

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Paper 1 Reading 11

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both texts closely
- read any introductions to the texts carefully, noting who wrote it and the general topic
- read the questions and followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills required, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension, **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language, **Question 3** is assessing the ability to select and use information for specific purposes
- used textual details to make valid inferences about a named character's feelings and opinions, for **Question 1(f)**, **Question 1(h)** and **Question 3(b)**
- avoided unselective copying from the text
- attempted all parts of all questions, using the marks and answer spaces as laid out on the question paper to gauge the length of response expected
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(f)** and **Question 2(e)**
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses.

## General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for the most part, were clearly written. If a response is incorrect, a simple line should be drawn through it. Attention is drawn to the rubric at the beginning of the question paper, asking candidates not to use erasable pens. Their use, and that of pencils to write a rough draft, which candidates then write over, result in confusing and/or illegible responses. A clear line should be drawn through rough work, with the final version written below. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page and not write their answers on any blank page or in any blank space in the question booklet which may be easily missed.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. **Text A**, a narrative text entitled '*The World's Oldest Swim*' tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect in **Question 2**. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each sub-question. 16 marks were allocated to **Question 1** and nine marks to **Question 2**. Candidates seemed to find the text accessible with some of the more descriptive vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

The chronology of the narrative was relatively straightforward, starting with a general discussion of the Strait of the Dardanelles, then the welcome meal, the morning of the swim followed by the swim itself. Only paragraph 8 jumped back to the previous day, but this did not seem to present any difficulties for candidates. The text was introduced with a short explanation outlining the situation. This is there to support comprehension, but it should not feature in candidates' responses; the text is about a race, but there is no evidence that the main characters were competitive and there only to win. Stronger responses demonstrated an ability to distinguish between the different characters named in **Text A**: Matt, the narrator, his brother Calum, and their 'new friend Ed', introduced in paragraph 4, particularly important for **Question 1(h)**, which asked about Ed's feelings, not those of Matt or Calum.

There was much more success in answering **Question 1** than **Question 2**, particularly with questions focusing on understanding of explicit ideas. In terms of inference questions – those focusing on understanding of implicit ideas – **Question 1(b)** was answered well by many candidates while **Question 1(e)**, **Question 1(f)** and **Question 1(h)** proved more challenging. To improve further, candidates should read literary texts, including those with a variety of structures and characters, and practise answering questions about aspects of those texts, considering the feelings and opinions of individual characters at specific times and places. As a general rule for comprehension questions, ‘explanations’ should be in the candidate’s own words, but ‘details’, ‘features’ or ‘evidence’ are most easily given as direct quotations from the text. This is the recommended strategy. Where a candidate chooses to paraphrase instead of quoting, the same key details need to be included, making this a trickier strategy. Quotations chosen by candidates should be written out in full, without the use of ellipses or only giving line references.

**Question 2** sub-questions were often answered as comprehension questions rather than being considered for the effect of the language used. Candidates should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal details and consider the suggestions and connotations of words and images. These sub-questions asked about what is being *suggested*, (in **Question 2(a)**), for *impressions*, (in **Question 2(c)**) and in **Question 2(e)**), and for *an effect*, (in **Question 2(d)**). Repeating or paraphrasing the words from the specified extract is insufficient as an explanation of how language works. No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective. Candidates are also advised to be clear in their explanations, avoiding generalisations, for example, *the writer uses imagery effectively*, or *is trying to create tension* – explanations need to be connected to the actual words used in the extracts. Candidates appeared to find the open nature of **Question 2(e)**, where *they* have to choose which words and ideas to focus on, more challenging. Candidates would benefit from increased practice in reading descriptive texts and thinking about what effects are created by the writer and how they do this through their choice of specific vocabulary to build images for the reader and to evoke a particular response.

The shorter non-fiction text, **Text B**, ‘*Volunteering to work with animals*’, assessed the candidates’ ability to select and use information from the text. For **Question 3(a)** candidates are asked to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words, using the key ideas relevant to the task, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Successful candidates were able to skilfully choose only those arguments in the text against volunteering, realising that not every paragraph in the text contains points relevant to the task. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading, though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)**. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful, candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. Weaker responses either successfully selected points by copying sections of text, thus limiting evidence of their *own* writing skills, or they used original vocabulary and phrasing to communicate points from the text but were imprecise, limiting the clarity and focus of the point being made, and ultimately their Reading mark. Some candidates did not separate irrelevant content from content which hampered their Reading mark.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task designed to assess candidates’ ability to understand implicit meanings and attitudes in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. To achieve a high mark, these ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that candidates do not have lengthy introductions.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A**

#### **Question 1 Comprehension**

- (a) **In what way does the geography of the Strait of the Dardanelles make it ‘one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world’? (line 2)**

This was a literal comprehension question which proved very accessible for the vast majority of candidates who correctly selected from lines 2 to 3: *it flows between four seas; can be accessed from Asia and Europe or connects four seas/Asia and Europe*.

- (b) **Explain what Calum is feeling when he says ‘Whoa!’ (line 6)**

This was the first inferential question, which many candidates found straightforward. Successful responses referred back to the previous paragraph expressing his possible *amazement, surprise, shock, nerves*, or his feeling *impressed*.

- (c) **From paragraph 2, give two ways in which the waters of the strait are different from the waters Calum and Matt are used to swimming in.**

This literal comprehension question demonstrated the need for careful reading of the appropriate paragraph and the question with thoughtful manipulation of the text. Stronger responses avoided reference to the *tankers* or *freighters*, as they appear in paragraph 1, not paragraph 2. The question refers to two different bodies of water: the Strait and where Matt and Calum usually swim. Stronger responses recognised that the comparison between the two needed to be clear, and so responded for example that *the waters of the Strait were not peaceful or clear*. Simply writing *peaceful lakes/clear rivers* did not give the necessary indication of which water was being described.

- (d) **Identify two details that show why ‘people call this the “World’s Oldest Swim”.’ (line 13)**

This was a straightforward explicit comprehension question. Some precision was required in response to this question. Line 9 talks of *the dusty ruins of ancient castles* – the *castles* needed to be *ancient* or in *ruins*, and the *ruins* needed to be of *castles*. The following sentence in the text provided two more possible correct responses: *Troy* and *Greek myths*. The final correct possible response was the most challenging, as the text talks of *Lord Byron/the Romantic poet wanting to do or attempt* something and then succeeding. It was important that candidates clearly stated that *Lord Byron/he swam* in the Strait to underline that it is a swimming competition.

- (e) **Explain what Matt is thinking when he says, ‘They were not really talking to me.’ (line 24)**

There were two marks available for this inferential question, so two different ideas were required. The question directed candidates to line 24 for the context. Finding the specific details from this line and from the previous paragraph, paragraph 4, was key to a successful response: ‘they’ are the organisers of the race, if they were not talking to the writer, who were they talking to? This was explicitly stated in lines 23 – 24: *their remarks were intended for the less capable swimmers*. This is what Matt, the writer, was thinking. Many successful responses correctly inferred from Matt’s words that *he does not include himself in the less capable swimmers/he feels he is a strong or capable swimmer*. A small number of successful responses looked more closely at the quotation, noting the word ‘*really*’ which showed that *Matt might be nervous*, but is trying to hide it.

- (f) **In paragraph 6, how does Matt feel on the morning of the swim?  
Give two details from the text to support your answer.**

This inferential question required candidates to infer how Matt *felt*, using evidence from paragraph 6 to support their answer. The first task was to identify the writer’s *feeling* and write the answer in the designated space. Correct responses recognised that the writer is *nervous, anxious* or *worried* or even *embarrassed*, based on the text evidence that they *assembled solemnly, tension was palpable, conversations were muted* (for apprehension), or that they were *passing amused early risers, clad in nothing more than swimming suits, it was quite a sight* (for a sense of feeling awkward). More extreme emotions of *fear, panic* or being *overwhelmed* were too strong and not creditworthy. Having *identified* the relevant text details and inferred the feeling, the second task for candidates was to write this supporting evidence in the designated space.

A single word answer for a feeling sufficed for one mark, and relevant details, carefully copied in full, were awarded an additional two marks.

- (g)(i) **In paragraph 8, Matt and Calum discover a problem that they will face during the swim. What is the problem?**

The vast majority of candidates recognised the straightforward information given when Matt and Calum were on the boat: *the two currents that flow ...in opposite directions* or the *strong undercurrent* would cause problems. Precision in copying vital details of the *two* currents flowing *in opposite directions* or the *strong undercurrent* was key to providing a correct response to this question.

**(ii) What does the guide suggest Matt and Calum should do to solve the problem?**

The majority of candidates focused on the guide's advice: *to aim left*. Close reading of the text ensured candidates did not include any idea of swimming in a *straight line*, or *going left and right* as the guide explained that this is done by the *best local swimmers*, not Matt and Calum.

**Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g)**

- read each question carefully; underline or highlight key words
- Check how many marks are allocated to each question
- read all of the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer
- if there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to get an idea of what is going on
- avoid lengthy copying from the text
- carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question
- write answers in the designated spaces.

**(h) Explain using your own words Ed's different feelings about the swim. Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer.**

**Question 1(h)** was a three-mark question which focused on Ed. The first task was to explain, in candidates' own words, Ed's different feelings about the swim. Candidates needed to select those sections from the text which are relevant to the question (about Ed). This means that sections of the text referring to the ferry journey, the boat ride on the previous day and the whole of the description in paragraph 12 about the swim were not relevant and should be ignored. It was also important to distinguish between how Ed felt from how the narrator, Matt, felt. The question was about Ed.

Three feelings were needed to show Ed's different feelings during the text. Some candidates displayed an impressive range of vocabulary to describe three separate feelings, allowing them to avoid synonyms for the same feeling, which can only be credited once. These inferences were then supported with three appropriate quotations from the text, one for each feeling, such as: he was *nervous* or *worried*, supported with a reference to the *jellyfish*; he felt *fear*, *unprepared* or *he was doubting himself*, supported by *Interrogating Matt and Calum*; he was *confused*, *unsure* or even *anxious*, supported by Ed being *flustered*; he was *embarrassed*, supported by *apologetically*; he was *impatient*, *determined* or *eager*, supported by *keen to get in the water before he could change his mind*; or he felt *enthusiastic*, *excited* or *confident*, supported by Ed *disappeared recklessly*, saying 'We're only here once'.

Although a precise and accurate paraphrase is acceptable as a text detail, this approach is not advised as paraphrasing can all too easily result in generalisation or a lack of focus or detail. Candidates are advised to present each text detail in the form of a quotation copied carefully from the text to support each feeling.

**Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):**

- identify the sections of the text and the character which are relevant to the question
- consider the different feelings of the character in these sections; consider whether there could be a change in their feelings over the course of the narrative
- use own words to describe three different feelings
- select evidence to support each feeling; this means a text detail in the form of a quotation
- present the answer clearly with each feeling supported by a relevant text detail
- prepare for this question by reading literary texts and describing the feelings of characters
- build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

**Question 2 Use of Language**

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A worth a total of nine marks relating to the author's use of language and the effect this has.

- (a) Read this sentence from the text:**  
**'Unexpectedly, the weather suddenly calmed, and the morning sun lit up the water as we waded in with the heat on our bare backs.'** (lines 47 – 48)

**What does the writer want to suggest to the reader about the swim at this point?**

Candidates who performed well on this question acknowledged that, as a **Question 2** sub-question, this was not testing comprehension but, rather, the effect of language used, and in the particular case of **Question 2(b)**, the structure of the text. Successful responses recognised that the weather change was a *turning point* in the swim. These acknowledged the initial fear of bad weather conditions and recognised that the *sudden calm* would make the swim *easier, safer, more enjoyable*. This was expressed either as a comparison, or with a focus on the swim *now* which had *become more pleasant*. Responses which focused only on *the weather*, speculating that *the heat would be a good or a bad thing*, needed to also say how this affected *the swim*.

- (b) Explain why the writer uses the word ‘paused’ rather than ‘stopped’ in the phrase ‘We paused in the middle of the rush of bodies’. (line 48)**

Most successful responses gained the mark for a variation on the idea of *the swim continuing after*, or of them *not stopping for long*. In some responses, there was a misunderstanding about the suddenness of the stop and what was actually happening at this point, as the swimmers had not actually started swimming at this point in the narrative.

- (c) What two impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader in this sentence?:**

**‘Splashes of water erupted in all directions and then we slumped forward, went under and pulled ourselves through the swirling green, quiet, veil of bubbles.’ (lines 50 – 52)**

This question required candidates to give *two impressions*. Two different ideas drawn from anywhere in the extract above could score. Successful responses avoided generalisation, listing terminology, repeating words from the text and explaining the narrative.

One impression, offered in a number of successful responses, was the *chaos* or *the water going everywhere*. Other impressions included *the energy* shown by the swimmers, from *pulled ourselves*; or *the calm/silence* from *the quiet...bubbles*. The best responses noted the contrast between the *noise above the water* and *the lack of noise below*.

There was some misinterpretation of the *swirling green* as dirty water, and the *splashes* as evidence of swimmers fighting for space in an attempt to win the race.

- (d) Read this sentence from the text:**

**“‘We’re only here once,” Ed called, disappearing recklessly into the squirming mass of swimmers.’ (lines 53 – 54)**

**What effect does the writer suggest about the swimmers by using the phrase ‘squirming mass’ to describe them?**

This question proved challenging for candidates. Two marks were available meaning that two different ideas were required, one for each of the words quoted (*squirming* and *mass*). A small number of strong responses associated the *squirming* with being *eel- or worm-like* or with *wriggling* or *constant movement*. Most candidates wrote that the swimmers were *noisy* or *competitive* or made general comments about the determination or the presence of the swimmers in the water. These lacked an explanation of the specific connotations of *squirming* and so could only score one mark. Similarly, many candidates gained just one mark by explaining that *mass* meant there were *a lot of swimmers* or *a crowd*, again without reference to the effect of the word *squirming*.

- (e) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to convey Matt’s feelings in this extract from the text: (1)**

**‘For the next half hour, slow waves rocked us as we rose and we sank, a contented pod of swimmers. The sea bed disappeared quickly, but the sun still stretched its arrows down deep underwater, catching umbrellas of clear jellyfish rising from the murk, glowing hypnotically under faint shoals of shimmering fish. Calum and I timed our strokes evenly as we cut a path through the criss-crossing wakes of other swimmers. Finally, I let my feet trail,**

**basking in the warmth washing over me, until we floated onto the glassy waters shielded by the harbour wall around the exit ramp.’ (lines 57 – 63)**

**Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.**

### Example

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write the example chosen and quotations should not exceed this line. Careful selection of the example is a key part of answering **Question 2(e)**. The example chosen needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two impressions to be confidently conveyed.

*Finally, I let my feet trail, basking in the warmth washing over me* proved a successful choice, as there were several possible impressions: *relief* from *Finally*; *relaxation* from *basking*; *pleasure* from the *warmth washing over*; or *a sense of achievement* from the whole example. Ellipses and line references were sometimes offered but these are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be words from the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as personification or metaphor.

### Explanation

There were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected example. Two marks were available for this part of the question. An explanation had to be written in candidates' own words to demonstrate secure understanding. Understanding the meaning of a key word is a helpful starting point for understanding an effect of that word. For example, with *a contented pod of swimmers*, the explanation that they were *happy* was awarded one mark. Successful explanations focused on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the quotation. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very strong explanations was jellyfish *glowing hypnotically under faint shoals of shimmering fish* with explanations such as, *beauty, mesmerising, shining*. Another successful choice was *the sun still stretched its arrows down deep underwater*, with the explanation that the *sun's rays (arrows) went far into the sea (down deep underwater), lighting up what was below*.

Occasionally candidates gave an example and then explained the impression created by language elsewhere in the extract. As this did not demonstrate how the writer had used language effectively in their chosen example, their explanation could not be credited.

### Advice to candidates on Question 2(e):

- select the **Question 2(e)** *example* carefully, ensuring that you have ideas for how to respond to the *explanation* part of the task
- choose an example that is not overlong and quote it directly; do not use line references or ellipses to substitute, as words not written in the *example* will not be credited.
- start by thinking of the meaning of words before going on to consider the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by them
- zoom in on individual words *within your chosen example* rather than making general comments.
- use your own words in your explanation rather than words from the text
- if a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things
- practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

## Section B

### Question 3

#### (a) Summary task

**Summarise the arguments against volunteering to work with animals, according to Text B.**

**You must use continuous writing (not note form).**

**Use your own words as far as possible.**

**Avoid copying long sections of the text.**

**Your summary should be no more than 150 words.**

In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for Reading and 10 for Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

## Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: *the arguments against volunteering to work with animals, according to Text B*. Successful responses selected a wide range of relevant points and used these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material, only including aspects of the text about *working with animals*, sensibly ignoring what *young people search online for*, examples of *cute experiences or animals*, or what *Rita Ni's sanctuary does*. Several content points were identified by many candidates. The more accessible content points included: *wanting to work with cute or popular animals*; *sanctuaries promoting cute and cuddly experiences*; *a hands-off approach being required*; and *volunteers should only work for a short time, so the difference they make is insignificant*.

Some content points were effectively combined in candidates' summaries, such as *saving species is more useful than saving individual animals, but protecting habitats is the most useful*, which covers three points from the text. A common incomplete point was the idea that *volunteers help sanctuaries with their business*, when the specific point made in the text was about *the exploitation of volunteers for the sanctuary's own ends*.

Misunderstanding of the text was evident in some candidates' responses. For example, mentions of: *captive animals sold by or to volunteers as pets*; *volunteers exploiting animals*; *animals or volunteers not solving or even causing the problem*. Other responses featured personal opinions, such as *captivity is cruel*, *exterminating invasive species is bad*, *volunteers could be eaten by wild animals*, which is not appropriate for a summary. Similarly, instead of noting the general point that *flying to remote sanctuaries is bad for the environment*, weaker candidates wrote that the *sanctuaries themselves damaged the animals' environment*, which is not the point made in the text.

## Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as *conservation*, *volunteering*, *sanctuary*, *exterminating invasive species* or *hands off*, but they should not copy sentence structures or whole sentences. Most candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives such as *does not help for the difference they make is likely to be insignificant anyway*. Successful summaries also wrote with a formality and clarity required for a concise summary style.

Less effective summaries included significant stretches of copied text, and occasionally there was not much which could be assessed as original writing or reworking which meant that these summaries achieved lower marks.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too, such as *popular animals for elephants, primates or big cats*. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas, for example the *hierarchy of habitats over species over individual animals*. Avoiding lengthy introductions and conclusions also helped achieve concision. A concise opening such as *A disadvantage of volunteering to work with animals... is enough*.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, with varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation that was accurate and helpful. These summaries were well-crafted and well-organised with appropriate linking devices such as 'moreover' and 'likewise' effectively and sparingly used to guide the reader through the summary. Level 3 responses often relied more on simple or compound sentences with occasional errors impacting clarity. Summaries which lacked clarity due to errors in grammar, awkward expression and little evidence of organising the content gained lower marks.

## Advice to candidates on Question 3(a)

### Reading

- read the introduction and then **Text B** to gain an overview of the content
- read the question carefully and make sure you understand the task
- re-read the text, underlining or highlighting the words and phrases relevant to the task
- ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations and examples
- look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways; these repeated ideas or examples could be covered as one point
- do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail
- do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content
- do not include content which is not in the text.

### Writing

- think of a sensible order for the points underlined/highlighted; this may be in a different order from the original text
- if points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision
- use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary
- explain ideas in a way that someone who has not read the text themselves would understand
- avoid introductions, conclusions, extended explanations or personal comments
- do not lift whole phrases or sentences
- write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures
- use a formal writing style
- write no more than 150 words.

#### (b) Short response task

**Imagine you are conservationist Rita Ni.**

**You are interviewed by a journalist about your work with animals.**

**Give your answer to the journalist's question, using information from the text.**

**Journalist's question: Some people think that sanctuaries like yours are irresponsible and exploit animals and volunteers. What is your opinion and why?**

In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They have to demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The perspective candidates were to take was Rita Ni's, a sanctuary manager, who, it should be assumed, would disagree with the question. Candidates who were confused in **Question 3(a)** about the narrator continued to show confusion about Rita Ni and her viewpoint. She is introduced in paragraph 2 then reappears in the paragraph 6. As the question asks about *sanctuaries like yours*, general points about responsible sanctuaries could also be brought in. Many candidates found it difficult to correctly identify the writer's point of view and gave general, undeveloped answers.

Candidates who performed well in this task returned to the text, specifically the sections where Rita is quoted, and considered what she would say to defend responsible sanctuaries, including her own. She runs *a captive breeding and reintroduction programme, the gold standard of working with animals*. Strong responses then developed on this point by explaining the value of *species* protection. Many connected this with the *hands-off approach* with some skilfully explaining that this may be *the opposite of* what most volunteers would choose. These responses consistently demonstrated the correct perspective supported by detail from the text, such as the importance of *education for volunteers* which they developed with sensible inference, for example that *she teaches her volunteers the value of having less contact with the animals to help when they are released back into the wild*.

Less successful responses identified details from the text but gave no development or support or were unable to maintain a consistent perspective throughout their response. The weakest responses offered her perspective, either without any support or using arguments which gave the opposite opinion. Candidates should avoid trying to give a balanced argument in response to this task as it is focused on a specific perspective. They should also be wary of making general inferential comments with no textual support, for example describing details about the sanctuary which are not in the text.

Some candidates misread the question, erroneously agreeing that *sanctuaries are irresponsible and exploit animals and volunteers*. Others simply restated information from **Question 3(a)** about conservation in general, merely copying pieces from the text with no perspective offered. These responses were not creditworthy.

**Advice to candidates on Question 3(b):**

- read the question carefully and identify whose perspective you are to take
- highlight or underline the relevant section(s) in the text where the person is mentioned, or where the task perspective is found – this may be in one or two paragraphs or spread throughout the text.
- decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if that person would agree or disagree with the statement
- state an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text
- extend and develop the ideas with inference; either a single idea could be developed at length; or two or three ideas could each have some development

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Paper 1 Reading 12

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both passages closely
- followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills required by each question, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension and **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language
- avoided unselective copying from the texts
- paid attention to the marks and space available for each question which indicate the detail needed
- made valid inferences about a character's feelings based on textual details for **Question 1(h)**
- copied out a precise quotation from the text for **Question 1(h)** as a text detail rather than providing a paraphrase
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(e)** and **Question 2(e)**
- used their own words when instructed
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses.

## General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for the most part, were clearly written although occasionally illegibility hampered reading. If a response is incorrect, a line should be drawn across it. Writing over an answer which has been erased results in illegibility. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page and not write their answers on any blank page or in any blank space in the question booklet which may be easily missed.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. The first text, **Text A**, a narrative text called *The puma*, tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and 16 marks were allocated to this question. **Question 2** tested understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect and nine marks were allocated to this question. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each sub-question. Candidates seemed to find the text accessible with some vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

Several candidates performed very well on **Question 1**, particularly for their understanding of explicit ideas. Where marks were lost, it was often because the text was copied and thus their response was not clearly focused on the question.

While candidates were successful in identifying explicit details in the text, making inferences was often more challenging. This was particularly evident in **Question 1(h)**. Candidates could identify details from the text about Laura's response to working at the sanctuary, but making sensible inferences about how she felt about working there proved more difficult. Candidates would benefit from further practice of reading literary texts and considering the feelings of individual characters.

**Question 2** was less successfully answered. Sometimes **Question 2** sub-questions were answered as comprehension questions rather than being considered for the effect of the language used as is the intention of this question. Candidates should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal

details and consider the suggestions and connotations of words and images. **Question 2** asked for an *effect* (in **Question 2(d)**), an *impression* (in **Questions 2(c)** and **2(e)**) and what is being *suggested* (in **Question 2(a)**). This means that repeating or paraphrasing the words from the specified extract is insufficient for an explanation of how language works. No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective.

**Question 3** was based on the shorter second passage, **Text B**, *Going at my own pace*. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words in candidates' own words. This selective summary required candidates to gather only those key ideas relevant to the task, as outlined in **Question 3(a)**, and to do so efficiently, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)**. This means that to reach Writing Levels 3, 4 and 5, ideas had to be communicated clearly. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. In Reading, some candidates found it difficult to separate irrelevant content from content which would have helped them fulfil the task.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. To achieve a high mark, these ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that candidates do not have lengthy introductions.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A**

#### **Question 1 Comprehension**

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A. These are short answers worth a total of 16 marks which test understanding of both explicit and implicit meanings.

- (a) **In paragraph 1, what evidence is there that Laura knew very little about wild cats before she arrived at the sanctuary?**

This first question was answered successfully by many candidates who selected the detail in the final sentence that Laura did not know what a puma looks like. Any answer which included detail about the monkeys could not be credited since this did not evidence careful selection. The question directed candidates to paragraph 1. Candidates, therefore, must not select their answer from the italicised introduction or any section of the text outside of paragraph 1.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what Laura means when she describes the bus journey as 'rumbling along in a rickety bus.' (line 3)**

In **Question 1(b)**, the rubric made it clear that use of *own words* was necessary to evidence understanding of both 'rumbling' and 'rickety' in the context of the bus journey. Successful answers offered creditworthy meanings for both words, such as noisy or slow for 'rumbling', and old, uncomfortable or bumpy for 'rickety'. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was usually the result of having explained just one part of the phrase, such as giving two meanings for the same word such as 'slow' and 'noisy' for 'rumbling'. Answers which identified the road surface as bumpy were incorrect since the focus had to be on the 'rickety bus' rather than on the condition of the road.

- (c) **From paragraph 2, identify two reasons why it is difficult for Laura to see through the bus window.**

Several responses recognised that Laura's vision was obscured by the *grimy* windows which were covered in *condensation* and scored two marks. Some answers were in candidates' own words such as dirty, unclean, steamed up or covered in mist. Some candidates were distracted by the crowded bus and incorrectly suggested that the other passengers and their belongings made it difficult for Laura to see.

- (d) **Explain what Laura is thinking when she asks the bus driver 'Seriously?' (line 7)**

This inferential question required understanding of what went through Laura's mind at that moment when she was expected to disembark at an empty road surrounded by jungle. Thus, candidates needed to consider the word *Seriously* in context and those who did provided successful responses capturing Laura's fear, confusion, disbelief or surprise, such as 'she could not believe this was the place' or 'he could not really be leaving her here'. Some responses were in the form of a question, and this was also acceptable: 'Is this really the place?' Focus on the bus driver could also score with 'she thinks the driver was joking' or 'he was fooling her'. To simply state what was happening was incorrect so 'the driver was leaving her on an empty road' could not score, and nor could any suggestion that 'Seriously?' referred to the state of the bus, the journey or the passengers.

- (e) **In paragraph 3, how does Laura feel about being in the jungle when she first arrives? Give two details from the text to support your answer.**

The first task for one mark was to infer how Laura *felt* about being in the jungle when she first arrived. A range of responses were acceptable provided they captured a sense of Laura feeling uneasy, overwhelmed or scared. This meant that answers such as uncomfortable, anxious and lost could score. Feelings which were too general or vague, such as bad, unhappy or negative, were not creditworthy, nor were feelings which focused specifically on the 'annoying' or 'irritating' mosquitoes.

The second task for two marks was to provide two supporting *details* from the text. These details could be copied, such as 'struggle to breathe', or *precisely* paraphrased as 'she has trouble breathing'. It is important that the details are not repetition so having identified the 'vastness' of the jungle, a response could not gain two marks if 'the jungle is everywhere' was offered as the second detail. The detail must support a relevant feeling: there is nothing in 'tall trees overhang the banks' to suggest unease for example. If two correct supporting details were given with an incorrect feeling, only one mark was awarded.

- (f) **Identify two things the monkey does to make Laura think that he is 'challenging' her. (line 15)**

This explicit comprehension question was answered well and those who read the question carefully and focused on the actions of the monkey (what 'the monkey *does*') – he 'sat on a sign' and 'stared' – rather than Laura's reaction ('I yelp and leap back') achieved two marks.

- (g)(i) **In paragraph 5, when a huge black boar suddenly appears, Laura notices something surprising about her. What is surprising about the boar?**

This explicit comprehension question was also successfully answered. Most responses recognised that the red sock in the boar's mouth surprised Laura. It was also correct to identify the fact that Laura would have been surprised to hear the boar was called 'Rita', though fewer candidates gave this as their answer.

- (ii) **Why does the boar run away from the man?**

The second part of **Question 1(g)** required inference and was more challenging. A minority of candidates realised that it was likely that the boar had stolen the sock from the man and that he was chasing her to retrieve it, but identifying just that the man was chasing the boar or that he wanted his sock was sufficient. Some responses erroneously stated that 'twigs and leaves' were being removed from the boar. Speculation that the boar ran away because the man was a vet and because she was scared of him was not creditworthy.

**Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g):**

- read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words
- check how many marks are allocated to each question
- read all the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer
- if there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to get an idea of what is going on
- avoid lengthy copying from the text
- carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question.

- (h) Explain using your own words Laura's different feelings about working at an animal sanctuary in South America.  
Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer.**

**Question 1(h)** was a three-mark question which focused on the character of Laura. The first task was to explain in candidates' own words Laura's different feelings about working at an animal sanctuary. Candidates needed to select those sections relevant to the question ('working at an animal sanctuary'). This means that sections of the text referring to the bus journey, the empty road, the monkey and the boar were not relevant and should be ignored.

Three feelings are required, and responses covered a range of relevant feelings, such as confused, uncomfortable, hopeful, scared and happy, thus demonstrating secure understanding. The question asks for 'different' feelings so 'scared', 'panicking' and 'anxious' could only score one mark since these feelings are too similar.

The question then directed candidates to find three supporting textual details (three quotations) to provide evidence for Laura's three different feelings. One text detail in the form of a quotation copied from the text is required for each feeling. Some examples of correct responses to **Question 1(h)** follow:

- *Laura feels confused: 'I stare at her dumbly'*
- *She is nervous when she sees Wayra – 'I stay very, very still'*
- *Mila's 'thrillingly contagious' smile shows that Laura is becoming excited*
- *'Some fear, the top layer blows away' shows Laura now feels confident.*

Some responses included an impressive range of vocabulary to describe Laura's feelings and supported each one with appropriate detail from the text. Candidates are advised to set out their responses clearly, with each feeling and corresponding supporting detail clearly identified.

Although a precise and accurate paraphrase is acceptable as a text detail, this approach is not advised as paraphrasing can all too easily result in generalisation or a lack of focus or detail. For example, 'Laura was scared *when she first saw the puma*' is too vague to be credited as a paraphrase of 'I stay, very, very still'.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences about feelings. These responses were characterised by lifting and narrative rather than own word explanations of Laura's feelings. For example, a response which reads 'Laura stays still when she sees the puma' is a text detail which narrates the events and makes no observation about her feelings. The addition of an appropriate identified feeling, for example, 'Laura feels scared' would have made this a successful response.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):**

- identify the sections of the text and the character which are relevant to the question
- consider the different feelings of the character in these sections
- use own words to describe three different feelings
- select evidence to support each feeling; this means a text detail in the form of a quotation
- make sure the supporting text detail is clear, relevant and not overlong
- present the answer clearly with each feeling supported by a relevant text detail
- prepare for this question by reading literary texts and describing the feelings of characters
- build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

#### **Question 2 Use of Language**

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A worth a total of nine marks relating to the author's use of language and the effect this has.

- (a) Read this extract from the text:  
'I'd probably feel more sad about this if there was not one huge question pounding my brain.  
I whisper it to Mila who does not answer at first.  
'Maybe,' she finally says.' (lines 47 – 50)**

**What does the writer want to suggest to the reader about what Mila and Laura are about to do?**

Candidates who performed well on this question acknowledged that, as a **Question 2** sub-question, this was not testing comprehension but the effect of language. They also demonstrated understanding of the suggestion that Laura and Mila were about to do something dangerous, risky or frightening since they were going to release the puma from her cage. Responses such as ‘they were going to walk the puma’ did not focus on what was being *suggested* and were not creditworthy.

**(b) Explain why the writer uses the word ‘each’ rather than ‘both’ in the expression ‘But we each have to decide whether we think these animals are worth it.’ (lines 50 – 51)**

Several responses recognised the implication of ‘each’ to suggest that the decision made about working with dangerous animals had to be independent or personal, and answers such as ‘Laura had to decide alone’; ‘they may think differently’; and ‘she has her own point of view’ were creditworthy. Candidates who effectively repeat the question are not demonstrating understanding of language use and so ‘they each had to make a decision’, for example, could not score.

**(c) What two impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader about the puma in the sentence:**

**‘But then her long tail whips and I glimpse the only parts of her that stand out: her eyes, as green as the paddle-shaped plants surrounding us, and her nose, pink as the tip of a sunset.’ (lines 53 – 55)?**

Two different ideas drawn from anywhere in the extract above could score. Successful responses avoided repeating the words in the extract. For example, the extract tells us that the puma’s eyes and nose are the colours of plants and sunsets respectively. Perceptive responses recognised that these are both images of nature with ‘she is part of nature’ or ‘she belongs in the jungle, not in a cage’. Less secure responses simply repeated the words – ‘her nose is pink like a sunset’ – without an analysis of their effect. Many responses correctly recognised that these images also created an impression of beauty and that the puma was magnificent and captivating.

Candidates need to focus on individual words in the extract. The impression of a puma which is fierce or dangerous is suggested by the comparison of the tail to a ‘whip’, while the word ‘glimpse’ gives the impression that the puma is seen briefly and is mysterious.

While it is useful to consider the extract in context, some responses referred to the preceding sentence. The puma is ‘hard to spot’ or difficult to see in the shadows are not impressions created by the specified extract. The impression created in the extract in the question is that her features are prominent or that her eyes and nose are brightly coloured and noticeable against her dark fur.

**(d) Read this sentence from the text:  
‘A real-life Wayra has materialised in the doorway.’ (line 57)  
What effect does the writer suggest about Wayra by using the word ‘materialised’ to describe the way she has moved?**

Candidates needed to provide two *effects* of the use of the word ‘materialised’. Success here depended on understanding the meaning of the word ‘materialised’ in context. Responses had to recognise that ‘materialised’ captured both the speed at which the puma moved, and the fact that the puma appeared, revealed herself or was simply there. Examples of answers which gained two marks: ‘she revealed herself suddenly’; ‘she appeared out of the blue’; ‘she was just there’; and ‘she teleported’. It was also correct to write ‘she appeared as if by magic’.

**(e) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to describe Wayra in this extract from the text:**

**‘I stay very, very still, transfixed by her bristling tail, the tense snake of her spine, her low growl. A pause. Then – she’s away! Erupting from the cage.  
‘Come!’ Mila grabs my hand. ‘We go in front – to protect her.’  
Protect her? Wayra turns, shooting me a look of disgust. There’s tension on the rope; she’s reached as far as she can get. Her growl has got louder, an engine deep in her belly. It was**

**an illusion before – her size, thinking she was not big. I realise she had not looked small in the cage; she'd looked squashed. Now, outside, she's expanded. Princess Wayra.' (lines 58 – 65)**

**Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.**

### Example

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write this example and quotations should not exceed this line. Many examples were carefully selected, such as 'Erupting from the cage' or 'Now, outside, she's expanded', but too often the example selected was excessively long. An example must be carefully chosen since it needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two ideas to be confidently explained. For example, not much could be said about the quotations 'her low growl' or 'thinking she was not big' so these were unwise choices. Sometimes a single image, such as 'Princess', might work, but generally selecting a short sentence, part of a sentence or a phrase is advisable. Ellipses and line references were sometimes offered but these are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be the words in the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as personification. The question places the focus on the description of Wayra. This means quotations about Laura or Mila, such as 'I stay very, very still' or "Come!" Mila grabs my hand', were not acceptable.

### Explanation

There were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected example and two marks were available for this part of the question. An explanation had to be written in candidates' own words to demonstrate secure understanding. Several candidates scored at least one mark for the explanation.

Successful explanations focused firmly on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the quotation. For example, some candidates who selected 'Erupting from the cage' likened the puma's release to an explosive volcano which is dangerous – thus concisely providing two ideas for two marks. Understanding the meaning of a key word is an effective starting point for understanding an effect of that word. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very good explanations was 'Princess Wayra' with candidates commenting on her majestic appearance and power – again, two clear observations scoring two marks. Both these examples demonstrate the effective practice of candidates zooming in on individual words ('erupting' and 'Princess') and thinking about what each one suggests. It is this close analysis which is key to success.

There is no credit for naming technical language features such as 'metaphor', but credit can be given for an explanation which successfully describes the effect of a feature or device. For example, the effect of suspense and speed is created by the full stop and dash in 'A pause. Then – she's away!'

Less successful explanations were characterised by a repetition of the language in the extract. For example, 'Her growl has got louder, an engine deep in her belly', was repeated in the explanation with 'her growl is like a loud engine'. A successful response would have focused on the effect of the central comparison – that she is like a machine, she is full of energy and is angry.

Candidates' explanations must only focus on the example they have selected. If a candidate has selected 'she'd look squashed', the explanation must focus on this specific image of the puma being cramped or squeezed into a cage which is cruel and unnatural. Less effective explanations discussed how she looked small but in reality is big which is not an idea that originates from the image in the selected example.

### Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- select the **Question 2(e)** example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly
- consider the meaning of a word before going on to consider what it suggests and its effect
- zoom in on individual words within a quotation or extract rather than making general comments
- think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words
- use your own words to explain effect
- if a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things
- practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

## Section B

### Question 3

#### (a) Summary task

**Summarise the disadvantages of the fitness app, according to Text B.**

**You must use continuous writing (not note form).**

**Use your own words as far as possible.**

**Avoid copying long sections of the text.**

**Your summary should be no more than 150 words.**

**Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 10 marks for the quality of your writing.**

In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for Reading and 10 for Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

#### Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: the disadvantages of the fitness app. Successful responses focused on the task and selected a wide range of relevant points and *used* these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material and sensibly ignored details about how the app works, its benefits and personal trainers – all of which were irrelevant to the task. Several relevant content points were easily identified by most candidates. The more straightforward content points included the app costs money, is addictive and causes the battery to run down. Some content points proved less accessible, requiring careful selection and attention to detail, for example, recognising that a disadvantage was not just having to run faster, but rather having to run *too* fast or to overtrain. Similarly, leaving comments alone is not a disadvantage; it is the fact that these comments are sometimes mean which is the point being made in the text.

Weaker responses were characterised by irrelevance; these sometimes relied too heavily on lifting sections of text, including dialogue, rather than selecting and presenting the key ideas economically and concisely. Some summaries opened with four or five lines explaining how an app works before mentioning any disadvantage. This is not careful or skilful selection. The summary needed to identify disadvantages explicitly stated in Text B and must not include personal opinion, advice or evaluation. Some weaker summaries included invented material such as the danger of strangers accessing personal details or compared a fitness app with a personal trainer.

#### Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as ‘monthly subscription’, but they should not copy sentence structures or whole sentences. Most candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives such as ‘without consent’ for ‘whether you want it to or not’. Successful summaries also wrote with a formality and clarity required for a concise summary style, changing the first person in the text to the third person.

Less effective summaries included significant stretches of copied text, often spliced together, and occasionally there was not much which could be assessed as original writing or reworking which meant that these summaries could not achieve above Levels 1 or 2.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas such as ‘an addiction to the competitive app removes all fun’. Avoiding lengthy introductions and conclusions also helped achieve concision.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, achieved by the use of varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions and punctuation

that was accurate and helpful. These summaries were well-crafted and well-organised with appropriate linking devices such as ‘moreover’ and ‘likewise’ correctly used to guide the reader through the summary. Level 3 responses also demonstrated use of adverbial connectives such as ‘furthermore’ and ‘in addition’ to shape the content, though when overused and placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, these did not necessarily aid organisation. Candidates should write formally in summary writing. This means avoiding phrases such as ‘in the same vein’, ‘on the flip side’ or ‘on top of that’. At the lower levels, summaries lacked clarity due to errors in grammar, awkward expression and little evidence of organising the content.

### Advice to candidates on Question 3(a):

#### Reading

- first read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content
- read the question and make sure that you understand the task
- read the text again, underlining or highlighting the words and phrases which are relevant to the task
- ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations and examples
- do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail
- do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content
- look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways or examples; these repeated ideas or examples could be covered as one point
- do not include content which is not in the text.

#### Writing

- think of a sensible order for the points underlined/highlighted; this may be in a different order from the original text
- if points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision
- use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary
- do not lift whole phrases or sentences
- write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures
- connect your ideas so that they flow smoothly for the reader from one point to the next
- use a formal writing style
- do not write more than 150 words
- do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

#### (b) Short response task

**Imagine you are Ned, the writer’s personal trainer.**

**You are asked a question by someone who enjoys running and is interested in your work. Give your answer to the runner’s question, using information from the text.**

**The runner’s question: I’ve been thinking of getting a personal trainer, but some people say it’s a waste of money.**

**What is your opinion and why?**

In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They have to demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question makes it clear that the perspective candidates are to take is Ned, a personal trainer, and the text makes it clear that he disagrees with the statement.

This question is testing reading skills. It is about a personal trainer and not a fitness app. The relevant information about personal trainers is in the references to Ned throughout **Text B** where we learn that, for example, a personal trainer can give advice about eating healthily and ensure that one does not overtrain. Candidates who performed well in this question returned to the text, specifically the sections where Ned is mentioned, and considered what might be the benefits of having a personal trainer.

To reach Level 3, a response had to consistently demonstrate the correct perspective supported by *detail* from the *text*, such as ‘I’d make sure you never overtrain’, *and* *develop* this with sensible inference: ‘this will

ensure you avoid serious injury'. A single idea or detail from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each one could have some inferential development.

Level 2 responses were not always fully secure in their understanding of the task or the text, often writing about the advantages and disadvantages of a personal trainer or including criticism of a fitness app. Thus, these responses, while being generally relevant, lacked the consistent viewpoint needed for Level 3.

Level 1 responses showed some awareness of the correct perspective: 'I think you should get a personal trainer', but were then either very brief or did not include relevant content.

Some candidates misread the question, confusing a personal trainer with a fitness app, or agreed that a personal trainer was a waste of money and that the runner should train independently. These responses gained no marks.

**Advice to candidates on Question 3(b):**

- read the question carefully and identify whose perspective you are to identify with
- highlight or underline the relevant section(s) in the text where the person is mentioned
- decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if they agree or disagree with the statement
- state an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text
- extend and develop the ideas with inference.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21  
Paper 2 Writing 21

## Key messages

- **Section A** is partly marked for Reading and so candidates need to read both texts thoroughly, evaluate the arguments made and respond to the views expressed, taking care to use their own words when selecting ideas from the texts.
- Responses to **Section A** must be rooted in the texts, rather than based on the candidate's own ideas and opinions about the topic.
- In **Section A**, candidates should ensure that they use an appropriate format and style for the required text type.
- In **Section B**, when choosing **Questions 2** or **3**, candidates should maintain a focus on description and avoid slipping into narrative. If **Questions 4** or **5** are chosen, candidates should ensure plots are fully developed using a narrative structure.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- Candidates are advised to adhere to the suggested wordcounts for each question.
- Candidates should remember that the majority of marks are for Writing and for Style and Accuracy and they should check that tenses are consistent and be careful with spelling and punctuation.
- Candidates are encouraged to proof-read their work for meaning and accuracy.

## General comments

- This was the second examination for the new syllabus. Short or incomplete responses were extremely rare.
- The best responses demonstrated highly accurate writing and a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Candidates' use of vocabulary was impressive, with many responses featuring a wide range of lexis appropriately employed.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors include confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and a lack of punctuation.
- Performance on **Section A** was strong overall, but more practice on how to evaluate arguments would be of benefit to many.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section B** questions. The range of options meant that all candidates seemingly found a topic they were interested in writing about.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A: Directed Writing**

#### **Question 1**

The question required candidates to respond to two texts giving different opinions about the impact of social media on young people. Candidates were assessed on their Reading skills based on their responses to the two texts, as well as on their Writing skills.

The writing format required was a school magazine article evaluating the ideas and opinions in each text and giving the candidate's own views on the advantages and disadvantages of social media for young people. The vast majority of candidates clearly had experience of using social media and so were able to write about this topic with confidence.

The question bullet points required candidates to:

- evaluate the ideas and opinions in **both** texts
- give their own views on the advantages and disadvantages of social media for young people, based on what they have read in the texts.

A strong performance on Reading was characterised by evidence of engagement with the ideas in each text and an evaluation of these ideas. In order to achieve marks in the higher levels, a range (Level 4) or wide range (Level 5) of ideas from the texts must be considered, as instructed in the first of the question bullet points. This meant that candidates needed to refer explicitly to several points made by both Sam and Ali in order to achieve a high mark.

Most candidates did this successfully, for example by picking up on ideas from Sam about how social media took up time that could be used more productively and mentioning the problems social media could cause in terms of social skills, family life and mental health. From Ali's text candidates commonly referred to the idea that social media is a quick and easy way to communicate, that it is good for less confident people and that it can build skills and spread positivity. While there does not need to be a balance across the two texts, consideration of ideas from **both** texts is a requirement of the question. Some candidates clearly favoured the arguments made in one of the texts and so only touched on those made in the second text. A few candidates chose one idea (e.g. the fact that social media can take up a lot of time) and wrote about this at great length rather than considering a range of ideas as was required.

Candidates needed to do more than just list the ideas from each text. Some candidates successfully identified the negative and positive points from each text, but just copied these down in the order they appeared in the texts, often making little use of their own words. It is acceptable for candidates to use some of the words from the texts, but they need to use their own words to demonstrate their development and evaluation.

Development came generally in the form of candidates referencing their own experience and knowledge of the subject. For example candidates could develop Sam's idea about hours being lost on news feeds and videos by giving examples of the platforms that young people use. Similarly, candidates could develop Ali's argument that social media builds skills by giving examples of things they had learnt from social media themselves.

Another way in which candidates could demonstrate development was in offering solutions to some of the problems raised by Sam, e.g. parents setting controls on the use of the internet to prevent their children wasting time or viewing unsuitable content. The best responses provided development for all or most of the ideas they selected and then went on to evaluate some of these.

The key factor in whether candidates achieved Level 4 or Level 5 for Reading was evaluation of ideas in each of the texts. Evaluation means offering judgement of the validity of the ideas expressed by Sam and Ali. This sometimes came in the form of the candidate saying that they agreed or disagreed with an idea and explaining why. Other candidates demonstrated evaluation by explaining why they thought one idea was the most important, or stating how one idea outweighed another, e.g. 'Sam says that social media is bad for social skills but he does not consider Ali's point that it can increase confidence.' Other candidates evaluated potential bias in the viewpoint of the two writers, e.g. pointing out that Sam was older and so did not understand what it was like to be a young person today.

It was important that candidates rooted their responses in ideas in the texts. Some gave their own thoughts about social media (for example writing about potential issues with identity theft and scams) but did not include many ideas from the texts. This had an impact on the mark that could be awarded to these candidates for Reading as the response should focus mainly on the issues raised by the texts rather than offer a discursive examination of social media generally. The second bullet point asks for candidates' own views but the first bullet point requires a detailed examination of the views expressed in the texts. Candidates would benefit from reading each of the two texts very carefully and taking time to jot down or underline the points they want to refer to from each text before they start writing.

The most successful responses dealt with the two texts together and offered development and evaluative comment throughout, often comparing and contrasting the ideas in the texts, e.g. by writing 'Ali believes that social media spreads positivity, but I agree with Sam that seeing pictures of people's perfect lives can cause mental health problems.'

Most candidates attempted to include some evaluation in their conclusions but not all were successful. Some candidates simply stated their own opinion, e.g. 'I believe that social media is dangerous and should be banned for young people.' This could not be credited as evaluation as the candidate did not link their opinion with specific ideas in the text. Stronger conclusions linked to one or more ideas from the texts, e.g. 'I agree with Sam that social media is dangerous as young people can be exposed to unsuitable content.' A statement like this would be credited as evaluation as it offers judgement of an idea in the text.

With regards to Writing, most candidates demonstrated good writing skills and produced relevant content that was often developed and effective. The structure of responses was generally secure with learners considering the advantages and disadvantages of social media in turn and the best combining and assimilating ideas. Most candidates also included an appropriate introduction stating what they were writing about and a developed conclusion summing up their thoughts. Sentence structures were generally accurate and this included the use of complex sentences. There were sometimes issues with sentence separation in weaker responses though with commas being used instead of full stops.

Almost all candidates showed awareness of some of the conventions of article writing and provided a suitable headline. Most letters were written in an appropriate style for an article aimed at an audience of school students and staff and included some appropriate touches such as direct address and rhetorical questions. The strongest were written in a lively tone and included engaging phrases, such as 'We all know how easy it is to lose hours of our time scrolling on social media' but there were a few responses that used inappropriately informal expressions such as 'wanna' and 'gonna.'

With reference to spelling, punctuation and grammar, spelling was generally strong, with confusion of homophones being the most common error. Errors were commonly seen in words like *there* and *their*, *too* and *to* and *your* and *you're*. There was often appropriate use of idiomatic expression, but this was overused in some cases and this reduced the coherency and flow of the response. Some candidates over-relied on words provided in the two texts and so could not be credited for their vocabulary as most of the creditworthy lexis used was copied from the texts.

Grammar was often the weakest area and frequent errors in the use of tenses and articles were observed. These errors made some responses difficult to understand. Paragraphing was a strength in most responses and punctuation was generally accurate. Some candidates made errors with capitalisation, in particular using the lower case 'i' when writing about themselves.

Candidates are recommended to proofread their work carefully to help them find and correct errors. Spending five minutes doing this after finishing each question would increase the Writing mark for most candidates.

### **Section B: Composition**

There were two marks awarded for **Section B**. The first mark is for Composition, Content and Structure; how effectively the candidate responds to the task, including the use of descriptive or narrative features and the clarity of the structure and how this is organised for effect.

There is a wide range of descriptive and narrative features that candidates can be credited for. Descriptive features include things like use of the senses, contrast, use of figurative language such as similes and metaphors and the use of sound devices such as onomatopoeia and alliteration. Narrative features include a clearly established setting, development of characters, control of time frame through, for example flashbacks, and an effective climax to a story.

It is important to note that responses which include numerous descriptive or narrative features will not necessarily achieve a high mark. The key point is how effectively these features are used to add detail and to bring descriptions or narratives to life. That said, responses that merely list events and include very few descriptive or narrative features will not access higher marks as they will be adequate, rather than effective.

The second mark awarded for **Section B** is for Style and Accuracy. This mark is awarded for the quality of a candidate's writing in terms of their use of sentence structure and vocabulary and the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Candidates are rewarded for using a wide range of sentence structures accurately, the effective use of a wide vocabulary and for accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The vast majority of candidates wrote complete **Section B** responses. A few candidates did write very brief responses though and this suggested that they had spent too much time on **Question 1**. There were also some candidates who wrote very long responses that went far beyond the recommended 350 to 450 words.

It often proved difficult for candidates to sustain linguistic control of their responses and this could lead to a lack of cohesion and an increased error count.

## Question 2

**Describe two people you know who have very different lifestyles. They could be members of your family, friends, famous people, or anyone else.**

This descriptive task proved fairly popular, with candidates appearing to enjoy writing about very different people. Candidates tended either to approach this question as a side-by-side comparison or as a comparison in two parts. Either approach could work, provided that the focus was on description and comparison.

The best responses described each person in detail and brought out the contrasts clearly. A common approach was to write about a rich person and a poor person or someone with an expensive lifestyle and someone who lived more humbly. Both of these approaches allowed for effective use of contrast. Less successful responses often just included what people did and focused on events or possessions more than description of the person. The focus of this task should be on description, rather than narrative. The control of tenses was a weakness in some compositions. The present tense was used well by most candidates but others used the present and past tense inconsistently.

## Question 3

**Describe the scene at a popular outdoor location in good weather and the same location in bad weather.**

The second descriptive task was addressed well in many responses and there were some memorable descriptions of parks, beauty spots and beaches in contrasting conditions. A successful answer to the question used sensory and descriptive language to describe the beauty of the location in good weather and contrasted this with a description of the same place in desolate or extreme conditions. The differences were often quite severe with extreme weather events and destruction featuring in some cases.

Some responses were very strong, employing evocative adjectives, detailed descriptions and language features such as similes and personification. They included people's reactions to the differing weather conditions and gave a real sense of what it would be like to be there. As with **Question 2**, weaker responses tended to be quite general and gave factual information about the outdoor location, or narratives about what people did there without offering much in the way of description. Other responses lacked balance and included very little about what the location was like in bad weather.

## Question 4

**Write a story in which a small notebook is important.**

This topic allowed for a wide range of responses and there were some very imaginative stories. Sometimes the notebook contained access to a deceased family member's wealth and other times it contained the protagonist's secrets. Many stories were constructed around the loss of the notebook and the potentially catastrophic consequences of it not being found. This task gave scope for candidates to demonstrate their ability to use appropriate features such as effective use of dialogue, characterisation and the build up of tension. The notebook could be introduced at any stage of the story.

Stronger responses included a solid scenario being established and featured successfully developed characters and how they were affected by the events. A strong ending would often give a logical consequence and reaction. The best responses were often rooted in candidates' direct experience of school or home life, with the notebook containing romantic secrets or treasured recipes. There were a few weaker responses that were not really stories but just explained how notebooks could be used.

## Question 5

**Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘She felt a huge sense of joy as she saw her best friend running towards her.’**

This title was the most popular of all of the **Section B** tasks. Candidates were able to use the sentence in a variety of ways and many wrote well-crafted and interesting stories. The sentence could be added at any point in the story, with most candidates using it to provide a plot twist at the end.

There were many stories about friends reuniting after going to different universities or after one had moved to another region. Another common theme was a friend going missing on a camping trip, or being feared to have been caught up in an accident. Many of these narratives were very engaging and well-constructed, with candidates often making effective use of features such as dialogue, flashbacks, and time shifts. Other candidates successfully used the opening paragraph as a teaser of what was to come and then returned to this at the end.

Less successful responses could be confusing as the narrative structure was sometimes difficult to follow. Another feature of weaker responses was a lack of development of character as well as weak beginnings and endings.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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## Key messages

- In **Section A**, candidates should take care to use their own words when selecting ideas from the given texts.
- In **Section A**, candidates should be encouraged to use evaluative and developmental language, using, for example, discourse markers and persuasive devices.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the majority of responses.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and more varied punctuation (colons, semi-colons, brackets, question marks and exclamation marks) would raise the level of most responses.
- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible and that where material is crossed out, a line is drawn through it neatly.
- Candidates should be encouraged to plan and paragraph their responses to improve organisation and clarity.
- In **Section B**, candidates should ensure that they use features appropriate to the type of writing required by the question selected and focus on writing for deliberate effect.
- In **Section B**, when choosing **Questions 2 or 3**, candidates should maintain a focus on description and avoiding slipping into narrative. If **Questions 4 or 5** are chosen, candidates should ensure plots are fully developed and brought to a meaningful conclusion.
- When writing dialogue, care should be taken to ensure that this is punctuated and formatted correctly.
- Candidates should focus on quality over quantity in their **Section B** response, being mindful to adhere closely to the indicative word count.

## General comments

Most candidates produced responses of an appropriate length and adhered to the rubric. Only a small number of candidates left sections incomplete or produced responses significantly below the indicative word count.

Candidates responded well to the Reading requirements in **Section A**, reflecting an understanding of and an engagement with the texts. However, a significant minority struggled to structure their responses and develop their ideas effectively, particularly when integrating and evaluating the source texts (**Text A** and **Text B**). Strong responses were characterised by effective paraphrasing and well-considered, while in weaker responses, there was frequent lifting of phrases directly from the source texts and evaluation was either superficial or absent. Most responses were clear and legible. However, some responses were difficult to read due to poor handwriting, untidy crossings-out and inconsistent use of capital letters.

Most candidates opted for narrative questions (**Question 4** and **Question 5**) in **Section B**, and these were generally well answered. The descriptive questions (**Question 2** and **Question 3**) were less frequently chosen and often weaker in execution. Many of these responses lacked descriptive features, such as imagery, focus shifts, or atmosphere creation, though more successful responses were strong in this regard. Occasionally, responses to **Section B** were overly long, with a few up to ten pages, far exceeding the indicative word count and resulting in a less successful response in quality terms.

Several recurring issues impacted the clarity and effectiveness of responses. A common issue was tense inconsistency, with responses sometimes switching between past and present tense within sentences, causing confusion for the reader. In some cases, responses shifted between first and third-person perspectives without clear intent. Punctuation errors, particularly the punctuation of dialogue, and disorganised paragraphing were other notable weaknesses. More successful responses featured impressive vocabulary and the effective use of literary devices, such as imagery and plot twists.

## Section A

### General comments

In **Section A**, the Reading requirements of the question were addressed well by most candidates. The question required them to read **Text A** and **Text B** about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones from which ideas and opinions were to be selected and subsequently developed and evaluated in an email to the school principal to assist him/her in deciding whether or not to ban mobile phones in school. All candidates appeared familiar with the benefits and drawbacks of having mobile phones in school and as such were able to engage with the material provided. While the majority of candidates selected a wide range of ideas from the texts and offered development of some or all of these, a few responses with thoughtful evaluation selected only a few ideas and were therefore less successful than they could have been had a greater range of ideas been discussed. Additionally, there were some candidates who, despite having selected a suitable *range* of ideas, did not offer any evaluation and, as such, precluded themselves from attaining marks in Levels 4 and 5. This highlights the need for candidates to balance breadth of ideas chosen with depth of development and evaluation in their responses.

Responses generally demonstrated a good understanding of the required text type and audience, with the majority correctly adopting the format of a formal email addressed to the principal. A respectful tone was maintained throughout for the most part, though a few responses included some overly familiar or colloquial language. Most responses opened with a polite and focused introduction, stating the purpose of the email, though many ended somewhat abruptly, without reference to the principal. Appropriate valedictions were provided in most responses; these ranged from the simple and polite 'Thank you' to the respectful and not overly formal 'Kind regards', through to those with a shade of deference, such as 'Yours respectfully'.

In terms of structure, many responses discussed the points for and against the proposed ban on mobile phones in separate sections before concluding with the candidate's view. While many responses followed this sequential approach, stronger responses skilfully integrated ideas from both texts, juxtaposing them to create more evaluative and cohesive arguments. This integrated approach allowed for more nuanced analysis and showed higher-level skills in balancing and evaluating competing ideas.

Reference to **Text A** and **Text B** was made in many responses, with some responses directly quoting Hamza and Rachna. More successful responses demonstrated an ability to go beyond merely citing the texts, instead developing their arguments with personal examples and additional insights, such as the implications of cyberbullying, gaming, and the health issues associated with too much time spent using mobile phones. Successful responses also employed powerful adjectives and evaluative phrases (e.g., 'this is undoubtedly true,' 'this is the most important factor'), to enhance the persuasiveness of their arguments. However, these techniques were not widespread, and most candidates relied heavily on factual presentation rather than rhetorical persuasion.

Most responses adopted an appropriate formality and a clear organisational structure. Paragraphing was mostly effective, and spelling and vocabulary were generally strong, with occasional ambitious vocabulary choices. Punctuation within sentences was less consistent, and some responses lacked sentence variety, limiting the fluency of the writing. Despite these issues, the majority of responses were clear and coherent.

The most successful responses were those which combined a formal tone, structured arguments, evaluative insight, and well-developed personal input, achieving a balance between analysis and creativity. Key areas for improvement would therefore include integrating ideas more effectively, enhancing evaluative skills, and providing more extensive development of the ideas selected from the source texts. The use of persuasive devices would further strengthen responses.

### Reading

Most candidates demonstrated a solid understanding of the source texts. Most responses included relevant ideas which were clearly presented, ensuring a balance of ideas across both texts. However, a recurring issue was the tendency to lift phrases or ideas directly from the texts without sufficient rephrasing or interpretation. Where this was the case, it limited the originality and depth of the response.

Almost all responses covered a wide range of ideas, with very few limiting themselves to a single text. Most addressed both texts methodically, showcasing an understanding of the topic and the arguments presented. Responses often discussed the advantages of mobile phones for organisation and research, offering developments such as using phones to take pictures of lesson notes and having access to the most up to

date information. Most responses also referenced the idea of responsibility being inculcated by the possession of a mobile phone, with more successful responses making a link between this and the idea of envy from Text B through the mention of the expense of mobile phones. This linking of advantages and disadvantages taken from opposing texts is to be encouraged. Of the five ideas present in Text A, that of photography or hobbies was least frequently selected. Of the five disadvantages present in Text B, that of addiction was the most frequently omitted while points around the potential for distraction and for limiting creativity, were widely addressed. Several candidates offered lack of focus in class *and* accidents caused outside of class when candidates' attention is absorbed by their phones as separate ideas, however these were both part of one single idea of distraction. When selecting ideas from the texts, candidates should look for these overarching ideas, rather than reiterating every example provided.

Development of ideas was present in most responses and was often offered by candidates in the form of an example or information additional to an idea already in one of the source texts. One example of this took the form of personal evidence which supported an idea, for example, 'Having my phone with me helps me to feel safe because it means that if I have a problem, such as missing the bus, I can call my parents and they can come and pick me up which means I do not have to walk home on my own'. We also saw examples where the development of an idea came before the idea itself, for example, 'When I have my phone in school, I am often tempted to play games or look at Instagram, which means I do not focus on what the teacher is saying.' where the personal experience is used as a lead in to the idea from Text B of mobile phones being distracting. This is a perfectly valid approach.

Many responses featured creditworthy evaluation, for example, 'Using a mobile phone provides crucial safety for students by allowing instant communication in emergencies, so rather than banning mobile phones, perhaps it would be better to only allow their use at certain times of the day, for example on the journey to and from school when students are more likely to be at risk.' or 'The high cost of mobile phones undoubtedly causes jealousy among students when they don't have the latest model and making sure their children always have the most up to date phone can place financial strain on families.' In the first example, we have evaluation of the idea that mobile phones provide safety, with the use of 'crucial' being a signal that this is evaluative. The development provided here is a solution which supports the evaluation by mentioning that permitting the use of mobile phones on the way to and from school would offer security in emergency situations. The second example picks up on the Text B idea of envy, judging that there is validity in this idea with the use of 'undoubtedly'. The development here comes with the effect of the expense on families.

Some candidates had clearly understood that evaluation required offering judgement of an idea present in the texts either by suggesting prioritization of one idea over another, or dismissal of an idea. Some responses featured appropriate vocabulary to support an evaluation, with phrases such as 'the most important factor', 'It is certainly true', 'I can't deny', 'we can't completely ignore the fact' and 'It is claimed'. However, while most responses presented a view on whether or not mobile phones should be banned in school, the depth and clarity of evaluations varied significantly. Weaker responses either omitted evaluation altogether or resorted to recycling ideas from the source texts without genuine analysis. Conversely, more accomplished responses prioritised and critiqued ideas, often embedding evaluative comments throughout, contrasting points between the texts and weighing their persuasiveness. For example, some candidates debated the usefulness of mobile phones for research against the risk of distraction, providing thoughtful analysis. However, these responses were rare. More often, where evaluation was attempted, it was confined to concluding paragraphs and lacked integration throughout the response. Weaker responses often included implicit or incidental evaluation, rather than explicitly signalled critical analysis. For instance, while ideas were dismissed or disagreed with, these dismissals were not always substantiated. Some responses refrained from offering a definitive view, instead leaving the decision to the principal. While this approach acknowledged the authority of the principal, it often resulted in a lack of purposeful tone.

To improve performance, candidates should practise identifying the strengths and weaknesses of an idea and presenting reasoned judgments to enhance their development and evaluation skills. Candidates are encouraged to cover a wide range of points from the source texts in their responses while ensuring depth through meaningful development and evaluation.

Overall, responses reflected a high level of engagement with the texts and demonstrated comprehension of key ideas. However, limitations in development and evaluation often hindered higher achievement. By focusing on critical thinking, integrating evaluation throughout responses, and improving the balance between breadth and depth, candidates can further improve their performance on the Reading component of the paper.

## Writing

The majority of responses demonstrated a reasonable grasp of simple punctuation, such as full stops and commas, with apostrophes correctly used for contractions and possessives. However, more complex punctuation, including colons and semi-colons, was seldom attempted and often misused. There was some effective use of brackets, dashes, and ellipses, though these were less frequently observed in candidate responses.

Long sentences, often linked by conjunctions, were prevalent, though some responses showed inconsistent paragraphing and a lack of sentence clarity. While stronger responses displayed a variety of sentence structures and organisation, weaker responses tended to rely on the source texts, limiting originality. Many candidates made genuine attempts to use their own words, but in many cases, the structure and order of ideas in candidates' responses frequently mirrored the original texts, showing limited reshaping.

Vocabulary usage ranged from basic to advanced. Many responses employed discourse markers and connective phrases such as 'however,' 'in addition,' and 'moreover,' although these were sometimes used indiscriminately. Some candidates attempted ambitious vocabulary, though this was not always accurately or appropriately used. Examples of impressive vocabulary included words like 'distraction-free environment,' 'critical thinking,' 'perspective,' and 'implement'. Weaker responses often over-relied on the language of the texts, demonstrating limited originality.

Spelling was generally accurate while grammar issues were more pronounced. Common errors included subject-verb agreement inconsistencies (e.g. 'candidate has phones for learning'), tense mismatches, pluralization issues, and awkward sentence constructions. For example, some candidates confused 'loose' with 'lose,' 'specially' with 'especially,' and 'in the passed' with 'in the past.' In addition, confusion of the homophones 'principle' with 'principal' and 'whether,' with 'weather' was prevalent in many responses.

Stronger responses demonstrated effective linking of ideas and coherent argument structures, while weaker responses showed limited control over basic grammatical forms, and sometimes neglected paragraphs entirely, impacting clarity and flow.

To improve the mark achieved for Writing, candidates would benefit from targeted guidance on the proper use of punctuation, particularly colons, semi-colons, and dialogue formatting, the development of a wider range of vocabulary, greater grammatical accuracy, and practice in structuring responses with clear and coherent paragraphs. Close reading of high-quality texts which model natural language use and persuasive writing styles would also be beneficial for candidates.

## **Section B**

### **General comments**

The narrative questions (**Question 4** and **Question 5**) were more popular than the descriptive questions (**Question 2** and **Question 3**). **Question 2** was the least popular choice. Responses to this question often lacked balance and depth, with many focusing extensively on the departure for a trip while neglecting the return. These were often chronological recounts rather than descriptive pieces. Common weaknesses included an over-reliance on general adjectives and adverbs, a lack of sensory imagery, and a tendency to fall into narrative structures. While **Question 3** was slightly more popular than **Question 2**, here candidates often neglected to discuss two role models, instead focusing on just one. Stronger responses provided authentic and meaningful accounts of what these role models represented, while weaker responses were formulaic, consisting of introductory sentences followed by lengthy, repetitive paragraphs that lacked depth. For **Question 3**, heartfelt descriptions of role models were seen, though many lacked the sensory richness expected of a descriptive task. A common weakness was the blending of descriptive and narrative styles was observed, particularly in **Question 2**, where candidates narrated events instead of describing them. Similarly, in **Question 3**, candidates often provided a 'shopping list' of qualities for their role models rather than exploring their significance in depth. When descriptive responses were successful, they created vivid, immersive pieces with carefully chosen details and a focus on atmosphere.

**Question 4** and **Question 5** proved popular choices though **Question 5** was the most popular and often produced creative and varied responses. Most candidates skilfully integrated the given sentence into their stories, creating diverse scenarios ranging from humorous and light-hearted situations to adventurous or

poignant tales. Successful responses avoided clichéd endings, maintaining reader interest with imaginative outcomes. Responses to both **Questions 4 and 5** often displayed thoughtful storylines, character development, and the use of sensory and figurative language. The most successful narratives integrated dialogue effectively, with stronger responses using it to develop characterisation and enhance atmosphere. Popular scenarios included dramatic events such as forgotten passports, surprise parties, and moments of personal failure or triumph. A few candidates crafted non-chronological narratives, starting with a key event and using flashbacks to build suspense. However, this technique was only effective when executed thoughtfully and when it was seamlessly integrated into the narrative.

Many candidates showed reasonable control of grammar and vocabulary, though errors were common. Issues included repetitive use of vocabulary, misuse of homophones, and inconsistencies in tenses and subject-verb agreement. Most candidates demonstrated reasonable essay structure and were able to reach a conclusion. Only a small number of responses showed that the candidate had run out of time, however some showed an imbalance in responses between **Sections A and B**, with the latter receiving only minimal attention. This highlights the importance of effective time management during exams, an area where additional guidance and practice could prove beneficial.

### Content and Structure

In terms of content, most responses were fairly successful, with the best ones incorporating realistic and engaging features such as tension in emergencies or the frustration caused by group dynamics.

Most responses demonstrated an awareness of literary devices, particularly in narrative writing. The use of direct speech was generally effective, though in a few cases this was over-used, resulting in dialogue-heavy responses that resembled film scripts. Many candidates employed stock phrases, similes, rhetorical questions, and alliteration, often making a conscious effort to include these features. While these devices were frequently present in opening paragraphs, the standard of writing sometimes declined in later sections, suggesting a reliance on pre-prepared responses or difficulties with time management.

Stronger responses included a wide-ranging vocabulary, with words such as *ebullient*, *sagacious*, and *ephemeral* enriching their writing. However, less successful attempts at incorporating advanced vocabulary occasionally disrupted the flow of the text. Candidates should focus on using sophisticated language naturally and in context.

Most candidates adhered to a clear structure, with appropriate paragraphing and logical progression. Chronological narratives were the norm, though non-chronological approaches were occasionally used to good effect, especially when the opening paragraph foreshadowed events later in the narrative. Many candidates signalled their conclusions clearly, with some including a moral or lesson learned. While this approach was often executed well, it sometimes felt forced and detracted from the overall impact of the response. In some responses, introductions or preambles were too long and that delayed the main events of the narrative, while in others overly long paragraphs could have been split for greater clarity. Effective planning before writing would likely improve the quality of these responses.

To improve the mark for Content and Structure of both descriptive and narrative writing, candidates should focus on allocating time for planning their response and reviewing their work to ensure coherence, consistency, and accuracy. Short, well-structured responses are more effective than lengthy, unplanned ones. In descriptive writing, emphasis should be given to sensory and emotional details, avoiding the temptation to lapse into narrative structures. Practice should be provided of how to create atmosphere through vivid imagery, figurative language, and precise word choices in advance of the exam. In narrative writing, candidates should be encouraged to develop coherent plots with well-rounded characters and meaningful resolutions, as well as to avoid overused scenarios and pre-prepared responses that may feel disjointed. The natural integration of advanced vocabulary should be practised, and candidates should be encouraged to ensure that literary devices are used to enhance the overall quality of the piece rather than appearing forced or formulaic.

### Style and Accuracy

Most responses could be followed, with few entirely lacking in clarity or meaning. However, persistent issues with grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure often impacted the overall quality of writing.

The most successful responses showed a strong command of language, incorporating literary devices, varied sentence structures, and effective pacing. Ambitious vocabulary and phrases such as 'sultry,' 'ambience,' and 'raindrops trickled across the windowpane' enriched the writing when used appropriately.

Stronger responses skilfully employed similes, metaphors, and idioms, alongside advanced vocabulary like 'discombobulated' and 'inculcated'. Despite occasional grammatical inaccuracies, many responses included engaging and descriptive language that enhanced the narrative or descriptive elements.

A common issue involved punctuation in dialogue, particularly when using question marks or exclamation marks, where errors such as placing a comma after closing speech marks, or omitting punctuation inside the same, were observed.

One of the most significant areas of grammatical weakness was tense inconsistency. Responses frequently shifted between past and present tenses within sentences, disrupting flow and coherence. For instance, a sentence might begin in the present tense and unexpectedly transition to the past, causing confusion. Addressing this issue would significantly improve the overall clarity and cohesion of many responses. Errors in subject-verb agreement were widespread and these often undermined the impact of otherwise strong vocabulary and ideas. While most responses demonstrated basic punctuation skills, many struggled with sentence separation; run-on sentences and comma splices were common. Additionally, some candidates overused dialogue to the point where responses resembled play scripts, reducing opportunities for descriptive depth. Others failed to format dialogue correctly, neglecting to start a new line for each speaker. Many candidates structured their work well with clear paragraphing. However, some responses lacked proper paragraph breaks, leading to disorganised presentation of ideas. Candidates should be reminded that effective paragraphing is essential for guiding the reader and ensuring coherence. A number of candidates attempted to use pre-learned sophisticated vocabulary and idioms, but these were often deployed awkwardly or out of context. Similarly, some relied heavily on rote-learned stock phrases, which detracted from the natural flow of their writing. Issues were also seen in the confusion of homophones, such as 'there' and 'their.' and there was occasional, though isolated, use of inappropriate language.

To improve their mark for Style and Accuracy, candidates should pay attention to tense consistency and subject-verb agreement; this will aid clarity and coherence. Emphasis should be placed on accurate sentence separation, use of varied punctuation, and correct formatting of dialogue, as this would enhance the overall quality of many responses. While ambitious vocabulary is encouraged, candidates should be encouraged to focus on using it naturally and in context. Candidates are encouraged to allocate time for planning and reviewing their work. They are also advised to use dialogue sparingly and purposefully, integrating it naturally into their narratives rather than letting it dominate the response. By addressing these areas, candidates will be better equipped to produce polished, coherent, and impactful writing.

## Question 2

Describe the scene in your home when your family is preparing to go away somewhere together, for example on holiday or on a day trip, **and** when they arrive home

This descriptive writing question which focused on the preparation for and return from a family holiday, was the least popular choice among candidates. While it offered opportunities for creativity and rich sensory description, many responses lacked focus and drifted into narrative.

The most effective responses captured contrasting emotions, such as the excitement and chaos of preparing for the trip versus the anti-climax or relief upon returning home. These responses used sensory imagery and figurative language effectively, such as describing 'the kitchen as a hive of activity, buzzing with chatter and laughter'. Humour and hyperbole were used by some candidates to portray chaotic family dynamics, with vivid depictions of frayed tempers, siblings squabbling over clothes, and parents' contrasting roles during preparation such as 'Mum doing everything while Dad washed the car or read the newspaper'. More successful responses conveyed atmosphere and detail through descriptive techniques, including imagery and list effects, to illustrate the scenes of preparation and return.

However, many candidates struggled to maintain a descriptive approach, instead veering into narrative. A significant number of responses became chronological accounts of the holiday itself, focusing on events at the destination rather than on the preparation and return as required by the question. Several candidates neglected the second part of the task or included it only briefly or as a single sentence. Some responses also failed to address the preparation phase in sufficient detail. Several candidates misinterpreted the question, producing narratives centred on holidays or journeys rather than descriptive depictions of the specified scenes. A number of responses demonstrated a limited range of descriptive features, focusing instead on factual recounting of actions. This lack of sensory detail and imagery reduced the effectiveness of the writing.

To help them improve their mark for **Section B**, candidates should be encouraged to carefully analyse the question to ensure their responses address all required aspects, such as the preparation **and** return phases.

Attention should also be given to ensuring that candidates focus on creating vivid imagery and atmosphere rather than recounting events. Candidates are encouraged to consider sensory language, figurative devices, and varied sentence structures to enhance their descriptions. To avoid imbalance, candidates should be reminded to allocate equal attention to both of the required elements of the question, exploring the contrasts in mood and experience between these. Finally, candidates should be encouraged to practice organising their ideas into clear, coherent sections, ensuring that both parts of the question are well-developed.

### Question 3

Describe two very different people, apart from your parents, who are important role models for you. They could be relatives, friends or famous people. Say why they are important to you.

This question, which required candidates to describe two role models, was among the least popular choices but allowed for some engaging and reflective responses when chosen. While most responses addressed the question, there were notable differences in quality and approach, with stronger responses demonstrating greater depth and insight.

Many candidates effectively described the emotional and psychological impact of their role models, using vivid imagery and metaphors. Examples included grandparents who provided nurture and wisdom, or friends with contrasting qualities, such as one being a scholar and the other an athlete. Stronger responses explored how the individuals influenced their lives in different ways, often creating heartfelt and moving accounts. Rather than emphasising physical appearance, most responses focused on the character traits, achievements, and impact of their role models. This approach allowed for richer content and deeper engagement with the task. More successful responses highlighted the differences between the two role models effectively, such as contrasting a caring grandmother with a successful celebrity or athlete. Some candidates concluded with thoughtful reflections on the shared qualities of their role models, such as resilience, compassion, or ambition.

Weaker responses often struggled to provide detailed descriptions, resulting in responses that felt plain or overly factual. Some relied on listing achievements or generic attributes without any specific examples or personal connections. While most candidates addressed the differences between their role models, weaker responses chose individuals who were not sufficiently distinct, limiting the scope for meaningful comparison. A few candidates wrote broadly about categories of people, such as teachers or relatives, without focusing on specific individuals. This lack of specificity weakened their responses. Some candidates ran out of ideas after a brief physical description or list of accomplishments, resulting in underdeveloped answers.

To improve, candidates should be encouraged to focus on specific individuals, detailing not only their achievements but also their unique qualities and the personal impact they have had. When describing people, candidates should be encouraged to provide a balance between descriptive detail (physical and psychological) and personal reflection on the influence of these individuals. Where questions require choosing two individuals, candidates should be reminded of the importance of choosing two distinctly different role models to allow for meaningful comparisons. Planning their responses can help candidates improve coherence and depth. More successful responses demonstrated evidence of planning, following a clear structure to describe each role model and then drawing comparisons or conclusions.

### Question 4

Write a story in which someone receives an unexpected telephone call with some exciting news.

This narrative question, based on a phone call delivering 'exciting news,' was the second most popular choice. Responses showcased a variety of imaginative scenarios, ranging from domestic and relatable moments to fantastical and dramatic events. While common themes included university acceptances, pregnancy announcements, and family reunions, the best narratives developed these ideas in unique and engaging ways. For instance, some explored the aftermath of the news, focusing on its impact on relationships or future choices, rather than merely recounting the announcement itself. More successful responses demonstrated skilful use of tension and pacing, building up to the phone call with cliffhangers and dramatic sentences. This approach effectively engaged the reader and added depth to the story. Sensory descriptions, dialogue, and figurative language were also used to enhance the narrative and create vivid imagery. Emotional responses to the news were often depicted convincingly, drawing the reader into the narrative. Candidates who avoided excessive melodrama and instead portrayed authentic and relatable reactions were particularly successful. Some candidates began the narrative with the phone call, immediately immersing the reader in the action. Others built up to the call, creating suspense and anticipation. Both approaches were effective when executed well.

In some cases, narratives focused solely on feelings of excitement without exploring the broader implications of the news or providing sufficient context. This lack of narrative progression resulted in responses which were somewhat 'flat'. Weaker responses frequently omitted scene-setting, imagery, and descriptive language, relying instead on straightforward accounts of events. This diminished the overall impact of the story. A few responses featured negative news or omitted the element of excitement altogether, failing to adhere to the requirements of the question.

To help improve their responses to the narrative writing questions, candidates should be encouraged to spend a few minutes planning their answer to help them create a cohesive and well-structured response. This includes developing a clear beginning, middle, and end, and ensuring a logical progression of events. Candidates should also be encouraged to consider the importance of sensory descriptions, imagery, and varied sentence structures to create a more engaging narrative. As more successful narratives often include authentic emotional responses that resonate with the reader, candidates should aim to balance emotion with storytelling, avoiding excessive melodrama.

### Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'What do you mean, you forgot it?'

**Question 5**, which tasked candidates with embedding the sentence 'What do you mean, you forgot it?' into a narrative, was the most popular question. Its open-ended nature encouraged a diverse range of responses, from common scenarios to highly imaginative narratives. While many candidates demonstrated effective storytelling, others struggled with integration of the sentence and with narrative development. Common scenarios included forgotten tickets, wedding rings, or birthday presents. These relatable themes were frequently well-developed. More unusual and engaging scenarios involved jungle adventures, wartime settings, haunted houses, or even fantastical worlds. Exceptional examples included unique plots, such as a campaign to reinstate a teacher dismissed unfairly, which showcased thoughtful narrative development. Many candidates managed to embed the given sentence meaningfully, using it as a pivotal moment to drive the narrative forward. Effective responses placed the sentence at a key moment of tension, often incorporating it into dynamic dialogue or conflict between characters. More successful responses effectively set the scene with vivid descriptions of, for example, forests, bustling airports, or tense wedding ceremonies. In these narratives, sensory language and dialogue were used to create immersive and emotionally engaging narratives. Better responses also employed narrative techniques such as flashbacks, pacing, and shifts in perspective to maintain reader interest. In more successful responses, dialogue was often well-crafted, showcasing the characters' emotions and relationships.

However, some responses did not integrate the given sentence naturally, resulting in the sentence feeling forced or disconnected. Pre-prepared or formulaic responses were particularly prone to this issue, with the sentence often shoehorned into the story. Over-elaborate plots reminiscent of action films often lacked coherence or focus. Weaker responses frequently covered too long a period of time or included multiple climaxes, leading to rushed or incoherent narratives. In some cases, the forgotten item had little impact on the story, diminishing the tension and significance of the plot. While many responses effectively used the sentence to build tension, some lacked emotional depth or ended on an anticlimactic note. Excessive melodrama or unrealistic character interactions occasionally weakened the overall impact of the response.

To improve, candidates should be encouraged to spend time planning their narratives, ensuring the given sentence is integral to the plot and that the story has a clear structure with a beginning, middle, and end. Practising this type of narrative question would help candidates learn to embed given phrases naturally, making them central to the narrative's progression. Candidates should be reminded that more successful narratives build tension effectively while avoiding abrupt or anticlimactic endings. Focus should also be given to learning the skills required to create a satisfying resolution to a story.