

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0627/01
Reading Passages

Key messages

candidates should ensure that they read all questions carefully and take careful note of specific instructions, such as ‘using your own words’ or ‘select **one** word’

candidates should take note of the number of marks available for each question – if there are two marks they should look for two discrete points

candidates should check their work carefully to avoid unnecessary errors, especially in **Question 2** where there are 15 marks awarded for Writing

in **Question 1(f)** candidates should only select language choices from the lines of the passage specified in the question

in **Question 2** candidates should select relevant ideas from Passage B and evaluate them in response to the task set, using the specified format and voice

in **Question 3(c)** the candidates should use the bullet points to ensure that the response covers all the assessment objectives but may choose to interweave their comments on language, structure and techniques throughout the response.

General comments

Examiners noted that almost all candidates made some attempt to write a relevant response to every question on the paper. Although most candidates had clearly been appraised of the specific requirements of each task, a few candidates misunderstood what they were required to do. This was often simply the result of not reading the question carefully enough.

The texts used on this paper proved effective and elicited positive responses from candidates. Although Passage A, *Villette*, was written in the nineteenth century, almost all candidates were able to respond with some understanding to **Questions 1(a) – 1(f)**. Passage B, *A Parents’ Survival Guide*, and Passage C, *Barack Obama on Fatherhood*, were drawn from the twentieth century and twenty-first century respectively and proved more accessible for many candidates who appreciated the contrasting ways in which the writers conveyed their views and ideas about the issues facing modern parents.

Examiners reported seeing some highly impressive work on this paper, especially in **Question 1(f)** where there was some perceptive analysis of Bronte’s language, and in **Question 3(c)** where some candidates exhibited mature control of the comparison of the writers’ views and ideas in Passages B and C.

Most candidates used their time effectively so that they could spend more time on the questions which are worth more marks. The length of their responses to some of the lower tariff questions suggests, however, that a minority of candidates may be spending too much time on these questions in **Question 1**. Centres are advised to train their candidates in effective use of time so that candidates spend time on each question commensurate with the marks available.

The majority of candidates seem to have followed the order of the questions on the paper. The low tariff questions in **Section A** are designed to build on one another and provide a solid foundation for the analysis required in **Question 1(f)**, and **Questions 3(a) – 3(b)** are designed to lead in to the evaluation and comparison of Passages B and C in **Question 3(c)**.

Candidates should assist the examiner who is assessing their work by signposting their answers clearly where they have used the additional pages in the answer booklet. They should indicate clearly which of the questions they are continuing by writing the number of the question in the margin.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Question 1 was based on Passage A, an extract from *Villette* by Charlotte Brontë. Despite being a nineteenth century fiction passage, most candidates found it accessible and were able to understand and follow the narrative.

Question 1 is broken down into several low tariff questions, **(a) – (e)**, worth between 1 and 4 marks up to a total of 15. These questions test a candidate's ability to select relevant details from the text and interpret them, as well as commenting on the writer's use of language in specific lines. **Question 1(f)** is a more extended response to the writer's effects and is again based on a specified section of the text.

(a) (i) Using your own words, explain why Polly has come to stay with Mrs Bretton.

Most candidates gained the 1 mark available for this question and were able to explain that Polly's mother had recently died, or that Mrs Bretton had offered to take care of Polly. Where a candidate did not get the mark for this question, it was usually due to a failure to use own words, instead copying out 'Polly recently lost her mother' or 'Mrs Bretton had offered to take charge of her'. Occasionally candidates misunderstood the passage and thought that Polly did not know her mother's whereabouts, or that Polly herself was lost.

(ii) Give one word from this section which shows that the rain was heavy that night.

The majority of candidates gained the 1 mark available for this question through selecting the word 'lashed'. Where the mark was not awarded it was usually because the candidate offered more than one word, sometimes copying out the whole sentence.

(b) What impression of Polly do you get from lines 17 – 20, 'Put me down please ... by those hands and arms.'?

Most candidates were able to gain at least 1 mark or the full 2 marks on this question by offering impressions of Polly such as her small stature, her quiet voice, her independence, or her eccentricity. Occasionally candidates only offered 1 discrete point for this 2-mark question. Some candidates incorrectly used the word 'please' as evidence that Polly was polite, or gave rather general impressions that were not precisely linked to the specific lines of text in the question.

(c) Using your own words, explain the meaning of the following phrases as they are used in the passage:

(i) 'advanced promptly'

This was another high scoring question. Most candidates were able to explain both parts of the phrase correctly as Polly moving towards Mrs Bretton without hesitation. Where a candidate explained part of the phrase they were able to access 1 mark. A few candidates misinterpreted the contextual use of 'advanced' in the passage as meaning at a higher stage, and 'promptly' as 'rushing or speeding at a fast pace' – highly unlikely in the short distance to the fire and Mrs Bretton.

(ii) 'rarely sentimental'

Candidates found this part of the question more challenging. Many were able to offer a meaning for 'rarely' and gain 1 mark, but a number of candidates interpreted sentimental as a nostalgic attachment to old belongings, clearly not its meaning in the context of the passage.

(d) What effects does the writer create through the descriptions of Polly’s behaviour in these lines?

In this question, candidates were expected to relate their explanations to a specific word or phrase in the text, but there were different ways to access the full range of marks. They could gain up to 4 marks for relevant explanations, or 2 marks for explanations and 2 marks for supporting quotations. They could not gain marks for quotations unless they supported a relevant explanation. Where candidates lost marks it was because they picked out relevant quotations without offering any explanations, describing the contents of the passage rather than interpreting the effects.

(e) Using your own words, explain how the phrases underlined in this sentence make us feel sorry for Polly.

In this 3-mark question candidates were asked to focus on three underlined phrases and analyse how the language elicited sympathy for Polly at this point in the passage. The majority of candidates gained 2 – 3 marks in this question, mostly focusing on Polly’s isolation in a strange, dark room, and her desire to hide her feelings. There were some responses which focused too heavily on her mother’s recent death, making assertions that could not be supported by the underlined phrases.

(f) Re-read lines 21 – 35, ‘Come here little dear, ... testified to her emotion.’

Explain how the writer uses language and techniques to describe:

**what Polly is like
how Mrs Bretton reacts to Polly.**

In your answer you should select powerful words and phrases and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

15 marks were available for this extended response on the writer’s effects. The specified section of the text offered candidates a wide range of language choices and techniques to explore. Any choices and comments which focused on the bullet points in the question and offered explanations of their use were rewarded. It was gratifying to see that for the vast majority of candidates this nineteenth century passage proved accessible and interesting with even the weakest responses offering some relevant comments.

The strongest responses made wide-ranging and judicious choices focusing on the extended metaphor of Polly as a ‘mere doll’ with her ‘neck as delicate as wax’ and ‘head of silky curls. Many candidates offered perceptive analysis exploring ideas about Polly being presented as a toy, or an object/possession, or citing the rather inhuman/fake/inanimate way that she is presented as well as the implications of beauty and perfection. They also commented on the ‘doll pocket’ of her ‘doll skirt’ often linking them to her ‘exceedingly tiny’ frame and ‘light, slight and straight’ figure. The best answers then contrasted these descriptions with Polly’s behaviour which was viewed as independent, mature and odd, but mentally strong. Polly’s references to herself in the third person were often analysed fully, as well, suggesting that she views herself as the possession of her Papa.

Common weaknesses included selecting language that might reveal something about Polly, but really couldn’t be classed as ‘powerful’; selecting a significant phrase, for example, ‘kissed it’, but failing to see that the use of ‘it’ was far more significant than the word ‘kissed’. There were also many high quality comments on Mrs Bretton’s reaction to Polly, with some good analysis of the effect Polly has on this ‘rarely sentimental’ woman who suddenly becomes motherly and loving at the sight of this ‘small stranger’.

Many responses comments on the symbolism of the warm fire, the repetition of ‘come’ and the motherly connotations of her ‘ample lap’, supported by the possessive use of ‘my’. To access marks in the top band candidates needed to analyse a selection of choices offering explanations of effects as well as meanings. Responses in the middle range tended to offer more meanings than effects, or a more limited number of language choices, sometimes commenting on them in too much detail. Weaker responses tended to offer a single explanation for a group of language choices or keep repeating the same explanations of Polly being small or doll-like. At times they used the words of the choices to explain them: ‘exceedingly tiny’ shows that Polly was very tiny, for

example. Some candidates selected quotations but made no attempt to explain them, instead embedding them in their own paraphrase of what happens in the passage. To access marks above the lowest bands candidates must offer some meanings.

A small but significant number of candidates did not follow the instructions in the question and selected language choices that were not in the specified section of the passage. Some of these choices had already been targeted in **Questions 1(d)** and **1(e)**. Any quotations outside the specified area of the passage could not be credited. Candidates are advised to read the question very carefully.

Question 2

You are the parent of a small child.

Write a letter to the author of this passage in which you disagree with her views about bringing up children.

This question was based on Passage B, 'A Parents' Survival Guide' and offered up to 15 marks for Writing and 10 marks for Reading. For the Reading marks candidates were expected to demonstrate understanding of explicit and implicit meanings and attitudes and critically evaluate the facts, ideas and opinions expressed in Passage B. For the Writing marks candidates were expected to write in an appropriate voice and register, write accurately and use a range of sentence structures and vocabulary for effect.

As a writing task, this proved very successful, most candidates convincingly adopting the role of an outraged parent, with very few candidates allowing the response to deteriorate into a rant or border on being offensive. Candidates clearly found the passage accessible and thought-provoking and the passion and indignation induced meant even weaker candidates did not produce repetitive sentence structures, and although mistakes of spelling, punctuation and grammar were sometimes evident, these rarely impaired communication. Examiners reported seeing very few responses in the lower bands for Writing. Many adopted a highly convincing voice for a committed and loving parent and challenged the writer's rather critical view of modern parents and their desire to fill their children's time with useful activities. Many cited their own children and reassured the writer that they truly enjoyed all the extra lessons and classes undertaken citing all the benefits that they would eventually reap in adulthood. Others were less convincing but still maintained a reasonably consistent voice and communicated clearly. Candidates had no problems writing a formal letter and the majority set it out carefully and used appropriate salutations and valedictions.

However, examiners reported less success with the marks for Reading in this question. The main problem was the failure to identify and evaluate a *range* of ideas. Many candidates chose a few ideas from the passage, the most popular being defending a parent's decision to offer a range of activities, and to allow children to give some up, rejecting outright the idea of only one a week, and condemning 'picking a scab' as a worthwhile activity. Even where these four were clearly evaluated in terms of the skills and talents developed, future successes, health, and making friends, a greater range was required to access marks in the top three bands. Often responses lacked a sense of overview or acknowledgement of the less obvious ideas in the passage.

The strongest responses offered a much more comprehensive evaluation of the writer's ideas: all credit to those who identified her failure to adapt to the modern era, her defeatist attitude about having little money and no second car, possible jealousy having herself missed out on accordion lessons, and her worryingly relaxed attitude to her children playing out on the street and only communicating with her through the letterbox. Some even questioned why she would have children if she wanted so little contact with them, and how impractical 'playing on the street' would be in an inner city environment, or how lonely in the depths of the countryside. Some responses used short quotations from the original, which worked well provided the comment or evaluation offered was able to reveal clear understanding, and appreciation of how insulting/exaggerated/sarcastic her accusations and arguments were. Few picked up on the idea of parents competing via their children.

Weaker responses tended to repeat the basic refutation of her view that the benefits of activities were 'illusory', and/or their counter claim that picking a scab was a waste of time. Another weakness was to spend too long explaining what they did with their own children and why, without clearly ensuring that each argument they offered was a direct response to one of her assertions. Candidates should try to use as many ideas from the passage in their response as they can, avoiding arguments that are unrelated to a specific idea. Conversely, a few candidates referred to a range of ideas but failed to give clear reasons for rejecting them. This resulted in a paraphrase of the passage with some unqualified disagreement expressed.

Examiners reported seeing some real engagement with the task through the voice created: advice was offered to her on how to find free or very cheap activities, organise lift shares, and taste for once the joy of sharing a child's sense of achievement instead of judging the whole procedure merely from observations of a few moments outside the school gate. There were also some scathing comments about how much free time was still available when activities ended by 5.00 pm at the latest. There was also some suggestion that her parenting days were well in the past, and therefore her experience no longer relevant.

Question 3

Question 3 was based on both Passage B and Passage C. **Questions 3(a) – 3(b)** were low tariff questions on both passages, designed to lead candidates to the extended **Question 3(c)** where they are asked to compare how the writers' views and ideas are conveyed.

- (a) **Give two reasons to explain why you think this paragraph is an effective opening to this passage.**

Examiners reported seeing a number of very general responses to this question, which failed to offer specific evidence from the paragraph. Candidates were expected to consider structural features as well as language and to clearly explain why they made the opening paragraph to Passage B effective as an introduction to the rest of the text. There were a number of opportunities to identify an emphatic opening statement, use of humour, the short sentences 'it worries me', the strong authorial voice, or the use of a rhetorical question at the end of the paragraph. The best responses were able to provide two clear examples, but the weakest were rather vague and could not be credited.

- (b) (i) **Pick one word from paragraph 1, 'I know ... love and respect', that shows that Barack Obama grew up without a father.**

The majority of candidates picked out the word 'absent'. Some responses incorrectly selected 'left' or did not follow the instructions and offered a phrase or copied the whole sentence.

- (ii) **Re-read paragraph 2, 'Still, I know ... build their lives.' In your own words, suggest two ways in which Barack Obama was affected by growing up without a father.**

The majority of candidates gained the full two marks on this question. Some responses repeated the same point twice: suffering financially and not being able to afford what other children had.

- (c) **Compare and contrast how the writers of Passage B, A Parents' Survival Guide, and Passage C, Barack Obama on Fatherhood, convey their views and ideas on what makes a good parent.**

In your response you should compare and contrast:

**the views and ideas each writer presents to the reader
the evidence that the writers use to support their views and ideas
the language, structure and techniques used by the writers and why they are effective.**

Remember to support your answer with details from the passages.

Although this question reflects the higher level of demand of this new IGCSE 9–1 syllabus, it was pleasing to see that almost all candidates were able to make a meaningful response to the task. At its heart this task requires candidates to think independently, making judgements about both texts, evaluating the 'power' of the language, structure and techniques the writers have used, and comparing the way they have presented their views and ideas.

Examiners reported seeing a number of impressive responses to this question where candidates were able to compare both passages at length with comments on language and structure skilfully interwoven with the juxtaposition of ideas and views. Better responses made good use of information given; they recognised neither writer used statistical evidence, or expert opinion to support their views, but suggested Obama's obvious success in his future life gave his views more credence. Again, he clearly had experience as a child without a father and as a parent of two girls to draw on, whereas the mother in Passage B does not tell us anything about her children and

states as fact what she observes and interprets as happening after school. Some compared structure, making helpful comments on the short clear paragraphs in Passage C, each covering one topic and reinforcing the argument through use of repetition, but were uncertain how to describe the less structured approach of Passage B. Few made use of the fact that Passage C was a speech presented in a church on Father's Day. Most could say something about Passage B's use of mocking language, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions, but only the best responses explored this in the context of a biased approach, and analysed the effects. There were some weak generalisations about negative versus positive approaches to parenting; others took this further to contrast how the mother might well antagonise parents, creating a division between supporters and opposition, whereas Passage C was more inspiring and all-inclusive, seeking to encourage, support, and create a sense of togetherness and learning via mistakes.

Candidates need to be aware that analysis of use of language must have short, relevant textual support, and a clear explanation of the effect on the audience: device spotting, use of first person/second person/metaphor, rhetorical question, counts at best as 'identification' if purpose and effect are not present. The best responses convincingly analysed Obama's metaphor of building a foundation, and similarly 'the rains will still come and the winds will still blow' was often analysed successfully, although some candidates interpreted it too literally and compared the weather to the snow mentioned in Passage B.

The weaker responses tended to concentrate on passage B instead of making time to fully understand Passage C, hence comparisons, if drawn, tended to be superficial – mother versus father, speech versus article, both writers being against television, both suffering from financial deprivation, for example. These responses failed to take an overview of the passages and what the writers were saying. Some responses included misreading, for example, not all realised that Obama was referring to fathers when he decried watching television all weekend, and very few spotted that the real menace associated with television in his eyes was the damage done to children's sense of self-worth. Some failed to give textual support for the comparison of views, only for use of language that was treated separately; conversely others lifted whole chunks of quotation to make the points for them.

The best responses demonstrated the art of embedding neat snippets of quotation within their analysis. Some failed to explore the differences in views, focusing more on the content of the passages, with the main contrast of laidback parenting and expecting children to learn through their own experience, versus hands-on parenting and seeing yourself as a role-model and guide to your children.

A small number of candidates made little or no use of subject terminology and some of those who did so used a limited range of terminology (such as adjectives and alliteration) and were unsure about the difference between a metaphor and a simile. The very best candidates were able to use a wide range of terminology to support their discussion of how the passages worked to convey the writers' views and opinions to influence the reader. However, it is not necessary to import the kind of linguistic analysis more appropriate for A-Level English Language into this discussion as it can lead to an obsession with naming of parts rather than understanding meaning. There was also considerable repetition in weaker responses to this question. A small minority of candidates ran out of time and didn't attempt **Question 3(c)** or offered a brief, undeveloped response.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0627/02
Directed Writing and Composition

Key Messages

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

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

- articulate and express what is thought, felt and imagined
- organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect
- use a range of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures
- use register appropriate to audience and purpose
- make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- analyse and critically evaluate facts, ideas and opinions, using appropriate support from the text
- select and synthesise information for specific purposes.
- use an appropriate form and style, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives.

General Comments

Most scripts showed a good grasp of what was expected in both the Directed Writing and in the Composition. Responses were substantial and purposeful, on the whole, with relatively few brief or undeveloped answers. There was evidence in many scripts of a clear awareness of how marks were awarded in the different questions and writing genres and most followed the rubric.

Most responses showed an understanding of the topic in **Question 1** and made sensible use of the reading passages in their responses. Responses clearly engaged with the question and the reading material; they were able to identify the various reasons why an employee would want to work from home rather than in a busy office and most were able to explain the advantages for both employee and employer. Most responses in the middle mark range tended to select a range of evidence from the passages. Weaker answers drifted away from the material or listed some points simply.

In the Composition, better responses showed a clear understanding of the features of descriptive or narrative writing and in both genres there was developed and structured writing. Some weaker descriptive writing tended to slide into narrative or in some cases was entirely narrative in character; these responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good descriptive style, such as a focus on detail and a more limited time span.

The best responses in both questions were characterised by the careful selection of precise vocabulary and sentence structures to create specific effects. The reader was often intrigued in the early stages of compositions and the writing was consciously shaped in both genres in order to engage and sustain the reader's interest. In weaker responses, an appropriate register and effective style was more difficult to achieve. In **Question 1**, for example, the required formal tone was sometimes forgotten. In this question and in the compositions, there was insufficient attention paid to basic punctuation in weaker answers. Capital letters were sometimes used rather indiscriminately, appearing frequently where not required but not used for proper nouns, in speech or at the beginnings of sentences. Semi-colons were much in evidence but only quite rarely used accurately.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section 1. Directed Writing

Question 1

You would like to work from home rather than in the busy office of the global company where you are based at the moment.

Write a letter to your current employer to request an arrangement to work from home.

In your letter you should:

- address any concerns you feel your employer might have about the idea**
- explain the advantages for both you and your employer of you working from home.**

Give reasons and examples to support what you say.

You should use evidence from the two passages you have read to help you answer this question. Remember to write the letter using your own words.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Most responses adhered to the letter writing structure using a clear introduction and were able to bring their letters to a logical conclusion. They showed understanding of the requirements of a letter in response to an employer, and in better responses both passages' content was scrutinised, synthesised and evaluated purposefully. They also wrote fluently and used vocabulary to good effect and adopted an effective register. Many, however, simply listed reasons for wanting to work from home.

The marks for reading

Good responses followed the bullet points but also synthesised the evidence and adopted the evaluative stance required for marks above Band 3. Better responses identified and explored the subtleties of the passage, for example the flexibility needed for a business operating in a global environment and the potential wider pool of employees available which could create a more effective workforce. They were able to evaluate both sides of the arguments in order to build a compelling case for home working in this instance. The best responses considered and countered the disadvantages, deriving evidence from the ideas and examples in both passages, i.e. the need to be face to face at meetings, how work could be monitored and the need for impromptu and immediate responses. These better responses assessed the implications of home working with clear and persuasive arguments.

The most successful responses assimilated the details of the passage into a whole new piece: the employee would be more productive at home and often work longer hours; the economic benefits; the flexibility of working can not only suit an individual but also suit business requirements; better work life balance would mean a happier employee who would in turn be more productive; flexible working signals a modern forward looking business which would be an attraction to potential employees and present a positive image.

This kind of evaluative approach to the material in the passage was required for marks in Band 5 and above. Where responses simply selected evidence from the passages, Examiners could not award marks above Band 4.

Responses in the middle range tended to list a range of evidence to support working from home but only for the employee, such as being less tired from the commute, spending less money on travel, having a better work life balance. Other responses at this level tended to focus on one passage only presenting evidence such as the Olympic games, and 'online' companies. Where there was some commentary on evidence, these remarks were just beginning to evaluate or consider mainly the explicit ideas from the passages, some even claiming that they would work '24/7' and also that they would work for less money.

Weaker responses didn't seem to understand the need to draw on information from the texts or present any evaluation of the arguments presented. These responses were vague, yet sometimes creative, for example

inventing a family situation and describing it at great length which necessitated the employee having to work from home. The misconception here seemed to be that the texts were merely a prompt to help generate ideas rather than a source to be used. Some weaker responses showed an over-dependence on some key phrases in the texts and obvious words and phrases such as 'skiving', 'rigid timetable', 'commuting can be a nightmare' and 'downsizing' appeared frequently. These responses found difficulty using the examples of successful working at home. References to the Olympics and Dame Stephanie Shirley often seemed forced or not well integrated. Responses at this level sometimes wrote as the employer, persuading the employee to stay at home to work, misunderstanding the task.

The marks for writing

25 marks were available for register and audience, choice of vocabulary, the structure of the answer, appropriate use of sentence structures and technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Register and audience

Most, across the mark range, wrote an introductory paragraph making clear the purpose of their letter.

The majority of responses adopted an appropriate register in their response and structured their answers according to the requirements of a letter. Numerous, however, did not end the letter appropriately, or even at all. Some responses adopted a plain voice with unambitious vocabulary whereas others appeared far too friendly which undermined the request.

Most candidates addressed the employer in their responses and continued to do so throughout, keeping an appropriate and respectful tone of voice. This was achieved through the use of sophisticated vocabulary and the embedding of clauses which directly addressed to the employer.

Weaker responses became confused who they were actually addressing; some wrote as the employer him/herself.

Structure

Some accomplished responses, awarded high marks for writing, handled the material confidently and presented their arguments as to why they should be allowed to work from home, cogently. The issues addressed were combined into a response which was clearly derived from the ideas in both passages but was not dependent on their structure and sequence. Some stronger responses did not base their structure around the bullet points. At the highest level, an overview of the issues involved was given rather than a list of reasons for working from home. Some fluent responses with effective sentences did not give full attention to sequencing, so ideas within and between paragraphs were not linked as smoothly as they could be. Moreover, there was some tendency, even among stronger responses, to neglect the use of paragraphs. Many middle band responses used discursive markers which provided effective structure. Some responses were structured according to the bullet points, occasionally devoting one long paragraph to each. Weaker responses lacked a clear introduction and conclusion to the letter and ideas were presented in a jumbled way, often without paragraphs. Responses given marks below Band 3 were characterised by brief or no introductions and a simple list of evidence from one, or both passages, in sequence.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 6. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. Responses in Band 4 were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. Responses given marks in Band 3 sometimes showed some clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation errors which precluded Examiners from awarding Band 4 marks and in addition, there was sometimes a simplicity of language and style. Sentence separation errors also appeared at this level and the frequency of errors became self-penalising, as did insecure grammar and awkward phrasing.

There was some overuse of informality, for example 'like' instead of 'as if', or 'such as' and also 'that' or 'which' instead of 'who'. The joining of separate words, for example 'aswell', 'infront', and particularly 'alot' was present.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved

Use material from both passages and offer an overview.

Try to develop ideas from the passages concisely, using inferences that are suggested, but without drifting beyond.

Be aware of the genre you are using for your answer. Think carefully about the right style for a letter or an article and the register appropriate to audience.

Use paragraphs to structure responses.

Check your writing for basic punctuation errors that will inevitably reduce your mark.

Section 2: Composition

Write about 350 to 450 words on one of the following questions.

Up to 16 marks are available for the content and structure of your answer, and up to 24 marks for the style and accuracy of your writing.

Descriptive Writing

Question 2

Write a description with the title, 'The Shop Window'.

OR

Question 3

Describe your thoughts and feelings as you unpack your belongings on the first night of a stay away from home.

The first question was the most popular of the two options.

The first question provided a great variety of responses across the range. The best responses not only demonstrated linguistic and stylistic skills but used a variety of devices to create atmosphere. Complex atmospheres relating to thoughts and feelings experienced were developed. There were some outstanding responses with a wide range of vocabulary and imagery evident.

Most responses chose to write from the perspective of an observer looking in on a shop window from the street. This included toy shops, Christmas displays and antiques. Some responses in the higher bands changed the perspective; a mannequin, a doll, the voice of the shop itself and the contrast between past and future; one successful response incorporated flash backs, taking the reader back to the time of childhood in a sweet shop and then contrasting with the present day. Other successful responses set the shop window within a larger context allowing for varieties of focus; for example, creating inner worlds that resided within the shop itself or alluding to narratives that occurred on the pavement outside it.

Middle band responses tended to list what could be seen in the shop window in a routine and perfunctory way which didn't allow for detail, creativity or development.

Weaker responses lacked focus and wandered from the window or made very little reference to a window of any sort. These responses often had a fairly long narrative build up to arriving at a shop which limited the description of what was in the window or shop. A common issue for some mid and lower Band responses was that in an attempt to convey immediacy these began by employing the present tense but then switched to the past.

The second question also produced responses across the range of marks and encouraged exploration thoughts and feelings and close observation of detail. This question was approached in many ways. Most who responded to this task wrote about themselves. Some were left at boarding schools and focused on thoughts and feelings; stronger responses articulated a sense of loneliness, isolation or abandonment and chose to express sadness, confusion or anger at being away from home. Rooms were unwelcoming and sterile.

Some set their responses in haunted houses, tents, log cabins or prison cells. Most remained as description and very few wandered into the narrative domain. Successful responses were able to take their writing and ideas beyond the obvious boundaries of this task by attaching significance to the belongings unpacked. For instance, a teddy bear became a symbol of parental responsibility and security.

Middle and band responses were not able to create a cohesive overall description as they seemed limited in their understanding of the task's possibilities: their responses often consisted of list like recounts as each object was pulled from a suitcase.

Weaker responses often offered lengthy narratives, typically about going on holiday.

Some responses which included formulaic use of detail from each of the five senses could lead to the details and images being presented in a disjointed way. This approach can weaken the structure and overall picture formed in even the strongest of responses.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were sometimes lower than those for Content and Structure. Better responses chose precise and varied vocabulary and controlled complex sentences with secure punctuation within and between sentences. In weaker responses, tenses were used insecurely, and incomplete or poorly separated sentences adversely affected candidates' marks. There were some examples of strings of incomplete, verbless sentences and this often limited responses to Band 3.

Some responses wrote descriptively through narrated events and, as a result could access the higher marks, whereas weaker responses used narrative alone.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved

Avoid narrative and remember to provide descriptive detail.

Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content.

It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.

Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.

Section 2: Composition

Write about 350 to 450 words on one of the following questions.

Up to 16 marks are available for the content and structure of your answer, and up to 24 marks for the style and accuracy of your writing.

Narrative Writing

Question 4

Write a story with the title, 'Taking a Risk.'

OR

Question 5

Write a story which begins with the words, 'The room had been empty for a while...'

The first narrative question was the least popular.

Question 4 produced a wide range of often adventurously written responses. Most chose to focus their plots on some form of crime or being tempted into committing something serious or dangerous for example a major robbery or a murder.

Often candidates wrote about imaginary risks involving action and the military, being spies, visiting haunted houses or jumping out of planes; however, some risks were more true to teenage life, such as asking a boyfriend/girlfriend on a date, peer or gang related pressure or being brave enough to be assertive.

The most successful responses used subtle twists and turns in the narrative which produced complex and sophisticated writing. Higher band responses explored the benefits and consequences of taking a risk, used appropriate vocabulary to set the scene, intense character description and well placed dialogue.

Middle Band responses often focused on simple events, for example taking a risk as a result of a challenge given by friends – ranging from taking part in extreme sports, visiting a forbidden place or completing some misdemeanour at school; these were event driven with only brief development and some had the predictable ending that 'it was all a dream'.

Lower band responses tended to focus on unrealistic events such as taking the risk to kidnap someone in a fantastical way or to steal unrealistic items. At this level, responses involved complicated 'risks' and lapsed into plots which were too unwieldy to convey events convincingly. Lower bands responses, used unclear sentence structure, over lengthy dialogue, simple vocabulary and had problems with choosing and staying in the correct tense.

There was quite a range of subjects in response to **Question 5**. Responses took both a literal or metaphorical approach where the 'room' was of one's own making and had its own prison like restrictions, the latter of which produced some of the most engaging responses. Responses typically involved rooms belonging to dead siblings or parents, they involved kidnap or hostage situations; some were set in haunted or abandoned houses. The most successful had a clear plot and were cohesive.

Successful students incorporated the room into an established narrative genre such as crime or gothic fiction which allowed them to exploit the features of these narratives by creating suspense and horror. A striking response was a detective who had stumbled across a tortured victim, left hanging from the rafters only to become the victim himself.

Higher band responses often introduced a more dramatic scenario which represented a turning point for the narrator, allowing them to create suspense and a sense of climax to a greater extent. In contrast, one of the most successful responses was a complex and sophisticated monologue which focused on solitary confinement – a considered exploration on the nature of freedom of both the body and the mind.

Average and weaker responses were characterised by less effective, more contrived endings or by less control over the chronology. Responses given marks in Band 3 were particularly dominated by events, some

of them rather unlikely, while Band 2 marks usually reflected very brief accounts with very little to engage the reader in terms of characters and setting. Some stories became a series of events which did not really cohere and some scenarios lacked credibility and in a few cases there was little sequencing or clarity overall. Overuse of dialogue was often a characteristic of these weaker narratives.

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. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, if persistent, limited even competently told stories to Band 3, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation. Speech was over-used only in weaker responses but there were many responses where the punctuation of direct speech was insecure, even when the story itself was quite well-structured. Basic punctuation errors with capital letters, the spelling of simple words and misused homophones appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes so frequent as to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved

Remember that stories need more than events to interest the reader.

Plan the ending before you begin so that you can shape your story appropriately.

Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader.

Originality is important. Try to think of unusual approaches to your topic, but keep the details credible.

Check your writing for errors, especially missing full stops.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0627/03
Speaking and Listening

To begin, the moderation team for 0627/03 would like to thank all those Centres who joined us for this inaugural series. Most Centres were conversant with the required procedures and carried them out professionally and effectively.

Key messages

Administration – General Points

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

Centres should generate audio files – transferred to a CD, DVD or USB drive – **in a recognised common audio file format** such as mp3, wav and wma (but not AUP) that can be played by standard computer software. Recordings should be collated onto either one CD, DVD or USB drive unless the cohort's size prevents this.

The Examiner should introduce each candidate by stating the following: the Centre's name and number; the candidate's name and number; the name of the examiner and the date on which the test is being conducted. The date on which the recording is made must be included to confirm the test has been carried out within the specified window. **A separate introduction is required for each candidate's test.** It is not acceptable for one generic introduction covering the whole of the Centre's cohort to be included with the sample recordings in the same way it would not be acceptable for a generic coversheet to be provided for every candidate taking a written examination. This is a formal terminal test and the same principles apply.

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

Where candidates have been entered but fail to take the test they should be recorded as **'absent' and not awarded a mark of zero.** A mark of zero should only be awarded to a candidate who is present for the test but who does not say anything worth awarding marks for when assessed against the marking grids.

Where there were issues, the following applies:

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

The Examiner should **introduce each recording** to include the required information.

Please check the recordings at regular intervals during the testing process to ensure their quality.

Please also check the CD, DVD or USB before despatching to Cambridge. Faulty recordings continue to delay the process of moderating a small minority of centres.

Conduct of the test

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

Part 1 should be a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 5 minutes. Please note this does not include the examiner's introduction. Where a Part 1 response is short, please consider whether the **assessment criteria can be adequately met** and assess accordingly. It is difficult to see how a response can meet higher level criteria in a performance lasting significantly less than four minutes. Equally, a response which is significantly overlong cannot be regarded as fulfilling the criteria for Band 1. It is in the best interests of the candidate that the examiner steps in to halt any Part 1 talk that exceeds the maximum time allowed.

Given that both speaking and listening are assessed in Part 2, it is important that the question and answer session lasts long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. **In Part 2 a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 5 minutes of discussion is expected.** It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure these timings are adhered to.

Candidates can take into the test **one cue card containing prompt notes**. These notes should not be written in full sentences or be read verbatim. A reliance on written material in Part 1 is counter-productive and only leads to a lack of natural fluency which affects performance. Please note that each cue card should include the name of the candidate and be retained by the centre for six months after the date on which the results are published.

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

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

It is important that the tests are undertaken **within the prescribed test window** published by Cambridge for each series. Tests taken outside this window are problematic. Centres are reminded that as part of the examiner's introduction to every individual test undertaken the full date should be quoted.

The test can be performed in front of a live audience but **this audience must be passive and silent throughout both parts of the test.** There should be no interaction between the candidate and the audience in either part of the test.

Accuracy of assessment

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

Part 1 should last for a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 5 minutes. Examiners should not interrupt or halt candidates within this time. 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 allowed.

One prominent cause of inaccuracy was generosity in the awarding of marks in Part 2 for short responses which were not of sufficient length or challenge to secure the higher bands. As in Part 1, 4 minutes is the minimum length required.

Articulate, confident candidates are best served with topics which lead towards higher level thinking including analysis and reflection rather than those where the content is predominantly factual.

It is important that the Examiners do not dominate 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 are expected.

Approaches to Part 1

The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates took ownership of a topic, had good knowledge of the subject and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Well planned and prepared responses are generally more successful but candidates should avoid an over-reliance on notes or over-rehearsal. Seemingly 'artificial' performances, where a natural fluency is missing, do not benefit the candidates. For weaker candidates, as with any other examination, more tuition from Centres in terms of general preparation, technique and confidence is required prior to the candidates planning their talks independently.

The focus for some candidates was just to get the material delivered, with less thought given to how the talk would be received by an audience. Often, this involved candidates memorising and over-rehearsing their talks to the detriment of the actual performance. A sense of audience was lost leading to less engaging performances. The best candidates often had a passion for their topic so the use of tone came more naturally.

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

When choosing a suitable topic for Part 1 candidates should also consider whether the subject lends itself to further development in Part 2. Sometimes a topic appears suited to Part 1 but there is limited opportunity for an examiner to develop a response to Part 2 that will be meaningful and last 4–5 minutes. This often leads to off-topic questioning in Part 2 that is counter-productive and limiting.

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

- My passion for a personal interest/hobby (that moves beyond the purely descriptive and is reflective and thought-provoking)
- Cultural change and the issues it raises
- Graphology
- Discrimination focusing on a social issue – i.e. disability, gender inequality
- The Human Singing Voice
- Topical events – e.g. Afforestation, Global Currency, Feminism, Space Travel
- Experience of other cultures- moving countries/other education systems compared
- The Fluency of Languages
- An extreme sport (focus on one specific sport)

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

- My Family/Friends/Pets (where there is little substance and no attempt to move beyond the descriptive)
- The Celebrity I Admire (where the talk is purely descriptive and a series of regurgitated facts and rumours)
- Footballer's Wages and Social Media (often cliché ridden and lacking depth and development)
- Gaming (where there is limited planning and very little beyond the descriptive)
- Future Plans (where the talk is generic and unfocussed)
- Four Things Which Are Important to You (Too wide-ranging and lacking focus)
- Football/Gaming/Social Media (Where a reliance on general knowledge as opposed to careful planning led to short undeveloped responses)

Management of Part 2

Most Examiners were supportive in their questioning to encourage and to settle nervousness. This helped students to achieve their best. Most Examiners conducted Part 2 effectively by asking pertinent questions which enabled candidates to extend and develop their Part 1 content.

Many Examiners showed genuine interest and enthusiasm in the candidates' topics and provided appropriate encouragement. This helped to put candidates at ease and subsequently resulted in a better performance in Part 2.

Open and challenging questioning gave many opportunities to allow candidates to develop their ideas as fully as they could. Questions that encourage candidates to explore ideas and demonstrate development of explanation and higher-level thinking always result in better performances. Some appropriate evidence of sensitivity by the listener was also noted when the topic was personal and potentially upsetting. (It should be noted that candidates should be dissuaded from choosing topics which could cause an intense emotional reaction under test conditions.)

Some candidates were hindered through the listener cutting into a response when it may have been 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.

Some Part 2 responses were limited because the Examiner ran out of questions to push the candidate to develop their ideas, thus denying them further opportunities to demonstrate their ability. **It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure each candidate is given the opportunity to extend their discussion to the advised time of 4 minutes for Part 2.**

Advice to Centres

Prepare for this examination as any other – i.e. techniques/research/thought about appropriate topics. Practise methods of presentation and response to questioning in other situations before preparing for this test.

Give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills through effective questioning in Part 2 and appropriate timings for both parts of the test. Keep to the time limits in the syllabus to avoid candidates being adversely limited in the accurate application of the mark scheme.

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

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

When conducting the discussions in Part 2, examiners should have plenty of questions to ask to push candidates to use the time allowed effectively. 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.

At the top end of the mark scheme, responses should be the required lengths and include evidence of higher level thinking skills being applied by the candidates. This requires the examiner in Part 2 to ask more challenging questions and keep the content on task throughout.