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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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Introduction

This is the first year of the new specification and centres and candidates on the whole seem to have adapted well to the different Assessment Objectives and mark distributions on the paper. Examiners commented that there was evidence of some good teaching and learning in preparation for this examination in the responses seen and examiners commented that many candidates seemed well prepared on the whole.

The number of candidates who sat this exam was relatively small so the evidence for this report is fairly limited.

Examiners commented that the texts about adventure activities were accessible across the full range of abilities and candidates were able to engage with the tasks and respond appropriately.

Better candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and respond thoughtfully and articulately. Their writing responses were often engaging and effective and were well controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing was often pedestrian or lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

There were a few candidates who copied out all, or considerable chunks, of the extracts in response to Question 8. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work and show the ability to adapt the original texts for a different audience and purpose.

Section A (Questions 1-7)

This consists of two short retrieval questions and a question on the writer's use of language and structure to create effects on each text and a question requiring candidates to compare the two texts.

Question 1

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The majority of candidates correctly chose 'harness pulling tight', 'left hand burning' or 'gripping rope too hard' to identify an unpleasant experience.

Incorrect responses included 'a steep slope' or simply using a single word e.g. 'gripping' or 'burning'.

Candidates must ensure they read the text and the question carefully.

Question 2

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates successfully identified a relevant point, commonly 'ended in a thwack' or 'spinning in the air'.

The most common errors were 'trauma' with candidates missing the hyperbole in her comment or 'she screamed' without adding 'to scare others'.

Candidates must ensure they read the question carefully.

Question 3

The question asks the candidate how the writer presents her ideas. Responses to this question were on the whole encouraging. Examiners commented that most candidates demonstrated at least some understanding of the text and awareness of the devices used to present ideas.

Better candidates were able to engage with the significance of language using a variety of examples. Terminology was frequently used and often correctly. References were regularly made to the semantic field, onomatopoeia and plosives. There was an understanding of the structure of the piece with regular references to the sub titles and how the content of the text had developed.

Examiners commented that most candidates were able to explain the language and structure and identify features and support them with a relevant quotation from the text but did not always explain how these features helped the writer to achieve her effects.

Some candidates covered all sections of the text and so, although there were many quotations used, sometimes these supported a content-based response rather than meaningful analysis.

Sometimes candidates made generic comments such as 'it makes it more interesting', 'it makes it more effective' or 'this makes the reader want to read on' which do not clearly explain how the writer has achieved her effects.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content based without much focus on 'how the writer presents her ideas'. Some of the weakest responses were simply summaries of the text.

Centres need to remind candidates that this question asks how the writer achieves effects not what she says.

Question 4

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates answered correctly with 'it was black', 'it was enormous' and 'it was like a floating car park'.

Incorrect responses did not focus on her impressions of the raft e.g. 'she began to feel slightly let down' or 'she wondered why she'd come'.

Candidates need to make sure they have read the question carefully.

Question 5

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Common correct responses included 'the rubber surface began to ripple', 'the raft tipping into a deeper trough', 'the foaming wall of water rose above them', the raft buckled across the middle'.

Incorrect responses tended to identify incorrect phrases e.g. 'large waves of contraction', 'the rapids', 'curved sinuously'.

Candidates need to make sure they have read the question carefully.

Question 6

The question asks the candidate how the writer describes what Emma experiences. Examiners commented that candidates' responses had similar qualities to the responses to Question 3.

Better candidates were able to engage with the significance of language using a variety of examples. The references to similes and short sentence structures were frequent. Candidates were able to explore the emotive

language such as 'buckled' and 'snapping'. They also commented on Emma's reaction and the use of the italics. Many candidates also successfully explored the nature of her injuries which contributed to the drama of the situation. There was occasional confusion over the naming of similes and metaphors such as 'shimmering around her like mist'.

Most candidates were able to identify and explain what Emma experiences and the language used to express this although there was often a tendency to explain what the language meant rather than how it was used for effect.

Sometimes candidates made generic comments such as 'it makes it more interesting', 'it makes it more effective' or 'this makes the reader want to read on' which do not clearly explain how the writer has achieved her effects.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content based without much focus on 'how the writer presents her ideas'.

Weaker candidates tended to re-tell the events.

As with question 3, centres need to remind candidates that this question asks how the writer achieves effects not what she says.

Question 7

This question requires candidates to compare how the writers convey their ideas and experiences. Examiners commented that the majority of candidates were able to identify and discuss basic differences at a minimum, and many produced well-thought out comparisons of the extracts.

Candidates attempted to deal with both passages and they were able to make appropriate links and connections. Some chose to do this separately text by text with a comparative section at the end whereas others made points linking the passages throughout. The latter approach tended to produce more sophisticated responses.

Most candidates understood that Text One focused on several activities and appreciated that in both texts the focus was thrills and excitement. Some candidates focused on the characters themselves and a number of candidates explored the structure and first person viewpoints, and the use of italics in Text Two. The tone was considered as was the positive language of Text One with candidates talking about the 'feel good factor'. Others in contrast saw Text Two as being a warning that things can easily go wrong

even though we all have to take risks. They realised that Text Two was a fictional text but they still believed in the horror and drama of the episode when things went wrong. Some candidates liked the more informal style of Text One. Generally language formed an integral part of this discussion so there was some repetition of points made in response to Questions 3 and 6.

Sometimes candidates commented on comparisons and supported them appropriately without developing their explanations. 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 without giving examples. There were a few candidates who forget to provide any kind of support or references to the texts.

Weaker candidates often compared the content. They sometimes wrote about one text and then added some undeveloped points about the other text afterwards. The least successful candidates wrote very little.

Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts in Section A. This should include how to analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve their effects and how to write comparative responses.

Section B (Question 8)

Although the mark allocations for the different Assessment Objectives has changed and there is a greater weighing for AO5, the task is familiar to those centres who have been used to the legacy specification.

There was some evidence of good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet.

Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a talk. It was generally felt candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. The most successful responses had a strong sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches and rhetorical language to engage the audience. Many candidates were able to adopt an appropriate register and there was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required although a few candidates struggled adopt an appropriate register.

AO1

Most candidates referred to the three bullet points and managed to cover a reasonable number of points. Some candidates failed to address the third bullet point (the unpleasant experiences) properly and it was occasionally treated quite superficially. It sometimes appeared as a final paragraph that seemed like an afterthought rather than being part of an integrated whole.

The first bullet point (the different types of activities) was more straightforward and this was generally done well. Even those candidates who only wrote on one activity (very few) often went into specific detail.

The second bullet point concerning what a person gains was dealt with effectively and focused on mental and physical development. Candidates commented on the fact that we have one short life and must not regret what we did not do. Mark Twain was quoted as highlighting this aspect of human existence. Overall the message was positive and such experiences needed to be seized.

The unpleasant experiences focused on the dangers such as injury and illness and the physical aspects of nature.

Candidates sometimes used their own ideas of adventure activities or their own experiences, adapting the ideas from the two texts.

Weaker candidates simply retold the texts, without exploring the good and bad points. In weaker responses there was evidence of lifting from the original texts without any attempt to re-work the material. However only a small number of candidates lifted material from the texts.

AO4

Examiners commented that most candidates were able to produce a successful talk about adventure activities using form, tone and register appropriately and effectively. There was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required.

Many candidates used an introductory paragraph devoted to establishing that this was a speech and most candidates sustained an effective register for a speech. Some candidates used rhetorical devices, short sentences and a personal voice effectively. Some candidates used humour and wrote about their own past experiences in an amusing and dramatic manner. There were candidates who managed to give their own ideas and used the material successfully to develop a convincing talk. These responses were full of passion: the writer was excited and there was a real sense of purpose. The answers which just regurgitated material entirely from the two passages tended to be less successful and inevitably somewhat predictable.

Some candidates only acknowledged the register at the beginning and ending of their response, rather than maintaining it through the whole response. Weaker candidates had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response. There were some quite brief responses. A few candidates wrote a narrative response.

AO5

Paragraphing was generally handled well. Spellings which were taken from the passage were invariably copied correctly and there were examples of some impressive and sophisticated vocabulary.

Some candidates had problems with grammar, despite good spelling and punctuation.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts and how to write appropriately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)

Although the mark allocations for the different Assessment Objectives has changed and there is a greater weighing for AO5, the tasks are familiar to those centres who have been used to the legacy specification.

Question 10 was the most popular question. There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section. There was evidence of planning 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 commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 9

AO4

Examiners commented positively on some candidates' responses to this question.

There were some well-argued and engaging responses with very competent writing and some very well-developed ideas.

The majority of candidates were clear about the discursive approach required by this question. There was a range of rhetoric present in the arguments and the inclusion of linguistic techniques, designed to persuade the reader.

Candidates offered a variety of arguments. Some responses were philosophical and there was advice and food for thought as to how to live your life and make the most of your opportunities. Examples were given and a realisation that we are all different but these responses often came with a warning: do not allow yourself to become old and then be filled with regrets about missed opportunities. The reader was in the situation of assessing their own life and perhaps having regrets. At times, life's duties and responsibilities were conveniently forgotten. Some of these activities require money and independence but a few responses did highlight that more ambitious aims needed to be fulfilled when you were young before careers or a family hindered you. 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. Safety was generally seen as boring but there was an acceptance that we are all different and for some, risk taking is less appealing. Young people need to embrace opportunities, so calculated risk taking was almost necessary if you wanted satisfaction in life and memories to cherish. Quite often there was a positive spin off to undertaking such activities and we were more likely to achieve success in this way rather than constantly refusing or declining opportunities. Some candidates suggested that risk takers are more successful in business and innovation, giving examples such as Steve Jobs and Elon Musk.

Weaker candidates offered points that were quite predictable and found it difficult to sustain an argument, often leading to repetition.

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 10

AO4

Examiners commented positively on the quality of some of the responses to the title 'The Accident'.

There were many varied responses to 'The Accident'. Some of the narratives ended tragically in that characters became obsessed with power and then suffered accidents because they became too arrogant to take basic precautions. These stories were full of pace and conflict and fast moving. At times, narratives were more positive and highlighted the importance of overcoming an accident in terms of recovery both mentally and physically. Some narratives were a little unrealistic in terms of how quickly lives were turned around after an accident.

The accidents were often suffered on the road. There was a plethora of sports cars or family saloons going out of control and killing loved ones. Other narratives involved characters messing around with substances or instruments they did not properly understand. The responses which delved into the reasons why the accident occurred and what the consequences meant in terms of a life change were more effective. Some stories were quite dark.

Sometimes narratives had too much direct speech and this impeded the development of the plot.

Weaker candidates struggled at times with clarity, with muddled storylines and weak endings.

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

Question 11

AO4

Candidates produced some well written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing the most exciting time in their life.

One examiner commented positively on these responses because there was a wide diversity of events chosen and they were very personal and reflective. Sometimes it was not difficult to see why certain occasions and events had been chosen. There were times which involved people who were now dead but they had been such a powerful figure that their influence and memory lived on and the excitement of that occasion was still vivid. Some

of these responses were very moving. There were sporting occasions where the candidates were victorious and several descriptions of what it feels like playing a computer game and the adrenaline rush that such violent games can generate. Other candidates focused on the birth of a family member (often a sibling but not always). On various occasions these exciting times came from childhood memories but candidates made the comment that more exciting times lay ahead (they hoped).

Weaker candidates tended to produce responses that were pedestrian and lacked detail.

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

AO5 Comments across Questions 9, 10 and 11

Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were generally sound in most responses.

Short responses disadvantage candidates as they cannot demonstrate sustained accuracy.

In some cases there was a real attempt to use more sophisticated vocabulary.

There was evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but 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.

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
- were able to explore language and structure and show how these are used by writers to achieve effects
- were able to select a wide range of comparisons and explore the writers' ideas and perspectives
- were able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- used ambitious vocabulary
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to identify language and structure or made little comment on how these are used by writers to achieve effects
- were not able to compare the texts or offered very limited comparisons
- sometimes narrated the texts in response to Questions 3, 6 and 7
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 8
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 9, 10 and 11)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

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