

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

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Paper 0516/01  
Reading

## Key message

To do well in this paper, 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 needed to give short, straightforward answers to the questions, generally without lengthy comments, apart from **Questions 1f** and **1h**, using their own words, where required.

In **Part 2**, candidates should produce a summary 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 engaging, well connected by a common theme of Work, and easily accessed by the majority of candidates. The majority of candidates could relate to the period and historical settings of the texts, which helped them give appropriate answers.

This year, the quality of candidates' handwriting has improved considerably, compared to the previous years, and did not impede the marking process. In order to provide fair marking, the Examiners had to be strict with those candidates who considerably exceeded the word limit in **Question 2**: the longer responses were only marked to a maximum limit of 275 words.

## Comments on specific questions

### Part 1

#### Content

It should be noted that the majority of candidates gave answers of appropriate length and managed to avoid lifting from the text, where citation was not required.

- (a) There was hardly any candidate who could not answer this question – an encouraging start!
- (b) Some candidates gave answers based on the evidence outside the lines indicated, which could not be credited.
- (c) (i) The response to this question should be within the synonymic range of 'cruel', however many candidates described the protagonist's behaviour as simply 'strict'.  
(ii) Surprisingly, despite the incorrect softer characteristic given in **(c(i))**, most candidates managed to give correct evidence of the character's cruel behaviour.
- (d) This was a straightforward comprehension question. However, the mark was awarded only to those candidates who based their answer on the text, rather than their own general statement of the hairdresser's being cheap (no prices were mentioned in the text).

- (e) The majority of candidates gave 3 different examples about Nicolka to be awarded 3 marks. His smoking or swearing habits could not be regarded as such because that was just the evidence of his attempts to look like an adult.
- (f) The best candidates managed to get two marks for showing Petka's **transition** from one state to another at the dacha, and another two marks for the reasons. However, some candidates just focused on Petka's activities at the dacha and missed answering the 'why' question.
- (g) The same as above could be stated about the 'why' part of this question.
- (h) This question gave an opportunity for candidates to express their own opinion, although based on the text. The best responses included Petka's 'surreal' experience, as well as the reaction of his audience to his fantasies, originating from the great contrast between the holiday experience and their hairdresser's dreary reality.
- (i) (i) This was a seemingly easy question but, surprisingly, only approximately 50% of candidates gave the correct answer stating what exactly a customer agreed with, i.e. with the punishment.  
(ii) This question appeared to be the most difficult in this Part. Only a few candidates could explain the adjective as 'tasteless' or 'vulgar'.

### Language

The quality of language produced in **Question 1** was on average good. Compared with the previous years, there was an avoidance of considerable lifting, where not required.

### Question 2

#### Content

This question required candidates to compare the attitudes of the two protagonists to their work.

The best candidates supported their ideas with appropriate quotes from both sources. Weaker candidates mainly retold events, expressed their own general thoughts on life and work, or simply compared two different lifestyles.

A few candidates mistakenly compared some characters from within either Text B or Text A. They could not be credited with high marks, even if they produced coherent responses. Also, in order to get a higher mark, candidates had to avoid merely repeating their answers already given to **Question 1**. The best responses focussed right from the start on the boys' attitude to their work, rather than describing the context or speculating about the boys' families or their childhood in general. Avoiding this also allowed those candidates to meet the important word count criterion.

#### Style, Organisation and Language

The majority of candidates demonstrated quite a decent level of linguistic competence this year. The style and organisation of a prevailing number of responses to **Question 2** were in the required format of comparison, with those responses being paragraphed appropriately.

On the whole, there has been a slight improvement in spelling and punctuation this year. Many candidates used quite a complex syntax and a sufficient range of connectives. However, compared with the last year, there were not quite so many outstanding responses demonstrating a higher level of literacy and knowledge of figurative language.

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

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Paper 0516/02  
Writing

## Key messages

- To do well on this paper, essays should be accurate, use a wide range of vocabulary and structures, be well organised and coherent, with well-developed ideas.
- In Section 1, discussion/argument 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, 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 helps 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 350–500 words for each composition; the compositions were divided up into paragraphs. Careful, logical argument focusing 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. They used a wide range of vocabulary that was clear and which conveyed exact meaning.

In Discussion/Argument many excellent responses contained well-developed paragraphs without repetition, supported by the use of appropriate connectives, with detailed, clearly structured, sequenced arguments on either side of the debate; they kept the title in their mind throughout their 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 the argumentative essay; 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 narrator. 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, importantly, an interesting ending. Others needed to plan their stories carefully, using straightforward narratives, character development and an effective ending.

The quality of the 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; 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), right punctuation, including commas, capital letters and speech marks, with correct spelling. Candidates are encouraged to spend time checking through their work within the time allowed.

## Comments on specific questions

### Section 1

#### Discussion and Argument

- (a) «Из ста попыток только одна приводит к успеху». Насколько вы согласны с этим утверждением?

'From one hundred attempts only one leads to success.' How much do you agree with this statement?

This was one of the most popular essay titles and there was a wide range of performance from candidates. 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 started with the introduction, e.g.: 'From a mathematical point of view, the greater the number of attempts, the greater the probability of success'; 'Success can be in small tasks, for example, catching a ball from a first attempt, or in big tasks.' Candidates considered all aspects of the question in a relevant way and devoted much thought to their writing, e.g.: 'Only a few are able to achieve success in serious tasks at the first attempt'; 'The more serious the task, the more attempts should be made'; 'People choose whether they need success or not'; 'The road to success is of one's own choosing.' Discussion was supported by careful analysis, e.g.: 'One's life situation – such as family, friends – can influence the initial capital increase or decrease in the chances of success.' Then followed the conclusion: that it is certain that you can't stop at one try; that success is a game in which it is necessary to reach the next level by pressing the 'back' button again and again; that the main components for success are training, hard work, talent, luck, and also the ability to change one's strategy at the right time.

Candidates showed their ability to consider and judge alternative explanations: 'In some cases, success has to be achieved at first attempt'; 'Success will come or not – nobody knows about it'; 'It's not a hundred attempts but fortune that is the most important factor.'

To support their arguments some candidates used famous Russian proverbs and expressions, such as: «*Семь раз отмерь – один раз отрежь*» (Second thoughts are best); «*Без труда не вынешь и рыбку из пруда*» (No sweet without some sweat).

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.

- (b) «Мода для людей или люди для моды?» Обсудите.

'Fashion for people or people for fashion?' Discuss.

It was pleasing to see evidence that candidates devoted thought to the whole topic.

Many excellent essays were well developed, logical, gave strong complex arguments, demonstrated clear sequence and good linkage, used fluent and accurate language.

These answers began with an introduction: 'Fashion is a popular style or practice, especially in clothing, places of residence, occupations, telephones, electronic devices, ideas, manners, departments, lifestyle, art, literature, cuisine, architecture', etc.; 'Fashion is part of human activity.'

The pro-statements argued that fashion is for people: fashion is an integral and inseparable part of our lives; your clothes reflect your social status, satisfy a person's need for novelty; you should be dressed appropriately because you fear being seen as outside of society and fear being isolated; you use different clothes in business or on holiday; shopping can be good therapy; psychologically, people spend so much time on fashion and buying clothes in order to forget their problems; for some people, this is the only opportunity to show themselves and to show their individuality; it allows people to demonstrate modernity, versatility, to show off; without fashion life would be boring and monotonous.

Some excellent essays used a lot of Russian proverbs and expressions, such as: «По одежке встречают, по уму провожают» ('Clothes don't make the man').

Moreover, some candidates argued that fashionable clothes reflect our soul greatly; that fashion is even for the soul: magazines, models and fashion create a feeling of celebration, helping to fill the dullness of everyday life with bright colours; that it's a great partner, a great hobby, especially for people who have money. Fashion takes into account the needs of people (trousers, warm clothes for winter); that clothing can even be used as a political weapon.

The contrary views stated the point that fashion is big business, just like any other business in the world; that designers, tailors, seamstress, drivers, shop assistants, editors, photographers are employed in it; that, like any successful business, fashion associates with advertising and mass-media, where again a large number of people is employed.

Then followed the conclusion: people work for fashion, then fashion works for people; fashion is a kind of litmus test of what is happening; like other forms of art, it subtly responds to significant changes in society; in it, as in a mirror, you can see the reflection of the most significant historical periods and important events. Generally speaking, fashion is a process of communication between manufacturers, retailers and consumers, so the question of who is the most important in this line has no meaning. While the whole cycle of communication is not passed down to the consumer, fashion can't be considered as just fashion in isolation.

Candidates should avoid conversation about the history of fashion, French or Italian fashion, long life stories of famous fashion designers, their own priorities in fashion etc., as this is not relevant to the question.

Candidates must consider all of the subject matter and support their answers with analysis.

Weaker answers were characterised by a tendency to generalise, and were less well supported by analysis.

- (c) «Современный спорт превратился в погоню за спортивными рекордами любой ценой». Вы согласны с этим утверждением?

Modern sport has become a pursuit for sports records at any cost. Do you agree with this statement?

The best answers integrated formal description with convincing discussion of the context and the concepts. The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised, and produced a unique and sophisticated analysis. They agreed with the statement that present-day sport has become a pursuit for sports records at any cost. They reasoned that modern sport is a dangerous and severe undertaking that starts in childhood; that very often people from early childhood bet everything on their sports education and forget about school and their health; that parents dream of growing a world champion, gradually loading their children with group and individual training and competitions to such an extent that the children do not have any free time left – they do not go to school, do not have the opportunity for normal education and development; that children get sick and injured from being overloaded; that parents sincerely wish success for their children, but do not think about the price that needs to be paid; that more often than not it can end not with a rise and a career, but the recognition that it was a mistake.

Candidates set out their point of view that a big prize requires a big risk; that athletes are ready to go to any length to compete for new records. When one looks at the competition, it all seems harmless enough; but then one witnesses the scandals, the arguing over points, the swearing, the lawsuits, the rampant aggression, the cruelty, the hatred, no love, no friendship, the insulting of referees, the accusations of bribery, the bribing of judges, the use of steroids to achieve good results. This argument is the most important today.

Some candidates noted that athletes put everything they have into sport, and as a reward receive their dreams, victory, new records, fame and money; that modern sport really brings insanity into competition; that neither athletes nor fans adequately perceive the reality any more or celebrate their achievements, instead killing themselves for unattainable goals.

On the other hand, candidates pointed out that these statements apply only to professional sport, not to everyday sports, and that everyone makes their choice.

Conclusions included the following thoughts: 'Modern sport is a dangerous and severe choice of work'; 'Sport is the chase'; 'This is mostly a competition with yourself, and a competition with others for the records'; 'We sincerely respect the athletes and acknowledge their incredible hard work'; 'They are decent people who know what they want and strive for their goal in spite of any obstacles'; 'Chasing records means only that the sport is constantly evolving and moving forward'; 'The only thing that is bad for sport, is the pursuit of money.'

Sometimes the question itself was not adequately addressed. Candidates needed to answer the question that was asked; those who provided an answer for a question they had prepared for, rather than for the question on the paper, were limited to low band marks.

In answering this question, candidates should avoid a long description of their personal issues in sport, sport games and matches, biographies of famous athletes as this was not relevant to the question.

(d) «Мы не можем себе позволить такую роскошь, как забота об окружающей среде». Вы согласны с этим утверждением?

«We can't afford such luxury as caring for the environment.' Do you agree with this statement?

The best responses considered all aspects of the question in a relevant way and were supported with careful analysis. They demonstrated a good overall style with orderly grouping of ideas, good linkage, appropriate and accurate language. These answers started from the statement that we must care for the environment, because planet Earth – our great common home – and its well-being, will have an impact on the health and welfare of each of us. There is a relationship between human activities and nature. Until recently this relationship was in a balance. However, at present times we have to face such ecological problems as acid rain, global warming, loss of rare species, ozone layer reduction, the explosions of nuclear power plants, oil tanker accidents in the oceans, deforestation, air and water pollution and exhaust emissions of factories and cars, etc.

Candidates noted some very important details: that now many people around the world are concerned about environmental problems, because planet Earth is our great common home; that we just could not or did not want to spend the time to evaluate all possible consequences our intervention in nature will have for us; that scientists around the world are now developing technologies that use renewable energy sources; that there are cars which are much safer for the environment than cars using conventional fuel; that new enterprises are built taking into account the environmental needs in developed countries; that the daily life of people (generating carbon dioxide and pollution) is also a factor affecting the environment and global warming, which will be the main problem for the next generation. The international organisations such as Greenpeace are also doing much to preserve the environment. People are using more bicycles, recycling their rubbish and doing many other useful things.

On the other hand, some candidates thought that the display of care for the environment is a luxury; that our efforts are only a drop in the ocean; that we should have thought about it before; that it's too late to do anything now; that there are not enough resources for this; that the money is needed for more pressing issues, such as migrants, the economic backwardness of some countries, famine in Africa, etc. They argued that nowadays the problem of ecology is not important for people with modern technologies; that these technologies will help us with hunger, unemployment, dangerous kinds of diseases such as plague and cancer; that nanotechnology will create new materials, which will be useful for the army, medicine, science; that with great technology humans will conquer space and defeat death.

The conclusion was that caring for the environment is not a luxury, but an obligation; that developed countries should help poorer countries with their resources; that our world is very fragile, and that we should take care of it because we are a part of this world; that humanity will die without beautiful nature, useful plants, animals; that to be born on planet Earth is a luxury, and the uniqueness of the planet is a good reason to take care of it.

Candidates should avoid general conversation about Ecology as a science, environmental problems of individual regions, etc. as this is not relevant to the question.

## Section 2

### Description and Narrative

- (a) Вы поднимаетесь по сверкающему на солнце корабельному трапу и присоединяетесь к шумной, праздничной толпе пассажиров. Опишите атмосферу на корабле, свои впечатления и чувства.

You climb the ship's gangway which is sparkling in the sun and join a noisy and festive crowd of passengers. Describe the atmosphere on the ship, your impressions and 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 and were written with accurate language.

Some candidates gave a detailed plan of the essay.

The best candidates described the weather, nature, the ship and the festive noisy crowd with a lot of appropriate amazing details: 'I lift up my head and gaze fixedly at the seagulls, which lazily dissect the sky with motionless wings.' 'I go slowly, trying not to push anyone inadvertently, but I never look away from the blue sky.' 'On the ship are dancers with tiger muzzles on their heads and long colourful tails, performing exotic dancing. They desperately pound drums and even some thundering musical instruments.' 'The sun was not fiery, not red-hot as during the scorching drought, not dull purple as before the storm, but bright and radiant; then there came round high clouds, golden grey, with delicate white edges; clouds as azure as the sky: they were thoroughly imbued with the light and warmth; the colour of the sky-light, pale lilac-did not change during the whole day and never darkened.

Many candidates provided a range of excellent details, for example: 'the deck, polished to a high gloss'; 'metallic rails glittering in the sun'; 'good taste and wealth was visible all around.'

Typically, successful applicants compared their feelings with the description of nature, for example: 'By evening, the clouds disappear; the last of them, blackish and undefined as smoke, lie in front of pink clouds. The evening star is silently blinking like a carefully carried candle. I feel as lonely as this star.'

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.

- (b) Представьте, что вы впервые рассматриваете альбом со старыми фотографиями. Опишите этот альбом и его содержание, а также свои эмоции и чувства.

Imagine that you are looking at an album with old photos for the first time. Describe this album, its contents and your emotions and feelings.

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, lively writing, forming a clear picture, with a broad, effective range of vocabulary, and accurate grammar.

The essay started from the description of the place: 'Another dull, autumn day in the huge metropolis. Outside there are raindrops. People are in a hurry about their business, smearing mud on the asphalt. Above the tall buildings hang grey clouds. They seem to go down lower and lower, devouring the buildings floor by floor. The grey mass all over the city swells. Does the sun light the city?'

Then followed the description of the album itself: 'wrapped in a neatly-cut piece of wallpaper'; 'an album with letters and notes'; 'an album of medium size, black leather, with hearts pinned on the cover'; 'a light pink one with 'Album' embroidered on it'; 'the album paper is so thin and not so soft now, the material so brittle that the pictures are actually cracked'; 'there was a pile of albums only with photographs'; 'this is the thinnest of the albums, richly green, tied with a crimson satin ribbon.'

Then the essay continued with a description of the photos: 'the photo was black and white, but it was clear that it was winter, because it featured a standing man wearing a voluminous white furry coat and a fluffy hat.'

The best candidates gave a range of details, for example: 'I approached the old chest of drawers and just opened the glass door cabinet'; 'the handle was made of oak, covered with an even layer of lacquer, it had clearly become part of the furniture masterpiece'; 'on the handle, as well as on the cupboard, there was not a speck of dust'; 'inside there was nothing that could seem like something special.'

The very best essays were extremely good in the description of feelings: 'Gently releasing the album from the tape that embraced it, I opened it. A yellowish-white sheet was attached to the black-and-white photo in the upper right corner, beside the folded triangle of ramshackle, damp-spoiled paper. In this way, they folded letters during the Second World War. Grandpa 'Missing' May 15, 1942.' 'In the picture, four young people in aviation uniform were waiting for their flight. All of them are in front of the plane, radiating excitement before the first flight, illuminating everything with their smiles. Boys, who have no idea what lies ahead, who are not thinking about their fate. The leanest figure on the far left is grandfather. My grandfather.' 'And now the album stands on the dusty wooden shelf, not lonely, but surrounded by the photo albums of my grandparents and all our family.' 'On this day, I ate 10 pies and calmed down.' 'I thumbed through slowly, peering, gazing, trying to feel the emotions of the people, imprinted on glossy paper. They were a delight, revealing excitement, happiness, anxiety. It is not just images captured on photo paper, but memories, feelings, the one and only way to live through the best moments of your life again.'

Candidates should be aware that this question asks them to describe an album with old photos and their feelings; the task can focus on description, not storytelling; candidates should avoid repetition.

- (c) «Приехав в город, он остановился в гостинице и на следующее утро, ничего не подозревая, отправился на встречу». Вставьте эту фразу в короткий рассказ или его часть.

'When he came to the town he stayed at a hotel, and the next morning, suspecting nothing, went to the meeting.' Insert this phrase in a short story or part of it.

There were a lot of very interesting responses. The places were mostly Moscow, a small provincial Russian town, New York, London, Alma-Ata. Other places were the palace of Princess Bolkonskaya, a weather station, a mystical country Turgalik, a mysterious city which can be accessed only by a special password. The times were also different: the 19th century, the present, the future, or even an unclear time and place.

The best essays started the story with an intriguing beginning: 'The door opened and a squat man, wearing a mask, a suit and a musketeer hat with peacock feathers, entered the hall. Two more masked men followed him.' 'At first, everything went on as usual: an ordinary forgettable secretary at the entrance, the usual office mediocre businessman, except for the strange absence of any portraits, posters or advertising on the walls.' 'For a long time I have been waiting for the appearance of at least someone, but in the house there was dead silence, and even the clock was not ticking.' 'Unfortunately I left the hotel alone. I was approached by a man who gently but firmly pushed my shoulder, then dropped his mobile phone. The phone shattered into pieces.'

Then they continued the story: 'A car drove up, two men, similar as twins and dressed in black, got out. They quietly opened the door and almost pushed me inside. Only at that moment did I wish I had told someone of my arrival – even my wife did not know where I was.' 'In the evening I returned to the hotel, where nothing looked as it had in the morning. Firstly, there were no welcoming porters and servants, indeed there was no one. When I got to my room, I did not open the door because it was open.' 'Then began a hail of misfortunes. While I was eating in a cafe, my wallet was snatched. I had to go on foot and I was late. A porter did not allow me to enter. And this is the first representative meeting with my employer!' 'Suddenly a figure in black appeared. I looked: a woman approached me. I asked her where the church was. She closed her eyes and was silent for a long time and suddenly spoke with a kind of strange and weird accent.'

The very best answers represented the characters through detail: 'a slim figure and broad shoulders, proven ability to endure all the hardships of life'; 'a dusty suit, buttoned only by two buttons, allows you to see the dazzling clean underwear revealing the habits of a decent man'; 'it

was a tight squat middle-aged man with a dashing moustache and a jaunty manner'; 'her eyes did not laugh ever, which is a sign of deep constant sadness'.

Candidates provided some convincing necessary details, for example: 'I left the hotel, which was buried in the sand and left to languish under the burning sun'; 'from the main street, many alleys of two or three little houses branch out'; 'it seemed that the sands want to swallow them'; 'all the shops were closed, and because of the heat on the streets one could not see a single person, but only fat stray dogs, who were dozing lazily, not wanting to yelp'; 'suddenly in the silence a splash of the waves was heard, they came out.'

Most of the candidates managed clearly to identify the climax and the appropriate ending to their stories, for example: 'It suddenly dawned on me – an inspired and desperate decision. I quickly ran across to the barber and shaved my head, using my last money as payment. My golden hair lay on the floor, and in the mirror an ordinary village boy looked at me. They will never catch me now!' 'The thing is, I took a picture of the double or possibly even triple agent, followed by chasing by the whole of the intelligence world. And for that, I paid a heavy price.'

The climax was often the end of the story: 'So far, it seems to me incredible that the Master brought me to him on that day, when I came to him in the early winter of 1900, and I was lucky enough to become his disciple. I was a frequent visitor at his house during all of the days of my stay in the country. And now, after his death, I'll meet unsuspecting strangers at the door.'

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

Many candidates were able to bear in mind 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.

- (d) «Однажды на чердаке я наткнулся на одну старинную карту. С этого и начались мои приключения». Напишите короткий рассказ или его отрывок, начинающийся с этой фразы.

'One day in the attic I found an old map. From this began my adventures.' Write a short story beginning with this phrase.

Most of the stories started with the exact phrase 'One day in the attic I have find old map. From this began my adventures', but there were stories where the phrase was in the middle or even at the end of the plot. Candidates should read the instruction in the question carefully.

The most popular place was a summer holiday in the village with grandmother and grandfather. There was also a mansion from the 19th century, an abandoned house, the dark forest, the neighbouring village, Kiev, Polish gentry, Mogilev, the steppes of Mongolia and a den.

The sequencing of sentences provided clarity and engaged the reader in the events and atmosphere of the stories: 'On the walls was dark wood. No rustling, not a sound, a complete silence. Dark grey and black trees blocked the way. I went 333 steps to the south-east, as was shown on the map, and in front of me there was an abandoned house. The door swung open by itself. I crossed the threshold and tumbled down into somewhere. So here it is, the portal!' 'We stopped at the foot of the slope, overgrown with moss, and pitched a tent. At night there was a terrible noise, the tent collapsed, and we were face to face with the orcs. We ran aimlessly, until our legs could carry us no longer. When I woke up there was no one, nothing. And the worst thing, there was no map.'

Most of the candidates managed clearly to identify the climax and the appropriate ending to their stories. The climax of one amazing story was: 'The portrait reminded me of someone. Glancing in the mirror, I recognised someone: myself. Then out of the mirror, at which I continued to peer, dropped a small bag. In it lay a silver key on which was engraved my name and date of birth. My adventure began from that moment.'

This example shows how candidates were able to invent details and events that could captivate the reader's attention.

There were a lot of interesting endings to the essays, for example: 'We have not been able to continue the excavations, as my grandmother needed to take care of some important financial affairs in the city, so we were forced to leave the village.' 'On the table was a photograph of a famous spy. I had no time to take a step as something crackled and the lights went off. Vlad disappeared.'

Candidates provided some convincing necessary details: 'I was waiting for him on the shore, and he swam to the yacht named 'Versace'. As you might guess, the captain's wife's name was Naomi, and John's wife was the Duchess of Scotland.' 'This house still retained its former glory: jewellery hewn blocks, marble window sills and columns.'

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