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Introduction

The texts about positive thinking and negative thinking were accessible across the full range of abilities and examiners commented that candidates were able to engage with the tasks and respond appropriately. Examiners also commented that the texts were apposite given the current pandemic.

There was evidence of some good teaching and learning in preparation for this examination in the responses seen and some candidates seemed well prepared on the whole. However examiners did comment that a significant number of responses to Question 3 and Question 6 did not focus on the writers' techniques and their intended effects. While examiners saw some good responses across all the questions, several examiners commented that there were fewer higher level responses than in previous series, despite the accessibility of the texts, perhaps reflecting the continuing disruption to education caused by the pandemic.

Better candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and their responses sometimes demonstrated exploration and analysis. Their writing responses were engaging and effective and were well controlled and accurate.

Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing was often brief or lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

There were some candidates who made references to the pictures in their responses to Question 3, Question 6 and Question 7. This is not a valid way to respond to texts as the pictures are not language or structural devices chosen for effect by the writers.

There were candidates who copied out all, or considerable parts, of the extracts in response to Question 8. This is not a successful way to respond as candidates are required to produce their own work and show the ability to adapt the original texts for a different audience and purpose.

There was some evidence of planning and proofreading which is to be encouraged. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Some examiners commented that candidates' handwriting was less legible than in previous series.

Section A (Questions 1-7)

This consists of two short retrieval questions and a question on the writer's use of language and structure to create effects on each text and a question requiring candidates to compare the two texts.

Question 1

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The majority of candidates responded correctly.

Some candidates referred to points from different sections of the text, most commonly, 'health benefits', 'improves your mood' and 'improves physical health'.

Candidates must ensure they read the text and the question carefully, ensuring they select material from the correct section of the text.

Question 2

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The majority of candidates responded correctly.

Candidates provided correct examples of the writer's difficulties, most commonly 'hold the elevator door' and 'pay for a coffee'. Occasionally candidates did not identify a suggestion the writer made about helping others and offered an incorrect response, most commonly 'The more we are helpful to others, the better we feel about ourselves'.

Candidates must ensure they read the question and the text carefully, ensuring they select material from the correct section of the text.

Question 3

This question requires the candidate to explore how the writer uses language and structure to present advice about positive thinking.

Examiners commented that they did not see many higher level responses.

Most candidates demonstrated some understanding of some of the techniques employed by the writer. They were able to identify the chatty style, the second person address, listing, subheadings and the use of experts and used mostly appropriate examples to support their points but they did not always explain how these features helped the writer to present her advice. Examiners commented that

the explanations sometimes consisted of simply giving generalised statements, such as 'to make the reader think' or 'to make the reader read on'.

Successful candidates were able to explore language and answer the question in detail, with appropriate references used to support points made. They wrote comprehensive answers showing a thorough understanding of language techniques and a thorough exploration of the effects of the various features such as the effects of the use of the colloquial tone, the use of experts, the structure (sub-headings) and the balanced ending. These candidates were able to develop points and show understanding of language through focusing on the specific effect of words and devices. They were able to use correct terminology to identify language features e.g. 'silver lining' (metaphor), 'Hold the elevator door for someone, send a handwritten note, pay for the person in line behind you at the coffee shop.' (tricolon) but their comments on structure were less successful although most commented on the use of sub-headings, the beginning and the ending and the use of listing.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content based and lacked focus on the writer's techniques. They wrote about 'what' the writer said rather than 'how' she presented her advice about positive thinking.

There was also evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular techniques used by the writer but do not link them to the advice being given to the reader or explain their effectiveness. Weaker responses contained lots of quotations from the text, often quite lengthy, which were left unexplained. Expressions were used such as 'she explained', 'she presented', 'she lists', but these were followed up by references to content, not to 'how' the writer achieved effects. Some weaker candidates re-told the text. Some did use quotations but these were used to support the narrative response. Occasionally candidates wrote responses that gave their own opinions about positivity with no reference to the text at all. The weakest responses were simply summaries or direct copies of the text.

Centres need to remind candidates that this question asks **how** the writer achieves their effects not **what** they say.

Question 4

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates responded successfully.

The most common correct responses were: 'can lose their judgement' and 'can become a way of avoiding necessary action'.

The common incorrect responses which used the wrong part of the text were: 'a sign of a mood disorder' and 'can interfere with their experience of reality'.

Centres need to make sure that candidates read the question carefully and select their points from the correct part of the text.

Question 5

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates answered correctly. However it was the question which seemed to be answered incorrectly most often – this was often due to only including partial answers such as 'better quality' or 'mental accuracy' which did not answer the question. Some candidates included too many points which were not needed to gain full marks e.g. 'produces better quality and more persuasive arguments' as well as 'improves memory and mental accuracy'.

Centres need to make sure that candidates read the question carefully.

Question 6

The question asks the candidate how the writer persuades the reader that negativity might have some benefits. Some examiners commented that candidates' performance on this question was similar to Question 3 and examiners' comments reflected this.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate some understanding of the writer's techniques and how these were used to persuade the reader. They were able to select appropriate features of the text to write about such as the use of a personal anecdote at the start of the text, references to research, the use of sub-headings, the use of the first person and the use of negative language when talking about positive thinking, and make some relevant comments on the effects of these features.

Better candidates were thorough and supported their points with appropriate quotations, whilst exploring the effects on the reader.

They explored how language and structural devices were used to persuade the reader and engaged with the tone of the piece, the use of idioms and the humour at the end and considered the effects of these features.

They were able to analyse how the writing was structured in order to make it clear and easy to understand.

Sometimes candidates were able to show thorough understanding of the language and structural devices used but then they failed to analyse the references that they used.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content based and lacked focus on the writer's techniques. They wrote about 'what' the writer said rather than 'how' she persuaded her readers to her point of view.

Expressions were used such as 'she explained', 'she presented', 'she lists', but these were followed up by references to content, not to 'how' the writer achieved effects. Weaker candidates often identified a small range of features supported with lengthy quotations and simple comments. There was evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them. Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the content. Occasionally candidates wrote responses that gave their own opinions about negativity with no reference to the text at all. The weakest candidates simply copied out all or sections of the text with no comments of their own.

As with Question 3, centres need to remind candidates that this question asks **how** the writer achieves their effects not **what** they say.

Question 7

This question requires candidates to compare how the writers convey their ideas and perspectives about positive and negative thinking.

Examiners noted that they did not see many higher level responses to this question but the majority of candidates were able to identify and discuss basic comparisons and a few produced well-thought out comparisons of the extracts. Some examiners commented that candidates did not support their comparisons with relevant textual references.

Examiners observed that an improvement from previous series was most responses did deal with both texts throughout their responses, rather than each text individually and then a brief comparative comment at the end. However some candidates are still writing about each text individually and then writing a comparative comment at the end. Examiners commented that these responses were not as successful as those candidates whose responses were comparative throughout.

Most candidates were able to identify some relevant comparisons and use some valid references from the texts as support but they did not always develop their responses sufficiently. Comparative points that were made covered the different purposes of the texts (to advise and to persuade) and that Text One concentrates

on positivity as beneficial whereas Text Two suggests a negative outlook could be beneficial. They also compared features of the texts such as the use of sub-headings and experts. Examiners commented that some candidates limited their comparisons to the techniques used by the writers rather than exploring the ideas and perspectives. There were some candidates who made good comparative points but offered no support for their points.

Better candidates explored the similarities and differences of the two texts, comparing a range of ideas and perspectives and supporting these throughout with evidence. Better candidates were able to make a wide range of comparisons. They did not make general or obvious comparisons but focused on the writers' perspectives and intentions in writing each text. They explored the tones of the texts, the use of humour and personal experiences. The comparisons they used were balanced and carefully selected references were developed. They were able to structure their responses comparatively by taking the various features of the texts and comparing and contrasting them throughout.

Weaker candidates either did not compare or made few limited comparative comments. They wrote about one text and then the other without making comparisons or had a brief comparison at the beginning or end of their response. Sometimes the texts were only linked by a single phrase, e.g. 'Whereas in Text Two...'. They lacked supporting references and made obvious comparisons about content e.g. 'They are both about being positive or negative'. The weakest simply summarised the texts or parts of them with no comparisons at all.

There were several cases of candidates using lists of similarities, sometimes on charts or tables, with no real explanation or expansion of ideas. Some were even presented as bullet point lists. These may have been plans for unfinished responses. Some responses were very brief for a 15 mark question. These issues may suggest problems with timing.

Examiners noted that a small number of candidates are still responding to this question as if it was Question 10 on the legacy specification explaining which text they preferred and why. This is not an appropriate way to respond to this question and should be discouraged.

Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts. This should include how to analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve their effects and how to write comparative responses.

Section B (Question 8)

There was some evidence of some good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet. Examiners commented that candidates who planned their responses seemed to respond in a more focused manner.

Examiners commented that most candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a talk to peers. The most successful responses had a strong sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches, humour and rhetorical devices to engage the audience.

AO1

The majority of candidates used the bullet points provided in the question to provide the content of their talk and some were able to make appropriate use of their own experiences to develop their points. They took a systematic approach to the bullet points and wrote about them in order.

Most candidates were able to select and interpret the relevant information from both texts and were able to include details from at least two of the bullet points and many were able to cover all three bullet points. However some candidates did not cover the first bullet point 'Reasons why people might want to change their outlook' sufficiently and sometimes did not refer to it at all. The coverage of the third bullet point 'How some negativity might be good for us' was occasionally rushed and relied too heavily on the texts.

Better candidates used a wide range of appropriate points of information from both texts, supported with perceptive comments. They covered all the bullet points in detail, selecting the most relevant points from the texts and developing their ideas. A few used their own ideas successfully. Better candidates were able to use all three bullet points, taking ideas from the texts and extending and personalising these, to produce convincing and persuasive contributions. Better candidates not only offered a wider range but dealt with the first bullet point inventively. They approached the idea of changing their outlook on life with relevant and personal examples linked to their own life experiences and perhaps returned to these ideas at the end of their response. They sometimes used ideas such as the use of a personal anecdote from the texts and came up with their own examples or referred to themselves and their friends in the context of positivity and negativity.

Weaker candidates were sometimes able to select and interpret a small number of relevant points but their responses were often short and therefore did not include many details. Often, they only focused on one bullet point, generally the second. They lifted too many of their arguments from the texts and they also referred to the authors of the articles, quoting lines from them which reduced the effectiveness of their response. Many weaker candidates copied large sections from the texts without any attempt to re-work the material.

Examiners commented that a number of candidates lifted information from the texts especially whole sentences or used very close re-wording. This affects the quality of the responses as candidates are expected to adapt the material and use their own words.

AO4

Most candidates were able to adapt the material for the audience and purpose, with suitable salutations and valedictions. They were able to communicate clearly with their audience and were able to write in a reasonably convincing spoken-word tone, although a significant number wrote in an essay register which they then topped and tailed with a greeting and a valediction. A reasonable number of candidates used devices such as rhetorical questions or second person pronouns to keep their audience in mind.

Occasionally candidates used sub-headings. It was not entirely obvious if these were for the benefit of the examiner (showing the question was being answered) or if the titles were to be considered as part of the talk.

Better candidates were able to create a lively and engaging style that suggested they had a well-developed understanding of the required approach. They used an inclusive address and an informal tone, and some were quite entertaining often adding personal experiences and using humour or empathy to relate to the audience. Better candidates were able to use the features of a talk effectively. This was often demonstrated in the structure, tone and purpose. They clearly wrote persuasively and assertively, always aware of their audience.

Weaker candidates communicated at a basic level and had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response often only acknowledging the register at the beginning and ending of their response. Some weaker candidates did not convey any sense that this was supposed to be a talk to peers often writing in a style that resembled an article or essay. Some wrote very little or seemed to have run out of time.

A05

There were some examples of successful responses with good levels of accuracy.

Most candidates were able to use spelling, punctuation and grammar appropriately to deliver their message. They were able to communicate clearly with reasonably accurate sentence structures and a range of vocabulary. Spelling was often correct and many candidates tried hard to use a range of sentence structures and punctuation for effect. However some examiners commented that expression, grammar and punctuation were not always secure.

Better candidates used a good range of correctly spelt vocabulary with some ambition and had a good range of punctuation including the correct use of apostrophes, commas in lists and other devices. They used a range of different sentence structures and punctuation to help them create particular effects. These responses employed accurate paragraphing which could be for effect. There was often evidence of proofreading.

Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to communicate their ideas and their language controls were not always secure, especially grammar. Some examiners commented that weaker candidates had problems with grammar and expression, despite good spelling and punctuation. Other examiners noted that punctuation was an issue with candidates writing long, one sentence paragraphs or using very little sentence punctuation.

Common errors commented on by examiners were: missing basic sentence punctuation; comma splicing; missing or misused apostrophes; problems with homophones; misspelling of basic vocabulary; not capitalising 'I' for the personal pronoun; missing capital letters at the beginning of sentences; verb tense and other grammatical errors.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts and how to write appropriately and accurately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section.

There was some evidence of planning which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Some examiners commented positively on evidence that candidates had proofread their work but other examiners observed that candidates would have benefitted from proofreading their work more carefully.

Examiners commented, as always, on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 9

Examiners did not see many responses to this question.

AO4

Some examiners commented positively on candidates' responses to this question and it was clear that many candidates who chose this question had been prepared to write in a persuasive and argumentative style. However other examiners thought that some candidates struggled to develop and sustain a response.

Most candidates were able to write in the appropriate discursive style, offering a range of points on the benefits and drawbacks of looking on the bright side. They were able to communicate their ideas successfully and understood the nature of discursive writing. They offered a range of ideas on having an optimistic view of life. Many candidates wrote about both sides of the argument before drawing their own conclusions.

Better candidates adopted a persuasive and argumentative tone and had clearly been prepared to write this kind of response. They wrote in an engaging and lively manner, offering strong arguments with some balance where they considered both sides of the discussion before completing with a strong conclusion. Some candidates produced quite impassioned pieces advocating positivity.

Weaker candidates had problems with both maintaining a clear argument and structuring their responses. They made some attempt to answer and address the statement but these responses were often unstructured or narrative. Occasionally responses were heavily reliant on the two reading texts from Section A and in a small number of cases candidates had just lifted large chunks from one or both of the texts.

Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop and sustain their ideas effectively.

Question 10

Question 10 was the most popular question.

AO4

Some examiners commented positively on the quality of some of the responses to the title 'The Choice'.

Candidates interpreted this question in a wide range of ways. The types of choices made ranged from miniature moral dilemmas to literal life or death scenarios and pretty much everything in between. The majority of stories were about either life and death decisions e.g., who to save (parent/sibling or friend), whether to switch off life support, or choices about education, careers or the future e.g. whether to stay in education, which university to go to, which job to apply for, whether to get married, covering a range of experiences both real and imagined. There was often a focus on 'doing the right thing' or making a difficult moral decision.

Examiners commented on the number of unnecessarily gruesome and gory stories. It was felt that these were perhaps influenced by themes on contemporary television, films and computer games. These unpleasant plots sometimes struggled to maintain focus on the title. There were some responses that were very far-fetched and lacked credibility. Occasionally candidates were over-ambitious, producing extremely long responses with complicated plot-lines.

Often candidates chose to reveal the choice at the end of their writing and, whilst in the majority of cases this appeared to be deliberate, occasionally it seemed to be an afterthought.

Occasionally, candidates interpreted the task as an argumentative piece of writing about the idea of making or having choices in life.

Most candidates were able to narrate successfully with an appropriate tone and some character development. They were able to present a clear plot, in a suitable register and use direct speech competently. Many candidates made a real attempt at crafting a story and it was clear that they had been prepared for the requirements of this task.

Better candidates were able to write well-crafted stories. Many were thought provoking and had twists or cliff hangers for effect. The best responses really built up suspense and recognised the strength of feelings involved in difficult choices. They were not over-adventurous, and were written with clarity and a sense of purpose. They often presented stories obviously based on their own lives, and these were the ones who showed narrative flair, handling their plots with some skill and avoiding crude simplicity in characterisation. Successful responses revealed the

choice as the story unfolded. The best responses were tightly plotted and covered a limited timescale. Some very effective vocabulary was used.

Weaker candidates lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative or tended to write simplistic narratives without any great awareness of form, tone and register. They struggled with clarity, with over-complicated or muddled storylines and weak endings that were not closely related to the events that had unfolded. They used plots from films and computer games which were barely adapted for purpose. Their responses were often lengthy with repetitive and unfocussed plot ideas. Sometimes the idea of the choice was added at the end of the story with little sign-posting making the response to the title tenuous. Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response without relying on plots from other sources.

Question 11

AO4

Some candidates produced well-written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing a place that made them feel happy.

Different interpretations of the title included their village, their home, their school, their bedroom, a historical site or somewhere abroad. Some described holiday destinations they had been to with their families or friends. These could be successful, but often tended to start with long and involved stories of how everyone travelled to their destination and tended to become narrative. The better responses chose a place that had a special effect on them e.g. the sea at dawn, a mountain at sunset, and the scenery and weather was described very elaborately. Occasionally responses were discursive e.g. considering what makes a home a happy place.

Most candidates were able to express and order information and describe the chosen place that made them feel happy. They were able to use some level of description and some grasp of purpose although some examiners commented that the descriptions were sometimes generic and similar paragraphs of descriptive writing appeared across different responses in the cohort.

Better candidates wrote in a perceptive and insightful manner, sharply focused on engaging the reader. They developed their responses using wide-ranging and apt vocabulary and through detailed description. They were able to give a perceptive insight into their happy place, instead of simply narrating at length. Their tone was convincing and there was a clear focus and avoidance of repetition.

Weaker responses were often pedestrian, undeveloped or unclear. These responses often drifted into narrative or showed a limited descriptive ability. Some of these responses started with effective description of a place but then became lengthy personal accounts and narratives without much description. This limited their achievement.

Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary which they can use appropriately.

AO5 Comments across Section C (Questions 9, 10 and 11)

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Most candidates were able to express and order information and ideas with some correctly spelt vocabulary, some control of punctuation and some accurate paragraphing. Most candidates were able to communicate successfully even if there were errors.

Better responses were accurate using a wider range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary. They were able to shape their writing and used carefully crafted sentences very effectively.

Weaker candidates communicated poorly. Weaker candidates had numerous errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar. They sometimes relied on basic sentence structures which became quite repetitive.

There was some evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but most examiners commented on the number of candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses and sentence structure including missing words. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication. Some examiners also commented on the use of over-ambitious vocabulary which was not effective or appropriate.

Common errors commented on by examiners were: missing basic sentence punctuation; comma splicing; missing or misused apostrophes; problems with homophones; misspelling of basic vocabulary; not capitalising 'I' for the personal pronoun; missing capital letters at the beginning of sentences; grammatical errors such as subject-verb agreement.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- were able to explore language and structure and show how these are used by writers to achieve effects in response to Questions 3 and 6
- were able to select a wide range of comparisons and explore the writers' ideas and perspectives in response to Question 7
- were able to select and adapt relevant information from the texts for Question 8
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- used ambitious vocabulary
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to identify language and structure or made little comment on how these are used by writers to achieve effects in response to Questions 3 and 6
- were not able to compare the texts or offered very limited comparisons in response to Question 7
- sometimes narrated the texts in response to Questions 3, 6 and 7
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- copied from the original texts in response to Question 8
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

