

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01
Reading Passage

General comments

Not all candidates fully appreciated the circumstances surrounding the character in the reading passage. However, most found the material accessible, and the interest aroused by it was evident in the many perceptive responses produced for the writing task in Question 2. As has been noted in reports on previous examinations, most candidates performed slightly better on Question 2 than Question 1. Although most showed a sound general understanding of the events of the reading passage, not all succeeded in selecting sufficiently precise details to score highly in those sub-questions which carried more than one mark. A related misreading this time came from those candidates who failed to appreciate that the first paragraph of the passage consisted of just over one line which resulted in their attempting to answer Questions 1(b) and 1(i) from the wrong paragraphs and, consequently, denying themselves the marks available for these questions. However, a similar number of candidates realised their mistake as they worked their way through the questions and revised their answers accordingly.

Presentation and Use of Time

Although some candidates' handwriting was rather wild and badly formed there were very few responses that required deciphering skills. Generally, however, there was evidence that candidates had taken great care to arrange their responses neatly and clearly.

Most candidates seem to have found it possible to complete the whole paper within the time allowed, with little or no evidence of haste. Incomplete papers were very rare, but just occasionally candidates missed out parts of Question 1, perhaps as a result of approaching the paper with undue haste.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This question asked why the man in the story was able to see the huts in the darkness. The answer, which most candidates gave correctly, was because of the (flashes of) lightning. This question produced very few problems although it should be noted that many candidates wrote considerably more than was necessary.
- (b) The question asked for words or phrases from paragraph 2 to describe the way in which the rain moved towards the man and then to explain what the selected words told the reader about the rain. Unfortunately, many candidates responded by quoting from paragraph 3 and consequently lost all 4 marks available for this question. Where candidates chose the correct paragraph, responses were often accurate, with some good explanations of the words or phrases chosen. The most common choices were *sweeping up in great sheets*; *methodical advance*; *gigantic rustle*. Candidates who successfully identified two of these phrases were rewarded with one mark for each; however, the other two available marks were reserved for those who gave an explanation of the phrases which indicated that they had been clearly understood. A pleasing number of candidates achieved full marks for the question; however those who gave explanations such as *methodical advance means that the rain advanced methodically* did not give sufficient evidence that the phrase had been understood and could not, therefore, be rewarded.

The problems that arose with this question are, perhaps, a good example of the importance of reading the rubric of all questions very carefully before attempting a response.

- (c) This question asked what was stored in the huts mentioned in paragraph 3. The correct answer was *maize*, and most candidates clearly identified it. As with Question 1(a), many responses were longer than necessary; several candidates chose to say that the answer was *rats*. Certain *rats* are mentioned in the passage but the question asks specifically for what was *stored* in the huts. A careful thought about the wording of the question would conclude that *rats* would be unlikely to be the answer required.
- (d) The question asked candidates to explain in their own words why the roofs of the huts let water through. Those who clearly identified that this was a two stage process – (i) the weight of the rain bent the twigs from which the roofs were made and caused them to snap or warp (ii) the spaces between the twigs then opened up and allowed the rain through – successfully gained both available marks. It was, however, necessary to show an understanding of the fact that the roofs were made of twigs. Some candidates failed to score full marks because their answers gave only a general explanation and were lacking in the necessary detail.
- (e) This question asked for three things the writer mentioned about the appearance of the woman and was answered very well by most candidates. The most frequent mistakes were to say that the woman was **old**, rather than **'old-looking'**, and to say that she was wearing a **shirt** rather than a **skirt**. There was also some confusion over the probable age of the woman. A careful reading of the text would have revealed that the author thought that she might not have been over twenty, but that it was very hard to tell her age. Both of these responses were rewarded.
- (f) This question asked for an explanation of what was meant by the statement *He had made his own world*. In general, candidates found this question rather difficult. The preferred response was that the man had chosen to be in this situation (or had it imposed upon him) because of events outside the scope of the extract. However, some candidates interpreted the text as implying that he had made a fantasy world out of his memories of his time at college, blocking out the hardships of his present situation. These responses were given some credit but the full two marks were reserved for those who showed some awareness of the character's state of mind which details of the passage suggest is clearly not a positive or contented one.
- (g) This question asked for an explanation of what was meant by *stirred by a sort of sullen anger*. Most candidates chose to explain **why** the man was angry (for example, he had been on his own for sometime and when he finally found another human being – the woman – she ran away from him) rather than attempting to explain the nature of the anger. Others, however, attempted to explain what was conveyed by the words *stirred* and *sullen*. Both approaches were rewarded. However, many candidates misread **'sullen'** for **'sudden'** which made their answers irrelevant. Again, careful reading of the question might have avoided this mistake.
- (h) With this question, Examiners were looking for responses which indicated that the capital letter for *Somebody* was there to show that the writer felt that a superior being, perhaps God, had taken control of the man's destiny. Many candidates who, perhaps, were not absolutely sure of the writer's meaning, made brave attempts to respond, and showed at least a partial understanding for which they were partially rewarded.
- (i) This question asked candidates to choose two phrases from paragraph 3 which were used to describe the rain and then to explain what each phrase suggested about it. This question proved to be a good discriminator with the best responses not only identifying suitable phrases (*like thick white smoke; like an enemy laying a gas cloud; the rain spread...lungs' endurance; the rain moved on...protective barrage*) but also giving both a literal explanation of what the words meant and then showing an appreciation of the metaphorical implication of the words (for example, that the rain appeared to have a malevolent intent). Middle range responses succeeded in identifying appropriate phrases and showing an understanding of their literal meaning – the rain was like a *gas cloud* because it was difficult to see through it, whereas the least successful responses did no more than quote the phrases without a convincing explanation.
- (j) This question asked for a summary of what the man did and thought and there was plenty of material available from which to choose answers with the result that many candidates earned full marks. However, many candidates tended to concentrate only on what the man did and although it was technically possible to gain full marks by this approach, in practice it proved difficult to do so. The actions and thoughts that were credited are as follow:

Actions

1. Walked all day
2. Looked/dashed for shelter (in huts)
3. Reached first hut
4. Stood in the rain
5. Sat down in a dry spot
6. Heard movement outside
7. Waited for what came next
8. Saw woman
9. Got up/went outside
10. Chased after woman
11. Returned to different/nearest hut

Thoughts

12. Imagined he could hear the rain
13. Expected to find nobody (in huts)
14. Remembered his college days
15. Thought about the man following him
16. Wondered how old the woman was
17. Thought he should not let her withdraw
18. (Accepted his) loneliness/being on his own

Candidates should also be reminded that this and equivalent questions in future papers require a summary to be written in **about 50-70 words**. Although candidates are not specifically penalised if they exceed this suggestion, responses of 150 words or even more are likely to contain much information which is irrelevant and to lose focus on the requirements of the question.

Question 2

The candidates were asked to write a continuation of the story from when the man woke up the following morning.

There were some excellent responses to this question, showing both that candidates had based their answers firmly in the text, and that they had used their imaginations to expand and develop their stories. The main resources from the text that candidates used were the storm and its consequences, the lady (a rich source of love stories here) and the pursuit by the authorities. Those candidates whose stories were developed from these elements earned high marks for the reading skills which they displayed. As was only to be expected, some stories wandered too far from any connection with the text, and ended up in New York or in some exotic gangster hide-out, with the lady turning out to be an FBI agent in disguise. In other situations, it was love at first sight, marriage, many children, and happy living ever after, ignoring the storm, the authorities and everything else in the text.

As far as writing skills were concerned, there was some evidence of exam fatigue. Quite frequently, stories started very well with accurate structure, spelling and punctuation, but deteriorated, sometimes severely, as the story went on. It is important when producing a piece of continuous writing that accuracy is never sacrificed for the sake of mere length, and that time is left after the completion of the response for a careful reading through so that inadvertent errors can be corrected. The comments made above on candidates' overlong responses to some of the sub-questions in **Question 1** are obviously pertinent here as time spent on, for example, irrelevant details in the summary will almost certainly have impinged on the time available for planning and checking a response to **Question 2**. However, there were many examples of mature and sophisticated vocabulary, accurately used, and there was a very welcome absence of slang or 'loose' writing such as 'textspeak'.

In conclusion, Centres and their candidates can be congratulated for the way they prepared for and performed in this examination. There were a pleasing number of very good responses and a very large number which were nearly very good: the difference between the one type of response and the other lay mainly in the amount of detail and the precision of focus which the candidates included in their responses.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/02
Reading Passages

General comments

Many candidates answered very well, but others found difficulty because they appeared to be insufficiently prepared for the type of questions appearing on this paper. There were also a number of candidates who would have been more suited to taking IGCSE English as a Second Language.

The main problems were:

- A lack of understanding that this was a paper that tested reading. Candidates did not always appreciate that the content of each answer had to be closely related to the reading passages set for study.
- Question 1** required creative thought in order to develop ideas found in the passage and to adapt them to the new context, but it was not an exercise in creative writing. Candidates were not expected to invent new material that could not be fairly inferred from the passage.
- The answer to **Question 2** required candidates to pick out and to quote examples of language used in the passage. They were then expected to explain why the writer had used those particular words and not others; in other words, to define the effects that the use of those words had on the reader. Many candidates went no further than to say they were good descriptive words.
- Many candidates confused writing a summary with writing a commentary. They were expected to write concise, informative prose and, for full marks for content, to discover fifteen relevant points from the two passages in answer to the question.

The Examiners have suggested that Centres start by ensuring that their candidates clearly understand what is expected of them in answering each question. Each question type remains fundamentally the same for each session, and the mark schemes are generic.

Question 1 was usually done well, and it was supposed that many candidates spent a good deal of time on it. **Question 2** was the most difficult of the three, and was marked strictly for quality rather than for length. Candidates could score full marks when writing up to a side and a half. One candidate wrote three sides and did not score highly. **Question 3** was normally answered in one side in total, as required by the rubric. Some candidates ignored this and answered up to a maximum of three sides. All candidates were able to finish the paper in time, although, rarely, there was evidence that they did not give themselves enough time to read the second passage methodically.

The first passage was normally very well understood. The irony was not an obstacle, and it was possible to score full marks without reflecting humour. Similarly there were some words that were commonly misunderstood but, because IGCSE is marked on the basis of what candidates can do, such misunderstandings did not normally affect the final mark for the question.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1: You have recently stayed at the Shamrock Hotel and, most surprisingly, you thoroughly enjoyed your stay. Write a letter to Mr and Mrs Doyle explaining the reasons why you liked the hotel so much. You know that the Doyles will use your letter to advertise the hotel in future. Base all you write on Passage A.

Candidates often showed a more detailed understanding of this passage than of others that have been used previously. There was a good understanding of the humour, for example of the reference to the amateur artist who was supposed to have designed the building in 'a moment of drunken frenzy'. This led one candidate to enthuse over the buildings, which, she said, reminded her of the works of Picasso. Several candidates were amused by the description of the only couch in the hotel, which had to be shared with a hen. The discomfort of the couch led to witty remarks about free massage. These were examples of intelligent creative thinking, which developed items from the passage in a relevant way. Both comments indicated that the candidates had understood what they had read.

Other candidates were creative in the wrong sense. They wrote about the sumptuous meals provided by Mrs Doyle and the beautifully appointed room. Sadly, the passage provided no assurance of such luxuries, and the Examiners were unable to award marks for such comments.

Good candidates did the following:

- read the passage for relevant, varied **ideas**
- developed** those ideas with appropriate thinking of their own (as illustrated above)
- supported what they wrote with **detail** from the text.

It was the detail that turned out to be the discriminator. Many answers were relevant but creatively vague. It was the intelligent selection of detail that tied the letter into the passage. Not all candidates selected, but tried to write many details down in no particular order and without development. The worst of these even copied whole phrases from the original. These answers were given without judgement, and they rarely provided evidence of real understanding. They scored few marks.

One of the reasons for setting passages of this length is to test whether candidates can concentrate their reading from beginning to end. Examiners noted that many answers scored well on material at the beginning of the passage, but failed to include ideas and details from the latter part.

The structure of the letter was important, and candidates' ability to write a brief, sound introduction that set an encouraging and congratulatory tone was rewarded as part of the writing mark out of five. In this task, there are no specific marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Examiners are looking for a good, balanced structure and a good sense of audience. One error that Examiners were not pleased with was reference to Mr Doyle in the third person, when the letter was already directly addressed to him.

A common example of the structure of a really good letter was as follows:

- introduction (see above)
- comments about the atmosphere of the hotel and its isolation
- praise for the unusual architecture and features of the building
- comments on the unspoilt animal life
- thanks to the Doyles (often with witty remarks about Mrs Doyle's qualities as a manufacturer of trousers)
- suitable ending.

An unusual feature of some of the best answers was the adoption of a persona, such as a writer, an artist or a cockatoo farmer. This seemed to give the letter some cohesion.

Overall, responses to this question gave enjoyment to the Examiners, and candidates were congratulated for appreciating the humour and dealing with a piece written a hundred years ago. Those who want to learn the secret of the Shamrock Hotel and its sun-dried bricks should consult Edward Dyson's available works on the Internet.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions (a) the animals you might find at the Shamrock, in paragraph 1, and (b) Michael Doyle, in paragraph 3. By referring closely to the language used by the writer, explain how he makes these descriptions effective.

This question was sometimes answered with great awareness of the ways in which language works and with some imaginative thinking into the passage as a whole. However, a significant number of candidates found the question difficult and made no useful comment at all.

The question was marked as follows:

- ❑ Up to four marks were available for clear and sufficient identification of suitable words and brief quotations.
- ❑ A further two marks were available for giving meanings of words or for identifying devices such as metaphors, personification and sibilance.
- ❑ A further four marks, making ten in all, were given to candidates who identified effects and who could explain how the devices, such as images and alliteration, worked. However, it must be said that this was not a literature question and that candidates could score full marks without ever using any technical terms.

Candidates were often able to look at the descriptions of both the animals and Michael Doyle as a whole and to draw general effects from them. For example, they realised that all the animals were described as if their condition was bad or they were ill fed. Some spotted the irony that the 'succulent' grasshoppers were the only healthy creatures. Most candidates realised that all the description of Doyle led to an untidy picture, although few were brave enough to point to the extremity of it. The best candidates realised that he was drawn as a cartoon character, peering out from the waistband of his trousers. Such general comments (which had to be proven) were of great value.

In the last of the three examples of answers that follow, Centres will see some quality deductions. Of course, candidates have their own ways of expressing effects. They may simply say, 'When I read this, it makes me think of...' which satisfactorily goes beyond meaning. Better candidates may think in terms of the strength of a word, or the associations that it sets up in the imagination of a reader. The best candidates will think of the contract between the writer and his interactive public.

Example 1

- (a) *When the writer describes the goat that 'rubbed her ribs against a shattered trough' you can see the picture of the goat clearly. 'Succulent' is an excellent word to describe a grasshopper. The bitch was old and 'wallowed complacently in the dust of the road'. This gives a vivid picture of the bitch and her family.*
- (b) *Mickey had 'a little, red humorous face, ever bristling with auburn stubble'. This has descriptive words and is quite a long sentence. He is described as of 'Irish extraction' which is stereotypical, since we all know what Irish people are like. His trousers were too long for him.*

This candidate scores some marks for quoting a few appropriate words, but there are no useful comments. At least he understands that words create pictures, but the second sentence of (b) is typical of answers composed of gratuitous statements that add nothing to our understanding. This short answer would score two marks only.

Example 2

- (a) *The writer uses a lot of describing words to make the animals come alive. The fowl are ... which means they do not catch anything. The grasshoppers are 'succulent' which means ... 'Moody, distempered' are examples of personification and mean that the goat was angry. The writer calls the bitch 'matronly', which shows she was behaving like a mother, and she was 'surrounded by her yelping brood', which says they made a lot of high-pitched noise.*
- (b) *The writer starts by calling Michael Doyle 'Landlord' which gives respect, but the use of the name 'Mickey' takes it away again. He is old because it says 'his stock was so old'. 'His personal appearance would not have led you to infer that there had been a king in his family' suggests he was untidy. Kings are tidy. 'Ever bristling with auburn stubble' means he could not be bothered to shave. 'Small, scraggy' is a good example of alliteration.*

This candidate starts to score in the third sentence, and identifies meanings and an example of personification (which is not supported by any explanation). After a series of meanings, he provides a good comment about Doyle, identifies alliteration without saying why the writer uses it, and provides plenty of literal meaning. The Examiner disregarded the two examples of wrong meanings and gave six marks. The deciding factor was the comment about 'Landlord' and 'Mickey'.

Example 3

- (a) *The writer chooses words that show the animals are neither well looked after nor attractive. I imagine hens as contented creatures, but these are frenetic: 'Groups of ungainly fowl chased succulent grasshoppers'. The whole picture is one of chaos, and 'ungainly' suggests to me that their movements were clumsy and that the animals looked ugly. Grasshoppers are bony so 'succulent' is ironic. Perhaps they were juicy to the hens. The goat is a sad creature. It is given near human characteristics or 'moody, distempered' which suggests that you would not risk its bad temper, but we also know that it is thin because we can see its ribs as it rubs them 'against a shattered trough.' The bitch too is thin. The writer describes her 'spare proportions'. She has no home but tends her babies in the 'dust' of the road. The life led by the animals reflects, of course, the state of the hotel.*
- (b) *The writer gives a humorous picture of Michael Doyle, reducing him to a cartoon character. 'That he assumed no unnecessary style' is a polite way of suggesting that he had no airs and graces and that he was very untidy. This is emphasised by the use of 'scraggy', which sounds like 'ragged' and 'scruffy' put together. The metaphor of 'a mop of grizzled hair' reminds me of a household mop, strands all over the place, certainly not combed. His trousers are 'built' and 'manufactured', the work of a mechanic more than a seamstress. The climax of the description is when he 'yanks them up into his armpits' and 'peers about over the waistband'. This unashamed exaggeration has a ludicrous effect and makes Mickey a figure of fun.*

Centres will see that this is a cohesive answer and that it says far more about the passage. Each section starts with a general comment about effect drawn from the language as a whole. Sentence 2 of (a) is a convenient way in to discuss effect. The answer cleverly manages to avoid mentioning personification at all, but makes far more telling remarks about the goat. The candidate takes us far into the writer's possible intentions in the piece on Doyle, and the comment on the trousers is a rare one. Work like this is beyond ten, so, of course, it easily gets the full mark. Note too, that the answer is not all that long, but everything is quality.

Part 2

Question 3: Summarise (a) the appearance and the facilities of the Technocrat Hotel that the writer appeared to find worrying or annoying; (b) the appearance and facilities, or the lack of them, of the Shamrock Hotel that a visitor might find worrying or annoying.

This question was often answered quite superficially. Candidates could score full marks for content by extracting fifteen answers that were relevant to the question. However, there was plenty of evidence of an attitude that assumed that four or five answers from each passage would be sufficient. It was also clear that candidates did not always read properly to the end of either passage. Centres are also reminded that the question always puts Passage B first in the summary because it has not been read before and usually there are more relevant answers in it than in Passage A.

A common error was to write the answer as a comparison between the two passages. They were expected to be separate and to be answered as (a) and (b). Candidates who tried to compare found it difficult and were unable to make enough comparisons and always finished up with too few marks. This has been noted in previous reports. The summary question will never be set as a comparison.

Most candidates understood that a summary should not start with an introduction, which nearly always loses a mark or two.

The rubric required, as always, an answer amounting to one side, allowing for the size of handwriting. Examiners were not strict about this, but if they saw an answer that lasted, for example, two sides and was anything but focused and concise, the mark for writing would immediately register as one or zero out of five.

Candidates did not always understand that summary writing was writing to inform and not to comment. They were expected at all times to provide facts and not to give their own thought and feelings about the content.

Other common errors were:

- not focusing on the exact wording of the question
- using quotations
- copying phrases and sentences from the original
- providing long explanations of simple points
- failing to encapsulate a point clearly enough for it to be rewarded.

Candidates who did not fall into any one of these rather obvious traps, found it easy to score full marks, particularly since there were twenty seven possible answers in the mark scheme.

The following answer makes more than fifteen content points and would take less than a side of normal handwriting:

- (a) *The writer appeared to find the size of the Technocrat hotel worrying. When he entered, he was alarmed by the automatic doors and annoyed by the tinny voice that welcomed him instead of a receptionist. He did not like the speed of the lifts or that they did not stop to let people on or off. When he reached his room, he was disconcerted by the confusing voices and that his preferences were already known. He was forced to order a meal he did not want and, when he did want fresh air, it was too strong. The hotel was full of gadgets but he saw no people.*
- (b) *A visitor to the Shamrock hotel might be irritated by the layout of the buildings. He would dislike the litter lying on the roof and the broken windows and blinds. Since the walls were propped up by logs, he might fear the collapse of the structure. Animals would be everywhere you went, including the one couch, which constituted the sleeping quarters. The hotel sign was inaccurate, and there were no facilities for meals.*

Final comments

The Examiners stress very strongly the importance of preparing candidates thoroughly for all three types of question in this paper. They expect candidates to work hard and thoroughly and to know how to tackle questions that do not change their nature from year to year.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/03

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

Section 1 was often well done, and much interest was shown in the content and argument of the passage. The topic, which was the link between diet, health and behaviour, was taken seriously, and candidates read the passage with some care. There were examples of extremely imaginative writing in both the descriptive and narrative sections. The essays were done less well, particularly by candidates who started writing without checking to see whether they had a sufficient amount to say. More than one Examiner complained about the absence of plans.

Centres are reminded that this is primarily a writing paper and that the only marks available for evidence of reading are ten in **Section 1**. The marks for **Section 2** are divided into firstly, content and structure and secondly, style and accuracy. The commonest errors were, as usual, failure to control tense, awkward or confused style, and punctuation (particularly sentence separation errors). The most common discriminators were evidence of well-constructed, fluent sentences and a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. Candidates often wrote with confidence, adopting a sensible register. There was only rare evidence of the wrong use of an informal register. There was virtually no confusion between standard English and text or email language.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: You want to write a winning article on 'The Diet and Fitness of Teenagers Today' for *Today's World's* competition. You should start with a clear account of the problems at Longwood High. Offer suggestions to make the School a fit, healthy and happy place to attend.

Centres should remember that the emphasis in this question, as always, was on selecting material from the passage and re-ordering it in an appropriate form for a different genre and audience. It was not expected that every detail would be used, and it was certainly not expected that it would be mechanically reproduced exactly as in the passage. The addition of suggestions gave candidates the opportunity to evaluate the effects of the problems and to work out ways of dealing with them.

Most candidates noted that their articles should consist of three parts:

- the food on offer and eaten on the School premises or perhaps at home
- associated problems such as inattention in lessons, bullying and opting out of P.E.
- suggestions that showed clearly how the problems would be met.

The first of these was the easiest to handle. Good answers selected the main points, such as School meals, the vending machines, packed lunches and healthy options, and gave a reasonably detailed but not exhaustive resume. Less good answers tried to reproduce each detail from the original and gave themselves little room for the more difficult parts of the task. The worst copied whole phrases and sentences from the passage and gave little evidence of reading or writing abilities.

The associated problems were a little more difficult to handle. They had to be joined up and the balance between them carefully shown. The links between them and bad diet had to be established. Some candidates over-emphasised bullying and a few seemed to make it the chief topic of the article. Others paid little attention to these important issues, or scattered references to them throughout the article. The matter of the P.E. classes was sometimes ignored.

Suggestions were often added to the end almost as an afterthought. Good candidates spent time giving a rationale and they did not merely rely on suggestions hinted at in the passage. Their thinking with previous ideas in the article and made the whole piece make sense. The Examiners were looking at this section as a discriminator, since it was likely that developed suggestions would reveal more understanding and give opportunities for the most original writing style.

Some of the answers were extremely long and may have restricted the time candidates could spend on **Section 2**. Others wrote at great length on diet and gave themselves too little time to tackle the more difficult parts. This was possibly the commonest reason for insubstantial listing of the suggestions. Centres are advised to train candidates to write balanced and complete answers to all questions in this Examination.

Candidates were helped in their writing by the passage, which provided some vocabulary and the framework for arguments. Most of them turned the semi-conversational style into good, formal English, with the result that over half of the articles read like essays. The article was clearly meant for adults and the journal was described as 'quality'. However, some candidates were much better than others at assuming a voice that was suitable for their imagined audience. They at least started with an arresting first paragraph, even if they were unable to sustain the register. Others were trained in simple rhetorical devices, such as the occasional use of questions. The mark scheme made reference to a sense of audience in the highest mark bands, and candidates should bear this in mind.

The quality of writing was generally fluent and appropriate, and the overall structure was not normally a problem. The incidence of error was much the same as in **Section 2**, so that a large number of candidates finished with similar marks for the two sections.

Section 2: Composition

Candidates who had been trained to write in their chosen genre scored more heavily than those who were left to their own devices.

Those who wrote **essays** tended to do less well than the writers of descriptions and stories. This was nearly always because they did not plan their writing and ran out of material before the end. They were also frequently unsure about the order of the arguments in their writing. Essays needed to have a sense of progression and wholeness. Some candidates achieved this, but others wrote a number of separate paragraphs that could have been presented in any order. Some candidates wrote poorly constructed paragraphs or paragraphs with little or no development. Such essays consisted of large numbers of short paragraphs whose disconnected thought gave the Examiners problems.

Another problem of essay writing was that some candidates attempted to express complex thought in language that was vague and inadequate for the task. There is a case for trying to simplify language and sentence structures to allow complex ideas to be presented clearly. Some candidates finished up by writing sentences that were very difficult to disentangle.

However, this does not mean that all the essays were unsuccessful, as will be seen in the reports on individual titles.

Those who wrote **descriptions** often did well. The commonest fault was not to know what a description was, and it was only too easy to confuse description with narrative. Examiners were asked not to be too strict about this, provided that the writing contained extended descriptive passages. Previous reports have suggested that candidates should be aware of devices that provide a convincing structure. Candidates can do this by describing sights and sounds from different viewpoints or by dividing their work into, say, three different scenes, like camera shots in a film. If the description is too static, it tends to be limited in material. In this session, descriptions tended to be more imaginative and more realistic than previously.

Some of the plots were too naïve, with anti-climaxes as endings. Another problem was that candidates presented their readers with too many details as if all were of equal importance. However, there was more evidence that candidates had been taught how to structure a story, and there were many examples of real suspense that led to an unexpected climax.

Some of the problems concerning style and accuracy have already been mentioned. Candidates should beware of starting sentences with 'and' and 'also'. A case can be made for 'and', but there was no reason for most examples. Another problem was the increasing habit of joining words that should not be joined.

Examples were 'infront', 'infact', 'alot', 'ofcourse', 'aswell', 'outloud', 'insight' (as in 'came insight', 'nightout'. These were counted as errors as were 'cause' for 'because' and 'gonna' for 'going to'.

Comments on individual questions

2a: All teenagers need to rebel in order to grow up. What do you think?

This question was rarely done well. Candidates wrote for a time about the reasons for rebelling but were not always clear about what constituted rebellion. For some it was simply a life of crime or drug taking. The better candidates were able to argue that rebellion prevented teenagers from becoming too like their parents, so society could move on. Others argued that it was possible to mature without wasting time and energy over rebellion. However, beyond that, the content was not strong and there was a tendency to repeat oneself. The abstract nature of the question caused some of the difficulty, but the candidates who answered in the form of their own case history did not provide a convincing alternative.

2b: Equality is a dream – it can never be a reality. What do you think?

While candidates were given freedom to focus on more than one area of equality, many found that they could write at length on gender equality or on wealth. The gender essays were better. Good candidates looked both at the history of their own countries and at conditions in different parts of the world. From this study they were able to draw conclusions, and there were few worries over structure and order. There were also some sound arguments about wealth, including individuals, different income groups and countries. Some candidates were too quick to assume that equality could never be a reality. More thoughtful candidates realised that the road to equality was a long one and that the journey could be accomplished with effort and perhaps some pain.

3a: 'The Celebration.' Describe the sights and sounds of a celebration in detail, and how it affects you.

Oddly, a number of answers were in the form of essays about celebrations, an error that could only be made by candidates who had not been fully prepared for the Examination. While the topic was one that has been commonly set, there was some original and lively writing. The commonest topic was that of the Millennium or the New Year. Some of these descriptions were too static and tended to be lacking in variety, but they did achieve interest by the increase in tension leading to the celebration itself. Some candidates could not save the fireworks until the big moment, and so the writing became repetitive. An example of an excellent description was of a football match, divided into three. The first 'shot' was of the start of the match. The second was of a moment where it seemed that the favoured team would never score, and their supporters fell silent and no one dared speak. The third was the scoring of the winning goal. There was no element of narrative here, since the three moments were separate, and linked only by the match and the supporters.

3b: Describe in detail some people you encounter in a library or a museum or a place of worship.

This question was answered well largely because the place was well defined. The writing was inclined to realism because the candidates were able to think of the people who might be found in these places. There were a number of candidates who did not read the question carefully, and described the place rather than the people. There were also candidates who only described one person, but the Examiners were prepared to allow such answers to be marked in the normal way. It was, after all, the ability to provide convincing descriptive detail that was tested.

4a: Write a story or episode of suspense, in which a character enters a room and finds that it has been disturbed and may even still be occupied by the intruder.

This question was frequently answered very well and there were some fine pieces of writing in a variety of effective styles. There were three opportunities for candidates to show their narrative ability. The first was the entry to the room. Here, some of the best were when the amount of disturbance was minimal and where the character was able to regain her self-composure. The second opportunity was the evidence that someone was still in the room. Again, the best writing consisted of understatement: the noise was only slight, so perhaps there was no one there after all. The tension was provided by the character, who went in search of the intruder. The climax was often handled well. For example, one candidate was relieved to find that the intruder was a pet animal and was half way through an expression of relief when a knife was held to her neck and the story ended without another word. The best climaxes were those that were at the very end

of the story: the worst were those that turned out happily. This topic was a template for good writing where the reader's interest had to be maintained at all times.

4b: Write a story in which disappointment is central to the plot.

If **Question 4a** prompted realism, this was more likely to consist of plots that were less effective. It was harder for a reader to be interested in yet another story about getting bad examination results, and writers of such events did not sound convincing. Some of the stories about teenage relationships were also flat. Candidates needed to remember about creating an interesting setting, building up their story, reaching a climax and ending unexpectedly. The Examiners suspected that many candidates launched into their stories without thinking of the reactions of a reader, and without a worthwhile plan.

Final comments

The Examiners recommend that Centres use **Questions 2a, 3a, 3b** and **4a** for instruction and practice. They also believe that it is unlikely that candidates will succeed in writing in any of these genres unless they are taught how to write them.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

Centres are continuing to see the advantages of coursework as an opportunity to develop their candidates' skills as writers. There were many examples of excellent work, and very few rubric infringements. Centres carried out internal standardisation to a high standard and Moderators identified very few sets where the marking was not in line. There were, as always, one or two cases where the Moderators agreed with the original rather than the adjusted mark, or where an adjustment had been too little or too great.

Centres are asked to check the following:

- that a copy of the article(s) used for the third assignment is included in the folder or the moderating sample;
- that an early draft of **one** assignment is also included;
- that the final mark on each folder is the same as that on the mark sheet (MS1).

There are important issues concerning:

- the use of downloaded material from the Internet;
- the nature of the task setting for Assignment one;
- the award of the reading mark for Assignment three.

These are dealt with in the main body of the report, and Centres are asked to consider them carefully.

Comments on specific aspects of the portfolios

Assignment one

Most of these tasks were argumentative but, despite comments in previous reports on this component, frequently used well-worn topics that elicited formal writing but very little personal viewpoint or liveliness.

It is important to remember that the best writing is personal and that this examination is in English, not science, history or social studies. One of the problems of setting topics that appeared over and over again, such as Euthanasia, Abortion and Capital Punishment, was that the writing seemed like a dull exercise. The Moderators read the same arguments from Centres all over the world, but never noted that the writing had indicated personal experience of any of these issues. Such experience would have brought the writing to life. Most candidates were taught to write in a formal style, meaning that they never include 'I'. However, real, personal writing has to take account of the first person. Otherwise, what is written is second hand and mainly at a distance from the reader. An easy way to personalise a topic was to write arguments for and against and to add a significant section in which the candidate discussed and developed her own viewpoints. This was often sadly lacking, or opinions were relegated to a short paragraph at the end.

Some ways to use these topics but to relieve the dryness of objective writing were therefore:

- ❑ to use personal experience as a starting point or to illustrate arguments;
- ❑ to develop personal opinions in the light of arguments on both sides of an issue;
- ❑ to write one's views in the form of the words of a speech, or a letter written to a specific person;
- ❑ to choose a topic which was close to the heart and about which the candidate knew something.

This last option was taken by a large number of candidates, especially where they were free to choose their own topic, but teachers are advised to monitor choice carefully in case they are not appropriate to an English portfolio (e.g. highly technical scientific topics).

The basic problem lies in the traditional 'research essay'. Candidates search the Internet and download material, which is not their own, and then use chunks of it to make a piece of writing. In some cases they copy whole paragraphs. Candidates who do this are warned of the ease with which they can be found out and the consequences of doing so. It is the duty of teachers to ensure that this does not happen. However, the Moderators discovered more examples this year of close paraphrase from website content. This was not much better. It showed candidates' ability to select and to edit but not to think for themselves. Even if the words were original, the thought was not, and it was a form of plagiarism.

Many Centres avoided these problems by not setting essays at all or by setting topics that concerned the candidates. Examples of these were Indian culture, Manners in Hong Kong, The world in fifty years' time, Fast food, and Uniform at my School. These responses were based on personal knowledge, experience and observation.

Some candidates wrote good informative pieces based on 'My city'. A piece about Lagos with European classmates as audience read very well and held the reader's attention.

Many candidates wrote about events such as work experience, community service, a music tour report, 'Training Day', a May week review or just 'A big trip'. These were often very well done and scored the whole range of the marks. They were personal and involved.

Media analysis worked well, better than literary analysis (often because of the intrusive quotations). There was good work on the Bhopal appeal and an advertisement for Coke.

There were informative accounts of relatives, although here, Centres had to ensure that the writing did not stray into the Expressive section (Assignment two).

There was plenty of speech writing, sometimes to cover traditional topics, but also to explore new territory. One candidate wrote a speech at a funeral, another a speech to the candidate council.

The 'Lives in the Day' tended to give very little challenge and the leaflets encountered the difficulties that leaflets always do. Film reviews were racy, but Centres must ensure that these are original and have not lifted material from the Internet.

A final reason for not using the essay form is that the third assignment adopts a rather similar style, and candidates might gain marks by showing more variety. An answer to the problem may be to write from a personal standpoint in the first assignment and to write fiction or description for the second.

Assignment two

Writing was divided between fiction and description with some personal writing. Candidates should remember that the writing for this assignment should be more decorative and use more devices, both linguistic and constructional than in Assignment one. One could write autobiographically for both assignments, but the style would be different.

It was encouraging that many Centres had taken the advice to analyse specific genres of short story and study, for example, mystery, suspense and atmosphere. Candidates' exercises in these genres were often successful and there were good examples of strong climaxes and interesting denouements.

After last year's report there were a number of stories called 'The Assassin'. The Centre which first, should be proud of itself, since the stories were often tense and exciting with unexpected twists.

Titles were sometimes terse, such as 'Forsaken', 'Revenge', 'Hatred', 'Shattered', 'Busted' and 'Lonely'. More original titles were: 'To sleep, to dream', 'Butterfly kisses at last', 'The Black Tunnel', 'Two sides every story', 'The tormented path'.

There were some poems, sonnets and poems about death, with rationales. Autobiographical incidents came (wisely) one at a time and included a splendid piece about the visit of a sister who interfered. There were new endings to well known stories (such as *Of Mice and Men*) and openings to novels. A great deal of description was generally of places or relatives, though the writing on relatives was not always sustained. Some candidates wrote whimsical life stories, e.g. of a coin and or a cinema seat, which was a very old idea, but it still worked fairly well.

Assignment three

This assignment was based on the facts, ideas and opinions contained in a piece of reading material. It had to be a direct response to what was read. Candidates were wrong to use the piece as a stimulus for their own writing.

Not all Centres used the reading mark scheme accurately. It was important:

- only to give high marks to candidates who consistently based their thinking on specific opinions and ideas given in what they read;
- to give no more than average marks to candidates who summarised or paraphrased the passage;
- to give few marks to candidates who did not refer to detail in the passage but who used the passages as a stimulus for their own writing.

It is recommended that teachers make the nature of this exercise quite clear before writing starts.

Most Centres and candidates chose an article lasting about one side or a side and a half. It was not helpful to choose long or multiple articles as this provided too much material for candidates to use conveniently.

The best articles were controversial, some strongly so. An article entitled *Why I hate vegetarians* was bound to contain strongly expressed ideas that a candidate could argue with. Some candidates chose articles about the Danish newspaper cartoons, which were bound to give views that were controversial. A.S.Neill's famous piece on *Summerhill* included ideas that candidates could either develop or destroy.

Articles that did not work were almost always informative. They often came from the Internet or from newspapers. A piece called *Eighteen year old made mayor* was just an informative report and only invited the candidate to repeat what was already there. A more erudite article on *Animal communication* was scientifically interesting, but only imparted information. A weakly written article on Marilyn Monroe, prompted the candidates to find additional information, which was not the point of the exercise and which gained them few marks. Candidates who attempted a film review of *Supersize me* wrote about the film and not about the review.

There were plenty of other types of text represented, though Centres are reminded that a response to literature must be about the content and not about the words and devices. One candidate responded well to the thinking of the words of a song lyric.

Because the writing was a personal response to what was read, the quality of the writing was often very high, higher in fact than some of the essays in Assignment one. The third piece was sometimes the candidate's best. The device of replying to the writer or writing to the newspaper or magazine where it was published added strength to the writing.

The draft

Although it did not contribute to the mark, the Moderators noted the drafts carefully. They hoped to see evidence of advice given by the teacher for improvements to be made before the final draft was written. Such advice might be to change an ending, to slim down a section or to express an argument more simply.

Some Centres did this well, and there were examples of candidates' notes that indicated changes made. However, most drafts contained little advice from teachers, only the sort of comment one might see on a final draft. The Moderators ask that all drafts should show some evidence of discussion with the candidate about the possibilities of improvement by revising, editing and correcting. Teachers are reminded that they are not allowed to indicate actual errors on an early draft, however. They may advise candidates where to apply their efforts, for example by saying that the spelling is correct but the punctuation is not.

A draft is a working document, and the Moderators look to see whether it is used as such.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05
Speaking/Listening

General Comments

Moderators report that the new tests are now well established, with the majority of Examiners managing the new format competently and with a good deal of confidence.

Administrative requirements have been adhered to remarkably well. Moderators have no issues to raise relating to procedural matters.

However, Moderators would like to receive an additional document from Centres if possible: a list of the topics that candidates have chosen for Part 1. This should be sent in with the sample tape(s) and other documents.

Comments on specific aspects of the Test

Part 1 - The Individual Task

Moderators again reported a wide range of Topics. However, these still tend to be of two main types: 1) the personal, perhaps anecdotal or autobiographical piece, and 2) the informative, fact-based talk. Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches, monologues, dramatic performances and Role playing media/news/documentary reports, for example, are uncommon. There are, however, an increasing number of presentations of a literary nature, and this is good news.

Some examples of presentation topics:

- Japanese music (including excerpts)
- Tea,
- A monologue in the character of a Russian hairdresser
- The dark side of cricket,
- Was the moon landing a hoax?
- Inward and outward beauty
- Malnutrition
- Taboos
- Training birds of prey
- Sleep cycles
- Oil in Kuwait
- Violence in video games
- Credit card debt.

None of these topics are included here as recommendations of course – they are presented merely as a snapshot of a very much larger picture.

Moderators would again like to emphasise the possibility of differentiating tasks according to candidates' interests and abilities. For example, it is permissible for a weaker candidate to select a more straightforward topic and to aim for a safe, competent presentation, perhaps accepting a Band 3. It is advisable, on the other hand, for a stronger candidate to select a topic which is more complex and is likely to result in a deeper level of discussion. More challenging topics will also require more sophisticated presentational skills and a wider deployment of language devices – needed if Band 1 is to be attained.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or a piece describing what might be described as mundane matters is unlikely to result in probing and interesting discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out to explore, to challenge, to provoke, etc. is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will probably result.

Part 2 - Discussions

It was very pleasing to hear evidence that the majority of candidates were well prepared for this examination. Moderators are happy that in almost all cases Examiners were very much part of the discussions, and the discussions were generally productive extensions of the Individual Tasks. It was clear in many cases that candidates had anticipated Examiners' responses and had planned for focused discussion.

A concern in some Centres – those at which candidates had not met the Examiner before – was that discussion was not focused enough. At such Centres, it is important that Examiners meet briefly with the candidates **prior to the actual Test** – so that there is time for an Examiner to consider each topic that will be the focus of discussion. The poorest tests were certainly those during which Examiners fumbled to find appropriate prompts; the weakest of these disintegrated into general chat. Candidates have prepared for this examination; it is only fair to expect Examiners to do the same. It is worth noting that this was not a concern at Centres where the Examiner had been teaching the candidates being tested.

Assessment

For Part 1, Centres are reminded that “lively delivery sustaining audience interest” is necessary, and that “a wide range of language devices” should be present in a Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian informative talk, which is secure and safe, is likely to satisfy the criteria for Band 3. For higher reward, the candidate needs to be attempting something more challenging, more creative, more ambitious perhaps. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.

For Part 2, we are now assessing listening skills using an independent set of descriptors. The essence of a good listener is that he/she will choose the right moment to respond and will respond accurately and in some depth, adding to the conversation. If a candidate responds to most of the Examiner's prompts soundly, this is likely to result in a Band 2 mark (7-8). For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward. This involves the integration of speaking skills. Consider a descriptor from Band 3: “the listener is generally prominent”. Moderators noted that many tests satisfying this had been assessed as achieving Band 2. However, the candidates were not able to take sufficient control of the discussion to justify a mark of 7 or 8 in this area.

Moderators again therefore noted lenience in some marking, but reported that fewer Band 1s are being assumed on the basis of competence in language - there appears to be more active engagement with the criteria in determining appropriate marks.

Some more observations

- As previously stated, most of the Part 1 Individual Tasks were straightforward informative pieces. While this is acceptable (and in many cases, was done very well), Moderators would like to point out that a wider variety of approaches is possible. There is no restriction, for example, on the use of literature – so monologues in character, dramatic or poetic performances, **using original content**, etc. are to be encouraged. Indeed, this might offer useful integration with texts being read for IGCSE Literature.
- In a very small number of cases, the interpretation of ‘postcard sized cue card’ was rather generous. Centres are reminded that candidates must not read from a script in Part 1 – a few hand-written notes is what was imagined here, written on a piece of paper about the size of a postcard.

Final comments

Moderators enjoyed listening to samples and recognise the amount of effort put in at many Centres by candidates and teachers in presenting interesting and appropriate work.

Centres are invited again to be a little more creative and ambitious in Part 1. Perhaps a way forward here is for candidates to attempt to deploy a wider range of presentational (language) devices. This may help broaden the types of presentation given, in addition to conveying to candidates the requirements of the Band 1 performance criteria.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

<p>Paper 0500/06 Speaking/Listening Coursework</p>
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General comments

There was a relatively small entry for the component this session; around 200 candidates opted to complete speaking and listening coursework.

Moderators report that the component is working well and that Centres are completing appropriate coursework tasks. Indeed, in some cases the tasks are very interesting and result in stimulating oral work.

Comments on specific aspects

Procedures were generally followed well. Centres who offered additional annotation (written on the candidate Record Cards), accompanying each task undertaken by each candidate, helped to make the process of external moderation swift and efficient.

Assessment was applied by most Centres with a good deal of accuracy. There was occasional, and only slight, leniency.

Advice to Centres

A Moderator is seeking to fulfil two main duties while listening again to a Centre's coursework: initially to confirm the Centre's interpretation and application of the assessment criteria, but also to confirm that a variety of appropriate tasks have been completed.

For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres should submit **recordings of the Task 2 activity**. The size of the required sample is stated on the reverse of the Coursework Summary Form.