

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 3170/12
Writing 12

Key messages

- Attention should be given to the full requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**; often there is a word, such as **and**, in bold type, to indicate two parts to the bullet point.
- In **Section 1**, candidates should pay particular attention to the type of text required, in this case a magazine article.
- It is advisable to plan the response bullet point by bullet point in **Section 1** to ensure that candidates have sufficient relevant material to include for each one.
- **Section 1, Bullet 2** often relies on some narrative, but candidates should avoid including too much of a narrative thread into their response. They should not lose sight of audience and purpose.
- Some candidates wrote over the recommended word limit in both sections, and this can be at the expense of accuracy. Candidates are encouraged to adhere to the guidance on word count for both sections.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the accuracy, clarity and fluidity of candidates' responses, as would the correct use of articles.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and a more varied use of punctuation (colons, semi-colons, and exclamation marks) would raise the level of many responses.

General comments

A great many responses were generally accurate with a high number demonstrating excellent syntax, sentence variety, precise vocabulary, and helpful punctuation. The very best responses demonstrated an impressive sophistication in their use of language. Candidates' performance on Task Fulfilment in **Section 1** was particularly strong with the vast majority of candidates fulfilling the task in at least a satisfactory way. As far as the use of language is concerned there is still a need for candidates to check their work thoroughly to ensure the correct use of articles and speech punctuation. This year, in **Section 2**, all of the titles were popular. The vast majority of responses reflected excellent time management.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Directed Writing

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that they and two classmates had been chosen to organise some entertainment or activity for parents who were attending their school Open Day. They had to write a magazine article about the experience. The majority of candidates responded very well to the **purpose** and **situation**. The response was required to include:

- who the two classmates were and where in the school the entertainment or activity took place
- details of the entertainment or activity
- the benefits of the Open Day for the parents and for the students.

For **bullet point 1**, successful candidates named the two classmates and stronger responses included details about the classmates and the nature of their relationship. Usually, full names were given but often just one name was given for each classmate. Some credit was given to reference to *best friends* or similar. Sometimes the classmates were identified by a position they held within the school, such as *head girl*. It was very difficult to give credit to those responses in which the word *classmates* was merely repeated. The vast majority of candidates successfully pinpointed a venue within the school, usually the *auditorium* or *the school ground(s)*. A few candidates gave a venue a little removed from the school, but the implication was that it

was a venue commonly used by the school for holding large events and so the benefit of the doubt was given. The majority made a solid start to their response.

Nevertheless, a few candidates did not mention the classmates and went it alone, relying simply on their own experience of organising. A few other less successful candidates did not mention a location of any kind and so this limited their response. A small number of responses relied almost entirely on simply lifting (or giving a close paraphrase of) the opening two sentences from the question as a means of starting their response and this was not sufficiently specific.

Bullet point 2 seemed straightforward for the vast majority, and very many different activities or forms of entertainment were mentioned. There were music recitals, instruction classes in some aspects of schoolwork, quizzes, talent shows and a wide range of sporting competitions, often between parents and pupils. Some of the more unusual and interesting events included designing a robot competition and managing food stalls. Recitals often meant detailing the acts and the music. Events which included a practical element, such as science experiments, saw candidates demonstrate their academic prowess while sporting competitions and quizzes often led to nail-biting finishes.

A very small number of responses were too brief here, some giving little more than the type of activity, but in the main, this bullet point was very well addressed. A few responses revealed a misunderstanding of the timescale, referring to the event as if it was going to happen rather than one that had already happened. Perhaps as a reflection of this, these did not include a convincing account of the event and further problems were encountered with respect to **bullet point 3** where candidates were tasked with discussing the benefits of the activity.

In response to **bullet point 3**, invariably, all described parents and students as having enjoyed and often benefiting from the event. Strong responses included a fuller explanation of just how they had benefited. The strongest responses described how parents and students were improved by participating; parents and students were brought closer together, and they developed an increased respect for each other as a result. Parents also welcomed an understanding of how the school operated while students enjoyed a day off from lessons. Most responses described a joint or mutual benefit between parents and students, but better responses stressed how both people were affected in different ways and so produced a fuller and more developed response. Many responses included some additional but rather generic benefits about Open Days.

Generally, there was evidence of a very good awareness of **purpose** and **situation** and candidates were very clear about what they were doing in this article. The intended **audience** was the school population. Virtually everyone showed an awareness of this and some emphasised it by using an expression like *fellow students*, although some did address their text to the Principal. The **tone and register** were very well maintained and appropriately formal and polite, in acknowledgement of the slightly formal situation and the probability of both students and adults reading the article. Several examples of appropriate technical language were useful in rooting the article in the correct context, but candidates are advised to avoid overusing colloquialisms such as *you guys* and *gobsmacked*, as well as slang such as *gonna* simply to be close to their audience. The appropriate **format** was well handled this year. Nearly everyone gave a title to the piece, as requested, and most were highly suitable, such as *Funday on a Monday*. A small number of candidates really did embrace the opportunity to show this as an article. Not only did they use a heading, but they included a sub heading and signed off at the end of the article with their name and sometimes a date and class. The strongest responses demonstrated an awareness of the fact that their writing was a communication of a sort throughout using a mixture of rhetorical questions and appropriate sentence types, questions and exclamations, to maintain the feeling that they were engaging with an audience. Some included useful, appropriate information such as where to leave feedback and included comments from students and parents – all of which helped to produce a livelier article. Less successful responses appeared more as a straightforward narrative or a report. Some responses were in the form of a letter.

Most responses followed the structure provided by the bullet points for their organisation, together with a very short opening and closing paragraph. The majority of articles were not overloaded with narrative, and as such remained focused.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1**. There were very few short scripts indeed in **Section 1** and even fewer examples of a nil response.

Linguistically, most candidates produced a convincing piece of work. Spelling and punctuation were generally satisfactory. Paragraphing continues to improve in the **Section 1** task from year to year and so it did this time.

Section 2 – Composition

Question 2

Describe two very different tourist sites which you have visited in your country and what you particularly enjoyed about them. (Remember you are describing the atmosphere and any people as well as the places.)

The descriptive task was a popular choice this year. The fact that it was two locations allowed candidates to structure their answers as a contrast although, in truth, not all responses were crafted as such. There was occasionally the contrast of the mountains against an urban or other setting but by and large the two locations were just that – two distinct areas or sites. The very best responses showed an appreciation and celebration of the physical nature of the two areas chosen and revealed an immense pride in the candidate's country. Some very engaging portraits emerged of areas and their characteristics – *lush, green carpeted mountains; early morning fog, ethereal and magical*. The best responses also heeded the advice in the question and went beyond the physical description of the places and gave a deep sense of the atmosphere and the various inhabitants of the regions.

Linguistically, as always, those responses which succeeded in evoking an atmosphere with descriptive details of the senses and the use of adjectives performed well. The range and precision of the vocabulary used by candidates continues to be excellent: *the appeal overshadowed by the intense heat*.

There was a tendency among weaker responses to merely describe the physical characteristics and to indulge in a little too much narrative, the visit invariably being part of a holiday trip with too many details of the travelling. Also, in such responses, the locations were often too similar, leading to some repetition of material and vocabulary. An over-reliance on words like *beautiful* and *amazing* restricted these weaker responses. This narrative approach often led to mixed tenses as candidates struggled to render the trip in the past tense and the features of the area in the present.

Question 3

'Playing video games is not as bad for us as people say: in fact, there are more benefits than disadvantages.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was quite a popular choice; many candidates appeared extremely knowledgeable on a whole range of video games and had an excellent grasp of the specialist language. Most responses conveyed a very balanced view of video games, though the majority concluded that there were more advantages than disadvantages – money can be gained through e-sports, video games relieve stress, and improve hand-eye coordination. Strain on eyesight and addiction were cited as problems. Where responses were at their best was where interesting personal examples were given – one candidate felt the storylines in video games had improved his reading, for example. These arguments benefited greatly from excellent planning with candidates using separate paragraphs to highlight different aspects of the argument. Weaker responses relied on a repetition of ideas and some, a mere description of the most popular games.

Question 4

'Climate change is not the most important problem in the world. There are other issues which are far more serious.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was not a popular choice. However, those who did choose this title appeared extremely passionate about the topic, whether they saw climate change as the most important problem in the world or whether they felt that other issues were more serious. There were some very detailed, accounts of the dangers of climate change and frustration at the way the younger generation were going to have to live with the consequences. Equally, there were candidates who made very good cases for other issues, such as warfare, poverty, societal expectations, intolerance and gender discrimination, being of more immediate concern. Weaker responses tended to list the issues rather than explore them. These would have benefited from writing about fewer issues in more depth.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘My friend was staring out of the window and paying no attention at all to what I was saying.’

This was the more popular of the two narrative choices and the most popular question of all of the questions in **Section 2**. There were very many reasons given in candidates’ responses as to why the candidate’s friend was staring out of the window – sometimes it was sadness caused by a friend or relative’s illness; a school or relationship problem; sometimes it was a feeling of guilt which prevented the friend from concentrating on what was being said; sometimes it was indifference or dislike; just occasionally it was immense happiness or some other preoccupation. One particularly charming story was about a boy who took offence because his friend was not listening to him and was instead looking out of the window. After a long conversation with his grandfather, he came to realise just how important friends were and how it was essential not to be offended by trivial matters. It was a warm-hearted story, very sensitively handled and depicted a great relationship between the two friends. A theme running through many stories was reconciliation.

The best narrative responses are always characterised by an understanding of narrative structures, ambitious vocabulary, the control of tenses, a seamless integration of the given sentence, and a variation in tone through the sparing use of dialogue. Weaker responses feature a repetition of ideas, confused tenses and an overuse of simple grammatical forms and vocabulary. Most candidates would have benefited from more variety in their punctuation. With specific reference to dialogue, two points are worth remembering here. First, if dialogue is added it should have a purpose – perhaps to show character in some way. Second, dialogue should be properly punctuated in order to make the communication being expressed clear.

Question 6

Write a story about an occasion when teamwork was necessary to achieve what seemed impossible.

This was not as popular a choice as **Question 5** and those who did attempt it focused on a sporting success or a rescue. As far as the quality of the response was concerned, the same strengths and weaknesses that were observed in answer to **Question 5** were in evidence here.