

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/21
Writing

Key messages

Candidates should focus on the prescribed instructions and focus within each question – for example, concentrating on ‘anticipation and adventure’ for **Question 1**, ‘outlook and mood’ for **Question 2** and ‘sense of enthusiasm’ for **Question 6**. They must ensure time management skills are observed, avoiding over-long narratives in **Section A**, often leading to short, self-penalising answers for **Section B**. Within the time limits of the exam, candidates should be prepared to spend a few minutes thinking about, and writing out, a short plan to ensure the sound and effective structure of an answer.

In preparing for **Section A: Imaginative writing**, candidates should develop skills in sustaining narratives in the tense they start out with, and safeguard against confusion of tense forms. Candidates should differentiate between ‘showing’ versus ‘telling,’ to improve descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must demonstrate their ability to make the reader feel as if they are in the world created in their narrative, and seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work.

When preparing for **Section B: Writing for an audience**, candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles and print newspaper correspondence (where available), and should prepare various modes of discursive writing in the media. Some appropriate skills in composition and rhetoric should continue to be the focus of exercises.

General comments

The sections *Imaginative writing* and *Writing for an audience* arguably afford candidates the opportunity to write in modes that deviate somewhat from standardised English and to employ idioms more particular to the colloquial parlance of everyday speech. This notwithstanding, some candidates demonstrated over-reliance on buzz-phrases such as ‘a thing,’ ‘literally,’ or ‘on the daily’.

The main area for improvement, as suggested in the *Key messages* above, is in sustaining tense forms. If a candidate began an imaginative writing task in the present tense, he or she would often struggle not to switch randomly to the past tense.

There was frequent evidence of candidates referring to ‘amounts’ rather than ‘numbers’ of people, and the confusion of ‘less’ and ‘fewer’ occurred even in some of the more competent submissions. Some candidates struggled with syntax: they either created comma splices or ended sentences without main verbs. Dangling modifiers were in evidence: candidates should be instructed as to the perils of beginning a sentence with ‘By ___ing’ formations, especially if participles are not related to the subject noun of a sentence.

Incorrect apostrophe use was evident in some cases, but a more common error was the absence of punctuation. Some candidates seemed to eschew capitals at the beginning of sentences completely. Candidates ought to ensure that if their sentences commence with a subject pronoun, the subject ought not to be different from the person named by way of a proper noun in the previous sentence.

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some essays were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

Where some candidates were less successful in *Imaginative writing*, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes an answer was devoid of paragraphs, even for new speeches in dialogue) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions. Stronger responses were often those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or

atmosphere; for example, some of the more successful responses to **Question 1** allowed the reader to vicariously experience the excitement of the commitment to a new future.

The more successful *Writing for an audience* answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were less effective in demonstrating the conventions of different forms, establishing a mature, credible voice or developing a well thought out, logically organised line of argument. This was particularly true of some responses to **Question 5**, which asked for two letters, and implied an inherently structured response.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – *New Horizons*

Candidates generally approached the imaginative writing exercise *New Horizons* with enthusiasm. The question, which asked candidates to produce the opening section of a story in which someone sets off on an adventure and to create in their writing a sense of anticipation, appeared to facilitate imaginative work across a range of candidate capabilities. Candidates seemed to respond well to the task of writing expository descriptive and narrative action and creating characters/establishing narrative voices, without feeling the pressure of foregrounding the action of a completed story within the span of 600–900 words. The most successful responses to the question were able to incorporate a range of devices, including dialogue, flashback, and even free indirect thought in some exceptional cases. Even where it was apparent that candidates had approached the question with pre-prepared story ideas in mind, the question allowed them to answer the question fairly appropriately.

In many cases, as in many imaginative writing tasks, one key technical problem tended to affect this question: continuity of tense forms. Candidates often used a mix of tense forms, fluctuating back and forth unpredictably in mid-sentence.

Assessment of answers to this question yielded the constructive criticism that candidates be prepared for this exam by developing skills in ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’. In other words, candidates should be encouraged to improve ways of using descriptive and narrative tools, to describe action and scenes indexically through visual or auditory imagery rather than through a more pedestrian form of fact-detail. Successful candidates for this question would ordinarily tend towards showing rather than telling, and thus their answers demonstrated a broader range of narrative as well as descriptive capabilities than did those of other candidates.

Question 2 – *Before and after a job interview*

In this question, candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces featuring the same person before and after a job interview. In this exercise, candidates needed to create a sense of the person’s outlook and mood. Since the vast majority of answers to this question constituted first-person narratives, outlook and mood were in the main successfully voiced. The most successful responses demonstrated skill in affecting a degree of irony. In the first piece, an unreliable narrator would be presented as boasting of his or her unquestionable suitability for a job prior to the interview; the candidate would employ imaginative skills to set the narrator up for a terrible fall in the second, post-interview narrative of bewilderment and despair. The majority of responses followed a more predictable and sometimes more prosaic narrative of pre-interview nerves and post-interview euphoria. Candidates tended to be more successful in ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’ in this question, as they found it relatively easy to convey the physical manifestations of nervousness, fear and relief. Better answers drew on both the given requirements for language effects, and successful candidates were just as willing to describe the more tricky aspect of the character’s general outlook on life and well as the easier depiction of fluctuating moods.

As with **Question 1**, a key technical problem candidates found was in maintaining tense forms. The first, pre-interview piece would often begin in the present tense with the narrator waking up for their interview. However, with the interview in the near future (later that morning), the candidate would struggle to maintain the sense of the present. By the second piece, candidates were generally successful in voicing a present-tense, post-interview narrative where the narrator looks back at the interview has just taken place. Still, it would seem that some stronger preparation for writing in the present tense would be of advantage.

Question 3 – *The Mountain*

The imaginative writing exercise *The Mountain* required of candidates that they wrote a descriptive piece creating a sense of atmosphere and focusing on colours and sounds to help the reader imagine the scene. Candidates were generally successful in this endeavour, although -- the inevitable problems with tense forms notwithstanding -- there were two identifiable areas for improvement. First, there was still some tendency to tell rather than show. Secondly, candidates might nod to the question rubric by listing red sunsets, green grass and blue skies as well as sounds of wind and rain, but only a comparative few candidates would successfully integrate allusions to colours and sounds into an effective evocation of atmosphere. The strength of this piece was that it allowed candidates to write progressive narratives of ascent as well as descriptions of flora, fauna and atmosphere encountered at each stage in the trek. The most competent, proficient or outstanding submissions achieved the delicate balance of narration and description, where it was clear that the descriptive element was of foremost priority.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – *Communication*

This proved a very popular question, where candidates were given the task of imagining that they had been asked to write a school magazine article on the topic of how communication has changed in their lifetime and how it might change in the future. The vast majority of submissions achieved an appropriate sense of voice and directed their discourse at an appropriate audience. A balance of persuasive and enthusiastic argument was largely maintained across a range of submissions at all levels of demonstrated capability. Some candidates grappled less successfully with imaginative considerations of future technology and tended to imagine technologies that are already in mainstream circulation, but on the whole candidates demonstrated a lively ability to create humorous journalistic effects in envisaging the future trajectory of communications technology.

Question 5 – *Prison*

This is one question that implicitly confirmed the extent of change in communications over recent years, as candidates wrestled with the task of writing two contrasting letters to a newspaper in response to the topic of prison being the best solution to crime. Some candidates were careful to format their letters with fictional addresses, dates, appellations, body text and signatures. Other candidates simply wrote two contrasting mini-essays, seemingly unfamiliar with epistolary conventions. In terms of content, a majority of candidates, with varying degrees of skill, succeeded in employing rhetorical figures and measured composition in constructing coherent arguments for and against the proposition outlined in the fictional newspaper article. In some cases, less successful candidates exhibited technical problems that compromised not only linearity of argument but on a deeper level, lexis and syntax. Further attention to teaching candidates to avoid mid-sentence connectors, dangling modifiers, and comma splices could aid enhanced expression.

The better answers for this question used a subtle blend of subject knowledge, comparisons that often referred to the other letter/review in ironic or humorous ways, and a strong sense of voice to engage their readers. Less successful responses made simplistic comparisons, often using precisely the same language, but with a few negative words in the 'disagree' statement. There was excessive ranting at times and where this was in character, for example a wrongly-convicted ex-prisoner, the language effects were rewarded; less effective responses tended towards excessive and inappropriately gruesome praise for the death penalty or repetitive hectoring about keeping the streets safe.

Question 6 – *Resort hotel voiceover*

This task, where candidates were asked to write an enthusiastic voiceover advertising a hotel resort, produced some of the most varied and imaginative work across submissions for this paper. Some candidates in particular seemed to demonstrate exhaustive knowledge of hotel resort facilities, from double vanity bathrooms and pool noodles to Tiki bars and facial spas. However, while there were lively descriptions of the benefits of stopping off at the resort, too often the answers were a pure and exaggerated list of the perfections of all aspects of the experience. Candidates often turned this list into a succession of rhetorical questions and their ecstatic answers, which after a while, became off-putting rather than persuasive.

Candidates often incorporated aspects of video screenplay-writing and direction, including descriptions of visual shots accompanying the voiceovers. An appropriate, lively and engaging tone and register was frequently achieved by candidates across a broad spectrum of capabilities. Some candidates fell short of the rubric requirement for length, with some expending more words on paratextual material to convey the

conventions being used than on the script itself. Overall though, most candidates were able to create an effective voice.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/22
Writing

Key messages

Candidates should focus on the prescribed instructions and focus within each question – for example, concentrating on ‘mood and how it changes’ for **Question 1**, ‘mood and place’ for **Question 2** and ‘gratitude and importance’ for **Question 6**. They must ensure time management skills are observed, avoiding over-long narratives in **Section A**, often leading to short, self-penalising answers for **Section B**. Within the time limits of the exam, candidates should be prepared to spend a few minutes thinking about, and writing out, a short plan to ensure the sound and effective structure of an answer.

In preparing for **Section A: Imaginative writing**, candidates should develop skills in sustaining narratives in the tense they start out with, and safeguard against confusion of tense forms. Candidates should differentiate between ‘showing’ versus ‘telling’, to improve descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must demonstrate their ability to make the reader feel as if they are in the world created in their narrative, and seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work.

When preparing for **Section B: Writing for an audience**, candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles and print newspaper correspondence (where available), and should prepare various modes of discursive writing in the media. Some appropriate skills in composition and rhetoric should continue to be the focus of exercises.

General comments

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The main area for improvement, as suggested in the *Key messages* above, is in sustaining tense forms. If a candidate began an imaginative writing task in the present tense, he or she would often struggle not to switch randomly to the past tense.

There was frequent evidence of candidates referring to ‘amounts’ rather than ‘numbers’ of people, and the confusion of ‘less’ and ‘fewer’ occurred even in some of the more competent submissions. Some candidates struggled with syntax: they either created comma splices or ended sentences without main verbs. Dangling modifiers were in evidence: candidates should be instructed as to the perils of beginning a sentence with ‘By ___ing’ formations, especially if participles are not related to the subject noun of a sentence.

Incorrect apostrophe use was evident in some cases, but a more common error was the absence of punctuation. Some candidates seemed to eschew capitals at the beginning of sentences completely. Candidates ought to ensure that if their sentences commence with a subject pronoun, the subject ought not to be different from the person named by way of a proper noun in the previous sentence.

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some essays were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

Where some candidates were less successful in *Imaginative writing*, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes an answer was devoid of paragraphs, even for new speeches in dialogue) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions.

Stronger responses were often those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere.

The more successful *Writing for an audience* answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were less effective in demonstrating the conventions of different forms, establishing a mature, credible voice or developing a well thought out, logically organised line of argument. This was particularly true of some responses to **Question 5**, which asked for two letters, and implied an inherently structured response.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1– *At Last*

In this task, candidates were asked to write a story with the title *At Last*, featuring a protagonist who has waited a long time for something to happen. Many submissions successfully balanced the construction of a complete story with attempts at characterisation, setting and appropriate narrative voice. The more successful attempts at third-person narration achieved quite complex effects such as free indirect discourse in the representation of the interior world of presented characters. In fact, many of the better answers were told from an omniscient point of view and thus enabled the writer more narrative control. Some better structured answers had a twist in the tale where, for example, the chance for the character to arrive ‘at last’ to a satisfying denouement was cleverly concealed in the first half of the narrative. In some cases, although it was clear that candidates had already pre-planned a story in advance of the exam, they were in the main able to adhere to the specifications of the question rubric.

In many cases, as in many imaginative writing tasks, one key technical problem tended to affect this question: continuity of tense forms. Candidates often used a mix of tense forms, fluctuating back and forth unpredictably in mid-sentence.

Assessment of answers to this question yielded the constructive criticism that candidates be prepared for this exam by developing skills in ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’. In other words, candidates should be encouraged to improve ways of using descriptive and narrative tools, to describe action and scenes indexically through visual or auditory imagery rather than through a more pedestrian form of fact-detail. Successful candidates for this question would ordinarily tend towards showing rather than telling, and thus their answers demonstrated a broader range of narrative as well as descriptive capabilities than did those of other candidates.

Question 2 – *Contrasting pieces about a hotel*

Candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces of 300–450 words each about a hotel: the first from the perspective of a receptionist and the second from the perspective of a hotel guest. The question invited the candidate to not only sketch a general observation of a place but also the subtler ironies of the expectations and moods of the fickle tourist and the (usual) boredom of the poor receptionist – those staff whose words seemed more like advertisements were less convincing. The more competent or proficient submissions for this question balanced descriptive and narrative effects in ways that achieved convincing character contrasts through voice. Less successful candidates tended to give rather flat descriptions of interior and exterior features of hotel life. This could likely be remedied by exploring ‘showing versus telling’, and setting candidates tasks to create a sense of mood and atmosphere, as mentioned in the comments regarding **Question 1**. Occasional submissions seemed to misunderstand the question and offer only the hotel guests’ view of the scene.

Question 3 – *Sailing*

When attempted, this question – an imaginative piece on the topic of sailing – resulted in some of the more outstanding or proficient responses of any variant of the AS-Level English Language and Literature (Writing) paper. Although candidates were encouraged to write a ‘descriptive piece’, some leeway was given to answers involving narrative elements if enough descriptive contrast was seen to justify criteria such as ‘clear focus’ or ‘relevant form and content’. Obviously ‘consistent focus’ would not apply in this case. Occasional submissions struggled to maintain appropriate tense forms, but on the whole this piece saw a range of interesting responses, with some very descriptive and even poetic atmospheric effects. Many of the better

responses concentrated on specific descriptive detail, including the contextual location, atmosphere, weather and other associated ambient factors when 'sailing'.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Post-school education

This question asked candidates to respond to an imagined class discussion on the topic of whether candidates should have to pay for post-School education, and to produce an article on the topic creating a sense of the importance of education. The majority of responses demonstrated, across a range of abilities and with varied success, the aptitude to write a sustained, discursive argument on the topic with some evidence of compositional and rhetorical skill. Among the less successful submissions, however, were responses that failed to comprehend the rubric of the whole question; such essays might typically have offered an appraisal of the value of education in general, rather than debate one way or another regarding the value of paid further and higher education. Occasional submissions demonstrated some inconsistency of argument or a propensity toward contradiction. Less successful submissions offered a series of seemingly unconnected or rambling points with a weak rationale or vague aim, rather than a developed, linear argument. Other less successful responses often descended into rants about the unfairness of not giving free tertiary education to all in developing countries – without necessarily outlining any practical methods for bringing about this ideal transformation.

Question 5 – A new exhibition

For this task, candidates were asked to produce two contrasting national newspaper reviews of the same exhibition. Each article would constitute 300–450 words and offer different experiences. In general, not many answered this question, but those that did generally did quite well and described either straightforward 'art' exhibitions or demonstrations of dinosaur artefacts. However, this question allowed the more successful candidates to employ imaginative as well as discursive skills in describing as well as evaluating the relative merits and demerits of a carefully described event. In some cases, the tone of reviews was not without humour as candidates gently satirised the snobbish prejudices and attitudes of newspaper critics. Less successful submissions were not so much compromised by inappropriate voice, tone or discursive approach as by technical errors.

Question 6 – A local charity

In this question, candidates were tasked with replicating the appropriate tone and address of a charity director giving a speech to a school to thank candidates for their financial support and explaining the charity's work. Similarly to the sailing exercise in **Question 3**, this task produced some of the most outstanding and proficient responses across all the variant papers for this AS-Level English Language and Literature (Writing) examination. Candidates were often able to use this task as a vehicle for explaining their understanding of complex socio-political themes, from war famine to honour killings, and from acid attacks against women to refugee displacement. Less successful submissions demonstrated a vagueness of detail regarding charity work and were often very generalised in approach, some forgetting to remind their audiences even what the name of the charity was, let alone its specific purposes. Some responses seemed to assume the candidates had not given anything yet and needed to be persuaded in the first instance, which was not what the question required. In the main, though, most responses successfully achieved an appropriate sense of audience and voice.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 8695/23
Writing

Key messages

Candidates should focus on the prescribed instructions and focus within each question – for example, concentrating on ‘suspense and anticipation’ for **Question 1**, ‘atmosphere and place’ for **Question 2** and ‘excitement and interest’ for **Question 6**. They must ensure time management skills are observed, avoiding over-long narratives in **Section A**, often leading to short, self-penalising answers for **Section B**. Within the time limits of the exam, candidates should be prepared to spend a few minutes thinking about, and writing out, a short plan to ensure the sound and effective structure of an answer.

In preparing for **Section A: Imaginative writing**, candidates should develop skills in sustaining narratives in the tense they start out with, and safeguard against confusion of tense forms. Candidates should differentiate between ‘showing’ versus ‘telling,’ to improve descriptive and narrative skills. Candidates must demonstrate their ability to make the reader feel as if they are in the world created in their narrative, and seek to utilise a broad range of effects in their work.

When preparing for **Section B: Writing for an audience**, candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles and print newspaper correspondence (where available), and should prepare various modes of discursive writing in the media. Some appropriate skills in composition and rhetoric should continue to be the focus of exercises.

General comments

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The main area for improvement, as suggested in the *Key messages* above, is in sustaining tense forms. If a candidate began an imaginative writing task in the present tense, he or she would often struggle not to switch randomly to the past tense.

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Where some candidates were less successful in *Imaginative writing*, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes an answer was devoid of paragraphs, even for new speeches in dialogue) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions.

Stronger responses were often those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – *He had only one more chance to succeed*

In this task, candidates were asked to write a story with the opening sentence, *He had only one more chance to succeed, and he knew it*. Candidates had to create a sense of suspense and anticipation in their work. This question saw some enthusiastic and in the main successful responses. As the opening line was presented in the past tense, most candidates were able to write consistently without confusing tense forms. There were inevitably some submissions where tenses shifted back and forth.

Some of the more successful responses to this question were sports-based in theme, often involving a heroic sporting protagonist who defied setbacks and the odds to win from an underdog's position. Less successful submissions, which were relatively limited in their attempts to create suspense and anticipation, tended to be scholastic in theme: there were several scripts where a protagonist sat for an exam, knowing that it was his or her last chance to escape from restrictive personal conditions. Many of the better answers were told from an omniscient point of view and thus enabled the writer more narrative control. Some better structured answers had a twist in the tale, where, for example, the chance for the character to 'succeed' was cleverly concealed in the first half of the narrative.

Less successful responses saw more frequent technical and structural problems, as would be expected according to mark scheme descriptors. As well as confusion of tenses, such responses often contained problems with syntax (ambiguities with subject nouns and pronouns, dangling modifiers, comma splices, or premature full stops), incorrect lexical choices and malapropisms, and reduced clarity of expression. Candidates could also improve by presenting a less pedestrian mode of diegesis, where the pace of sentences is varied and effects are employed to create a sense of suspense via the language.

Question 2 – *A tourist resort*

This task, where candidates were asked to write two contrasting pieces of 300–450 words each about a tourist resort at alternately busy and less-busy times of the year, produced responses that on the whole proved satisfactory and appropriate to the task across an expected range of abilities and results. Answers were reasonably uniform in the ways they sought to provide indexes to a busy or relatively vacant resort at different times of the year. The question perhaps called for a more descriptive approach than this, but the better responses were often seen through characters' own perceptions of a narrative taking place at two different times of year, often invoking the weather having a big effect or otherwise the crowded nature of the resort being somewhat claustrophobic. Candidates who concentrated solely on descriptions of place missed out on a chance to evoke the differences in atmosphere and, by association, the nostalgic feelings of a holiday resort off-season.

Question 3 – *Backstage*

This task asked candidates to write an imaginative piece describing the sights, sounds and movements backstage as a theatrical production is in progress. Responses to this question demonstrated an enthusiastic approach that in turn evidenced successful attempts to show as well as to tell of the atmosphere of behind-the-scenes theatrical bustle. Many of the better responses concentrated on specific descriptive detail, including the contextual location and atmosphere, and contrasts between the actors and the 'backstage' crew. Rather than merely list perfunctory visual and auditory signifiers as well as allusions to movement, many candidates employed a degree of narrative perspective in facilitating setting description and action. Some introduced dialogue to show a breadth of facility in creating appropriate effects. Not many candidates attempted this question, though, given the success of the responses, it might be fair to propose that most

candidates who approached this question were those who demonstrated competence or proficiency in their work overall.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Technology in schools

Candidates were asked to write a speech for an imagined school audience, on the topic of technology in schools. Candidates had to create a sense of enthusiasm regarding how technology in schools might change in the future. In general, the more conversant the candidate seemed to be in describing the function of technology in a learning environment, the more reasonably evaluative and coherent the candidate appeared to be in offering a prognosis for its future trajectory. The 'enthusiasm' here was ideally for both serious and fun aspects of the benefits possible for candidates and teachers. Other less successful responses tended to provide lists when discussing how useful (or not) these dizzying changes were to schools, but often the discussion did not progress further than the fact that lazy teachers did not have to grade so many actual papers and just pressed a few buttons on screen. More competent and proficient submissions demonstrated appropriate voice and a relevant sense of audience, incorporating correct greetings, allusions to the school environment in which the speech was meant to be set, and a sense of form and structure that concluded with the kinds of closing remarks that are hallmarks of public speaking. Lower-scoring responses tended not to have such a strong sense of voice or audience and showed less argumentative development. This task successfully tested candidates' functional English and indicated a range of capabilities across mark scheme descriptors. In all, it was an instructive task in facilitating assessment.

Question 5 – The right to vote at 16?

In this task, candidates in the main showed enthusiasm in responding to the instruction to compose two contrasting letters to a newspaper regarding an imaginary article debating the right to vote at sixteen. Some candidates were careful to format their letters with fictional addresses, dates, appellations, body text and signatures. Other candidates simply wrote two contrasting mini-essays, seemingly unfamiliar with epistolary conventions. In terms of content, a majority of candidates, with varying degrees of skill, succeeded in employing rhetorical figures and measured composition in constructing coherent arguments for and against the proposition outlined in the fictional newspaper article. In cases where candidates scored 9 or below, there was evidence of frequent technical problems that compromised not only linearity of argument but, on a deeper level, lexis and syntax. Further attention to teaching candidates to avoid mid-sentence connectors, dangling modifiers, and comma splices could aid enhanced expression.

Question 6 – Voiceover for a TV news report of a sporting event.

There were relatively few submissions regarding the task of producing a voiceover for an imaginary TV news report on a sporting event. Candidates who approached this question were, however, enthusiastic in their tone and appropriate in their sense of voice and audience. Even in cases where candidates demonstrated some limitations regarding functional English, they would still often manage to score quite well according to other mark scheme descriptors on account of the appropriateness of their work in response to the set task. It was at times apparent that the candidates were sports fans who enjoyed writing about their favourite teams or athletes, whom they would list, and whose prowess they would describe with tangible relish.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- Questions ask candidates to consider ways in which writers treat particular concerns, successful responses will focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary are not successful.
- Detailed references and quotations are needed to support points in essays.
- Candidates need to focus on the specific question in order to select the most appropriate poems, stories or episodes from texts.
- Answers to **(b)** passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General comments

In this session examiners were pleased to see examples of vigorous, thoughtful and discriminating writing on most of the texts offered for study. *The Namesake* appeared for the first time this session and proved very popular; Lahiri's novel attracted not only a high number of responses, but also some very careful, sophisticated writing, demonstrating appreciation and enjoyment as well as intelligent understanding. On many of the texts there were some very confident answers to **(a)** questions, where candidates selected their own material and constructed a carefully argued case from detailed knowledge and thoughtful evaluation.

Many answers on poetry showed candidates' knowledge of poetic techniques, but were hampered by a narrow focus, selecting words, phrases and poetic methods in a way which did not support their context within the poem. This made it difficult for candidates to show how such techniques developed the poem's meaning. It is very important for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the whole poem, the direction and development of its meaning, and to show how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape this meaning for the reader.

Comments on specific questions

1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Markedly fewer candidates attempted this question than the accompanying question on '*Harvest Moon*'. In a large number of cases, candidates did not pay enough attention to the phrase 'sensitive, detailed observation' and wrote more generally about Hughes's poetry, usually focusing on ferocity, cruelty and violence. More careful candidates recognised an opportunity to show their knowledge and understanding of a broader range of Hughes's poetry, writing about such poems as '*Snowdrop*', '*A Cranefly in September*', '*Full Moon and Little Frieda*' as well as '*Pike*', '*Thrushes*' and '*Thistles*'. Depending on the choice of poem, candidates were able to explore an unexpected tenderness in the observations, Hughes's use of precise metaphors or his surprising but apt language to highlight particular aspects of his subjects.
- (b)** There was some confusion about 'harvest' and a 'harvest moon' in candidate answers, some suggesting that the poem describes the moon in eclipse or even the sun. Others picked out a number of the interesting features of the poem, such as the 'gold doubloon' and the moon 'sinking upwards', without considering how these phrases present the appearance of the moon in the poem. More successful answers demonstrated that the image which Hughes creates, develops

during the poem, at times playful with the 'balloon' image, at times paradoxical, like the 'sinking upwards', both images suggesting the movement of the moon through the sky. Some candidates also explored the aural imagery in the second stanza which gives the moon's presence a strong impact. Others also effectively considered how the connection between the moon and earth is conveyed in the way that the 'earth replies all night'. There were many, very sensitive responses to the poem's final reverential tone and its mood of awe and wonderment, which was interpreted spiritually.

2. Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

- (a) A successful response to this question depended to a large degree on the appropriate choice of poems. A number of candidates fell back on Owen's more traditional war poetry without careful consideration of whether the poems provided suitable material to respond to the specific question. '*Dulce et Decorum Est*', for example, used by many candidates, was not a relevant choice; similarly, '*Anthem to Doomed Youth*' provided a limited range of material for candidates to discuss in specific reference to the question. More suitable material used by candidates included '*The Letter*', '*Disabled*' and '*Mental Cases*', while there were also interesting discussions of '*The Send-Off*' and '*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*'.
- (b) '*The Sentry*' was the more popular option here; however, a surprising number of candidates were unclear on the actual narrative of the poem, with misunderstandings around the sentry himself – sometimes understood as a gun, and uncertainty about the 'old Boche dugout' these fundamental misunderstandings severely restricted the success of an answer. Some successful responses started with the irony of the sentry – he who stands on guard – being the one wounded, and progressed to thoughtful discussion of the poem's recreation of a wartime experience. Candidates often picked up the details in the poem which exemplify the soldiers' discomfort amongst the mud, wet, smells and incessant noise with comment on fear, shock and subsequent nightmares. They also commented on small details such as 'forgetting' the casualty in the fast-paced action, where a man's destiny changes in an instant, amongst the activities of calling for a stretcher and arranging a duty rota. There were some very sensitive comments about the almost childlike 'O sir! my eyes –' line, with an understanding of how young the soldiers might be. This kind of alert response often also noted the familial tone in the relationships between soldiers and officers, the narrator speaking 'coaxingly' for example. Several candidates commented on the detail of having to 'beg' a stretcher, showing the stretched resources. The use of dialogue, repetition, onomatopoeia and the metaphor of the final image of lights were all explored in strong answers. Weaker responses suggested that candidates had not studied or revised the poem before the examination and it is never a good idea to respond to the selected poem as an unseen exercise.

3. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) The poems in the selection offer a wide range of significant experiences, but most candidates who responded to this question chose to write about love and unrequited love in particular. '*I Grieve and Dare Not Show My Discontent*' was a very popular choice, followed closely by '*They Flee From Me*'. Most responses discussed the experiences themselves, but often paid less attention to ways in which those experiences were explored through the poems; focus on the language and methods used by the poets was key to successful responses. Successful answers looked carefully at the poetic shaping of the experiences and the poets' choices, made to highlight particular aspects for the reader. Answers which moved beyond love considered poems such as '*Weep You No More*', '*Written the Night Before His Execution*', '*When I Was Fair and Young*' and '*Litany in Time of Plague*' amongst others.
- (b) There were a number of misinterpretations of '*Sonnet 31*' and in consequence, these limited a number of essays. At the other end of the range, a number of candidates acknowledged that the poem is part of a longer sequence and were able to discuss its form intelligently. Most essays showed an understanding that the speaker of the poem projects his own unhappiness in love onto the moon and sees in the moon's 'wan' face a reflection of his own unhappiness. Some candidates argued that this perspective effectively conveys the self-absorption of the lover who sees his pain in everything, and effectively analysed the use of rhetorical questions to demonstrate the anguish and confusion of unrequited love. Candidates made similar points about Cupid's 'sharp arrows'. Successful responses explored how the poem's ideas are developed through the sonnet and while several candidates noted the moon's traditional association with romance, few acknowledged its traditional association with chastity.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) The question on marriage was very successful, producing many carefully judged and organised responses. While there were answers which summarised key marriages in the novel, many candidates recognised an opportunity to discuss how Lahiri creates contrasts between marriages and questions certain assumptions about them. Most answers began with an exploration of the marriage between Ashoke and Ashima, noting that this arranged marriage with an apparent lack of intimacy proves to be the benchmark of love and fidelity in the novel. Telling details were often noted, such as Ashima trying on Ashoke's shoes, the fact that she never uses his name, his comforting her after the death of her father and his regular phonecalls home when away. Candidates recognised that by the use of such details Lahiri presents an undemonstrative relationship which is nevertheless solid and loving. This marriage was often contrasted with the Ratcliffs, as an ideal example of an American marriage; sophisticated and relaxed and to which Gogol aspires; a further comparison was often drawn between Gogol and Moushumi, a hybrid Bengali-American marriage based on passion but which eventually fails through infidelity.
- (b) Most candidates wrote with understanding about this passage, considering the depiction of Gogol's loneliness and, from later in the excerpt, his awareness of strangers in their house with 'no trace' of his family left behind. Some weak responses only offered paraphrase of the extract, often without any quotation at all. Lahiri's use of listing for emphasis, and the repetition of 'no' and 'nothing' were often noted in more successful responses. Observant essays recognised this passage as a moment of epiphany for Gogol, who finally realises that he has not understood his parents' lives and how much they missed their culture. The references to the overcoat were seen as important, as was the setting of a train station, as trains and journeys are used by the writer in symbolic ways throughout the novel. Some judicious reference to the wider text was often very useful to develop some candidates' responses.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) Some less secure responses to this question opted for character study, summarising Selden's involvement in the novel without paying due attention to the wording of the question. A large number of candidates also showed good knowledge of the character and some appreciation of his role in Wharton's text, without actually considering his potential status as an 'ironic observer'. Stronger answers looked at Wharton's portrayal of Selden as a character both inside and outside of New York society. While not one of the very wealthy social set, he moves freely within it and, particularly to Lily, offers his judgements of that social world. Some capable responses sought to challenge the question's premise, arguing that Selden likes to consider himself ironically detached, but in fact is shown to very much enjoy the moneyed world and has indulged in an affair with Bertha Dorset. Confident responses were supported with careful, detailed reference to the novel and with key quotations.
- (b) Many candidates engaged enthusiastically with this passage, though some did not read the question closely enough and wrote about Lily rather than about the 'social world' revealed in the passage. More successfully focused responses looked at ways in which the extract shows the hierarchy of money in New York, with Judy Trenor patronising Lily through 'refurbished splendour' and Lily patronising Gerty and her 'cases'. Many candidates saw the irony of Lily looking down on girls who were 'employed' whereas she has nothing that is really her own, many too, were aware of the ironic foreshadowing of Lily's position at the end of the novel. There were some thoughtful comments on the idea of a 'façade', picking out the significance of Lily wanting a cloak and a dressing case to mask reality and create an impression for society. Equally, her shopping for showy articles was contrasted with Gerty's seeking to have her watch repaired and Gerty's charitable work was compared with the thoughtlessness of most of New York society. A large number of candidates picked up and discussed such details successfully; fewer were able to discuss Wharton's narrative tone and language with equal conviction.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) This question on sympathetic responses to characters produced some interesting, personal answers; these were very successful when supported by detailed knowledge and understanding of the author's presentation of those characters and the structure of the stories in which they appear. Ella in '*Five-Twenty*', the narrator in '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', the boy in '*Secrets*', the victim in '*The Lemon Orchard*' and Ravi in '*Games at Twilight*' were among the popular characters chosen.

Approaches to the discussion varied, with some answers considering the varied effects of third and first person narration, while others looked at the portrayal of other characters who oppress the central character. Some candidates discussed the changing relationship between reader and character as the story developed, revealing more and more about the situation. In these ways, successful answers analysed narrative mode, characterisation and structure and were therefore much more successful than those responses which relied on narrative summary.

- (b) Several responses to this question showed a lack of understanding of the kind of village life described in the story and were not alert to the social satire implicit in this society. However, the majority of responses demonstrated a lively appreciation of the humour and the careful depiction of the class strata of English society. Mr Metcalfe's apparently self-deprecating aspirations were often noted, with his conscious limiting of his land acquisition, while yearning for his home's importance to be recognised. The villagers' comic appellation of it as 'Grumps' was noted as undermining his pretensions, while the attitude of Colonel Hodge, who accepts dinner invitations but refers to Metcalfe as 'the cotton-wallah' was seen to show his sense of superiority. In an impressive alertness to detail, a number of candidates noted the effect of the 'of course' accompanying the observation that Lord Brakehurst is 'a class apart'. The passage repaid careful reading and it was pleasing to see how many candidates responded to it with both enthusiasm and appreciation.

7. Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
(b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

8. William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) There were few answers to this question, but some candidates discussed the contrast between Roman and Egyptian politics and the ways in which the love affair between Antony and Cleopatra interferes with political events and duties. Stronger responses looked carefully at specific episodes, often beginning with Philo and Demetrius' opening observations and moving on to Antony's meeting with Octavius in Rome and the negotiations with Pompey. Antony's marriage to Octavia was sometimes discussed as a political marriage to contrast with his relationship with Cleopatra.
- (b) Far more candidates opted for this very famous scene and speech, though a disappointing number offered little more than paraphrase of Enobarbus' words without engaging with his language or imagery. More confident responses considered the context of the speech and considered that Enobarbus may be embellishing his narrative for the benefit of his intrigued Roman listeners. They explored the mythological references and the language of exotic richness which he uses to describe the Egyptian queen. The personification of parts of the barge to suggest love, the hyperbole and mocking humour used to describe Antony's position were all suitable aspects for careful discussion. A few candidates successfully noted the effect of Agrippa's amplifying responses.

9. Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were not many responses to this question, but there were some sound answers which paid careful attention to both dialogue and stage directions. There was observant discussion of the dialogue about parsnips and mutton and Alice's awareness of her fall from her social position, compared with Thomas' kindly resilience. Many candidates noted ways in which Alice's disappointments are revealed in her actions – silence, kicking, refusing to answer – as well as her tone of voice in suggestions such as '*sharply*'. The extract was also successful in encouraging a number of candidates to consider dramatic performance, with discussion of the lighting changes with '*darkness gathering*' which leaves More '*isolated*'. Several candidates noted the symbolic suggestions of this extended stage direction towards the end of the passage.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/92
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- Questions ask candidates to consider ways in which writers treat particular concerns, successful responses will focus on authors' choices of language and literary methods, and the effects these might have on a reader or audience.
- Responses which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary are not successful.
- Detailed references and quotations are needed to support points in essays.
- Candidates need to focus on the specific question in order to select the most appropriate poems, stories or episodes from texts.
- Answers to **(b)** passage-based questions should examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General comments

In this session examiners were pleased to see examples of vigorous, thoughtful and discriminating writing on most of the texts offered for study. *The Namesake* appeared for the first time this session and proved very popular; Lahiri's novel attracted not only a high number of responses, but also some very careful, sophisticated writing, demonstrating appreciation and enjoyment as well as intelligent understanding. On many of the texts there were some very confident answers to **(a)** questions, where candidates selected their own material and constructed a carefully argued case from detailed knowledge and thoughtful evaluation.

Many answers on poetry showed candidates' knowledge of poetic techniques, but were hampered by a narrow focus, selecting words, phrases and poetic methods in a way which did not support their context within the poem. This made it difficult for candidates to show how such techniques developed the poem's meaning. It is very important for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the whole poem, the direction and development of its meaning, and to show how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape this meaning for the reader.

Comments on specific questions

1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** This was a question which allowed candidates to re-examine some of the preconceptions about Hughes's poetry and explore some poems beyond the usual limits of ferocity in the natural world. Some of the most successful essays discussed poems such as '*Pike*', '*The Harvest Moon*', '*A March Calf*' and '*Full Moon and Little Frieda*', while some candidates forced the question towards savage beauty and considered poems like '*Hawk Roosting*', '*Thrushes*' and '*The Jaguar*'. On the whole, candidates who were able to refer to the poems closely, with quotations, were able to comment on the effects of Hughes' choices of vocabulary and imagery; far fewer were able to discuss structure effectively.
- (b)** '*Crow Hill*' was a popular choice, though this poem was a clear case where many candidates tended to comment on individual words or phrases without considering an overview of the whole poem and its meaning. On the whole, though, candidates responded well to the depiction of landscape, presented as treacherous with 'sheer sides' and 'sodden moors'. This landscape was seen as difficult to farm as 'farmers make a little heat', while their cows have 'bony' backs and the

pigs struggle to survive with 'delicate feet' that 'hold off the sky'. The difficulty of human survival in such a world was recognised, Hughes portraying humankind's powerlessness but also endurance in a land where human beings and animals are levelled and in awe equally.

2. **Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems***

- (a) The strongest responses to this question discussed poems which contain glimpses of the soldiers before the war: the formerly 'stout lad' that becomes the 'dead-beat'; the now disabled ex-footballer; the stone-cold dead, farm lad that used to wake to the sun. In this way the question's focus on 'personal consequences' was directly approached, more successfully than in those essays which just recounted the horrors or warfare depicted in Owen's poems. There were also effective comments on Owen's depiction of his personal experiences which haunt his own dreams, as well as his guilt at being unable to help his own men. Here poems such as '*The Sentry*' and '*Inspection*' were used effectively. Examiners also saw successful essays on poems such as '*Disabled*', '*Mental Cases*', '*Anthem for Doomed Youth*' and '*The Letter*', with candidates showing secure awareness of Owen's use of shifting perspectives and voices.
- (b) '*Wild With All Regrets*' attracted a large number of answers however, it seemed to be a poem with which many candidates were not confident and there was particular confusion with the second stanza. More confident candidates were able to discuss the degree to which the monologue traces the regrets through shifting moods within a stanza structure which echoes a declining grip on life. The persona's attitudes alter gradually, as a result of emotional struggles and physical trauma, rather than as a sudden epiphany. The de-glorification of a desire for heroic death lies at the core of the poem and indeed some responses sensed that the poem transgressed a taboo. Those who were able to deal successfully with the second stanza showed understanding of the speaker's preference for any life, even a lowly one, rather than facing oncoming death in a bed which has already become a 'coffin'.

3. ***Songs of Ourselves***

- (a) There are many poems in the selection which explore personal distress of one kind or another, so candidates had plenty of material to choose from in dealing with this question. Most opted for love's anguish or death, with poems such as '*When I was Fair and Young*', '*I Grieve, and Dare Not Show My Discontent*', '*What Thing Is Love?*', '*Weep You No More, Sad Fountains*', '*Written the Night Before his Execution*' and Wroth's '*Sonnet 19*'. Less successful answers tended to explore the nature of the distress rather than its poetic expression. More confident candidates were able to make precise references and support their answers with well-selected quotations and in this way examined the poets' choices of language, imagery and structure. There was some particularly effective discussion of poets' use of the sonnet.
- (b) A number of less successful responses to this poem offered little beyond summary and paraphrase and many candidates took '*Come Live with me, and be my Love*' literally, discussing Marlowe's attempts to gain the affections of a woman. Relatively few answers showed an awareness of the pastoral tradition and the crafting of such poems as examples of pastoral art. Nevertheless, there were some interesting and thoughtful responses. There were well argued essays that considered the speaker as an aristocrat with wealth and material goods, among the shepherds that he so clearly controls and uses for his own amusement; noting that the rustic pleasures are to mirror court life, with 'madrigals'. In a similar way, some candidates argued from a feminist perspective, suggesting that the speaker intends to control his beloved's response and gives her no space for reply, no voice of her own. Some were alert to structure, picking up on the repetition of 'Come live...' and that the regular rhythm and rhyme asserts confidence and clarity in the argument.

4. **Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake***

- (a) Candidates took a number of different approaches to this question, most often comparing Ashoke's and Ashima's solid relationship with its fidelity, with Gogol's sequence of failed relationships. Others focused on Gogol himself, examining the contrasts between his relationships with Ruth, Maxine and Moushumi, often using these as staging posts on his own search for identity. Either approach worked equally well; the discrimination lay in whether candidates merely recounted the relationships, or looked carefully at how Lahiri presents them and contrasts them within the structure of the novel.

- (b) There were many sensitive and thoughtful responses to this passage. Candidates often commented closely on the writing and looked both forwards and backwards in the novel to show how Ashima's feelings had been shaped by her past experiences, and how this is a turning point in her life with a different future ahead of her. The writing of the passage offered plenty of scope, with essays noting the variation of verb tenses, triple emphasis, stream of consciousness, flashbacks, adjectival choices and the novel's shifting notion of place/home, all of which gave candidates an opportunity to display their skills and knowledge. The robe itself was seen as an important symbol of the marriage, offering 'warmth and comfort' despite not quite fitting. Most also acknowledged that the passage presents a moment when Ashima tries to assimilate all aspects of her life and recognises that Pemberton Road is a home 'nevertheless'.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) Many candidates showed good knowledge of Selden's character, though a number struggled to see how he might be considered a 'victim'. Some opted to write about Lily instead, which was not an appropriate response. Others recognised Selden as being a 'victim' in the sense of being trapped in a state of passivity through the novel, unable to act on his feelings for Lily, constrained both by her attitude and that of society. Better responses discussed Wharton's interpretations of the male predicament as well as social satire with thoughtful sensitivity.
- (b) Candidates made much of the 'artistic' presentation of Lily at the start, as if she is posing for a romantic painting, yet still noted that she is in no hurry to join the charmed 'circle about the tea table' which might suggest some ambivalence. Lily was often judged harshly, for her plans to get Gryce to spend lavishly on her (the words 'system' and 'game' were noted), her belief that her beauty will carry her through everything and her eagerness to pay off old scores. Some brought in the wider text to show how Lily had 'suffered' various slights and humiliations at the hands of this 'brutal' crowd and used this to make some allowances for her current state of self-congratulation; seeing the 'relief' that went with it. The most effective responses showed a keen understanding of the subtleties seen in Wharton's writing.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) There were few responses to this question as 6b proved so popular. Among those essays focused on the question of changing responses to characters, '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', '*The Signalman*', '*Games at Twilight*', '*Secrets*', '*The Village Saint*', '*Meteor*' and Grace's '*Journey*' were favoured stories. A good answer required detailed knowledge of the story in order to demonstrate the development and changes and this sometimes led to answers which did not offer a great deal more than plot summary. Stronger work showed appreciation of ways in which the authors presented characters in order to encourage differing responses from readers at different stages of the story. Candidates often wrote very well, for example, on the changes in tone in the first person narrative of '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', showing how the narrator's situation and mental state is gradually revealed. The Aunt in '*Secrets*' was also discussed sensitively as candidates noted her sympathetic and kindly relationship with the boy in the early stages of the story, compared with her shocking 'You are dirt' speech later. Here the comparison of the tone of dialogue often led to subtle and successful writing.
- (b) There were very many responses to the question on the passage from '*The Lemon Orchard*' and la Guma's writing provoked some thoughtful, detailed and sensitive writing. While there were some responses which worked through the passage offering paraphrase, there were few candidates who could not find something to say about how the language of the extract conveys threat. There were several different areas of focus: the night-time setting, the noises in the distance, the effects of the descriptions of the light at different points, the anonymity of the characters, the harsh language used in the dialogue, the insight into the mind of the victim, the brutal treatment of the unnamed man and the ambiguity of the intention, which remains until the end of the story. Candidates did not have to cover all of these areas to write a strong essay and Examiners saw strong personal responses driving individual candidates' choices of focus, which produced a range of interesting answers. Some made very subtle points, such as noting the references to 'the men' and 'the man', before the specific, slightly different focus on 'This man', who then becomes the poorly dressed 'coloured man'. Others noted the references to 'darkness', 'silhouette', 'shadowed' and 'half-light' until the full light illuminates 'the rest of the party' when the threat becomes most clear. Similarly, general references to the 'shotgun' and the 'sjambok' carried by each man were developed as 'the leader brought the muzzle of the shotgun down, pressing it hard into the small of the man's back' at the end of the passage, bringing the nature of the threat sharply into focus.

7. Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were a very few responses to this question. Candidates usually took 'significance' to mean significance to the concerns of the play, concentrating largely on the first half of the extract. The Girl and Boy going about their chores was often interpreted as a microcosm of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchal society. Writing was less effective on the dramatic qualities of the passage and few noted the significance of the Girl resembling Anowa and looking like 'a wild one'. There was a better understanding that the comments she made about 'Mother' were a dramatic technique to display both the current state of Anowa, and the local gossip around the couple. Although the Girl's comments on the importance of a child were not always noted to fully develop interpretations.

8. William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) There were few responses on Antony's marriage to Octavia. The role of the marriage as a political tool was noted, leading to harsh judgements of both Octavius and Antony, and Octavia herself was contrasted with the characterisation of Cleopatra. Where these comments were restricted to a comparison of the women, they were unsuccessful; stronger responses looked closely at how the characterisation contributed to the relationship with Antony. This was expanded upon in some interesting answers, with discussion of the scene between Cleopatra and the messenger bringing the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia.
- (b) Candidates answering on Shakespeare favoured this question and usually wrote soundly on the impressions of Antony and Cleopatra created at the opening of the play. The importance of beginning with a Roman view was noted with some focused comments on the language, contrasting references to 'Mars' and 'triple pillar of the world' to 'dotage', 'fool' and 'the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gipsy's lust.' The reductive and sexist judgements of Cleopatra were also explored with candidates noting that Shakespeare uses Philo's descriptions to set the scene and create the initial expectations for the audience. Thereafter candidates were divided between those who thought the appearance of the lovers confirmed his view and those who saw Shakespeare's portrayal of them as a contrast to the sardonic Roman perception. Answers which based their judgements on careful discussion of the language and action of the scene did well.

9. Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, which tended to look at More's dilemma between serving his God and serving his King, noting that this is the central axis of the play and his fidelity to God leads to his downfall. There was less discussion of Bolt's characterisation of More as a religious man.
- (b) The few responses to the question on More's domestic life considered the scene as peaceful and homely, but most noted the inclusion of Rich- foreshadowing the disruption of that peaceful domesticity by the end of the play. Others noted the balance between God and King in the blessings at the beginning of the extract, another foreshadowing of challenges to come. Rich being at this point included within that domestic circle was a subject of effective discussion, with references made to prior events to contextualise More's 'Be a teacher' comment. The role of the cup gifted by More and the Steward's final words were also the focus of useful discussion.

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Many answers on poetry showed candidates' knowledge of poetic techniques, but were hampered by a narrow focus, selecting words, phrases and poetic methods in a way which did not support their context within the poem. This made it difficult for candidates to show how such techniques developed the poem's meaning. It is very important for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the whole poem, the direction and development of its meaning, and to show how the writer's choices of language, imagery and structure shape this meaning for the reader.

Comments on specific questions

1. Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** This question allowed candidates a wide range of poems and attracted some good answers on poems such as '*Hawk Roosting*', '*Pike*', '*Thrushes*', '*October Dawn*' and '*Snowdrop*'. Candidates were most successful when they chose contrasting poems which helped to create a structure to their essay. This allowed them to consider Hughes' focus on the powerful and brutal as well as looking at responses of awe and wonderment, or a focus on beauty and delicacy.
- (b)** The imagery of '*Wind*' prevents a literal paraphrase and some candidates were puzzled by 'Blade-light', 'mad eye' and 'green goblet'. On the other hand, there were some lively responses to the poem and its depiction of the ferocity of wind through Hughes' characteristic language and imagery. The suggestions of the house's instability through being 'far out at sea', the force of 'crashing' and 'stampeding', the vulnerability of the 'quivering' fields and the stones which 'cry out' were all noted in confident answers.

2 Wilfred Owen: Selected Poems

- (a) Some candidates' answers to this question were hampered by their choice of poems, as it required prudent selection. Some considered the purveyors of 'the old lie' in *'Dulce et Decorum Est'* though perhaps some of the most thoughtful essays were based on *'The Send-Off'*, *'The Letter'* and *'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young'*. In this way, candidates were able to consider a variety of people who were not directly involved in the war, including Jessie Pope, politicians, retired generals, parents and loved ones, and this helped to create some thoughtful essays.
- (b) There were some developed and sensitive responses to *'Mental Cases'*, usually beginning logically with the opening questions. The dehumanisation of 'Who are these?' was often noted and gave a platform for further consideration of the poem's frank and often horrific language and imagery. Essays often picked up the idea of hell from the end of the first stanza and developed a view of the poem as a hell on earth for the suffering patients, and an indictment of the war that has reduced them to this state.

3. Songs of Ourselves

- (a) A number of candidates clearly wanted to write about discontent rather than content. More logical essays looked most often at the extract from Jonson's *'Underwoods'*, Carew's *'A Song'*, Nashe's *'Spring'*, Greene's *'A Mind Content'* and Shakespeare's *'Sonnet 18'*. Successful essays considered not only the feelings of content and the situations that produced feelings of happiness and satisfaction, but carefully explored the language, imagery and structure used by poets to express it.
- (b) The use of paradoxes and oppositions in the first stanzas of Queen Elizabeth's poem *'They Flee From Me, That Sometime Did Me Seek'* enabled many candidates to analyse form and structure, which often continued into consideration of the pattern of the stanzas and the effects of the final couplets. There was also some careful discussion of the images of the shadow and the snow. Although many essays which listed rhyme scheme, numbers of lines and rhythms these were noted, without relating these to the meaning of the poem which consequently, did not support candidates' understanding. It is very important for candidates to consider the effects of such metrical and technical practices and how they convey meaning.

4. Jhumpa Lahiri: The Namesake

- (a) The precise focus of the wording of this question evaded some candidates, who showed themselves adept at the discussion of relationships, but less able to deal with their ending. Most answers looked exclusively at Gogol's relationships with his girlfriends, discussing the ends of his affairs with Ruth, Maxine and Moushumi. These answers often considered the causes of the break-up of the relationships, less often the ways in which Lahiri narrates them. Some essays took a broader view and looked at the death of Ashoke creating a very different end to the relationship between Gogol's parents. This, when compared with the end of one or two of Gogol's relationships, provided a thoughtful contrast.
- (b) More candidates chose this question, the passage from the end of the novel, which draws together several strands. Wider textual knowledge was used well here as candidates made pertinent references to issues of Gogol's name and the story of 'The Overcoat'. Essays often noted both freedom and loneliness for Gogol in these paragraphs as he now faces a full opportunity to define himself and his identity; emphasised with the reference to his full name and the Bengali vocabulary in the first paragraph. The detail of Nikolai Gogol emphasises how he has neglected this interest, and, therefore a part of his father in the past, creating pathos. Few candidates were able to discuss Lahiri's shift to the future tense with confidence. Those who did noted that the effect isolates Gogol at the moment that he begins read 'The Overcoat'. The section prior to that is narrated in the past, and as he turns to the story the tense shifts to the future, leaving Gogol reading the story in an unnarrated present tense. Some candidates applied some sophisticated, careful thinking to this tense change.

5. Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) There were few answers to this question, but among them were some very perceptive responses which showed detailed knowledge of the text and ability to write intelligently about Lily's and Selden's respective places in the society of 1900s New York, with focus on the pathos of the ending of the novel. Selden's fluctuating emotions were ably dealt with in most cases, together with his judgements of, and advice to, Lily at various points of the novel.
- (b) There were also a limited number of responses to this question, but candidates answering the question showed understanding of the situation and the characters. The relatively high proportion of dialogue in the passage gave candidates who favoured writing about characters plenty to work with; though many would have benefited from greater focus on the authorial asides and Wharton's use of irony. Most essays noted the key details of Lily's calculated moves on Percy Gryce and some of the clear pointers towards his characterisation, particularly in the details of his response to Lily. The detail of the tea – 'nectar' to Percy but 'railway brew' to Lily – was widely appreciated.

6. *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) Some candidates seemed to relish the opportunity to discuss characters they disliked, with John, the husband in '*The Yellow Wall Paper*', being subject to particular opprobrium, though Royal in '*Five-Twenty*' was a close competitor. Essays explored ways in which these characters are shown to oppress their wives and the ways the stories show the results of this oppression. There was also some politically-aware discussion of the group of men in '*The Lemon Orchard*', the ignorance of the human beings compared with the idealism of the aliens in '*Meteor*', the shift in character of the Aunt in '*Secrets*' and the bullying, hypocritical Mma-Mompatu in '*The Village Saint*'. Strong answers needed not only a detailed knowledge of the stories to supply key references and quotations, but also an understanding of ways in which authors shaped the characters to create critical responses from readers.
- (b) Some essays betrayed candidates' uncertainty in their understanding of this passage from '*Journey*' but most were very responsive to the author's ways of creating the phantasmagorical atmosphere of the opening of the story. Candidates looked at the structure of the extract, beginning with the nightmare images which set the unnerving mood before understanding the location of the girl on the bus. The discomfort of the bus journey, being described with language such as, 'jolted', 'reckless rush', 'wounded shriek' and 'frenzy' was seen to add to the unease, where fellow passengers offer no comfort, separated from each other with 'eyes marshalled inwards'. Candidates wrote well on the girl's feelings of alienation as she walks among the comfortable houses after disembarking, houses from which she feels excluded. Good answers often used knowledge of the rest of the story to compare the comfort of these houses and 'fenced-in gardens' and families with 'daily meals' with the girl's own family situation and her own isolation and hunger.

7. Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

8. William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.

9. Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

- (a) There were few answers to this question, which observed that More is an expert in law and believes that the law will protect him. Not many essays went further than this, but some were able to discuss the legal battles between More and Cromwell and the verbal fencing in their dialogue created by Bolt to show the two men's knowledge, skill and manoeuvring around each other.
- (b) Far more candidates opted for this passage question and seemed to enjoy this discussion between More and Rich, recognising its significance for future events in the play. This gave some candidates the opportunity to explore the proleptic irony of More's insistence on 'friendship' between the two. Candidates often showed an awareness of the characterisation of Rich as ambitious, but also vain and shallow, noting his reference to his rejection by doormen and his aspiration for fine clothes: 'a gown like yours'. They observed too that he rejects the teaching post offered him at a decent salary – here the stage direction '*bitterly disappointed*' was noted – and instead Rich willingly accepts a 'contaminated' bribe. Candidates were able to use their knowledge of the play's development to write soundly on the last section of the excerpt and More's comments on what one might be offered as bribes when 'in office', almost as if he already knows the direction Rich will take in the rest of the play, particularly with the final stage direction '*grimly*'.