

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/12
Reading Passages

Key messages

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

In **Questions 1(g)(ii)**, **1(g)(iv)** and **1(g)(vi)**, candidates should focus their response on describing the effect of the whole phrase not the underlined word explained in the previous question.

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** and avoid copying from the passage.

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

In **Question 3(b)**, candidates should try to reorganise the material and write in their own words where possible.

General comments

Overall, the passages proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates and they responded positively to both passages and questions. The vocabulary was within the range of candidates at this level; 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. In general, the questions enabled all candidates to produce some correct answers while at the same time challenging those who were more perceptive to gain higher marks. 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. Where a response had not been attempted it tended to be to **Questions 1(g)** or **3(b)**.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates identified the correct answer 'solitary'. A number incorrectly identified 'lonely' and some offered 'chestnuts'. A number of candidates did not follow the rubric of the question by identifying a single word instead offering a lifted phrase or sentence.
- (b) Most candidates gained both marks available for this question. Most stated that the song was sad and about her lover or partner. Candidates could reword the passage or gain credit for selecting relevant words. Excessive lifting denied the marks.
- (c) (i) A number of candidates explained that the writer was more energetic and received a mark for this question. Many lifted 'refreshed and revitalised' without showing understanding and were not rewarded.
- (ii) To gain this mark candidates needed to show understanding that Modestine began to move more quickly. A large number of candidates lifted 'forced her hooves to a livelier pace' which was not credited. Some did not refer to Modestine's pace at all instead referring to the inspiration of the moonlight.
- (d) For the first mark candidates needed to explain the misshapen shadows of either the writer or Modestine using their own words. A number of candidates were able to explain this in their own words, however many offered 'twisted', 'out of shape' or 'distorted' which denied the mark. For the second mark candidates needed to explain that the shadows moved or appeared to move. The majority of candidates did not refer to movement at all. Very few got both marks for this question.
- (e) (i) A number of candidates were able to explain that the music referred to was the sound of the wind or the breeze. Where candidates did not offer the correct answer, they tended to claim that the music was in his head, or that the music was soft, neither of which answered the question fully.
- (ii) To gain the mark for this part of the question, candidates needed to explain that danced in tunes means moved in time or any own words equivalent. A number of candidates could explain this correctly, but some were confused and discussed the trees moving rather than explaining the phrase in the question.
- (f) This was a very straightforward question and the vast majority of candidates got 2 marks by mentioning the fact that she was about the close the inn, that she had to relight the fire or that she had to cook her visitor supper.
- (g) The new layout of **Question 1(g)** 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.
- (i) The majority of candidates were able to explain the word 'carpeted' as used in the context of the passage. Most offered the phrase 'covered' or 'layered'. Very few candidates offered an incorrect response.
- (ii) Many candidates found it challenging to explain the whole phrase in this question despite being able to attain marks for explaining the silence or emptiness of the road or the softness of the dust covering. Many simply repeated the quotation without attempting to explain it in their own words.
- (iii) The word 'gullies' caused problems for a number of candidates. A few did identify the idea of troughs, dips or valleys in the mountains, but some thought it was associated with intestines. Only a minority of candidates were able to gain this mark.

- (iv) Many candidates paraphrased the given quotation by lifting words from it, particularly the words 'monstrous skeleton'. Very few candidates were able to explain the distortion of the mountain caused by the moonlight, its immense size, or the eerie effect created.
- (v) This was the most accessible word in **1(g)** and a number of candidates were able to offer a correct meaning by citing the intensity of the darkness.
- (vi) Answers which focused on the noiselessness, loneliness or isolation here gained the marks. Some candidates also said it was mysterious or creepy and were rewarded. Again, many candidates simply repeated their explanation of opaque, lifted 'asleep and silent', or quoted the whole phrase.

Question 2

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 the landlady's thoughts and feelings about the writer and her conversation with him. The vast majority of candidates were comfortable writing a personal journal offering an appropriately confiding and honest 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 landlady's reaction to the writer's late arrival the previous night, offered their impressions of the writer's journey through the French countryside, and then described her thoughts about his undertaking such a long and lonely trip with just a donkey for company. The ability to adapt the perspective from the writer's viewpoint to describe the landlady's impressions of the journey was a key differentiator in this question, as well as how carefully candidates looked for and used the details in the passage to address the bullet points.

Many candidates attempted to cover the three bullet points offering a balanced response to the whole task. However, although some candidates produced promising journal entries, they only focused on the first two bullets in the question, simply addressing the third bullet point by wishing him well on his onward journey or writing one sentence to express concern or sympathy. There was no attempt to use the details given earlier in the passage to muse about the peace and solitude experienced, the beauty of the journey, the bravery and self-denial of the writer, or this adventurous nature. These responses often gave convincing descriptions of landlady's irritation when the writer arrived so late, her softened reaction when she decided to give him supper and an account of his travels as told to her over the supper table. Many of the responses developed the ideas in the passage effectively for these 2 bullets, building up a convincing voice for the landlady and her growing interest in the writer who has arrived so unexpectedly at her inn. However, a significant number of candidates chose to largely ignore the third bullet point. This meant that opportunities to develop ideas in the passage about how the writer may have been perceived by local people as he journeyed through France on a donkey were not taken.

A number of candidates mistakenly thought that the woman singing the ballad was also the landlady which caused some confusion as they thought that she was or had been romantically involved with the writer. Some responses simply narrated the events of the passage in response to bullet 2 with no attempt to reframe them using the landlady's perspective. At times there were factual inaccuracies, sometimes linked to a lack of understanding of the 19th-century setting of the passage. A small minority of candidates merely copied extracts from the passage with very few own words or produced responses which were too close to the original passage. This was particularly problematic with bullet 2.

To gain the higher marks of 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 this session wrote imagined responses, although there were a few candidates who ignored the passage and wrote about a different lonely journey, searching for gold, for example. 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 – and there were a number – managed to develop imaginatively all three bullet points using and developing the finer details in the passage. These responses firmly tethered any development to the landlady's impressions of the writer developed through clear references to their conversation.

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) This question gave candidates the chance to boost their total marks by appropriate selection. It was generally answered quite well with many candidates making one point per line as instructed and focusing on the topic and the question. However, there were a small number of candidates who (largely by selective lifting) 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, most notably focused on the artificial island or the three sections of the crossing, or the linking of the two main cities. There was less repetition this session, but still inclusion of irrelevant points that did not address the question, mostly concerned with the history and politics of the planning of the bridge. Some candidates included 3 or more irrelevant points. The question clearly asked for points relating to the features of the bridge and its effects on the surrounding areas, but 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) A number of candidates were able to achieve Band 3 for clear, concise and fluent summaries mainly expressed in own words, however, many candidates' responses were Band 2 (some concision but dependent on the words of the passage). Many of these responses had lengthy sections that were irrelevant as they focused on the political history of the bridge rather than addressing the question. The least successful responses, of which there were only a few, tended to be lengthy, including unnecessary details, repetition or unselective 'lifting'. The most successful responses showed careful planning and organisation of material with some synthesis of points. Middle range responses tended to be rather wordy with lack of focus on the question. The weakest responses copied unselectively or were extremely brief.

Most candidates tried to write with some concision and to use own words where possible. Better responses managed to reorganise points and to stay focused on the two aspects of the question, although a large number did include irrelevant material. There were some responses which started off quite well but then became less relevant by starting to copy lengthy chunks of the passage. A good number of candidates lifted material selectively but comparatively few merely copied from the passage with no recasting. The most commonly lifted phrases were 'created a region with a population of 3.7 million', 'the position of the bridge near Copenhagen Airport also played a role', 'linking the bridge and the tunnel is the man-made island of Peberholm' and 'it is now easier than ever to live on one side of Øresund and work on the other'. The best responses were organised, concise, with some own words and sustained focus.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/22
Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- avoided copying and/or lifting from either text
- focused on the ideas and details in each passage rather than inventing untethered material
- used their own words appropriately and precisely when explaining, using and interpreting ideas
- considered carefully the particular evidence of skills and understanding they needed to show for each of the three tasks
- addressed tasks in the order set, paying attention to the guidance and instructions for each
- returned to the text when necessary to check understanding of an idea or important detail
- planned the ideas they would use 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 errors, 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 familiarity with the format of the paper and some understanding of the general demands of the three tasks. There were relatively few instances where a task had not been attempted, though on occasion responses to questions were incomplete with answers self-limiting as a result. Examiners noted that a small number of candidates had attempted to answer the tasks out of order and had found time management more difficult as a result.

Candidates appeared to find both texts equally accessible though 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 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**. Whilst answers across the cohort covered the full range of marks for each question, opportunities to target higher bands were often missed where candidates offered only explicit and/or more generalised points, 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 simply repeat or copy, material from the text in their answer. The most successful responses paid attention to the specific focus of each task and were able to modify relevant material from the texts skilfully, adapting and using it to demonstrate understanding. Less successful responses were often over-reliant on the wording and/or sequence of the text(s) providing less convincing evidence of skills and understanding as a result. Centres are reminded that basic paraphrasing, lifting and/or copying of the text should be avoided.

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

Question 1 responses for the most part had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task. Most candidates had remembered to sign off their letter as Willie, though in the body of their response a number of potentially stronger answers lapsed back into the voice of the original tourist narrator, missing opportunities for development as a result. In some responses, misreading of key details was a limiting feature. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passage, with the best adopting Willie's perspective convincingly and considering the clues to Adam's attitude and approach carefully. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities as a consequence of adopting a more mechanical treatment of the text and leaning heavily on the structure of the original passage. Less successful responses either included only brief reference to the passage and/or repeated sections from the text with minimal modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text 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 should offer comments in relation to these choices. To aim for higher bands, candidates should explore and explain in some detail the precise meanings in context and effects of the examples of interesting or powerful language use they have identified, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose. Most were able to suggest potentially useful examples for analysis in each half of the task, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently clear or careful in the examination of their choices. In **part (b)** particularly, a number repeated the language of the choices in their explanations, 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 the same idea and/or inclusion of material not relevant to the focus of the question meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. A few 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 copied from the text, with minimal/no rewording or reorganisation of the original. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. 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.

Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, however 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 Willie, the trainee Inuit guide. After the Arctic cruise is over, you write a letter to your girlfriend, Eska.

Write the letter.

In your letter, you should explain:

- where you took the tourists and what activities were organised for them**
- what you think the tourists expected and how far you think they were satisfied**
- your thoughts and feelings about Adam as a tour guide.**

**Base your letter 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 letter: 'Dear Eska, We have just come back from another tourist cruise around the Arctic ...'

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood the text and task; many offered convincing responses, engaging with both task and text to develop lively responses. Candidates commented on the events of the narrative to make explicit for their imagined reader, Eska, some of those underlying ideas and attitudes only hinted at in the passage. Where content had been planned in advance, and the route through their answer considered beforehand, candidates were often able to include a good range of relevant ideas – both explicit and implicit – over all three bullets. Where responses relied on just tracking through the text, replaying the passage, answers were less focused and often simply repeated details of the journey without offering any interpretation from Willie’s perspective. The least successful responses copied sections of text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading of key details and information.

The most convincing responses to **Question 1** indicated that candidates had revisited the passage to examine carefully the details of Adam’s actions and behaviour and make judgements based on the evidence in the text about how Willie might view him. Many candidates had spotted the ‘*broad wink*’ that prompted Willie’s ‘*apparently uncontrollable giggles*’ and recognised that it suggested some kind of joke between Willie and Adam at the expense of the tourists, though fewer then returned to the text in the light of that understanding to establish that Adam’s ‘*intrepid polar bear monitor*’ was an elaborate act. Where candidates had read less closely and not considered how the tour guides’ perspectives might differ from those of the tourist narrator, they sometimes struggled to offer relevant development as a consequence.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to include in their letter explanation of where the tourists were taken and what activities were organised for them. Bullets two and three guided candidates to include Willie’s thoughts in relation to the tourists’ expectations and Adam as a tour guide. Whilst some successful answers relied on the order of the bullets to help structure their answer, stronger answers had often spotted and exploited the potential offered by considering all three aspects throughout their response. They developed and linked their ideas – for example, noting that Adam had organised for tourists to view an amazing array of wildlife but recognised that all the tourists wanted to see was polar bears and had created drama around that. The best answers often let Eska in on the joke from the start – explaining that she too would have found it amusing how easily the tourists were fooled by Adam’s act during the land expedition and might be equally frustrated at the tourists’ stereotypical expectations of their lives. Answers demonstrating evidence of thorough reading often dealt with the implications of the ‘*sharp look*’, with Willie for example, admitting to Eska that he had got into trouble by nearly giving the game away with his reactions.

Where candidates had dealt with each bullet separately, ideas related to the journey and organised activities were often only hinted at through passing detail and opportunities for development were not taken. For example, the views of awe-inspiring scenery were just touched on in some responses through casual reference to sailing past the ‘*dark mountains of Frobisher bay*’ as candidates replayed the text. Answers that attempted to paraphrase the passage in response to bullet one quickly became repetitive and/or paid limited attention to bullets two and three as a result. Where candidates had identified key aspects of the itinerary from the tourist’s narrative and gone on to interpret and support those with useful detail from the passage, they were best able to extend and develop ideas to offer an appropriate voice for Willie’s thoughts and a balanced response covering all three bullets. Errors regarding the local food offering – including the suggestion that tourists were invited to eat walrus – and suggestions that activities included tourists paddling canoes (or watching a man paddling) through Frobisher Bay indicated that more careful reading was required. Less successful responses that suggested that saunas, penguin spotting trips and swimming pools had been provided for the tourists were operating outside of the text. Candidates need to remember that any development offered has to be rooted in the facts and details of passage to be creditworthy as evidence of their reading skills and understanding.

In relation to the second bullet, almost all answers recognised that the tourists had expected a very different boat and/or cruise to the one with which they were presented. Better answers teased out the detail of their expectations and surprise. Some candidates who were reading closely considered and offered relevant interpretation for more subtle ideas – for example, why only the guides might have looked unconcerned as the ship ‘*ploughed through the ice floes*’ and ‘*sliced through*’ an iceberg. Some linked this to the sturdy nature of the ship and mocked guests’ expectations of an exotic cruise liner when a far more serviceable and reliable vessel was required. Others suggested that what tourists might have regarded a dangerous collision with an iceberg was nothing remarkable to the local guides and/or a deliberate stunt on their part designed to spook their guests and/or create a sense of adventure and excite the guests. A few answers interpreted the tourists as keen to learn – citing the evidence of their questioning – others regarded their response to Adam’s story as further evidence of their gullibility and/or stereotypical expectations of Arctic life. More successful answers had often noted the tourists’ surprise at Willie’s mode of transport and developed the idea by offering his reaction to their limited view of Inuit life – often linking into explanations of Adam’s exasperation and/or their choice to eat separately and consume different foodstuffs to those they offered the

tourists. In less well focused responses, enthusiastic descriptions of tourists riding on sleds pulled by huskies, fighting with polar bears and sailing their own boats by day were indicators of significant misreading. Meanwhile, in other potentially stronger responses insufficient consideration of key hints and details meant opportunities were missed to make connections and offer well related, sustained development. Closer reading allowed those candidates who noted that tourists wanted and expected to see polar bears, but were (only) treated to a glimpse early on plus a lucky strike of one swimming past after a whole two days of searching, were often able then to decide on the likelihood of there being any real bear '*lurking*' nearby during their land expedition.

In dealing with ideas related to bullet three most answers were able to include details such as Adam taking a long time to pick out the route, the rifle strapped to his back and his constant checking from left to right. Where answers had simply lifted these and other details from the text without considering what they might suggest, understanding evidenced was often general at best. As with bullets one and two, the weakest answers when attempting to deal with bullet three relied on copying part or whole sentences word-for-word from the text and in doing so were unlikely to evidence more than limited evidence of understanding. Answers copied from the text often also included suggestions of misreading, such as asserting that Adam carried '*an intrepid polar bear monitor*'. More secure answers were able to suggest that Adam appeared to be a brave, knowledgeable and/or efficient guide, with the best going on to suggest just how much of this was an act designed by a competent and convincing business owner to meet tourists' expectations.

In creating a voice for trainee guide Willie, stronger responses had often picked up on the suggestion from his sharing of the photos that he might miss Eska and/or his life in Nunavut and took the opportunity to develop a number of ideas further from this angle. For example, they suggested what she would enjoy and/or find amusing should she be able to accompany him on his next trip, or described the photos/videos he had on his phone to show her once he was back of variously scared, amazed or hoodwinked tourists and Adam's theatrical performance as the intrepid polar bear monitor. A few strayed too far into speculation about unwell relatives and past/future trips abroad, though passing reference to domestic arrangements – such as '*remember to clean the car*' – along with some touching valedictions, often helped to create a sense of engagement with the character and form of the response. 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. In the weakest answers, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of whole 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 lively and relaxed, conversational style with own words used to good effect as Willie reflected on the voyage and shared his thoughts.

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
keep the audience and purpose for your response in mind throughout your answer
decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain that in your answer
read the whole text carefully, more than once, and reconsider any points that you are unsure of
do not invent information and details beyond the scope of the passage; use the clues and evidence in the text to make judgements about characters and situations
give equal attention to each of the three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of 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 or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
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) the sightings in Ungava Bay in paragraph 2, beginning ‘The adventure ...’
(b) Adam and his actions in paragraph 3, beginning ‘We did most of our sailing ...’

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. Strong answers offered clear analysis of relevant selections in both parts, 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 were able to avoid those more generalised comments of weaker answers which offered only partial explanation of the phrase as a whole or which selected incomplete choices and then attempted to explain words they had not included. The strongest responses considered words within choices individually, as well as suggesting 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 (b)**, some less focused answers attempted to discuss choices that were not related to Adam and his actions, such as ‘*uncontrollable giggles*’ or ‘*opportunity to stretch our legs*’, and missed opportunities to target higher bands as a result. In **part (a)**, some answers selected only part of a longer image, limiting the evidence of understanding offered. For example, choosing to explain ‘*eerie ghost ship*’ led some candidates to discuss an actual abandoned ship appearing ahead of the Russian ship, failing to notice that the image referred to the iceberg. Misreading was also evident in relation to other choices such as ‘*loomed closer*’ and ‘*black stormy clouds*’, which were taken to be references to the yellow-white polar bear and the actual weather conditions at the time respectively. Careful reading might also have helped candidates avoid errors such as attempting to explain the use of ‘*bellowing*’ rather than ‘*billowing*’ and ‘*slumbering*’ rather than ‘*lumbering*’.

Repetition of the vocabulary of the text in the explanations offered was common in less successful answers, whilst more successful responses were able to offer explanations of precise meaning in their own words which then lead them on to consider effect. Some better answers for example managed to avoid replaying the variations of ‘*protective*’, ‘*alert*’ and ‘*heavily*’ that were a feature of many partially effective responses, and demonstrated understanding of the choices made by the writer by consideration of synonyms, associations and through effective visualisation of images.

Where the meaning of words had been 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 (b)**, having considered the precise meaning in context of choices such as ‘*as regularly as a pendulum*’ and ‘*intrepid polar bear monitor*’ many candidates went on to suggest something mechanical and predetermined about Adam’s approach, with some suggesting the ludicrous picture created through images of Adam theatrically cupping his ear to hear the ‘*creature*’ and controlling the tourists with a mere ‘*flick*’ of the hand. Often answers had picked up on the associations of such words as ‘*command*’ and ‘*immediate*’ and were able to offer understanding of how these created a sense of danger, though fewer went on to consider layers of meaning and effect – for example, to explore whether the sense of threat was real or imagined.

Meanwhile, opportunities to target higher marks were sometimes missed where meaning in context was not carefully considered or explained – for example, suggestions that ‘*stealthily pad round us*’ meant that Adam was cushioning the tourists (from the cold) or providing with layers of protection (in case they fell over) were not accurate and could not be credited. Similarly, candidates are reminded of the need to ensure that their explanations can be clearly understood in **Question 2**. Whilst the task is not assessing writing, encouraging learners to explore choices fully and operate at the very edges of their vocabulary, it is nevertheless important that they read back their explanation to check that what they have written is what they mean. For example, suggesting that ‘*glimpse means to see something shortly*’ is not the same as saying that to glimpse means to see something for a short while.

Candidates are reminded it is the quality of their analysis which attracts marks. Answers which 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 some candidates who selected it were able to offer credible and varied interpretations of the effect created by the description of the iceberg having '*twisted and turned*', others struggled to comment as a consequence of having simply identified the choice as '*an example of alliteration*'. 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 both and might have achieved higher marks by extending their explanations to consider how or why a particular synonym had been selected in favour of another to demonstrate that they understood some of the subtleties of how language can work. Where candidates had unpicked choices carefully, they often offered interesting and imaginative explanations – for example, as to why the writer might have chosen '*vast*' to explain the overwhelming numbers of murrelets filling the air, rather than big or enormous, or how associations and connotations of '*hulking*' suggested a solid muscular build indicating physical power rather than simply meaning huge or large. Answers sometimes prejudiced the evidence of understanding they were able to demonstrate in relation to meaning and effect by attempting to discuss selections outside of the context of the text – for example, some answers tried to explain '*lumbering*' as chopping wood – or through inaccurate copying – for example, referencing a sleepy bear '*slumbering heavily*'. Better answers that focused on exploring and explaining each of their choices carefully and in detail, were able to offer 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 which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful and result in very thin general comments at best. 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 chose '*the eerie ghost ship of an iceberg appeared*' but missed the chance to consider the meaning or effect of '*appeared*' or even '*eerie*', limiting their suggestions to generalised comments regarding the scary nature of being haunted by ghosts. Similarly, some candidates attempted to guess at the meanings of words they did not understand rather than select those where their understanding of meaning might be more secure – '*disdain*', '*painstakingly*' and '*billowing*' were often selected by candidates who then struggled to explain them, overlooking arguably more accessible alternatives such as '*blinding ice*' and '*revealed*' which might have proved more profitable. Likewise, examiners noted that some candidates who wrote at some length in **Question 2**, offering relevant suggestions in **part (b)** such as that Adam's movements variously appeared to be robotic, deliberately exaggerated and/or comedic, had completely overlooked that aspect in their **Question 1** answer and might have usefully returned to their letter to correct their mistake.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- once you think you have identified 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 shows us what it is like to be there*' – unless you say how and in what way your chosen example does this you are not showing understanding
- consider each of the key words within your identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- 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 factors influenced traditional lives of the Inuit communities and how has life in Inuit communities changed since the 1940s, 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 selective summary task successfully often showed evidence of having planned the content and organisation of their answer before writing their response. There were some very effective, well-crafted responses that demonstrated concision and accurate reading of the passage and question. Some candidates chose to deal with each part of the task in turn, others dealt with both at the same time, highlighting each factor in turn and linking where relevant to an aspect of how things had changed. Both approaches worked well in carefully planned and executed answers. The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the demands of the task and carefully avoided inclusion of more obviously redundant material such as the explanations about language and locations in paragraph one. Better answers avoided excess through identifying only those points that were specifically relevant to the dual focus of the question (the factors that had influenced the traditional lives of Inuit and how life has changed). They distinguished between the facts of traditional life offered in the passage (such as Inuit having sleds and various types of boats) and the influencing factors (for example, the need to transport goods between summer and winter homes). Candidates who had spent time reviewing their initial selection of ideas were best placed to recognise similar examples of the same idea and were often able to group those examples usefully together under one umbrella point, avoiding repetition of ideas or inclusion of unnecessary detail.

Successful answers did not rely on the structure or language of Passage B to communicate ideas. Less effective responses often relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text and/or tried to work through the passage chronologically, indiscriminately recording any facet of Inuit life, old or new. In these answers excess material was commonplace – including descriptions of tent-like huts, sleds pulled by strong dogs and thick coats with big hoods, for instance, as well as repeated reference to ‘permanent settlements’ and the invention of aeroplanes. 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 and is likely to result in transcription errors that betray weaknesses in their comprehension – for example, through such errors as suggestions that ‘*sheds were pulled by huskies*’ or that ‘*transpired snow*’ was good for building with. Candidates need to show understanding of ideas rather than simply track the passage making minimal changes and/or slotting in substituted words.

As with **Question 1**, the weakest answers copied sections from the original text with little modification and/or were almost entirely reliant on the language of the text. Stronger answers were able to recast information, organise it helpfully, and use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing or blurring the original idea. Rather than seeking to ‘translate’ a key section of the whole text (leading to overlong answers) the best answers identified the central point in hand and made it clearly and succinctly in their own words. They avoided excess such as unhelpful lists of the creatures comprising traditional dietary options and the means by which these former ‘*staples of [the Inuit] diet*’ were captured by pinpointing the factor influencing such a meat-based diet according to the text – that growing their own plant-based food wasn’t practical or possible in the challenging conditions of tundra.

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. Candidates producing the most effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a wide range of relevant ideas, communicating them in their own words and skilfully selecting and organising/linking points where helpful to offer an overview. Successful answers read closely and carefully, avoiding the misreading of details evident in less secure answers – for example, that traditional life had been influenced by climate change rather than the challenges of the ‘*harsh climate*’ or that huskies were killed for their fur. Some potentially stronger answers offered comment and opinion adding further ideas not drawn from the text and losing sight of the task.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

re-read the passage after reading the task instructions, in order to identify potential relevant ideas given the focus of the question

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

return to any idea you are unsure of to check that you understand it before you try to use it

organise and sequence your ideas helpfully for your reader; do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the passage

aim to explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the passage would understand

write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning

do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage

avoid repetition of points

though it is not necessary 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 (9-1)

Paper 0990/32
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

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 how to approach the tasks in both sections, Directed Writing and Composition. The 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, though there were a small number where more than one Composition question was attempted. In **Question 1**, a few responses were mostly or wholly copied from the passages in the Reading Booklet Insert or, more commonly, where synonyms were used for some of the words and phrases in the passages and the structure of the passages was adopted with limited adaptation to the task.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the reading passages in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and register for a letter to a family member 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. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the passage to create a clear and persuasive argument. In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the passage, sometimes reiterating the arguments in the second passage but without commenting on their validity. Examiners noted that at this level responses used the arguments from the second passage to raise some doubts about the holidays described in the first, but without offering any critique of the arguments against eco-tourism given in the magazine article.

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 travel or the notion of 'eco-friendliness' or the environment in general were offered with limited reference to the specific ideas in the passage. The informal style required for a letter to someone familiar was understood by the majority of candidates though sometimes the tone and style of a letter was sometimes not sustained. For example, appropriate opening and closing sentences for the letter, particularly the valediction at the end, were fairly often not used.

More effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for an informal 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 with some awareness of the intended audience though a more discursive summary of the reading passages were given rather than a persuasive letter. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the passages with less selection and regrouping of ideas from the originals. This sometimes made for a disjointed and less coherent style and structure.

In the compositions, effective 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 hosted festivals of varied kinds in the first descriptive writing question which Examiners found engaging and effective. A wide range of approaches was employed in the second. Some used a contrast between a quiet time in a shop and a particularly busy time, while others focused on the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as the shop became overrun with customers. In both questions, descriptions were better when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene imaginatively. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions tended to contain straightforward physical descriptions or, often, some reliance on narrative with less descriptive focus.

The most successful 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.

Less effective narratives were less credible and there was often less overall cohesion and narrative purpose. Some were simple, chronological accounts and were under-developed as narratives and less cohesive in structure. The second question allowed for a wide range of interpretations of the idea of a 'journey', both physical and metaphorical, though some responses

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

Imagine you have a relative who wants to plan an eco-friendly holiday. They have asked for your advice. Write a letter to your relative offering your advice.

In your letter, you should:

- evaluate how far it is possible to be eco-friendly as a tourist**
- suggest the concerns your relative should have about booking a trip with Backpack.**

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 ...'

Write about 250 to 350 words.

As usual in the Directed Writing question, Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing or challenging of the points made in the passages, 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. Most effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the second passage and the way in which problematic aspects of eco-travel were skated over in the first. The highest marks were awarded for those where the contradictions inherent in the notion of eco-tourism were exposed 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. Some listed the explicit points in the passages about the places offered by Backpack, and the doubts expressed about eco-tourism in the second passage. Responses often included some opinion or reaction to the ideas in the passage though without evaluation of them. Examiners noted that many responses at this level offered the arguments in the second passage as their own but without applying real scrutiny to them.

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

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passages but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of ideas or the task was not properly understood. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic at this level, particularly where contradictory points conflicted with each other between the two passages. The letter often did not follow the conventions of letter writing or the information in the passage was not adapted in style and purpose, reading more like a summary of the passages than a transactional piece of writing.

Marks for reading

The best responses, as always in this task, adopted a consistently evaluative stance and read effectively between the lines of the passages, drawing inferences and making judgements about the how far, or even whether, it is possible to travel in an eco-friendly way for a holiday. Most responses included the guidelines in the second passage about how to protect the fragile environments visited and most showed some understanding of the need to be more aware of the impact tourists might have on them. More thoughtful responses went to the heart of the key contradiction of travelling many miles in order to 'protect' the most fragile places in the world. Most also saw the mismatch between the eco-friendly intentions of businesses such as Backpack and their need to make profits in an increasingly competitive market.

Some perceptive responses explored directly the tensions between protecting the planet and wanting to explore it responsibly. The comparison made in the second passage, between an eco-friendly holiday such

as those offered by Backpack and a 'fuel-efficient' flight to Paris, gave careful readers some food for thought. Some effective responses used the idea to show that the destinations offered by Backpack were much further away than Paris and that Backpack gave no indication how the inevitable environmental damage done by flying to them, or sailing around them, would be offset: 'One could argue that Paris has already damaged its environment with all its hotels and attractions but nobody wants to see people queuing up to see rare creatures in the Antarctic like they do in Paris for the Eiffel Tower!' Other perceptive readings of the passages elicited some comment on the language used by Backpack to describe their destinations, such as 'untouched', 'cleanest', 'clearest', and suggested that it could not protect such places as long as it wanted to make money by attracting people to them. Backpack's schemes to add value to their holidays were also probed carefully by many at the highest level, with many making thoughtful inferences about what the company did not tell its customers, such as how much money was donated to charities and which charities benefited. The 'Pack for a Purpose' scheme was challenged in a number of ways: some suggested this did nothing for the fragile environments visited, that it created a damaging dependence on tourism or that it directly contradicted the more common eco-friendly practice of buying locally.

Other successful approaches to the task involved a closer focus on the perceived needs of the relative from a holiday. The potential added costs involved in Backpack's charity donations and 'Pack for a Purpose' were noted by some. Many also suggested that the 'unsophisticated facilities', especially the rule about 'taking too many showers', did not sound very appealing when most people wanted to relax and enjoy themselves on their holidays. The number of rules and restrictions to be adhered to were seen as off-putting and limiting: 'Who wants to be looking over their shoulders the whole time worrying about whether you've stepped on some rare plant when you could be soaking up the sun and having a ball on your two weeks off?' The lists of rules to follow on Backpack's holidays were cited in some responses as 'the things we should follow every day wherever we are' or 'sensible ways to live'. The lack of enforceable guidelines for eco-tourism was also a focus of some insightful evaluation. Backpack's boast of 'strict adherence' to such rules was exposed as empty and meaningless without a mechanism to police them and in some responses this idea was combined with the profit-driven business model of eco-tourist companies to show that it was inevitable that corners would be cut and the environment left the poorer for eco-tourism.

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 passages. In some cases, the arguments contained in the second passage were reproduced but their implications for Backpack's holidays were not explored. The contradictions of eco-tourism were sometimes reflected without recognising that these arguments were part of the angle and approach taken by the writer of the second passage.

Another approach which was not consistently evaluative was where the doubts about eco-tourism in the second passage were understood and reproduced but Backpack was discussed exclusively as a good example of sound, ethical eco-tourism. This was perhaps a rather superficial reading, often based on Backpack asserting their 'eco' credentials repeatedly and the unspoilt nature of their destinations.

Responses given 7 marks tended to respond more evaluatively to some ideas more than others. Many accepted Backpack's descriptions of its holidays at face value but could point out that the cost to the tourist might be prohibitive if extra supplies for locals had to be carried or if the charity donations were made using their customers' money. In some responses, there was evaluation of the 'Pack for a Purpose' idea as inconsistent with green principles or patronising to local inhabitants. In the closing comments of some responses, Examiners were able to credit as evaluation some grasp of the inherent contradiction in being part of a potential influx of tourists into previously untouched environments.

Examiners awarded marks in Band 4 for Reading where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the passages 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 how far it was possible to be an eco-friendly tourist, and Backpack's claims to have a principled approach were generally accepted with limited discussion or doubt expressed. While the points made were given mostly in candidates' own words, the structure of the second passage was often replicated in responses. In some responses given 6 marks for Reading the arguments in the passages were regrouped a little but some contradictions or more subtle ideas were not addressed or there was limited application of the arguments against eco-tourism in the second passage to the claims made by Backpack in the second. To score higher marks for Reading, Examiners looked for some scrutiny of the apparent contradictions in both passages rather than reproduction of them.

Less secure responses, in terms of the Reading mark, 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 frequent lifting of words and phrases from the



passages. In these cases, Examiners were not convinced that the key ideas in the passages had been understood. Misunderstanding of some ideas was common at this level. In some responses, the holidays on offer were thought to be backpacking trips and the merits of carrying backpacks were discussed without understanding of BackPack as a company or of eco-tourism as a concept. In other responses, there was advice about how to be environmentally aware in general, rather than as a tourist. Some responses only addressed the first passage in any detail, often looking at the different destinations and choosing between them with little reference to the idea of eco-tourism or its limitations as outlined in the second passage. Copying of phrases and, sometimes, whole sentences 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

An informal tone was required for a letter to a known, familiar individual and most responses were written in an appropriate register, even where the writing was technically weak. Opening sections made reference to shared experiences or family connections and often closed in a similarly appropriate vein. Although not always sustained, most letters began with a straightforward introduction to the purpose of the letter and made reference to the reading material, either as separate texts or their own views, as evidence to support their advice. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical, stylistically persuasive style and presented their arguments with some subtlety of tone, always maintaining an apt tone but making their case effectively and with some impact: 'I just can not see you, Aunt Lizzie, a woman who loves her luxuries and comforts, getting bossed about to follow the rules in some freezing, empty godforsaken place where you can not even have a shower when you feel like it!' In another persuasive response, the advice given included the observation that the relative should not 'buy into this cynical exploitation of your long-held beliefs as an environmentalist to put money into these charlatans' pockets.'

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 an account of what was written in the passages 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 but there was often less development of the advice given to the relative beyond, perhaps, wishing them a happy holiday in whichever destination they chose.

Less effective responses sometimes had limited overall cohesion because the different opinions in the passages 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 advice which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the passages but the response had its own cohesive structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the first paragraph and the information and views given were gleaned from both passages and assimilated into the candidate's own argument. One response, for example, after some pleasantries, opened with 'I know how much you want to see the beautiful wild places of our planet, but I'm afraid the whole idea of eco-tourism is flawed and full of contradictions which make it nothing but a money-making scam.' The opening and concluding paragraphs of this and other well-structured responses 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 passages but were reordered and sensibly structured and paragraphed. In most cases the bullet points in the task were used to give structure and cohesion to the response, so that conflicting ideas were addressed separately. Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the passages whereas Band 5 responses were usually organised more selectively. Straightforward Band 5 responses were paragraphed and balanced and followed the conventional structure of letters.



Some less effective responses given marks below Band 5 were limited in structure and more dependent on the sequence of ideas in the passages, often with a degree of lifting and copying. This approach led to some weakness in cohesion and some disjointed use of contradicting points.

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, as illustrated above.

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 'your' and 'you're', 'advice/advise' and some words used in the passages such as 'environment', 'business', 'vulnerable' and 'facilities'. There were occasional lapses in the use of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical disagreement. Tense use was uncertain in some responses, particularly in phrases such as 'Mum had asked me to advise you..' or 'I had done some research.'

Faulty sentence structures, insecure tense use or weakly demarcated sentences often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Band 5, even where 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 5 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 almost entirely.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- be prepared to challenge and disagree with the views in the passages and always justify and explain your own conclusions
- look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the passages and comment on them
- look for the key ideas given in the passages and focus on them
- aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them
- be aware of the audience for your writing and adapt your style accordingly; think carefully about the kind of style the recipient of your letter would expect as well as how letters should begin and end
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

Section 2

Descriptive Writing

2(a) Write a description with the title, 'The day after the festival'.

OR

2(b) Imagine you work in a shop. Describe a time when the shop is particularly busy.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates. Examiners saw a range of different approaches to the tasks. In the first task, a wide range of different kinds of festivals in various settings was depicted at all levels of achievement. One fairly common subject was the aftermath of a large-scale music festival, with some focus on the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as they emerged from sleep on the morning after. The selection of specific details often gave candidates an opportunity to contrast the atmosphere of the day after with the festival itself. In some responses, there was a focus on the eerie silence of the scene while in others the impact of the festival on the narrator's mind and body was described in some detail.

In the second question, a wide variety of details and images was used to describe a scene in a busy shop. Various kinds of shops in different locations were described with some responses structured around the contrast between quiet and busy times and others focused on the sense of dread or exhaustion experienced by the narrator.

Some successful responses to the first question focused on the writer's thoughts and feelings as they surveyed the scene the day after a festival. A rather melancholy mood was created in a number of evocative responses to this question. There were striking images of forgotten or abandoned objects which recalled the atmosphere of the festival itself. In the most successful responses, unusual or apparently insignificant but closely observed details created an impression of reality.

In one, for example, an extended metaphor of ghosts and spirits was used to describe the scene after a festival, where the vibrant colours of the day before had become muted and faded into shades of grey when seen through the eyes of a sad and reflective narrator. 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 creating a detailed scene which was often emotionally charged. At the top of the mark range, some highly skilled writing wove complex emotions into the depiction of the scene, creating cohesive responses held together by a single thread or concept of ideas. Memories of the actual festival the day before also featured strongly in effective responses to this question, though these were often fleeting and now tinged with a different kind of emotion. One effective piece described the narrator waking up in a country hotel which had been the venue for a large wedding celebration the day before. The drooping decorations and the stray flowers which had fallen from the buttonholes of the dancing guests gave the happy occasion a rather melancholy atmosphere in its aftermath. Other successful descriptions used the perspective of a hungover, regretful narrator to depict a miserable landscape of bedraggled tents, empty bottles and the debris left after a large scale outdoor music festival. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's interest by linking the different elements described in an engaging way, often suggesting the kind of atmosphere of the festival itself but without relying on narrative. In a significant number of responses at Band 6 and above, there was some conscious use of imagery which helped to evoke the scene. Where this technique was controlled and used sparingly, the effects created were striking and original. In one description, for example, set in a village where people had come together to celebrate a religious festival, the rain overnight had 'swept the gawdy decorations into a swamp of muddy memories'.

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. The blinding headaches and nausea of hangovers featured commonly, and although the images used were less original and striking, they were relevant and apt and some were more effective. Some responses at this level lapsed into narrative about the day of the festival itself or were hampered by an over-reliance on the narrator's own state rather than the scene observed. At the lower end of Band 5 for Content and Structure, some responses were a little unbalanced, with more narrative which tended to overshadow the focus on detail and description. 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.

Less effective responses were characterised by a tendency to list details briefly rather than develop them or a narrative introduction became a series of events rather than a preamble to description. Sometimes, sense impressions were given in a rather mechanical way, starting each paragraph with 'I can see..' or 'I can hear..' and the description relied on more clichéd ideas and images. 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 equally popular 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 descriptions focused on the shop itself, the customers and the staff, others used different times of the day to show the changing atmosphere. The quiet, orderly calm of the early morning often gave way more gradually to the chaos and noise of a busy shop in these more effective responses, for example, and there were many responses where the aftermath of an onslaught of customers was described to good effect. Some responses focused on the narrator's thoughts and feelings and managed to evoke the mounting dread of a young, nervous shop assistant at the height of the Christmas shopping season with some success. As always, closely observed detail worked better than broad generality.

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. Again, sense impressions were often used with limited effect at this level or strings of details were listed with less effective overall cohesion. At this level, responses often became simple, unengaging accounts of a day in the life of a shop worker rather than a description of the surroundings at the time. In other responses, the description was general rather than specific, describing the crowded shop's customers as 'a swarm of bees' or 'a tidal wave' but without the closer focus needed to build the scene in the reader's mind. While paragraphs were mostly used accurately, paragraphs were not linked to cohesive whole.

Marks for Style and Accuracy, in the most effective responses, reflected the precision and variety of vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. The ability to use language carefully and consciously to create a specific effect, such as the sense of melancholy left after a celebration in the first task or the sensation of being overwhelmed or overrun in the second. In the middle range of marks, vocabulary was often varied but imprecisely used and in some cases not well understood. Strings of adjectives to describe objects or people sometimes contained contradictory or inappropriate choices: for example, a shop front was described in one response as 'posh, delapidated and prolix'. 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 less secure responses, as is often the case in descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences were very common, even in scripts where responses to **Question 1** showed a secure grasp of sentence structure, and some responses used hardly any complete sentences: 'A wall of people swarming the shop like bees. People grabbing at items on the shelves like their lives depended on it. Children screaming and picking up items with their sticky hands.' Another 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

3(a) Write a narrative which includes the words, '... all the screens went blank ...'

OR

3(b) Write a narrative about a journey you make on your own for the first time.

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 quotation in **Question 3(a)** was not really important to the story as a whole. Occasionally, narratives seemed to be answers to previously set questions rather than those on the current paper or were not really appropriate responses to the given questions.

More effective responses, as is often the case in narrative writing, were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used interesting, credible storylines and paid attention to the reader's engagement with well-rounded characters. Both narrative titles implied some build-up of tension or a moment of jeopardy and most candidates made use of this to help construct their stories.

There were various structures employed in strong 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, as a hospital monitor went blank after the patient had been involved in a prank that had gone wrong. Another was set in a high-tech office where bored and under-used young staff members hoped for some challenging work in their pursuit of hacking criminals, only to be confronted with a major cyber-attack on themselves. This narrative included some skilful characterisation and used sparing but precisely observed details to show the relationships between characters: 'I caught the Supervisor's eye as I scanned the room, lost in the tedium of another long afternoon of nothing. He lifted one eyebrow almost imperceptibly and I knew my card was being marked in the next round of redundancies.'

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, with sci-fi scenarios or stories about contemporary battle zones. Effective responses showed an ability to create characters that were believable, even if the scenario itself was fantastic or unfamiliar. Science fiction stories or narratives set in the future were often very successful if the characterisation of the main protagonists was credible and rooted in detail and observation. Some school stories involved cheating such as downloading examination papers from the Principal's computer and there was a range of crime stories in which CCTV screens were involved. 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 rather basic accounts of friends gathered around a television screen for an important match or televised event. Examiners could award marks in Band 5 for Content and Structure, even where the sequence of events was perhaps pedestrian and lacked drama and pace, 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, although some endings were a little lacking in impact.

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 more effective responses.

Less effective 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. The football match being watched by a group of friends would be stopped by the screen going blank at a crucial moment and the rest of the story involved the disappointed characters trying to find a way to discover the result or restore the power. Characters were identified, often in a list of names, but there was less in the way of real characterisation and observation of individuals and relationships. While the majority of less effective responses has some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative style. Occasionally, Examiners found that responses lacked a sense of narrative drive and purpose and were more akin to straightforward reporting of events.

For the second narrative question, there were varied interpretations of the idea of a 'journey'. Many narratives made use of the idea of a journey as a kind of rite of passage which was implied in the title. Many responses were built around an actual journey undertaken for the first time with some trepidation or nervousness. Travelling to visit relatives in other regions or countries, by bus, train or plane, was a common topic, as was leaving home to study at a university or college far from home. Others used the idea to convey the sense of a personal journey involving some important milestone or decision which led to some significant change in the narrator's life. Both approaches resulted in some high level, effective and engaging stories. Narrators sometimes embarked on a metaphorical journey towards a goal. In one which used the task in this more figurative way, for example, the writer began a search for a long-lost brother in an attempt to heal a family rift. Others used the 'journey' in a more concrete way but controlled the narrative effectively using credible, if dramatic events such as the hijacking of a bus in deserted bushland. The reactions of the terrified passengers depicted were entirely credible and engaged the reader throughout. While these kinds of ideas featured across the mark range, more effective responses prepared the reader and shaped the narrative in an engaging way. Another successful response featured a deeply troubled narrator, escaping from domestic turmoil, whose anxieties and fears were convincingly developed to engage the reader's sympathy. The journey itself became a vehicle through which the narrator revealed the events and relationships which had led to this point, so that the physical journey became a more metaphorical pathway to a better life.

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. The anxiety and nervousness involved in journeys undertaken alone featured in most at this level and in many cases the story did not really develop beyond the arrival at the destination to the evident relief of the narrator. 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 a sequence of events into a real narrative. 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 a series of events 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, particularly in the use of dialogue and for effect, was skilfully used in responses in the higher Bands and where coupled with a sophisticated and precise use 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. There were, at almost all levels of achievement, errors where words were wrongly divided or joined, such as 'alot', 'aswell', 'eventhough', 'can not', and 'all though'. 'Although' was fairly often used where 'however' was needed.

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 ('it's/its' and 'your/you're, especially) commonly appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. 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. The mixing of tenses within a narrative, sometimes within a sentence, was also prevalent. This was more marked in descriptive writing but also occurred in narrative writing, where stories seemed occasionally to have been transcribed from speech: 'Suddenly, a man appeared in a corner of the train carriage. He has a gun in his hand pointing straight at me.'

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; do not try to make a story fit the title if the ideas used are not appropriate
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader; do not rely on events
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0990/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

Many candidates produced coursework portfolios to be proud of which contained varied work across a range of contexts. Candidates demonstrated flexibility and the facility to adapt their writing for a range of audiences and purposes. Much of the work related to the candidates' personal interests and experiences and genuinely reflected matters that are important to young people today. The best work provided mature, sophisticated and engaging reading.

Many centres set a good range of appropriate and varied tasks which allowed candidates to respond in writing of three different genres. The most successful writing was related to the personal interests and experiences of the candidates. Writing was less successful when candidates responded to a limited range of tasks which lacked flexibility and opportunities for the candidates to respond in an original or personal way.

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- wrote original and interesting assignments which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them in a mature and sensible way
- structured the content of their writing in order to clearly guide the reader from one section of writing to the next
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of arguments or events
- wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect
- adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and contexts for each of the three assignments
- revised, edited, proof-read and corrected the first drafts of each assignment
- wrote accurately and made very few errors with spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1:

Moderators reported that there appeared to be a much greater personal selection of topics by the candidates for this assignment. Many candidates were allowed to follow particular interests which resulted in mature, thoughtful and interesting work. Climate change, environmental issues and gender equality seemed particularly popular, with much of the writing reflecting the concerns that young people have about the world today. Most tasks set for this assignment were of an appropriate level of challenge for the candidates and allowed candidates to produce work that reflected their abilities. Although moderators reported that they saw fewer polemics, such as 'Room 101' and 'Do not get me started', some centres continued to set these tasks. Previous Examiner reports have commented on the limitations of this sort of task for helping candidates to produce writing which contains thoughtful, mature and considered arguments. Some centres also set very broad or frequently debated topics, such as the death penalty, legalising cannabis and school uniforms. Task such as these do not engage the candidates in the same way as tasks related to their personal interests might. This lack of engagement is often reflected in the quality and effectiveness of their writing and can make it difficult for candidates to meet the higher level assessment criteria.

Moderators also reported that when candidates had engaged in research of a particular topic, there was a tendency to rely too heavily on the ideas, words and phrases they had seen in their research. Candidates should present original ideas and thoughts using their own words. The overuse of words, phrases and ideas from research documents tends to result in loss of originality of thought and fluency in writing, and could result in unintentional plagiarism.

The majority of Assignment 1 pieces had a good sense of audience and the genre and form selected was clear to the reader. When the genre, form or intended audience was not clear writing tended to be less successful.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 1:

write about a subject that is of importance and/or of interest to you
be aware of the audience and purpose of your response and adapt your style accordingly
try to develop your points to create a detailed and clear line of argument or discussion
try to use your own words instead of quoting chunks of text from your sources
acknowledge your use of quotes.

Assignment 2:

Many candidates produced original and engaging descriptions or narratives which reflected their personal experiences of the world or of people or events that were important to them. Less successful writing was produced when generic tasks were set and candidates were asked to describe places or people they did not know well, or to create stories in a genre that they did not fully understand.

Description:

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those in which the candidates had created a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place, or person and which were well sequenced and cohesive. Moderators saw descriptions of much-loved family members and places or events that were important to the candidates. Many candidates understood the need to be thoughtful and controlled with their use of vocabulary and to make sure that the vocabulary they used accurately reflected the content of their writing. Less successful descriptive writing was seen when candidates were overambitious with their vocabulary, over used complex words, or included images that did not match the content of their writing. There was a tendency with some centres to over reward use of complex language, even when the overall effect of the writing was not entirely successful.

Other tasks which resulted in less successful writing were those which required candidates to describe scenes from a film. Tasks such as these limit the opportunities for candidates to fully demonstrate the skills needed to meet some of the assessment criteria because the structure and content is provided for them by the film clips. This issue has been highlighted in previous Examiner reports.

Narratives:

With narrative writing, moderators reported that they noted a continued reduction in candidates producing unrealistic and incredible zombie, gothic and dystopian-style stories. Candidates tend to struggle with these genres of writing because the imagined situation is beyond their personal experience, so writing becomes clichéd and unconvincing. Previous Examiner reports have commented on the limitations of this sort of task.

Some of the most successful narrative writing was seen when candidates responded to personal experiences such as memorable events, journeys or people. There were moving accounts of how some candidates overcame challenging personal situations or wrote about important journeys they had undertaken with their families or close friends. Other successful writing was seen when the candidates fully understood their chosen genre for writing. It was clear in the work provided by many centres that candidates had been effectively taught how to create and write short stories in which setting, character and plot were developed in order to produce cohesive and entertaining writing.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 2:

when writing to describe, try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of ideas and images

when writing to describe make sure that you do not slip into writing a narrative, try to stay focused on description and create a clear sense of time, place and atmosphere
when writing to describe try to avoid writing in list-like paragraphs which are unconnected
write about something that you are familiar with, or something or someone you know well
when writing narratives remember to structure your writing carefully and to follow the writing conventions for a short story
choose vocabulary and sentence structures carefully to create specific effects
make sure that the images you create match the context and content of your writing.

Assignment 3:

Many candidates responded to appropriate texts and provided responses which demonstrated their ability to analyse and evaluate ideas and to present their own lines of thought in response to the content of their reading. As with Assignment 1 and Assignment 2, the best responses tended to be written by candidates responding to texts about subjects or matters that interested them; for example, free college tuition in America, the effects of computer games on children's brains and speeches by activists such as Greta Thunberg. Less successful texts were those that were outdated, or which contained limited ideas and opinions with which the candidates could respond. Despite highlighting the limitations of certain types of texts in previous Examiner reports, moderators still saw a significant number of candidates responding to texts by Katie Hopkins (children's names), Jeremy Clarkson ('Stuff the Tiger') and Educating Essex. These texts are now old and unoriginal and public opinion may have changed since they were written. In addition, when candidates responded to text such as these, they tend to personally attack the author instead of evaluating the ideas and opinions contained within the texts. Other less successful responses were those written in response to mainly factual texts containing limited ideas or opinions with which candidates could engage. To achieve Band 5 marks, candidates need to evaluate and analyse a good range of ideas from the text to provide an extended overview, or write an overall, structured response that assimilates many of the ideas and opinions presented within the text. Some of the issues highlighted above can limit the opportunity for candidates to fully engage with this process and therefore limit their ability to meet the higher-level assessment criteria. Guidance on how to select appropriate texts for this assignment is given in the syllabus.

The most common form for responses to texts tended to be letters or speeches. On the whole it was clear that candidates understood, and could use, the writing conventions of the chosen form. However, it was noted that even some of the very best letters lacked an appropriate closing salutation such as 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully'. This sort of error could easily be avoided if candidates carefully proof-read their work.

Administration:

All centres are thanked for ensuring that the samples were sent to Cambridge for despatch to the Moderation team in good time. Moderators commented that they noted a significant improvement in the accurate completion of the Coursework Assessment Summary Forms (CASFs) and MS1s and that there were fewer samples sent in plastic wallets. However, a small but significant number of centres are still submitting portfolios of work in which the individual sheets of paper are not attached to the Individual candidate Record Card (ICRC). Paperclips and plastic wallets are not secure method of securing folders of work. As highlighted in the June 2019 Examiner report, in order to avoid loss or misplacement of candidates' work, it is essential that centres submit the individual portfolios of work in accordance with the instructions set out in the syllabus and Coursework Handbook. These documents can be found on the School Support Hub via the main Cambridge Assessment website.

Drafts:

The overwhelming majority of centres provided a copy of a first draft of one of the assignments. It was evident from these drafts that many candidates had engaged in a process of editing and redrafting. However, moderators noticed that there was a significant increase in the number of drafts that showed no evidence of a process of revision, redrafting or editing by the candidate. On many occasions the drafts were almost identical to the final versions of pieces of work. There were also some instances where teachers had offered specific advice and guidance on how a candidate might improve their work. Teachers are required to make general comments at the end of drafts as to how a candidate might improve their work, but they are not allowed to make specific suggestions for improvement in the body or the margin of the drafts. Guidance on the drafting process can be found in the syllabus.

Assessment:

Moderators reported that assessment of Writing and Reading by the centres was generally accurate. It was clear from the provision of informative summative comments related to the mark scheme at the end of each completed assignment that many centres understood, and were able to apply, the mark scheme accurately. The accuracy of the application of the mark scheme may have been because many centres provided clear evidence that a process of effective internal moderation had taken place. With centres that provided little or no evidence of internal moderation, there was a general tendency to be either lenient or slightly severe with the application of the mark scheme. It is important that internal moderation is undertaken at the end of the course by the centre and recorded on both the CASF and the folder itself.

When moderators did not agree with a centre's marks it was often because structural insecurities or inaccuracies with the candidates' work did not seem to have been taken into account by the markers. As highlighted in the June 2019 Examiner report, it is essential that teachers indicate all errors in the final versions of the candidates' work. If this is not done, it becomes difficult for teachers to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and award an appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. It is important for teachers to understand that all errors, especially those made with typing, the incorrect selection of words from spellcheck, the incorrect use of commas and the confusion of tenses should be taken into account when awarding marks. Errors such as these can affect the overall meaning and quality of a piece of work and make it difficult for a candidate to meet some of the higher level assessment criteria.

Good practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was where:

centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience

a wide range of appropriate texts were used for Assignment 3, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond, and were relevant to their interests

centres set tasks which allowed candidates to respond in three different genres of writing

candidates' responses were within the recommended 500 to 800-word limit

teachers gave general advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts

candidates revised, edited and carefully proof read their first drafts in order to improve their writing, including checking for errors with:

- basic punctuation such as missing full stops, the incorrect use of commas and semi colons and the correct use of capital letters
- typing errors
- spelling, especially any words selected from spellcheck

teachers provided informative summative comments relating to the mark scheme at the end of each completed assignment

coursework portfolios were securely attached and presented as indicated in the syllabus,

the CASF included all the candidates in the cohort and candidates were listed on the form in numerical order, with the candidates in the sample being clearly indicated by an asterisk.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0990/05
Speaking and Listening

Key messages

Most centres assessed candidates accurately and performed the required administrative procedures professionally and effectively.

Where there were issues, the following guidelines may help to clarify administrative requirements.

Administration – General Points

All the recordings for the entire cohort should be sent as part of the sample package to Cambridge. The centre does not have to choose which recordings to send.

Each recording for every candidate entered should begin with a formal introduction by the Examiner to reflect the guidelines included in the syllabus.

It is not acceptable for a centre to create one generic introduction for the whole cohort.

All tests should be carried out within the boundaries of the test window stipulated by Cambridge. This is another reason every test should begin with a full introduction to include the date on which the candidate is being examined.

Please check the forms very carefully before sending to Cambridge. Errors of addition on the Summary Form and transcription to the Mark Sheet delays the moderating process for a small but significant number of centres.

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

Conduct of the test

Generally, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given many opportunities to express their views and exhibit their range of oratory skills.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered.

In some centres, examiners engaged in an ‘off topic’ conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their **Part 1** task. While this was aimed at putting candidates at ease before the test it was not a necessary part of the process, led to some very long overall recordings and was distracting for candidates who really only wanted to begin their talks. It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the Examiner’s formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the presentation.

The importance of timing within the test should be appreciated. Where a **Part 1** response is significantly short of the minimum required, please consider whether the assessment criteria can be adequately met and assess accordingly. It is difficult to see how a response can meet higher band criteria in a performance lasting significantly less than the prescribed minimum time allowance.

Given that both speaking and listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the discussions last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the Examiner’s responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation is met.

Accuracy of assessment

In most cases, centres have applied the criteria accurately, appropriately and fairly whilst underpinning this through successful internal moderation procedures.

When considering what marks to award this guidance may be helpful:

Examiners should not interrupt candidates within **Part 1**. Examiners should only interrupt to move the candidates into **Part 2** if they show no signs of reaching a natural conclusion after the maximum time prescribed.

Examiners may prompt candidates who are struggling in **Part 1**, perhaps through loss of concentration or nerves, to help them get back on track. Asking a question however is inadvisable as this normally indicates **Part 2** has begun.

Articulate, confident candidates may be over-assessed in **Part 1** when the content is largely factual or linear in nature rather than including analysis and reflection. A travelogue that only narrates a holiday day by day would fall into this category.

The examiner must ensure a full **Part 2** discussion takes place. Short discussions generally inhibit the candidate's ability to fulfil the criteria in the higher bands.

It is important that examiners do not over-dominate the discussions in **Part 2**. Candidates should be allowed to talk and their contribution should be dominant, particularly for those being awarded marks in the higher bands where detailed responses to questions and prompts are expected.

Approaches to Part 1

The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates took ownership of a topic, had a strong base knowledge of the subject and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Well planned and prepared responses are generally more successful but responses do not benefit from an over-reliance on notes or over-rehearsal.

Once again, Moderators reported a wide range of topics being undertaken although the tasks generally took the form of an individual presentation. Some dramatic monologues were presented and these tended to be well received. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when choices are made. To achieve the higher bands, the presentations should move beyond the descriptive and narrative to include elements of reflection and analysis.

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

- My Love of Musical Theatre
- The Mandela Effect
- Food Waste
- Cultural Differences
- The Digital World
- Being Alone
- Identity
- Percussion
- Introverts
- Football Ticket Prices
- The Tooth Fairy
- Climate Change (and other environmental issues).

Some other examples of less successful **Part 1** topics include:

- The person I admire most (where the talk is purely descriptive and a series of regurgitated facts and rumours)
- Bullying (too vague when generalised and a possible safeguarding issue where more specific)
- Football (too generalised and unfocused)
- Social Media (becoming cliché ridden and repetitive)
- Future Career Plans (where the talk is generic and unfocused)
- Favourite Movie/TV Show (Where there is no attempt to move beyond the narrative and descriptive)
- A Project About Food
- My Holiday (Where there is only a linear narration of events)
- Video Gaming
- Pyrotechnics.

Management of Part 2

Good examiners understand the role in **Part 2** is to provide stimulus for the candidates to express their ideas and opinions on their chosen topics.

Good examiners do not:

- consider their own thoughts and opinions to be more important than those of the candidates
- do not stick rigidly to a list of pre-prepared questions that limit any genuine discussion that may arise from what the candidate has said
- run out of relevant questions about the chosen topic and ensure a full discussion takes place
- allow discussions to meander into general conversation that is not focused on the topic.

Good examiners do:

- show genuine interest and enthusiasm in the candidates' topics, provide appropriate encouragement and are not judgemental
- give many opportunities for candidates to develop their ideas as fully as they can, providing open questions that help them to explore and develop the discussion
- avoid the use of closed questions. They understand that closed questioning limits the candidates' ability to respond at length.

In addition, good examiners are good listeners and do not hinder the candidates by interrupting or cutting into a discussion when it may be more advantageous to allow the candidate to continue. Detailed and developed responses are required if marks in the higher bands are to be awarded for Listening

Advice to centres

Please check administrative procedures to ensure a smooth and trouble-free moderation of your centre. Choosing the most appropriate topic is key to being successful in the test.

Although candidates should prepare thoroughly, it must be remembered that **Part 1** is a demonstration of presentational skills and that the monotonous regurgitation of a memorised topic will not fulfil the criteria for Band 1.

Give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills through effective discussion and appropriate timings for both parts of the test. Keeping to the timings prescribed in the syllabus will avoid candidates being adversely limited in the accurate application of the mark scheme.

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0990/06
Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

The standard of administration and accuracy of assessment continue to be of a high standard.

Key messages

Administration

When completing an Individual Candidate Record Card for each candidate, please provide specific information about the choices made for each task as this is important information for the Moderator. 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.

All the recordings for **Task 1** and **Task 2** for the whole cohort should be sent in the sample packet. For **Task 1** it is helpful if for each candidate the file name is the candidate's name and examination number. For **Task 2** it is helpful if the file name contains at least the candidate numbers of both candidates involved.

The teacher/examiner should introduce the recordings using the rubric in the syllabus. For paired activities, once this introduction has been made, it would be helpful if candidates introduce themselves and the roles they are playing before beginning the task. This will allow the moderator to clearly distinguish who is speaking and when.

Key messages

Approach to coursework

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.

For **Task 1** a good comparison is the **Part 1** presentation within the 05 speaking and listening test. For this a candidate is required to speak for 3–4 minutes on a chosen topic. A similar length would be appropriate for **Task 1**.

In **Task 2**, the Paired Task, it is important to offer both candidates an equal and sufficient amount of time to contribute for both speaking and listening. Short tasks of less than four minutes really do not give both candidates enough time to convincingly fulfil the criteria in the mark scheme for the middle and higher bands.

General comments

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

For Component 6, centres are encouraged to be creative in the choice of tasks but the assessment criteria should always be used as a guide to the skills being assessed. The integration of literature into the activities is encouraged and continues to yield some excellent results in both **Task 1** and **Task 2**.

Comments on specific tasks

Responses to any of the three tasks do not benefit from over-scripted and seemingly 'artificial' performances. Well planned and prepared responses to tasks are generally more successful but a degree of spontaneity is

still required for marks to be awarded in the higher bands. Generally, responses to **Task 1** and **Task 2** where the candidates were interested in the topics and could demonstrate a personal involvement in the content were more successful than those where a topic had been imposed by the teacher. It is recommended that for **Task 1** the candidate chooses the topic with guidance from the teacher. For **Task 2** it may be that candidates are offered alternatives from which a choice can be made. For **Task 3** it is recognised that the teacher may choose the topic for logistical reasons.

Task 1

Pleasingly, once again, a wide range of topics were undertaken although the task generally took the form of an individual presentation. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when the choice of topic is made. More able candidates should be encouraged to choose more exacting and sophisticated topics that extend their abilities to construct a compelling argument within a period of approximately 3–4 minutes. The inclusion of an element of introspection and reflection is positively encouraged. Dramatic monologues in the voice of a chosen character have resulted in some very successful talks which stand out for their creativity and ingenuity.

Some examples of productive Task 1 activities also include:

- A significant event in my life and its effect on me
- My love of a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- A critique of a favourite book, work of art or movie
- My passion for (e.g.) dance/playing a musical instrument
- My ideal holiday destination
- Are we ready for 5G (or any specific technological advance)?
- What we eat is who we are
- Why youth should be given a louder voice.

Some examples of less successful Task 1 activities include:

- Should cannabis be legalised (this has potential safeguarding issues)?
- Football (too generic and unfocused)
- 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)
- Social media (unless a specific viewpoint is being argued)
- Gaming (generally too unfocused).

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. Alternatively, engaging in a lively role play that allows them to demonstrate their discursive strengths also works well. A clearly defined focus is better than a general exchange of views. 'Football' and 'Social Media' remain popular topics but where there is no sense of audience or specific focus there will be little evidence to support 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. To this end, sufficient research and development should be built into the preparation time leading up to performance of the task.

Generally, entirely scripted responses, be they discussions or self-generated role plays, do not allow candidates to access the higher attainment bands because they do not fulfil the relevant criteria.

Some examples of productive Task 2 activities include:

- Arguing for and against a current affairs topic such as the benefits of artificial intelligence or responses to climate change
- Discussing a text or author both candidates know well but may have differing views about
- Comparing the merits of two famous people where each candidate acts as a champion for one of the celebrities
- Acting as employers discussing who should be given a job from a list of prospective candidates (and variations on the theme)

Marvel v DC.

Some examples of less successful Task 2 activities include:

Should cannabis be legalised (this has potential safeguarding issues)

Interviews generally but specifically where one of the candidates acts solely as the interviewer (this is limiting for the candidate)

A single topic imposed by the centre for the whole of its cohort such as 'Room 101' in which no individual choice is allowed (ownership of and commitment to the topic is not always evident)

Role plays such as two neighbours arguing or a customer complaining to a sales assistant. The evidence of the present and previous series suggests these often rely too heavily on scripts, generally become vacuous arguments and limit the candidates' ability to demonstrate the required range of speaking and listening skills.

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 so long as the assessment criteria for the group work are met. It is most important that each candidate in the group is allowed sufficient scope within the activity to demonstrate their strengths without being dominated by others. It is, therefore, advisable to create groups of similar ability levels so that weaker candidates are not disadvantaged and to consider the group dynamic so that each member has the opportunity to contribute to the best of their ability. A group should consist of no fewer than three members and it is advised that it does not exceed five candidates. A group consisting of three or four candidates is preferable for the logistical purpose of being able to assess each candidate's performance more accurately.

Some examples of productive Task 3 activities include:

A trial scene, possibly based on a literary text – e.g. 'Of Mice and Men', 'An Inspector Calls', 'A View From The Bridge', 'All My Sons'

A radio discussion of a significant event from a work of literature involving the key characters

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

A meeting in which the candidates discuss their roles and possible contributions to a named community event

A review of a named event from the perspective of those involved in its planning

General conclusions

The general standard of assessment by centres is at the correct level. It is to their credit that centres have become very efficient in the administration of the component and in the choice of topics. It is very pleasing to observe that candidates undertaking speaking and listening activities continue to be enthusiastic about the experience and clearly benefit from careful planning and practice.