

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/01
Composition

General comments

In the Composition component of the syllabus, many candidates showed an ability to write thoughtful, confident and well-structured essays. There was some outstanding work at the top of the range, and it was evident that teachers and candidates had prepared carefully for the examination. The interesting, amusing and thought-provoking responses testified to the hard work of the candidates and their enthusiastic desire to show their linguistic skills to advantage. Most candidates engaged well with their chosen task and even among the weakest scripts there were few where the meaning was continuously in doubt. The performance overall was comparable to the standard of previous years and the paper proved accessible and aroused interest across the ability range and in the many varied areas of the world where this examination is taken.

Some candidates developed their **Part 1** essays at too great a length and found that they had insufficient time to deal adequately with the Directed Writing task of **Part 2**. Long answers often deteriorate in accuracy and lose focus on the topic, whilst very short answers, of which there were quite a lot in **Part 2**, will incur a penalty and may also fail to include the required content points. Candidates are advised to note and abide by the advice given in the rubrics on how much time should be spent and the number of words expected in each part of the paper. Although careful planning is advisable before embarking on a composition, to write out a full draft version before copying it out unchanged is not a wise use of limited time; candidates would be better advised to allow time for checking and correction of errors when the work has been completed.

In many **Part 1** compositions, there were still examples of prepared introductory paragraphs describing scenery or weather conditions, or the inclusion of passages from practice essays written on topics from past papers whilst preparing for this examination. Candidates must realise, however, that such devices become obvious and intrusive when the standard of linguistic accuracy in such passages differs noticeably from that of the rest of the essay or from that shown in the directed writing exercise of **Part 2**.

The more able candidates had imaginative tales and perceptive comment to offer with considerable freshness of approach and originality of expression. The increasing universality of the English language was reflected in the elimination of some typical errors of preposition and idiom seen in the past. However, the other consequence of candidates' greater familiarity with modern English used in the media was seen in the frequent use of colloquialisms and abbreviations - e.g. 'you guys', 'pissed off', 'crap', 'wanna/gotta/gonna' ('I did not wanna die'), 'He has a sad kinda face' – or texting symbols, especially 'u' ('r u going?'), all of which are inappropriate or offensive in formal English composition for this examination. Candidates often enlivened their essays for dramatic effect, with short passages of direct speech; unfortunately, this was often unparagraphed or even unpunctuated and thus confused rather than clarified the situation in the narrative.

Weaker candidates and those of average ability showed genuine engagement with the topics, even where there were difficulties with tense sequence and consistency, verb formation and flaws in idiom or word order, leading to imprecise or clumsy expression. Meaning was rarely in doubt. However, limited or inaccurate use of complex structures, errors of agreement and failure to separate sentences correctly or to venture beyond a mundane level of vocabulary were features that marred some essays in this range.

Some candidates were unwise in their choice of topic, selecting subjects where they proved to have insufficient material and therefore resorted to repetition or claimed a word-count that was patently not fulfilled in the script. Others were over-ambitious and struggled to express complex and lively ideas beyond their linguistic ability, sometimes in 'learned', but inappropriately used, vocabulary.

Nevertheless, the essay topics of **Part 1** provided the opportunity for candidates to write from personal experience, opinion or imagination, and most seized the chance eagerly and wrote lively and original essays, varying the tone and register effectively according to the subject matter. Although the more abstract topics of **Questions 2 and 3** presented greater difficulty to all but the best, no topic was conspicuously avoided this year. However, by far the most popular question across the ability range was the 'open' narrative of **Question 5**.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1

Describe someone who makes you very angry and two occasions when you let your anger show.

Candidates write well when they draw on their own experiences, and this was reflected in responses to this topic, which proved quite popular across the ability range. It elicited some very good responses – amusing, witty stories which allowed candidates to express their pent-up anger and frustration, which eventually erupted as their feelings came to the surface. Often younger siblings, cousins or classmates were the focus for the anger, and although the annoying behaviour was often trivial, the feelings aroused were deeply felt. Many referred to the irritation caused by a younger child being over-indulged by the parents, whilst plaguing the writer with 'borrowed' clothes and make-up, wrecked rooms and refusal to change the TV channel. Annoyance with classmates, often through bullying, usually ended with a physical confrontation. Sometimes, the writer's anger was aroused by an adult, usually a teacher or a strict grandparent rather than a parent.

Most candidates followed the structure suggested by the question, and the two occasions were related in a straightforward manner, though some writers were more adventurous and began with one of the 'occasions' and used a flashback technique to show how the situation had evolved.

In many instances, candidates wanted to include dialogue, but in some Centres, lack of understanding of correct paragraphing and punctuation and frequent blurring of the distinction between direct and indirect speech led to considerable confusion.

This was also a topic that attracted the 'prepared' opening paragraph involving 'blood red sunrises', 'chirping birds' and other familiar cliches. These openings were stilted and out of place, but the writing began to flow and have greater impact as the narrators focused on the object of their anger, of whom they wrote with such strong feeling that sometimes control of the language was lost and tenses, agreement and punctuation suffered.

Question 2

What are the pleasures and the disappointments of shopping?

This topic was not of such universal popularity as might have been expected but appealed to some areas more than others and usually to girls more than boys. Examiners were impressed by the careful balance attempted in most essays, in dealing with both parts of the question. However, most candidates found more pleasures than disappointments on which to comment. Shopping was usually seen as 'retail therapy' or 'an enjoyable form of self-indulgence' by the more able candidates who approached the topic in a light-hearted vein and wrote of their shopping sprees involving 'large amounts of money, extravagant purchases and, sequentially, aching feet.' Such expeditions led to 'material bliss' and 'the inevitably deflated wallet.' Other, more serious, approaches focused on the pleasures of relieving stress, enjoying the company of friends and family, keeping up with fashion trends and getting a bargain, whilst drawing attention to the temptations of advertising and peer pressure, the sale of poor quality or ill-fitting goods and the difficulties of getting a parking space.

Some responses relied on two or three anecdotes to illustrate their views, or introduced cautionary tales to show the consequences when excessive shopping and over-spending led to bankruptcy or the inability to purchase the necessities of daily life.

In the hands of weaker candidates, this topic produced disjointed and repetitive responses with confusion of tenses between present, past and conditional and haphazard pronoun use. Some essays were short, as candidates ran out of things to say. There were errors in idiom: 'going shopping' was frequently replaced by 'going to shopping' or 'going for shopping' and 'disappointment' was frequently mis-spelt, despite being given on the question paper.

Question 3

Friendship.

This topic was perhaps the least successfully answered, though very popular. When chosen by the best candidates, adopting a philosophical approach to consider the notion and nature of friendship, there were some outstanding essays – structured, thoughtful, wide-ranging and interesting, written in carefully controlled, mature prose. Unfortunately, such scripts were rare. This topic attracted many weaker candidates who also attempted an abstract or reflective consideration of the concept of friendship, which proved far beyond their linguistic skills and thought processes. The results were unstructured, confused, rambling and repetitive pieces. There was considerable confusion between 'friend' and 'friendship' and 'relation' and 'relationship', many candidates seeing these as interchangeable: 'A friendship is a close relation or a connection between us and someone special to us. We want to make them become our friendship'; 'My friendship and I had made a promise that we have to help each other', 'I have three friendships but my best friendship is Amir'. Linguistically, such candidates floundered, finding it difficult to sustain a tense sequence and using pronouns inconsistently and ambiguously: 'If he is a good person and when his friend tries to imitate him he automatically becomes a very good person.'

An alternative approach to the topic, and one which proved much more successful, was the narration of a story illustrating the loyalty or courage of a true friend or the betrayal and bad influence of a false one, letting his friend down by turning to vice. A number of scenarios from past papers, possibly used in preparation for the examination, were noted: a rescue from a fire; help on an adventure holiday; betrayal of a secret.

One thing that was clear was the familiarity of the candidates with the saying 'A friend in need is a friend indeed', which appeared in virtually every essay on this topic!

Question 4

Write about an occasion when someone had to find a family possession which had been lost.

This topic was the least popular choice but it did elicit some engaging and entertaining narratives. The time sequence was implied in the question and the straightforward narrative past tense did not present any particular problems. There was some good characterisation, often enhanced by direct speech. Candidates were generally adept at capturing the emotions of panic, frustration and anger involved, as well as the relief when the lost possession was recovered, or regret and grief if it proved to be lost forever. The mislaid item was frequently jewellery, a significant heirloom, legal documents, a passport (as featured in a question on a past paper), a straying pet or, in one case, a vintage car! A number of candidates misunderstood 'possession' as 'position' and wrote about the family's loss of honour or status following financial problems or immorality. One candidate mistook 'possession' for 'procession' and caused an Examiner considerable confusion with 'the family possession moved slowly down the street'!

Question 5

Write a story which includes the words: 'We all agreed it was too late to do anything about it.'

As expected, this 'open' narrative proved extremely popular with candidates across the ability range and in all areas, eliciting some very good work. The key sentence was appropriate to a wide range of circumstances and was usually convincingly integrated into the narrative at a suitable point. Candidates allowed their imaginations to run freely and produced a great variety of moving, entertaining and exciting tales from those of families stricken by terminal illness, drug addiction and financial problems to tragedies at sea or in the mountains and even to military action and encounters with aliens. A number of essays began with the quotation and adopted a 'flashback' technique to follow. Weaker candidates sometimes repeated previously written work and simply attached the quotation unconvincingly at the end. There were some strong first-person narratives involving disastrous misjudgements leading to catastrophes and botched rescue attempts, or to grief over a friend or relative led into bad ways by dubious acquaintances.

Inappropriate learned or re-hashed opening paragraphs were frequently seen: 'The moon silvery and not yet augmented posed its way behind the clouds and abruptly surfaced out like the shiny head of an ogre enveloping the earth.' Such an opening was sometimes followed by the 'Ring, Ring!' of the telephone (seen so often as the opening of a narrative, whatever the main focus), or the 'purple prose' prefaced a perfectly straightforward adventure story related in suitably straightforward language – but the feeling of authenticity had already been lost. Such false introductions are invariably counter-productive and candidates would be well advised to avoid them.

Part 2

Most candidates seemed to understand the scenario and set about giving the required information with enthusiasm. Nearly all scored 4 or 5 marks for the content points. The most frequent omission was the detail of exactly when the incident took place; many candidates gave a time of day but no date: 'The old man fell to the ground when time is 8.00 p.m. at night.' 'It was Sunday morning on Saturday when I was jogging in the park at 12 a.m.' The rubric references to 'a famous place' and 'in your country' were loosely interpreted or perhaps not carefully read, with many incidents taking place in Europe or USA and at famous (or infamous) places varying from the museum, zoo or temple to the shopping mall, theme park or bus stop. The physical descriptions of the old man and 'the other person' were given in detail. The cause of the fall often involved robbery and violence on the part of the other person and the subsequent happenings went far beyond the time and place of the incident to hospital visits, court appearances or of the writer's continued enjoyment of his visit to the famous place. Many candidates wrote far too much, seemingly unaware of the need for precise factual detail, rather than a display of lurid description and narrative technique, in an account written for the police.

Although the required heading, signature and date at the close of the report format were clearly stated in the rubric, many candidates ignored the instruction and adopted full letter format or a combination of the two. Others offered no format at all but wrote a straightforward narrative based on the required content points, with a suitable title: 'Murder on the Mountain' or something similar.

It seemed that the majority of the candidates were not familiar with the crisp, informative tone, precise detail and concise, clear style needed for a task of this kind. Perhaps the most surprising thing of all was that so many candidates who had structured their **Part 1** essays perfectly well in paragraphs failed to paragraph the account in **Part 2** entirely. Paragraphing is essential in any piece of written communication to clarify the sense and sequence and to assist the instant comprehension of the reader. In the Directed Writing task, the bullet points help to indicate paragraphs, whatever the specific format required.

Linguistically, many candidates fared better in **Part 2**, helped by the language of the rubrics and the bullet points and the generally appropriate simple narrative past tense – although 'man' was frequently written as 'men', adding to the problems of number agreement, confusion of pronouns and, particularly, errors of idiom that were found in these accounts: 'An aged old guy who had wearing a blue jean and seems like 40'; 'an old men with a black trouser, a stick on his hand, a lot of white hairs on his head and a grey mouth starch.' 'he had a short pant clothings, bald hairs and a scar on his left face.'

Candidates should be encouraged to consider carefully the intended audience, purpose of the task and required format in **Part 2**, to ensure that they present the information in appropriate language and tone.

Final Comments

Teachers preparing candidates for future examinations will have noted various linguistic weaknesses mentioned in considering the individual questions in this report and will, no doubt, advise their candidates accordingly.

Problems with sequence, inconsistency of tense, incorrect verb forms, and failure to separate sentences correctly with appropriate punctuation, all noted in previous years' reports, have again emerged as areas of particular difficulty. Another punctuation error seen this year is the tendency to use an apostrophe whenever a word ends with 's': 'They always's used to hurt my feeling's and sometime's make me angry for many day's.' Accurate punctuation is a vital aid to a reader's instant comprehension, in the same way as paragraphing is vital to the reader's understanding of the sequence of thought processes or events.

This year's paper has also highlighted the problems of singular and plural form and agreement associated with some irregular, abstract and collective nouns – hair, trousers, jeans, pants, clothing – and the confusion

caused by the inconsistent use of personal pronouns: 'Everyone going for shopping would want the shop to have the trainer they want in your right size. That is one of the pleasures we get from the shopping.'

It was disappointing to find text-messaging symbols, particularly 'u', still in use despite last year's warning.

Teachers should emphasise the importance of candidates choosing topics that allow them to write from personal experience, in familiar settings, wherever possible. It would be advisable for teachers to give more specific guidance on the presentation of the discursive essay: the planning needed to structure the ideas and arguments into a forceful statement of opinion in appropriate vocabulary, avoiding repetition. Such training would give candidates more confidence to opt for topics other than the narrative and allow for more choice in selecting the question which can show their command of English at its best.

Candidates should also be advised again that it is unwise to attempt to include rehearsed or partially memorised passages or to try to adapt essays written to past titles to suit those of the present paper. Such practices are contrary to the purpose of the examination and are almost invariably obvious to the Examiners.

Examiners have commented, as always, on the obvious hard work that has gone into the preparation of candidates for this syllabus and the genuine effort made by all the candidates to use their linguistic skills, however limited, to express their ideas and opinions and show their ability in this highly regarded and important examination.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/02
Comprehension

General comments

This year's paper was another narrative topic and seemed to be accessible to most candidates. Overall, the passage seemed to engage their interest and be well matched to their understanding.

The performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Almost the entire range of marks, from 1 to 48, was seen. Examiners reported very few rubric infringements.

As in previous years, candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper, and more candidates than in previous years managed to offer both a rough draft and a fair copy in response to the summary question. The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text, and assessment of ability to express these points fluently and in own words. As in previous years, the questions giving most difficulty were the questions which required candidates to answer in their own words; some candidates seemed to ignore this rubric or, even when they identified the key words for recasting, or indeed the key words were identified for them by the question, found it impossible to find synonyms. There was a particular problem with this paper in the second of the two own-words questions, where the majority of candidates were unable to isolate the words to be re-cast into own words, and instead often referred to an irrelevant section of the text.

A small number of candidates numbered every word in the summary, placing the number above the word, thus making the summary a very crowded marking area, and hindering the task of the Examiner. Examiners reported a higher number of candidates than in the past writing in excess of the 160 words prescribed by the rubric. Where candidates made alterations to their summaries, this was not always done neatly, or was sometimes done in pencil; candidates must understand that such untidy or pencil alterations make it difficult for Examiners to check the accuracy of the number of words used in the summary. Furthermore, untidy or pencil elimination of extra words and phrases, in an attempt to reduce the number of words used, sometimes resulted in crossing out key points or key verbs or articles, producing nonsense and denying marks both for content and for style of writing.

Again, some Examiners were concerned about Centres which gave candidates examination booklets of eight or twelve pages, resulting in waste of paper and unnecessary postage expenses.

Many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and handwriting, the fact that spelling and punctuation were generally very good and the overall impressive standard of written English.

Comments on specific questions

As is customary, **Question 1(a)** was designed, as the opening question, to ease candidates into the examination with a fairly accessible question, and, indeed, the majority of candidates scored the mark for writing that the noise of the rattling anchor awoke the writer. Similarly, most candidates scored the mark in **Question 1(b)** for the correct answer that the writer went up on deck because he had reached his destination, or because he wanted to see Spain, or Vigo, or the port; if the candidate also made reference to the cry of the cockerel, the howling of the dog, his enjoyment of the voyage or his first experience of Spain, then these were regarded as neutral extensions and did not deny the mark. Candidates who failed to score the mark here usually did so because they copied the irrelevant sections of the text about cockerel, dog, etc. without also making reference to the fact that he had reached his destination. Very many candidates scored at least one of the two available marks in **Question 1(c)**, where the answers required a reference to shape

for the first mark and to light for the second mark. Where candidates scored only one mark, it tended to be for the 'light' answer rather than the 'shape' answer. Thus the candidate who wrote that Vigo resembled a sparkling necklace because it was looped or curved around the bay and that the lights were twinkling scored two marks. Some candidates referred only to the shape of the city, without stating what that shape was, and thus were denied the mark for that limb of the answer. Candidates who also made reference to the fact that there was no movement among the houses were denied the mark for the limb in which the reference was made, as such an answer was sufficiently wrong to be regarded as spoiling an otherwise correct answer rather than being simply a neutral extension. Once a candidate referred to lack of movement, he/she failed to show understanding of the question.

Candidates fared reasonably well with **Question 2(a)**, where the mark was awarded for writing that the evidence which suggested that the writer might have difficulty settling in the new country was that he did not speak the language, or that he only had enough words to ask for as glass of water. Where candidates failed to score this mark, it was generally because they spoiled a correct answer by also making reference to the writer's rucksack, ticket, tent etc. – such answers lacked the precision required in the question's asking for 'what other evidence'. Other candidates failed to score here because they gave the lack of return ticket as the evidence, whereas the reference to the lack of return ticket was the answer to **Question 2(b)**. Likewise, in **Question 2(b)**, candidates who failed to gain the mark did so because of lack of precision; the 'other piece of evidence' required was that the writer had no return ticket, and extraneous reference to the rucksack, tent etc. once again was imprecise enough to deny the mark. Many candidates offered the wrong answer that the writer headed for the open country, while others lost the focus of the answer by writing that he could not afford a return ticket. **Questions 2 (a) and (b)** were relatively easy to answer, but candidates needed to focus on the correct answer rather than haul into their responses extraneous information as a kind of insurance policy against failure. To award such answers would be unfair to those candidates who tackled the questions with the necessary degree of close attention and precision.

Question 3 was the first of the three questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. It was more straightforward than the type of own-words question which requires candidates to isolate the key words for re-casting before they can properly begin to answer the question; in this case, the key words 'primitive' and 'instinct' were set out before the candidate, where acceptable synonyms for 'primitive' were, among others, 'basic', 'natural', 'inbuilt' or 'subconscious', and acceptable synonyms for 'instinct' were 'urge', 'feeling', 'intuition' or 'inclination'. Candidates scored badly here; where a mark was scored, it was for giving a synonym for 'instinct' rather than one for 'primitive'. Many candidates made reference to ancient history, or primitive man, without formally defining the key words; there was a general knowledge rather than language precision shown. Other candidates thought that the key words referred to people, e.g. policemen, vigilantes, security guards or government officials; others clearly understood that something ancient was involved, but were unable to express it.

Question 4(a) was an inferential question, which was indicated to candidates by the conditional tense used in the question; the mark could be scored for writing that the writer felt abandoned because he was alone, or because there was now no way he could go back home or because he was in a new or unfamiliar country. Very many candidates made a sensible inference here, although a popular wrong answer was merely to paraphrase the question and write that he felt left behind, or an equivalent. In **Question 4(b)**, the mark was awarded to candidates who wrote that the writer felt foolish because he had wanted to go to Spain, or it had been his own idea, or simply that he was not in fact abandoned; again, many candidates were successful here. Popular wrong answers included the feeling of a personal relationship with the ship, his lack of return ticket and the idea that the ship left without waiting for the writer to make up his mind about whether he really wanted to stay in Spain.

Question 5 carried two marks, which could be scored for giving any two of three possible correct answers. The first of these was that the writer was sleeping in a ruined castle, the inference being that sleeping in any ruined building would not be conducive to sleep. The second possible correct answer was that he was sleeping near to the skeleton of a sheep, and the third possible correct answer was that there might be bandits nearby. Mere reference to the remains of fires did not score a mark; candidates had to infer the reason for the fires, namely that they had been lit by the bandits. Candidates fared generally well with this question, although some candidates misread the question and wrote an answer which explained why the writer needed to sleep - for example, to be out of the wind or away from the dogs - rather than why it was surprising that he did in fact sleep.

Question 6 proved to be the most challenging questions on the paper, with many candidates scoring only one or even no mark; full marks were extremely rare, and so this proved to be a discerning question which differentiated candidates. In **Question 6(a)**, a mark could be scored for writing that it could be seen that not much rain fell around Zamora because the roads were, or the writer was, covered in dust. Lifting line 49 scored the mark – ‘I stood there, covered in road dust’, although the agent in fact was the first person rather than the third person. The second piece of evidence, which scored the second mark, was that the river was dried up. Lifting at lines 50-51 scored the mark here – ‘the nearby river was like a leathery arm of wrinkled mud, with a vein down the middle of green, stagnant water.’ In each case, although lifting was acceptable, the correct agent had to be given, namely the writer (or ‘I’ in the case of lifted answers) or the road or the river; mere reference to dust or lack of water was insufficient. Where candidates scored only one of the two available marks, it tended to be for the reference to the river; the reference to dusty conditions was beyond the grasp of most candidates. Many wrote wrongly that the bright sunlight or the abundant crops was the evidence that not much rain fell; this was surprising as surely lack of rain would lead to less, rather than more, abundant harvest.

Question 6(b) was the second of the questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. This was more challenging than **Question 3** because candidates had first to isolate the key words, namely ‘decrepit’ and ‘splendid’. It had been intended that candidates be led to these key words by the trigger words in the text: ‘now’ and ‘past’. Thus the candidates should have made the link between the text at lines 49-50 (‘somewhat decrepit now but still retaining something of its splendid past’) and the question, which asked candidates what contrast the writer saw between Zamora as it is now and as it was in the past, i.e. it used to be splendid but now it is decrepit. Acceptable synonyms for ‘decrepit’ were words like ‘ageing’, ‘crumbling’, ‘worn’, ‘shabby’ and ‘decaying’, while acceptable synonyms for ‘splendid’ were words like ‘beautiful’, ‘grand’, ‘great’ and ‘magnificent’. Very many candidates came nowhere near the key words, let alone acceptable synonyms, because they focused on an irrelevant section of the text at lines 46-47, and wrote wrongly that Zamora used to be a fertile area but was no longer thus. Perhaps they failed to realise that Zamora was a place – although that information was given in the introduction to the text – and therefore they focused wrongly on climate and agriculture rather than on the isolation of the key words. Some gave an appropriate synonym for ‘splendid’, but lost the mark by wrongly linking it to the countryside rather than the town.

Candidates scored generally well in **Question 7**. The majority of them made the correct point in **Question 7(a)** that what the writer and the young men had in common was that they all had violins, or that they all intended to earn their living through playing music. The two marks available in **Question 7(b)** were awarded for writing that evidence of Artur’s illness was, firstly, his cough and, secondly, his fever; these were relatively easy points to make and could in fact be scored by lifting at line 60 (‘feverish blue eyes’) and line 63 (‘rasps of coughing’). A popular wrong answer was to write that Artur talked with vitality, a lift which was, presumably, not understood by the candidates who made this mistake.

Question 8 was an inferential question, the answer to which had to be the fact that Artur was fatally ill or near to death. Weak answers such as ‘ill’ or even ‘seriously ill’ were not sufficient to score the available mark; there was sufficient evidence in the text, in the references to Artur being carried ‘like a corpse’, the fact that nobody spoke and the persistent coughing, to suggest imminent death. A popular wrong answer was to write that Artur was already dead, or that his friend was weeping from exhaustion or because their income would be depleted by Artur’s not being able to play.

Question 9 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. Examiners reported marks ranging from 0 to 5 here. Most candidates who attempted ‘finally’ scored the mark for synonyms such as ‘at last’, although a popular wrong answer was ‘after a long time’. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered ‘darkness’ or ‘dimness’ for ‘gloom’ and ‘hiding place’ or ‘shelter’ for ‘refuge’ (although some candidates confused the word ‘refuge’ with ‘refugee’ – any suggestion that the word meant a person failed to score). Candidates scored a mark for writing ‘low’ or ‘soft’ for ‘faint’, and for offering ‘gently’ or ‘relaxingly’ for ‘soothingly’. A popular wrong answer for ‘faint’ was ‘unconscious’, thus showing the need to read the word in its context rather than blindly offer a synonym. The least popular choices were probably ‘vitality’, meaning ‘energy’ or ‘liveliness’, and ‘enthralled’, meaning ‘captivated’ or ‘charmed.’ Because understanding only is being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form is not insisted upon, and therefore, although synonyms such as ‘made happy’ were preferable as answers to ‘cheered up’, ‘answers such as merely ‘happy’ were acceptable, as well as words like ‘contented’ and ‘pleased’. Examiners reported, as in previous years, some candidates giving the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, but there were many fewer cases of this than in previous years. As ever, there were some candidates who offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. Another

misconception among a few candidates was that all of the words would need to be tackled, or perhaps that the best five of eight would be credited; such candidates must understand that only the first five attempts will be looked at by the Examiner.

The final question on the paper was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise the difficulties experienced by the writer on his journey from Vigo to Zamora. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were twenty-one content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. The most common fault was the failure to select and focus exclusively on the writer's difficulties. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question. However, there continued to be the incidence reported of candidates failing to cross out their rough draft, thus failing to make it clear to the Examiner which version was to be marked. A very small number of candidates forfeited their Style mark by writing their summary in note form rather than continuous prose.

There were three content points available in paragraph three. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that the writer had to climb up from the coast, or to a hilltop. Merely writing that the writer put up his tent was not sufficient to score, as there was no obvious difficulty in such an action; the difficulty, according to the text, lay in the climb. The paragraph went on to explain that the country ahead of the writer was desolate, wild or silent and that the writer was homesick.

In paragraph four, another six content points were available. Very few candidates made the points that there were eerie shadows in the valley or that the coastline looked menacing. More candidates made the points that the writer felt abandoned or alone when the ship sailed off, that he, or Vigo, became cold, that he had only stones to lie upon and that he was troubled by wild dogs.

A further two marks were awarded in paragraph five to candidates who wrote that the writer was drenched in dew and that his limbs were stiff. Many candidates scored the first of these two points, but very few scored the second.

In paragraph six, a mark was awarded to candidates who wrote that the writer felt lonely when he saw signs of life; many candidates wrote in random sections of their summary that he was lonely, but scored a mark only when they linked his loneliness to the ship sailing off in paragraph four and to his seeing signs of life in paragraph six. The next content point was that the writer frequently thought that he was lost; many candidates lost the mark for writing that he was in fact lost. The remaining three content points in paragraph six were that the skeleton of the sheep frightened him (not merely the presence of the skeleton, which was sufficient to score in **Question 5**), that the place was an obvious hideout for bandits, and that he was hungry or that his food had run out, a point which the majority of candidates made.

Paragraph seven contained a further five content points. The sunlight gave the writer a sore head, or sore eyes, his face was burnt by the sun, or he had sunburn, he was covered in dust, he was sweating and he had been carrying a heavy load.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to break away from the words of the original text varied from candidate to candidate and even from Centre to Centre, but that in general candidates were skilful at recasting the original text in their own words. There was a much lower incidence of random, mindless copying than in the past. However, some weaker candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points. It seemed that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, indeed, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentence, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style. Examiners reported a higher than usual incidence of candidates attempting to select content points from irrelevant sections of the text or from paragraphs outside the parameters of the summary as specified by the rubric. In addition, Examiners reported candidates who scored only a few marks for content points, despite being clearly proficient in English, because their summaries were far too generalised and lacking in the precision required to make content points; such candidates made oblique references rather than specific points.

Common errors reported were the usual failures of agreement in singular and plural, misplaced or omitted prepositions, omission of definite and indefinite articles, use of articles where none were in fact required, and inconsistent and illogical verb tenses. As already indicated, spelling and punctuation were generally very good, and handwriting clear.