark was quite low.

### The marks for writing

Good answers were structured and it was often clear from the start who the preferred applicant was, followed by a convincing overview. Many good responses gave an appraisal of each applicant in turn followed by a conclusion that emerged logically out of the points raised in the body of the answer. Others structured their answers by addressing different areas of the teaching post in different paragraphs, such as the curriculum or teaching style, with each applicant's strengths and weaknesses discussed. This was also often a successful approach.

The majority wrote in a formal style, and some made good use of the role of parent governor in their answers, often referring to the kind of teacher they would want for their own child or the importance of maintaining the good reputation of the school.

Good answers were written in a clear, fluent style. They sometimes used effective rhetorical devices to persuade, such as exclamations of surprise at Ms Njord's apparent naivety or Mr Ling's impressive record. A satisfactory writing style, attracting average marks, was usually less expressive of subtler ideas but was nevertheless competent, without undue error or awkward style. Some responses lacked more complex sentence structures and consistent control of sentences. There were frequent errors of sentence separation at this level, as well as more basic errors, such as the failure to use capital letters for proper names. In weighing up the attributes of the applicants, weaker responses made simple statements or used 'however', 'while' or 'whereas' appropriately, but without the necessary punctuation. Apostrophes were commonly used where there was no need. Weaker candidates also misspelled words which featured commonly in the task, such as 'applicant', 'governor' and 'experience.'

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

- Make sure that you read the passage closely and look beyond surface facts to underlying meanings.
- Ensure that you cover all the areas that the task requires.
- Try to develop the points raised in the passage, rather than just reproduce them.
- Be careful to adopt the voice required. Think of who your reader is and express your point of view firmly.
- As always, end sentences with full stops, put commas in the right places and remember apostrophes.

### Section 2: Composition

#### Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

It is important to remember that half of the marks were given for the content of the writing and how it was structured. The criteria varied according to the three genres. The other half of the marks were given for style and accuracy.

(a) 'Tourism spoils beautiful countries.' What are your views? (25)

OR

(b) 'Teenagers moan all the time about being bored. There is no such thing as boredom, merely a lack of purpose.' Do you agree? (25)

These questions proved popular choices and there were some well-argued responses. A sustained point of view was needed for both questions and sometimes the interpretations of the quotations in each question were unclear, so that the responses were occasionally a little muddled.

The more popular choice was option (a). Successful responses often argued that beautiful countries could be spoiled by tourism, despite the economic benefits it brought. A range of benefits was offered in good responses, as well as a number of different ways in which tourism might spoil beautiful countries. Some apt examples of countries visited by tourists were given and some good answers made good use of candidates' own experience as tourists or as residents of beautiful countries. This breadth of material, as well as a clear focus on addressing the question, was necessary for higher marks for Content and Structure. There were some satisfactory accounts of the various benefits brought by tourism, such as employment and better infrastructure, but they did not address the implications of the word 'spoils' at all. Others were sometimes led

away from the question by following the economic consequences of tourism too far: better employment for locals was linked to better schools and housing, which was then linked with better health or happiness, for example.

Most candidates had enough relevant ideas on which to base their answers and many attempted to structure their writing logically. Weaker responses showed less grasp of an overall argument and there seemed little conviction behind the statements made, or ideas were added with little sense of a cohesive structure.

The second option was generally less well handled. The question was more complex than first appeared and required more thought about its wording. Better responses had a clear point of view, often arguing that teenagers' lives were deprived of interest by parents and teachers, or that boredom was an inevitable consequence of having little responsibility for their own lives. While many candidates seemed to want to defend teenagers' reputations, they struggled to articulate ways in which boredom was different from lack of purpose. Some exhorted teenagers to find diverting interests or to be more helpful, giving many examples of ways in which teenagers could be less bored. While these ideas were relevant, there was often little real argument in the answers. The weakest answers were repetitive, there was limited substance in the ideas used or there was little logic in the sequence of paragraphs.

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

- Make sure you understand the question and have a clear point of view about the issues.
- Link your ideas logically to build an argument.
- Develop each idea at sufficient length and sequence your sentences.
- Try to avoid writing abstractly and use specific examples to engage your reader's attention.
- Use clear and precise English.

### Question 3: Descriptive writing

(a) Describe a group of people at work. (25)

OR

(b) 'Suddenly everything stopped moving and there was complete silence.' Describe what was before your eyes and the sensations that you experienced. (25)

Option (b) was the more popular choice but option (a) was generally more successfully handled. Option (b) was much more likely to become a story while candidates who selected option (a) often gave more descriptive detail.

Option (a) gave some freedom to choose the kind of workers to describe, and there were good answers based on a range of different types of people at work, such as office workers, theatre actors, dancers and market traders. Many effective descriptions described each individual in turn, though in the best examples there was a strong evocation of the atmosphere of the workplace, as well as closely observed details about the workers themselves. Some excellent responses linked the descriptions of individuals with the overall atmosphere in a subtle way: the banality of workers' conversations in one description reflected the stultifying dullness of the workplace, for example. Some effective images were also employed by skilful writers. The enclosed cubicles in which workers in a call centre were confined became an image of their limited imagination and the rhythmic sounds of copying machines or water coolers were sometimes used as motifs which changed to signal different phases of the office day.

Some weaker responses introduced the individual workers to the reader in turn but there was little sense of a working life or place of work that linked these personalities. These descriptions, while sometimes quite detailed, were often static and there was little atmosphere. Many candidates sensibly made use of a single working day to give the description movement and variety, but not all handled this structure well and there were some which were simple accounts of the collective working day, with limited focus on individuals.

Option (b) was sometimes done very well. Candidates avoided a long, narrative preamble and provided just enough succinct detail to make clear to the reader the scenario which led up to the moment described. There were some very effective descriptions based on a literal interpretation of the question, in which time stopped and the people and objects around the narrator froze for a moment. In some weaker responses which used this idea, there was sometimes too much explanation rather than description, especially in discovering the reason for this mysterious phenomenon. Some excellent responses used the question more metaphorically. One described the moment at the top of a huge roller coaster, just before the terrifying

descent and there were various descriptions of the moment a terrible or exhilarating discovery was made and time seemed to stop. Better responses were characterised by an ability to capture a snapshot moment and evoke the strong and vivid atmosphere implied by the question.

The danger here was that candidates became too caught up in the run-up to the particular moment and the quotation given in the question became part of a narrative response. Where candidates created a story but there was some focus on describing emotions and sensations in this one moment, a reasonable mark could be awarded. However, weaker responses showed little awareness of the different requirements of descriptive and narrative responses, and there was sometimes little to reward in a straightforward account of events.

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

- Do not write a static description. Allow for a little movement and a short time span.
- However, do not confuse a description with a story.
- Try to make your description as real as possible. You should be able to see and hear what you write.
- It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Be especially careful to use full stops at the ends of sentences.

#### Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a) **'You received, unexpectedly, two tickets for a mystery trip. After some initial doubts you decided to go. Write the story of what happened.** (25)

OR

- (b) **Write a story about a survivor.** (25)

Option (b) was more popular and there were some highly original stories. Characters and narrators survived all kinds of experiences, from more literal scenarios such as plane crashes, surgical operations and military ambushes to more metaphorical interpretations such as difficult childhoods or bad relationships.

The best responses here created realistic, credible storylines and engaging characters with whom the reader could identify and could care about their survival. A clear focus on the emotions of the protagonist in difficult circumstances often characterised these excellent responses and helped to engage the reader. A plane crash was often used, for instance, but some responses evoked the abject terror of the narrator very successfully and one described with shocking effect the horror of sifting through debris for evidence of other survivors.

Less successful candidates created scenarios which were too wide in scope or which they struggled to control and complete realistically. The time span of some stories was too long, involving some rather dull recounting of weeks or months of erecting shelters, fishing for food etc. Plane crashes sometimes occurred in rather stereotypical island settings and rescues were often contrived or rushed. At this level, endings often lacked impact and effect, even in responses that started effectively.

Option (a) was less popular and generally less well done. The best responses dealt quite concisely with how the tickets arrived, the doubts and so on, so that the mystery trip became the main focus of the narrative. In some stories, the tickets were gifts from relatives or boyfriends/girlfriends and while these scenarios were quite straightforward, they were often more successful than over-complex plot ideas involving kidnappings or ambushes for reasons which rarely emerged in a credible way. Some better narratives linked the giver and the recipient of the tickets in some surprising twist at the end, such as a marriage proposal, whereas less successful narratives became straightforward accounts of the events of a holiday.

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

- Remember that stories do not consist of events alone.
- Include realistic details, description and the thoughts and feelings of characters in the story.
- Do not try to write a story with too long a time span.
- You can improve a story by using devices such as time lapses, flashbacks and two narrators.
- Make sure you use a wide range of appropriate language.
- Originality is important. Try to think of unusual approaches to your topic.

- If you write more than you expected, make sure you do not get careless at the end of the story.

### The marks for style and accuracy

The strengths and weaknesses of style and accuracy were similar to those of **Question 1**.

In **Question 2**, expression needed to be clear and lucid to convey more subtle arguments. Responses to **2(a)** were more consistently formal in style and better answers occasionally used some quite impassioned language to further their argument.

In **Question 3**, the best responses used a wide range of descriptive vocabulary effectively and precisely. There was often inconsistency in the use of the tenses. While the present tense helped to prevent some candidates from slipping into narrative, there were many examples where past and present tense were both used, even within paragraphs. Sentences without verbs were also a problem in some responses. Sentences with no active verb, creating a list of details rather than a coherent overall picture, affected the mark for style and accuracy quite frequently in the middle range.

In **Question 4**, although some candidates were able to create and control complex sentences capable of conveying shades of meaning, there were many examples of weakly controlled sentence structures and a limited variety. The use of commas where full stops were needed was evident in many responses, even where the writer was otherwise quite accomplished. The effect of poor sentence control on the overall style and fluency of such responses was often very damaging.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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**Paper 0500/04**  
**Coursework Portfolio**

## **Key messages**

In order to aim for high marks in this component, candidates should:

- reflect in their writing their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them
- demonstrate variety of style, use of language and genre in the three assignments
- choose assignments that challenge them to write at the highest standard of which they are capable
- write in fluent and varied sentences separated by full stops
- proof read their work carefully, as marks may be deducted for typing errors
- carefully choose the text for Assignment 3 and ensure that they engage with the ideas in the text.

## **General comments**

The aim of this coursework component is to enable candidates to become better writers by practising composition in varied genres. It followed that the most successful candidates explored their personal views and experiences of the world as they knew it, and wrote in their own developing style and range of language. It was not beneficial to copy styles such as those of literary criticism or travel brochures, which were not personal to them. It was good to see that many candidates revealed their own personalities and values through their writing.

Thus the quality of the work continued to improve, and Centres were thoughtful in their choice of assignments. The topics chosen for Assignment 1 were much more varied than in previous sessions. Candidates showed more evidence of personal thought and expression and relied less on wording and facts derived from the internet and other sources. There were fewer research essays, which in a First Language English folder can create some challenges for assessment.

The choice of suitable articles for Assignment 3 is an area for improvement. This is addressed below in more detail.

The quality of word processing was high and the work was nearly always well laid out. There were cases where proof reading required more attention. It should not be assumed that the spell check would solve all matters of spelling, for example where 'to' could be confused with 'too'. Teachers often rightly prompted candidates to proof read their work on the drafts, but this prompt was not always followed.

Much of the work was accurate and well expressed. Since the conditions for coursework were very different from those of the Examination, candidates were expected to correct their own work. The commonest errors were those of punctuation, particularly of using commas to separate sentences instead of full stops. Frequently, commas were not correctly used to indicate divisions in complex sentences and there was much confusion over the use of apostrophes. Some candidates confused the use of colons and semi-colons and there were examples of over-using the semi-colon. In Assignment 2, care needs to be taken with the clarity of present and past tenses.

The best candidates used a variety of well-constructed sentences, including complex sentences that contributed to fluency. They wrote in an assured style and used a wide range of vocabulary. Candidates in Band 3 for writing wrote competently but used shorter, simple sentences and a more limited range of language. Candidates below Band 3 for writing showed some uncertainty of style, writing awkwardly in places and making grammatical errors.

In Assignment 3, reading marks of 9 and 10 were appropriate for candidates who evaluated, developed and explained ideas and opinions in the reading material. This was frequently done well, and for a number of candidates, Assignment 3 was their most successful. Some candidates commented generally on the reading

material and tended to summarise and to repeat ideas. An appropriate mark for these candidates was 5 or 6. A few candidates found the reading material too difficult and used it as a stimulus for their own writing. While the writing could be assessed, the evidence of reading was very low and was rarely worth more than 3 marks.

It was evident that this component had been completed as a real opportunity to learn the craft of writing. Centres and their candidates are to be congratulated for their good work.

### **Administration by Centres**

The most important administrative form is the candidate Assessment Summary Form (CASF). This tells the Moderator the marks given for reading and writing and whether these marks have been changed during internal moderation. The Moderator can tell if one particular set has been subject to change more than the others, and this can then be checked. In addition there is the Individual Candidate Record Card that is attached to each folder, and this tells the Moderator what is in the folder and gives the teacher's general comment on the quality of the work. Finally there is the mark sheet (MS1 hard copy or electronic copy) that is sent to Cambridge with a copy to the Moderator.

It is **essential** that the final internally moderated mark on the CASF is the same as that which appears on the mark sheet and on the folder. Moderators carried out a check and on several occasions discovered that the marks did not tally. As a result, a Coursework Amendment Form had to be sent to the Centre.

Most Centres were careful to fix the work for each candidate securely with a staple or a paper clip. It was not necessary to send each folder in any kind of wallet.

### **Assessment by Centres**

Internal moderation generally ensured that the folders were in a reliable rank order. This moderation was carefully carried out and Centres are thanked for their efforts. It was not always clear whether all the folders in each set had been accounted for. If one teacher is generous or severe, either all of the teacher's folders should be checked or it may be possible to scale the marks of the whole set. If a sample is taken and alterations to the marking are made, some judgement must be made on the other folders in that set. Because there were marks for both reading and writing, it was likely that some adjustments to the marking would be made.

In writing, some of the work was under marked when it was error free and written in a fluent style with a good range of vocabulary. There were cases of severity in assessing the content of the writing particularly in Assignment 1. In reading, candidates in some Centres consistently evaluated ideas and opinions at some length, and the marking was extended slightly too far into the lower mark bands.

In writing, the commonest reasons for lowering the marks was that stylistic and technical error had not been taken into consideration. Band 1 and top Band 2 candidates are not expected to make errors in coursework. In some folders there was no evidence that errors had been noticed during assessment. In reading, the commonest reason for lowering the marks was that ideas and opinions from the reading material had not been sufficiently evaluated or developed.

### **Annotation**

Some of the final drafts were carefully marked with marginal comments, a comment at the end, an indication of errors and good use of language. This was essential since the Moderator needed to know why the marks had been awarded. Where there was no indication of errors on the script, particularly of errors of punctuation, the assessment was sometimes in doubt.

## Drafts

It was generally understood that first drafts must not be corrected in detail. Moderators should see that first drafts bore some alterations in pen by the candidate and that comments by the teacher should be only suggestions for revising, editing and correction. For example, a comment that the candidates should go through the work and insert full stops at the end of sentences was in order, but a mark indicating that a full stop was missing at a particular point constitutes correction. Many drafts bore no comments at all, while others were different from the final version but considered advice from the teacher's draft comments. The latter case represented good practice.

## Comments on individual assignments

### Assignment 1

Most of the work consisted of informative or expository writing. There were examples of guides to places, film reviews, restaurant reviews and media work. In general, leaflets were not advisable for candidates aiming for high marks since they rarely gave opportunities to expand ideas or to use a whole range of language. Where guides to places were set, there was a tendency to assume the same standard style used in real life examples. Candidates who wrote about *My Town* from a personal point of view generally produced better outcomes. Similarly a personal response to watching a film was better than one that assumed a journalistic style, and the same was true of the restaurant guides.

Centres that set *A Day in the Life of...* needed to ensure that candidates were challenged sufficiently to access the high mark bands, and specifically that high quality writing could be elicited. The original newspaper versions of this exercise are often written in quite an ordinary style and the content may consist of some trivial details. Some attempts at this genre worked well because the candidate tried to bring out the precise nature of the challenging work that the subject's career involved.

The vast majority of the rest of the writing was on particular topics and largely avoided the familiar arguments concerning euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment and smoking. This was good to see, because it suggested that candidates had chosen topics that they could think out for themselves rather than to reproduce the traditional arguments from the internet or from other sources.

The following list gives some indication of how candidates decided to follow their own thoughts:

*Ghosts and things that go bump in the night*  
*Food in the School cafeteria*  
*Should teachers be role models?*  
*Teaching the tango in School*  
*An account of a horse rehabilitation Centre*  
*The Christchurch earthquake*  
*Subway construction in Córdoba*  
*Dolls as stereotypes*  
*Football and technology*  
*Against intimate relationships in School*

One Centre set a personal research project on the history of each candidate's family, most of which were immigrants at some time in the past. The results were fascinating to read and had obviously given enjoyment and pride to the candidates.

Another Centre set a series of topics called *Do not get me started...*. This was good because it clearly elicited a strongly personal response. However, care should be taken that the writing does not turn into too much of a rant without real argument. It nevertheless was a brave attempt to get away from the traditional essay form.

Many Centres took the advice to turn the topic into the words of a speech, and this was nearly always done well. Some candidates need to be reminded that it was to be spoken format rather than a formal response, and thus that they can be creative rhetorically.

### Assignment 2

There were no problems concerning this assignment. Candidates took the opportunity to demonstrate their range of expressive language and made sure that the style was different to that of Assignment 1.

The choice was between fiction, descriptions of places and people, autobiographical fragments and writing from personal experience. These were all equally good options, although some candidates wrote very moving and personal accounts, which seemed in the spirit of coursework.

Teaching what makes a good narrative before letting any experimentation take place proved to be good practice. Stories were well developed and were rarely series of events. There was plenty of description and a good deal of tension. Much attention was paid to the climax of the story and there were some effective endings. A number of these narratives were mystery or ghost stories, and here the challenge was to make them sound real and to avoid stereotypes.

Some of the narratives were unnecessarily violent and there remained a number of war stories from the past. It is sometimes good to think of the possibilities of portraying life as happy, wholesome and perhaps amusing.

Some promising titles were *Catnapping*, *The story of a lighthouse keeper*, *Whisper in the bedroom*, and *I can not understand humans* (told by a tortoise).

Most of the descriptions were well written and were generally of places or people known to the writer, and therefore realistic and not overloaded with descriptive language and detail. There were titles such as *The stadium*, *The fish and chip shop*, *An untidy place*, *Storm*, *The circus* and *A person you are close to*.

Writing from experience took many forms, including the analysis of quite brief moments in candidates' lives, but most titles were in themselves unadventurous, such as *A day with Grandfather*, *A day I will never forget* and *My new School*. The interest and the quality of these stories lay in the personal detail.

### Assignment 3

Since this assignment was first set, it has become clear what advice is useful to Centres. Previous reports have given detailed advice on the choice of texts and the ways in which candidates should respond to them. The advice about the text choice can be summarised as follows:

- Choose an article that contains ideas and opinions that can be argued, evaluated and developed. For example the article may use inconsistent arguments or confuse fact and opinion.
- Choose one article of no more than two sides. If you choose too much reading material it is difficult for candidates to select the best ideas to explore, and the result is that their responses are often too general and not specific.
- Avoid factual material, including newspaper reports, as these have no arguments with which to engage.
- Avoid whole novels and poems unless they contain very obvious ideas and opinions.

There were examples of articles without enough argument for effective engagement or where the topic was so worthy that it was impossible to disagree. The response was therefore little more than a summary and the reading mark could not be more than average.

Some effective choices of article were:

*University: why bother?*

*Wearing fur*

*How much money do I need to be happy?*

*Why you can not sack boring teachers*

*Bringing up Chinese children*

*Too young to be a criminal*

There were also some controversial articles on topics such as Sterilisation, Video Games, Single sex Schools, House husbands and Capital Punishment. While these were not unusual, they offered new and sometimes refreshing slants on the topics.

Candidates responded to the reading material by, for example, writing a letter to the writer or another article for a publication. It was also possible to respond in the form of a conversation. Responses were to the ideas and opinions expressed in the text and these represented the personal thoughts and feelings of the candidate about the views that were expressed. It was easier to write effectively where the candidate did not agree with the writer. Those who did agree could score marks by developing the ideas or by putting a relevant personal slant on them. Candidates could also establish a priority based on their perception of the relative importance of the ideas in the text.

Some candidates responded to literary texts by making critical comments about the choice of language and technical devices as if the work was for an English Literature Examination. Where the text was a speech, a similar approach was used, concentrating on the use of rhetoric rather than exploring ideas. This was not relevant to the mark scheme for reading, which may be found in the syllabus under 6:Appendix, Table B.

For example, responses had to be matched with the wording for Band 1 if a mark of 9 or 10 was to be given. This states that 'candidates analyse and evaluate several ideas and details from the text(s), and develop lines of thought. Their own ideas are closely related to the original text(s) and show a good understanding of the main arguments'. This does not refer to rewarding marks for identifying literary or media techniques. It is important that judgements are made for this task using this mark scheme.

Some Centres allowed candidates to make their own choice of text for this assignment. This created much extra work when it came to giving a reading mark, and it also caused a challenge of monitoring. It is important that the choice of text is carefully agreed by Centres with their candidates to ensure that in responding to the content, candidates can score high marks for reading. Some Centres chose a single text for all their candidates, and others provided one text per teaching set. Sometimes there was a choice of perhaps three texts available for candidates to choose from. Where one choice was set per teaching set, it was important that the teacher should not tell candidates what to write as the response was then not original and the thinking was neither personal nor refreshing.

This task often encouraged some excellent writing, particularly where the language was original and persuasive.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/05  
Speaking and Listening (Test)

## Key messages

- Teachers should encourage candidates to make their Part 1 presentations more lively, by perhaps incorporating more creative presentational styles, but certainly by relying less on reciting factual information. A key action may be to ensure that candidates begin working on their tasks with the aim of stimulating the listener. It is important for candidates to research their topics fully to bring fresh, interesting content to their task.
- If candidates wish to talk about a hobby or interest, it is suggested that they find a creative way of doing this, with new information or through a different kind of delivery. The quality of Part 1 might be improved if candidates perhaps focused on the idea of an audience that they wish to inform, entertain or even intrigue.
- There is certainly scope for further creativity in Part 1 – e.g. taking up a voice or presenting a dramatic monologue. Where candidates speak about travel or sport, they could speak in the role of a tour guide, or indeed as if they are their favourite sports person.
- Moderators noted increased leniency in awarding Band 1 marks for Part 1. For Part 1, Centres are reminded that “lively delivery sustaining audience interest” is necessary, and that “a wide range of language devices” should be present in a Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, informative talk, which is perhaps secure and safe, is likely to satisfy the criteria for Band 3. For higher reward, the candidate needs to be attempting something more challenging, more creative, more ambitious perhaps. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.
- Please restrict Part 1 to 4½ minutes – as specified in the syllabus.

## General comments

Many candidates who successfully complete this component clearly prepare very well in advance, conduct appropriate research, and are very adept at making presentations.

Cambridge is very grateful to have received the majority of samples on Compact Disc (CD). Moderators welcome this as it makes the task of external moderation more efficient. Cambridge encourages Centres to send in samples on CDs. The use of modern, digital recording equipment is strongly recommended (as opposed to cassette recorders), as this tends to produce higher quality recordings, but also allows the easy transfer of an appropriately collated sample to be burned onto a single CD, using separate tracks.

## Comments on individual aspects of the test

### ***Part 1 - The Individual Task***

The dominant task in Part 1 remains the informative presentation. Candidates select a topic and provide historical and/or contemporary information about it. A small number of these presentations remain purely factual, but many engage with an issue or controversy relating to the topic. For example, developments in media and technology were often related to issues of over-reliance on technology and social media. These discursive elements add interest to the individual tasks.

Where the chosen topic relates directly to the candidate's personal situation or their country/location, there is sometimes scope for more engaging content. For example, a focus on government policies toward diversity in one particular country allows for specific information about this to be presented.

Personal experiences and interests were another common focus – for example, recent trips abroad, reading, sport, music. These kinds of presentations varied in their degree of success, with less successful tasks simply describing likes, dislikes and experiences without further research or insight.



Candidates sometimes attempted to use techniques such as addressing the listener and rhetorical devices, but often these approaches were inconsistent or not fully maintained.

It was pleasing to see more candidates using visual aids and props to enhance their presentations – an effort clearly to liven up what might otherwise be rather dry talks.

Centres and candidates are of course free to focus on topics which lend themselves to standard presentations. However, Moderators encourage a combination of more specific topics and a greater range of presentational formats.

***Some examples of productive topics from this session:***

- Conspiracy theories
- Beauty and cosmetic surgery
- Adoption
- Racism and prejudice
- Forced marriage
- Paranormal phenomena
- Harry Potter series versus the Twilight series
- The rapper, Eminem and his impact on society
- The positive and negative development of social media

***Part 2 - Discussions***

In almost all cases, Examiners were very much part of the discussions, entering into the spirit of the occasion and the conversations were generally productive extensions of the Individual Tasks. It was clear in many cases that candidates had planned for further discussion.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/06

Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

## Key messages

- Please remember to send in the Individual Candidate Record Cards – these are the only means by which the Moderator is made aware of all of the tasks/activities which have been undertaken at the Centre. It is useful if details relating to each activity are provided – indeed, it is permissible for the candidates to fill out these sections.
- Centres only need to record the individual and paired activities for all their candidates. It is not necessary to record the group activity. We hope this enables easier management of the coursework and reduces the pressure on candidates and teachers alike.
- For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres need only submit **recordings of the Task 2 (paired) activity**. Centres need not send in recordings of group activities or talks/speeches from individual candidates.
- It is not necessary to conduct the same activities within a Task for every candidate. For example, different pairs can engage in different pair-based activities.
- Please be careful that Task 3 is not too similar in approach and content to Task 2. For example, if Task 3 is a small group discussion, then try to make Task 2 a lively role play between two candidates.
- Please ensure that some of the activities which are conducted enable the higher level achievement criteria to be demonstrated. More capable candidates need to be challenged and to be given the opportunity to display Band 1 attainment. It is therefore recommended that differentiated activities are designed by teachers.

## General comments

Centres are reminded that three specific tasks are required: an individual presentation, a paired activity and group work. A wide variety of activities are encouraged – from creative role playing of real life situations, to activities which are drawn from literary texts, and large-group debates based on areas of contemporary interest. Teachers and candidates are encouraged to be as creative as possible in the activities undertaken for each task, ensuring of course that speaking **and** listening skills are demonstrated and are able to be assessed using the given criteria.

Moderators report that most of the work presented for this session was appropriate and resulted in interesting speaking and listening activities which many of the candidates clearly enjoyed. Candidates and teachers worked together to design and implement a wide range of activities which illustrated the candidates' speaking and listening skills appropriately.

Centres who offered additional annotation (written on the Individual Candidate Record Cards), accompanying each task/activity undertaken by each candidate, helped to make the process of external moderation efficient. Many thanks for such full and explanatory notes relating to the work undertaken.

Cambridge encourages sample work to be sent in using CDs – indeed, it is preferable for all of the candidate recordings in the sample to be collated onto a single CD. The use of modern, digital recording equipment is strongly recommended. It was good to see the majority of Centres this session using CDs to capture and present their samples.

**Comments on specific tasks**

Moderators received samples with integration of literature into some of the activities – in many cases in an active and dramatic manner, with candidates role-playing characters from novels and plays.

There was evidence of candidates being involved in choosing their own activities; this was most apparent with Tasks 1 and 2, where individual and paired work was required. Candidate-centred tasks are often the most rewarding and usually provide the best means of potential achievement as the candidates are highly motivated.