

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

<p>Paper 8693/01 Passages for Comment</p>

GENERAL COMMENTS

There were some informed and perceptive scripts at the top of the range. Such scripts were marked by their capacity to combine detailed analyses with skilful and mature directed writing. The best answers usually took a strategic view, though there were some that focused on one point – language, for example – to the exclusion of other possibilities. The best responses in the directed writing were produced by enthusiastic readers who were able to write consciously crafted pieces for a given audience. Scripts in the middle of the range offered competent understanding of the set extracts supported by efficient and focused re-creative writing. Responses at the lower end of the range tended to rely on a checklist of learned techniques and attempted to look for such techniques in the passages whether they were present or not. This led to a process of feature-spotting at the expense of close, engaged analysis.

In the directed writing tasks, some candidates wrote well over the 150-word guideline to the extent that the work took on a life of its own and became diffuse and meandering. Material needs to remain focused so that unnecessary time is not expended on the task at the expense of addressing other matters.

Some candidates had an over-mechanistic formula for appraising a text, usually expressed as if authors have a narrow target audience in mind. (So, Orwell was writing for conservationists; the Venice extract was for people who understood Shakespeare; the passage on the vintage clothes was addressed solely to parents of annoying teenagers.)

Some candidates infringed rubric requirements but, in most cases, time management was efficient and focused.

COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Question 1

- (a) Answers usually demonstrated sound understanding of the content of the passage, and were able to provide at least basic comments on purpose, theme, structure and style. Audience and genre proved to be a little more difficult to pin down. Candidates showed reasonable proficiency in identifying language features, but analysis and explanation were not always forthcoming. Less secure responses tended to pay less attention to the final two paragraphs; candidates need to recognize the development of the whole of the material presented. Some candidates seemed to be preoccupied with commenting on the presence of punctuation. When taken in isolation, the ability to spot commas, hyphens and semi-colons does not always add a great deal to an analysis of style.
- (b) Candidates were usually able to employ an appropriate style and register, but some responses were highly derivative (for example, transcribing complete sentences from the original). The requirement to record 'thoughts and feelings' was not always adhered to.

Question 2

- (a) Proficient answers succeeded in recognizing the variety of moods in the passage, its sense of mystery, romance, awe and modernity. However, less secure responses did not always appreciate the subtlety of the extract and saw the writer's references to darkness and fog as indicative of anger or misery. There were some attempts at the lower end of the range to comment on rather obvious features at the expense of closer engagement with the style and language of the extract.

- (b) There were some strong, often imaginative, responses to the directed writing task – although the requirement to base answers closely ‘on the style and language of the original’ proved difficult for those candidates who had not managed to form a very clear impression of what these were. For example, there were a number of exuberant, frothy pieces on Paris – city of love and fine food – that, whilst being technically competent, were very different in tone from the original.

The stipulation that the article should be based on another tourist location was sometimes ignored, although – on the other hand – some candidates leapt at the opportunity to write very enthusiastically and sensitively about places within their cultural orbit such as Bali, Hong Kong and Mumbai.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates were able to respond on some level to the writer’s excitement about vintage clothing. Effective responses managed to grasp the fantasy element and the ways in which different items of clothing inspired and enthused the narrator’s imagination and seemed to drive her into a world populated by figures from different times and places. Less effective answers tended to become embroiled in narrative aspects of the material. In such answers there was a frequent lack of precision when discussing purpose, genre and audience; some candidates chose simply to ignore these aspects. The point made earlier about ‘feature spotting’ was particularly apparent in a number of the responses here.
- (b) This directed writing task was usually tackled proficiently, and sometimes excellently. The task provoked some very entertaining and sparky responses. On the whole, there were many engaging and focused pieces of writing. Many candidates successfully engaged with the ‘role play’, writing with a clear sense of purpose, context and audience, and adopting a convincing style and register. Almost every candidate choosing this question wrote with some measure of success. Sometimes these achievements were compromised by significantly flawed expression, though. A number of candidates misunderstood the rubric and either fell into the role of the daughter or wrote an approving letter on the mother’s behalf.

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<p>Paper 8693/02</p>

<p>Composition</p>

There was a wide range in the standard of the work presented. At the higher end of the range, while truly inspired work was rare there were some highly proficient scripts containing imaginative, fluent and focused compositions underpinned by an awareness of strategy and audience, making them a genuine pleasure to read. At the lower end of the range, a number of responses were marked by a level of accuracy not commensurate with AS level standard. Lapses in tenses, expression and syntax were very much in evidence in those scripts. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates' responses were inappropriate to task due to insecurity of form/genre.

There was little rubric infringement or misuse of time allocation.

A number of candidates ran out of time resulting in a brief response to **Section B**. However, most candidates used their time allocation effectively

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a popular choice and produced some imaginative and sustained responses supported by effective use of language. Occasionally there were some digressions into narrative. Less discriminating candidates failed to bring out contrasts in 'setting' and 'atmosphere'.

The main points and qualities that characterised good answers to the question were a wide range of descriptive devices within a tightly constructed response; a variety of sentence structures used effectively to assist in the creation of atmosphere; and original figurative language. (This is applicable to other questions on the paper too.) The main weaknesses seen were use of clichéd similes and metaphors resulting in a lack of originality; unvaried expression; using too many simple sentences resulting in a disjointed style; describing the buildings in a very literal manner without attempting to create atmosphere; and failing to create descriptive *contrasts*.

Some candidates simply narrated the process of renovating a building rather than creating a sense of restoration and newness.

Question 2

This, too, was a popular choice and elicited some inventive and persuasive ideas. There were some original plotlines interpreting the idea of invasion in interesting ways, from war invasion to body invasion and even to invasion of the mind by the media. Less successful examples tended to rely on plot at the expense of effects. Many made use of rather derivative or unconvincing alien invasion plotlines.

In better answers Examiners noted strong opening paragraphs in which narrative devices were used to create a sense of fear and suspense from the very beginning. Some candidates were able to create a convincing sense of character through direct speech, using tightly constructed responses that engaged the reader throughout with varied language and narrative effects.

In lower scoring answers the main problems were unclear expression, and a failure to use a range of descriptive/narrative devices resulting in an opening chapter that did not engage the interest of the reader.

A few candidates constructed their response as a short story rather than an opening chapter.

Question 3

Effective responses clearly brought out contrasts between the generations, each part possessing a clear and valid sense of voice and appropriate register. Key qualities that characterised high scoring answers were frequent connections in subject matter between the two monologues and original ideas about the basis of parent/child conflict rather than the obvious ones. In such scripts a variety of narrative and language effects was used to good effect.

In the weaker scripts monologues tended to become rants rather than thoughtful considerations. There was also a lack of connection in subject matter between the two monologues.

A number of candidates simply gave a third person generic explanation of the differences between parents' and children's attitudes and behaviour rather than providing two separate monologues.

Question 4

In the main, this was tackled disappointingly. While some good answers utilised a range of narrative and descriptive features and had some imaginative and original ideas for storylines, it was more frequent to read answers with a paucity of descriptive/narrative devices. Many had clichéd conclusions, and there were a surprising number of "it was all a dream"-type endings. Many candidates relied far too heavily on appropriating elements of popular children's stories (e.g. the *Harry Potter* books) for this task. Others failed to give their story a sense of an unusual or unexpected ending which the question required.

Some scripts entirely ignored the fact that this was a Section A (Narrative/ Descriptive/ Imaginative) task and provided an explanation of magic rather than a short story as instructed.

Question 5

This was the least popular question on the paper. While there were some strong responses which were convincing and engaging, it proved rather difficult for other candidates who attempted it. Weaker candidates merely described some conspiracy theories rather than attempting to write the discursive essay as required. Sometimes there was no response to the quotation given, and sometimes a confusion over what the phrase 'conspiracy theory' means.

Some of the more commonly occurring areas explored in answers were the assassinations of Martin Luther King and President Kennedy, '9/11' and the Roswell UFO incident.

Question 6

This was a popular choice and was generally well answered. It drew out some competent and proficient material where contrasting voices and perspectives were aligned in sharp opposition. The best answers showed clear understanding of the possible benefits and disadvantages of industrial and residential developments, referring to specific places known to candidates. This helped add a sense of realism and atmosphere. These answers made good use of contrast in perspective when switching to the other side of the argument.

Weaker answers had difficulty with appropriate tone and made limited use of persuasive techniques. Use of imaginary locales was often unconvincing. A number ignored the question's focus on 'residential' and 'industrial' and wrote about new shopping malls or retail parks.

Question 7

This was by far the most popular Section B question. Many responses explored the issues involved with relish and keen interest. There were some very strong opinions voiced, but candidates were usually able to offer measured and highly focused ideas and attitudes without resorting to diatribe or rant, giving a variety of valid reasons to support their arguments.

In weaker scripts the main weakness was an over-reliance on personal anecdote, and lack of counter-argument and discursive techniques. Some answers were far too rambling and digressive.

Question 8

There were some solid and focused ideas in response to this task, but sometimes the choice of location was rather surreal or unimaginative. Most candidates wrote about well known holiday destinations and disappointments. This task enabled them to cover a good range of complementary detail in their two pieces of writing. Letter writing was popular here. As with Question 7, weaker answers used very few persuasive techniques in their writing, and tended to be rambling and digressive, with little solid support.