

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Writing

## Key messages

- It is essential to read the question carefully and follow all the instructions given.
- In **Section 1** tasks it is important to develop the bullet points as evenly as possible and ensure that all required information is included.
- In **Section 1** carefully consider purpose, situation and audience when planning a response
- Avoid joining individual words together, such as 'alot' or 'eventhough'.
- Consider all the titles in Section 2 before deciding which topic to write on.
- Direct speech is useful in developing characters and plot, but must be punctuated properly with correct use of paragraphs.
- Care should be taken in the use of capital letters.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.

## General comments

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be comparable to that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most candidates but some underestimated the demands of the question. There was a good range of responses in **Section 2**, although the narrative questions were generally more popular than the others and this is a sensible approach for many candidates who are clearly comfortable writing narratives. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements, all of which demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing. There was little evidence of prepared openings to essays and this worked to the benefit of candidates. Furthermore, there were very few instances of prepared essays, although occasionally a candidate found it challenging to include a prescribed sentence in a natural way. There were few examples of the inclusion of text messaging language, abbreviations and expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna', which can sometimes suggest the wrong register and are best avoided. There were still some examples of unnecessarily offensive language, or content designed to shock, in Section 2: candidates are reminded that this is never appropriate, even in direct speech.

## Comments on specific questions:

### **Section 1**

The Directed Writing task is assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write a speech to introduce a sports star at the opening of a new school sports centre. The sports star was a former pupil of the school. In particular, the candidates had to introduce the sports star and outline his or her achievements, describe the centre and its facilities, and explain how the school would benefit from the centre. They also had to offer an expression of thanks to the sports star. The audience was made up of pupils and teachers. This was a scenario that was within the imagined or practical experience of the candidates, the majority of whom responded well to the task. The scenario allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

**Section 1** is Directed Writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing a formal and informative speech for the specified audience, the teachers and pupils of their school, in addition to the content of the speech. Candidates were also instructed that they were *introducing* the sports centre to the audience. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year, responses needed to include:

- an introduction to the sports star **and** his or her achievements
- a description of the new centre **and** its facilities
- the benefits to the school that the centre will bring **and** an expression of thanks to the sports star.

In the first bullet point it was essential to name the sports star and outline specific sporting achievements which demonstrated their fame and success, in the second bullet point they were expected to offer some developed descriptions of the new centre and its facilities and in the third bullet point there were opportunities to develop ideas of how the school may benefit, as well as ensure that formal thanks were offered to the sports star for agreeing to attend the opening. Therefore all three bullet points offered scope to develop ideas and explanations.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make it clear that candidates will be judged on:

- clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience
- a correct format for the piece of writing
- appropriate tone and register
- the use of information to justify opinion
- the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points.

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks were awarded to responses which kept their focus on the context and purpose of the speech and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. There were few candidates this session who misunderstood the situation, although a few described a community centre rather than a sports centre, and some did not acknowledge that the sports star was an alumnus of the school. This limited the scope for developing relevant content at times.

In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point was relatively clear and did not pose problems for the majority of candidates who offered a name for the sports star, and outlined some impressive achievements in their sporting career. There were a few candidates who did not name the sports star or who introduced him or her as a star of school sports, thus limiting their achievements to school tournaments and records. Some candidates did not acknowledge that the sports star was an alumnus of the school thus limiting scope for developing their introduction. It is crucial that candidates read all the given information in the task, as well as the bullet points, very carefully to ensure that all the required information is utilised. The second bullet point was usually explained fully; many candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge about the various facilities that a new sports centre may offer, giving details of not only tracks, gyms and indoor courts, but also changing and leisure facilities. The third bullet point was often less developed than the first two, with some candidates omitting to offer thoughtful benefits for the school. Many responses just referred to developing sporting talent, or being better than rival schools. The more successful ones usually alluded to the health benefits of the centre in terms of developing fitness for all pupils and staff, or the opportunities for involving the wider community and hosting sports events, fully developing the ideas. Weaker responses sometimes repeated some of the facilities being offered in response to the third bullet point.

Therefore, the stronger responses usually amplified all three bullet points, using relevant and imaginative ideas to develop the speech. Other responses needed to incorporate more detail in the all three bullet points. The bullet points do not always have to be addressed at equal length but it is also true that the answer should not be too unbalanced because otherwise a bullet point might not be adequately developed.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and most candidates were comfortable with the concept of writing a speech to welcome a guest to the school and introduce a new school facility. However, some candidates missed the finer detail in the task, therefore not addressing the situation and purpose fully. The register was kept suitably formal in most responses. Others were occasionally too informal, referring to the sports star's own experiences at school in a rather casual way, sometimes even suggesting that they lacked academic ability or misbehaved when at school. However, the vast majority of candidates employed an appropriate format following the guidance given in the rubric by adopting a polite and informative tone. The best responses were able to balance the need to introduce the sports star warmly, while focusing on an exciting development of the school's facilities. The majority of responses adopted an appropriate format for a speech, opening with the greeting specified in the task and addressing the audience at appropriate moments throughout the speech. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to improve performance.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite but informative tone very well. Other responses were rather short, only just reaching the lower word limit. Candidates need to ensure that they address the word length requirements in their responses. Linguistically, candidates were generally at ease with vocabulary associated with a formal school context. Most candidates found little difficulty in addressing the task to produce a convincing piece of work.

## **Section 2**

### **Question 2**

**Describe a long journey by car or public transport that passes through different kinds of scenery. (Remember that you can describe your fellow travellers as well as the scenery).**

This was a reasonably popular title. The vast majority of candidates described journeys by car or on a bus. The best responses were able to capture the essence of a long journey through describing various rural scenes as well as towns and villages passed through, focusing on how the scenery changed as well as their own thoughts and feelings about the journey. Many included vivid descriptions that made it possible for the reader to imagine the places being described. Some responses were also very entertaining, especially those which described long journeys by bus, describing various fellow travellers, as well as the (often incompetent) bus driver. At times responses became rather narrative-like, with some including criminal activities, crashes and disasters along the way. This often resulted in a lack of focus on description.

### **Question 3**

**Do you think countries should spend their money on saving wild animals from extinction? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was a popular title and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who had interesting ideas and opinions on the subject. Most expressed great support for the statement, citing several endangered species and the need to protect them from poaching. Some candidates took a very balanced view and argued that although the preservation of wild animals is important, many countries need to tackle more pressing issues such as poverty and political conflict before spending money on endangered species. Many responses cited the importance of wild animal preservation to the tourist trade through established game parks and argued that the 'Big Five' are a source of national pride and should always be protected whatever the cost. Other responses focused on the need to balance the eco-system arguing that extinction of any species could have far-reaching effects on the natural world and our place in it. It was impressive to see how many candidates were well informed about global concerns and environmental issues, but also how many could utilise their personal opinions and feelings in their responses to this question. Many candidates could explore their ideas with convincing evidence over a number of paragraphs rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view.

### **Question 4**

**Write a story which includes the sentence: 'You change places with me; no-one will ever know.'**

This was a popular title. Favourite themes included asking a twin or sibling to take an examination, humorous tales of stepping in for a good friend at a social event, being invited to jump ahead in a queue for a flight or to purchase tickets, or requests from mysterious strangers to take their place in a shady transaction or deal. The best essays were those that built up to the prescribed sentence effectively and explored the reasons for the impersonation fully. There were some really thoughtful and well developed plots involving impersonations that were desperately begged for, but reluctantly undertaken for various reasons, often resulting in feelings of guilt or shame when the protagonists were discovered. Such responses focused on building up suspense for the reader. Less successful responses included the required sentence in their narrative, but did not really explore the potential in terms of the plot. These responses often started with the prescribed sentence but the reader was left unsure of why the impersonation was necessary as the plot did not explain it clearly. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well the majority of candidates integrated the given topic sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness.

### Question 5

#### Laughter

This was a less popular topic inviting a very small number of responses. Any approach to this question was possible. The best responses either treated it as a reflective title exploring the importance of laughter and happiness in today's world, or wrote a narrative where laughter featured as an important turning point or denouement in the plot. There were some thoughtful explorations of why laughter is of such importance in our lives and why we so often fail to laugh enough through taking life too seriously. Other successful responses described a grandparent through their memories of their laughter and joy. Weaker responses found little to say on the topic and tried to define and explore the word 'laughter', often resulting in rather repetitive and unconvincing responses.

### Question 6

#### Write a story in which an argument in a queue plays an important part.

This was a less popular title, perhaps because candidates had already seen an attractive title before reaching Question 6. Many stories focused on long waiting times, building up a tense atmosphere then an explosive argument as tempers frayed when somebody tried to move ahead in the queue. Favoured settings were banks, gas stations and shops. The better responses explored thoughts and feelings of impatience and frustration fully, with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama and tension. Many responses incorporated effective descriptions of the different people in the queue, exploring their attitudes and behaviour. Many also created vivid settings of hot, stuffy buildings with slow, inadequate service, successfully creating an atmosphere in which tempers were likely to flare. Some also explored interesting social hierarchies, often resulting in the victory of the less fortunate and someone considering themselves superior being taught a lesson in equality. Less successful responses were wholly narrative, focusing on events but not developing the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Writing

## Key messages

- In **Section 1** candidates should be familiar with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use them as a checklist. Candidates getting a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- Attention should be given to the full requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**, especially when there is a word in bold type. Candidates are advised to go beyond lifting from the question to supply information in answer to the bullet points.
- In **Section 1**, candidates in general need to be more aware of how to make a written speech sound like a spoken text.
- Ensuring correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority candidates, as would the correct use of full stops.
- Increasingly, the use of capital letters is inaccurate whereas it must be seen as essential.

## General comments

- The overall standard of the vast majority this year seemed to be comparable to previous years. There were some examples of very high quality writing, although there were relatively few examples of Band 1 Language being displayed in **Section 2**, and some suggestion that the better candidates were 'playing safe' with shorter sentences. Equally, fewer and fewer candidates fell into Bands 7 and 8. Candidates are now much better at avoiding text messaging in essays, although there was still evidence of inappropriate language ('gonna', 'wanna', 'pissed'). **Section 1** was done well by the vast majority although there is still a need to ensure that every part of each bullet point has been addressed as there are sometimes two considerations in any bullet point. Time management for the vast majority was very good. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports. There was improved paragraphing in the **Section 1** task this year but the correct punctuation and lay out of direct speech needs more attention. Sentence separation errors still gave cause for concern with commas used instead of full stops.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1 Directed Writing**

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that they and other members of their class had been invited to organise and run an after-school activity for younger pupils. The Principal of the school was pleased with the success of the enterprise and asked the candidate to make a speech about it at a school assembly. Candidates could choose any kind of activity that appealed to them and the vast majority responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. **Section 1** is directed writing and candidates must accept the need to follow instructions. This year they had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer had to have:

- details about where **and** when the activity was held
- a description of the activity that took place
- the benefits to the younger pupils **and** to the speaker's classmates.

In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas, or responses to the bullet points, that will gain most marks.

This year, for **bullet point 1**, a simple addressing of the point gave the name of a location and an indication of a time or date. Such thin details were enough to locate the event but candidates should always be prepared to elaborate, within the 200-300 word limit. More successful candidates were prepared to give the day(s) as well as the date and to say something about the location, perhaps to say how suitable it was for the event. Therefore, simply to put 'our school' as the location was to do little more than copy from the rubric. The addition of 'the auditorium in our school', or something similar, was enough to suggest a precise location which convinced the reader. School halls, specific classrooms or laboratories, running tracks, football fields or the gym were all used effectively as locations. Some candidates went beyond the school buildings and mentioned the school surroundings or a particular stadium nearby. Some went even further afield and mentioned locations which were some distance away from the school (a seaside venue or mountain range) and these were all acceptable, although the candidate who chose America for an after-school activity was possibly being a little ambitious. Most candidates understood 'after-school' to mean after school closed for the day but some took it to mean after the school week or term ended; this was generally where the more exotic locations came in. Although the examination is testing linguistic ability in the main, a small number of candidates needed to give more thought to the logistics of the scenario because they mentioned times which could not have been regarded as 'after-school'.

**Bullet point 2** asked for a description of the activity that took place and it needed a sense of the older pupils leading the younger ones. The responses to this were many and varied. Very many of them centred on education and the improvement of the academic standards of the younger pupils. To this end, the older pupils held what were in effect seminars covering many aspects of academic life. Equally popular were similar events aimed at introducing the younger pupils to new sports or improving their sporting prowess. A number of candidates saw this as an opportunity to improve the life skills of the younger pupils. Debating practice was another favourite and there were any number of lesser interests, most notably art work, environmental cleaning and planting. Those who saw 'after-school' as a weekend or holiday time went for more exotic adventures and often set out on hikes etc. in far flung locations. There was, though, a danger here of turning this event into a school event rather than one inspired by a class of older pupils. Some made it an obvious annual school camp; it was just as much of a misreading to make the activity a school-organised Open Day or Sports Day (often with massive participation by neighbouring schools which would seem beyond the administrative abilities of one class). Some candidates got around this by saying that the older pupils had a smaller, specific job within the larger school activity. The bullet point called for a description of the activity and the better candidates did this by detailing aspects of the event (such as organisation, cost, different kinds of participation), whereas weaker candidates simply narrated step by step what happened. This was especially obvious in routine reports of a sporting tie. Candidates should also be aware that simply producing an overlong list of activities without detail made the bullet point less credible.

**Bullet point 3** needed details regarding the benefits to both younger pupils and the older ones as a result of the activity. It is important to note that in bullet 3 the word 'and' was in bold, therefore suggesting that the classmates should be mentioned and that their benefits might be different. Most candidates did mention both sets of benefits separately but many dealt with it as a joint benefit, whereas there were also many who mentioned only the younger pupils as benefiting and so limited themselves in marks for Task Fulfilment. Whether a separate benefit or a joint one, the usual benefit was that learning had been substantial, that people were better or more motivated as a result and that, in the case of the older pupils, they had learned about teamwork. They had come to know each other better and had improved their organisational skills.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and candidates were clear about what they were doing in this text. The purpose was to inform the assembly audience in an interesting way about how the activity had gone and the majority had no difficulty in conveying this. However, the greatest issue was when a significant number of candidates set the event in the future which was clearly the opposite of what was intended by the question. This not only hampered the awarding of this bullet point but also reduced the effectiveness of the other two. It made it extremely difficult to answer bullet 3 because they could only guess at what the benefits might be. Similarly, the **situation** was very well understood by the majority but many were a bit weaker in not making it clear that they had organised the activity and it often sounded as if the school had. As for the appropriate **audience** for this task, candidates were open to choose either a general school assembly gathering or an audience simply of the younger pupils who had been at the activity. Virtually everyone did this correctly, although a small number seemed to have parents attending as well, but this did not make much difference. **The register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal by most but there was also the opportunity here for some teenage phrases in a spoken text aimed at least in part at peers ('you guys', 'a fun time') but these were not to be overdone.



The correct **format** for a speech allowed candidates to demonstrate what they saw as spoken English. Candidates were given an opening line and nearly everyone used this. Nearly everyone also closed the speech with a thank-you, either to the participants in the activity or to the assembly for listening patiently, or sometimes to both. In this respect, the text came across as a speech but beyond that there was often very little to suggest that the text was a spoken one. It is true that some candidates rose to the challenge and provided rhetorical questions, or made reference to the Principal in the audience or used phrases such as 'here today' or 'on this Monday morning' to give a sense of immediacy; however, a high number of candidates wrote their text mainly with the content in mind so that the majority of them could easily have been magazine articles. Some candidates included written conventions such as 'etc' or used stage directions ('smiles at audience') which took away from the feeling of something spoken. Occasionally, there were letter endings, even after something which sounded very much like a speech. Organisation hardly varied, with candidates logically and sensibly following the bullet points in the order given. As a result, there were some methodical, beautifully organised speeches where planning had clearly taken place. With weaker candidates, too much space was sometimes taken with lengthy introductions with a lot of attention to protocol, and in conclusions over-elaborate thanks were given, to the detriment of what was specified in the bullet points. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, formal **tone** and approach very well. **Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when bullet 3 was answered fully. There were very few short scripts in **Section 1** and everyone attempted the question.

Linguistically, most candidates found it quite straightforward to produce a convincing piece of work. Spelling was generally satisfactory. Paragraphing was also done very well indeed this year although there were a number who thought that a speech did not need to be paragraphed. Weaknesses in the use of capital letters were again obvious and candidates would do well to practise this skill. Possibly the weakness which needed to be thought about most is that many candidates had difficulty maintaining the correct tense when looking back at the event and far too often used constructions starting 'we had...' as in 'we had organised...' when simply 'we organised' was correct. A very common incorrect construction was to say "As we all know that our class was asked to conduct an activity for the younger students' with the redundant 'that'. Another very common, incorrect construction was 'I, Maryam, is here today...'. The word 'Principal' was sometimes written as 'Principle', which was unexpected as the word was in the question. Although given in the question, 'successful' was often spelt wrongly.

## **Section 2 Creative Writing**

### **2 Describe the scene at a busy medical centre. (Remember you can describe the atmosphere, the surroundings and the people.)**

The descriptive essay is popular with relatively few candidates and so it proved again this year. Those who attempted it successfully chose it because they understood the need to describe for the majority of the answer, as was stressed in the brackets in the question. These were clearly candidates who had a particular medical centre in mind, probably from personal experience, as indicated by the centre being given a name. There were some vivid scenes involving highly motivated staff and impressive medical provision; there were also alarming descriptions, with dirty surroundings, unmotivated and indifferent staff, chaotic scenes, long queues (with pushing and queue jumping), and neglected, often very ill, patients. The use of adjectives and similes was as important as always in a descriptive essay to conjure up the atmosphere of the place. Vocabulary, such as 'pungent' and 'stench' was often highly evocative. Even more than in previous years, the ability to use the senses played an important part in a full description and the best responses employed all five as a medical centre lends itself to this multi-layered impression. The smells of medicine and antiseptic; the sight of blood or a needle; the sounds of relatives crying or patients suffering; the feel of bandages and even (in the best responses) the taste of fear – all contributed to making the reader feel a part of what was observed. Candidates who devoted a paragraph to each sense gave a clear evocation of the scene. Essays were often made more powerful by comments on the differing treatment received by people of different social groups. Weaker candidates tended to find the sustained description beyond them and substituted narrative. With a medical centre, such narrative sections dwelt for too long on how the narrator had arrived at the medical centre or how patients had been injured. One response was a narrative about an atrocity and the medical centre was barely mentioned. It is essential to say again that only those candidates who appreciate the need to **describe** throughout should attempt this option and those who prefer narratives should answer one of those titles. As far as language is concerned, it is worth repeating last year's advice that candidates are advised that this kind of essay is most effective in the present tense, unless contrasting past and present events. Mixed tenses were a problem in a number of scripts.

**3 'Spending time away from the familiar things at home is an important part of a young person's education.' What is your opinion? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was not a very popular question but a small number of candidates clearly were at an age when they felt that this was extremely relevant to them and they wrote with great conviction. Although most of the candidates acknowledged the merits of home life, there was universal agreement amongst candidates of all linguistic ability about how useful it was to spend time away from what was familiar in order to mature. Some saw the move away as merely temporary so they wrote about days or weekends when they abandoned their usual routines and did something different out of doors. Some candidates wrote about the more permanent move overseas for an extended period of study while some candidates confronted the permanent move from the parental home because of marriage or work opportunities. For those who spoke about a short time away, it was interesting to see how a break from social media and computers was seen as necessary to promote a healthier lifestyle with an emphasis on learning something new. A longer stay away from familiar things was seen as necessary for the growing independence of the candidates who had to learn to fend for themselves as they entered the adult world. Most candidates were able to expand their arguments but some of the weaker ones ran out of ideas and repeated what they had already said.

**4 Write a story which includes the words: 'I hadn't spoken to my sister for some time but on this occasion I just had to call her.'**

This year the two narratives, **Question 4** and **Question 6** were by far the most popular titles. Yet again this year, the given sentence in the title of this question was well integrated into the narrative, with only a small number in which the sentence had little or no relevance, or where the tense had to be changed to make sense of what was being narrated. Good characterisation was obvious in very many scripts, together with humour, pathos and suspense. There was a wide range of subject matter. Sudden death, betrayal, misunderstandings, illness, shattered relationships and the fragility of life were very well evoked and had the ring of truth, so convincingly were they handled. A very popular construction was to outline first of all the cause of the break up between the narrator and his or her sister. Sometimes this was a petty squabble over a possession or an argument over some deeply held belief. Often, the sister had moved abroad to study. It was quite common for the sister to have left home to marry against the family wishes and for contact to have been broken. Some candidates missed the seriousness of this by not having spoken to the sister in the last half an hour or so and this undermined the drama. Mostly, the need to contact the sister after 'some time' was because parents had been involved in an accident or were ill or had died. Sometimes it was a happier occasion when the narrator or sister had become a parent themselves or had obtained very good exam results. Whatever the reason, it was nearly always the case that reconciliation took place and the ending was happy. Direct speech, when used sparingly, was highly effective in suggesting character; when it was overused, it merely slowed the narration.

**5 Work**

Overall, this was not a popular title, although some responses took a philosophical approach and highlighted the virtues of hard work in all walks of life, the pros and cons, or they took the narrative approach and demonstrated the virtues of hard work through an example of someone they knew. There was a danger in both these approaches. The narrative approach said very little about work itself; rather, it emphasised the privations of a life without work and so lacked a little weight. The philosophical approach was often beyond the vocabulary of the weaker candidate and tended to be rather repetitive. There was very often a merging of work, jobs, careers and professions rather than a concentration on work.



**6 Write a story about someone whose personality changed as the result of an accident.**

This question was very popular, if not quite as popular as **Question 4**. Most stories presented a first half which built up the success/ privilege/ arrogance of the protagonist and then a second half which involved a traffic accident followed by the dire consequences, followed by the rehabilitation of the main character. Very often the character was guilty of drinking or using drugs and then driving a car which either hit someone or was hit by another vehicle. The most successful responses were those which played on the contrast between the protagonist before and after the accident. Some candidates took a less dramatic interpretation of the word 'accident' and saw it as luck or chance but the change was often just as obvious. There was a large element of hubris in these stories as candidates cleverly related the 'accident' to the initial arrogance as in the example of the response which described a person who was vain about their own appearance and disparaging of others, only to find herself disfigured. Less dramatic, less physical, but just as effective were stories about privileged people who were forced to confront disadvantage in others and thereby learnt a real lesson in humility. Pathetic fallacy was effectively used, e.g. dark night, ominous clouds and rain mirroring the events of the story. Quite often, weaker candidates mistook 'accident' for 'incident'.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21  
Reading

## Key messages

- Close reading of the given texts is essential before candidates begin to answer any questions. In Section 1 there will always be a considerable amount of information to be absorbed and processed in order to summarise the content. It is likely that more than one reading of the passage will be necessary to fully understand and to deal appropriately with a subject and ideas which may be new to the reader. The same applies to the narrative passage of Section 2, where reading for meaning necessitates thorough consideration to appreciate both literal and implied meanings.
- In **Question 1(a)** it is good practice to present selected information under bullet points, as this allows for clear, structured expression. There were fewer instances than in the past of a single point being spread across two bullets.
- For **Question 1(b)**, more practice with the use of connectives such as 'however', 'nevertheless', 'furthermore' and 'moreover' is advised to ensure that these are used, appropriately, to suggest an alternative or contradictory idea to the one which has just been mentioned, or to extend that idea further. Candidates can also improve on sentence separation, recognising where a full stop is necessary between distinct pieces of information which are complete in themselves.
- Proper nouns, which always require a capital letter, frequently occur in passages set for examination; in this paper, for example, 'Egypt', 'Olympic Games', 'Jem' and 'Miss Caroline'. The use capital letters for names should be practised thoroughly and candidates are also advised to remember the necessity for their use after a full stop.
- While the vocabulary question was generally well done, those questions which require candidates to answer in their own words were less successfully answered. Practice in recognising the meanings of words within a specific context can be achieved through regular, wider reading of both fiction and non-fiction texts.

## General comments

The vast majority of candidates offered neatly presented scripts. However, when crossing out is necessary at any point, and particularly in **Question 1(b)**, this should be done carefully to avoid illegibility. While there were a few examples of incomplete scripts, most candidates attempted every task demonstrated that they were familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked.

A range of questions were to be answered on two passages, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. The variety of subject matter aimed to engage the readers' interest and to stretch and discriminate amongst them; this was reflected in scores ranging from a small minority in single figures to almost full marks.

The first passage, entitled 'Horses', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for selection of content points from the text of 'Horses' and 5 marks for the assessment of the candidates' ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions continued to test the ability to read for ideas, candidates having to decide whether statements were true, false or not stated in the passage, and to respond to the text by drawing on personal knowledge or experience.

In **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)**, more candidates than usual did well, a high number of responses achieving the maximum 15 marks in **Question 1(a)** and many fewer candidates than previously scoring below half marks.

Those who were not so successful in this first question had usually omitted the necessary detail to express the main points fully. Equally high numbers achieved above average marks for style in **Question 1(b)**. In this question, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures, with a high number of full or almost full marks being awarded. Weaker responses used the words of the passage, inaccurately copied or rearranged, sometimes linked only by repetition of the conjunction 'and'. Random repositioning of chunks of text frequently leads to fractured syntax and mangled sense.

The second passage, the story of 'Jean Louise' and her first day at school, tested the candidates' ability to read for meaning, with questions focusing on literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The context of school would be familiar to candidates and answers from many showed empathy with the main character and her situation. The names of some of the characters caused uncertainty regarding Jean Louise's gender. The first words of the text refer to 'My older brother Jem', a clear indication that Jem was a boy, and **Q7** refers Jean Louise as Jem's 'sister'. However, gender was not important in any question and incorrect use of male / female pronouns was not penalised.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### ***Section 1: Reading for ideas***

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30 per cent of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the uses and attractions of horses in former times, and the continuing uses and attractions of horses in modern times, as outlined in the passage. The summary was based on Paragraphs 2–8, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, and were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied it was usually because key words or phrases were missing, or because the point referred to irrelevant sections of the text. Occasionally, material from the first paragraph was introduced, e.g. 'Hunted for meat', or 'Horses were depicted in cave paintings 30,000 years ago'; such ideas, taken from outside the given parameters, were not credited.

Excluding the points provided, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 18 further content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences. Although candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, most did so, following the example of the given points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented in this way. It was rare to find points listed in the wrong box.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 referred to the uses and attractions of horses in former times, and there were 11 points which the candidates could make. Of these (excluding the first, given point) there was 1 point in Paragraph 2: the racing of horse-drawn chariots. Most candidates identified this point correctly, while a few imprecisely offered merely 'horse racing' or 'chariots were popular'.

From Paragraph 3 candidates could select a further 4 points: that light cavalry (or men on horses) could be used to overpower the enemy or allow for a quick retreat; that heavy cavalry (or soldiers wearing armour) carried lethal weapons or weapons such as swords or axes; fighting from horseback gave the advantage of height and speed; and finally, horses were used to carry goods or supplies. Candidates are advised that if no specific subject of an offered point is mentioned, the subject will be taken to be that of the rubric; here, 'horses'. So, for example, while most successfully made the first point in the paragraph, there were those who suggested that '*They* could overpower enemy soldiers' and did not score, as it was *the men riding* the horses who did so. The second point was less frequently accurate, where the men were not defined as '*heavy*' cavalry (or as wearing the armour which gave them that name) or their lethal power mentioned. Fighting from horseback was what gave the useful advantage of height and speed, but again there were those who did not mention fighting at all for this point, implying simply that horses offered these advantages in any situation. The final point in the paragraph, the carrying of goods, was almost always given correctly. In Paragraph 4 the passage mentioned 3 ways in which horses proved to be attractive, rather than useful, in medieval Europe: jousting, tournaments and horse shows. Candidates needed to include that the first of these was entertaining, exciting or popular; the second was also popular or entertaining; the term 'horse shows' was sufficient to suggest the entertainment value of the third. Most candidates were successful in doing so and only those who offered single words for the first and second points did not score.

There were 2 further 'uses' of horses in former times in Paragraph 5, which were that they were used for ploughing and also to pull carts or carriages. Both of these points were usually offered successfully, except where it was occasionally suggested that the horses were used 'as' ploughs, rather than to pull them.

The second section of the rubric asked for the continuing uses and attractions of horses in modern times and the remaining 9 points were in Paragraphs 6, 7 and 8. The first of these paragraphs began with mention of 'in modern times', signalling that information for the second answer box started here. Apart from the first, given point of the section, there was 1 other point available in Paragraph 6: the entertainment value which comes from 'marvelling' at the extent to which horse and rider have been trained to work in harmony (in events such as the Olympic Games, mentioned in the given point.) For this to be an 'attraction', reference was necessary to marvelling at – or an equivalent idea such as seeing or recognising – the sight of man and animal working as one; it was this which provided the entertainment value. Some responses did not complete this idea fully, offering merely 'Horses work in harmony with riders'; this did not suggest the attraction, or the entertainment value.

In Paragraph 7 there were 3 content points. The first was the use of horse skin to make attractive or hardwearing items, or the examples of such items, i.e. coats and handbags. Occasionally a candidate noticed that the introductory words for this point suggested that creation of the same items is being done now 'As in ancient times...'. It was acceptable, therefore, to give this point in the first box or in the second, but it could not be credited twice. Either way, most scripts included the idea, correctly recognising the need for the items to be either 'attractive' or 'hard-wearing'. Another two points were linked to horse hair which is used to make the bows for stringed instruments (or for musicians) and to make paint brushes. The better responses distinguished clearly between the use of horse *skin* and the uses of horse *hair*, but others sometimes suggested that clothes, bows and paint brushes were all made from the same part of the horse. Other inaccuracies which denied a mark included the suggestion that 'musical instruments', or parts of them, are made from horse hair and that 'horses are used as paint brushes'. Precise detail was crucial for these content points while the addition of distracting material, such as the instruction to remember the contribution that horses have made to classical music, or the ways in which horse hair holds and applies paint, were unnecessary.

The last 4 content points were in Paragraph 8 and there were certain essential elements to be included in 3 of them which not all candidates offered. The first use mentioned was that the horse is not just a means of transport in some areas of the world; it is a *vital* means, and candidates had to say this, or use an equivalent adjective such as 'necessary' or 'important. If such a qualifier was not used, the alternative was to repeat or paraphrase the text, saying that the horse is used as transport *in places where travelling by other means is difficult, or impossible*. These words would carry the same weight as 'vital'. The next point was that therapeutic riding is a cure for some physical ailments, or for spine or brain injury. The subject of the point had to be 'riding', not 'horses' which, of themselves, are not a therapy for serious ailments. The following content point was one which only the very best responses recognised accurately: that *therapeutic* horse riding gives people confidence – in other words, it gives confidence to people who are not able-bodied, or who suffer from brain or spinal injury. The majority who attempted this idea did not recognise that this point was closely linked to the previous one, referring specifically only to those with serious physical ailments. The last available point, offered by virtually every candidate, was that handling or grooming a horse is restful or a means of relaxation. The few who did not score tended to be those who said '*It* is restful'; the use of the pronoun, without the action of either grooming or handling, had to refer to 'the horse' of the question rubric, which did not make sense.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the uses and attractions of horses in former times, and the continuing uses and attractions of horses in modern times, as outlined in the passage. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet. Almost without exception, candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. Very short answers were extremely rare; advice given previously appears to have been noted – that such brevity can never achieve a high mark because sustained use of own words and stylish, accurate, English cannot be demonstrated.

Irrelevant material taken from the first paragraph was seen on occasion and candidates should avoid introducing their own ideas and opinions in a summary which is to be based on the given passage.

'Key Messages', above, mentions the work still to be done on the use of capital letters and on the use of connectives or adverbs which frequently demonstrated little understanding of their meaning. Such linking

words were sometimes used in an arbitrary or inaccurate way but should instead be used carefully, in context.

One connecting phrase which was sometimes attempted was 'In addition...' or 'In addition to *this* ...'. When correctly written, both are quite acceptable but were regularly used inaccurately, e.g. 'In addition to ^ horse shows were popular' (without the inclusion of 'this'), or '*Adding on* horses are harnessed to ploughs'. In the attempt to substitute for the vocabulary of the text, inappropriate words were sometimes used; a noticeably frequent example was the use of 'famous' as an alternative for 'popular', e.g. 'chariot races were famous'; these two words are not synonymous. Candidates are advised to ensure they spell carefully any unusual words which appear in the passage (e.g. 'Byzantium' and 'psychological'). While the spelling of easier, more common words was generally quite accurate, one word in this passage as well as in the question, was regularly mis-spelt: 'mordern' was the usual, incorrect spelling of 'modern'.

**Question 2** and **Question 3** continued to test Reading for Ideas, where candidates could show their ability to respond to the ideas presented in the whole text or a section of it.

**Question 2** was based on Paragraph 1, and asked candidates to decide whether each of three statements based on the information in that paragraph was true or false or not stated in the passage. The first of these statements – that before they were domesticated, horses were hunted as food – was true, and most candidates correctly ticked the appropriate box. The second was the inaccurate suggestion that the first domesticated use of the horse was to pull burial chariots, and candidates should have ticked the 'Not Stated' box. Because mention was made in the text of horses being used in this way 'around 4,000 years ago' some candidates thought that this must be true as well; they did not take into consideration the rest of the paragraph which considered the uncertainty of when domestication took place. The final statement – it is certain that horses were domesticated 6,000 years ago in Kazakhstan – was false; we are told that this was merely a 'theory'. This type of question is not always as easy as some may think; it is not a case of spotting some words which seem to match the statement, but requires careful reading of everything the paragraph has to say. There were those who recognised this need and distinguished between evidence and theory, gaining the 3 marks, but many ticked all as 'true', without due consideration.

**Question 3** required candidates to give, from their own knowledge or experience, an example of a major advance for society, and to explain what effect this advance has had on society. Paragraph 5 referred to the 'major advance for society in terms of public transport' which was brought about by the use of horses to pull carts and carriages. A wide range of sensible 'advances' was offered including 'the creation of cars' for improved and more effective transportation or 'the printing press' as a means of creating books and thus imparting knowledge 'Technology' was a popular generalisation which was not acceptable as an advance unless a specific form was added, such as 'the internet', for speedy access to information or 'the telephone', which allowed communication over long distances. However, when 'the mobile phone' was given as a form of technology, certainly correct in its position as a 'major advance', the 'effect' was often inaccurate, suggesting that it allowed easy communication all over the world; it was the *telephone*, not the mobile phone, which was the major advance allowing easy communication throughout the world. Only those who said it allowed 'easier' communication scored the second mark. If a generalised idea such as 'technology' was given, followed by a relevant and valid 'effect', one mark was awarded, e.g. 'A major advance is technology' did not score but 'An effect is the creation of security cameras to catch criminals' was credited. A number of responses did not consider the fact that the 'advance' they suggested had to have a 'major' impact on society, offering such minor ideas as using animal skin for fashion or inventing surf boards for fun. Despite the instruction of the rubric, there were a number of candidates who gave examples relating to horses, e.g. 'Horse hair is used to make artificial hair for people'; such answers did not score.



## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 2: Reading for Meaning**

Most candidates seemed to find this narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1. Questions require interpretation and appreciation of the writer's skill and, as suggested in 'Key Messages' above, regular reading and discussion of fiction will help a great deal with all types of question in this section.

**Question 4(a)** was a literal comprehension question, asking why Jean Louise was 'miserable'. Candidates of all abilities saw that it was to do with her friend, Dill, having left to go home after staying at his grandmother's house for the summer. Some explained this very fully but the mark could be gained for the simple idea of separation: 'Dill had left', or 'she was miserable without her friend', etc.

**Question 4(b)**, the question 'What made Jean Louise feel better?' required candidates to recognise that Jean Louise was miserable only 'until' she realised that she 'would be starting school in a week', a clear pointer to this being the reason that she felt better. Some responses did not include the immediacy of her starting school, either in the words of the passage or something equivalent such as 'soon' or 'she was about to..'; this was necessary as it implied that she had no time to feel miserable for long. Others referred to 'school' starting soon, but this was not precise enough, and could have meant that a new term was starting rather than it being Jean Louise's very first term. A few candidates selected from the following sentence the idea that Jem had agreed to take her to school.

**Question 4(c)** was the first question which required candidates to explain in their '**own words**' why, according to Jem, he and Jean Louise would play at home but not at school. Most candidates realised that the key words to be recast would be found in what Jem said (i.e. 'according to him') and accurately identified them as 'mortify' and 'tagging along'. Many gained one of the available marks, offering 'embarrass' for 'mortify', although quite a few interpreted it as 'scare'. Though the second mark eluded many candidates, the most popular correct synonym for 'tagging along' was 'following'; 'shadowing', 'hanging about' and 'in tow' also clearly gave the picture of Jean Louise constantly following her brother. The weaker responses did not look to Jem's words for the answer and gave their own suggestions such as that school was for studying and home for playing, or that they were in different classes so could not play together.

**Question 5(a)** was a literal comprehension question which candidates found challenging, and was one which differentiated among candidates. They were to explain why the children were not impressed by Miss Caroline's story; two marks were available but while most candidates scored one of these, only a few succeeded in gaining both. The reason identified most frequently was that the children had all grown up with animals, knew them well, or that they did not believe the story ('because they were familiar with them' being understood). However, what was only addressed by a small number was the story itself; its content was the reason the class was unimpressed and disbelieving. Thus there was a need to explain that the story personified cats, or made them wear clothes, or be able to talk like humans. The best responses completed the reason: 'The children were familiar with animals and did not believe the story about talking cats; or 'They did not believe the story about cats wearing clothes and living in kitchens'.

**Question 5(b)** was an inferential one, requiring candidates to infer from the line which appeared between her eyebrows the emotion Miss Caroline was experiencing. The words referred to a frown which suggested that the teacher was angry, annoyed, irritated or perhaps puzzled or confused; she had not expected anyone to know the alphabet. There were many correct answers here, though 'fury' and 'horror' were rather too strong for the emotion. 'Surprise' was a common wrong answer.

**Question 5(c)** asked for the 4 consecutive words in the paragraph which told us that Miss Caroline did not like Jean Louise. This was well answered by almost all candidates, who correctly quoted 'more than faint distaste'. A very few responses gave separate words such as 'distaste, sternly, annoyed, crossed-swords'. Only the first of these was in Paragraph 2, to which candidates were directed for **Question 5**. Candidates are advised to keep in mind which paragraph they are dealing with, until instructed to move on to another.

**Question 5(d)** was another inferential question. While stronger responses answered succinctly, gaining both marks, weaker ones did not score because they did not really understand the last word in the question: 'Explain fully why Miss Caroline's instruction to Jean Louise was *ironic*.' Answers required the idea of contradiction, which could be expressed in many ways for both marks. The context was a teacher, whom one would expect to be pleased that a pupil was learning something, and a child who has picked up how to read by listening to and watching her father. The contradiction arises from the fact that Miss Caroline is *not* pleased and even suggests the father is 'damaging' Jean Louise's education. Some weaker responses

simply repeated or recast them, e.g. 'Her father should stop teaching her and she would have to undo the damage he caused.' In contrast, the best answers showed understanding of the need for two sides to establish the idea of contradiction, frequently flagged up by the use of connectives such as 'yet', 'but' or 'not', e.g. 'A teacher should encourage her students to study at home and praise them, not discourage them'; 'Miss Caroline's instruction suggested that her father had done a lot of harm, but he had helped her to be a good reader'; 'It was ironic because teachers would usually tell you the opposite – to ask your parents for help'; 'She was a teacher yet she was telling her father not to help her any more'; 'Being able to read is a good thing, not a bad thing'.

The answer to **Question 6** was in Paragraph 3, which described how Jean Louise had never 'deliberately' learned to read and candidates were to explain fully how she did in fact learn. The correct responses needed to include (i) the idea that she *frequently* listened to her father reading and (ii) the idea that she watched his finger moving along the line of words. Both ideas were needed for two marks. Paraphrasing the idea of frequency by 'often', every day' or even 'reading the daily news' was acceptable. This was not an 'own words' question and candidates could have scored by using the words of the text.

**Question 7(a)** The majority of candidates scored two marks for this question, and only a few did not give both pieces of information which showed that Jem cared for his sister. In Paragraph 4, Jem is mentioned almost immediately as asking Jean Louise how she was getting on, something which a number of candidates successfully rephrased as 'He asked if she was ok', or 'Jem checked that things (or her lessons) were going well'. Once his sister had told him about Miss Caroline, the second piece of evidence was given in two different ways in the text: 'Don't worry about her', he said, or 'he comforted' her.

In **Question 7(b)**, candidates were asked why they thought Miss Caroline's printed words were described as 'so-called' revelations. The inference was that they were not actually revelations, or something new, at all; they were already known or understood by Jean Louise; she could read them. Many responses recognised the inference and scored the mark; others mistakenly thought that the whole class already knew them. Weaker responses did not attempt to distil the highlighted word, quoting the early part of the sentence about no comment being expected. There were occasional misinterpretations of 'revelations' as having a Biblical or religious context.

**Question 8(a)** explored the ability to appreciate the writer's craft. From Paragraph 5, candidates were to 'Explain exactly why the ceiling danced with metallic light'. While many responded to the metaphor by mentioning the reflection, or reflected light, which was hitting the ceiling, they did not explain what 'exactly' was being reflected. Some responses mentioned that it was the lunch boxes, but the inference that the lunch boxes were made of metal or tin, etc. was not expressed for the second mark. The class was told only to put lunch boxes on the desk, and so those who went on to describe cutlery and foil-wrapped sandwiches inside them were going beyond the text with their answers. Similarly, the ideas expressed by others about children dancing for joy because it was lunch time, or lights flickering, were creative but wrong.

**Question 8(b)** was another which the majority answered correctly. Someone whispered that Jean Louise should tell the teacher something about her lending money to Walter for his lunch the expected response was that Jean Louise had to tell the teacher that 'Walter was poor', '...was from a poor family' or that he 'had no money to pay the teacher back'. The few incorrect responses were those which suggested that Jean Louise herself had no lunch, or that she told the teacher to stop, with no reason added.

**Question 8(c)** was the second in which candidates had to answer in their own words to explain 'what the class were thinking as they looked at Jean Louise'. The candidates usually found the key words: the class was looking at her 'in the *assurance*' that she 'could *rectify* the situation'. One word was recast more easily than the other: here, 'rectify' was more readily substituted, usually as 'solve', 'put right', 'correct' or 'fix'. Such words as 'explain' or 'settle' were tempting but did not accurately replace the given key word. 'Assurance' was often replaced with 'surely', which did not score, as synonyms with the same stem as the key word are not acceptable. Other attempts to substitute for this second word included 'expected' and 'believed' and a few suggested that the class thought Jean Louise was the best person for the job but did not explain why this was so, i.e. they knew she would sort the situation out.

**Question 9** was the familiar vocabulary question in which candidates fared much better this time than in recent examinations. As usual, five words or phrases were to be selected from a choice of eight and their meanings, in the context, given in a word or short phrase. The first, *condescended*, was the least often chosen and was invariably misunderstood. The notion of 'lowered himself', 'stooped' or 'deigned' (a difficult synonym in itself) was not present in attempts such as 'agreed' or 'wanted'. *Sweet* was almost always, and accurately, defined as 'cute', with alternatives such as 'endearing', 'adorable' and 'pretty' all being acceptable. *Mumbled* was not always precisely substituted but 'muttered' 'spoke incoherently', 'inaudibly' or 'unclearly' and 'said under your breath' were all good responses; common wrong answers for this were 'whispered', 'spoke softly' or 'spoke in a low tone'. For *meditated*, 'thought about' was a common correct synonym, though some stopped at 'thought' or 'thinking'; given the context of 'I ... *meditated* on my crime', this was not sufficient. Other excellent responses were 'reflected upon', 'thought deeply', 'considered' and 'pondered'. *Compelled* was usually recast as 'forced', with 'made to' or 'had to' as equally correct. 'Intertwining' and 'mess' were popular and accurate alternatives for *tangle*, together with 'twisted' and 'mixed up', but it was not a particularly frequent choice and sometimes there were unsuitable suggestions as 'tied', 'bunch' and 'pair'. *Sternly* was regularly chosen and usually successfully so: 'firmly', 'harshly' and 'strictly' were the best synonyms, while 'seriously' was a popular wrong definition. The simplest substitute for *On the wrong foot* was 'badly', which was often given; 'not well', 'not in a good way' and 'in a bad way' were seen and credited, too, as was 'on the bad side'.

Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, correct grammatical form was not insisted upon. Many more candidates gained 3, 4 or even the full 5 marks; only a very few responses were awarded no marks. It was also noticeable that candidates very rarely attempted to define their chosen words by including them in a sentence.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Reading

## Key messages

- Close reading of the given texts is essential before candidates begin to answer any questions. In Section 1 there will always be a considerable amount of information to be absorbed and processed in order to summarise the content. It is likely that more than one reading of the passage will be necessary to fully understand and to deal appropriately with what may be a subject and ideas new to the reader. The same applies to the narrative passage of Section 2, where reading for meaning necessitates thorough consideration to appreciate both literal and implied meanings.
- In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised that content points cannot be scored if they are spread over two bullets with no obvious link, or if they are put in the wrong boxes, although there were fewer instances of this than in past examinations. Candidates should also focus in this question on making the *whole* point; it is easy to miss marks because details have been omitted.
- In previous series, occasionally responses to **Question 1(a)** included the use of ellipsis, as in ..., instead of writing out the points in full, which led to the loss of such points and candidates' attention should be drawn to this fact. However, fewer instances of this were found in this series.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates can improve on errors of noun-verb agreement, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, or intrusive use of the article where none is required. They should learn the appropriate use of the apostrophe and ensure they do not use it to denote plurals. Candidates are advised that practice in the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' would help to ensure that these are used appropriately.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates need to be careful how their own writing continues from the given words. There were many errors here, the most common being to start the summary with 'The first two-wheeled method of transport, invented in 1817, was Draisine'. 'Also' is a word that was commonly overused without relating to the context it was in. Some candidates used words like – 'in addition', 'hence', 'on the other hand', again with no relation to the context. These words were also used in some cases at the beginning of almost every sentence.
- When copying from the passage, care should be taken that this is done accurately. Examples of incorrect copying led to 'sandals' and 'scandals' for 'saddles', and 'petals' and 'paddles' for 'pedals'.
- Candidates in general seemed to cope better than in some past examinations with questions in which they were required to answer in their own words. Moreover, there were fewer instances of candidates omitting to couch their synonyms of key words in sentence form, as in 'puzzled – confused, peered – looked closely' in **Question 6(e)**.
- As has been reported in past examinations, some candidates wrote answers to questions, particularly the content points in **Question 1(a)**, in pencil, before writing over the pencil in pen; the incidence of this had reduced, but increased again this session. This often led to writing which was difficult to read and is a practice which candidates are advised to discontinue.
- Candidates are advised that responses need to go beyond the literal when they are asked to explain the effect of a word or image. The difference between meaning (what / why / when questions) and effect (how questions).
- Candidates should not suggest that responses, or extensions to given responses, have been written elsewhere when this is not the case.

### General comments

The vast majority of candidates offered neatly presented scripts. However, when crossing out is necessary at any point, and particularly in **Question 1(b)**, this should be done carefully to avoid illegibility. While there were a few examples of incomplete scripts, most candidates attempted every task and demonstrated that they were familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked.

A range of questions were to be answered on two passages, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. The variety of subject matter seemed to engage the readers' interest and to stretch and discriminate amongst them; this was reflected in scores ranging from a small minority in single figures to almost full marks.

Candidates were to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet. As is generally the case, Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 2, as Passage 2 required understanding of implied meanings and some aspects of imagery and writer's craft.

On the whole, the Paper seemed to allow all candidates to demonstrate what they were capable of, at every level of ability. The excellence of the best candidates was impressive. Teachers had equipped their students with sound comprehension skills and also with effective examination craft. Very few seem to have been overwhelmed by the exam, with very few questions not being attempted. In general they coped well with the layout of the answer booklets.

The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Bicycles' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish true statements from false ones, and to link what they had read to their own knowledge or experience. The second passage tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.

The format of the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or producing both fair and rough copies. There was very little irrelevance noted or evidence of candidates diverging from the rubric by referring to Paragraph 1 in a question which directed them to Paragraphs 2–7.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures. Others needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks. It was not uncommon for candidates to begin by re-casting and then lapse into lifting text.

Both spelling and punctuation were good. The overall standard of written English was in some cases impressive. As indicated in 'Key Messages', candidates can improve accuracy of noun-verb agreement, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, even by the best candidates, or intrusive use of the article where none was required. There was confusion over the difference between 'alternative' and 'alternate' and 'environmental' and 'environmentally', and 'famous' was often incorrectly substituted as a synonym for 'popular'. There was also a tendency to add 'furthermore', 'hence', etc. liberally with no clear idea of their usage; in some cases there was little sense in what had been written because of this.

In Section 2, the names of some of the characters caused uncertainty, particularly regarding Jean Louise's gender. The first words of the text refer to 'My older brother Jem', a clear indication that Jem was a boy, and **Q7a** which focuses on Jean Louise refers to 'her father'. However, gender was not important in any question and incorrect use of male / female pronouns was not penalised.



## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1**

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30 per cent of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the evidence for the development of the bicycle and its growing popularity in former times, and give reasons for the continuing popularity of the bicycle today, as outlined in the passage. The summary was based on paragraphs 2 to 7, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied it was usually because key words or phrases were missing. Some responses were able to reach the maximum 15 marks; those candidates who identified in excess of 15 content points could be awarded only 15 marks. The exercise was fully discriminating as almost the whole range of marks could be found.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 18 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. As is generally the case, most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, most candidates used bullet points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets.

Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 gave the evidence for the development of the bicycle and its growing popularity in former times, and there were 9 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 3 content points, (excluding the provided first point) outlining the stages in the development of the bicycle. The Draisine was an alternative to the horse, it became popular with dandies, and adjustable saddles were a breakthrough. The 'Draisine' was the forerunner of the modern bicycle; candidates were free to use the term 'bicycle' if they wished, although almost none did. The term 'dandies' did not have to be used, and candidates were free to use the definition of dandies in the text, i.e. young men who were proud of their appearance. Reference to 'adjustable saddles' was enough to gain the available mark here, as that answered the question by giving one of the developments of the bicycle; there was no insistence on Draisines not needing to be made to measure, although very many candidates gave this additional information.

There were 3 content points to be found in Paragraph 3, which were that pedals were invented, that mass production of bicycles made them cheaper or more accessible, and that indoor riding academies opened up. As with the development of adjustable saddles, the development of pedals was considered sufficient to answer the question. Some candidates lost the available mark by writing that the pedals were called velocipedes; others offered only the second half of the sentence – 'riders could propel them by pushing their feet against the pedals' – which was not sufficient to score as it was an incidental reference to pedals and not a presentation of a development. Some candidates did not make the link between the mass production and the lower prices or increased accessibility, while a few who attempted the point about academies did not mention that there were riding academies as opposed to general learning institutions, and in such cases the mark was withheld.

In Paragraph 4, there were a further 3 content points. Bicycles started to be made with metal, which made them more comfortable, larger front than back wheels meant that the rider could travel further, or that the bicycle or velocipede was more efficient, and rubber tyres made the bicycle or velocipede more comfortable. Many responses focused on the 'improvements in metallurgy' and missed the fact that velocipedes were made of metal. The comparative sizes of the wheels had to be referred to, as this was what made the bicycle move further; reference to large and small alone was not enough, as every bicycle will have large, medium or small wheels depending on its size. In each of the points where increased comfort was a key idea in the development of the bicycle, namely the reference to metal bicycles and rubber tyres, the link with comfort was omitted by some candidates and so available marks could not be awarded.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the reasons for the continuing popularity of the bicycle today, and there were 9 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 5, candidates could make 4 points (excluding the provided first point): bicycles are a useful alternative to other forms of transport, or to bus or train or car; cycling combines travelling to work with taking exercise; cycling reduces the risk of heart disease, or high blood pressure or obesity or serious illness; people use exercise bikes to keep fit. The point about combining exercise with travelling to work was sometimes incompletely made because there was no reference to work; this was essential as, without it, what was left was simply the idea that cycling is travelling, or that cycling is a means of keeping fit. The point

about cycling reducing the risk of serious diseases was sometimes not made because omission of the reference to 'risk' meant that what was left was too much of an exaggeration to make the point. The point about exercise bikes was often overlooked or misunderstood.

In Paragraph 6, it was possible to find 4 content points, all concerned with the recreational uses of bicycles. Reference to the bicycle having recreational uses alone was not sufficient to gain a mark as this was merely the topic sentence which introduced the recreational uses, which were: cycling holidays or cycling tours; either participation or spectating at competitive cycling events; BMX, or Bicycle Motocross, offering fun or fitness; competitive or professional cyclists raising the profile of cycling or being good role models. Many candidates who made the point about cycling holidays often included unnecessary detail about the English countryside, the banks of German rivers and the Mekong Delta. There was some confusion over the competitive cycling events themselves, where the mark was gained by reference to these events as being a reason for the continuing popularity of cycling today, and the separate point about the competitors in these events who raise the profile of cycling. Sometimes the fact that these events were competitive, or that the participants were taking part in competitive events, or competitions, was overlooked. Instead of reference to competitive events, candidates were free to use one or both of the examples of such events in the passage, namely the Tour de France and the Olympic Games. When reference to BMX was made, the necessary reference to fun or fitness was often not made, or the identification of BMX was not given but rather a reference to customised bicycles was made.

In Paragraph 7, candidates could make 1 point, which was that in developing countries children use bicycles to go to school; the lift of the bicycle being a 'lifeline', or vital, for children to get to school was acceptable, although merely stating that children used bicycles to get to school was considered too weak. Some responses focused only on the charity reference, and did not score.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to identify, in their own words, the evidence for the development of the bicycle and its growing popularity in former times, and give reasons for the continuing popularity of the bicycle today, as outlined in the passage. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were a number of candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. The general use of own words was recognisable, with many candidates being innovative or original in their use of English; many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, while others moved blocks of text around rather than re-wording detail, or copied from the text. There were occasional examples where attempts at use of own words proved unwise in that the over-ambitious vocabulary did not entirely match the meaning of the original. There are still frequent attempts to use connectives or adverbs with little understanding of the meaning.

Although Examiners were not checking the number of content points in **Question 1(a)** against the number produced in **Question 1(b)**, if many fewer points were made in **Question 1(b)** than in **Question 1(a)**, this would be reflected in the language mark. Writing only, for example, 6 content points would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words whereas, conversely, writing 15 content points might be sustained use of own words, though not necessarily. As is always the case, the best responses came from candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentences, and therefore able to gain many, or full, marks in this question. Under use of own words, the best responses were focused on the textual material and offered appropriate alternatives or synthesised the details in the text. Vocabulary was assured and convincing such as 'vain and fashion conscious' to describe dandies. Weaker responses lifted large sections or simply moved the text around, e.g. 'pedals sprang up'. Some weaker responses often used single word substitutions, or dropped in connectives to string text together. Under use of English, the best responses were assured and controlled and used complex constructions competently. Connectives as sentence openers and within sentences created cohesion. The weakest responses were usually mangled attempts to re-work the text or fragmented lifting.

The most common errors were as follows:

- Missing definite or indefinite article
- Sentence separation errors – comma used instead of full stop
- Incorrect use (and overuse) of semi-colons
- Confusion over spelling of 'its' and 'it's'
- Confusion over spelling of 'their' and 'there'
- Subject-verb agreement (bicycles is... / the bicycle are...)
- Incorrect tenses, or tense swapping within a sentence
- Incorrect prepositions

**Questions 2 and Question 3** were the questions testing Assessment Objective 4 in the syllabus, Reading for Ideas, where candidates are being tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. There was much success with this part of the Paper.

**Question 2** asked candidates to identify whether each one of three statements was true or false. The first statement – nobody knows when the first bicycle-like machine was invented – was true, as shown by the term 'non-proven' in the text. The second statement – a pupil of Leonardo Da Vinci invented the bicycle – was false, as shown by the term 'deliberate fraud' in the text. The third statement – there is no proof that a French nobleman developed an early form of the bicycle – was true, as shown by 'that claim is now thought to be a misinterpretation' in the text.

In **Question 3**, candidates were to relate what they had read about the bicycle solving the problem of polluting vehicles to other environmental issues by giving one example of an issue affecting the environment, and either what is being done, or what could be done, to address the issue. This question was well-answered, with very many candidates showing an awareness of areas of concern such as global warming, deforestation, water and air pollution and traffic congestion. Occasionally, an example of the problem identified in the first part of the answer was given for the second part of the answer instead of a solution. A small number of candidates did not realise that the problem described in the first part of the question needed a corresponding solution, and elaborated only the problem described in the second part of their answer, or supplied an unrelated solution, or even introduced a new issue. Candidates were instructed not to give examples related to bicycles and, unlike other sessions, in the main they adhered to this instruction.

## **Section 2**

As is usually the case, most candidates seemed to find the narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1. Nevertheless, in general they coped well with many of the comprehension questions and vocabulary.

**Question 4(a)** asked what was happening that meant that Jean Louise 'nearly died of fright'. The vast majority of candidates wrote, correctly, that it was snowing; acceptable answers were also that Jean Louise saw snow for the first time. Those who did not gain the mark generally did so because they wrote that it was the end of the world, or that Jean Louise had never seen snow before which, although true, was not a 'happening'.

In **Question 4(b)**, candidates had to give evidence to support the idea that Jem was older than Jean Louise, the answer being that he knew what snow was. There was much success with this question. Where wrong answers were given they tended to be the incomplete idea that Jem had never seen snow before, or that Jem gave instructions to Jean Louise, (which could be as much to do with personality as to age) or comparing his mature attitude to snow to hers.

In **Question 4(c)** candidates were asked to pick out and write down the five consecutive words which showed that Jem's hopes might be in vain, the correct answer being 'feeble layer of soggy snow'. This question was generally fairly well done. Incorrect responses, e.g. 'was hopeful it would lie' suggested that candidates were unclear about the meaning of 'in vain'. Other popular incorrect answers included 'didn't want to waste it', or 'would lie for a while', and the expressions 'waited until it snowed some more', 'we could scrape it all up' and 'he had a plan'.

**Question 4(d)** asked what Jem's plan was, and this was almost always correctly answered with the idea that he planned to make a snowman, or a character out of snow. When incorrect answers were given it tended to be responses where text was lifted 'to make a character out of it' without reference to snow.

**Question 5(a)** asked what two things the children did to make sure they did not waste the snow, the answers being that they hopped across the front yard, or simply that they hopped, and that they walked back in their earlier tracks, footprints or footsteps, or that Jem told Jean Louise to walk back in her earlier tracks. Words such as 'road', 'path' and 'trail' were not considered acceptable synonyms for 'tracks'. Answers such as 'they brought the snow from front to back in baskets', or 'they brought the snow from Miss Maudie's yard to their own', were incorrect as these referred to the scarcity of snow and not to the children's efforts to conserve it. A great many focused on the movement of the snow and ignored the paragraph's opening, so that the 'tracks' element scored much more frequently than the 'hopping' element.

**Question 5(b)** asked why Miss Maudie did not think the snow was wonderful, and there was a range of answers, including the idea that it might kill or damage or be bad for her plants or flowers, or that she had to protect her plants or flowers from the snow or the cold. A popular wrong answer was that she was protecting her plants, which, although true, explained what she was doing which showed she did not think the snow was wonderful rather than explain why she did not think the snow was wonderful, which was what the question asked.

**Question 6(a)** asked candidates what was unusual about the method the children used to build the snowman. The answer was in Line 16 of the text which gave the information that they used mud. Candidates then had to read on to lines 19–20, which explained that they plastered snow on top of the mud. Therefore, answers which stated simply that they used mud were insufficient to make the point, which had to be that they used mud as well as snow, or that they used mud to make the base or the interior of the snowman. It was not necessary to refer to snow as that was included in the idea of a snowman, so that answers such as 'they used mud too' were sufficient to make the point.

**Question 6(b)** required candidates to de-code the image that the snow was like 'powdered diamonds'; what was being looked for was the idea that, like diamonds, the snow was valuable (but not expensive) or rare or precious. Weaker versions of the 'rare' idea were acceptable, e.g. that there was not much of it, or that it was limited. Answers such as 'there was not enough' was not acceptable as such answers had strayed too far from the word to be de-coded, namely 'diamonds'. A common wrong answer was that Jem treated the snow carefully which, although a true statement, did not begin to de-code the image but rather explained what Jem did because the snow was precious or rare. Some candidates focused on the similarity in appearance of snow and diamonds – that they are white, shining or glittering – and such answers were incorrect as they did not explain why Jem handled the snow with care. 'Very less snow' was a common, but incorrect response.

**Question 6(c)** was an inferential question asking candidates why they thought that Jem saved for himself the part of the snowman facing the street, and there was a wide range of possible answers, such as that was the part of the snowman people would see, or that he wanted to show off or to be complimented, or that he thought he would be better at building a snowman than his sister (because he was older than she was). Probably the most common wrong answer was that he wanted to make a snowman which looked like Mr Avery; this was unacceptable because the choice to make a caricature of Mr Avery, according to the text, came before Jem decided to make the part facing the street, and so the sequence of events did not support such an answer. Other popular wrong answers were ones which restated the question, e.g. 'so he could do it himself'; others wrote, incorrectly, that Jem wanted to shape the face himself.

Most candidates correctly answered **Question 6(d)**, which asked for the emotion Jem was feeling, by stating that he was proud, happy or glad, or that he was embarrassed. Popular wrong answers were that he was feeling angry – an odd reaction to a compliment from a father – or surprised. Some candidates included the unnecessary information that he blushed which, although correct, was not sufficient to score the mark on its own as blushing is the result of an emotion and not the emotion itself.

**Question 6(e)** was the first of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, the key words being 'puzzled' and 'peering'. For the first available mark, acceptable synonyms for 'puzzled' were 'confused', 'bewildered' or 'baffled'; common wrong synonyms were 'surprised' or 'shocked'. Some offered a correct synonym but did not score the available mark because they wrote that it was Jem who was confused, and not his father. Acceptable synonyms for 'peering' were 'look closely', 'gazing' and 'staring'; a common wrong synonym was merely 'looked'. Candidates were generally quite successful in this question, with most giving at least one correct answer; 'confused' was a common correct answer under 'puzzled'. Where candidates did not score a mark it tended to be because they answered that Jem was worried because he thought his father would be annoyed that they had made a snowman which looked like



his friend Mr Avery; however, this is a common type of question where candidates need to respond to the rubric 'in your own words', as meaning they have to look in the text for key words. Although there were instances of the key words being copied rather than re-cast in own words, this was perhaps not as prevalent as it has been in previous series.

**Question 6(f)** was generally well answered by candidates who wrote that their father told the children to disguise the snowman because it was a caricature, or a mockery, of his friend or of Mr Avery. The lift of 'you cannot make caricatures of other people' was sufficient to score the available mark. The statement that the snowman looked like Mr Avery was an acceptable answer, but the statement that the snowman looked like a person was not considered to be an acceptable answer, as that gave a definition of any snowman, and did not explain what was wrong with this particular snowman.

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates were asked what was implied by the expression 'it seemed', and had to link the time it seemed to take for her father to waken her with the length of time she might have been asleep. Thus acceptable answers were 'she had been asleep for a long time' or 'it seemed as if she was awakened minutes later but it was actually much longer'. The most common wrong answer was to focus on the word 'seemed' but to ignore the comma after it, thus coming up with the wrong answer that she thought it was her father who woke her up but it wasn't her father, or she wasn't sure who had wakened her. Some incorrect responses gave an alternative for 'it seemed', such as 'looked like' or 'it appeared'.

**Question 7(b)** was generally well answered. The question asked what the 'trouble in the street' was, and very many candidates wrote, correctly, that Miss Maudie's house, or a neighbour's house, or even 'a house' was on fire. Incorrect answers tended to be those which stated 'there was a fire' or 'there was fire in the street', or that the siren could be heard. A small number of candidates wrote, incorrectly, that Miss Maudie's kitchen was on fire.

**Question 7(c)** was the second of the questions on the Paper where candidates were asked to answer in their own words. They were asked what effect the smell of burning had on Jean Louise, and had to isolate the key words as being 'helpless dread'. Acceptable synonyms for 'dread' were 'fear', 'terror' and 'horror', and there was a fair degree of success with this. However, only a few responses recognised that 'helpless' referred to Jean Louise's helplessness and not to other people's power to help her. This meant that acceptable answers were 'powerless' 'useless' or 'could do nothing'; 'nobody could assist her' was the wrong focus and so did not score the available mark. Some candidates attempted to answer the question from their own knowledge by writing, incorrectly, that Jean Louise couldn't breathe properly because of the smoke.

**Question 8(a)**, a question requiring candidates to show appreciation of the writer's craft, asked what effect was created by describing the fire as 'eating' its way into the roof. The answer could be based on de-coding the image of 'eating', e.g. that it destroyed, or that it finished off, the house or the roof. Alternatively, candidates could score the available mark for an answer which linked the 'eating' to the idea of the fire having a personality, e.g. it was cruel, merciless, ferocious, aggressive or unstoppable. Several candidates seemed unfamiliar with explaining the effect of an image and gave a literal response, e.g. the fire was 'fast', 'spreading' or 'big', or 'the roof collapsed'. This was a discriminating question answered correctly by very few candidates.

**Question 8(b)** proved challenging for candidates because in order to explain why it was 'dawn' before the men began to leave, despite the fact the fire had gone out 'around midnight', they had to explain the inference that the men wanted to make sure that another fire wouldn't start, or that they wanted to comfort or support Miss Maudie. Very few candidates seemed to appreciate the fact that the first fire had been put out and so referred to putting out sparks or throwing blankets down. These were actions that had already been taken before the fire went out at midnight and did not explain the delay of several hours between midnight and dawn. Any suggestion that it was the first fire which detained the men was not sufficient to score. A sensible inference was required to explain the delay in the men's departure. Some supposed that they might be removing furniture from the house, but if there was nothing left but a black hole, that was an incorrect inference.

**Question 9** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Candidates scored much better here than in previous series. Most candidates who attempted 'glistening' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'shining', 'sparkling' or 'glowing' (with 'covering' being the most common wrong answer); most candidates who attempted 'operation' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'task', 'job', 'activity' or 'procedure', (with 'plan' and 'mission' being the most common wrong answers), and most candidates who attempted 'moulded' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'shaped', 'formed', 'created' or simply 'made'. Fewer candidates attempted 'groggy' or 'pile', but a reasonable degree of success



was gained by those who did, and many correctly offered 'sleepy' or 'half asleep' or 'half awake' for 'groggy', or 'pile' or 'mass' for 'heap', For 'pensively', candidates scored a mark for writing 'thoughtfully', 'thinking carefully' or 'thinking deeply'; the idea of thinking was key here and so 'carefully' alone was not enough to score the available mark. Correct synonyms for 'cautioned' were 'advised', 'warned' and 'telling to careful'; words which did not connote warning were not sufficient to score, as in 'instructed' or 'told'. The one word where candidates rarely offered a correct synonym, and yet found the word an attractive choice, was 'confirm' and this was a clear example of the need to examine the word in the context in which it is used. The text stated that the town siren confirmed what they knew, and so the meaning of 'confirm' in this context was 'verify' or 'prove' or 'endorse'; however, the vast majority of candidates who opted for 'confirm' regarded it as meaning 'make sure', 'ensure' or 'make certain', all of which might be synonyms for 'confirm' in another context, but not in this one.

Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, correct grammatical form was not insisted upon. Many more candidates gained 3, 4 or the full 5 marks; very few responses were awarded no marks. It was also noticeable that candidates very rarely attempted to define their chosen words by including them in a sentence.