

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/11  
Reading 11

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through questions and texts in the order set
- followed task instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question
- focused on the particular evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each of the three extended response questions
- considered the marks allocated to each question and targeted their response time accordingly
- paid attention to the guidance offered in tasks– for example, explaining three examples from each of the two paragraphs identified in **2(d)** and using just one example from the text extract in **2(c)**
- considered and used relevant ideas, opinions and details in the response to reading task rather than inventing untethered material
- used their own words where instructed to do so, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- returned to the text to clarify understanding of an idea or important detail
- planned the ideas to be used and structure of longer answers before writing
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- checked and edited their responses to address errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

## General comments

The majority of candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the revised format of the paper and understanding of the general demands of the three tasks. Some could have paid greater attention to the guidance in the task instructions.

Candidates appeared to find all three texts engaging. Occasionally, candidates lost focus on the rubric – for example, a few candidates attempted to choose and explain three choices from every paragraph between paragraphs 18 and 24 rather than from paragraph 18 and paragraph 24 as instructed. Similarly, there were some less well-focused responses from candidates who had scored well in smaller sub questions but missed opportunities to target higher marks in other higher tariff tasks – for example, by explaining the content of each of the two paragraphs rather than choosing examples from them to explore and explain in **Question 2(d)** or writing far more than the maximum of 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)**.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example, by paying attention in **Questions 1(a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in their response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates followed the line or paragraph references in the questions carefully to help them to move down **Text A** in order and to direct their attention. Others overlooked paragraph 1 and as a consequence had to correct their answer to **1(a)** once they had read on. Most remembered that in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from the text in order to evidence their Reading skills and are not based on personal opinion or experience.

Less successful responses often attempted to include extra material in response to **Questions 1(a)–(e)**, diluting evidence of understanding by doing so. Some offered circular answers, repeating the language of the question where own words were specified as required; such responses provided limited evidence of understanding as a consequence – for example in **1(b)(i)** by suggesting 'this is an adventure to raise funds'. In **Question 1(f)** some candidates relied heavily on the language of the text and/or copied whole chunks of texts, limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result. A small number of candidates attempted to base their answers to **Question 1(f)** on Text A, instead of Text B as instructed.

In **Question 2** candidates needed first to identify and/or explain words and phrases from the text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. Stronger answers were careful to refer back to Text C to locate specific relevant choices and consider meaning in context. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should explore and explain the precise meaning of words chosen in some detail before moving on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most were able to suggest three potentially useful examples for analysis in each half of the **2(d)** task and offer basic effect/meaning in context, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently clear, careful or detailed in the examination of their choices. In less successful responses, generalised comment or labelling of devices without explanation of how these were working meant opportunities to target higher levels were missed. A small number of candidates attempted to base their answers on choices selected from seven paragraphs (18 through to 24) rather than the two specified in the question.

In **Question 3** responses for the most part had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task. Most candidates had remembered to talk from Vivian's perspective, offering her answers to just the three interview questions set. The best were focused on the evidence in the text and kept in mind their audience throughout. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities as a consequence of uneven focus and/or offering a narrow range of ideas from the text. Less successful responses either included only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with minimal modification

Whilst Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity and register of their writing. It is advisable to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Candidates should be aware that unclear and/or inaccurate writing is likely to limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to edit and correct responses is advisable.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1 Comprehension and summary task**

##### **Questions 1(a)–(e)**

Short answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read and respond to Text A. Strong responses paid careful attention to the command words and paragraph references in the instructions to demonstrate effectively and efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong explanations, striving to offer own word answers where these were not needed and/or repeating language of the text where own words were required. Less well focused answers showed limited understanding by including additional unnecessary material and/or extra guesses.

Successful responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions to show what they could do and understand. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through the text from the beginning, picking up on pointers where appropriate to help them to identify relevant material.

**(a) Give the three reasons people go bicycle touring, according to paragraph 2.**

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates reading closely recognised that paragraph 2 of the text identified pleasure, adventure and (sense of) freedom as reasons for people to go bicycle touring. Some candidates made use of the question stem to help focus their answer, whilst others simply wrote the key words of their answer alongside each bullet – either approach was acceptable. Candidates reading less carefully attempted to answer this question using material from later in the text, missing the opportunity to evidence their selection skills. Most of the candidates who had overlooked paragraph 1 initially and based their answer on paragraph 3, realised their initial mistake and corrected it.

**(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

- (i) 'fund-raising venture' (line 5):**
- (ii) 'broad spectrum' (line 7):**

In **Question 1(b)**, the task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Some weaker responses explained just one aspect of the phrase, for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** explaining 'venture' only and repeating the word 'fund-raising'. More effective answers were able to indicate that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of the question in the context of the text – for example, in **1(b)(ii)** that the 'broad spectrum' of people involved meant there were many different types of them.

**(c) Re-read paragraph 3, ('People of all ages ... air.').  
Give two reasons why bicycle touring might particularly appeal to people who want to improve their physical health.**

Candidates who paid attention to command/key words in the question were best placed to offer creditworthy responses. For example, in **Question 1(c)** candidates following the instructions in the task did not try to suggest ideas from their own experience as to why bicycling might appeal to people, but instead re-read paragraph 3 to identify the two reasons offered in the text in relation to the potential health benefits of bicycle touring, giving these as their answer.

**(d) Re-read paragraphs 4 and 5, ('The good news ... before dark.').  
(i) Identify two things you should do when training for your bicycle tour.  
(ii) Explain why camping rather than staying in hotels during your tour can slow down your progress.**

In **part (i)** of **Question 1(d)** successful answers were careful to identify two separate and distinct reasons from the four available. Less well focused answers sometimes repeated the question – for example, asserting that 'training' was required. Others offered answers not connected to training such as deciding whether to stop in a hotel or camp. Successful answers in **part (ii)** were careful to identify only those ideas related to camping that would slow down progress, rather than explaining the benefits and attractions of camping.

**(e) Re-read paragraph 7, ('Bicycle riders ... home.').**

**Using your own words, explain why some people might not want to go on a bicycle tour.**

In **Question 1(e)** the most successful explanations showed that candidates were able to derive three distinct reasons of the four available in the specified paragraph. Candidates who recast the relevant information using their own words as instructed were best able to demonstrate that they had understood the separate aspects of the explanation – related to others' perceptions of cyclists, strangers, problems on route and the likelihood of personal injury or accident.

**(f) According to Text B, what are the various attractions of cycle touring?  
You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.  
Your summary should not be more than 120 words.**

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from Text B and some understanding of the requirements of the task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea and/or inclusion of material not relevant to the focus of the question meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks.

Stronger candidates made consistent attempts to use their own words, to keep explanations concise and to organise their ideas helpfully for their reader. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, resulting often in redundancy. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

The strongest responses to the selective summary task often showed evidence of candidates having planned the route through the content of their answer before writing their response. There were some extremely effective and well-crafted responses that focused specifically on the attractions of cycle touring as presented by Text B, demonstrating both concision and precise understanding of a wide range of relevant ideas.

The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to avoid excess, though not all navigated successfully around the more obviously redundant material. For example, less focused responses spent time citing concerns around boredom and misery. Less effective responses also tended to repeat ideas – most commonly in relation to meeting people and noticing small things – and often included extraneous material such as reference to broken bikes and bandits.

More effective responses were not dependant on the structure or language of Text B to communicate their ideas and were often able to offer more concise explanations as a result. Less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer a summary of the whole text in the order it was presented. In these answers excess material, often through inclusion of irrelevant details, was commonplace. In low to mid-range answers, some candidates lifted longer sections of text, occasionally substituting words and/or altering word order, without careful selection of a central idea. Candidates need to be aware that rearranging words within a sentence, slotting in substituted words here and there, does not provide secure evidence of reading skills and understanding.

The least effective responses were almost entirely reliant on the language of the original – candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task. The weakest responses had sometimes made little/no attempt to select from Text B – sometimes basing their answer on Text A, or copying out sections from Text B with little modification.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing the original idea and to organise points helpfully for their reader. On occasion, candidates overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task, with some candidates continuing to write far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Candidates producing effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a fairly wide range of relevant ideas, communicating these accurately and concisely in their own words.

Advice to candidates on **Question 1(f)**:

- the selective summary task is based on Text B only
- after reading the task instructions, re-read the text to identify just those potentially relevant ideas you can use in your answer
- identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan, checking that they are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which might need further explanation
- return to the text to ‘sense check’ any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response
- organise and sequence your ideas to make them clear to your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the original text
- explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the passage would understand
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage
- keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ and aim for concision.

## Question 2

- (a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**
- (i) Chris mended the broken bicycle.
  - (ii) Vivian only stopped briefly when she talked.
  - (iii) Vivian had adopted the solution of pushing her bicycle along.
  - (iv) Vivian and Chris met up with their hosts for the evening.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified in each part the correct word or phrase from Text C to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example – simply and efficiently giving the word or phrase as their answer. Other responses added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire sentence in each case, substituting the word or phrase and then bracketing or underlining their answer. Marks were sometimes missed where answers were incomplete (for example, giving ‘paused’ without ‘barely’) or unfocused (for example, by copying out longer sections of text that went beyond the sense of the underlined word(s)). Very occasionally, the specific instruction to identify a word or phrase from the text was overlooked and candidates attempted to explain the meaning of words underlined in their own words, missing the opportunity to evidence relevant skills and understanding.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words underlined:**
- (i) closed
  - (ii) wildlife
  - (iii) erect

In **Question 2(b)**, successful answers had considered carefully the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined, recognising for example that ‘closed’ referred to concluding or finishing off the day by making camp and that ‘wildlife’ referred to animals or creatures in this instance.

- (c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests his thoughts and feelings that evening.**

Use your own words in your explanation.

After more walking/cycling we closed the day making camp by Lake O’Hara. I’d found a great spot with inspirational views of snowy peaks. Vivian seemed concerned about wildlife, particularly bears: ‘I’ve been camping on petrol station forecourts.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Yes. I thought it was safer.’

Vivian wasn’t exactly happy but began to erect her tent and unpack. I did the same, somewhat faster, then cooked us dinner on my trusty stove. Vivian’s stove was one of the many things she’d thrown away.

In **Question 2(c)**, where candidates had focused clearly on using just one example taken from the text extract they were best placed to demonstrate their understanding. Successful responses often centred on the question of ‘Are you serious?’ and were able to exploit it to good effect to suggest something of Chris’ incredulity at Vivian’s decisions. Other strong responses considered instead the suggestions of superiority and amusement indicated in the observation ‘somewhat faster’, whilst others explored the associations of ‘trusty’ stove and what these suggested of Chris’ opinion of himself. Many choosing his observation that he had ‘found a great spot with inspirational views’ highlighted his pleasure and sense of satisfaction. A number of successful responses had noted carefully the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less successful responses often attempted to discuss more than one example – time that might have been more profitably spent in **Question 2(d)** where there were up to 15 marks available. Some weaker responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms. On occasion there was some evidence of misreading – for example, by suggesting that it was Chris who had thrown away the stove, or that it was snowing on the two cyclists as they camped.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 18 and 24.

- Paragraph 18 begins ‘I woke next morning...’ and is Chris’ description of Vivian’s attitude.
- Paragraph 24 begins ‘For weeks ...’ and is about the changing landscape.

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

Successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three relevant selections in both parts, often beginning by explaining meaning and then moving on to consider effect. Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language in each case through detailed discussion of sharply focused choices. Where candidates considered all of the key words in slightly longer choices they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses. Candidates responding in note form and/or relying on repeating the language of the text within their explanation were less well placed to demonstrate understanding fully and often offered only partially effective explanation. The strongest responses considered words within their choices individually, as well as suggesting how they worked within the longer phrase and/or in the context of the description as a whole. Successful responses often set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain. Some of the strongest responses explored how their judiciously selected choices worked both individually and together to influence the reader’s impression, building to an overview, with the best responses offering an effective analysis of each. Responses at level 5 frequently showed imagination and precision when discussing choices, for example in relation to Vivian being ‘thrust into [an] alternative universe’ and ‘the unbending, unrelenting highway’ as the pair crossed the prairies.

In **part (a)**, many answers had identified ‘wails’ as a potentially interesting example to discuss, with most able to offer a basic explanation of the sense of complaint or distress it indicated and many going on to consider the annoyance and/or amusement it suggested in Chris’ reaction. A number of answers missed opportunities to target higher marks by limiting their comments to an explanation of just one or two words within longer choices – for example, not all considered the word ‘plucked’ alongside ‘(out of her) comfort zone’ and many weaker answers dealing with this popular choice did little more than repeat /replay the wording of the text to assert that Vivian was uncomfortable as she was a ‘city girl’. Many mid-range answers offered more careful selection and explanation in one half of the answer than the other – often repeating the word ‘boring’ in part b rather than finding synonyms to evidence understanding of meaning and rarely taking time to consider the distinct meanings of ‘unending’ and ‘unbending’ separately. Others reasonably selected words within longer choices separately – for example highlighting ‘dotted’ and ‘tempting’ as two choices - though rarely explored or explained these separate elements fully. Secure responses offered clear explanation of meaning and effect in both parts, often focusing their discussion in part b on how the change in landscape was revealed.

Some candidates selected one or more less-interesting/relevant choices in the second half of the question such as ‘guess-the-animal game’ or ‘cycle separately’ that did not engage them in a productive discussion about how the language describing the changing landscape conveyed meanings and effects. Likewise, many responses suggested that there were ‘boring images’ or ‘images that really helped you to imagine how boring it was to be there’ though did not always go on to outline or explore the details of how or why. In **part (a)**, Vivian’s reaction to the slugs and/or problem with her phone were popular selections, though not always fully exploited in the explanation offered. Some of the least successful answers spent time unwisely selecting and discussing examples from paragraphs between 18 and 24, not responding to the question as set. Where responses were most successful, candidates had often considered them in relation to Chris’ evident amusement. Stronger answers were often able to visualise the images, using explanation of the meaning/what you could ‘see/hear happening’ in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect.

Candidates are reminded of the need to ensure that their explanations in **Question 2(d)** are in their own words and can be clearly understood. Whilst the task does not assess writing skills, it is important that candidates read back their explanations to check that what they have written is what they mean and evidences their understanding. It is the quality of their analysis which attracts marks. Answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without

careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks in a language question. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful. Opportunities were missed in some answers where choices were from one paragraph only and mid-range answers often showed better understanding in the half of the question they tackled first, sometimes appearing to be incomplete. Some of the least successful answers to **Question 2(d)** were very short or offered only general outlines of each paragraph without selecting choices. The most successful answers were often able to ‘talk through’ their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, ahead of arriving at an understanding of how and why they might have been used by the writer in this context.

**Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

- make sure that the quotations you select from the text are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- in each part of **2(a)** make sure that your selection from the text for the underlined word(s) only is clearly identified
- in **2(d)**, choose three examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (six choices in total)
- where you are trying to explain meaning check that your explanation makes sense
- when explaining how language is working avoid generic comments such as ‘the writer shows us what it is like to be there’ – you need to say how and in what ways your chosen example does this to show understanding
- consider each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- when you are trying to suggest effect, you might start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) in the choice
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

### Question 3

You are Vivian. Several months after completing your journey you have written a book about the experience. You are interviewed for a television show to promote your book.

The interviewer asks the following three questions only:

- Can you tell us about the early part of your journey and the kind of difficulties you faced?
- Part of your journey was travelling with Chris – what benefits and drawbacks were there for each of you in travelling together?
- You finished your journey alone – why was that? How do you think the journey changed you?

Already familiar with Text C having worked through **Question 2**, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to think their way into the attitude, opinions and memories of Vivian, as distinct from those of the narrator, Chris. The question offered candidates prompts in the bullets to help them identify relevant ideas in relation to Vivian's point of view, and develop them in line with her reflections following the experience of riding across Canada. Picking up on both explicit and implicit ideas to use in their answer, stronger answers were able to show that candidates had read closely and understood. Most candidates were able to indicate that they had grasped the text and task in general terms. Many had engaged with the detail of both task and text to offer competent responses, evidencing some evaluation and interpretation of the experience from the perspective of Vivian herself, rather than simply repeating the descriptions offered by Chris. Where candidates had paid careful and equal attention to each of the bullet points they were often able to extend ideas and attitudes from the text to create a convincing voice for the character of Vivian.

Whilst the task guidance specified that only these three questions were asked many answers added further exchanges between the host and interviewee. On occasion this did help to demonstrate awareness of suitable register, but ran the risk of taking the focus away from the text itself – for example, where answers became overly concerned with introducing advert breaks, the guests who might be on next week's show and/or other imaginary books featured in previous shows. Where responses attempted to rely on just tracking back through the text, replaying the passage, answers were less well placed to offer Vivian's perspective and target higher marks. Such mechanical answers often also became over reliant on the language of the text to communicate ideas.

The least successful responses copied sections of text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading of key details and information, for example, suggesting that Vivian had begun her journey with Chris, or that she was wearing the wrong gear. The most convincing responses to **Question 3** indicated that candidates had revisited the passage to examine carefully the details of the narrator's account of events and make judgements based on the evidence in the text about how Vivian might have presented them from her point of view. Recognising that Vivian had begun the trip alone with little experience but with a worthwhile cause in mind, many were able to think their way into the role of a now reflective Vivian, perhaps slightly embarrassed or amused by her initial naivety, but recognising those determined and resourceful qualities that saw her through to the end of the trip.

The first bullet invited candidates to revisit Chris' version of events to offer an explanation through Vivian's eyes of what she had found difficult initially – stronger answers provided an evaluation of each challenge as seen through the perspective of a more experienced Vivian looking back post-tour, having successfully completed her journey. The second bullet required candidates to reflect on the benefits and drawbacks as suggested by Chris' narrative and consider how Vivian might present these. Similarly, to evidence close reading of Text C when answering the third question candidates who accepted Chris interpretation wholeheartedly needed to consider how Vivian might have had to adapt in order to complete the 3200 km ride based on details of the narrator's account to the point where they parted.

Stronger answers to bullet one offered ideas beyond Chris' report of Vivian's initial outline of catastrophes – noting details later in the text around the kinds of equipment she had left behind and her progress on hills. Some responses however missed opportunities by inventing details outside of the text – for example, speculating as to how Vivian might have lost her food, encountered a bear and broken her bike – on occasion these were useful vehicles for including the basic ideas but often they did not evidence close reading skills.



In relation to the second bullet, almost all answers recognised the value of companionship for both riders, though fewer went on to consider the differences in outlook and/or reflect on Chris' attitude towards Vivian. Whilst many acknowledged her gratitude towards him, stronger answers often tempered that with recognition that Chris seemed to find some amusement in her experiences – some saw this as reasonable from the perspective of a now wiser Vivian, others argued it was patronising given her resilience in making it as far as she had unaided in the face of adversity. Some relied on Chris' interpretation of Vivian as a city girl ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of nature. Others pointed out that however true that might have been, Vivian's inventiveness when faced with an issue and familiarity with technology had brought benefits too (for example the welcomed stop with hosts who offered a service it seemed that the 'expert' Chris knew nothing of).

In dealing with ideas related to bullet three most answers were able to recognise that succeeding in her goal would have resulted in a more confident Vivian, satisfied with her achievement. Most were able to identify the point at which the pair had separated and many went on to offer valid interpretation of why Vivian looked hurt and rode off. Successful answers recognised and developed differences in the two rider's outlooks and experiences to offer evaluation of why Vivian had continued alone – citing for example, Chris' fascination with the wildlife she had little affection for and/or more positively recognising what she had learned from Chris but deciding to try to put that into practice, rather than slow his progress further.

On the whole, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of an interview and were guided by the task instructions to ask and answer three questions only, with most either providing just Vivian's answers or adding only minimal extra dialogue from the programme's imagined host – both of which worked well as approaches. A few candidates wrote out a playscript, complete with stage directions (for example, Vivian sighs and wipes away a tear), added additional characters not referred to in the text and/or spent considerable time speculating on what might have happened between the pair after the trip. Whilst setting the scene for the interview was outside the passage and task, and candidates should be wary of moving too far away from the text by doing so, short orientations focused on introducing Vivian, the nature of the book she had written and the questions to be asked were used to good effect by some candidates as a way to think themselves into the context. Sometimes stronger answers were able to carefully develop points relevant to the text and integrate supporting details through more extended contributions and reactions of the host during the body of the interview. Some less successful answers however were drawn away from the text by their enthusiasm to imitate a TV host. The strongest answers often took little time to get into the answers to the questions and allowed Vivian opportunity to answer each in some detail and at some length.

On occasion, errors with punctuation and grammar detracted from otherwise strong writing – resulting for example in some awkward expression or loss of clarity. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to read back through their response to correct any mistakes or inconsistencies in their use of language – for example to ensure that meaning is clear and the register sounds appropriate. Where responses lapsed into more mechanical reproductions of ideas and/or tended towards lifting, the audience had often been forgotten and opportunities to use language convincingly were overlooked.

In the least effective answers, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of whole sections of text not uncommon in these responses. This affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills. Meanwhile, answers at the top end were often presented in a polite, relaxed and reflective style and included evidence of reading from the outset.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- remember to base your answer on the ideas in Text C
- keep in mind the new perspective required for the task – for example, writing from the point of view of a character other than the narrator and/or a time later than that during which events occurred
- keep the audience and purpose for your response in mind throughout your answer
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain that in your answer
- do not invent information and details beyond the scope of the passage; look for the clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements about characters and situations
- give equal attention to each of the three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas you can use in your answer
- plan a route through your answer beforehand: you can choose not to follow the order of the bullet points and/or link ideas from each
- do not copy directly from the text: use your own words as far as you can to express ideas

- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas allows you to better show your understanding, for example by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/12  
Reading 12

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- followed instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question
- considered the marks allocated to each question and targeted their response accordingly
- read the introductions to the texts carefully
- understood the different requirements of the extended response questions
- paid attention to the guidance offered to help them focus their answers – for example, writing no more than 120 words in the summary and using just one example from the given text extract in **2(c)**
- avoided unselective copying and/or lifting from the text where appropriate
- focused on the texts in their responses
- used their own words where specified in the question
- planned the ideas to be used and the structure of extended responses before writing
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- checked and edited their responses to address errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

## General comments

Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format of the reading paper. There were relatively few examples of misunderstanding in terms of task requirements and time-management was generally good with very few candidates not attempting every question. .

Candidates seemed to find all three texts accessible and the majority demonstrated engagement through their responses. Occasionally a failure to follow the rubric or complete a task fully limited opportunities to demonstrate understanding. This was most common in **Question 1(e)** where some candidates did not attempt to find three points, in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates included a limited range of ideas in their responses, in **Question 2(c)** where a number of candidates did not select a clear example from the text provided, or in **Question 2(d)** where some candidates offered three choices of language in total rather than three choices from each paragraph as specified in the task.

In **Question 1**, the most successful approach taken by candidates was to work through the questions in the order presented carefully noting the number of marks allocated and the space provided for their responses as helpful indicators of how detailed their answers needed to be. They also referred to the lines or paragraph specified in each question moving carefully through the text as directed. Less successful responses to **Question 1** tended to lack focus on the text or lacked relevance to the question. At times candidates used the language of the text where they had been asked to use own words – for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** by explaining 'dominating' but using the word 'region' instead of offering an alternative. In **Question 1(f)**, some candidates copied phrases (or whole chunks of text) rather than remodelling the language of the text in their response.

In **Question 2** candidates were required to explain carefully selected words or phrases from the text. **Question 2(c)** supplied a short section of the text to select from as a preparation for the longer response in **Question 2(d)**. Stronger answers were able to consider meanings in context and as well as the effects of the powerful language identified, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose in a clear overview. Mid-range answers tended to focus on the meanings of the language choices showing mostly clear understanding, although at times they tended to be literal rather than considered within the context of the whole text. Weaker responses struggled to develop viable explanations sometimes repeating the language of the text in the explanations. These answers did not always choose appropriate language to discuss or only selected three examples in total.

In **Question 3** the majority of responses addressed all three bullets in the question, although many candidates would have benefitted from more development in relation to the first bullet. Most candidates wrote as the base commander, Simon, with the best responses developing a convincing voice and tone for his speech to a group of young people demonstrating understanding of the need to be enthusiastic and encouraging but also realistic about life in the Arctic. Stronger responses developed the ideas and details in the text selectively to work through the bullets logically. They were able to clarify the range of job opportunities at the base, offering some details and developments, as well as realistically outlining what the recruits could expect from day-to-day life at Base, as well as exploring the rewards and challenges faced by those living there, by developing the ideas in the text. Responses in the middle range tended to use the text rather mechanically, often paraphrasing closely rather than selecting ideas and details to use in their own writing to demonstrate understanding. Weaker responses tended to lack focus on the text covering only the main ideas and sometimes inventing material that moved too far away from the text itself. Some responses copied unselectively thus providing little evidence of understanding.

Paper 1 is primarily an assessment of Reading, however 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – 5 marks in **Question 1(f)** and 10 marks in **Question 3**. In these questions, candidates need to pay attention to the quality and accuracy of their writing to maximise their achievement. Candidates are advised to plan and review their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style and to correct errors that may impede communication.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

#### **Questions 1(a)–(e)**

In response to Text A candidates responded to a series of short answer questions. Stronger responses paid careful attention to the command words in the instructions as well as the number of marks allocated to individual questions. These responses demonstrated sound understanding by selecting appropriate details and evidence from the text in concise, focused answers. Weaker responses tended to write too much or did not follow the instruction to use own words. Some candidates offered several possible answers thus using time inefficiently and diluting evidence of understanding.

#### **(a) Give two continents that are smaller than Antarctica.**

The vast majority of candidates identified Oceania and Europe to get the mark for this question. A very small number of candidates did not look for the answer in the text, instead offering other named continents.

#### **(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

- (i) ‘dominates the region’ (line 3)**
- (ii) ‘integral part (line 5 and 6)**

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were instructed to use their own words to evidence understanding of the phrases in the question. Where both of the marks available for each phrase were missed, it was usually due to the candidate’s partial use of the words from the text. For example, in **Question 1(b)(i)** a number of candidates used the word ‘region’ in their explanation of ‘dominates’ thus partially addressing the task. In some responses the explanation of ‘dominates’ focused on power and control thereby ignoring the context in which it is used in the text where it clearly refers to coverage or occupation. More successful responses were able to explain the full phrase as used in the context of the text by demonstrating understanding of the ice covering most of the area. In **Question 1(b)(ii)** a number of candidates lifted the phrase ‘important role’ from line 5 when attempting to explain ‘integral part’ instead of following the instruction to use their own words. Some responses were able to explain the whole phrase as an essential or vital aspect or feature; others were partially successful usually by explaining ‘integral’ as ‘essential’.

#### **(c) Re-read paragraph 3, (‘Ice is...warming.’).**

Give **two** reasons why loss of ice in Antarctica is significant.

To achieve both marks for this question candidates were required to offer two distinct reasons based on the role of the ice in reflecting solar radiation away from earth or the impact loss of ice has on global warming/the earth's heat balance. The majority of candidates were able to score both marks by clearly offering two points, often by explaining that loss of ice decreases solar radiation. Where candidates failed to gain both marks, it was usually because they expressed the idea of ice reflecting solar radiation unclearly, failing to clarify that it is ice that reflects solar radiation, not loss of ice.

**(d) Re-read paragraphs 4 and 5, ('While Antarctica...colonies.')**

- (i) Identify two reasons why the region is popular for scientific research from lots of different countries.**
- (ii) Explain why growing numbers of tourists want to visit Antarctica.**

To answer **Question 1(d)(i)** candidates needed to identify and select two reasons from paragraphs 4 and 5 to illustrate Antarctica's popularity with scientists from across the globe. The majority of candidates were able to identify the open borders *and* clean air/reliable data to gain both marks. Occasionally candidates lost focus on research and cited the scenery or wildlife as attractions for scientists visiting the continent.

In **Question 1(d)(ii)** many candidates were successful at gaining all three marks available by referring to the scenery, endangered wildlife and affordable cruises. Fewer mentioned the more adventurous natures of the tourists. Some candidates appeared to have missed the fact that this was a 3-mark question and therefore required three distinct points to be made.

**(e) Re-read paragraph 6 and 7, ('Although nearly...wherever possible').**

**Using your own words, explain why the impact on the area of scientists on national research programmes may have been worse than that of tourists.**

This question required candidates to show both explicit and implicit understanding from their reading of paragraphs 6 and 7. Most candidates were able to achieve one mark, a reasonable number gained two-marks, and some gained all three. The most common correct inference was that the fact that scientist stay for longer periods of time, and therefore build infrastructures, leads to a worst impact. Fewer candidates were able to explain that the fact that most tourists visit by ship limits their impact with many claiming that scientists stay on ships instead. Occasionally the wording of responses was too vague, and it was unclear whether the pronoun 'they' referred to the tourists or scientists. The most confused point tended to be about waste with few candidates citing the fact that scientists produce wastes of different kinds instead referring to it as 'litter' or 'trash'. Very few candidates referred to the lack of responsible waste disposal in the past. Some candidates did not use their own words in this question with copied chunks of text denying the marks. It is possible that some candidates did not look at the number of marks available for this question and therefore offered a less developed response than required.

**(f) According to Text B, what challenges does Seale face to achieve her goal?**

**You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible. Your summary should not be more than 120 words.**

This question was based on Text B and required candidates to select relevant ideas from the text and organise them into a focused summary which addressed the task. The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of the text and offer some relevant ideas about the challenges faced by Searle in her quest to break the world record for a female skiing solo to the South Pole. The most successful responses were carefully planned and coherent, focusing sharply on the task by referring to a wide range of the challenges she faced, reordering the material where necessary to aid fluency and achieve logical progression. These responses avoided repetition and re-modelled the wording of the text to use own words successfully. These responses were often preceded by a bullet-pointed plan in which ideas from the text were noted briefly before being included in a fluent own-words response. Responses in the middle range tended to include a more limited range of challenges, the most common being the length of her journey and the time she needed to beat, carrying her supplies and not being able to have help or company. They also tended to give a great deal of detail about her training programme or the pulk she had to pull behind her, often leading to repetition and inclusion of excess material even where a good range of ideas had been considered. Candidates at this level of performance often missed

the more subtle reading points: for example, claiming that she had no skiing experience despite the text referring to her trip across Iceland a year earlier. Some less successful responses focused too heavily on irrelevant material such as her supportive family and independent children. Very few responses included material from outside the text, but occasionally candidates voiced their own opinions about female explorers instead of rooting their answer firmly in the reading material.

Some responses were too short and others were very long and wordy due to unnecessary information and comments. The strongest responses tended to adhere to the advised length through adopting a concise and focused approach to the task. Weaker responses were either very brief due to a limited number of ideas being considered or were excessively long and unselective. In most responses there was an attempt to use own words although some candidates relied on lifting phrases from the text. The most commonly lifted material focused on the length of her journey and the time she needed to complete it in (both of which could have been reworded more concisely), phrases such as 'outside assistance' and 'completely alone', with some responses adding 'cannot even accept a cup of tea', and the wording of the text about her training regime with some candidates lifting the whole of 'she needs to spend 10 hours a week lifting weights and running up and down hills pulling a tyre'. For many candidates the reliance on the wording of the text affected the quality of their response despite selecting appropriate ideas. In weaker responses there was some misreading of the text, most commonly when discussing her previous experience or her method of carrying supplies. There was also a tendency to include too much introductory and irrelevant detail about her motivation for the trip.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 1(f)

- re-read Text B after reading the question to identify relevant ideas
- plan the response using brief notes to ensure a wide range of ideas from the text is selected
- avoid including unnecessary details which do not address the question
- organise the ideas, grouping them where relevant, to ensure that your response is coherent
- avoid repeating ideas
- avoid including a general introduction or summative conclusion
- use your plan rather than the text as you write your answer to avoid lifting
- write clearly and try to express yourself fluently in your own words
- do not add comments or your own views – use a neutral writing style
- try to keep to the guidance to 'write no more than 120 words'.

#### Question 2

- (a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**
- (i) There were **lots of containers** of supplies stored in hangars on the base.
- (ii) Some scientists **regularly went underwater** to study animals living beneath the ice.
- (iii) The scientists' observations that there are major changes to the climate of the earth **are impossible to prove wrong**.
- (iv) There were **lots of practice drills** to ensure safety.

The most successful answers to **Question 2(a)** focused on the underlined word or phrase, located the correct version in the text and gave it as the answer. Other responses copied the whole sentence from the text. This was acceptable but wasted examination time. Answers that used the text more widely than in the equivalent phrase/sentence could not be rewarded even if the correct word/phrase was included. Most candidates were familiar with the demands of this question but some seemed confused about how to respond offering own words equivalents of the underlined words instead of locating them in the text. Where marks were lost, it was usually due to partially explaining the underlined phrase, for example 'truckloads' or 'rehearsals', or including too much of the text and therefore moving beyond explaining just the underlined phrase.

- (b) **Using your own words**, explain what the writer means by each of the **words underlined**:
- (i) **encountered**
  - (ii) **sported**
  - (iii) **confided**

In **Question 2(b)** the most successful answers considered the meaning of each word as it is used in the text. For example, the word 'sported' refers to wearing a garment rather than being active. Most candidates were able to explain 'encountered' as 'met' or 'came across'. Some were too vague, offering 'saw' which does not get the idea of them meeting. 'Sported' was usually successfully explained also, however, a number of candidates were unable to explain 'confided': the best responses explained it as 'confessed' or 'shared' but many confused it with 'confined'. Some candidates used 'in confidence' but could not be rewarded as it is too close to the original word.

- (c) Use **one** example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the contrast between the narrator and the Base People living permanently on the base.  
**Use your own words in your explanation.**

**That evening we encountered more Base people – young, fit figures without that fume of the outside that still clung to us. They sported the same padded boiler suits and fleece jackets, and were keen to talk. 'I don't call the real world often, it's best to just live in the bubble,' confided marine biologist, Ben. I said I planned to stay until the very last boat out. 'Winter here's long,' he added.**

In **Question 2(c)** candidates were required to select one example of language from the specified section of the text and explain how it suggested the contrast between the narrator and Base people he meets. A significant number of candidates did not follow these instructions but instead offered a very general response with no focus on the writer's language. Where a paraphrased version of a language choice was offered it was possible to reward some of the comments if they lifted a word such as 'bubble' or 'fit', but they often lacked focus on the specific words used by the writer. The most successful responses offered a concise quotation then considered how the writer was able to convey the contrast through the language used. The most popular example was 'without the fume of the outside that still clung to us' and many responses explored the connotations of the 'fume' as representing the pollution of the outside world contrasted to the purity of the base people. Others advocated that it showed how the base people have been there for a long time and have therefore become distanced from the worries outside unlike the narrator and other visitors who still have all the pressures of the outside metaphorically clinging to them. Others were more literal and thought that the visitors literally brought the smells of the outside in with them accentuating the idea that time in Antarctica makes you lose those smells. Other responses considered the idea of 'just live in a bubble' and were able to explain the idea that the base is like a small world or society of its own where the people have different priorities and concerns. Many candidates were able to offer convincing explanations of 'young fit figures' and suggest that it makes the narrator feel older and less physically able than the base people he encounters. The example 'keen to talk' was also selected by some candidates who used it to suggest that the Base People saw so few new people that their enthusiasm to socialise is heightened. Some weaker responses tried to do too much, selecting several examples. Explanation of only one example could be rewarded, so offering more was a waste of examination time. Others repeated the meaning for 'encountered' or 'sported' offered in the previous question and could not be rewarded.

- (d) **Re-read paragraphs 2 and 4.**

- **Paragraph 1 begins 'Base emitted...' and is about the narrator's first impressions of the base station in Antarctica.**
- **Paragraph 13 begins 'Around us...' and is about the arrival of winter in Antarctica.**

**Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.**

The most successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three appropriate language choices from each of the two paragraphs indicated in the question. The most successful approach was to consider the meanings of carefully chosen phrases in the context of the text and then consider the effect in terms of connotations and the atmosphere created by the writer's language choices. These responses often offered a clear overview of the writer's intentions in each paragraph. Less successful responses were sometimes written in note form and offered less developed analysis or repeated the same ideas about effects, often making rather generalised assertions rather than considering specific words more closely. Middle range responses were usually more successful when explaining meanings but struggled to explore the effects, and the weakest responses tended to offer quotations (sometimes rather unselectively) without any further relevant comment. A significant number of candidates chose three language choices in total rather than three from each paragraph as clearly stated in the question. This led to some under-developed responses to this question.

The strongest responses selected phrases but also considered the individual words within them suggesting how they worked within the context of the whole language choice. Rather than identifying literary devices they engaged fully with the language, considering its impact and connotations fully and linking each choice to a coherent and developed consideration of the paragraph. In paragraph 1 many were able to explore their individual choices within the context of the extraordinarily unfamiliar environment presented. They considered phrases such as 'hushed grandeur' and 'vault door had been closed' as indicating that Antarctica is another world, closed off and guarded as though hiding something immensely secret or valuable. They could successfully develop these ideas through other phrases such as 'A gunshot like crack echoed...' and also 'the roar of a distant waterfall' as showing the power and hidden dangers of such a hostile environment and the lack of 'smells of soil, trees, nor grass'...only the scent of Antarctica' as indicating the completely alien land being presented. These choices could all be linked successfully yet considered independently. In paragraph 13 many responses were able to appreciate the rather sinister and invasive nature of the winter in Antarctica with many candidates successfully exploring the progression of the 'ice flowers, tiny crystal formations' with their connotations of beauty and fragility becoming a "creeping carpet of flowers knitted together...." evoking more sinister ideas. The progression to 'grey gruel, thickening into porridge' invited some excellent analysis of the effects of the winter ice turning something beautiful into something with an unpleasant texture, the 'grey' often cited as depressing. The 'porridge ice welded itself together' and 'sounded like steel grinded' invited some effective analysis of the industrial strength and power of the winter weather evoking harsh and unpleasant aural effects. 'Gathering darkness', closing in on itself, locking itself in' suggested claustrophobia, hibernation, and the complete isolation of the continent from the outside world. Some candidates used the 'steel', 'porridge', 'grey gruel' and 'locking itself in' to explore an extended metaphor of imprisonment and were able to support some strong analysis of effects through such an approach.

Where effects were less successfully explained, it tended to be due to repeating the same idea for all three language choices in the paragraph. In paragraph 1 this tended to be through repeating the idea of a frightening hostile or alien environment, and in paragraph 13 it tended to be repeating the idea of the winter being extremely cold and harsh. Candidates need to focus on the language and engage at word level with each choice offered to explore effects in detail before linking them to a more general overview of the paragraph.

There was very little evidence of misreading in the two paragraphs specified in the question. Some candidates found it challenging to move beyond literal interpretations: the vault door being a real door; a real waterfall roaring and sounding like a lion; real flowers freezing in the winter ice; and even real porridge being too cold or thick to eat. Some candidates who were aware that they were dealing with noise/sound and smell could go no further than stating it was auditory or olfactory imagery without qualification, or kept repeating 'loud noise' with little focus on the words chosen. They tended to repeat these general ideas for every language choice selected, sometimes using the wording of the text in their explanations. Some weaker responses also included very long quotations with general explanations rather than engaging closely with specific words. Very rarely no quotations were included at all with a brief description of the paragraphs offered instead. Such responses did not address the question at all. In a small number of responses the wrong paragraphs were used so no choices could be credited.

Candidates are reminded that it is the quality of their language analysis which attracts marks. Listing of literary devices or the selection of plain language from the text is unlikely to lead to a successful response. Examples of plainer language cannot be credited in this question therefore



candidates need to exercise care when selecting their language choices to maximise their opportunities for developed discussion.

**Advice to candidates on Question 2:**

- select three precise and accurate language choices from *both* of the specified paragraphs
- make sure explanations of meanings make sense within the context of the text – avoid literal meanings unless this is the case
- avoid very general explanations such as ‘this helps the reader imagine it’, this makes us want to read on’ or ‘this makes the reader feel part of the story’
- try to engage with the language at word level by considering connotations/associations of words and why the writer has selected them
- always start with the contextualised meaning then move on to the effect created by the language in terms of how it helps our understanding of the events, characters, atmosphere etc.
- avoid repeating the same explanations of effects for each language choice: try to be more specific about analysing at word-level.

**Question 3**

**You are Simon, Base commander. You are giving a speech for a group of young people to explain to them the opportunities and challenges of living and working on the base station.**

**In your speech you should:**

- **explain the different kinds of jobs available at Base station and what activities each job might involve**
- **outline what they can expect day-to-day life to be like when they first arrive and once they have settled in**
- **suggest the challenges and rewards of living and working at the Antarctic base station.**

This question required candidates to write a speech as Base commander addressing a group of young people about working at the base station. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their speech. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and adapt it to fit Simon’s perspective as a seasoned Base commander, as well as develop his advice for people who have just arrived and know nothing about life in Antarctica. The third bullet required candidates to infer what those who work at the base may find rewarding or challenging using ideas and clues in the text to support the inferences.

The majority of candidates were able to show general understanding of the text addressing the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support the response. Many of the responses were also able to develop the ideas by creating a convincing voice for Simon and interpreting the information in the text from his perspective, evaluating the ideas and adapting them accordingly. Where candidates had followed the bullets carefully, they were often able to develop explicit and implicit ideas effectively to include convincing articulation of Simon’s knowledge, views and advice about the realities of life on the base station. Most candidates addressed the bullet points in chronological order using them to structure the response coherently. Less successful responses tended to be unselective or closely paraphrase the text without adapting the perspective therefore lacking the experienced voice needed for Simon. The least successful responses used the ideas in the text thinly, often simply listing the jobs available in response to the first bullet without offering any further details or trying to develop the ideas in any way.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to explain the different kinds of jobs available at Base station *and* the kind of activities involved. This offered opportunities to look at the range of different jobs mentioned in the text, including the different scientific roles, as well as the more supporting roles such as pilots, mechanics, cooks etc. The best responses looked for details to support each job, for example linking the role of mechanic to the mention of a generator, sewage treatment plant, or ski repair workshop. Similarly, the role of a cook was linked to the detail that the base could house over one hundred people and the ‘tinned food boxes’ in ‘hangars’ as evidence of little fresh food available to work with. These responses were also able to develop ideas about the different roles for scientists, such as marine biologists or ice corers, linking them skilfully to the importance of the research being undertaken in Antarctica. These responses tended to adopt an authoritative yet friendly tone commensurate with the situation and purpose, as well as develop the idea that on Base each job fulfils a crucial purpose and they all work as a strong and united team. In responses where candidates listed the jobs available without offering supporting details, this bullet tended to be addressed thinly. There was little evidence of misreading in response to the first bullet but some

responses didn't select and use material from different parts of the text to develop this section of the answer fully.

The second bullet offered many opportunities to explore what day-to-day life at Base would be like, using the many clues in the text about the Base peoples, the training activities, the safety drills and considerations, and the effects of winter approaching on their day-to-day lives. The best responses selected carefully and were able to remodel the material developing the ideas. These focused sharply on the difference between living on Base and the opportunities offered in the summer months that are not available when the winter sets in. Many responses explored Simon's role as Base commander in response to this bullet by stressing the need to ask his permission before leaving Base in Winter as well as his understanding of the need to follow careful routines to ensure everyone's safety. These also alluded to the dullness of life on base, filling time playing cards or reading magazines. Some weaker responses lifted all the details of the training activities, sometimes copying from the text without modifying the material to suit the demands of the question or to create a convincing voice.

When responding to bullet 3 the most successful responses clearly organised the material into rewards and challenges, using ideas and details in the text to offer a realistic and balanced view. There were some highly successful responses to this bullet which outlined the importance and life-changing of the research as well as the personal satisfaction gained from experiencing the strange and dramatic landscapes and weather patterns. These responses also developed ideas about how the isolation from the outside world could affect Base people as well as the dangers of experiencing the harsh Antarctic winter months. Many less successful responses were reliant on lifting from the text, particularly the list of things unavailable in Antarctica such as museums, restaurants and WiFi. These responses did not attempt to develop the impact of not having these luxuries.

Candidates seemed comfortable and familiar with the format of a speech with most adopting an appropriate tone and welcoming the audience. The less successful responses tended to be too narrative as they relied heavily on the sequencing of the original text and did not offer reflections to adapt the material to Simon's perspective. The language used was mostly appropriate and some more successful responses created a wholly convincing voice as Simon utilising his experience to offer advice. In less successful responses the language and voice were rather plain but rarely inappropriate for the character. Generally, accuracy was good with some skilfully written responses. Others did not always maintain fluency resulting in some awkward expression caused by errors in grammar and punctuation. Candidates are advised to check through their work carefully to address errors where possible. There were few instances of wholesale lifting from the passage but some weaker responses were over-reliant on lifted phrases and sentences throughout the response.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read Text C carefully, more than once, to ensure sound understanding
- pay careful attention to the perspective required for the task – for example, the voice being created as well as the purpose and audience of the task
- do not invent information and material that is not clearly linked to the details and events in the text
- give equal attention to all three bullet points
- briefly plan your response to ensure that you are selecting ideas relevant to all three bullets
- avoid copying from the text: use your own words as far as possible
- remember to use ideas and details from the text but to adapt and develop them appropriately to create a convincing voice and new perspective
- leave some time to check through your response
- do not waste time counting the words: the suggested word length is a guide, not a limit.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/21  
Directed Writing and Composition 21

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were 15 marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence the style adopted
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required

## General comments

The great majority of candidates understood what was required in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Although there were few very brief scripts or responses which showed significant misunderstanding of tasks, more scripts than in previous series showed some confusion about the requirements of narrative, descriptive and discursive writing. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements. In **Question 1**, most responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, though some responses were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for an article for a specific audience of school or college students and many candidates made a clear attempt to address the central issue in the texts, the limits of individual actions in the face of climate change. The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response, often making suggestions about changes which could be made within their own institutions. Comments made about whether such actions were genuinely significant were rooted in the ideas given in the reading texts and showed some ability to probe and challenge those ideas.

In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with a little opinion on the effectiveness of particular actions, with some beginning to evaluate. A substantial number of responses at this range made some reference to the ideas in the texts, though to improve they needed to tackle the central dilemma posed by the two texts about which kinds of actions are worth making to have an impact on climate change and environmental damage.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side. Others produced summaries of what each text said with limited understanding of how to adapt the ideas for an article for young people.

Most candidates made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Less effective responses sometimes showed limited awareness of the specific audience for the article, providing a commentary on the texts but without adaptation to the style and format of an article. Overall, however, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register to appeal to an audience of young people and, at the highest

level, some understanding shown of how magazine articles are structured and presented and how rhetorical language can be used to engage and persuade readers.

The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were lively but evaluative in style, using ideas from the texts to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices such as questions, exclamations and some exhortation and calls to action. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a more straightforward style and there was less focus on scrutinising the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the texts with less selection and reordering of points from the originals. This sometimes resulted in responses which had less overall coherence.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very effective and sustained. There were some detailed descriptions of objects found outdoors in the first descriptive writing question which examiners found engaging and effective. A wide range of objects and situations in which they were found were given, some with close detail and description of the impact of the discovery on the narrator. In the second task, many kinds of scenarios, 'welcome news' and reactions were described. Achieving good examination results or gaining admission to a sought-after college or sports team were common topics across the mark range. Less effective responses to both questions tended to become narratives quite quickly or lengthy narrative preambles to set the scene unbalanced the main focus of the task. In both questions, descriptions were more effective when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene credibly and engagingly. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions tended to lose descriptive focus.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and interpretations and candidates achieved marks across the range here. Effective and engaging responses to the first question used a range of different kinds of 'signals', the most effective of which gave purpose and cohesion to the story while less effective pieces included more clichéd scenarios such as getting lost in a forest without a phone signal. While some included rather ordinary events, other less effective narratives were less credible or were under-developed in style and less cohesive in structure.

Some composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The best descriptive writing was specific, used some original and thought-provoking imagery and effectively evoked the atmosphere of the time and place described. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of credible characters were features understood by the most effective writers who chose narrative writing options.

In **Question 1** responses and some narrative writing responses, several candidates appeared to use a pre-determined structure and content which seemed imposed on the task and not always relevant to it. For example, a structure in **Question 1** which began with '*Imagine a world where...*' and ended with '*Now imagine a world where...*' was used by a number of candidates and was not always helpful where the content of the response was not handled with specific regard for the texts and the task.

## Comments on specific questions

### Section A

#### Question 1

Write an article for your school or college magazine.

In your article you should:

- evaluate the views given in both texts about saving the planet
- give your own views, based on what you have read, about whether your school can make a difference and how

Base your speech on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

#### Question 1

##### Marks for reading

15 marks were available for Reading in **Question 1**.

Candidates achieved high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material. Less successful responses provided a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded to those which handled the central dilemma of whether individual actions can help to save the planet with confidence and perceptive evaluation.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, some discussion of the idea of 'green shopping' and its potential to harm or benefit the cause of saving the planet. In responses given marks in Level 6 for Reading, candidates often provided some thoughtful interrogation of the limits of individual or collective actions as opposed to those actions available to governments and large companies. In Text A, for example, some responses discerned with some insight the mockery of 'green' consumption and commented on how companies profited from their customers' concern for the planet but actually exacerbated the problem by encouraging people to consume more: *'People who think they're doing something good for the planet end up buying more and recycling less because companies see there's a profit in it.'* Others considered green concerns to be merely a marketing trend, an idea implicitly given in Text A in the description of green shopping as 'fun': *'Companies make things which attract consumers who worry about the planet but it's just a trend for them, the latest bandwagon to jump on.'*

More effective responses saw Text B as offering a route to collective action in schools and colleges as a more significant solution to saving the planet, as an inspiration to join with others to have a bigger impact. While some missed the sense of such actions being more impactful than individual decisions to buy green products, some thoughtful responses reflected evaluatively on the text's focus on young people. Raising awareness and educating children and young people to take responsibility for the planet, an idea implicit in Text B, was widely discussed in more effective responses as a more productive way to effect changes on society in the future: *'It's our fight for our future and bringing our own generation with us to save the planet together is the only way. We can't rely on governments and businesses to do the right thing on their own – we have to make them.'*

Responses given marks in the middle range – in Levels 4 and 5 – tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the limits of green consumption in Text A and on the importance of not giving up in the face of enormous environmental damage in Text B. Responses at this level included some

opinion or reaction to the ideas in the texts, with marks in Level 5 given where some comments amounted to 'some successful evaluation'. Suggestions about actions which could be taken at school or college level often tried to reflect the ideas in Text B but did not consider how such ideas would make a difference, as was indicated in the second bullet of the question. These explanations and justifications, where they were given, were often where evaluation of the ideas emerged.

Responses achieving marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the texts and offered sensible suggestions about what their school or college could do locally. They could have been improved by examining the main debate about the usefulness of such actions compared to those made by governments and big institutions.

The focus of the comments was more general and missed some of the implications of the ideas in the texts. In Text A, for example, some responses at this level exhorted readers to buy environmentally friendly goods because it was an easy choice, missing the ironic tone of the text and the criticism of such behaviour. In Text B, the more hopeful exhortation to take action was reproduced with understanding but the need for collective rather than individual action was often missed. More commonly, where candidates reproduced the points made in both texts, there was at this level less awareness of the opposing views in them.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the details. In Text A, for example, some responses advocated green shopping as having some good impact on the environment but did not quite grasp the writer's critique of such practice. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic of responses in the lower levels. The sequence and organisation of ideas often reflected closely the order of ideas in the texts and this sometimes resulted in contradictory or disconnected responses. Responses also often had fewer characteristics of an article or the information in the texts was not presented as an article. Such responses often began in a way which showed this, such as '*Text A says that...*' Ideas were sometimes summarised with very limited conclusions or comments on them which made it difficult for candidates to achieve marks above Level 4.

Some weaker responses, given marks below Level 4, were reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, and there was little of the candidate's own words in the responses. A few responses showed little connection with the texts, sometimes focusing on improvements to their school or college that could be made but with limited evidence of having read the texts.

### Marks for writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

### Style and audience

Candidates could adopt a range of appropriate styles and registers for their articles and could show their understanding of the intended audience of their school and college peers in a variety of ways. Across the ability range, an apt, fairly conversational but standard English style allowed candidates to achieve marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many articles began with the given headline and a lively introduction which engaged the interest of the reader. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in an engaging way which appealed to their young audience. A tone which reflected a familiarity between writer and audience worked well for some: '*Is there really nothing we young people can do to save our own futures? Are we reliant on wealthy adults and greedy corporations to save our planet?*' Other choices were made in favour of a more informative style, with some exhortation at the end to rally support and take action: '*Let's not leave it to everyone else. Organise, educate and push for change before it's too late.*' The ironic, slightly mocking tone of the writer of Text A was adopted and developed in some responses, often effectively: '*Making people believe they have to buy the latest green product is part of a marketing strategy, not a contribution to saving the planet.*'

In the middle range of marks, candidates sometimes achieved marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage a young audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, responses which were accurate in the main but showed little adaptation of style from the original texts to suit the style of an article were sometimes limited in the marks attained.

Level 3 marks were usually achieved where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent article. While most responses to varying degrees worked their way through Text A then Text B, sometimes offering a brief concluding paragraph to address the second bullet, less effective responses tended to refer to the texts as Text A and B with limited grasp of what the intended audience knew or understood.

### Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the texts, but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the two texts were addressed as a whole rather than a disjointed response to two different texts. The central debate about collective versus individual actions to save the planet was grasped from the start and the ideas in the texts were organised as arguments and counterarguments in a coherent and cohesive article. The opening and concluding paragraphs of these effective articles tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing the case. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses achieving Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text and were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. While the limits of individual actions were usually acknowledged, the more optimistic tone of Text B often led to a final call for action despite the damage already sustained by the environment. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were unconnected with the ideas outlined up to that point and were contradicted by some comments which had come before.

### Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register achieved a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were often authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the contending views in the texts. Additionally, complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' yet not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Common spellings for the task such as 'environmentally', 'government' and 'campaign' were often inaccurate and sentences were frequently separated by commas rather than full stops. Semi-colons were sometimes inserted inappropriately and homophones were wrongly selected.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often restricted candidates' Writing marks for **Question 1** to Level 3. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning. A wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors meant that candidates did not achieve marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was very common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not achieve marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content or the style of the response was the candidate's own.

### Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation.
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.
- aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience.
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

### Section B

#### Descriptive Writing

##### Question 2

Describe an object you find hidden somewhere outdoors.

##### Question 3

Describe the moment you receive some welcome news.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and were interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In the first task, many kinds of objects were found in outdoor settings from mysterious boxes containing various objects to glowing orbs with science fiction powers and whole underground rooms and tunnels. Occasionally, the process of finding the object or the preamble to finding it tended to overshadow with narrative the description of the object itself, although in many responses there was much to reward in these preambles for descriptive detail.

This tendency to narrative and lack of specific detail was a more common weakness in the second question, although there were many highly effective responses which imaginatively evoked the tension of waiting for news and the moments of joy and relief when the news came. Waiting for examination results or other academic or professional achievements were common scenarios described across the mark range.

Some effective responses to the first question conjured up images of country walks on sunny days when the narrator accidentally came across some indication of a hidden object. There was often some evocative detail in this build-up to the actual discovery: *'It was a day of blissful tranquility, of gratitude for everything good in the world, of rest and sunshine and friendship.'* In this response, this effective opening was the prelude to a grisly discovery of an unexploded, wartime weapon, making the contrast between the present day and the conflict endured in the same location in the past a particularly poignant one.

Boxes of various types, often buried or hidden, were very commonly found objects. These were sometimes ornately decorated and difficult to open, often containing interesting objects from the past which gave candidates more opportunities to describe. In one high achieving response, a time capsule buried in the grounds of a family home by a long dead relative provided a range of objects which were described effectively. This emotional tie between the narrator and the object helped to engage and interest the reader: *'I looked intently at the face of the little girl in her best Sunday dress, holding the hand of a stern-looking mother. The strangeness and familiarity of the image struck me forcibly: it was my own mother.'*

In responses to the second question, Level 6 responses sometimes constructed around very surprising, unexpected good news, such as a longed-for pregnancy or the return of a family member after a long absence. The contrast of scenes between before the good news and after provided good opportunities for description. Boring, routine days were described in some detail as a foil to the excitement and thrill experienced after the news was received. In one response, the narrator's rather smug description of his opulent, luxurious home was interrupted by news of his wife's pregnancy, making the difference between his thoughts and feelings quite subtle but very engaging for the reader: *'I looked around and realised, with the force of a thunderbolt, that none of this mattered any more. In the blink of an eye, everything had changed.'*

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised and usually more predictable. The tension of waiting for notification of examination results often featured at this level, with images to describe these scenarios and the joy afterwards relying more on clichéd



ideas such as the ticking clock. More general descriptions such as '*Thoughts were racing through my mind*' and '*I couldn't believe I'd finally done it*' were more prevalent. There was at this level, however, a clear attempt to evoke an atmosphere and to describe some details without slipping into narrative with limited description.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to become a little unbalanced or included over-long narrative introductions about why the narrator was where the object in the first question was found. In some responses, overlong preambles often gave way to more specific description though the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses attaining higher marks.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given. These could have been improved by further development. Some discoveries of rather unlikely objects were explained or stated rather than described, such as a box which contained Hitler's bunker memorabilia which was listed and could have been further improved through description.

Responses which had little descriptive content were more frequently submitted in the second question. Narratives loosely based on welcome news showed some insecure understanding of what is expected for different genres of writing.

High marks for Style and Accuracy often reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, similar details were often included and better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to create specific effects. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by imprecise and inappropriate use.

In less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks achieved in the middle range, even where other technical aspects of style were more accurate. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, meant that candidates were unable to achieve Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included disagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and the omission of definite and indefinite articles and fluctuating tense use was the most common serious error.

#### **Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:**

- try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content.
- choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.
- keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.
- write sentences with proper verbs and avoid switching tenses.
- use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.

#### **Narrative Writing**

##### **Question 4**

**Write a story which includes the words, '... there was no signal at all ...'.**

##### **Question 5**

**Write a story which involves getting help from an unusual source.**

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses. **Question 4** was the most popular choice on the paper with marks awarded at every point on the range. Candidates sometimes wrote narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title. In a few cases, this lack of relevance affected the mark for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative, to produce moments of tension

or drama and to vary the pace of the story were credited by examiners as essential elements of narrative writing, as was the use of characterisation to create believable protagonists and characters. In the first question, the 'signal' was usually a mobile phone signal though not always. Other kinds of signal such as the sound of a life support machine in a hospital or a flare being fired during a military assault were also used. In one engaging story, a young woman escaping some unexplained but skilfully evoked terror in her own country attempted to cross the border with her young sister and waited for a signal that it was safe to cross. The signal never came but the story ended with the nearing sound of dogs searching for them on the other side of the border. The characterisation of the young sister and the menacing setting in which the story took place showed a clear appreciation of how to engage and maintain the interest of the reader. In Level 6 responses for Content and Structure, moments of drama and tension were carefully paced with more descriptive sections and stories were resolved in interesting ways. In one, the story opened with a sad scene in which the life support machine of a loved one was going to be turned off. The patient's son relived some of the happy memories he had with his mother, some times of conflict and reconciliation, and prepared for her death, only to end the story as the signal returned, much to the amazement of doctors and relatives.

There were also some very effective narratives to address the alternative narrative question. Rivals in some way or other often came to each other's aid at times of crisis, such as a cyclist who would otherwise have broken an important record if he had not rescued a rival who had had a bad accident. School bullies also came to the rescue of their peers, sometimes many years later in their professional lives. Effective stories employed some skilful characterisation to show rather than explain why the person who came to the aid of the narrator was an unlikely source of help: *'The memory came to me suddenly, with a shock that felt like a kick in the guts. The scruffy boy who waited for me after school with his gang of hoodlums was the smart-suited man on the other side of the desk with my file in his hands.'*

Narratives achieving marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless engaging for the reader. Candidates could achieve marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt create a developed story which was relevant to the task. Responses in this range, were more usually chronological accounts, but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution. There were many camping trips, hikes in the forest and shortcuts through various landscapes and townscapes in which some help or rescue was needed but no phone signal was available to source it. While many of these were straightforward, there was often some characterisation or depiction of setting which helped to create a more engaging story.

For the second narrative question, Level 5 responses were often a little predictable but there was some conscious shaping of the story to create moments of drama or tension. Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks, for Level 5 marks for Content and Structure, stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task and were less developed and used fewer elements of good narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were used as those in more effective narratives – a camping trip which went wrong or a rival who offers help unexpectedly – and at this level there was a tendency to say what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by shaping the narrative. Characters were identified although there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing characters as credible and rounded. In the first question, for example, the original lack of signal was resolved by moving to some other area where there was a signal or sometimes more gruesome but unconvincing and unexplained denouements were given, such as the discovery of a friend's murdered body in the woods. While the majority of less effective narratives had some simple and clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

Responses given marks in Level 4 and lower were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. Scenarios which quickly became clichéd and unengaging were used and below Level 4 some responses became confusing and muddled in attempting to control stories which were too wide-ranging or improbable.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary

allowed candidates to achieve the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses receiving marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent while Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary which obscured meaning. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, placed otherwise competently told stories in Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which saw many responses achieve Level 4. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. Weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, was one of the most common weaknesses in Level 4/low Level 5 writing, though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were more prevalent in the descriptive writing.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:**

- think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.
- consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Avoid relying on events.
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.
- use complicated vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0990/22  
Directed Writing and Composition 22

## Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were fifteen marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise the response effectively to inform, persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- know the different kinds of content required for description and narration
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to create an effect on the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required.

## General comments

The majority of responses showed a secure understanding of how marks were awarded for both tasks, Directed Writing and Composition. There were few very brief and undeveloped scripts or responses. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements. In **Question 1**, most responses were written mostly in candidates' own words. There were a few responses which were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert, although some lifting of phrases or sentences was common. Where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were limited for both Reading and Writing. In **Section B**, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were stories submitted for the descriptive writing tasks which made it difficult for candidates to achieve high marks for Content and Structure. In some cases, mostly for the 'The view from the other side' title in the descriptive writing, the response was largely discursive and lacked descriptive intent and development.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a magazine article intended for a specific audience of young people. The register required here was generally well understood, with most responses reflecting the interests and concerns of a peer audience. The majority of candidates demonstrated enthusiasm for and engagement with the topic of modern friendship and approached it using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response. Some opinion was often given as a conclusion to the article and most candidates remembered to include an appropriate address to the reader, often including some advice about safety or an appropriate exhortation. Comments made about the potential benefits and pitfalls of creating friendships online were rooted in the ideas given in the reading texts. In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with an opinion given about some of the points made, with some beginning to evaluate. A substantial number of responses at this range made some comments about the ideas in the texts, though not always probing or offering judgements about them. Many responses reflected the positive views of Text A on the relationship of social media and modern friendship, often taking strong issue with the assertion in Text B that it is not possible to form close friendships online, although less effective responses did not always develop that opinion into evaluative discussion.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side as well as some straightforward listing in the same sequences as the texts.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Most responses also avoided slipping into generalised approbation or condemnation of social media and the internet in general, and maintained focus on the idea of friendship in modern times. Less effective responses sometimes showed limited awareness of the specific audience for the article, providing a summary of the ideas in the texts but without providing a coherent view of the subject for an audience of peers. Overall, however, there was often a clear adaptation of style and register to appeal to the required audience and a confidence in their peers' acceptance of their point of view. Introductions and conclusions and the structure and organisation of ideas required in an article were well understood by a majority of candidates.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were effective and sustained. In response to the first option there were some imaginative evocations of the anxiety of sleeplessness when sleep is most required: a majority wrote about the night before an examination of some sort, but there were varied scenarios including the night before a wedding, or before leaving home for the first time. Less effective responses to this question tended to become more narrative or the details given were clichéd or stereotypical. Interpretations of the second descriptive question were very varied and often highly imaginative and engaging: while many were views of and beyond physical features such as mountains, rivers, or urban landscapes, 'the other side' might also be of the past or present seen from the future, or the other side of a social divide, or indeed from beyond the grave.

Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and interpretations and candidates achieved marks across the range here. Effective responses to the first question, on the title of 'The Invitation' constructed engaging narratives with well-managed endings and developed characterisation. Varied scenarios included invitations to parties and weddings, to join elite teams or groups, mysterious invitations to perilous places and some very touching stories of 'prank' invitations intended only to mock and deceive the recipient. Less effective pieces tended to include more obvious or more mundane events or, conversely, a series of unlikely actions in responses which paid limited attention to characterisation and setting. While some included rather ordinary events, other less effective narratives were less credible or were under-developed in style and less cohesive in structure.

Some composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The best descriptive writing was specific, used some original and thought-provoking imagery and effectively evoked the atmosphere of the time and place described. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of credible characters were features understood by the most effective writers who chose narrative writing options. There was a tendency for descriptive writing questions to be answered by straightforward narratives with limited descriptive detail, sometimes in responses where the writing was accurate and quite fluent.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A**

##### **Question 1**

**Write a magazine article for young people about modern friendship.**

**In your article you should:**

- **evaluate the ideas about friendship given in both texts**
- **explain, based on what you read, to what extent you think social media affects friendship.**

**Base your article on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.**

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

**Marks for reading**

15 marks were available for Reading in **Question 1**.

Candidates achieved high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. Most responses focused on the requirements of the task, assessing the characteristics and qualities of online friendship, and usually avoiding general discussions of the virtues and vices of the internet in its many forms. At all levels of achievement the topic was approached with confidence and often enthusiastic engagement.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks achieved by those which handled the central dilemma of the comparative validity and worth of online versus face-to-face friendship with authoritative and perceptive evaluation, developing their arguments beyond the confines of the material in front of them.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, some discussion of the idea of 'real life' being only 'face-to-face', raising the idea of generational bias; some antagonism towards the perceived ignorance of, and prejudice against, the internet and the lifestyles of the young amongst older people was often a springboard for assertive and detailed evaluation. Many candidates could name and describe apps which allowed for the 'synchronicity' and 'shared experience in real time' denied to online friendship by the writer of Text B. Also challenged in some higher-level responses was that text's implication of a simple binary division which equated 'real life' friendship with profound and supportive relationships and online friendship with superficiality and impermanence. Although the overwhelming majority of responses supported and expanded upon the positive views of Text A, some awarded marks in Level 6 for Reading questioned its unvarying approbation of online relationships as being overly simplistic, and reflected on the possible hyperbole of the claim that the writer's long-distance friends were 'my best friends in the world' and again in the reference to the person who found online 'the [three] women she cherishes most in the world'. Responses at all levels offered the ease of finding people of similar interests online, but responses awarded marks in Levels 6 and 5 offered a subtle and developed analysis of the idea: 'The crucial importance of friendship has never been doubted, but until recently the acquisition of friends has mostly been limited by proximity: the neighbourhood, the school, the workplace – unless one could afford frequent travel or work or study abroad. It can be difficult to find a friend that shares the same unusual hobby or loves the same arcane literature. Now even the sky is not the limit ...'.

The protection from summary judgement on the basis of appearance, race, clothes or accent was important for many supporters of online friendship. While recognising the dangers of 'scams' and 'catfishing' more effective responses often thoughtfully interrogated the idea of becoming 'one's most authentic self online'. The impermanence of online friendships criticised in Text B was here seen as sometimes an advantage: if revealing one's innermost thoughts and feelings as many said they did online was met with an unfavourable response the relationship could be ended without the unfortunate consequences and embarrassment that might ensue in 'real life'.

Responses achieving marks in the middle range – in Levels 4 and 5 – tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the benefits and ease of instant communication with a large range of people. In Level 5 'Some successful evaluation' also resulted from reflecting on the life-enhancing benefits of friendship across and between different cultures, and also from considering how casual 'chatroom' relationships could deepen over time and lead to growing confidence in social situations, actual meetings and full-blown relationships and even marriage. At all levels, but particularly in Levels 4 and 5 the terrible restrictions of the COVID pandemic were cited as proof of the crucial importance of online communication in every aspect of life. Here the opinion was sometimes expressed that if that had not changed the minds of the older generation about the internet or 'time spent on phones', nothing would! Responses at this level included some opinion or reaction to the ideas in the texts, with marks in Level 5 achieved where some comments amounted to 'some successful evaluation'.

Responses achieving marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the texts and offered sensible advice about maintaining friendships in different forms and avoiding the dangers online to privacy and security. To improve, these candidates needed to examine the impact of ubiquitous social media on the nature of friendship itself, as suggested in the task's second bullet point. At this level too assertions, anecdotes and statistics offered in both texts were reproduced without challenge or comparison of their usefulness, or responses developed the writer's own ideas about the topic rather than the ideas in the texts; here often the reader was advised to 'just have a good balance of online and face-to-face friendships': sensible perhaps but not evaluation. Responses at this level frequently stated that the writer of Text A met all three of her bridesmaids online without showing that this was an illustration of the writer's belief that even the most important and intimate relationships could be formed online. The focus of the comments was more

general and missed some of the implications of the ideas in the texts, and opportunities for effective evaluation were missed. In Text B for example, responses frequently reproduced the assertion that keeping up an actual friendship takes time, without pointing out as did higher level responses that many 'actual' friendships flounder because young people often do not have the time – or the means – to arrange frequent social meetings whereas sharing a funny meme or sending an affectionate emoji is the work of a moment, costs nothing and 'keeps us in each other's hearts and minds'. Often, where candidates reproduced the points made in both texts, there was at this level less awareness of the opposing views in them, so responses were contradictory, and no clear point of view emerged.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the details. In Text A, the cited study about the correlation between social media use and loneliness, low self-esteem and social isolation was reproduced uncritically, missing the writer's point that 'no-one knows what came first; the loneliness or the social media'. Similarly, many responses reproduced the material in Text B about 'Dunbar's number' without further comment or explanation, seeming to think that statistics in themselves are a useful offering. In some otherwise high-level responses time was spent reproducing and explaining this same material without evaluating it.

Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic of responses in the lower levels. The sequence and organisation of ideas often reflected closely the order of ideas in the texts and this sometimes resulted in contradictory or disconnected responses. Responses also often had fewer characteristics of an article or the information in the texts was not presented as an article. Such responses often began in a way which showed this, such as 'Text A says that...'. Ideas were sometimes summarised with very limited conclusions or comments on them which made it difficult for candidates to achieve marks above Level 4. Others used a 'compare and contrast' format, treating the texts like a comprehension exercise, which was inappropriate.

Some weaker responses, attaining marks below Level 4, were almost totally reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, where there was little of the candidate's own words in the response. A few responses showed very little connection with the texts or the task, sometimes focusing on online bullying or damage to health resulting from looking at a screen all day. These were very few in number but perhaps a little less common than in recent years.

### **Marks for writing**

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

#### *Style and audience*

Candidates could adopt a range of appropriate styles and registers for their articles and could show their understanding of the intended audience of young people in a variety of ways. Across the ability range, an apt, fairly conversational but standard English style allowed for candidates to achieve marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many articles began with direct address and a lively introduction which engaged the interest of the reader. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in an engaging way which appealed to their young audience. A tone which reflected a familiarity between writer and audience worked well for some: 'Everyone from your Grandma's cat to your boss's uncle probably has some sort of online presence nowadays. As social media becomes the new playground for children and a barrier for adults, how can we legitimise the so-called 'friendships' formed on the web?' Other choices were made in favour of a more informative style, with some exhortation at the end to exercise caution or value friendship wherever it is found: 'If you've taken your time building a healthy, open friendship with someone online, then it will be just as meaningful as any initiated face-to-face'

In the middle range of marks, candidates could sometimes achieve marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage a young audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, responses which were accurate in the main but showed little adaptation of style from the original texts to suit the style of an article were sometimes limited in the marks achieved. However, some responses adopted a colloquial style in their adaptation to audience which proved inadequate for nuanced discussion of the ideas. A few responses used

sophisticated vocabulary, usually precisely, but in an overly formal, discursive style which was less appropriate for the given audience.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent article. While most responses to varying degrees worked their way through Text A then Text B, sometimes offering a brief concluding paragraph to address the second bullet, less effective responses tended to refer to the texts as Text A and B with limited grasp of what the intended audience knew or understood. However, in a way rarely seen in previous series, a significant number of responses awarded Level 5 or even Level 6 for Reading made inappropriate reference to the texts in this way, affecting their marks for Writing.

### *Structure*

As mentioned above, responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts, but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the two texts were addressed as a whole rather than a disjointed response to two quite different texts. The central debate about the validity of online friendships in comparison to face-to-face ones was grasped from the start and the ideas in the texts were organised as arguments and counterarguments in a coherent and cohesive article. The opening and concluding paragraphs of these effective articles tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing the case. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text and were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. Responses usually recognised the possible dangers of online relationships and the superficiality of many of them claimed by Text B, but enthusiastically embraced the benefits and resources of social media as propounded by Text A. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were unconnected with the ideas outlined up to that point and were contradicted by some comments which had come before.

### *Accuracy*

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a writing mark in Level 6. These responses were often authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments and also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentence structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the contending views in the texts and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Common spellings for the task such as 'friendship', 'superficial' and 'interaction' were often inaccurate and sentences were frequently separated by commas rather than full stops. Semi-colons were sometimes inserted inappropriately and homophones were wrongly selected. Responses awarded Level 4 and Level 5 rarely contained much wholesale copying from the texts but some phrases were frequently reproduced, such as 'the synchronicity of shared experience', 'glorious mish-mash', 'lack deeper connections' and others, sometimes in a manner which did not demonstrate understanding of their meaning.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying



meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that candidates could not attain marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was very common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not achieve marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation.
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.
- aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience.
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

## **Section B**

### **Descriptive writing**

**Describe trying to sleep before an important day.**

**Write a description with the title, 'The view from the other side'.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates, the first being the most popular composition choice overall, and candidates achieved a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions were interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In the first task, there were various scenarios described although a majority chose to write about the night before an examination — often IGCSE English Paper 2 — or a test of some kind. There was a great variety of scenarios offered for the second question, often highly imaginative and original, and marks in Level 6 were awarded more often for this task than for any other composition question.

Responses were more effective if they contained vivid and specific details rather than more general or stereotypical ideas and images. Generalisation and lack of specific detail was a more common weakness in the first question, where some responses were mainly narrative in that while focused on the task, they frequently offered accounts of the actions taken during the night, adopting different sleeping positions, getting up for a drink, finding the cool side of the pillow, rather than creating the images required to convey effectively the anxiety of insomnia rather than simply asserting it. Relevance to the topic was sometimes a little insecure in both questions, but some responses to the first seemed to run out of ideas describing their bedroom and extended description by looking out of the window and describing storms, urban landscapes, or mysterious forests, losing focus and coherence. Others, describing the night before an examination or crucial interview, moved quickly to describing their projected or imagined performance the next day: one was a richly descriptive, engaging evocation of a nightmarish panic attack in an examination hall, and was written with great accuracy and sophistication, although its lack of relevance to sleeplessness affected its marks for content and structure. The 'night before an exam' scenario produced some responses awarded marks in Level 6 and at the top end of Level 5: while realistic and convincing, they were largely factual, missing opportunities to develop the 'well-chosen images' to lift content and structure marks out of Level 4. A small but significant number of responses to the second question were not descriptive but polemic or discursive pieces extolling the virtues of seeing other people's point of view, or lamenting the difference between wealthy and developing countries.

Some very effective responses to the first question focused description narrowly on a small area of their room, evoking the almost surreal transformation of the familiar in darkness and exhaustion, with ordinary items, reflecting the insomniac's inner turmoil, assuming lives of their own: '...a hunched, distorted figure, hunched over, matted hair tumbling down — but it is only a scarf drooping from a coat hanger...' or, '...fuzzy yet somehow distinct outlines of shapes and shadows, whispers of their solid daytime presence...'. Pathetic fallacy was employed successfully in several responses. Others concentrated on changing levels of light and sound as the night progressed with great effectiveness: 'I turn to face the wall and am met with flickering illuminations of the muffled nocturnal city, diluted fluorescent lights sneaking slyly past the incompetence of my blinds.' Responses awarded marks in Levels 6, 5 and 4 employed, with varying effectiveness, tactile images to convey the night-time magnification of usually trivial physical discomforts: sudden itches, the

roughness of a hitherto comfortable blanket, the sudden chill or increasing heat: 'My beloved memory-foam pillow seemed to be remembering a previous existence as an uneven heap of wet sand.'

In the second descriptive writing question, which elicited a great variety of scenarios, more effective responses were often views not of concrete objects or physical forms but of abstractions such as social exclusion, freedom, relative wealth, conflict or time. High-level responses also included descriptions from a much-changed life perspective: one awarded highly for content and structure described an Intensive Care Unit almost overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients from the point of view of a newly qualified doctor on her first day there, expecting ordered calm but hearing 'the impatient bellows of the doctors, their faces invisible behind phantasmagoric masks, the panicked squeaks of the nurses, mere blurs of blue and white scuttling around the maze of obstacles. The only constant was the whirring of the ventilators, which did little to mask the heart-wrenching rhapsody of the ICU's discombobulated choir, its percussion provided by hacking abrasive coughs and strained, gasping breaths...'. Closely observed details conveyed the exhaustion and apprehension of frantically overworked staff: '...swathes of crumpled bits of paper, stained half-empty coffee mugs, brimming laundry bins, their white paint peeling, filled with discarded plastic aprons and stained bedsheets..'. This was complex, vivid and engaging. Another most effective first-person description was that of a hospital ward seen by a nursing sister who had managed it for many years, but who was now paralysed by a devastating but unspecified illness and able to move only her eyes. Elsewhere were also descriptions of landscapes or towns horribly despoiled by war or natural disaster but remembered as places of great beauty or bustling prosperity.

In both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created convincing, evocative scenes in the best responses. Most were sustained and developed and at the highest level showed skill in building a detailed, often emotionally charged scene. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's attention by linking the different elements described in an engaging, cohesive response. Level 6 responses were characterised by this cohesive structure as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised and usually more predictable. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas. In the first question, some responses which created a convincing picture became rather prosaic and repetitive, or drifted away without an effective conclusion; sometimes the descriptions of bedrooms or other sleeping quarters such as dormitories were rather like inventories, with items pictured but not developed as 'well-chosen images' so did not evoke atmosphere or the feelings of the writers.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to become a little unbalanced or to slip into narrative with less descriptive detail. Some more clichéd features also appeared at this level, particularly in the first question: crumpled bedclothes, noisy air conditioners, rumbling stomachs, and a number of loudly ticking alarm clocks. In responses to both questions awarded marks in Level 5 and Level 4, some candidates offered scenes and writing more properly fitting questions in previous examination sessions, sometimes sitting rather awkwardly in the current composition. These featured views of mountains, rivers, forests and urban landscapes.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed. Other responses at this level became the narration of a series of events, of a climb up a mountain, or a failed job interview, or going up and downstairs in the middle of the night then oversleeping in the morning. An approach seen more commonly than usual involved discursive responses to the second question. Although some of these were organised and paragraphed, they contained limited descriptive focus. Some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing was evident in these responses, although some were well written and accurate.

High marks for Style and Accuracy often reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, similar details were often included but better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to create specific effects. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow. Imprecise use and lack of clarity meant that candidates could not achieve credit for a wide-ranging vocabulary. Obscure, sometimes archaic language was not helpful where it was not used with understanding.

In less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks achieved in the middle range, even where other technical aspects of style were more accurate. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included misagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and the omission of definite and indefinite articles was also common and damaging to otherwise quite accurate style at this level.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

- try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.
- keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.
- write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses.
- use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.

### **Narrative writing**

**Write a story with the title, ‘The invitation’.**

**Write a story which includes the words, ‘...nothing seemed to go right...’.**

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses. There were some narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title, and which, on occasion, seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations. In a few cases, this lack of relevance affected the mark for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension or drama and to vary the pace of the story were successful essential elements of narrative writing, as was the use of characterisation to create believable protagonists and characters. In the first question, the title set elicited a great variety of narratives, both first and third person and ranging from the shocking and sometimes harrowing to the highly dramatic and humorous. Narratives featuring invitations to parties and weddings were sometimes wistful in tone, recalling happier times before the impact on young lives of the pandemic. At all levels, stories based on the response to an unexplained invitation featured, which led the invitee into deadly danger or situations of gothic horror. The more effective of these managed to convince the reader of the reasons for accepting such an anonymous invitation, while at lower levels the recipient’s willingness to go immediately and often unaccompanied to a place of obvious danger strained credibility. These narratives sometimes successfully created a sense of mystery or peril, although they were less successful in explaining the motives of the usually psychopathic antagonists. Some engaging and more believable versions involved school or college initiation ceremonies of varying degrees of unpleasantness. Also convincing were the number of invitation stories which involved the cruel bullying of a vulnerable outsider or newcomer, with the group of ‘popular’ people using the party as a theatre of mockery. In some cases, highly effective stories were created from these plotlines by dialogue, characterisation and the shaping of the narrative to create moments of tension or resolution to satisfy the reader.

There were various structures employed in effective responses to the first question, as well as more straightforward chronological recount. While many responses began with the receipt of the invitation – often giving an opportunity for some engaging detail in the description of the embossed or otherwise elaborate envelope – others launched immediately into a moment of high drama or revelation, before providing the background to the incident. Elsewhere dual narratives and time lapse devices were employed with varying efficacy. Structures often betrayed a lack of balance, with the lead-up to and the receipt of the invitation taking considerable time and being followed by a rushed and arbitrary plotline. More effective responses showed an ability to create credible characters, even if the scenario itself was fantastic or unfamiliar. One awarded marks in Level 6 had a group of three friends arrive at an elegant house – black tie specified – to find themselves in a place of medieval torture situated below the dining room. The characterisation of the boys and their adolescent inability to resist a dare, conveyed almost entirely in dialogue, sustained the interest of the reader. Another in the same level was both tense and richly comic in its depiction of a nervous suitor invited to dinner where he planned to ask the notoriously fierce and volatile father for his daughter’s hand. The chronology was straightforward, and the tension was built up with varied animal references conveying the young man’s fear: ‘built like a grizzly bear with biceps bigger than my head and a beard thick enough to nest a colony of wasps’; ‘A shot gun hung on with wall with a deer’s head beside it ...a slaughterhouse indeed’; ‘The formidable beast sat right across from me, gnawing on his steak...’. The employment of deliberate bathos made for a successful ending. For the second question, there were many

different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability. A common scene at all levels was a protagonist's day at school or work which began badly with oversleeping or having no hot water and got worse with setbacks at every turn. There were many stories of lost passports, forgotten certificates of entry, missed trains and lost opportunities. Many of these were prosaic series of events with little differentiation of importance or effective climax. Some effective responses, which also featured mundane reversals, achieved marks in Level 6 because they used description, characterisation and carefully plotted structural devices to heighten the developing sense of fate's intervention and the climax on which the success of the story depended. Another at this level was a self-mocking tale of a bad day for a professor of Mathematics trying to compute the probability of so many minor catastrophes happening to the same person in the space of twenty-four hours.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless engaging for the reader. Candidates could achieve marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed story which was relevant to the task. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts. However, they were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying resolution. For 'The invitation' question, the content was often engaging and even ingenious. The structure, particularly the ending, was less well managed. One invitation was for 'a luxury tour of your new afterlife' which led the narrator through various circles of hell, and another was about an invitation to a beloved daughter's memorial service, and not the birthday party that the reader is initially led to believe. For the '...nothing seemed to go right...' question, the narrative was often situated in highly dramatic missions of epic or galactic importance which were very difficult to convey in the restrictions of an examination: these were overpacked with incident and the characters less developed.

Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks, for Level 5 marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were used as those in more effective narratives, but while the majority of less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result. Some responses became confusing and muddled in attempting to control stories. This was particularly seen in responses to the second question where the story sometimes seemed to have limited relevance to the task and there was limited attention paid to setting the scene or creating the characters.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6 and where coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were achieved. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent. Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A frequent reason for otherwise clearly written stories not achieving Level 5 was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these weaknesses also limited the marks achieved in the narrative writing.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.

- consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Don't rely on events.
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.
- use complicated vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0990/03  
Coursework Portfolio 03

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- Read critically and gave a thorough response to the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions and attitudes they identified in a text
- Assimilated ideas from a text to provide developed, thoughtful and sophisticated responses
- Supported their analysis, evaluation and comments with a detailed and specific selection of relevant ideas from a text
- Wrote original and interesting assignments which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them
- Sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of arguments, description or narrative
- Wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect
- Adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and context for each of the three assignments
- Demonstrated a high level of accuracy with their writing
- Engaged in a process of careful editing and proofreading in order to identify and correct errors in their writing.

## General comments

A significant number of candidates produced interesting coursework portfolios which contained varied work across a range of contexts. There was evidence to show that centres set tasks which allowed candidates flexibility to respond to subjects related to their personal interests or experiences. The majority of coursework portfolios contained writing of three different genres.

The majority of centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. The major concern for all Moderators was that markers of the coursework portfolios did not indicate errors in the final draft of each assignment. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for adjustment of marks.

## Administration

Successful administration was when centres:

- indicated all errors in the final draft of each assignment
- carried out a thorough process of internal moderation
- supplied specific comments and marks in relation to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- ensured that each portfolio of work was securely attached to the Individual Candidate Record Card (ICRC)
- accurately completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and ICRC, including any amendments made during internal moderation.

The Moderation Team reported an increase in the provision of summative comments related to the mark scheme provided at the end of each completed assignment. These were extremely helpful in helping

Moderators to understand how and why marks had been awarded and centres are thanked for following the process as instructed in the Coursework Handbook.

Centres who followed the instructions for carrying out internal moderation as directed in the Coursework Handbook are also thanked for engaging in this important process. There was a general trend of greater accuracy of marking by centres that had carried out internal moderation than centres that had not carried out internal moderation. Problems and some confusion occurred when centres did not record changes made at internal moderation on the candidates' Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRCs). Centres are requested to make sure that any changes made at internal moderation are also recorded on the ICRC as well as on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF).

A cause of concern for all Moderators was that some issues persist even though there are clear instructions in the Coursework Handbook and the same concerns have been raised in previous Principal Moderator Reports. In order to ensure effective and accurate marking is achieved, and that all paperwork arrives safely for moderation, it is essential that all the instructions given in the Coursework Handbook, and on the relevant forms, are carefully followed. Below highlights some of the most worrying issues related to the administration and annotation of candidates' work.

#### **Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment:**

- The majority of the final drafts showed little or no evidence of complying with the instruction in the Coursework Handbook that markers should indicate all errors in the final draft of each assignment. This process helps markers to effectively and accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work and to apply the most appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. If this process does not take place it is difficult for markers to make a balanced judgement. There was a significant and clear trend with the majority of centres, across all three assignments, for markers to award marks from the higher levels of the assessment criteria to work containing frequent, and often serious, errors. The absence of the indication of all errors in the final drafts could account for this rather worrying trend and the need for Moderators to adjust marking. It is important for all who mark the coursework portfolios to fully understand the importance of indicating and taking into account all errors in the final draft of each assignment. To avoid adjustment of marks for accuracy it is essential that centres engage in this process and clearly indicate errors in their candidates' work.

#### **Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC):**

- A significant number of centres did not attach the portfolios of work to the ICRC in accordance with the instructions in the Coursework Handbook and point 4 on the electronic version of the ICRC
- Some confusion was caused when centres included ICRCs for the whole cohort as well as the ICRCs for the sample sent; centres only need to send the ICRCs (securely attached to the coursework portfolio) for the candidates in the sample submitted for moderation
- A small number of centres provided their own version of an ICRC instead of using the one provided by Cambridge; these had to be requested by the Moderator, which slowed down the moderation process.

#### **Coursework portfolios:**

- A significant number of centres did not collate the individual assignments into complete coursework portfolios but instead placed the loose pages of work into the grey plastic envelopes and despatched them to Cambridge; this caused Moderators some difficulties and increased the risk of work becoming lost or mislaid
- All Moderators noticed an increase in the number of plastic wallets used to present candidates' work as an alternative to securely attaching the individual assignments to the ICRC; as with the point above, this caused Moderators some difficulties and increased the risk of work becoming lost or mislaid
- The tendency for some centres to include unnecessary cover sheets and extra copies of drafts continued from previous sessions; the only paperwork that should be included in the sample is clearly indicated in the Coursework Handbook.

## **Comments on specific assignments**

Candidates were successful when:

### **Assignment 1:**

- the form, purpose and intended audience of their writing was clear to the reader
- they responded to interesting and relatable texts
- they demonstrated analysis and evaluation with the provision of thoughtful and perceptive responses to the individual ideas and opinions identified within a text
- they wrote in a fluent, accurate and appropriate style.

Moderators commented that many candidates responded to texts which were of an appropriate length and challenge and which appealed to the interests of the candidates. Successful texts included articles about the merits of online learning during the Covid pandemic, feminism, political issues in the candidates' own countries and climate change. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated, or were of limited personal interest to the candidates; for example, Katie Hopkins on migration or children's names, Jeremy Clarkson's article about tigers, gun control in America, the death penalty and euthanasia. Previous Principal Moderator Reports have commented on the limitations of texts such as these. Centres are encouraged to use a good range of relevant and up-to-date texts for Assignment 1. Other unsuccessful texts were chapters from a novel (e.g. *The Great Gatsby*) and advertisements (e.g. Nissan Micra) because they tended to encourage candidates to analyse and comment on an author's use of literary features and techniques instead of evaluating ideas and opinions, as required by the mark scheme.

Some centres set one, or a limited number of texts, for a whole cohort. When this approach was adopted by a centre there was usually a tendency for candidates to produce responses which were very similar in content and structure. This made it difficult for candidates to create the original and sophisticated responses expected of the higher-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments of marks.

If centres are unsure about how to approach and set tasks for Assignment 1 they can refer to the Syllabus and the Coursework Handbook. Both documents provide advice and guidance about task setting and text selection and can be found on the school Support Hub via the main Cambridge website.

### **Reading:**

Although some centres were accurate with their marking of reading, as with the previous moderation sessions, there was a significant trend for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria. Candidates who successfully met the higher-level assessment criteria were those who demonstrated a consistently evaluative approach to most points in a text, and provided a developed, sophisticated response which made direct reference or included quotes from the text. Candidates who engaged in a general discussion about the topic or subject of a text, or those who did not thoroughly evaluate a text, tended to produce work which more appropriately met the Level 4 assessment criteria in Table B (reading). The most common reasons for adjustments to a centre's marks for reading were when Moderators identified a trend of candidates engaging in a general discussion about the topic of a text/s, or when the number of points covered were 'appropriate' rather than 'thorough'.

### **Writing:**

Many candidates responded to texts in an appropriate form and style. Letters, articles and speeches were the most popular choice of form and many candidates demonstrated some understanding of audience and purpose. When candidates were less successful with writing it was often because the form, intended audience and purpose of the writing was not clear. Moderators noted an increase in this type of response to Assignment 1. Quite often, some discussion points were confusing because it was not clear who the intended audience was. This made it difficult for the candidates to meet the highest-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments to writing marks for Assignment 1. Successful responses to Assignment 1 tasks were those in which the writing was highly effective, almost always accurate and consistent throughout with the application of form and style. Work which showed insecurity with form and style, such as the omission of an appropriate ending to a letter, a limited or inconsistent use of rhetorical devices for speeches, tended to meet the assessment criteria for Level 5, Table A (writing) or below. The Moderators noted that there was a general tendency for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria.



Inaccuracy was another common reason for the adjustment of marks for writing. When errors impaired meaning, such as the incorrect construction of sentences or use of grammar, typing errors, or the incorrect selection of words from a spellchecker, the overall quality and efficacy of the discussion was affected. Errors such as these are classed as serious and make it difficult for candidates to meet the higher-level assessment criteria; this type of writing is more characteristic of writing achieving marks from the middle to the lower levels of the assessment criteria.

### Advice to candidates for Assignment 1:

- Be prepared to thoroughly explore, challenge and discuss the ideas in the text
- Try to avoid making general comments about the topic or subject of the text: instead, try to make sure that your comments are specifically related to the ideas, opinions or attitudes that you have identified in the text
- Look for, and use in your response, inferences made indirectly in the text
- Look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the text and comment on them
- Try to develop your points to create a thorough, detailed and clear line of argument or discussion
- Make sure that the audience and purpose of your writing is clear and adapt your style accordingly
- Make sure that you carefully proofread your work and check that your punctuation, vocabulary choices and grammar are correct.

### Assignment 2:

The majority of tasks set for Assignment 2 were appropriate and encouraged candidates to write in a descriptive style. Many candidates wrote engaging and vivid descriptions from experience, which were a pleasure to read. It was also pleasing to note that the reduction in responses characterised by the inclusion of overlong narrative preambles explaining the events leading up to the focus on the description has continued from previous sessions and there was much greater focus on description. Moderators also noticed that there were fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions.

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those where the candidates had carefully selected vocabulary to create a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place or person, and which were well sequenced and carefully managed for deliberate effect. Successful responses included descriptions of towns or cities in which candidates lived, important events in candidates' lives and descriptions of the thoughts and feelings about candidates' experiences of being locked down during the Covid 19 pandemic. Less successful tasks were those which asked candidates to describe events or scenarios of which they had no personal experience. For example: gothic descriptions, haunted houses and unlikely journeys into forests which involved the narrators finding dead bodies or being murdered. This type of writing is characteristic of work achieving marks from the middle to lower levels of the assessment criteria, although it was noticed that many centres awarded marks from the higher-level assessment criteria. This was quite often a reason for adjustment of marks from Table C (content and structure).

Whilst many candidates showed a secure and confident understanding of language there was still a general tendency by a significant number of centres to award marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to work which contained overworked or overwrought language. Some Moderators commented that this seemed to be actively encouraged by some centres. To achieve marks from the higher-level assessment criteria, candidates need to demonstrate a confident and secure understanding and use of language for specific effect. This is difficult for candidates to achieve if they over-use adjectives, include inappropriate images or idioms and/or use obscure or archaic language. The overworking of language was a common reason for Moderators adjusting marks.

Another common reason for adjustments to marks was when Moderators identified a trend of awarding marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to writing that contained a limited range of sentence structures, incorrectly constructed sentences, or contained frequent errors with punctuation and grammar. Writing that achieves marks from Levels 5 and 6 of Table D (style and accuracy) is expected to be consistently accurate, consistent with the chosen register and demonstrate an ability to use a range of sentences for specific effect. The Moderators saw some writing which displayed these characteristics, but a significant number of the assignments receiving marks from centres from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D more frequently displayed the characteristics of writing expected from Level 4 or below. Many candidates 'told' the reader about the scene being described, rather than 'showing' the reader with a careful and precise use of vocabulary and images. The Moderators also noticed a general trend for candidates to use repeated sentence structures and create almost list-like descriptions.

In addition, the work of a significantly large number candidates contained frequent and serious errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of candidates' work. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, changes in tenses, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and errors of grammar. Quite often, the meaning of sentences was blurred, or meaning was lost altogether. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as 'minor'. As mentioned earlier in this report, the absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult for the Moderators to determine whether errors had been taken into account when marks had been awarded. Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which 'best fits' the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that all errors are identified and indicated by the markers. Engaging in this process allows markers to effectively balance the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and award marks that are most appropriate to their candidates' work.

Information and guidance on how to apply the mark schemes are given in Coursework Handbook. Examples of the standard of work expected at the different levels of the mark scheme are also provided in the Coursework Handbook.

### **Advice to candidates for Assignment 2:**

- Make sure that the vocabulary you use matches the context and content of your description
- Make sure that the images you create match the context and content of your description
- Try to 'show' readers your imagined scenario instead of 'telling' them about it
- Keep your focus on the details of your description and avoid slipping into narrative
- Carefully check and proofread your work to identify and correct common errors such as missing articles and prepositions, switches in tenses and typing errors
- Try to avoid repetitive sentence structures; instead use a range of sentences to create specific effects.

### **Assignment 3:**

Much of the task setting for Assignment 3 was generally appropriate and Moderators saw some engaging, effective narratives which were well managed and convincing. Successful narratives were those in which the candidates created stories which featured well defined plots and strongly developed features of fiction writing such as description, characterisation and convincing details and events. The narration of personal experiences and events, or when candidates were able to create convincing details and events within their chosen genre (e.g. fantasy), tended to be quite successful. Candidates were generally less successful when their understanding of audience and genre was insecure, and the resulting narratives lacked credibility and were not very convincing. Moderators commented that this sort of writing was often seen when candidates were writing in the genre of detective, horror, murder mystery or revenge stories. Stories such as these, although containing a definite beginning, middle and ending, were often unrealistic and incredible, or lacked development of character or plot. This sort of writing is classed as 'relevant' or 'straightforward' and should expect to be awarded marks from Level 4 or below from Table C (content and structure). Moderators noticed that there was a trend with a significant majority of the work sampled for centres to award marks from Levels 5 and 6 to writing which more appropriately fitted the Level 4, or below, assessment criteria. This was quite frequently a reason for marks to be adjusted.

When Moderators saw very accurate work containing precise well-chosen vocabulary, and which maintained a consistent register throughout, they could agree when centres awarded marks from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D (style and accuracy). As with Assignments 1 and 2, Moderators noticed a significant trend for centres to award marks from the highest levels of the mark scheme to work which contained frequent and persistent errors and which more accurately met the assessment criteria from Level 4 or below in Table D. This was a common reason for adjustment of marks. The comments made for Assignment 2 with regards to accuracy and the annotation of errors are also relevant to Assignment 3 and should be noted by all who mark coursework.

**Advice to candidates for Assignment 3:**

- Try to create stories that are realistic, credible and convincing
- Remember that characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader; do not just rely on events
- Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider an individual and original selection of content
- Carefully proofread your work and check your writing for errors which will affect your mark, such as punctuation, your use of prepositions and articles, tenses and construction of sentences.

**Good practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was when:**

- Centres followed the guidelines and instructions set out in the syllabus and the Coursework Handbook
- A wide range of appropriate texts were used for Assignment 1, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond, and were relevant to their interests
- Centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience
- Teachers gave general advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- Candidates revised, edited and carefully proofread their first drafts in order to improve their writing
- Candidates revised, edited and carefully proofread their final drafts in order to identify and correct errors
- Teachers provided informative summative comments and marks relating to the mark scheme at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- Teachers indicated all errors in the final drafts of each completed assignment
- Centres engaged in a process of internal moderation and clearly indicated this in the coursework portfolios, on the Individual Candidate Record Cards and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

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Paper 0990/04  
Speaking and Listening Test 04

## Key messages

Despite the ongoing disruption caused by the global pandemic, the administration of the component by the overwhelming majority of the centres that entered candidates for the June 2021 series was accurate and helpful to the moderating team. Centres are to be congratulated on their continued commitment and professionalism during the present most testing of times.

Generally, centre assessment was accurate and in line with the standard. It is pleasing to note that examiners have become aligned to the relatively new descriptors very quickly. Most adjustments recommended during moderation are the result of 'fine tuning' rather than a need to correct serious misinterpretations of the mark scheme.

The timings of the test are very important. **Part 1** should consist of an individual talk, most likely a presentation of a chosen topic, and should last between 3–4 minutes in length. A talk lasting less than 3 minutes will rarely satisfy the first descriptor for Level 5 that states the talk should consist of content that is 'full and well-organised'. Equally, a talk lasting considerably longer than 4 minutes also runs the risk of not satisfying the same descriptor. **Part 2** should consist of a conversation lasting for 7–8 minutes in length. Examiners who do not ensure this stipulation is met are doing a serious disservice to the candidates being tested.

Candidates should choose topics that they are familiar with and should consider that unfamiliarity will be exposed in **Part 2**, no matter how well **Part 1** has been prepared. Simply choosing a topic to 'impress' the examiner but that the candidate has only a superficial knowledge of will never be as successful as a topic chosen because the candidate genuinely has an interest in it.

## General comments

### Administration

As with previous series, centre administration was of a high standard. Where there were issues the following guidelines may help to clarify administrative requirements:

- Every test should begin with a full introduction to include the date on which the candidate is being examined. Think in the same terms as for a written examination where each candidate would be expected to complete their own information at the beginning of the answer booklet. For Component 04 it is the examiner who should complete the introduction but the same principle of identifying key information on an individual basis is still relevant. Generic introductions for even a small cohort of candidates is not acceptable.
- Centres may choose to create and use their own versions of the Oral Examinations Summary Form (OESF) as opposed to utilising the one provided by Cambridge Assessment but in these cases the form used must accurately reflect the information required. One centre chose to use its own form but there was no breakdown of the marks given for **Part 2**. Instead of showing separate individual marks for Speaking and Listening, only an overall total for **Part 2** was included. This is not helpful for the moderator and should be avoided.
- Perhaps because of restrictions caused by the pandemic, there seemed to be less internal moderation taking place in this series. If so it is understandable, but centres, particularly where more than one examiner is involved in the series, are urged to complete internal moderation if at all possible.

## Conduct of the test

Generally, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given many opportunities to express their views and demonstrate their range of oratory skills.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- In some centres, examiners engaged in an ‘off topic’ conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their **Part 1** task. While this was aimed at putting candidates at ease before the test, it was not a necessary part of the process and is potentially distracting for candidates who want to focus on their prepared talks. It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the examiner’s formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the **Individual Talk**. If an examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is done before the recording is started.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner’s responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met.
- **Part 2** is now a conversation between the candidate and the examiner based on the topic presented in **Part 1**. A **Part 2** that consists of a formal question and answer format is not beneficial for the candidate, particularly if the questions have little relation to each other and do not consider the candidate’s previous replies. A conversation which is more fluid and evolves in a more natural way offers the candidate more opportunities to satisfy the higher level descriptors because the candidate’s answers, rather than the examiner’s questions, are driving the conversation forwards.

## Comments on specific sections

### **Part 1 – Individual Talk**

Formal presentations were almost exclusively the medium for approaching this part of the test in this series. This is an observation and certainly not a criticism. Candidates should be commended for preparing thoroughly for the test by researching their chosen topics in great depth. Many of the presentations were memorised: while this is not recommended, it is acceptable as long as there remains an element of natural fluency to the delivery. The most successful tasks attempted were those where the candidates displayed a strong base knowledge of their chosen topics and were genuinely interested in what they were saying. Less successful, in terms of the marks achieved, were those talks where the candidate had chosen a topic because the theme sounded ‘mature’ or ‘serious’ but where the candidate had little real in depth knowledge of the subject. This was not such an issue in **Part 1** where thorough preparation often disguised the lack of depth, but in the Conversation in **Part 2** the paucity of understanding of the topic was exposed and the performance suffered as a result. Choosing topics merely to try to impress the examiner/moderator is not recommended. It is much better to choose a topic of interest. When deciding on a topic for **Part 1**, candidates should bear in mind that half the total marks for the test are awarded in **Part 2** so it is vital that candidates choose topics that they are confident they can converse on in depth and at length.

A strong element of presentations achieving Level 5 in **Part 1** was the structure underpinning the talks supported by appropriate timing. A clearly defined persuasive argument or a cyclical arrangement that brought the concluding statement back to the initial point often helped candidates to fulfil ‘the full and well-organised’ descriptor for Level 5. Less successful structures tended to meander from point to point without such a strong sense of purpose. While structure itself does not confirm a mark in Level 5, it does provide a strong basis for candidates to exhibit their linguistic and presentational skills. Talks awarded marks in Level 5 also consisted of more than just linear narratives that described one event after another. Self-reflection and analysis are important elements in moving a talk beyond the adequate.

Some examples of productive **Part 1** topics from this series include:

- Introverts and extroverts
- Global Sustainability
- Temporal Illusions
- Feminism in literature
- Speaking as a tour guide at Chernobyl (in character)
- Learning languages
- The importance of money

- Beauty
- Being in care
- Pollution and its effect on the local environment
- How school could be better
- Should (name specific video game) be banned?

Some examples of less successful **Part 1** topics include:

- Education (Needs focus)
- Video Games (Too generalised)
- Social Media (Too generalised)
- My family holiday (If restricted to linear narrative)
- Television programmes (Particularly soap operas)
- Football (Too generalised – better to focus on own experience as a supporter, for example)
- Mental health (Needs to be carefully managed and avoid generalisations)
- Covid-19 (Better to focus on own experience during pandemic and effects thereof)

It should be noted that almost any topic chosen can be productive or less successful based on the candidate's own knowledge of the subject, the depth of research undertaken and the degree of preparation. However, some topics offer more opportunities for development and discussion than others. It is often the focus that is the deciding factor. One candidate's version of 'My favourite holiday' could be a simple narrative exposition of the events that occurred whilst another candidate could use the same topic to develop a more interesting talk on how experiences have shaped maturity and a greater understanding of the world.

## **Part 2 – Conversation**

Good examiners understand their role in **Part 2**. They are not in teaching mode, they do not feel the need to correct or contradict statements made by the candidates if they disagree with them and they do not try to monopolise the conversation. Good examiners are empathetic to the candidates, take an interest in the topics chosen and are flexible in their manipulation of the conversation to tease out the very best the candidates can offer by using lots of open questioning and subtle prompts. Sympathetic examining in **Part 2** is a really important factor in allowing candidates to thrive and there was satisfying evidence of such good practice being employed by examiners in this series. Examiners understood their role in **Part 2** was to provide stimulus for the candidates to express their ideas and opinions on their chosen topics. Generally, candidates were not interrupted when in full flow and examiners were not judgemental when the candidates' responses could be deemed inaccurate or potentially controversial. Examiners do not need to agree with the statements the candidates make but may seek to challenge more able candidates if they feel this will stimulate them to develop their ideas more fully. This is a judgement call for the examiner and should only be made if the examiner is certain a candidate's reaction will be a positive one.

Where there were issues and improvement can be made in examining **Part 2** the following advice is offered:

- The timing of **Part 2** is controlled by the examiner. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure **Part 2** lasts for at least 7 minutes in order to give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills and accrue marks.
- **Part 2** conversations solely conducted on a question and answer basis, where the series of questions is only loosely connected and responses from the candidate are then ignored in favour of the next question on the list, do not fulfil the descriptors in the higher levels.
- It is important that questions are open and not closed. Closed questions do not allow candidates to consistently answer in the necessary detail to move beyond adequate.
- Examiners must ensure the conversation is connected to the ideas presented in **Part 1** for the whole of **Part 2**. Veering into more generalised conversation does not help the candidate's performance. For example: if a candidate's topic is about Physics, the examiner is justified in asking a question related to the candidate's future career plans in this sphere. However, a more general question about how the candidate has performed in other subjects is not on topic.
- Allowing the conversations to progress beyond the maximum time allowed of 8 minutes is unnecessary and may become counter-productive. It is very doubtful whether any contribution made by a candidate after the 8 minutes have been exceeded will have any bearing on the mark being awarded for **Part 2**.

### Advice to centres

- Keep preparing your candidates as you have for this series.
- Administering the conversation in **Part 2** can be quite challenging for examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the examiner but they should not be restrictive, and, of course, the candidate should have no prior knowledge of them.
- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test.
- Try to dissuade candidates from simply reeling off a memorised talk in **Part 1** that may have fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.
- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful.

### Advice to candidates

- Practise your presentation but do not learn it by heart and then attempt to regurgitate it verbatim in the test.
- Make sure your talk lasts between 3–4 minutes. Aim for 4 minutes rather than 3 minutes to allow for speaking more quickly under pressure in the actual test.
- Have bullet point notes on one side of a cue card to help prompt you in **Part 1**. These bullet points give structure to your talk. Be mindful that full sentences and detailed notes are not allowed.
- Develop each bullet point in a lively and enthusiastic way when delivering your talk.
- Prepare for **Part 2** by trying to predict the kind of questions you may well be asked but do not prepare memorised responses.
- Listen attentively to what the examiner is saying in **Part 2** especially if being prompted to give a detailed response to a point being made.
- Do not be afraid to ask the examiner's opinion in **Part 2** or to ask a direct question related to your ongoing conversation as this demonstrates you leading the discussion in a positive way.
- If you do not understand a question then say so to the examiner who should repeat or rephrase it. It is better to do this than give a response that is irrelevant or off topic.