

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, blogs, advertisements and advertorials. 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 subject, mood and tone. Candidates should also be able to explore the contrasts and differences between the sections of a given extract; they need to move 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.

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. A secure degree of technical accuracy, especially in the use of spellings, punctuation and tenses, is required at this level.

General comments

The passages proved to be accessible and engaging and afforded a good choice for candidates. There appeared to be no difficulties with any of the passages in interpretation of the events and customs. All the passages were of equal difficulty and candidates were fairly equally divided over all three passages.

At the higher end of the range, there were some mature and engaged answers which explored the effects and qualities conveyed by individual words and phrases with aplomb and insight, exploring their significance in context and in relation to the extract as a whole. Such responses were able to consider the development of the mood and subject matter of the given passage as well. For example, in question 2, candidates were able to detect the increasing sense of exclusion on the part of the writer and her note of frustrated irony developing as the material unfolded. The majority of responses contained some linguistic content. However, a number of candidates need only a small element of further analysis or commentary so that their answers become more fully engaged: developing sensed ideas into some interpretative point about the impact of a particular word, phrase or technique would help to convey an understanding of an extract's stylistic framework.

At the lower end of the range, there was extensive evidence of knowledge of specialist terms relating to expression and effect but little evidence of candidates' ability to select the most appropriate to the passage and apply it productively. Some candidates used a standard approach/checklist which was then not followed by a more specific analysis. Yet where such candidates relied on just "technique spotting", it was always individual candidates and not whole Centres: it was clear that candidates are being taught to analyse. There are still some candidates who write too briefly; they should know that the appropriate standards require significant detail and exemplification. There are also some candidates who name or discuss features but give no examples.

The directed writing sections on all papers gave candidates the opportunity to write for a range of purposes and audiences. However, some candidates resort to "borrowing" words and whole phrases from the original extract: this is a tendency that candidates need to avoid because it limits the number of marks that can be awarded for original and individual responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) On the whole, this question was answered well. It was a popular choice among candidates, with responses showing clear understanding of the purpose, structure and progression in the passage. Many also picked up on the humour underscoring the passage, with some recognising this as often inherent in customs that are foreign to others.

Most candidates identified and explored the strong theme of tradition running through the passage, highlighting the difference in cultural attitudes to the occasion. At the higher end of the range, candidates enjoyed the humour and irony of the passage along with the imagery of combat. These candidates thoroughly engaged with the material with obvious appreciation of the writer's sense of confusion and wonder. Although many answers identified the ominous mood sensed at the outset, foreshadowing the rest of the passage, less secure responses showed more misunderstanding, thinking that the writer was not welcome at the wedding. Indeed, in this part of the range, candidates did not really understand the sardonic quality of the writing, and some saw no humour in it at all, thus missing key features. While such responses recognised language features, particularly the simile of the Rolls-Royce and Russian truck and the wedding spread, these were often listed, with a failure to develop and comment further on effects. In fact, the point of differentiation was whether candidates could show ability beyond the general content commentary, to concise engagement with the text. Nonetheless, nearly all responses were able to make some comments on the differences between the bride and groom and on the descriptions of the wedding breakfast.

- (b) This section usually produced appropriate material, the best able to capture tone and a sense of being an outsider. The task produced lots of lively, detailed and very engaged writing, often versions of the candidates' own local customs. The range of topics was very wide, yet many candidates made good use of their own experiences. Such responses were often confident in tone with many sympathetically presented from the outsider's viewpoint. The inclusion of associated foreign vocabulary used in particular customs added to this confident response.

Less secure answers needed to place their answers in a setting that could be clearly identified: others put themselves in a foreign country but needed to describe a national custom.

Question 2

- (a) On the whole, this question was answered well. This was a passage which seemed to be enjoyed by many. Most candidates grasped the structure of the passage, from the writer's apparent bewilderment of the male attraction to sheds, to the eventual understanding of its true meaning.

There were a number of lively and often engaging responses to this question. Most candidates showed understanding of the nature of the passage and particularly the significance of the shed. Many effectively examined differing attitudes towards the shed, with stronger responses reflecting the wider dichotomy between male and female perspectives. At the higher end of the range, candidates were able to enjoy the spying idea and how the mother felt over the shed issue. There were many who thoroughly engaged with the passage and appreciated the humour, especially when the focus was on the husband's shed, its description and the "lame excuses" that he made. Astute responses explored how the writer seemed very resigned in concluding that she could do little or nothing about the situation. In the middle of the range, candidates who did focus reasonably well on content tended to apply a line-by-line approach which led to concentration on earlier rather than more interesting sections. Less secure answers did not always focus on the humour and some tried to develop a discussion on how the marriage had broken down. Even so, nearly all candidates were able to make some comment on the comparison of the sheds and the exaggeration when the writer described her husband's comment coming from a distance of "130 miles". However, such answers tended towards an overview or narrative on the importance of sheds, showing understanding of the writer's frustration but failing to directly engage with the language and imagery in the passage.

- (b) Generally, this was addressed successfully by many candidates who took the opportunity for some heartfelt assertions of the rights of privacy. Most candidates recognised the need to assume the role of Louis' father with the correct purpose. Many candidates captured the humour of the passage, writing in a lively and amusing tone. Strong responses showed empathy with their narrator's role, portraying a balanced and confident argument of the need for their own space. Indeed, there were some excellent responses, which offered a very perceptive recognition of context and clear insight into the character and feelings of the husband.

Less effective responses showed little concision, becoming rather unclear at times. Others became side-tracked by focusing almost entirely on the father's challenging relationship with his wife, with less attention on his need for space. Furthermore, a significant number of responses relied too heavily on language from the original passage.

Question 3

- (a) The question was a popular choice for many candidates and one which a number of candidates found poignant, analysing the passage in considerable depth and with feeling for the topic. Most recognised the personification of the bear in the passage, with many highlighting the feelings of bitterness and resignation. The strongest responses sensitively grasped and distinguished the dichotomy between the natural and civilised world, referring or extending this point, at times, to the rawness of nature versus cultural intervention. Others were able to view the polar bear as a symbol of the natural world and its destruction. There were many thoroughly engaged responses. The extract generated quite a lot of productive comments on ideas, language use and style. In the middle to lower part of the range, candidates needed to look at the multi-layered images in greater depth and comment in more detail on the perspective of the passage rather than concentrating on the ethics behind the text. The least secure responses tended towards an overview of the passage, some making a subjective reaction to the subject matter. These responses needed to offer greater engagement with the content and style, referring to examples in the text. Some candidates found the passage a little confusing, with a minority expressing their confusion in the commentary. This reflected a fragmentary response with little understanding. Such responses often solely picked out language features without explaining their effects.
- (b) The majority of candidates were able to assume the role of an endangered animal of their choice. Some of the best responses from the paper came in this question because the directed task presented the opportunity for candidates to express persuasive and convincing messages using relatively simple language. Many candidates wrote with great conviction, a real sense of purpose. The task elicited some very moving responses: there was a great deal of heartfelt but well developed pleading for the eagle, tiger, whale and ant, in particular, and the most unusual plea was for a sea anemone. Effective responses were often sensitively and poignantly written, capturing the pathos of the passage. The less secure responses did not always capture the tone or follow the style of the passage, at times simply presenting a violent and threatening, rather than threatened, animal.

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Paper 8693/12

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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. A secure degree of technical accuracy, especially in the use of spellings, punctuation and tenses, is required at this level.

General comments

The passages proved to be accessible and engaging and afforded a good choice for candidates. There appeared to be no difficulties with any of the passages in interpretation of the events and customs. All the passages were of equal difficulty and candidates were fairly equally divided over all three passages.

At the higher end of the range, there were some mature and engaged answers which explored the effects and qualities conveyed by individual words and phrases with aplomb and insight, exploring their significance in context and in relation to the extract as a whole. Such responses were able to consider the development of the mood and subject matter of the given passage as well. For example, in question 1, candidates sensed the development of the narrator's increasing excitement and passion after her initial feelings of frustration and anxiety. The majority of responses contained some linguistic content. However, a number of candidates need only a small element of further analysis or commentary so that their answers become more fully engaged: developing sensed ideas into some interpretative point about the impact of a particular word, phrase or technique would help to convey an understanding of an extract's stylistic framework.

At the lower end of the range, there was extensive evidence of knowledge of specialist terms relating to expression and effect but little evidence of candidates' ability to select the most appropriate to the passage and apply it productively. Some candidates used a standard approach/checklist which was then not followed by a more specific analysis. Yet where such candidates relied on just "technique spotting", it was always individual candidates and not whole Centres: it was clear that candidates are being taught to analyse. There are still some candidates who write too briefly; they should know that the appropriate standards require significant detail and exemplification. There are also some candidates who name or discuss features but give no examples.

The directed writing sections on all papers gave candidates the opportunity to write for a range of purposes and audiences. However, some candidates resort to "borrowing" words and whole phrases from the original extract: this is a tendency that candidates need to avoid because it limits the number of marks that can be awarded for original and individual responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Many candidates found this to be an enjoyable passage and engaged with its content, language and style effectively. There were some excellent comments which showed thorough appreciation of the writer's feelings about the dance. The text drew out some detailed and perceptive answers which worked their way through the passage with considerable insight. Candidates at the higher end of the range were able to carefully contrast the journey to the dance room with the actual dancing inside very well and discuss tone and effects. Such responses also showed awareness of how mood, pace and structure changed in the passage, as well as how language expressed this. A number of candidates commented on the strong romantic atmosphere and explored this well. They considered effectively how the sensual nature of the tango was conveyed by language throughout the passage, how individual words and phrases captured the mood of anticipation and how short sentences created the dramatic effects of the situation. Less secure responses were more narrative, often purely retelling the passage or showing understanding of language features, without developing this a stage further to show the effects and qualities conveyed by specific examples of language.
- (b) Many responses were able to reflect the purpose of the passage using first person, present narrative. Secure responses reflected the increasing anticipation in the composition, and were able to make good use of what were obviously their own experiences. Some delightful customs were described with engaged style and fluency. Less secure responses misjudged the style of the passage, needing to consider the pace, mood and sensual tone of the passage but drifting too close to the text, lifting phrases or sentences with little originality.

Question 2

- (a) This proved to be a popular question, mostly demonstrating good understanding of the writer's aims and purpose. Most candidates understood the autobiographical nature of the passage, with many recognising the symbolism of the Aga as a source of solace, and a protector. Others developed this, exploring and comparing the significance of the writer's relationship with the Aga and his relationship with his step-father. Most candidates managed some relevant points about content and many went beyond the content to explore the way language was being used to create effect. Most were able to comment on the Aga and also the "war" analogy. Many candidates picked up on the step-father lavishing more attention and care on his produce rather than the little boy.
- Effective responses examined the development of the boy's character. Many recognised the exaggerated viewpoint of the child towards his step-father attracting the reader's sympathy, as well as the ironic similarities in character between step-father and son. The key differentiating point was engagement with the text. Less effective responses re-narrated the passage, using language from the original to show understanding of the text but not effects. Others knew and showed evidence of language features but were unable to develop them further. Candidates needed to ensure that they engaged with the qualities and effects conveyed by individual words and phrases.
- (b) This was generally well answered. The task seemed to give an opportunity for candidates to engage with the question and situation at every level of achievement and language skill; they dealt with the task confidently and with a sense of purpose and context. Most candidates managed to write in character, with varying degrees of success, and recognised the need to write an informal letter, detailing the developments within the household, and accurately, sometimes sensitively, portraying the relationship of step-father and son. Many of the candidates adopted a really convincing motherly tone for Mrs Grant and there was some heart warming sympathy for Graham. Less effective responses drifted towards language that was too close to the passage to merit too much reward.

Question 3

- (a) This was a popular piece and the majority of candidates appreciated the changes of tone in the passage and the different effects the trees had on the writer. Again the good answers showed thorough appreciation of the writing and analysed the piece with perception, at times demonstrating some sophisticated understanding. Such responses were able to track the author's changes of tone and reaction, supporting their viewpoints with illustrations from the text and some thoughtful comment on language use. Answers in the middle of the range tended to focus quite constructively on the core personification, exploring the effects and qualities established by it in quite a degree of depth and moving beyond simply identifying it as a central technique of the extract. Such answers touched upon some of the nuances of the text that responses higher in the range explored in detail. Many responses showed obvious understanding of many aspects in the passage but tended towards repetition of the perceived superiority and might of trees. Precision and a clear structure were needed in these cases for an effective and concise commentary. In responses lower down the range candidates tended just to identify language features, particularly similes and personification of the trees. Not all were able to explain the effects of these, while others attempted but misunderstood or became confused with the writer's intentions.
- (b) Most candidates understood the task well, reflecting the first person emotive tone of the passage. Responses often captured the mood, seeking intimacy with the natural aspect of their choice. Indeed, there were some very effective answers to this directed writing task, especially those which used the oceans as the focus of their observation; some showed a real sense of purpose and perception. Stronger responses sensitively reflected the power and beauty of nature, the humility of the narrator and their attempts to use nature as a source of creative inspiration. Although most understood and portrayed the purpose of the task, less effective compositions showed an inconsistency of style and tone.

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Paper 8693/13

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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, as appropriate.

General comments

On the whole, responses were of a similar standard to those produced in recent sessions, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful, to ones affected by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the higher end of the range there were some very creative and highly imaginative narrative/descriptive responses and some sophisticated and well exemplified argumentative/discursive compositions. At the lower end of the range, *Section A* answers tended to rely on often undirected and drifting plots, and *Section B* responses tended to be undeveloped, with lapses in expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. Some candidates needed more carefully to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in *Section A* e.g. areas of focus such as 'character and motivation', 'setting', 'mood', 'mystery' or 'suspense'; or a specified structure such as 'novel' or 'short story'.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in *Section B* was convincing on the whole: most candidates were well prepared in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as discursive texts, letters, arguments and magazine articles. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in letters opposing each other; some candidates kept to the same voice for both.

There were some sophisticated and mature responses which were highly enjoyable to read and impressive, considering the time constraints within which they were produced. On the whole, time management was satisfactory, and relatively few instances of short work were seen this session. There were some examples of prepared answers that did not quite fit the examination questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 (Ghost Town)

There were some very evocative and focused responses which created atmospheric suspense. Candidates employed a range of descriptive and narrative effects in a substantial number of answers. Many stronger candidates involved subtle mixtures of place and mood, often highly subjective points of view from lone travellers. Sometimes ghost towns were not conventionally empty places, but contained ethereal, ghost-type entities which had past relations with inhabitants or situations.

Less secure compositions tended to draw on horror conventions alone at the expense of a degree of originality. Sometimes there were parodies of westerns or post-holocaust scenarios. Weaker candidates often used image after image in an attempt to 'describe', often overdoing the numbers of adjectives applied to the task. On the other hand, some candidates concentrated too much on 'narrative', thinning out the descriptions and largely ignoring 'mood' and 'place'. Some were too absorbed in 'mood' to observe

gradations of 'place', but also, some over-facile descriptions of 'place' were produced, as if on a tour of the town.

Question 2 (The Coach Trip)

There were some pleasing and engaging responses, characterised by careful planning and forethought. Successful answers established subtle and carefully constructed contrasts in individual purpose and motivation. Some answers used dialogue very effectively indeed and blended in telling bursts of descriptive writing to great effect. Answers lower down the range lacked subtlety and sophistication, and tended to make such factors explicit from the very start; to spell out the construction of the episode well in advance; and a number ignored the coach element.

'Coach' was variously interpreted according to the cultural understanding of the word. For some candidates a sports coach was the main interpretation, for others it was coach class on an aeroplane as opposed to business class. Others wrote historical accounts of trips in horse-drawn coaches or railway carriages. In most cases, the candidate's interpretation added to the interest of the story.

Question 3 (Contemporary version of fairy tale/myth)

This was not such a popular choice and some answers struggled to find variations on the original fable or myth. There were some pleasing responses and these tended to be aware of the conventions and elements of the original sources to the point that they were adapted with subtle and, at times, ironic, techniques. Some good offerings included a re-writing of 'Red Riding Hood' from the wolf's point of view; another version satirised teenage dependency on all the technology of modern life. However, some merely told an established story/myth in their own words, which was hardly the point of the question. With the weaker answers there seemed to be a lack of understanding of 'contemporary'; there were several unadventurous re-tellings of the Cinderella story, and even a very competent re-telling of an ancient Greek myth, but with no attempt to update the setting.

Question 4 (Life without/with money)

This was a popular choice. Some candidates felt the need to include stage directions in their responses. One of the limitations of some answers was that the second piece often tended to be a simple reverse image of the first – that is, negative becomes clearly positive or vice versa, thus rendering the expression rather unvaried. There were, nonetheless, some imaginative and focused answers which offered subtle and persuasive contrasts in the situations of the narrators, often drawing on fictional self-realisation and personal insights.

Strong candidates stressed the contrasts through a variety of personae/situations: often the reversal of the clichéd happiness-with-money took place, where the narrator was more content without money and, after winning the lottery, felt the burdens of guilt or the dilemma of whether to use the fortune altruistically or for selfish ends. Misreading led to two separate characters or placing the whole piece into the third person with little emotional impact.

Question 5 (Capitalism)

This produced some very thoughtful and, at best, sophisticated and passionate, strongly-argued material which contained incisive and very relevant exemplification. Such answers drew on a wealth of historical and contemporary knowledge. Some candidates were not afraid to take an individual and unexpected line. There was, however, a tendency to conflate democracy and capitalism; capitalism is an economic theory not a system of government. The more able candidates understood the nature of the overlap, though weaker candidates showed confusion. There were some extremely complex answers, which although exhaustive and using the correct technical economic terms, often failed to be clear and/or fluent. Many answers tended to be a little diffuse, not focusing sharply on the actual question. However, stronger candidates who were aware of a possible non-expert audience, simplified the more abstruse ideas into a flowing discussion, either to press home a strong sense of voice in argument, or to even-handedly discuss the benefits and weaknesses of both systems.

Question 6 (Advice to a ten-year-old)

This was a hugely popular choice, which in general was answered very effectively, though more difficult than it first appears. The best candidates realised the need to keep the focus clearly on a ten-year-old reader. Weaker candidates produced the whole gamut of teenage angst and the horrors of life in general, assuming a life-history had to be unfolded through to old age for the ten-year-old, and some assumed the reader was already thirteen. Some candidates spent too much time describing the processes of puberty and the physical changes the recipient of the letter would experience. However, the title elicited some very detailed and thoughtful answers which gave some sensible advice and showed real sensitivity. 'Preparing' and 'coping' were usually well-balanced, with a lot of sincere/heartfelt sentiments (many obviously real experiences of the writers). This question provided lots of opportunities for ironic humour, some darker than others. Many of the better answers wrote in straightforward language suited to a ten-year-old, with reiteration, encouragement and empathy: 'Trust me, I've been through this'.

Question 7 (Feminism)

Occasionally, a misunderstanding of the term 'feminism' occurred: taken to mean femininity, prejudice against women and bias in favour of women, sometimes all in the same essay. In general, though, answers were strongly argued and developed, relevant and used informed examples. At best, responses were supported by a strong sense of personal voice and an engagement with the issue. There were some useful appraisals of past activists, with some accurate historical references, and illuminating analyses of ongoing struggles.

Question 8 (Marriage)

This was a popular question with many steady and competent responses, with all but a few avoiding the pitfall of merging both points of view into one long discussion. There were some pertinent and sensitive explorations of both aspects of the case, and a clear sense of voice was apparent in each section. Interesting political and religious connections were made also. Occasionally, candidates would lose direction, or focus on one half of the response. The first part was sometimes weaker, concentrating on the expense of a wedding; the second part usually managed to address the idea of marriage as the foundation of society. There were others who wrote really well on marriage being outdated and then struggled to write effectively for the opposition. These candidates needed to plan the structure of their material more carefully.

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General comments

On the whole, responses were of a similar standard to those produced in recent sessions, with answers ranging from the very mature and thoughtful, to ones affected by significant lapses in technical accuracy. At the higher end of the range there were some very creative and highly imaginative narrative/descriptive responses and some sophisticated and well exemplified argumentative/discursive compositions. At the lower end of the range, *Section A* answers tended to rely on often undirected and drifting plots, and *Section B* responses tended to be undeveloped, with lapses in expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The majority of candidates made real efforts to meet the prescribed task. Some candidates needed more carefully to address the question focus and consider the nature of the guidelines of the task in *Section A* e.g. areas of focus such as 'character and motivation', 'setting', 'mood', 'mystery' or 'suspense'; or a specified structure such as 'novel' or 'short story'.

The candidates' sense of audience, form and purpose in *Section B* was convincing on the whole: most candidates were well prepared in terms of appropriate register, form and tone for such tasks as discursive texts, letters, arguments and magazine articles. One area for improvement is to use two different tones in letters opposing each other; some candidates kept to the same voice for both.

There were some sophisticated and mature responses which were highly enjoyable to read and impressive, considering the time constraints within which they were produced. On the whole, time management was satisfactory, and relatively few instances of short work were seen this session. There were some examples of prepared answers that did not quite fit the examination questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 (The Land that Time Forgot)

This question provided a good opportunity for candidates to be inventive with sci-fi or semi-realistic scenarios and create suspenseful and tantalising cliffhangers at the end of their answers. It was a popular choice. Many candidates produced focused and atmospheric work and offered imaginative and convincing narratives, evoking a sense of a lost and isolated world with a fair level of success. However, others were far-fetched and sometimes over-ambitious. Some responses tended to ignore the rubric request to write 'a short opening chapter' and completed a wholly narrative short story instead, forgetting 'mood' and 'place'. Then there were candidates who were side-tracked and wrote narratives prior to reaching 'the lost world'; these narratives took precedence and candidates seemed to feel that because this was an opening chapter they did not need to focus on 'mood' or 'place' until the next chapter.

Question 2 (The Day Trip)

Candidates established a strong sense of characterisation in the most effective responses, teasing out subtle contrasts between different participants. Less secure answers tended to make the contrasts too clear from the start, leading to a rather simplified, although honest, interpretation of the material. Writers seemed very constrained by the 'day' element; some just ignored it and wrote about lengthy holidays instead. Candidates need to be reminded to keep to the terms of the question.

Question 3 (Claustrophobia)

This was a popular choice: the title allowed for some excellent and authentic writing, although the condition was widely interpreted. More imaginative responses seemed to adopt a first person narrative with a strong sense of voice, often adopting the present tense in order to convey feelings and sensations as they unfolded. Strong answers included very precise and effective description, for example, of what it was like to be transported in a black plastic bag against one's will. Less effective answers tended to focus on narrative aspects, such as how and why the central character had ended up in a claustrophobic situation; several candidates completely ignored claustrophobia and just wrote a story creating danger and tension.

Question 4 (Monologues)

Clear and effective contrasts were established in the majority of answers in what proved to be a popular choice of question. There were some mature and thoughtful considerations of the topic combined with some other responses which tended to take an 'I had nothing and now I am rich' approach with rather obvious and foreseeable contrasts. One of the limitations of some answers was that the second piece often tended to be a simple reverse image of the first – that is, negative becomes clearly positive or vice versa. Inevitably there were a few third person responses. A few wrote in the personas of two different characters, thus losing the opportunity to show a vivid and reflective descriptive contrast.

Question 5 (Social equality)

This stimulated some thoughtful and strong responses underpinned by a sense of purpose and voice. Answers in which the candidate adopted a personal and individual approach evoked some particularly engaging and sensitively aware ideas framed by historical and contemporary knowledge and examples. The question allowed candidates to express complex arguments and develop points; the topic was usually chosen by more able candidates who showed good understanding of the issues involved. However, although candidates who chose this question usually understood the meaning of the term, some found the issue rather too wide-ranging to handle. A few candidates found this a step too far conceptually, but attempted it nevertheless, resulting in answers that were diffuse and scattered. Candidates should be reminded to choose their questions carefully and write on what they understand best.

Question 6 (Letter to five-year-old self)

Responses, on the whole, were focused and informed by a strong degree of personal experience and effective reflection on it. There were common areas of advice – such as peer pressure and romantic advice – but also some individual and telling anecdotes drawn from the candidate's own development, successes and failures in real life. The responses were more directed to a teenage audience; work hard at school, get good grades, etc. The more successful ones, which emphasised the need to play, read and not be glued to the TV or computer screen, were often engaging. Most were clearly able to use voice in this question to varying degrees of success.

Question 7 (Men need their rights)

This was not a popular choice. Some candidates turned this title into a gender equality essay without quite adapting appropriate material to suit the focus of the question. 'Men's rights' was frequently turned into an argument for women's rights, with the main focus forgotten. Most tried to offer alternative points of view with examples, which was pleasing. At best, answers were detailed, developed and mature, combining apposite examples and arguments with an individual and measured sense of reasoning and assessment.

Question 8 (Parents' Legal Responsibilities)

This was a popular choice and presented candidates with the challenge of adopting stances not always in tune with their own experiences. There were some lively and strongly argued ideas and candidates in the main could voice the arguments from a parent's point of view as well as their own. However, weaker answers re-wrote or simplified the question as a description of how parents should bring up their children. This in itself would not have been a problem had they brought the question back to legal responsibility; most did not. Many failed to separate the arguments. The few who did so struggled with development of ideas beyond two or three, or produced unbalanced arguments.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/23
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, as appropriate.

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