

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 0396/01
Composition

General comments

The paper this session attracted a wide range of ability and offered a strong sense of differentiation. Examiners noted that, whilst there were plenty of strong and imaginative responses, there were some candidates whose English language skills were not sufficient for the task in hand. They displayed so many technical errors – such as tense confusion, sentence structure and subject-verb agreement – that understanding of their essays was impeded and they struggled to produce effective and successful pieces of writing.

In a few cases some potentially strong candidates did not attain the highest marks because they produced short work. The rubric on the paper clearly states that candidates are required to produce responses between 600 to 900 words but some candidates seemed to ignore this: short answers are self-penalising and candidates who might have been destined for grades at the top of the range too often fell into the middle bands because of this practice. In general, most candidates managed their time effectively and rubric infringements were minimal except for the short work noted above.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

- 1 This was a popular and generally well-attempted question. Imaginative, whimsical and structured essays were produced with the best ones having a masterly control of cohesive use of detail between sunrise and sunset and fresh and startling use of imagery. They possessed a freshness about them that brought life to their selected locations. Some answers seemed over-written, relying a little too much on 'purple prose': others tended to focus on a narrative at the expense of description. Technical issues here tended to be centred on the inconsistent use of tenses, often in the same piece: this is an area where candidates lose marks and an area that could be worked on.
- 2 This was a less popular question. The best answers brought out clear contrasts between the two reactions. However, answers were sometimes quite predictable: a lot of former lovers were "bumped off" or there were disagreements over a visitor to the household. Yet the concept of revealing the reason for a course of action was quite well understood.
- 3 There was a varied range of good to competent answers here. Effective answers utilised the power of slow revelation and contained a light touch and dramatic use of sentence variation. They managed to bring out a sense of tension and suspense. Less engaged answers seemed happy to offer an outpouring of sorrow following an action which induced guilt such as flirting with a friend's partner. Moreover, the question clearly indicated that the narration should be first person but many candidates produced self-penalising work because they wrote in the third person. Examiners were concerned with the nature of some of the violent and sexual content of some of the essays.
- 4 This was a very popular choice and in general was answered well. There were many effective responses which combined description, setting and dialogue and an awareness of the genre skillfully. Such answers created a futuristic world, often marked by an air of loneliness, desolation and alienation, imaginatively and used sci-fi terminology skillfully. Some less effective answers tended to be too derivative of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* material.

Section B

- 5 The best answers here demonstrated an informed attempt to show an awareness of the complexities of Eastern and Western society and culture and how globalization made it necessary for mutual understanding to develop. They displayed awareness of political and economic issues and the primary drive for enlightened self-interest. Less engaged answers resorted to stereotyping or generalizing; others – instead of making reference to a historical event and using it to support an argument – lapsed into lengthy expositions on history.
- 6 This was covered well on the whole. Candidates were able to draw on their own knowledge and experiences and many offered up to date and informed examples and well-reasoned arguments. These outlined matters such as time wasting, obesity, sexual vulnerability, celebrity victimization, eating disorders and social isolation as the debit side of media and technology. Some good candidates even masqueraded as the mother or father complainant. Format and tone were usually appropriate for purpose and audience.
- 7 This was generally well-answered with most candidates having a reasonable range of ideas to offer. The most effective answers showed a mature knowledge of the world and of themselves. A number drew on their own cultural experiences and related their ideas to the areas in which they lived. However, some candidates, many of them quite capable ones, tended to produce some rather self-indulgent material which was creative/descriptive rather than discursive/argumentative, the focus of this section of the paper.
- 8 Most responses to this question were measured and interesting, particularly from Centres where students were aware of the continuing repression of women in certain areas. There were some very mature and incisive – even amusing – compositions. These tended to select historical examples and then use them as a foundation to explore contemporary progress on those issues. Less secure answers tended to offer less informed and more fanatical answers where the tone of voice was not always apposite for the task.