

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/11
Passages for Comment

GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidates produced some proficient and thoughtful work. All questions set achieved satisfactory differentiation amongst the candidates. Indeed, there was much to enjoy, with a real spread of abilities. Even the less able candidates sometimes demonstrated lively and engaging responses which helped to increase their marks. There were, however, some competent candidates who wasted time on feature spotting and failed to analyse texts in any reasonable depth. Overall, candidates produced meritorious responses to directed writing questions. There was evidence of more thorough preparation for this examination than in previous sessions. Yet, it should be noted that Examiners felt in some cases there was a genuine need to ensure that the English language skills of some candidates lower in the range of marks should be monitored in order to ensure that they are ready and confident enough to enter an examination at this level. At the top end of the range there were some pleasing and discriminating responses to the questions on language and style with candidates able to demonstrate an understanding of how extracts were structured and how different sections of the piece related to each other. Candidates in the middle of the range showed a good understanding of the material without always building on their initial insights. Less secure answers tended to rely on paraphrase, or, as already noted, offer comments on technical features – such as the use of commas and full stops – without really exploring the effects of specific words and phrases, the qualities and images they brought to mind or the moods they conjured up. Time management was satisfactory in the main, although some candidates did feel the need to answer three questions rather than the specified two.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Question 1

- (a) This was a popular question with many thorough responses produced. Many candidates were aware of the potential humour throughout the passage and noticed the changes in tone. Key aspects of differentiation were the degree to which candidates engaged with details of language and imagery (of which there was an abundance to choose from), and their ability to distinguish the different attitudes to the environment presented by the writer and his friend, Craig. Indeed, the better answers were able to go beyond narrative. The very best answers picked up on the mood progression throughout the text, commenting on the critical and sarcastic self-deprecating tone of the writer. Analysis of the figurative language was sometimes brilliantly executed with insightful comments on the sense of a battleground, of prehistory and an elemental atmosphere. Many weaker candidates engaged almost exclusively in feature spotting without further development of the features' effects. They tended to be concerned with lists of similes and metaphors copied from the text, with no accompanying analysis or consideration of effects. Some candidates failed to read the irony in the opening paragraph and thought the place really was called 'Badlands'.
- (b) Almost all candidates found this task accessible. Candidates at the top of the range had a secure focus on the task set and produced appropriate openings of pieces that reflected Craig's eco-friendly, laid-back perspective and celebrated Waddy Point as a natural refuge from the pressures of modernity. A number of effective answers put a very successful and positive spin on the original material. However, the article for a travel magazine was sometimes erroneously rendered as an advertisement for Waddy Point. Less secure responses focused too much on Craig's opinion (usually extremely negative) of the passage's author and wrote with an inappropriate sense of purpose.

Question 2

- (a) The best answers were sensitive to the tone of the piece and how the writer made this atmosphere intensify throughout the text. Perceptive comments were made on the contrast between expectation and reality and how irony lay within the descriptions. The passage's gloomy imagery and tone of despair and hope gradually dispelled was noted by the majority of candidates. Authorial voice was thoroughly understood by many able candidates. There was a lot of material for candidates of all levels of ability to work with, from feature spotting to thorough analysis, so this was a passage that achieved particularly good differentiation. The historical context of this passage appeared to be understood by the considerable majority of candidates. Less successful answers criticised the text for its lack of colour and read the repetition as a flaw in the text. Some candidates misread the tone of the passage and described it as comic and entertaining. Some candidates misunderstood the genre, reading it as a piece of non-fiction that was somehow informing travellers why they should avoid Chicago.
- (b) A good number of interesting, strong responses were seen. Effective answers captured the mood of the original piece successfully, combining a clear and strong sense of the location and the mood of the visitors, their changing responses and aspirations. There were some very perceptive character studies informed by the original text. However, a number of candidates wrote in the first person and/or depicted arrivals in places other than cities (including, surprisingly, rural locations). There were a number of responses dealing almost exclusively with arrivals at airports, which limited opportunities to reflect the language of the original passage especially. Indeed, there were also a number of candidates who went beyond the original passage's narrative, the newly arrived character achieving unqualified success too quickly and easily. The least effective answers contained huge leaps in time, with insufficient structural signals for the reader.

Question 3

- (a) This passage struck a chord with most candidates; there were some very interesting and detailed responses. The very best answers showed perceptive analysis of the imagery in the speech, with the poetic features highlighted and responded to. Such answers noted its persuasive rhetoric and responded to its structural elements. There were a lot of competent answers here, too, and it proved to be a passage that was accessible to the less able candidate. However, some missed opportunities to comment on the conventions of speech writing successfully employed by Mbeki, the many stages of the narrative he relates, and the allusions that explore his relationship with geography, wildlife and his people's tempestuous history. In such cases, the opportunities for reward became limited because such answers tended to offer a narrower range of insight, tending to focus exclusively on the appeal for unity, and the use of the first person personal pronoun to denote pride.
- (b) On the whole this answer was well attempted by most candidates with a strong sense of cultural belonging coming through. The purpose was significantly well understood. The task allowed candidates of all nationalities to show their linguistic skill, while giving them a clear 'hook'. All sorts of interesting responses emerged, with references ranging from Hugo Chavez to Rosa Parks. This seemed to be a task clearly enjoyed by candidates. There was a great variety of national histories presented by candidates situated in different countries who frequently produced "ringing affirmations of pride and identity". Such responses produced a high degree of personal engagement, impassioned language, and clear identification with the patriotic subject matter that could be broached. The few rubric violations noted were: writing again about South Africa (rather than "a different country"), and not specifying a country at all.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/12
Passages for Comment

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Question 1

- (a) This passage was warmly responded to, with some excellent answers. The very best responses ranged widely around the text, and the humour was nicely picked up. The analysis of the smog description was often perceptively handled with the seeming contrast between the beauty of something which is also devastating cleverly grasped. There seemed to be lot of detail for the stronger candidates to comment on, with the potential to provide a broad overview offered to all candidates. Many answers successfully focused on the structure and development of the material as it progressed. However, less secure answers tended to misinterpret the tone of the passage – especially misunderstanding the nuances of the humour employed by the writer – and assumed the writer enjoyed all aspects of his journey. Other less secure answers tended to focus on the perspective of the writer and misunderstood his purpose, judging it to be an informative piece on the perils of pollution and the environment.
- (b) Many candidates wrote effective responses featuring an appropriate amount of hyperbole and suitably great earnestness. A sound point of positive differentiation was the ability to comment appropriately on “the attractiveness of the local scenery” (as many candidates restricted themselves to descriptions of deluxe buses and superior customer service). However, some candidates could not resist the tongue-in-cheek nature of the original text, and described the dangerous roads and crushed conditions in their advert, thus causing an uneven sense of purpose and leading to some rather fluctuating aspects of style and concern.

Question 2

- (a) This was quite a popular question. A useful point of differentiation was whether the candidates understood the day-dreaming segments and the transition point between those and the dealing with reality. Effective responses could also comment on the passage's humour effectively and focused not only on Walter but made astute characterisation comments on Mrs Mitty. The analysis of this couple's relationship was perceptive and showed a lively understanding of Walter's fantasies. The use of repetitive phrases and the contrasts between the mundane world Walter inhabited and the way life was going on in the world outside his mind were explored in detail and with some nuance in such answers. However, less secure responses were confused and neglected most of the passage, limiting their comments to the fantasy scenes.
- (b) This answer was on the whole well done, with nicely structured responses and a perceptive sense of purpose. The quality of the directed writing response depended considerably on the degree of understanding of the passage. A useful point of differentiation was the degree to which candidates characterised Mrs Mitty. Effective pieces of directed writing produced succinct and purposeful epistles focusing on the underlying delusional problems afflicting her husband, and seeking specialised help accordingly. Even less secure answers understood enough to compose letters seeking help for the writer's husband, especially as he posed a grave risk to his own and other characters' safety whilst driving. The least successful answers tended to misunderstand the nature of the passage and the task itself.

Question 3

- (a) A number of informed and detailed answers analysed the persuasive features of the speech and showed a discriminating awareness of language effects. Perceptive answers commented on the change in tone and the irony of Kenyatta's words regarding violence. On the whole, there was general understanding of the tone of the speech and the appeal for unity. Some discriminating comments were made in the most perceptive answers about the ways in which a moral tone would appear in the text as the speaker offered his views about the path to a righteous life. Overall, the majority of candidates adopted a straightforward approach to content and structure and sensed the direction and development of the material with confidence and insight. Less successful answers tended to resort to paraphrase or to avoid central sections of the extract.
- (b) Directed writing responses were, on the whole, successful. Good answers produced impassioned and engaged writing and most candidates appreciated the requirement to use rhetorical language for the purpose of soliciting support for a cause. Promoting positive qualities of the espoused organisation, and not merely airing grievances or denigrating other groups in a sustained rant, was an important discriminating point.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/13
Passages for Comment 13

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/21
Composition 21

GENERAL COMMENTS

The overall performance of candidates entered for this component was comparable with that of previous exam sessions, though Examiners reported seeing fewer scripts at the top end of the ability range. Nonetheless, there were some focused and informed responses which were enjoyable to read.

At the lower end of the range, a number of responses were marked by a level of accuracy not commensurate with AS Level standard. The most frequent language problems were of tense confusion, lack of subject/verb agreement, absence of paragraphing and inaccurate punctuation.

More candidates than usual opted to write 500-550 words. Candidates are reminded that very short work is likely to be self-penalising.

To avoid unnecessary additional work on the part of the Examiner and ensure that the candidate's complete response is given consideration, Centres are kindly reminded of the need to instruct candidates to:

- write clearly on scripts the number and/or title of the question selected;
- fasten all of their response sheets securely together.

If there was one question in **Section A** that troubled a few, it was **Question 3**, for which a number of candidates failed to provide a contrasting pair of reminiscences, or got carried away and lapsed into straightforward narrative, more-or-less writing stories. In addition, there remains a tendency in **Section B** to state a conclusion at the outset where candidates would be better advised to present an exposition and build up to their conclusion.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Section A: Narrative/Descriptive/Imaginative

Question 1

This was a popular question with a very wide range of interpretations. Most candidates managed something that had a twist at the end. There were some good responses with some rather simple narratives in other compositions; occasionally some rather fairy-tale responses with quite a generalised view of characterisation.

Question 2

This proved to be a popular choice, and produced some good and imaginative ideas about futuristic worlds; others tended to be clichéd desert island material with the plane crash quite often taking up more space than the business of actually being a survivor. A lot of candidates wrote a rather tedious exposition, as though they were going to write 300 pages. The majority, of whatever standard, tried hard to create an atmosphere of mystery and tension and this impressed the Examiners. The strongest candidates concluded the opening chapter with a convincing cliff-hanger.

Question 3

There were some highly competent responses to this question, with contrasts fully in evidence and changes in age and experience brought out very well. Most candidates did manage to do something more than tell a story, and, at the top end, there were really interesting, contrasted pieces. Some were quite moving. A small number of candidates simply wrote one piece. One or two had both halves of the partnership talking about now, or about the past. At the lower end of the ability range, there was an awful lot of greeting card sentimentality in the falling in love sections.

Question 4

Imaginative and descriptive responses demonstrated some thoughtful and effective vocabulary and expression with sentence structure variation clearly marked. Other responses tended to be narrative rather than descriptive. Occasionally, candidates wrote about places that they had been to themselves, and these were often very interesting and personal.

Section B: Discursive/Argumentative

Question 5

This was a popular choice with some well exemplified material; candidates showed personal and informed knowledge about the topic and a variety of approaches succeeded on different levels. However, there are blind alleys implicit, and a number went up them (e.g. writing only about one source of revenue or one sport and, as a consequence, repeating themselves quite a lot) leaving the reader admiring candidates' general skills but searching for something to reward beyond that. The strongest responses dealt with a convincing range of particular examples. Few candidates were able to balance the argument before coming out on one side or the other for themselves.

Question 6

This was an effective idea which was answered well by quite a number of candidates, bringing contrasts out very well indeed. Faith was often regarded by candidates as being belief in something, rather than religious faith, and this was perfectly acceptable. Few candidates actually took to heart the instruction to write a newspaper article, so most were simply argumentative pieces. Some candidates never got near to what we might be being saved from.

Question 7

There were some good responses to this popular question, with candidates taking some strong personal views on the topics; better answers showed informed exemplification. Many candidates managed some sound examples and could see that there are exceptions where rules can and should be broken. Most candidates grasped the point of this question. Many candidates were able to cite historical/political examples which were impressive.

Question 8

There were effective answers to this question but those at the lower end of the ability range tended to offer mirrored structures in each letter. Many candidates were able to write convincingly, using an appropriate tone. Some candidates simply reviewed the nature of providing a public service such as running a hospital, without ever really producing an argument for why they should not have funds cut. However, a good number of candidates seemed to know plenty about their chosen service, so, even where the language was not strong, the content was acceptable.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/22
Composition 22

GENERAL COMMENTS

The overall performance of candidates entered for this component was comparable with that of previous exam sessions, though Examiners reported seeing fewer scripts at the top end of the ability range. Nonetheless, there were some focused and informed responses which were enjoyable to read.

At the lower end of the range, a number of responses were marked by a level of accuracy not commensurate with AS Level standard. The most frequent language problems were of tense confusion, lack of subject/verb agreement, absence of paragraphing and inaccurate punctuation.

More candidates than usual opted to write 500-550 words. Candidates are reminded that very short work is likely to be self-penalising.

To avoid unnecessary additional work on the part of the Examiner and ensure that the candidate's complete response is given consideration, Centres are kindly reminded of the need to instruct candidates to:

- write clearly on scripts the number and/or title of the question selected;
- fasten all of their response sheets securely together.

In **Section A**, *The Jungle* and *The Gangster* were popular choices; many candidates seized the chance to use films and computer games as their source material, which was not always a good idea. In **Section B**, a relatively small number of candidates opted for **Question 8**. There remains a tendency in **Section B** to state a conclusion at the outset where candidates would be better advised to present an exposition and build up to their conclusion.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Section A: Narrative/Descriptive/Imaginative

Question 1

Question 1 was popular, evoking the full range of responses, in terms of content and quality. There were some good efforts to establish mood, atmosphere and conventions; less successful ones relied on badly articulated and badly punctuated dialogue which limited effective progress and development, tending to fall out as predicted, with many criminals, drug-addicts etc. Some candidates went deeper into motivation, character creation, and gave a real sense of place and mood. However, much of the description of place was film-derived and unconvincing.

Question 2

This composition was solidly if unspectacularly done; some candidates focused too much on narrative. There were lots of stories about friends reunited and some very pedestrian descriptions of character and appearance at times, with candidates not really seeing how to use detail to create an impression without being explicit. There were an awful lot of poorly handled accounts of school proms. Nonetheless, many candidates managed clear contrasts.

Question 3

In attempts at this question, sometimes exposition obstructed the development of the main focus of the title, delaying introduction of the central topic. There were some answers that really went for character development and these worked well. The best responses talked about quite ordinary situations, rather than thinking that exotic was going to be more convincing.

Question 4

There was a varied range of responses to this question and some candidates were let down by a focus on narrative rather than descriptive. These ignored the instruction about description and unloaded the survivors' essay. A number of candidates selected this question and then seemed to have no knowledge of the sort of terrain or wildlife that lives in a jungle. Some attempted a sense of mystery with the idea of jungle noises at night. Very few candidates saw it as an opportunity for word painting. Some Examiners found genuine efforts being made to evoke mystery and the unknown, with some good twists.

Section B: Discursive/Argumentative

Question 5

This was a popular choice but sometimes essays focused on the benefits of the Internet rather than the central words of the title. There were lots of accounts of the history of the Internet and its current uses. At the top end, candidates did move towards some sense of the ethics and morality of the net, though this tended to centre on pornography. There was much discussion of why the Internet should be limited in order to stop adolescents from damaging their brains etc. through over-indulgence.

Question 6

This was not a common choice and the question was generally satisfactorily attempted rather than brilliantly. Compositions were usually successful, though some candidates chose real people. Some candidates wrote about two different people and these were not penalised. Many did not really take on board the instruction to write for a magazine. Others managed the glossy magazine tone quite well. Some football-loving candidates successfully wrote in the style of a fanzine.

Question 7

Proficient and competent responses to this question showed good focus and knowledge of the topic; less secure ones tended to offer a history of technology. Many candidates balanced the two quite well but there was an awful lot of floundering here, with a lot of candidates giving lists of technologies without ever really tackling the question. Many candidates refused to see that they were being asked to say what they thought, not just simply arrange a series of possible arguments.

Question 8

This question was popular with a few Centres, though candidates often struggled with ideas of national security. Some candidates took seriously the injunction to write speeches, and worked hard to make their work sound like it could be spoken. One or two managed the trite conventions that dominate public speaking contests, with full reference to learned oppositions etc.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/23
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