

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Composition

## **Key Messages:**

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about the particular focus of the question.
- In **Section 1** tasks, especially, it is important to be aware of the whole scenario and the specific purpose of the task, not just the bullet points.
- Register is an important aspect of Directed Writing and needs consideration.
- The proper punctuation and layout of speech can give problems and a greater focus on this would pay dividends.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of candidates.

## **General Comments:**

The overall standard of the vast majority this year was comparable to that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most but some candidates appeared to have read the question too hastily and this report will elaborate below on approaches to this part of the examination. The narrative questions in **Section 2** proved more popular than the others and most candidates made a good attempt at these. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements, all of which is very encouraging given the changes to the exam format this year and it demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative writing and accurate writing which was a joy to read. Fewer prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates but there are still a number who come to the exam with essays in mind which are fitted to an essay title and sound awkward, especially when a given sentence has to be included. There is clearly an increase in Americanisms which can sometimes suggest the wrong register with the use of expressions such as 'gonna'. Text messaging language needs to be avoided.

## **Comments on specific questions:**

### **Section 1**

This year, for the first time, the Directed Writing task was assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria rather than Content Points and Language. Candidates had to write a letter to an aunt who had asked how they were getting on in school. In particular, the candidates had to write about a recent upsetting incident. This was a scenario that proved within the everyday experience of the candidates, the majority of whom responded extremely well to this task. The scenario allowed for a wide range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

As is always said with this question, **Section 1** is directed writing and so requires very careful attention to all aspects of the task, as described in the rubric. Candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on what contributed to **an upsetting, school-based episode** and in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear and detailed indication of what happened in the incident;
- precise details as to why the incident had a particular impact on the candidate;
- an explanation of how the situation was resolved.

In the first bullet point it was essential to mention the places and people involved in what was by definition quite a serious episode so that the aunt was fully aware of aspects that were probably unfamiliar to her. The second bullet point depended on the stress put on the most upsetting aspect of all and not just implying it.

Bullet 3 required details of a resolution, either in the sense of something concluded happily or simply brought to an end.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged under headings of 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 personal opinion as well as the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points. As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks went to those who kept their focus on the incident being school-based and shaped their response according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. Therefore, the most successful candidates explained clearly the nature of the incident, real or imaginary, selecting from areas such as bullying or theft, being forced to join the school choir, a fire in a hostel or laboratory, being beaten up, or the death of a teacher. All of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question, either overtly or by strong implication. A few candidates disadvantaged themselves by writing about some family tragedy that had little or nothing to do with school.

Sensible suggestions were made as to how these dramas might have so upset the candidate, possibly because the stolen items were crucial notes for revision or fees for exams or the dead teacher had been a particularly influential character to the candidate. The resolution of the incident usually saw the happy outcome to the event with money or possessions found and restored, or friends putting aside their disagreements. Candidates usually were able to amplify the second and third bullet points well and those who did particularly well were those who included their own additional material rather than just repeat details from the first bullet point.

Less successful candidates could have done with more detail in the second and third bullet points. The bullet points do not always have to get equal treatment but it is also true that the answer should not be too unbalanced because otherwise a bullet point might not get the proper credit. In particular this year there was a considerable tendency to latch on to the narrative possibilities of the first bullet point and write a great deal for it and so leave little time or space to deal adequately with the later bullet points. Also, less successful candidates wrote too little for the second bullet point because they assumed it was obvious why they were upset (they thought the dramatic event implied it) and although this was true to an extent they had been asked to make out why they were '**so** upset' and therefore they needed to do more than just let the reader infer the answer. Furthermore, for the third bullet point, having already written a lot to explain the event, some candidates did little more than tag on one sentence as an explanation and the shortage of information here sometimes left this a little unconvincing.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience through an acknowledgement in the first paragraph that the aunt had requested news from school and the candidate was very willing to comply. Some candidates however did miss the opportunity to make the audience clearer by not asking the aunt about her family and how they all were or not saying at the end that they were looking forward to seeing the aunt. The register was kept suitably informal by most but lapsed into too much formality on some occasions ('I am writing with regard to your letter...'; 'I am writing to inform you of an incident..'). The vast majority of candidates employed an 'appropriate' format following the guidance given in the rubric by adopting a friendly, even affectionate, ending. Some less successful candidates adopted perhaps too formal an ending by putting 'Yours sincerely...' or even 'Yours faithfully,...'. Some ended with 'Your son/daughter' or added a surname which betrayed a lack of awareness about the situation and some had no valediction at all. It is worth adding that if candidates choose to add addresses at the top of the letter they should get these right rather than putting names above addresses and adding the recipient's address even though it is a friendly letter. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points for each of their complaints and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Most made good use of paragraphs to reinforce the organisation but there were still a large number who could have done better here because they wrote the piece as one paragraph, a common mistake in this section every year.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, friendly tone very well although some candidates needed to gain sympathy a little more by stressing, without overdoing it, that the incident was no fault of theirs.

Linguistically, candidates were at ease with school-related vocabulary and writing to a close relative: most found little difficulty in describing features they were familiar with to produce a convincing piece of work. For the same reason, spelling was generally good although there were common misspellings of 'leave' for 'live'; 'compass' for 'campus' and 'beat' for 'bite'.

## Section 2

1. **Describe your favourite time of year and explain what makes it special. (Remember that you are describing the characteristics of the time and not telling a story.)**

This was a very popular title, especially, it seemed, with girls. There were a vast number of different times of the year mentioned, which added greatly to the pleasure of marking them, and the favourites were Christmas, Divali, Eid, and the summer holidays from school. Planning and organisation were quite straightforward with this title and the majority of candidates coped well with the need to demonstrate their enthusiasm for the time being highlighted. There were some quite lavish descriptions of Christmas weather and preparations as well as the lingering beauty of this and other religious festivals. In fact, the candidates who did best were those who embraced the need to describe as well as merely narrate the events of the occasion. Most candidates did find it helpful to be reminded of this need in the wording of the question and there was a richness of vocabulary in detailing the lights of Divali and the decorations associated with Eid. The seemingly endless variation in clothing associated with all of the religious festivals was a source of inspiration when describing, with good candidates able to demonstrate the use of adjectives especially in recreating the atmosphere. Similarly, food was described in detail through all of the senses by those who responded most fully to this topic. Those who did less well in general were those who wrote about the summer holidays as they were more concerned with listing activities rather than describing, and so missed the point of this title.

2. **'Many films are a bad influence on young people.' What is your view?**

This was another very popular title, especially with boys, and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who clearly had a strong religious background. Therefore there were a great number of candidates who agreed strongly with the sentiments expressed in the title and they were extremely critical of films, often seeing them as responsible for increases in violence, crime, illegitimacy and AIDS in society. The writers tended to distance themselves from such films and often condemned them in strident terms. There was an admirable sense of passion about such writing in the best essays because candidates presented admittedly one-sided views in a persuasive way with a lot of illustration from a number of films. Less successful candidates lacked such examples in sufficient number and so tended to make unsupported accusations. Perhaps the most successful overall were those who presented a balanced view, seeing other reasons as well for society's ills and who were also able to see that films could provide positive, even moral viewpoints for young people. Again, it was impressive to see how many examples of such films could be quoted by candidates and it was clearly a title for those who had some considerable knowledge of films as they could sustain their arguments with deepening evidence over a number of paragraphs rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view several times. Before attempting the discursive title, candidates should consider whether they have the ability and confidence to structure a cogent argument.

3. **Write a story which includes the sentence: 'I could not believe how much the place had changed since last year.'**

This was a very popular title as the narrative titles normally are. Favourite themes were a candidate returning home after a time away at a university overseas or a candidate returning to a former school after a period in secondary education. Going back to the place of one's birth also figured heavily in this section. There was often quite a strong political angle to these stories with the improvement or deterioration that was noticed being attributed to the work of a local benefactor and/or the authorities in power. The best essays were those that drew the greatest contrast between before and after, and those which were able to convey the emotional as well as the visual impact of the change. The most sophisticated responses dealt with memory, nostalgia and disillusionment and there some very good accounts which related all this change not just to physical alterations but to the process of growing up. Less successful candidates were content to leave the change merely as one of urban or rural development with the emphasis restricted to changes in buildings or infrastructure. The weakest responses of all were those which simply told the story of returning, the emphasis being wholly on a narrative journey which lacked an adequate sense of reflection. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well candidates integrated the given topic sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness, apart from those who merely tagged it on the end of an essay about the journey.

**4. Trophies.**

This proved a less popular topic and there were relatively few responses. Of course, any response was possible here but very few indeed, only the most able, chose to treat it as a discursive title. If they did, it was because they were familiar with the language of sports journalism and they were able to deal with the topic in a philosophical way, often questioning the value competition and prizes. Weaker candidates tended to treat this title in a narrative way and gave a short definition of trophies (money prizes, acclaim) and then told stories, usually of a football match, which involved winning against the odds, with a trophy presented at the end.

**5. Write a story about an occasion when someone witnessed a very poor musical performance.  
(Remember that you should include full details of what is poor about the performance to show that it is an important part of your story.)**

Rather surprisingly, this again was not a very popular title, possibly because candidates had seen an attractive title early in the list of options. Stories usually involved a pop star or group, usually famous and named, whose performance was below par and a disappointment to the paying public. Sometimes they were first or third person narratives of someone performing at a school function and being overcome by nerves or some unfortunate happening. Such events were treated in a number of ways with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama of it all and some seeing the humour in the situation.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Composition

## **Key Messages:**

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about the particular focus of the question.
- In **Section 1** tasks, especially, it is important to be aware of the whole scenario and the specific purpose of the task, not just the bullet points.
- The proper punctuation and layout of speech can give problems and a greater focus on this would pay dividends.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of many candidates.

## **General Comments:**

The overall standard of the vast majority this year was comparable to that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most but some candidates appeared to have read the question too hastily and this report will elaborate below on approaches to this part of the examination. The narrative questions in **Section 2** proved more popular than the others and most candidates made a good attempt at these. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements, all of which is very encouraging given the changes to the exam format this year and it demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative writing and accurate writing which was a joy to read. Fewer prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates but there are still a number who come to the exam with essays in mind which are fitted to an essay title and sound awkward, especially when a given sentence has to be included.

## **Comments on specific questions:**

### **Section 1**

This year, for the first time, the Directed Writing task was assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria rather than Content Points and Language. Candidates had to imagine their Principal had asked them to write a report to ensure that their school was doing all it could to encourage a healthy lifestyle for the candidates. This was a scenario that was within the everyday experience of the candidates, the majority of whom responded extremely well to this task. The scenario allowed for a wide range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

As is always said with this question, **Section 1** is directed writing and so requires very careful attention to all aspects of the task, as described in the rubric. Candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on what contributed to '**a healthy lifestyle**' and in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear indication of what may be wrong at the moment so that the Principal knew exactly what had to be changed;
- precise details of the improvements the candidate would like to see, both in the curriculum and the school facilities;
- an indication of how the candidates and the school might benefit from the suggested changes.

In the first bullet point it was essential to mention areas where the school was failing to encourage '**a healthy lifestyle**'. These might be to do with hygiene, potential accidents, faulty or inadequate equipment and so on. The second bullet point depended on finding solutions to what was mentioned for the first bullet point, although there was also room here to introduce further improvements even if the problems had not yet been

mentioned. Bullet 3 did relate directly to the improvements mentioned in the second bullet although candidates did not have to mention both the candidates and the school to gain credit.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged under headings of 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 personal opinion as well as the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points. As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks went to those who kept their focus on a ‘healthy lifestyle’ and shaped their response according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. Therefore, the most successful candidates explained clearly the current problems, real or imaginary, selecting from areas such as the unhealthy food on offer in the cafeteria and the general lack of hygiene, inadequate and dirty washrooms, the accumulation of litter which attracted flies and mosquitoes, the dangers of poorly maintained laboratory equipment and the lack of provision for physical activities which led to obesity. All of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question, either overtly or by strong implication. Sensible suggestions were then made as to how these facilities could be improved (new menus with less oily food) and how the curriculum could be adapted to include offering additional sports, a programme of regular exercise and guidance on how to eat healthily. Benefits to candidates included fewer absences from school because of stomach upsets, a more alert mind leading to better concentration and academic performance, the pleasure of competing in sports events with neighbouring schools and generally finding school more attractive. The school would benefit from an enhanced reputation and an increase in the number of candidates as parents became aware of the new regime. Candidates usually were able to amplify the second and third bullet points well and those who did particularly well were those who included additional material rather than just repeated, for example, that candidates would be healthier and the reputation of the school would improve.

Less successful candidates could have given more emphasis to the link between what they listed for improvement and ‘a healthy lifestyle’. Instead they listed such general school failings as poor library provision, a lack of computers, the use of mobile phones, peeling paintwork and broken tables or uncomfortable chairs in classrooms and left the reader to infer how their complaints related to ‘a healthy lifestyle’. Others included some irrelevant material that could have nothing to do with a healthy lifestyle (for example, the colour of the classrooms) and some digressed as they explained their research methods. Stronger candidates successfully addressed the three bullet points not by trying to list all the possibilities but by choosing three or four points per bullet and addressing these in depth supported with convincing examples.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience through an acknowledgement in the first paragraph that the Principal had requested the report and the candidate was very willing to comply. The register was kept formal by most but lapsed into over-familiarity on some occasions. Occasionally, candidates adopted a narrative approach describing their tour of inspection of the school (...then, as I reached the washrooms, sir, you will never guess what a shock awaited me!) and this needed to be used only sparingly, if at all, given that it was a formal report.

Many candidates employed an ‘appropriate’ format following the guidance given in the rubric with the most successful candidates adding a subject heading to their text, thus giving the writing a genuine feel of a report. Some less successful candidates adopted a hybrid of a letter and a report format and a very small number clearly wrote a letter or ignored format completely. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points for each of their complaints and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Some made good use of paragraph headings to reinforce the organisation and the format.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, accurate, helpful tone and approach very well. Where many candidates scored more heavily than others was in the use of a persuasive tone because all three bullet points were tied so well together and conveyed with authority. Some candidates needed to adopt a less peremptory tone rather than saying, ‘you have to’, ‘you must’, ‘I expect you to’ and ‘I insist’.

Linguistically, candidates were at ease with school-related vocabulary and most found little difficulty in describing features they were familiar with to produce a convincing piece of work. For the same reason, spelling was generally good although there were common misspellings of ‘exercise’ (excercise), ‘cafeteria’ (cafateria), ‘hygiene’ (hygene/hygeine). Many less able candidates made an uncertain start because they relied too much on lifting the wording of the question: ‘Thank you for giving me the opportunity to suggestion to you some changes’ (sic). The word ‘that’ was often intrusive: ‘I was told to write a report suggesting that how.....’(sic). Improvements and changes were ‘done’ rather than ‘made’. ‘Class’ and ‘classroom’ were regarded as synonymous whereas it would be useful in the future to appreciate the difference as many

directed writing tasks are school-based. To many candidates ‘curriculum’ meant only extra-curricular activities and there were some basic errors with plurals – ‘homeworks’, ‘equipments’.

## Section 2

**1. Describe the latest hobby, possession or activity in which you have become interested. Why does it give you so much pleasure?**

This was quite a popular question and it appealed to all abilities. It was generally well done in that candidates were mainly writing about a hobby, something close to them and something about which they knew a lot. There was enormous variety here with football, cricket, gaming on the Internet and Internet chat rooms being very popular choices. Others wrote about reading, playing an instrument, singing, dancing, weaving, drawing, hiking, jogging, fishing, horses and cookery. There was a particularly good essay about knitting which was clearly written from the heart by someone with considerable expertise. The secret of a good answer was to engage with the second part of the topic and explain why the particular choice gave so much pleasure: usually, the hobby or activity released stress and allowed the candidate space away from day to day problems either in school or with family. The enthusiasm was evident in the best essays: ‘I can not wait to get home and meet my friends to play football.’ ‘The best day of my week is when I get a new book.’ Some candidates needed to resist the temptation merely to list all their out of school activities without pausing to describe any one of them or to indicate pleasure other than by repeating ‘I enjoy it’ or the wording of the question ‘..it gives me pleasure’. Not many candidates chose to write about a possession although, occasionally, an i-phone or laptop featured. Here the problem was often just in listing the technological features of the latest electronic gadget. Some candidates were impressive with their grasp of technical terms but did sometimes fail to convey the pleasure as well as the knowledge. Reading the question more carefully would have helped a handful of candidates who tried to deal with all three interests in the title, having overlooked the word ‘or’. Understandably, they were unable to give adequate time to each.

**2. Is it better to have comfort or excitement in life? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was the least popular topic as the discursive title often is. There were some very able candidates who handled the topic successfully by exploring both alternatives and they demonstrated both the linguistic skills and the ability to marshal a cogent argument in support of their choice. Very often, they argued that both alternatives were needed to achieve balance but were also clear that one of the alternatives meant more than the other. These good responses were supported by apt examples, often personal, and were engaging to read. Some candidates found it more difficult to construct a convincing argument: they described the comfort which a good income provided, a home, furniture, a car (usually expensive) and holidays, without any reference to this being ‘better’ than excitement. Again, through reading the question too hastily, some candidates did not note the word ‘or’ and wrote about what provided both comfort and excitement and then failed to say which was more important. Often there was good example and organisation, and such answers still gained a mark for their use of language but writing equally about both without a definite conclusion lost the point of the question. It is highly advisable not to take on the discursive topic unless candidates have the linguistic ability for these more taxing titles and a good fund of specific examples to act as convincing illustration.

**3. Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘I was surrounded by important people, but no-one that I knew.**

This question was very popular and produced some lively narratives with the better candidates weaving the given sentence convincingly into the essay. They constructed an occasion at which important people were likely to be present and found a valid reason for their own presence, usually social events or an interview, or crime or hospital-related dramas. Often it was an important reception when the candidate accompanied parents, an award ceremony in a government building or high class hotel, standing in for a superior at a key business meeting or inadvertently joining the wrong reception in the wrong room in a hotel. In such scenarios, the key sentence was pertinent and used to good effect to illustrate the candidate’s reaction. The best were those which drew on rich characterisation and were able to convey the embarrassment, the discomfort or the delight of the occasion. Other candidates needed to give more thought to how the sentence should be best used in the narrative because there were occasions when the given sentence was merely tagged on and seemed to have little to do with the events. This was often signalled by the incorrect use of the

tense in the sentence when set in the rest of the essay. Weaker essays were also characterised by the use of contrived endings, in particular with the candidate waking up to find the embarrassment had all been a dream. Such endings are best avoided as they deflate the narrative.

**4. Jealousy.**

This title proved popular with a large number of candidates who saw the narrative possibilities in it. There were some quite poignant pieces of personal writing where candidates wrote with great sincerity and sensitivity about their jealousy of a perceived favourite sibling. There were also examples of jealousy between friends at school or colleagues at work with 'stolen' boyfriends or girlfriends being a popular topic. One unusual and very interesting approach was a narrative by a mother cat, jealous of her offspring and the attention it received. The narratives, written in either the first or third person, were generally very lively, concluding often with expressions of remorse for the unforeseen consequences of jealous behaviour. The other common approach was a survey of the situations in which jealousy arose. Most referred to 'good' or 'bad' jealousy, 'bad' being destructive and 'good' spurring on individuals to greater achievements. While these responses covered similar material to the narratives they did not always have the narrative pace to make them as interesting. Weaker candidates found it difficult to distinguish between the correct use of the noun 'jealousy' ('a jealousy person') and the adjective 'jealous'. Candidates are reminded when taking the discursive approach to adopt a more formal register and avoid colloquialisms, especially 'gonna' and 'wanna' which some candidates were not careful enough to do. It is also important to remember that philosophical approaches require an appropriate level of linguistic ability and may need to be supported with specific examples.

**5. Write a story in which your first impressions of someone or something prove to be misleading. (Remember that you should include full details of your first impressions, to show how wrong you were.)**

This second narrative title was also a popular choice and was open to a great variety of treatments. The bracketed guidance helped candidates to structure their responses relevantly. The settings were varied although the familiar one of school was the most popular, usually featuring a newly arrived candidate (mistaken either way), sometimes a new teacher who ultimately proved to be kind and supportive despite initial impressions of severity. Others involved a chance meeting on public transport, on holiday, in a shopping mall, with a friend of a friend, or where, despite initial fears, an arranged marriage led to marital bliss or an elopement proved to be a disastrous move. Personal experience was best. Occasionally, the balance of the narrative was unfortunate with a lengthy description of initial impressions followed by a hasty final paragraph showing how wrong the writer had been. However, most candidates achieved a much better balance. Tenses were sometimes a problem as they often are in narrative essays (often switching from past to present and back) and all candidates would do well to check their work with this in mind.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21  
Comprehension

## Key messages

Candidates should develop greater skills in answering those questions which require them to answer in their own words, first learning how to identify key words in such questions. They should learn how to give answers which require some distillation of the text, as well as the decoding of figurative language. They should focus on looking beyond the literal in inferential comprehension, while at the same time drawing their inferences from a sensible context linked to the text.

## General Comments

Candidates for this year's paper followed the revised structure of the examination, now with questions based on two shorter passages, 'Piracy' and 'Victory', completed in a common answer booklet.

Most candidates completed the paper and appeared to have been well prepared by their teachers, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked. They adapted well to the new layout of the answer booklets.

Candidates engaged in an interested way with the passages, with strong candidates taking the opportunity to show their ability; weaker candidates also managed to engage with the materials, although at a lower level.

The first passage, 'Piracy', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second, 'Victory', tested their reading for meaning. 40% of the marks were available for the summary question, with 15 marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Pirates,' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions afforded candidates the opportunity to exercise their personal observations or imaginative responses to the text.

The second passage, 'Victory', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.

The questions which proved most challenging were those which required candidates to answer in their own words, or answers which required some distillation of the text, decoding of images or inferential comprehension.

The revised format of the summary question, (both **Questions 1 (a)** and **Question 1 (b)**), largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or from producing both fair and rough copies. There was very little irrelevance noted or evidence of candidates diverging wildly from the rubric. Indeed, candidates are to be congratulated on the neatness of presentation and on the legibility of their handwriting.

Originality in **Question 1 (b)** was not always in evidence but wholesale copying of the text was generally avoided and both spelling and punctuation were good. The overall standard of written English was impressive for the level.

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

**Question 1 (a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to 'identify and write down the reasons for piracy, and the actions of pirates, in former times and in the present day'. The summary had to be based on the bulk of the text, 'Pirates', and this year candidates were encouraged to write their answers in note form, not necessarily in their own words.

There were eighteen content points of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points, carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that most of the candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences and that few presented a verbatim copy of the text in continuous prose. They also reported hardly any infringements of the rubric or any instances of complete irrelevance or personal reflections.

Paragraphs Two, Three and Four referred to piracy in former times and there were nine points (excluding the first which was given) which the candidates could make. Most recognised that hostages were taken by pirates, that they captured foreign territory and stole ships' cargoes. Many alluded to the pirates who stole horses, but this point was at times hidden amongst more general comments about plundering ships. Candidates were only allowed a mark for stating that piracy was a main source of income if they mentioned the reason i.e. that they were poor or that their land was poor.

A large number of candidates failed to make a distinction between pirates and privateers. It was essential to note that privateers were authorised by governments in wartime, that it was the privateers who stole the ships in wartime and that it was the privateers who were encouraged to do so, according to the text. It was also the privateers and not the pirates in general who continued to rob and plunder in peacetime. Candidates who did not mention wartime were not awarded the mark. Similarly the pronoun 'they' often failed to distinguish between pirates and privateers. When writing in note form candidates should not sacrifice detail and precision for the sake of being short and concise. Each individual response to the rubric should demonstrate a candidate's full understanding.

There were a number of candidates who lost marks by using examples of modern piracy (paragraphs Five and Six) in the first section relating to former times (paragraphs Two, Three and Four) and vice versa. The lesson here is to follow the rubric.

There were a further nine points available concerning present day piracy. Many recognised that pirates stole inexpensive goods from on board ships, that they also attacked large cargoes and often held crews to ransom. Some lost the mark because they made a general reference to taking hostages (wrong era), rather than taking the crew members hostage (modern era). Many recognised that some pirates operated for political reasons, that piracy was successful because there was more trading via shipping and that, because of the traffic, ships had to slow down. Candidates also noted that pirates used technology to find the location of ships to plunder and that ships sailing through narrow passages of water afforded opportunities for attack.

There was a small number of candidates who were awarded maximum points and a large number scoring half marks and above. Some candidates wasted the space available by reproducing the points in each section which were given. Examiners felt that candidates would be best served by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form (many did), rather than in continuous prose. However, points should be fully made with appropriate agents. On the whole, the response to the revised format for the summary was most encouraging.

In **Question 1 (b)**, candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the reasons for piracy, and the actions of pirates in former and modern times. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), preferably within the space available in the answer booklet.

Examiners reported that most candidates completed the exercise and that most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. Some, not many, presented a draft on a separate sheet of paper without acknowledging whether it represented a fair or rough copy. The feeling is that **Question 1 (a)** provided the notes as a basis for writing the summary in **Question 1 (b)** and that the rough drafts would be unnecessary.

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. However, the general use of own words was less noticeable this year and many candidates selected from, edited and restructured the text well, without being innovative or original in their use of English, and there were some who copied wholesale from the text. Encouragingly, nearly all candidates attempted the question and adhered to the rubric. However, candidates should be aware that very short answers cannot justify a high mark, since they cannot demonstrate a sustained use of own words or completely accurate use of English.

**Question 2** simply asked candidates to write down one fact and one opinion about pirates, contained in Paragraph 1. Most were able to quote from the text that piracy had been around for a long time, that few pirates were wealthy or that many died young; they were also cognisant of the opinion that they buried treasure or were rich and ruthless villains. Only a few candidates muddled their facts and opinions and this proved to be a relatively accessible introduction to the comprehension questions.

**Question 3** Most candidates understood that the writer thought that Julius Caesar was proud and arrogant. Many referred to him correctly as being ‘self-centred’ or ‘full of himself’. However, a few thought that he was ‘selfish’ or ‘rubbish’ and these were clearly incorrect.

**Question 4** asked candidates to use their own knowledge or experience to provide two examples of piracy from personal or cultural imagination or from real life. Many candidates infringed the rubric by reproducing specific examples from the passage; others simply defined piracy; some gave examples of simple robbery and theft. The best answers referred to modern piracy by detailing specific events or places, such as the recent activities in Somalia. Answers referring to characters in literature or film such as Captain Hook, Blackbeard and Jack Sparrow were rewarded. A number of candidates referred to pirated CDs and DVDs or to identity theft and the hijacking of aeroplanes and these were all acceptable responses.

## Section 2 Reading for meaning

**Question 5 (a)** eased candidates into the second passage, ‘Victory’, by asking what story was told about Amir’s father and most were able to say that he had once wrestled a bear.

**Question 5 (b)** was equally well answered with candidates recognising that people tended to believe the story about Amir’s father because (i) he was a big man and (ii) he was respected or that he had never denied the stories. Only a few candidates lifted too much from the text without distilling the answer.

In **Question 6 (a)**, the responses were equally successful when candidates stated that Amir thought that his father hated him because (i) his wife had died giving birth to Amir and (ii) because he was not like his father and preferred poetry to sport.

**Question 6 (b)** was the first of the own words questions, asking candidates to say why Amir was a ‘blundering liability’ to his football team by redefining the idea that he ‘unwittingly obstructed’ them. Better candidates were able to state that Amir ‘got in the way’ or ‘blocked’ his team members, but many repeated ‘obstructed’ or simply reported that he was ‘rubbish’ at football. Recasting ‘unwittingly’ was a rare occurrence, but a few candidates did note that Amir had got in the way ‘unknowingly’ or ‘unintentionally’.

**Question 6 (c)** asked for the single word telling us that Amir’s father realised that Amir would never be interested in football. Whilst many candidates understood the rubric and provided the one word, ‘resigned’, many others incorrectly chose ‘bleak’ or ‘sensed’.

**Question 7 (a)** asked candidates to explain how the winner of the competition was decided and many knew that the winner was the person with the last kite flying. However, many did not write, for the second mark, that the opponents’ strings had to be cut. Those who stated that participants ‘tried’ to cut the strings were not rewarded with a mark.

In **Question 7 (b)**, many candidates failed to adhere to the rubric of the question which asked for a single feature of the string, crucial to winning the competition. The simple answer was that the string should be sharp. Many said that the string should be ‘sharp, long and colourful’, thereby infringing the rubric; such imprecision was not rewarded.

**Question 8 (a)** asked why Amir felt like an Olympic athlete. Many referred to the presence of spectators and especially that of his father. Better candidates correctly referred to how proud he was of his kite or to his confidence about winning the competition.

**Question 8 (b)** wanted candidates to decode the image of kites “roaming like sharks.” This question proved to be accessible only to the better candidates, who referred to their movement in all directions (one mark) and to their predatory qualities, looking for and about to attack opponents (one mark).

**Question 9 (a)** was the second of the own words questions, requiring candidates to recast ‘fantasy’ and ‘feasible’ with reference to the contrast between how Amir felt at the start of the tournament and his feelings just before he won it. Most candidates found this question very difficult, but it did uncover the better ones who were able to tell us that he originally felt victory was just a dream, impossible or unlikely to happen, whereas, as the contest is coming to a conclusion, he begins to feel that victory is possible, that there is a chance he could win the tournament. Candidates were more successful with the idea of ‘feasibility’ than that of ‘fantasy’, but some erred in stating that victory was probable when it was only possible, or that it was a reality when it had not yet been attained. A number gave the answer the wrong way round, stating that Amir was confident at the beginning but tense at the end.

**Question 9 (b)** asked why we thought Amir’s hands were bloody and many candidates knew the answer, but did not fully provide the reason - that his hand had been cut by the string. Two key elements – ‘cut’ and ‘string’- were required, but many candidates provided only one, either that the string was sharp or that his hands had been cut. Candidates should provide full explanations to show they understand and not expect the Examiner to work out the reasoning.

In **Question 9 (c)**, many candidates understood that Amir’s redemption was to make his father love him.

In **Question 10**, many candidates knew that Amir was happy because he had won the competition and because his father now loved him and was happy and proud of him. Marks were lost by vague and general statements such as ‘things had turned out just as he had hoped’. Candidates need to remember that each question is an independent entity, however close the link to a previous question, and should be answered fully.

**Question 11** was the vocabulary question in which candidates were required to show their understanding, in context but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Most candidates attempted five words and most adhered to the rubric by providing a single synonym or short explanatory phrase. The answer box helped the candidate from infringing the rubric by giving more than five examples.

‘Affliction’ meaning *sickness* or a *curse* was not commonly or successfully attempted. Synonyms such as *problem* or *trouble* were offered but were considered too weak or general for a mark. ‘Glaring’ meaning, in context, *obvious* or *clear* was a common and successful choice, although some candidates wrongly thought it meant *staring*. This illustrates the need to study the word in the context of the passage and not to define it in isolation. ‘Moulded’ was a popular choice and candidates recognised that it meant *made*, *shaped* or *formed*. Some suggested that it referred to *change* or *transformation* but such synonyms were regarded as being too extreme. ‘Shred’ was also a popular choice and candidates who provided such diverse synonyms as *bit*, *fraction*, *a tad*, *an iota*, *a small part* or *section* were awarded a mark but those offering *little*, *part*, *piece* (alone) were not, since such definitions were regarded as inadequate. Common correct answers for ‘undeniably’ included *definitely*, *without question*, *obviously*, *truly* and *certainly*. ‘Highlight’ in context referred to *the best part*, *the star event*, *the peak*, but not *the main event* or *the best* (on its own). ‘Havoc’ represented *chaos*, *confusion* and *mayhem* and many candidates understood this and were awarded a mark despite some bizarre spellings of *chaos*. The final word ‘tentatively’ was understood correctly by a number to mean *carefully* or *hesitantly*, but not *slyly* or *timidly*.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Comprehension

## Key messages

Candidates should develop greater skills in answering those questions which require them to answer in their own words, first learning how to identify key words in such questions. They should learn how to give answers which require some distillation of the text, as well as the decoding of figurative language. They should focus on looking beyond the literal in inferential comprehension, while at the same time drawing their inferences from a sensible context linked to the text.

## General Comments

Candidates for this year's paper followed the revised structure of the examination, now with questions based on two shorter passages, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet.

Most candidates completed the paper and appeared to have been well prepared by their teachers, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked. They adapted well to the new layout of the answer booklets.

Candidates engaged in an interested way with the passages, with strong candidates taking the opportunity to show their ability; weaker candidates also managed to engage with the materials, although at a lower level. The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. Twenty marks were available for the summary question, with fifteen of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Time For Tea' and five 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 fact from opinion and to distinguish true statements from false ones.

The second passage, 'Betrayal' tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.

The revised 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 wildly from the rubric. Indeed, candidates are to be congratulated on the neatness of presentation and on the legibility of their handwriting.

Originality in **Question 1 (b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, was not always in evidence. Both spelling and punctuation were good. The overall standard of written English was impressive. Common errors overall were use of the present tense instead of the past where required, and prepositions caused some problems. There was also the problem of noun-verb agreement, as in 'tea have good effects on health'. The most common error was the omission/incorrect insertion of articles, even by the best candidates. References to '**the** tea' were ubiquitous. There was also sometimes an absence of agreement between the article and noun (especially in **Question 6a**), where the phrase 'a new servants' was encountered many times.

Some candidates wrote the content points in **Question 1 (a)** in pencil, before writing over the pencil in pen. This often led to writing which was difficult to read and is a practice which is probably best discontinued.

Some candidates lost marks in **Question 1 (a)** because they put content points in the wrong boxes.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section 1**

**Question 1 (a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the reasons for the initial popularity of tea and the spread of tea drinking, and the reasons for the continuing popularity of tea. The summary had to be based on all but the first, brief and introductory paragraph of the text, and this year, for the first time, 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.

Excluding these provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were eighteen content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most of the candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences; some, however, presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point, although there is little evidence to suggest that such a strategy yielded more marks. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, it might help candidates to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets.

Paragraphs Two, Three and Four referred to the reasons for the initial popularity of tea and reasons for its increasing popularity and there were ten points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In paragraph 2, there were four content points, (excluding the provided first point) all linked to China by the introductory ten words, which provided a Chinese context. There were myths surrounding the origins of tea, it was a stimulant or restorative, it was formed into the shape of bricks because it was thus easier to trade or transport. Furthermore, Lu Yu's book, or 'The Tea Classic' was influential; mere reference to a book or to a scholar was insufficient to score here. In paragraph three, another three points were available: tea then spread to Japan, or was the drink of the aristocracy in Japan, and it took on religious significance there, and it then spread to other Asian countries. Paragraph four yielded three content points: tea was brought to the West by the Dutch, the British campaigned to increase its popularity and smuggled tea was cheaper.

The second section of the rubric asked for the reasons for the continuing popularity of tea, and there were eight available content points, (excluding the first, which was given.) In Paragraph 5, candidates could make four points (excluding the provided first point): tea's ability to absorb aromas of other plants allows a variety of flavours, (both the ideas of 'absorbing other flavours' and 'variety' were necessary here), mixing, or blending tea, made it better or cheaper, and the invention of tea bags made tea both quicker and cheaper to make. If the point had not already been made from paragraph two that tea is a stimulant, it could be made from paragraph six, as well as the fact that making tea is soothing or relaxing. Finally, tea has a beneficial effect on health, and prevents dental decay.

There was a small number of candidates who were awarded maximum points and a large number scoring half marks and above. Some candidates wasted the space available by reproducing the given content points. Although points could be made by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form, as indicated above, rather than in continuous prose, these points nevertheless need to be fully made with appropriate agents. On the whole the response to the revised format for the summary was most encouraging.

In **Question 1 (b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the reasons for the initial popularity of tea and the spread of tea drinking, and the reasons for the continuing popularity of tea. 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. However, the general use of own words was less noticeable this year and many candidates selected from, edited and restructured the text well, without being innovative or original in their use of English, and there were some who copied wholesale from the text. Encouragingly, nearly all candidates attempted the question and adhered to the rubric. Candidates should be aware that very short answers cannot justify a high mark, since they cannot demonstrate a sustained use of own words or completely accurate use of English.

Although the number of marks allocated to this task has been halved compared to previous years, the method of assessment remains unchanged. Furthermore, Examiners were not checking the number of content points in **Question 1 (a)** against the number produced in **Question 1 (b)**. But if many fewer points were made in **Question 1 (b)** than in **Question 1 (a)**, this would be reflected in the language mark in any case. Writing only, for example, six content points would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words, whereas, conversely, writing fifteen content points might be sustained use of own words, though not necessarily. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original ways, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style. Unfortunately, Examiners reported candidates who scored only a few marks for content points, despite being clearly proficient in English, because their summaries were far too generalised and lacking in the precision required to make content points; such candidates made oblique references rather than specific points.

Common errors reported were failures of agreement in singular and plural forms, and misplaced or omitted prepositions. There was a high incidence of the omission of definite and indefinite articles.

**Question 2** and **Question 3** were the questions testing the new assessment objective in the revised syllabus, Assessment Objective 4, 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. This section in general was well done. **Question 2** asked for two opinions from paragraph 2. Candidates had to focus on the trigger words which heralded the idea of subjectivity rather than objectivity and these words were 'delicious' and 'fascinating'. 'Delicious' supplied the answer to the first limb, namely that tea is delicious, or that there is no better *pick me up* than a cup of tea. Mere lifting of 'this delicious drink' was not sufficient to score as it lacked an agent. The answer to the second limb was that Lu Yu's book, or 'The Tea Classic' is fascinating to read; this could be scored by lifting, and there was no penalty for going on to lift 'describing the weather conditions in which tea should be picked and even the best water to be used to make it', although any other excess quoting would deny the mark. Candidates were free to use their own words equivalent, and to present their answers in either order.

All the answers in **Question 3** were false. Very few candidates scored full marks here, and where only two marks were scored it tended to be the first two, leading to the conclusion that some candidates had written that the third statement was true against their better judgment, because they felt that not all of the three statements could be false. Statement 1 was false because the text referred to the growing season, suggesting that tea plants do not grow throughout the year. Statement two was false because the text referred to the fact that inferior tea is used to produce tea bags. Statement three was false because the text established a clear link between caffeine and stimulants, with the soothing effects of tea, not of caffeine, being separately made.

## Section 2

Some candidates appeared to struggle with **Question 4 (a)** and **Question 4 (b)**. **Question 4 (a)** asked candidates to write the two things which Hassan did for Amir every morning. Bearing in mind that Hassan was a servant, they were to see that Hassan made Amir's breakfast and ironed his clothes. Many candidates here wrote that Hassan waited for him to sit down to breakfast, or that he talked to him. Such answers were additions to correct answers; they scored the mark, but if they departed from the focus of the question the mark was denied. Candidates are reminded to read the question carefully to ascertain exactly what is being asked even in what may appear to be straightforward questions.

**Question 4 (b)** asked for a full explanation of how Hassan's behaviour changed, the word 'fully' being an indication that there was some depth or possibly two limbs to the answer, which was, firstly, that Hassan did Amir's chores or ironing before Amir got up, or before he appeared in the morning, and, secondly, that he stopped talking to him. Answers such as 'he avoided Amir' failed to score under either limb. Candidates need to work on distinguishing past events from present ones, and to avoid the temptation to think that a literal rephrasing of the text will always gain the mark.

In **Question 5 (a)**, candidates had to explain the idea contained in 'the oxygen seeped out of the room', namely that Amir could hardly breathe, or that he felt suffocated, or uncomfortable. Candidates should learn to move beyond the more literal interpretation of language to appreciating its more figurative applications. Then candidates had to explain the reason for Amir's discomfort: his embarrassment, or guilt, at his betrayal of Hassan, or his wish not to be in the same room as, or near, Hassan.

**Question 5 (b)** proved challenging and only about one in five candidates scored the mark for the correct word, which was ‘periphery’. Common wrong answers were ‘milled’, ‘uncertainly’ and ‘unwavering’. In this type of question, candidates should work on linking the key word in the question, in this case ‘involved’, with all the key vocabulary in the area of the question, trying to make an appropriate match.

**Question 5 (c)** was the first of the questions where candidates had to answer in their own words, after first inferring that the warm slippers were signs of Hassan’s ‘unwavering loyalty’. Acceptable synonyms for ‘unwavering’ were ‘constant’, ‘unceasing’, ‘never-ending’; the mark could also be awarded for simple words or phrases like ‘still’ or ‘continued to be’. Acceptable synonyms for ‘loyalty’ were ‘faithfulness’, ‘devotion’ and ‘dedication’. Candidates should learn to hone in on the words being tested, rather than writing, for example, merely that the slippers showed that Hassan was still around. The word ‘still’ did not score as a synonym for ‘unwavering’ here, as it was in the wrong context.

**Question 6 (a)** was accessible to the majority of candidates. Amir saw that the solution to his problem was to get rid of Hassan, or simply to get a new servant. The lift of the text, or even a version of the lift where appropriate pronouns were used, i.e. ‘he asked his father if he had ever thought of getting new servants’ were too vague to score the available mark. Candidates should appreciate that sometimes lifting the text sometimes only seems to answer the question; in cases where the text is written in first person but the question is written in third person, it is unlikely that lifting verbatim will provide an accurate answer.

**Question 6 (b)** asked candidates to make a link between Amir’s father’s attitude to planting the tulips and his personality. Reasonable inferences were that he was confident, or that he did not care what people thought of him, or that he valued his own opinion over those of others. Many candidates wrote that he was kind, or calm, or intelligent, claims which could not be supported by the text. Very many others wrote that he loved or was knowledgeable about gardening. Other candidates inferred the idea of confidence, but linked it to being confident about when to plant tulips, which was much too narrow a focus. In this type of question, candidates should make sensible inferences, avoiding general or bland ‘personality’ adjectives they might have learned in other contexts.

In **Question 6 (c)** very many candidates scored both available marks for writing that Amir showed his regret when his heart started racing and when his voice faded away to a murmur. Candidates who did not score either or both of these marks usually did so either because, as with **Question 6 (a)**, verbatim lifting will not answer a question written in third person if the text is written in first person, or because they did not appreciate the wording of the question which asked for ‘apart from what he said’, which excluded his apology as an answer. Candidates are reminded of the importance of reading and re-reading each question carefully.

**Question 7** was the second of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. They were to respond to the question that when Amir was dropped off by his father he felt embarrassment and emptiness, and then re-cast those words into their own. Acceptable synonyms for ‘embarrassment’ were ‘awkwardness’ and ‘shame’, and acceptable synonyms for ‘emptiness’ were ‘hollowness’, or phrases such as ‘feeling that life was not worth living’. In this type of question, candidates should focus on selecting the correct word to be re-cast, and avoiding the temptation to merely repeat the key word without attempting to re-cast it. Perhaps because the word ‘empty’ was in a different sentence, many candidates failed to pick it out as a word to be re-cast at all. Others offered an acceptable synonym for ‘embarrassment’ but failed to score the mark because they linked the feeling to embarrassment about Amir’s treatment of Hassan rather than embarrassment about his father’s luxury car. Candidates should focus on responding to the entire context of these difficult own words questions, not just on the vocabulary and meaning of isolated words.

As with **Question 5 (b)**, **Question 8 (a)** asked candidates to find a single word in the paragraph, this time from paragraph 5, which meant the same as ‘teemed’. ‘Mingled’ was a popular incorrect answer here. As in **Question 5 (b)**, candidates should work on linking the key word in the question, in this case ‘teemed’, with all the key vocabulary in the area of the question, trying to make an appropriate match.

Most candidates were successful with **Question 8 (b)**, where they had to make a sensible link between Amir’s ‘fixed smile’ and his feelings; he was feeling sad or unhappy, or he was pretending to be happy. Where candidates did not score the mark it tended to be because they wrote a statement about Amir’s smile rather than his appearance. Thus ‘he was pretending to smile’ was incorrect. A few candidates missed the focus of ‘fixed’, writing, wrongly, that Amir was happy. Candidates should learn to read the question carefully, focusing on key words, which in this particular question was ‘feelings’.

**Question 8 (c)** was the customary question on writer's craft, and invited candidates to decode the image in comparing fireworks to bouquets. The answer lay in making a link either with colour (fire) or with shape or beauty (bouquets of flowers). This type of question generally proves to be difficult and candidates should learn that, in order to decode an image, it is not sufficient merely to repeat the image. Thus answers such as 'fireworks were like flowers' merely re-states the image and does not explain it.

The answer to **Question 8 (d)** was that the darkness was 'merciful' because it hid Hassan, or because it meant that Amir did not have to see Hassan; this question was generally well-answered. Where the mark was not scored it was usually because candidates had merely referred to the fact that Hassan was serving drinks, or had made a mistaken link between the event being described and the meaning of 'mercy' offering responses such as 'he felt sorry for Hassan' or 'he wanted to apologise to Hassan'.

The wording of **Question 9** was designed to show candidates that this was an inferential question. Candidates should read such questions carefully in order to make a judgement based on the text. Here, Amir has taken his own money and planted it in Hassan's room. A context has already been established that Amir wanted rid of Hassan. Thus the most sensible inference is that Amir lied to his father by telling him that Hassan had stolen his (i.e. Amir's) money.

**Question 10** was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. Marks ranged from 0 to 5 here. Most candidates who attempted 'barely' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'rarely', although a popular wrong answer was 'sometimes'. Marks were gained by candidates who correctly offered 'busied' or 'focused on' for 'preoccupied' and 'pain' or 'sorrow' for 'anguish'. Candidates scored a mark for writing 'lively or 'enthusiastic' for 'animated', (where a popular incorrect answer as 'artificial' or 'cartoon') and for offering 'quick' or 'casual' for 'perfunctory'. There was little success with 'beaming', meaning 'smiling' or 'grinning', (with 'shining' or 'glowing' being popular incorrect answers) 'bursts' meaning 'explosions' and with 'mingled', meaning 'mixed' or 'socialised with'. Because understanding only is being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form was not insisted upon. As in previous years, some candidates gave the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, but there were very few cases of this. As ever, there were some candidates who offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. Another misconception among a few candidates was that all of the words would need to be tackled, or perhaps that the best five of eight would be credited; candidates are reminded that only the first five attempts will be looked at by the Examiner.