

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

The overall performance of candidates was broadly equivalent to that of previous years. There were apparently very few cases of candidates failing to complete the examination because of lack of time and Examiners commented favourably on the way in which candidates approached the directed writing task in **Question 12**.

The standard of written English was encouragingly high; the linguistic expression of the candidates was generally of a satisfactory-to-good standard, with a fair proportion of answers being awarded marks in the top two or three categories for writing skills in **Questions 11** and **12**. Unfortunately, these writing skills were not always matched by the candidates' reading skills. The ability to identify and focus on the precise details required for answering **Questions 7 - 11** and then to articulate an understanding of these to the Examiner was limited in many cases. Similarly, although many candidates wrote well in response to **Question 12**, very often this linguistic competence was not matched by the content of their answers. Candidates should be advised that this is a *directed* writing task and, therefore, it is expected that what is written should have some close relation to the original passage which is printed on the question paper and which is used as source material. The tasks are set with the intention of providing clues which candidates can use in their own responses and the wording of the question emphasises this. It was, therefore, a little disappointing for Examiners to find that candidates who appeared capable of writing to a high standard more often than not produced stories whose content was only tenuously connected to the original, if at all.

The most disappointingly answered parts of the paper were both parts of **Question 11**. Although this was quite a demanding reading passage there were, nevertheless, a large number of points contained in it which related directly to the two sections of the summary. A large number of candidates, however, failed to identify more than a small number of these and their answers contained much irrelevance which did not give a clear indication that either the passage or question had been understood. Candidates should be reminded that the summary question very seldom requires the candidates to précis the whole passage. The usual practice (and this year was no exception) is to *focus* the summary on *specific areas* of the passage; the failure to identify these in the first place is unlikely to produce a good answer. This point, of course, applies to all reading tasks. Careful reading of the questions themselves is as important as the reading of the passages on which the questions are based.

Handwriting and presentation were of a good standard overall although Examiners reported incidents of work that was difficult to read because of use of light blue ballpoint on grey paper; the use of black or dark blue inks should be encouraged. Some candidates still, mistakenly, answer **Questions 1 - 6** by ringing the correct letter on the question paper itself. Examiners will mark and accept these answers if the question papers are included with the other answer scripts and contain the candidate's name and/or number. Unfortunately, Examiners cannot award marks to candidates who answer in this way if the question papers are not included with the script envelopes! Centres are asked to be aware of this practice and to remind candidates that they should be writing the letters on their *answer* paper.

Comments on specific questions

Questions 1 - 6

The answers were as follows: C B D A D C.

Only a small number of candidates succeeded in gaining all six available marks; most managed 3 or 4.

Question 7

This asked what was meant by 'We can live like normal people' and was worth 2 marks. 1 mark was awarded for evidence that the word 'normal' had been understood and the second for a clear understanding of the word in its immediate context i.e. the assumption that eating international fast foods is an indication of a 'normal' state.

Question 8

This was a more demanding question and required the candidates to read closely into the inferences in the passage. 1 mark was awarded to candidates who showed an understanding that nodding in reply meant that the writer was in agreement. Up to 2 further marks were given for the ability to explain the writer's ambivalent attitude - she once thought the same as the girl but, with reflection, she now doubts her earlier viewpoint. Relatively few candidates gained all 3 marks.

Question 9

A pleasing number of candidates gained full marks for this question; others could have done so if their answers had been a little more precise. There were 5 reasons they could have given which were:

- Bassil had owned the restaurant for many years
- It is the only one of its type left
- The owners are friends of the customers
- The customers do not want change of menu
- It is popular/successful.

Candidates who stated that it was the only restaurant left in Beirut or that its customers did not want change (without mentioning menu) were not awarded points 2 and 4.

Question 10

One of the main difficulties candidates found with this question was in distinguishing relevant points from those used to answer the previous task. Most succeeded in finding 3-4 points; again only a small number identified all 6. The mark scheme provided Examiners with 9 points in total. These were:

- Old restaurants sell "delicious"/traditional food
- Old restaurants are more comfortable/friendly
- Old restaurants are more peaceful
- You can have tea made with real mint
- Children can play in open areas
- You can talk to/meet interesting people
- You get excellent service
- Old restaurants are cheap(er)
- They maintain links with traditional culture.

Question 11

(a)(b) As already mentioned, this caused some problems for many candidates, mainly due to their failure to read both the question and the passage carefully. Others approached it confidently and wrote concise and well-focused summaries using their own words wherever possible to indicate their understanding. What needs to be emphasised here is the importance of selecting relevant material. Many candidates tended to summarise the whole passage for both sections with the result that the same points appeared twice although, if they were relevant, they could only apply once. As always, weaker candidates showed a tendency to copy the passage indiscriminately with the result that they did not convey a clear understanding of the material. In general, candidates performed better in response to **(a)** than to **(b)**. Most managed to identify 4 or 5 points relating to nobody having been to the mill or its surroundings for a long time. A much smaller number of candidates did as well on **(b)** which required a more inferential approach.

Question 12

Candidates were asked to continue the story and to base their ideas and details in the passage. As previously mentioned, there was much fluent and accurate writing produced in response to this task which was not always supported by relevant details to make the continuation convincing. Candidates were *not* penalised for having little or no knowledge of events relating to Stalingrad in 1943; this is, after all, an English and not a History examination and they were not expected to know these facts. However, it was disappointing that the clues in the passage relating to the date on the newspaper and the mysterious nature of the three figures were not assimilated by many candidates. The best answers built upon the eerie atmosphere of the original and continued in a similar vein with the figures turning out either to be ghosts or with Simon having entered a time warp. The least successful answers were those which developed into modern-day cops and robbers stories which showed very little appreciation of the style or suggestions of the original passage.

Conclusion

The performance of the candidates was of a generally encouraging standard this year. Examiners were of the impression that many could have scored higher marks with only a slight improvement in their answer technique. The main area for improvement is in the ways candidates apply their reading skills; more practice to encourage concentration on reading both questions and passages in a focused and critical way would be of benefit to many.

Paper 0500/02

Reading and Directed Writing (extended)

General comments

The paper produced a wide range of marks. Very good candidates had no difficulty in scoring marks well into the fifties, provided they did as they were told. By contrast there were some very poor scripts seen, scoring very few marks.

Low marks were often attributable to candidates not being first language users: this affected their ability to understand, collate and express ideas from the passages.

Nearly all Examiners reported at least one Centre whose performance overall was low because most or none of their candidates fully understood what they were expected to do. The most common misunderstandings were:

- in **Question 1**, the difference between a summary and other types of writing, such as commentary, description and polemic;
- in **Question 2**, the need to base one's argument on and to illustrate it copiously from the passages in order to demonstrate accurate reading and interpretation;
- in **Question 3**, that it was necessary to give carefully explained reasons and not to rely on a repetition of the material given in the examination paper.

There were no variations in what was required of candidates from previous papers, and several Examiners were dismayed that a significant number of candidates seemed poorly prepared.

There was little evidence of insufficient time to answer all three questions. However, some candidates wrote at considerable length in **Questions 1** and **2**, thus giving themselves less time to answer the last question without some degree of hurry.

Other points often raised by Examiners were:

- failure to write in paragraphs for **Questions 2** and **3**;
- failure to number each question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was not a difficult summary. There were twenty seven points on the mark scheme of which only fifteen were needed to score fully for content. On the other hand, candidates had to discover them from two fairly lengthy passages and then *organise* them into at least some logical order.

Some candidates did not read the passages methodically and either failed to make points that occurred towards the ends of the passages, when their reading stamina had failed them, or had read superficially so that their answers were not focused on the question.

Other candidates mixed up the two passages, wrongly assuming that a feature of one city was also true of the other. Examiners were able to be fairly generous, provided that the candidate could make the mental connection from city to city. However, many scripts bore the word *where?* and the mark was not given.

However, the chief problem was as always, that what was written was not a *summary*. This had two effects: firstly that the mark out of five given for concision and focus, was very low (even zero) and secondly, that by losing focus candidates failed to include points that were on the mark scheme.

Errors of judgement were:

- providing long introductions and endpieces where a maximum of three lines would have been sufficient. (Most summaries need only a handful of words to set them in motion.)
- providing long explanations and descriptions for individual points where a well placed word would have done;
- inserting ideas that were not in the passages;
- providing commentaries on what had been read;
- writing polemics on globalisation and anything that upset the candidate politically (though it has to be said that most candidates followed the passages and understood that there were two sides to every argument).

Some summaries were simply commentary, description or polemic and, however well written, scored only a handful of marks.

What then should an answer have looked like? A summary is a collection of facts that answer a particular question. Avoidable wordiness should be omitted as should repetition. It should be written in continuous prose and the facts should be presented in order, avoiding confusion. Here is a sample answer:

In Beirut, international life can be seen to be taking over by the number of American fast food restaurants and bars which have replaced Lebanese restaurants serving traditional meals. Places like McDonald's have introduced valet parking and inside the waiters now speak English and perform to American dance music. All the available land in Beirut is being taken up for this type of development.

In Bangkok, multinational firms are more and more in evidence in the new shopping malls. There are super tramways on ugly concrete piers and tall glass fronted buildings that make the city seem like any other. Globalisation brings international merchandise to the markets and everywhere there is pollution.

However, signs of the past remain in Beirut where old buildings still exist. A few old restaurants remain. In one older people relax and chat, in another, parents can take their children to enjoy playing in the open air, and in another, the owner knows his clients by name.

In Bangkok, you can also find fine old houses from the past and also the shanty towns of the poor. Beautiful shrines bring a touch of colour. In the markets, traditional selling continues, small shops can be found and you can buy food from roadside kitchen stalls. The tuk-tuk is still a much used form of transport and the bicycle is a means of transporting bulky loads.

This example follows the structure suggested by the question and has no ending and precious little introduction. It should serve as a model for future candidates. In this example there is no copying of whole phrases and sentences from the text. Candidates should be taught never to do this. Quotations are not appropriate to a summary either.

Centres will find similar advice in recent reports on this examination. Teachers are earnestly requested to ensure their candidates know the difference between what is expected in answers to **Question 1** and **Question 2**.

Question 2

There were some extremely good responses to this more challenging question. In particular, candidates should be commended for developing interesting ideas about change and for structuring them well. Most candidates took the view that the old and the new should co-exist and divided their answers well between an examination of the one and the other. The link between the two halves was usually well made. Those who did really well read the sentence that said, *Your argument must be clearly based on ideas and details from both passages*.

Since this paper is largely a test of reading, marks can only be given where there is evidence that the passages have been understood both for explicit and implicit meaning. This question, unlike the summary, always gives candidates the opportunity to develop and respond to *ideas* that come from the passages. They should illustrate their ideas with *details* from the passages.

Some candidates wrote mini-essays that correctly referred to the effects of change on culture, people and atmosphere, which was what the passages are all about. They referred particularly to the effects of change on the young and the old, and how the needs of the young set the new culture for tomorrow which in turn would be replaced by something new.

There was as usual, a mark out of fifteen for content derived from the passages and an approach like this went at least half way towards an award of those marks. However, many candidates failed to illustrate their arguments with details. To complete the argument they might have referred to the culture of eating, whether in a traditional or a fast-food restaurant, or entertainment, chatting with the old or dancing to the music of *Greased Lightning*, to modes of transport, comparing the super tramway with the tuk-tuks, to the different types of architecture, such as the skyscrapers and the old, gracious houses. Reference to the text could be direct or glancing, but it had to be there for a high mark.

There were also candidates who drifted away from the passages. Some of the arguments were economic, which was not in character with the passages at all. Others went into tourism which could be linked to the material more easily. Some wrote about health and education which were far away from the reading material. While all these approaches were good to read, they did not give candidates the opportunity to engage closely with what had been read and therefore did not fulfil the intention of the exercise or of the syllabus.

Some candidates interpreted *argument* as an argument between two people. This was allowed since it did not prevent a debate on the subject taking place.

Five marks were available for the structure of the argument and the appropriate use of language to express ideas effectively. Candidates often scored well here.

Question 3

This required a letter written to the organiser of an award for 'Young Citizen of the Year', weighing up material given in the examination paper about two people, Katrina and Tomas. Katrina was a powerful person who gave the impression of doing things to succeed and of setting herself possibly unattainable standards. Tomas was a kind person who was dedicated to help others but who concentrated poorly and took criticism badly.

Candidates answered this question well, although a number of answers were unadventurous and did very little with the material, sometimes coming dangerously near to copying it out.

The important part of this question was the part that required candidates to *explain carefully your reasons for preferring one to the other*. *Make clear how far each of them reflects your values and beliefs*.

A *good* letter started by stating the writer's values and beliefs. This was usually done clearly and well and created a structure for the rest of the letter. Candidates then compared the personality, the failings and the achievements of each person to the criteria, evaluating as they went along. The letter ended with a clear choice and the main reason for making it.

A *satisfactory* answer started with a formal introduction, usually expressing pleasure at being asked to be a part of the process. It went on to select and approve certain aspects of each person's personality and achievements, possibly with an element of comparison and, at the upper end of the middle mark band, very much in the candidate's own words. At the end there was a reason for making the choice.

A *poor* answer was often jumbled and unclear, going from one idea to another. Most of the answer consisted of a repetition of the given material, often using some of the original wording. The poorest candidates even forgot to restore the words such as articles missed out in the notes. There was little or no evaluation, but simply occasional approval of the actions of the two people.

All candidates who failed to write about *both* people lost some marks for content.

Some candidates made poor judgements when invited to add their own material. Some added descriptive detail such as the ins and outs of Katrina's software company or the events concerning the rescue of the children. This was interesting reading but it no longer focused on the reason for writing the letter.

There were also some unnecessary and scurrilous comments that were too far outside the material to be rewarded. In one answer Tomas apparently set up the drowning incident in order to win the nomination and, in another script, was in no danger himself as he only had to wade out to the children. Another ingenious suggestion was that he was only trustworthy because he could not concentrate and therefore would never remember any confidences that were told to him. One Examiner wrote of the "ridiculous lengths to support one candidates or to malign the other."

On the other hand, there were some good arguments about the importance of education and how Tomas would not make a good role model; how concentration was essential when trying to make decisions and to organise things; how a sense of purpose and high ideals would motivate people who would otherwise achieve nothing. Strangely, few candidates related Katrina's work with the football team to a capacity for effective leadership.

Of course, there was no 'right' choice between Katrina and Tomas. The latter had the slight edge over the former in the responses seen, largely owing to his selflessness.

There were the usual fifteen marks for understanding and using the material and five for the quality of the writing. Candidates should be reminded of this since, by this time, fatigue sometimes set in, and there was some very awkward prose and plenty of unnecessary mistakes. Those with an assured prose style and sense of register wrote excellent formal letters.

Final comments

Some candidates, as always, will have been disappointed. The Examiners give the following simple advice to any re-sitting the examination:

- study and heed what the question says must be done;
- learn the difference between a summary and other types of writing;
- base all the reading texts answers on what is presented in the question paper.

<p>Paper 0500/03 Continuous Writing</p>

General comments

All the Examiners reported a mixed standard of writing, as might be expected. In general, the essay subjects, **Questions 1, 4 and 8**, were not done well because many candidates had little to say after sometimes a promising first half page or so. Candidates were much more at home when writing about their best friend, various types of races and visits to the dentist. Only those candidates who are able to construct an argument with varied, developed material should choose to write on the 'essay' subjects.

Having said that, this component is not a test of content knowledge: success depends on the candidate's assured use of *language*. As always, variety of sentence structures, fluency and the ability to call on a wide range of appropriate vocabulary generally separated the good writers from the poor.

Many candidates showed a good variety of language, and spelling was normally good. However, there were many errors of sentence building. Subordinate clauses often posed as main clauses, and there were many examples of clumsy sentences without verbs. Simple sentences were sometimes strung together with commas when at least a semi-colon was needed. Commas were frequently put in the wrong place, and required words missed out of sentences. Paragraphs were often uncertain. Some lasted no longer than a sentence while others lasted for over a page. Tenses frequently drifted from present to past. These shortcomings inevitably affected candidates' marks.

Examiners noted a growing tendency to join words together that should be separate. The commonest example was *alot* but others included *ofcourse*, *infront*, *aswell*, *inturn*, and *infact*. There were also examples of words that should have been joined but were not, such as *when ever*, *near by*, *no where*, *to gether*, *trust worthy* and *spokes man*. This is apparently an area for potential confusion.

Most answers were sustained, sometimes too much so. In the case of long narratives, the mark would have been gained much earlier on, but in many cases after a good start there was loss of quality and the appearance of increasing numbers of errors. Candidates should only attempt excessive length when they are sure that they can sustain the interest and the accuracy of their writing.

Some candidates wrote a complete first draft that was generally copied out neatly but not altered. This was not a wise thing to do as the amount of time allowed to write an answer did not allow for this. However, a *plan* was essential. Editing was frequent, with plenty of untidy crossing out and awkward alternative phrasing written in tiny script over the top. In many cases this did not improve the work but caused additional errors when new phraseology did not fit the syntax of the old.

Candidates are advised to think of ways to engage the attention of the reader. A sense of audience is important. Engagement is often achieved by using unusual events and details, for example an unexpected ending to a story, and by making a careful choice of the words to be used. For example, the repetition of the word 'country' in many answers to **Question 1** had a dulling effect, and it was clear that the writer was not thinking of the reader. It is also important to choose a register that will attract the reader. If it is to be colloquial then it should be an imitation of the way people speak and not, as was quite frequent this exam session, an example of unconsidered writing where the candidate appeared not to understand the difference between formality and informality and the occasions on which different registers should be used.

Some candidates wrote narratives that were mere successions of event without the interest of character or description of background and where the storyteller kept well clear of any admission of feeling. These narratives sounded more like documentary-type factual writing and were often very unadventurous in terms of vocabulary, a key reason why they failed to secure higher marks.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

How important is it for people to be proud of their country?

This was clearly of interest to many candidates but it required some thought and planning. It was not unusual for a candidate to start well but to run out of things to say after a little while. Then there was nothing left but to argue in circles and to repeat key words and sentences such as 'we must love our country' or 'you have to be proud of your country.' By contrast some answers were mature and sensible. They nearly always took each side of the argument and most showed how patriotism could be good until it turned into nationalism. Such candidates were able to give examples from history and around the world, explaining the virtues and vices of loving one's country. Some candidates wrote about their country where it was unfashionable to be proud and the effect that that had upon them. Some expatriates wrote about their feelings of living away from home and viewing it through the wrong end of the telescope.

Question 2

A visit to the dentist.

This topic was very popular and was often done effectively with plenty of atmosphere and tension. Strangely, not many scripts contented themselves with a realistic description of the waiting room and the surgery. Recognising the topic's potential to deploy all sorts of vocabulary (one script used technical terms in dentistry very well), some candidates went somewhat over the top in their descriptions of dentists from hell. However, this was not necessarily a problem and, indeed, some scripts were enlivened by humour and exaggeration. Opportunities were missed by those who spent so much time writing about the prelude to the event that they hardly gave themselves the time to get into the surgery itself.

Question 3

The Race.

This was another popular choice and was also usually done well. The feelings of the competitor were often well expressed, what one Examiner described as the 'agony of exertion'. The storyteller nearly always won but only after a great battle. Not that the race was always running or motorised. Examiners reported the human race, animals, trees, dinghies and the race against time. Many candidates dwelled on the prelude to the race and did not spend enough time on the race itself. But like the visit to the dentist, there were plenty of opportunities to use good descriptive vocabulary, to build up tension and to describe feeling.

Question 4

'A good sense of humour is essential in life'. Give your views.

The weaknesses described earlier under **Question 1** were found here too, only more so. Some candidates were able to provide five or six different topic sentences, for example about being more popular, getting on at work, living a happy family life, getting on at school and having to be careful not to make oneself unpopular. However, it rarely sounded as if the candidate really meant it, and the same topic sentences kept on turning up, so that many scripts had the ring of practice essays. Nor were the separate paragraphs very well developed in such scripts. Poorer candidates ran out of material and repeated 'sense of humour' too frequently or tried to argue from the abstract and became hopelessly muddled. As one Examiner put it, 'They tied themselves in knots if they didn't work out a plan.'

Question 5

'He had always believed that grownups shouldn't cry, they should be strong – but all he wanted to do at that moment was cry his eyes out...' Continue the story.

Most candidates wrote well structured and moving stories. The technique of flashback was often used. The stories were varied, though most were about death and loss, sometimes the ending of a relationship. One Examiner described the candidates in her marking allocation as having 'hidden depths - writing from the heart'; another described the stories he had seen as 'poignant and powerful'. Some responses were, however, far too plot driven and came into the category of documentary as described above. Others tried for too much event, 'fitting a novel into a short story'.

Question 6

My best friend.

This was a hugely popular topic. The friends ranged from peers to mothers, to horses, dogs and squirrels. Some accounts were over-sentimental. The best accounts were a mixture of attributes of the friend plus illustration: answers should not just have said that a friend was 'absolutely trustworthy and reliable' but should have given an example to interest the reader. A long list of attributes lost its effectiveness, but so did a simple list of anecdotes. The two elements were required. Less able candidates often chose this topic since it was easier to get material. They wrote simply but quite effectively.

Question 7

Describe your ideal house. It could be a house you know or one you imagine.

This was a moderately popular topic, but it was seldom done well. Much opportunity was given for descriptive language and that was often taken. The problem was the amount of material available. Candidates took it upon themselves to describe every room and the writing became a list. Most Examiners noted this. They also noted the predilection for items that were available only to the wealthy. Perhaps less actual description of objects and more about atmosphere and the feelings that a home might induce would have been more effective. One can see why 'My favourite place' set some years ago produced better responses.

Question 8

Write about something that makes you angry, and why it makes you angry.

This was a topic that was done well by some but poorly by others; relatively few came within these extremes. Poor writing was often a formless diatribe. Good responses paid more attention to the issue than to the anger *per se*. As in all these argumentative topics, it was essential to have a well planned line of thought and development, and not having one militated against production of something worth higher marks in many cases.

Question 9

Write a story in which the people in the photograph below are the central characters.

This was not a particularly popular choice and some slightly silly writing was reported by Examiners. There were some imaginative and lively interpretations of what the people in the photograph were doing and who they were, but in some scripts matters were ridiculously exaggerated, and failed to convince, with plots ill-thought out and poorly sustained. On the whole, this proved the most disappointing of the questions in terms of the quality of answers prompted.

Further general comments

As always the Examiners suggest which topics might be the best for examination practice. This time they have nominated **Questions 2, 3 and 5** (and, with some advance guidance), **Question 1**.

Paper 0500/04

Continuous Writing (Coursework)

General comments

Each Centre receives a short individual report on its particular coursework submission, and this general report should be read in conjunction with it. There were very few cases of failure to meet the syllabus specification, although Moderators discovered some individual candidates who did not vary their writing in their third piece but who wrote in a style and for a purpose very similar to one of the other two. Centres are asked to check all folders to ensure that candidates have chosen which pieces to enter according to the specification.

It was clear that many Centres had taken advice from recent reports and had given thought to the most appropriate types of task that would develop their candidates best as writers. Some comments about tasks are given below.

Marking and internal moderating was again carried out with care. There were very rare occasions when the External Moderator tended to agree with the original rather than the moderated mark of some candidates, but in nearly all cases changes to marks had at least brought an errant marker near to the majority. The rarity with which the Moderator questioned the overall rank order has to be commended.

Most of the marking was very near to the standard set by CIE. Where adjustments were recommended, these were almost always plus or minus one or two which should be considered minor. There were a few adjustments made between plus or minus three to five. The reasons for any adjustment should have been made clear on the report form.

It will be clear from their comments that Moderators read the sample folders with care. They also relied heavily on the information given them by Centres. There were still some cases where there was virtually no sign of the Teacher's pen on the work or anywhere else. Each piece of work should have been marked for errors, infelicities and examples of good expression. A comment on each piece was helpful because it explained the mark that has been given. The comment should have reflected the criteria for the grade to which it had been assigned. Moderators found comments such as the following useful: "*This is a well structured story. I liked your clever use of flashback and the details you used to describe the room. Your vocabulary was very varied, but you relied too much on short sentences. Your use of full stops was not always secure.*" A comment such as "*I really enjoyed this; it's your best piece so far*" is of little or no use to the Moderator (nor to the candidate).

Comments on specific aspects of the work

Task setting

Piece 1: Argumentative/informative

Most Centres set topics that involved the expression of points of view. These encouraged a wider vocabulary, more complex sentences and a more challenging structure. Informative writing was often less of a challenge and less appealing to the candidate. Moderators saw good and bad leaflet writing. A leaflet to describe the nature and personalities of the school band worked better than one to advertise a hotel precisely because the candidate was more involved in the first than in the second.

This was also true of the arguments of which there were three types:

Type 1: The Teacher prepared the subject with the candidates. They read stimulus material together and talked about it with the Teacher. In some cases they could choose from three or four subjects and prepared them in groups again from the same stimulus material. In some Centres they worked through more than one class essay.

The result was a mechanical, if individual, version of a given plan, and the use of the same material which appeared in the work of more than one candidate.

The topics for such writing were usually the ones that have been seen in many previous sessions, and doubtless will continue to be: women's rights, capital punishment, cloning, and so on.

Type 2: After teaching the method for writing an argumentative piece, candidates were sent away to work up their own topic. They were expected to use references from books and from the internet (a complicated reading exercise). They then incorporated their references into the plan of their essay. Unfortunately it was often difficult to see where the original thought or opinion of the candidate lay; it was also difficult to know whether the references had been largely copied, perhaps at length, from the internet. It was certainly true that on some occasions the writing in the first piece was significantly better than the writing in the rest of the folder, and Moderators wondered why and voiced their concern.

Teachers are reminded that this is a writing exercise and that candidates should be able to argue from their own views. These may be illustrated by references, but Teachers need to know how those references have been used and to be assured that the work is largely original.

Type 3: Here candidates again chose their own topics once they understood how to present their views in a way that appeared personal. The difference between this and Type 2 was the nature of the topic. They were less academic and more important to the candidate. Sometimes the topic was something that the candidates already felt strongly about and something (like the treatment of animals) that they knew what they wanted to say and had access to a range of information. Often the topic was particular to the country or the town from which they came. In one case a controversial issue was the killing of feral cats or, from the same island, the difficulties of establishing tourism in a place that had no facilities but which was the sort of place that people might want to come. In topics like these there was a certain amount of life which gave vigour to the writing.

Of these three types the third was usually the most successful. Practising this method ensured that everyone in the class chose a topic appropriate to their ability. Moderators did see examples of candidates struggling with over-difficult concepts that strained their command of language beyond its limits.

Piece 2: Expressive writing

This part of the coursework was generally handled well although, as always, there were candidates who were less happy than when writing discursively.

It was clear that some Teachers had taken time to teach some of the ways that writers handle fiction or effective autobiography. There were fewer examples of writing that consisted only of events, as one saw commonly in answers to Paper 3. The best candidates were those who introduced significant touches of character, background or detail for effect and who provided interesting moments in the plot. There were many examples of unexpected endings that went far beyond waking up and "it was all a dream". The best candidates also demonstrated care in which the story had been constructed and crafted.

Weaker candidates used flat and uninteresting vocabulary and did not practise any ways in which the reader might be interested. In their responses, there was too much emphasis on a train of events or too much dialogue that served no purpose.

Piece 3

It was clear that many Centres had thought very carefully about the variety that this piece is supposed to bring. The important questions are: What does this piece add to the profile of the candidate as a writer? Is what is chosen significant and effective enough to add to the mark that would have been given were the requirement only two pieces?

Moderators were increasingly concerned with the use of literature-based pieces, not because they did not show variety, but because they were originally provided for a non-English purpose. Essays on literary criticism were often quite difficult to assess because of the intrusion of quotation and because all the candidates who wrote them were trying to conform to the same, rather limited academic style. Equally, some of the creative pieces, particularly in the form of diaries and especially of newspapers had a lack of excitement and involvement about them. The best literature-based pieces were probably of the "You are A at point B. What are your thoughts and feelings?"

However, that is not to say that Centres should necessarily avoid such pieces which are permitted by the syllabus. Two literature-based exercises that worked much better were as follows:

- Candidates were taught about language in drama and dramatic effect and were then asked to write an additional or alternative scene for the play they were studying. Another approach was to turn part of a novel or short story into a play-scene. The results were sometimes remarkable. There were some excellent experiments in the use of language based on *The Crucible*.
- More than one Centre taught sonnets and then asked candidates to write their own. When the sonnet was complete candidates had to write about their experiences in making the poems. This produced some excellent analytic writing in a personal register about such difficulties as structuring and about the nature of language and how it might be made suitable for a reader.

Centres are again recommended to experiment with writing about the media as an alternative to literature. There is a good deal more freedom of expression in writing that is equally analytical.

Assessment

While major problems were extremely rare, the chief reasons for changing a mark were, as in previous sessions, linguistic.

Example 1: A Centre gave a number of Grade As to candidates who made a fair number of minor errors and who wrote competently and fairly fluently. Moderators did not expect to see errors other than slips of the pen at this level.

Example 2: Candidates were frequently given high marks when their work was completely accurate but their vocabulary was plain and workaday and their sentences were quite short and unadventurous.

Example 3: The candidates from this Centre used lively and interesting vocabulary at all grades and even when they made quite serious mistakes, their work read quite fluently.

In the cases of the Centres in examples 1 and 2, the marks were adjusted downwards and in example 3, the marks were raised.

Centres needed to take errors on board, particularly those of failure to use full stops. Proof reading errors in word-processed work should have been noted. The quality and range of language and the ability to present meaning fluently in a variety of different sentence structures are always important in differentiating good from competent work.

<p>Paper 0500/05 Speaking/Listening Option</p>
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General comments

The examination was taken this year by about 550 candidates from 60 Centres. The overall level of achievement was broadly comparable with previous years. At the top of the range, there were some very secure and confident responses by candidates, using English fluently and seeking to extend role playing and initiate discussion. Candidates in the middle of the range tended to provide satisfactory performances, doing what was required of them, but many were not apparently capable of moving either section of the test forward in a convincing manner. Some second language users were inappropriately entered for this examination.

Administrative procedures were completed properly by most Centres. However, Centres should note the following:

- There is no need to write marks in the Internal Moderation column on the Summary Sheet, unless internal moderation is being conducted, and this need only be done at Centres with a large number of candidates. In almost all cases, Centres need not concern themselves with internal moderation. If a Centre wishes to discuss its candidates' performance within the English department - perhaps inviting Teachers to share their views for professional development or other purposes - then this is fine. However, under these circumstances there is no need to register an adjustment of the marks. Internal moderation is intended only for large Centres using more than one Examiner.
- A small number of Centres (about 8) failed to average out the marks for the two sections of the test, but instead, added the columns together. Occasionally, a Centre averaged out the marks, but then added the three columns together and transferred a mark out of 30 to the Mark Sheet. The Moderators found that they had to complete a number of Amendment Forms because marks had been transcribed incorrectly to the Mark Sheets; marks out of 20, 30, and 100 were all seen. **The final mark entered on the Mark Sheet should be out of 10.**
- As stated above, some Centres are still entering candidates who are clearly ESL users. The assessment criteria assume first language status, and candidates exhibiting second language weaknesses will not score highly on this test. It is particularly disappointing when a Centre conducts the test as an ESL examination. The First Language component is testing very different and in some cases additional skills and Centres should not, therefore, confuse this with the ESL speaking test, which concentrates on fluency, structure and vocabulary.

Comments on specific aspects of the oral

Role play

As in previous sessions, a number of Teachers handled the role plays with expertise, adopting realistic and authentic roles and allowing candidates every chance to respond appropriately and to extend the role playing. It was apparent at these Centres that role playing, and, in particular, strategies of response, had been practised.

However, problems did arise with slightly weaker candidates, who were unable to take the lead, and very weak candidates, who were unable to respond appropriately. Some Teachers chose to intervene too early and perhaps say too much, dominating the situation, making a suitable response even more difficult for candidates. At these times, Teachers are advised not to intervene, but to wait a little longer. This would also aid the assessment of candidates' abilities to express themselves in an appropriate manner.

There was a variety of styles of role playing, from the very realistic and serious approach, to the quite informal and often casual approach. In all cases, it did not matter which style an Examiner adopted. The main aim of this section of the test is to assess the candidates' skills in fulfilling their roles convincingly. Some Teachers should take note that it is the candidate who is being assessed and not the Teacher!

The conversation

There were examples of interesting and two-way conversations about topics and issues to which a great deal of thought had clearly been given by candidates. In these cases, evidence of planning and preparation was apparent, and the test served as a means by which candidate and Teacher could conduct a discussion.

However, in a large number of cases, Teachers appeared to prefer a 'Question and Answer' approach. In the most disturbing cases, this became an interview or an interrogation based on the candidates' knowledge of a topic or an issue. A candidate being subjected to this is likely to lose confidence and will not be in a position to attempt to initiate discussion and elicit responses from the Teacher. Both of these skills are required before the highest achievement level can be awarded.

In general, Teachers need to regard the conversation as a two-way discussion, which is not restricted to knowledge and which is not too dependent on questions. The Moderators would like to hear more candidates being encouraged to involve the Teachers in conversation. Teachers should consider making the occasional comment, for example, which draws a candidate into probing the Teacher's view about an issue, rather than relying on questioning alone.

Too many conversations were based on Teacher and candidate 'agreement', and as a result, were not always as interesting or productive as they might have been. Teachers may wish to consider varying their contributions in light of this. A lively discussion is more likely to test the candidate than a mundane one.

Moderators also noted that some Centres are still allowing candidates to deliver speeches. This occurs in one of two ways: either as a presentation of information, or as a monologue. Neither is acceptable and Teachers should ensure that candidates who are seeking to talk continuously are stopped, and that discussion prevails.

Centres need to be aware that this should not be a general conversation about any number of things. The purpose of the assessment criteria is to measure candidates' skills in maintaining and sustaining a conversation which has a central theme. Generalisation leads to a level of informality which does not correspond to the vigour expected by the criteria.

Summary

Moderators would like to see more Centres engaging in genuine two-way conversations in which the Examiner and candidate are sharing views, ideas, experiences and opinions. Candidates are being assessed according to their ability to take occasional control of the discussion, and this means that they need to be given every chance to talk on equal terms. In the scenarios observed above, Moderators heard little evidence of this happening.

Assessment

The majority of Centres were generally accurate regarding the placement of candidates into the appropriate numerical band. However, in almost all cases where an adjustment to the marks was necessary, Examiners were found to be generous.

There were two main areas where adjustment proved to be needed:

- Candidates awarded 9 or 10 who had not been able to extend the role play or extend the subject matter of the conversation.
- Candidates whose linguistic restrictions resulted in a lack of fluency.

The Moderators would like to conclude by stating that many Centres are producing good quality speaking and listening samples and that, in many cases, the test is being conducted to a high standard.

<p style="text-align: center;">Paper 0500/06 Speaking/Listening (Coursework)</p>
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General comments

Centres that entered for this component gave the art of speaking and listening the seriousness that it deserved. Some Centres selected just three varied activities and assessed all their candidates on them. Others selected assessments from a wide range made throughout the course, thus ensuring that candidates were rewarded for their best performances and that they understood the importance of speaking and listening in their general education and in their future lives. The Moderators recommend the second approach.

Assessment was sound. The tapes included many examples of candidates who spoke fluently, confidently and with a good command of the language. Candidates at the highest level were able to address challenging topics and to extend and develop ideas and contributions.

Centres are asked to check instructions. The records must be accompanied by a tape recording to provide evidence for assessments. Without that, moderation cannot take place. It is also important to accompany the tape with at least a brief list of candidates in the order in which they are heard, together with the mark that they are given for the taped activity. Two Centres provided detailed commentaries, one of which included the reasons for awarding the marks. The Moderators found it much easier to understand the Centres' reasoning in these cases, and thank them for it.

Centres had gone to a great deal of trouble to fill in the various forms that accompanied this component. The Moderators appreciated this too.

Comments on specific aspects of the samples

Tasks

There were very few examples of performances that might have been read or learned by heart. One Centre gave detailed comments on the use of notes and the spontaneity of solo performances. Moderators must be sure that what they are hearing is not read since, in such circumstances, there is no listening and no real talk. In most cases a talk was rightly followed by questions, although for the purposes of this exercise, it might be better were the candidate to speak for two or three minutes at the most and the presentation then become an informal discussion.

Most solo tasks are examples of performance which has its place as part but not all of a speaking and listening course.

Many good tasks involved pairs of candidates working on assignments, discussing poems, talking about experiences at school and in the locality and carrying out role plays. Again, Centres should be wary of using over-rehearsed dramatic performance. The assessment could consist of candidates' work in discussing what they intend to do, running through a "first draft", discussing improvements and a final performance for the class.

Most Centres provided evidence of a solo activity, a paired activity and a group discussion for assessment, and that was the most satisfactory menu as far as the Moderators were concerned.

Recordings

There were no inaudible recordings, but one Centre pointed out the difficulties of recording a group discussion and of identifying the participants.

The following is recommended:

- The maximum number of candidates in a recording should be three.
- Their names should be recorded on paper with a description of their voices, male or female, high or low and any recognisable accent they may have.
- They should sit in a triangle facing each other with the recorder, or preferably an external microphone between them. If an external microphone is used it may be suspended to avoid extraneous noise from the floor.

Where group discussions were recorded, Moderators had no difficulty in following the assessments except where the numbers in the groups were large.