

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/11
Passages for Comment

Key messages

In preparing for this paper, candidates need to ensure that they read a wide range of material from a range of diverse sources, such as travel writing, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, newspaper articles, magazine features, blogs, advertisements and advertorials, as well as online sources. This will better prepare candidates to assess the conventions and language associated with different formats and genres and also to comment on the effects and qualities conveyed by specific words and phrases. They should be able to comment on how a particular extract is structured in the way that it unfolds and develops in terms of content, mood and tone. Candidates should also be able to explore the contrasts and differences between the sections of a given extract; they need to progress beyond identifying essential aspects of language and style such as personification, alliteration and punctuation so that the effects of such features are considered in relation to their context and the extract as a whole. Mere feature spotting alone will inhibit the marks which can be awarded.

In terms of writing, candidates need to be able to adapt their own writing styles to incorporate diverse directed writing tasks, for example, letters, articles, diaries, and demonstrate secure familiarity with their conventions and style. Borrowing of phrases from the original extract is not recommended. A secure degree of technical accuracy, especially in the use of spelling, punctuation and tenses, is required at this level.

General comments

The passages offered a solid range of differentiation and proved to be accessible to most candidates and all questions appeared to be broadly equal in popularity and outcomes.

There were some consistent and competent analyses of the language and style of the passages: effective responses concentrated on exploring the moods established by the material, whilst also being aware of structural developments. Such responses focused on offering specific comments on the effects conveyed by individual words and phrases. At the lower end of the range, a number of candidates still tended to focus on a strategy based on feature spotting or paraphrase – that is identifying devices such as alliteration and personification or presenting detailed summaries of the contents of each paragraph – so that more precise engagement with the material was avoided. It should be noted that, although candidates need to know appropriate technical language, it is important to emphasise that this knowledge is only important when used to explain the effects of the language. Perhaps an advisable response to individual quotations from practice texts might be: ‘the effect of... is...’ or ‘this... suggests/conveys...’ Such a technique may help learners to gain confidence in their insights.

Some other candidates had been encouraged to keep one central point in mind – such as the youth of the worker in the blueberry fields – and to relate every point back to this one idea. This process created a rather repetitive pattern which tended to constrict the candidates’ answers.

In the same way, quite a number of candidates spent too much of their time covering different literary and linguistic features isolated from the contexts and purposes of passages, and these were reproduced in isolation as if they had validity even when separated from meaning and effect. Valuable time could have been spent more effectively on selecting a few of these identified features, quoting them and, then, most importantly, commenting on the ideas and qualities they conveyed in terms of tone, purpose and inference.

Some candidates also spent an unnecessary amount of time identifying genre and audience, a process which should be employed only as a useful, concise introductory approach before moving on to a recognition and exploration of the distinctiveness of texts and language use. Candidates are not served well by spotting a type of text and assuming its features and effects are self-evident. The extracts are quite long but even so

a more productive approach might be to explore the process of meaning making as it develops rather than cutting straight to conclusions, or at any rate, making some time for close reading.

The directed writing responses provided some engaging and perceptive material. Effective answers showed sensitivity and awareness – such as in the task for the passage about Miss Anstruther – combined with a pleasing degree of accuracy and precision. Some candidates needed to ensure that they addressed the terms of the question: appropriate formats could have been developed with greater focus in some instances. Learners need to be aware that this process has an impact on how Examiners mark the directed writing question and that valuable marks can be lost through a rubric error that is simple to rectify. Some responses were limited by their technical accuracy: for example, the inconsistent use of tenses was evident in a number of cases. Candidates also need to be aware that they are only marked on the first 150 words so that extended writing often leads to more mistakes and unevenness of purpose than if they had stopped. The essential need here, as well as the need for being able to write in a variety of genres, is to understand the skills required for an economical beginning to a piece which can then move quickly into the required style and purpose. Good examples of this were seen in the Grand Canyon extract where the guide's warning was replicated into a different travel adventure as an effective introduction.

There were some examples of rubric infringement, varying from omitting a whole question to avoiding section (a) systematically in favour of section (b). Only a very few attempted three questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This was a popular choice in this paper and the passage was obviously accessible to learners. Most candidates seemed able to follow the text and responded to it with some sensitivity. Almost all candidates understood the extract and most were able to work through its narrative.

Effective answers saw that the first two paragraphs were a kind of flashback or introduction to the author's own experience and noted that the tense change was significant before moving confidently into sustained analysis of the central aspects of the extract. Such responses could see that the extract was about a kind of 'rite of passage' or growing up experience and were able to appreciate that the author's own attitudes towards the work and himself altered towards the end. These answers looked more closely at aspects of the whole extract, noting differences in pace, mood and tone and were thorough, noting the change in point of view and explaining the impact of this stylistic technique. They also explored the subtle changes in the narrator's feelings and style: for example the colloquial style and what some explained as stream-of-consciousness. Less effective responses focused much more on the bus driver and the author's relationship to him and omitted to make much comment on the purpose of the passage, such as notions of discomfort and loneliness. In such answers the sense of the writer's naivety and his need for people and objects with familiar associations needed to be explored in greater detail and depth.

- (b) Overall, this extract seemed to provide candidates with a very useful model for writing. Most learners were able to pick up on aspects of the style and language of the extract and go at least some part of the way to replicating or adopting an appropriate style. At the top of the range there were some excellent responses, perceptive and confident. The middle of the range produced a large crop of café, diner, service jobs and, generally, the less complex the job, the more focused the candidate was able to be on their thoughts. At the lower end of the range, some candidates moved into convoluted explanations of circumstances for getting the job which prevented them from achieving good marks for purpose. Others chose to emulate the approach of the original passage by including one or two paragraphs of preamble, but there was a risk here of becoming too involved in this so that the essence of the question, describing a different work experience, was only touched on briefly or, in some cases, virtually ignored. The work being undertaken was not always defined with sufficient clarity, and some relied too much on the passage for their content. Indeed, some of these answers contained words and phrases which were extremely close to the wording of the original – a process that will reduce the number of marks which can be awarded.

Question 2

- (a) All those who answered this question found points about it: for example, they saw clearly the hopelessness and desperation of the protagonist and most noted the length of sentence structure

which went towards portraying this. The setting was dealt with well, with most answers able to make some comment on aspects of language and style.

Effective responses tackled this with perception, really getting under the skin of Miss Anstruther and understanding that what she was searching for was not material but likely to be something relating to her past life. They commented on the use of the ellipsis at the end to show how what Miss Anstruther said was not entirely what she meant; they were able to look at the extract as a whole and comment on both circumstances and language in the story. The extensive imagery was often commented on quite perceptively and this part of the extract was well done. The most perceptive answers were able to compare the materialism of the basement tenant with Miss Anstruther's lack of interest. Even those who decided it was her manuscripts she was looking for commented on the fact that the author's hints about what Miss Anstruther was searching for added mystery to the extract. There was quite a lot of condemnation of the demolition men and some thought that it was they who had destroyed things "like a ravaging mouse". One or two thought it was her silver racing trophies she was searching for and a few candidates did not understand the phrase "basement tenant", thinking that this was a basement that had been made to talk.

- (b)** Many candidates were able to transform the original text into a poignant account of loss, especially those who picked up on Miss Anstruther's apparent lack of concern masking her devastation. Indeed, there were some fine atmospheric pieces, which clearly balanced the journalist's voice with that of Miss Anstruther. Such effective answers showed an awareness of the traumatic impact of losing her home, rather than a cheery do or die response which did not fit with the tone of the original. Responses like these were well structured, often introducing Miss Anstruther's human interest story with an opening which set the writing in an appropriate context.

Less secure answers merely resorted to describing her predicament without engaging directly with her as a character. Other less focused answers found it difficult to write up the interview into an article. Some learners put the actual interview into the form of a play script, while others just described what had happened to Miss Anstruther, sometimes adding a quote from her and at other times not, giving the impression that she had been interviewed. Learners need to practise writing in the style of newspaper articles which have a distinctive style. A number of responses handed over the entire account to Miss Anstruther.

Question 3

- (a)** This engaging passage, with its early excitement gradually giving way to a mood of tranquillity and relaxation, was generally well attempted, with effective responses giving a perceptive analysis of the trip, focusing on the exaggeration, the humour, Scotty and the beauty. These candidates did not just pick out the first description of the rapids but focused in detail on the change of tone with the different activities – such as the description of the scenery and the wildlife – and noted that those who went on the "large, motorised ten-metre monsters" were missing out on the true spirit of the Grand Canyon, before finally analysing the effect of the ending with the song and return to civilisation. They appreciated that the author's attitude towards the other Grand Canyon boats was more than just what the text told them, but were able to explore the difference between onlooking and partaking, and how this might affect one's enjoyment and experience.

Nearly all candidates appreciated the description of the beauty of the area as well as the description of Scotty the guide; they also saw it as a persuasive piece. There was plenty of linguistic material for candidates to focus on and, on the whole, it produced many informed comments. Almost all answers were able to note the dramatic impact of the opening warning. Less effective responses confined themselves to paraphrase and repeating that the effect of the writing was to show excitement in the narrator, with little attempt to note changes in tone.

- (b)** Climbing, caving, safaris, and horse riding in exotic locations were frequent topics undertaken by candidates. Other answers created dangerous episodes based on the approach of wild animals; bungee jumping was a popular sport to describe the rush of adrenaline. Most candidates were able to focus on some excitement and then follow with a description of the scenery. Several candidates were quite inventive and amusing, producing perceptive and discriminating writing. Almost all candidates included the format of an instruction at the start whereby the writer was advised not to do something but did, with dangerous consequences.

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Paper 8693/12
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In the same way, quite a number of candidates spent too much of their time covering different literary and linguistic features isolated from the contexts and purposes of passages, and these were reproduced in isolation as if they had validity even when separated from meaning and effect. Valuable time could have been spent more effectively on selecting a few of these identified features, quoting them and, then, most importantly, commenting on the ideas and qualities they conveyed in terms of tone, purpose and inference.

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a more productive approach might be to explore the process of meaning making as it develops rather than cutting straight to conclusions, or at any rate, making some time for close reading.

The directed writing responses provided some engaging and perceptive material. Effective answers showed sensitivity and awareness – such as in the task for the passage about Miss Anstruther – combined with a pleasing degree of accuracy and precision. Some candidates needed to ensure that they addressed the terms of the question: appropriate formats could have been developed with greater focus in some instances. Learners need to be aware that this process has an impact on how Examiners mark the directed writing question and that valuable marks can be lost through a rubric error that is simple to rectify. Some responses were limited by their technical accuracy: for example, the inconsistent use of tenses was evident in a number of cases. Candidates also need to be aware that they are only marked on the first 150 words so that extended writing often leads to more mistakes and unevenness of purpose than if they had stopped. The essential need here, as well as the need for being able to write in a variety of genres, is to understand the skills required for an economical beginning to a piece which can then move quickly into the required style and purpose.

There were some examples of rubric infringement, varying from omitting a whole question to avoiding section **(a)** systematically in favour of section **(b)**. Only a very few attempted three questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a)** This question was very popular and provided a good basis for analysis. Many candidates were able to access the material. They understood the passage and many also were able to analyse it in the main. In some cases the language proved to be challenging, but most got the sense behind it. Some candidates were able to see the piece as a ‘coming of age’ piece and explored the material with insight and a solid degree of precision. There was appreciation of the writer’s nervousness and apprehension, especially when he had to also deal with the strange appearance and behaviour of his employer initially. Effective answers commented on this relationship well. The sudden end of the narrator’s excitement as it came ‘screeching to a halt’ was explored to good effect, with some responses grasping how it seemed to herald a progression into adulthood on the writer’s part. On the whole, responses to this extract were fairly thorough and reasonable: they engaged with the content and style of the passage and dealt well with the contrasts between excitement and then the reality of the work. Most candidates could make something of the name “Edge” and the ambiguity at the end of the passage.
- (b)** Some responses were excellent, with imaginative detail and a clear picture of an authority figure and their attitude towards the job. Discriminating pieces of writing incorporated humour, which worked well. The relationship between employer and employee picked up the nuances of the original extract in such cases. Answers in the middle of the range presented competent and steady ideas, adopting the same structure as employed in the original piece to explain how they overcame their nervousness and started a job. Less secure answers struggled to come up with a different experience and lacked imagination in their approach to the task.

Question 2

- (a)** This was also an accessible extract. Many candidates did really well on this question: there was a lot of language to discuss in terms of its links with tone, purpose and character. Examiners noted that there were some superb answers which displayed perceptive and sensitive understanding of Miss Anstruther’s state of mind. A number of learners wrote quite convincingly about this text, picking up the feeling of chaos and writing about specific words or phrases such as ‘A wild blazing hell of a night.’ Others went beyond the content to explore the way language was being used to create effect, picking up on the “red garden of night” particularly. Less secure answers merely catalogued devices without exploring the imagery or the psychological and emotional aspects behind the mood of the extract.
- (b)** Some responses were excellent, dealing with the task confidently and with a sense of purpose and context. Most managed to write in character and the writing was often well done, even though analysis of the language and style had not been handled with great precision in **(a)**. The idea of a diary entry caused few problems, although less secure responses tended to copy phrases from the

extract. Some candidates did not base their answers closely on the passage and this point is one that needs to be reinforced.

Question 3

- (a) A number of answers had some solid engagement with the text and some appreciation of the ideas expressed. Some were able to demonstrate a perceptive understanding of the writer's purpose and the effects achieved. The most focused responses engaged with the beauty of the river Murray and the wildlife, offering some informed insights about the language used to convey its majesty and mood. Some candidates found the spoken section more difficult to appreciate and others avoided discussing the second half of the extract, focusing only on the dialogue and the idea of captain and crew.
- (b) This part of the question was often tackled using dialogue and often successfully. For most candidates it proved to be an interesting challenge because of the element of humour in the dialogue. Answers tended to be quite humorous and captured clearly the relationship and banter between child and adult, exploiting the style of the original but also developing it.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/13
Passages For Comment

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General comments

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Some other candidates had been encouraged to keep one central point in mind, and to relate every point back to this one idea. This process created a rather repetitive pattern which tended to constrict the candidates’ answers.

In the same way, quite a number of candidates spent too much of their time covering different literary and linguistic features isolated from the contexts and purposes of passages, and these were reproduced in isolation as if they had validity even when separated from meaning and effect. Valuable time could have been spent more effectively on selecting a few of these identified features, quoting them and, then, most importantly, commenting on the ideas and qualities they conveyed in terms of tone, purpose and inference.

Some candidates also spent an unnecessary amount of time identifying genre and audience, a process which should be employed only as a useful, concise introductory approach before moving on to a recognition and exploration of the distinctiveness of texts and language use. Candidates are not served well by spotting a type of text and assuming its features and effects are self-evident. The extracts are quite long but even so

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There were some examples of rubric infringement, varying from omitting a whole question to avoiding section **(a)** systematically in favour of section **(b)**. Only a very few attempted three questions.

Question 1

- (a)** This was quite a popular question and was tackled quite successfully: learners seemed to relate to this extract. It enabled candidates to focus on the relationship between mother and daughter and the character of Isabella Blow and her influence on the author. Such responses appreciated the change in tone from a mood of attrition to a much more optimistic one, and also appreciated the somewhat fairy-tale nature of the events. Some even made more precise and interesting parallels with Alice in Wonderland and the idea of the tea party.

Other candidates picked up on the differences between the figure of the author and that of most models, but several candidates misread the description of Isabella Blow and produced some strange comments on her wearing a ship on her head and why this might be, not having understood that this was not a literal statement. Less secure answers tended to miss the intended humour in the extract.

- (b)** There were some very perceptive pieces of writing, showing focused understanding and bringing out humour – one explaining how her previous modelling life had been disappointing and how, ironically, this had resulted in her taking a nine to five job instead. Indeed, in some cases the work was sensitive and showed some skill in the execution – showing an empathy with the original. Other answers varied in terms of outcome; some just related her thoughts about how modelling was not for her, some had her going back to secretarial college and some had her gaining her dream of living in Italy. Less successful writing explored how the narrator had finished her modelling career rather than engaging with the start of a new job.

Question 2

- (a)** This question was popular and generally candidates engaged with it. The passage was well understood and there was a considerable amount of material which could be used in the analysis. Learners showed empathy and understanding of the situation. The most effective answers looked at the language and were able to relate some of it to the situation and how it enhanced the feeling of loss and unhappiness. Most understood the tone of the piece and many appreciated the phrases that had been used in the letters, as well as realising that the letters were worth more than any material goods. The final simile, in particular, produced sensible comments. Answers in the middle of the range picked up on the desperation of Miss Anstruther in the first few paragraphs, yet they needed to follow through with the more detailed description of the surroundings and circumstances. At the lower end of the range, some missed the significance of the word 'Miss' and went into the happiness of the protagonist's life with her husband and how this was the reason why she was in so much distress over the loss of the letters. They became quite inventive as to why there would need to be letters even though they married, suggesting long periods of time apart. These candidates got quite carried away by their own imaginings rather than looking to the actual text for evidence.

- (b) There were many quite sensitive and well written answers. Many candidates picked up on the loss of the letters well and wrote with feeling about the strange choice of things to save and the desperation of trying to recall what had been written. The letter was a format that most learners seemed to be well prepared for. In most parts of the range, candidates were inventive and thought of names for both the friend and Miss Anstruther herself which made the response more realistic. However, lower down the range some did not take on board that this should be a letter or were very vague ('Dear Friend') or signed off as Miss Anstruther. These responses tended to just describe what had happened.

Question 3

- (a) Effective and informed responses picked up on the uncertainty and paranoia of the topic. The interesting thing about the passage was the number of candidates who recognised the situation. It is clear that the references in the passage were accessible and that learners understood the situation and the responses to it. The language was accessible and the nuances were often picked up. For example, some analyses noticed how the use of clipped sentences in the initial paragraphs conveyed the sense of the prevailing dismissive atmosphere the journalists inhabited and the negativity that it evoked: they also appreciated the frustration, the anger and, at the same time, the camaraderie between the journalists. A few candidates did not seem to get to the end of the passage, and time management may have been an issue here. Less effective responses focused on one or two details only (the cost or the midnight summons, for instance) and were more vague about the passage as a whole.
- (b) Those who chose this question answered reasonably well, basing their responses on the original and simply choosing a different country and using many of the circumstances of the passage to elaborate on. Some brought out the sense of unreality and uncertainty of the original material with some finesse and some skill. Less successful efforts struggled with the setting and did not identify a different location. One or two candidates went astray and wrote their own stories with absolutely no relation to the original.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/21
Composition

Key messages

Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to:

- engaging with all key words in a question;
- planning the development of their writing;
- avoiding predictable or derivative plots and ideas;
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question;
- checking that tenses used are correct and consistent.

General comments

A clear, differentiated range of achievement was seen across this component. At the top of the range, candidates produced some highly imaginative and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section, and very tightly controlled answers – supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification – in the discursive and argumentative writing section. Answers in the middle of the range tended to offer some focused and directed creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles. Lower down the range, imaginative responses needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative or descriptive control; argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses and paragraphing: issues which seemed to be more prevalent this session. Some of the responses to **Section B** were alarmingly short; these were self-penalising: short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Many candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. Candidates who wrote a brief plan often wrote more structured responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This title was very popular and, when addressing the specific terms of the title (i.e. descriptive), candidates produced some highly evocative and detailed material, conveying both setting and atmosphere with specific use of colour, sound and sensory description. Several included contrasts within their work, by describing, for example, the location either before or after the wedding, highlighting the differences with the actual event. There was also a refreshingly wide range of cultural examples. However, a number of answers merged descriptive elements with narrative ones, with candidates spending a long time describing the preparations in the previous months or about the bride/groom getting dressed on the day. These created an uneven, pedestrian feel to the writing. Language devices attempted were sometimes unimaginative e.g. 'the dress was amazing/incredible'; and ideas were sometimes clichéd, e.g. the bride looking like a princess, the groom always wonderfully handsome, the father weeping about giving away his baby girl, etc. Further, while lateral thinking is to be encouraged, the terms of the question have to be adhered to: a cruise liner or a hotel called 'The Wedding' is stretching the interpretation of the question too far.

Question 2

This question was also a popular choice. Many answers evoked the sense of the genre and the references to mystery and suspense very well. Effective responses combined characterisation with an alien environment, and a suspicious and often threatening opponent was created with some aplomb. However, quite a few candidates were influenced by action films and possibly included too much action at the expense

of mystery and suspense. Many candidates spent too much time getting their character to the location and should be encouraged to start writing the narrative immediately. Many stories began with irrelevant detail – often dialogue – before developing the narrative. The best answers provided a quick introduction to important characters and setting before leading to an appropriate cliff-hanger.

Question 3

This was an equally popular choice and elicited some engaging answers, especially where the sense of a futuristic world was established through the use of technological language and the evocation of setting. Some focused on the idea of a planet, a nearby star or even a spaceship itself. The better answers used a very simple storyline as a basis for effective imaginative writing. The more able writers explored alternative systems / philosophies quite effectively. Unfortunately, there were some generic space stories which relied on popular television examples rather than trying to create something more personal and imaginative. The demands of creating a futuristic world, along with a sinister or unusual aspect, proved rather challenging for some candidates.

Question 4

There were solid and consistent responses to this in the main, with perhaps a drift towards a degree of predictability in terms of focus on violence of some kind (though handled with effective care and concern). Some candidates could have been a little more experimental here – perhaps the ‘truth’ could have been a little more unusual or the narrator not necessarily adopting the voice of a teenager? Sometimes, the purpose was not always made clear, but most candidates were able to narrate appropriate events with descriptions of feelings and implications. A number of narratives displayed problems with inappropriately shifting tenses. The better candidates structured their answers to give an element of surprise or satisfaction.

Question 5

This produced some excellent answers which explored complex ideas underpinned by informed exemplification. Such material was grounded in a thorough knowledge of, and familiarity with, historical precedents and developments. A number of candidates opted for dictatorship as a better means of driving society than the democracies they are used to. It was fascinating to read across so many countries so many different takes on democracy and how religious leanings influence the nature of politics. With some candidates, though, the range of reference to support an argument was limited and predictable. Less secure answers tended to drift away from the central topic into critiques of other issues such as capitalism. Less successful answers focused exclusively on personal or local groups, detailing, for example, the decision-making processes of their family or local sports clubs. These were often heartfelt answers but read as rather restrictive arguments and some reflection on wider issues would have added depth and validity to their opinions.

Question 6

This was not a popular option, but in most instances where it was approached it was done so using an appropriate voice and lexis for a teen magazine. Some candidates produced clever and focused responses which clearly drew on the style of such magazines and incorporated a suitable register in order to replicate the features of their house styles. These also tended to establish clear differentiation between the members of the band. Less effective material seemed to play safe and focus on the narratives and biographies of each star alone. Many of these had stories which were quite generic with a large number of the musicians coming from broken homes and having dreamy blue eyes and curly blond hair.

Question 7

This was a popular choice and responses ranged in success. Most candidates who attempted to answer this question found a range of points to make on the subject, sometimes with great eloquence and use of appropriate exemplification. Less secure answers tended to be rather unvaried, repeating the phrase ‘Being the best’, so that expression became rather laboured; others tended to drift towards relaying information about their favourite sports team – either one they watched or participated in. Weaker responses tended to move from one point to the next with little variation in tone or theme. More engaging responses drew on a range of examples – from sport to politics to business – to deliver their verdicts. At best, candidates developed a line of argument and explored both sides to arrive at an effective conclusion.

Question 8

Again, this was also a very popular choice: responses were, on the whole, well focused and showed a good sense of voice, with evidence of clear structure and planning. Advice was sensible and practical, centring on dress, mode of address, the résumé, confidence and enthusiasm. Effective answers clearly enumerated different stages of the process and adopted a clear sense of register targeted at the audience. Some candidates, however, tended to dwell on processes leading up to the interview itself, which were not directly relevant to the question.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/22
Composition

Key messages

Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to:

- engaging with all key words in a question;
- planning the development of their writing;
- avoiding predictable or derivative plots and ideas;
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question;
- checking that tenses used are correct and consistent.

General comments

A clear, differentiated range of achievement was seen across this component. At the top of the range, candidates produced some highly imaginative and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section, and very tightly controlled answers – supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification – in the discursive and argumentative writing section. Answers in the middle of the range tended to offer some focused and directed creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles. Lower down the range, imaginative responses needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative or descriptive control; argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses and paragraphing: issues which seemed to be more prevalent this session. Some of the responses to **Section B** were alarmingly short; these were self-penalising: short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Many candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. Candidates who wrote a brief plan often wrote more structured responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a very popular question and it generated a wide range of responses. There were some efficient and focused answers among the ones seen. There were opportunities for candidates to focus on the descriptive rather than narrative aspects. Few chose the western standard pop-festival as a model, many going instead for local music festivals, competitions and school music festivals. Many were obviously writing from their own experience and wrote very well when they reflected their own enthusiasm. A few became over ambitious, writing about things they had only read about and not experienced, and their writing suffered accordingly. A few misunderstood the brief and produced information about bands they liked and experienced at the festival, instead of creating a sense of setting and atmosphere.

Question 2

This was a popular choice and frequently well answered, with some effective and controlled material creating a keen sense of danger and tension, especially when aspects of tension were thought through in advance. Better answers combined character and setting with a degree of imagination. There were some obvious reflections of James Bond-type movies but none the worse for that. Many chose to take a psychological approach with multiple personality narratives, giving graphic details of mental illness or depression, mental breakdowns, schizophrenia – often with very good results. Also interesting were the military or political

narratives of betrayal, ambushes and moles. In the main, the narrative form was used quite well, often in the first person.

Question 3

This title was not as popular but where attempted it was addressed with some sustained and engaging imagination, especially where the sense of a futuristic world was established through the use of technological language and the evocation of setting. Some candidates seemingly did not appreciate that a science fiction narrative is primarily suggested by the title. Weaker answers trotted out highly-derivative storylines. Understanding of *unusual and sinister* varied greatly and few were able to create both. Many seemed to think that simply placing events in the future automatically made it unusual, and there was little real sense of the sinister.

Question 4

This was a very popular choice with a wide range of responses. Candidates produced some sensitive and thoughtful material in response to the title: many were able to create tightly-argued narratives which gradually unfolded, exploring an issue from which the “Lie” originated, with developed accounts of outcomes and perhaps even lessons learnt. The best responses started with a situation which the reader was encouraged to misread, only for the truth to be revealed as the story unfolded. Weaker answers either revealed the lie at the start or suddenly in the last few lines. Here, too, a little more risk could have been taken in terms of the kind of ‘lie’ explored – it often seemed to rely on romantic relationships.

Question 5

Effective answers to this question weighed the inference of the title against other methods of government in a balanced and measured fashion. Candidates produced some very powerful responses clearly influenced by a keen interest in nationhood, current events and historical and economic studies. Good answers tended to contextualise “rule by the people” by examining the pros and cons of different systems of government, most siding with some form of representational democracy. There was a high standard in the use of technical jargon as a result; the candidate’s ability to control the argument was the key discriminating factor in most responses. These responses tackled the issue directly and with a focused sense of purpose and voice. Some centres showed a deal of understanding regarding historical and social forces, with candidates mentioning the days of empire and colonial rule in their answers. Weaker answers approached the question too literally: candidates often did not consider the implication of the question that the people should elect representatives, but considered a situation where nobody at all was ‘in charge’ and the chaos that would result. The essays therefore tended to dwell on the absurdity of such a state, in terms of social organisation and international affairs.

Question 6

There were some humorous and thoughtful answers in response to this title, with the best ones writing with a sense of audience. Better candidates saw the potential of the question and provided some fascinating profiles of elderly or retired people who still had a lot to offer to the world. There did not seem to be any difficulty creating three very different profiles. Compositions explored possible talent shows for this age group or even reality Big Brother formats. One or two responses tried too hard to be clever so that the featured participants drifted into caricature or excessive stereotypes. Weaker answers missed out the reasons for entering the contest and ignored the cue, ‘elderly’ audience. Little attempt was sometimes made to differentiate the profiles sufficiently.

Question 7

This was a popular choice and elicited an equally divided sense of opinion. Effective answers took one line of argument whilst addressing clear counter-arguments with informed awareness; some candidates argued for one side of the case and then switched to arguing the other side of the case half way through without clearly acknowledging where their ultimate sympathy lay. Some responded that qualifications were of little importance as they could be faked or bought, and only the caring teacher really mattered even if they had no qualifications at all. Much reference was made to older siblings teaching younger ones, and parents helping with homework even when they do not know the subject. There was almost universal condemnation of PhD holders who might know a lot but cannot get candidates through exams. While there were many strongly-argued responses, weaker answers fell back on anecdote or personal experience rather than answering with supported argument.

Question 8

This was the least popular question in **Section B**. Those seen offered practical and sensible advice, encouraging a need for empathetic understanding and tolerance. There was a clear sense of sympathy for other family relatives on display. Candidates could draw on personal experience very capably and usually went for an approach of suggestions on how to engage more with each family group. Rhetorical questions were often used. There were some very mature and fluent responses, as candidates were instructed to write for what would often be a peer audience.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/23
Composition

Key messages

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General comments

A clear, differentiated range of achievement was seen across this component. At the top of the range, candidates produced some highly imaginative and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section, and very tightly controlled answers – supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification – in the discursive and argumentative writing section. Answers in the middle of the range tended to offer some focused and directed creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles. Lower down the range, imaginative responses needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative or descriptive control; argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses and paragraphing: issues which seemed to be more prevalent this session. Some of the responses to **Section B** were alarmingly short; these were self-penalising: short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Many candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. Candidates who wrote a brief plan often wrote more structured responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was quite a popular choice and effective answers established a clear sense of setting and atmosphere, often drawing on contrasts from before and after the occasion. Some tended to drift into narrative forays at the expense of descriptive elements. The best answers showed a tight control of structural devices, using precise descriptive details. Many of the best answers successfully combined a delicate nostalgia for the past and a vigorous hope for the future.

Question 2

This was a popular choice. There were some steady and focused answers, though candidates could have afforded to be a little more experimental and imaginative at times so that the contrasting elements implied by the title were brought out in greater depth. On the whole its purpose was understood. Some weaker responses drifted on with no real sense of either 'fear' or 'uncertainty'.

Question 3

This was quite a popular choice; less secure answers tended to offer narrative responses while more engaging and proficient ones drew on a range of descriptive ideas and moods to convey the sense of mystery and magic required by the title. Those which explored the idea of a subterranean world managed to create some engaging images. Some candidates were unable to create a short story with a specific ending and the writing was more appropriate as an opening chapter. Other responses were imaginative and engaging. In general, “mysterious” was more successfully addressed than “magical”.

Question 4

As in similar titles, candidates could have afforded to be a little more adventurous and experimental in terms of their choice of the central piece of evidence. Answers seemed to play it safe and avoid taking unnecessary risks: the result was that compositions were efficient if rather uninspired at times. Many candidates ignored the words “a past event” and just wrote about a character’s past in general terms.

Question 5

Few responses to this question were seen. Those who did choose to write about patriotism had a clear idea of what the term means and were able to develop their arguments as a result. Some very thoughtful responses questioned the premises of patriotism and argued about the evils it could engender.

Question 6

This produced some reasonable and competent answers: approaches varied, with some offering outlines of the three actors while others centred on an interview style format. Effective compositions succeeded in creating clearly demarcated differences between the ensemble: others tended to rely on narrative and condensed biographies in a less detailed and developed manner. Often, expression lacked variety and there was only a limited sense of voice. When it was well-written, there was a clear journalistic style with some convincing and effective use of language.

Question 7

This was a popular choice and answers offered thoughtful and informed choices of ideas at best. There were some effective explorations of how mixed schools offer benefits of social integration in preparation for the real world; others examined how academic research proves that single sex schools provide better opportunities for academic achievement. Less secure answers tended to be rather unvaried and one-dimensional in their approach to the topic. These failed to develop their arguments and repeated the same point in numerous ways.

Question 8

This was also a popular choice. Candidates offered very practical and relevant advice, focusing on the need for detailed preparation and practice, in particular. There was evidence that the matter was of strong personal concern to a number of the writers. Quite a few candidates wrote advice about communication in general, rather than focusing on improving “public speaking and presentation skills”. A closer reading of the question would have helped.