

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Composition

## General comments

This year's paper allowed candidates across the ability range to choose a topic on which they felt able to write fully and interestingly, with opportunities for autobiographical writing from their own experience, whether in the narrative, descriptive or discursive genre. The overall performance of the candidates was wide-ranging in the quality and accuracy of language but their enjoyment and involvement in the task was evident in the enthusiasm and liveliness which characterised their work, whatever their linguistic skills. The scenario and format of **Part 2** also proved extremely accessible and there were many creative ideas in the description of the bag-snatching incident, with the guidance of the bullet points giving a logical structure to the report, as well as a checklist of the information required. Unfortunately, many candidates had not taken heed of the usual advice to deal with one bullet point per paragraph and left the report completely unparagraphed but very few failed to gain the 5 marks for the content points themselves.

The best candidates wrote with a variety of complex structures, good use of idiom and a wide range of precisely used vocabulary, producing a natural fluency in English that allowed Examiners to read the compositions with ease and enjoyment. Errors in tense and idiom, the incorrect punctuation of direct speech, the omission of articles or other vital words in a sentence, or the omission of the final letters of a word itself still occur frequently, and an increasing use of colloquialisms and slang in inappropriate contexts is apparent. Such errors are often the result of carelessness or haste rather than innate problems with the language. Very few candidates did not observe the rubrics and attempted more than one topic from **Part 1** or omitted **Part 2** altogether. There were also very few unfinished or irrelevant responses. Generally, candidates judged the timing of the examination well this year, with few very short scripts and equally few repetitive, over-long scripts, which so often simply add to the error count, without enhancing the quality of the writing overall.

This paper proved to be one which allowed discrimination between candidates' abilities, whilst at the same time presenting all candidates with the opportunity to exhibit the full range of their linguistic skills.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Part 1**

#### **Question 1: Describe the occasion and your feelings when you had to make an important speech.**

This was a very popular choice, with many candidates seemingly writing from personal experience and describing convincingly a range of emotions both during the preparation of the speech and in the period waiting to deliver it, as well as when making the speech itself. The valedictory speech on graduation from High School was the occasion most frequently chosen; others included speeches made as part of a debating competition or at family weddings or funerals. Sometimes the narrator was a last-minute replacement, which heightened the emotions involved in speaking without preparation or without a written text to consult. In some events, the speaker was unable to rise to the occasion and was embarrassingly struck dumb, ran from the stage or disgraced himself in some way, but such a situation was used by the better candidates to enliven their work with humour or a shame-faced apology. Many candidates demonstrated a familiarity with the format of such formal occasions and, as a result, produced convincing accounts.

Examiners were impressed with some accurate use of a good range of vocabulary in this descriptive writing, noting particularly: 'a standing ovation'; 'a round of applause'; 'eloquence'; 'perfectly articulated'; 'anticipation'; 'procrastination' and 'hesitation'. One candidate summed it up: 'By sustaining the illusion of the assembled dignitaries as babies in diapers, my nerves steadied and the humour boosted my confidence.' The less successful responses were those where the candidate had chosen to write a fictional narrative about a speech on unfamiliar content in an unfamiliar context (e.g. A speech to the US government about

development of the US tourist industry) or when the speech was no more than the final paragraph in what was really a description of a celebration. Two common errors associated with this question were the use of 'applauses' and 'I was asked to say (rather than 'give' or 'make') a speech.'

**Question 2: How is your life similar to that of your grandparents and how is it different?**

This was a fairly popular choice, again offering candidates the opportunity to write from their own experience and observation, which elicited some very interesting and thoughtful responses. Whilst there were many compositions which described the lives of grandparents growing up in the past compared with the current experiences of the teenage generation, there was an equally valid, alternative interpretation, set in present times and comparing the current lifestyles, values and personalities of living grandparents with related aspects of their teenage grandchild sitting this examination. Both approaches produced some mature, sensitive writing, for example:

'My birth was a celebrated occasion, whereas that of my grandparents was simply a formality of marriage. To their mothers they were symbols of womanhood and fertility; to their fathers they were cheap labour.'

Similarities were identified as moral values, interests, religious beliefs and personalities, leading to similar actions or attitudes; differences focused on industrialisation, consumerism and advances in technology, particularly the use of mobile phones, computer games and the Internet, all of which were often seen as beyond the understanding of grandparents everywhere! Much consideration was given to the role of the extended family and the candidates' love for and debt to grandparents, whether living or fondly remembered.

Some candidates found difficulty with tense and verb forms in linking the past with the continuous present; prepositions also presented some problems following the use of 'different' or 'difference': 'from'; 'to'; 'in'; 'between' and even 'than' or 'with'. Similarly confusion of singular and plural nouns led to errors of number agreement and spelling.

**Question 3: Write about an occasion when your friend was right to be ambitious.**

This topic was the least popular. Where it was chosen, it became a vehicle for stories of heroism, with some sterling examples of pursuing and succeeding in ambition, through a plethora of hardships, by virtue of hard work, determination and self-belief. 'Disability is not inability'; 'As you sow so shall you reap'; 'Hard work brings its own reward' were some of the exhortations seen frequently in these moral tales. Whilst the better candidates produced well-structured narratives, others were diffuse and rambling, with too much emphasis on character and background and not enough detail on the events which demonstrated ambition. Again, those candidates who attempted a scenario outside their own experience struggled most. A not infrequent error was a change of voice and protagonist within the narrative as the candidate forgot that the success in achieving ambition was not their own but that of a friend.

**Question 4: Mistakes.**

As always, the single word topic was a very popular choice. Whether an autobiographical, narrative or discursive approach was chosen, many candidates failed to note the plural used in the title and focused on a single mistake, rather than a number of them, some confusing a mistake with what was really a misunderstanding. Those who chose the narrative interpretation sometimes prefaced the tale with a generalised introduction on the nature of mistakes, describing such incidents as inevitable ('we are all human beings') and necessary ('we learn from our mistakes'). Themes included drug or alcohol abuse, choosing an unsuitable friend, succumbing to peer pressure, convicting an innocent man, ignoring parental advice, neglecting education – or burning the cooking!

Some candidates who chose the discursive approach wrote quite sophisticated, philosophical pieces with again the use of a range of complex vocabulary including: 'susceptibility'; 'perfectionist'; 'meticulous'; 'infallible'; 'accountability'. However, when chosen by candidates without these linguistic skills, such discussions were often disappointing and very repetitive, as synonyms for 'mistakes' could not be found and many ran out of ideas too, so repeated earlier points or took refuge in extensive quotations from scripture or proverbs such as 'curiosity killed the cat' (or 'care killed the cat') or 'learn from your mistakes' or 'there's no smoke without fire' and others of doubtful relevance. Some wrote of mistakes in history, notably the candidate who saw the falling of the apple on the head of Sir Isaac Newton as a 'mistake' to which anyone other than he might have said 'I would have eaten the apple and thanked God for the meal.'



Errors associated with this topic were the difficulties of tense consistency, when candidates began the narrative in the past, drifted into the continuous present for immediacy of reader involvement but frequently lapsed. Another idiomatic error was the constant reference to mistakes being 'done', rather than 'made'.

**Question 5: Write a story which includes the words: 'Would he be able to convince them?'**

This was a very popular choice. Ironically, the need for the protagonist to be convincing led to many of these narratives themselves being confusing and unconvincing for the reader, particularly in those cases where the candidate had gone into the examination with some ideas for a story already worked out and found it difficult to use the given phrase in a suitable context. Often, it was given as the final sentence of the piece, leading to an unresolved ending. In the hands of competent candidates, well-versed in narrative techniques, this was highly effective, leaving the reader in suspense. However, all too often the quote appeared 'tagged on' as an afterthought and frequently the use of the conditional tense 'would' was inappropriate, wherever the phrase was used in the story. Favourite scenarios included courts of law following an arrest, facing parents after forbidden activities, cases of mistaken identity and even encounters with vampires. Again, in the hands of skilled writers, some stories were racy, entertaining, full of suspense and tightly written. Many candidates used direct speech to enliven the plot and develop character but very frequently this was presented without proper punctuation or paragraphing, adding to the confusion rather than to the enjoyment of the reader.

**Part 2**

The scenario and task of **Part 2** proved to be very accessible to candidates across the ability range. The given structure of bullet points, detailing the information which was required, proved very helpful to candidates in planning coherent accounts, focused on the items mentioned, avoiding undue amplification and inappropriate length. Unfortunately, for some, what began as a report became extended into a narrative of how the bag snatcher was eventually apprehended and even tried in court and sentenced, which sometimes resulted in a loss of focus on the situation and purpose of the account, or sometimes led to the exclusion of a required point, in the eagerness to tell the full story. Many candidates struggled with the idea of 'an account' as opposed to 'a report' for which they had been perhaps more precisely instructed. Some were uncertain how to begin, not completing the given opening in a grammatically correct fashion: 'To the Police: an account of the story that one Sunday I saw the victim ....' or 'To: the Police From: Junior Taylor; Subject: A witness account.....' Frequently, the ending was that of a letter: 'Yours faithfully...' or there was no indication of a conclusion, with no signature and thus no identification of the witness. Lack of paragraphing was commonplace, even from candidates who had paragraphed their compositions perfectly satisfactorily in **Part 1**. A very precise layout was seen from one Centre, where candidates had not only been taught a format for the report heading and signature but had been advised to respond to each bullet point in a separate paragraph, with its own underlined heading – 'Location and Time of Incident: What the Victim was Doing: How the Bag was Stolen: Description of Attacker: Help given to Victim:'. These candidates could scarcely fail to cover all five content points.

In fact, most candidates did gain 4 or the full 5 marks for content in **Part 2**. Sometimes details of both when and where the crime took place were not given or were too vague to be helpful to the police investigation. Similarly, exact details of how the bag was snatched or how the victim was helped, rather than mere statements of the facts, were needed for the marks and were not always supplied. Occasionally, 'victim' and 'attacker' were confused: 'The victim who stole the lady's bag ...', or the witness was actually the victim herself. However, usually, a clear account of the crime was given, with the victim engaged in buying fruit and vegetables in the market, buying 'air time' from a hawker, gossiping to a friend, struggling with the baby's buggy or searching for her car keys in her bag, when the attacker, often described as 'acting suspiciously' or 'stalking his prey', made his move. Some effective vocabulary was used in the description of the crime and the attacker: 'miscreant'; 'assailant'; 'perpetrator'; 'petty thief'; 'known vagrant'. The weapons of choice were knives, guns, machetes, broken bottles or sheer physical force. Means of escape included a pick-up car, bicycle, running into the forest or the bushes or 'melting into the crowd in the market place'. The description of the attacker produced some very creative writing: 'He had huge arms with muscles protruding like a tug-of-war rope'; 'His t-shirt had the word 'PEACE' emblazoned on it in bold black letters', but this section was also the place where errors of number and idiom occurred in the description of the attacker and his clothes: 'he put on a black jeans trousers and a white Adidas sneakers'; 'he had a slim built and tall hair with a blue jeans pants and a sandals on his foot'; 'his face was scored (scarred) with a tatoo in his bold (bald) head.' Another frequent error in this section was inconsistency of tenses: 'He is tall. He was brown skinned and had worn black pants.'

The accessibility of the task and the help of the bullet points allowed many average or weaker candidates to perform better in the language assessment in **Part 2**; however, some of the more able candidates scored less well here, writing in a more repetitive or simple way, without the opportunity to include more



sophisticated vocabulary and more complex sentence structures, which they perhaps judged inappropriate for the task.

### **Final Comments**

All the Examiners spoke warmly of the enthusiasm and lively interest to be found in the work of these candidates. The general clarity and accuracy of idiom and expression was evidence of the thorough preparation undertaken by both teachers and candidates and their familiarity with the syllabus, which allowed them to tackle the examination with confidence and the Examiners to read the scripts with enjoyment.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Composition

## General comments

The descriptive, narrative and discursive topics offered in **Part 1** of this year's paper proved accessible to candidates across the ability range, giving them the opportunity to choose a subject on which they felt able to write fully and interestingly, either from their own experience or using imaginative, original situations in the narrative topics, which, as usual, were the most popular and frequently the most successful responses. The overall performance of the candidates was wide-ranging in the quality and accuracy of language but their enjoyment and involvement in the task was evident in the enthusiasm and liveliness which characterised their work, whatever their linguistic skills. Some candidates perhaps chose unwisely in **Part 1**, attempting the discursive topic of **Question 2** or attempting a 'philosophical approach' to **Question 4**, whilst lacking the linguistic abilities required to handle abstract ideas and complex structures. It was clear that some candidates who chose the narrative options of **Question 3** or **Question 5** had come to the examination with storylines already in mind and they found difficulty in including the given sentence or the vital letter convincingly in context. The scenario and format of **Part 2** proved particularly appealing to candidates this year, giving everyone the opportunity to present an authentic, entertaining and informative letter, involving family members, local characters and customs. Candidates warmed to the task and produced enthusiastic responses which, whilst enabling linguistic discrimination across the ability range, were also a pleasure to mark. The bullet points provided clear guidance for paragraphing the letter and a checklist for the information required.

The overall standard of work this year seemed to be similar to that from previous years, with some very fluent, accurate and assured writing from the most able candidates, using complex structures, good idiom and a wide range of precisely used vocabulary. Although there were comparatively few very weak candidates, there were clearly some who were not yet of sufficient familiarity with the English language to attempt the examination at 'O' Level.

Linguistic difficulties were those so often encountered in the past and quickly exposed by certain questions on this paper. Errors in tense and idiom, the incorrect punctuation and paragraphing of direct speech, the use of intrusive commas and of comma splicing between sentences, the omission or misuse of articles, incorrect word order, confusion of singular and plural in verb and pronoun agreement and the use of inappropriate vocabulary in context, remain problems frequently encountered. Some examples are given in the comments on individual questions in this report.

The most frequently misused words and phrases this year were 'alot'; 'infront'; 'anyways'; 'atonce'; 'occassion' (given on the question paper); 'me and my cousin did other stuff'; 'everything went good.'

There were very few candidates who did not observe the rubrics, and attempted more than one topic from **Part 1** or omitted **Part 2** altogether. There were also very few unfinished or irrelevant responses. Generally, candidates judged the timing of the examination well this year, with few very short scripts and equally few repetitive, over-long scripts, which so often add to the error count without enhancing the quality of the writing overall. It was pleasing to note the virtual absence of detailed 'first drafts' which are overly time-consuming, and the use of more helpful short plans. It was equally pleasing that few texting symbols were used except the ubiquitous 'i' for 'I'. Presentation was generally good, although some Examiners noted some poor handwriting and confusing letter formation, especially of 'r' or 'x' in a number of scripts.

This paper proved to be one which allowed discrimination between candidates' abilities, whilst at the same time presenting all candidates with the opportunity to exhibit the full range of their linguistic skills.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Part 1**

#### **Question 1: Describe the scene when you enjoyed a meal in the open air.**

This was a popular choice, with many candidates seemingly writing from personal experience and describing convincingly the natural scenery, the food, the ambience and service. Evening barbeques; family picnics in the countryside, on a beach or in the park; romantic appointments; camping excursions; restaurants in the cooler valleys and those in city streets, specialising in outdoor meals on the terrace, were the most frequently described locations. Candidates should recognise that a topic asking them for a piece of descriptive writing should never be undertaken unless they are prepared to demonstrate the skills required of the genre.

Many described the atmosphere and scenery to good effect, with evocative detail and appropriate but restrained vocabulary, which brought the happy ambience of the outdoor scene to life and held the reader's interest throughout, limiting the narrative context of the occasion to the opening and concluding paragraphs. After dealing briefly with the reasons for the meal outdoors ('the restaurant was too hot and crowded inside'; 'there was a need for air to refresh us, away from the city'), candidates described the other people dining, the natural surroundings and the pleasure of the atmosphere. Details of the meal chosen, the aroma, appearance and taste of the food followed and the feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment concluded the account of a memorable occasion. One candidate enjoyed being in his 'paradise in the labyrinth of buildings in Karachi, where I can escape from the various worries, problems and angst that plague nearly every teenager.'

Unfortunately, a number of weaker candidates saw this as an opportunity to write a narrative and embarked on a long account of the reason for a celebration (the end of examinations, good results or a birthday treat), the preparation and packing of food and luggage, an eventful journey to the venue (car accident, taking the wrong road), a brief mention of eating the food and then the journey home again. A few simply described an outing to a beach or the park, with the 'meal' being simply 'a few snacks'.

Occasionally Examiners came across candidates who had not noted that this was a meal to be enjoyed and wrote of mosquitoes, other customers smoking or behaving badly and even of long waits, poor service and disappointing food.

Examiners were impressed with some accurate use of a good range of vocabulary in this descriptive writing. However, it was clear that some candidates had prepared for the examination by carefully learning recommended words and phrases which were sometimes seen in several scripts of a particular Centre: 'The bees played hide and seek with the flowers, as they buzzed from one to another. The wind tiptoed through the meadow and the flowers waltzed in the gentle breeze.' Such a technique may be successful if the language is understood and the context appropriate but may otherwise be very confusing: 'The whole car was fragmenting with Gucci perfume.'

Common errors associated with this question were the inconsistency in the use of the present or past tense; confusion as to whether waiters/waitresses were male or female and whether they were 'bringing' or 'taking' food 'to' or 'from' the tables; frequent repetition of the phrase 'in the open air'; the use of 'too' or 'much' for 'very', and of 'sooo' for emphasis.

#### **Question 2: Should school pupils be taught how to be good parents in the future?**

This was not a very popular choice, but it did offer some opportunity for candidates to write from their own observation and to offer an opinion on a topic relevant to their own experience. Most candidates were in favour of the suggestion and always assumed that most people would become parents in the future, but few succeeded in making a grammatically correct, logically coherent and well supported argument. Some had not given much thought to what the question was actually asking them to consider and digressed from the idea of parenting being taught in school, to describe their ideas on good parenting in general terms, sometimes with criticism of their own parents in this context. Some Examiners were impressed by the range of aspects of good parenting mentioned by the candidates: physical care of the child; kindness and consideration; financial concerns; advice over academic work and exams and guidance as to careers and future behaviour. Frequently focus on the idea of these qualities being taught in the classroom was lost and the emphasis was placed on pupils being able to learn these 'skills' from their own parents or, at least, to avoid the mistakes their own parents had made. Those who disagreed with the proposal had more comments to offer and expressed them more successfully. They suggested that such teaching might cause pupils to grow up too quickly and that teachers – not necessarily the best qualified to talk about parenting –

should spend their time on core subjects. One candidate expressed this idea succinctly: 'You cannot teach how to love your children in lecture rooms and air-conditioned halls. You learn only from experience and from the way you were treated.'

This topic attracted a number of weaker candidates, who lost focus or ran out of ideas, which, as usual, resulted in repetition of wording from the question paper and of relevant points already made. Candidates who choose a discursive topic are advised to make sure that they have enough to say before embarking on the essay: writing a brief list of varied points beforehand might help.

Major linguistic problems in this topic came from the confusion of singular and plural, together with the confusion of person and number agreement: 'a student can learn to be good parents'; 'school pupils can learn to be a good parent'.

Some candidates found difficulty in maintaining a tense sequence and confused the use of 'would' and 'will'. Other errors were the misuse of 'a good parents' and 'his/her/their childrens'. Similarly confusion of singular and plural nouns led to errors of number agreement and spelling, for example:

'Parents plays a vital role in improving the children life. Every parent has a first and important responsibilities to give their childrens the best a good parents can give. After the parents, a child spend most of their time in the School, where she meet with different peoples and different idea of his teacher.'

**Question 3: Write a story which includes the words: 'He struggled across the last part of the beach as quickly as he could.'**

This topic was the most popular. It gave candidates the opportunity to write a story on almost any subject, providing that the given sentence was included somewhere. There were many examples of candidates using an essay that had been written before, in preparation for the examination, which led to the sentence being brought in unconvincingly in an inappropriate context and quite often not exactly as given on the question paper. The most popular narratives included near or actual drowning; shipwrecks, storms, huge waves and shark attacks; disastrous fishing expeditions, escapes from tsunamis, hurricanes and monsoons; confrontations with pirates, enemy soldiers, smugglers or drug-runners and many acts of heroism and sacrifice. The better candidates produced well-structured narratives, with imagination, suspense and effective characterisation, integrating the given sentence convincingly into the narrative. Others were diffuse and rambling, often writing at excessive length and with increasing error, the tagged-on sentence providing a disappointing and unsatisfactory ending. Many candidates seemed to think that 'beach' meant 'sea' and it was obvious that the final struggle was to swim away from the shark or the encroaching wave. 'In the beach' was a common misuse of the preposition and produced unintentional absurdities: 'He swam in the beach'; 'He pulled himself out of the beach and on to the sand'; 'He was over his knees in the beach and splashed the vital papers'.

Many candidates across the ability range sought to enliven their narratives with the inclusion of direct speech, although the inability to punctuate and paragraph such conversation accurately was one of the most frequently noted linguistic errors in the examination this year. It is vital that readers understand immediately which person has spoken and what was actually said if the fluency and flow of the narrative is to be maintained. All candidates preparing for this examination would be wise to focus on learning these skills. Likewise, the frequent confusion between direct and indirect speech, with the intrusive use of 'that' and the misuse of 'said' and 'told', breaks the fluency of the conversation and the flow of the narrative.

Some examples seen this year were: 'He told me that 'Are you going to the beach?'; 'I said my mother that my little brother is in the water.'; 'My mother told that my grandmother has dead.'

**Question 4: Success.**

As always, the single word topic was a very popular choice, whether an autobiographical, narrative or discursive approach was chosen, although the latter proved challenging for some candidates. Few of those who tried were able to sustain a convincing, philosophical approach. They started with a lame definition of 'success', supported by a list of areas in which success might be achieved, with weak, generalised points, floundering in the confusion of noun, verb, adjective and adverb derived from the same root. Many weaker candidates used 'success', 'succeed' and 'successfully' repeatedly and almost indiscriminately, sometimes even straying into the unrelated and inappropriate 'successor' and 'succession'. Some more linguistically confident candidates were able to write more thoughtfully, attempting to analyse the nature of success and concluding that material success does not necessarily bring happiness or contentment. The insistence on hard work and virtue led to some moralising: 'Failures are the pillars of success.' 'Do not run after success,

because if you do it will run away from you and if you do not it will follow you.’ Even the better discussions were very repetitive as candidates could not find synonyms for ‘success’ and many ran out of ideas.

Those who chose the narrative interpretation were generally much more successful. Many wrote personally about examination successes, job interviews, romantic and social acceptability, family, business, political or sporting success and the satisfaction, personal pleasure or family pride evoked by such outcomes.

Unfortunately, whatever the chosen approach, the key word ‘success’ was frequently and repeatedly misspelt and people ‘got success’, rather than achieving it.

**Question 5: Write a story which includes a letter which caused great disappointment or happiness.**

This was a particularly appealing and very popular choice, with the narratives divided equally between letters which brought happiness and those which brought disappointment. The topic clearly allowed for a personal approach and many of the stories were written in the first person. The letters bringing happiness usually gave news of examination results, successful applications for places at university (frequently at Cambridge or Oxford University), contract offers following job interviews, the impending return of a soldier or reassuring results following medical tests. The letters bringing disappointing or sad news usually told of examination or application failure, news of serious accidents, cancelled visits, the break-up of boy/girl relationships or illness and death of family members. A number of candidates failed to focus on the key word and simply wrote about a day or an event which brought happiness or disappointment – sometimes even both! This topic again was seized upon by those candidates who came to the examination with a story already in mind and added the letter unconvincingly to the prepared tale. Sometimes the actual text of the letter was included. Again, in the hands of skilled writers, some stories were interesting, entertaining, lively and full of suspense. As in **Question 3**, many candidates used direct speech to enliven the plot and develop character but very frequently this was presented without proper punctuation or paragraphing.

Examiners were impressed with the use of some sophisticated and effective vocabulary in these stories but again there were examples of candidates making a plan and actually listing vocabulary that they intended to use, before beginning their compositions. As noted in the comments on **Question 1**, this may have been successful where the meaning and appropriate context of such expressions were understood but it is a technique to be used with caution, as it may lead to some confusion at times. Happy news was greeted with: ‘Noelle jumped from the bed and sing in extreme halcyon.’ or ‘He vociferated at the apex of his voice.’ On the other hand, the fear of disappointment was shown in: ‘A plethora of apprehensions beetled down his spine.’ or ‘A gamut of frissons beatled down her haggard face.’ Candidates would be wiser to use a more familiar vocabulary with accuracy, rather than risk such confusing errors.

**Part 2**

The scenario and task of **Part 2** proved to be very accessible to candidates and, whilst allowing differentiation across the ability range, it proved equally enjoyable to boys and girls and to Examiners, who found great interest in reading of the various traditional customs practised across a range of different cultures. The structure of bullet points, detailing the information which was required, proved very helpful to candidates and the familiarity of the scenario and the format led to detailed information presented with eager enthusiasm.

In fact, most candidates gained 4 or the full 5 marks for content in **Part 2**, tackling each point sensibly, in strict order and often in separate paragraphs, although better candidates, completely confident of the purpose and familiar tone needed for the task, integrated the five points with more variety and fluency and not necessarily in the order given.

The majority of candidates began their letters by expressing regret at Aunt’s enforced absence from the occasion, usually referring to the unfortunate reason that lay behind this: illness, accident, non-arrival of a visa, business commitments or flight delay, sometimes caused by the topical volcanic ash cloud. Better candidates struck a caring and solicitous tone here but some used it as an opportunity to tease or scold their Aunt. Many overlooked the information given that the Aunt had requested the letter, and began, ‘I have decided to write to you.’ Letter format was almost always correctly followed, with the opening as instructed – ‘Dear Aunt’ – but with a surprising number of incorrect signatures, ‘From your loving daughter’ or the ungrammatical ‘Yours loving son’. Other inappropriate signatures were: ‘Your obedient nephew, X-Y-Z’ or ‘Your loving niece, A-B-C’. Examiners wondered if this came from practice examples of letter formats given in text books used in preparation for the examination. Some irritating errors, frequently found in the opening paragraph of the letter, were the omission of the subject pronoun in ‘Hope you are well’; ‘Hope to see you soon’; and the declaration: ‘We are all good here and we hope you are good too’ or ‘The event went great’.



Such terms, like those of 'gotten', 'gonna' and 'you guys', are increasingly used colloquially but completely distort the intended meaning and are grammatically incorrect.

All candidates gave the names of both bride and groom, sometimes as 'Mr and Mrs Ali', as they were now a married couple. Some candidates realised that the Aunt would already know the names, as she had been invited to the wedding and was often a family relative, so they included the required information in a more natural way: 'Well, Aunt, Hiba and Ali are now on their honeymoon after an awesome wedding celebration. What a pity that you missed it!' There were language difficulties for many candidates in the frequent misspelling of 'weeding' and of the appropriate terms for the bride and groom, seen as 'bribe'; 'bridge'; 'bridle'; 'brider'; 'bright'; 'the women bride' and 'broom'; 'gloom'; 'bloom'; 'groove'; 'grome'; 'male bride'. When referring to the couple together, these difficulties produced some unintentionally unfortunate phrases: 'The bride kissed the broom'; 'the gloom and bridge made a perfect match'; 'The bribe has to dance with his new weeded man'; 'The pride and bloom made a cute couples' were some of those noted by Examiners.

The description of the location was sometimes dealt with very briefly, with no more than the name of the hotel; other favourite venues included lawns, parks, pools, houses and beaches. Some of these must have been vast to cope with the numbers of people invited – as many as 3,000 tables and between 5,000 and 20,000 guests! Sometimes the descriptions of the colour schemes and floral arrangements dominated the letter. Some weddings were themed in Egyptian or Greek styles or co-ordinated around a colour scheme, with guests all wearing appropriate styles or colours of clothing.

An account of the ceremony was usually filled with interesting detail of customs such as the hiding of the groom's shoes for a ransom, the bride and groom feeding each other or smearing cake over each other's face, dance competitions between the families, photographs with the bride and groom on the stage and the bride tossing her flowers to the guests. Examiners experienced some confusion when traditional names were used for some rituals, clothing and parts of the ceremony but many candidates, aware of this, provided descriptive details or a helpful glossary at the end of the letter. In most letters though, the focus of the description of the ceremony was on the food provided – not least because, in most cases, this was deemed to be the part of the ceremony that Aunt would have enjoyed most and details of special dishes and creamy cakes were provided to make her regret her absence from the occasion. Some candidates believed 'account' referred to the cost of the wedding and gave details of large sums of money involved in payment for the venue and the food and in providing lavish gifts for the guests.

The candidate's own choice of the most interesting feature of the wedding provided Examiners with some surprises, as most girls chose romantic or sentimental moments when the couple kissed or danced together, when the bride threw her bouquet or when the handsome bridegroom arrived on a white stallion, whilst boys favoured a mishap, writing of laughter at grandparents' attempt to dance or sing, the food fights between the rival families or, even more callously: 'The most interesting thing was when the bride fell down from the stage and broke her leg.'

The Aunt's particular interest was the content point most frequently omitted. Candidates should be advised to check the bullet points for what is specifically required when preparing to sit this examination. Those who did remember that something else, different from the main interest of the letter writer, was to be mentioned specifically for the Aunt, usually directed her attention to the food, the music, the dresses or the weeping at the departure of the bride.

Most candidates wrote interesting, informative letters, in the correct friendly, conversational tone and format. Many seemed to have a real person in mind, a youngish, unmarried Aunt scarcely older than themselves, which led to the use of much colloquial expression and 'fashionable slang' popular with modern teenagers: 'awesome'; 'cute'; 'mind blowing'; 'just adorable'; 'so happening'; 'rocked' and 'a blast'. Another novelty was the inclusion of 'ha ha' or 'he he' in a sentence, apparently to indicate the writer's amusement and share the joke: 'Do not be jealous, Aunt, ha ha!' or 'You cannot imagine how sweet he is. He he'. This is not a helpful technique, even in an informal letter, and should be avoided.

Three words actually given on the question paper were frequently misspelt: 'ceremony', 'interesting' and 'occasion'. Other errors occurred in 'marriage' (written 'marraige'), 'wedding' (written 'weeding'), 'niece' (written 'neice') and 'receive' (spelt 'recieve'). Word order was frequently incorrect, especially involving the word 'all': 'My all family members were there'; 'me and my brother and my all cousins excused our relatives as we left the table.' Tenses were generally straightforward except in the final bullet point when candidates overlooked the guidance of 'your Aunt would have liked', given on the question paper and became very confused with 'I wish you would have been there to enjoy the food' or 'If you would have been there you would had liked the big cake.' Nevertheless, the accessibility of the task and the help of the bullet points allowed many average or weaker candidates to perform better in the language assessment in **Part 2** than in

**Part 1** and all candidates deserve praise for their performance in a task that proved enjoyable to Examiners and candidates alike.

### **Final Comments**

It is always a pleasure to be able to pay tribute to the extremely high standard of work found in many of the outstanding scripts, providing many of the very best seen in this type of examination, with some gaining full marks. All the Examiners spoke warmly of the enthusiasm and lively interest to be found in the work of these candidates, giving evidence of the thorough preparation undertaken by both teachers and candidates and their knowledge of the syllabus, which allowed them to tackle the examination with confidence, whatever the level of their linguistic skills.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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**Paper 1123/21**  
**Comprehension**

## General comments

This year's paper, on the theme of Music, seemed to engage the interest of the candidates, while at the same time testing the most able. It stretched and discriminated among the candidates – a true measure of comprehension reflected in the wide range of scores. There were sufficient nuances in the summary to tax the candidates and to engage their thought processes rather than their ability to copy from the text.

The performance of the candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. The paper seemed to be deceptively hard for some candidates who were unable to score by fortuitous lifting from the text. Examiners reported very few rubric infringements.

As in previous years, candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Most candidates completed the paper and some, though not many, managed to offer both a rough draft and a fair copy in response to the summary question. The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty-five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty-five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text, and assessment of ability to express these points fluently and in own words. As in previous years, the questions giving most difficulty were those which required the candidates to answer in their own words; some candidates seemed to ignore this rubric or, even when they identified the key words for re-casting, found it impossible to find synonyms.

Examiners continued to report some candidates writing in excess of the 160 words prescribed by the rubric for the summary. There was also an increase in the number of candidates writing fewer than 160 words and a number who failed to address the task by providing their own reflections on recorded music.

Many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and handwriting, the fact that spelling and punctuation were generally very good and the overall impressive standard of written English.

## Comments on specific questions

**Question 1(a)** was designed to ease the candidates into the examination with a fairly straightforward test, asking why, according to the writer, music is a "universal" form of communication. Many candidates successfully reproduced the first sentence of the extract to score a mark, referring to its affecting the idea of either time or place. Some distillation of the text was required and the simple statement (from a small number of candidates) that "music has existed throughout history" was not rewarded. Any further copying from the text past the first sentence denied some candidates a mark as did the misreading of "religions" for "regions".

**Question 1(b)** proved to be an unproblematic question for most candidates who were able to identify that the sounds of nature or animal cries had inspired human beings to produce music. Many chose to answer by accurate reproduction of the text, starting with "Human beings..." in line 2 and ending with "... of their daily existence" in line 4. Any verbatim excess denied the mark to only a handful of candidates.

In **Question 1(c)** successful candidates were able to identify that the feature of Indian music which provided a beginning for the study of music was the "written representations". Correct and succinct answers indicated that "it/music was written down". Many, however, wrongly stated that the feature was the discovery of flutes and instruments, and candidates who added this to an otherwise correct answer were denied a mark.

**Question 1(d)** was a straightforward question and the answer could be lifted from the passage (lines 9–10), stating that music touched the individual, playing its part on a personal/individual level.

**Question 2(a)** asked why the soldiers would be “fearful at first”, referring to their reaction to the sound of Christmas songs being sung by the enemy German soldiers. Many candidates understood their suspicions that the singing could be a trap to ambush them and others recognised the incongruity of such music coming from enemy soldiers. Some candidates did not score a mark because they stated simply that the soldiers were at war or because they had been fighting. Such answers were regarded as too general a reference by not referring to the proximity of the enemy/Germans or that they had been fighting them (earlier). A number of candidates failed to reshape the lift of lines 17–18 (“Men who had earlier in the day been fighting against each other stepped from their hiding places”) and thereby were denied the mark by not addressing the question.

**Question 2(b)** asked why the conversations between the soldiers would be limited and many stated correctly that the Germans and the British spoke different languages, that there was a language barrier, that they did not understand each other’s language. However, a significant number of candidates chose to lift line 19 (“The language barrier was somehow broken down”) which did not address the question and which was, in fact, incorrect, suggesting that there was not a language problem at all. Some candidates also focused, incorrectly, on not wishing to reveal information to the enemy as a reason for limited conversation.

**Question 2(c)** required the candidates to identify a single word from the passage which showed that the Christmas truce was unplanned. This word was “spontaneously” and a great number of the candidates recognised this. Those who did not score offered “astonishment”, which related to the reaction to the sound of the Christmas songs.

**Question 2(d)** was the first of the own words questions and proved to be a good discriminator. Candidates were asked to identify what the Christmas truce had come to represent, leading them to find synonyms for “endurance” and “adversity”. A few candidates recognised that “endurance” suggested ‘perseverance’, ‘stamina’, ‘willpower’ and ‘a refusal to give in’ rather than the simpler, more general and hence unrewarded ideas of ‘bravery’, ‘strength’ or ‘persistence’. Slightly more candidates were successful with synonyms for “adversity”, offering words such as ‘struggle’, ‘trouble’, ‘bad times’, ‘problems’ and ‘suffering’. Any references to being ‘at war’ or to the ‘enemy’ suggested a more specific context rather than a general state of affairs and these were not rewarded.

**Question 3(a)** The phonograph marked the beginning of the recording industry because it played back sounds/music and this was recognised by many of the candidates. Those who did not answer correctly rephrased the question by stating that the phonograph recorded sound. Other unsuccessful attempts lifted the reference to Thomas Edison or extended the quotation by reference to the phonograph as a scientific breakthrough and therefore failed to distil their answer.

In **Question 3(b)**, both parts of the question were successfully answered by the majority of candidates by selecting the appropriate lines from the text. Most spotted the two ways in which the rush to invent recording devices were chaotic by noting that **(i)** inventions often overlapped and **(ii)** inventors were often in dispute to be acknowledged as the inventor. Little reshaping was necessary but a minority of candidates omitted to mention that the inventors were involved in disputes.

**Question 3(c)** on the writer’s craft asked what the word “mere” suggested about his attitude to the effects of recorded music and proved to be a good discriminator since few candidates recognised that the writer was amazed or that he thought that so little time had passed for such effects to take place.

In **Question 4**, most candidates recognised that people were able to visit “far-flung destinations” because air travel had become cheaper. Unsuccessful attempts usually did not mention air travel and simply provided a general answer: “it had become cheaper” or referred to the destinations being cheaper.

**Question 5** was well answered by the majority of candidates who understood that talent would be wasted or undiscovered if children were discouraged from playing musical instruments. However, the answer did require some reshaping of the text and credit is due to the many who were able to do this. Those who were unsuccessful either did not address the question because they quoted directly from the text (“Is it not likely that...” (lines 66–67)), or because they used a double negative, thus producing a wrong answer: “It is not likely that talent will remain undiscovered”.

**Question 6(a)** was the second of the own words questions and asked candidates to explain why pop stars “are not necessarily the best musicians” thus prompting a rephrase of “image” and “talent”. This question proved taxing for many. Synonyms for “image” such as ‘appearance’, ‘looks’, were more common than those for “talent” for which only a few were able to offer correct alternatives such as ‘skill’, ‘gift’ and ‘producing good music’. Most candidates simply offered the lifted words “talent” and “image”.

In **Question 6(b)**, Examiners found that a number of candidates focused on the information that editors could gain from pop stars. Successful candidates suggested that editors hoped to gain money, wealth and riches or more sales/readers of their publications.

**Question 7**, the final own words question, was challenging for many candidates who did not explain why the internet had transformed our experience of music by reshaping “increased accessibility” and “increased choice”. Many reproduced the lifted words or failed to produce synonyms for “increased”. Although many understood that “choice” meant ‘options’, ‘selection’, ‘variety’ or ‘types’ they did not add a comparative such as ‘more’ and since they did not appear to understand the meaning of or provide a synonym for “accessibility” failed even to gain the one mark available for two synonyms without a comparative.

**Question 8** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. On the whole candidates generally selected wisely. For “individual” ‘separate’, ‘specific’ and ‘personal’ were common correct answers and ‘a person’ a common incorrect one. ‘Feelings’ and ‘emotions’ were frequently offered correctly for “moods” and ‘praised’ was the usual synonym for “hailed”. For “investigate” candidates frequently provided ‘research’, ‘find out’ and ‘know more’ as synonyms along with ‘investigate’, ‘examine’ and ‘look into’. Commonly used but unacceptable synonyms for “investigate” were ‘look for’, ‘study’, ‘find’, ‘search’ and ‘know’. ‘Targeted’, ‘directed towards’ and ‘made for’ were popular choices for “aimed at”. “Outrageously” engaged the imagination of many candidates and demonstrated the breadth of the English language. Incorrect answers usually resulted from the use of bland expressions referring to pop stars’ “outrageous salaries” as being ‘high’ (salaries) or ‘very/quite high’ (salaries). Correct responses included ‘too high’, ‘extremely’, ‘obscenely’, ‘unbelievably’, ‘ridiculously’ – in fact, adverbs which implied some degree of incredulity or condemnation or disgust. ‘Bad’ and ‘poor’ often scored a mark for “negative” whereas ‘wrong’ did not. The most difficult word in the vocabulary, section but certainly not ignored by the candidates, was “advent”. Candidates generally suggested ‘arrival’ and ‘invention’ as correct synonyms although few chose the simpler coming. It was agreed that ‘beginning’ and ‘approach’ were not acceptable choices.

**Question 9** was the customary summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise the advantages and disadvantages of recorded music, as identified by the writer of the passage. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were twenty one content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that most of the candidates completed the summary questions but that there were, as usual, a number of candidates exceeding the word limit. Also, it was noted that there were more candidates than usual writing fewer than 160 words and thereby limiting their opportunity to score as many content points as possible. There were also fewer candidates gaining maximum content points on this paper. A very small number of candidates forfeited their style marks by writing in note form rather than in continuous prose. There were also a number of candidates who did not address the question and preferred to offer their own thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of recorded music, thus limiting their total of content points through irrelevance or oblique relevance.

The first two paragraphs of the area for summary search, namely paragraphs four and five, dealt with the advantages of recorded music. The opening ten words were designed to ease the candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that people can listen to a wide range of music; most candidates started off well by making this point. “Many” or “any types” or a “variety” of music were acceptable but candidates who suggested “different” did not gain a mark. Paragraph four continued by suggesting that music crossed boundaries and that people could listen to music from all over the world as often as they liked without the need to own an instrument. These points were well made as was the fact that recorded music was cheaper than going to a concert. Some candidates simply said that recorded music was cheap and this on its own was an inadequate response. Less frequently awarded was the point that people can buy music from the countries they have visited.

Paragraph five concentrated on the quality of recorded music whereby musicians could record perfect versions without worrying about errors or without their performance being spoiled by an audience. These

points along with the statements that music would not be lost and can be recorded quickly were frequently made.

Paragraph six focused on the disadvantages of recorded music and most candidates recognised that people do not go to concerts, that they have little motivation to play an instrument and that this leads to undiscovered talent. On the other hand, the point that was made by only a minority of candidates was that people had lost their sense of wonder at the creation of music. Also the general point about poor behaviour at concerts was rarely made, although its more specific alternative concerning the public walking in and out of the auditorium did make the occasional appearance.

Paragraph seven carried seven marks. Firstly, it was recognised that the focus today was on the musicians and that pop stars are not necessarily the best. These points were commonly made. Candidates referred to pop stars' high salaries but often failed to score the mark since to indicate a disadvantage a qualifier was required such as "too high" or "outrageously". Points which were frequently awarded were references to the pressure to buy merchandise and the poor example set by pop stars. It was unusual to see a mention of the values of pop stars and parents being at odds with each other and that people were bombarded with images of pop stars.

Ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to break away from the words of the original text varied from candidate to candidate and even from centre to centre, but that in general candidates were skilful at re-casting the text in their own words. There was little evidence of random, mindless copying although some weaker candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring too highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points. It seemed that some candidates had been taught or had decided to adopt this strategy and, indeed, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. It is not without its own skill in that the candidate must be able to demonstrate his/her understanding by careful editing and selecting the content points from across the chosen paragraphs. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex structures and sentences, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Common errors reported were the usual features of agreement in singular and plural, misplaced or omitted prepositions, the omission of the definite or indefinite articles and inconsistent and illogical verb tenses. Spelling and punctuation were generally very good and handwriting clear.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Comprehension

## General comments

This year's paper was a narrative topic which seemed to be accessible to most candidates, engaging their interest and for the most part matching their understanding.

The performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Almost the entire range of marks was seen. Examiners reported very few rubric infringements.

As in previous years, candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper. The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty-five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty-five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text, and assessment of ability to express these points fluently and in own words. As in previous years, the questions giving most difficulty were the questions which required candidates to answer in their own words.

A small number of candidates bracketed sections of their summary, placing small crosses on either side of the brackets but making no deletions within these brackets. Whether or not the bracketed section was intended to be part of the summary was unclear and led to problems for Examiners. As usual, Examiners reported a number of candidates writing in excess in the summary. Candidates sometimes made untidy alterations to their summaries, sometimes in pencil; candidates must understand that such alterations make it difficult for Examiners to check the accuracy of the number of words used in the summary. Furthermore, untidy or pencil elimination of extra words and phrases, in an attempt to reduce the number of words used, sometimes resulted in crossing out key points or key verbs or articles, producing nonsense and denying marks both for content and for style of writing. Some Examiners reported very small handwriting making work almost illegible, and confusion arising because some candidates wrote in the margins. Many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and handwriting, the fact that spelling and punctuation were generally very good and the overall impressive standard of written English.

## Comments on specific questions

**Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)** were designed, as the opening questions, to ease candidates into the examination with fairly accessible tests, and indeed the majority of candidates scored the marks for writing in **Question 1(a)** that Jameela was going to the cinema that night, and for writing in **Question 1(b)** that Rose was going to study, although some candidates wrote, wrongly, that Rose was packing up her books to go to bed. Candidates fared reasonably well with **Question 1(c)**, where the marks were awarded for writing, firstly, that the university examinations were a week away, or near, or soon, and, secondly, that Rose's parents had made sacrifices to allow Rose to attend university. Where the mark was lost in the first limb, it tended to be because the candidate used a wrong preposition, thus suggesting that the university examinations were in progress, e.g. 'there was one week left in the examinations'. If the mark was not scored for the second limb, it tended to be because candidates made reference to the sacrifices of Rose's parents, without the purpose of the sacrifice, namely her education. Many candidates scored the mark for **Question 1(d)**, the answer to which was that Jameela's unrealistic attitude towards time could be seen in the fact that she said she would stay out for two hours (although she stayed out for four), or that she stayed out two hours longer than she said she would. The question here was about Jameela's lack of realism, not punctuality, and so answers which merely stated that Jameela was late, or that she stayed out for a long time, or that she did not value time and wasted it, or that she did not bother about time keeping, were not sufficient to score; the difference between Jameela's intention and actual behaviour had to be spelled out here.

In **Question 2(a)**, the mark was awarded to candidates who wrote that Jameela insulted Rose by suggesting that she was incapable of organising the trip; many candidates failed to score the mark because they referred, imprecisely, to organisation but did not specify what had to be organised, namely, the trip. Others thought the insult was directed at Rose's parents' difficulty in affording her fare home; some lost the mark because they did not distinguish sufficiently who was telling whom that travel arrangements were difficult. Others seemed not to know the meaning of 'insult'. The answer to **Question 2(b)** was that Rose ignored the insult because she did not want to make work for herself, or that she wanted to study instead; candidates had to reshape the question in the text at lines 12–13, as merely lifting the question would not answer the question. A popular wrong answer was the somewhat mangled 'she did not want to work for herself'.

The mark for **Question 3** was awarded to candidates who wrote that Jameela was happy because she had the tickets for the trip, or that she had arranged the trip. Many candidates spoiled a correct answer by adding incorrect detail, such as a reference to the shopping bag, the kicking off of the sandals, or, more commonly, the need to pass the examinations; precision was required here, and a careful reading of the entire third paragraph which showed that there was only one reason why Jameela was happy. Some offered inadequate answers that Jameela was happy because she had the tickets, without specifying what these tickets were for; as in **Question 2(a)** this imprecise answer did not score. Other candidates wrote, imprecisely, that Jameela was happy to be going home, with no mention of the tickets.

Most candidates did well with **Question 4**, and full marks were common. The answer to **Question 4(a)** was, firstly, that the car made strange noises, or that it spluttered, or wheezed and, secondly, that the back door was held in place by a piece of string. Lifting was possible here, but an agent had to be supplied, namely 'the car' or 'it', so that the lift of 'spluttered' (alone) was insufficient as it did not answer the question. Likewise, including 'untying' in the lift of 'the piece of string which held the car's back door in place' denied the mark as it did not answer the question. A few candidates confused the state of the car with that of the rucksack, referring to its frayed straps or even to sweaters on top. The answer to **Question 4(b)** was the single word 'disparaging'; candidates did very well here, showing either skill in vocabulary or in deducing meaning from written text, both skills being laudable. Where the mark was lost, it tended to be for offering as the answer 'cool', 'nodding' or 'decrepit'; some candidates spoiled their answer by writing two words, 'disparaging eye', which was an unfortunate way to lose a mark when the knowledge of the answer was there.

**Question 5** was the first of the three questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, with the key words being 'conceal' and 'embarrassment'. Acceptable synonyms for 'conceal' were, among others, 'hide', 'cover', 'disguise' or 'not show', and, for 'embarrassment', 'awkwardness', 'humiliation', 'confusion' or 'not to show'. Many candidates scored the mark for 'conceal' but there was much less success with 'embarrassment', with many candidates merely copying over the word, presumably because they could not come up with a synonym. 'Shame' was accepted here too; although it does not mean exactly the same as 'embarrassment', it was seen as a way to open up the answer to a difficult question. Many candidates wasted time here by giving unnecessarily long answers explaining the background to the girls' smiling, namely the problem with the automatic ticket machine.

In **Question 6**, candidates were being tested on response to the writer's craft. The difference between 'boarded' and 'hurled' lay in the idea either of speed or of effort, so acceptable answers were that the girls hurried, or that they were desperate. The idea of difficulty was not accepted, although it did not deny an otherwise correct answer; likewise, if the candidate wrote that the girls had to push themselves onto the train because it was crowded, this did not score the mark, as there is nothing in the text to support that the train was busy, and in fact quite the opposite seems to be the case. A few candidates thought that 'boarding' referred only to planes and not trains, and gave an explanation of this, which was unfortunately incorrect.

**Question 7** carried two marks. The first of these was scored for writing that Rose thought that the taxi driver would or might die, the inference being drawn from lines 74–75, concerning Rose's thoughts. The second possible correct mark was scored for reference to the driver's careless, or reckless, or dangerous driving; an inference had to be drawn here, so that mere reference to weaving in and out of traffic, or accelerating violently, or speed, or talking on the mobile phone, were not sufficient to score. Many candidates offered a weak answer for the first limb, writing the driver might be in an accident, rather than a fatal one, and many candidates did not score the mark for the second limb because they merely offered one of the symptoms of the dangerous driving, for example the weaving in and out of traffic, or because they offered imprecise synonyms for dangerous/careless/reckless, for example 'crazy' or 'violent'.

**Question 8** was, perhaps, the most difficult question on the paper, with some candidates scoring only one or even no mark; the achievement of full marks was rare, and so this proved to be a discerning question which



differentiated candidates. **Question 8(a)** was the second of the questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, the key words being 'uncommunicative' and 'avoided contact'. Acceptable synonyms for 'uncommunicative' were words like 'not speaking', 'being silent', or even the weaker 'did not speak much', while acceptable synonyms for 'avoided contact' tended to be short expressions rather than single words, expressions like 'did not meet her gaze', 'did not look at her' or even 'did not look her in the eye' – there was no need to re-cast the word 'eye'. Many candidates failed to score the second mark because they copied over 'avoided' in their answer, and this was one of the key words being tested; some candidates offered 'ignored' for either the first or the second limb, but this was not rewarded as it was considered to be too imprecise. Some candidates did not seem to appreciate the distinction between 'to look at' and 'to see'. In **Question 8(b)**, some candidates, wrongly, merely copied the text in its question form at lines 89–90, thinking that this question was a matter of two easy marks for two straight lifts; many other candidates managed to re-cast the questions into statements, but imprecise statements, which were that she was worried that Rose would tell Nizam about the rucksack and that she was worried that Rose would tell Jameela's parents about her work rate. However, given that the question asked candidates to explain exactly what Jameela was afraid of, these answers were incomplete and imprecise, the correct answers being that Jameela would tell Nizam that the rucksack had fallen apart and that she would tell Jameela's parents that her work rate had been poor that year.

**Question 9** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. Examiners reported marks ranging from 0 to 5 here, with a clustering at only 2 or 3. Most candidates who attempted 'mused' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'thought', and those who attempted 'tension' found many acceptable synonyms, such as 'anxiety', 'pressure' or 'stress'. 'Whispered' and 'murmured' were popular wrong answers for 'mused'. Candidates scored a mark for writing 'comforting' or 'relaxing' for 'soothing', and for offering 'distractions' or 'entertainment' for 'diversions'. The few candidates who offered a synonym for 'smug', where acceptable synonyms were 'proud' or 'self-satisfied', often spoiled their answer by the suggestion that speaking was involved, by writing for example 'he spoke proudly'; there was nothing in the text to suggest that his response was vocal, and therefore the mark was withheld. 'Narrowly' was a popular choice, but unfortunately rarely scoring because candidates tended to offer words such as 'closely' or 'nearly' rather than the correct 'barely' or 'just'. Few candidates were successful with 'tailed off', where 'ended', rather than 'faded' or 'receded', was offered as an incorrect answer. The least popular choice was probably 'initiative', meaning 'lead' or 'first move'; some candidates confused this with ideas of control or organisation. Examiners reported, as in previous years, some candidates giving the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, but these cases were few. As ever, there were some candidates who offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. Another misconception among a few candidates was that all of the words would need to be tackled, or perhaps that the best five of eight would be credited; such candidates must understand that only the first five attempts will be looked at by the Examiner.

The final question on the paper, **Question 10**, was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise the difficulties and anxieties experienced by the girls from the time they reached the airport to the time they got on the express train at Central Station in the city centre. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were twenty-two content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question. However, there continued to be the incidence reported of candidates failing to cross out their rough draft, thus not making it clear to the Examiner which version was to be marked. As reported above, a small number of candidates bracketed sections of their summary, placing small crosses on either side of the brackets but making no deletions within these brackets. Whether or not the bracketed section was intended to be part of the summary was unclear and led to problems for Examiners. A very small number of candidates forfeited their Style mark by writing their summary in note form rather than continuous prose. A small number used irrelevant material from outside the area of summary search as prescribed by the rubric, namely paragraphs 1 to 4, and paragraph 10.

There were five content points available in paragraph five. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that buses left from Terminal Two, or from somewhere else. Then the text went on to say that the buses came only every half hour, and that one had just left. The candidates were then expected to focus on the train ticket problems, firstly that the ticket machine did not accept cash, and that there was a queue for the ticket office. Many candidates wasted words in this area by bringing in irrelevant detail of Jameela preferring trains to buses, or

the trip downstairs to the station, or their embarrassment on realising that the ticket machine accepted only credit cards.

In paragraph six, another six content points were available, and all of these focused on the train journey. The train made many stops and became crowded – and very many candidates made these points correctly – the girls were squashed by other passengers, they were afraid of thieves and pickpockets, they were hungry, and they realised either that they had underestimated how long the journey would take or they were going to be late for the connecting train.

A further six marks were awarded in paragraph seven to candidates who wrote that the girls could not afford a taxi, and that there was no taxi rank at their chosen exit in any case. The next three points concerned the rucksack; it split open, its contents were scattered on the ground, and they had to pick everything up and put it in a bag. There was much imprecision of language in this area, where understanding was clear but poorly expressed, thus denying marks. The final point in the paragraph was that the girls then had to run to the front of the station to get a taxi.

In paragraph eight, three content points were available, all of them about the taxi driver. He drove too fast, he drove dangerously, and he conducted a conversation on his mobile phone. Here a mark was awarded for writing that his driving was crazy, or violent, or that he wove through traffic, or any of the other imprecise ideas which were not accepted as answers to **Question 7**; the rationale here was to avoid a double penalty, which is always part of the rationale in this Paper.

Paragraph nine contained a further three content points. The girls had to run down the platform, or they had only two minutes to spare; the access to the train was on the other side of the platform, or the doors on that side of the train were locked; and they had to run down the correct side of the platform. There was much confusion here and all three points were scored only by those candidates who could grasp the visual effect of what was being described in this final and fairly difficult section of the text.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to break away from the words of the original text varied from candidate to candidate and even from Centre to Centre, but that in general candidates are skilful at recasting the original text in their own words; the majority of candidates made an attempt to avoid wholesale lifting, and the best demonstrated considerable fluency in using their own words. There was a low incidence of random, mindless copying. Some weaker candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points. It seemed that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, indeed, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentence, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style. As is normal, Examiners reported candidates who scored only a few marks for content points, despite being clearly proficient in English, because their summaries were far too generalised and lacking in the precision required to make content points; such candidates made oblique references rather than specific points.

Common errors reported were the usual failures of agreement in singular and plural, and misplaced or omitted prepositions, for example 'travel through train' instead of 'travel by train', and 'buses left after thirty minutes' instead of 'buses left every thirty minutes'. Weaker candidates often slipped into the present tense, after beginning in the past tense. There was a high incidence in some time zones of the omission of definite and indefinite articles, and the spelling of 'they' as 'the'. 'Luggage' was sometimes written as 'luggages', and 'crowdy' instead of 'crowded' was surprisingly ubiquitous. 'Fastly' for 'fast' was often seen, as well as Americanisms such as 'gotten', 'gonna' and 'wanna'. There were some problems with irregular verbs, producing, for example, 'goed' and 'wented'. Inconsistent and illogical verb tenses were reported. As already indicated, spelling and punctuation were generally very good, and handwriting clear.

