

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/01
Reading

Key message

Candidates should pay careful attention to the wording of each question and construct their answers solely on the basis of the texts. Also, candidates should first look through all the questions in **Part 1** and **Part 2** in order to avoid any repetition while answering.

In **Part 1**, candidates should give short, straightforward answers to the questions, generally without lengthy comments, apart from **Question 1(h)**, using their own words, where possible.

In **Part 2**, candidates should produce an extended response in the format of a comparative essay, extracting only relevant information from both texts and avoiding retelling the stories or merely presenting quotations from both texts.

General comments

Both texts were processed successfully by the majority of candidates, as demonstrated by the variety of interesting responses produced. **Questions 1(a) – 1(d)** required simple, straightforward answers, and were generally done well. Those candidates who paid attention to the number of marks available for each question, especially **Questions 1(f), 1(g)** and **1(h)**, tended to do better as they included all the expected points in their responses. **Questions 1(e) - 1(i)** needed interpretation and/ or explanation, and some weaker candidates resorted to lifting chunks of text rather than targeting the demands of the question. **Question 2**, which required candidates to demonstrate analytical and comparative as well as language skills, was more challenging for the majority of candidates.

In some cases, the quality of a candidate's handwriting made the script difficult to read. Candidates are also reminded to consider timing when planning their responses.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1, Question 1

Content

It should be noted that while the majority of candidates gave answers of appropriate length, some candidates gave disproportionately lengthy answers even to 1-mark questions, e.g. **Question 1(a)** or **Question 1(d)**. On the other hand, some responses to the 4-mark **Question 1(h)** were too short. In addition, the requirement of paraphrasing was not observed by some candidates.

- (a) Many candidates answered only one part of this question, i.e. where the protagonist met the woman, and forgot about when.
- (b) Many candidates identified 'doodling', not 'a girl's portrait', as the reason why the protagonist made the conclusion about his ability to draw.
- (c) The strongest candidates were able to paraphrase the text, even with the complex verb form (subjunctive) and the meaning of the word 'statski'.
- (d) The key word to answer this question correctly was 'dinner'. Some candidates answered just 'a servant', which changed the meaning completely.

- (e) The best answers included mention of the protagonist's participation in activities, both in youth and in older age. It was not enough to give just a list of activities he was engaged in.
- (f) The best candidates managed to pick up all three points and explained why the life of artists was different. Some candidates shifted their responses explaining 'in which way' it was different or deviated from the text altogether and expressed their own opinion.
- (g) This question did not cause many problems, though some candidates confused it with **Question 1(f)**.
- (h) The majority of candidates managed to describe all the disadvantages of the artists' life in comparison to the protagonist's and gave support with the appropriate quotes from the text. The best answers also included explanation of the reason why the protagonist was content.
- (i) (i) The majority of candidates gave the correct answer.
 - (ii) Almost all candidates explained the meaning of 'a light suppressed' correctly but 1 mark was awarded only to those candidates who managed to explain the phrase avoiding the word 'suyeta' ('fuss', 'routine') already used in the question.
 - (iii) Only half of the candidates managed to work out the meaning of this colloquial idiomatic expression. Some took the word 'devil' literary.

Language

The quality of language produced was generally good, though some candidates lifted substantial chunks from the text. The majority of answers did not contain any complex syntax, so punctuation was not a big consideration in responses to **Question 1**.

Question 2

Content

This question required candidates to compare the personalities of the two protagonists on the basis of their attitude towards art. The best candidates supported their ideas with evidence from both texts. Lower marks were awarded to those candidates who were mainly retelling events or expressing their own general thoughts on art and the lives of artists.

A few candidates mistakenly treated the author of Text 2 as its main protagonist, which shifted their comparison in a different direction. Even if their level of expression was quite adequate, they could not be credited with high marks.

Style, Organisation and Language

It could be stated with great pleasure that the majority of candidates demonstrated quite a decent level of linguistic competence this year. The style and organisation of the majority of responses to **Question 2** were in the required format of comparison, with those responses being paragraphed appropriately. Many candidates used quite a complex syntax and a sufficient range of connectives. A few responses stood out not only by appropriate use of low frequency words within the formal register but also by a gentle linguistic analysis provided as evidence to support candidate's ideas.

On the other hand, however, it should be noted that some candidates still had serious problems with spelling. Also, punctuation in complex sentences remained the main issue for the many responses. It is worth mentioning that those candidates who paid attention to distinct paragraphing and clear handwriting benefitted more in **Part 2**.

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/02

Writing

Key messages

- To do well on this paper, essays should be accurate, use a wide range of vocabulary and structures and be well organised and coherent, with well-developed ideas.
- In **Section 1** discussion should be logical, consistent and may require complex arguments. In **Section 2** the Descriptive tasks need well-developed ideas and images, using vivid details. The Narrative tasks require a gripping opening, careful development and a well-thought-out ending.

General comments

In successful answers, the candidates will have read all the titles carefully before choosing the ones on which they wish to write. Writing out the task title and underlining key words will help candidates focus on the question being asked and avoid writing irrelevant material. Before writing the essay, candidates should spend time planning their essay to avoid repetition and achieve a logical structure.

Most candidates wrote between 350–500 words for each composition; the compositions were divided up into paragraphs. In **Section 1**, careful, logical argument which focuses on the main points can achieve an excellent answer without excessive length.

The best candidates carefully constructed their writing to ensure clarity of expression and fluency of style. The best answers in Discussion and Argument were able to call on a wide range of vocabulary that was clear and which conveyed exact meaning. In Description, appropriate vocabulary was especially important, in order to create images in the reader's mind. In Narrative, a wide vocabulary helped to achieve particular effects, and added to the enjoyment and entertainment of the writing.

In Discussion and Argument, many excellent responses contained well-developed paragraphs without repetition, supported by the use of appropriate connectives, with detailed, clearly structured and sequenced arguments on either side of the debate; they kept the title in their mind throughout the writing, using the beginning or the end of each paragraph to state how the content of this paragraph supported their arguments. Candidates need to avoid informal or colloquial style in this Section; also they need to avoid describing personal matters but focus on specific question asked. Candidates are also reminded to develop more detailed and balanced arguments in order to achieve high marks.

Many successful responses in Description created some wonderful, imaginative, often heart-rending scenes, focusing attention on details, which reflected the emotions of the writer. Some candidates needed to emphasise description rather than narrative. Many excellent stories in Narrative were well structured, with a gripping beginning, a middle with key events of a plot, including characters and climax, and, very importantly, an interesting ending. Others needed to plan their stories carefully, using straightforward narratives, character development and an effective ending.

The quality of handwriting was on the whole very good, and many candidates had prepared well for the examination. The majority of candidates wrote in fluent, correct Russian, handled syntax and lexis very well and used appropriate, consistent, complex sentences which were varied and sophisticated, with ambitious vocabulary. They should pay attention to using participles (active and passive), gerunds (imperfective and perfective), correct punctuation, including commas, capital letters and speech marks and correct spelling. Candidates are encouraged to spend time checking through their work before the end of the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Discussion and Argument

- (a) Как вы думаете, какой будет Россия через 50 лет? Порассуждайте на эту тему.

What do you think Russia will be like in 50 years? Discuss.

The best responses showed consistent analysis, a clear and sometimes sophisticated style, logical, relevant, complex arguments, linkage between the paragraphs and sequenced sentences within paragraphs. The answers firstly noted that the world changes with an amazing speed, and that predicting the potential changes is not exactly possible; that these changes will take place in all spheres of society. Candidates then continued to say that there are several possible controversial theories of development. One of them stated that a great influence on development will be provided by scientific and technical progress, that people will increasingly resort to technology to solve life's problems. But scientific and technological progress has both positive and negative effects; this points to the possibility of improving the quality of life, the invention of weapons and solutions to environmental problems - there is a possibility that all these problems in Russia may be solved positively.

Candidates gave some interesting examples for the future of Russia: by 2050 Russia will build the first base on planet Mars, and will begin to develop it; our scientists will find new minerals on Mars; the Russian language will become one of the most recognisable languages on our planet.

On the other hand, candidates said that now in Russia we have no effective measures against corruption and other abuses. However, the legislation is booming, so there is a reason to believe that in fifty years Russia may reach notable successes.

Many said that if we talk about the future of Russia we want to pay attention to youth, to the new generation that will soon be working, and will learn to do things to create something new; the generation that will soon take the place of their parents and grandparents; the future of Russia is in its children who now go to kindergartens, schools or colleges. Then followed the conclusion: the main idea is that in fifty years the state ideology in Russia will be based on the principles of traditional society, humanism, healthy lifestyle, tolerance, religion, spiritual development; Russia will be one of the great, rich countries.

Candidates should avoid general conversation about the history of Russia, the greatness of Russians, Russian tradition etc., as this is not relevant to the question.

- (b) Есть русская пословица «Не в деньгах счастье». А в чем, по-вашему, счастье? Порассуждайте на эту тему.

There is a Russian proverb 'Money cannot buy happiness'. But what is happiness? Discuss this topic.

This was the most popular essay title and produced a wide range of performance from candidates. Many excellent essays were well developed, logical, gave strong complex arguments, demonstrated clear sequence and good linkage, and used fluent and accurate language with a wide, consistently effective range of vocabulary. These answers began with an introduction: people over the years ask a truly eternal question: 'Is there happiness in money?'; economic experts say that the more money we have, the happier we feel; psychologists argue that if you treat money in proportion to other things it can make you happy: that if a person lives in poverty for a long time and then moves to the middle class, wealth is unlikely to harm them.

The pro-statements argued that happy people do not focus on the negative – on the contrary, they interpret trouble in a positive way; secondly, happy people do not care about the success of others, they do not envy them. Happy people do not need to compare themselves with others, they have their own sense of purpose and their own idea of happiness. To understand whether you are happy or not, think about what you have, whether it be interesting work, family, children, or friends.

The contrary views stated the point that a lot of money does not bring happiness, but happiness is impossible without money nowadays: without it you cannot buy clothes, tasty food, travel; and more importantly, without money you cannot have better medicine or education in any country of the world or at any university that gives you great opportunities. These last points were seen as very important by many candidates.

Then followed the conclusion: if you spend money properly, you can benefit from it and be happy; often we think that we will feel happier when buying a new expensive car, collectible wine, a modern plasma screen, and after a while we are again not happy; to enjoy life, one should spend money on travel, invest in self-development, make gifts to family and friends; happiness is to have friends, family, to love and to be loved and not to be afraid of your life: *“With money, you can buy a bed but not sleep; food but not appetite; medicines but not health; servants but not friends; a house but not a home; fun but not pleasure; education but not the mind.”*

Some excellent essays used a lot of Russian proverbs and expressions, such as: *«Не имей сто рублей, а имей сто друзей»; «Деньги всему голова»; «Счастье не в деньгах, а в их количестве»; «Дружба дороже денег»; «Дружба дружбой, а денежки врозь».*

Candidates should carefully plan their essays to avoid repetition, long, irrelevant explanations and examples from their own experience and the experience of their relatives and friends. Discussion should include facts, reasons, explanations and some examples.

- (c) «В эпоху свободного распространения информации бесполезно вести борьбу с интернетным пиратством». По-вашему, это верно? Обоснуйте свой ответ.

‘In the era of free spreading of information, fighting against internet piracy is useless’. Do you think this is true? Justify your answer.

The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised, and produced a unique and sophisticated analysis. The best responses started with stating the problem: software piracy can be considered a plague of the XXI century; it is the scourge of our time, creating a feeling that all of humanity is divided into two halves: pirates and those who use their services; every second they download movies, music, and programmes, and are not even aware of the fact that this in some way violates the “Law on Copyright and Related Rights”; companies, writers, composers, actors and content owners lose money; those who hold the rights suffer, while protective measures overload computers.

Some candidates noted that today piracy is the only way for poorer people and for populations of poorer countries to have any information at all; it is their choice whether to save money or to pay more for the pleasure of viewing a movie with good technical standards, or listen to a song without the sound of applause in the performance hall.

Candidates set out their point of view that the fight against internet piracy is useless and gave their reasons. For example, there are many ways to spread illegal content; people who lose the possibility of downloading from the Internet will search for another way do the same and will expand piracy; cloud storage does not give access to anybody except the owner, who may sell their account for a low price; there is imperfection in the law, whereby a pirate can easily avoid punishment or pay only a small fine when caught.

On the other hand, candidates pointed out that this fight is not only useful, but sometimes very effective; that without the fight there will be chaos, and it would be impossible to keep any information safely; that the next generation of pirates will have to develop new computer programmes and spend more of their time and money on them.

Candidates saw a solution: for example, restoring order is a very slow process, and this problem should be solved not by one person, or even one country, but by the world; the main weapon of a

successful fight is education and prevention; the users of pirated versions would not be able to receive timely technical support and critical updates; or the solution could be to allow piracy and spend money on the quality, originality, and development of games, making a worthwhile product for a low price that people would choose to buy.

Candidates should avoid a long description of their personal issues.

- (d) «Самый эффективный метод обучения, общения и отдыха – это игры». Насколько вы согласны с этим утверждением? Обоснуйте свой ответ.

‘The most effective method of education, communication and relaxation is games’. How much do you agree with this statement?

The best answers demonstrated a good overall style with orderly grouping of ideas, good linkage, well-focused, excellent expression and clear, appropriate, accurate language using a varied, precise vocabulary. These answers started from the statement that games are an important part of how a person matures, especially now, when technology and computer games develop very quickly. There are different types of games: active (sport games), learning games, etc. Candidates noted some very important details: the effectiveness of games has been proven at nursery schools, schools and colleges; games motivate, bring together, distract from the negative; families relax, spend their time doing something interesting, and feel closer; a game is an easy way to receive knowledge (quizzes, crosswords, etc.); games like chess prepare for difficult situations and train the brain.

‘To play and to study’ is a good slogan. Companies input learning programs into many computer games: it is an interesting fact that children’s interest in history, technology, foreign languages and progress in studies has increased.

The contrary view noted that in some cases children who are playing games can disturb others, get tired, quarrel, and generally interfere with the learning process. The main disappointment is that today students sometimes take gaming and virtual reality very seriously, as an escape from reality. Some candidates rightly point out that games take up a lot of time, making the education process longer, while not giving much knowledge; that there is too much effort and money spent on the development of games.

The conclusion was that everything is fine in moderation; games are especially good in childhood, in small amounts. One excellent essay used a Russian proverb: “Делу время – потехе час” (Give time for work, and an hour for fun). We are in favour of including game learning in the school programme, because this is 21st century. Nobody should refuse games for study, communication, relaxation in our time of technology and inactive lifestyles, but no game has ever replaced a teacher.

Candidates need to understand that in this type of question they should focus more on how far they agree with the allegation that the most effective method of education, communication and relaxation is games. Candidates should avoid general conversation about their like/dislike of specific games, as this is not relevant to the question.

Section 2: Description and Narrative

- (a) Вы прилетели в один из самых известных международных аэропортов, где вас встречают родные и друзья. Опишите этот аэропорт, его атмосферу, пассажиров и встречающих, ваши личные впечатления по прибытии.

You have arrived at one of the most famous international airports, where you have met your relatives and friends. Describe this airport, its atmosphere, passengers and meetings, and your personal feelings and impressions on arrival.

This was a popular title and gave rise to some imaginative responses. There were many well-structured essays with a good selection of interesting ideas and images, a range of details and lively writing, forming a clear picture, with a wide, effective range of vocabulary, and accurate grammar.

Candidates “visited” a lot of airports all over the world: Berlin, Istanbul, Dubai, Beijing, Ben-Gurion, JFK, Heathrow, St. Petersburg, Sheremetyevo, Magadan, etc.

One excellent essay described a desert on the Red Sea. The essay started from the description of the place: the life of the city and its airport depends on an oil well; the airport, like a city, stands in the middle of nowhere and thousands of people need it every day, all year. Then followed the description of the airport itself: the airport building stretches out across a long distance, especially since space is not limited; tracks snake around, and cloned transport (dressed in red liveries resembling airplanes) moves in a coordinated fashion, and it seems that everything is part of a single organism that lives in the midst of sands; here one sees how the architects have taken space for granted. This is a depot where, 24 hours a day, hundreds of people serve hundreds of other people; this place provides life for all these people. Then the essay continued to say that the many terminals and the coordinated work of all the people reminded them of an anthill. Everybody works without exception, and this creates an unbelievably complicated structure which is capable of carrying out incredible feats.

There was a range of details in the description of the airport and its atmosphere:

“I departed from the hall to the transit zone, and suddenly I noticed a man wearing an expensive suit, with a leather briefcase, loudly discussing his secret business plan.”; “A migrant worker trailed behind him, wearing a cheap working dress with a considerable number of bags and suitcases, shabby like their owner.”; “I was sailing through the crowd as it poured into the arrival hall.”; “When the door to the arriving hall opened, even I felt unsteady: ‘Here they are, the ants’ – I thought, grinning.”

The candidates finished their essays with a description of their feelings: “I think that I will fly only for the experience of spending some time here.”; “Under the parked airplanes rises an elegant cortege of drakes, yes, ordinary drakes, and I want to go together with them there, over the horizon, without a return ticket.”

Candidates should be aware that this question asks them to describe the airport, its atmosphere and their feelings when visiting; the task must focus on description, not storytelling; candidates should avoid repetition.

- (b) «Вскоре я поднялся на перевал, и тут мне открылась необыкновенная картина». Опишите открывшуюся картину и свои чувства.

“I soon climbed on top of the mountain pass, and then an extraordinary picture opened in front of me.” Describe the picture and your feelings.

There were many excellent responses that showed well-developed ideas and images, described feelings and thoughts, included appropriate, sophisticated, complex sentences used to achieve a particular effect, were written with accurate language and an effective range of vocabulary.

Some candidates gave a detailed plan of the essay.

Candidates ‘climbed’ Ural, Altai, the Alps, the Himalayas, English hills, Elbrus, etc. Then they described the weather, for example: “It seemed that nature could barely control itself under the heavy load of languid stuffy air; then it started to rain, not just ordinary rain, but a wall of rain, which dashed down to earth like the wrath of the Gods; this tropical rain finished as quickly as it started, and in a few minutes the island filled with its habitual sounds of the chirr of insects, the rustle of grass, the cries of animals.”

Many candidates provided a range of excellent details, for example: a dark green coniferous forest; giant mountains grabbed the valley in the tight ring, casting sharp shadows on the warmed earth; the only break in the silence was the singing of a bird; clouds slowly floated in the sky, sometimes obstructing the summer sun with their silhouettes; as soon as the sun appeared again, it shone all around, spotlighting a small field in a mysterious dark forest, through which a mountain river stretched as a light blue ribbon; the smell of flowers was everywhere, filling my lungs with their sweetness; while having lunch, I continued to notice more details: in the lake, illuminated by the sun, were barely visible silhouettes of fish; as soon as the sun hid from the heavens, birds stopped singing; the impression was that the cloud was stuck and could not climb down from the steep height.

Typically, successful candidates compared their feelings with the description of nature, for example: "I was filled with delight from what I saw, from these green meadows, small fields, tall trees, fastest rivers, calm lakes." One essay was especially excellent in its sense of place and the feelings it evoked: "It became clear why temples are built here, why ascetics go to live in these caves, despite the cold and harsh conditions; only here you can feel unity with nature, feel free, see the meaning of life; the beauty of these mountains has no comparison with anything else, because it changes your soul."

Some candidates wrote short quotations, for example a famous line from a song of Vladimir Vysotsky: "Only mountains are better than mountains." One essay gave an unusual ending: "HE kept me, I did not understand why then. I looked back. HE walked on the snow and did not leave any footprint marks. HE sat on a stone close to me. We sat silently, looking at stars, at the moon, at clouds... The night melted away, and with it melted away my companion. I did not notice this, but I did notice that I had changed. I would probably never forget this..."

Candidates should be aware that this essay should focus on description, not storytelling or just writing about travelling all around the world. The most common mistakes were repetition, lack of clarity, too long or too short length of writing, poor grammar and spelling, punctuation.

- (c) «Как человеку постоянно путешествующему, мне приходилось бывать в разных местах. И сейчас ничто не предвещало удивительного происшествия, которое случилось со мной». Напишите короткий рассказ, начинающийся с этой фразы.

"As a person who travels constantly, I have visited many different places. And this time, nothing warned me of the amazing event which was about to happen to me." Write a short story beginning with this phrase.

Many candidates remembered that to create a narrative, it is important to think about content that has some originality, creates tension, produces effects to engage a reader's attention, and provides necessary and appropriate details. The best responses were balanced. They needed to use language appropriate to the narrative.

Not all stories had an intriguing beginning, a real climax, an unpredictable surprising punch line, or were funny or exciting.

There were a lot of very interesting responses, for example: "The scorching torrid night kills with heat, and mosquitoes are haunting me. I glance from the window and cry rapturously! In the canyon below us, flickering under the morning sunshine, there is the ancient abandoned deserted Inca city, Machu Picchu. 'No, this is Machu Picchu' – I whispered."

Candidates wrote stories about the mist named 'Beard' flowing above Novorossiysk; a cockfight in Latin America; a yacht trip ("Above me was the face of my doppelganger"); Tibet, Nepal, a monk's elixir Yun-Ha; an unbelievable fabulous plant on the mysterious island, which treats wounds and extends life; "a magician Elf has sent me to Skellig, the Supreme Advisor" ("I am a courier. The package is a small pouch, green in colour. My horse trembled, I fell, the pouch dropped. The lock fell off, and the pouch shook, releasing black smoke and a demon.")

One excellent essay represented the characters through detail: "Algazel excuses himself in front of the Secret Interplanetary Police: 'You broke The Space Code: you forgot that eyes have to look to one side only; you forgot that people do not have the ability to go through walls and advised a man to go ahead; and most terribly of all, you forgot to hide your tail, causing the women in the café to faint!' The detective looked into the innocent eyes of the young newcomer and decided to grant him freedom, but only provided that Algazel would erase his memory about his trip to Earth. 'Never ever will you return!'"

Candidates provided some convincing necessary details: the dark brick structure of a monastery; strange flags with the images of mythical creatures; "in the centre was the sacred vase Yun-Ha"; "the snack turned into a kennel, on the floor was my 'bed' - some rags and tatters with a shaggy smelly dog on it", etc.

Most of the candidates managed clearly to identify the climax and the appropriate ending to their stories, for example: "At night, a transparent white figure floated one meter above me: judging by

its long hair, it was a woman. Suddenly a dog, of whose presence I had completely forgotten, roared unusually. The figure flickered slightly, giving me the opportunity to whip out a snack for the dog with my hands. In the morning, I was removed from the tree together with the dog. From this story I made one conclusion: I will never come to Morocco.” The climax may be the end of the story: “The boy was lost in the cockfight, it was his last chance to earn money. Tomorrow we will collect our suitcases and go home. What’s the merit of staying in a place where the fate of person depends on the outcome of a cockfight? My last words here are: ‘As a person who travels a lot...’ I see life as one big journey and I try to enjoy it.” Some essays had unpredictable endings: “When I woke, there were monks around me, saying, ‘In the fountain and the vase was not an elixir, but the brain of a yak.’ I do not want to know what happened to Elis, but I thank him for this adventure.” “Suddenly my redeemer Elf appeared, who pierced the demon with a jet. Then my redeemer hired me as a partner.”

- (d) «В деревне говорили, что в странном доме на горе живет всего один человек. Этот дом притягивал нас с другом, как магнит, и однажды мы решились подойти к дому поближе». Вставьте эту фразу в короткий рассказ или его часть.

“In the village it was said that in the strange house on top of the mountain only one person lives. This house attracted me and my friend like a magnet, and once we decided to get close to the house.” Insert this phrase in a short story or part of it.

This topic proved to be the most popular. Responses varied from simple tales to balanced, intense stories, with a carefully managed climax, well developed characters and appropriate details.

The most excellent responses provided a very well managed beginning, for example: “On the road of my life I had met different types of women. I was acquainted with chamomile, girls wearing colourful dresses and straw hats. Every day they wore a new wreath of flowers different from last year’s, but their smiles were similar, as if they could only feel joy. I met swallows, so free and dreamy, that it was simply impossible to drag them from the heaven to the earth. But she...she was an ocean.” “We prepared for this campaign thoroughly, taking the following: three fishing rods, two loaves of bread, a saucepan, a pannikin, a pot, and two sets of cutlery. The impression was that we were going hiking for a week, not for two days.”

The places described ranged from an ocean, an airplane to Bashkortostan, Ufa mountain Shaigantaz, Polesye (Marshy Woodland), a village called ‘Heart of the Forest’, a village Kunushchan, the rivers Pokhra and Konopelka, the mystical place called Nowhere.

Then followed a representation of the characters: Amelia and Mark; the witch called ‘Agatha-Thunderstorm of Sunset’; a mermaid, a lyrical hero; twin wolves, indistinguishable at night, etc. Candidates gave much detail to build up their characters, for example: “Behind the girl could be seen the petals of an exotic flower, which I have never seen before, but most marvellous was the fact that that it grew straight out of her back. She clearly noticed my surprise and slightly smiled, but her eyes were filled with sadness. Suddenly her angelic voice called inside my head: ‘You understand that now I can’t release you.’”

The sequencing of sentences provided clarity and engaged the reader in the events and atmosphere of the stories: “It was Amelia’s book, wrapped in a vacuum package to protect it from getting wet. There was familiar handwriting, flowing words, one phrase: ‘Please, live for our love.’” “An old crow, sitting on the moon’s patches of reflected light, opened one eye and peered at us, squinting. Then, it shifted from foot to foot and steeped in slumber again. The cold gust of wind hit and subsided in a silent expectation. The moon disappeared behind the trees. My friend and I exchanged glances and switched on the flashlight. In a few minutes the flashlight clicked and went out, leaving us in the dark...”

There were a lot of interesting endings to the essays, for example: “Everybody who touches these treasures will be cursed!” – rang the loud voice.”; “On the bottom of the river there was a small box with the writing: ‘Shaygan-taz, year 1941’. That was the Officer Order of Bulat’s ancestor Bagration, the hero of The Patriotic War of 1812” “On the box was an inscription ‘Be careful!’ When I opened it, a small dog jumped out.”

Most of the stories started with the exact phrase “In the village it was said that in the strange house on top of the mountain only one person lived. This house attracted me and my friend like a magnet, and once we decided to get close to the house.” There were some excellent, unexpected stories,

where the phrase was in the middle or even at the end of plot: “The book opened on a random page: ‘In the village it was said, that...’ I relaxed - this was not Harper Lee’s ‘To Kill a Mockingbird.’” “Amelia fastened her belt, looked at her watch and opened a book, which she had bought at the airport to have a good time during the flight. In the next few minutes she read the introduction of the author, the prologue, and started to read the first chapter of a mystical novel: ‘In the village it was said that...’ Suddenly the loud crying of a child interrupted her reading.”

The climax of one amazing story was: “I felt excitement mixed with curiosity. Heat flooded in like a million tiny fires. Scattered everywhere were papers with texts, schemes, and charts. On the dilapidated table and the shelves barely holding upright, some devices were positioned. In the middle of the room stood a rocking chair, under a cover. There was a sapless old man, weakened with time. He said: ‘This device will make people happier and kinder, it allows you to remember only your good dreams. Put your hands on the touchpad and wish with all your strength that people would remember their dreams’. The sun touched the horizon, birds sang, trees rustled. I was bursting with a feeling of unbridled endless happiness. Everything was good. Even more so, everything was right.”

These examples show how candidates were able to invent details and events that could captivate the reader’s attention.