

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Composition

## General Comments:

The overall standard of work this year seemed to be well up to that of previous years. The narrative questions in **Part 1** were, as always, more popular than the others but there was a greater interest in the descriptive and discursive titles than in previous years. This year, **Part 2** was done confidently as an exercise but there was some difficulty in addressing one of the Content points. This report will elaborate on approaches to this part of the examination. The vast majority of candidates used the time well and rubric infringements were few. The length of essays was generally appropriate and there were fewer examples of lengthy drafts which were then copied word for word. The use of correcting fluid continues to pose less of a problem than it used to. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports: there was much lively, dramatic, engaging writing by very many candidates whereas some candidates would benefit from avoiding inconsistency of tenses and faulty agreement. Fewer prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. A number of candidates would be helped by writing shorter essays within the word limits as the main task of this exam is to demonstrate linguistic and organisational skills rather than to show ingenuity in the content. It is however always a pleasure to be able to pay tribute to the extremely high standard of work at the top end of the range which continues to impress with little evidence of second language errors.

## Comments on specific questions:

### Part 1

#### **Question 1 Describe the sights, sounds, tastes and smells of the busiest street in your area.**

This was intended, as the first question often is, to be a descriptive essay which would allow an opportunity to those candidates who could create atmosphere, setting, and character etc. This particular question was a popular one and there were plenty of lively answers as candidates spoke directly from personal experience about a place that they felt strongly about and knew a great deal about. This led to some engaging descriptions, which tried to persuade the reader about the merits or de-merits of the place. The stronger candidates covered all of the senses fully and became quite creative in attempting to evoke the atmosphere for the reader, using similes and metaphors to make their descriptions more vivid. Colours were very well used as were the cries of the various sellers. The smells and tastes of food were evoked with great enjoyment by the majority of candidates. Contrast was a very effective method of describing the scene and many candidates were excellent at illustrating both the rich and the poor shoppers, the early and the late activities as well as the individual sellers and the big businesses. Adjectives, carefully chosen, were a very positive feature as one would expect in descriptive essays. Some candidates, perhaps those who did not live in big cities, offered equally successful descriptions of rural communities with busy market areas. There were some essays which were more limited because the candidate wrote a 'list' type description which moved far too quickly from one aspect of the scene to another. In descriptive essays of this sort it is usually better to give some depth of detail to each aspect mentioned even if it means leaving out something else about the location. A number of candidates needed to take a more descriptive approach as they had given their answer too much of a narrative base – it was more about what they themselves did in the busy street. Similarly, there were a number of unbalanced essays where the venue was described but only some of the senses were evoked and it did prove the need to consider all of rather than just a part of the question.

**Question 2 Is the behaviour of people in your neighbourhood better or worse than it used to be? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was a popular question because it was so close to personal experience. It produced some well-argued cases and answers which described the deterioration of a neighbourhood into a violent area where armed robbery, murder and other crimes seemed to be the order of the day. H.I.V., drugs and violence were seen as everyday occurrences and both parents and teenagers themselves were blamed in equal measure. Other answers described the reverse situation where neighbourhoods had been turned around with improved education, more jobs and better infrastructure all making peoples' lives better. Such discursive topics benefit from being considered from both sides and this time stronger candidates made a clear distinction between the past and current situation in their neighbourhood and described reasons for the change in detail. Weaker answers confused the timing of good and bad aspects and did not always say whether things had changed. Some candidates were attracted by the personal nature of the topic and clearly felt strongly about lots of issues but they did not have the range of examples for this topic and thus produced repetitive ideas. It proved how important it is to plan a discursive essay to ensure that there are enough ideas to complete a worthwhile discussion without repetition. The question directly requested reasons and examples to add to the text and some candidates would have done well to take this opportunity so as to add a convincing edge to their beliefs.

**Question 3 Write a story which includes the words: 'It was just as well she decided to change her appearance..'**

The responses were generally lively, interesting and often moving. There were lots of stories involving winning a school prom by being slimmer or more glamorous, or merely slimming for health reasons or someone changing their appearance when they were out of line with a peer group. These were all perfectly satisfactory responses. Most candidates took the opportunity to finish off the essay with a moral about the power of the change and the strength of mind it had taken. At their best such essays were marked by a high level of characterisation. The reader was given details of the struggle within a character when faced with the dilemma of having to change or not. In good essays there was useful background detail supplied, such as the details of the opposing or supportive views of friends or parents to the change. Less successful essays dealt in stereotypical characters and unrealistic detail with, for example, people suddenly winning the lottery and/or being transformed overnight. It is worth remembering that this is a test of language and does not need to rely on sensationalism. This title, as well as **Question 5**, proved how effective direct speech can be in providing character but only, of course, when it is properly punctuated and used sparingly. Some candidates could have been a bit more precise in their interpretation of the word "appearance". They took this to mean 'behaviour', 'character', 'attitude' or 'mood' – perhaps how you appear to others in a metaphorical sense rather than a literal sense. This was particularly true of stories about an unexpected and unwanted guest turning up at a party. There were also examples of a long, unrelated narrative, and the insertion of the sentence 'It was just as well...' at the end was rarely successful. 'Just as well' sometimes did not get the implication that something else might have happened if she had not decided to change her appearance.

**Question 4 Gossip.**

This topic proved less popular, even though with short titles such as these any approach is invited. Some did attempt a narrative title from personal experience about people who were gossips and they produced successful and engaging answers. Invariably, the gossips were dangerous people who damaged reputations and either did or did not suffer as a result. Occasionally there were examples of gossip that did some good because it highlighted a situation that led to the rescue of someone. The narrative approach succeeded whereas some candidates attempted a discursive approach and investigated the difference between 'good' and 'bad' gossip; not many were well-structured and they lacked a certain balance; weaker answers had fewer ideas and answers therefore became repetitive.

**Question 5 Write about an occasion when someone had a sleepless night.**

This proved an accessible, well-understood question and it allowed candidates to use expressive language to describe emotions and dramatic events. They could speak from personal experience or become creative in thinking up a likely scenario. The best answers gave lots of detail about not being able to sleep including "tossing, turning, rolling over and sweating". Some had invented dramatic narratives such as people being kidnapped which led to a sleepless night. Some told of relatives who had moved country and who could not cope with the temptation of drugs. Others chose the night before an exam where they spent the night worrying about the exam ahead. There were also stories of people having sleepless nights when they realised they were adopted. The best essays certainly did contain some very accurate characterisation as

candidates outlined the fluctuating emotions of the person concerned. Unfortunately there were also several essays where the candidate wrote about a barely related topic and at the end the sleepless night was only tenuously linked to the narrative which preceded it. In such circumstances it is very difficult to write a convincing narrative with the depth of tension that this title required.

## **Part 2**

In **Part 2**, candidates were asked to imagine or remember when accidents had taken place in their school. At the request of the Principal they had to write a report into the accidents. There was a further request to include suggestions on how to improve safety in the school. This was a scenario that was well within the experience of the vast majority of candidates who responded well to this task and many were able to gain all five Content points whilst the majority managed to gain at least three. The scenario allowed for a wide variety of causes for the accidents and suggestions for improvement.

As is always said with this question, **Part 2** is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Part 1**. Candidates had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to have:

- the names of two candidates who had been involved in accidents in the school;
- precise details of these accidents and it had to be more than one accident;
- other dangers that the candidates had noticed at school;
- a clear indication of the improvements that could be made to the school;
- a clear indication as to how candidates could be made more aware of keeping safe in school.

Where candidates failed to gain the Content points they were usually guilty of simply omitting the point or misreading the question or the scenario. It is vital to remember in this task that it is partly testing whether a candidate can follow instructions as they would do in factual writing in later life. In the first bullet point it was essential to mention two names and not just one as some did. The names of the candidates could be first or second names or both. Occasionally, candidates forgot to mention the candidates by name and simply left it at 'two candidates' or 'two members of 4b' and so lost the mark as the Principal would have been no wiser. There is room for some creativity in **Part 2** but with Content points candidates must answer what they are asked. Bullet point 2 asked for 'accidents' in the plural and careful reading of the question should have ensured this although many assumed that only one would do. Popular answers included broken water pipes and slippery floors, broken window glass, faulty furniture breaking in use, and various traffic problems in the school grounds. Some candidates misinterpreted 'accidents' as 'incidents', usually 'fights', and there were rather too many descriptions of *deliberate* confrontations whereas the whole point was that they should be accidental. This in turn also made the first point rather suspect as the two named candidates were perpetrators rather than victims. The third Content point should have been straightforward and was for the vast majority who mentioned alternative dangers such as snakes in the grounds but some did mention the same dangers as they had mentioned in bullet 2 and so did not gain the point. There was great variety in the detail given for the fourth bullet point. Most improvements, such as new furniture, new traffic controls, renewed windows and properly cleaned floor areas were related to the accidents already mentioned but some were new and included the rebuilding of toilets or refurbishing of workrooms and laboratories. The final bullet point was usually gained well enough with new, improved signs and reinforced rules being the favourite means. As far as tone was concerned, candidates needed to accept the Principal was in charge of this and not, as some did, *demand* that something be done.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Part 2** and captured the polite, accurate, helpful tone and approach very well. Where many candidates scored more heavily than others was in the use of the correct format. If a report is asked for, candidates could write a letter or a formal report but not mix the two as some did by starting as a report and then ending with a letter valediction. It is very pleasing to be able to say again this year that more and more candidates paragraphed their directed writing along the lines of the bullet points but equally there were a number who would do well to implement this skill.

### **Guidance for teachers preparing candidates for future examinations:**

- In **Part 1** tasks, essays asking candidates 'To describe...' should not be attempted unless the candidate is prepared to demonstrate that skill.
- Letter headings are not required in **Part 2** unless specifically requested.
- The proper punctuation and layout of speech can give problems and a greater focus on this would pay dividends.



- Continued work on correct tenses would benefit the majority of candidates.
- Candidates should avoid clichéd essay openings such as ‘It all happened/began...’ or ‘I still remember...’.
- Candidates should be clear about the difference between and appropriate use of ‘his’ and ‘her’ and the verbs ask/say/tell.
- Candidates should remember to choose appropriate vocabulary for the audience and task. For example, the use of expletives is unlikely to be acceptable in the examination context.

**Final Comment:**

There is a very great deal of excellent expression and vocabulary amongst the candidates who take this examination. The best writing this year was really was of a very high standard indeed, which is a tribute to the hard work of both candidates and teachers.



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Composition

## General Comments:

Once again, the overall standard of work this year seemed to be well up to that of previous years. The narrative questions in **Part 1** were, as always, more popular than the others but there was a greater interest in the descriptive and discursive titles than in recent years. This year, **Part 2** was done more confidently than previously and an improvement was seen overall in addressing the Content points. This report will elaborate on approaches to this part of the examination. The vast majority of candidates used the time well and rubric infringements were few. The length of essays was generally appropriate and there were fewer examples of lengthy first drafts which were then copied word for word. The use of correcting fluid also posed less of a problem than it used to. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports: there was much lively, dramatic, engaging writing by very many candidates whereas some candidates would benefit from avoiding serious problems with the inconsistency of tenses and faulty agreement. Fewer prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. A number of candidates would be helped by writing shorter essays within the word limits as the main task of this exam is to demonstrate linguistic and organisational skills rather than to show ingenuity in the content. It is however always a pleasure to be able to pay tribute to the extremely high standard of work of the best candidates which continues to impress with little evidence of second language errors.

## Comments on specific questions:

### Part 1

**Question 1 Describe your favourite place of entertainment and write about some of the people who work there.**

This was quite a popular choice of question and done very well by a large number of candidates. It was intended, as the first question often is, to be a descriptive essay which would allow an opportunity to those candidates who could create atmosphere, setting, and character etc. and it is true that there were very many successful attempts. The choice of venue was important and the best answers came when the choice was a specific place rather than just any beach or any picnic or activity, so games arcades, the botanical gardens, market places, shopping malls, discos, 'nite clubs' and cafes provided suitable locations to describe and emphasise 'entertainment'. Some candidates suggested more unlikely venues such as school, library and even hospitals and these proved more difficult to suggest 'entertainment'. Some venues, such as a sugar-refining plant, were clearly places of interest rather than 'entertainment' and so were more difficult to write about at length. Adjectives, carefully chosen, were a very positive feature of the best work as one would expect in descriptive essays. A number of candidates needed to take a more descriptive approach as they had given their answer too much of a narrative base – they were more like stories of a trip or a holiday. Similarly, there were a number of unbalanced essays where the venue was described but the workers gained only a cursory mention as to their task and it did prove the need to consider all of, rather than just a part of, the question.

**Question 2 Is it worse to have too little money or too much? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This topic produced more responses than were expected and may have attracted a number of candidates studying Economics or Accounts; certainly there was a good use of financial terms by many. Examiners commented that there were very many sensible and interesting arguments and what was particularly striking was the balanced nature of much of the argument. Candidates are clearly learning that being aware of both sides of a debate will not only impress as a rational approach but will, in practical terms, provide much more material and so avoid the greatest pitfall of discursive essays, the repetition of ideas. A few candidates



tended to repeat thoughts and it proved how important it is to plan a discursive essay to ensure that there are enough ideas to complete a worthwhile discussion without repetition. This was overcome very well by those candidates who had good stories and evidence to support their views. Some candidates were led into generalisation a little, assuming that anyone with too little money was led into crime and those with too much were invariably arrogant and/or alcoholic but overall most candidates did a good job of illustrating the pitfalls of either extreme and came to the conclusion that a comfortable amount of money, sufficient to cover wants and needs, was probably the best outcome in life. One path to avoid in such an essay is too much repetition of the key word(s) from the title and in this case the finding of ways to avoid saying 'money' too often invariably helped.

**Question 3 Write about an occasion when someone made a great sacrifice to keep a best friend.**

This essay was the second most popular of the questions set, after **Question 5**. The responses were generally lively, interesting and often touching. There were lots of stories involving giving up a university place abroad, giving up a girlfriend/boyfriend, or about donating one or more vital organs to a friend in need. Taking the blame in school when someone else was guilty of a misdemeanour was a common topic. These were all perfectly satisfactory responses. Some candidates could have been a bit more precise as some misinterpreted the mere doing of a favour, helping or giving encouragement as 'sacrifice' and these lacked the necessary tension provided by the better narratives. Most candidates took the opportunity to finish off the essay with a comfortable moral about the power of friendship or sacrifice. At their best, such essays were marked by a high level of characterisation. The reader was given details of the struggle within a character when faced with the dilemma of having to sacrifice or not. In good essays there was useful background detail supplied, such as the harrowing details of an accident which led to organ transplant or the poverty which required a financial donation by one friend to another, either for study or an operation. Less successful essays dealt in stereotypical characters and unrealistic detail with, for example, a narrator prepared to donate both eyes, or even his/her heart, to a deserving friend. It is worth remembering that this is a test of language and does not need to rely on sensationalism. This title, as well as **Question 5**, proved how effective direct speech can be in providing character but only, of course, when it is properly punctuated and used sparingly.

**Question 4 Silence.**

This was an unpopular title and the vast majority chose to ignore it, even though with short titles such as these any approach is invited. Some did attempt a narrative title about people who were silent for a reason and some wrote about places that were havens of peace. Some wrote stories about situations when silence was necessary if not vital. Discursive approaches which listed occasions when silence was beneficial and explained why tended to be a little more limited. If a discursive approach is to be taken, it is essential that the candidate has a lot to say and can push the text into a new area, paragraph by paragraph; if not, the essay becomes a mere list which it is better to avoid. Connectives such as 'Moreover' and 'Furthermore' are very useful but only if they genuinely further the argument rather than attempt to disguise a mere repetition of information.

**Question 5 Write a story which includes the words: 'Right! That's it! You have been late too often'.**

This was easily the most popular question, probably because of its closeness to personal experience; it was a title which fitted both school and business locations and offered endless possibilities for those seeking to be creative. Mostly there were stories of getting up late in the morning or a traffic hold up or crash on the way to school or work which resulted in lateness. Sometimes it was more a personality trait of the narrator to be late for events and this was never worse than in many stories where someone was due to get engaged or married and turned up late for the ceremony to find that the patience of the other party had worn thin. Good characterisation, setting, vocabulary and varied sentence structure marked out the better scripts as always. This particular question gave rise to some excellent use of the flashback technique when the lateness was highlighted at the beginning of the essay and then the reader was taken back to see example of previous such occasions. On the other hand, weaker scripts treated the idea of lateness as a bolt on to a familiar story so that there was a very thin connection to the given sentence in the title. Quite often, weaker candidates indulged in a long drawn out build up to a far too rapid denouement. Linguistically, the confident use of tenses and the ability to build to a climax so that the given sentence did truly seem devastating were considerable advantages.



## **Part 2**

In **Part 2**, candidates were asked to imagine or remember an occasion when they witnessed a noisy argument between two rival candidates queuing for food in the school canteen. At the request of the Principal they had to write an account of the incident. This was a scenario that was well within the experience of the vast majority of candidates who responded extremely well to this task and were able to gain all five Content points very easily whilst the majority managed to gain at least four. The scenario allowed for a wide variety of reasons for the argument and the rivalry and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

As is always said with this question, **Part 2** is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Part 1**. Candidates had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear indication of the date of the event **and** the names of both candidates;
- precise details about what started the argument, what was the flashpoint;
- details of how the incident continued, however briefly;
- a clear indication of why the candidates disliked each other in the first place;
- the writer's suggestion about what should happen to the two candidates.

Where candidates failed to gain the Content points they were usually guilty of simply omitting the point or misreading the question or the scenario. It is vital to remember in this task that it is partly testing whether a candidate can follow instructions as they would do in factual writing in later life. In the first bullet point it was essential to mention the date of the incident, not just date the report. This could be done by putting an actual date in the text or referring to 'last Tuesday' if the account had been dated. Something as vague as 'it was a Monday..' simply did not help the Principal enough. The names of the candidates could be first or second names or both. Occasionally, candidates forgot to mention the candidates by name and simply left it at 'two candidates' and so lost the mark as the Principal would have been no wiser. Some had one candidate arguing with the chef or the canteen manager and again lost the mark.

There is room for some creativity in **Part 2** but with Content points candidates must answer what they are asked. There were many reasons for the argument because invention was welcome here. The most popular reasons were queue-jumping, pushing in the queue, and both candidates wanting the same item of food when there was only one left and then it was a matter of who came first. More unusual reasons involved putting chewing gum in someone's hair, and finding money on the floor. The third Content point should have been straightforward as it only needed the argument to move on in some way. Most candidates ensured this point by saying 'Then..' or '..the fight continued..' and so there was no doubt. However some candidates elaborated the initial flashpoint a little too much and assumed this was good enough for the continuation whereas it left doubt in the Examiner's mind. It is far better with the bullet points to leave the reader in no doubt. This was certainly the case with a significant number of candidates who included a considerable amount of violence in the two points and suggested that some other candidates were gaining great amusement from the incident!

There was great variety in the detail given for the fourth bullet point. Although they had often been friends in the first place, the two candidates disliked each other now because they competed in academic and/or sporting areas, or they were fighting over a girlfriend or boyfriend, or their families were rivals in business. Whatever the reason, it was accepted even though the answers were sometimes a little long and took away time that could have been spent on the third bullet point. Some candidates would have done better to remember the timescale implied – the candidates had 'always' been rivals and saying that they broke their friendship the week before was a bit short. Sometimes vagueness was a problem; candidates need to remember to be precise and simply saying 'family problems' did not really spell out the problem well enough. Again, a lack of precision was a problem if candidates said that the dislike was only on one side even though the bullet point suggested otherwise. Careful consideration needed to be given to the correct tense here. Some said they 'had' always disliked each other whereas in fact they still did. In the last bullet point there were some severe corporal punishments suggested by the minority and equally some very liberal 'punishments' but in the main it was a matter of a detention or a talking to by the Principal or a matter of calling in the parents. Expulsion was more serious but in fact any suggestion was acceptable as long as it was something in the future whereas some candidates mentioned what had already been done. As far as tone was concerned, candidates needed to accept the Principal was in charge of this and not, as some did, 'demand' that something be done to the two candidates.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Part 2** and captured the polite, accurate, helpful tone and approach very well. Where many candidates scored more heavily than others was in the use of the correct format. If an account is called for, candidates can choose to write a letter **or** a report but they should not confuse the two as some did here by starting off in report mode and then ending with a letter valediction, sometimes an incorrect one. It is very pleasing to be able to say again this year that more and more candidates are paragraphing their directed writing along the lines of the bullet points but equally there were still a number who would do well to implement this skill.

**Guidance for teachers preparing candidates for future examinations:**

- Candidates should remember to choose appropriate vocabulary for the audience and task. For example, the use of expletives is unlikely to be acceptable in the examination context.
- In **Part 1** tasks, essays asking candidates 'To describe...' should not be attempted unless the candidate is prepared to demonstrate that skill.
- Letter headings are not required in **Part 2** unless specifically requested.
- The proper punctuation and layout of speech can give problems and a greater focus on this would pay dividends.
- Continued work on correct tenses would help the majority.
- Candidates should avoid clichéd essay openings such as 'It all happened/began...' or 'I still remember...'

**Final Comment:**

Very large numbers of the candidates in all countries can feel justifiably proud of their performance in expressing themselves so accurately and this is a tribute to the ability and hard work of both candidates and teachers.





# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21  
Comprehension

## General Comments

The performance of the candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. A number of candidates did not read the questions carefully and lost marks as a result. At the beginning of the summary question there were some lengthy explanations of comparatively simple points. On the positive side there was evidence of synthesis from most candidates in the second half of the summary question.

Candidates seemed in general to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, largely, the types of questions likely to be asked. Most candidates completed the paper but surprisingly few opted to attempt a rough draft of the summary or a list of points before presenting the final copy.

In the paper, twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of the writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were awarded to the summary question; these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text and assessment of ability to express these points fluently and without lifting.

As in previous years, the questions giving most difficulty were those which required the candidates to answer in their own words; some ignored this rubric or found it difficult to find synonyms. There was a welcome decrease in the number of candidates writing in excess of 160 words for the summary question. It was noticed that candidates had heeded their teachers' advice to address the rubric of the summary and there were fewer instances of total irrelevance or of candidates providing their personal reflections on advertising.

It was also pleasing to note the neatness of presentation and legibility of handwriting. Spelling and punctuation were generally good and, even if there was a lack of originality in the summary, the overall standard of written English was impressive.

## Comments on specific questions

**Question 1** was designed to ease the candidates into the examination with a fairly straightforward test. The writer called the advertising industry 'universal' and the candidates were asked to provide a **single** phrase which echoed this idea later in the paragraph. Many candidates correctly offered 'throughout the world' or 'operating throughout the world'. Incorrect responses usually involved excess copying from the passage. If the candidate presents the single phrase or single word within a longer sentence he needs to identify it within quotation marks or by underlining or by making clear in his expression exactly which single word or phrase he is offering. The best way to answer such a question is to simply offer the word or phrase alone.

**Question 2 (a)** proved to be well answered on the whole. It asked how we realised that the writer did not regard advertisements as simply ways of relaying information and successful candidates told us that he referred to these ideas as being 'naïve'. 'Naïve' on its own was an acceptable answer. Few candidates offered an own words alternative such as 'innocent' or 'gullible'. Some unsuccessful answers wrongly attributed the naivety to the writer; other incorrect answers usually centred on copying the appropriate reference from the text without relating it to the question.

**Question 2 (b)** proved to be an easy question for most candidates who understood what the café owner might achieve by adding to his advertisement. They correctly suggested that it would persuade more customers to come, that they would get a lot to eat or value for money and that he would make money. Any of these points scored the mark.

**Question 2 (c)** was the first of the 'own words' questions, asking why the writer felt that the world of advertising was such a dangerous place for ordinary people and leading candidates to find synonyms for 'potent' and 'ruthless'. Most correctly focused their answers on the seller and not the buyer but the penal words were often repeated or misunderstood. Some candidates suggested correctly that 'potent' meant 'powerful', 'forceful' or 'influential'; synonyms such as 'strong', 'persuasive' and 'convincing' were deemed too weak. Rather more candidates understood that 'ruthless' suggested that the sellers were 'heartless', 'merciless' or 'unfeeling', and that 'they would stop at nothing'; weaker or incorrect synonyms commonly offered were 'bad' and 'brutal'.

**Question 3** proved to be one of the most difficult questions on the paper and correct answers were rare indeed. Candidates were asked why they thought it surprising that advertising methods were similar throughout the world. A simple and correct answer would refer to the idea of size (because the world is large) or diversity (there are many different cultures or types of people). A correct response could not be lifted directly from the text and the majority of candidates simply copied irrelevant references to 'methods ranging from the obvious to the subtle' or to 'names and details varying from place to place'. Successful candidates had drawn their own conclusions from the text and ensured that they had addressed the question.

**Question 4** was the second of the 'own words' questions asking why, according to the writer, television advertisements are broadcast at a higher volume than the actual programmes by offering synonyms for 'pressure' and 'prospective customer'. Many candidates understood that 'pressure' meant that people were being persuaded or being forced to buy; answers which suggested that possible buyers were being 'urged', 'attracted' or 'lured' were regarded as being too weak and went unrewarded. 'Prospective customer' proved too difficult to substitute for most candidates. Some were able to offer 'buyer' for 'customer' but most were unable to state that they were 'potential' or 'would be' buyers, and both elements were required for the mark.

**Question 5** asked the candidates to explain fully what promise was implicit in naming the perfume 'Irresistible'; therefore, they were expected to state that by using, or spraying on the perfume (one mark) other people would be attracted to or could not keep away from the wearer (one mark). A number of candidates achieved the first mark but most either simply reproduced the word 'irresistible' or copied out irrelevant parts of the text.

**Question 6 (a)** proved challenging and those who were successful were able to decode the metaphor of humour as an important weapon by stating that the writer was ruthless in his pursuit of a sale. Some candidates, but not many, responded with their own metaphors, suggesting that the writer fought for his sales, won over or battled for his customers and these candidates were awarded a mark. However, the idea of the customer as an enemy or victim was not acceptable - nor was the incorrect image of having the customer as a target.

**Question 6 (b)** was more successfully answered, especially the first part. A good answer explained that, in the writer's opinion, advertisements increased sales because we are drawn towards or like funny people (one mark) and that we like or want to buy products that are advertised in an amusing way (one mark). Many candidates were able to manipulate the text, distil their answers and thereby achieve at least one mark; strong candidates address such questions by studying the rubric and explaining fully without blindly copying from the text. Those who went unrewarded in this question stated that people are attracted to humour and this, alone, was insufficient.

In **Question 7 (a)** candidates were invited to explain what the writer meant by calling the advertisers' approaches 'mock-scientific'. Two marks were available and good answers indicated that the products had been researched, tested or proved and this defined the 'scientific' element (one mark). Quoting from the text that the approach was 'credible and effective' did not address the question, suggesting the results of research rather than the scientific testing itself. A minority of candidates stated correctly that 'mock-scientific' intimated that the research was fake or that it had not taken place, that the advertisers were lying, pretending or fooling us that it had.

**Question 7 (b)** asked the candidates to define the meaning of 'seemingly irrefutable' evidence. Two marks were available but few candidates could define 'seemingly' and many offered the wrong words in their answers. Those who did achieve marks were able to tell us that the evidence looked like, or appeared to be, (one mark) completely true or the proof (one mark). Others were correct in stating, in various ways, that the evidence could not be contradicted. Weaker and unrewarded answers for 'irrefutable' suggested the evidence was convincing, right or correct.



**Question 8 (a)** was another 'own words' question which invited the candidates to find alternatives to 'unconsciously' and 'persuaded' to explain what the author found frightening about subliminal advertising. A number of candidates understood that people were being urged, pushed, driven or pressurised (not forced) to buy (one mark) against their will, or without their knowing or noticing, (one mark). A substantial number of candidates simply repeated the penal words.

In **Question 8(b)**, by referring to the writer's attitude to subliminal advertising, many candidates simply and correctly stated that the author did not like this kind of advertising or that he was against it. Such candidates demonstrate the value of studying the rubric and ensuring that their answers have addressed the question. Those candidates who were unsuccessful commonly stated that the writer was aware of the illegality of such advertising or that he knew that it was 'a bad thing' but these answers did not tell us about his attitude towards it.

**Question 9** was the usual vocabulary question in which candidates were required to show their understanding, in context but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of 5 words from a choice of 8. On the whole, the group of words proved to be more taxing than in some previous papers. Common correct answers for 'impending' were 'coming up' and 'approaching'; 'waiting' or 'current' were frequently offered unrewarded answers. For 'assure' many candidates correctly suggested 'convince', 'promise', 'guarantee' and 'make (us) certain', whereas 'ensure' and 'insure' were contextually inappropriate. 'Paraded' illustrated the need for candidates to study the words in context; here it clearly meant 'showed' or 'displayed' and many candidates recognised this. Those offering 'marched' or 'carried' had not applied their synonym to the text and consequently did not score. 'Necessarily' proved to be a tricky word to define; common correct answers were 'certainly', 'a must', 'needed', whereas common unacceptable synonyms were 'exactly', 'actually' and 'really'. 'Continually' was well understood in general and successful synonyms were 'repeatedly', 'time after time', 'again and again' and 'over and over'; some candidates were incorrect in offering 'continuously' or 'constantly'. The importance of trying out the alternatives in the text was emphasised in the answers given to 'complaints' which, in context, clearly refers to physical disorders and this was understood by many candidates who gave us 'illnesses', 'diseases', 'aches', 'pains' and 'upsets'; synonyms which referred to 'moans' and 'dissatisfactions' were contextually inaccurate. Common correct answers for 'cunning' included 'crafty', 'sly', 'tricky' and 'wily'; references to 'cheating' or 'deceit' went unrewarded as did the bland offerings of 'clever' and 'intelligent'. Many candidates rightly saw appetite as referring to the 'desire', 'wish' or 'hunger' to have a connection with famous people; 'urge', 'need', 'liking' and 'interest' were considered inappropriate and therefore scored no marks.

**Question 10** was the usual summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise the ways in which advertisers use celebrities to sell products and the disadvantages of these strategies. The summary had to be based on approximately half of the original text, expressing content points, as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were 19 content points of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points carrying one mark each.

Examiners reported that most of the candidates completed the summary question with only a small number grossly exceeding the maximum word limit but also a number writing fewer than the word limit and thereby reducing their ability to score as many content points as possible. It was rare to see the maximum number of content points awarded. It was noted that only a small percentage of candidates had written out a rough draft. Many candidates need at least to make a list of content points to mention in their fair copy in order to avoid lengthy repetition and unnecessary irrelevance and to ensure that they have addressed all the requirements of the rubric. Most candidates completed the paper suggesting that time was not a problem. Candidates are advised to remember the benefits of concise and precise answers and it was noted that this advice when followed, particularly in paragraphs 11 and 12, resulted in an accumulation of content points. It was pleasing to see that almost all of the candidates had addressed the question and the text and there were few instances of complete irrelevance or personal reflections.

The first two paragraphs of the area for summary search, namely paragraphs 9 and 10, dealt with the ways in which advertisers sell products. The opening ten words led candidates to the first content point which was that successful advertisers established a link with a celebrity. Most candidates started off well by making this point or by providing the examples of an actress promoting cosmetics or an athlete promoting sportswear which were acceptable alternatives. A large number of candidates expanded upon this point by extensive paraphrasing of the text, thereby needlessly eating into the word limit. This is a useful illustration of how candidates could benefit by making an initial rough list to eliminate such repetition and, sometimes, irrelevance. The writer stated that advertisers used celebrities as experts and some candidates provided the example of the use of the racing car driver without explaining his function. Many candidates recognised that advertisers took advantage of the fact that people admire celebrities and that they targeted the young in



particular. The notion that a garment became “cool” by linking it to a celebrity was mentioned by some candidates.

In paragraph 10 we learnt that advertisers use appearances or comments by celebrities (to trigger an image of the product) and that they put the manufacturers’ names on the items worn or used by the celebrity; the examples of a t-shirt, tennis racquet or cricket bat were acceptable but some candidates misread the passage, stating that the celebrity’s name was put on the item. Advertisers also set up appearances of the celebrity and this was recognised by many candidates. However, when candidates pointed out that the celebrities’ children were used by advertisers many forgot to set this point, either directly or indirectly, in the context of clothing.

Candidates proved to be more concise and skilful when editing the disadvantages from paragraphs 11 and 12. Firstly, as most recognised, celebrities might fall from favour, causing the product to be linked with failure, resulting in a drop in sales of the product. Candidates also were aware that if a celebrity were involved in a social or moral disaster then his sponsorship might not work for the product.

Candidates scored well in paragraph 12 by stating that celebrities often demanded high fees and that they could be unreliable and difficult to work with. The final point was less well made when candidates failed to make the comparison of being more interested in their own image.

Ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures.

The ability of the candidates to break away from the original text was more limited with this passage than in some previous papers. There was, however, little evidence of mindless copying and stretches of irrelevance even though many candidates relied upon the wording of the text. In spite of the absence of originality in vocabulary or syntax there was some pleasing synthesis. Candidates would be well advised to consider the importance of the use of own words and some original complex structures, especially if linked to the synthesis of points. Overall, the standard of written English was commendable.

Common errors reported were the usual features of the omission of the definite and indefinite articles and inconsistent or illogical verb tenses. Spelling and punctuation were generally very good and handwriting clear.



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Comprehension

## General comments

This year's paper had a narrative topic which seemed to engage the interest of candidates. The performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Examiners reported very few incomplete scripts and very few rubric infringements, although more Examiners than usual reported over-long summaries, where excess words meant that points could not be rewarded because they appeared after the word limit of 160 words, including the ten opening words provided.

As in previous years, candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper. In the paper, twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text, and assessment of ability to express these points fluently and in own words. As in previous years, the questions giving most difficulty were the questions which required candidates to answer in their own words.

In the summary, some candidates completed a first draft and then crossed out random words to get the word count correct, spoiling grammar and content points in so doing. Some summaries were little more than patchworks of obviously misunderstood text.

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

## Comments on specific questions

The opening question, **Question 1** was designed to ease candidates into the examination with a fairly accessible test in a reassuring opening and indeed the majority of candidates scored the available mark for writing that Emma was starting at a new School. On the rare occasions when the mark was withheld it was because the candidate had merely reiterated the question by writing that Emma had a frightening prospect before her, and no more.

**Question 2** proved to be difficult for candidates because it asked them to detail two events: firstly, that Emma's father had been promoted; and, secondly, that the family had to move away or re-locate. Many candidates responded to the reference in the question to 'mixed feelings', focusing on Emma's delight that her father had been promoted and her concern about re-locating; this approach was accepted by Examiners as long as the feelings were linked to appropriate events. Thus 'she was delighted that her father had been promoted' scored the available mark. Some candidates missed out the promotion element of the answer, writing only that father had got another job, or that he had been moved to a different branch of the bank. However, many candidates merely lifted, for the second strand, 'she was far from sure that she could recapture the blissful existence she had known'; this failed to score the mark because it neither gave an appropriate emotion nor the needed event. Thus many candidates scored the first, but not the second, available mark here.

The mark for **Question 3 (a)** was awarded to candidates who showed understanding of the word 'nostalgic', with answers focusing on the family's sadness about leaving, or the fact that they might never see the places again, or the fact that the places held memories for them. Popular wrong answers here were a reference to the speed of the move or the difficulty in finding a house in the new location. It seemed that many candidates did not know the meaning of 'nostalgic' or 'misgivings'. **Question 3 (b)** was probably the most difficult question on the Paper, or at least the question with which most candidates seemed to wrestle, with





very few candidates scoring both available marks, and around a third of candidates scoring only one mark. Some candidates did not even attempt to answer it. Candidates were required to home in on the words 'possibilities' and 'probabilities' in the text, as the gap between what the family and their friends thought would happen and the reality of what did happen. Synonyms for 'possibilities' were 'they meant to' or 'there was a chance' (that they would keep their promises), or even 'they might' (keep their promises) and synonyms for 'probabilities' were expression such as 'it was unlikely' (that they would keep their promises) or even 'they almost certainly would not' (keep their promises.)

The answer to **Question 4 (a)** was that the mother was pretending to be happy, or that she was hiding her unhappiness, or that she was trying to encourage her family, or that she was trying not to cry. Many candidates scored this mark; where the point was not made, it was often because candidates referred merely to the furniture van or to leaving the house. **Question 4 (b)** was the second of the questions requiring candidates to answer in their own words and, like **Question 3 (b)**, turned out to be difficult for candidates. The first mark was scored for offering synonyms for 'tough male'; both elements had to be dealt with, and so Examiners were looking for words such as 'strong' or 'brave' teamed with 'man', although the mark could be scored by single synonyms such as 'macho' or 'masculine'. The second available mark was scored for writing synonyms for 'unaffected by emotion', such as 'could cope with', 'could control' or simply 'did not have' as synonyms for 'unaffected', and for writing words such as 'feelings', or specific appropriate words such as 'sadness' or 'unhappiness', as synonyms for 'emotion'. The mark could even be scored by single word synonyms, such as 'sentimental' or 'sensitive'. There was much copying over of the key words here, particularly of 'unaffected by emotion'. Many candidates offered a synonym for 'tough' but failed to score the mark because they either copied over 'male' or failed to address it at all; there were no half marks here and so half an answer scored zero.

In **Question 5** two marks were awarded to candidates who wrote that the journey took a long time and that it was to a distant place. If they chose to refer to the image in the text about the distant planet, they needed to make it clear that they understood it was an image by partially decoding it, writing that the journey seemed to be endless, or that it was as if it were endless, and that it seemed to be to a distant planet, or that it was as if it were to a distant planet; merely writing that the journey was endless or that it was to a distant planet scored no marks. Most candidates scored the first available mark, for a reference to the length of the journey, though sometimes perhaps by the fortuitous lift of 'the journey seemed endless', but there was much less success with the second mark for the reference to the distance of the destination. The answer 'long' could refer to either time or distance and Examiners were instructed here to be as generous as possible, awarding the mark for 'long' as either time or distance to accommodate the second limb of the answer offered by the candidate.

In **Question 6**, candidates were being tested on response to writer's craft. Candidates had to infer from the language of the text at 'trees and fields assumed a reddish-golden hue' that the sun was setting; very many candidates were able to make this inference and so scored the mark. Weaker candidates mentioned that it was the end of the day, a mere lift from the question, or referred only to the beauty of the trees or the landscape. Some picked up on the idea of reddish-golden, but missed the reference to the end of the day, writing, wrongly, that dawn was being described.

**Question 7** carried four marks, and produced marks ranging from nought to four, with many candidates scoring full marks, and so in this respect the question seemed to discriminate well. It was possible to score the mark for **Question 7 (a)** without scoring the mark for **Question 7 (b)** and vice versa. The first of these marks was scored for writing that a specialist shop was one selling only one type of item. Popular wrong answer here referred to 'services' or 'variety of goods' or merely lifted the wrong idea of 'special'; others wrote that the shop was unique, or had specialised or trained staff. The second mark was scored for offering an example from knowledge or experience of a specialist shop, with a wide range of possible correct answers, such as baker's shop, shoe shop, spices shop, electronics shop. In the case of local or unknown (to the Examiner) examples, Examiners were instructed to be generous in marking of **Question 7 (b)** as long as the answer to **Question 7 (a)** was correct; otherwise the benefit of the doubt could not be given. Popular wrong answers here were 'convenience store', 'supermarket' or 'mall'. In parts of the world where French is spoken, some candidates wrote, wrongly, 'library' as a supposed English version of the French 'libraire' or bookshop. Perhaps surprisingly, some candidates gave a clearly correct answer for **Question 7 (b)**, e.g. a shoe shop, having written something incorrect for **Question 7 (a)**. There were two marks available in **Question 7 (c)**, and very many candidates scored both of these; the first was scored by making reference to the shop owner's reluctance to sell his book, and the second was scored by making reference to the fact that people could browse as long as liked without being expected to buy. It was possible to score these relatively easy marks by lifting at lines 28-29 and 30-31 respectively.





The answer to **Question 8 (a)** was the single word 'featureless'; about half of all candidates gained the available mark here. The most popular wrong answer was 'eerie'; some candidates spoiled what would have been a correct answer by adding 'building' to 'featureless'. In **Question 8 (b)**, the mark was awarded to candidates who showed they understood why it was understandable that the gates were closed, i.e. because it was the holidays, or because the term had not started yet. The mark could also be gained for focusing on the idea of keeping out intruders or trespassers. Weaker candidates merely gave a synonym for 'understandably' offering answers such as Emma, or the writer, knew that the gates were closed, or even that the writer knew why they were shut, without offering the reason why. Only about a quarter of candidates answered this question correctly.

Candidates performed more strongly with **Question 9**, the answer to which could be made in a variety of ways, such as by reference to rudeness, offhandedness, coldness, unkindness or arrogance; 'strictness' or 'anger' were considered inappropriate and did not score the mark.

**Question 10** required the idea of negativity, rather than simple curiosity, in order to score. Thus, marks were awarded to candidates who wrote that the mother was worried, or afraid, or thought that Emma had had a bad day; answers such as 'she wondered if Emma had had a bad day' or 'she was uncertain whether Emma had had a bad day' were insufficient to score as they focused merely on the meaning of 'questioned' rather than that of 'hesitantly'. Other possible correct answers were those such as 'she did not know if she should have asked the question' or 'she was dreading the answer she might get'. About half of all candidates scored this mark. References to Emma collapsing into the car, or to the secretary, did not score the mark, but were regarded as neutral extensions to correct answers if they did appear.

**Question 11** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. Some candidates found this a challenging set of words. Examiners reported marks ranging from 0 to 5 here, with some bunching at 2 or 3. Most candidates who attempted 'procedures' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'rules', 'regulations' and 'routines' and those who attempted 'focused' found many acceptable synonyms, such as 'concentrated' or 'based on'. 'Many' and 'lots of' were correct answers for 'multiplicity', but 'various' was commonly, and incorrectly, given. Correct synonyms for 'devoted' were words such as 'given to' or 'assigned to', and correct synonyms for 'casually' were 'informally', 'naturally' or even 'normally'. Candidates who attempted 'meandering' were almost invariably wrong, choosing to write 'flowed' rather than the correct 'twisted' or 'turning'. Similarly, there were few correct attempts at 'enthralled', where the mark was given to synonyms such as 'fascinated' or 'captivated'; wrong answers here were usually 'interested' or 'amazed'. Likewise, there were very few correct attempts at 'imminent', where correct synonym were 'impending' or 'about to happen'; many candidates were confused here between 'imminent' and 'inevitable', writing, wrongly, 'bound to happen' or 'unavoidable'. There were a few rubric problems here, with some candidates writing the word in a sentence, with no attempt to re-cast it, and others opting to offer a synonym for all eight words, when only the first five attempt are looked at by the Examiner.

The final question on the paper was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise the actions and events which by the end of the day made Emma feel happier. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were nineteen content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question. A very small number of candidates forfeited their Style mark by writing their summary in note form rather than in continuous prose. This proved to be a more difficult summary than might have appeared at first glance; a mere recounting of the School day was insufficient to score, as the rubric asked for actions and events that made Emma feel happier, not just events that she experienced or endured.

There were two content points available in paragraph ten. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that the teacher greeted Emma with a smile, and that she asked the class to make her welcome. Many candidates wrote, wrongly, that the class welcomed Emma, information not supported by the text.

In paragraph eleven, another two content points were available, which were the teacher explained the School routine individually to Emma, and either that she made a joke about there being two new girls in the class, or that she herself was new. The first of these points was often insufficiently made because one of the elements required was omitted – perhaps the reference to School procedures, or perhaps the individual attention given to Emma.



A further two marks were awarded in paragraph twelve to candidates who wrote that a girl, or that Tanya, showed Emma the outdoor area, and that she spoke to her about herself, her family or her previous School; if the subject matter of the discussion was omitted, the mark was withheld.

In paragraph thirteen, three content points were available, all of them about the science lesson. Any reference to the teacher's enthusiasm scored a mark, followed by the fact the lesson was on a favourite topic, or on global warming, and the fact that all of this made Emma forget her anxiety.

Paragraph fourteen contained a further two content points. Emma sat with some classmates at lunch time, and they talked together; here the topic of the discussion did not have to be included, but the context of lunch time was necessary.

In paragraph fifteen, three marks were available to candidates who wrote that the drama teacher explained the activity to Emma, that Emma enjoyed Role play, and that she was distracted from her problems as a newcomer.

Paragraph sixteen centred on the English lesson and yielded four content points. Emma was interested in a poem about tigers, she contributed to, or started, a discussion about tigers, and she became the centre of attention. This resulted in her feeling she was starting to belong.

There was one available content point in paragraph seventeen, which was that the secretary beamed at Emma, or that she asked her about her day.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to break away from the words of the original text varied from candidate to candidate and even from Centre to Centre, but that in general candidates are skilful at recasting the original text in their own words; the majority of candidates made an attempt to avoid wholesale lifting, and the best demonstrated considerable fluency in using their own words. There was a low incidence of random, mindless copying. Some weaker candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points. It seemed that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, indeed, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentence, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style, and indeed the best candidates wrote stylishly, succinctly and with ambitious vocabulary. As is normal, Examiners reported candidates who scored only a few marks for content points, despite being clearly proficient in English, because their summaries were far too generalised and lacking in the precision required to make content points; such candidates made oblique references rather than specific points. Others gave a chronological account of Emma's day, without focusing on the rubric, namely the events and actions which made Emma feel better by the end of the day.

Common errors reported were common failures of agreement in singular and plural, and misplaced or omitted prepositions. There was some misunderstanding and misconceptions of agents matched to verbs. There was much weakness in verb form, e.g. the widespread use of the Present Tense where Past Tense was required, e.g. 'Emma forget her anxiety' and 'her companion ask Emma'. Weaker candidates often slipped into the present tense, after beginning in the past tense. There was a high incidence in some parts of the world of the omission of definite and indefinite articles.

In parts of the world where French is spoken, there was confusion between 'journey' (journée) and 'day', and between 'remarquer' (remarquer) and 'notice'. Some candidates wrongly used the construction 'faire' plus a verb, e.g. 'Tanya made Emma go to the outdoor recreation area'.

