

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/01
Composition

General comments

The topics in this component of the syllabus presented candidates with the opportunity to respond with personal interest and imagination on subjects that were readily accessible across the ability range and across the different geographical regions. It was obvious that both teachers and candidates had worked hard in preparation for the exam. Examiners were impressed by the confidence and enthusiasm of the responses and commented both on the interest of the content and the slightly improved level of communication achieved.

The questions set achieved the required differentiation across the range, from a number of excellent scripts, with some highly impressive writing, to some relatively much weaker and more uncertain presentations. It was pleasing to see that some candidates could produce high-quality writing within the time span of the examination. Familiarity with the nature of the paper over the years and careful practice, in preparation for the examination, meant that candidates were well trained in what to expect and what was required. Many candidates planned and developed their essays at some length, sustaining a fair level of accurate writing and relevant content, although some seemed to spend too long on plans that sometimes ran to two pages, leaving too little time to develop the fair copy fully or accurately. It was noted that there were fewer very long essays this year; candidates have realised that over-long answers often deteriorate in accuracy and presentation or leave insufficient time for careful and finished responses to **Part 2**, forfeiting marks that would have been gained with better use of the time available.

In **Part 1**, the two narrative choices, **Questions 3 and 5**, were by far the most popular, **Question 3** having a particularly wide appeal. Perhaps these questions were appealing as narratives in themselves or maybe it was simply that many candidates found themselves able to adapt stories that they had written before to suit the topics, some very successfully, others rather less so. The factually based discursive titles of **Questions 1, 2 and 4** demanded greater awareness of the subject matter and a more specialised vocabulary. Nevertheless, there was something for every candidate's level of interest and an opportunity to select a topic according to their particular skills and enthusiasms. The task in **Part 2** and the familiarity of the context allowed many candidates to achieve a higher mark in this section.

Linguistic errors were, as ever, the usual range of tense and verb-form errors, faulty idiom and sentence structure, over-use of co-ordinating conjunctions, especially to begin sentences and the frequent use of the comma instead of the full stop in sentence division. Some errors were seen so widely across the whole entry as to merit special mention:

- (1) careless spelling, even of words given on the Question Paper – many speeches were written to ask that 'Ladies and Gentlement' would take the 'oppurtunity/oppertunity' to help with the School's 'activites' and if they wanted to be 'involved' and have 'benfit/benifit', should show their 'intrest' by 'filing the form' in the 'Principle's ofice'! All these errors were frequently seen – but not all at once!
- (2) poor punctuation and paragraphing, particularly in direct speech, often confused with reported speech by the tendency to preface the spoken words with 'that':
'I said that 'What is your problem?' She told that 'I must go to her boss with my parcel' or 'I asked myself that why had she done it' or 'I asked him that what help do you need?'
- (3) misuse of learned, high-tariff vocabulary in inappropriate contexts: 'The arrangements for the party were completely so seraphic that it had allured our eyes in an instance.' 'Nobody in our primary School had seen such a naughty boy who always revolted against the antagonistic acts of kids in our class.'
- (4) incorrect linkages: 'infront; atonce; incharge; infact; ofcourse; atlast; incase; everytime
- (5) inconsistent use of plurals and pronouns: 'Every child benefits from the attention of their parents in their life.' 'Every son should ask yourself do you help your mothers.' 'A mother is an important women.'
- (6) 'Me and' instead of '....and I'

- (7) errors in time-setting phrases: 'After a few minutes later'; 'It was about past fifteen years when...', and the use of 'As' for 'When' e.g. 'As we were at the beach, we saw...'

Linguistic inaccuracy often prevented candidates from earning the high marks that their original ideas and lively expression might have achieved. However, Examiners were impressed by the fact that the vast majority of the candidates now write recognisable English, communication is established and the intention can be understood. Some candidates seemed to have opted for less ambitious but more accurate writing. It was heartening to note that text language, correction fluid and inappropriate colloquialisms or bad language, though still found, were less in evidence this year. However, all Examiners commented on an increase in untidy scripts and some barely legible handwriting, which may have suggested errors which the candidate had not actually committed, especially in spelling and punctuation. Teachers should warn candidates about this.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1

Describe the scene during a busy time at your local health or community centre.

This topic attracted surprisingly few candidates, which was a pity since it offered the opportunity for some good descriptive writing in a context of universal interest. Most candidates chose to describe the local government-funded health centre or hospital clinic, mentioning noisy, over-crowded and often dirty rooms where patients had to wait for a very long time to see the doctor or a nurse and then queue again at the pharmacy for the prescribed medication. Many were able to include personal experience, presenting their essays in anecdotal or narrative form, describing their own frustrations and the pain experienced during the long delays and the irritations of screaming babies, whining children, shouting mothers and drunken or fighting men trying to push their way to the front of the queue and be seen at once: 'No proper queuing system is adhered to and so the law of the jungle prevails.' Others chose to concentrate on an overview of the scene and a frenetic atmosphere of chaos and confusion, with queue-jumping leading to fights, emergency cases arriving and grudgingly being given precedence and some neatly deployed characterisation of the martinet receptionist, overworked and flustered nurses and the tired doctors 'who came in their own time in the sweltering heat. It was so hot in there we were all melting like ice-creams.' Several candidates chose to describe activity at the clinic following a nearby explosion or train crash, allowing suspense, colour and horror to be added to the busy scene.

The community centre was a less popular choice and was usually interpreted as a place where members of the community gathered in large numbers – a town centre, market or shopping mall – rather than a meeting place for social activity, entertainment or discussion. There were some lively and atmospheric descriptions of both venues, with the sense of bustle, chatter and excitement convincingly conveyed.

Inevitably, the topic led to the introduction of some pre-learned (though relevant), descriptive writing and weaker candidates ran out of things to say. A number of candidates struggled with tenses, tending to switch inconsistently between past and present, an inconsistency which sometimes required quite a lot of re-reading to establish exactly what was happening, although better candidates were able to use the present tense and short sentences effectively to create a sense of immediacy.

Question 2

Which two of your local customs are most important to you, and why do you value them?

This was the least popular topic in **Part 1**, perhaps because the question's key-word 'customs' was frequently mis-interpreted. Some thought in terms of Customs and Excise officials at border crossings and found it hard to relate this to personal value. Others thought it meant 'customers' and could associate the value of the customers of a shop with the prosperity of the business, especially for the family of the shop owner. A further interpretation was as 'costumes', with descriptions of different styles of dress adopted on different occasions, although candidates who wrote on this often lacked the specialised vocabulary needed and inevitably had to incorporate much of the language of their own region, making full understanding difficult for Examiners. However, those who fully grasped the title and its focus wrote with commitment and a genuine desire to inform and explain their views, presenting some of the most competent, interesting and carefully planned scripts of all.

Religious ceremonies most frequently described were those associated with Eid, Christmas or Divali. Traditional customs involved the celebrations of Basant, Independence Day, Carnival, arranged marriages, funerals and initiation rites. The value of such traditions was summed up well: 'Customs and traditions are the nitrates for the growing plants of society'; they show 'respect for the elders and fear of God'. Love, respect and unity were seen as the reasons for customs to be valued by society.

Many weaker candidates had good ideas but not the linguistic dexterity to control the complexities of the language as they tried to explain their thoughts on their 'religion'; 'traditions' and arranged marriages 'where the gloom(sic) slowly went to his bride's home'. Others found they had insufficient material, which inevitably led to repetition, though most made a reasonable attempt to tackle the second part of the question and assess the value of the customs described.

Examiners felt that it was disappointing that more competent candidates did not choose to exercise their undoubted skills on this topic, rather than taking what they perhaps saw as the easier option of the narrative.

Question 3

Write a story which includes the words: 'I was so glad that my mother didn't give up...'

This was the most popular question by far, perhaps because it offered the only immediately obvious opportunity to write a first-person narrative, in which candidates could call upon their own experience. It was felt that many of the candidates who chose this topic showed a genuine appreciation of what mothers do and the essays often had the convincing 'ring of truth' about them.

There were three main approaches, generally centred on tragic family circumstances: the death, divorce, violence, desertion or prolonged business trip of the father leaves an ill-educated mother to struggle to raise the family by working at two or three jobs at once, to provide food and continued education for the children; mother is diagnosed with cancer or kidney failure, has a heart attack or suffers in a road accident but survives and is miraculously cured, by medical care and her own determination; son or daughter rebels as a teenager, becomes addicted to drugs, alcohol or criminal activities, often ending in prison or hospital but mother keeps faith and with her support the narrator 'turns over a new leaf'.

All accounts emphasised the strength and determination of these mothers, some lighter-hearted stories even describing them entering athletic, dance or cookery competitions, training and winning, or working for educational qualifications that had been denied them as children, whilst still holding down jobs and caring for the family. This approach offered the opportunity to include suspense, climax and anti-climax.

The very best narratives managed effective characterisation and credible stories as well as the ability to integrate the given sentence smoothly and without tense errors. Many weaker candidates simply wrote over-sentimental essays praising mothers, with much repetition of the cliché, 'My mother was always there for me' and unfortunate errors such as 'tears ran down my slippery chicks(sic), when I saw her sliming(sic) face'. However, most candidates across the ability range agreed with the narrator who said 'If my mother had given up, I would not be who I am today' though not all would express it so succinctly.

There was plenty of evidence of re-hashed essays, in which the mother's role was incidental or peripheral and the given words were slotted in with the thinnest of links or simply used as the final sentence, with an attempted tense adaptation: 'I'm so glad that my mother did not gave up.' was frequently seen. Many candidates wanted to use direct speech but confused the reader by failing to punctuate or paragraph this correctly. Indirect speech was poorly handled, with tense and construction errors adding to the problem

Question 4

Fortune-telling.

This topic was not very popular but was handled competently by those who chose it. The essays were usually very readable with sensible, thoughtful ideas. Some were lively, humorous accounts of visits to fortune-tellers, who were often seen as crooks and charlatans, out to make easy money from the gullible people who could not resist their own desire to know the future. More candidates chose a factual approach, analysing and explaining the different methods used by fortune-tellers and commenting on their validity, some displaying an impressive knowledge of fortune-telling techniques around the world. Many stressed the incompatibility of belief in God and giving credence to fortune-tellers, who were universally condemned as being against the omnipotence of God or Allah and His sole right to determine the future. Fortune-telling was

usually regarded as a relic of an ignorant past, exposed as nonsense by the scientific and technical advances of the present day. A few candidates chose a philosophical approach, considering the reasons for consulting a fortune-teller and the consequences of being over-confident in the truth of the predictions given. It was suggested that a life of total predictability could spell the end of Man's struggle for survival. There were also some perceptive comments on the positive aspect of 'knowing' the future, as a motivating factor in striving for personal achievement or financial success.

For weaker candidates though, this was the title where too few ideas and a lack of precise vocabulary limited the achievement, and repetition was all too obvious.

Question 5

Write a story about someone who agreed to do a job for a friend, which went seriously wrong.

This narrative proved another very popular choice, with the clear structure suggested by the question enabling candidates to present well-organised, logically developed, convincing stories. Some focused on the key word 'job' and interpreted it literally, writing stories in which one person took over a friend's employment for a period of time and the incompetence in performance led to financial loss, job loss or, in the worst cases, complete failure of the business. A more popular approach, for the majority of candidates who chose this topic, interpreted 'job' as a 'task' or a 'favour' and generally produced a more convincing story, perhaps based on personal experience in some cases. Particularly popular were scenarios where a friend stole the papers or sat an exam on behalf of a less erudite friend, undertook to deliver a mysterious parcel which was found to contain drugs or a bomb or agreed to look after a child, animal or house to which some disaster occurred. Usually, the outcome broke friendships, resulted in financial disaster or led to the imprisonment or even death of the protagonist; there were, however, some happier endings, with the transgressor being quite contrite and determined not to make the same mistake again. A number of candidates wound the story into a scenario of unrequited love or the Shakespearian device of a young man wooing the young lady rather too successfully on behalf of his friend, as the messenger got the girl for himself! Examiners were able to recognise some of these situations as adaptations of compositions written in practice for the examination to questions on past papers, but careful planning and clear structure to the given task, maintained relevance.

This was the composition where the use of good dialogue was most obviously needed but unfortunately where the need to punctuate and paragraph the direct speech, which caused difficulty and errors for many candidates. Sentence separation faults and the constant use of the comma splice marred the coherence of many scripts and the failure to indicate, punctuate and paragraph direct speech added to the confusion. Teachers are advised to focus on these aspects of composition writing when preparing candidates for the examination.

Part 2

The scenario of **Part 2** was within the experience of almost all the candidates and, inevitably, produced a great similarity of response from candidates within a Centre, since they were all writing about the same school. However, some variety in the suggested avenues of parents' involvement and the benefits to be gained, added to the interest of the responses for both Examiners and the candidates themselves. It proved to be generally accessible in most of the geographical areas of the world where this examination is taken.

It is always important that candidates should spend time reading very carefully *exactly* what the tasks demand and nowhere more so than in **Part 2**, where the requirements are very clearly stated but surprisingly often not followed. Equally, it is important that candidates take note of the recommended length and relative mark allowance for the two parts and do not spend time writing much too much for **Part 2**, which carries only 20 marks, at the expense of giving full weight to **Part 1** which carries 40 marks. This is a particular danger for those who deliberately choose to address **Part 2** first, knowing that they will score marks for every content point covered, so it is important to complete this section of the paper.

Most candidates found no difficulty in understanding the purpose of the exercise and addressing their speech to the appropriate audience. They took on the role of head prefect, staff representative or delegated candidate, all of which were convincing and encouraged a suitable, personal voice. Those few who chose to write as the Principal had not read the task with sufficient care. Most wrote at an appropriate length, addressed the audience directly and adopted a respectful, if not positively polite and persuasive tone.

Despite being given the start of the speech, a small number of candidates used the familiar letter heading 'Dear' and ended their speeches with 'Yours sincerely'. Most candidates addressed the speech to 'Ladies and Gentlemen' as directed, but there were far too many examples of 'Gentlement' or 'Gentleman'.

Some candidates were excessively polite, beginning each paragraph with 'Dear Ladies and Gentlemen' or some version of it, although, too often, paragraphing was ignored throughout the speech. This was very disappointing as, almost certainly, teachers will advise candidates to think of each content point as the focus of a paragraph, or, at least, to think of **Part 2** as having three paragraphs (introduction, body, conclusion), whatever the format required in the task. This should certainly be emphasised when preparing candidates for future examinations, a point mentioned in last year's Report.

The vast majority of candidates scored all five content points. The invitation to parents to help was usually quickly and clearly issued. For the second point, 'School activities' was taken to cover anything at all to do with school, from joining the Parent-Teacher association, helping with concerts, sports and field trips to fund-raising for the school itself or for charity, providing financial or practical help with building new facilities at the school, or even checking the students' homework and seeing that they arrived at school punctually and appropriately dressed. This range reflected the school situation of the candidates themselves, in the various regions of the world involved. Whatever their request for help entailed, most candidates felt that parents' involvement and presence at school would make the candidates feel valued and loved and would inspire them to strive for better results; if parents contributed practically to the school, providing computers, air conditioners or a new gymnasium, the students' education would benefit accordingly. Benefit for parents was more difficult to judge, but many referred to parents' pride in their children's achievements, friendship and contacts with other parents and new interests or hobbies to brighten up dull lives. Some even suggested a 'prize' for helpful parents...! To show their interest, parents were urged to 'fill a form', contact the school by e-mail or telephone or simply to turn up at the school.

The points most commonly missed were the first and last, often because candidates became diverted from the task, as they elaborated on the many ways in which parents might be involved and developed a long list of facilities the school lacked, or were diverted to expressing their views on parent-child relationships and the problems of busy, working parents and rebellious teenagers in this respect. Such digressions increased the length of the speeches well beyond the recommended word limits for **Part 2** and probably beyond the patience of the audience too! Certainly, the required emphasis on the request for help in school activities was lost.

The best speeches made use of rhetorical devices, direct appeal to the audience, even a touch of humour, but most relied purely on force of argument to encourage participation and sometimes this could become aggressive, rather than persuasive, suggesting 'You must come to school...', 'You have to attend', or even 'Aren't you ashamed of yourselves that you do so little?'

Others were too casual and colloquial: 'You guys could help your kids, if you people were really interested.'; 'If you wanna help that'd be good, cause, like, we're gonna need the aircon in the heat.'

Several linguistic problems arose in **Part 2**. The use of plurals and pronouns was inconsistent. Candidates switched between 'student' and 'students', 'your child' and 'their children', 'a parent' and 'parents'. They were particularly confused when addressing the parents, switching between the direct address of 'you' or 'you, parents', and the more distant 'they'. Nearly all candidates experienced problems with prepositions. There was confusion between 'bring', 'take' and 'send'; 'hope' and 'wish'; 'come out with' and 'come up with', as in 'We wish parents can come to see how our school is really like and come out with new ideas, when they send their children to school in their car.'

Generally, however, this task was presented more appropriately in content and more accurately in writing, enabling most candidates of all abilities to score slightly better marks in **Part 2**.

Final Comments

As always, the Examiners involved in the marking of these scripts have expressed their interest and enjoyment of the content of the essays and their appreciation and admiration of the clarity and accuracy of expression in English achieved by so many of the candidates who take this examination. This is, indeed, a tribute to the hard work and diligence of both teachers and candidates.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/02
Comprehension

General comments

This year's paper was based on a narrative topic. The passage seemed to engage the interest of candidates and be well matched to their understanding. A wide range of marks was achieved, with a substantial number of candidates scoring very highly indeed. Overall, the paper seemed to succeed in discriminating between candidates and enabled the more able to show what they were capable of, while allowing the less able to score appropriately.

Despite the ease of understanding presented by the passage, there were a few questions which many candidates found challenging. In **Question 5(a)**, for example, very few recognised the novelty of the situation, and in **Question 7(a)** many candidates opted for the philosophical point that life was more important than material possessions, rather than recognising the pathos of the poor quality of goods for which people were prepared to risk their lives. **Question 8** was another example of a discriminator where candidates failed to pay sufficiently close attention to the wording of the passage, preferring to offer more creative responses of their own.

Examiners continued to report that the performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. 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 many of them 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, found it impossible to find synonyms.

In the summary question, **Question 10**, many candidates wasted words by including detail which was irrelevant to the rubric, e.g. reference to Reena's inability to call for her parents, to her realisation that an earthquake was happening and to intricate detail about the construction of the fireplace.

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.

Other Examiners were concerned about candidates who wrote right across the page and into the margin, making the positioning and subsequent addition of marks difficult. Other Examiners were concerned about almost microscopic handwriting in some scripts, again detracting from ease of marking.

Many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and (generally) handwriting, the fact that spelling and punctuation were often 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 test, and indeed the majority of candidates scored the mark for writing that earthquakes were caused by giant snakes, or large creatures, underground; both the ideas of 'large' and 'underground' were needed here, and lifting of lines 1–2 ('giant snakes live underground, and it is their movements which cause earthquakes') or lines 3–4 ('something large living beneath the earth's surface') scored the mark. Very many candidates scored the mark in **Question 1(b)** for the correct answer 'fanciful', the single word that explained the teacher's scepticism about the beliefs of ancient peoples. Popular wrong answers here were 'relentlessly', 'droned', 'exaggerated' and 'distracted'. Some candidates spoiled their answer with 'fanciful explanations', which was an unfortunate rubric infringement.

Candidates fared reasonably well with **Question 2(a)**, where one mark was awarded for writing that Reena's mother was angry with her because she was late, and the other for writing that she needed Reena to look after her brothers. Sometimes only one of the two available marks was scored, perhaps because candidates did not pick up on the word 'fully' in the question, or on the fact that two marks were offered, which suggested a two-part answer. Perhaps some candidates did not appreciate the meaning of 'dawdled'. In **Question 2(b)**, one mark was available for the point that Reena's mother showed no gratitude to Reena for looking after her brothers, and this could be scored by lifting at line 13 ('her mother left without a word of gratitude'). However, the second mark proved to be more elusive for very many candidates. It was available for writing that Reena's brothers bickered and/or argued while their mother was out; this mark could not be scored by mere lifting of lines 14–15 ('her bothers had a tendency to bicker and argue when their mother was out') as this was merely a general statement about normal behaviour rather than a clear point about the brothers' behaviour on that specific occasion; candidates who failed to gain the mark did so because of lack of precision. This question asked candidates to give two reasons; in the case of any answer under either (i) or (ii) which offered two reasons, only the first answer was marked, because such questions are designed to encourage economy of language and precision of understanding.

Question 3 was correctly answered by candidates who spotted the inconsistency in the fact that Reena's mother was smiling in the photograph and yet an earthquake was occurring. Candidates who merely wrote that Reena's mother's smile was inappropriate because the house was shaking failed to gain the mark because such a statement was out of sequence with actual events in the text, but the mark was scored for making a general reference to the earthquake, or to the fact that Reena was afraid, or the fact that this was no laughing/smiling matter. Most candidates were successful with this question, although weak candidates perhaps did not know the meaning of 'inappropriate'.

Question 4 was the first of the three questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words; in this case, the key words which had to be isolated by the candidate were 'calm' and 'impending danger.' Acceptable synonyms for 'calm' were, among others, 'relaxed', 'unworried', 'tranquil' or 'taking things in her stride' and for 'impending danger' 'something terrible about to happen', 'catastrophe approaching', 'trouble looming' or 'destruction imminent'. Alternatively, in the case of 'impending danger' a mark was awarded to candidates who wrote how Reena's mother was feeling, e.g. 'frightened' or 'terrified'. The wording of the question included 'pretending to feel' and 'the way she really felt' and so there were no marks awarded for attempting to re-cast 'feigned' or 'disguised'. Surprisingly, many candidates chose not to attempt to re-cast 'calm', perhaps thinking that it was too simple a word to require re-casting.

Question 5(a) was another question requiring candidates to answer in their own words, and proved to be the most taxing on the Paper. The key words were 'novelty', with acceptable synonyms such as 'new', 'unexpected' or 'rare', and 'proximity', with acceptable synonyms such as 'close', 'near' or 'surrounded by'. Some candidates mentioned the family being together, without spelling out the necessary closeness to the baby which the idea of 'proximity' required. Very many candidates wrote that the baby was gurgling with happiness because she did not understand the situation; such an answer did not deny an otherwise correct answer, but it did not answer the question either. The reference to the baby's lack of comprehension was an incidental reference in the text; the wording of the text, and the wording of the question, each directed candidates to 'gurgling with happiness, delighted at the novelty of having all her family in such proximity'. Of candidates who did score in this area, attempts at 'proximity' were much more common, with attempts at 'rare' occurring in only around one in fifty scripts. In some cases candidates suggested that the baby was happy for the most inappropriate reasons: that her family were rushing around terrified; that they were in great danger; that her father might have been trapped and killed. In **Question 5(b)**, the first mark was awarded to candidates who referred to the fact that there was a long queue, or many people, waiting to get water. The question could be answered by lifting at lines 58–60 ('by now a long queue of neighbours was starting to wind around the block to fetch water from the pump at the end of their street', although merely writing that the pump was at the end of the street was insufficient to score as the text did not support the idea

that the end of the street was far away. The second mark in this question was given for making reference either to the small size of the containers used, or to the large size of the barrel to be filled. Again, lifting could score ('Reena and her brothers were sent with small containers'), but a run-on into 'to join the queue' denied the mark, as the answer then lacked precision. As with **Question 2(b)**, in the case of any answer under either (i) or (ii) which offered two reasons, only the first answer was marked.

In **Question 6(a)**, the first mark was awarded to candidates who referred either to the explosion or the fire that followed the earthquake; lifting at lines 71–73 ('a loud explosion could be heard as a gas pipe, fractured by one of the earthquake's tremors, ignited') or by lifting at lines 73–75 ('throughout that night, the roaring of leaping flames could be heard for miles around'.) Mere reference to smoke was insufficient to score, although it did not deny the mark in an otherwise correct answer. The second mark in the question was awarded to candidates who distilled the text at line 75 ('Would there be further tremors?') by referring to the possibility or worry that there would be more tremors or another earthquake. As with **Question 2(b)**, in the case of any answer under either (i) or (ii) which offered two reasons, only the first answer was marked. Any reference to Reena being afraid of the noise of sirens denied the mark in an otherwise correct answer, as it is clear from the text that Reena was pleased by, rather than afraid of, the sirens, and indeed a mark was available in the next question for making such a point. **Question 6(b)** required the idea of practical support in order to gain the available mark, with many acceptable answers such as 'it showed help was at hand' or 'injured people would be taken to hospital'.

Question 7(a), which tested candidates' understanding of writer's craft, proved to be a difficult question as most candidates treated it as a question on vocabulary, thus offering mere synonyms for 'pathetic' such as 'sad' rather than distilling the idea that the pathos of the situation stemmed from the fact that people were prepared to risk their lives for so little. Many candidates seemed to be familiar only with the more colloquial meaning of 'pathetic' as 'silly', which is incorrect in any case. Candidates generally fared better in **Question 7(a)**, where a mark could be scored for writing that the building could collapse or crush people; any reference to looting was wrong and denied the mark in an otherwise correct answer. Weak candidates failed to score the mark because they merely lifted 'the building was unstable' without explaining the danger which that fact represented.

Question 8 was the third of the questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. This was a difficult question, designed to bring about differentiation, and in this respect it was very successful. Candidates were in fact directed to the key words, namely 'contrast', 'power' and 'frailty'. Acceptable synonyms for 'contrast' were words like 'difference', 'discrepancy', 'comparison', 'distinction' and 'disparity'; acceptable synonyms for 'power' were words like 'strength', 'force', 'ability to destroy' and 'might', and acceptable synonyms for 'frailty' were words like 'weakness', 'helplessness', 'feebleness' and 'fragility'. As no half marks are ever available in this Paper, candidates had to offer correct synonyms for both 'power' and 'frailty' in order to score the second mark. Many candidates did nothing to isolate the words, preferring rather to make a generalised statement about the natural world, or Reena's desire to find out more about earthquakes once she had experienced one.

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, with all words being chosen more or less in equal measure. Most candidates who attempted 'bizarre' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'strange' or 'odd' and a reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered 'strength' or 'energy' for 'stamina' and 'stealing' or 'robbing' for 'looting'. Many candidates scored a mark for writing 'damaged' or 'destroyed' for 'stricken', and for offering 'chaos' or 'devastation' for 'havoc'. 'Broken' was a popular wrong answer for 'stricken'; 'damage' was a popular wrong answer for 'havoc', being too weak, although 'great damage' was acceptable, while other popular wrong answers here were 'danger' and 'mess'. A popular wrong answer for 'urged' was 'forced'; correct synonyms were gentler words such as 'persuaded', 'advised' or 'encouraged'. The worst attempted words were probably 'summon', meaning 'gather' or 'collect', and 'relentlessly', meaning 'without stopping' or 'continuously'. Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form was not insisted upon. Examiners reported, as in previous years, some candidates giving the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, but such cases were very rare indeed. 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. However, such cases are becoming increasingly rare.

Question 10 was the final question on the paper and was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise how it became increasingly clear to Reena that an earthquake was happening, and what the various members of the family did to survive after it. The material for the first part of the rubric came from paragraphs three to five inclusive, and the material for the second part of the rubric came from paragraphs six and seven. 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. 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 four 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 house seemed to be swaying. The paragraph went on to explain that the dishes rattled in the kitchen, the photograph fell down and then the house started shaking. Some candidates got off to a bad start by writing initially that the house was shaking; in order to obtain all the marks available for describing the effects of the earthquake, it was essential to chart the gradual changes for which the rubric asked. The house swayed, then rocked, then rocked more violently, and although it was possible, indeed desirable according to the rubric, to give an own words explanation, it was nevertheless necessary to chart the gradual nature of the movement.

In paragraph four, another three content points were available. The sound of breaking crockery could be heard, the chest of drawers moved, and the bed moved. For candidates who failed to make either of these specific points about the chest of drawers or the bed, an alternative mark was available for writing simply that the furniture moved. Most candidates had a fair degree of success here, although some confused the rattling of dishes in paragraph three with the breaking of dishes in paragraph four, and lost marks because of confused sequence of events.

A further five points were available in paragraph five for writing that Reena's mother had to steady herself against the movement of the floor, that the house started to rock even more violently, that the bedroom wall collapsed, that the furniture was buried and that there was a lot of dust. Very few candidates picked up on the point about the buried furniture.

In paragraph six, candidates were to move on to the second part of the rubric, namely what the family members did to survive the earthquake, and there were four available points. Firstly, the family assembled in the yard, or Reena's father brought the brothers outside. This point could alternatively have been scored in the previous paragraph for writing that Reena's mother brought her out in to the yard or told her to go there. Then the further points to be made were that the father made a stove or fireplace, that he also gathered firewood, and that the mother made a tent or shelter. It was not necessary to specify agents here, although the majority of candidates did. The passive voice was acceptable ('firewood was gathered' etc.), but where agents were used, they had to be correct.

In paragraph seven, the further five points to be made were that the father brought food or essential items out of the house, that the children fetched water, and that the mother made a shade for the baby. The final two points concerned the grandparents, who brought blankets, and also matches and candles; correct agents were necessary here.

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 are aware of the need to try to recast the original text in their own words, and that many of them in fact are skilful at doing so. There continues to be 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 continues to be the case that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, indeed, as has been reported in the past, 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. 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. Some candidates demonstrated a pleasingly thorough command of structure, excellent vocabulary, clear understanding and skilful synthesising of the original material.

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 generally clear.