

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

In this component, candidates should aim to:

reflect in their writing their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them;
choose assignments that challenge them to write at the highest standard of which they are capable;
write independently of undue guidance from published materials or from teachers;
demonstrate variety of style, use of language and genre in the three assignments;
write in fluent and varied sentences separated by full stops and clarified by the appropriate use of commas and other punctuation;
revise, edit and correct first drafts using their own handwriting;
proof read their work carefully, as marks are deducted for typing errors.

General comments

Ninety eight candidates from eight Indian Centres entered for this component. The standard of writing was generally very high and there was an excellently wide variety of topics set for each of the three assignments. There were some issues with the quality of the responses to reading, and these are set out later in this report. The standard of assessment was high. There was a tendency slightly to under mark writing and occasionally the marks for reading were slightly too high. On balance, the Moderator's adjustments were a little higher than the original marks.

Good practice

Candidates were encouraged to choose from a wide variety of topics rather than respond to a single topic set by the teacher.

Candidates were taught to use a wide range of language and frequently wrote in fluent, well-constructed sentences.

Suggestions for improvement

Candidates should not rely so much on content from the Internet, but are encouraged to state their personal ideas and opinions and to give their own responses to material found on websites.

In **Assignment 3**, it is important that the texts should constitute an appropriately challenging test of reading the written word. Candidates should respond by evaluating ideas and opinions that they have selected from the texts.

Task setting

Most of the tasks set for **Assignment 1** were discursive, so that candidates were able to argue their points of view and to develop and structure complex ideas. Informative tasks sometimes restricted the range of writing skills, but, for example, chronicles of visits often attracted high marks, especially where candidates expressed their feelings about what they experienced.

Some informative tasks were research essays that involved selecting information from a number of websites. It was assumed that candidates showed skills of selection and that the content had been restructured and paraphrased. However, these essays gave little evidence of the candidates' own, original thoughts and opinions, the expression of which is an important feature of good coursework.

Most of the writing gave evidence of candidates' own opinions. The following list indicates the variety of interesting topics that were chosen:

Are comics literature?
Are we becoming technological zombies?
Digital dementia
Marks are not everything
Are hoverboards dangerous?
Paper books versus ebooks
Working from home
Re-defining womanhood

There were few issues regarding **Assignment 2**. Some tales of the supernatural were well managed so as to make them sound credible. Fiction depended largely on a good selection of detail and language. A few candidates used a narrow range of language and their work was less engaging as a result. There was some good writing from the candidate's own experience. This included accounts of holidays and trips and an account of a first volleyball match which described the atmosphere well and the initial reluctance of the parents to encourage participation in what they thought was a minor sport.

Some of the titles produced some whimsical writing and others a good deal of originality. They included the following:

The gastronomic journey of a morsel
The love life of a stamp
Whispers in the dark
My last nightmare
A minute on an unknown planet
I'm sorry
Friends for ever
A rebellious day

Many different types of text were chosen for **Assignment 3**, including poems and other literary extracts, advertisements (for comparison), guides to places, newspaper reports, and leaflets. It was important that the text gave candidates a sufficient reading challenge both in the number of words and in difficulty. The best choices were articles that expressed the views and opinions, often one-sided, of the writer. The intention of the assignment was that candidates should present an overview of the writer's attitude and the range of content in the article. They should then examine specific ideas and opinions and evaluate them, for example explaining inconsistencies of argument and discussing bias. The ideas and opinions could be developed and explained as well as including the candidate's response.

Most poems were a satisfactory choice as the ideas in them were sufficiently complex and implicit for candidates to explain at some length. However, there were examples of comments on literary devices and the use of language that were not suitable for this assignment. The extract from the Ibsen play was well selected and the response was satisfactory. However, candidates should refer mainly to the selected text and only use the rest of the text where it explains a point. Setting a whole chapter from a book or a scene from a play tended to give too general a text for candidates to respond in detail.

The least successful texts were advertisements because they contained very little reading material. Candidates tended to write a media response which referred more to the graphics than to the words. This did not constitute a reading test as intended by the syllabus.

Some texts contained little argument. In particular, newspaper reports of events gave limited opportunity for candidates to engage with ideas and opinions. Examples of this were the texts about bringing penguins to the Mumbai zoo and the problems caused by potholes. The travel guides were also lacking in ideas except where the writing was over-enthusiastic, though no candidate questioned the writers' exaggerated claims.

Texts which successfully engaged candidates in an analysis of the writers' views were:

A review of the latest smartphones (with advantages and disadvantages)

Sexual harassment

Poems: -The road not taken; Daffodils

Demonetisation

Fracking

Internet trolls

Hostilities between India and Pakistan

Transgender issues

Shopaholism.

Assessment

Writing

The assessment of writing was generally sound, if often slightly severe. The standard of writing was high, except for some candidates whose grasp of language and syntax was not yet fully realised. In particular, some of the content was complex and original and it was often well developed, explained and sequenced. The structure of some of the writing was very good. This included **Assignment 3** where the responses were not merely a list of individual ideas. The range of language was also very good. Although some of the better writers tended to use too elaborate a vocabulary, they rarely used words wrongly. These qualities of content, structure and language were sometimes under marked. Most candidates were also very accurate.

Style was more of a problem. Some candidates wrote well-formed, fluent sentences. Other, less confident writers tended to write in short sentences or sentences that were repetitive in their structures. They also made syntactical errors and some of these were frequent, even causing occasional problems with meaning. There were cases where stylistic problems and, in a few cases, punctuation issues, were not given their full weighting in the assessment so that occasionally, a candidate was over marked, while another, writing with few errors, was under marked. This was the only issue in the marking of writing.

Reading

Many candidates were correctly assessed. There was a general understanding that specific references should be made to the texts and in some cases, the explanations and comments were sound and well developed. There was often evidence that the text had been read thoroughly and had been understood. The addition of a selection of ideas and opinions with comments justified a mark in Band 2.

Some responses were over marked, although rarely by more than one mark. This was because of the following:

There were few references to ideas and opinions in the text

There were references, but the quality of the response and evaluation was over marked

The text did not constitute a proper test of reading

Candidates responded to aspects such as language and graphics that were not part of this test

Candidates wrote parallel responses that reflected the text in a general way but which made no specific reference at all.

Administration

There were no problems of administration. Forms were correctly completed and the marks on the Candidate Assessment Summary Form were correctly transcribed on to the mark sheet.

There was evidence of effective internal moderation and these changed marks were also correctly transcribed. However, one Centre did not write the new marks on the cover sheets of the folders.

Annotation

One Centre made detailed comments on the cover sheet of each folder and submitted a sheet of comments on each of the assignments within each folder. This was a very clear guide to the Moderator. All other Centres provided sufficient evaluation of the work.

Teachers are asked to annotate errors on the final versions of each assignment. They are also allowed to give general advice at the end of the first draft with a view to further work by the candidate who should revise, edit and correct the work where it is necessary. It would be good practice for the candidate to indicate where changes take place between the first and final draft.

The first draft of only one assignment is required by the Moderator.

Final comments

The effort involved in presenting the folders was entirely justified by the quality of the work and by the educational value of the writing. The Moderator thanks both candidates and teachers for providing some stimulating reading and a great variety of tasks and ideas.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05
Speaking and Listening

Key messages

Administration – General Points

Cambridge requires Centres to provide **three different items** in the package sent to the Moderator. These are a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive, the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered and a **copy of the marks** that have already been sent to Cambridge. Each one of these items is very important in the process of assessing a Centre's performance. Centres are urged to ensure all these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process, or in the worst scenario, an inability on the part of the moderator to complete the process until the relevant items are received.

Centres are requested to use **digital recording equipment** to generate audio files which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a recognised common audio file format that can be played by standard computer software, such as mp3, wav and wma. Please note that AUP files are not appropriate, as they require moderators to have specific programme to access the file. Please collate recordings on to either one CD or USB drive unless the cohort's size prevents this.

Where total marks for a candidate have been altered because of internal moderation, please indicate on the Summary Form which of the three marks has been changed.

Most Centres were conversant with the required procedures and carried them out professionally and effectively. Where there were issues, the following applies:

The Centre does not choose which recordings to send. Recordings **for every candidate in the entered cohort** should be sent as part of the sample.

The Examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. This must include the date on which the recording is made to confirm the test has been carried out within the specified window. **A separate introduction is required for each candidate's test.** It is not acceptable for one generic introduction covering parts or the whole of the Centre's cohort to be included with the sample recordings.

Please check the recordings at regular intervals during the testing process to ensure their quality. Please also check the CD or USB before despatching to Cambridge. Faulty recordings continue to delay the process of moderating a small minority of Centres.

Conduct the test

Generally, there are now far fewer problems with how the tests are conducted, but there remain some issues that do affect candidate's performance.

When considering candidate's marks, the importance of **timings** must be appreciated.

Part 1 should be a minimum of three minutes. Please note this does not include the Examiner's introduction. Where a **Part 1** response is short, please consider whether the **assessment criteria can be adequately met** and assess accordingly. It is difficult to see how a response can meet higher level criteria such as 'sound' or 'full and well organised use of content' and 'employs a wide range of language devices' in a performance lasting significantly less than three minutes. Equally, a response which is significantly overlong is unlikely to fulfil the criteria for Band 1.

Given that both speaking and listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the discussions last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. **In Part 2, a minimum of six minutes of discussion is recommended.** It is the Examiner's responsibility to ensure candidates are given adequate opportunities to demonstrate their ability.

Candidates can take into the test one cue card containing prompt notes. These notes should not be written in full sentences or be read verbatim. A reliance on written material in **Part 1** is counter-productive and only leads to a lack of natural fluency which affects performance.

The use of pre-prepared responses to known questions in **Part 2** is not permitted. When they plan and prepare their responses, candidates are encouraged to consider what questions they may be asked during the discussion but there should be no collusion between the Examiner and candidate. Candidates who prepare long and unnatural monologues in response to anticipated questions penalise themselves. The discussions should evolve and to do this an element of spontaneity must be apparent.

The test should only be attempted once in any examination series. Once the test has begun it should not be re-started or interrupted.

Accuracy of assessment

In most cases, Centres had applied the criteria accurately, appropriately and fairly whilst underpinning this through successful internal moderation procedures. Where there were issues the following applies:

Part 1 should last for a minimum of three minutes and a maximum of four minutes. Examiners should not interrupt or halt candidates within this time. Examiners should only interrupt to move candidates into **Part 2** if they show no signs of reaching a natural conclusion after five minutes.

One prominent cause of inaccuracy was generosity in the awarding of marks in **Part 2** for short discussions which were not of significant length or challenge to secure the higher bands.

Articulate, confident candidates tended to be over assessed where content was factual rather than demonstrating higher level thinking.

It is important that the Examiners do not over-dominate the discussions in **Part 2**. Candidates should be allowed to talk and their contribution should be dominant, particularly for those being awarded marks in the higher bands.

Approaches to Part 1

The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates took ownership of a topic, had a strong base knowledge of the subject and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Well planned and prepared responses are generally more successful but responses do not benefit from an over-reliance on notes or over-rehearsal. Seemingly 'artificial' performances where a natural fluency is missing do not benefit the candidates. For less able candidates, as with any other examination, more tuition from Centres in preparation and technique will help to build confidence.

The focus for many candidates was just to get the material delivered, with fewer candidates also thinking about tone and rhetorical devices to support their talks. The best candidates often had a passion for their topic; therefore the use of tone came more naturally.

Moderators reported a wide range of topics being undertaken although the tasks generally took the form of an individual presentation. More successful Centres allowed candidates to choose their own topics as opposed to dictating a generic theme. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when choices are made. To achieve the higher bands, the presentations should move beyond the descriptive to include elements of reflection and analysis.

Some examples of productive **Part 1** topics include:

- a significant moment of my life
- my passion for a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- being a teenager in the twenty-first century
- cultural change and the issues it raises
- gaming (where it was well constructed)
- trap shooting
- discrimination focusing on a social issue – i.e. disability
- my hero
- topical events – e.g. afforestation, global currency, gender equality
- experience of other cultures –moving countries/other education systems compared

overcoming challenge
extreme sports

Management of Part 2

Most Examiners were supportive in their questioning, offering encouragement and attempting to settle nervousness. This helped students to achieve their best. Most Examiners conducted the discussions effectively; when faced with reticent candidates they asked pertinent questions which enabled candidates to extend and develop their presentations.

Many Examiners showed genuine interest and enthusiasm in the candidates' topics and provided appropriate encouragement. This helped to put candidates at ease and subsequently a more natural, relaxed discussion ensued.

Good discussions gave candidates ample opportunities to develop their ideas as fully as they could. This was mainly by providing questions that helped them to explore ideas which demonstrated development of explanation and thinking. Some appropriate evidence of sensitivity by the listener was also noted when the topic was personal and potentially upsetting.

Some candidates were hindered through the listener cutting into a discussion when it may have been more advantageous to allow the candidate to continue.

One example of a weaker discussion was where both candidate and Examiner asked each other a series of questions, with the Examiner's answers somewhat dominating the discussion.

Some discussions fell into 'limited' or just 'adequate' because the Examiner ran out of questions to push the discussion to the required minimum length, thus the candidates were disadvantaged. In a similar vein, where the Examiner did not extend the discussion, candidates were not given the opportunity to really show what they could do.

Advice to Centres

Candidates should prepare for this examination as they would for any other. They should learn about techniques they could use, and have researched and considered appropriate topics. It is important that candidates have opportunities to practise methods of presentation and discussion in other situations before preparing for this exam.

Give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills through effective discussion, and ensure that they speak for an appropriate length of time for both parts of the test. Keep to the time limits in the syllabus to avoid candidates being adversely limited in the accurate application of the mark scheme.

Follow the instructions on how to present the recordings and documentation efficiently and concisely. Please check everything before sending it to Cambridge.

Encourage candidates to choose topics that they know well through personal experience, and are passionate about. Issues and ideas work better than factual topics unless the candidate has an individual flair or interest.

When conducting the discussions in **Part 2**, Examiners should have plenty of questions to ask to push candidates to fill the time for the discussion. Examiners should ask questions strategically, to encourage and help the candidates to think for themselves and show off what they can do. Examiners should avoid saying too much or interrupting too early, which can affect the candidates developing their own ideas.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/06
Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

Key messages

It is important for a centre to choose **either** Component 5 or 6 **before** planning the schemes of work through which this examination is to be delivered. Component 5 is a test taken within a specified window, being suitable for centres who wish to assess their candidates on one topic, on one chosen date. Component 6 is more flexible in that three separate tasks are required that can be assessed at any time during the course. This flexibility allows a broader range of topics and skills to be assessed but requires Centres to fully embrace the concept that the speaking and listening tasks are an integral part of the overall course.

Having chosen Component 6, Centres should pay close attention to both the current syllabus and 'Speaking and Listening Handbook' to ensure the requirements for the administration of the component are met in full. In particular, the **Individual Candidate Record Cards** should be treated as 'living' documents that are completed when each task is undertaken. It is permissible for candidates to fill out these sections themselves but please check the accuracy and amount of detail given. **Specific** information about the choices made for each task is required by the Moderator and not just generic statements that are unhelpful. For **Task 1** a comment reading 'a talk about a hobby of your choice' is not helpful but 'my interest in (explain specific hobby)' is useful for the Moderator.

Cambridge requires a Centre to provide **four different items** in the package sent to the Moderator. These are a **recorded sample** on CD, DVD or USB drive, the **Summary Forms** for the whole cohort entered, a **copy of the marks** that have already been sent to Cambridge and the **Individual Candidate Record Cards** for the candidates included in the sample. Each one of these items is very important in the process of assessing a Centre's performance. Centres are urged to ensure all four of these items are included in the package sent to Cambridge as the omission of any of them may cause a delay in the moderation process, or in the worst scenario, an inability on the part of the Moderator to complete the process until the relevant items are received.

It is preferable that Centres use **digital recording equipment** to generate audio files which can then be transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive in a recognised common audio file format that can be played by standard computer software such as mp3, wav and wma. The file type AUP is not a common audio file format and should be avoided. Please **check the quality** of the recordings before despatching to Cambridge.

It is helpful if, for each candidate, a **separate track** is created and its file name is the candidate's name and examination number.

The teacher/examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. For paired activities, it would be helpful if **candidates introduce themselves and the roles they are playing** before beginning the task so the Moderator can clearly distinguish who is speaking and when.

Although there is no formal requirement that activities should be of a minimum length, please consider whether the **assessment criteria can be adequately met** if the activity is very short or overly long.

General comments

Centres are reminded that there are specific forms provided by Cambridge for use with Component 6; namely the Individual Candidate Record and the Summary Form.

For Component 6, Centres are encouraged to be creative in the choice of tasks but the assessment criteria should always be used as a guide to the skills being assessed.

Comments on specific tasks

The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates took ownership of a topic and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Well planned and prepared responses to tasks are generally more successful; responses do not benefit from over-scripted or those where spontaneity is missing.

Task 1

A wide range of topics were undertaken although the task generally took the form of an individual presentation. Centres allowing candidates to choose their own topics as opposed to dictating a generic theme is viewed positively. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when these choices are made. More able candidates should be encouraged to choose more exacting and mature topics that extend their abilities to construct a compelling argument within a time frame of approximately 3–4 minutes that includes an element of introspection and reflection.

*Some examples of productive **Task 1** activities include:*

- A significant moment in my life.
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking).
- Why I love a particular text/movie/work of art/etc.
- My passion for...
- My favourite place.
- The challenges faced in the Twenty First Century.
- My hero – who and why.

Task 2

The Pair-Based Activity works best between two candidates of similar ability discussing a topic they have prepared and that they feel strongly about or engaging in a lively role play that allows them to demonstrate their discursive strengths. A clearly defined focus is better than a general exchange of views. 'Football' remains a popular topic amongst boys but where there is no sense of audience or specific focus there will be little evidence of the higher order thinking skills expected for those wishing to attain a mark in the higher bands. Where candidates have clear viewpoints that lead to persuasive argument the resulting task will be more successful than when candidates are unsure of their opinions. Generally, entirely scripted responses, be they discussions or role plays, do not allow candidates to access the higher attainment bands.

It is difficult to see how both candidates in the Paired-Task activity can meet higher level criteria such as 'responds fully', 'develops prompts' or 'employs a wide range of language devices' in a performance lasting less than four minutes. Given that both speaking and listening are assessed for both candidates it is important that the activities last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both speaking and listening if marks in the higher bands are to be awarded.

*Some examples of productive **Task 2** activities include:*

- Arguing for and against a current affairs topic such as the benefits of modern technology or the use of GM crops.
- Discussing a text or author both candidates know well.
- Planning a special event – either at school or for a more personal function.
- The effects of social pressures on teenagers.
- Comparing the merits of two famous people where each candidate acts as a champion for one of the celebrities
- Acting as employers discussing who should be given a job from a list of prospective candidates (and variations on the theme).

Task 3

Task 3 may take the form of a group discussion debating an issue which is topical and/or a role play where each candidate plays the part of a character. Both can be successful as long as the assessment criteria for the group work are met. It is most important that each candidate in the group is allowed sufficient scope within the activity to demonstrate their strengths without being dominated by others. To this end, it is advisable to create groups of similar ability levels so that weaker candidates are not disadvantaged and to consider the group dynamic so that each member has the opportunity to contribute to the best of their ability. A group should consist of no less than three members and it is advised that it does not exceed five candidates. A group consisting of three or four candidates is preferable for the logistical purpose of being able to assess each candidate's performance more accurately.

*Some examples of productive **Task 3** activities include:*

A trial scene, possibly based on a literary text – e.g. George Milton, Arthur Birling.

A discussion of a topical issue with each candidate having their own viewpoint.

Balloon debate – who to include/discard from a list of famous people where each candidate champions the cause of their chosen celebrity.

Planning a celebration or community event.

General conclusions

The general standard of assessment by Centres is at or near the correct level. Generally, Centres have become very efficient in the administration of the component and in the choice of topics. Candidates undertaking speaking and listening activities continue to be enthusiastic about the experience and clearly benefit from careful planning and practise.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/12
Reading Passages (Core)

Key messages

Candidates should take careful note of the precise requirements of each question. If the wording asks specifically for a quotation of 'a two-word phrase' from the passage then **only** two words should be supplied for an answer.

When the wording of the question states that candidates should use their own words in their answers, it is important that they do not just copy verbatim from the passage as such copying does not convey understanding.

For **Question 1(g)(i)** candidates should note that they should give a synonym that relates to the underlined word only and not to the whole phrase. When responding to **Question 1(g)(ii)** they should comment on the whole phrase and not just repeat the answer given to **Question 1(g)(i)**. It is also important that they respond to the words and phrases given on the question paper and not choose other words and phrases at random.

For **Question 1(g)(ii)** candidates should ensure that their comments about the effects of the writer's choice of language should relate to the specific focus of the question.

Question 2 Reading. Candidates are expected to develop the third bullet in some detail and not just mention it in one sentence at the end of their account. It is also important to understand the third bullet point is intended to assess how well the inferences of the passage have been understood, and that a successful response to this bullet should go beyond the original story while remaining true to the original's content, genre and register.

General comments

In general, candidates were well prepared for this paper and responded well to the subject matter of the reading passages. Overall, the sub-questions that constituted **Question 1** discriminated successfully with those who had focused on close reading of both the passage and the questions scoring high marks.

Question 1(g) proved the most difficult and candidates are reminded that it is important when answering this question to relate their comments specifically to the terms of the rubric – in this instance they were asked to comment on how the language used suggested the narrator's thoughts about the sights and sounds on the moor.

Nearly all responses to **Question 2** were of at least adequate length, although many focused mainly on the first two bullet points and gave only a brief reference to the requirements of the third. A significant number of responses appeared to have misunderstood the focus of the question and wrote about events from the standpoint of the original narrator and not that of either the brother or sister which, inevitably, limited their mark for Content.

Passage B proved to be accessible for nearly all candidates and the standard of responses to both parts of **Question 3** was of a high level with much evidence of confident summary writing technique.

The great majority of candidates completed the paper confidently within the time and the overall standard was consistently satisfactory to good for nearly all questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Answer all questions using your own words as far as possible.

- (a) State two features of city life that the narrator's brother and sister enjoy, in preference to living on the moor (paragraph 1, 'Although I have lived happily...'). [2]

Nearly all candidates identified correctly at least two of the features of city life that were enjoyed by the narrator's brother and sister ('busy streets...chatter-filled restaurants...dizzying skyscrapers'). The question did not require the use of own words (although many candidates attempted successfully to re-phrase the words of the passage) and so a direct lift from the passage was acceptable.

- (b) In paragraph 2 ('We were emerging...from my passengers. '), the narrator explains that the weather had recently improved. Which two-word phrase in paragraph 2 tells you that the atmosphere was cheerful? [1]

It would appear that many candidates found this question quite difficult to answer with relatively few identifying the two words 'joyful mood'. Many quoted more than just two words, instead copying up to three complete sentences from the passage. Sometimes these longer answers did contain the correct two words but unless the required two-word phrase was clearly identified as the answer, either by being underlined or placed in quotation marks, the mark could not be awarded. There were also indications that some responses misunderstood the reference to 'atmosphere' and linked it to the weather as opposed to the mood of the people going to the party. Candidates should be encouraged to follow strictly the requirement of the question.

- (c) Using your own words, describe the behaviour of the narrator's brother and sister and their feelings as they prepare to go to the party (paragraph 2, 'We were emerging...from my passengers. ') [2]

Most responses successfully identified at least one point about either the siblings' behaviour or feelings as they prepared for the party. The most common feature comprised the wearing of summer or lightweight clothing. A smaller number recognised that the weather was making the siblings happier but many who did so did not make reference to 'improved' or 'warmer' weather which was a key requirement in showing that the detail had been clearly understood. Similarly, responses stating that the siblings' happiness arose from the prospect of attending the party without mentioning the improved weather, contained insufficient detail as their feelings about the party itself are not specifically stated in the passage.

- (d) Using your own words, explain what the narrator's feelings are on seeing the diversion sign and why the narrator reacts in this way (paragraph 3, 'The skies promised...become my priority. ') [2]

With questions such as this where two marks are available, relating to the narrator's feelings at seeing the diversion sign and the reason why she/he reacts in this way, respectively, it is important for candidates to understand that two discrete details from the passage should be mentioned to achieve both available marks. The most successful responses showed clear understanding of the narrator's feelings by using an acceptable synonym for 'unease' such as 'worried' or 'unsettled' and then identifying the reason for this feeling as the road being unknown, strange or seldom travelled on by the narrator, especially in the dark. The two marks for this question were not interdependent so it was possible for candidates to gain a mark for the 'why' answer without having gained a mark for the 'what' aspect.

Less successful responses lifted the phrase 'twinge of unease' from the passage to explain the narrator's feelings which did not follow the question's requirement to use own words and was not sufficient for the mark to be awarded. Responses containing phrases such as 'lack of ease' or 'no ease' were awarded a mark because these were examples of candidates reshaping information in the passage and not simply relying on verbatim lifts.

A small number of responses referred to the lack of petrol and although this is mentioned in paragraph 3 it is relevant to **Question 1(e)** and not **Question 1(d)** with its specific reference to 'seeing the diversion sign' and the subsequent reaction of the driver.

(e) Re-read the following sentence:

'Peering nervously at the fuel gauge, I realised with horror that finding a petrol station had become my priority.'

Using your own words, explain why the narrator is concerned and how the narrator reacts to this concern (lines 26–27). [2]

This question was generally answered quite well with many responses gaining both marks by making clear that the narrator's concern was due to the petrol gauge showing nearly empty and the need to find a petrol station as a matter of urgency. The reference to lack of fuel was usually explicitly stated and the narrator's determination to find a petrol station was sometimes implicitly suggested but usually in such a way that understanding was clearly conveyed. Although there is no evidence in the passage that the car had run out of fuel at this stage, responses that referred to this point were still credited. Less successful responses tended to contain incomplete information such as stating that the narrator looked at the fuel gauge but did not explain what she/he saw and so the mark could not be awarded.

(f) Explain why the narrator is 'a little warmer and definitely much wiser' at the end of the passage (lines 38–39). [2]

A large number of responses correctly stated that the narrator was feeling 'a little warmer' as the neighbour had provided blankets for the stranded travellers and so gained one mark. Fewer responses successfully explained why the narrator was a 'little wiser' after the moorland experience and many did not address this point at all. Credit was given to attempts which focused on some detail of a lesson being learned such as being more careful in future and prepared for the possibility of changing weather; carrying appropriate equipment; remembering important letters about the road system, and, even, learning how important it is to help others as demonstrated by their life-saving neighbour.

(g) Complete parts (i) and (ii) to answer Question 1(g).

(i) Re-read the passage. Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words in italics in the following phrases: [3]

(a) 'the whirling wind that makes your skin tingle' (line 4)

The most successful responses explained that 'whirling' implied a circular, spinning, or rotating motion – 'swirling' and 'twirling' were also credited. As only one mark is available for each vocabulary definition it is important that responses show precise understanding, and so definitions such as the wind was 'fast' or 'strong' showed insufficient awareness of the circular motion to be rewarded.

(b) 'With a spluttering cough, my car shuddered' (lines 30–31)

This proved to be the most difficult to explain of the three words. The most successful responses expressed that the sound involved choking, gasping and an element of explosive spitting; the least successful responses relied on saying that there was a coughing sound and lacked the required precision.

(c) 'lace-like labyrinth of moorland roads' (line 33)

A large number of responses successfully defined 'Labyrinth' as a maze; those less successful thought that the word conveyed the length of the road but not its intricate windings. In general, this question proved to be difficult. Candidates are advised to attempt to use the context surrounding the actual word indicated to try to work out its meaning rather than to leave the answer space blank. There were some examples of candidates attempting to give the meaning of another word in the phrase rather than that indicated, especially in **Question 1(c)** with 'lace-like' instead of 'labyrinth'. Candidates should be aware that the answer must relate to the word indicated only – it is **Question (ii)** that requires a comment on the whole phrase.

(ii) Explain how the language in each of the phrases in (g)(i) helps to suggest the narrator's thoughts about the sights and sounds on the moor. [6]

Candidates are advised to focus much of their preparation for the examination on acquiring techniques for commenting on the effects writers achieve through their choice of language. Two points are particularly important to keep in mind when responding to this task: the first is to take into account that a successful response involves commenting on the effects achieved through the use of language in the complete phrase quoted; the second is to ensure that the comments made are focused specifically on the requirements of the question. In this case, candidates were asked to comment on how the use of language suggested the narrator's thoughts about the sights and sounds on the moor.

It is also important that responses to **(ii)** go beyond what has already been said by the candidate in answer to **(i)**. For example, to answer phrase **(a)** by saying that the wind on the moor blows in a circular motion would not be credited if this simply repeats the definition of 'whirling' given in answer to **(i)**. Similarly, stating that the 'whirling wind' created an unpleasant feeling for the narrator would also not be credited as this shows a misunderstanding of the passage which clearly implies that the 'tingling' effect of the wind is reinvigorating. A statement such as the example given in the Examiners' mark scheme: 'The repetition of 'w' helps you to imagine the sound of the wind as it whistles past you, giving your skin a prickling sensation that makes you feel alive and alert' would, however, gain both available marks for the question as it shows both an understanding of the sense of the whole phrase as well as perceptive appreciation of the writer's use of language.

Question 2

Imagine that you are either the brother or the sister of the narrator in Passage A. You have been asked to write an article for a magazine, describing your experience on the moor. Write your magazine article.

In your magazine article you should:

- describe the sights and sounds of the moor and your responses to them
- explain what happened when you travelled to the party and your reactions to this
- explain what you have learned from the experience and what advice you would offer to anyone as a result.

Base your magazine article on what you have read in Passage A, but do not copy from it. Be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.

Begin your magazine article: 'It felt strange seeing the moor again...'

Write about 200 to 300 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 5 marks for the quality of your writing.

This task enabled candidates to respond in detail to the passage and many provided a detailed, coherent article which described the sights and sounds of the moor, the journey to the party, and the salutary lesson learned from the car running out of petrol. The more successful accounts included an accompanying background explanation of the sibling's thoughts and feelings during what started well but turned out to be an ordeal. Less successful responses either did not write the account as a sibling of the narrator but as the narrator her/himself, or, if they did begin as the narrator, often had changed voice by the end of the article with the tell-tale 'my' and 'I' relating to driving the car and so on. A number of such responses also revealed some misunderstanding about the sibling's feelings about the moor as opposed to the city, and some even appeared to confuse the features of the landscapes of both places. As mentioned in the 'Key Messages' section at the beginning of this report, the third bullet point should be developed in some detail as this allows candidates to show their appreciation of the implicit ideas and attitudes contained in the passage and is a key discriminating factor between the award of Band 3 or Band 2 Reading marks. Candidates should be encouraged to read the passage very carefully and ascertain what has happened before they attempt to start writing their responses. Such an approach will help them develop an article which is rooted in the original but is clearly developed mostly in their own words in terms of the bullet point requirements.

Overall, the written expression of most responses was of a satisfactory to good standard, of at least adequate length and not over-reliant on the language of the original passage.

Question 3

Read carefully **Passage B, Avocados in Andalusia**, in the Reading Booklet Insert and then answer Question 3(a) and (b) on this Question Paper.

Answer the questions in the order set.

(a) **Notes**

What facts do you learn about avocados and the farming methods involved in growing them, according to **Passage B**?

Write your answers using short notes. **Write one point per line.**

You do not need to use your own words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer.

A large number of candidates responded well to this question and many correctly and clearly identified 7 or more points. The distinguishing feature of less successful responses was repetition of details relating to the same key point. Point number 3 in the mark scheme, for example, comprises 'They need a frost-free environment/suit the Andalusian climate/hot summers and mild winters/sub-tropical' and candidates frequently repeated the different options in up to three of their ten points. This was similarly the case with point 10 with candidates giving 'contains nutrients' and 'lowering cholesterol' as discrete points. This question primarily tests reading skills and the ability to select and discriminate is a central requirement for success.

(b) **Summary**

Now use your notes to write a summary of what **Passage B** tells you about avocados and the farming methods involved in growing them.

You must use **continuous writing** (not note form) and **use your own words** as far as possible.

Your summary should include all 10 of your points in Question 3(a) and must be 100 to 150 words.

Up to 5 marks are available for the quality of your writing.

In general, the summaries building on the notes written in (a) were well written and mostly of Band 3 standard or above with a pleasing number achieving a Band 1 mark of 5. Many candidates attempted to write in their own words as far as possible for much of their answers, showed an awareness of the need to be concise, and organised and structured their material so that it did not read like a list of disconnected points. Less successful responses tended to fall into repetition of details which resulted in lack of focus, but such responses were in the minority and overall candidates revealed competent summary writing technique.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/22
Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read each question carefully, identifying key words and instructions
- did not rely on skim reading texts and tasks
- returned to a text when necessary to clarify an idea or reconsider a key detail
- considered the evidence of the skills and understood that they needed to demonstrate in each response before they began writing
- gave equal attention to all sections of each question
- selected the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- used their own words carefully, appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- avoided copying and/or lifting whole sentences or sections from either passage
- checked and edited their response to amend any careless slips, incomplete or unclear ideas
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

General comments

Candidates' responses generally indicated familiarity with the format of the paper and the demands of each task. Nearly all candidates responded to all three tasks. There were very few instances where all or part of a task had not been attempted. Many responses indicated an awareness of the need to use, not repeat, the material from the passages in order to answer the questions. The most successful responses were able to adapt and modify the material in the passages, remaining focused on the specific demands of each task. Others were over reliant on both the wording and/or sequence of the text(s) and paid limited attention to the details of the question as set, providing less convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a result. Centres are reminded that copying from the text is to be avoided.

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible and engaging, and were generally able to finish the paper within the time allowed. Very occasionally, achievement was limited by a failure to follow the rubric and/or complete all aspects of a task – for example, by not providing 15 answers in **Question 3(a)**, selecting examples from the wrong paragraph in **Question 2** or offering an incomplete response to **Question 3(b)**.

More successful answers were able to demonstrate purposeful reading, interpreting and using details effectively in **Question 1**, and ensuring that selections from the text in **Question 2** and **Question 3(a)** were accurate and addressed the question.

Most **Question 1** responses attempted all parts of the task and were aware of the need to answer the interviewer's questions from the mayor's perspective. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passage, some with real engagement to provide convincing and thorough replies. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement. Less successful responses often did not include sufficient reference to ideas from the passage – some did not offer answers from the mayor's point of view, at times the result of minimal modification of the material. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and to be avoided.

For **Question 2** candidates need to consider appropriate choices of words and phrases from each of the two paragraphs and make specific, detailed comments about these choices. To target higher bands, candidates should explore and explain in some detail the meanings and effects of the examples of interesting or powerful language use they identify, demonstrating sound understanding of the writer's purpose. Most were able to suggest potentially relevant examples for analysis, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently precise in their examination of their choices. Some repeated the language of the choices in their explanations, and/or offered generic comments which could be argued to apply to any author's use of language in almost any circumstance – diluting evidence of understanding as a result.

In **Question 3(a)** many candidates were able to find a good number of points. Though all points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, opportunities were often missed to target full marks. Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 3(a)** and most understood that they should use short notes rather than whole sentences taken from the passage. Copying chunks of the passage, or listing several possible points on one line, cannot be taken as evidence of understanding or rewarded. Each point offered needs to be precisely identified and clearly communicated.

Where responses were most successful in **Question 3(b)**, candidates had attempted to use their own words and organise their ideas helpfully. Others were over reliant on copying from the text with minimal/no rewording of the original. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response and do not need to replace every word of the original. They should not however lift whole phrases and/or sentences from the passage and/or rely on simply listing ideas in the order of the passage. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and comment should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the task.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and reviewing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression. Whilst writing is not specifically assessed for accuracy in this paper, candidates should be aware that unclear style will limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to edit responses is advisable. The best responses considered their reader, for example by ensuring that any ambitious vocabulary choices helped to sharpen, rather than blur, focus on the idea in hand.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Later the same month, after a tour of the island, the mayor returns to his home country just in time for his re-election campaign to begin. A radio programme interviews him about his visit to the island.

Write the interview.

The interviewer asks the mayor the following three questions only:

So tell us about the island, its people and their way of life. What impressed you and why did you decide to visit?

What kind of reactions did your visit receive from the media and the islanders?

Your speech and gifts to the islanders have been criticised recently and your motives questioned. What exactly are people's criticisms and how do you defend yourself against each of them?

Base your interview on what you have read in Passage A, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.

Most candidates had noted the instruction for the mayor to respond directly to just the questions detailed in the task – questions which gave ample opportunity to cover and develop a wide range of ideas. Some chose to sub-divide these questions, staging the mayor's replies to offer particularly full and carefully crafted responses. Many of the more successful answers showed some confidence in adopting an appropriate style and suitable language for a radio interview, taking account of the audience listening and the need for the mayor to sound reasonable and electable. Some responses offered just the mayor's answers, others framed their interview with a very short introduction and equally brief signing off from the host. Where content had been planned in advance, both of these approaches proved successful. Some responses lapsed into a third person narrative reminiscent of the passage; a number relied too heavily on repeating and/or replaying the passage. The least successful responses copied sections of the text.

The most convincing responses to **Question 1** took careful account of the areas of interest and concerns identified in the interviewer's questions, offering developed and detailed answers to these rather than inventing new questions of their own. The best answers showed evidence of having returned to the passage to tease out implications, hints and details. Ahead of writing their response, they had arrived at a considered view of the mayor and his motivations, as well as an understanding of island life as it was presented in the passage. Well-focused responses used their time efficiently: offering extended answers to the questions themselves and avoiding becoming distracted by redundant, overlong introductions and/or exchanges of pleasantries in an imagined preamble between the radio interviewer and the mayor. Occasionally, candidates lost sight of the need to evidence close reading, for example by drifting into speculation far outside the text about imagined events in the mayor's life since leaving the island and/or having him refuse to answer one or more of the interviewer's questions.

The first two bullets of the question allowed candidates to offer a number of more explicit ideas. Better answers used these ideas rather than simply repeated them. It was rare for an answer not to include reference to the fact that the mayor had been born on the island, that people worked in vegetable gardens or fished and that his father had been a poor shoemaker – strong answers developed these points, interpreting their significance and often making something of them in terms of the mayor's message to his electors once back home. Where candidates had read carefully they were able to distinguish between the simple or traditional ways of the island's inhabitants and the poverty as described only in relation to the mayor's parents.

Some candidates made profitable use of details related to the seemingly constant activity – for example referencing the busy and enterprising trade of the mobile shops. Most chose to present island life as attractive to the mayor – often a reminder of his roots and/or humble, honest beginnings. Some chose to use the mayor's provenance as evidence of his inherently trustworthy nature, recognising that his audience of electors did not include the islanders but inhabitants of the large city in a wealthy country who might respond favourably to evidence that he, like his ancestors before him, was prepared to work hard and believed in better things to come. Many answers were able to refer to the impressive scenery, some recognising and capitalising on the contrast between the inland and coastal areas of the island as well as between the natural, unspoilt island and the busy city location for the interview.

In the weakest answers, lifting in relation to the first two bullets was often an issue, with copying of whole sections not uncommon. For example, the first sentences of paragraph three including the long list of people forming the reception at the airport were often reproduced. Incomplete copying was sometimes a symptom and/or cause of misreading and misunderstanding in **Question 1** – for example, reference to 'confused policemen' or 'policemen who looked confused' indicated that the sense of a disordered mix of different people in the crowd greeting the mayor had not been fully understood.

Some basic development of the mayor's feelings in either of the first two bullets was a feature of mid-range answers though in the third bullet answers were often less secure. Opportunities were missed where answers simply asserted that 'gifts were considered useless' without considering how and why in each case, or even identifying what the gifts were. A number did recognise and make use of the criticism that the visit had been a publicity stunt of some sort. Where answers were less carefully planned and edited however, repetition of ideas used earlier in the answer such as the desire to visit the place of his birth or get back in touch with his roots, were featured in the mayor's defence of his motives at the expense of other ideas not yet used. Some answers drifted into speculation as to why other gifts had not been given or promised lists of further gifts in future – neither of which addressed the question. Where answers were most successful, the third bullet had been given equal attention to the first two – with each of the gifts considered in turn and justified carefully in response to the implied criticism levelled at the mayor, as well as consideration of the speech and the mayor's motives. Those who chose to present an overly arrogant mayor whose refusal to answer questions offered an apparently easy way out, demonstrated little understanding of implied ideas.

They over-looked evidence in the passage of the mayor's desire to talk at some length regarding himself and his experiences, considering himself an inspirational example to others.

Advice to candidates on Question 1:

read the passage carefully, more than once, identifying key ideas and details to use in your answer
take account of the persona, audience and purpose for your response
give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
plan a route through your answer to avoid repetition
consider how to adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include – do not just repeat them
answer clearly, using your own words to express ideas rather than leaning on the language of the passage
leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) ***the reaction to the mayor's car and his visit in paragraph 2, beginning 'The car had only just arrived...'***
- (b) ***the narrator's impression of the scenery and sights in paragraph 4, beginning 'At first, the road had passed...'***

Select four powerful words or phrases from each paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase is used effectively in the context.

Responses in **Question 2** needed to identify relevant examples of language for discussion and provide sufficiently focused and clear analysis of these to evidence understanding of how the writer was using language in each case. Where the precise meaning of words was considered in context, candidates were often able to suggest something of the effect and better answers remembered to consider all key words within choices, arriving at a more complete understanding of the overall impact. Where meaning was misunderstood or less carefully considered – for example 'fleets' taken as flocks – answers were often general at best. There were plenty of potentially useful choices relating to both the reaction to the car in paragraph two and the narrator's impression of the scenery and sights in paragraph four. Where candidates had not paid close attention to the detail of the task less relevant choices were considered – in a few cases candidates selected from the wrong paragraph and consequently offered more limited evidence of Reading skills as a result.

Selections in **Question 2** need to be clear and deliberately selected – not least as this helps to focus the analysis which follows. On occasion candidates selected longer phrases containing various aspects of an image and went on to unpick these with some success. Others narrowed the focus down to single words and then reassembled the image. Both were potentially useful approaches and candidates are reminded it is the quality of their analysis which attracts marks. Indiscriminate lines of text copied out from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks in a language question. Opportunities were missed in some answers where a chosen phrase contained more than one word of interest and the answer moved on too quickly – offering a more general explanation of the phrase as a whole and/or only considering one of the words it contained.

Care is needed when copying choices from the text – for example reference to 'painted cars' was a common mistake and resulted in inappropriate comment. Likewise repetition of the words of the choice within the response was a feature of a number of lower range answers – often an indication that the meaning of the vocabulary selected had not been fully understood. Taking time to select from the full range of potential choices those about which they felt most able to comment, rather than simply taking the first four or identifying choices by feature spotting, would have helped a number of candidates who offered only thin analysis to avoid inappropriate comments. For example, some selected the image of the cart 'belly-upwards' though suggested it was connected to sunbathing rather than a creature stranded or 'beached'. Amongst those attracted to the simile used to describe the contents of the broken cart, a number did not demonstrate understanding of the word 'entrails' and might have been better advised to select other choices within the paragraph to consider. Many spotted 'endless fleets' though only considered 'endless' or 'fleets' and missed

opportunities as a result. A good number of answers offered 'cinematic panorama' sometimes with reference to the 'agile forms', though not all considered 'panorama' as well as 'cinematic'.

Planning of ideas ahead of writing would have helped some candidates to avoid empty phrases such as 'the writer's use of language help[s] build keen interest in the readers mind and a thirst to read further ..' and 'the writer uses literary devices ...[and is] successful in describing and conveying the effects created in these paragraphs,' Offering generic comment that might apply to any writer anywhere can distract a candidate from the task in hand. Far from offering a useful starting point from which to move on to focus on particular language choices, such comment can offer a false sense of security and also take up valuable time. Responses to **Question 2** need to explore and explain how or why chosen language examples are working. Stronger responses were beginning to do this – with the best offering considered and careful analysis focused on language use in both parts of the question.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

pay close attention to the question as set
ensure you copy choices accurately – avoid careless errors with spelling which change meaning
once you have identified the potentially relevant choices from each paragraph, select your strongest four from each to explore and explain
make sure your choices are precise – do not copy out lines of text
avoid empty comments such as comments praising the writer for good use of language or using lots of similes and metaphors
show your understanding in full – consider all the key words within your identified choice
consider the precise meaning in context of the words you have identified when attempting to analyse effect.

A good number of candidates were able to provide evidence of skills and understanding in Band 1. Others struggled to offer evidence of understanding at Band 5. For the most part, candidates were able to show that they recognised at least some potentially interesting examples of language use and could offer some sense of the meanings and/or effects of their selections, even if only in a generalised way. For marks in the top bands, candidates need to be careful to select and interpret choices accurately, considering examples in context and demonstrating that they understand some of the subtleties of how the language is working. Better answers focused on quality of analysis rather than feature spotting.

Question 3

(a) Notes

According to Passage B, what facts are remarkable about the sea women and their work and what factors are making this tradition unlikely to survive?

Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line.

You do not need to use your own words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer.

(b) Summary

Now use your notes to write a summary of the remarkable facts about the sea women and their work and the factors making this tradition unlikely to survive, according to Passage B.

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.

To address the task successfully, candidates needed to first identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question, listing them clearly – one per numbered line. Candidates are reminded that they are only credited with a maximum of one mark per line. Candidates are not required to use their own words in **part (a)** of the question, though better answers had often chosen to do so for clarity, for example where points were implied and/or exemplified more than once in the original text. Reflecting on potential answers during planning stages would have helped a number of mid-range candidates to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point, identify implied points and/or avoid repetition of ideas.

In **Question 3(b)**, many candidates demonstrated an awareness of an appropriate style for a summary, though a number relied on the language or order of the original passage. The most successful responses re-ordered and re-grouped the relevant information from the text, connecting ideas with some skill. The least successful copied wholesale from the text with minimal or no modification, or offered a response which communicated very few relevant ideas. Candidates producing answers at the top end often showed signs of having revisited points in **3(a)** when planning **3(b)** in order to edit and refine points in this first part of the question and plan their route through their prose answer. This resulted in clearer, more distinct points in **3(a)** and an efficient and often well-focused response in **3(b)**.

The majority of candidates had understood that in a question testing their ability to 'select for specific purpose' they needed to identify fifteen distinct points in **3(a)** and that further answers added on after the fifteen would not be credited unless replacing a crossed-out answer earlier on. A few candidates however carried on beyond fifteen or did not complete the grid, offering fewer than fifteen responses. A number repeated the same idea more than once, missing opportunities to target higher marks, or offered incomplete or inaccurate points. There were a small number of candidates who repeated long sections of text copied from the passage potentially highlighting several ideas but without clear focus. Where candidates offer lists of potential points on one line leaving it to the examiner to select the right answer, they are not demonstrating the understanding or skill necessary to be credited.

Question 3 is a selective summary, not a précis, and the best answers showed that candidates had remembered to focus carefully on the details of both question and text to make sure the answers they offered were relevant. Opportunities to score full marks were often missed by otherwise successful answers where unnecessary facts from the passage had been included at the expense of other relevant ideas. For example, references to men in the seventeenth century going to war, the surface area of the island, its rocky soil or pearly beaches and golf courses were redundant in terms of the question which asked what was remarkable about the sea women and their work. Similarly details of the steps taken to help the tradition survive such as improved conditions in the beach huts and accident insurance were often included unnecessarily given that the question asked about the factors making this tradition unlikely to survive.

When selecting material and answering using note form, candidates need to ensure they have communicated the whole idea clearly – for example 'painkillers and anti-sickness drugs' on its own as an answer does not make it clear that the women's health is being affected. Ideas need to be precise and clear, answering the question as set. Where ideas are implied through details and examples in the text, reading back through notes before leaving **3(a)** can be a useful way to ensure that each noted idea would make sense to anyone who has not read the text. Candidates who were well focused on the task took time to consider each point in turn and show they had clearly identified and understood the distinct point they were offering. Some had made good use of time spent revisiting their **3(a)** answers when organising **3(b)** and had amended their **3(a)** answers – for example spotting and correcting factual errors such as depths of 30 metres or 13 feet which others left unchecked. Candidates offering carefully edited, clear responses in **3(a)** were often best placed when writing their prose response in **3(b)**.

Where candidates used an example from the text to make a more general point that example needed to be accurate and precisely relevant in terms of the question. For example, it was not accurate to say that haenyeo numbers had decreased by 84%. When identifying factors making the tradition unlikely to survive, better answers recognised the significance of the fact that it was the young women who preferred to work in the tourism industry, and the implications that daughters (the next generation of haenyeo) did not even know how to swim. These ideas were often linked helpfully in good **3(b)** answers to the deteriorating health and increasing age of the current divers as significant factors in the threat facing the tradition.

Question 3(b) requires consistent use of own words, and the best responses understood the need to be accurate, clear and concise when summarising relevant material from the passage. They were able to identify useful connections between points and reorganise ideas for the benefit of the reader. Whilst lifting phrases from the text is to be avoided, there is no requirement to change every word from the original – and at times attempts to do so blurred rather than clarified ideas. For example, altering 'breathing equipment' to 'inhaling instruments' did not help the reader to follow the sense of the point being made. Stronger answers were careful to recast information, organise it helpfully and use their own vocabulary where feasible (without changing the original idea). Less secure use of expression was evident on occasion and prejudiced achievement in some answers – for example 'spine-chilling winter' is not focused on the idea of cold water. A number of responses had attempted to paraphrase the passage rather than focus on the requirements of the question and were all too easily tempted to lift from the original as a result. Clarity was also an issue for some candidates who tried to link parts of lifted sentences together.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

read the question carefully to identify the focus of the task
re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify potential content points
reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to establish and select 15 complete and distinct points
list your points – one complete idea per numbered line – using as few words as possible
plan your response in **3(b)** to organise and sequence content helpfully for your reader
write informatively and accurately, avoiding errors which affect meaning
do not add details or comment to the content of the passage
you can choose to use your own words in **3(a)** and must use your own words in **3(b)**
do not add further numbered points in **3(a)** past the 15 required
avoid repetition of points
check that you understand the point you are trying to communicate
when checking and editing your answers to **Question 3(a)**, consider whether each point you are making could be easily and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/32
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively, developing ideas to create a balanced response
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct sentences accurately and vary sentence types to create specific effects
- select appropriate and wide-ranging vocabulary and use language with precision.

General comments

Examiners found that in most scripts, there was a clear understanding of the kind of style and register expected for both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Most responses, regardless of achievement, were developed and substantial and there were very few brief or unfinished scripts. The rubric of the examination was understood by almost all candidates and only a very small number did not complete both questions.

Most responses showed a committed engagement with the topic in **Question 1**, often with a sound grasp of the issues addressed in the passage and usually some attention paid to the style and format of a letter. The great majority of candidates approached the topic in their own language rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage. Some phrases were more regularly lifted but rarely formed a substantial part of the answer. Better answers here also tended to structure their responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to support a cohesive argument of their own. In some middle range responses, there was a tendency to reiterate the ideas in the passage in the same sequence. These could have been improved by selecting and commenting on ideas from the passage. Many made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response. In some cases, a better approach could have been achieved by a closer reading of the question to ensure that the correct voice – that of a parent of a student in the writer's school – was adopted. In weaker scripts, the material in the passage was sometimes discussed in general terms, with the main body of the response addressing the laziness of teenagers or there was drifting from the main focus of the passage concerning the Headteacher's plans for a new fitness regime. In weaker responses there was often some general commentary on teenagers and their addiction to electronic gadgets. These often missed opportunities to criticise, discuss and evaluate the ideas in the passage.

Better responses paid attention to the audience and style required for a letter to a person in authority. These were respectful but challenged the assumptions made by the head teacher politely. In the middle range of marks, scripts often showed some insecurity in grammar, particularly in the use of definite and indefinite articles and grammatical agreement. Valedictions were sometimes forgotten in weaker responses and responses could have been more coherently organised and paragraphed for higher marks.

In the compositions, there were more answers to the narrative questions than the descriptive. The second descriptive task about returning home after a long time away proved very popular while both narrative tasks were equally often selected. Better responses in the composition section as a whole were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected and the particular ways in which the reader's interest could be engaged.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses across the mark range made use of descriptive detail without becoming too narrowly focused on narrative events. Some of the responses to the first descriptive question, about the scene just before a theatrical production, were highly evocative, bringing to life many different theatre experiences from Kathakali to Shakespeare or ballet performances. The second question elicited some poignant and often heart wrenching responses about returning to home and family after a long absence. In both descriptive questions, weaker responses tended to be more straightforward accounts which listed more than described the details observed. Most responses avoided entirely narrative accounts. In a few cases the chain of events recounted contained limited description. These could have been improved by focusing on the sights and sounds noticed by the writer and the effects these had on thoughts and feelings.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Weaker narrative writing was often characterised by inconclusive or unsatisfying endings, plotlines which lacked credibility or less attention paid to character and setting. In **Question 4**, the opening line of the story was sometimes not well integrated into the narrative as a whole. Some composition responses would have benefitted from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of characters to stimulate the reader's sympathy were features understood by effective writers in this series. Many descriptions would have been improved by the inclusion of well chosen, closely observed details which created an overall picture and engaged the reader's interest and emotions.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1:

Imagine you are the parent of a student at the school.

Write a letter to the headteacher of the school in which you should:

- identify and evaluate the issues raised in the speech**
- explain your views on whether the headteacher's proposals are the best way to benefit pupils at the school.**

**Base your letter on what you have read in the passage, but be careful to use your own words.
Address each of the two bullet points.**

Begin your letter, 'Dear Headteacher ...'

(25 marks)

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 15 marks for the quality of your writing.

High marks were awarded where there was some challenging of the Headteacher's views or the contradictions in his arguments were exposed, as well as some discussion of the more explicit points made. Where the letter showed a high degree of accuracy and fluency, often with a consistent sense of audience and a polished style, Examiners could award very high marks indeed. Better responses here tended to challenge the headteacher's views respectfully, often agreeing with some aspects of the views expressed in the passage but disagreeing with others and offering a balanced overall response to the new fitness regime proposed. Some reacted to the rather hectoring tone of the headteacher and to the criticisms of parents, both implicit and explicit, given in the passage, creating a strong and credible voice in their responses. Examiners awarded the highest marks for responses where the nuanced, implicit attitudes of the headteacher towards young people and their parents were teased out and the inherent contradictions in the regime proposal were highlighted and explored.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward selections of the points in the passage, mostly focusing on the difficulties of encouraging teenagers to exercise and some of the main features of the proposed fitness regime. In most cases, there was a reasonable grasp of the headteacher's main points and some reaction to them. For example, many at this level agreed with the need for a fitness regime but balked at the 'naming and shaming' of students who did not perform well. These responses,

while accurately identifying areas such as teenagers' fixation with social media and television and increasing obesity levels, typically showed a less subtle grasp of the inferential points in the passage. Weaker responses typically showed some understanding of the main ideas in the passage. Some wrote in more general terms and covered fewer points in the passage. At this level, the range of points addressed was narrower or some responses drifted away from the main focus of the passage, which was the proposed new regime, and towards a general discussion of teenage laziness and its causes. These needed a clearer focus on the particular task in this question. There was also a tendency for different solutions to the problems identified to be offered where candidates would have fared better by evaluating the solutions proposed by the headteacher.

Marks for reading

The best responses adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage to show a more sophisticated understanding of the ideas in it. At this level, the headteacher's attitudes and assertions were addressed together in a consistently evaluative answer. The assumptions made that parents were too weak or lazy themselves to challenge teenagers' laziness, that they provided poor nutrition and that young people could not be relied on to take responsibility for their own health, were often challenged. The best answers provided a critique of these by addressing the headteacher's generalisation and assertion without evidence, showing a clear evaluation rather than straightforward rebuttal of the ideas. Some offered explanations for parents' inaction – the need for long hours of full-time work needed to provide for families these days, for example – while some defended teenagers against accusations of laziness by suggesting that relaxation and leisure was necessary after school. A few thoughtful responses argued that the headteacher's ideas about the ways in which modern teenagers should use their leisure time were old fashioned and reactionary and that 'social media, the internet and multi-channel TV were here to stay', as one candidate wrote.

The inherent admission that school was also implicated in young people's inactivity was also picked up in many responses. Some reacted to the headteacher's implied criticism of parents in that he/she could not control the 'nutritional quality of the food you allow your children to eat'. Some politely suggested that this was overstepping the responsibility of a headteacher while others suggested the school could provide more nutritious meals in its own canteen. While the latter argument was based on a point made in the passage by the headteacher, it relied on some invention of detail (that the quality of the food in the school canteen was poor) whereas the former was a more thoughtful evaluation of the same point. Similarly, while the WHO seemed an unimpeachable source of evidence in support of the headteacher's new regime, highly evaluative responses highlighted ideas which were less credible such as the claim that students' social development, self-confidence and academic success would improve with this specific fitness regime. These claims were countered with sensible ideas including the inevitability that self-esteem would be undermined rather than boosted by the 'naming and shaming' of those not exercising to their full capacity or that exhausted and humiliated students would be less likely to succeed academically. There was outrage at the cruelty of the humiliation of students at all levels of achievement, although in the best responses this anger was validated by arguments which showed how the declared aims of the fitness regime were at odds with its practice.

Marks in Band 2 were given where the ideas were evaluated to some degree. A mark of 7 was awarded for many responses where some thoughtful inferences were made from the passage. At this level, responses tended to include some discussion of teenagers' attitudes to exercise and in many cases the new fitness regime was generally welcomed, with one or two points challenged, such as the 'naming and shaming' of students and the potential for this to encourage bullying amongst students. Alternative solutions which showed some critical evaluation of the ideas in the passage were also rewarded as sensible inferences by Examiners. These included the idea that students who were less capable of vigorous physical exercise through illness or obesity should be required to undertake a more graduated programme. Alternatively, those who were already engaged in sports activity should not be over-taxed by extra exercise. These inferred ideas, even where other, more surface points were reproduced, were often enough for Examiners to award a mark of 7. Where a more sustained probing of the attitudes in the passage was given, addressing more of the ideas in the passage, a higher mark could be awarded.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 3 where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above. Responses at this level showed a sensible understanding of the headteacher's reasons for wanting to tackle students' lack of fitness and generally agreed with a range of different points made in the passage. Responses tended to list aspects of the evidence given of the benefits of greater fitness and the claims made by the headteacher in support of the new programme. Examiners noted that responses often included alternative solutions or candidates made suggestions about a different regime. While these showed an understanding of the ideas in the passage, they were not always evidence of evaluation. These kinds of responses could have been improved by an explanation of why, for example, circuit training was less likely to be successful than team sports or why students would rebel against the new regime. Where there was enough range and discussion, Examiners could award a mark of 6. Responses with more limited selection were given 5. Some responses were given 5 where there was some understanding of the main features of the passage but there was also some drifting from the task. In these cases, responses lost focus on the headteacher's proposal and drifted into a general discussion of teenage lifestyles or relied on some general promise as a parent to improve their offsprings' fitness.

Weaker responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passage or task, or addressed the material thinly. Where a mark of four was awarded, some firmer links with the passage and a wider range of points was needed, whereas three was generally given for very thin or brief responses. Marks below three were very rarely given and usually applied when the passage was mostly copied or only a few lines were written.

Marks for writing

Fifteen marks were available for style and a sense of audience, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

A formal tone was required for a letter to the Headteacher and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. The best responses were often quite subtle in the tone of the writing, always respectful and challenging the recipient by careful explanation rather than direct confrontation. Sometimes, an opening paragraph expressed gratitude that the headteacher was concerned for students' physical health as well as academic success but also signalled that, while the intention was appreciated, the solutions needed some revision. Letters given high marks were well organised and the arguments were given more weight by careful structuring of sentences within paragraphs. For example, some began each paragraph by addressing each main idea in the passage separately, acknowledging the headteacher's good intentions but moved towards a different view of the idea with some persuasive clarity of thought. Some rhetorical devices were used judiciously at this level, often as questions to encourage the headteacher to rethink his ideas.

In the middle to lower mark range, the style was often appropriate with some lapses in candidates' awareness of the audience so that the response as whole became more an account of what was said rather than a response to it. A clear sense of purpose and audience was needed for marks in Band 3, even though some of these responses relied on reproduction of points in the passage. Most at this level were able to gauge what was an appropriate register for the task. Some given marks lower than Band 3 showed less awareness of the intended audience and made straightforward statements rather than addressing the Headteacher specifically.

Structure

Some accomplished responses, awarded high marks for writing, handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. At the highest level, the bullet points were addressed in an integrated way, showing an assimilation of passage within a skilful evaluation of it. At the highest level, an overview of the issues underlying the passage, such as the extent of a headteacher's responsibility for the well-being of students and the role of school in improving students' health, was evident, rather than an outline of what the Headteacher said in the speech.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 for writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the article in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. Responses opened with a considered introduction and ended formally with a concluding paragraph and a suitable valediction. Many at this level were straightforwardly but clearly organised with an introduction which often expressed respect and gratitude towards the headteacher and a clear statement to indicate the writer's general response to the fitness regime. At the lower end of Band 3, responses sometimes structured their responses too closely to the sequence of the passage, resulting in some lack of cohesion and purpose overall.

Some weaker responses given marks below Band 3 were less coherent in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passage. This often led to some basic reiteration of the passage, often using some of the language in it, with a general introduction and some valediction and closing comments which adhered to the basic conventions of letter writing.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 1. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. Precision in the control of a subtle and ambitious vocabulary resulted in some very high marks in this component. In some otherwise quite accurate responses, lapses in the selection of appropriate vocabulary or sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary precluded Examiners from awarding marks in Band 1 though Examiners found fewer instances than in the past where complex vocabulary was frequently misused.

Responses given 7, 8 or 9 were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. The style was usually appropriate and the level of formal language was sustained, but at this level a range of fairly straightforward words was misspelled and there were errors in punctuation, though rarely very serious ones. The spelling of words included in the passage was sometimes insecure, including 'exercise', 'obesity' or 'physical'. Sentence demarcation by commas rather than full stops began to creep in at the lower end of Band 3 and there were mis-selected homophones, usually 'their' and 'there' as well as 'your' and 'you're'. Expression and grammar errors also sometimes reduced the mark available for writing here. Agreement between pronouns and verbs sometimes became insecure or tenses varied. Some responses were affected quite badly by these errors which, although not necessarily damaging to the style in themselves, were too frequent to allow for marks in Band 2.

While some of these more minor errors could be compensated for by a secure sense of audience or a varied vocabulary, faulty sentence structures or frequent lapses in grammar often kept writing marks for **Question 1** in Band 4. These responses often showed some clarity in conveying meaning. In others, there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation, spelling and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award in Band 3. A common error was the use of the pluperfect tense where it was not needed: many wrote, 'I had heard the speech you had given...', for example. Commas were sometimes used inappropriately, in the wrong place within sentences and phrases. Key words in the passage, such as 'social media', 'skipping' or 'benefits' were more frequently misspelled. Similarly, a simplicity of expression and language, limited in range and complexity, sometimes resulted in a rather immature style which could not be given marks in Band 3. The omission of indefinite and definite articles and mis-agreement within sentences were often more evident at this level. Candidates at this level would have benefitted from more careful proof-reading of their writing to address these basic errors.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Consider the writer's ideas and the attitudes underlying them
- Be prepared to challenge or question ideas in the passage
- Make sure you understand the task and which point of view you should adopt
- Check you understand whose voice you should adopt and who the intended audience is
- Look for, and use in your response, inferences made indirectly by the writer
- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them
- Think carefully about the kind of style which is expected for the task
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors such as sentence demarcation and for the spelling of key words which appear in the passage.

Section 2

Composition

Descriptive Writing

2 Describe the scene before and as a theatrical production begins.

OR

3 Imagine you have been away from home for a long time. Describe what you see and your thoughts and feelings during your journey home.

Content and Structure

The second descriptive writing question was a popular choice for candidates across the mark range. The best responses to **Question 3** were sustained, with a strong focus on describing the sights and sounds on the journey home or, in many cases, using these details to trigger some childhood memory or recalling the scene when the writer was last in his/her home. The thoughts and feelings of the writer at different points in the journey, as well as the landscape seen from a train, plane or bus, often gave candidates a variety of focus and a range of emotions to evoke. There were some highly effective, often poignant descriptions here. In **Question 2**, Examiners noted some very interesting descriptions across the mark range as well as a wide variety of theatrical experiences used. Some successful responses focused on the scene backstage while others wrote as members of the audience.

In the first question, there were some highly evocative and sustained descriptions which Examiners rewarded with very high marks for Content and Structure. One memorable response described the backstage preparations being made for a Kathakali drama in which the smallest details of the colours of the actors' face paint being applied seemed infused with the excitement and energy of the occasion. Another reproduced the internal thoughts of a leading actor just as the production opened, from the last minute 'mouthing of my lines in obsessive rhythms' to the curtain opening where the 'spotlight searched me out and fixed on my terrified self as the confident face of my character shone out to the audience.' These and other effective responses created a cohesive whole using the limited time suggested by the question and other devices such as the repeated countdown given by the stage manager or the progress of participants from excited chatter to a concentrated silence just before the production began.

Responses given marks in the middle range were more straightforward in their approach, often rather narrative in focus but with enough descriptive detail to address the task. The quality and effectiveness of the writing varied but in most cases the response was paragraphed and organised coherently. In some cases, while the content was relevant, responses tended to be more factual accounts than descriptions and there were weaknesses in cohesion and structure where observations were described but listed without links between paragraphs or sections.

Examiners gave marks below Band 3 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus or more general than specific. Some responses addressed the task from the point of view of an audience member and perhaps this approach did not offer enough range of ideas and sometimes individuals in the audience were not described but rather the general atmosphere in the theatre.

Responses to the second question were wide-ranging in content, approach and in the marks they were given. The best were strongly evocative descriptions which were focused and effective. At this level, the thoughts and feelings of the writer sometimes imbued the observed landscape with added power and significance as candidates described the apprehension, excitement and even fear of returning home after a long absence. Various scenarios were recreated as the backdrop to the writing, often returning home after studying abroad but also in one response returning after a long prison sentence and in another returning to a childhood home after the death of a grandparent. The cities, countryside or villages passed on the way were described in considerable detail but there were often cohesive devices used which gave responses shape and interest. Passing cafes where friends had gathered as school students or parks where the writer had played were used as opportunities to reminisce on happier times in some evocative responses as were memories of the last occasion when these features were passed in different circumstances. Some well-crafted pieces showed considerable skill in using physical description as a way to reflect quite complex feelings of nostalgia and remembered comfort and an impression of a carefree childhood was effectively recreated in many at the highest level.

Weaker responses were more prone to narrative and tended to focus on the actual journey with only a few descriptive details. In a few, the account of the journey led to responses which were more characteristically narrative with accounts of robberies, chance encounters or other events on the journey home. Most, however, had some descriptive details and some overall cohesion, even where the response was narratively framed, which Examiners could reward with marks high in Band 2 or just into Band 3. The weakest responses to this question were usually simple narratives with little description and which lacked cohesion, consisting of a list of rather unlikely events.

The highest marks for Style and Accuracy were awarded where a precise and varied vocabulary and secure, varied sentence structures were used. Images, words and phrases, as well as varied sentence lengths, were employed to create specific effects in the best responses in order to capture and sustain the reader's interest. Middle range responses were generally secure in style with some lapses in expression or imprecise vocabulary. Occasionally, an over-ambitious style in which the meanings of words used were not precisely understood tended to affect the style even where content was relevant and interesting. In weaker responses, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences, and incomplete or verbless sentences were common. Grammar errors, usually in agreement, were also common at this level.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

try to include a more individual and original selection of descriptive details
keep the timespan of your writing short to avoid lapsing into too much narrative
think about the kind of atmosphere you want to evoke in your description
choose your vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects.

Narrative Writing

4 Write a story that begins with the words 'It felt as if I had been waiting all my life for this moment...'

OR

5 Write a story with the title, 'The Reunion'.

(25 marks)

Both narrative questions proved popular and a wide range of interpretations of the titles was evident. In the first question, better responses were carefully structured to make the given opening a crucial and integrated part of the story. The best were those which had a ring of authenticity about them although a wide variety of characters, plotlines and scenarios made for some interesting stories which were highly rewarded by Examiners. Successful stories were written about wedding ceremonies which went well or sometimes very badly, sporting triumphs, examination or career success and many others. There were some ambitious narratives which included elements of fantasy fiction or science fiction and where these were well-managed and controlled. Examiners could award high marks for Content and Structure. Other successful responses worked well because the content was more manageable or smaller in scale, focusing on how narrators had been led to this crucial moment in their lives. Characteristics of higher band responses were the creation of credible and well-drawn characters and settings and where the 'moment' referred to in the opening line was a pivotal point in the unfolding narrative.

Middle range stories offered many different versions of the 'moment' but the stories were more straightforward accounts, usually of sporting or academic success. One feature noticed by Examiners was that the 'moment' itself was more a lead-in to the story rather than a genuinely pivotal point in the protagonist's life. There was also often some predictability in the plots at this level, with the opening line followed by a straightforward, chronological account of the effort entailed in training for an Olympic event or studying for a qualification.

Weaker responses tended to be series of events rather than shaped narratives or, in some cases, the storyline was very simple and the characters lacked development. Where the plot itself was credible and had some shape and sense of purpose, a mark of 6 was often given where more preparation and characterisation was needed to engage the reader.

The second narrative question was very popular and elicited a very wide range of interpretations of the title. Some very effective responses addressed the idea of 'Reunion' in interesting ways, such as re-uniting with estranged family members or long-lost friends. One interesting response was based on a return to the family home after having run away many years before to get married to someone who later turned out to be violent, making the narrator reflect on how her family had warned her of such an outcome. Other narratives were based on more straightforward interpretations such as school reunions, but then wove more intriguing content into their stories. In one reflective narrative based on a reunion of school friends who had fared very differently since their school years, the protagonist's own values of striving for wealth and ostentatious success were challenged by the event. In others, school bullies were humbled or had been reformed or old friendships were destroyed or renewed by the reunion.

In the middle range, stories tended to be cohesive overall if more straightforward in their content and storytelling. Where there was some credibility in the characterisation and setting and the story had some engaging features, Examiners were able to award 7 or 8 for Content and Structure. There were more school reunions at this level as well as reunions with siblings or parents.

Weaker narrative responses to this title tended to be less well developed and cohesive. There were quite a few where the account was dominated by the mechanics of setting up the reunion by phone, the journey to the venue and an account of what was said or done in the event itself.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was lively and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The highest marks were given where the style used was both polished and striking and where there was a conscious control of language in varied way to engage and intrigue the reader.

Errors in grammar and lapses in expression, as well as inadequate control of sentence structures, if persistent, limited some otherwise quite competent narratives to Band 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation. In many lower level scripts, the punctuation of direct speech was insecure, even when the story itself was quite well-structured. Speech marks were sometimes not used at all and the omission of new paragraphs for new speakers made for rather confusing dialogue at times. Basic punctuation errors with misused or omitted capital letters, the spelling of simple words, disagreement between verbs and pronouns and wrongly selected homophones affected the mark for Style and Accuracy at this level. A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 3 and even where candidates wrote in a plain style but punctuated sentences accurately, Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 3. A few responses were very brief and grammatically weak in style. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- plan how to resolve your story in an interesting way before you start writing
- make sure that the characters and setting are credible and developed
- remember it takes more than events to keep your reader interested
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes.