

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 1520/22
Directed Writing and Comprehension

Key messages

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

To achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise responses effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- adapt their style and structure for different audiences, purposes and genres
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required.

General comments

Examiners found that in a great majority of cases candidates understood what was required in the directed writing question and composition questions. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, although a few candidates responded to all questions in **Section B**. Some responses to narrative questions, usually **Question 5**, wrote more discursively than narratively and in some cases responses to descriptive writing tasks were more narratively constructed than was required. In **Question 1**, responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, with only a few mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and some engagement with the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for an article for a specific audience of young people and there was in many a clear grasp of the main ideas about tidiness and whether being tidy is essential for success and happiness in life. Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response, often offering personal opinions or attitudes about tidiness in their own lives. Effective responses often responded with comments about social attitudes to tidiness and how valid and important these were, showing some ability to probe and challenge the views given in the texts.

In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with a little personal opinion about the value of tidiness in their own lives, with some beginning to evaluate. A substantial number of responses at this range made some reference to the ideas in the texts, though without really addressing the central argument about whether tidiness reflects moral or social values or is simply a person's choice and personality.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side. Others produced summaries of what each text said with less secure understanding of how to adapt the ideas in them for an article for young people.

Less effective responses sometimes showed limited awareness of the specific audience for the article, providing a commentary on the texts but without adaptation of style. Overall, however, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register to appeal to an audience of young people and some understanding shown of how magazine articles are structured and presented and how rhetorical language can be used to engage and persuade readers.

The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were lively but evaluative in style, using ideas from the texts to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices such as questions, exclamations and irony. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a more straightforward style and there was less focus on scrutinising the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the texts with less selection and reordering of points from the originals. This sometimes resulted in contradictory statements or weak paragraphing.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions showed a clear understanding of appropriate content, structure and style for the genre selected.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very engaging and sustained, especially for the first descriptive writing question. Various family gatherings, from religious festivals to funerals, were described successfully, creating an atmosphere which rang true for examiners. In the second task, bike rides through various landscapes and townscapes were described, some focusing on what was observed from the bike and others more on the sensations of the rider. Less effective responses to both questions tended to become dominated by events or lengthy narrative preambles to set the scene rather over-balanced the focus of the task. In both questions, descriptions were more effective when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene credibly and engagingly. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions were characterised by a lack of descriptive detail and a tendency to become narrative.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and examiners awarded marks in all Levels here. Effective and engaging responses to the first question presented dilemmas which required important decisions on a wide range of issues. Some involved split second decisions to be made, such as on a battlefield, while in other responses decisions had to be weighed up and considered, including which parent to live with after a divorce or whether to leave the family home and country to study abroad. Less effective responses focused on rather ordinary decisions or lacked pace and drama in the making of the decision. The second narrative question elicited response with many versions of 'teams', although sports teams were common. Sometimes friendship groups or family groups were engaged in various activities which required collaborative working, for example, which led to a greater appreciation of such 'teams'. Less effective narratives relied on accounts of important football matches and while relevant in content, some were simple series of events rather than developed narratives.

In responses to both narrative writing questions, examiners noticed there was a tendency for straightforward, biographical accounts of a person's life or career to be submitted which did not really develop as narratives. Sports figures often featured in **Question 5** responses, for example, where a factual resume of the person's background and achievements was given. While these were often organised and paragraphed, they were not really narrative in intent or development. Similarly, political leaders were sometimes used in **Question 4** responses, perhaps involving a decision to enter politics, but these were usually straightforward accounts of the person's career.

In some narrative writing responses, several candidates used a prepared story which was available on revision websites and seemed imposed on the task and not always relevant to it. In some cases **Question 1** responses in the same scripts showed a range of skills and abilities which may have resulted in more successful narrative responses than what was submitted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Write a magazine article for young people about tidiness.

In your article you should:

- evaluate the views and opinions about tidiness in both texts
- give your own views, based on the texts, about how important it is to be tidy.

Base your article on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words.

Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words. Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which addressed and evaluated the key question of whether or not tidiness reflects an individual's moral character and helps to determine his or her future.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised determined the Level and mark awarded for Reading. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, consideration of how others judge a tidy or untidy person and whether this is a fair way to assess their character. In responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 for Reading, examiners often rewarded some thoughtful interrogation of the assumption that a 'tidy desk reflects a tidy mind'. Some suggested that such superficial judgements should be resisted and challenged while others conceded that, however unfair, such assumptions tended to govern one's professional progress and therefore adopting tidy habits early was a good idea. In Text A, for example, some candidates could discern the ironic undertones of gurus teaching people how to fold t-shirts 'correctly' and took issue with the extremes of tidiness which could result in poor mental health and obsessiveness. Others questioned the motives of such gurus and suggested that, as was noted in one effective response, *'if you can persuade people that being untidy is some terrible moral failing, then you can make a lot of profit from their fears.'*

The medical research and the idea that creative people tended to be messy offered in Text A also required some probing for responses to be awarded marks in Level 5 and 6. The neurologist's findings were sometimes combined thoughtfully with Text B's vilification of teenage habits to suggest that as young people matured they would be more willing and able to create tidy environments around them and it was therefore pointless to insist that teenagers *'learned to run before they could walk'*, as one candidate said. The rather clichéd example of creative minds being preoccupied with more important things than tidiness was also tackled in various ways in Level 6 responses. Some discerned and developed the rather mocking tone used in Text A to make this point, suggesting that teenagers were adept at making such lofty claims which actually belied their laziness. Others pointed to the range of pressures on teenagers, academic, social and familial, which inevitably made tidiness a low priority. The supposed benefits of calmness and less time wasted which were mentioned in both texts also came in for some scrutiny in effectively evaluated responses: *'The assumption that tidy rooms affect everyone in the same way is not credible as we're all different and some find comfort in their own messy surroundings rather than some clinical, hygienic place.'* For some, the notion that keeping spaces tidy saved time in looking for things was equally ambiguous: *'A room that looks messy to a parent doesn't mean that things can't be found quickly and tidying everything up wastes time rather than saves time if this is the case.'*

More effective responses often approached Text B with some sympathy for the parent but with some challenging of the assumptions made in it about how others judge young people. The generational differences between modern teenagers and their parents were highlighted in some responses: *'Most young people wouldn't make snap judgements based on what someone's room looks like whereas parents have been brought up to be prejudiced in this way.'* The implied belief that untidiness reflects a selfish attitude was considered fair by some but qualified by such observations as *'if you have your own space and don't have to*

share you don't need to be meticulous' or 'it's not your own room if you live in your parents' house and they're entitled to set the rules.' These kinds of explanations and extensions of the ideas in the texts were more evaluative than a simple opinion and warranted marks in Level 5 or above. However, responses in which a range of such evaluations were made were less common and there were relatively few Level 6 responses for Reading.

Responses given marks in the middle range – in Level 4 and lower Level 5 – tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the need to avoid adverse judgements by being tidy at work in Text A or some opinion on the parent's reactions in Text B. Marks in Level 5 were given where some comments amounted to 'some successful evaluation'. Some responses generally agreed with the need to be tidy and reflected the ideas in Text A, for example, but made a distinction between unhygienic and untidy spaces, suggesting that a minimum standard of cleanliness was necessary for everyone for their health.

Responses given marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the texts and offered straightforward opinions on the need to be tidy while not examining those ideas more closely. Examiners also noted that the focus of the comments was more general and missed some of the implications of the ideas in the texts. In Text A, for example, some responses advocated the use of 'tidiness gurus' or their books, missing the mocking tone of the writer. In Text B, there was some general acceptance of the parent's frustrations but less probing of the underlying assumptions about teenagers' selfishness or laziness reflected in the text. More commonly, where candidates reproduced the points made in both texts, there was at this level less awareness of the opposing views in them.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the details. Some responses conflated hygiene and tidiness and focused on the need for cleanliness to avoid disease rather than the ideas in the texts. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic of responses in the lower levels. The sequence and organisation of ideas often reflected closely the order of ideas in the texts; this sometimes resulted in contradictory or disconnected responses. Responses at this level were also poorly adapted for an article with awkward references such as '*Text A says that...*' which showed some weaknesses in understanding how articles are constructed. Ideas were sometimes summarised with very limited conclusions or comments on them which made it difficult for examiners to award marks above Level 4.

A small number of weaker responses, given marks below Level 4, were almost totally reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, where there was little of the candidate's own words in the response and the task was not understood.

Marks for writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

Candidates could adopt a range of appropriate styles and registers for their articles and could show their understanding of the intended audience of young people in a variety of ways. Across the ability range, an apt, fairly conversational but standard English style allowed for examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many articles began with a suitable headline and a lively introduction which engaged the interest of the reader: '*Are you regularly driven mad by parents and their obsession with tidiness?*' Some high scoring responses used a consistently rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in an engaging way which appealed to their young audience. A tone which reflected a familiarity between writer and audience worked well for some: '*What right has anyone to judge us based on whether our bookshelves are tidy and our clothes stored away? Tolerance is more important than tidiness, don't you think?*' Other choices were made in favour of a more discursive style in which arguments were considered in an organised way with some attempt to show an understanding of the style of article writing at the beginning and end of the response, sometimes with reference to '*next week's topic*' or an appeal for comments in response to the article.

In the middle range of marks, examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage a young audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, there were many responses

which were accurate in the main but showed little adaptation of style from the original texts to suit the style of an article, limiting the effectiveness of the article as a whole.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent article. While most responses to varying degrees worked their way through Text A, Text B was sometimes not referred to at all or was described: '*a parent wrote about her daughter...*'. Less effective responses tended to refer to the texts as Text A and B with limited grasp of what the intended audience knew or understood and the style was more appropriate for a summary than an article.

Structure

As mentioned above, responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a whole rather than a disjointed response to two quite different texts. The central debate about whether tidiness reflects moral character and the extent to which tidiness should matter was grasped from the start and the ideas in the texts were organised as arguments and counter-arguments in a coherent and cohesive article. Many at this level focused on the principles involved rather than the practicalities of being tidy with discussion about prejudice and respect for others rather than whether young people should keep their rooms tidy or not. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. Many agreed that tidiness was important so as to avoid the judgements of others or parental disputes, with some fine-tuning of arguments later in the response. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were unconnected with the ideas outlined up to that point and were contradicted by some comments which had come before.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a writing mark in Level 6 for Writing. These responses were often engaging and showed a strong awareness of audience but were also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the contending views in the texts and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually fairly plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Common misspellings at this level included some words from the texts, such as '*tidyness*', '*shelvs*', or '*declutering*', and the incorrect use of homophones.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that examiners could not award marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was very common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In very rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- **Be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation.**
- **Make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.**
- **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 suits your task and the audience.**
- **Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.**

Section B

Descriptive Writing

Question 2

Write a description of the first moments as you arrive at a family gathering.

Question 3

Describe what you see, hear and feel on a bike ride.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and were interpreted in a wide variety of ways, though the first question was more popular than the second. In the first task, many kinds of gatherings were included, usually joyful occasions to celebrate religious festivals or birthdays in which several generations of relatives were included. There were also some moving depictions of funerals in which the atmosphere was more subdued. Some gatherings were impromptu or surprise parties to celebrate the writer's return from studying abroad but most were much-anticipated, carefully planned occasions. Occasionally, the process of preparing for the gathering or the preamble to travelling to it tended to overshadow with narrative the description of the first moments of arriving but where the time scale was short and the focus on detail secure, Examiners could award some very high marks.

This tendency to narrative and lack of specific detail was a more common weakness in the second question, although there were some effective responses which evoked the sensations of travelling by pushbike or motorbike at speed. Other responses were more focused on what was seen and heard from the bike and there was a wide range of countryside landscapes, city streets and coastal or mountain routes described.

Some effective responses to the first question created an excited or apprehensive atmosphere as the narrator approached the venue for the gathering, moving on to the various greetings from relatives. The viewpoint of a young person was used to good effect in many responses, with some humour generated by aunts and grandmothers hugging and commenting on the young person compared with the distaste and sometimes dread felt by the young narrator as a result. In some responses the narrator's initial unwillingness to attend such an event gave way to a happier tone, affording opportunities to structure the response with the focus changing and affecting the mood of the narrator. Some observed the conventions and hypocrisies of such events more critically. As one candidate wrote: *'Of course some gazes were judgmental and full of jealousy, like those of Aunt Aaliyah and Aunt Shazia, appraising our apparel, but they managed to quickly school their expressions, shifting to more welcoming ones as if they'd never done that ...'* Other effective responses evoked a very nostalgic mood as the writer returned to a home not visited for a long time. In many cases, this emotional connection with the scene being described, both positive and negative, was more engaging for the reader than a more objective description of what was seen and heard. Lavish settings contributed to some effective description, including the colours and textures of vivid saris, the gleam of food platters and the gaudy decorations. There was a tendency in some responses for some slightly clichéd details: the men in the event often talked about politics while the women gossiped and the children careered about noisily. The most effective descriptions avoided these more general, stereotypical ideas and focused more closely on individuals, small details or the unspoken emotions of the narrator.

In responses to the second question, which was less often selected than the first and less often awarded high marks, higher level responses used the viewpoint of a seat on a moving bike in interesting ways to show the effect of speed, traffic jams or perilous routes in high mountains on the rider. A sense of freedom and escape was sometimes created to good effect: *'As the trees and hills became a blur of green on either side of me, the wind in my hair and the sun on my face, I felt the thrill of freedom.'* Other sights and sounds in different scenarios which were effectively described included weaving through traffic jams to the anger of

static car drivers and the effort involved in climbing steep hills in a deserted, mountainous landscape. Responses which focused on the impact of the bike ride on the narrator as well as observations made while riding tended to be more successful and have more impact on the reader.

Level 5 responses used a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but were usually a little more predictable or did not use the bike ride itself to shed a different light on the surroundings described. Some described scenes quite competently but made little reference to the bike ride.

For Content and Structure, responses given marks in Level 4 tended to become narrative quite quickly, describing how and why the bike ride happened, where the rider needed to go and some of the incidents that occurred on the way. In some responses, such overlong preambles often gave way to more specific description though the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses given higher marks.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed or were simple narratives that involved riding a bike at some point.

Responses which had little descriptive content were more frequently submitted for the second question than the first and occasionally there was evidence that the difference between narrative and descriptive writing was not well understood. Where responses were largely descriptive at this level, details were listed and paragraphing was insecure or not used.

High marks for Style and Accuracy often reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, highly rewarded responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to create specific effects. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by imprecise and inappropriate use.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks given in the middle range. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included disagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and the omission of definite and indefinite articles which created an awkward style lacking in fluency, even where other elements were accurate such as spelling or sentence construction.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved

- **Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.**
- **Keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.**
- **Write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses.**
- **Use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.**

Narrative Writing

Question 4

Write a narrative about a person who makes an important choice.

Question 5

Write a narrative with the title, 'The team'.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plotlines, characters and scenarios in these responses. **Question 4** was the most popular choice on the paper and examiners awarded marks across the range here. As mentioned above, some

straightforward biographical accounts of the lives of famous footballers or political leaders were submitted for both questions. In a few cases, this lack of narrative cohesion and development limited the mark available for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and often original interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative, to produce moments of tension or drama and to vary the pace of the story were credited by examiners as essential elements of narrative writing, as was the use of characterisation to create well-rounded, convincing characters. In the first question, responses given higher marks for Content and Structure often revolved around a pivotal decision which had a profound effect on the protagonist's future. One interesting story involved a battlefield scene in which the fear, danger and chaos were depicted vividly to create a strong sense of place: *'The ratatat of machine gun fire all around us seemed to be closing in as Ismail and I crouched in terror, our backs against a flimsy wall that was crumbling under the barrage of fire even as we cowered behind it.'* Conflicting pressures which made the 'important decision' more poignant or crucial often helped to provide drama in the most effective stories. In the one referred to above, the protagonist was faced with having to leave his wounded brother in order to escape himself, a decision made particularly affecting when, surprisingly, he decided to stay with his brother. Other decisions which were well chosen to help construct a developed narrative included the choice to leave an abusive partner, written as a series of flashbacks, interspersed with paragraphs which described their frantic preparations to leave. Another story which was awarded high marks for Content and Structure was much smaller in scale, involving a narrator who gradually realised that her closest friend had betrayed her and made the decision to cut off all ties with her. Again, the story was constructed carefully, with the reader in mind, as incidents in the past were recalled and reinterpreted as the realisation grew.

There were also some very effective narratives to address the alternative narrative question. The idea of a 'team' was interpreted in a wide variety of ways, most of which were valid and gave candidates a range of approaches to adopt. Sports teams of many kinds featured here though the best steered away from detailed accounts of matches and focused instead on more engaging elements of narrative such as characterisation, a sense of jeopardy and some resolution which went beyond simply winning a match. In one given high marks for Content and Structure, the protagonist described, humorously and quite poignantly in places, having to produce a play using only students who had failed to qualify for more interesting projects at school. The story began with the thunderous applause of the audience when the play was performed, making the journey the team undertook to reach such success much more engaging for the reader.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but cohesive and with some engaging features. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt create a developed story which was relevant to the task. Responses in this range, were more usually chronological accounts, but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution. There were many 'important decisions' which involved difficult choices about where to study, which careers to choose and whether to change schools. At this level, some drama was provided by the opposition of parents or the stubbornness of the protagonist. Effective characterisation of the protagonist or another character was often a factor in examiners selecting a mark in Level 5 rather than Level 4, especially in responses to the second question where the 'team' involved in the story did not always have clearly defined, interesting characters. While some Level 5 narratives were a little predictable, stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of good narrative writing. At this level, stories were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were used as those in more effective narratives – a decision about whether to study abroad or a team which had to overcome difficulties to win a match – but at this level events tended to be simply described but not really prepared for and characters were named but not given attributes and personalities. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing characters as credible and rounded. In the first question, for example, the narrator sometimes decided to pursue the choices made by the parents rather than themselves with a simple moral ending which vindicated their choice by their success. While the majority of less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

Responses given marks in Level 4 and lower were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. While there was usually some relevance to the task selected, the plot was either very simple or confusing and characters lacked substance, often appearing only as names. In **Question 4** responses, the 'important decision' was not always clear or pivotal and simple accounts of sports matches for **Question 5** lacked cohesion and narration. Dialogue was either used very little or, occasionally, too much, with limited storytelling to help the reader make sense of events.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary allowed examiners to consider the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent while Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements, missing definite and indefinite articles. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. Weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, was a common weakness in Level 4/low Level 5 writing, though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **Think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.**
- **Consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.**
- **Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely on events.**
- **Check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.**
- **Choose your vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create effects.**