

A680 Information and Ideas - Guidance Notes

Reading – Higher tier

Question 1

Candidates are required to identify the main purpose within the media text. Best answers will show ability to select those key points and **summarise, without ‘lifting’ from the passage**. The mark scheme identifies ‘understanding’, ‘overview’ and ‘focus’ as the principal qualities the examiner will be looking to reward. Repetition of subordinate detail or personal comment on the subject matter has no relevance here, nor should there be comment on the style of the extract. The examiner will be looking for a ‘range of points’ and the ability to rearrange material to suit the requirements of the question. This is not the same as rewarding quantity, but candidates do need to offer enough material appropriate to purpose to demonstrate the security of their knowledge. There are a significant number of marks available for this task. Candidates who offer only one or two sentences are unlikely to score highly.

Question 2*

This builds on the work done for Q1. Candidates should explore how the presentation of the article conveys its central purpose. **In the mark scheme the key discriminator that rests between band 4 and band 5 concerns ability to analyse and explain rather than describe** - this is not an exercise that will reward candidates for simply saying what they see on the page. Observations that are made about, for example, size of photographs, subheadings etc are only of relevance if the candidate can tie observations to the writer’s purpose and say how this was intended to shape the reader’s response. Likewise, speculative comments around the source of the article or personal suggestions about the type of person who might like to read the article are not going to gain credit. Q1 asks **what** is in the piece and Q2 asks **how** it is presented. Answers that can link ideas firmly to the text will score well here.

Question 3*

Careful reading and some thought is needed here - some personal note making would certainly help candidates be sure that they have grasped the core content before writing. **The mark scheme for Q3 replicates the Q2 criteria and we are looking for understanding and appreciation**. Can the candidates tell us what key thoughts, or feelings, or attitudes might be presented in the piece and can they show appreciation of the literary features that are supporting that presentation? This is not an exercise in spotting and naming devices such as similes, rhetorical questions and ‘rule of three’ - although quoting examples of such elements, if present, may well support a response. Assertions and general personal comment not linked to text should be avoided. It will not help if candidates simply describe their own feelings – they will need to indicate that they have some sense of what the writer is doing to cause those feelings. Effective use of quotation is very helpful here, but ‘lifting’ large chunks of text should be discouraged. **Thoughtful commentary that consistently links technique to the writer’s purpose will score highly**. N.B In both questions 2 and 3 it is important that comments made by the candidate relate to the terms and requirements of the question they are answering.

Depending on the content of passages used, there may be some overlap in terms of the requirement for Questions 2 and 3

Reading – Foundation tier

The Reading Insert Booklet contains two Reading texts, one for use with Question 1, the other with Question 2.

Question 1

This question comprises three questions requiring short answers (together worth a possible 6 marks) and a question requiring a longer answer (worth a possible 14 marks). The questions will usually direct candidates to particular parts of the text. Answers to Questions 1(a), (b) and (c) should be written in the boxes provided in the question-and-answer booklet used for the Foundation tier. Candidates should not try to cram too much writing into the boxes; brief responses are required, sometimes only one word.

Question 1(d) asks for candidates to retrieve information from a section of the first text. **The mark scheme identifies ‘understanding’ and ‘focus’ as the principal qualities to be rewarded, together with an ability to express points in candidates’ own words. It follows that a good answer will include a range of points showing understanding, expressed in own words, in a response which is clearly focused on the question. Answers which include a good number of points that have been lifted, and not expressed in own words, will not score highly.** Candidates should not use quotations or comment on a writer’s use of language when answering this question, which is a ‘What?’ question. Lengthy introductions and conclusions are not required, and points should be made once only, as there is no credit for repeated points.

Question 2

This question relates to the second text and is divided into two. **Question 2(a)**, weighted at 6 marks, focuses on presentational features of the text. **The question will direct candidates to comment on the effect of specific features such as headings and photographs; this is a ‘How?’ question.** Candidates should note the amount of space allocated to answering this question (just short of a page) and **select** relevant material for their answer accordingly. **Examiners are looking to reward evidence of the ability to analyse.** Generic answers about the size of font or the colourfulness of pictures will not score highly. Candidates need to identify specific items (e.g. a title or caption) and go on to analyse their precise effects.

Candidates should note that **Question 2(b)**, another ‘How?’ question, is allocated 14 marks and more space in which to write their answers. The question, in broad terms, will focus on how the text uses information and language to communicate its subject-matter. **Successful answers will include brief, pertinent quotations and precise analytical comment on specific language choices.** Generalised comment about language and the mere cataloguing of devices or listing of ‘effective’ words will not lead to high reward.

Writing – Higher tier

Time should be spent on careful planning. Candidates should be secure in their understanding of the task, the intended audience and the suggested format before they start writing. Clarity of thought concerning the intended effect on the reader will prove most helpful. Control of the material and structure will be important - at least a recognisable opening and concluding section. **A carefully crafted but relatively brief piece of work may score better than a longer, less purposeful piece that loses its way.** Ability to develop, adapt and sustain the material becomes more significant in the higher bands. Above band 4 the examiner is looking to reward some ambition in the writing - a willingness to use language for effect is encouraged. If a specific format is requested – a newspaper/magazine article, for example – it is not necessary to make the piece ‘look like’ media text with columns and pictures, but it is certainly necessary that the writing should show some awareness of audience and ability to shape the audience response to what is being communicated.

Reading questions are directed towards a candidate’s understanding of what qualities makes a piece of writing effective and Writing questions invite them to bring those qualities in their own work.

Writing – Foundation tier

Candidates should select one of the two Writing questions and on no account attempt both of them. Bullet points will be provided in those questions where it is felt they will provide useful support. Highlighting the key words of their chosen question is a useful starting-point for addressing the particular demands of the question. Where a specific audience is indicated, candidates should keep this in their sights throughout their answer. Where no specific audience is indicated, they should bear in mind the real audience that is the examiner.

Three lined pages are provided in the booklet after the Writing questions, partly so that the answers of those candidates with big handwriting can be contained within the answer booklet. Candidates should use some of this space to plan their answers, as this is more likely to lead to carefully-paragraphed writing with evidence of conscious shaping for a reader. Unplanned writing often leads to laboured or rambling pieces, and longer answers are more likely to contain a greater number of errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In practice, one and a half sides of writing should be enough to produce sustained and accurate writing which engages the reader, especially if time is allocated to planning and also to proof-reading.

Final Note

The exam is 2 hours long, but students may benefit from spending 10 minutes more on reading the reading texts, so 1 hour 10 minutes on Reading and 50 minutes on writing is recommended, especially if students are stronger in Writing than in Reading.