ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Writing 11

Key messages

- Candidates should ensure they identify the key words in each task to enable them to satisfy the requirements of the question. This is particularly important in **Section 1**, especially when the word **and** is in bold type, indicating there are two parts to the bullet point.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- In **Section 1**, candidates should ensure that they use an appropriate format and style for the required text type and audience.
- Candidates are advised to adhere to the suggested wordcounts for each section.
- Candidates should remember that the majority of marks in this exam are for language; they are encouraged to proof-read their work for meaning and accuracy.

General comments

- The vast majority of candidates appeared to be fully engaged with the questions and there were very few short or irrelevant responses.
- The strongest responses were characterised by highly accurate writing and demonstrated a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Vocabulary continues to be impressive, with many responses including a wide range of words used appropriately.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors include confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and incorrect usage of commas and apostrophes. Candidates should avoid the use of slang expressions.
- Performance on **Section 1** was strong with the bullet points being generally well addressed in the majority of candidate responses.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section 2** questions. All candidates appeared to have been able to find a topic they were interested in writing about.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

The question required candidates to write a letter in response to an article on a travel website about their area. The purpose of the letter was for candidates to say what they agreed with in the article and to complain about things they did not agree with. The audience was the author of the article.

Both the situation and the purpose proved to be accessible to candidates who appeared to be familiar with travel articles and who were also generally empowered by writing about their own areas.

The following points had to be included:

- what they agree with in the article
- which opinions they thought were unfair **and** why
- details of the important local attraction that was not mentioned in the article.

For **bullet point 1** candidates had to say what they agree with in the article. The large majority of responses praised the author of the article for picking out positive things about their area, for example tourist attractions,

the food, the friendliness of the people or the efficient transport links. A few responses praised the author for including negative things about their area, for example the high crime rate or the poor state of the roads. This was also a valid approach and most candidates did well on this bullet point. There was some evidence of misinterpretation of the task with a few responses reading as a review of a travel website, rather than a response to an article about their area. These responses often raised points that were not relevant to their area, for example the prices on the website or how the travel website would be useful. There were also a small number of responses which omitted this bullet point concentrating instead on the complaint element of the task.

For **bullet point 2** candidates had to say which opinions they thought were unfair **and** why. As the **and** was in bold, candidates had to address both parts of the bullet point in order to be fully credited for this point and the large majority did this. Most picked out negative points that the author had made about their area, for example the fact that it was dangerous, difficult to travel around or that there was not a lot to do there. They then went on to give positive points about their area to refute the author's opinions. Where candidates did less well on this bullet point it was sometimes because they did not identify an opinion that they disagreed with but just complained about something that was not mentioned which addressed bullet point 3 more than bullet point 2. Others wrote about things they thought were unfair about their area generally, e.g. high prices, transport, or water supply but did not link this back to tourism or to the article.

For **bullet point 3** candidates had to give details of the important local attraction that was not mentioned in the article. This was probably the best addressed of all of the bullet points and almost all candidates managed to identify a local attraction that was not mentioned. Attractions included cultural venues such as museums, natural wonders and safari parks or zoos. More general attractions were also discussed, e.g. the culture or food of the area and this was a valid approach. A small number of candidates were not sufficiently specific in addressing this bullet point and complained that a local attraction was not mentioned but did not name or describe it.

Balance is required in selecting material for Task Fulfilment and it usually works best to write roughly the same amount for each bullet point. Candidates are better served by addressing a few points in detail in response to the bullet points, rather than by listing numerous points. Also, it does not help to add overlong introductory and concluding sections that are not directly related to the task.

The large majority of candidates included some features of letter format. Addresses were not required, but most candidates managed an appropriate greeting and salutation and many also included the date and an appropriate reference. Candidates appeared to be familiar with the conventions of letter writing and very few wrote in an incorrect format.

There was a good sense of audience among most responses with candidates understanding that they were writing to the author of an article. The best responses managed to blend the complaint element of the task with a positive tone, thanking the writer for covering their area and praising what they like about the article, as well as pointing out what they disagreed with. These responses also generally ended well, for example by suggesting that they would be grateful if the author could revise their original article and saying that they would be delighted to show the author around if they returned to the area. Some weaker responses were inappropriately aggressive, for example accusing the author of lying.

Most candidates used an appropriately formal register for a letter to an unknown person and the strongest candidates managed to combine this with a friendly tone. The use of direct address to the author was another common feature of strong responses. A few candidates did use inappropriately informal terms such as *gonna* and *kinda*, but this was not widespread.

Generally, spelling was satisfactory, with confusion of homophones being the most common error. Errors were commonly seen in words like *there* and *their*, *too* and *to* and *your* and *you're*. A number of candidates also struggled to spell *sincerely* or *faithfully* correctly in their valediction. Other difficult words such as *scenery* and *beautiful* were generally spelled correctly, although candidates struggled with *accommodation*.

Grammar was often the weakest area and there were frequent errors in the use of tenses and articles. These errors made some responses difficult to understand. Punctuation was generally accurate and direct speech was usually punctuated correctly. Some responses demonstrated weak sentence control and included very long sentences. Others contained capitalisation errors, in particular, the use of the lower case 'i' when writing about oneself. Candidates are recommended to proofread their work carefully to help them reduce the number of errors particularly those which can impede understanding for the reader.

Section 2: **Composition**

The vast majority of candidates wrote complete *Section 2* responses. A few candidates did write very brief responses though perhaps suggesting that they had spent too much time on **Question 1**. There were also some candidates who wrote very long responses that went far beyond the recommended 350 to 500 words. These candidates often found it difficult to maintain control of their responses and this could lead to a lack of cohesion and an increase in communication-impeding errors.

Question 2

Describe the scene in your house when you are preparing for a special occasion. (Remember you are describing the atmosphere, the people and what they are doing, as well as the place.)

The descriptive task proved fairly popular among candidates. A wide variety of occasions were described, including Christmas, Eid, weddings and birthday parties. Most candidates took an entirely positive approach in describing the special occasion, but there were also some well-crafted pieces that described things going wrong in the build-up to them as well.

The best responses employed the full range of senses to give accounts of their surroundings and made effective use of detail to bring the scene they were describing to life. Vocabulary was often very impressive and included words like *aromatic, sophisticated* and *delectable.*

Less successful responses often relied too much on narrative, sometimes focusing more on narrating the events of the special occasion rather than describing the preparation. The focus of this task should be on description rather than on narrative. The control of tenses was a weakness in some compositions. The present tense was used well in most responses but inconsistent use of the present and past tense was also observed in some responses.

Question 3

'There are far more advantages to competing against others at a young age than disadvantages.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was the least popular of the *Section 2* tasks, but many candidates did produce strong answers. Most candidates seemed familiar with the argument about whether competition is healthy and the majority argued that it was but that there should be safeguards in place. The most common supporting examples were competition in sport and in academic performance.

Many responses included the argument that competition toughens people up and helps to get them ready for competing with others for jobs as adults. Other responses pointed out that people could improve their performance through competing with others and learn the value of teamwork. Arguments against competing at a young age included the fact that this could have a negative impact on young people's confidence and stop them enjoying sport or school. Many responses examined both sides of the argument and concluded with a balanced view that competition could have more advantages if it was approached correctly.

Most candidates who attempted this task performed successfully. The topic allowed them to refer to their own experience and use argument and counter argument appropriately. Weaker responses tended to describe the candidate's experience of competition without directly addressing the question.

Question 4

'Cities are a great place for young people to grow up in.' What do you think? Give reasons and examples to support your views.

This was a popular task among candidates and there were a wide variety of views expressed on this topic. Opinions were balanced with candidates being split as to whether it was better to grow up in a city or in the countryside. Commonly cited benefits of living in cities included access to better education, healthcare and technology. The idea that there was more opportunity in cities was referred to in many responses.

Negative points of living in cities included the risk of young people falling prey to bad influences and possibly joining gangs or taking up drugs. Some responses made unfavourable comparisons between family life in the city and the countryside and suggested that people would grow up with less strong morals in the city.

As with **Question 3**, many candidates performed well on this task and examined both sides of the argument in detail, before reaching a balanced conclusion. Weaker responses sometimes did little more than express a preference without fully explaining the reasons behind this. Others lacked structure and sometimes became repetitious as candidates repeated points, rather than developing their arguments. It is important for candidates to consider how much they have to say on a topic before opting for one of the discursive tasks. Planning would help candidates with this.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'It was obvious that his aunt had not visited him just to say hello.'

This was the most popular of all of the *Section 2* tasks. Candidates were able to use the sentence in a variety of ways and many produced imaginative and interesting stories. The sentence could be added at any point in the story and most candidates integrated the sentence convincingly into their stories.

A common theme was an unscrupulous aunt visiting her nephew after he had come into money, having previously taken little interest in his existence. In other stories the aunt had visited to give bad news or to scold the nephew for something bad he had done. Many of these narratives were very well-constructed, with candidates often making effective use of features such as dialogue and including inventive beginnings and endings.

Less successful responses struggled to advance a clear narrative and could be confusing. A feature of these weaker responses was that they sometimes switched between the past and present tense which made it difficult for the reader to follow the events.

Question 6

Write a story in which a motorcycle plays an important part.

This was another popular question. The motorbike was included in many different stories, including bank robberies, medical emergencies and getting someone to an exam or interview on time. The task allowed quite a lot of freedom to candidates and many wrote successful stories in which dramatic events were resolved with the help of a motorcycle.

The best responses contained varied sentence types and lengths, as well as linked paragraphs. The precise use of a wide range of vocabulary also lifted responses. Weaker responses tended to focus on one simple event, for example a motorcycle accident, and would only describe this in quite basic detail.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Paper 1123/12
Writing 12

Key messages

- Candidates should ensure they identify the key words in each task to enable them to satisfy the requirements of the question. This is particularly important in **Section 1**, especially when the word **and** is in bold type, indicating there are two parts to the bullet point.
- Where introductory paragraphs are included in the Directed Writing, they should be as brief as possible, and should not rely on lifting words or phrases from the question.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority of candidates.
- The correct use of direct and indirect articles is essential at all levels and is vital to ensure the achievement of higher bands.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and a more varied use of punctuation (colons, semi-colons, and exclamation marks) would raise the level of most responses. However, where used, these need to be used properly as this year saw an increase in semi-colons and colons used where commas or full stops were required. Where direct speech is used, attention should be given to accurate punctuation.
- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible, as poor handwriting can cause difficulty in assessing the work.
- Although the use of ambitious vocabulary is to be encouraged, it is important that this is used appropriately by candidates.
- Descriptions of (often gratuitous) violence are not appropriate for this exam.

General comments

There were few short or incomplete scripts this session. However, the overall level of presentation was weak with noticeably untidy, sometimes almost illegible handwriting.

Most candidates responded well to the requirement of Task Fulfilment in **Section 1**, with the vast majority of candidates fulfilling the task in at least a satisfactory way and a very great number achieving higher than that. It was clear that candidates were confident with the required format and incidences of candidates adopting a different format were few and far between.

In **Section 2**, the Narrative titles (**Questions 5** and **6**) proved the most popular, though the Descriptive title (**Question 2**) was also attempted by many. **Questions 3** and **4**, the Argument titles, were less frequently attempted by candidates this year.

For both Sections, time management was generally excellent with almost all candidates producing responses which were close to the indicative word counts for each question. Candidates should remember that responses which far exceed the indicative word count are not encouraged and that the focus should be on quality of response, rather than quantity of words.

As far as the use of language is concerned, candidates need to check their work thoroughly to avoid carelessness, particularly in the use of verbs, tenses and articles. Some of the language seen in responses was truly impressive – our *quotidian lifestyle*; *perfervid disapproval*; *the tenebrosity of the night*; *I was utterly bewitched by the thaumaturgy of the pageant*; *The sun's golden glow gave an effect of chatoyancy to the table*. While vocabulary at this level does impress, it is important that it is used sensitively and appropriately, otherwise it can sound unnatural and detract from the flow of the response. It is also important that candidates are aware that ambitious vocabulary is not a substitute for grammatical accuracy.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Directed Writing

Question 1

Task Fulfilment

The majority of candidates performed well on Task Fulfilment. The task required them to imagine that a local company had purchased and wished to develop some land next to their school and to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper to explain how they felt about the company's plan. There were many developed, persuasive discussions about the company's proposed plan. Less effective responses, despite covering all three bullet points, either presented list-like advantages and disadvantages, or failed to link the three bullet points into a coherent argument. Candidates are advised that producing a list of as many examples as possible, with little or no elaboration, is less impressive than two to three well-developed ideas for each. Where there was evidence of planning, candidates tended to produce more successful responses.

Many candidates used a first paragraph to introduce the purpose of the letter and finished with thanks and a hope that the letter was appropriate and would appear in the newspaper. The bullet points required candidates to include:

- the land's current use **and** what the company intended to build on it
- the advantages and disadvantages of the company's plan
- how they thought the land should be used instead.

Bullet point 1

For bullet point 1, successful responses outlined the current use of the land. Many suggested that the land was used by the school, with examples such as a space for sporting activities, a space for events, a car park for staff and parents, or an area for students to relax away from the demands of studying. A significant number of responses stated that the land was currently used by the local community or as agricultural land, while some suggested that it was simply empty, unused, even barren, land.

The majority of responses explained what the company was intending to build on the land, again providing credible ideas such as a mall, supermarket, restaurant, factory or office block.

Some candidates omitted one half of this bullet point, usually the first half, and as such, despite often sustained responses to the other bullet points, limited the mark they were able to achieve for Task Fulfilment. Candidates should ensure that they note the bold '**and**' in the bullet points, as this indicates that **both** parts of that bullet point are required.

A number of responses to this bullet point lacked specificity, for example stating that the company wanted to *build a building* indicating little more than what was given in the question, while other candidates developed this bullet point in much greater detail by adding details such as the company's name, the type of business they were involved in and how well-known they were. Similar additional details for the first half of the bullet point were offered in strong responses, for example '*the land is currently used as our school's sports field where we have our physical activity sessions and where our basketball team practices*.'

While most intended uses were acceptable, responses needed to show an awareness of how the current use of the land might constrict or provide opportunities for development in the later bullet points. For example, if the current use was limited to a *small area to relax in*, it is difficult to imagine a shopping mall being built in such a space. Some weaker responses revealed a misinterpretation of the scenario, writing as though the company had already built on the land and thereby making it difficult for candidates to address both parts of the bullet point.

Bullet point 2

Some responses showed evidence of a less than full understanding of the scenario outlined in the question. As a result, an effective balance between the *advantages of the company's plan* and being *very unhappy about many aspects of it* was lacking. Some letters identified more benefits than disadvantages which in turn affected the convincing nature of how the land should be used instead.

In terms of disadvantages, many responses focused on environmental concerns, such as the emitting of *harmful gases* and the resultant issues of *air pollution* and the negative impact on the health of both the school and local communities. The impact on the school community was also a popular focus with suggestions that the company's plan would lead to *noise pollution* and *distract students from their studies*. Attention was also frequently given to the traffic congestion that would be created as a result of development of the land. Responses suggested that this would adversely affect parents when dropping off or collecting their children from school and considered the potential impact this may have on students' ability to arrive on time for classes. The temptation to skip classes brought about by the company's building of gaming arcades or malls was considered in some responses, and again, environmental concerns were raised with worries about deforestation of a natural area.

Alongside these disadvantages, most responses also offered potential advantages of the company's plan. In general, these tended to be financial, focusing on the company's ability to *generate greater revenue* and *significantly raise their profits*. Other advantages included increased employment opportunities for local people, the potential for students at the school to learn about the particular business through connections between the school and company, improved infrastructure and greater availability of and easier access to products for students and the wider community. Many candidates offered a balance of advantages and disadvantages, however some focused solely on the negative aspects of the company's plan, perhaps mirroring real-world letters to the editor they had seen.

Stronger responses developed bullet point 2, particularly in relation to disadvantages, by referring to the previous use of the land – for example, students would become unhealthy because of lack of exercise, or staff would only be able to park outside the school thereby causing congestion at the beginning and end of the school day. Weaker responses employed lengthy list-like advantages and disadvantages which were not as effective as fewer, more developed ones.

Bullet point 3

For bullet point 3, candidates were required to indicate how they felt the land should be used instead and performance was generally very good here. Frequently, it was suggested that the land should retain its current use, as outlined for bullet point 1, however some candidates suggested that a hybrid plan could be adopted, whereby the company could develop part of the land to expand their business, while the remaining land could be either retain its current use or be given to the school. The idea of the school being given the land to build, for example, additional *classrooms*, or a *sports arena*, were popular choices. More successful responses outlined why this alternative use of the land would be preferable, frequently referring back to the disadvantages they had outlined in the previous bullet point and elaborating on how using the land differently would help to avoid or alleviate these issues. Some candidates gave multiple suggestions for the alternative use of the land; however this list-like approach was often less successful than providing one suggestion with elaboration. In weaker responses bullet point 3 was addressed very lightly. Candidates are reminded they are asked to *cover all three points above in detail.* The weakest responses either failed to give a reason for how the land should be used or did not make a clear recommendation at all.

Other aspects

Most responses demonstrated a very good awareness of purpose and situation, with many including an introductory paragraph to establish the reason for writing and a concluding paragraph requesting publication in the newspaper in order to raise awareness of the company's plan and its possible effects. In the majority of responses, audience was also secure, although some candidates mistook the editor for the owner of the company. There also seemed to be some misunderstanding as to the role of the editor, with many candidates asking them to resolve the situation in some way, rather than simply publishing the letter in the newspaper. Tone and register were well-maintained and most responses were suitably polite and formal. However, informal phrases such as *How are you doing?* and the use of the slang word *gonna* detracted from the formal tone required. Informality was also noticeable in the valedictions observed in a number of responses, with examples such as *Yours truly* and *Best wishes* rather than the more appropriately formal alternatives. Some candidates did not provide a valediction, instead just signing their name at the end, while a small number of candidates provided no sign-off at all.

Language

Generally, ideas were well-structured, with the use of discourse markers such as *firstly*, *in addition*, *moreover* and *furthermore* being used appropriately. The majority of responses were paragraphed with one paragraph per bullet point bookended by a suitable introduction and conclusion. Some excellent vocabulary and

convincing expression was observed, with candidates demonstrating an ability to use words such as *infrastructure*, *esteemed*, *consequently* and *utilised* confidently and accurately. Spelling was generally good, with frequently used and accurately spelled words including *environment*, *pollution* and *government*. Vocabulary was often precise and effective, although there were a noticeable number of responses where candidates were attempting to use vocabulary that they appeared to have not fully understood. Sentence separation was clear in most responses, with full stops and capital letters used accurately. Accurate use of commas following conjunctive adverbs, such as *Firstly*, *Moreover*, *Additionally*, etc. was in evidence in a large number of responses, and the accurate use of commas with conditional and embedded clauses was also observed. Additional practice on the accurate use of semi-colons is advised. Apostrophes for omission were generally used accurately and there was occasional accurate use of apostrophes to indicate possession. Errors in verb forms and tense consistency often hindered communication however. The use of plural for singular, the omission of articles and confusion with prepositions continue to be areas of weakness.

Section 2 Composition

Question 2

Describe the New Year celebrations in your country. (Remember you are describing the events, the places, the atmosphere and the people.)

Candidates produced some lively descriptions of New Year's celebrations in their country. Most concentrated on evoking atmosphere and describing spectacular sights, sounds and foods. Some responses captured the vivid atmosphere of a community event which drew the reader into the joyful celebration with use of descriptive devices, rich imagery, and ambitious vocabulary. Cultural references and a clear sense of national pride was conveyed through these responses. Other responses focused their descriptions on family celebrations which took place at home. These pieces were often passionate and, at times, reflective and nostalgic. Most responses included a sense of anticipation and climax, with candidates describing the preparations for the celebration and culminating with a countdown to midnight which was often punctuated with *fireworks blooming across the inky sky*. Many candidates took the opportunity to reflect on how New Year brings a chance to contemplate on the year that has gone before making resolutions and welcoming the fresh start afforded by the start of a new one. This was often offered as either an introduction or conclusion to the response, showing that structure had been considered. The colour red was prevalent in many responses as candidates described the outfits worn to symbolize luck as part of Lunar New Year celebrations or the red paper envelopes received when visiting relatives at Chinese New Year. Visiting loved ones and the exchanging of gifts featured in a large number of responses as candidates detailed personal New Year celebrations, while most also featured the fireworks and pyrotechnic shows central to organised New Year's Eve events. Candidates chose to answer this through either the third or first person. There was hardly any straying into narrative, but the use of the first-person approach did invite a certain amount of it.

Question 3

'Most people spend far too much money these days on things they do not really need.' Do you think this is true? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

Both Argument titles were not very popular among candidates, and of the two, this was the least popular. Where candidates did attempt this question, the focus was on greed, waste, branded good and people's selfishness. The impact of advertisements and social media influencers on unnecessary spending was considered by many candidates, testament to how prevalent both are in their own lives. The example of *purchasing the newest model of phone when it has almost identical capabilities to the old one* was the most popular example used in support of wasting money, with famous brands singled out for direct criticism for the manner in which they *convince consumers to buy their products*. The social media influencers who endorse this type of spending were also criticised for how they manipulate those who cannot afford to do so to *mirror their lavish lifestyles*. There was often mature commentary on how excessive unnecessary spending can lead to *financial crisis*, and consideration of the impact this may have on family relationships. Frequently, there was discussion of how this *materialism* and the accompanying constant waste of money is morally unacceptable when there are still so many people living in poverty throughout the world. The suggested solution to this was that those who are guilty of spending frivolously on pointless items, should instead donate money to those less fortunate than themselves.

Stronger responses showed an awareness of the issues, as in *Some say that money is the root of all evil, a void of despair. Others say it is a source of kindness, a glimpse of hope.* However, some weaker responses lacked well-structured arguments and established an initial idea and then reiterated this. In some cases, the given statement appeared to have not been clearly understood and linguistically these responses often

struggled – *spending money on irrelevant things for no use makes your personality less attractive as so many peoples buys car….in this year of inflammation rate increase as the government is suffering from economical crisses*. Planning in advance of attempting this question would have helped these candidates to ensure that they had enough material to produce a suitably sustained and developed response.

Question 4

Is it better to be the oldest child in the family or the youngest? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

Whilst also not popular, this question was attempted by more candidates then **Question 3**. Candidates engaged with their own experience of being either the eldest or youngest child to bring in personal anecdotes in support of their ideas. These anecdotes revealed a great flavour of family life and were often humorous in their consideration of how it was possible to exploit each position within the family hierarchy.

Those who wrote from the perspective of the oldest child frequently maligned the greater degree of *responsibility* and higher levels of *expectation* placed on them by parents, with examples of having to take care of younger siblings and the requirement for high academic achievement. Despite these pressures, benefits were also cited, such as parents having more time to devote to their first-born, being a role model and, humorously, having a ready-made scapegoat to blame for any misdemeanours. Youngest siblings, on the other hand, saw benefits in terms of having greater freedom than their older brothers and sisters, always being able to get their own way and having someone to turn to in times of trouble or when in need of advice. The drawbacks were always being compared to older siblings and being expected to live up to their standards, not getting as much attention from parents and having to wear hand-me-downs.

A number of candidates displayed maturity and strength in their writing, presenting well-constructed arguments with clarity and insight. They provided well-developed reasons and examples to support their perspectives, showcasing their ability to think critically and analyse the advantages and disadvantages of being the oldest or youngest child.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'She threw her bag on the back seat of the car and quickly got into the passenger seat.'

The most popular this year, this given sentence question produced a number of dramatic, fast-paced and exciting narratives, however a significant number of candidates clearly had a story in mind that they wanted to tell and inserted the given sentence in a way that was not cohesive. There was a tendency also for weaker responses to extend far beyond the indicative word count but without any real control. These responses included limited details of character and setting, comprising instead of a series of events with very little sense of rising action, climax or resolution. For these candidates, focusing on quality of writing over number words would have resulted in a better outcome.

The best narratives were complex, sophisticated, and tense, featuring scenarios such as relatives sick in hospital, being late for an interview, escaping from kidnappers, car chases, and bank robberies. In these responses, pace was maintained, and the plot moved forward through effective deployment of a range of devices, with wide and precise vocabulary woven seamlessly and naturally into the writing.

Many responses included direct speech, however this was often not accurately punctuated, with the punctuation inside the closing speech mark frequently omitted and capital letters erroneously used for reporting clauses. Additionally, many candidates wrote their direct speech continuously, rather than beginning a new line for each new speaker, which sometimes led to difficulties in comprehending who was speaking and to whom, thus disrupting the narrative. Some responses also relied too heavily on dialogue, at the expense of developing character or setting.

A number of responses contained graphic scenes of extreme violence. A reminder to candidates that such material has no place in this exam.

Question 6

Write a story about a person who completely changed their mind about someone.

Along with **Question 5**, this was also a popular option this year, with responses often based in a school setting. The complete change of mind was often about a new student who initially seemed quiet, anti-social or aloof, but after some incident became a close friend. There were tales too of hate turned to romantic love and academic jealousy switched to admiration, alongside those in which seemingly cruel teachers turned out to have compassion. Beyond the confines of the school setting, narratives featured double agents, turning on their unsuspecting colleagues at the moment a criminal was about to be apprehended, idols who upon meeting were not as expected, and workplace friends turned to enemies.

Linguistically, a tendency towards over-dependency on dialogue was the most frequent issue observed. First person narratives abounded here, with very few candidates choosing the third person, however successful examples were seen of each.

Often narratives had quite emotional endings – *..this broke my heart; I'll never trust again; I did lose all faith in the world*. Very many responses ended with the words *..never judge a book by its cover*.

One particularly memorable, and humorous, narrative featured an elderly woman who *waddled* into her kitchen to find her cat missing. A comic chase ensued of a man she suspected of taking her pet only to find the bundle he was carrying contained a papaya and the cat, in fact, was found safely catching mice at home. The realisation that the perceived catnapper was rather an innocent fruit-carrier provoked a sharp change of mind from the elderly protagonist.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21
Reading 21

Key messages

- Candidates are strongly advised to read both of the texts and all of the questions very carefully to make sure they know what is being asked and where to find the appropriate information before beginning to answer any questions. In both sections of the paper, concentrated reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.

- Candidates should pay close attention to the wording of every question when considering what information is required in response. To ensure their answers are focused, candidates are encouraged to underline or highlight key words, e.g. **Question 1(a)** 'the advantages and disadvantages of working from home.'

- Candidates are advised for **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)** to focus on identifying the key overarching points from the text and avoid the unnecessary inclusion of examples or repetition. If examples are included, candidates should ensure that they make this clear, using 'for example', 'such as' or 'like'. Brackets, dashes and slashes or punctuation such as the colon, comma or semi-colon are to be avoided as these do not indicate examples.

- In **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, candidates are reminded that their responses should be based on the passage and not on personal opinion or additional knowledge they may have. Candidates should also keep looking back to the question to avoid additional unnecessary detail; candidates were asked in the second section to identify 'disadvantages of working from home', therefore details about what happens in offices are not relevant.

- Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**, but substitutions are not always appropriate. While candidates should write succinctly and avoid copying lengthy sentences, they should also be aware that all key information needs to be given: simply writing 'Workers can take refreshing breaks' does not include the essential information that the difference at home is that this can happen 'when they like'.

- In **Question 1(b)**, a focus on clear expression will ensure a piece of writing that is easy to follow. Coherence is established by the correct use of linking devices, both to link ideas between sentences and within a sentence to link clauses. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso', 'adding to', 'the last but not the least' should be avoided, as well as lengthy introductions, conclusions and personal opinions. Candidates should use a wide range of appropriate linking devices accurately. Precise punctuation assists in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.

- For **Question 2**, candidates needed to identify three pieces of advice given in the text by the writer. The most successful responses used the writer's words and included all necessary details, for example, 'it is important that you remember' in paragraph 6. In **Question 2**, candidates might be asked to identify opinions, advice, criticisms or warnings; they should carefully highlight the key word in the question and find the correct function in the text.

- *Section 2* has two specifically 'own words' questions, **Question 5(a)** and **Question 6(a)**. Successful responses avoided repeating the key words, or their derivatives, in their response and instead provided suitable synonyms or paraphrases which explained the meaning of the phrase. All candidates should look out for these questions ('Explain in your own words…') and practise identifying the key words, noting that the answers lie in the given phrase, rather than in the events in the narrative. Responses should then be given within the context of the text.

- In the multiple-choice vocabulary question, **Question 9**, candidates are encouraged to look at the given words in the context in which they appear in the text.

- In **Question 10**, candidates are required to make a clear distinction between the 'meaning' and the 'effect' of the given phrases. Further practice in the approach to these writer's craft questions would be beneficial. Candidates are advised to focus on the straightforward, literal meaning under 'meaning', and to differentiate between that and how this affects what the writer is telling us about characters, situations or places given the writer's choice of particular words or images under 'effect'.

General comments

Candidates answered questions based on two passages of approximately 700 words each, the first non-fiction, entitled 'Working from home' and the second fiction, entitled 'The new fountain pen'.

If a response needs to continue on additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number and part which is being continued. If a candidate uses space elsewhere on the question paper booklet, they should write an explanatory note in the original response space. It is better to use additional pages or a blank space than to use margins or squeeze answers into the bottom of the page, as these are not always visible. Candidates are encouraged to clearly cross out previous attempts at a response, rather than try to rub out their words and write over the top.

The first passage explored candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second assessed reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary question: 12 marks for the assessment of the ability to select content points from the text 'Working from home' and 10 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a summary which was relevant, logically organised and easy to follow. Almost all candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**, while some responses, which were in excess of the recommended length, lacked relevance and were less fluent hampering performance on coherence. Most candidates were able to balance the two sections of the text, advantages and disadvantages, which allowed them to write a more relevant summary.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates used the suggestion in the rubric that they use bullet points for their notes. The strongest responses identified key overarching points, without the inclusion of examples, or the inclusion of the writer's advice, for example 'eco-friendly' without going on to advise 'we should all commit to reducing our collective carbon footprint'.

Question 1(b) asked candidates to summarise their notes from **Question 1(a)**. The skill of summary writing involves selecting the main points from a given passage without lengthy or unnecessary introductions and conclusions. The strongest responses rephrased and synthesised the content points fluently and coherently, moving from one idea to the next using a range of concise linking devices. Acceptable responses selected parts of the original passage, rearranging and adding to them, to ensure a coherence of their own.

Question 2 assessed candidates' ability to distinguish fact from non-factual statements, in this case to write down the writer's advice from three paragraphs in the text. In answer to **Question 2**, a very small number of candidates erroneously referred to the fiction passage. **Question 2** is always based on the first (factual) passage.

The second passage, 'The new fountain pen', assessed candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary and of key phrases by the use of their own words, and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the paper could be gained here, with the most successful candidates clearly focusing on retrieving information or inferring details from the passage in response to the questions asked.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Reading for Ideas

Question 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the advantages and disadvantages of working from home, as outlined in the passage. Candidates were asked to write their answers in note form, and they were free to use either the words from the text or their own words. The first content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration; these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Although points should be presented in their correct sections, the order within each section is not considered; there is no need to write between the lines or use arrows to show that one point comes before another. Candidates seem to have followed the topical passage well and were able to successfully identify a good number of key points. This helped to prevent irrelevance being carried forward into **Question 1(b)**. It was important to not omit words, for example, 'helpful chats *don't happen*' from paragraph 6, and to avoid repeated points, for example explaining that 'You need to know about technical issues' which expands a given point.

Excluding the given content points, there were 14 content points available for selection. The best responses were expressed concisely, almost always in bullet points, with a large number of possible points offered. To gain 12 marks, candidates need to offer at least 12 main points over the 2 sections. There is no maximum number of points candidates can offer, so crossing out additional points is unnecessary and can sometimes cause marks to be lost.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 described 'the advantages of working from home'. Excluding the first given point, there were seven content points which candidates could choose. This section appeared to be slightly more accessible for candidates than the 'disadvantages'.

Paragraph 2 contained the given point and two further content points. More skilled responses omitted details of commuting, as this was unnecessary further information about the given point, 'no time is spent travelling to and from work'. The first credited point was either that employees or workers are now 'able to choose work hours' or that 'work can be done in office hours or at other times'. The following point continued the ideas of time and choice with 'breaks when / as often as they (workers) like'. Stronger responses realised that choosing when or how often to have these breaks was vital for the point.

Paragraph 3 contained three further content points describing what is saved by working from home. Stronger responses demonstrated an understanding that there is 'no need for childcare' without including the examples in the text of how their day could be organised – collecting children from school, cooking an evening meal or working again after the children have gone to bed. Examples could be included as long as they were clearly indicated as examples. The following point demonstrated careful reading of the text. 'You don't need to pay for travel or transport' or 'financial savings' are two ways to express the same money saving idea. The final point explained that working from home is 'eco-friendly' or reduces carbon emissions or pollution. Many responses showed evidence of careful selection, aware that the continuation of the last sentence in the paragraph is the writer offering advice about reducing carbon footprints which answers **Question 2**, but not as a main over-arching point in **Question 1(a)**.

Paragraph 4 provided two content points. The first content point described how not being in the town or city centre can change lifestyles and habits, as it 'removes the temptation to buy unhealthy, fattening snacks or 'food'. Stronger responses began their bullet point with 'removes' acknowledging that writing 'saving money' before this idea changes the focus, taking it away from being an advantage of working from home to being an advantage of trying to save money. The second point, about how 'money saved can be used or spent on other, more useful or interesting things' also showed good understanding of how to deal with examples in the text – by either not including them, or by clearly indicating that they are examples, in this case by using the text '*such as* holidays, clothes or treats for the family'. Careful readers picked up the importance that this money is the money *saved* by working from home, and not just 'money'.

In the second section of the summary, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7, the rubric asked for 'the disadvantages of working from home' with seven more content points across the three paragraphs. Successful responses focused on the requirements of the question, rather than bringing in what might happen in offices: 'you might have a whole team of technological experts nearby' or that 'helpful chats across the desk or the office solve problems' which served as introductions to main points.

Paragraph 5 provided the given point, 'technology might let you down', as well as two further points associated with poorer mental health as a result of working from home. Again, more skilled responses omitted details about connectivity, bandwidth or having technological experts in offices, as these related to unnecessary further information about the given point. The first credited point in this paragraph is that 'lack of social contact leads to loneliness'. More skilled responses recognised the importance of both parts of this point and avoided simply writing 'loneliness', 'working alone' or 'lack of social contact' – one part was needed to explain the other. The second point followed on from loneliness to explain how this could get worse, with more 'serious or adverse or harmful effects on mental health'. Careful candidates realised that the inclusion of 'severe anxiety' was unnecessary or needed to be introduced as an example with 'including' from the text.

Paragraph 6 focused mainly on the consequences on your health of working from home. The first point of three in the paragraph is the consequence of a lack of movement when working from home. More thoughtful responses realised this is not the same as 'less' or 'reduced exercise' as the passage talks of doing nothing physical at all as the 'disadvantage'. Skilled responses avoided writing about 'running for the bus or walking from the car park', which happen when not working from home, or examples of ill health, such as 'heart disease', caused by the lack of exercise. The second point continued the theme of physical health by alerting us to the dangers of 'staring at a device or screen' which can 'harm the eyes'. Once again, stronger responses did not specify 'laptops' or include details about how health is affected, correctly identifying the 'headaches' or 'eye strain' as examples which are not part of the main point. Careful reading and focus on

the rubric again identified the importance of 'remembering to give your eyes a rest' as advice for **Question 2**, but not a main point for **Question 1(a)**. The passage introduced what is possible when working in the office, for example, 'helpful chats'; stronger responses noted the 'disadvantage of working from home' is that these 'helpful chats' or 'impromptu meetings *don't occur*' at home.

Paragraph 7 included two final content points about the effect which homeworking has on other businesses. Successful candidates appreciated that there are two separate points here, one about restaurants or coffee shops and one about public transport, so were specific about each one, rather than noting a sweeping reference to 'businesses' which missed essential details. The lack of people in cities or town centres, producing fewer customers, introduced the main effect on restaurants and coffee shops, that they are 'forced to shut'. Strong responses recognised that 'unemployment' was not enough on its own and needed more explanation, so the main point is the closing of restaurants or coffee shops. The second point involved under-used 'public transport' resulting in 'public transport reducing services'. Equally valid was that people still needing these services have 'less choice of bus or train services or public transport'.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes from **Question 1(a)** to write a summary of 'the advantages and disadvantages of working from home'. They were advised to write 150–180 words and to use their own words as far as possible in a piece of continuous writing. Marks were awarded for producing a relevant, well organised and easy to follow summary. Most candidates completed the task to an appropriate length. The best responses focused on the 'advantages of working from home' in the first section and 'the disadvantages of working from home' in the second section. They avoided including additional material from the text, for example, illustrations of how parents can look after their children themselves, or specific physical problems associated with overuse of screens.

The strongest responses used notes made in **Question 1(a)**, synthesising them, without including repetition, examples, or supporting detail. There were 10 marks available for highly relevant and coherent responses.

The most impressive summaries included a wide range of relevant content points, clearly made, with points linked succinctly, for example bringing together employees being able to choose their own hours and when to have breaks, which helps parents look after their own children, without the need for outside support. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question, without lengthy introductions to each section, a conclusion or repetition of the rubric. Impressive coherence was aided by the skilful and accurate use of a range of appropriate linking devices, the effective use of punctuation and adverbial connectives, as well as the correct use of original complex structures introduced by 'which' and 'who', for example.

Satisfactory responses effectively used simpler words such as 'another advantage' or 'in addition', which moved the reader through the various ideas in the passage. Other responses relied accurately but somewhat repetitively on 'and', 'also' and 'firstly, secondly, lastly', with an occasional suitable adverbial link which aided fluency. Candidates need to move away from a memorised list of connectives which may not be appropriate and limit their ability to demonstrate a skilful level of fluency.

There were a number of responses which lacked relevance, and included only a few key points from the passage, predominately from the 'advantages' section. A few responses included points in **Question 1(b)** which had not been made in **Question 1(a)**; candidates are encouraged to include these in **Question 1(a)**. There were a larger number of responses this session where strong bullet points in **Question 1(a)** did not result in high relevance in **Question 1(b)**. Although candidates are asked to write in their own words where possible, it remains a summary task, where the focus should still be on presenting the key points from the passage. The summary should make sense to anyone who has not read the passage.

Question 2

In **Question 2,** candidates were asked to re-read paragraphs 1, 3 and 6 and to write down one piece of advice given by the writer from each of these paragraphs. A mark was awarded for the identification of each piece of advice. Although candidates can use their own words, the most successful followed the rubric to 'write down' the advice *as it is given in the text* without omissions or additions. In this question, candidates need to separate factual information from the non-factual, as presented by the writer. The key here is to identify structures which offer clear guidance and advice as to how individuals should act. Candidates should not automatically presume the modal verb 'can' is an indicator of advice. In this text, 'can' is used to suggest the possibility or ability to do something.

Successful candidates identified words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, involving what the writer believes should happen. They avoided writing examples of the writer's opinion – advanced

technology sparking 'an exciting revolution in the world of work' from paragraph one, for example. On the whole, candidates appeared to have carefully re-read what they had written in response to **Question 2** to make sure the advice was complete and made sense, with many candidates successfully gaining full marks.

The first piece of advice in paragraph 1 was 'People ought to consider (carefully) whether working from home is a change for good.' The majority of candidates realised that this needed to be identified in full and carefully wrote out the whole sentence.

In paragraph 3, the writer advised that '(and), we should all commit to reducing our (collective) carbon footprint'. Again, using all the relevant words from the passage brought best results, including the 'all', which directed everyone to be involved. Successful candidates also avoided the more factual information leading up to the advice, that 'working from home is eco-friendly'. Whilst the advice needs to be written in full, this does not always involve a complete sentence, so careful selection is important.

Paragraph 6 required candidates to select '(If you are working from home,) it is important that you remember to give your eyes (a chance to) rest'. Effective responses again demonstrated the importance of not excluding key words within this piece of advice; 'to remember', for example, shifts the focus from advising people about something they may not have thought about, to not forgetting to put breaks into a daily routine. Reference to 'light exercise' reducing 'heart disease' in the paragraph may be alerting readers to a possible risk of being inactive, but is not advising readers to take more exercise.

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

In dealing with a narrative text, candidates will often encounter less familiar vocabulary and will be expected to show an understanding of figurative language and inferred as well as explicit meaning. Many candidates appear to find this narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1.

Question 3

Question 3(a) was a literal comprehension question requiring candidates to select the relevant part of the sentence in lines 1 and 2 explaining why Farris was 'becoming increasingly unhappy in his job'. This proved very accessible for the vast majority of candidates who recognised that 'the senior architect or Farris's boss' or more frequently, 'Mr Arsalan was (extremely) demanding or put (too much) pressure on him.'

Question 3(b), also a literal comprehension question, asked what the advert claimed. Successful candidates looked back in the passage to find that the advert was for a shop 'specialising in fountain pens', so the 'one' in line 4 had to be clearly identified as a fountain pen: 'using a fountain pen gives a feeling of supreme confidence', with the advert specifying that the effect came from 'using', not just owning it. Virtually all candidates recognised the importance of 'supreme' to describe the 'confidence'.

Question 4

Question 4(a) was an inferential question, asking candidates to infer why they thought Mr Arsalan and his colleagues stared at Farris 'in amazement' when he spoke. Effective responses referred back to line 8 in the passage: 'As usual, Farris was silent' whilst realising that repeating the whole section would mean that Farris was silent in that meeting as well, which is not true to the narrative, nor would it explain why the colleagues were staring 'in amazement'. Therefore, they wisely chose to re-word it to 'Farris was usually silent' or 'rarely spoke'. Alternatives turned the idea around and wrote that 'Farris spoke for the first time'. Simply saying that Farris lacked confidence did not explain why the colleagues were amazed.

In **Question 4(b)**, candidates had to give the single word used earlier in paragraph 2 which conveyed a similar idea to 'ventured'. This proved challenging, but more shrewd candidates recognised the link between 'colleagues *ventured* to speak' and 'Farris suddenly *dared* to say', and correctly wrote 'dared'. Frequent incorrect answers included 'unprecedented', 'presided', 'eloquence', or 'attacked'.

Question 4(c) was an inferential question. Candidates were asked why they thought 'Mr Arsalan spoke coldly' at the end of the meeting. The key to this lay earlier in the paragraph where we are told that Farris 'attacked, point by point, the arguments put forward by Mr Arsalan'. Mr Arsalan may well have been angry or felt insulted, but we need an explanation as to why with reference to the passage. Stronger responses re-worded the text slightly, saying that '(Mr Arsalan was annoyed because) Farris had attacked or argued against his arguments or points'. They recognised the need to include Farris by name, as he is not named in the question. They were not confused by the word 'arguments', here meaning 'views' and so avoided saying

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that one of the men had 'won' the argument. Successful candidates also recognised the difference between Farris challenging what Mr Arsalan *had said* and challenging Mr Arsalan himself.

Question 5

In **Question 5(a)**, candidates were asked to explain in their own words how Farris, having got through the meeting without 'any of the anxiety that had plagued him' since early childhood, had felt since his childhood. Successful candidates identified that this 'own words' question was asking them to focus on the key words 'anxiety' and 'plagued', and was not a straightforward comprehension question about the meeting. Very strong candidates attempted to explain 'anxiety' as 'fear', 'worry' or 'stress' with imaginative suggestions for 'plagued' being 'haunted', 'crippled', 'consumed', or 'taken over'. Those who focused on 'plague' as the disease tended to offer ideas of incurable illnesses, rather than something which 'afflicted' or 'troubled' him. When faced with challenging vocabulary, candidates should look at the context and attempt to put the given phrase in more broad terms – what could the writer be saying had been an issue for Farris since his childhood?

Question 5(b) was a literal comprehension question which required careful reading, asking candidates to pick out two *physical* changes which Farris would have experienced after a confrontation with Mr Arsalan in the past: 'his heart racing' and 'indigestion'.

Question 6

Question 6(a) was an 'own words' question, focusing on Mr Benjamin's reaction to what Farris had said at the meeting. The two key words to be explained came from Mr Benjamin's statement that he was 'very struck by your analysis' of the company's objectives. Perceptive candidates appreciated that close reading of the context showed the positive nature of 'struck', as Mr Benjamin went on to offer Farris a promotion. Successful responses, using clues from previous paragraphs, felt Mr Benjamin was 'impressed', 'moved' or 'amazed', but only the very strongest attempted to explain 'analysis' as a 'dissection' or 'evaluation' of the company's objectives or the 'breakdown of his points'.

Question 6(b) asked candidates what the 'opportunity' that would totally alter the course of Farris's life was. This was a literal question which required careful reading of both text and question. Whilst the pen was '*responsible* for this opportunity', close attention to the question wording: '*What* was the opportunity', allowed candidates to successfully identify the 'promotion', or the chance to become '*second* senior architect' as the new opportunity in Farris's life.

Question 7

For two marks, **Question 7** asked for two reasons why the restaurant was 'the best restaurant in town'. This was a literal question. Many candidates effectively identified that **'**the interior was stunning' with, or without, the additional information about 'high ceilings' and 'glittering chandeliers'. For the second reason, stronger responses identified that the 'food', or 'speciality dish', was 'delicious' rather than other information about the menu design or high prices, which might be found in good restaurants, but would not make them 'the best'.

Question 8

Question 8(a) required candidates to infer Farris's emotion from the description that 'Time stood still for Farris.' The best responses reflected the context of how much Farris relied on the pen and the key role it played in his new-found confidence, with emotions such as 'panic', 'fear' or 'horror'. Successful candidates avoided 'shock', 'worry', 'sadness' or 'anxiety' as they did not sufficiently convey this importance.

For **Question 8(b)**, candidates had to suggest why Farris gave up his search for the fountain pen. Although at first glance this question may have appeared a literal question, careful reading was needed along with a realisation that just saying 'he sensed a note of irritation in the restaurant manager's voice' did not explain *why* the manager was irritated, and therefore *why* Farris gave up his search. Successful responses identified that a lot of time had passed and Farris had been calling 'every day', so the manager was irritated because of his constant calls or his continual pestering. An alternative response focused on the time which had passed; 'days, weeks, months', adding that the pen had still not turned up, leading to Farris giving up. Successful candidates avoided paraphrasing part of the question; 'he realised that it was time to give up the

search' or simply writing Farris's conclusion that 'he knew he would never see his fountain pen again', understanding that neither would explain *why* Farris gave up.

Question 9

Question 9 tested understanding, in context, of words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. Such contextual checking is all-important with this type of question as words can have different meanings when used in different circumstances. The clearest method of indicating the chosen word is to circle the correct letter at which it appears. If candidates change their mind, they are advised to show this by crossing out the answer they no longer wish to give, rather than attempting to rub it out. If they further change their minds, they can re-write the letter to indicate their choice.

The most accessible were **Question 9(b)**, **Question 9(c)** and **Question 9(e)** where the vast majority of candidates recognised 'constantly' for 'repeatedly', 'protected' for 'shielded' and 'shouted' for 'yelled'. The majority of candidates appreciated that 'worries' is closest in meaning to 'misgivings' in **Question 9(a)**, as the context was the staff being concerned about issues and therefore required something negative, ruling out 'decisions' or 'ambitions'. **Question 9(d)** proved the most challenging part to this question, but many candidates did recognise that 'large' fitted the context of 'generous'. 'Kind' was most frequently chosen by others; this was incorrect in the context of the celebration of Farris's new job and his 'signing the cheque with a flourish of his fountain pen' implying more than mere kindness.

Question 10

This was the section dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft by testing the candidate's understanding of the meaning and effect of selected phrases. As mentioned in '**Key messages**', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question to ensure success. Candidates should avoid offering an effect as a meaning and vice-versa. Meaning needs to look solely at the words in the phrase and provide synonyms or a paraphrase, within the context of that part of the passage. It is important that candidates avoid using words from the quotations or any derivatives as these do not allow them to demonstrate understanding. Explanations of the effect need to focus on the language choice in the quotation and not the wider literal context of the narrative. Successful responses concentrated on how the writer had chosen to influence their reader's view of the characters and action through their choice of language. In both parts of the question, successful effect marks were a result of honing in on the specific effect the writer intends for the reader rather than simply making a general observation.

Question 10(a) directed candidates to 'as usual, My Arsalan had plenty to say' in line 9 which described how he normally behaved in meetings. For meaning, the strongest responses recognised that the need to paraphrase 'as usual' and 'plenty'. Many successful responses expressed these simply as 'normally Mr Arsalan spoke a lot' or 'Mr Arsalan always had a lot to talk about', without the need for further information about the meetings or the behaviour of other staff or Farris. Although candidates should be looking at the context of the phrase when explaining the effect, this should not distract them from focusing on the effect of the phrase itself. The strongest responses realised that the writer was expressing negative feelings about Mr Arsalan; that he was 'arrogant' or 'liked to dominate' – they appreciated that this is not the same as saying he was 'in charge'. They also demonstrated an understanding of the difference between being 'confident', which can be a positive character trait, and being 'overconfident', which expresses the view of Mr Arsalan as having too high an opinion of himself, hence talking a lot in meetings.

For **Question 10(b)**, the given phrase was from line 42: 'the taxi driver accelerated back'. The best responses for meaning gave alternatives based on speed, such as 'the driver drove quickly' or he went 'faster'. This allowed them to see that this speed showed the driver's understanding of the urgency of the situation for the effect, or that it was an emergency. Some candidates focused on the effect of the phrase on the reader, creating tension and panic.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

> **Paper 1123/22**
> **Reading 22**

Key messages

- Candidates should try to gain a clear, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions through close reading before they begin to answer each section. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.

- Candidates might find it helpful to underline or highlight key words in the question, e.g. **Question 4(a)** 'Give the three-word phrase…' and **Question 6(b) '**Explain in your own words…'. This will ensure the answers are focused and creditworthy.

- To achieve high marks for both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to focus on identifying, specifically, the main overarching points from the text without the unnecessary inclusion of examples, repetition and extensions of those points.

- If examples are included in **Question 1(a)**, candidates need to identify them as such with the use of 'for example', 'such as' or 'like'. The use of brackets, dashes and slashes is to be avoided as they are not indicators of examples, nor is punctuation such as the colon, comma or semi-colon. Examples of this are 'access to facilities (gyms, yoga studios)', and 'extra-curricular activities: drama groups, sports clubs'. The former suggests that only the two identified facilities are provided rather than two examples among many; the latter suggests that drama groups and sports clubs are the only activities offered rather than two examples among many.

- Candidates do not have to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**, but substitutions are not always appropriate. Therefore, it is recommended that candidates keep close to the wording of the passage for **Question 1(a)**. For example, 'travel time is *reduced*' is not the same as 'travel time is *eliminated*'.

- While candidates need to be encouraged to write succinctly and to avoid copying lengthy extracts from the text when answering **Question 1(a)**, they must also be aware that brevity can exclude key information. For example, 'feedback' omits the word 'individual' and does not clearly identify the benefit of online learning.

- Candidates are encouraged to write to the recommended length in **Question 1(b)**; overlong or short responses are self-penalising since they cannot satisfactorily fulfil the criteria for Relevance or Coherence.

- For **Question 1(b)**, it is essential that linking devices, used by candidates to establish coherence, are appropriate and also used selectively. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso' and 'to add on', are to be avoided. Similarly, expressions such as 'moving on', 'in a nutshell', 'by the way' or 'alongside' are not appropriate for a summary. Many candidates would benefit from further practice of appropriate linking devices to enable them to move from writing a competent summary to writing a summary which is skilful or even impressive.

- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to use their own words and should be discouraged from copying complete sentences from the text.

- Candidates should be aware that accurate punctuation in **Question 1(b)**, particularly the accurate use of commas and full stops, can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.

- Many candidates were able to identify the pieces of advice in the non-fiction passage for **Question 2**. Candidates should be reminded that **Question 2** is part of *Section 1* and refers to the first passage. Candidates are advised to copy the piece of advice exactly as it is given in the passage since own word attempts can miss detail or include inappropriate alternatives. It was noticeable that a few candidates were selecting opinions based on previous exam series. Centres need to be aware that in **Question 2** candidates might be asked to identify opinions, advice, criticisms or warnings.

- To assist candidates in understanding Passage 2, regular reading of narrative texts and consideration of both explicit and inferential questions about characters and situations will help a great deal with all types of question in *Section 2*.

- There was some misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the questions in *Section 2*. Candidates need to spend time considering exactly what is being asked. Simply lifting from the passage rarely works; candidates need to rephrase the text in such a way that the question is clearly being answered.

- In the 'own words' questions, **Question 3(c)** and **Question 6(b)**, candidates can improve if they avoid repeating the key words in their response, and instead provide suitable synonyms which work within the given context. This question requires candidates to explain the meanings of two words in a phrase from the text. *Section 2* has two specifically 'own words' questions. Candidates should be adept at locating these (*Explain in your own words*…) and should practise answering them, noting that the answers lie in the given phrase, rather than in the events in the narrative.
- In **Question 8**, the multiple-choice vocabulary question, candidates should be encouraged to try out each of the possible words and decide which is the most appropriate in the passage with which they are dealing. Candidates are asked to circle the correct letter. Occasionally, other methods such as eliminating the incorrect answers or writing the letter in the margin resulted in ambiguous responses.
- In responding to the final question on the writer's craft, understanding of both literal and inferential writing is required. It was not always evident that candidates could distinguish between *meaning* and *effect*. Further practice on the approach to these questions on the writer's craft would be beneficial. Candidates are advised to provide a straightforward literal meaning under 'Meaning' and for 'Effect' to go beyond the literal and comment on the impact or connotations of particular words or an image.

General comments

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages, each of approximately 700 words: the first entitled 'Online learning and classroom learning' and the second entitled 'Laurent'.

Most candidates attempted every question and there were few candidates who offered no response.

Responses were, for the most part, clearly written. A few candidates who wrote to excess – in **Question 1(a)** particularly – found themselves writing at the side or at the bottom of the page which can cause illegibility and the risk of writing not being scanned so this should be avoided. If the candidate's response does not fit in the space provided, the response must continue on an 'additional page' rather than being written in a random space in the question paper booklet.

The first non-fiction passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second fiction passage tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary **Question 1**, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the passage, 'Online learning and classroom learning'. 10 marks were awarded for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a piece of writing which was relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Part of the skill of summary writing is writing concisely; several responses exceeded the recommended word limit of 180 words.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates wisely adhered to the suggestion in the rubric that they might find it useful to use bullet points for their notes. Generally, candidates were selective in extracting the relevant information. Practice in identifying the overarching points would benefit those candidates who feel the need to copy extensively from the text. In these cases, candidates often incorporated irrelevance, resulting in a loss of potential marks.

In **Question 1(b)**, there was a maximum of 16 content points, including the given points, candidates could refer to. Points not fully made were acceptable here. To achieve Bands 4 or 5 for Relevance, it is expected that candidates include a wide range of the available points. For Bands 4 and 5 Coherence, the summary must demonstrate significant stretches of fluent and accurate writing.

Question 2 allotted three marks to the testing of the candidates' ability to identify three pieces of advice in three different paragraphs of the passage.

The second passage, 'Laurent', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

(a)   This was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the advantages of online learning and the advantages of classroom learning, as outlined in the whole passage. Candidates were to write their answers in note form and were advised that own words were not necessary. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding these given points, there were 14 content points. Many candidates achieved 10 or more marks. These successful responses were expressed concisely, used bullet points, as suggested, and avoided repetition, unnecessary examples and additional information, ensuring at the same time that key words essential to making the point were included.

Less successful responses offered irrelevant material, particularly repetition. Examples of such are given in dealing with the individual points below.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 included seven advantages of online learning. There was much success in identifying the first content point that 'candidates can work at a time that suits them' or at any convenient time, with most candidates avoiding identifying the example of working at night as the overarching point. The advantage that 'travel time is eliminated' was also succinctly identified, although less precise alternatives for 'eliminated', such as 'reduced' or 'less' travel time, distorted the meaning so could not score. Most candidates recognised that 'walking' or 'being driven to school' were unnecessary examples.

In Paragraph 3, there were a further two content points, the first being that 'candidates can learn at their own pace' or that there is 'no pressure to keep up with others'. Candidates need to be alert to content which is repetition of the overarching point. In some cases both of the above representations of the point were given as two content separate points. Some skill was needed to condense the main idea in the lengthy second sentence that 'work not understood can be revisited' or 'revised'. Candidates who copied the long sentence often neglected mentioning the final detail, that the work revised was *not understood,* because they ran out of space.

There were three more points in Paragraph 4. The advantage of 'individual feedback' was identified by many candidates. There is nothing in the passage to suggest that the candidate is providing feedback so candidates who misread this could not score. The second point in the paragraph was that shy or unconfident candidates could communicate or speak online. To locate the final advantage of online learning, candidates had to read to the end of the paragraph. Too often they were distracted by the example of science experiments and so missed the overarching point identifying the 'broader range of learning content', which meant that few candidates were credited here. If science experiments were mentioned, this example needed to be identified as such with 'such as' or 'for example'.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the advantages of classroom learning as outlined in the passage, and there were a further seven content points, excluding the given point, to be found in Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

The first point from Paragraph 5 could be made in several ways. Many candidates correctly selected the fact that 'candidates can work more easily in groups'. This point about the benefit of working together could also be made by stating that candidates can 'help each other' or 'cooperate with others'. Many candidates provided the alternatives as separate points but could only be credited once. While the advantage of online learning is *individual* feedback, the advantage of classroom learning is 'feedback from *other* students', peers, classmates or 'someone their own age'. Often, 'valuable feedback' or 'feedback from students' were given as points, but neither of these capture the idea of student-to-student feedback.

In Paragraph 6, most candidates identified the advantage that classroom learning allows candidates 'to socialise'. Some candidates then went on to repeat this point in another bullet about 'lifelong friendships' which could not be credited. The second point in this paragraph was successfully identified and there were very few instances of the overarching point that schools offer 'extra-curricular activities' being spoiled with examples.

In the final paragraph, Paragraph 7, there were three content points. Candidates were required to read the opening sentence carefully to extract the key idea that 'rules encourage personal discipline'. Omission of 'personal' or 'self' did not fully capture the benefit to the individual. 'Rules

encourage discipline which build character' was a valid alternative. Occasionally, lack of careful focus meant that extraneous detail about school rules being separate from those at home spoiled the point and blurred the focus. The next advantage that classroom learning provides 'access to facilities' was successfully identified by many candidates. The final point that the physical classroom or the learning environment are 'stimulating' was reasonably successful. Alternatives for 'stimulating' such as 'motivating' or 'inspiring' were valid, but words like 'better' or 'fun' were too weak. Candidates are encouraged to ensure that what they write makes sense. Too often candidates wrote 'the classroom is more educationally', omitting the final word 'stimulating'. Nearly all candidates recognised that what followed in the text about 'wall-displays' or 'photographs' was irrelevant.

(b)   In **Question 1(b)**, candidates who scored highly in **Question 1(a)** were often able to transform their notes into a relevant summary which did not rely on excessive copying of the text. There was a maximum of 16 content points, including the given points, candidates could refer to.

The most impressive Band 4 and Band 5 efforts were from candidates who included a wide range of relevant points, made with clarity, and avoided unnecessary examples and additional details. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question.

Weaker responses, many relying on copying sections of the text, included irrelevance, such as details about what students can do in the time saved by not travelling, as well as offering unnecessary conclusions. These candidates sometimes repeated points: having identified students can 'socialise' as an advantage of classroom learning, some went on to discuss 'lifelong friendships'. Band 3 responses included at least half of the available points, while a limited range of points generally merited Band 2 or Band 1 levels for Relevance.

Candidates are advised to use their own words and those who did use them, together with some of their own constructions to link the main ideas, created a fluency which was easy to follow. The best responses demonstrated an impressive coherence using a range of stylish and skilful linking devices, including varied and appropriate adverbial connectives and original complex structures introduced by 'which' and 'who'. Points were often synthesised, such as 'candidates can work at a time and place which are convenient'. The repetitive use of 'and' or 'also' to link content was also avoided in these skilful and impressive summaries, and punctuation was accurate and helpful.

Despite the guidance to 'use your own words as far as possible' and to not exceed 180 words, the less successful summaries were often too reliant on copying from the passage and ignored the word limit. It was also common for some adverbial connectives such as 'nevertheless', 'subsequently' and 'likewise' to be used incorrectly with no precise connection to what had just been written. Others, such as 'in addition', 'moreover' and 'furthermore', were placed at random or mechanically at the beginning of a new sentence. The quality of coherence was also impacted by awkward attempts to use phrases such as 'by the way', 'on the flip side of the coin' or 'adding on' which are not appropriate for a summary. The use of 'next' and 'then' is also a limited way to link content. Weaknesses in grammar and punctuation impacted on the fluent presentation of points.

Question 2

In **Question 2**, candidates were to select and write down three pieces of advice, one from each of the Paragraphs 1, 2 and 5. Some candidates achieved two or more marks. In some cases, candidates did not appear to fully understand what constitutes advice. It is important that candidates follow the rubric and 'write down' the advice as it is given in the text without omissions or additions. If a word is missed or added, it can change the overall meaning. The key here is to identify structures which offer clear guidance and advice as to how individuals should act. Candidates should not automatically presume the modal verb 'can' is an indicator of advice. In these paragraphs, 'can' is used to suggest the possibility or ability to do something.

In Paragraph 1, we are told 'It is wise to consider the advantages of both types of learning.' Many candidates selected this and copied the sentence carefully with a small number of candidates omitting 'it is wise' or 'both'. Incorrect responses focused on the advances in technology making online learning possible, but there is no advice in this factual statement.

The advice in Paragraph 2 was less successfully identified with much irrelevance spoiling the answer. The advice is 'candidates really ought to be encouraged to unwind after their studies.' Several responses went on to discuss how they could unwind but this is moving away from the advice. Candidates need to recognise that they are provided with two lines to write the advice; answers which exceed the two lines are clearly too

long and incorrect. Many candidates were distracted by the use of the word 'can', as in 'candidates can work at a time that suits them', but this is suggesting a possibility rather than advice.

In Paragraph 5, the advice is that 'Teachers should never underestimate the advantages of group work.' The more perceptive candidates recognised the modal verb 'should' as being the indicator of advice, and this was reasonably well answered. Weaker responses featured random sections of the text without understanding.

Section 2

Many candidates appeared to find the Passage 2 narrative text much more challenging than the Passage 1 non-narrative text. Questions required close reading to be able to demonstrate an understanding of both explicit and inferential meaning, in addition to language and effect.

Question 3(a) was a straightforward literal comprehension question asking what job Laurent got when he left university, with nearly all candidates providing a correct answer. Although 'a young banker' was acceptable, lifting 'a promising young banker' was incorrect since it did not demonstrate careful selection. Similarly, the single word 'bank' also showed lack of clear focus on the question.

Question 3(b) was another literal comprehension question asking why Laurent stayed in his job as long as he did. The question required candidates to focus on the second half of the paragraph and identify 'the money he was earning' as the reason. Some candidates sought an answer from the earlier lines describing the start of his banking career and spoiled a correct answer that 'he was earning a lot of money' with detail about being excited and his responsibilities. A lift was permitted – 'the money he was earning was compensation' – but if it went on to include 'but then it could no longer make up for it', the answer became unfocused and could not score.

Question 3(c) was the first 'own words' question and candidates were asked to explain the contrast between 'his ideal and reality', and the key lay in capturing the meaning of the words 'ideal' and 'reality'. Those candidates who recognised that this 'own words' question required synonyms in a sensible context for these two words performed well. For 'ideal', 'his dream' or 'his ambition' scored, as did 'he wanted a life in reading' or 'he desired to work with books', with the verbs 'want' and 'desired' capturing 'ideal'. A second mark could be scored for 'reality' with answers such as 'his current life', 'what he is actually doing' or 'his present job', with 'current', 'present' and 'actually' capturing the idea of 'reality'. This meant a two-mark answer might read: 'the contrast between what he wanted to do and his current life' or 'he wanted to work with books but he was actually a banker'.

Candidates need to ensure that they do not misread the question as a literal comprehension question: What was Laurent's 'ideal' job and what was he doing in 'reality'? This resulted in responses such as 'his ideal was to work with books but in reality he became a banker'. In such cases it was clear that many candidates did not understand that 'Explain in your own words' questions require them to provide meanings of the given words.

Question 4(a) asked for the three-word phrase with a similar meaning as 'immediate'. The correct answer, 'there and then', was often missed. Many candidates had seemingly not read the question carefully and provided one, two or four-word answers. A common incorrect response was 'eager to negotiate' which *describes* what Laurent immediately did.

Question 4(b) could be answered in a few ways. The 'occasions' could be identified with the noun 'book-signings'; a lift, 'hosting book-signing evenings'; or a description of what a book-signing actually is. The latter had to include all the relevant details. To describe it as an occasion 'when customers queued up to buy books signed by the writer' omitted the key feature of the writer being present to sign the books and so was not creditworthy. Less successful responses selected selling novels and poetry which is not an 'occasion'.

Question 5(a) was a literal comprehension question asking why Laurent went to the café, the correct answer being 'to read his notes on Pichier's novel' or 'on *Tears of Sand*'. Candidates had to make the connection between 'and planned to re-read his notes on <u>it</u>' and the specific novel mentioned in the previous line. Many candidates failed to make this link. There was also confusion over whose notes Laurent was reading. Consequently, answers such as 'to read Pichier's notes on his new novel' were incorrect. 'He planned to read his notes on the new novel' also could not score. Several candidates thought the book-signing took place in the café or Laurent was there to meet Pichier.

Question 5(b) was an inferential question asking why Laurent 'glanced around him', the reason being he was looking for the owner of the handbag. There is no reference to 'handbag' in the question so it had to be

referred to in the answer to demonstrate full understanding. Lifting 'as no woman was suddenly going to appear and claim her property' did not answer the question and was a common incorrect response. Responses had to be clear that he was looking for the owner; therefore the use of the negative in 'to check *no one* was around who owned the handbag' was not creditworthy. Some responses developed this with speculation that he wanted to steal the handbag or was concerned that he would be regarded as a thief, but there is no evidence for these ideas in the passage.

For **Question 5(c)**, candidates had to focus on the second half of Paragraph 3 to locate two reasons why Laurent thought the handbag had been stolen. This was well answered with many candidates gaining two marks. The first reason was that 'the handbag bulged', implying it had contents inside so a bin would be an unlikely place for it. A correct answer could also state that 'it obviously was not empty' – 'obviously' because Laurent has not looked inside so could only infer from its appearance. The second mark could be gained by commenting on its unexpected location and there were many ways this could be shown: 'the owner left it on top of the bin'; 'if it had been old, it would have been placed in the bin'; 'it was not placed in the bin'.

Question 6(a) was fairly well answered, particularly **(i)** which asked why the woman *looked up*. The key word 'hopefully' in the text served as a prompt and answers such as 'she hoped' or 'she thought it was her bag' were correct, but 'she saw that Laurent had found her bag' was wrong since he had not. The second part of the question was not answered quite so well. Discerning candidates recognised that the woman *looked away* because 'she realised', 'saw' or 'was upset that the bag and/or contents did not belong to her'. Less successful responses approached **(ii)** by giving a factual statement that 'it was not her bag' or 'they were not her items' without any reference to the woman's reaction. There was some misunderstanding of the narrative in responses which stated that she was disappointed because her phone and wallet were missing.

Question 6(b) was the second question which required candidates to answer in their own words. The meaning of the key words 'clattering' and 'resonated' had to be captured, and, as with **Question 3(c)**, this had to be done within a sensible context. There were several sensible synonyms for 'clattering' such as 'noisy', 'loud' or, to be more specific, 'rattling', 'clinking' or 'clanking'. Alternatively, 'the sound of items hitting the table' could also score. Words such as 'thumping' or 'shattering' were not appropriate, the former suggesting a low, dull noise, and the latter suggesting the items breaking.

Some candidates scored a second mark with words such as 'echoed', 'reverberated', 'vibrated' or 'spread through the room' to explain the meaning of 'resonated'. The focus had to be on how the sound travelled within the room. This meant that 'the sound could be heard' was not creditworthy.

Candidates need to recognise that 'Explain in your own words' questions are not literal comprehension questions. Many candidates incorrectly described what literally happened: 'the policeman emptied the contents of the handbag on the table and they made a clattering noise', with no evidence of understanding the meanings of the text quoted in the question.

Question 6(c) was an inferential question which asked why the information (that there was no phone and wallet) was 'needless to say'. Candidates who understood that 'needless to say' meant 'obviously' or 'as one would expect' then went on to provide a correct answer: 'the wallet and phone are valuable', 'worth a lot' or 'precious'. It was not enough to say 'these items would be stolen by a thief' because such answers omitted the reason why – the fact that they are expensive. Only a few candidates provided correct answers with many simply repeating that they were stolen or not present, or focusing on the fact that they would have provided information about the owner's identity – both were too far from the question.

Question 7 was a literal comprehension question which required candidates to go back to the situation in Paragraph 4: 'We must look for the identity of the owner'; 'The key chain might be some sort of clue.' The mystery was 'the owner of the handbag'. Responses which stated 'The owner of the handbag was Emma Valadier' were correct. The mystery was not, as some candidates presumed, the 'indecipherable squiggles' on the key chain; these served as a clue to the mystery so could not score alone. For this reason, a correct answer had to make reference to both 'the handbag' and its 'owner'.

Question 8 tested the understanding, in context, of words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. This was generally well answered and several candidates scored three marks or more.

There were several successful responses for **8(a)** where 'slightly' was invariably chosen as the meaning for 'dimly', with candidates occasionally offering 'dully' or 'darkly', suggesting they were not considering the word in context.

Cambridge Assessment
International Education

Many candidates correctly selected 'followed' for 'succeeded' for **8(b)**, recognising that the alternatives such as 'improved' would have made no sense in context. **8(c)** was fairly well answered with 'faithful' commonly chosen for 'loyal', and the negative connotations of 'impatient' and 'unreliable' sensibly rejected. The clue to **8(d)** 'sobbed' lay in the word 'miserably' in the previous sentence prompting successful candidates to select 'cried' as the correct answer. For the final vocabulary question, **(8e)** 'assorted', candidates had to refer back to the range of items on the table. The key idea conveyed is all the 'varied' items, rather than the fact there are 'many' or they are 'messy. 'Strange' was also an incorrect choice since the items are not unusual.

Question 9 was the question dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft. Some responses incorrectly resorted to narrative details about the events in the passage. In both **Question 9(a)** and **Question 9(b)**, candidates were asked to give, first, the meaning of a phrase as used in the passage, and then to give the effect of that phrase. As mentioned in 'Key Messages', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question. Too often, candidates offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa.

Question 9(a) directed candidates to the phrase 'he was wasting his life' which described the writer and the first task was to give the meaning of this phrase. Successful answers included 'he was not doing anything valuable' or 'useful', or that 'he felt his job was meaningless' or 'lacked purpose'. Other successful answers included 'he was throwing away' or 'squandering' his life, demonstrating clear understanding of the meaning. To write that 'he was in the wrong job' or that 'he did not like banking' was incorrect since such responses failed to capture the idea of a life being wasted.

The key to success in identifying the effect was to ask 'what does the phrase tell us about the writer's feelings and/or situation?' and successful answers included 'he feels unhappy', 'worried' or 'scared', or that his situation is 'frightening' or 'depressing'. The feelings of the reader towards Laurent were also valid so 'the reader feels sympathy' was a creditworthy response. Several candidates misinterpreted the 'effect' part of this question as the literal effect – what he actually did – which is an incorrect way of approaching this question. The narrative details that 'he left his job' or 'he opened a bookshop' could not score.

Question 9(b) directed candidates to the phrase 'It took a few slow moments to register' which described the writer's response when he passed the bin and the first task was to give the meaning of this phrase. Candidates had two parts to focus on: 'a few slow moments' and 'register'. To gain the mark, an answer had to show understanding of the meaning of both parts. For 'a few slow moments', correct meanings included 'a while', 'time', 'seconds' or 'a minute' – any sensible length of time within the context. This meant that 'a long time' or 'minutes' was incorrect. While it was acceptable to repeat 'few' as in 'a few seconds' where credit is given to 'seconds', it was incorrect to write 'some moments' since 'moments' is text and 'some' alone lacks clarity. 'Register' was well understood by many candidates who provided sensible alternatives such as 'process', 'realise', 'recognise' or 'catch on'. A correct answer might read 'it took a while for him to process', 'Laurent recognised in a few seconds' or 'he did not catch on immediately'.

For effect, several correct responses identified that 'it was strange' or 'unusual', or that Laurent felt 'confused' or 'taken aback'. Words such as 'shocked' or 'amazed' were too extreme within the context. As with **Question 9(a)**, some candidates answered with the literal effect – what Laurent actually did: 'he retraced his steps' or 'he took the handbag to the police station' which were not creditworthy since they did not demonstrate understanding of the effect of language.