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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Introduction

The texts were accessible across the full range of abilities and enabled candidates to respond appropriately. Examiners commented positively on the engagement with the topic of challenging activities.

Better candidates engaged fully with both texts and responded with sensitivity and fluency. In response to the writing tasks they produced lively and confident responses which were well controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages. Their writing lacked coherence and the use of idiomatic English.

Most examiners commented that a significant number of candidates do not use own words in the questions that ask for them. It is essential that candidates should try to use their own words in order to be successful in responding to these questions.

Some candidates copied all or considerable chunks of the passages in response to Question 11. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work. Similarly responses to Question 12 should be original and not prepared essays or re-worked plots from novels or films.

Some responses to Question 11 and 12 lacked paragraphing. Candidates must understand that the lack of effective paragraphing will limit the success of the response.

There was some good evidence of teaching and learning in the responses to this exam and examiners commented that many candidates seemed well prepared on the whole and noted that many candidates now understand how to respond to Question 10.

Section A (Questions 1-10)

This consists of mainly short answer questions that require candidates to locate and retrieve relevant information. Some questions required candidates to use their own words. Question 10 is longer requiring candidates to give a personal response and justify it with references to the text. There were some very good answers to questions 1-9 but many candidates continued to have difficulty with the requirement for own words thus limiting their performance. A few candidates also ignored the line references in some questions.

Questions 1, 3, 5, 6 & 7, which did not require candidates to use their own words, were generally well done and where candidates lost marks it was because they made unclear points, misinterpreted the questions or used material from outside the line references.

Question 1: A significant number of candidates thought that he saw a 'perfectly clean floor' as well as the white sand. A number of candidates offered 'rippled firm and hard', 'sequins', 'sand' or 'fish' which were not detailed enough to be rewarded.

Question 3: There were a number of candidates who offered 'Supposing his head went round' and others who simply said he was frightened.

Question 5: Some candidates used material outside the line references especially from line 36 '...convulsive kick forward'.

Question 6: This was almost always answered correctly, apart from the small minority who thought that one of her hobbies was writing. Scuba diving was by far the most popular answer.

Question 7: The majority of the candidates responded successfully but some candidates did not make the complete point 'started to rise and the dive master grabbed her by her ankles' and made only half of the point e.g. 'started to rise to the surface'. A few candidates used material outside the line references.

Examiners commented that a few candidates used their own words for these short retrieval questions when there was no need.

Examiners commented that responses to questions requiring candidates to use their own words (2, 4 & 8) quite often had direct lifting from the texts. This continues to be a problem with some candidates using quotations from the texts in quotation marks. However some examiners commented positively on candidates' attempts to use their own words.

Question 2: Examiners commented that many candidates had difficulty with using their own words especially for 'took a big chestful of air', 'groped', 'hugging', 'clinging' and 'obstacle'. Some candidates offered paraphrases that were too close to the original wording e.g. 'he was groping the surface of the rock'. However one examiner commented that the majority of candidates were able to re-work the original text.

Question 4: Again examiners commented that a significant number of candidates did not use their own words in responding to this question. 'The roof was sharp and pained his back', 'A sharp pain dizzied him', 'He was without light' were commonly copied phrases. A number of candidates did not read the question carefully and wrote about the preparations Jerry made, rather than his experience in the tunnel. Examiners commented that despite these problems there were a significant number of candidates who managed to find relevant points e.g. counting, hurt his back, banged his head, darkness, and sea creatures.

Question 8: Examiners commented that candidates often did not attempt to use their own words. There were many references to 'trapped in fog', 'flying at 100-something feet', 'in a wooded area', 'it was raining like a monsoon', and 'all of a sudden this little grass strip opened up under us and we landed'. Some candidates did not always clarify that it was bad weather. There were, however, significant numbers who phrased ideas in their own words e.g. 'she thought she would die' and 'it was raining cats & dogs' and most candidates made successful points about the unexpected bad weather and the storm. Centres need to work with candidates to develop their vocabulary and ensure that candidates realise they must attempt to produce responses to these

questions using their own words. Copying, close paraphrasing or quoting from the text will not be rewarded.

Question 9: Many examiners commented that candidates generally responded to this question more successfully than in previous series however a significant number of candidates did not use their own words for their points despite the rubric and helpful layout which meant they could not achieve any marks. Similarly a number of candidates produced paraphrases of their chosen support as their point – often too close to the text to be rewarded. 'If you don't confront your fear, it wins' and 'a lot of people enjoy fear as pleasure' often appeared quoted as points. Some candidates put quotation marks around their points which suggested they did not understand how to respond to the question. A quotation followed by another quotation does not demonstrate the candidate has an understanding of the text. Some examiners noted that there were examples where quotations had been made up. Examiners commented that there were some clever ways of re-working examples of vocabulary from the passage. Popular quotations to support points were 'light up like a Christmas tree' and 'get so close to the dragon that you can feel its warm breath'. The first point on the mark scheme, or variations of this, seemed the most popular point that candidates identified. Occasionally candidates used the wrong section of the text in their responses despite it being clearly stated in the question.

Centres need to ensure that candidates understand how to respond to the first part of this question by making the point in their own words and not using a quotation then supporting it with a relevant quotation from the passage.

Question 10: Examiners commented that the responses to this question have improved over recent series and there were many successful responses to this question. Most candidates were able to make some sort of choice. Better responses had clearly identified reasons and appropriate support for their choices. There were some candidates who only responded on their chosen text which limited their achievement and a number of candidates forgot to provide support for their reason against choosing a particular text. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the texts, retelling the passages. Some weaker candidates made their choice based on the difficulty of the vocabulary or that they thought one of the texts was boring. These types of comments are too vague to be rewarded. The question 'Which text is more successful at describing challenging situations' was sometimes ignored with candidates simply saying which text they liked. There were sometimes paragraphs which summarised the content and purpose of the two extracts but did not really answer the question. Some candidates were effusive about the language of the texts without giving examples. The majority preferred Text Two for reasons ranging from its inspirational motivational tone, the fact it offered real examples of challenging activities, its first person narrative voice, its use of a range of examples and the use of persuasive language. However, some rejected Text Two for not being descriptive enough – they felt it was limited in its actual description of the reality of a challenging activity, and that Text One offered a much more in-depth approach. Some examiners commented on how many candidates dismissed Jerry's experience as boring or not that challenging.

Centres need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts.

Section B (Question 11)

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section.

There was evidence of planning in this section which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register and format for a letter to a friend. It was generally felt candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. More successful responses integrated ideas from both texts and wrote in a fluent and lively way with a clear sense of audience and purpose. There was often a sense of realism with an introductory paragraph devoted to catching up with their friend and some convincing explanations as to why they were writing a letter. Some candidates used humour effectively and wrote about their own past experiences in an amusing manner. There were some issues with the first bullet point which required candidates to cover a range of activities – some candidates only discussed one activity which limited their achievement. However examiners commented that those candidates who only wrote about one activity often did so in great depth. Also the final bullet point on what might be learned was not always addressed. Sometimes it was treated quite superficially appearing as a final paragraph that needed to be 'tacked on' rather than being part of an integrated whole. The second bullet point concerning experience was often dealt with well and often linked to the writer's past experiences. A significant number of candidates chose to write about activities other than those mentioned in the texts but used the ideas from the texts to create successful responses based on their personal experiences. There was occasionally a tendency to lose focus on the question and to focus too much on giving instructions. Some candidates didn't quite understand what a challenging activity is, and included activities which seem quite mundane (although perhaps a personal challenge for them) and there were some who interpreted 'challenging' as 'hard'. Weaker responses lifted parts of the original texts and made little attempt to adapt the material. Weaker candidates relied heavily on the texts, especially the Patricia Cornwell text. Weaker candidates often used a salutation and a sign off but with little sense of a convincing letter in the main body. Language controls were not always secure, especially grammar, and some responses lacked paragraphing. The three bullet points provide a rudimentary structure which should help students to use basic paragraphing. Centres need to remind candidates that lack of accurate paragraphing will limit their achievement.

Centres need to remind candidates that copying from the texts cannot be rewarded. Centres should work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt the texts and how to write appropriately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 12)

12b was the most popular.

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section.

There was evidence of planning in this section which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Examiners, as in previous series, commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 12a: This was the least popular choice. Examiners commented that some responses were less discursive and more advisory and persuasive offering an impassioned cry to 'live life to the full', often with that phrase repeated too many times. However examiners also commented that candidates who responded to this question often offered lively responses that engaged with the statement. A common theme was to not allow oneself to become old and then be filled with regrets about missed opportunities. At times life's duties and responsibilities were conveniently forgotten. A few responses did highlight that more ambitious aims needed to be fulfilled when you were young before careers or young children got in the way. The overall message was we all need a dream or dreams to follow because living a life was different from surviving which was much less satisfying. Some candidates had clearly been 'trained' to adopt a particular format for an 'argued essay', for example giving a number of points for and points against leading to a final summarising paragraph with a considered view. This was helpful in many ways as it meant there was a clear structure and it was possible to reward organisation of material. Better responses were fully controlled with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, however the weaker responses had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop their ideas effectively.

Question 12b: There was a wide range of interpretations of the title with many candidates choosing an imaginative response but some successfully produced extended anecdotal responses. Many candidates handled this task with enthusiasm. Examiners commented that many candidates showed their ability to be imaginative and engaging. Some of the narratives ended tragically (almost reminiscent of Macbeth) in that characters became obsessed with power and were forced to commit crimes in order to achieve such power. These stories were full of pace and conflict and fast moving; however sometimes they involved too much direct speech and the plot stumbled rather than being properly executed. At times narratives were more positive and highlighted the importance of ambition in terms of achievement. Other examples focused on autobiographical detail: people's ambitions to

follow a particular career path e.g. successful entrepreneur, actor, doctor or scientist. They provided reasons as to why such ambitions existed and how these goals were going to be achieved. Sometimes these were a lacking in detail and development and were rather pedestrian. Some narratives were a little unrealistic in terms of how quickly lives were turned around because of ambition. Better responses were able to create tension and use effective description and dialogue with good technical accuracy. Weaker responses lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative together with poor language controls. One examiner commented that some candidates did not write a story but gave more of a discussion on ambition.

Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response.

Question 12c: Some examiners commented that this question produced some of the best responses to Section C. Examiners commented with enthusiasm about the quality of some of the responses. Popular choices for a role model were family members, celebrities, politicians and heads of organisations and charities. There was some very touching writing about the influence of family members which gave a real insight into the lives of the candidates. A recurring theme was how a parent had struggled to work, look after extended family, get an education and make a better life for the children. Where famous role models were chosen, the writing was best when it considered why these people were role models and did not just list their achievements. Better responses were detailed and lively with fully developed ideas. Weaker responses were little more than a string of descriptions of the role model (often of appearance), while others were biographies, with the idea of role model shoehorned in. Weaker candidates tended to lose the focus on the descriptive nature of the task and lapsed into narrative or produce responses that tended to be pedestrian and lacked detail. Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Centres need to continue to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary.

Quality of Written Communication (QWC)

This is assessed in Questions 11 and 12.

Better responses were accurate using a wide range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary.

As in previous series, there was evidence of good spelling and some ambitious vocabulary use and reasonably accurate punctuation, although examiners commented that there was a limited range of punctuation used. Most examiners commented on candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses and sentence structure. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication. Some examiners commented on improvements in AO3 this series.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- selected relevant points, from the appropriate part of the text, in response to the reading questions
- used their own words in response to questions that required them in Section A
- used their own words in response to Question 11
- selected and adapted relevant information for Question 11
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, lively, well developed and controlled (Question 12)
- used accurate paragraphing and organised their responses effectively
- used ambitious vocabulary and an appropriate range of punctuation
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to find enough relevant points in response to the reading questions
- did not attempt to use their own words in response to questions that required them in Section A
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 11
- did not write in an appropriate form or register in response to Question 11
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 11
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 12)
- sometimes used prepared essays or copied plots from films, games and novels in response to Section C (Question 12)
- did not use paragraphs or organise their responses effectively
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

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