

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11

Writing

## Key Messages:

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about its particular focus.
- In **Section 1** tasks it is important to develop the bullet points as evenly as possible.
- Register and tone are important aspects of Directed Writing and need consideration.
- Candidates should pay particular attention to commonly confused words, for example, they/there, this/these.
- Candidates should remember to write in paragraphs in both sections.
- Greater focus on correct use of possessive pronouns would pay dividends.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.
- Candidates should ensure that they develop their writing in both sections, taking careful note of the suggested word lengths.

## General Comments:

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be comparable to that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most candidates and a formal letter of application seemed a genre most had been well prepared for in terms of tone, structure and style. There was a less even spread in terms of question choice in **Section 2** with the majority of candidates choosing the discursive or narrative options. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements which demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing. Very few prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. There were very few instances of prepared essays which either were not wholly relevant to the set questions or which could not include a prescribed sentence in a natural way. Candidates should avoid using offensive language in **Section 2**, even in direct speech, and avoid descriptions and scenarios of a violent nature unless handled very sensitively.

## Comments on specific questions:

### **Section 1**

The Directed Writing task is assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write a letter applying for a job in a hotel seeking to recruit School-leavers. In particular, the candidates had to identify the job being applied for and explain why their qualities, qualifications and experience made them a suitable candidate and how their career may develop in the future. This was a scenario that was easy to imagine for candidates and it was clear that the vast majority had been prepared for writing formal application letters. A full range of real and imaginary information was employed and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

**Section 1** is Directed Writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing a formal letter to a potential employer, adopting the correct tone and register. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year, responses needed to include:

- the job being applied for and why they would like to do this work
- details of their achievements in and out of School and why they make them suitable for the post
- how they would like to develop their career in the hotel business.

In the first bullet point it was essential to clearly identify a specific role in the hotel **and** explain why they wanted to apply for that job. The second bullet point required a reasonably developed explanation of what

they have achieved in and out of School, linking their achievements to the post applied for, and Bullet 3 required developed suggestions of how their career in the hotel business may develop in the future.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged on:

- clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience
- a correct format for the piece of writing
- appropriate tone and register
- the use of information to justify personal opinion
- the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points.

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks were awarded to responses which kept their focus on the purpose of the letter and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point posed few problems and the majority of candidates identified a specific role within the hotel and offered a number of compelling reasons to explain why they particularly wanted the job. The most popular suggestions were taken from the question paper and the majority of candidates applied for jobs as a chef or a receptionist. Some were more ambitious and applied to work in the HR department or work on designing the interior rooms. Occasionally candidates did not clearly specify a job, but instead lifted the phrase 'such as receptionists or chefs' from the question paper: this was not fully in keeping with the demands of the question and usually led to a muddled response. The best responses fully developed their reasons for seeking employment, often citing a passion for cooking, or enjoyment of meeting people and looking after their needs, but the very best also cited wider reasons such as earning money to fund university fees or contribute to the family income.

The second bullet point invited a wide variety of responses: many candidates listed great achievements at School nearly always clearly linked to the chosen job. For example, many applying for a post as a chef referred to courses taken in Food and Nutrition, or prizes won for the subject. Others cited working in the School dining hall or snack bar. Those applying for a receptionist role cited experience in debating, or speech-giving, clearly linked to enhanced communication skills. Outside School references were made to cooking at home from a young age, preparing dishes for family celebrations or taking further courses at college. Some candidates assumed that the job was being applied for following university education and others straight from school - either approach was completely acceptable in response to bullet 2 as all of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question.

When addressing the third bullet point many sensible suggestions were made as to how they may develop their career in the hotel business. The strongest responses considered their suggestions carefully and linked it to their chosen job, suggesting a role as Head Chef or Assistant Manager in the future. Others were far more ambitious and talked about owning a chain of hotels or restaurants. Weaker responses did not fully address the notion of career development, instead referring to improving the quality of the hotel food, or making guests more contented thus leading to a better reputation. This approach limited scope for development of this bullet and did not demonstrate full understanding. A significant number of candidates ignored this bullet point completely, making no reference to future career prospects at all. The stronger candidates usually were able to amplify all three bullet points well and the best responses were those which included additional material while using the clues in the task.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and candidates were comfortable with the concept of writing a letter of application. However, some candidates missed the opportunity to adopt a persuasive yet formal tone, making the letter either rather arrogant or too pleading. In some cases the letter became too personal and included inappropriate information about personal circumstances. The vast majority of candidates employed an appropriate format by adopting a purposeful and persuasive tone. The best responses were able to communicate their passion for the job while maintaining a formal style. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas effectively in another order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to improve performance; they should use the bullet points to help them do this successfully.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the formal and persuasive tone very well. Other responses were rather short only just reaching the lower word limit. Candidates need to ensure that they address the word length requirements in their responses. Linguistically, candidates were at ease with the vocabulary required for a job application: most found little difficulty in addressing the task to produce a convincing piece of work.

## Section 2

### Question 1

**Describe the sights, sounds and activities at the end of a busy day at School. (Remember that you are describing the people and atmosphere and not just what everyone is doing.)**

This was a reasonably popular title. Planning and organisation were less straightforward with this title but most candidates coped well with the need to describe a variety of sights and activities that may be witnessed at the end of a busy school day. Weaker responses tended to be less organised in their approach, often losing focus on the 'end of the day' and instead describing more generic school activities, sometimes in lessons or at lunchtime. This did not necessarily limit the responses in terms of descriptive writing, but occasionally led to a more narrative approach. However, there were some highly sensitive descriptions of how different people react at the end of school, often focusing on different groups of candidates, or comparing the differing behaviour of candidates, teachers and the parents waiting at the school gates. Many started with a cacophony of sounds, then described them dwindling as the candidates and parents left, until finally the lone caretaker shuts the gates. The best responses were those which embraced the need to describe in detail and used the wording of the question to guide them. Most candidates found it helpful to be reminded of the requirement to describe in the wording of the question and there was a good range of vocabulary deployed in detailing the different sights and sounds. Occasionally responses lapsed into narrative accounts of leaving school at the end of the day and what happened at home afterwards.

### Question 2

**Town or village life? Where would you prefer to live? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was a very popular title and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who clearly had strong opinions on the subject. The majority of candidates organised their responses well, either by looking at different aspects of town and village life and comparing them throughout the response, or by looking at the advantages and disadvantages of one, then the other, before reaching a conclusion. Either approach was suitable. Many responses cited the advantages of town life in terms of superior medical facilities, Schools, roads and employment prospects, but an equal number referred to the superior community life offered in the village and the high levels of crime in towns. Other responses offered a very balanced view, pointing out that both have advantages and disadvantages and in the end it is personal preference. Some candidates painted vivid descriptions of life in the village referring to cultural festivities and traditions, the warmth of family life, the beauty of rural surroundings and freedom from pressure and expense. They tended to see towns as pressured, polluted, dangerous and unfriendly. Others described town life as vibrant, exciting, modern and clean, referring to the endless opportunities afforded by a sound infrastructure. They tended to describe the village as backward, limiting, lacking basic facilities and being too remote. Many candidates argued very strongly, clearly using their personal experience to support their views.

### Question 3

**Write a story which includes the words: 'It was lucky that I ran as quickly as I did'.**

This was a very popular title. It offered much scope for an endless variety of settings. Many candidates wrote exciting stories of rescue, or fleeing from a potential assault. Another popular scenario was an important appointment nearly missed through transport problems. A small number of candidates took the sentence literally and wrote about running in a race. The best essays were those that built up tension and expectation, and embedded the specified sentence naturally and fluently. The most sophisticated responses did not end with the sentence but dealt sensitively with the aftermath and relief of saving the day, or escaping the unwanted situation. Less successful responses did not build up the tension enough so that the specified sentence lacked impact in terms of the development of the narrative. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well the majority of candidates integrated the given sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness.

#### Question 4

##### **Dancing (Remember you may adopt any approach to this topic.)**

This was a reasonably popular topic inviting a wide range of responses. Any approach to this question was possible. There were many very strong responses that explored the importance of dance in a variety of cultures, often revealing very sound knowledge of the subject matter. Other candidates discussed the importance of dance as a form of self-expression and its importance as an art form in modern culture. There were also many very strong narratives which explored a variety of scenarios about struggling dancers, the rehearsal process leading up to a dance competition, or an individual forbidden to dance but overcoming restrictions and breaking the mould. It was noticeable that many candidates used anecdotal evidence in their essays, which often led to lively and sensitive writing. Clearly this was a topic that enabled the candidates to use their own experiences. Weaker responses tended to simply list types of dances and offer a few details about them, or attempt to explore the importance of dance with a rather weak grasp of the subject-matter.

#### Question 5

##### **Write a story in which two different shops play an important part. (Remember that you should include full details of their importance in order to show how they are central to your story.)**

There were very few responses to this title, possibly because candidates had seen an attractive title early in the list of options. Stories usually involved complex narratives, involving competition between two rival shops, or criminal activities where two shops were targeted by gangs of thieves or shop-lifters. The better responses developed characters in the form of the shop owners, and tension through their competitive relationship, or the unfriendly deeds of others. Such situations were treated in a number of ways with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama of it all.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12

Writing

## Key Messages:

- In **Section 1** candidates should familiarise themselves with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use them as a checklist. Even candidates who score a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- In **Section 1** it is no longer necessary to start with addresses in a letter but if candidates volunteer this information it can create a poor impression if it is done incorrectly. Also, putting a word count at the end of an essay is a waste of a candidate's time which could be used for checking.
- Ensuring correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority candidates.
- Candidates should clear up confusions between 'everyday' and 'every day', 'wish' and 'hope' 'prize' and 'price' and 'since' and 'until'.
- Repetitive vocabulary as sentence openings should be avoided.
- There is an increasing but unnecessary use of the word 'itself' in some Centres, as in the sentence 'These are the aspects of my school itself'.
- Increasingly, the use of capital letters is becoming careless, as in 'music day', 'prize-giving' and 'sports day' when referring to major events.
- Despite the occasional use of 'wanna', there was a great improvement again in the use of correct expression rather than slang/ text language or swearing.
- Candidates should avoid the use of vague words such as 'things' and 'stuff'.

## General Comments:

The overall standard of the vast majority of candidates this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. There were relatively few examples of Band 1 writing. The very best candidates demonstrate great creativity and accuracy every year, as well as a wide vocabulary. Equally there were relatively few in Bands 7 and 8. **Section 1** was done well by the vast majority. This year, in **Section 2** all of the titles had their followers and there was an improved take up for the discursive and single word titles. Time management for the vast majority was very good. The strengths and weaknesses of linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports. There was an improvement in the use of letter endings but also still many candidates who give addresses to the letters even though they do not have to. There was improved paragraphing in the **Section 1** task this year. Sentence separation errors still give cause for concern.

## Comments on Specific Questions:

### **Section 1 Directed Writing**

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that their Principal wanted to make a documentary film about their school. He or she was looking for a suitable candidate to speak in the film about the best aspects of the school. As a result, candidates had to write a letter to the Principal applying to take part in the film. Speaking about their school was well within any candidate's personal experience and the overwhelming majority of them responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. There were very few

misinterpretations of the task. The scenario allowed for a wide variety of personal views of their school and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

As is always said with this question, **Section 1** is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Section 2**. Candidates must accept the need to follow instructions and this year had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear reason for wanting to take part in the film
- details about the candidate's achievements, in and out of school, that would make them suitable to take part
- clearly identified aspects of the school they wished to highlight and why this was so.

In the first bullet point it was important to have *reasons* for wanting to take part in the film and not just merely a vague desire to do so. The second bullet point depended on supplying as many *relevant* achievements as possible so that the Principal would be in no doubt about choosing the writer. Bullet 3 depended on a wise choice of aspects that would show the best of the school and being able to justify the choice.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged under headings of clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience; a correct format for the piece of writing; appropriate tone and register; the use of information to justify personal opinion, as well as the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points.

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks went to those who kept their focus on giving reasons for their suitability and their choice of aspects. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas, or responses to the bullet points, that will gain most marks. Therefore, for bullet point 1, the most successful candidates went beyond simply stating that they would like to be in the film; they gave a reason for wanting to be in it. For many it was a matter of pride and/or gratitude; they had a desire to show off the school for all that it had done for them, or they were in their final year and wanted to give something back to the school. Some wanted to make their families proud. Understandably, virtually everyone took for granted that the film was to be made in English and so wanted to do it to prove, or improve, their ability in this language. Many wanted the opportunity because they saw themselves as journalists or actors in their future life. These were all genuine reasons and made a good impression. Some candidates relied on weaker answers and gained a little less credit; for example, some just found the idea an interesting one but failed to specify why and some merely said they were the best person for the job, again without specifying why. A small number of responses were difficult to reward here as candidates started to talk immediately about their suitability rather than their *reason* for wanting to be in the film. One person, for example, said that he was a scout leader and it was difficult to see this as a *reason* for wanting to be in the film. Linguistically, quite a large number of candidates made the mistake of applying 'for the film' rather than applying 'to be in the film'.

Bullet point 2 was the most successful of the three for most candidates. A very large number of candidates were able to list achievements which, crucially, were relevant to their involvement in the film. Many had the required skills in oratory: many were students of Drama or good at English Oral examinations; many were naturally confident when it came to speaking in front of a camera; many could claim certificates and medals for debating competitions and many were fluent in more than one language, which would give the film wider appeal. A very large number of candidates rightly claimed they had spent a long time in the school, it was their 'second home', and so knew more about the school than most. These, and similar reasons, were so obviously suitable as qualifications that they hardly needed justifying. Some other achievements were suitable but less obviously so and therefore needed greater justification – for example, being head prefect or a top candidate might imply ability but it needed to be explained what exactly was helpful in those achievements or qualifications. Even more so, anyone who claimed sporting prowess (for example, medals in a swimming gala) would find it hard to use this for justification here unless bullet point 3 aimed to highlight the sporting aspects of the school. Some weaker candidates even listed achievements/ qualifications which made it very difficult to see how they could have any relevance – for example, life-saving skills. If candidates got this bullet 'wrong', it was because they read 'your achievements' as being the school's achievements and so said very little about themselves and their suitability. Weaker still were a small number of candidates who admitted to having no qualifications or achievements which may have been a little too honest for their own good.

The 'best aspects' for bullet point 3 needed to be very carefully chosen and they needed even more justification than the points in bullet 2. Merely listing, as some did, the rules and regulations of the school or simply outlining a school day was rather limited as it was true of virtually all schools. Also, some aspects, like good manners or high exam pass rates, would be quite difficult to *show* in a film. The best candidates here kept their eyes on the fact that it was a *film* and chose a relatively small number of aspects of the school

which were outstanding or which made the school different or which had visual impact and then said very clearly why they had chosen these features. There was a great emphasis on recently-built laboratories or sporting facilities or updated classrooms. Programmes of visiting the poor and needy were effectively highlighted. Many of the celebrations in the school, such as Music Day or Prize Giving, would have made for good viewing. Effective justification included wanting to inspire candidates to come to the school or wanting to show how involved the school was in social issues or extra-curricular matters.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose**, and **situation**. This was also true of the awareness of **audience** through an acknowledgement in the greeting ('Dear Sir' or 'Dear Principal') and throughout the letter where the candidate often referred to the Principal in glowing terms as one of the strengths of the school. A small number of weaker candidates lost this focus as the letter went on and they started to refer to the Principal in the third person, despite addressing him ('..when the Principal recognised my talent'), and by referring to 'your school' instead of 'our school'. **The register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal by most and only a very few lapsed into a casual approach. There was some appropriate vocabulary, as in 'curriculum', 'editing', and so on which lent authenticity to the venture. It was good to see that most candidates avoided the temptation of writing a **narrative** but a small number did allow themselves in bullets 2 and 3 to tell too long a story about some achievement or aspect. Most candidates employed an 'appropriate' **format** with the formal letter ending (usually 'faithfully' but also 'sincerely' and 'truly') following the guidance given in the rubric. Many candidates added a subject heading after 'Dear Sirs' which was accepted. However, this was intended to be a letter to the Principal and some candidates (fewer than last year) ignored this wording and set their text out as a report or a mixture of a letter and a report. Therefore, whilst most candidates ended the letter appropriately, a small number of candidates (again, better than last year) ended the letter inappropriately ('Regards', 'From') or ended it as a report with just a signature and a date. A significant number wrote 'Your faithfully'. Very few ignored format completely. Organisation hardly varied, with candidates logically and sensibly following the bullet points in the order given. A very small number made use of paragraph headings to reinforce the organisation and, although this looked more like a report, in the circumstances again, it did not cause a problem. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, formal **tone** and approach very well. Where tone slipped at all it was in the first bullet point where some candidates were rather demanding in their request ('I want to take part..' or 'I will take part..' rather than the more polite 'I would like to take part..'). Some even assumed they had the part already. There were many particularly good final paragraphs where the candidates asked for their letters 'to be taken into consideration' and thanks were given in advance. **Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when bullets 2 and 3 were answered fully.

Linguistically, with the personal and school-based information required, most candidates found it quite straightforward to produce a convincing piece of work. For the same reason, spelling was generally satisfactory. As far as vocabulary was concerned, there was some confusion between 'documentary'/'document'/'documentary film' as well as 'since' and 'until'. There was also an overuse of an awkward agreement where the candidates took the word 'aspects' or 'achievements' in the plural from the question and then only provided one example or used the singular verb 'The best aspects of the school is..'. Very obvious with some candidates this year was the omission of 'though' in expressions such as 'Even I am well known..' and the overuse of 'itself' as a random sentence ending. Verb use and control was essentially good although there was sometimes confusion between what the school and/or the candidate did routinely and what had been done on only one occasion previously.

There was sometimes some clumsy expression as in, 'I will give you some of my aspects..'. Another weakness as a letter opening was to write 'I is writing..' or simply 'Am writing..'. Far too often the word 'Principal' was written as 'Principle', which was unexpected as the word was in the question.

## **Section 2 Creative Writing**

- 1. Describe the people and atmosphere inside a busy workplace. (Remember that you are describing the people and the atmosphere and not just what everyone is doing.)**

This was quite a popular question. Candidates tended to split themselves into three camps when it came to their approach. Very few seemed to be able to simply describe a workplace without giving it some narrative context. So, they described either a place where they had themselves held a temporary post, or it was a place they had visited as part of their school work, or it was a business that was owned by someone in their family and they had reason to go there one day. In the context of a descriptive topic, a short narrative opening was acceptable. The location of 'a busy workplace' was very varied and included market places, clothing factories and factories dedicated to light industry. Some of the locations were not strictly interior ones but, as long as the candidates described what was within the workplace, the interpretation was

perfectly acceptable. A successful descriptive essay will always makes use of all the senses and this title allowed very easily for this. Candidates wrote evocatively about the sight of workers scurrying about, and the noise and heat that some of them endured in a factory. By contrast, the quiet efficiency of a city office was suggested by others. The smells of each location, be they the acrid smells of industry or the antiseptic cleanliness of an office, were highlighted. Descriptions of fruit, vegetables and other produce in a busy market worked very well as they introduced the senses of taste and touch. Many candidates took the opportunity to discuss the exploitative nature of much factory work but, equally, a large number praised the efficiency and good practice of managers and workers in a well-run business. As is said every year, candidates who could use adjectives effectively did very well in such circumstances, as did those who kept narrative to a minimum.

**2. 'What are the biggest benefits and drawbacks of travel away from home? Give reasons and examples to support your view.'**

This topic produced many more responses than is usual for the discursive topic and, in fact, this was one of the more popular questions on the paper. The expression 'away from home' in the title did not imply any restriction on the distance travelled; indeed there were many candidates who wrote about travel abroad and also many who wrote about travel within their own country. It was noticeable that the great majority of candidates did both sides of the question, benefits and drawbacks, and so provided a balanced, lengthy response. Travel away from home was seen as exciting, allowing the individual to discover new cultures, religions, and laws. It allowed the traveller to mature and become self-reliant with money. Above all, it was the gateway to further education. Nevertheless, candidates were well aware of the problems created by being away from friends and family. They may have gained freedom from parental control but they could see that help from those who loved them at times of crisis was now not available. Furthermore, the prospects of having to cook for themselves, the cost, the problems of illness and the problems caused by a different language provided further drawbacks. Some candidates really exaggerated the problems, suggesting that kidnap, theft and an inability to adapt to the climate awaited travellers. The better essays did not just outline both sides of the argument, they came to a conclusion which was usually that travel away was more beneficial than disadvantageous, with the major benefit being the growth of responsibility in the individual. A weakness for some candidates was to confuse the word 'de-stress' for 'distress' which often gave the opposite impression from the one intended.

**3. Write a story which includes the words: 'I never realised how useful that item of clothing would be.'**

This question was an extremely popular one and it produced a number of very good narratives. There were a vast number of stories which involved the narrator setting off for a specific location or event, such as school, a party or an expedition, and the narrator's mother insisting on the narrator taking a particular piece of clothing (usually protective in some way) which was at first unwelcome but which later turned out to be essential. Such essays turned out to be a lesson for the narrator. There were also many in which an elderly relative gave the narrator a 'sensible' present of a totally unfashionable piece of clothing which later earned the admiration of everyone, often at a wedding or other such formal occasion. Better candidates again were able to draw lessons from such events and imbue the story with energy and good humour, often by the inclusion of properly-punctuated direct speech. Some stories did stretch belief – one such involved the narrator tying together all his clothes to save someone dangling on the edge of a cliff while another was about the narrator wearing a vest which turned out to be bullet-proof and allowed him to protect President Obama. A significant number of candidates made the mistake of confusing the words 'item of clothing' for 'cloth' and produced essays which were wide of the mark. Linguistically it was quite common for weaker candidates to confuse singular and plural by referring constantly to 'all their clothes' and then having to include the phrase 'that item of clothing'.

**4. Keeping fit.**

This was a very popular title indeed. Candidates took advantage of interpreting this title in any way they wished and so wrote discursive or narrative essays. Those who wrote factually about the need to keep fit knew a lot about this subject, possibly from other school lessons and possibly from government initiatives. They were able to outline, very knowledgeably, the requirements for a proper diet and exercise regime in order to keep fit. There was a good deal of scientific expertise in some of the vocabulary related to medical conditions ('cardiovascular' etc.) and the best essays structured ideas so that the reader was aware of the negative results of a poor lifestyle before being shown the advantages of a proper lifestyle. 'Five fruits a day' and 'thirty minutes of exercise a day' was the usual requirement to combat the evils of fast food and a 'couch-potato' lifestyle. The results of losing weight and feeling better awaited everyone and there was also great enjoyment to be had from practising yoga and Zumba dancing which was a particular favourite. As this



title was so popular, it highlighted even more than is usual, the problem of repeating the title as a sentence opening. There were some essays in which virtually every sentence started with 'Keeping fit'. Varied sentence openings are essential in every essay, as is varied sentence length, and never more so than with this kind of title. Almost universally, candidates, even the best ones, made the mistake of saying 'balance diet' instead of 'balanced diet'.

**5. Write a story in which two different keys play an important part. (Remember that you should include full details of their importance in order to show how they are central to your story.)**

This was not a particularly popular question and was certainly not as popular as the other narrative question. Candidates who chose it tended to write stories with a common theme. The narrator had very often got up late in the morning and had to rush to school or work. This had led to confusion over which set of keys had been taken and the narrator subsequently found himself or herself locked out on returning home. Whether a comic or a serious tone was involved, these straightforward stories had a clear narrative energy and included some good characterisation. Slightly more adventurous narrators told stories of mystery and crime, often involving two sets of keys needed to open a chest or safe. Some were a bit far-fetched, like one story in which the narrator stood outside his house for an hour searching everywhere for a key, only to find it in his pocket. A significant number of candidates misinterpreted the title to an extent and saw the keys not as objects but as key people or qualities so they wrote about the key influence of their father and mother in their upbringing or the part played by both energy and hard work in their success at something or music and sport as key to their enjoyment. Whilst not the expected interpretation, there was some sympathy for this approach as it was obviously a hasty misreading and most made it clear in what sense the two elements were 'keys'.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21

Writing

## Key Messages

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised that content points will not score if they are spread over two bullets with no obvious link, or if they are put in the wrong boxes, although there were fewer instances of this than in previous sessions. Again, while concise notes are recommended, the essential detail of the point being made must be included.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates need practice in the use of connectives such as 'nevertheless' and furthermore' to ensure that these are used appropriately. Work is also needed to avoid the over-use of other, simple conjunctions such as 'and' or 'but', and in using alternative ways of constructing sentences to provide variety. Another useful focus would be the use of the apostrophe to indicate possession, and the fact that it should not be used to denote plurals.

Candidates should read all question wording thoroughly; merely glancing at it sometimes results in a crucial instruction being missed, as in **Question 2**, where quite a considerable number gave the example of 'cinema', despite the emboldened direction that they should not do so.

It is advisable in all questions, including the final vocabulary question, to avoid offering a number of alternative responses. Candidates should consider carefully before deciding on their answer, as in some questions only the first response will be marked.

In those questions which required them to 'explain' in their own words, candidates showed the ability to recognise the key words. While many succeeded in finding suitable synonyms, not all of these answers were couched in explanatory sentences; rather, they resembled the single-word definition of the final vocabulary question.

## General Comments

Candidates generally offered neatly presented scripts, using the guiding parameters of the answer booklet to accomplish this. Most attempted every question and none appeared to find lack of time a problem, having been well prepared by their teachers for the types of questions which might be asked. Candidates are advised to avoid annotating their scripts with unnecessarily confusing arrows, ticks or crosses.

Questions were to be answered on two passages, the first being non-fiction and the second, fiction. The first passage clearly engaged the candidates' interest, being based on something they are likely to have encountered; the second seemed to be less accessible, requiring as it did an understanding of implied meanings and certain aspects of imagery and the writer's craft. The variety of subject matter provided the opportunity for questions which stretched and discriminated amongst candidates, allowing the best responses to demonstrate an ability to deal with the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. This was reflected in a wide range of scores.

The first passage, 'Reading and Viewing', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas; the second, entitled 'Miss Garnet', tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Reading and Viewing' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas; in this case to respond to the text by drawing on their personal knowledge and experience, to distinguish a true statement from distracting false ones, and to demonstrate understanding of the writer's meaning by recognising which of a further three statements reflected accurately what the writer had said and which did not.

The second passage, 'Miss Garnet', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here.

The answer booklet's writing-frame format for the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess or copying verbatim at length, although there were those who attempted to reproduce as much of the original as possible and, in doing so, had no space to include points to be found in the later part of the text. The best responses avoided irrelevance and adhered to the rubric.

In **Question 1(a)** those candidates who followed the bullet point style of the first (given) point in each answer box produced a clear list of selected ideas. The two boxes, with their distinct headings, are intended to guide candidates to separate the two different aspects required in the summary, and very few put content points in the wrong boxes. A single, clear point per bullet should be aimed for, to avoid confusion, with no point relying on a previous one unless an appropriate contextual link is made. Candidates are advised always to refer to the heading in each box. Beginning a bullet point with no subject, or with pronouns 'It' or 'They' will always refer to the noun in the question heading; here, 'Advantages of Film Versions of Books' and 'Disadvantages of Film Versions of Books'. Thus, if the subject of the point was something else, for example 'special effects', 'DVDs' or 'subtitles', there was a need for explicit mention of these things, which was not always met.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose; there were some commendable results among those who made a genuine attempt to use their own words and original structures, while others needed to include greater originality of expression in order to gain high marks. The choice of own words, however, should always be accurate in the context. Certain subject-specific words are difficult to substitute, such as the 'DVDs' mentioned above, and may be retained rather than changing the meaning of the text as, for example, by saying that 'films' (rather than 'DVDs') cost 'more than books'. Many candidates attempted to rework the relevant details from the passage, with the substitution of their own words here and there where possible. Those who lifted randomly selected patches of text sometimes encountered difficulty in linking them and the result made only fractured sense. Very occasionally candidates diverged from the content of the passage to write their own opinions on the topic. This is not the task; it results in irrelevance and is a practice best avoided.

While spelling was quite sound, there was noticeable confusion of singular and plural in pronoun use and in noun-verb agreement, perhaps due to the use of the plural 'film versions' and to the singular concept of 'watching' them e.g. 'Watching films *curb* the imagination' and '*Films* help candidates understand the language and also *it* gives a great experience of the novel'. Improvement could be made in terms of sentence separation which was insufficient in many scripts, the comma frequently substituting for the full stop.

## **Comments on Specific Questions**

### **Section 1 Reading for Ideas**

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of film versions of books, as described in paragraphs two to six of the passage and they could produce these points using either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding those given, there were a further 18 points of which candidates could identify any combination, to a maximum of 15 points. The full range of marks was seen, a small number of candidates being awarded the maximum and many scoring half marks and above. Most chose to list points either in note form or short sentences, usually under bullet points, as suggested by the examples provided. Those candidates who did so were able to focus more clearly on the specific content points than those few who copied large sections of the text. This strategy scored some early points but lack of space and inclusion of irrelevance denied the later ones. Where marks were lost it was often because points were incompletely made, e.g. referring to films helping 'candidates' to read, without the defining addition of 'less motivated', or suggesting that films are 'restricted', with no mention of this being by 'time' and 'place'.

Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 referred to various benefits of film versions of books and there were 11 points which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 3 content points, all linked to the visual potential of

cinematography, compared with books. Almost without exception candidates recognised how settings come to life and how special effects can be even more realistic than the imagination. Fewer expressed the third point successfully, omitting crucial reference to it being films of 'non-fiction' texts which may be more interesting than the books.

Paragraph 3 suggested three advantages of using film versions in Schools. The first was that appreciation of texts being studied can be enhanced by seeing the film version and, further, that such versions may stimulate interest in a particular genre, leading to increased reading or language skills. While the 'increased reading' benefit was noted, it was not usually linked to this newly stimulated interest, and the point was not, therefore, fully made. Most candidates mentioned that teachers may show the film first to make reading the text easier; many did not include that this was particularly in the case of weaker responses.

A further 5 points were available in Paragraph 4, the first two concerning the ways in which film versions make the books' language more readily accessible. If these two points were made clearly and distinctly under the same bullet, both were credited. A number of candidates did not differentiate between film versions generally making language easier to understand than the words of the book and the separate advantage of subtitles allowing the film to be understood by those who speak a different first language. 'Subtitles make the language more accessible' was a common response which scored neither mark. While most noted that film watching provides a communal experience, the last two advantages were offered less frequently: that people often buy the book after seeing the film was an incomplete attempt, requiring the fact that this increases reading; that reading may be seen as 'cool', because of the film's high profile, was rarely given.

The second section of the rubric asked for the disadvantages of film versions of books and a further 7 points were available in Paragraphs 5 and 6. Paragraph 5 contained 2 of these effects: making people too lazy to read and the benefits of reading being lost. The latter could be expressed either in terms of the sort of benefits lost – better spelling, enhanced vocabulary, language skills generally, etc. – or as the fact that such language skills would be harder, or impossible to improve. Candidates were usually successful in making these points, often by careful lifting from the passage, and almost all avoided repeating the rhetorical question posed there without distilling it into a statement.

Paragraph 6 outlined the last 5 disadvantages. The first two concerned the restrictions on film versions of books i.e. when they are available in cinemas and where you can watch them. It was possible to score these points either by reference to these restrictions or to the fact that, by contrast, books may be read anywhere and at any time. A further 2 points suggested the disadvantages of DVDs or home films: they are more expensive than the books and you are less likely to become attached to them in the same way that you might love a book. Attempts at these points were sometimes denied because candidates did not distinguish between 'films' in general and 'DVDs'; the disadvantages of cost and lack of attachment thus became less meaningful. The last point concerned the near impossibility of capturing, in a film, the ambiguity or layers of meaning to be found in a book. The point could also be made by reference to the viewers' own interpretation being inhibited in the face of the film director's point of view being imposed on them. Many candidates made this final point, although a number said, simply, that ambiguity cannot be found in films; omitting the comparison with books left it incomplete.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, stating the advantages and disadvantages of film versions of books, as outlined in the passage. They were to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet. The vast majority of candidates completed the exercise within the given space and very short answers were extremely rare; notice seems to have been taken of past advice that such brevity can never justify a high mark because sustained use of own words or completely accurate English cannot be demonstrated. The best responses used original wording in a noticeable manner, some sustaining this throughout. Occasionally, over-ambitious attempts at own words proved unwise in that they did not always reflect the meaning of the original, as in the attempt to substitute part of lines 7 and 9-10: 'Settings of texts can be more practical than even the broadest of visions'; or, again, 'Watching films curbs visualities'. There were those who managed to combine careful rewording with accurate English and recast the text using a variety of structures, including complex sentences, gaining many or, on occasion, full marks for style. Others selected areas of text appropriate to the task, restructuring and editing without innovation or originality in their use of English. Weaker responses were those which directly copied blocks of text; in the attempt to link these, it proved difficult to control sentence structure fluently.

In **Questions 2, 3 and 4** candidates were tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. **Question 2** asked candidates to give, from their own knowledge or experience, an example of a communal activity in which they had taken part. There were many interesting and thoughtful responses,

ranging from attending church services or football matches to school visits and community service activities. The passage stated that watching a film in a full cinema is a 'communal experience' and that example was not to be used. A significant number ignored this instruction and could not therefore gain the mark. It is advisable to choose an example which has nothing at all to do with that which is forbidden; a few candidates scored with reference to 'watching a film, at home, with the family'. The words 'communal' and 'community' were sometimes confused, but the root idea being the same meant that answers were successful anyway. The addition of 'with friends' sometimes rescued what might otherwise have been a non-scoring, individual activity such as 'listening to music' or 'shopping'.

**Question 3** required candidates to decide, from their reading of Paragraph 5, which of three statements was true. The majority correctly ticked **the third box**, having understood the implication of the paragraph's final sentence.

**Question 4** asked candidates to decide, from their reading of Paragraph 6, to indicate whether each of three given statements was true or false. To do this necessitated careful consideration of each one in the light of precisely what the author had written. **The first two were** misleading, **false** generalisations; **the third was an accurate summary of what had been written**. Most candidates scored at least two and very many all three of the marks.

## Section 2 Reading for Meaning

This text proved more challenging than the first, candidates having to deal with less familiar vocabulary and narrative style and, in general, fewer marks were scored in this section than in **Section 1**.

**Question 5(a)** asked what was particularly 'bold' about Miss Garnet's decision to travel and there was a variety of reasons inferred in Paragraph 1, any of which could be selected: **the fact that she was going to spend a long time, or six months away; that she had not been abroad much in the past; that those trips abroad had made her apprehensive**; and, finally, that **she would be travelling alone**. All of these could also have been combined to suggest that the whole idea would be a big change in her lifestyle. Some candidates chose to copy the words of the passage: 'Her expeditions abroad had been few and for the most part tinged with apprehension', and this was an acceptable lift. Many others chose the distracting reference to the loss of her friend, Harriet, without recognising the inferred connection between that event and her travelling alone, without her companion.

**Question 5(b)** directed candidates to look for 'the experience', mentioned in that first paragraph, which had 'left its mark on Miss Garnet's teaching' and 'on her memory'. The details were clearly given in the passage, immediately before the quoted words, and there were many correct answers about **her taking a school trip to France and hearing her candidates mock her French accent**. The majority mentioned the mockery but fewer included the fact of her taking the trip to France as part of explaining 'fully', as required. That word, 'fully', and the possible two marks, indicated that something more than a single aspect of the experience was to be found. Again, careful lifting of lines 4-6 was acceptable as long as the rhetorical question 'What young teacher would not have been flustered when...' was omitted. This lift was used quite well, candidates realising that the writer's rhetorical technique had to be distilled.

**Question 5(c)** asked for two reasons why Miss Garnet found difficulty in forming good relationships with her candidates and the answer booklet provided distinctly separate lines at **(i)** and **(ii)** for the two reasons to be given. **Her shyness** was recognised by the majority; the other reason, **her reputation for strictness**, was frequently spoiled by the attempted lift of parts of lines 9-10 and the random inclusion of the word 'not', suggesting quite the opposite of the correct answer. A lack of understanding was shown quite often when candidates offered her 'strictness' at **(i)** and 'her severity' at **(ii)**; clearly, the similarity between these characteristics was not appreciated. Quite often the candidates' mockery was repeated from the previous question. Candidates should realise that it is most unlikely that exactly the same answer would be required in two questions.

In **Question 6(a)** candidates were asked to identify, from the second paragraph, two reasons why Harriet's death was a shock to Miss Garnet. Again, one reason was to be given, distinctly, at each of **(i)** and **(ii)**. Many candidates did well to attempt to distil another rhetorical question and provide the statement that **it was Miss Garnet who was always worried about her health, not Harriet**. Unfortunately, the imprecise use of the pronoun 'she' frequently spoiled this attempt. To say 'She made frequent trips to the doctor', when both women were named in the question, was ambiguous; which one made these trips? Precise reference by name was necessary. As with the previous question, some candidates offered the same reason in two ways: **(i)** 'Miss Garnet was always worried about her health. **(ii)** Harriet didn't go to the

doctor's'. Obviously, only the first answer could score. The second reason, **the suddenness of Harriet's death**, was usually overlooked. The majority of candidates lifted the first line of the paragraph, to the effect that the women had lived together for thirty years, but failed to add that after such a long time the *sudden* death was a shock.

**Question 6(b)** was the first in which candidates were instructed to answer in their own words. Referring to the death of heroes, in ancient stories, they were asked what it is which makes the dead men's comrades glad. The final sentence of the paragraph - 'Then they travel on, *glad that ...*' - clearly pointed to the key words: **'confront'** and **'mystery'**. For the first available mark, **acceptable synonyms for the metaphorical 'confront' were 'challenge', 'take on', 'brave', 'stand up to'** and the one which was offered by many candidates: **'face'**. For **'mystery'**, the second key word, **'uncertainty', 'secrets', 'they couldn't understand', 'strangeness'** and **'unknown' were all acceptable** and, although this was less successfully attempted than 'confront', there were a few excellent synonyms which included 'enigma' and 'puzzle'. The question was a challenging one and many lifted widely and irrelevantly from the previous sentence. Better responses gave synonyms in a full sentence of explanation and deserved both marks.

**Question 7(a)** was an inferential one, candidates having to deduce, from information given in Paragraph 3, what Harriet might have found irritating about Miss Garnet. This was answered well by many, Harriet's 'soft-hearted' attitude to the stray cat being recognised as an indication that **Miss Garnet's prohibition against cats** would not have pleased Harriet. A number of candidates, however, were misled by the first sentence and, confusing the two women, offered Harriet's loud laugh, which irritated Miss Garnet. This was an example of how carefully questions should be read, rather than skimmed.

**Question 7(b)**, testing vocabulary in context, asked why Stella, the cat, was referred to as 'anonymous' when she followed Harriet home. The better candidates understood the meaning of the word and answered succinctly that **Harriet and/or Miss Garnet had not yet given the cat a name, or they did not know her at the time**. Suggesting that Stella 'was not known', alone, did not score; presumably she had been known to someone, before she strayed, but the anonymity had to be linked to the two women. There were many candidates who clearly did not understand the word and typical answers made reference to Stella being black, or to her waiting outside all night.

**Question 8(a)** looked for evidence that Stella remained particularly attached to Harriet, the answer being that **as soon as, or when, Harriet died, Stella went away**. This literal comprehension question was usually answered accurately, although some candidates simply lifted from the passage the words which followed those of the question. These were irrelevant and referred merely to how long she had been attached to her mistress.

**Question 8(b)** was the second which required answers in the candidates' own words, and asked them to explain what risk Miss Garnet was taking when she left milk outside the apartment block for the runaway cat. The passage stated that worry made Miss Garnet *'risk the neighbours' potential ridicule'*; candidates were thus clearly directed to the key words **'potential'** and **'ridicule'**. **Synonyms such as 'mocking', 'laughing at', 'making fun of', 'scorn' and 'derision' were all acceptable as substitutes for 'ridicule'** and the first three of these were frequently offered. **'Potential', with synonyms like 'possible', 'there was a chance', 'they might' or 'could'** was successfully attempted only by the better candidates; many wrongly thought it meant 'anger', 'criticism' or 'irritation'. Answers which included the idea of 'might' or 'could' occasionally did not score because the context in which they were used was quite wrong e.g. 'She risked that a fox might drink it'. The context had to be the possibility of the neighbours' actions. It is important to recognise that there may be more to the required explanation than single words, as in the rather limited response: 'potential – possible; ridicule – laugh'.

**Question 8(c)** asked that candidates pick out 'three consecutive words' which showed that Miss Garnet did not want to face up to the fact that she was wrong about Stella's whereabouts. **'Forced to accept'** were the required words, and those who understood the meaning of 'consecutive' often scored, although a few suggested 'she was forced', which was not quite accurate. Candidates should know what the word 'consecutive' means; it is often used in examination questions, yet there were many who selected three (and even, sometimes, more) random, individual words which had no connection with the question.

**Question 8(d)** asked what Miss Garnet saw as her 'incompetence'. This inferential question was answered correctly by only the very best candidates and was probably the most discriminating on the Paper. The majority said that 'her incompetence was trying to deal with the loss of Stella so soon after losing Harriet'. They reworked the sentence in which 'incompetence' occurred, substituting 'was' for the crucial word 'in', not realising how this changed the meaning. The passage had told us how she had tried to tempt Stella back and how she had been forced to admit failure. The inference was that her 'incompetence' lay *in* that failure

to get the cat back; her **'incompetence'** was that she had been **unable to deal with Stella's loss by finding her.**

**Question 9** was another which had to be answered in the candidates' own words. They were asked why Miss Garnet 'found herself' in the letting agent's office and had to recognise that the words to be considered were **'numbness'** and **'caution'**; there was no necessity to re-cast 'emotional' or 'usual' and some candidates used them, sensibly, to frame their responses. The key words could be identified from the trigger which followed them: *'...and so she found herself in the office...'* Another discriminating challenge, only a few explained that **Miss Garnet's emotions or feelings had been deadened by losing her friend; that she felt 'empty', 'drained' or 'detached from reality'**. Some explained it satisfactorily by saying that 'she felt nothing', or 'hardly anything'. More success occurred in the attempts to re-cast the word 'caution', which could be approached in two ways: the numbness had made Miss Garnet lose her usual **'carefulness', 'tentativeness' or 'wariness'**; alternatively, it had made her more 'bold', 'daring', 'audacious', or made her 'careless', 'less wary', 'less careful'. A large number of candidates seemed to make little effort to locate the key words, an essential strategy in any 'own words' question. There were many attempts to answer in straightforward terms of why Miss Garnet *went* to the letting agent's office (i.e. to look for a tenant for her flat), rather than *'why she found herself there'*.

Answers to **Question 10** were to focus on something 'about Miss Garnet', about what the writer was trying to imply in the fact that she 'noticed' the man's 'too short haircut' and 'fluorescent mobile phone'. There were some excellent, astute answers such as her being **'conservative'** or **'old-fashioned'**; many others recognised that she was 'judgemental', 'critical' or 'disapproving', without picking up from the implication of the fluorescent phone and the 'too short' haircut that such disapproval was directed at 'young', 'trendy' or 'modern' people. Weaker responses stated, merely, that Miss Garnet was 'observant' or somehow deduced that she 'fancied' the agent or that he 'reminded her of Harriet'.

**Question 11**, having mentioned the writer's reference to 'the habits of a lifetime', asked what particular habit of Miss Garnet was being referred to in the final paragraph. The question turned out to be a good discriminator with probably half of the candidates recognising that **she was always careful with money**. The word 'frugal' appeared in the best scripts; others correctly suggested the idea of her being 'stingy', 'mean', 'miserly', or of her 'not spending too much', or 'looking for bargains'. Less thoughtful answers irrelevantly focused on Harriet's cutting out of advertisements, and bore no relation to the question. After the generalisation about 'habits of a lifetime', candidates were asked to give the single habit of Miss Garnet implied here; the addition of other 'habits' denied a correct answer. Once again, the advice is to read the question very carefully.

**Question 12** was the customary vocabulary question. Candidates were required to show their understanding, in context, but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or phrases from a choice of eight. Fewer candidates than usual scored the full 5 marks, many gaining only 1 or 2.

**Inevitably** and **ultimately** were popular choices and the most frequently correct. The former was usually defined as **'unavoidably'**, with **'bound to happen', 'surely'** and **'certainly'** also being seen quite often; individuals came up with **'inescapable'** and **'was always going to happen'**, showing clear understanding. Common misconceptions were 'obviously', 'clearly' and 'evidently'. For **ultimately**, the usual answers were **'eventually', 'finally'** and **'in the end'**; 'lastly' was an occasional wrong attempt. **Somewhat** was quite often chosen, with the synonyms **'sort of'** and **'kind of'** being most frequent; equally acceptable were **'rather', 'quite', 'slightly'** and **'a bit'**. 'Somehow' and 'almost' were inaccurate alternatives. **Scavenging** was often seen as either the act of eating food or as searching or looking for 'something'. Separately, these alternatives did not score; a combination of the two was ideal, as in **'searching for food'**, with credit being given to words such as 'leftovers', and 'scraps, to indicate 'food'. The essence of **scavenging** is the action of 'picking over' or 'rooting in', 'foraging' or 'ferreting' and all of these definitions were acceptable alone. **Exotic**, when selected, was sometimes correctly defined as **'faraway'** or **'foreign'**; other possible synonyms, which were very rarely seen, included **'unusual', 'different', 'alien', 'out of the ordinary'** and **'unfamiliar'**. Some candidates undoubtedly had the right idea about the meaning of **exotic**, but their phrases of definition were too generalised, e.g. 'places not found in your location' or 'from another place'. Words such as 'beautiful', 'wonderful' and 'exciting' were, again, too generalised to be credited; 'tropical' was a popular wrong attempt, being too specific, geographically. **Futile** was another word chosen quite frequently and many scored, usually with the adjective **'useless'**. Other suitable synonyms were **'pointless', 'purposeless', 'worthless'** and **'obsolete'**; candidates also came up with interesting and equally acceptable alternatives: **'to no avail', 'bootless'** and **'in vain'**. Definitions such as 'stop', 'impossible' and 'hopeless' were all seen but did not score. Few candidates opted to define the other two words, **tinged** and **indifference**. For **tinged**, with its contextual sense of **'a trace', 'a hint', 'touch of, or 'a little'**, some suggested 'painted' or gave quite the opposite meaning with 'full of' or 'covered with'. The final word, **indifference**, was occasionally correctly

substituted with '**lack of care**', '**lack of interest**' or '**lack of concern**'; while 'not caring' was synonymous, 'carefree', which was sometimes offered, means something quite different. Other tempting but incorrect answers were 'disinterested', 'not paying attention', 'not noticing' and 'carelessness'.

Because understanding only is being tested in the vocabulary question, correct grammatical form was not insisted on, as long as meaning was clear.

Candidates are advised that where two alternative answers are offered only the first of two distinct responses will be credited.



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22

Writing

## Key messages

In **Question 1(a)**, although some candidates reproduced lengthy extracts, this did not seem to be as common as previous years. There was generally secure understanding of the passage, with candidates selecting accurately for the appropriate boxes.

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised that it is necessary to complete a point within one bullet; where a point is split across two or more bullets, with no sensible contextual link between them, a mark cannot be awarded.

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates need to be encouraged to write within the frame.

In a few cases in **Question 1(a)**, the use of ellipsis, as in (.....), instead of writing out the points in full led to the loss of such points and it is important that teachers draw their candidates' attention to the fact that this is not an acceptable form of communication, even in note-form, in an examination.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates could improve in the area of noun-verb agreement, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, or intrusive use of the article where none is required. Candidates can improve the quality of their responses by working on the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' to ensure that these are used appropriately.

In questions which ask for an opinion from the passage, candidates should be advised that a simple lift will not always work. Candidates need to learn how to distinguish between a fact and an opinion.

Candidates in general seemed to cope better than in the past with questions in which they were required to answer in their own words in that they seemed able to select the key words to be re-cast; however, limited vocabulary often prevented them from offering accurate synonyms.

There seemed to be more questions not attempted than in previous sessions, particularly **Question 3** and **Question 8d**.

## General Comments

Candidates were to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. As has happened with previous examinations, Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 2, as Passage 2 required understanding of some fairly sophisticated vocabulary, nuances of language, and some aspects of writer's craft.

There were very few incomplete scripts and even the weakest candidates seemed to engage with the tasks and the texts. Most candidates appeared to have been well prepared by their teachers, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked. In general, they coped well with the layout of the answer booklets.

Both passages, the first entitled 'Electronic Book Readers' and the second contextualised with an introduction rather than a title, seemed to engage the interest of the candidates and to stretch and discriminate amongst them, and this was reflected in a very wide range of scores.

The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Electronic Book Readers' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further

questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish fact from opinion, to relate the information in the passage to their own knowledge or experience, and to identify the writer's attitude to the topic under discussion.

The second passage tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.

The format of the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or producing both fair and rough copies. There was very little irrelevance noted or evidence of candidates diverging from the rubric.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures, and there were several assured and stylish writers gaining full marks. These candidates used carefully crafted and punctuated complex sentences. Others needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks. Some are very skilled at moving around the text, but offered no original vocabulary. Often candidates who relied on lifting did not distil their answer. This seemed to be a matter of technique rather than understanding sometimes and Centres are advised that candidates need to consider the content when they lift and ensure it addresses the question.

Both spelling and punctuation were good. The overall standard of written English was in some cases impressive, although more errors were reported this session. As indicated in 'Key Messages', candidates can improve on the problem of noun-verb agreement, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, even by the best candidates, or intrusive use of the article where none is required, e.g. 'a loss to the society'. There was also a tendency to add phrases or connectives such as 'furthermore', 'hence' etc. liberally with no clear idea of their usage; in some cases there was little sense in what had been written because of this, e.g. 'they are portable but on the contrary they don't take up much space'.

In parts of the world where French is spoken, there was some confusion over the English 'libraries' and the French 'librairies'; thus libraries and bookshops overlapped in some content points. The use of the intrusive article was also an issue, as in 'dislike of the snobbery' instead of simply 'dislike of snobbery'.

### **Comments on specific questions:**

#### ***Section 1***

**Question 1 (a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of electronic book readers, or e-readers as they were subsequently called, as described in the passage in paragraphs two to six inclusive. They could produce these content points in sentences or in note form, and they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied, it was usually because key ideas, or possibly agents, were missing. Some responses were able to reach the maximum 15 marks – indeed some candidates identified in excess of 15 content points although only 15 marks could be awarded; the exercise was fully discriminating as the whole range of marks could be found.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 19 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences; few responses presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point, understanding that there is little evidence to suggest that such a strategy yields more marks. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, most candidates used bullet points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets. If more than one content point was made under a single bullet, both marks (or all marks in the unlikely event of there being in excess of two points under a single bullet) were awarded.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 described the advantages of e-readers, and there were 10 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 5 content points, (excluding the provided first point) outlining these advantages. Some e-books are cheaper than bookshop prices, there is no need to visit bookshops, e-readers do not take up much space and are portable. Moreover, it is possible to carry very many, or hundreds, of books on an e-reader. Where points were incorrectly made in this section, it tended to be because of the confusion between e-books and e-readers, the electronic device

on which e-books are read; thus it was incorrect to write that e-readers can be downloaded at a cheaper price than bookshop prices, or to imply that was being said by the omission of the agent. The rubric suggested that the understood agent was 'e-readers' and so when the content point was about e-books, the correct agent had to be spelled out by the candidate. Leniency was exercised here in that if candidates described 'e-books' simply as 'books', this was overlooked provided the context was indeed e-books and not 'real' books. Very few candidates made the point about being able to carry hundreds of e-books on an e-reader, because they lifted the section of the text without the reference to e-books, writing merely that you can carry 'hundreds on an e-reader'.

Paragraph 3 explained that e-readers help visually impaired people because the size of the print can be increased, and lights can be attached to keep eyes healthy. Furthermore, reading can be personalised with an e-reader, the novelty of e-readers might lead to increased reading or improved examination results, and there is no need to use a bookmark as e-readers take you to the point where you stopped reading. Points incompletely made were a cause of lost marks in this paragraph: the link between visually impaired readers and increased print size had to be established, and the link between attached lights and healthy eyes had to be established. There were many cases of only half of each of these points being made, and there are no half marks awarded in this examination. Some said the size of the screen, and not the print, could be enlarged. It was not sufficient to say that e-readers will lead to increased reading unless this increase was linked to the novelty factor.

The second section of the rubric asked for the disadvantages of e-readers, and there were 9 available content points, (excluding the first, which was given.) to be found over Paragraphs, 4, 5 and 6. In Paragraph 4, candidates could make 3 points (excluding the provided first point): the cost of e-readers is high, consequently they are socially divisive, or not everyone can afford one, and many people will have little opportunity to read at all if libraries close. This latter point was frequently incompletely made, with the point being made that people will be deprived of reading, but without the addition of the reference to libraries closing. In Paragraph 5, it was possible to find 3 content points: e-readers deny the pleasure of simply owning or holding 'real' books, e-books cannot be swapped, and they cannot be annotated. As with some of the previous content points, there was some confusion here over agents; it was incorrect to suggest that the devices called e-readers cannot be swapped or annotated, as it is the e-books to which these limitations belong. To either state the agent as being e-readers, or to imply that 'e-readers' was the agent by omitting an agent altogether, was a common source of lost marks in this area.

Paragraph 6 outlined a further 3 disadvantages of e-readers: you have to know what you're looking for when you buy e-books, or you miss out on the possibility of finding a new book by browsing in a bookshop, bookshops have to close because they can not compete with e-readers, and jobs will be lost if bookshops close. There were many incomplete points here where reference was made to the closure of bookshops without reference to the reason for it, namely the impossibility of competition with e-readers.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the advantages and disadvantages of electronic book readers as described in the passage. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet. Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were a number of candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. As indicated above, the general use of own words was often noticeable, with many candidates being innovative or original in their use of English; many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, while others moved blocks of text around rather than re-wording detail, or copied from the text. There were occasional examples where attempts at use of own words proved unwise in that the over-ambitious vocabulary did not entirely match the meaning of the original.

Encouragingly, nearly all candidates attempted the question and adhered to the rubric. Candidates are advised that very short answers cannot justify a high mark, since they cannot demonstrate a sustained use of own words or completely accurate use of English.

Although Examiners were not checking the number of content points in **Question 1(a)** against the number produced in **Question 1(b)**, if many fewer points were made in **Question 1(b)** than in **Question 1(a)**, this would be reflected in the language mark. Writing only, for example, 6 content points would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words, whereas, conversely, writing 15 content points might be sustained use of own words, though not necessarily. The best responses came from candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentences, and therefore able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

**Questions 2, Question 3 and Question 4** were the questions testing the new assessment objective in the revised syllabus, Assessment Objective 4, Reading for Ideas, where candidates are being tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. In general, candidates found these questions challenging.

**Question 2** asked candidates to select and write down two opinions from Paragraph 2; these were that **going to a bookshop is a hassle**, and that **carrying hundreds of books on an e-reader is delightful**. The key to answering this question lay in successfully identifying the subjective words, which were 'hassle' and 'delightful': what is a hassle or a delight for one person may not be a hassle or a delight for another, and thus to state categorically that it is so is an opinion. Many seemed to pick a quote at random and a small number referred to the wrong paragraph.

In **Question 3**, candidates were asked to explain why they, or someone they know, was wary of a piece of technology and whether or not the fear was justified. Some, but not many, candidates were entirely successful here and, for candidates who responded correctly, there was a refreshing range of answers which showed real engagement with the text. Some examples were a candidate who was wary his mobile phone would cause him to spend hours in the evening making phone calls and thus neglecting his studies, and the fear was justified because he failed an examination, or an uncle who was worried that online banking would not be secure and the fear was justified because someone hacked into his financial data and stole from him. In order to answer the question correctly, candidates had to identify a piece of technology, relate it to a particular person, and explain a fear; then they had to explain why the fear was either justified or unjustified. Many candidates missed the point and wrote in general terms about technology or life in the technological age; others gave a fear and a reason for it without linking the fear to a specific person; others gave and explained a fear but failed to explain why it was justified or otherwise. A few candidates stated that the fear came as a result of using the computer/mobile etc. so their answer was out of sequence, for example: 'My friend had an X-box and he would play all day. As a result his grades dropped and this made him wary of it.'

In that respect this turned out to be a discerning question. A lot of weaker candidates used the example of e-books, despite the rubric prohibition against this. Examiners were lenient in the selection of what constitutes a piece of technology, bearing in mind local and international differences: thus what was accepted ranged from computers to air-conditioning units.

In **Question 4**, candidates were to choose from a selection of three statements which one of them described the writer's attitude to e-books. They were asked to tick the correct box from a choice of three, and most candidates answered this successfully by ticking **the third box**: the writer is undecided whether e-books are beneficial or detrimental to society, an answer which could be understood from the final two sentences of the passage.

### Comments on specific questions:

#### **Section 2**

Most candidates seemed to find this text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1 and in general fewer marks were scored in this section than in **Section 1**.

**Question 5(a)** asked what kind of weather Miss Garnet was expecting when she arrived in Venice. This was a more searching opening question to **Section 2** than in many previous examination papers; the answer lay in the correct interpretation of 'surprisingly cold', as being she expected **warm, sunny or hot weather**, or even less cold weather. Comparatives were also accepted, as in 'warmer' or 'sunnier'. Very many candidates, however, were lured by the reference to 'surprisingly cold' to write that the weather was cold, quite the opposite response to the correct one. Perhaps some candidates were put off by the reference to the warm boots.

In **Question 5(b)**, candidates were asked to pick out and write down the single word which continued the idea of 'exotic' the correct answer being '**alien**'. Candidates almost invariably found this challenging. There were several common wrong answers, the most popular being 'insubstantial', but sometimes 'adventure', 'pearl-grey' and 'shimmering'.

**Question 5(c)** asked for two pieces of evidence which showed that Miss Garnet was cautious about spending money and there was much success with this literal comprehension question. The first piece of evidence was that **Miss Garnet had an old, or a well-worn, suitcase**, or that she had her mother's suitcase: the second piece of evidence was that **she was staying in a cheap area**. The lift of 'well-worn

suitcase that had been her mother's' was acceptable, but if this was prefaced by 'collected' it was considered that the focus of 'evidence' had been lost; the lift of 'taken an apartment in one of the cheaper areas (of Venice)' was considered acceptable as it encapsulated the focus of 'evidence'. Several responses incorrectly focused on the purchase of boots for either of the two parts; some candidates made reference to the thick soles, which did not seem to make much sense as a response to the question.

In **Question 5(d)**, candidates were asked to identify the job of the man with the clipboard. The key lay in inferring from his actions when he 'shouted and gestured alternately to water-taxi drivers and prospective passengers' that **he was arranging taxis for passengers or passengers for taxis**. Any sensible answer which linked the drivers to the passengers was acceptable. Some candidates did no more than describe his actions without making the necessary inference, while very many wrote that he was a taxi driver, and sometimes even a taxi. There was occasional distortion of the information: 'he carried passengers' luggage onto the taxi' or 'he helped the passengers to board'. A small number picked out the words 'newspaper' and 'agency' and stated that he sold newspapers, that he was an agent or that he was there to greet passengers.

**Question 6(a)** asked for two pieces of evidence that the American couple were wealthy, the first being that **they were elegantly dressed** and the second being that **they were staying in one of the best or most exclusive hotels**; although the passage stated that the hotel was 'one of the most exclusive hotels', the response that in fact it was the most, and not just one of the most, exclusive hotels was acceptable, as was the assertion that it was an 'exclusive' hotel, with no use of the comparative. This literal comprehension question was generally well answered, although some candidates were not rewarded for their attempt at the status of the hotel because they wrote simply that the couple were staying at the Palace Hotel, without spelling out its exclusivity. Others wrote that the Palace Hotel was exclusive, without completing the answer by writing that the couple were staying there. Others split the answer over the two limbs, writing **(i)** they were staying in the Palace Hotel and **(ii)** The Palace Hotel was one of the most expensive in Venice. Such responses were not rewarded as one correct response being split over two limbs is regarded as the two answers it is and so gains no credit in either limb.

In **Question 6(b)** candidates were asked for the most important factor which contributed to Miss Garnet's uncharacteristic behaviour. The key to a correct response lay in focusing on 'especially' in the text, which led to the correct response, namely **her dislike of snobbery**. If candidates referred to the flight or the cold, even with a correct response, they were not rewarded because the question asked them for a single factor, i.e. 'the most important factor'. Some candidates made the correct connection with snobbery, but were not rewarded because they wrote, wrongly, that it was the couple's snobbery which annoyed Miss Garnet rather than a general dislike of snobbery. The answer to **Question 6(c)** was given by a few candidates in response to this question (or was sometimes crossed out), which meant they failed to answer the next question correctly.

**Question 6(c)** asked candidates to explain the way in which Miss Garnet asserted herself, the answer being that **she raised her voice** or that **she said that she had been three first**. There were very many incorrect responses here, the most common being that she grazed her leg against a bollard or that she lost her footing. Perhaps such responses showed that candidates did not in fact know the meaning of 'asserted'.

**Question 6(d)** asked how Miss Garnet now felt about attempting the trip to Venice, and was the first of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, the **key words** being 'apprehension' and 'foolhardiness'. For the first available mark, **acceptable synonyms for 'apprehension' were 'fear', 'worry' or 'nervousness'**, (although there were many others) and **for 'foolhardiness' acceptable synonyms were 'stupidity', 'rashness' and 'silliness'**. With 'apprehension' few candidates achieved a mark though most appreciated her feelings were negative. 'Mad', 'disappointed', 'angry' and 'embarrassed' were popular wrong answers, as was the generalised point that she regretted taking the trip to Venice. With 'foolhardiness', there was also little success, as with most questions asking for an own words answer; many candidates wrote 'foolish' or 'she had been a fool' for 'foolhardiness' but this was considered to be too near to the word being tested to be rewarded.

**Question 7(a)** asked candidates for the two reasons why Miss Garnet decided not to throw away the hat that had belonged to Harriet, the first of these being that **she was reluctant to throw anything away**, and the second reason being that **the hat reminded her of Harriet**. There was much success with this literal comprehension question. Incorrect responses tended to be ones which simply repeated the question, as in 'she was reluctant to throw the hat away', or the lift of 'she realised a side to Harriet' which showed lack of comprehension of what the question was asking. Some candidates wrote, incorrectly, that she had placed the hat on her head, or that the hat was overdramatic. A very small number were confused and implied Harriet was alive, or in Venice.

**Question 7(b)** asked candidates to explain the offer Miss Garnet had received, and the reason why she had accepted it. Correct responses were that **an offer was made to share the American couple's taxi, and the fact that the American couple had pushed in front of her was the reason why she accepted the offer**. This question was not tackled particularly well. Many candidates did not make the first point fully because they did not stipulate the agents as being the couple; the man as agent was acceptable, because it was he who did the talking, but the idea that he was alone in the taxi destroyed an otherwise correct response. The second point was rarely made correctly, with suggestions that Miss Garnet accepted the offer because she was tired or because her leg hurt being popular wrong answers: even if a correct answer was given it was negated by these wrong references to tiredness or a sore leg, because the passage refers to 'the overriding fact' in connection to why she accepted the offer. Careless lifting of 'they had pushed her' instead of 'they had pushed in front of her', was another wrong answer.

In **Question 8(a)**, candidates were asked to explain why the slime was dangerous. Credit was given for the inference that **it was slippery, or that people, or Miss Garnet, might fall**. Any suggestion that the danger was caused by the fact that the slime was green denied an otherwise correct answer. Several responses recycled the question as in 'it was covered in dangerous slime' or simply stated that the stone steps were covered in slime. Some thought the slime was a villain or creature or focused on bacteria or toxicity.

**Question 8(b)** was another discriminating question. Candidates were asked why Miss Garnet felt it was silly to be upset when the couple left, the answer being that **she hardly knew them**. Responses included 'they had paid the fair' or 'they were nice'. The many candidates who wrote that the departure 'left her feeling forlorn' clearly had not understood the question, or perhaps did not understand the meaning of 'forlorn'. Some just focused on 'upset' and commented on her hurt knee, or that she was alone, or that they had pushed in front.

**Question 8(c)** was the second of the questions on the Paper where candidates were asked to answer in their own words. They were asked what Miss Garnet realised about the three boys who grabbed her suitcase, and were to home in on '**sinister**' and '**augment**'; there was no need to re-cast 'intentions' or 'pocket-money'. **Acceptable synonyms for 'sinister' were 'not bad', 'not evil' and, simply, 'good'**; alternatively, the point could be made in a more particular way, as in 'she realised they were not going to rob her' or even 'they were trying to help her', although the word 'help' appeared nearby in the passage. There was a fair degree of success with this. However '**augment**' proved to be too challenging for very many candidates, who wrote merely that they wanted to get or earn some money, without reference to actually **increasing their money**.

**Question 8(d)** was a question on writer's craft and asked candidates to explain what effect was created by the use of the word 'commandeered' that would not be achieved by the word 'took'. This question was not well done, with many candidates confusing 'commandeered' with 'command' and suggesting that orders were given, while others implied violence or force. Some suggested that the boy was stealing the suitcase. **The correct response needed to incorporate something of the boy's personality, in that he was bossy or assertive, or that he was the leader**.

**Question 9** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Candidates scored worse here than in previous examinations, and there were no particular favourite choices, as all words or phrases seems to be equally attempted. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered '**power**' or '**might**' for 'authority', 'B', or '**reluctant to spend money**' for 'stingy', and '**rude**' or '**bad-mannered**' for 'churlish', Correct synonyms for 'foresight' were '**thinking ahead**', '**planning**' and '**anticipation**'; correct synonyms for 'scrutinise' were '**examine**' or '**look closely**', while correct synonyms for 'alternately' were '**one after the other**' or '**in turn**'. By far the most challenging words for candidates to re-cast seemed to be 'own' and 'urbane'. Correct synonyms for 'own' were '**admit**' or '**confess**'; wrong answers here showed the importance of reading the word to be re-cast in its context, as very many candidates who attempted this word thought that it meant 'possess', while another popular wrong answer was 'accept'. The most common response to 'urbane' was 'belonging to the town or city', thus showing confusion with 'urban'; correct synonyms were '**sophisticated**', '**civilised**' or '**mannerly**'. There were, as usual, a few candidates who included the word in a sentence, with no explanation of its meaning.

Because understanding only is being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form was not insisted upon. Candidates can improve their performance by ensuring that they select five words only and explain the meanings of those words. Only one synonym for each word or phrase should be offered as, where more than one is given, only the first will be considered.