

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0990/06  
Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

## Key messages regarding administration

It is most important that centres enter candidates for the chosen component using the correct component code. Entering candidates using an incorrect code causes delays to the moderation process and possible maladministration issues that are best avoided.

Cambridge International requires a centre to provide four different items in the package sent to the moderator. These are:

All the recordings of **Task 1** and **Task 2** for the whole cohort entered for the series. It is recommended that these are sent on one CD or one USB drive wherever possible

All the Coursework Assessment Summary Forms for the whole cohort entered. If more than one teacher/examiner is involved in the process then a separate form completed by that teacher/examiner should be included. This allows the moderator to cover within the moderation process the range of teacher/examiners used by the centre

The Individual Candidate Record Cards for all the entered candidates in the cohort

A copy of the marks that have already been sent to Cambridge.

It is essential to successful completion of the moderating process that all the required items are present in the packet sent to Cambridge. Of equal importance is that the addition and transcription of marks is accurate and that the marks on the separate forms tally against each other. The moderator will undertake a check of the centre's administration before moderating and any discrepancies found can cause a delay in the process.

The following guidelines may prove helpful in completing the sample successfully:

Centres should generate audio files in a recognised common audio file format such as mp3, wav and wma (but not AUP) that can be played by standard computer software. It is helpful if, for each candidate, a separate track is created and its file name is the candidate's name and examination number. Where possible, the recordings should be transferred to a single CD or a USB drive. It is highly recommended that the quality of the recordings is checked regularly during the recording sessions. The final CD or USB drive should also be checked before despatching to Cambridge

The teacher/examiner should introduce each recording 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 as to who is speaking 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

An Individual Candidate Record Card is required for each candidate entered. These cards should be treated as 'living' documents that are completed when each task is undertaken. 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

Where there are multiple teacher/examiners in a centre, internal standardisation and moderation is required. If, as a result of this internal moderation, the marks for candidates' tasks are changed, please indicate on the Summary Forms exactly where these changes have taken place. Changing just the total marks is unhelpful for the moderator.

## **General comments**

Generally, across the entry, the standard of administration and accuracy of assessment continue to be of a high standard. Centres and their candidates continue to be fully committed to the component and produce work of a very good quality. A wide range of topics were chosen in response to **Task 1** and some inventive literature-based paired discussions were evident in response to **Task 2**.

Centres are reminded that the Individual Candidate Record and the Summary Form are specific to Component 6 and cannot be substituted by forms from any other component, such as Component 5.

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. The integration of literature-based activities is encouraged where it will benefit the candidates' performance.

## **Comments on specific tasks**

Across all three tasks, the most successful examples were those where the candidates enjoyed a personal interest in the topics chosen. Candidates who were genuinely interested in the topics they had chosen often had more to say and in greater depth, leading to more interesting and developed responses.

Well planned and prepared responses to tasks are generally more successful but responses do not benefit from over-scripted and seemingly 'artificial' performances where spontaneity is missing.

### **Task 1**

A wide range of topics were undertaken although the task generally took the form of an individual presentation. This is a perfectly valid response to the task and one candidates often feel most comfortable in performing. Some centres chose to be quite inventive and their candidates responded to this task by delivering dramatic monologues in a chosen character. Again, this is a perfectly valid response to the task.

When preparing a response to **Task 1**, whether it is a presentation or a monologue, candidates should consider the length. It is recommended that a response of 3 to 4 minutes is a reasonable expectation if a mark in the higher bands is being targeted.

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

- An important event in my life
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- An in-depth and evaluative review of a movie, piece of music or work of art
- Being an introvert
- Colours
- The rise of Artificial Intelligence
- Why you should visit my city
- Did we really journey to the Moon?
- My inspiration
- Role models.

*Some examples of less successful **Task 1** activities include:*

- Should cannabis be legalised? (This has potential safeguarding issues)
- Football (Most often too generic and unfocussed)
- Travelling (Where too generic and lacking focus)
- A single topic imposed by the centre for the whole of its cohort in which no individual choice is allowed (Ownership of and commitment to the topic is rarely evident).

## 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. Coupling a more able candidate with one who is weaker normally stifles the stronger one, by not allowing a sufficiently taxing springboard for development of the ideas expressed and limits the contribution of the weaker one because she/he is dominated by their partner.

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 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. The lack of spontaneity usually reflects an adequate response to the task.

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 mediums 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 moral implications of cloning
- Discussing a text or author both candidates know well
- Planning a special event – either at school or for a more personal joint function
- Discussing a favourite painting or other work of art
- 'Introducing the News' – a simulated radio broadcast with two presenters
- In-character discussions between two literary personalities focussing on a specific point(s) in the text
- Arguing for and against the existence of zoos
- Discussing a moral dilemma
- 'High End Fashion Goods' – Desirable or not?
- How to spend a specified amount of money on school improvements.

*Some examples of less successful Task 2 activities include:*

- Should cannabis be legalised? (This has potential safeguarding issues)
- Interviews where one of the candidates acts solely as the interviewer (This is limiting for the candidate)
- Disagreements between neighbours – a role play that is rarely developed
- Customer complaints regarding faulty service – another role play rarely developed
- A single topic imposed by the centre for the whole of its cohort in which no individual choice is allowed (Ownership of and commitment to the topic is not always evident).

## Task 3

**Task 3** may take the form of a group discussion debating an issue which is topical 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.

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.

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 the 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.

*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
- An interview panel discussing potential candidates for a job
- Planning a special event – either at school or for a more personal joint function
- How to spend a specified amount of money on school improvements.

Some topics work equally well for either **Task 2** or **Task 3** but this is not always the case so caution is advised.

### **General conclusions**

Component 6 remains a successful and enjoyable vehicle for candidates to express their opinions, demonstrate their oral skills and genuinely engage with speaking and listening.

The standard of assessment by centres is accurate and easy to follow.

As in all examinations, candidates clearly benefit from clear instruction, careful planning and thoughtful practise.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0990/11  
Reading Passages (Core)

## Key messages

Candidates should read all questions carefully to ensure that their answers focus on the questions. In the sub-questions in **Question 1** where candidates are asked to answer in their own words, candidates should avoid lifting long phrases or whole sentences from the passage.

Proof reading is essential. Marks were lost through avoidable mistakes which could have been corrected by candidates checking over their work.

In **Question 1(d)**, candidates should avoid repeating the meanings of the underlined words in the second part of the question but should focus their response on describing the effect of the whole phrase.

In **Question 2**, candidates should read the question carefully to ensure that they adopt the correct 'voice'.

In **Question 2**, candidates must remember to deal with all 3 bullet points attempting to develop the ideas in the passage, both factual and inferential. The key message here is to develop the details offered in the text for the third bullet point, using the passage to develop a plausible response.

Candidates need to ensure that they are writing in the correct style and register for **Question 2**.

Candidates should avoid copying from the passage in **Question 2**.

In **Question 3(a)** candidates should only make one point on each line and avoid repeating similar points.

## General comments

Overall, the passages proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates and they responded positively to both passages and questions. Most candidates completed the paper in some detail and examiners reported seeing some high-quality responses to **Question 2**. It is clear that the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared for these questions and were confident in their approach.

Responses to the sub-questions in **Question 1** revealed that the main points in the passage had been clearly understood and many responded well to the more straightforward questions. The majority of candidates were familiar with the requirements of **Questions 3(a)** and **3(b)**. There was very little evidence of candidates not working within the paper time limit and few examples of No Response answers.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) **Reread the second sentence (lines 1–3). Give one word that suggests Rio de Janeiro is an outstanding place to visit.**

Most candidates identified either 'paradise', 'wonder', or 'world-class'. A good number of candidates thought that 'famous' or 'appeals' was the correct answer. A few candidates did not gain a mark because they wrote 'wonderful' as opposed to 'wonder'. Where a candidate did not get the mark for this question, they tended to write a full answer explaining what makes Rio de Janeiro an outstanding place to visit, often including one or all of the correct words, but not following the rubric of the question by identifying a single word.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain why the writer did not feel confident about hang-gliding (paragraph 2, 'Paulo was ...').**

Most candidates gained at least one mark here and many gained both marks available. The most common point identified was the writer having had no knowledge of hang-gliding. This was either explicitly stated or implied by it being his 'first time'. The fact that no-one else was hang-gliding that day was also identified.

- (c) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means when he says: 'I looked out over the ledge and saw nothing but a vast carpet of trees ...' (lines 12–13).**

To gain both marks for this question, candidates needed to explain two of the ideas in the given sentence: a sense of the great height, the huge scale of the area and/or the sense that the trees covered or blanketed the area. Some candidates merely repeated the phrase 'carpet of trees' in their answers or wrote about seeing 'lots of trees' without trying to explain the figurative idea of a massive covering from a great height.

- (d) **Give the meaning of the underlined words in the following three phrases as the writer uses them in the passage. Then explain how the phrases help you understand the conditions at the jump site.**

The new layout of **Question 1(d)** has led to more carefully structured answers from the majority of candidates and there were fewer examples of candidates simply repeating meanings when asked for an explanation of the whole phrase. Where candidates did not define the meaning of the individual word in the first part of the question, they were credited with it in the next part where appropriate.

- (d)(i) **'sheer' (line 16)**

Most candidates were able to explain the word 'sheer' as used in the context of the passage. Most offered the phrase 'steep drop' although 'steep' was also accepted. Others offered 'vertical' or a 'straight drop'. Some candidates thought that it simply signified height and did not score the mark.

- (d)(ii) **'This seemed pretty logical: just run and jump off a sheer cliff.' (lines 15-16)**

Quite a number of candidates recognised the sarcastic tone to the given quotation and explained that the writer did not mean that it was logical or easy, but rather that it was dangerous and foolhardy. Some interpreted it literally as something simple to achieve, not picking up on his anxiety about the hang-gliding, or the potential danger.

- (d)(iii) **'buffeted' (line 19)**

The word 'buffeted' caused problems for some candidates. A few did identify the forceful nature of the wind with its connotations of 'hitting' or 'pushing' them. A number of candidates provided answers here explaining the strength of the wind. A few candidates believed that the wind had given the narrator some food associating the word 'buffeted' with a 'buffet'.

- (d)(iv) **'A savage wind buffeted us.' (line 19)**

The references to the violent strength of the wind gained marks, here, as did the sense of danger and immense risk. Some candidates merely repeated their answers from the single word question or paraphrased the given quotation by lifting words from it, particularly the word 'savage'.

**(d)(v) 'perilous' (lines 21-22)**

'Perilous' was the least understood word of the three underlined words in this question. A few candidates did recognise it as being 'dangerous', but a number believed it meant 'beautiful' or had positive connotations. Candidates frequently tried to explain 'abyss' rather than the underlined word in this question.

**(d)(vi) 'I found myself on the ramp ready to hurl myself off into a perilous abyss' (lines 21-22)**

Answers which did focus on the endless or unknown nature of the abyss were rewarded here, and quite a number of candidates described the narrator's uncertainty about what would happen when she/he jumped. Few candidates attempted to explain the effect of the word 'hurl'. Some repeated their explanation of 'perilous'.

**(e) Using your own words, explain why the writer asks himself: 'Why are you doing this, you fool?' (line 23).**

This question was answered well with many candidates recognising the narrator's realisation about the predicament he finds himself in. Candidates expressed this in a variety of ways including his uncertainty, his regret, his stupidity, and his realisation of the risk / danger. A number of candidates only offered one point for this 2-mark question.

**(f) Reread paragraph 6 ('To this day ...'). Using your own words, explain two things that the writer enjoys about his experience of hang-gliding.**

The majority of candidates were able to score two marks on this question although some responses simply lifted whole sentences from the passage and could therefore not be credited. Candidates are expected to make a genuine attempt to remodel the language used in 'own words' questions.

**(g) Reread paragraph 7 ('Half an hour...'). Using your own words, explain what happened when the writer reaches the end of his hang-gliding trip.**

As with question 1f, this question was clearly understood and generally answered well and there was little copying in the responses. Most candidates scored 2 marks, explaining that the narrator was sad to land, that Paulo releases his/her legs and/or that he/she fell backwards. It's worth noting that precision is important when answering this type of question. The narrator fell on her/his back not on 'his neck', or indeed, just 'fell'.



## Question 2

Imagine you are Paulo, the guide in **Passage A**. The day after these events you write a letter to a friend describing your experience taking the writer on their hang-gliding trip.

### Write your letter.

In your letter you should comment on:

- the place where you take people hang-gliding
- your impression of the writer and what they thought about their hang-gliding experience
- what happened after you landed.

Base your responses 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 letter: 'I had mixed feelings when I first set out on this tour ...'

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.**

For this task, the majority of candidates seemed to understand the need to address each of the bullet points given in the question and to give a credible account of Paulo's thoughts and feelings about the hang-gliding trip with the writer, both before and after the jump. The vast majority of candidates were comfortable writing a letter to a friend offering an appropriately warm and friendly register and tone. The most successful responses used the ideas and details in the passage to address and develop each of the 3 bullet points. They described the journey up the mountain and the position of the jump spot, offered their impressions of the writer's behaviour during and after the hang-gliding trip, and then described what happened after landing on the beach when they showed the writer their favourite spots in Rio. The ability to adapt the perspective from the writer's viewpoint to describe Paulo's impressions of the trip was a key differentiator in this question, as well as how carefully candidates looked for and used the details about the attractions in Rio to address bullet 3. A number of candidates did not read the question properly and wrote the letter as the writer; this tended to produce a more general narrative of the events of the passage without fully focusing on the three prompts given in the question rubric. This made the third bullet very challenging, but also meant that Paulo's viewpoint was not considered. A small minority of candidates merely copied extracts from the passage with very few own words or produced letters which were too close to the original passage.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three bullet points offering a balanced response to the whole task. Some, although they produced promising letters, only focused on the first two bullets in the question, simply addressing the third bullet point by describing landing on the beach and sometimes mentioning showing the writer 'his favourite parts of the city'. There was no attempt to use the details given earlier in the passage about Rio's attractions for tourists. These responses often gave convincing descriptions of the trip up the mountain and the view from the jump site, as well as the writer's lack of confidence after looking over the edge followed by his/her exhilaration during the flight and when landing. Many of the responses developed the ideas in the passage very effectively for these 2 bullets, building up a convincing relationship between Paulo and the writer. However, a significant number of candidates chose to largely ignore the third bullet point, only describing the landing rather than what happened *after* it. This meant that opportunities to develop ideas in the passage about what the writer may have seen and experienced in Rio were lost. Those responses which did address the third bullet wrote effectively about seeing the stunning harbour, attending a carnival, the beauty of the most popular beaches and seeing Paulo's favourite parts of the city (offering development by referring to restaurants and shops etc.).

To gain marks in Bands 1 and 2 for Reading it is essential that candidates develop ideas based on the passage rather than add their own imagined content. Very few responses wrote imagined responses, although there were a few candidates who ignored the hang-gliding trip completely and simply wrote about visiting a city. All development of the ideas in the passage should be firmly tethered to the details given resulting in feasible extension.

The best responses in terms of reading managed to develop all three bullet points using and building on the finer details in the passage. These responses firmly tethered any development to Paulo's experience as a hang-gliding instructor that day.



In terms of writing, many candidates wrote fluently using convincing vocabulary. Others were less convincing but sometimes expressed themselves clearly. The weakest responses were sometimes difficult to follow or relied very heavily on lifted material.

### Question 3

(a) **Notes**

**What do you learn about the appearance of flying squirrels and how they fly (or glide), 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.**

This question asks candidates to respond by appropriate selection. It was generally answered well with many candidates making one point per line as instructed and focusing on the topic and the question. There were a small number of candidates who included several points on the same line thereby self-penalising. Sometimes candidates included more than 10 relevant points, but by putting them more than one point on each line gained fewer than 10 marks overall.

There were also some points repeated several times, most notably focused on the outstretched arms and legs or forming a flat surface by stretching their legs. There were a number of instances of the inclusion of irrelevant points that did not address the question, mostly concerned with flying squirrels' nesting materials or eating habits, or the fact that they are nocturnal. The question asked for points relating to their appearance or how they glide, though many candidates selected very generally without considering whether the question was being addressed. It is important that only relevant points are selected from the passage and that candidates focus carefully on the question.

(b) **Summary**

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the appearance of flying squirrels and how they fly (or glide).**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 150 words.**

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

A number of candidates were able to achieve Band 3 for clear, concise and fluent summaries mainly expressed in own words. Many candidates' responses were Band 2 (some concision but dependent on the words of the passage). Such responses often had lengthy sections that were irrelevant as they focused on the squirrels' feeding and nesting habits rather than addressing the question. Less successful responses tended to include lengthy lists, unnecessary details, repetition or unselective 'lifting'. Successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. The least successful responses copied unselectively.

Most candidates tried to write with some concision and to use their own words where possible. Stronger responses managed to reorganise points and to stay focused on the two aspects of the question, although a large number did include irrelevant material. Some responses started off well but then became less relevant by listing what flying squirrels like to eat, or the materials used to make their nests. A number of candidates lifted material selectively but comparatively few merely copied from the passage with no recasting. The most commonly lifted phrases were 'tail flips downwards', 'velvet soft fur ranged in colour', 'their tail is broad, flattened and fluffy' and 'large, black eyes dominate the head'. The best responses were organised, concise, with some own words and sustained focus.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/21  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- used their own words appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- avoided copying and/or lifting from either passage
- considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to show for each of the three tasks
- paid attention to the guidance and instructions for each task
- returned to the text when necessary to clarify an idea or reconsider an important detail
- planned their ideas and the route through their answer before writing
- gave equal attention to all aspects of each question
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- edited their responses to correct any careless slips, incomplete ideas or unclear points
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

## General comments

Candidates' responses for the most part indicated a familiarity with the format of the paper and that they had understood the demands of the three tasks in general terms at least. There were relatively few instances where all or part of a task had not been attempted, though opportunities to target higher marks were missed where candidates offered a restricted range of ideas, misread or over-looked details and / or dealt unevenly with each part of the task in hand. Better responses indicated an awareness of the need to use, rather than repeat or replay, the material from the text in order to answer the questions. The most successful answers were able to modify the material in the passages skilfully and use it to demonstrate understanding, paying attention to the specific focus of each task. Less successful responses were often over reliant on the wording and/or sequence of the text(s) and paid limited attention to the details of the question, providing less convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a result. Centres are reminded that simple paraphrasing, lifting and/or copying of the text should be avoided, whilst careful attention needs to be paid to key words in the task instructions.

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible, and were for the most part 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 writing from the wrong perspective or for the wrong audience in **Question 1**, explaining fewer than eight choices in **Question 2** or writing far more than the maximum of 250 words advised for **Question 3**.

Successful answers were able to interpret and use details to demonstrate accurate reading in **Question 1**, offer explanation of meaning and effect in relation to appropriate selections from both paragraphs in **Question 2** and show understanding of carefully identified, relevant ideas which addressed both aspects of the focus of the task in **Question 3**.

Most **Question 1** responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task and candidates were generally aware of the need to reinterpret Peter's account of his experiences as a trainee guide from the viewpoint of the more experienced Head Guide, Chris, offering advice to new trainees as described. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passage, with the best adopting the role of Head Guide convincingly and demonstrating a particularly strong sense of purpose and approach. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities through more mechanical and/or generalised treatment of the text. Less successful responses either included only brief reference to the passage or repeated Peter's narrative with minimal modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the passage and/or the wording of any introduction in order 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 specified paragraphs and offer precise comments in relation to these choices. To aim for 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 understanding of the writer's purpose. Most were able to suggest potentially useful examples for analysis, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently clear or careful in the examination of their choices. Some had paid limited attention to the focus of each of **parts (a) and (b)**, and as a result missed opportunities. A number repeated the language of the choices in their explanations, and/or offered generalised comments, diluting evidence of understanding as a result.

In **Question 3** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas and some understanding of the requirements of the task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of aspects of the same idea from an earlier part of the text and/or inclusion of material not relevant to the focus of the question meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. Some candidates dealt with only one aspect of the question, limiting the range of ideas they could include. Where responses were most successful, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words, to keep explanations concise and to organise their ideas helpfully. Less well focused responses were over reliant on copying from the text, with minimal/no rewording or reorganisation of the original. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response. They should not however lift whole phrases and/or sentences from the text, or rely on simply listing ideas in the order of the passage. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, 20 per cent of the marks available are for Writing – divided equally 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, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. 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 and correct responses is advisable.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Question 1**

**You are the Head Guide, Chris (Peter's boss). You are responsible for training safari guides. When a group of new trainee guides arrives at the camp, you give a talk to prepare them for what lies ahead.**

#### Write the words of your talk.

**In your talk, you should:**

- describe the range of attractions Idube camp and the area around it have to offer and how these might appeal to guests**
- explain what being a trainee guide is like – the kind of activities they will be asked to do and what they should and should not do as trainees**
- suggest what makes a good safari guide, the challenges of the job and the personal qualities they will need to develop**

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

**Begin your talk, ‘Welcome to Idube Camp...’**

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood the passage and task in at least general terms. Many offered extended detailed responses, attempting to rework and develop the material with their audience in mind and engaging with both task and text. Where content had been planned in advance, and the route through the answer considered beforehand, answers were often able to include a good range of relevant ideas – both explicit and implicit – in relation to all three bullets. Where responses relied too heavily on tracking through the text, replaying the passage, answers were less well focused and often simply repeated rather than developed ideas. The least successful responses copied sections of the text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading key details and information.

The most convincing responses to **Question 1** showed evidence of candidates having revisited the passage to reconsider and interpret Peter’s narrative account of events for the audience of new trainees that Head Guide Chris was addressing. Many made good use of the guidance in the bullets to help them identify and then organise the ideas and detail they might usefully include and most had used the prompt offered as a helpful starting point for their response. Others made less effective use of time by offering overlong introductory paragraphs where Chris outlined in general terms what he would include in his speech – often almost verbatim repetitions of the task instructions.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to outline the range of attractions of Idube Camp and to suggest how these might appeal to guests. Better answers had identified the basic information from the introduction to the text and gone on to interpret and support that with useful detail from the passage, extending and developing ideas to consider the nature of the appeal of each attraction. Almost all answers recognised that guests were offered drives, walks and dinner nights though did not always read sufficiently carefully to note that the dinner nights were at a location a little way away from the main camp. Less successful responses misread/misused details, for example to suggest that dinner nights appealed to guests because they were cheap and/or that the guests would be transported for safari drives in an ageing, decrepit truck. Many answers identified the chance to see a range of animals as an appealing prospect, though suggestions of petting zoo opportunities and/or feeding baby lions were speculative/outside of the passage and could not be credited as evidence of reading. Likewise, the suggestion that guests would book a holiday at Idube to sunbathe on the beach could not be supported by the text.

Where candidates had attempted to just paraphrase the passage rather than read purposefully and identify ideas for inclusion before they began their response, opportunities for linking and developing suggestions in the text were often missed. Many candidates however did make good use of the guidance within each bullet to help focus their response and, in bullet two, were able to include a range of potentially relevant ideas. Most had understood that the ‘walking’ trainees needed to learn related to the skills and knowledge needed to lead a guided walk. Where evidence of reading skills was less secure, some answers had tried to link learning to ‘walk’ with the advice ‘don’t run’ – instructing new trainees to slow down around camp.

Rather than consider the nature of the activities trainee guides might be required to undertake, responses in the mid-range often simply repeated Peter’s account of what he had to do and offered long lists of items loaded on to the truck. Where details had been less carefully considered some answers went on to suggest that trainees would have to transport heavy loads of drink by wheelbarrow through to Bush Camp and/or find shortcuts through from one camp to the other – neither of which was trainee Peter supposed to do. More secure responses were able to include suggestions in line with the implications of Peter’s reflective narrative for example that trainees should never walk off into the bush on their own or be tempted to try to find a shortcut, explaining the potential dangers of such actions.

In dealing with ideas related to bullet three, most answers were able to make use of the advice not to run when faced with a wild animal, though many relied on repeating it word for word. Answers tracking the text often included the point in passing more than once and missed opportunities to make explicit other suggestions. For example, the ideas that guides might need to be good communicators, able to deal with excitable tourists and observant/able to interpret the warning signs around them, were picked up in more competent responses. Where answers had taken a mechanical approach to the task and/or relied on lifting from the text with the occasional own word substitution, evidence of any general understanding often had to be balanced with that of misreading. A sense of context and/or some understanding of the whole text was evident in answers that were reasonable or better. On occasion, the words substituted into lifts from the passage in the weakest responses changed the facts – for example, the suggestion that ‘tigers often walked

in the soft sand' was incorrect. Candidates are reminded that they need to work to understand the ideas in the text rather than look to lift and/or copy sections of text with minimal modification.

Some answers moved too far from the text when suggesting what makes a good safari guide – forgetting that they needed to show evidence of their Reading skills by using ideas in the passage. For example, some included suggestions of extreme survival skills they imagined they might need if separated for long periods of time from camp – a possibility not hinted at in the text – and/or offered long lists of general personal characteristics that might, or might not be, relevant without any clear indication of how or why. The best answers had often recognised that the narrator's viewpoint was distinct from that of 19-year-old Peter and were able to suggest that a good safari guide might well have learned from experience (including their mistakes).

In creating a voice for Head Guide Chris, stronger responses had often picked up on the suggestion that he might need to curb the enthusiasm of new trainees a little and caution against over-confidence. Better responses had interpreted the tone of his comment 'You'll need to learn how to walk' and applied their reading of it to the voice they created – with some responses adopting a stern tone. The best had often decided on a more measured attitude, in keeping with the role model position of Head Guide and carefully contrasted with the impetuous and impatient attitude of new trainee Peter. Stronger responses had recognised the suggestion in the narrator's voice that young Peter had had much to learn. On occasion less effective writing contained some awkward expression, often as a result of insecure vocabulary choices and/or a failure to read back to check for the sense of what they had written – for example, suggesting that quests 'can see animals inside vehicles'. In the weakest answers, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of sections of text not uncommon. This affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills. Meanwhile, answers at the top end were often presented in a firm but fair style and able to evidence a strong sense of purpose and approach in their use of ideas from the passage.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 1:

remember that the response to reading task is asking you to adopt a different perspective to that of the text – for example by writing from the point of view of a character other than the narrator  
consider the audience and purpose for your response and keep these in mind as you write  
decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain in your answer  
read the whole text carefully, more than once, and return to reconsider any points you are unsure of  
give equal attention to each aspect of each of the three bullet points – the bullet points are designed to help you to identify relevant ideas in the text  
plan a route through your answer beforehand – you can choose not to follow the order of the bullet points and/or link ideas from each  
express ideas from the text which are relevant to your answer using your own words – do not copy from the passage  
try to extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include rather than simply repeat details – for example, by explaining justification or reasons for any advice/ideas offered  
leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response  
do not waste time by counting the exact number of words in your answer – the number of words suggested by the question is a guide to help you plan your time, not a limit.

#### Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) Wusani and her experience at Bush Camp in paragraph 2, beginning 'Setting up meant ...'
- (b) Peter's journey to the Bush Camp in paragraph 9, beginning 'After struggling ...'

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 have identified a range of relevant examples of language use for discussion in each half of the task, paying attention to the particular focus of each part of the question: Wusani and her experience at Bush Camp in **part (a)** and Peter's journey in **part (b)**. Where answers were not focused on the task as set opportunities were missed to evidence understanding. Strong answers offered clear analysis of relevant selections, often beginning with explanations of meaning and moving on to



consider effect, and were able to demonstrate understanding of how the writer was using language in each case.

Where candidates considered all of the key words in longer choices they avoided those more general comments of weaker answers which offered only partial explanation of the phrase as a whole. The strongest responses considered words individually as well as how they worked within the phrase and in the context of the description as a whole. Rather than selecting the first four choices in each half they came across or the most 'obvious' literary devices, successful answers often set out to identify the relevant selections that they felt best able to explain.

In **part (a)**, some less focused answers attempted to discuss choices that were not related to Wusani, such as 'cool tranquillity' and 'enjoying the shade' and missed opportunities to target higher bands as a result. In **part (b)**, some answers selected only part of a longer image and/or selected the whole image but only explained one word from it, limiting the evidence of understanding offered. For example, a number of answers offered explanations of 'sense of peace' as meaning calm or tranquillity, though fewer went on to explain the image as a whole and many included the word 'mingled' in their selections without attempting to explore its meaning and/or effect. Repetition of the vocabulary of the text in the explanations offered in **part (b)** was common in less successful answers, whilst more successful responses were able to offer explanations of precise meaning in their own words that then lead them onto a suggestion of effect. Some for example, considered how 'met' and 'mingled' were suggestive of a polite social gathering and/or how 'undercurrent' might suggest Peter was in danger of being carried away by his sense of adventure.

Where the meaning of words was considered carefully in context, candidates were often able to go on to suggest something of the effect and better answers ensured that they had considered all key words within choices. For example, in **part (a)**, having considered the precise meaning in context of choices such as 'unpleasantly surprised' and 'gravity's pull resolved the issue' many candidates went on to suggest both the deliberate understatement in Peter's description and the cartoon-like humour of the situation. Likewise, in considering how the meaning of 'improbably' combined with 'perched', many responses were able to suggest the intended humorous effect of picturing the large figure of the chef balanced precariously on a branch like some kind of over-grown bird. Meanwhile, opportunities to target higher marks were missed where meaning was not carefully considered or explained – for example, suggestions that 'ominous creaking' meant the approach of something dangerous like a lion or that the truck in which Wusani was travelling was haunted were not accurate and could not be credited.

Candidates are reminded it is the quality of their analysis that attracts marks. Answers that simply list literary devices used and/or copy 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.

A number of weaker answers relied on simply spotting literary devices and as a result struggled to interpret meaning or effect. For example, whilst many candidates who selected it were able to offer credible interpretations the description of the lourie bird's call 'long drawn out hag-like rasp', others struggled to comment as a consequence of having simply identified it as 'an example of a simile'. Taking time to select from the full range of potential choices those about which they felt most able to comment, rather than simply trying to spot literary devices, would have helped a number of candidates who offered only thin or inappropriate comment.

Many candidates were able to provide satisfactory evidence of skills and understanding in either one part of the task or the other and might have achieved higher marks by extending their explanations to consider 'how' or 'why' the words chosen were creating the general or basic effect they claimed. Most candidates were able to show that they recognised at least some potentially interesting examples of language use and could begin to offer some relevant comment. 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. Answers offering less careful or considered choices sometimes prejudiced the evidence of understanding they were able to demonstrate in relation to meaning and effect, for example by attempting to discuss selections such as 'slugging through soft sand' or 'improperly perched'.

Better answers focused on exploring and explaining each of their choices in detail, offering some high quality analysis in each half of the question. Selections in **Question 2** need to be clear and deliberate – helping to focus the analysis that follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful and often result in very thin general comments at best. On occasion, candidates selected phrases containing a few words and then went on to unpick the separate elements of these with some success.



Others narrowed the focus down to single words and then reassembled the image. Both were potentially useful approaches where careful explanation was offered and replaying of the language of the original as part of the commentary was avoided.

Opportunities were missed in some answers, such as 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. For example, a number of answers discussed the use of ‘adrenaline’ but missed the chance to consider the effect of ‘fuelled’. Similarly, some candidates having identified ‘branches met overhead, offering cool shade’ limited their discussion to either ‘met’ or ‘offering’ rather than consider each in turn and suggest how they might work together.

Planning of relevant ideas ahead of writing would have helped some candidates to avoid empty phrases such as ‘the writer’s use of language makes the reader want to know what happens next’ or ‘this helps us to imagine the scene’. Unless the answer goes on to suggest exactly how and in what ways the writer is doing this, such comment can offer a false sense of security and take up valuable examination time unprofitably. Stronger responses, offering considered and careful analysis focused on language use in both parts of the question, were often able to build to a useful overview of how the language was working and evidence clear understanding.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

once you have identified the potentially relevant choices to answer **part (a)** and **part (b)**, select your strongest four from each paragraph to explore and explain  
make sure your choices are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice you wish to discuss  
avoid empty comments such as comments that ‘the writer has used lots of great adjectives’  
show your understanding in full – consider each of the key words within your identified choice  
if you are unsure of effect, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) you have identified  
try to explore and explain the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create  
allow time to edit your answer – for example to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

### **Question 3**

**What were the problems for wildlife reserves and their surrounding communities in 2010 and what was being done to help tackle these problems, according to Passage B?**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 250 words.**

Candidates who addressed the task successfully, often showed evidence of having planned beforehand both the content and a route through their answer. They had identified those points that were potentially relevant to the dual focus of the question (the problems and what was being done to tackle them) and had reflected on their potential answers to refine their ideas and avoid excess. For example, they were able to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point, identify implied points and/or avoid repetition of ideas or inclusion of unnecessary detail. Successful answers did not rely on the structure or language of Passage B to communicate ideas and considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for a selective summary task. Less effective responses had often relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text and/or tried to paraphrase the original or shadow it, substituting (sometimes inappropriate) vocabulary for individual words. The least effective answers adopted a cut and paste approach, copying sections from the original and/or were almost entirely reliant on the language of the text.

On occasion, incorrect and/or incomplete lifting from the text also served to dilute evidence of understanding in potentially stronger answers that would have benefitted from careful editing. Reading back through their answer afterwards to make sure that it would make sense as a piece of informative writing for a reader who had not read the original passage would have helped a number of candidates target higher marks. Often answers began well and showed some understanding of relevant ideas but lost focus, for example by repeating information and/or including unnecessary details such as statistics to exemplify their point. A few less successful answers showed evidence of having misread details of the task – for example by offering

comment from outside the text in relation to African tourism in general rather than information from the text. Misreading of details in the text diluted evidence of understanding in some answers – for example, it was not correct to suggest that ‘wildebeest are moved each year to the Mara plains as a result of tourism’ or that a solution is to ‘pay camp owners depending on how many tourists visit’.

Where candidates had paid careful attention to the task as set, they aimed for concise and well organised answers using their own vocabulary where practicable and appropriate to help clarify meaning for their reader. They demonstrated their understanding of relevant ideas within the context of the whole text and avoiding lifting of more general comment such as that the ‘wilderness is at tipping point’ or that ‘the planet’s most varied mammal and bird population is facing a crucial decade’ and/or repetition of strings of similar examples in favour of clear, distinct points conveying the nature of the problems.

Strong answers did not repeat the separate details related to the effect on animal numbers but rather organised their response to connect and summarise that information. Competent answers showed they had focused on the specifics of the task as set and did not include detailed accounts of Boynton’s trek or the precise numbers of beds added to lodges since the early 80s. Candidates producing the most effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a wide range of relevant ideas, explaining them in their own words and skilfully selecting and organising points to offer an overview. On occasion, potentially effective answers lost sight of the need for concision in a selective summary task and significant excess arose as a result of continuing to write way beyond the maximum of 250 words advised in the task guidance.

Where answers copied wholesale from the text with minimal or no modification, or offered a response which communicated only a few relevant ideas, candidates missed opportunities to target higher marks. The best responses showed that candidates understood the need to be accurate, clear and concise in the use of their own words when summarising relevant material from the passage. Stronger answers were careful to recast information, organise it helpfully, and use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing or blurring the original idea. For example, better answers reorganised the material rather than relying on the order of the text – avoiding repetition by doing so and establishing useful links such as that between the increase in permanent lodges and the permanent settlements of the Maasai. Stronger answers were able to offer their own vocabulary consistently, though in the mid-range some lifting of phrases was common with fewer candidates offering confident alternatives for ‘camp owners guarantee payment every month to local people’, or ‘soaring visitor numbers have severely damaged roads and grasslands’.

In low to mid-range answers, incomplete awareness or understanding of why they might want to avoid lifting meant that some candidates tended to concentrate on substituting words and/or altering word order without careful selection of the central idea – diluting evidence of understanding of both task and text. Candidates need to be aware that simply moving word order around within a sentence or replacing just one word is not a short cut to providing secure evidence of their reading skills and understanding. Candidates need to work to show understanding of ideas rather than simply track the passage making minimal changes and/or slotting in substituted words. The best answers were clear, concise, largely accurate and well organised.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify the potentially relevant content points  
you can use spare pages in your answer booklet to plan your ideas ahead of writing your response –  
draw a neat line through your planning afterwards  
identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question  
reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to check they are distinct and complete – for example, whether  
there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which need further explanation  
check you understand each idea you use and aim to explain it in your own words  
organise and sequence your ideas helpfully for your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order  
of the passage  
write informatively and accurately, avoiding errors which affect meaning  
do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage  
avoid repetition of points  
when checking and editing your answer, consider whether each point you are making could be easily  
and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage  
though you do not need to count every word, you should keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more  
than 250 words’ as a reminder in the selective summary of the need for concision.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/22  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- used their own words appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- avoided copying and/or lifting from either passage
- considered carefully the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to show for each of the three tasks
- paid attention to the guidance and instructions for each task
- returned to the text when necessary to clarify an idea or reconsider an important detail
- planned their ideas and the route through their answer before writing
- gave equal attention to all aspects of each question
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- edited their responses to correct any careless slips, incomplete ideas or unclear points
- adapted their writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose.

## General comments

The majority of candidates were aware of the requirements of each question and were able to demonstrate, at varying levels, the different skills required for each task. The most successful responses displayed a sound level of understanding of both passages and the ability to modify material for the purposes of the task. They also wrote in an appropriate style using a range of effective vocabulary. Less effective responses were often over reliant on the wording and structure of the texts and were not always focused on the details of the question. Most candidates attempted all parts of the tasks and there were very few unfinished or incomplete responses.

The majority of **Question 1** responses attempted all three bullet points and were aware of the need to write from the zookeeper's viewpoint. There were some engaging and convincing answers where their views and thoughts were conveyed to the reader effectively using an appropriate register and interesting language. In the best responses ideas were modified and developed and there was strong sense of purpose and audience. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities for development and used the material from the passage in a mechanical or straightforward way. Less effective responses were not well focused and contained a narrow range of ideas, often repeating the narrative of the passage with little modification.

For **Question 2** most candidates had selected a sufficient number of examples for explanation from both of the specified paragraphs and only a small number selected inappropriate choices or addressed only one part of the task. The best responses selected precise examples and gave focused and clear explanations of meanings, effects and images, demonstrating a clear understanding of the writer's use of specific words and phrases. Mid-range responses were less precise, offering either incomplete or overlong choices that did not always include explanations of significant words. In others, although clear meanings were given, attempts to explain effects were often tentative. Less good responses often repeated the words of the original when attempting to explain choices or were focused on simply identifying literary devices rather than discussing their use or effectiveness.

Many responses to **Question 3** displayed a good or reasonable understanding of the ideas in Passage B. Most had attempted to address all three areas outlined in the question and there were relatively few summaries that went significantly beyond 250 words. The best responses included a wide range of relevant ideas that were effectively organised and expressed clearly and succinctly, in the candidate's own words as far as possible. Mid-range responses contained a good number of relevant ideas though also included some material that was not always relevant, particularly from the introduction and conclusion to the passage. There was also a tendency to re-tell some of the events from the passage in detail instead of explaining what types of challenges they posed for Mee, the novice zoo owner. Less effective responses were often written in the same order as in the passage, often with the consequence that ideas were repeated. The grouping together of similar or related ideas would have resulted in a more cohesive account of Mee's struggles and difficulties and helped to avoid excess. Weaker answers also contained lifted phrases and sometime indiscriminate copying, indicating an insecure understanding of both the passage and the task.

Although Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20 per cent of the available marks are for Writing, divided equally between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing and allow sufficient time to review their answers and correct any inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Unclear expression will limit the mark awarded for Writing, as will over-reliance on the wording of the passage and copying parts of the text.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

**Imagine you are the zookeeper. Later that day you write in your journal reflecting on your feelings about life now and how things have changed.**

#### **Write your journal.**

**In your journal, you should:**

**describe what you do each day, why you do it and how that makes you feel.**

**explain what you have noticed about the boy and his father and your feelings about each of them.**

**consider how things have changed for you and the world around you since you first started working at the zoo and suggest what you think the future may hold for you.**

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

**Begin your journal, 'Today was ...'**

The majority of responses were written from the viewpoint of the zookeeper in an appropriate style and genre for a personal journal. Not all candidates demonstrated a full understanding of the main ideas of Passage A and some failed to recognise that the lion, and other animals in the zoo, were mechanised artefacts, or that the boy and his father resembled each other so closely because they were augmented humans/part robots. Such oversights resulted in some straightforward accounts of the zookeeper's day which although containing some relevant details were unlikely to develop ideas effectively or go beyond a basic narrative outline of the day's events. The wording on the plaque, near the end of the end of the passage, provided clues about the artificial nature of the lion. Reflecting on events in the light of this and/or reading back to reconsider details would have provided a clearer understanding of the dystopian nature of the story and allowed candidates to select more details and ideas that were relevant to possible developments in future technology. Most understood that the story was set one hundred years in the future and some titled the journal '2119'.

For the first bullet point most candidates were able to describe the normal routine of the zookeeper and explain his thoughts and feelings about his daily tasks. Most referred to his tiredness and the difficulties of working due to his old age, the ritual of collecting meat in the bucket and his efforts to coax the lion out of the cage to 'eat' his meal. Less effective responses used the detail in a mechanical way sometimes copying phrases from the text, for example, 'attracting a frenzied swarm of flies' and 'the animal shuffled out'. This lifting of phrases and straightforward repetition of ideas displayed a less than secure understanding of the passage. Better responses commented on the zookeeper's despair at the futility of pretending to feed fake meat to a cybernetised animal, and also his sadness that a once majestic creature had been re-animated

and was now a tattered and pathetic shadow of its former self. Less successful responses were not fully focused and sometimes digressed into speculative accounts of the zookeeper's family, an invented history of his life or the qualities required to be a successful zoo worker. There were opportunities to develop ideas that were firmly linked to the passage and some candidates commented that the zookeeper had to continually mop the sweat from his brow as a result of the heat due to global warming and that the meat was synthetic because most animals had become extinct, and that he yearned for the old days when he was a young man and the zoo had a collection of real animals that did not need constant repair.

When addressing the second bullet point most candidates commented that the boy was watchful and curious and that his father appeared unemotional and more reticent and detached. Some referred to their daily visits and expressed the zookeeper's thoughts about why they bothered as these visits usually resulted in disappointment for the boy whose questions were not fully answered. Several included references to their similar appearance, their perfect unblemished skin and dry palms though they did not always explain that they were a result of being programmed/augmented and/or cloned. Some commented on the contrast between the aged features of the zookeeper himself and the likelihood that the boy would never suffer the ailments of old age as he had. Better responses demonstrated an understanding that these visitors were part robots, that the father was transmitting knowledge to the boy's siliconised brain and was able to anticipate his next question. The most successful responses used a convincing voice to convey the zookeeper's thoughts about the couple, for example, 'staring at me as if I were an exhibit', 'they unnerve me with their robotic behaviour and unspoken thoughts'. This section of the journal often contained a good amount of supporting detail, though in less focused answers there were some general comments about the father and son relationship that were not fully relevant to the ideas in the text.

When addressing the third part of the journal better responses focused on all aspects and included reflections on the future of the zoo, the future of the zookeeper and his thoughts on modern life. In less effective responses ideas from the passage were not developed and general discussion was included about how the man might possibly spend his retirement and that someone else would take over the zoo, possibly the young boy as he had shown an interest in animals. Some expressed regret that he was no longer strong enough to continue to work and that repairing the animals had become a futile exercise. In a few responses it was suggested that the empty cage near the exit may one day contain a re-animated artefact of the zookeeper himself – a suggestion that evidenced a careful reading and a sound understanding of the ideas in the passage. Many commented that the zoo attracted fewer visitors and would eventually close, though not all gave suitable explanations for the demise of the zoo, for example, that it no longer contained real animals and feeding time was not such an attraction as in the past.

Some candidates picked up on suggestions in the text to develop very effectively potential ideas related to ecological and environmental issues, voicing concerns about global warming and extinction of animals convincingly from the wholly human perspective of the zookeeper. Many of the responses were reflective and displayed nostalgia for the time when people were not artificially programmed and lions actually roared and devoured real meat. The best responses were carefully planned to avoid repetition of ideas and to ensure that ideas were relevant and focused on each bullet point.

Stronger responses were written in a consistently appropriate and convincing voice and conveyed effectively the ideas of an elderly zookeeper whose non-augmented body and thoughts were out of place in a modern world that he did not fully understand. Views were expressed in a range of interesting and appropriate vocabulary. Less good responses relied on the wording of the passage or contained copied phrases. Most responses followed the order of the bullet points and in some cases this led to repetition of ideas, for example references to the lab grown meat and the physical weaknesses of the zookeeper. Better responses planned beforehand where in the journal details and ideas from the passage would be most effective.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 1:**

- read the whole text carefully, more than once, identifying the key ideas and details you can adapt for use in your answer
- consider how the response to reading task is asking you to adopt a different perspective to that of the passage – for example by writing from the point of view of a character whose actions are described in the narrative
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain in your answer
- consider the audience and purpose for your response before you begin writing
- give equal attention to ideas relevant to each of the three bullet points
- express ideas from the text which are relevant to your answer using your own words



do not simply repeat details from the text – try to extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include, for example by conveying the thoughts and feelings of the character you are writing as  
leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response  
do not waste time counting the exact number of words in your response – the number of words suggested by the question is a guide and not a word limit.

## Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) the zookeeper in paragraph 1, beginning ‘The boy stared ...’
- (b) the animal in paragraph 14, beginning ‘The ancient ...’

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.

In response to Question 2 candidates needed to identify a range of relevant examples and give sufficiently focused and clear analysis of these to demonstrate an understanding of how the writer was using language. Candidates are advised to select four appropriate examples for each part of the question and most responses included a sufficient number of choices to allow their explanations to target higher marks. While candidates are rewarded for the quality of their answers rather than the quantity, answers that only include one or two relevant examples do not allow candidates to display a full understanding of the writer’s use of language. Good responses contained precise and relevant choices with clear explanations focused on the key selected words and phrases with an equal focus on both parts of the question.

Whilst many answers discussed a range of relevant examples, some responses to part (a) attempted to analyse choices such as ‘dented metal feed bucket’ and ‘swung ponderously’ which did not refer to the focus of the question – the zookeeper. Some generalised explanations were insufficiently precise to be rewarded – in a number of less focused responses the comments that the zookeeper was old, weak and worn out were repeated as generic explanations for several choices, for example, ‘hobbling’, ‘gnarled knuckles’ and ‘ropy tendons and veins’. These words and phrases each have different meanings, and better responses were able to distinguish these differences to give accurate explanations and tackle imagery with some imagination. For example, candidates were rewarded for explaining that ‘gnarled knuckles’ gives an image of something knotty and rough like an old tree trunk, a result of age or hard work, and that ‘ropy tendons and veins’ suggests a thickening and lack of suppleness due to exertion and physical labour over a period of time. Some explanations repeated the words of the original, for example, ‘tissue-thin skin’ and ‘time-withered muscle’, indicating that the meanings of these choices were not fully understood. Where the meaning of words was carefully considered, for example, ‘withered’, candidates were then able to suggest the effects of muscle that had wasted and shrivelled over the years. The naming of literary devices such as the alliteration in ‘brittle bones’ offered little evidence of understanding without an explanation of how that was working to suggest that the bones were easily broken and fragile and emphasise the frailty of the zookeeper’s body. There were some clear explanations of ‘baggy covering’ and ‘secret stories of wounds’. The most successful answers were those that addressed all of the key words in the choices. For example, the word ‘inhabited’ is a key part of the phrase ‘ghosts of forgotten injuries’ and some answers explored profitably the implications that the zookeeper was haunted or possessed in some way.

In a number of responses part (b) was less successful. Where candidates had not spotted that the lion was cybernetised and partly mechanical this impacted on the quality of the explanations they offered. Some responses referred incorrectly to the damage to the lion’s cage, rather than the lion itself and in the phrase ‘fur rubbed painfully against metal’ some commented that the lion had injured itself by rubbing against his metal cage. The opportunity to discuss the contrast between the natural and unnatural substances of the lion’s body and the image that this evoked was missed. Some choices were incomplete which prevented a full exploration of effects. The words ‘betrayed’ and ‘exposing’ were often not included when explaining the ‘old tears’ and ‘bare spots’ which led to candidates giving basic meanings without explaining that the lion had been let down because its damaged pelt revealed the mechanised parts of its body, showing it that it was not a wholly organic animal.

In better responses there were attempts to explain the effects that the language had on the reader. In less effective responses these effects were repeated and it was not made clear why certain words and phrases evoked feelings such as sadness or sympathy in the reader. The most successful answers included a range of effects with clear explanations of why the writer had chosen specific words to communicate the animal’s suffering and indignity.



Candidates missing opportunities to aim for higher marks did not always make specific choices and in several answers the phrases ‘atrophied meat’, ‘underlying musculature’ and ‘churning gears’ were grouped together as one example without individual explanations of their different meanings and effects. This grouping did not allow candidates to display an understanding of the chosen vocabulary and why the writer had used specific words to convey meaning.

Candidates are advised to avoid making ‘empty’ comments such as ‘the writer has used interesting language to create an image in our minds’. Without an explanation of how and why these particular images were created the comments are very general and cannot be rewarded. There was some clear analysis of ‘raggedly sutured gaps’ and several candidates successfully explained how the zookeeper had made an effort to stitch up the lion’s pelt, despite his lack of expertise, by focusing on the meanings of key words then suggesting effects. Strong responses offered careful analysis of well selected words and phrases in both parts of the question. Less good responses gave incomplete choices and offered imprecise or general explanations that were not always focused on key words.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

once you have identified the potentially relevant choices to answer part **(a)** and part **(b)**, select your strongest four from each paragraph to explore and explain

spend some time considering the exact meaning of each choice in context before you go on to explore effect

make sure your choices are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice you wish to discuss

show your understanding in full – consider each of the key words within your identified choice

avoid general comments such as ‘the writer has used great imagery’ – try to explain how and why

avoid repeating the wording of the question as an explanation of effect – for example, ‘this suggests just how ancient the animal is’

try to explore and explain the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the precise effect the writer might have wanted to create

allow time to edit your answer – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

### **Question 3**

**What were the challenges for Benjamin Mee in buying, saving and running the zoo, according to Passage B?**

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

**Your summary should not be more than 250 words.**

Most summaries had made some attempt to address all three parts of the task and were an appropriate length. Less good responses included material that was not relevant to the task. Some included information from the introduction to the passage regarding Mee’s persuasive ability and the family arrangements that he needed to undertake before buying the zoo. Some also included the reflective comments made by him at the end of the passage about loss, the cycle of life and the plans for a Hollywood film. References were also made to the zoo’s rustic charm and homemade signs, and the leaflet Mee’s sister had sent to him. This loss of focus on the challenges of buying, saving and running the zoo did not demonstrate the ability to select relevant information and key points from the passage and often resulted in less concise responses. Some loss of concision was also the result of including unnecessary detail from the passage and re-telling events at the zoo rather than summarising the information and providing an overview of the main difficulties and challenges.

Several responses relied on anecdotal details from the passage, for example, the incident when the jaguar escaped from its cage was sometimes described in detail, often repeating or paraphrasing the original language. Better responses referred to the challenges of dealing with potentially dangerous animals and the need to ensure public safety. Similarly, the footage of Mee begging the bank manager for money was an indication that he had cash flow problems and was in desperate need of funding for repairs. Most answers included the points that the zoo was in poor condition when he first bought it, that its licence had been withdrawn and it needed to pass an inspection. Less effective responses copied the words ‘dangerously rundown’ and ‘revoked’ and also listed the features that were unsafe and needed urgent repair, often replaying the wording from the passage.

The most successful responses were those that showed evidence of careful selection and planning of relevant points before writing the summary. This planning allowed candidates to re-organise the main points and group similar ideas together, resulting in concise and well-structured summaries that avoided repetition and which were focused on the key ideas. The least successful responses were when candidates appeared to have worked through the passage locating any potentially relevant details and then simply presenting them in the same order as the original. This resulted in some repeated ideas and unnecessary material. For example, several responses included the reference, near the beginning of the passage, to Fudge the bear who needed his 13 cm claws trimmed as well as later references to Tammy the Siberian tiger and the actions of her keeper rather than sum up the challenge of caring for dangerous animals. Most responses included some reference to the 'myriad of expensive tasks' faced by Mee and to the money for animal feed and workers that should have been paid. Some candidates then later referred to the high costs of running the zoo and referred again to animal feed and staff costs. In some responses the problem of employees was also referred to several times, including the actions of the inexperienced keeper, instead of using staff concerns as an umbrella term for the challenges of having select, train and pay reliable employees. In a number of potentially stronger responses opportunities were missed as a consequence of only hinting at the challenges and difficulties through inclusion of the detail rather than making understanding explicit by referring, for example, to repair, maintenance and running costs and issues of public safety, privacy, and personal challenges and responsibilities.

The best responses were focused on all three areas of the question, they were also concise with clearly expressed ideas using own words. They displayed a sound understanding of the task and of the ideas in Passage B. Weaker responses contained words and phrases copied from the original and even though some words were replaced with suitable alternatives and words were re-arranged within a sentence there was evidence of a heavy reliance on the original wording. This reliance did not demonstrate a good understanding of ideas or the requirements of a summary.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

read the question carefully and underline the key words  
re-read the passage after reading the question, to identify potentially relevant content points  
you can use spare pages in your answer booklet to plan your ideas ahead of writing your response –  
draw a neat line through your planning afterwards  
identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question  
reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to check they are distinct and complete – for example, whether  
there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which need further explanation  
check you understand each idea you use and aim to explain it in your own words  
organise and sequence your ideas helpfully for your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order  
of the passage  
do not add details, examples or comment on the content of the passage  
avoid repetition of points  
write informatively and accurately, avoiding errors which affect meaning  
when checking and editing your response, consider whether each point you are making could be easily  
and precisely understood by someone who has not read the passage  
in the selective summary, keep in mind the guidance to write 'no more than 250 words' and the need for  
concision.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/31  
Directed Writing and Composition

## General comments

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, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and interest the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- construct varied sentences accurately
- use appropriate, precise and wide-ranging vocabulary.

Examiners found that in most cases a secure understanding was shown of what was expected in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. A large majority of responses, regardless of achievement, were sustained and there were few very brief scripts. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted Question 1 and either a descriptive or narrative writing task. In **Question 1**, a few responses were mostly or wholly copied from the passage in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the reading passage in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a letter to a website organisation and there was in many a clear attempt to argue and persuade the recipient. The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. Better answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage in a coherent response. In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the passage, sometimes with an opinion given about some of the points made. A substantial number of responses at this range refuted or made simple rebuttals of some of the information in the passage without evaluating or commenting on their validity.

Weaker candidates tended to repeat the ideas in the passage, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some weaker responses, this resulted in a lack of cohesion and some contradiction of competing ideas.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the passages were scrutinised thoughtfully. Sometimes, insufficient use was made of the reading material and opinions on screen use were offered with limited reference to the specific ideas in the passage. The formal, impersonal style required for a letter to an organisation was understood by the majority of candidates although some of the conventions of formal letter writing were not used by candidates across the mark range. For example, appropriate opening and closing sentences for the letter, particularly the valediction at the end, were often not used.

Better responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for a formal letter. These were polite but evaluative in style, using ideas from the passages to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices and showing a strong sense of audience. Some in the middle range of marks wrote in a more discursive style and there was less focus on arriving at a clear judgement based on the passage. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the article with less selection and regrouping of ideas from the original article. This sometimes made for a disjointed and less coherent style and structure.

In the compositions, better responses to the composition questions 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 gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very effective and sustained. There were some imaginative evocations of places which had been significant in various ways to the writer in the first descriptive writing question which Examiners found engaging and effective. A wide range of approaches was employed in the second, with some highly effective and detailed descriptions of the sky and the landscape. In both cases, these were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene imaginatively. Weaker responses to both descriptive writing questions tended to contain straightforward physical descriptions or some reliance on narrative with less descriptive focus.

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 interpretations and Examiners awarded marks across the range here.

Weaker narratives were less credible and there was often less overall cohesion and narrative purpose. Some were more simple, chronological accounts and were under-developed in style and less cohesive in structure. Composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The best descriptive writing was specific, used some original and thought-provoking imagery and effectively evoked the atmosphere of the time and place described. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of credible characters were features understood by the most effective writers who chose narrative writing options.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

##### **Question 1**

**Write a letter to the website in response to the ideas in the article.**

**In your letter, you should:**

- evaluate the different arguments given in the article**
- explain how far you agree or disagree with the views in the article about the dangers and the benefits of time spent by young people in front of screens**

**Base your letter on what you have read in the article, but be careful to use your own words.**

**Address each of the bullet points.**

**Begin your letter: 'Dear Digital Trends ...'**

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

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

As usual in the Directed Writing question, Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and discussion of the points made in the passage, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in it. Where the letter was also both accurate and ambitious in vocabulary and style, often with a consistent sense of audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded. Better responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the passage, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The extent to which the inferences contained in the passages were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some listing of the explicitly points in the passage about the health effects of too much screen time and the potential benefits of modern technology for young people. Responses often included some opinion or reaction to the ideas in the passage though without evaluation of them.

At this level, the ideas included showed an understanding of the main ideas in the passage although opportunities to scrutinise their validity were not taken. Responses could have been improved by more thoughtful consideration of the opposing ideas rather than simple reproduction of them.

Weaker 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. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level, particularly where contradictory points conflicted with each other. The letter often did not follow the conventions of letter writing or the information in the passage was not adapted in style and purpose.

### **Marks for reading**

The best responses, as always in this task, adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passage, drawing inferences and making judgements about the pitfalls and benefits of young people's screen use. Most responses included the evidence in the passage that too much screen time for children and teenagers can be harmful and most showed some understanding of the article's main thesis that these dangers should be mitigated by the imposition of limits. More thoughtful responses went to the heart of the issue in considering whether the results of a 25 year old study of these harmful effects should, or could, be applied in modern society where the use of screen technology was much more widespread than in the past.

The task set did not specify the voice and perspective of the letter and a large number of candidates chose to write as if they were parents of children or young people. Others addressed the task in their own voices, often as young people who had grown up using various devices from an early age. Some perceptive responses explored the ways in which modern screen usage could not have been anticipated 25 years ago and also discussed the curtailment of 'entertainment screen time' suggested by the studies as unfair, since it did not take account of the much increased use of screens for work, school and basic daily life that modern society takes for granted. Many at this level argued convincingly that innovations and changes in how young people spent their time had always been met by disapproval and efforts to control them. This generational divide was seen as unjust when the article itself showed that adults were just as dependent on screens and some responses suggested that parents' use of them could have even worse effects on children and young people, in terms of language and social development and maturity, than children themselves using screens. The assumption of a link between obesity and screen use in the article was also probed and challenged in high-scoring responses. Some counter-arguments focused on the false assumption that, as one candidate put it, 'if we weren't playing video games all evening we'd be outside in the sunshine having a lovely kickabout with our jolly friends on some idyllic village green.' Others saw an underlying value judgement in the correlation between obesity and screen use, pointing out that reading, 'which all parents think is a good way to spend our time' is just as sedentary an activity as using screens and many responses made reference to the ways in which modern technology supported and inspired a more active lifestyle.

Similarly, the inference that mental health conditions, mentioned in the article, resulted from social isolation induced by too much screen time led to some strong evaluation. The kinds of uses young people made of screen technology were often felt to improve the social skills and well-being of young people rather than damage them. Gaming in particular was described sometimes as a social, and sociable, activity which helped young people build their own communities of friends with similar interests all over the world, not just in their own neighbourhoods.

The adverse effects of screen use were sometimes thoughtfully challenged in other ways. A common thread in Band 6 responses was that blaming anxiety, depression and increased levels of aggression on screen use alone was simplistic and misleading. Some responses argued that other factors of teenage life, such as examination pressures and economic hardship, were ignored in the article. Others accepted the distinction between screen use itself and the content being viewed to explain that simply restricting the time allowed on screens would have little effect on mental health. Harmful content was also addressed with some thoughtful evaluations. One candidate noted that 'this kind of content is, no doubt, harmful for young people but they need to learn for themselves that it even though exists everywhere and is easily accessed they should learn to control their impulse to watch it.' Some felt that even though restricting access to such content had been made easy by parental blocks and other technological fixes, teenagers needed to develop their own attitudes



and strategies for looking after their mental health rather than relying on, as one wrote, ‘keeping the real world out of their heads.’

The article’s assumption that there was ‘good’ content available on screens but that young people could not be trusted to find it was questioned and probed in Band 6 responses. The notion was often considered patronising and simplistic in assuming that only educational content was deemed ‘good’ and that using screens for entertainment seemed in the article to be considered wrong or inherently harmful.

Examiners awarded Band 5 marks where there was some evaluative commentary in places but the response as a whole did not offer a consistent critique of the ideas in the passage. In some cases, there was more focus on criticising the article itself than the ideas contained in it. The imbalance between benefits and pitfalls of screen use in the article was sometimes criticised but with limited scrutiny of the actual points made. Bias against screen use was detected and criticised without recognising that this was the angle and approach taken by the writer and without considering the reasons given in the article for the views in it.

Another approach which was not consistently evaluative was where solutions for the health impacts of too much screen time mentioned in the article were offered. For example, various sleep regimes were suggested such as restricting screen use for an hour before bedtime or making children play outside for an hour each day. While these solutions showed some understanding of the ideas in the article, in seeking to mitigate the harmful effects of screen use, they were not always evaluative in challenging or probing the assumptions in the passage in the same way as those described above.

Responses given 7 marks tended to respond more evaluatively to some ideas more than others. Many explored the idea of parental responsibility, suggesting that screen time in itself was not harmful but that parents should be setting a better example with their own screen use or that creating balance and moderation in screen use was a parent’s job. In contrast, responses sometimes concluded with a more evaluative position emerging, that screens were so essential that restricting children’s use of them would damage their job prospects or their social lives.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 4 for Reading where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passage but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above or with less scrutiny of the points made in the passages. There was often less argument and focus on using the passages to arrive at a judgement about whether screen use should be restricted for young people, rather than a simple opinion based on personal preference. While the points made were given mostly in candidates’ own words, simple opinions on them were offered rather than evaluation of them. For example, many wrote that they agreed that children under 2 should have no screen time but that teenagers should not be restricted but did not offer a rationale for their judgements. In some responses given 6 marks for Reading the arguments in the passage were regrouped a little but some contradictions or more subtle ideas were not addressed. Sometimes the evidence given in the article for harmful effects was simply refuted and the opposite view asserted rather than justified. One response, for example, claimed that ‘parents shouldn’t restrict teenagers from playing games because it’s not true that these games cause lack of sleep or aggression.’ To score higher marks for Reading, Examiners looked for some scrutiny of the apparent contradictions in the article rather than reproduction of them.

Weaker responses showed some misunderstanding, drifted away from the passages or addressed the material thinly. Some tracked through the passages simply but gave a straightforward paraphrase with little reorganisation and often some lifting of words and phrases from the passage so that Examiners were not convinced that the main ideas were understood. Misunderstanding of some ideas, such as the recommendation that entertainment screen time rather than all screen time should be restricted was common. Copying of phrases such as ‘we use them to communicate, to shop, to share’ and ‘kids can stumble on inappropriate content accidentally’ was also very common. Where a mark of 4 was awarded, some firmer links with the passages were needed, whereas 3 was generally given for very thin or mainly lifted responses in which there was some insecure grasp of the ideas in the passage.

### **Marks for Writing**

15 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, polite tone was required for a letter to an unknown individual at a website publisher and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. Although not always sustained, most letters began with a straightforward introduction, referencing the article and outlining the purpose of writing. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical, stylistically persuasive style and presented their arguments with some subtlety of tone, always maintaining a formally polite tone but making their case effectively and with some impact. As mentioned above, some responses adopted the voice of a parent in order to argue from a more mature viewpoint, while most were written from the perspective of a young person.

In the middle range, the letter usually began in an appropriate tone and style but there were lapses in awareness of audience. The content and tone of the letter, once the opening sentences were given, became more a report of what was written in the article and often the valediction at the end of the letter was forgotten. Most often at this level there was limited argument to give the response shape and purpose, even where the passage was adequately reproduced. Several points made in the passage were listed and agreed or disagreed with but there was limited overall argument or structured discussion.

Weaker responses sometimes had limited overall cohesion because the different opinions in the passage were simply reproduced as they appeared in the original.

## Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the decision which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the passages but the response was not dependent on the passage for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the first paragraph and the information and opinion in the article were assumed rather than restated. The opening and concluding paragraphs addressed the purpose of the letter clearly and objectively, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case.

Responses given Band 6 marks for Writing tended to reflect the sequence of points made in the passage but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed so that conflicting ideas were addressed separately, often addressing the harmful effects of screen use, then the benefits, with some conclusions drawn in the final section of the letter. Weaker responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passage whereas Band 5 responses usually organised and re-sequenced ideas more selectively. Straightforward Band 5 responses were paragraphed and balanced and followed the conventional structure of letters, though opening and concluding paragraphs were often brief, single sentences and the conventional ending of a formal letter was not used in many responses.

Some weaker responses given marks below Band 5 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passages, often with some lifting and copying. This approach led to some weakness in cohesion and paragraphing was not used securely or was completely lacking.

## Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 7. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used to create specific effects. Rhetorical flourishes, such as the use of contentious, challenging questions or exclamations, were often used at this level, such as 'It's not only Dr Strasburger's grasp of technology which is outdated and old-fashioned but his attitude to young people!' or 'How do parents hope to limit their children's use of screens when they can barely tear themselves away from their own phones to check what their kids are doing?'

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Band 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt. 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. Commonly used words were also wrongly spelled in responses at this level, especially homophones and some words used in the passage such as 'communicate', 'viewing', 'obesity' and 'accidentally'. There were occasional lapses in the use of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical disagreement. Tenses were sometimes problematic: many responses at this level began with statements such as 'I had recently read your article...', for example.

Faulty sentence structures, insecure tense use or weakly demarcated sentences often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Band 5, even where other technical skills such as spelling were more accurate. 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 Band 35 where mostly correctly structured sentences are required. The omission of definite or indefinite articles, tense errors and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the passage was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially 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 and disagree with ideas in the passage and always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage
- look for, and use in your response, inferences and assumptions made by the writer
- aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well as some depth in evaluating them
- be aware of the audience for your writing and adapt your style accordingly and think carefully about the kind of style the recipient of your letter would expect as well as how letters should begin and end
- check 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 2**

### **Descriptive Writing**

#### **Question 2**

**(a) Describe a familiar place at an unusual time or from a different point of view.**

**(b) Describe what you see, hear and feel when you look up into the sky as day changes into night.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates though the second task was more often selected. Examiners saw a range of different approaches to the tasks. In the first task, there were some strongly evocative descriptions of houses, villages and towns which were revealed anew to the narrator at different times of the day or after a long absence. One fairly common subject was the return of the writer to a much loved childhood space or building, such as the home of a grandparent, a school or park. Another frequent use of the title was to describe a familiar space, such as the writer's street or home, at an unusual time. Description of such landscapes at dead of night or in the early hours of the morning gave candidates an opportunity to recreate a strong atmosphere: some were intimidated by the eerie silence of the scene while others found the transformation of familiar sights enlightening or interesting.

In the second question, a wide variety of details and images was used to describe the changing sky at dusk. Some descriptions focused on the encroaching darkness of the sky while others widened their canvas to include a wider range of details about the surrounding landscape.

Some successful responses to the first question focused on the writer's thoughts and feelings as they approached or looked at a once familiar scene. Dilapidated or abandoned buildings such as a childhood home or the home of a close, much loved relative featured in a number of evocative responses to this question. There were striking images of household objects, toys or pictures, gardens or outbuildings which tapped into long-gone memories of happy times or significant people. Unusual or apparently insignificant but closely observed details created an impression of reality in the best responses. Most were constructed in a

fairly straightforward way, with a paragraph devoted to some aspect of the scene, though many were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed scene which was often emotionally charged. At the top of the mark range, some highly skilled writing took the reader on a journey into the narrator's childhood or past, not always reflecting pleasant memories and creating cohesive responses held together by a single thread or concept of ideas. The sense of looking at mundane, very familiar scenes in a new light also featured strongly in better responses to this question. One effective piece described the narrator walking through a quiet house from bedroom to kitchen at dead of night when some very ordinary, domestic objects became imbued with a sense of threat or danger. Some featured an empty school building to which the narrator had to return after class or at night, finding the classrooms and corridors echoing and empty. These consciously crafted pieces in no way fell into narration but held the reader's interest by linking the different elements described in an engaging way. In a significant number of responses at Band 6 and above, there was some conscious use of personification which was often quite effective. The streetlights of a familiar street 'leered evilly' or the broken rocking-horse in a grandmother's house 'stared accusingly', for example, and where this technique was controlled and not over-used, the effects created were interesting for the reader.

Middle range responses were characterised by rather more obvious images and ideas and the sensory impressions given were more mechanically listed and organised in different paragraphs. Vines or ivy climbing the walls of a childhood home or other once familiar building or the sounds of the narrator's footsteps in an empty corridor featured commonly, and although the images used were less original and striking, they were relevant and apt and some were more effective. Few responses at this level lapsed into narrative with little real description or lost the main features of descriptive writing. At the lower end of Band 5 for Content and Structure, some responses were a little unbalanced and included a long introductory preamble which explained why and how the writer came to be in the place described and this sometimes tended to overshadow an otherwise competent descriptive piece. In some, the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard and lacked the emotional engagement suggested by the title which was evoked in better responses. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses given higher marks.

Weaker responses were characterised by a tendency to list details briefly rather than effectively develop them or a narrative introduction became a series of events rather than a preamble to description. Sometimes there seemed little sense of 'a familiar place' as required in the task or details of the journey to a place and the reasons for it tended to overwhelm the descriptive elements in some responses at this level. Most responses to this question were organised and paragraphed but at this level the descriptions of each feature were brief and general rather than developed and specific.

The second question was more often selected and there were some effective and highly skilled descriptions here. Various scenarios worked well for candidates given high marks for Content and Structure here. While most depicted an awe-inspiring, beautiful skyscape, some effectively evoked the transition from day to night as threatening or used an unusual viewpoint or voice. A few responses, for example, were written as if the narrator were a nocturnal animal, watching and waiting with anticipation for the night to arrive and observing the smallest details from this interesting perspective. One response described in a controlled and oddly chilling way the effect of the darkness on the vampire narrator as the transformation in the night sky was reflected in the transformation of the narrator's mind and body. In similarly effective descriptions at this level, the emotional impact of the changing sky on the narrator was observed. One which described the darkening sky in detail, for example, wrote about 'melting into the stars, as insignificant in this vast universe as a grain of sand in a desert, but part of all creation' and other responses evoked this sense of awe and wonder in different ways.

Some successful responses interpreted the title more widely, with the transition from day to night in busy cities, harbours, beaches and on airplanes giving able candidates opportunities to focus on other details. While there were some effective responses which interpreted the title more widely, some at Band 5 and below tended to focus more on the landscape rather than the sky, describing the streetlights coming on in the town or people gathering in nightclubs and bars in the city.

Examiners gave marks below Band 5 where the writing was more typically narrative than descriptive in focus, and where there was limited organisation of the details described or where strings of details were listed with limited overall cohesion. At this level, responses became simple, unengaging accounts of an event rather than a description of the surroundings at the time. In other responses, the description was general rather than specific, usually including some rather clichéd ideas such as the whistling of the wind in the trees, the chirping of crickets and birds going home to their nests.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were, in the best responses, reflective of the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, the same kinds of details were often included but better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary and showed an ability to use language deliberately to create a specific effect, such as the nostalgia of childhood in the first task or the sense of wonder in the second. In the middle range, vocabulary was less rich and varied but there was still a fair degree of accuracy in spelling and sentence construction. In weaker responses, as is often the case in descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences were common, even in scripts where responses to **Question 1** showed a secure grasp of sentence structure, and limited control of tenses was quite widespread. A very common weakness here also was the demarcation of sentences with commas rather than full stops. This often meant that Examiners could not award marks in Band 5 where the style was otherwise quite accurate and secure.

### 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.
- choose your vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects.

### Narrative Writing

#### Question 3

- (a) Write a story which includes the words, 'I tried to stay calm'.  
(b) Write a story with the title, 'It's Now or Never'.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses. Examiners sometimes saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title or where the given title or the quotation in the question was not used or the story did not really use these ideas. These narratives seemed to be answers to previously set questions rather than those on the current paper.

Better responses, as is often the case in narrative writing, were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used interesting but credible ideas and developed balanced and engaging stories. Both narrative titles implied some build-up of tension or a moment of decision or crisis and most candidates made use of this to help construct their stories.

There were various structures employed in better responses to the first question, rather than straightforward chronological recount. Stories sometimes began with the quotation from the title with some skilful release of significant detail as the story unfolded. One effective story began with the quotation, suggesting some confrontation between the narrator and another intimidating figure whose eyes 'glittered with venom'. Only as the story ended did the identity of both characters emerge as two young children in a playground and the carefully controlled bathos gave the ending humour and impact. A wide range of scenarios was created in response to this title, often effectively creating tension and some resolution which maintained the reader's interest. Some high-scoring narratives were written in specific genres, such as fantasy battles between warring peoples or stories about more contemporary battle zones. Better responses showed an ability to create characters that were believable, even if the scenario itself was fantastic or unfamiliar. War stories in which difficult missions were undertaken were often very successful if the characterisation of the main protagonists was credible and rooted in detail and observation. Sports stories centred around football matches or other sporting feats were also sometimes more effective because there was a carefully delineated relationship between players or between a player and a coach. While there were some graphic or violent scenes included in many responses, at the highest level these were written with restraint and control which made them all the more effective.

Middle range narratives were usually more straightforward in structure and approach and in some cases these responses sometimes relied on some over-dramatic and less likely scenarios, such as robberies or kidnappings. Examiners could award marks in Band 5 for Content and Structure, even where the sequence of events was not very credible, provided the narrative was organised and there was some attempt at characterisation. Responses in this range, whilst often more predictable, were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution or conclusion to the story overall. Sporting narratives or school stories were common at this range and were usually told in a straightforward chronological sequence. Some began with the title quotation but resorted to 'It all began when...' to relate how this point



was reached, producing clear accounts which were cohesive but without the drama and impact of better responses.

Weaker responses were often more dependent on a simple series of events which led up to a moment of tension, as implied in the task, but which lacked attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Often the same kinds of scenarios as in better responses were used, such as sports matches, but there was less awareness of the needs of the reader. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than creating characters. While the majority of less effective responses offered a simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative style. Occasionally, Examiners found that responses were more discursive than narrative, with some reflections on the need to stay calm but with limited narrative shaping and content.

For the second narrative question, there were varied interpretations of the title. Many narratives made use of the sense of a critical moment implied in the title. Some responses built a narrative around a more concrete moment of danger or threat from an intruder or attacker of various kinds. Others used the 'Now or Never' idea to show a moment of decision or depict a personal journey which reached a climax. Both approaches resulted in some high level, effective and engaging stories. Narrators sometimes reached important moments in their professional or academic lives, or were confronted by other kinds of difficult decisions, and while these ideas featured across the mark range, better responses prepared the reader and shaped the narrative in an engaging way. One thoughtful response featured a deeply troubled narrator whose anxieties and fears were convincingly developed to engage the reader's sympathy and for whom the 'Now or Never' moment involved a simple social event. The care taken to engage the reader meant that the sense of the narrator having overcome some real and credible obstacles was poignant and convincing.

Band 5 responses were generally more straightforward accounts in which the content was ordinary but there was still some organisation and shaping of the narrative and a cohesive story was produced. These tended to be a little less imaginative in their interpretation of the task but with some understanding of how stories create interest for the reader. Clinching moments in football matches or other sporting events were described with varying levels of success in developing credible plots and characters. Straightforward accounts of work undertaken to achieve academic or professional goals were also evident. Some scenarios involved more dramatic events but were less developed and convincing. Robberies or intruders being confronted by terrified narrators were quite common at this level, as were war scenarios in which some important mission had to be carried out. While stories at this level were often cohesive and organised, there was less attention paid to the kind of characterisation and relationships between characters which helps to engage the reader.

Responses given marks in Band 6 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. Scenarios which quickly became clichéd and unengaging were used, such as murders, kidnappings or chases, many of which lacked credible explanation. These responses lacked narrative shaping and interest. Some produced organised and paragraphed pieces which were more discursive than narrative in style and intent.

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. Punctuation within sentences, in dialogue and for effect was skilfully used in responses in the higher Bands and where coupled with a sophisticated palette of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. Responses awarded marks in Band 6 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still accurate and largely fluent while Band 5 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary but had few errors which damaged the clarity of meaning such as weak sentence control and sentence separation.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Band 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 Band 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the mis-spelling 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. The misuse of capital letters was fairly common from Band 4 downwards. The most frequent reason for keeping an otherwise clearly written story out of Band 5 was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, though the mixing of tenses was also prevalent in the descriptive writing.

A controlled, competent style secured a mark in Band 5 and even when written in a fairly pedestrian style Examiners could award a mark of 7 or 8. Where there were errors, even quite frequent errors, but the style had more ambition and variety, a mark of 9 was awarded. Weaknesses in constructing sentences, comma-splicing or frequent basic spelling and punctuation errors resulted in marks below Band 5. In some cases, despite accurate sentence construction, sentence structures were simple and repetitive and the vocabulary was limited and fairly simple. A few responses were very brief and faulty in style, making it difficult to follow the meaning. These were given marks lower than Band 4.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:**

- think about the build-up towards the most important moment in your story
- try to consider alternative interpretations of the titles given
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader; do not rely on retelling events
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.