

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/11
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the introductions to the texts carefully
- followed instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question
- considered the marks allocated to each question and developed their response accordingly
- understood the different requirements of the extended response questions
- focused on the specific question in **1(f)** and selected material from the text, accordingly, avoiding repetition
- selected three precise language examples from each of the specified paragraphs in **2(d)**
- addressed all three bullet points in **Question 3** offering appropriate development of the ideas in the text
- avoided unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- considered the ideas, opinions and details in the text rather than inventing untethered material
- used their own words where required
- planned the ideas to be used and the route through extended responses before writing, selecting only relevant material for each question
- checked and edited their responses to correct any careless errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format of the reading paper and the requirements of each question. There were relatively few examples of misunderstanding in terms of task requirements and time-management was generally good with few candidates not attempting all questions.

Candidates seemed to find all three texts accessible, and the majority demonstrated engagement through their responses. Occasionally a failure to follow the rubric or complete a task fully limited opportunities to demonstrate understanding. This was most common in **Question 1(f)** where there was a failure to use own words as appropriate, in **Question 2(c)** where a candidate did not select a clear example from the text provided, or in **Question 2(d)** where some candidates selected long chunks of the language in the specified paragraphs rather than selecting words and phrases or discussed fewer than six language choices.

In **Question 1**, the most efficacious approach taken by candidates was to work through the tasks in the order presented paying careful attention to the number of marks allocated and the space provided for their responses as helpful indicators of how detailed their answers needed to be. They also referred carefully to the lines or paragraph specified in each question moving carefully through the text as directed. Most candidates remembered to base their responses on evidence from the text to evidence their reading skills, but a few offered unsolicited opinion or comment that could not be rewarded. Less efficacious responses to **Question 1** tended to lack focus on the question, for example in **Question 1(c)** where they focused on reductions in places to rest, breed or find krill instead of reorganising the text to answer the question. At times candidates used the language of the text where they had been asked to use own words – for example in **Question 1(b)(ii)** by repeating the word 'conditions' instead of explaining it. This was sometimes an issue in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates copied phrases (or whole chunks of text) rather than remodelling the language of the text in their response thus limiting their ability to show evidence of understanding.

In **Question 2** candidates were required to explain carefully selected words or phrases from the text. **Question 2(c)** supplied a short section of the text to select from as a preparation for the longer response in

Question 2(d). More effective answers were able to consider meanings in context and as well as the effects of the powerful language identified, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose in an overview. Middle-range answers tended to focus on the meanings of the language choices showing mostly clear understanding. Less effective responses struggled to develop viable explanations sometimes repeating the language of the text in the comments. These answers did not always choose appropriate language to discuss or only selected three examples in total.

In **Question 3** the majority of responses addressed all three bullets in the question, although many candidates found it challenging to develop ideas for the third one. Most candidates wrote as Saffron with the best responses developing a convincing voice and an appropriately tone for a letter to her best friend demonstrating understanding of her need to confide in Josie while reflecting on the trip with her mother. More effective responses used the ideas and details in the text selectively to work through the bullets logically. They were able to describe the events of the trip and their impact on her, as well as reflecting on the other people on the trip before going on to explain how and why the trip may have changed Saffron's plans for the future by selecting a range of appropriate ideas and details from the text to develop. Responses in the middle range tended to use the text rather mechanically often writing narratively and paraphrasing closely rather than selecting ideas and details to use in their own writing to demonstrate understanding. Less effective responses tended to lack focus on the text covering only the main ideas and sometimes inventing material that was not tethered to the text. Some responses copied unselectively thus providing little evidence of understanding.

Paper 1 is primarily an assessment of Reading, however 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – 5 marks in **Question 1(f)** and 10 marks in **Question 3**. In these questions, candidates need to pay attention to the quality and accuracy of their writing to maximise their achievement. Candidates are advised to plan and review their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style and to correct errors that may impede communication.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Questions 1(a) – (e)

In response to Text A candidates were asked to answer a series of short answer questions. More effective responses paid careful attention to the command words in the instructions as well as the number of marks allocated to individual questions. These responses demonstrated sound understanding by selecting appropriate details and evidence from the text in concise, focused answers. Less effective responses tended to write too much or failed to follow the instruction to use own words. Some candidates offered several possible answers thus using time inefficiently and diluting evidence of understanding.

(a) How many penguin species are there, according to paragraph 1?

In **Question 1(a)** candidates needed to state how many species of penguins there are from paragraph 1. Most candidates were able to identify that it was eighteen and very few candidates did not gain the mark for this question. Occasionally an answer contained the excess information 'over half' in their answer which negated the evidence of understanding.

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

(i) 'global popularity' (line 1)

(ii) 'difficult conditions' (line 3).

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were instructed to use their own words to evidence understanding of the phrases in the question. Where answers failed to achieve both of the marks available for each phrase it was usually due to the candidate's partial use of the words from the text. For example, in **Question 1(b)(i)** most candidates were able to explain 'global' but 'popularity' was rarely explained successfully as the vast majority of candidates offered meanings associated with fame of being well known rather than focusing on the general affection felt for penguins. Some candidates confused 'popularity' with 'population' and offered explanations linked to penguin numbers. In **Question 1(b)(ii)** more candidates successfully explained the meaning of the whole phrase and gained both marks with many using phrases such as 'challenging' or 'hard' to explain 'difficult' and 'environments' or 'situations' to explain 'conditions'. Some candidates missed a mark

by repeating one of the words in the phrase being explained, for example 'hard conditions'. Others were too specific/narrow and tried to explain conditions as 'weather'.

(c) Reread paragraph 3 ('Seasonal melting ... connected to the land.').

Give two reasons why ice is important in the lives of penguins.

To achieve both marks for this question candidates were required to offer two distinct reasons for ice being important to penguins such as for resting / avoiding predators, or breeding, or for finding food. Where candidates failed to gain both marks, it was usually because they offered resting and avoiding predators as two separate points, or because they misread the question and tried to explain the effect of ice disappearing. Use of own words was not required in this question where candidates were required to be selective.

(d) Reread paragraphs 4 and 5 ('Some commercial ... colonies of penguins.').

(i) Identify two problems caused by commercial fishing.

(ii) Explain the threats (other than commercial fishing) to penguins.

To answer **Question 1(d)(i)** candidates needed to identify two problems for penguins caused by commercial fishing. Correct responses focused on drowning / collisions with boats and difficulty finding food or nourishment. Many candidates found this question relatively straightforward and were able to gain both marks. A number of candidates offered rather vague comments such as 'getting caught in fishing nets' without linking it to the search for food.

In **Question 1(d)(ii)** many candidates were efficacious in gaining all three marks available by identifying threats to penguins other than those caused by commercial fishing by citing problems caused by tourism, for example, littering or suffocation hazards, non-naïve predators being introduced and exposure to pathogens which their less developed immune systems cannot cope with. Most candidates understood the need to remodel the language of the text in their response. Where candidates only gained one or two of the three marks available, it was because they wrote too vaguely about predators without demonstrating understanding of them being non-native, or because the candidate seemed unaware that three clear points were necessary to target all three marks for this question.

(e) Reread paragraph 6 ('And how ... water surfaces.').

Using your own words, explain how penguins may not always be what humans expect them to be.

This question required candidates to show both explicit and implicit understanding from their reading of paragraph 6. Many candidates were efficacious in gaining all three marks available by identifying unexpected traits or characteristics in penguins such as their aggression, their territorial behaviour, their predatory instincts or their sharp eyesight. Some candidates did not score the second or third mark because they offered a vague reference to equipment being damaged or a 'resounding slap' without linking it to unexpected aggression, or because the candidate seemed unaware that three clear points were necessary.

(f) According to Text B, what are the benefits of the proposed changes to the ways in which scientists study penguins?

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible. Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

This question was based on **Text B** and required candidates to select relevant ideas from the text and organise them into a focused summary which addressed the task. The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of the text and offer some relevant ideas to demonstrate understanding of the benefits of the proposed changes to the ways in which scientists study penguins.

The most efficacious responses were carefully planned and coherent, focusing sharply on the task by referring to a wide range of ideas in the text. These responses were often preceded by a bullet-pointed plan in which ideas from the text were noted briefly before being included in a fluent own-words response. Responses in the middle range tended to consider a more limited range of ideas, the most common being the use of CCTV and AI, the higher level of accuracy, scientists having time for more important work, identifying individual penguins and learning more about their lives. These responses often missed the more

subtle points about AI being able to detect things that the human eye cannot, or the new system being safer than the previous system which used uncomfortable tags. Some less efficacious responses did not adapt the information in the text to focus on the question so claimed that penguin-spotting was time-consuming and boring rather than it being less so with the newly proposed method. Other less effective answers included unnecessary examples, such as the differing formations of spots and markings that the new software can detect, or a long list of the different things scientists could learn about penguins' lives.

Length was often an indicator of the level of the response with some less effective responses being too short due to a limited number of points being offered and others very long and wordy due to the inclusion of unnecessary information and/or personal comments. The most effective responses tended to adhere to the advised length through adopting a concise and focused approach to the task. In most responses there was an attempt to use own words although some candidates did rely on lifting phrases from the text. This included some responses where there was evidence of selection and a range of ideas but also a failure to use own words which is an important aspect of summary writing. Examples of the most commonly lifted phrases were 'penguin spotting is a lonely job', 'sit on a beach for hours', 'specialists are building more accurate systems', 'to distinguish one African penguin from another', 'scientists can get on with more important things', 'whether it has a friendship group and if it hunts with the same group of friends each day', 'assisting in our projects for breeding and conservation', 'how deep and for how long penguins can dive without breathing', 'how to develop more effective anaesthetics' and 'After all, no one should have to be bored at the beach'. Some very ineffective responses simply copied indiscriminately without any effort to select relevant ideas. There was also a tendency to include too much irrelevant or general details about penguins.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(f)

- re-read Text B after reading the question to identify potentially relevant ideas
- plan the response using brief notes to ensure a wide range of ideas from the text is selected
- avoid including unnecessary details which do not address the question
- avoid including examples
- organise the ideas, synthesising and grouping them where relevant, to ensure that your response is coherent
- avoid repeating ideas
- use your plan rather than the text as you write your answer to avoid lifting
- write clearly and make sure you express yourself fluently in your own words
- do not add comments or your own views; adopt an informative style
- try to keep to the guidance to 'write no more than 120 words'.

Question 2

(a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) The ship was tossed up and down by heavy waves.
- (ii) Saffron appears unhappy to be visiting places that are situated so far from main centres of population.
- (iii) John precisely steered the small boat that held the tourists.
- (iv) John told Saffron that it was very important for the truth to be told about the effects of climate change in parts of the world.

The most efficacious answers to **Question 2(a)** focused on only the underlined word or phrase, precisely located the correct version in the text and gave it as the answer. Other responses copied the whole sentence from the question replacing the underlined phrase with the correct words from the text. This was an unnecessary approach as it wasted candidates' examination time. Answers that used the text more widely than in the equivalent phrase / sentence, diluting evidence of understanding, could not be rewarded. The most common examples of excess included 'rocked over *the rough seas*', 'remote islands *in this cold*', and 'carefully guided *the zodiac*'. A few candidates seemed confused about how to respond, offering own words equivalents of the underlined words instead of locating them in the text.

(b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

- (i) **ancient**
- (ii) **silently**
- (iii) **lonely**

In **Question 2(b)** the most efficacious answers considered the meaning of each word as it is used in the text. For example, the word 'lonely' refers to the iceberg's solitary or unaccompanied journey to the sea rather than a sad /desolate feeling or emotion. The majority of candidates were able to explain 'silent' as creating no noise, although many offered 'quietly' which was not precise enough. A significant number found 'ancient' hard to explain as they did not include an intensifier to make words such as 'old' work in the context of the text.

(c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the evidence of climate change on Antarctica.**

Use your own words in your explanation.

In response, John's face dropped and he pointed inland to where we could see verdant plant life greedily snatching at gentle contours of quietly receding ice.

In **Question 2(c)** candidates were required to select one example of language from the specified section of the text and explain how it suggested evidence of climate change on Antarctica. A number of candidates did not follow these instructions but instead offered a very general response with no clear language example selected. These responses tended to offer a general paraphrase of the whole section of text and could therefore not be rewarded as the question was not addressed. The most efficacious responses offered a concise quotation such as 'verdant plant life greedily snatching' or 'gentle contours of receding ice'. Either of these language choices allowed candidates plenty of scope for word and phrase-level analysis to demonstrate their understanding of the writer's use of language. For example, considering the connotations of words such as 'verdant' and 'snatching' as suggesting that the plants do not belong in the environment or their aggressive and predatory nature as they take land that does not belong to them. In contrast, many candidates focused on the ice as a passive victim unable to fight back and just quietly shrinking in the face of an aggressor. Some less effective responses tried to do too much, running both phrases together or even selecting the whole section of text and therefore only offering slight explanations. Only one example could be rewarded so offering more was a waste of valuable examination time that could have been spent on **Question 2(d)** where more developed responses are expected.

(d) **Re-read paragraphs 10 and 20.**

- **Paragraph 10 begins 'We all gasped ...' and describes the scenery in the bay from the Zodiac.**
- **Paragraph 20 begins 'But the penguins! ...' and is about a sighting of a colony of penguins.**

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

The most efficacious responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three appropriate language choices from each of the two paragraphs indication in the question. The most efficacious approach was to consider the meanings of carefully chosen phrases in the context of the text and then consider the effect in terms of connotations and the atmosphere or attitudes created by the writer's language choices. These responses often offered a clear overview of the writer's intentions in each paragraph. Less efficacious responses were sometimes written in note form and offered less developed analysis or repeated the same general ideas about effects, often making rather vague assertions rather than considering specific words more closely. Middle range responses were usually more efficacious when explaining meanings but struggled to explore the effects, and the least effective responses tended to offer quotations (sometimes rather unselectively) but struggle to find anything relevant to say about them. A small number of candidates chose three language choices in total rather than three from each paragraph as clearly stated in the question. Some candidates used very long language choices linking the first and last words of the choice using ellipsis thus excluding key language from the response. Choices should be precise and fully quoted in the response for effective exploration of language.

The Most effective responses selected precise phrases but also considered the individual words within them suggesting how they worked within the context of the whole language choice. Rather than identifying literary devices they engaged with the language, considering its impact and connotations fully and linking each choice to a coherent and developed consideration of the paragraph. In paragraph 10, many were able to explore their individual choices within the context of the view of the bays and its impact on the tourists. They considered phrases such as 'the heavenly sights', and 'panoramic views' as representing the magnificence and vastness of cutting white lines between the clear blue sky and the silent waters' and also 'its crevassed and sculpted glory', to explore ideas about the deliberate artistry and its implications of perfection. Some responses focused more on the tourists' responses selecting language such as 'We all gasped' and 'We were captivated' to explore the collective admiration for the scenery and the awe and amazement communicated. These responses were sometimes linked to the appearance of 'a lone seal surfaced to distract us' and the more light-hearted tone established as they enjoy the wildlife. Many candidates were also able to analyse the implications of the seal 'disappearing into the secret depths below' indicating the mystery of the unknown parts of the ocean. These choices could all be linked successfully yet considered independently. In paragraph 20, many responses were able to draw an obvious contrast citing the humorous portrayal of the colony of penguins and the effect it had on Saffron's mother. This was often developed through exploring the phrases describing the penguins' collective behaviour such as 'comically squabbling', 'petty domestic warring' and 'noisy chastising' as indicating how amusing and cartoonish they were, almost as if they were putting on a show for the tourists' entertainment. Many responses also cited their swift change of mood from 'squabbling and 'warring' to 'unite angrily' when faced with a common threat such as the 'predatory gull'. Some candidates focused on Saffron's mother's reaction 'I laughed and laughed and was delighted' to explore the way that the penguins lighten the mood and allow for a shared experience of joy. Many candidates were able to appreciate the quirky and humorous nature of this scene through discussing three appropriate choices and analysing the effects of the language as well as the overview created.

There was generally little evidence of misreading in the two paragraphs specified in the question, but some candidates found it challenging to explore the language chosen without repeating very similar or identical words as those used in the original text in their explanations. This was mostly through using words such as 'heaven', 'panorama', 'without end', 'lone seal', 'playful', 'secret', 'deep', 'unite', 'predatory', and 'laughed'. Candidates should ensure that they use their own language to demonstrate full understanding and also to be credited for explaining the meanings of the words used in the text. A number of candidates thought that 'comically squabbling' was referring to the way that the penguins were walking rather than the sounds they were making as they interacted. Some candidates repeated one general ideas for every language choice selected, for example, the beauty of the Antarctic, or the comedy of the penguin colony rather than looking closely at individual choices. Some less effective responses also included long quotations with very general explanations rather than engaging closely with specific words. Very rarely no quotations were included at all with a brief description of the paragraphs offered instead. Some candidates looked at the wrong paragraphs to find language choices, most commonly paragraph 11. Such responses sometimes did not address the question at all.

Candidates are reminded that it is the quality of their language analysis which attracts marks. Listing of literary devices or the selection of plain language from the text is unlikely to lead to an efficacious response. Many candidates simply identified literary devices offering vague explanations such as 'it creates a strong image' with no attempt to look at the words themselves. Candidates need to exercise care when selecting their language choices to include carefully chosen words to maximise their opportunities for developed discussion.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- select precise and accurate language choices from the specified paragraphs
- make sure explanations of meanings make sense within the context of the text – avoid literal meanings unless this is the case
- avoid very general explanations such as 'this creates a strong visual image', or 'this makes the writing effective': always develop such statements by adding further details to exemplify the statement
- try to engage with the language at word level by considering connotations / associations of words and why the writer has selected them
- always start with the contextualised meaning then move on to the effect created by the language in terms of how it helps our understanding of the events, characters and atmosphere.

Question 3

You are Saffron. After your trip to Antarctica you write a letter to your friend Josie.

In your letter you should:

- **describe what you saw and did on the trip and how it made you feel**
- **give your thoughts about the people you spent time with on the trip**
- **explain how this trip has influenced you and your thoughts about what you might like to do in the future**

This question required candidates to write a letter from Saffron to her best friend, Josie, who is referred to in the text, describing her thoughts and feelings about her trip the Antarctic with her mother. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their letter. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and develop the ideas to describe and reflect on what she did on the trip and her thoughts about the people she was with. The third bullet required candidates to infer how the trip may have influenced her with particular focus on her future plans.

The majority of candidates were able to show general understanding of the text addressing the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support the response. Many of the responses were also able to develop the ideas by creating a convincing voice for Saffron and interpreting the events from her perspective (rather than her mother's), evaluating the ideas and adapting them accordingly. Where candidates had followed the bullets carefully, they were often able to develop explicit and implicit ideas effectively to include convincing articulation of Saffron's feelings about the trip and how the activities and sights changed her perspective about her future. Many dealt with her initial reluctance on the trip and her jealousy of Josie spending her holidays in the sun with other young people while she was in a cold and remote place with just her mother. Many candidates carefully evaluated the ideas in the text to explore how the extraordinary sights started to thaw her initially cold reactions and open her mind to new possibilities. These responses successfully traced her changing attitude to her mother and her growing independence of thought about her college choices. Less efficacious responses tended to track the text often paraphrasing it closely and therefore lacking development of Saffron's thoughts and feelings. The least efficacious responses used the ideas in the text thinly, referring vaguely to the main events but with little sense of Saffron's perspective.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to describe what Saffron did on the trip and her feelings about the activities requiring candidates to select only the most appropriate ideas. This offered opportunities to consider the disappointing first day spent in the cabin due to the rough seas and sickness suffered by both Saffron and her mother then the exploration of the bays in the Zodiac and the magnificent sights of the landscape and wildlife. Saffron's gradual change of heart from reluctance and determination not to enjoy her mother's choice of trip to enthusiasm for it could all be included in response to this bullet point. The most efficacious approach to this bullet was one where candidates extracted the relevant details and developed them by expressing Saffron's inner feelings as she describes the activities and her reactions to them. These responses tended to adopt a reflective tone suitable for a personal letter to a close friend where Saffron is looking back on her behaviour and the reasons for it. Many cited her envy of Josie's more fun-filled and warm holiday, as well as her annoyance at having to get up early and wear warm clothing. Many cited the penguins as the final turning point in her attitude describing their infectious fun as the moment where she could no longer hide her enjoyment and had to admit she was having fun after all. There was little evidence of misreading in response to the first bullet, but some answers used the text very mechanically, ignoring opportunities to develop a convincing voice for Saffron. Others just lifted phrases or whole sentences from the text to describe the events with no attempt to explore Saffron's feelings about them.

The second bullet required candidates to offer Saffron's thoughts about the other people on the trip. The best responses carefully considered Saffron's relationship with her mother and how it changed over the days spent in the Antarctic. They were able to communicate her initial irritation with her mother's overly enthusiastic attitude and many expressed feelings of being pressured into studying environmental science because it was her mother's passion rather than her own. The best responses considered John's influence at this point and the importance of an independent voice confirming the need to alert people to the effects of climate change and the importance of environmental scientists in leading that. Many candidates were able to communicate Saffron's deep respect for John's wisdom and honesty, linking it to her growing maturity and the ability to talk to her mother properly, listening to her experiences rather than sulkily dismissing them. These responses also distanced Saffron from Josie's influence at this point by allowing her to express what a life-changing experience the trip was for her with many softening her initial frustration with only being with

older tourists rather than other young people. Less efficacious responses to this bullet point focused only on John and the older tourists and did not consider Saffron's mother in enough detail. These responses ignored the parts of the text which clearly demonstrate their improving relationship, and the importance of that in Saffron's growing independence and ability to make her own informed decisions. Some less effective responses simply repeated ideas from the text listing John's comments about climate change without considering their effect on Saffron.

When responding to bullet three the most efficacious responses focused on Saffron's final decision about her college course as well as how the course would direct her future. For example, most candidates decided that she would study environmental science rather than medicine with the best responses developing this idea by considering Josie's weakening influence and Saffron's enthusiasm to make a difference in the world, particularly in the area of climate change and conservation. These responses often displayed great respect for her mother as someone who encouraged her but allowed her to make her own choice in the end. Many expressed a desire to work with Josie on the future by linking their different fields in overseas work. Some responses decided that environmental science would be too challenging due to John's comments about being far away from family and friends for long periods of time, so decided that medicine may be a better option for the future. Most responses focused on a desire to do good in the world whichever path was chosen. Less efficacious responses did not develop the response to bullet three sufficiently simply opting for environmental science (or not) without really exploring the reasons behind the decision.

Candidates seemed comfortable and familiar with the format of a personal letter with most adopting an appropriately honest, familiar and reflective tone. The less efficacious responses tended to be too narrative as they relied too heavily on the sequencing of the original text and did not offer reflections and interpretations to adapt the material to indicate what Saffron would choose to say to Josie. The language used was mostly appropriate and some more efficacious responses created a wholly convincing voice as Saffron, capturing a lively and confiding tone. In less efficacious responses the language and voice were rather plain but rarely inappropriate for the character. Across the cohort, there were some skilfully written, convincing responses. Others struggled to maintain fluency and control resulting in some awkward expression. Candidates are advised to check through their work carefully to correct errors and ensure their ideas are clearly communicated. There were some instances of wholesale lifting from the passage, and other candidates were over-reliant on lifted phrases and sentences. Candidates should be aware that use of own words is necessary both to show reading understanding and also to access writing marks in the higher levels.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- read **Text C** carefully, more than once, to ensure sound understanding
- pay careful attention to the perspective required for the task – for example, the voice being created and whether you are looking back at the events
- keep the audience and purpose firmly in mind
- remember to use ideas and details from the text but to adapt and develop them appropriately to create a convincing voice and new perspective
- do not invent information and material that is not clearly linked to the details and events in the text
- give equal attention to all three bullet points
- briefly plan your response to ensure that you are selecting ideas relevant to all three bullets
- avoid copying from the text: use your own words as far as possible
- do not use details from Text A and/or Text B in **Question 3**
- leave some time to check through your response
- do not waste time counting the words: the suggested word length is a guide, not a limit.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/12
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- attempted all parts of all questions in the order set
- followed task instructions and guidance
- responded appropriately to the command words in questions
- read the details of questions and texts carefully
- based their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- only used ideas rooted in and clearly derived from the text
- organised their response time efficiently, paying attention to the number of marks allocated to each question
- avoided repetition of the same idea(s) within an answer
- used their own words where appropriate, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- planned the ideas they were intending to use in longer answers before writing their response
- checked and edited their responses to correct any unforced errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated that they were familiar with the format of the Reading paper and the general demands of each of the three questions. There were very few instances where whole questions had not been attempted, though occasionally responses to part questions were incomplete or missing and/or answers were uneven, or appeared rushed, limiting the possibility of scoring higher marks. Occasionally, candidates attempted to base their answer on the wrong text/section of text or offered their response to one question in the style/approach of another – often this appeared to be where candidates were attempting to answer questions in a different order to that set. There were some candidates who missed opportunities to target higher marks by offering mechanical answers that simply played back sections of text with little modification and/or by paying insufficient attention to the details/focus of the question.

Candidates appeared to find all three Reading texts equally accessible and engaging. There were few examples of significant misreading across the cohort, though opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas were often missed as a consequence of less careful reading of detail in both texts and tasks. Across the cohort as a whole there were excellent answers to all three questions, with many going significantly beyond the expectations for Level 5, though candidates do need to ensure that they do not spend too long on one question at the expense of any of the others. For example, it was not unusual for the response to **Question 1(f)** (worth a maximum of 15 marks) to be more carefully planned and crafted than the response to **Question 3** (worth up to 25 marks), or for the answer to **Question 2(c)** (worth just 3 marks) to offer more extended explanation of meaning and effect than the response to **Question 2(d)** (worth up to 15 marks).

In many of the least efficacious answers, a failure to complete all aspects of a task and/or a loss of focus on the rubric limited the evidence of understanding and skills offered, or resulted in redundant material – for example, a few candidates offered choices from all of the first eight paragraphs in the language question **2(d)** (sometimes repeating material from the section of text used in **2(c)**). Explanations of choices not relevant to the question could not be credited. Others did not pay attention to the task guidance and so offered just three examples overall in **2(d)** limiting the material for discussion and missing opportunities to target higher marks

as a result. Similarly, there were some less well-focused responses from candidates who had scored well in the smaller sub questions but missed opportunities to target full marks in other higher tariff tasks. For example, some wrote considerably more than the maximum of 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)** indicating limited grasp of the evidence of skills and understanding required in a selective summary task. Others only addressed two of the three bullets in **Question 3**, limiting opportunities to target higher levels in an extended response to reading task, or attempted to write a full draft version of their response and then copy it out – an inefficient use of examination time. The best answers planned their responses to the longer questions. Others unwisely apparently wrote without any careful consideration of key ideas and/or planning a route through their answer, instead focussing on the number of words they had written. This was often at the expense of other aspects of their answer – for example, precision, range or development of ideas. Candidates should note that spending time counting individual words is unlikely to be an efficient use of time in the context of an examination and that it is the quality of their answer rather than its length that will most influence their level of achievement. Candidates are reminded that the word guidance offered in **Question 2(d)** and **Question 3** is not a limit or requirement of the task in itself – the guidance is offered to help them organise their time efficiently and offer sufficient evidence of their skills and understanding to target higher levels.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in **Questions 1(a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates were careful to follow the line or paragraph references in the questions to help them to move down **Text A** (Time travel) in order and direct their attention, though a number of the least efficacious responses tried to answer questions based on one part of the text from another and/or by unselective copying that did not recast the text as a response to the question. A few candidates had not remembered that in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from **Text A** in order to address the question as set and evidence their Reading skills. Answers should not be based on their personal opinion or outside knowledge and need to take careful account of what the question is asking – for example, offering their own suggestions of what someone physically travelling through time might be able to do was not an appropriate response to **Question 1(e)**.

Less efficacious responses attempted to include extra guesses in their answers to **Questions 1(a)–(e)** taking up valuable examination time and often diluting evidence of understanding. Others simply copied out sections of text with limited modification – often negating any suggestion of understanding by doing so. A number of otherwise effective candidates offered circular answers in one or more of their responses, repeating some or all of the language of the question where own words were specified as required, and/or addressed only part of the question/idea in their answer. Such responses provided limited evidence of understanding as a consequence and these candidates missed out on marks they might reasonably have been expected to target. In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on the language of **Text B** and / or copied out chunks of text (much of which was not relevant to answering the question) limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result.

In **Question 2** candidates needed to identify (in **2(a)**) and explain (in **2(b)**) words and phrases from the text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. Effective responses were careful to refer back to **Text C** to locate specific relevant choices and consider their meaning in context. In **Question 2(a)** answers that did not indicate clearly just the word/phrase that matched the sense of the underlined word/phrase in the question were not providing secure evidence of their understanding. A few candidates attempted to answer **2(a)** in their own words rather than selecting from the text as instructed. Some candidates did not offer answers for all parts of **2(b)**, necessarily missing the possibility of scoring full marks. Likewise, opportunities for marks were missed by a few candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify just one example from the text in their explanation and/or attempted to offer a generalised overview of the whole extract. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should ensure that they have explored and explained the meaning of each of the words they have chosen in some detail before they move on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most candidates were able to suggest three potentially useful examples for analysis in each half of the **2(d)** task and offer a little basic effect / meaning in context, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently precise or detailed in the examination of their choices. Less efficacious responses often repeated the language of the text when attempting to explain and/or offered thin, generalised comment that did not refer to individual words. In some answers, labelling of devices without careful explanation of how these examples were working in context, meant opportunities to target higher levels were overlooked. A small number of candidates did not address the **Question 2(d)** task effectively, addressing just one part of the question.

In **Question 3** most responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets, though a few candidates lost sight of the audience and/or purpose for the task – for example, writing speeches to new recruits or to twentieth century people interested in time travel. Candidates are reminded that responding to the specifics of task as set for that particular text will offer them the widest range of opportunities to demonstrate skills at higher levels in any extended response to reading question. Responses across the cohort covered the full range of levels of achievement, with top level answers showing evidence of having established the different timeframes in the narrative carefully before using, interpreting and developing a wide range of ideas to address all three bullets equally well, integrating key details from the text appropriately. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities as a consequence of uneven focus on the bullets, a lack of planning beforehand and /or offering a narrow range of ideas from the text overall. Less efficacious responses either offered only very brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with limited or no modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text in order to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and should be avoided.

Though Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these two questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity, organisation and register of their writing. Where meaning becomes unclear due to inaccurate writing this is likely to limit achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. When responding to **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**, it is advisable to factor in time to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication and awkward expression.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Comprehension and summary task

Questions 1 (a)–(e)

Short answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read and respond to **Text A: Time travel**. More effective responses paid attention to the paragraph references and command words in the instructions to demonstrate efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong, incomplete or unfocused explanations. The least efficacious responses often repeated the language of the text where own words were required and/or relied on copying longer sections of text with little or no modification to address the question as set.

Efficacious responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions to show what they could do and understand. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through **Text A** from the beginning, picking up on pointers where appropriate to help them to identify just the relevant material. Occasionally, opportunities to evidence understanding were missed where the explanations offered were unclear or partial and/or injudicious selection changed the meaning from that of the original text – candidates are reminded that whilst Writing is not assessed in **Questions 1(a)–(e)**, answers do need to be sufficiently precise and clear to communicate details from the text accurately.

(a) How fast are we travelling through time, according to paragraph 1?

In **Question 1(a)**, almost all candidates recognised that the speed / velocity was detailed as ‘one second per second’, though some made less efficient use of time by copying out the question and/or almost all of the second sentence from the text. Simply writing the key words of their answer was sufficient. In a few answers key words were missed, altering the meaning, and the response could not be credited

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

- (i) ‘entirely feasible’ (line 1)**
- (ii) ‘recent acquaintance’ (lines 4–5).**

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where answers failed to score both marks for one or both parts it was sometimes the result of offering a partial explanation only and/or repeating rather than explaining one of the two words. In **Question 1(b)(i)**, whilst ‘entirely’ was largely understood and often explained successfully, ‘feasible’ was sometimes misinterpreted as meaning impossible – in direct contradiction with the sense, and missing clues in the context of the sentence as a whole. In **Question 1(b)(ii)** ‘recent’ was often repeated rather than

explained, whilst evidence that candidates had understood the meaning of 'acquaintance' was sometimes diluted in answers that offered several contradictory guesses, including incorrect suggestions such as a good friend and a trusted work colleague.

(c) Reread paragraph 2 ('But this isn't ... such knowledge.').

Give two things that fictional time travellers do, according to paragraph 2.

In **Question 1(c)** many candidates reading paragraph 2 closely were able to identify all three answers in the text – though only two were required to score maximum marks. Most had paid attention to the key words in the question and so focused their answer on the actions of 'fictional time travellers' and not on those of the science fiction writers and filmmakers also mentioned in this paragraph. Some used own words, others simply recast the material from the text appropriately to ensure their answer was relevant. Copying phrases / sections of paragraph 2 indiscriminately diluted evidence of understanding in some answers – for example, 'presented characters who invent some wild vehicle to blast into the past or spin into the future' did not communicate secure understanding of the actions of fictional time travellers.

(d) Reread paragraphs 3 and 4 ('To date ... distant childhood memory.').

- (i) Identify two reasons why the possibility of time travel seems unlikely.**
- (ii) Explain the different opinions that people have about the causes of déjà vu.**

Candidates who paid attention to command / key words in the question were best placed to offer creditworthy responses and make efficient use of their time. On occasion, candidates offered suggestions in their answer to one part of the question that would have been more appropriate to the other. For example, responses to **1(d)(i)** scoring just one mark had often spotted the lack of solid evidence in real life, but then lost sight of the question, moving on to describe déjà vu'. In **1(d)(ii)**, candidates paying attention to the marks available were careful to offer three different opinions from the text and score the maximum 3 marks. At times opportunities to score in both parts of **1(d)** were missed where information was copied or used incorrectly – for example, some suggested that 'no one has seen hordes of tourists' or that 'time wouldn't destroy them on the way'.

(e) Reread paragraph 5 ('Certainly ... our dreams.').

Using your own words, explain how being able to mentally time travel might be beneficial to humans.

In **Question 1(e)** the most efficacious explanations reworked the relevant information from paragraph 5, using their own words as appropriate, to identify three distinct potential benefits to humans of being able to mentally travel in time. Many scored all three marks available, though where this was not the case it was often the implicit idea of helping to create your future life according to your wishes / making better life decisions that was overlooked as being separate to the idea of planning for a known future. Occasionally, some overlooking the word 'mentally' offered imagined scenarios not related to the text or task that could not be credited as evidence of reading skills.

(f) According to Text B, how should a person working from home manage challenges to their time?

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.

Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from **Text B: Working from home** and some understanding of the requirements of the selective summary task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea, misreading and / or inclusion of extra details meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. A failure to recast information from the passage to address the question sometimes diluted evidence of focus and/or understanding in less efficacious responses.

Where responses were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words and to keep their explanations concise. Overview was evidenced in some of the most efficacious answers

where relevant ideas had been carefully selected from different parts of the text and organised helpfully for their reader – for example to first deal with advice related to dealing with friends and family and then to move on to potential or existing clients. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy and/or points that simply narrated experience rather than offered advice. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text and should be careful to recast the material to answer the question as set – a summary of how should a person manage challenges to their time did not ask for lengthy descriptions and illustrations of what those challenges might be. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to demonstrate their understanding and successfully address the selective summary task.

The most effective responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned a route through the content of their answer before writing their response. Many had produced and followed a useful bullet point plan that showed evidence of having organised and grouped similar ideas to avoid repetition. There were some extremely effective and well-crafted responses that demonstrated both concision and precise understanding over a wide range of relevant ideas. In partially effective answers, excess often arose from attempts to offer unsolicited additional advice and/or personal experience of working or studying at home (e.g. during a pandemic) to anyone considering it as an option, losing focus of both text and task. On occasion, there was repetition of ideas as the result of an unnecessary introduction or conclusion to the response.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible – without changing or blurring the original idea – and to organise points helpfully for their reader. However, some candidates overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task and offered lengthy explanation, with a few candidates continuing to write far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others adhered to the advised length of the response but took far too long to explain just a few, sometimes repeated, ideas. A few appeared to have misunderstood the **1(f)** task entirely, offering quotations and explanations more in line with a **2(d)** language question – where this error was made it was often evident that candidates were attempting to answer the questions in a different order to that set and so adding unnecessary challenge/making rubric errors more likely.

The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to select only those ideas relevant to the focus of the question, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – for example, the suggestion of what happens when working in an office, the examples of additional temptations such as hot drinks and biscuit and the lengthy explanation of who timewasters are, what they do and why. Some candidates unwisely wrote a commentary on working from home, rather than a summary of the ideas in the source text whilst others misread the timewaster as the narrator / person working from home and showed limited understanding as a result.

More effective responses were not dependant on the structure or language of **Text B** to communicate their ideas and were consequently able to offer more concise explanations. They remembered to keep in mind the focus of how to manage challenges to time, often presenting their answers in terms of what someone working from home should do based on explicit/implicit advice in the text. They discounted, or recast as things to avoid, any illustrations of what the writer used to do or had experienced in the past. Meanwhile, less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer an own words version of the whole text in the order it was presented and often repeated ideas and/or included unnecessary or inappropriate detail as a result. In these answers, excess was often a significant feature, limiting achievement. Many missed opportunities to target own words and indicate more secure understanding by failing to reword phrases from the text such as 'distinguish between the two' and 'get wised up'. The least effective responses were almost entirely reliant on the language of the original. Candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text and splicing them together is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(f):

- after reading the task instructions, read **Text B** again to identify all those ideas that are potentially relevant to the focus of the question
- discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the specific focus of the question
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan - check that they are distinct and complete
- identify in your plan where you have repeated ideas or listed similar examples which could be covered instead by one 'umbrella' point

- use your plan rather than the text as you write your response to avoid lifting
- return to the text to ‘sense check’ any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- organise and sequence your ideas to make them clear to your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the original text
- explain ideas clearly in a way that someone who had not read the text themselves would understand
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- check back after writing your answer to ensure that you have included all of the ideas you planned to, but not repeated anything
- aim to keep to the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ by concentrating on concision.

Question 2

(a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) The Commander felt that Q was the only person able to endure the experience of time travelling.
- (ii) At the end of her mission, Q would be suddenly and very quickly moved back to 3030.
- (iii) Q knew that hiding her travelling clothing in bushes was potentially dangerous.
- (iv) The Commander tells Q that people will now look after future trees.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified the correct word or phrase from **Text C: The time traveller** to correspond with the meaning of only the underlined example in each part of **Question 2(a)** – simply and efficiently giving just the exact word or phrase as their answer. Candidates should note that it is not necessary to write answers to **Question 2(a)** in full sentences and providing only those words required to answer the question is likely to be a more efficient use of their examination time.

Marks were sometimes missed where answers were unfocused – for example, offering responses that covered only part of the meaning of the underlined phrase, or adding in extra words from the text that went beyond the meaning of the underlined words, such as ‘inconvenient’ in **2(a)(iii)**. Very occasionally, candidates had misread the instruction to ‘identify a word or phrase from the text’ and tried to explain meaning in their own words. A few of the unsuccessful answers to part **iv** offered ‘take care of’ – adding words that were not in the text.

(b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

‘Marvel’s tree seeds and compost’ a golden sign read. Q walked towards it, looking neither left nor right at the inquisitive humans that were now appearing singly and in groups around her. No, she wouldn’t be distracted by their strange voices and their incredibly small stature.

- (i) inquisitive
- (ii) singly
- (iii) distracted

In **Question 2(b)**, some answers offered just one carefully chosen word or phrase as their answer, whilst others offered longer explanations to evidence their understanding. Either approach could be creditworthy, though candidates should be careful not to dilute evidence of understanding by offering several suggestions and extra guesses of different meanings that are contradictory and/or not in line with the text. Efficacious answers had considered the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined, and matched their explanation accordingly, for example explaining that Q being distracted would mean she experienced a loss or a lack of focus. A number of candidates appeared unsure of the meaning of ‘singly’ – for example, suggesting incorrectly that it meant the humans were musical or singing. Many were able to offer a reasonable suggestion for the meaning of inquisitive in part (i) such as curious or interested, though others had not recognised that this word described the feelings of the humans, rather than those of Q, and so could not be credited – other incorrect suggestions included ‘interesting’ or ‘weird’. A small number of candidates offered no answer for one or more part(s) of this question and so were unable to target all three marks.

(c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests Q’s thoughts and feelings about the money she is carrying.**

A sudden gush of panic flooded her mind, making her check her pocket. Relief radiated warmly as her eager hands folded round the small wads of paper. This was what people in this century called ‘money’, and she would need it.

Use your own words in your explanation.

In **Question 2(c)**, those candidates who had focused clearly on using just one example taken from the text extract as instructed were best placed to demonstrate their understanding. Some underlined or bracketed their chosen example in the text, others copied it out as a subheading for their explanation – either approach was acceptable. The most popular choices included the images ‘a sudden gush of panic flooded her mind’ and ‘Relief radiated warmly’ – often, explanations of these choices scored well, though where opportunities were missed it was sometimes the result of limiting discussion to just one word in their selection. For example, of those selecting ‘Relief radiated warmly’ a number of candidates focused solely on ‘relief’ and did not attempt to explain the rest of the phrase

Efficacious answers included those which began with an explanation of the meaning of the key word(s) in their example, ahead of going on to explain what those meaning(s) suggested about Q’s feelings and thoughts at that point. Many responses selecting the opening phrase touched on the overwhelming nature of the emotion suggested by ‘flooded’ and/or its immediacy as indicated by the word ‘sudden’, profiting further by finding their own word for the feeling of ‘panic’ rather than repeating it. Others selecting ‘relief radiated warmly’ as their chosen example were generally able to exploit this image to good effect, suggesting something of the comforting sense of relaxation and reassurance it indicated. A few attempted to explain the less interesting phrase ‘making her check her pocket’ and consequently often did little more than replay the text, for example offering that ‘it was the panic making her do that’ which could not be credited

The most efficacious responses had carefully noted the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less efficacious responses often attempted to discuss more than one example – time that might have been more profitably spent in **Question 2(d)** where there were up to 15 marks available. Some less effective responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted unwisely to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms.

(d) Reread paragraphs 1 and 8.

- Paragraph 1 begins ‘The blue and red streaks ...’ and describes Q’s arrival.
- Paragraph 8 begins “‘I want 100 each ...’ and is about Q ‘s experience in the store.

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

Write about 200 to 300 words.

Efficacious responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of **six** choices (three relevant selections from each paragraph) often beginning by explaining the literal meaning of the choice and then moving on to explore effect. Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language through detailed discussion of focused choices centred around images, individual words or phrases. Where candidates had considered all of the key words in slightly longer choices they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses, though candidates do need to be careful to choose and explain examples of interesting or powerful language use precisely and deliberately, rather than simply offer whole sentences from the paragraph with a general comment in the hope there will be something relevant in there. Occasionally some candidates did not indicate any clear choices for explanation, offering instead a general summary of each paragraph that did not address the task and could not be credited.

Some candidates used each of their choices as a sub-heading for their explanation of it to good effect, though candidates repeating the language of the text within their explanations missed opportunities to target higher marks. Rather than selecting the first three choices in each half they came across, or the most ‘obvious’ literary devices, efficacious responses often set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain. Some of the most effective responses spent some time exploring interesting contrasts between how the words were working in this context and their initial expectations of those words – for example noting that ‘blanket’ might usually refer to a soft, warm covering humans would find reassuring, yet here was described as ‘suffocating’ suggesting Q’s experience of the forest was far less comfortable and

more restrictive/claustrophobic. Others reading, or considering their response, less carefully suggested that Q had found the trees beautiful and enjoyed the natural scents of the atmosphere in 2030 – often contradicting evidence they had offered elsewhere in their answer that the smell must have been unpleasant (for example, when discussing the violent image of ‘promptly smacked her nostrils’). Many of the better responses identified and discussed choices containing interesting use of verbs – such as ‘tossed’, ‘smacked’ and ‘enveloped’ in paragraph 1 and ‘studied’ or ‘scurried’ in paragraph 8 – though partially effective and mid-range responses often limited their explanation to basic meaning. For example, many candidates noted that ‘tossed’ means thrown, though fewer went on to suggest the nuance of carelessness/lack of agency it conveyed. The most effective responses considered these verbs and other interesting words within their choices individually, as well as suggesting how they worked within the longer phrase and/or in the context of the description as a whole

Responses at level 5 frequently analysed each of their choices precisely and at some length, offering answers that were balanced across both parts of the question. In the mid-range, answers were often uneven in favour of one paragraph or the other and opportunities were missed where the same or very similar general suggestion was offered for more than one choice. Repetition of the language of the original, resulting in circular answers that could not be credited, was evident in explanations offered for both paragraphs – for example where ‘mouse-like’ was explained as being like a mouse, or the ‘heady aroma’ explained as an (earthy) smell. Some words from choices in the same paragraph were repeatedly copied in explanations of others, diluting evidence of understanding – for example ‘smell’, ‘new’ and ‘different’ from paragraph 1. On occasion, candidates copied incorrectly and so offered explanations that drifted from the meaning in the text – for example reading/copying ‘earthly’ rather than ‘earthy’ lead some candidates to suggest incorrectly that Q was from a different planet and in response to paragraph 8, rewriting ‘falter’ as ‘flatter’ changed the meaning unhelpfully. Others recognised the meaning of words but failed to spot when they were being used figuratively as part of an image – for example, suggesting that the storekeeper really was a rodent and/or that the ‘small, stunned animals’ were non-human inhabitants capable of speech in some strange other world.

Choices from paragraph 1 often centred around the implied contrast between the Earth in 3030 and 2030 – some answers did little more than repeat the text to say everything was ‘new’ and different’ for Q, whilst others took time to explore more carefully how some of that contrast was conveyed and were able to target higher marks as a result. For example, the reference to ‘safely sanitised air’ was sometimes contrasted usefully with the ‘new heady aroma’ Q experienced, with candidates unpacking the suggestion that whilst readers might consider 3030’s atmosphere to seem sterile, unnatural and bland, it was preferable and reassuring to Q.

A number of responses to paragraph one commented generally on the physical experience of time travel itself – identifying potentially useful choices such as ‘extreme’, ‘insane dancing’ and ‘being tossed from a white-knuckle thrill ride’ with the most efficacious often considering the lack of agency ‘tossed’ implied and the disorientating, emotional overload suggested by ‘insane’ and/or ‘extreme’. Occasionally, limiting their comments to an explanation of just one word within longer choices meant some candidates offered partially effective explanations only – for example, not all considered the word ‘promptly’ in ‘promptly smacked her nostrils’ and so overlooked what it suggested about the impact of the atmospheric conditions.

More general initial comments around how humans appeared to have evolved between 2030 and 3030 as suggested in paragraph 8 were carefully supported by examination of relevant choices in a good number of more effective answers. Others limited their success overall by simply repeating over and over in relation to all/any of their choices from this paragraph the idea that the humans in 3030 were different to Q and were surprised by her appearance. Some misinterpreted ‘painstaking’ as suggesting Q was experiencing physical discomfort rather than understanding the meticulous attention to detail it described. Others misread ‘small eyes wide and alert’ as referring to Q’s eyes rather than those of the shop keeper.

The least efficacious answers to **2(d)** offered generic empty comments such as ‘The writer uses lots of interesting words and phrases to describe what it was like to be there.’ Comments such as these are not helpful to candidates since they do not evidence any understanding of how language is working in a particular given section of the text and can create a false sense of security, meaning candidates move on without saying anything more concrete. Satisfactory responses to the task offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each example they had chosen, whilst more effective answers also identified effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, using explanation of precise meaning/what you could ‘see happening’ in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect. Less effective responses often only labelled devices and/or offered no more than a generic explanation of the writer’s reasons for using them.

In a small number of answers, choices from paragraphs other than those specified in the question were offered – these could not be credited and were an inefficient use of examination time.

In **Question 2(d)**, candidates should remember that it is the quality of the analysis when considering how language is being used which attracts marks. Whilst explanations need to convey ideas as clearly as possible for the reader and choices from the text should be reproduced accurately, writing skills are not being assessed in this question. Candidates should be encouraged to work at the very edges of their vocabulary range as they explore and explain each choice – reaching to find the right words to help explain their choice precisely, rather than limiting their answer to those words they are sure they can spell correctly, could be helpful for some candidates.

Answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are unlikely to be useful and/or result in very thin general comments at best. Opportunities were missed in a small number of answers where choices were from one paragraph only or only three choices were offered overall. The most efficacious answers were often able to ‘talk their reader through’ their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, ahead of arriving at an understanding of how and why these particular words might have been used by the writer in this context.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- make sure that any quotations you select from the text are precise – do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- copy words within your choices correctly from the text
- in each part of **2(a)** make sure that your selection is clearly identified – remember you are looking for just the word or phrase to match the sense of the underlined words in the question
- in **2(b)** be careful that your explanation is consistent with how the word is used in context (if unsure, try substituting your answer in the text to check it)
- in **2(c)** try to say three separate things about your one chosen example
- before you begin your response to **2(d)**, identify in the insert the two paragraphs of text from which your choices need to be selected
- in **2(d)**, check you have selected three examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (six choices in total)
- only offer an overview in **2d** if you have spotted that there is a relevant connection between your chosen choices in a paragraph
- where you are trying to explain meaning, read your answer back to check that your explanation makes sense
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as ‘the writer helps us to picture the scene’ – you need to say how your chosen example does this to show your understanding
- make sure your explanations in **2(d)** deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- when you are unsure how to explain the effect in **2(d)**, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) in the choice and work from there
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

Question 3

Reread Text C, The time traveller, in the insert and then answer Question 3 on this question paper.

You are Q. After your mission you are asked to give a speech about it to people from your century who are interested in time travel.

In your speech you should:

- explain what the mission involved and how you felt about it
- describe what worked well and what was a challenge
- suggest how further missions could be improved.

Write the words of the speech.

Base your speech on what you have read in Text C, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullets.

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with **Text C**, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to adopt the perspective of the time traveller, Q, in this extended Response to Reading task. The task guidance invited candidates to write the words of Q's speech recounting and reflecting on her experience for an audience in 3030 interested in time travel. Almost all candidates were at least able to open and/or close their speech from the perspective of someone talking to a group of people, though many did not sustain the voice and sense of audience throughout. Others missed the opportunity to offer and develop a range of key ideas by losing sight of the task in the body of their response and not addressing all parts of all three bullets. Some missed more 'obvious' points such as explaining the purpose of the mission and/or in an attempt to use own words diluted evidence of key ideas for example by using the word 'saplings' rather than 'seeds'. On occasion, responses spent time unwisely imagining a back-story for Q – including how she came to be involved in the selection process for time travelling, her childhood dreams and experiences, for example. These ideas were not rooted in the text and so could not be rewarded.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood both the narrative and task in at least general terms. Some in the mid-range though had misread/mispresented key details to suggest that Q's mission had been to travel forward in time to 3030 and/or that the inhabitants of the world she visited were talking animals. A number referred to the vehicles and/or time machines from Text A. A few of the least efficacious answers moved away from evidence in this text completely, attempting to create a narrative about another time travel experience, often including details from other fictional time/space travellers' adventures. However, where candidates had planned their response beforehand, they were often able to draw on relevant ideas and details from different parts of the text to address each of the first two bullets successfully and then extend and evaluate implications in the narrative to offer appropriate ideas/developments in bullet three as to how future missions might be improved. Along with the more explicit issues to be solved around the uncomfortable, potentially dangerous ride, limited time and necessity of travelling alone, candidates responding to the text and task more carefully were often able to pick up on more subtle suggestions that Q didn't fit in quite as well as expected/hoped, extending the idea to suggest that further or better research before any more trips back in time might be advisable.

Some answers lost sight of the purpose and/or audience for the speech and as a result limited/skewed unhelpfully the range of ideas they included – for example, some writing advice to new recruits to the training programme lapsed into general advice related to working hard, not losing focus and being part of a team and missed opportunities to include relevant details from Q's experience. Those who confused the time zones for the mission were rarely able to offer evidence of more than a general understanding of the text. Responses that relied from the outset on simply mechanically tracking back through the text and replaying the passage often offered a more limited range of ideas overall, missing opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas and suggestions and were more likely to confuse details of time zones and Q's training/mission itself. The least efficacious responses copied sections of text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading of key details and information for example, a small number suggested that Q had flown in a spacecraft and landed on a distant planet where she encountered a shopkeeper who was a mouse.

On the whole, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a speech, and many were able to establish an appropriate register, combining/linking ideas from all three bullets to structure their speech helpfully and maintaining a sense of audience throughout. Occasionally, candidates chose to write as if Q was being interviewed by/reporting orally to her superiors, which though outside the details of the task did not generally get in the way. However, where candidates lost sight of both the perspective and form/purpose for writing, for example writing the Commander's journal entry, responses were likely to be less efficacious. In the least effective responses, overreliance on the language of the text limited success and/or expression became awkward as a consequence of poor control and/or inconsistencies of style. A few responses were very brief, necessarily limiting opportunities to offer convincing evidence of understanding and skills. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time both to complete their response to **Question 3** and to read back through it to correct any errors in their use of language and to ensure that meaning is clear and that the register sounds consistently appropriate. In the least effective answers, copying whole sections of text was common. This adversely affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- remember to base your answer on the ideas and details you find in Text C only
- keep in mind the audience, form and purpose for your response
- decide on the voice, style and level of formality you want to create and maintain that in your answer
- do not invent information and details beyond the scope of the passage; look for the clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements and suggestions
- give equal attention to each of the three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas
- plan a route through your answer beforehand: you can choose not to follow the order of the bullet points and/or link ideas from each
- do not copy directly from the text: use your own words as far as you can to express ideas
- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas allows you to better show your understanding, for example by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/13
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the introductions to each text carefully
- worked through the texts and tasks in the order set
- followed question instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words
- attempted all parts of all questions
- considered the marks allocated to each question and developed their responses accordingly
- planned the ideas to be used and the route through extended responses before writing
- paid attention to the guidance offered to help them focus their responses – for example, writing no more than 120 words in the summary, using just one example from the given text extract in **2(c)**, and
- selecting three language examples from each paragraph in **2(d)**
- used their own words where appropriate, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- avoided repetition of the same idea within an answer
- did not introduce material/ideas that were not rooted in the text
- checked and edited their responses to correct any incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

The vast majority of candidates attempted every question on the reading paper; examiners reported seeing very few incomplete papers. Candidates' responses indicated that they were familiar with the format of the Reading paper and the general demands of each of the three questions. The texts proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates, and they responded positively to both texts and questions. Some candidates did not pay careful attention to the marks available in each question and/or key details of the texts/tasks and so missed opportunities to target higher marks as a consequence. This was most common in **Question 1(d)(ii)** and **1(e)** where some candidates did not attempt to find three points, in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates included a limited range of ideas in their responses, in **Question 2(c)** where a number of candidates did not select a clear example from the text provided or selected more than one, in **Question 2(d)** where some candidates offered three choices of language in total rather than three choices from each paragraph as specified in the task or focused on the wrong paragraphs in the text, or in **Question 3**, by including details from **Text A** or **Text B**, or inventing a commentary on celebrations at the base, rather than reflecting in character, as the Captain, on the experience as detailed in **Text C**.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in comprehension questions **1(a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. At times candidates used the language of the text where they had been asked to use own words – for example in **Question 1(b)(ii)** by explaining 'inhospitable' but lifting the word 'wasteland' instead of offering an alternative to show understanding of the whole phrase. In **Question 1(f)** some candidates copied phrases or longer sections of text rather than remodelling the language of the text in their response. Even where copying is selective, it should be avoided in **Question 1(f)** to demonstrate evidence of full understanding for the Reading mark and produce an effective response to the task. Many candidates also included too many examples and details from the text, such as references to why Mars looks red or the months of darkness. This made copying the original wording of the text more tempting and often led to the inclusion of excess material or sometimes indiscriminate selection of ideas.

In **Question 2** candidates needed to identify (in **2(a)**) and explain (in **2(b)**) words and phrases from the text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer in **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. More effective answers were careful to refer back to Text C to locate relevant choices and consider their precise meaning in context. Middle-range responses showed mostly clear understanding and tended to be literal, as they focused on the meanings of the language choices, rather than considering the choice within the context of the whole text. Less effective responses did not always choose appropriate language to discuss and struggled to develop viable explanations, sometimes repeating the language of the text in the explanations or identifying literary techniques. This was done with varying degrees of accuracy and sometimes general comments were offered about the techniques rather than focusing on the words themselves.

In **Question 3** most responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task, although some candidates found it challenging to develop the ideas from the text. Most candidates wrote as the Captain, although some misread the question and adopted the voice of Bob. The most effective responses produced a convincing journal entry by using an appropriate voice for the Captain reflecting on the progress of the Mars expedition so far. More effective responses developed the ideas and details in the text selectively to work through the bullets logically. They were able to describe what the mission that day involved, including the Captain's thoughts and feelings about her team of astronauts and the working and living arrangements on Mars, as well as explaining what she did after she received the news that day and her plans for the remainder of their time on Mars. Responses in the middle range tended to use the text rather mechanically, often paraphrasing closely rather than selecting ideas and details to use in their own writing to demonstrate understanding. Less effective responses tended to lack focus on the text covering only the main ideas and sometimes inventing material that moved too far away from the text itself. Some responses included a great deal of fabricated material about how the Captain missed her family and what they would be doing on Earth, often reminiscing about fictional past events with her children. Other less effective responses copied unselectively which provided little evidence of understanding.

Candidates should remember that though Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these two questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity, organisation and register of their writing. Where meaning becomes unclear due to inaccurate writing this is likely to limit achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. When responding to **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**, it is advisable to allow sufficient time to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Comprehension and summary task

Questions 1(a)–(e)

Short answer questions **1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read, locate and respond to key ideas and details of **Text A: Is there life on Mars?** More effective responses paid careful attention to the paragraph references and command words in the instructions, as well as the number of marks available, to demonstrate efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Less effective responses tended to write too much or failed to follow the instruction to use own words. Some candidates offered several possible responses thus using time inefficiently and diluting evidence of understanding.

(a) What temperature can Mars reach in wintertime, according to the text?

In **Question 1(a)**, most candidates recognised that the temperature Mars can reach in wintertime according to the text is minus 153. A significant number read less carefully and offered an incorrect answer by omitting the minus sign.

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

- (i) 'inhospitable wasteland' (line 1)**
- (ii) 'comprised principally' (lines 2–3).**

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where responses failed to score both marks, it was sometimes the result of offering a partial explanation only, for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** offering a meaning for 'inhospitable' but repeating rather than explaining any sense of 'wasteland'. In **1(b)(i)** effective responses often explained 'inhospitable' as meaning 'uninhabitable' or 'a person could not live there'. A few missed opportunities to score both marks in **1b(i)** – for example, by offering that the area was 'inhabitable' or 'wasteland' was a 'dumpsite' or 'rubbish tip' for which there was no evidence in the text instead of being a barren or desolate area. In **1(b)(ii)** effective responses tackled both aspects of the idea, dealing first with 'comprised' most commonly as 'made up of' or 'contains' and then 'principally', often explained as 'mostly' or 'mainly'. Effective responses to both parts of **1(b)** were able to evidence that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of each question.

(c) Reread paragraph 2 ('However, Mars ... vanish into space.').

Give two factors that could have made life a possibility in the first billion years of Mars's existence.

In **Question 1(c)** candidates rereading paragraph 2 closely were able to identify two factors that could have made life a possibility in the first billion years of Mars's existence. Most recognised was 'oceans' or 'seas' and 'air' or 'atmosphere'. A few had not read carefully however and so offered 'its magnetic field shut down'; this was not in line with the question and where included in an answer indicated that the information had been misinterpreted.

(d) Reread paragraphs 3 and 4 ('Most potential ... as we know it.').

- (i) Identify two suggestions of what could have happened to life forms on Mars.**
- (ii) Explain what the rover currently on Mars has been able to do well.**

To respond to **Question 1(d)(i)** candidates needed to focus on what could have happened to life forms on Mars. Some candidates did not read the question carefully enough and offered that life forms had been killed or become fossilised or included in their answer details of what the rover currently on Mars has been able to do well which was more suitable for **Question 1(d)(ii)**, such as the use of drills. Where candidates had read the question carefully, they were usually able to identify two suggestions such as the life forms had either died/perished or that they had retreated underground. Fewer candidates offered the idea that they found water-bearing rocks. Likewise, in **1(d)(ii)**, candidates paying attention to the command word 'explain' used, rather than simply repeated, information from the text, reworking it to offer secure evidence of close reading and score the maximum 3 marks. On occasion, candidates diluted evidence of their understanding – for example, suggesting incorrectly that rover had a large memory or that it could hold significant amounts of data even though the text states that there were issues with both storage and sending data. A few responses offered incomplete ideas that did not evidence understanding securely – for example writing one-word responses such as 'samples' or 'analyse'.

(e) Reread paragraph 6 ('This could be exciting ... more pressing concerns.').

Using your own words, explain why some humans might want to find evidence of life on Mars.

This question required candidates to use their own words as appropriate to show both explicit and implicit understanding of relevant ideas from their reading of paragraph 6. Many candidates identified that humans might want to find evidence of life on Mars as it helps with understanding the Earth's early history or understanding the evolution of life on Earth or they might want to meet Martians. Less efficacious responses mentioned only partial details, such as referring to history without a sense of it being ancient. Some candidates were able to correctly identify the possibility of material gain or power, though occasionally incorrectly offered the counter argument that resources should be used on Earth instead.

(f) According to Text B, in what ways can living and working in Concordia Station help a person to understand what it might be like to go on a long-term mission to Mars?

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible. Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

This question was based on **Text B: Life at Concordia Station** and required candidates to select relevant ideas from the text and organise them into a focused summary which addressed the question. Most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of the text and task, offering some

relevant ideas about the ways that living and working in Concordia Station can help a person to understand what it might be like to go on a long-term mission to Mars. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea, misreading and/or inclusion of extra details or comment meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. The most efficacious responses were carefully planned, organised and coherent, focusing sharply on the task by referring to a wide range of ideas from the text, reordering the material where necessary to aid fluency and achieve logical progression, avoiding repetition and had made a consistent attempt to use their own words. These responses were often preceded by a bullet point plan, and the best were careful to turn around implicit ideas to answer the question explicitly. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to include only those ideas relevant to the focus of the question, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – such as explanations about oxidation and how iron minerals in the soil cause Mars to look red, long hours of darkness or references to polar bears. In partially effective responses, there was a tendency to make a point about Concordia Station on its own with no reference to how this was like Mars or would imitate or simulate the living conditions on Mars. Other generalised comments included that the conditions in Concordia Station and Mars are similar: similar temperatures or landscapes without specifying the extremely low temperatures or that there is a huge desolate terrain.

Responses in the middle range tended to consider a more limited range of ideas. The most common were that Antarctica is very cold, it has a barren landscape with few life-forms and they have to manage a lack of privacy by working out how to co-exist with colleagues. These responses often missed the more subtle points about there being nothing to engage your mind or needing to acclimatise or having to adapt to this new environment. There was also a tendency to offer 'extreme conditions' without including the sense of it being related to work as suggested in the text. In low to mid-range responses, some candidates simply linked lifted phrases, missing opportunities to target own words and indicate more secure understanding by failing to reword phrases/sections from the text such as 'we had to develop our own strategies for managing both our privacy and working together professionally' and 'video calling home was unreliable'. The least effective responses were almost entirely reliant on the language of the original. Candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text and splicing them together is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task.

Focused and well-planned answers often grouped the ideas about the barren landscape that contained very few life forms which consequently meant that it was boring and there was nothing to engage your mind. They also showed understanding that contact with family members was limited due to the unreliability of video calling rather than it being not allowed (a common misreading) when describing what living in Concordia station was like. Careful planning also helped many candidates to avoid/correct examples of misinterpretation that were evident in less effective responses – for example, common misunderstandings included that the reference to Mars being red suggested it was hot rather than extremely cold and that the astronauts did not have enough food. They also avoided adding extraneous comments such as there being an absence of shopping malls or take-aways. This session there were some particularly effective and well-crafted responses that demonstrated both concision and secure understanding of a wide range of relevant ideas.

Advice to candidates on Question 1f:

- after reading the task instructions, read **Text B** again to identify all those ideas that are potentially relevant to the focus of the question
- discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the specific focus of the question
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan - check that they are distinct and complete
- use your plan to help you to organise and group your ideas to ensure that your response is coherent
- avoid including a general introduction or summative conclusion where ideas may be repeated
- explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the text themselves would understand
- do not comment on ideas or add examples/details/opinions of your own that are not in the text
- use your plan rather than the text as you write your response to avoid lifting
- check back to ensure that you have included all of the ideas you planned to but not repeated anything

- aim to keep to the guidance to write 'no more than 120 words' by concentrating on concision.

Question 2

(a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) Bob was grateful that he, Sarah and Rajah would not be visiting any more sites after this one.
- (ii) Sarah and Rajah had promised the Captain that they would cooperate with each other while out on this mission.
- (iii) Sarah and Rajah both jumped up at the same time because they wanted to be the first to speak to the Captain.
- (iv) Rajah had a very sad expression on his face after the Captain told him she wanted to speak to Bob, not him.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified the correct word or phrase from **Text C: The Mars expedition** to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example in each part by simply and efficiently giving the exact word or phrase only as their answer. It is not necessary to write responses to **Question 2(a)** in full sentences, as only the word or phrase selected from the text is needed as an answer. Some candidates added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire question in each case, substituting the word or phrase from the text and then bracketing or underlining the relevant section of their answer. Marks were sometimes missed where responses were unfocused – for example, offering responses that covered only part of the meaning of the underlined phrase, or adding in extra words from the text that went beyond the meaning of the underlined words, such as 'grabbing the communication device' in **2(a)(iii)**. Occasionally, candidates had overlooked the instruction to 'identify a word or phrase from the text' and tried to explain meaning in their own words. Other less efficacious answers only offered part of the phrase by omitting 'simultaneously' in **2a(iii)** or offered 'jumped from the door, arms outstretched' or 'undignified heap' from another part of the text.

(b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

They'd ended up in an undignified heap together on Mars's surface, while Bob and the other astronauts had ambled over and past them to inspect the base that the rover had built.

- (i) undignified
- (ii) ambled
- (iii) inspect

In **Question 2(b)** the most effective responses covered the meaning of each word considering its context as used in the text. Many candidates were able to explain 'undignified' as 'inelegant' or 'embarrassing', but some candidates simply repeated the question diminutive 'without dignity' which did not show full understanding. A number of candidates were unsure of the meaning of 'ambled' – for example, suggesting incorrectly that it meant 'rushed', 'jumped' or 'pushed' as opposed to 'walked slowly', 'strolled' or 'wandered'. Some missed the suggestion that 'inspect' in this context is to examine, scrutinise or to look carefully at and offered only 'look' which was too general to credit.

(c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests what Bob experiences as he searches for water.**

Use your own words in your explanation.

The ground was promisingly soft here. His booted foot sank the shovel blade through a surface layer of fine crimson crumbs. An unmistakably damp wedge of soil was removed, and clear liquid slipped gently into its place.

In **Question 2(c)**, those candidates who had focused clearly on using just **one** example taken from the text extract as instructed and explained what it suggests that Bob experiences as he searches for water were best placed to demonstrate their understanding. Some underlined their chosen example in the text, whilst others copied it out as a subheading for their explanation; either approach was acceptable. A few of the least effective responses attempted unwisely to rewrite the whole extract in their own words and/or discuss it in very general terms only or offered phrases such as 'His booted foot' which did not address the requirements

of the question. Others limited the marks available for their response by repeating the language of the original in their explanations by suggesting it was 'soft' or 'damp'.

The most effective responses offered a concise quotation then considered how the writer suggests Bob's mounting confidence or hope as he searches for water. The most popular example was 'The ground was promising soft here' and many responses explored how Bob was hopeful as he had found a location to investigate that looked appealing and encouraged him to think that there could be water present. Other responses considered the example of 'unmistakably damp wedge of soil' and were able to explore ideas about how there was no denying that the moist solid lump of earth implied that there was growing evidence of what was underneath. When candidates simply focused on single words such as 'sank', 'wedge' or 'soil' or short phrases such as 'fine crimson crumbs', they missed opportunities to offer fully developed responses for this 3-mark question. The most effective responses had carefully noted the number of marks available, chosen an appropriate example and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to it.

(d) Reread paragraphs 12 and 16.

- **Paragraph 12 begins 'Seconds passed ...' and is about the astronauts watching as Bob puts the sample under the microscope.**
- **Paragraph 16 begins 'Bob realised ...' and is about the astronauts' reactions to their discovery.**

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

The most effective responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three appropriate language choices from each of the two paragraphs indicated in the question and often began with explaining literal meaning and then moving on to suggest effect. These responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language through detailed discussion of focused choices centred around images, individual words or phrases. Where candidates had considered all of the key words in slightly longer choices, they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses who struggled to move beyond explanation when it came to the description of the life-forms and their movements. Candidates do need to be careful to choose and explain examples of interesting or powerful language use precisely and deliberately, rather than simply offering whole sentences from the paragraph with a generalised comment, such as repeating 'this creates a sense of suspense or anticipation' for every choice. A feature of less efficacious explanations was the repetition of the words of the text, for example, 'when the place is small and cramped, the silence makes it cramped'. A number of candidates chose inappropriate language choices – sometimes plain language, such as 'observing' or 'a clear image on the slide' offering limited opportunities which did not maximise their opportunities for developed discussion. There was some misunderstanding where the microscope was misinterpreted through personification as 'observing' the astronauts and 'inhaled sharply', was often portrayed as a sigh of relief rather than an expression of surprise or shock. Occasionally, some candidates did not indicate any clear choices for explanation and instead provided a general summary of each paragraph that did not address the task and could not be credited. Others chose only three words/phrases in total rather than the six specified in the question resulting in some undeveloped responses.

Some of the most effective responses had identified choices in each half that worked well together, exploring how those judiciously selected choices both worked individually and combined to influence the reader's impression, building to an overview. For example, in paragraph 12, the suggestion that time went by slowly when 'Seconds passed like hours', showed they were eager to know the result and the 'intense scrutiny of the microscope's eye' intensified the claustrophobic atmosphere while the detailed examination took place in the hope of getting accurate information, as not a sound could be heard while they waited. The 'movements were subtle and deliberate, as if choreographed' suggested the elegance of the deliberate actions that were synchronised as though they were putting on a show in the build up to the dramatic discovery of life-forms. Responses evidencing understanding at level 5 frequently showed imagination and precision when discussing language use and offered answers that were balanced across both parts of the question.

Often better answers had recognised and explored something of the contrasting reactions of the astronauts in paragraph 16 – sometimes noting that nothing had prepared Bob for this momentous occasion when he looked into the microscope and saw living creatures. There was some misunderstanding around 'rapturous moment' as a few candidates interpreted this as ideas of terror rather than the awakening and enlightenment that followed. Despite another misconception of the reference to 'poor rehearsal', in that a number thought that this meant that Bob was disappointed by what he had found and was miserable, regretful or

overwhelmed by feelings of despair, which then extended into his 'contemplating' or that he had been badly trained as an astronaut, candidates recognised the theatrical implications of 'rehearsal' and linked it to the apparently 'choreographed' life-forms. Others assumed that Sarah was simply happy and that Rajah was serious and professional by writing a 'solemnly worded message or suggested he had a similar response to Bob without realising that that they are both selfish people who were trying to steal Bob's glory in finding life on Mars. 'Delineating the grandeur' was sometimes portrayed positively rather than exploring the connotations of Rajah's behaviour or that he was overplaying his role. Candidates picked up on the celebratory aspects of parading the microscope but not that Sarah and Rajah were promoting themselves and being entirely unprofessional as they were so eager to share the wonderful discovery. Others simply relied upon a range of technical terminology such as kinaesthetic/auditory/tactile imagery, sometimes misapplied, without any further explanations or repeated 'achievement' to show their accomplishments in response to a number of choices. Comments like these are not helpful to candidates since they do not evidence understanding of how language is working in a particular given section of the text and can create a false sense of security, meaning candidates move on without saying anything more concrete. In **Question 2(d)**, it is the quality of the analysis when considering how language is being used which attracts marks. Candidates are reminded that their Writing skills are not being assessed in this question. They should be encouraged to work at the very edges of their vocabulary range as they explore and explain each choice. Likewise consideration of shades of meaning might help some candidates to improve the precision of their explanations and move towards effect, targeting higher marks – for example, in paragraph 12 the description of the 'intense scrutiny of the microscope's eye' did more than suggest it was merely 'looking at' and in paragraph 16 the use of the phrase 'parading the microscope like a glorious trophy' went further than suggesting Sarah just 'walked about' with it.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- in each part of **2(a)**, make sure that your selection from Text C is clearly identified and matches the sense of just the underlined words in the question
- in **2(b)**, be careful that your explanation is consistent with how the word is used in context – you could try substituting your answer in the text to check it
- in **2(c)**, try to say three separate things about your one chosen example
- in **2(d)**, select three precise and accurate language choices from both specified paragraphs and give six in total
- make sure explanations of meanings make sense within the context of the text
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as 'makes you feel as if you are there and you are able to place yourself in the moment' or 'it gives more effect and helps to build an image in your head'
- make sure your explanations deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- try to engage with the language at word level by considering meaning in context and then explore connotations and associations of words and why the writer has selected them
- avoid repeating the same explanations of effects for each language choice.
- allow time to check your responses – for example, to add in extra detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

Question 3

You are the Captain. After speaking to Bob about the mission of today, you write a journal entry about the progress of the Mars expedition so far.

In your journal entry, you should:

- **describe what the mission today involved and your feelings about how it has gone**
- **describe your thoughts and feelings about your team of astronauts and the working and living arrangements on Mars**
- **explain what you did after you received the news of today and what your hopes are for the rest of the time you spend on Mars.**

Write the words of the journal entry.

Question 3 required candidates to write a journal entry from the perspective of the Captain describing her feelings about how the mission has gone, her thoughts and feelings about her team of astronauts, the working and living arrangements on Mars and what she did after receiving the news of the discovery and her

hopes for the remainder of her time on Mars. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their journal entry. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and adapt it to fit the requirements of a journal entry written from the Captain's perspective. The third bullet required candidates to infer what the Captain did and what her plans are following the discovery of life-forms on Mars. A few candidates attempted to answer the question as Bob or one of the other astronauts. Some missed the detail that the Captain and trio 'belong to a team' of astronauts in the introduction to the text or assumed it was just the three of them living in the base and considered living in cramped quarters to be a cause of the issues between Sarah and Rajah. Others thought that the Captain was with them in the rover or back on Earth. A number of candidates incorporated ideas from **Texts A** and **B** about general living on Mars, loneliness, no contact with their family, lack of internet or mistakenly, the standard of food, often at the expense of relevant details from **Text C**.

The majority of candidates were able to show general understanding of the text and address aspects of the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support their response. Many were also able to extend their ideas by writing in a credible style for a journal entry, evaluating the ideas in the text and adapting them accordingly. Where candidates had followed the bullets carefully, they were often able to develop explicit and implicit ideas effectively to write an engaging journal entry which captured the assured and measured voice needed for a Captain describing the success of the mission. Most candidates addressed the bullet points in chronological order using them to help structure the response coherently. Less effective responses tended to be unselective or closely paraphrase the text without adapting the style therefore offering a rather plain account of the mission with little sense of the Captain's perspective of the events. The least effective responses used the ideas in the text thinly, often offering very general ideas about the mission in response to the first bullet mostly connected to the discovery without actually specifying what was discovered or only addressed one or two of the bullets.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to describe the mission today and the Captain's feelings about how it had gone. This gave candidates opportunities to discuss the purpose of the mission, their different jobs, the collection and testing of samples before describing the discovery of the life-forms which was indicated as being a hugely significant finding for humankind. The best responses considered the need to look for promising areas to dig and the intricacy of the work. Less effective responses usually found a narrow range of ideas in this bullet and did not look for ways to develop the ideas. There was some evidence of misreading in response to the first bullet in relation to the mission itself and the time they had been there, as some candidates thought they had already been there for three months rather than two days, and assumed this was their 'last site' and final day before returning home.

The second bullet offered many opportunities to identify the Captain's thoughts and feelings about the team of astronauts and the working and living conditions on Mars. The best responses selected carefully and were able to remodel the material. They were able to consider the reliability of Bob who was in charge of the mission and the basic accommodation that the Captain hopes does not prove too cramped. A number of candidates did not separate the reactions and behaviours of Sarah and Rajah and analysed them as one entity, simply referring to them 'fighting' or the competition between the two astronauts rather than the specific actions of each character highlighted in the text. Others assumed that the Captain would find this behaviour funny or entertaining and would relieve everyone's boredom, rather than appreciating the seriousness of the mission and that their behaviour could jeopardise it.

When responding to the third bullet, the most effective responses focused on the evidence in the text such as the conflict between Rajah and Sarah and the idea of future discoveries, talking to Bob and sending information to Earth. Fewer candidates grasped the idea of protecting the life-forms or studying them at the base, whilst others did not realise that Sarah and Rajah were attempting to steal Bob's achievement and some mistakenly thought he was disappointed or angry, or that Rajah had made the discovery. Most were able to convey a sense of the Captain's exasperation with Sarah and Rajah by developing the idea that they were childish or needed to work as a team, and her feeling of great delight at the discovery. However, some candidates described Sarah and Rajah's escapades in too much detail for a journal of this type and omitted other aspects of the text. Some candidates referred extensively to celebrations or referred to more general activities on the planet or in the base, such as the supposed party or lavish meal that the astronauts held to celebrate their discovery, despite there being no evidence of this in the text. Some candidates strayed further with more personal diary material about missing children and home comforts, rather than dealing with the business element of what would follow the discovery.

Where candidates copied sections of text and/or replayed phrases that were not securely understood, responses were generally less effective; expression often became awkward and/or there were inconsistencies of style that also affected the writing mark. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to read back through their response to correct any mistakes, ensure that meaning is clear and that the register

sounds consistently appropriate. In the least effective responses, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of whole sections of text common in these responses. This affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- read **Text C** carefully, more than once, to ensure sound understanding
- do not refer to details in **Texts A** and **B**
- keep the audience and purpose for your response in mind throughout your answer
- do not invent information and details beyond the scope of the passage; look for the clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements about characters and situations
- give equal attention to all three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas
- plan your response to ensure that you are selecting ideas relevant to all three bullets
- avoid copying directly from the text: use your own words as far as possible
- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas allows you to better show your understanding, for example by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to check through your response.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/21

Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were fifteen marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence the style adopted
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task.

General comments

Candidates were familiar with the format of the examination paper and understood what was required for both the directed writing and composition questions. There were few incomplete scripts or scripts in which the instructions regarding which questions to answer were not followed, although some responses to the Composition questions ended abruptly. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements seen. A small number of candidates did not attempt **Question 1** but wrote quite competent responses to one of the composition questions. Most responses were written in candidates' own words although there were a few responses which were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert. Some lifting of phrases or sentences was fairly common but where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing. In **Section B**, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were some stories and occasionally discursive or polemical pieces submitted for the descriptive writing tasks, which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure. This was more common in **Question 3**.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of habit-changing and the difficulties encountered in the process in **Question 1** in **Section A**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for an informal letter to a friend. The register required here was generally well understood, with a friendly and supportive tone and the use of some stylistic devices, although some responses used phrases which were inappropriately colloquial.

The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than excessively lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on or employing the ideas in the texts in a coherent response. Even in responses which offered only limited coverage of the ideas in the reading material, some opinion or recommendation was usually given about whether or not long-standing habits could be changed and how to go about doing so as instructed in the task, though not always probing or offering judgements about the ideas. Only a very small minority of responses simply reported the views and ideas in the texts with no comment on them. More effective evaluation tended to challenge some ideas in the texts rather than reproduce them and developed them thoughtfully in the context of their friend's life and needs.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Here salient ideas in the texts were not quite addressed, such as the reliability or

motivations of ‘influencers’. A number of responses at different levels of writing skills focused on the requirements of only one bullet point, usually the second, thus missing opportunities for evaluation offered by the other.

Most responses made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response, and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Less effective responses were sometimes little more than a summary in paraphrase of the two passages in the Reading Insert. The structure and organisation of ideas required in a letter, such as a focused and explanatory opening and a thoughtful and convincing conclusion, were well understood by many candidates, though there were also responses which were quite flat and discursive in style after a brief introduction.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing for each. In this examination session the narrative options were rather more popular than the descriptive.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were effective, organised and sustained. **Question 2** was slightly the more popular and produced responses across the mark range. Two equally valid approaches were taken in response to this option: one where the café had just closed after the day’s business, and the other where the café had closed permanently. There were many convincing evocations of stillness after the hectic service of the day, or sad observations of the signs of failure of an unsuccessful business. Less effective responses to this question were sometimes inventory-like enumerations of the pieces of furniture and equipment to be seen, with little or no creation of feeling or atmosphere. Responses to the second descriptive option, **Question 3**, resulted in some highly effective and nostalgic evocations of family occasions or deceased loved ones. Here some overly long narrative preambles to the finding of the photograph limited the Examiners’ opportunities to reward descriptive writing, or a mysterious detail in the photograph changed the direction of the finder to a quest for answers, inevitably resulting in narrative. Examiners rewarded descriptive content where they could.

The first narrative option, **Question 4**, was more popular than the second, but both produced responses across the range of abilities. In response to **Question 4**, a large proportion of narratives involved recovery from injury or other mishaps of sporting figures, or the sudden return of errant family members. There were many stories in the thriller or suspense mode, and some effective responses recounted person growth and development or self-realisation. There was some appearance of zombies, and in less effective responses there was a general absence of the features of narrative writing such as effective characterisation or dialogue used to move the plot along. Most responses to the second narrative option kept the idea of replacing or standing in for another person at the heart of their plot. Many had sporting or theatrical scenarios where understudies were called to replace an injured player or star and went on to great personal success. There were engaging stories inspired by well-known film franchises where twins or parents and children swapped roles, and these were often well characterised and quite dramatic. Themes of betrayal in love were also prominent and often effectively characterised. Responses to both questions which were coherently constructed and which included credible characters and scenarios were always more effective. Less effective responses to both questions were ‘over-packed’ with incident succeeded by an ambiguous or poorly managed ending. Some highly effective responses created tension and pace, supporting the narrative detail with the deliberate manipulation of paragraph and sentence length for effect.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Imagine a close friend is trying to make a change in their life but is finding it hard to do so.

Write a letter to your friend giving your advice.

In your letter you should:

- **evaluate the ideas in both texts and suggest why you think your friend might be finding it difficult to make the change**
- **suggest to your friend some of the things they could do to help them make the change.**

Base your letter on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. Where the letter was also accurate and precise in vocabulary, with a clear understanding of the appropriate style and register for the specific task and audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded. More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement.

Marks for Reading

The most effective responses adopted a consistently evaluative, critical stance and read effectively between the lines of the texts, drawing inferences and making judgements about the power of habits and the difficulty of changing them. Almost all responses showed at least some engagement with the topic, and many were able to develop the ideas in the reading material from their own perspective, especially when discussing the addictive nature of the internet and influencers on social media.

Responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 successfully adapted the information about the psychology of habit-forming to the specific needs of their addressee, and those which imagined a particular habit were more readily able to focus the advice given in a way which evaluated the reading material while addressing both bullet points. Some showed effective synthesis of the ideas in concise expression: 'It's the accumulation of your actions and beliefs – your habits – that construct who you are, and as with any construction it takes time and effort to rebuild it, especially when we feel we don't have the strength or drive to do it.' There was some quite sophisticated analysis of the importance of influencers to young people, one strongly-argued response advising, 'There's no harm in those influencers whose content is shallow and not beneficial if we only watch them from time to time, but the minute we start to regard those people as someone we know and can therefore trust an issue arises!'

Responses awarded marks in Level 4 sometimes spent a great deal of time explaining the information in the second paragraph of Text A, or re-wording it in laborious paraphrase, losing focus on the task. At this and at lower levels of achievement, the paragraph was sometimes reproduced verbatim. Some responses were almost entirely taken up with lengthy anecdotes recounting the writer's personal struggles with bad habits, with very little coverage of the reading material: sometimes these were accurately and stylishly written resulting in marks in quite different Levels for the two components of the question.

There were a number of responses which managed to synthesise ideas from both texts to craft a fully developed response in the form of a letter, offering a range of evaluative points, and these could be awarded marks for Reading in Level 6 or high in Level 5. These showed a mature and thorough grasp of the subtleties of the issues involved. Where even a single evaluative point was firmly made Examiners could award marks at the bottom of Level 5 if there was otherwise reasonable coverage of the reading material. Where coverage was more extensive and more evaluative points were made the response could move up the mark range in this Level. There were an increasing number of responses which precluded the awarding of marks in Level 5 or above because they were not 'thorough' or 'developed' responses, but where some comment on or development of key ideas in the texts was offered Examiners could award marks in Level 4. A small number of responses were seen in which one or two points in the material were subjected to quite lengthy discussion and development but the marks awarded were restricted to the middle or lower parts of Level 5, because the range of evaluative points was limited. These responses were sometimes awarded high-level Writing marks.

Where some comment or opinion was offered, sometimes without specific reference to particular points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks at the lower end of Level 4 were usually awarded. Where the beginnings of evaluation of explicit points were evident, marks at the top of Level 4 could be awarded, while in undeveloped or brief responses, a mark of 7 at the bottom of Level 4 could be given if a comment had some firm roots in the text.

Examiners usually awarded marks in Level 3 for Reading where there was some coverage of the texts, and some selection of ideas from them, but where these were listed or simply recorded, or comments were relevant but simple. A mark of 5 or 4 was usually given where answers were thin or partly lifted directly from the texts. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but little comment on them. Where there were some brief opinions, usually at the end of the response, they tended to be more general and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts.

Less effective responses tended simply to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in lower Level 3 and below contained much copied material.

Marks for Writing

Style and audience

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for a letter to a friend, whose specific concerns and points of view could be imagined or understood. Most responses showed a clear understanding of the required register, even where technical writing skills were weak, and this allowed Examiners to consider marks in Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. At all levels of achievement having a distinct idea of what the recipient's desired change actually supported the effectiveness of the writing because it could be focused and coherent as well as friendly and supportive.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and audience. These often maintained an effective register without resorting to the overly-colloquial slang of some responses. In these, expressions such as, 'gonna' and, 'you guys' or overly loose sentence structures were used which were not appropriate for a response in the context of an examination where a range of writing skills is assessed.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent style or argument. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for Examiners to reward, though this kind of response was quite rare. More commonly, phrases and sentences were lifted and, in some cases, increasingly so as the response developed. In a small number of responses lengthy quotes from the texts were supplied; the fact that inverted commas were used did not disguise that too much of the response was not the candidate's own writing. At the lower level, awkward paraphrasing was seen with syntactically incorrect insertion of phrases from the text. Several instances of inappropriate reference to 'Text A' and 'Text B' which would negatively affect the register were seen.

Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the first paragraph and the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a cohesive piece. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The point of view being developed determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than their sequence in the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed and usually avoided the repetition of similar ideas which appeared in both. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide coherent judgement or recommendation and were more dependent on the sequencing of the original texts. In most cases, the information given in the texts was

offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were imposed on the structure of the original texts rather than argued for, and a concluding recommendation was sometimes in apparent contradiction to the weight of selected points preceding it. Sometimes a conclusion summarised all that had gone before in a very laborious, repetitive manner. It was noted that very short responses were seen more often than in previous sessions; these occasionally included an evaluative point but were not thorough responses supported by a detailed selection of relevant ideas.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were not only engaging in style and convincing in their deliberations but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and consciously used to persuade the reader. Some complex sentence structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views, and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation within sentences.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Because the letter was to a good friend, aptness and precision were required in vocabulary rather than the ornate and overwrought choices occasionally seen in some responses. Level 4 responses were sometimes effective but not consistently so. Although the style was usually fairly plain, the language used was generally precise. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There was some grammatical disagreement, often between plurals and verb forms. Words commonly misspelt in this range included 'repeatedly', 'motivation', 'excuses', 'disappointment', and 'benefit'. Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept Writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Here, the omission of definite or indefinite articles was quite common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more detrimental to meaning at this level. A small but not insignificant number of responses had lengthy pieces of writing without any meaningful punctuation. In some cases, material from the texts was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Level 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

Examiners noted an increasing tendency for writers to use capital letters randomly, with some responses written wholly in capital letters.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts
- look for contradictions in the arguments and point them out
- group ideas from both texts together and discuss them rather than repeat them
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience
- ensure that you understand the specific focus of the question to avoid misinterpretation or 'drifting'
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passages or given in the task
- do not lose marks by using capital letters randomly.

Section B

Descriptive writing

Question 2 Write a description of a café just after it has closed.

OR

Question 3 Write a description that involves someone finding an old photograph.

Descriptive Writing was a very popular choice for candidates, with **Question 3** being chosen rather more often, and Examiners could award a wide range of marks for these responses. The tasks in both questions were quite specific, but candidates still approached the subjects in a wide variety of ways which Examiners could reward appropriately. In **Question 2**, there were many detailed, organised and effective descriptions of cafés both recently closed and in various states of dilapidation. There were highly engaging and often nostalgic evocations of beloved cafés which had been the locus for friendly gatherings and romantic trysts, as well as for betrayals and disappointments. Descriptions were often very convincing, a reflection of how relatable young people found the subject. A range of sensory images were employed at differing levels of achievement: the bubbling and clanging of the coffee machines, the voices of the baristas calling out customers' names, the stickiness of unwiped tables, and of course the pervasive smell of coffee. Where these responses eschewed narrative beyond that strictly necessary for context, and included original and convincing details and images, Examiners could award marks in Level 6. Some very effective descriptions for **Question 2** used personification very subtly: 'The last lonely click of the door whispered down the street, merely an echo of its exclamations during the café's bustling hours.'; 'Curious vines crawled up the wall, braiding their way over the rooftop terrace.' At this Level, detailed literal description was also very effective: 'An old Monopoly board, the cash inside strewn loose, the player pieces replaced by bits and bobs brought by loyal regulars or fleeting visitors.' Descriptions, as is always the case, were more effective if they contained vivid and specific details rather than more general or stereotypical ideas and images. In the middle and lower ranges of achievement, writers depended more on visual images. Sometimes exaggeration reduced the effectiveness and credibility of the picture created, with rats everywhere, food strewn around and noxious stench escaping through closed doors.

In responses to **Question 3**, there were some highly effective descriptions awarded marks in Level 6. One very poignant and effective response had the adult narrator describing a black and white photograph of his childhood self and his family immediately before some unnamed tragedy. Under his gaze, the colours he remembers briefly suffuse the photograph before fading again and the response concludes, 'The knowledge that my family as we had been immortalised in this image would never exist again was an unmovable burden.' Here there was only the most elliptical reference to a back story and no narrative, but intense focus on the image. At all levels of achievement responses depicted photographs discovered in dusty attics or abandoned houses and were usually nostalgic in feeling. Here, overly long narrative preambles to the finding of the photograph were often noted by Examiners, sometimes taking up much of the response. This usually affected the marks for Content and Structure, but Examiners rewarded effective descriptive writing where they could: in one richly descriptive response the photograph only appeared in the final two sentences, after the depiction of the movement through the house of the adult narrator returning to the scene of his childhood. However, the writing conveying the atmosphere of the family home was so convincing and evocative, effectively foreshadowing the event depicted in the photograph, that the Examiner was able to award marks at the top of Level 5. In Level 5 and at the top of Level 4 some responses were seen that were wholly focused on the photograph and descriptive throughout but included so much minute visual detail that they did not provide a 'convincing picture' as required by the mark scheme because the realism of what could be contained within a single small image was lost. At the lower end of Level 4 and in Level 3 there were responses which were almost entirely narrative or which recounted only the visual details of the photograph without any exploration of the implications of the images therein.

For both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created convincing, evocative scenes and atmospheres in the best responses. Where they were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed, convincing overall picture, Examiners could award marks for Content and Structure in Level 6. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's attention by linking the different elements described in an engaging, cohesive response. Level 6 responses were characterised by this cohesive structure, often provided by the narrator's reactions or attitudes or a specific atmosphere, as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details with well-managed structures, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but usually more predictable. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less-striking images and more stereotypical ideas. In responses awarded marks in Level 3, there was often some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing, even though some were fairly accurately written. These were sometimes entirely narrative or the details included were mundane and stereotypical.

The most effective responses employed precise and varied vocabulary, striking images and personification, as well as a range of sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was occasionally wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by its imprecise use and lack of clarity. As is often the

case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. In this examination series incomplete or verbless sentences continued to affect marks given in the middle range, even where other technical aspects of style were more accurate. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more detrimental when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included disagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs. The omission of definite and indefinite articles was also common and hindered otherwise quite accurate, if simple, styles.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved

- **try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus**
- **keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a specific atmosphere**
- **write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses**
- **use vocabulary precisely: complex words used incorrectly do not help your style.**

Narrative writing

Question 4 Write a story that includes the words ‘... I’m back ...’.

OR

Question 5 Write a story where someone stands in for, or replaces, someone else.

Narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range, and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses, some of which were awarded marks in Level 6 for both components of the answer. These most engaging responses often included vivid descriptive detail to create the setting and characters, essential elements of more effective responses to both questions. Examiners sometimes saw narratives which seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations or were pre-prepared: this was much more apparent in **Question 5**. Occasionally responses were seen which did not comfortably fit with either title and where some lack of cohesion was evident. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 showed an ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension, mystery or drama and to vary the pace of the story.

In **Question 4**, this very popular task elicited a range of scenarios, although they often included a footballer or athlete returning from a setback or injury, or some malevolent entity returning to do harm. In this examination series the given phrase was more meaningfully embedded in the narrative, at all levels of achievement, than in previous sessions. Those awarded marks at the lower end of Level 5 and in Level 4 were, in the main, fairly predictable and employed a straightforward structure. There was some development of feelings or relationships with family members and mentors, though the narrative based on a mysterious and menacing villain or a torturous escape from captivity often enabled candidates to build tension through structure and language with some success. One strikingly intense first-person account featured an arsonist incarcerated in an asylum who, after escaping, decides to return in order to burn the asylum down. Effective structuring led the narrative – and the reader – inexorably to the final words of the conclusion: ‘I’m back’, and the response was awarded marks at the top of Level 5. Another was a simply plotted but tightly structured account of separated lovers meeting again and was effective precisely because the narrative was entirely focused on the given phrase. Several responses, at various levels of achievement, were based on self-improvement, personal growth or a return to health after addiction or mental illness.

Those awarded marks at the top of Level 3 or in lower Level 4 tended to be straightforward chronological accounts, with little or no characterisation or convincing scene-setting. These did not convince or engage the reader, sometimes because of their unrealistic nature: several responses concerning the disappearance of parents tried to explain their absence with far-fetched plots involving gangland wars, monsters or kidnaps. These were rarely convincing and sometimes lacked cohesion.

For **Question 5**, there were many different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability, but several themes dominated at all levels of achievement: the replacement of a lover, parent or spouse by another; the Hollywood-style trope of an understudy suddenly shot to fame in the theatre or on the football field; twins swapping roles either for pranks or to sit each other’s examinations, and some horror-genre substitutions of family members or friends by alien creatures. Examiners noted that responses to **Question 5** were more often effectively characterised than those to the other narrative option, **Question 4**, because the plot development or dénouement depended on minute differences between people being discovered, or the reasons for a relationship breakdown needed

explanation. Some responses awarded marks in Level 6 or at the top of Level 5 were notably uneventful in terms of plot but depended entirely on the plausibility of the characterisation: one new wife reflected sadly that her husband would never stop grieving for the wife who had died, as he slipped out of the house with increasing frequency to visit the cemetery. 'I know he sees only her blue eyes and not my brown ones...' There is no happy resolution but only an acceptance by the narrator of her minor position in her husband's life, which she prefers to living without him. This was most effective characterisation. In a tale of an understudy who is at last called to play the lead, the picture created of the understudy's life was most compelling: the need to be word-perfect at all times, just in case...; the guilt at hoping that the star will incur some injury; the deadening feeling of always being second-best: 'Foolish hope blooms and wilts in my chest ...miracles only happen in Disney films.' To achieve high marks for Content and Structure, such narratives had to demonstrate convincing scene-setting and characterisation, and also the creation of drama and tension. At the lower end of Level 5 and in Level 4 responses to **Question 5** were sometimes engaging but did not convince, as close friends or familiar teachers failed to notice a substitution, or fantastic or spectacular events were sometimes presented without any expression of fear or even consternation; the resulting loss of credibility negatively affected marks for Content and Structure. Sometimes marks in the Level first considered by the Examiner for an engaging tale could not be awarded because of the weakness of their endings or faults in the plot's resolution. This particularly affected some otherwise engaging and convincing responses to **Question 5**.

Examiners awarded marks in Level 6 for Content and Structure for narratives which created convincing, interesting scenarios and characters in responses to both questions. While the events in a story were important in creating such credibility, Level 6 responses paid careful attention to characterisation and how events are driven by character traits and choices. This was often supported by the skilful employment of both direct and reported speech.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless cohesive and reasonably credible for the reader. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed, relevant story. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying, if not always engaging, resolution. For higher marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level: here there was a tendency to say simply what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by characterisation and setting. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events rather than developing them as credible and rounded. While the majority of less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6 and, where this was coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate while Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. Speech punctuation and paragraphing were usually problematic at this level although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, faulty sentence separation and grammar errors. Some writers resorted to laying out dialogue in the style of a playscript in order to make clear who was speaking. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in lower Level 4 responses such as disagreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes obscure vocabulary. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which prevented many responses from being awarded Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and incorrectly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A common reason for an otherwise clearly written story not achieving Level 5 was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops

were needed but sometimes sentence separation was missing altogether. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these weaknesses also limited the marks available in the narrative writing. As in responses to **Question 1**, Examiners noted the random use of capital letters, with some responses entirely written in capitals.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative
- consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely only on events
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes, taking special care to avoid misspelling words given in the tasks. Accurate speech punctuation and paragraphing will help to lift your mark
- use complicated vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/22
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were fifteen marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use a form and style appropriate for each question addressed
- structure ideas and organise writing effectively to engage or persuade the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence the style adopted
- construct varied, accurate sentences, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task.

General comments

Most candidates were familiar with the format of the examination paper and understood what was required for both the directed writing and composition questions. There were only a few very brief or incomplete scripts. There were some responses where copying of large sections of the reading texts made it difficult to assess the candidate's own abilities. Some lifting of phrases or sentences was fairly common but where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing. There were a small number of responses to **Question 1** which were entirely copied from the texts and a few scripts contained no **Question 1** response.

In **Section B**, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were responses clearly intended as stories submitted for the descriptive writing tasks, especially **Question 3**, which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of art and Artificial Intelligence in the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses showed some understanding of the tone, structure and style expected in a formal letter to a person in authority, written by a parent. The register required here was interpreted in different ways with most adopting a respectful, polite tone and others a more strident, angry voice. The latter was sometimes successful if the stridency of the tone was tempered with strongly persuasive arguments though occasionally it was less appropriate.

The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the texts. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, often matching the details in Text B of the requirements for entries to the competition with the ideas in Text A, with some consideration of how 'original' or 'personal' an art entry could be if produced by AI.

Some opinion, based on ideas in the texts, was often given about the fairness of AI, with only a minority simply reporting the facts and ideas in the texts with no comment on them. More effective responses tended to comment on specific ideas in the texts, such as AI's dependence on expensive computer equipment and how this may discriminate against less affluent students. Sometimes, responses reflected the ideas in Text A in a more straightforward, practical way with limited reflection on how these ideas would affect the school's art competition. A fairly common weakness was where Text B had been read as simple instruction or information and the implications of 'fairness' mentioned in it had not been considered. There was some 'glossing over' of quite important ideas in Text A: many candidates argued, for example, that traditional art

took much longer to produce and was therefore better art, whereas Text A made a specific point which contradicted that. More effective evaluation tended to probe some ideas in the texts and examine carefully the implications of the competition on different groups, rather than record or summarise what was in the reading texts.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Some salient ideas in the texts, as mentioned above, were side-stepped rather than examined and some superficial reading of Text B meant that opportunities to evaluate the implications of the rules of the competition were missed.

Most candidates made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Effective evaluation often addressed what candidates saw as the inherently impersonal and unemotional nature of AI art and its dependence on other artists' imagination rather than the potential artist's own experience and talents. The structure and organisation of ideas required in an article, often including some rhetorical sub-headings or clear lines of argument, were used effectively in better responses to persuade and argue a case. Less effective responses were often written in a flat, reporting tone with less consistent awareness of the audience and purpose of the task.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each. Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative.

Responses to **Question 2** often made good use of the contrasting scenarios suggested by the wording of the question. Many were written in the voice of a shop or supermarket employee, opening a deserted shop before the customers arrived, with some stark and detailed contrast with the same scene at the end of the trading day. Effective responses often reflected a worker's sense of monotony or sometimes pride in opening and closing a busy shop, giving the account a strong personal voice and detailed observations.

Sometimes candidates missed the guide in the question to structuring their responses and described the working day of the shop rather than capturing the contrast between before the shop opened and after the customers had left. There were also some responses in which exaggerated details of noxious smells and aisles full of squashed fruit tended to overwhelm more evocative description.

There were many kinds of boats in different scenarios described for **Question 3** and Examiners awarded some high marks for more original interpretations such as fishing trips depicted from the point of view of a working fisherman or an escape by sea from a town being consumed by wildfires.

Less effective responses to this question were sometimes a little vague or more stereotypical, depicting natural landscapes seen from a boat and relying more on rather clichéd descriptions of glistening water and trees waving in the wind. Narrative responses to this question were also more prevalent, both those clearly intended as stories and those in which storytelling rather overwhelmed description by the end.

Both narrative writing questions proved very popular across the range of abilities. **Question 4** was a very common choice for candidates of all levels of achievement. As always, using the question to make the quoted phrase, 'I looked around the table', a significant moment in the narrative tended to help to determine how credible and well-constructed the story was. For many quite effective responses, the phrase marked a pivotal point in stories about many subjects from families to war strategists.

Less effective responses tended to include the required phrase in a way which was less impactful or was incidental to an otherwise quite straightforward narrative. While some at this level used quite credible scenarios, stories were sometimes mundane or lacked drama and pace.

The use of the 'letter' in **Question 5** was also important in helping candidates to create engaging narratives with believable characters who were driven by the need to find a lost letter or whose lives were changed significantly by the contents of a letter found or given to them. Some protagonists accidentally stumbled upon letters which changed their view of a familiar person such as a parent or grandparent, a scenario which sometimes produced highly effective stories. Where the letter was less personally significant, less effective responses tended to rely on codes to unlock clues to hidden treasure or a vast inheritance previously unheard of. While these had some shape and cohesion, they often lacked the narrative drive and opportunities for effective characterisation of more effective responses to this question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Imagine you are a parent of a child attending the school which is advertising the art competition in Text B. Following complaints that it would be unfair to allow entries of computer art, the headteacher has asked parents to share their opinions.

Write a letter to the headteacher.

In your letter you should:

- evaluate the ideas and attitudes about art and fairness in both texts
- give your opinions on whether computer art, such as digital art or AI art, should be allowed in the school competition.

Base your letter on what you have read in **both** texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.

Begin your letter, 'Dear Headteacher ...'.

Marks for Reading

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. The most effective responses adopted a consistently evaluative, critical stance and read effectively between the lines of the texts, drawing inferences and making judgements about whether AI art should be included in the school's art competition.

More effective responses here focused carefully on ideas about what constitutes art and whether pieces produced by AI should qualify on equal terms as entries in a school competition in which 'fairness' is foregrounded. The highest marks were awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting, views with confidence and perceptive evaluation.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement in the Reading mark for **Question 1**. These implicit ideas in particularly successful responses tended to revolve around whether the execution of art – meticulous skills honed over time – should be valued over the artistic, original impulse to create which could be realised in many different ways, including AI. Many responses, for example, reflected Text A's implied criticism and the rather dismissive tone of its opening paragraph in which the writer describes the speed and ease of producing art by AI. In better responses, however, some use was made of that implication to explore the idea of originality and creativity as separate from the technical reproduction of a recognisable scene or object.

Similarly, the idea that AI art was based on other artists' work was often explained fairly simply but in some more evaluative responses this was examined from the perspective of the requirement for entries to the school competition to be 'personal' and to reflect on the theme of 'friends, family and community'. Art which was essentially based on other artists' experience of the world could not, it was argued, truly reflect a student's own experience in a meaningful way.

There was sometimes some subtle grasp of a complex idea underlying Text A about the difference between mechanical artistic skills such as drawing and the genuinely creative impulse to produce art. While some read the point that AI 'makes no creative judgements' as another reason to disbar AI entries from the competition, there were some highly evaluative discussions about the vital agency of the artist in creating AI art which ensured that a genuinely original piece could emerge. One candidate developed this idea convincingly by suggesting that 'traditional artists might work for hours to copy something which exists in the real world but AI comes straight out of the imagination of the artists without the constraints of having to look like something else.'

The most common evaluation made by candidates concerned the necessity for expensive computer equipment in producing AI art. Where there was a clear link made with the competition and how this would

affect its fairness, Examiners could credit this idea as evaluation. A comment in one response was well articulated: 'If rich students from privileged backgrounds can simply buy their way to success in the competition, then your claim to be championing fairness is hollow.' Sometimes the high cost of computer equipment was noted but was not clearly applied to the discrimination this might create in the school competition. Addressing the task itself was sometimes neglected in less focussed responses.

While credit could be given for evaluation whether the argument was in favour or against the inclusion of AI art, successful arguments often centred around the ideas in Text A about originality, emotional engagement and accessibility. Most argued that AI art simply plagiarised other artists' work and could not be considered original while some suggested that without the controlling vision of an original artist, AI was just another tool. The skill set required was different from that needed in traditional art but no less original. Candidates arguing both in favour and against AI art also discussed the lack of genuine emotion in AI art: as explained by one candidate, 'A machine has no feelings, can't feel any connection to family, friends or community, but it can fake those emotions. Is that really what we want to teach our kids in school?'

Keeping the school competition in focus, other effective responses made reference to different attributes deemed appropriate to teach in a school. Encouraging children to abandon the painstaking learning of traditional art skills in favour of a quickly generated art piece was thought by many candidates to be the inevitable outcome of including AI art in the competition. This laziness was mostly considered detrimental to their learning and development though in a few responses a thoughtful case was made for AI being an essential skill for the future and that it was desirable that young people learned how to apply it in all areas of their lives.

The point made in Text B that people who did not have technical art skills could now produce interesting pieces using AI was also taken up by those arguing on both sides. For some, this went to the heart of what art is. Artistic talent is rare and to pretend that anyone could be an artist was specious and deprived traditional artists of their opportunity to shine. For others, the fact that disabled or otherwise disadvantaged children could compete on equal terms was a strong argument to include AI art.

As is usually the case with **Question 1**, it was in the justification of views and opinions that Examiners found evaluation to credit rather than the solutions sometimes offered. Many candidates asserted that a separate competition for AI entries should be introduced so that traditional artists did not need to compete with them. In many cases, this idea was supported by careful examination and evaluation of the ideas in Text A though sometimes it was offered with limited justification. While in reaching this conclusion some consideration of ideas might be inferred, candidates should be encouraged to provide an evaluative rationale which examines the salient points in the texts.

Where some comment or opinion was offered, mostly without specific reference to particular points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks in Level 4 were usually awarded. These comments were usually less selective and included some details which were factually accurate but not evaluative, such as the suggestion that traditional art takes much longer to produce than AI art. More general, if valid, ideas were also typical at this level with many responses describing how AI art is created or the effect of cameras on the art world.

Examiners usually awarded marks in Level 3 for Reading where there was some coverage of the texts, and some selection of ideas from them, but where these were listed or simply recorded, or there was some more obvious misreading. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but limited comment on them. Where there were some brief opinions, usually at the end of the response, they tended to be more general and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts.

Comments made at this level were given mostly in candidates' own words. Less successful responses tended to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in low Level 3 and below contained much copied material. In a few cases the entire response was copied from the texts. Where a mark of 6 was awarded, some firmer roots in the passages were needed, whereas 5 was generally given for thin or mainly lifted responses in which there was some insecure grasp of the ideas in the texts.

Marks for Writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for an informative, persuasive letter to a head teacher. Most responses showed a clear understanding of the appropriately formal register, even where technical writing skills were weak, and this allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Some high scoring responses for Writing used a more rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in a more combative way, but maintaining a careful balance of politeness and diplomacy. For example, one response commented: 'Your school has been a bastion of equality and fairness for every pupil for many years but this competition, sir, risks all of this for the sake of some fake idea of opening up the competition to people with no talent.' Another response was a little more combative: 'Does your school really want to teach children that the easy, lazy option is the best? Do effort, persistence and honesty mean nothing anymore?' These responses made their case effectively and with some impact while sustaining a respectful overall tone.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks for Writing in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to argue a case in favour or against the inclusion of AI art could sometimes mitigate frequent minor errors in a response. Conversely, some responses were generally accurate but were largely summaries of the reading material rather than adopting the structure of a formal letter or the register appropriate for head teacher.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent letter. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for Examiners to reward, though these kinds of responses were fairly rare. Phrases and some sentences were commonly copied but there were instances where much of the response was lifted from Text A. Such responses were difficult to credit for Reading or Writing. In more effective responses, ideas were incorporated into the writer's own style and selected for their usefulness to the overall argument rather than copied.

Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the texts but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the introductory paragraph and the issues were addressed as a cohesive piece. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in Text A but were reordered to some degree in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes found it challenging to provide a coherent argument and were more dependent on the sequencing of the original texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas and the letter format was sometimes forgotten. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were asserted and imposed on the structure of the original texts rather than argued for.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as subtle in tone and register was given a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were not only engaging in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation within sentences.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses were sometimes effective but not consistently so. Although the style was usually fairly plain, the language used was generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There were grammatical misagreements, often between plurals and verb forms. Common spelling errors in this mark range included some frequently used words in the texts.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept Writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level and sentences structures were not accurately controlled. In rare cases, material from the texts was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Level 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts
- look for contradictions in the arguments and point them out
- group ideas from both texts together and discuss them rather than repeat them
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage
- check your spelling of key words which appear often in the texts.

Section B

Descriptive writing

Question 2 Write a description of a shop before and after a busy day's trading.

OR

Question 3 Write a description with the title, 'A boat ride'.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates, though **Question 3** was much more often selected, and Examiners awarded a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions elicited responses describing a wide variety of scenarios which Examiners could reward appropriately. A specific focus on the contrasting details of a busy shop at different points in the trading day was often key to the success of the description in **Question 2**. Shops of all kinds and sizes featured in both effective and less successful responses though perhaps there was more scope and variety in larger supermarkets for opportunities to describe.

In some very effective responses, however, small, local shops provided the focus for some skilled writers. One, for example, was able to evoke the particular familiarity of waiting for a small bakery to open early in the morning, closely observing the eccentric owner, the sound of the shutters being lifted, the steam rising from loaves of bread as the hot air of the ovens hit the freezing temperatures of the air outside. Another evoked the daily ritual of entering the same shop each morning to be greeted by the same owner: 'Mr Abel, dressed in his shabby apron and bent over painfully by arthritis, was ever cheerful, ever optimistic about the world, despite the increasing dilapidation of his little shop.'

Other scenarios included fishmongers, florists and other shops where early deliveries of stock before dawn gave candidates opportunities to describe unusual settings. In one response, the small detail of a worker's hand being 'blue with cold' as he piled the ice around the lifeless fish on a market stall helped to create a vivid picture of the scene. The flash of yellow daffodils being unloaded from a lorry in a florist's shop was described as 'bringing the promise of sunshine before the sun had even thought of rising.' Such details and images were often the hallmarks of an effective response to this question.

Most often, supermarkets were chosen as the scene to be described. There were some responses in which a weary worker's point of view was used quite effectively, or occasionally that of a worker who took great pride in preparing their section of the shop each morning. Waiting for the lights to come on and the wide,

automatic glass doors to open was described in one response: 'Blowing on his cupped hands as he waited in his flimsy shop uniform for the doors to open, Sunny's mind was as numb as his hands. It was the only way to get through another day where no one would notice him as he slipped between the aisles like a ghost, filling the shelves with goods he couldn't afford to buy.'

Question 3 also elicited responses across the mark range. Here, as well as in **Question 2** and many previous descriptive writing tasks, the selection of a particular scenario often contributed significantly to the success of the response. Leisure rides on boats full of tourists sometimes gave candidates a range of people, places and details from natural environment in and around the water. In one response, an old couple observed carefully at the beginning and end of such a boat ride helped to give cohesion and an engaging thread of interest to the description: 'The last off the boat were the ones who had been first to board, the old man holding his hand out, smiling, to his wife to steady her as she gingerly stepped onto the jetty. She feigned a haughty glance at him, pretending he was her servant and the two of them giggled softly.'

Rarely, but often with some success, a more unusual scene was described, such as an escape by boat from an island engulfed by wildfires or soldiers stealthily climbing into a boat on a dark river as they returned from a mission at dead of night. In some responses, rides in lifeboats provided opportunities to describe particular and often vivid atmospheres of fear and panic. One writer described the eerie silence on an overloaded lifeboat of frightened people: 'The sound of the shivering of dozens of rescued people stretched across the empty, black ocean but nobody said a word, lost in their own terror and trauma.'

In both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created engaging, evocative scenes in the best responses. Where they were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed, convincing overall picture, Examiners could award marks for Content and Structure in Level 6. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's attention by linking the different elements described in an interesting, cohesive response. Level 6 responses were characterised by this cohesive structure, often provided by the narrator's reactions or a specific atmosphere, as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images or extended motifs which held the piece together.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but usually a more predictable. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas. In **Question 2**, much use was made of personification though it was not always effective: 'smiling fruit' in supermarkets, for example, which was sometimes 'begging to be eaten' or was 'forlorn and disappointed' not to be bought. In **Question 3**, colourful fish or playing dolphins were very common at this level and descriptions of the sea were more predictable and clichéd.

In both questions, where some responses lacked specific detail or the situation chosen was too stereotypical to sustain a more striking range of ideas, marks for Content and Structure tended to be awarded in Level 4. Lower in the mark range, responses to both questions were rather prone to narrative, especially in **Question 3**, though Examiners rewarded description wherever it appeared. The boat ride was often part of a larger narrative or the descriptive elements were quickly exhausted and storytelling took over. In **Question 2**, some responses did not use the wording of the question to help structure their responses to focus on the specific times of the day specified. While some of these responses attempted to describe in places, attempts to tell the story of a whole day in a busy shop tended to become unwieldy or unfocussed.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to be more narrative in intent, and while most responses at this level were organised and paragraphed, the details included were simple and there was less use of images or a range of vocabulary.

Some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing was evident in responses at Level 3, although they were sometimes fairly accurately written. These were sometimes entirely narrative and often brief and undeveloped.

Narrative writing

Question 4 Write a story that includes the words, ‘... I looked around the table ...’.

OR

Question 6 Write a story that involves finding a letter.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range. There was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses as candidates took the opportunities offered by the open questions to determine the genre, style and content for themselves. Sometimes, especially for **Question 5**, similar storylines were used in responses which were given very different marks for Content and Structure: this highlighted how important scene-setting and characterisation, rather than simple storytelling of events, were for the creation of effective narratives.

Effective responses were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension, mystery or drama and to vary the pace of the story were essential elements of more effective responses to both questions. In **Question 4**, the required line in the question gave candidates an opportunity to construct a story around a pivotal moment and where the phrase was used as a central point in the response, the narrative often proved more engaging and cohesive. In some successful responses, the whole story was built around the table in question, an ambitious, often confidently executed structure involving family dramas or workplace settings. In one such response, where the scene never moved from the table, a family had gathered for one young member to announce that they were going to move abroad. As the story unfolded, secrets and buried tensions emerged from different members of the family, shedding light on relationships and characters. In this response and many other high-scoring responses to both questions, close observation of details helped to engage the reader and reveal character in a concise and interesting way: ‘My sister, Kate, the one with the happiest disposition and the confidence of a favourite child, flashed me a dangerous look of pure venom. “We don’t need to talk about that,” she said through gritted teeth.’

A number of workplace settings also provided some effective writers with opportunities for tension, drama and sometimes humour. In one, a hapless, low-paid employee was mistaken for a new CEO of a large company when taking a break from cleaning the impressive boardroom. The obsequiousness of other board members as they entered the room and took their places around the table provided some real humour before the protagonist was uncovered and the story concluded. In other engaging responses, people gathered around a table in a military setting to decide on the fate of a deserter or the strategy for a mission. While this approach, in which there is limited action and more focus on relationships, characterisation and moments of tension, can be difficult to sustain, these responses often scored highly for Content and Structure.

In the middle range of achievement for the boundary between Level 4 and 5, responses were cohesive but often a little more predictable, with fairly simple chronological structures and less developed characterisation and setting. The phrase required by the question was not used to help structure the narrative and was often incidental, such as looking around a table to find a lost phone or some document that had been left behind such as a passport. Sometimes, events in the story somewhat overwhelmed the reader at the expense of characterisation. Nevertheless, many cohesive, organised responses were given marks in Level 4 for Content and Structure where there was enough shape and cohesion to meet the criteria.

Less successful narratives for this question tended to be brief outlines of a sequence of events, often lacking credibility and development but with some overall clarity. These sometimes employed similar content to more effective stories, such as the loss of some important item, but there was very limited characterisation and the focus was almost entirely on events and actions. Occasionally, the story was almost entirely written in dialogue with little actual narrative.

For **Question 5**, the significance of the ‘letter’ in the question was used quite imaginatively in more effective responses. While there were many stories in which the letter contained important information about the protagonist themselves or someone close to them, the most successful ones paid more attention to scene-setting, characterisation and how the story was resolved. Some effective responses, as well as less successful ones, used the death of a family member as the starting point. For example, the opening scene in one response described the funeral of a quiet, unassuming grandmother. The small group of mourners, combined with some anecdotes about an ordinary but loving elderly woman devoted to her family, effectively established a convincing scenario which then gave more impetus to the revelation, in a letter, that she had been a revered resistance fighter during her country’s occupation by a hostile power long ago.

At all levels of achievement, stories involving wills or disclosures after death featured commonly though other kinds of letters often helped to create convincing narratives. Letters home from soldiers on the front line, letters explaining the disappearance of a long-lost parent or sibling and letters stumbled upon which revealed the protagonist's real heritage all worked well for writers who understood how to engage the reader and shape a story.

In the middle range of marks for Content and Structure for both narrative questions, responses were often cohesive and there was some attention paid to characterisation and scene-setting. Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless cohesive and reasonably credible for the reader.

In most responses at this level, especially for **Question 4**, the question itself was not always used productively to help construct the narrative. Looking round a table for some lost object was common here, sometimes as just part of a search and opportunities offered by the question were not taken to create impact. In **Question 5** responses in the middle range, lost letters such as acceptances to college, and documents which proved the protagonist's identity for some important event or which gave access to secret inheritances all featured in cohesive narratives. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed, relevant story. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying resolution. Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks, for Level 5 marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical lower in this level. There was a tendency to say simply what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by characterisation and setting. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing credible characters. While the majority of less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent, confident and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6 and, where coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given.

Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate while Level 4 responses were plain in style and there was a more limited range of vocabulary. Speech punctuation was almost always problematic at this level although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 marks, such as disagreements, missing articles and imprecise vocabulary. In both descriptive and narrative writing, an insecure grasp of tenses was evident below Level 4. Sometimes this was only slight, such as the use of, for example, 'we had gone' where 'we went' was required but repeatedly slipping between present and past tense was also noted by Examiners as a quite serious weakness in otherwise competent responses.

Errors in sentence control and separation also limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and incorrectly selected homophones sometimes appeared in quite clear writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A common reason for an Examiner to be unable to award Level 5 marks for Style and Accuracy was weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed but sometimes sentence separation was missing altogether. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these weaknesses also limited the marks available in the narrative writing.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **choose your plot carefully so you have time to develop characters and settings**
- **consider imaginative ways and points of view to tell your story, not just a chronological account**
- **characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely on actions**
- **check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes. Only use incomplete sentences when you want to create a specific effect**
- **use complicated vocabulary only with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/23

Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were fifteen marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise responses effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- adapt their style and structure for different audiences, purposes and genres
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required.

General comments

Most candidates understood what was required in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task. Some responses to descriptive questions, usually **Question 3**, wrote more narratively than descriptively, and although Examiners credited description wherever possible, some responses showed a clear misunderstanding of how descriptive writing differs from narrative. In **Question 1**, responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, but some were mostly or wholly copied from the text in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of, and some engagement with, the topic of the reading text in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a letter written by a friend offering advice. Most responses also demonstrated a clear understanding of the two bullet points requiring candidates to evaluate the ideas in the podcast discussion about attitudes to making mistakes, and to suggest ways to help the friend feel less nervous and less worried about their first day in this part-time job.

The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passage, although many included short phrases from the text. More effective answers also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the text in a coherent response which argued consistently throughout. Effective responses showed some ability to probe and challenge the views given in the text by both speakers, suggesting the need to acknowledge and manage mistakes and the various approaches that were suggested.

Middle range responses tended to reproduce the points made in the text, sometimes with a little personal opinion or expression, with some beginning to evaluate. A substantial number of responses at this range made some reference to the ideas in the text, though without really addressing the different implications suggested by the ways the speakers suggested to manage mistakes.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the text, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side, saying that acknowledging your mistakes was both vital and not important. The example of the 'older club member' refusing to own up to her mistakes tended to be reproduced with limited comment or judgement. Others produced a summary of what the text said with less secure understanding of how to adapt the ideas for an informal letter sent by a friend.

For the Writing mark, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register to reflect the writer's judgements and attitudes. In most cases, some understanding was shown of how a letter is opened, developed and closed and how rhetoric, persuasion and sometimes humour can be used to engage and persuade. The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were lively but evaluative in style, using ideas from the text to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices such as questions, exclamations and humour. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a more straightforward style and there was less focus on scrutinising the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the text with less selection and reordering of ideas from the original. This sometimes resulted in contradictory statements, weak paragraphing and less cohesive responses.

In **Section B**, descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses were very engaging and sustained, especially for the first descriptive writing question. The idea of 'an area where children are playing' was interpreted using a range of places, from playgrounds to theme parks, amusement arcades and beaches. Many successful responses described a clear setting, with clear descriptive development, often focusing on the senses. In the second task, 'the athlete' was also varied in type, describing participants from a range of ages and different sports. Effective description of these scenes often focused on the thoughts and feelings of the athlete, as well as details of the surroundings and other people that were encountered. Some less successful responses to this question were clearly intended as narratives, usually concerning a specific race or game, rather than descriptions, and Examiners found only limited descriptive content to reward. Less effective responses to both questions also tended to become dominated by events or lengthy narrative preambles to set the scene, which rather over-balanced the main focus of the task. In both questions, descriptions were more effective when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene credibly and engagingly. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions were characterised by a lack of descriptive detail and a tendency to become narrative.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were well-prepared. Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and Examiners awarded marks in all Levels here. Effective and engaging responses to the first question presented situations with some inherent jeopardy, as implied by the quotation in the question, including a wide range of events leading to things becoming totally 'quiet'. Less effective responses focused on rather ordinary series of events or mundane scenarios in which nothing much happened, hence the 'quiet'. The second narrative question elicited responses with many interpretations of when 'determination' was clearly demonstrated, from finding the right moment for a proposal, to finally succeeding in a much-rehearsed task. Less effective narratives tended to become a series of events which, while relevant to the task, were not developed, engaging narratives. Some weaker responses to this question were more discursive than narrative, defining and outlining the meaning of determination in different situations rather than using characters and scenes to illustrate these ideas narratively. While these were often organised and paragraphed, they were not really narrative in intent or development.

In some narrative writing responses, several candidates used a prepared story which seemed imposed on the task and not always relevant to it. In some cases, **Question 1** responses in the same scripts showed a range of skills and abilities which may have resulted in more successful narrative responses than what was submitted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Imagine a friend is about to start a new part-time job and is nervous about making a mistake when dealing with a customer or colleague on their first day.

Write a letter to your friend giving your advice.

In your letter you should:

- **evaluate the ideas and opinions in the text about attitudes to making mistakes**
- **suggest to your friend the best way to approach day one to help them to feel less nervous and less worried.**

Base your letter on what you have read in the text, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Marks for reading

The task required candidates to consider and evaluate the ideas in the podcast discussion between two hosts used as the text, and to suggest to the friend how they might manage any mistakes that might happen during their first day in the part-time job. Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the text.

More effective responses focused carefully on the arguments in the text, with the highest marks awarded for those which addressed and evaluated the most salient ideas about the range of approaches that were suggested. Most responses also addressed the nature of the friend's anxieties.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the text were probed and scrutinised determined the Level and mark awarded for Reading. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, the understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the 'fake it until you make it' approach, the way that overconfidence can lead to being perceived as arrogant, and the likelihood that any mistakes made on the first day might well be understood and tolerated. In responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 for Reading, Examiners often rewarded some thoughtful consideration of the morality involved if you only pretend to be confident, or that if you are arrogant then you might miss opportunities to learn from your mistakes. Even though this was a part-time job, often stated as being in a restaurant or a warehouse, a valid evaluation was that it is good for professional development to learn during your work, and that is good professional practice to be positive and approachable.

These kinds of explanations and extensions of the ideas in the texts were more evaluative than a simple opinion or summary and warranted marks in Level 5 or above.

Responses given marks in the middle range tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the nature of the mistakes and the variety of ways of managing these, often with one evaluative point, such as the fact that any mistakes made on the first day would probably be trivial and quickly put aside. Marks in Level 5 were given where some comments amounted to 'some successful evaluation'. Most common here were comments about the anticipated understanding nature of the colleagues on a first day, and that over confidence can lead to further mistakes if nothing is changed when mistakes are made.

Responses given marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the text and often offered a straightforward summary while not examining those ideas more closely. Examiners also noted that the focus of the comments was more general and missed some of the implications of the ideas in the text. There was less probing of the underlying assumptions about making mistakes reflected in the text. More commonly, where candidates reproduced the points made in the text, there was less thoughtful consideration of how and why mistakes could be made and learned from, and there was more summary, re-phrasing and reproduction.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points, missing a number of the ideas. There was no real misunderstanding of the content of the text, but there was some misunderstanding of the register and form, having no clear indication of being a letter or having a specific audience. The nature of the job as being 'new' and 'part-time' was at times ignored. Responses at this level were also not suitably adapted for a letter with awkward references such as 'the Text says that...' which showed some lack of awareness of how letters are constructed and how

the audience addressed should be accommodated. Ideas were sometimes summarised with very limited conclusions or comments on them which made it difficult for Examiners to award marks above Level 4.

A small number of weaker responses, given marks below Level 4, were almost totally reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, where there were few of the candidate's own words in the response and the purpose of the task was not understood. This inevitably limited opportunities to make use of the ideas in the text or to evaluate the ideas.

Marks for writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

Candidates could adopt a range of appropriate styles for their letter and could show their understanding of the intended audience in different ways. Across the ability range, an apt, fairly informal style of standard English allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many letters began with a lively introduction which engaged the audience. In some, humour was used to good effect, often by describing the writer's relationship with the friend and the nature of their new part-time job. Openings usually had a clear understanding of how to show an appropriate tone and register in the given circumstances. Candidates should be reminded that if you are writing to a real friend, it is unlikely that you would begin your letter, 'Dear Friend', as you would probably know their name. The best responses had a consistently effective tone and register throughout and had a clear and relevant audience in mind.

Another technique successfully used by some candidates at Level 4 and above was to characterise the friend or the writer as someone who had themselves already made mistakes and could draw on past experiences. In some, specific previous part-time jobs were used as examples to illustrate the kinds of mistakes and the methods of managing them. Most jobs chosen were appropriate as new part-time jobs; trainee baristas and shop workers were popular choices.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage the specific audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, there were many responses which were mainly accurate but showed little adaptation from the original texts to suit the style, context and register of an informal, friendly, advisory letter, limiting the effectiveness of the response as a whole.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent letter. While most responses to varying degrees worked their way through the ideas in the text, less effective responses tended to refer to the text in a very literal way with limited grasp of what the intended recipient was being advised to do, and the style showed less awareness of how this type of letter would be constructed.

Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the text, but the response was not dependent on it for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the text were addressed but as a structured whole with a clearly advisory purpose rather than a disjointed summary of the podcast. The central debate about mistakes was grasped from the start and the ideas in the text were organised as arguments and counterarguments in a coherent letter. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in the text by both speakers but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each speaker. Some responses aimed for an inspirational ending which often worked well: 'I would say good luck to you, but in your new job you won't need luck, you'll just need to understand how to deal with events and people, and you will have that understanding.' An

overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording or some phrases were lifted from the texts.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing, which was accurate and controlled, as well as appropriate in tone and register, was given a writing mark in Level 6. These responses were often engaging and showed a strong awareness of audience but were also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentence structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the views of the podcast speakers and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses were sometimes effective but not consistently so. Although the style was usually fairly plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Common misspellings at this level included some words from the texts, such as 'deceiving' or 'vocal cords', and the incorrect use of homophones.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Tense errors such as 'You had been learning from today's mistake' and agreement errors such as 'this workers' were more frequent and impacted meaning more at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response were the candidate's own.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation
- make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage
- aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them
- think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

Section B

Descriptive Writing

Question 2 Write a description of an area where children are playing.

OR

Question 3 Write a description with the title, 'The athlete'.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and were interpreted in a variety of ways, with **Question 2** being the most popular. In **Question 2**, different kinds of areas 'where children are playing' were included, from supervised, secure and well-managed playground settings to less pleasant areas where rusty and seemingly dangerous equipment was left readily available for the children to risk using. Beaches and parks were other popular locations, where the description often moved away from the children to a more general description of the surroundings. All relevant interpretations were acceptable and valid, as long as there was a clear and sustained link with the question. Occasionally, the preamble to travelling to a particular place, or eating arrangements, usually sustained details concerning breakfast items,

tended to overshadow the description with narrative, but where the time scale was short and the focus on detail secure, Examiners could, and did, award some very high marks.

This tendency to narrative and lack of relevant detail was a more common weakness in **Question 3**. Although there were some effective responses which evoked the character, thoughts and feelings and physical description of 'The athlete', there was more of a tendency to narrate rather than focus on descriptive detail. In some cases, whole responses seemed narrative in intent, with limited understanding of how descriptive writing differs from narrative. There were, for example, a number of minute-by-minute descriptions of basketball and football games rather than a descriptive focus on any particular athlete.

Some effective responses to **Question 2** created an engaging atmosphere from the start as the narrator observed their surroundings. School settings were common, but natural settings were also used, some evoking moments of peacefulness changing to activity, while other responses depicted the atmosphere as quite lifeless and even threatening. As so often in descriptive writing, the choice of details and closely observed images helped to conjure a sense of place. In one effective description, the perspective was from the playground itself as if personified and reacting to the children. A reflective, nostalgic approach was a successful effect to develop and was seen in some responses. One response began in the past with a memory of a brand-new play area opening but then described it as a decayed urban hellscape when it was returned to several years later, and this led to an effective reflective conclusion.

Other settings also elicited some effective description. The chaos, noise and lively behaviour of the children was often clearly evoked, while others were more orderly and controlled. Where the descriptive focus was sustained and the details given were precise and concrete, Examiners awarded high marks for Content and Structure.

There was a tendency in some responses for some slightly clichéd details, especially in descriptions of the seaside or other natural landscapes such as a playing area in a park or woodland. Some descriptions of the effect of such landscapes on the narrator relied on a narrower range of vocabulary – 'beautiful', 'different colours', for example. Some responses only offered a list of different activities and play equipment. The most effective descriptions avoided these more general, stereotypical ideas and focused more closely on sensory description and specific moments.

Question 3 was less often selected than the first but, for some candidates, proved a good vehicle to show their skills. The range of different types of athletes and different sports was quite wide. Most sports made an appearance, with footballers and basketball players probably being the most popular. There were detailed physical descriptions of the athletes in training and in performance. One successful response focused on an older former sportsman thinking back to his past successes as he watched and described a modern athlete. Another response had a disillusioned former competitor bitterly comparing and describing the 'now' and 'then'. A number of responses developed the description of the individual by moving on to the crowds at the venue and the atmosphere of the event.

Level 5 responses to both questions used a wide range of details and were well-constructed, although they were less consistently effective and cohesive overall. Lower Level 5 and Level 4 responses were sustained and competently organised but were usually a little more predictable or drifted into narrative.

For Content and Structure, responses given marks in Level 4 tended to become narrative quite quickly, especially in the **Question 3**. In some responses to both questions, overly long preambles often gave way to more specific description though this sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses given higher marks.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed or were simple narratives about a journey to a play area or a detailed commentary on a football match.

Responses which had little descriptive content were more frequently submitted for **Question 3** than the **Question 2** and occasionally there was evidence that the difference between narrative and descriptive writing was not well understood. Where responses were largely descriptive at this level, details were listed and paragraphing was insecure or not used.

High marks for Style and Accuracy reflected the precise and varied vocabulary, used carefully to achieve specific effects, as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, highly rewarded responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to evoke atmosphere and engage the

reader. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres of, for example, tranquillity or chaos. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of quite complex language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was reduced by imprecise and inappropriate use. Plainer, clichéd or repetitive vocabulary was often characteristic of Level 4 marks.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Some candidates struggled when trying to maintain the present tense throughout their responses. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks given in the middle range, although this error was less evident than in previous series. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more detrimental when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included disagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and fluctuations in tenses which created an awkward style lacking in fluency, even where other elements were accurate, such as spelling or sentence construction. The misspelling of 'athlete' was a common error.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

- **try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus**
- **keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere**
- **write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses**
- **use vocabulary precisely: complex words used incorrectly do not help your style.**

Narrative Writing

Question 4 Write a story that includes the words, '... everything went quiet ...'.

OR

Question 5 Write a story that involves someone showing determination.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plotlines, characters and scenarios in these responses, based on valid interpretations of the questions. In **Question 5**, there were a few examples of a more discursive approach, searching for a definition of 'determination' and giving various examples of it. These lacked real narrative shape and intent and this limited the marks Examiners could award for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and often original interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative, to produce moments of tension or drama, to vary the pace of the story and create well-rounded characters were elements credited by Examiners. In **Question 4**, responses given higher marks for Content and Structure often revolved around a realisation of something which was not quite right which had a dramatic impact on established and effectively drawn characters. In some cases, it was a moment of sudden self-doubt during a performance of some kind that created this drama and addressed the question. For example, a previously confident individual with a moment of reflection that stopped them in their tracks and caused everything to become quiet. Other interesting narratives relied on well created moments of tension and fear that evolved around the words in the question. Scenes where an embarrassing situation happened, or a difficult question was asked which led to an awkward silence, were regularly seen and successful approaches. Other successful responses included the moment a heart-monitor flatlined, or a hypersensitive girl managed to quieten her world through writing.

There were also some very effective narratives to address **Question 5**. The idea of 'determination' was nearly always the main focus and gave candidates a range of approaches to adopt. The drive to be accepted into a particular college, or to be given a place in a prestigious sports team, often turned out to be the motive, and some important lessons were learned as a result. Initial failures resulted in new vigour and energy until – usually – success was achieved. A number had the successful character return to their doubters to make certain that they knew that the journey had been completed through determination despite their previous negativity. Again, effective scene-setting and characterisation were crucial in giving the narrative credibility and shape.

For some candidates, the question title lent itself to a more complex narrative structure than a straightforward chronological account and resulted sometimes in a more engaging story as a result. The sense of looking back at the arc of the story, realising after the event when the 'determination' had engaged, gave some responses an interesting narrative structure.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were not as balanced or as carefully managed in structure and approach but were still cohesive and with some engaging features. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt create a developed story which was relevant to the task. Responses in this range were usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution. There were many which involved trekking or climbing where credible characters and atmospheric settings were created. Effective characterisation of the protagonist or narrator was often a factor in Examiners selecting a mark in Level 5 rather than Level 4. While some Level 5 narratives were possibly a little predictable, stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of a series of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of developed narrative writing. At this level, stories were often more dependent on a series of events, without the preparation of setting and character to engage the reader. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were often used as those in more effective narratives, but the narratives were less effective in engaging the reader. For **Question 4**, the key moment where everything went quiet was still central, but at this level more time and focus were given to relating events than cohesive progress or developing credible, rounded characters. There were a number of adventures involving haunted houses and escaping zombies, and these did tend to put a sequence of events over character and lacked more subtle development. In **Question 5**, fairly simple sports stories or academic successes were common, often cohesive overall but with limited development. While the majority of less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

Responses given marks in Level 4 and lower were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. While there was usually some relevance to the task selected, the plot was either very simple or confusing and characters lacked substance, often appearing only as names. Dialogue was either used very little or, occasionally, too much, with limited storytelling to help the reader make sense of events. Occasionally, responses at this level were pre-prepared stories, or stories from revision websites which had limited relevance to the question set. For **Question 4**, some responses included the given phrase in a quite arbitrary manner, making it feel as if it been added on to the response to another question. Responses which seemed to be based on questions set in previous examinations were also limited in relevance or were awkwardly adapted, limiting the mark Examiners could award for Content and Structure. For **Question 5**, there were a number of biographies of real footballers or athletes which were not effectively managed as narratives.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary allowed Examiners to consider the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent, whereas Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range and precision in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements and some awkward use of prepositions. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which prevented responses from reaching Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing, limiting the mark for Style and Accuracy. Weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, was a fairly common weakness in Level 4 and low Level 5 writing, though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative**
- **consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account**
- **characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely on events**
- **check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes**
- **choose your vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/03 Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and context for each of the three assignments
- read critically and thoroughly evaluated the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions, and attitudes they identified in a text in **Assignment 1**
- assimilated ideas from a text to provide developed, thoughtful and sophisticated responses in **Assignment 1**
- supported their analysis, evaluation and comments with a detailed and specific selection of relevant ideas from a text in **Assignment 1**
- wrote original and interesting responses which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of events and situations
- wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect in all assignments
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of argument, description, or narrative
- demonstrated a high level of accuracy in their writing
- engaged in a process of careful editing and proofreading to identify and correct errors in their writing.

The best practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was when:

- centres followed the guidelines and instructions set out in the Course syllabus and the Coursework Handbook
- centres used the centre checklist and included it with their coursework sample as requested
- an appropriate text was used for **Assignment 1**, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond
- centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience
- teachers gave general but pertinent advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- following feedback, candidates revised and edited their first drafts to improve their writing
- candidates checked, revised, and edited their final drafts to identify and correct errors
- teachers provided marks and summative comments at the end of the final draft of each assignment which clearly related to the appropriate mark level descriptors
- teachers indicated all errors in the final drafts of each completed assignment
- centres engaged in a process of internal moderation and clearly indicated any mark adjustments in the coursework portfolios, on the Individual Record Cards, and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms.

General comments

A significant number of candidates produced interesting coursework portfolios which contained varied work across a range of contexts. There was evidence to show that many centres set tasks which allowed candidates flexibility to respond to subjects related to their personal interests or experiences. The majority of

coursework portfolios contained writing of three different genres. There were very few incomplete folders seen by moderators.

Moderators reported an improvement in the number of centres following the instructions in the coursework handbook and in this session most centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. The Moderation Team reported that many centres provided summative comments closely related to the mark schemes at the end of each completed assignment. These were extremely helpful in helping moderators to understand how and why marks had been awarded and centres are thanked for following the process as instructed in the Coursework Handbook.

The major concern for all moderators was that some markers of the coursework portfolios did not indicate errors in the final draft of each assignment and/or provide a summative comment which referred to the marking level descriptors to justify the marks awarded. Some folders had no teacher annotation or marks on the assignments at all. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for downward adjustments of marks by moderators.

Administration

Successful administration was when centres:

- completed the centre checklist and included it in the coursework sample
- annotated all errors in the final draft of each assignment
- carried out a thorough process of internal moderation which was clearly signposted on the assignments themselves as well as on all relevant documentation
- supplied marks and specific comments relating to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- accurately completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and ICRC, including any amendments made during internal moderation and listed the candidates in candidate number order on BOTH documents
- ensured that each coursework folder was stapled or tagged and securely fastened with the Individual Candidate Record Card (ICRC) used as the front cover
- submitted their sample of coursework folders without using any plastic or cardboard wallets.

Internal Moderation

Centres who followed the instructions for carrying out internal moderation as directed in the Coursework Handbook are thanked for engaging in this important process.

Some centres did not record changes made at internal moderation on the candidates' Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRCs) which caused some confusion about the final mark awarded to candidates. Centres are requested to ensure that any changes made at internal moderation are signposted clearly on the work itself then also recorded on the ICRC as well as on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF). This is essential to ensure that the correct marks are recorded for all candidates and to make any changes to the original marks transparent for the moderator.

Using the coursework handbook

A cause of concern for all moderators was that some issues persist even though there are clear instructions in the Coursework Handbook, and the same concerns have been raised in previous Principal Moderator Reports. To ensure effective and accurate marking is achieved, and that all paperwork arrives safely for moderation, it is essential that all the instructions given in the Coursework Handbook, and on the relevant forms, are carefully followed. Centres are now required to complete a checklist and include it with the sample to ensure that all administrative procedures have been followed correctly.

Below highlights the three most significant issues related to the administration and annotation of candidates' work which led to mark adjustments by moderators:

1 Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment

- Some of the assignments showed little or no evidence of complying with the instruction in the Coursework Handbook that markers should indicate all errors in the final draft of each assignment. This process helps markers to effectively and accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece

of work and to apply the most appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. If this process does not take place, it is difficult for markers to make a balanced judgement. In several centres there was evidence across all three assignments that markers had awarded marks from the higher levels of the assessment criteria to work containing frequent, and often serious, errors that had not been annotated by the marker. This inevitably led to a downward adjustment of marks by the moderator. It is important for all who mark the coursework portfolios to fully understand the importance of indicating and taking into account all errors in the final draft of each assignment. To avoid adjustment of marks for accuracy, it is essential that centres engage in this process and clearly indicate errors in their candidates' work.

2 Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

- Some centres did not attach the portfolios of work to the ICRC in accordance with the instructions in the Coursework Handbook and point 4 on the electronic version of the ICRC (although this was a smaller number than in previous sessions).
- Some confusion was caused when a small number of centres included ICRCs for the whole cohort as well as the ICRCs for the sample sent; centres only need to send the ICRCs (securely attached to the coursework portfolio) for the candidates in the sample submitted for moderation.
- On some folders there were errors in the transcription of internally moderated mark changes, or it was unclear which mark was the final one. Where internal moderation has taken place, any mark changes should be transferred from the assignment to the ICRC to ensure that the moderator has a clear understanding of all mark changes.

3 Coursework portfolios

- Moderators reported that some centres used plastic or cardboard wallets to present candidates' work as an alternative to securely attaching the individual assignments to the ICRC; this caused extra work for moderators and increased the risk of work being mislaid. Centres are requested not to place coursework folders into plastic or cardboard wallets and are reminded of this on the coursework checklist.
- Some centres included more than one rough draft; this is unnecessary and can lead to confusion. Please ensure that the rough draft included is clearly labelled as a draft.
- Occasionally rough drafts contained annotations and specific feedback; centres are reminded that when markers offer feedback on a rough draft, it should be general advice. No errors should be indicated, and the marker should not offer corrections or improvements. Overmarking of rough drafts can be raised as malpractice by moderators.
- Some centres included documentation not required for the moderation process; the only paperwork that should be included in the sample is clearly indicated in the Coursework Handbook. There is also a checklist for all submissions which centres should complete and include with their coursework sample.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

Candidates were successful when:

- they responded to interesting and appropriate texts which contained engaging content
- they demonstrated analysis and evaluation of the individual ideas and opinions identified within a text
- the form, purpose and intended audience of their writing was clear to the reader
- they wrote in a fluent, accurate and appropriate style.

Moderators commented that most candidates responded to texts which were of an appropriate length and challenge and which appealed to the interests of the candidates. Successful texts included articles exploring issues relevant to young people, for example, online schools, mobile phones in schools, social media, national issues in the candidates' own countries, and environmental issues. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated, texts expressing hateful or offensive opinions, informative texts on a given topic, or texts on themes which were of limited personal interest to the candidates. Texts selected for **Assignment 1** should be an appropriate length, explore ideas and offer opinions, and use rhetorical or literary devices designed to provoke or sustain the reader's interest to ensure that the text offers scope for candidates to fully engage and respond to it in a sustained piece of writing. Centres are encouraged to use a good range of relevant and up-to-date texts for **Assignment 1**. Other less successful texts were ones where the candidate fully agreed with and endorsed the writer's views and opinions because they offered few

opportunities for evaluating ideas and opinions, as required by the mark scheme. It is also crucial to select texts for their quality of written communication: moderators reported seeing a small number of poorly written texts taken from a variety of websites. Many of these were too long and tended to be informative, offering very little scope for rigorous evaluation or analysis. This may indicate that candidates were allowed to make their own text choices, but centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that all texts used for **Assignment 1** are fit for purpose, and this includes avoiding offensive or unsuitable material. Disagreeing with completely unreasonable or offensive viewpoints also provides fewer opportunities for rigorous evaluation and can be far less challenging for able candidates. Responses which attack the writer rather than engaging with the ideas and opinions should be avoided.

Some centres set one text for a class or sometimes whole cohort. When this approach was adopted by a centre there was usually a tendency for candidates to produce responses which were very similar in content and structure due to heavy scaffolding. This made it difficult for candidates to create the original and sophisticated responses expected of the higher-level assessment criteria and was sometimes a reason for adjustments of marks. Centres are advised that teaching a text to a whole class and offering a scaffolded plan for the response may be a useful teaching strategy for initially developing the necessary skills and knowledge for **Assignment 1**, but this approach should not be used for the final coursework submission.

If centres are unsure about how to approach and set tasks for **Assignment 1**, they can refer to the Course Syllabus and the Coursework Handbook. Both documents provide advice and guidance about task setting and text selection and can be found on the School Support Hub via the main Cambridge website.

Reading

Although some centres were accurate with their marking of reading, as in the previous moderation sessions, there was a significant trend for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria. Candidates who successfully met the higher-level assessment criteria were those who demonstrated a consistently evaluative approach to most of the ideas and opinions in a text, and provided a developed, sophisticated response which made direct reference or included quotes from the text. Candidates who engaged in a general discussion about the topic or subject of a text, or those who did not thoroughly evaluate a text, tended to produce work which more appropriately met the Level 4 assessment criteria in Table B (reading). The most common reasons for adjustments to a centre's marks for reading were when moderators identified a trend of candidates engaging in a general discussion about the topic of a text/s, or when the number of points covered were 'appropriate' rather than 'thorough'.

Writing

Many candidates responded to texts in an appropriate form and style. Letters were the most popular choice of form, and many candidates demonstrated some understanding of audience and purpose. When candidates were less successful with writing, it was often because the form, intended audience and purpose of the writing was not clear. This made it difficult for the candidates to meet the highest-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments to writing marks for **Assignment 1**. Successful responses to **Assignment 1** tasks were those in which the writing was highly effective, almost always accurate, and consistent throughout in the application of form and style. Work which showed insecurity with form and style, such as the omission of an appropriate ending to a letter, a limited or inconsistent use of rhetorical devices for speeches, or lack of clarity of the intended audience, tended to meet the assessment criteria for Level 5 or below, Table A (writing) or below. The moderators noted that there was a general tendency for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria.

Another common reason for the adjustment of marks for writing was because of the accuracy of the candidates' writing. When errors impaired meaning, such as the incorrect construction of sentences or use of grammar, typing errors, or the incorrect selection of words from spellcheck, the overall quality and efficacy of the discussion was affected. Errors such as these are classed as serious and make it difficult for candidates to meet the higher-level assessment criteria; this type of writing is more characteristic of writing achieving marks from the middle to the lower levels of the assessment criteria. Moderators also noted a tendency for centres to over-reward vocabulary that had some merit in its selection but was not always used precisely or effectively in the response.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 1

- thoroughly explore, challenge, and discuss the ideas in the text
- avoid making general comments about the topic or subject of the text, instead, ensure that comments are specifically related to the ideas, opinions or attitudes identified in the text
- avoid criticising or attacking the writer: focus on what the text says
- look for, and use inferences made implicitly in the text
- look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the text and comment on them
- develop points to create a thorough, detailed, and clear line of argument or discussion
- make sure that the audience and purpose is clear and adapt the written style accordingly
- proof-read assignments to ensure punctuation, vocabulary choices and grammar are correct.

Assignment 2 (description)

The majority of tasks set for **Assignment 2** were appropriate and encouraged candidates to write in a descriptive style. Many students wrote engaging and vivid descriptions from experience or their imaginations, which were a pleasure to read. Moderators also noticed that there were relatively fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions, but this is still a regularly observed flaw in descriptive writing assignments, sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which invited candidates to describe an experience or holiday which tended to lead to tasks more suited to narrative writing. Centres are reminded to set descriptive tasks and remind candidates to avoid using narrative writing techniques in their responses.

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those where the candidates had carefully selected vocabulary to create a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place or person, and which were well sequenced and carefully managed for deliberate effect. Successful responses included descriptions of towns or cities in which candidates lived, important rituals or festivals, or significant settings or places. Less successful tasks were those which asked candidates to describe events or scenarios of which they had no personal experience, or settings and situations in which the candidate clearly had no interest or engagement. Many of these responses relied on unconvincing descriptive writing which did not engage the reader. This type of writing is characteristic of work achieving marks from the middle to lower levels of the assessment criteria, although it was noticed that many centres awarded marks from the higher-level assessment criteria. This was quite often a reason for adjustment of marks from Table C (content and structure).

Whilst many candidates showed a secure and confident understanding of language, there was still a general tendency by a number of centres to award marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to work which contained ineffective overuse of literary techniques. Some moderators commented that this seemed to be actively encouraged by some centres. To achieve marks from the higher-level assessment criteria, candidates need to demonstrate a confident and secure understanding and use of language for specific effect. This is difficult for candidates to achieve if they over-use adjectives, include inappropriate images or idioms and/or use obscure or archaic language. The overworking of language and/or use of unconvincing imagery was a common reason for moderators adjusting marks downwards.

Another common reason for adjustments to marks was when moderators identified a trend of awarding marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to writing that contained a limited range of sentence structures, incorrectly constructed sentences, or contained frequent errors with punctuation and grammar. Writing that achieves marks from Levels 5 and 6 of Table D (style and accuracy) is expected to be consistently accurate, consistent with the chosen register, and demonstrate an ability to use a range of sentences for specific effect. The moderators saw some writing which displayed these characteristics, but a significant number of the assignments receiving marks from centres from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D more frequently displayed the characteristics of writing expected from Level 4 or below. Many candidates 'told' the reader about the scene being described, rather than engaging the reader with a careful and precise use of vocabulary and images. The moderators also noticed a general trend for candidates to use repeated sentence structures and create almost list-like descriptions.

In addition, the work of a significantly large number of candidates contained frequent and serious errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of the candidates' work. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, tense inconsistencies, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and grammar errors. Quite often, the meaning of sentences was blurred, or meaning was lost altogether. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as 'minor'. As mentioned earlier in this report, the absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult for the moderators to determine whether errors had been considered when marks had been awarded; moderators noted that on some weaker

assignments no errors had been annotated, and the summative comment declared a high level of accuracy. Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which 'best fits' the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that errors are identified and indicated by the markers. Engaging in this process allows markers to effectively balance the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and apply marks that are most appropriate to their candidates' work.

Information and guidance on how to apply the mark schemes are given in the Coursework Handbook. Examples of good tasks and exemplification of the standard of work expected at the different levels of the mark scheme are also provided in the Coursework Handbook.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 2

- use a range of vocabulary suited to the context and content of the description
- create images appropriate for the context and content of the description
- create an engaging imagined scenario using language designed to have an impact on the reader
- avoid slipping into a narrative style
- proof-read responses to identify and correct common errors such as missing articles and prepositions, switches in tenses and typing errors
- avoid repetitive sentence structures; instead use a range of sentences to create specific effects.

Assignment 3 (narrative)

Much of the task setting for **Assignment 3** was generally appropriate and moderators saw some engaging and effective narratives which were well controlled and convincing. Successful narratives were those in which candidates created stories characterised by well-defined plots and strongly developed features of narrative writing such as description, strong characterisation, and a clear sense of progression. The narration of personal experiences and events, or responses where candidates were able to create convincing details and events within their chosen genre, tended to be more successful. Candidates were generally less successful when their understanding of audience and genre was insecure, and the resulting narratives lacked credibility and conviction. Moderators commented that this sort of writing was often seen when candidates were writing in the genre of murder mystery stories. Stories such as these, although containing a definite beginning, middle and ending, were often unrealistic and incredible, or lacked development of character or plot. Some responses failed to conclude properly, ending with an unconvincing or unsatisfactory cliff hanger. Moderators noticed that there was a trend with much of the work sampled for centres to award marks from Levels 5 and 6 from Table C (content and structure) to writing which more appropriately fitted the Level 4, or below, assessment criteria. This was quite frequently a reason for marks being adjusted.

When moderators saw very accurate work containing precise well-chosen vocabulary, and which maintained a consistent register throughout, they could agree when centres awarded marks from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D (style and accuracy). As with **Assignments 1** and **2**, moderators noticed a significant trend for centres to award marks from the highest levels of the mark scheme to work which contained frequent and persistent errors and which more accurately met the assessment criteria from Level 4 or below in Table D. This was a common reason for adjustment of marks. The comments made for **Assignment 2** with regards to accuracy and the annotation of errors are also relevant to **Assignment 3** and should be noted by all who mark coursework.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 3

- create stories that are realistic, credible, and convincing
- remember that characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage the reader
- avoid clichéd scenarios and consider an individual and original selection of content
- carefully proof-read and check assignments for errors in the use of punctuation, use of prepositions, articles and tenses, and errors in the construction of sentences.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/04 Speaking and Listening Test
--

Key messages

Thank you to all the centres who completed their administration correctly, uploaded samples to Submit for Assessment (SfA) promptly and conducted the tests appropriately. Moderation advances smoothly when centres are so diligent.

A small number of centres did not apply the correct timing to the test, and this seriously disadvantaged their candidates. This was particularly so if either part was significantly short of the minimum time expected in the relevant syllabus.

Part 1 should last for 3–4 minutes. A significantly short **Part 1** response will affect the mark that should be awarded. Equally, an overlong response to **Part 1** should also affect the mark awarded. It is the candidate's responsibility to plan and practise effectively with correct timing in mind.

Part 2 should last for 7–8 minutes and it is the responsibility of the examiner to ensure the correct timing is adhered to. Conversations that run for significantly less than the minimum 7 minutes required do not allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available because certain descriptors in the higher levels cannot be met.

Part 2 should consist of a conversation between the candidate and the examiner. It follows that a **Part 2** that is in essence a series of unrelated questions is not an appropriate model to use for the most successful outcome. Questions should be used to prompt candidates to explore ideas and opinions related to the topic content introduced in the **Part 1** talk but a **Part 2** that consists solely of questions followed by answers is not a natural conversation and cannot be credited as such when awarding marks.

Centres should avoid grouping marks in the top level unless this is strongly evidenced in the candidates' performances. Centres that simply award marks in Level 5 for either **Part 1** or **Part 2**, without recourse to applying differentiation where it is needed, actually disadvantage those candidates who may have performed to a higher level. This was particularly noticeable in **Part 2**. The way that moderation works means that inflating marks for those candidates who do not justify them through performance may mean downscaling for all candidates on the same mark will be applied.

Four centres uploaded video samples of candidates' tests. It is strongly recommended that centres do not use video to record the tests. An audio recording is sufficient.

General comments

Administration

For most centres, administration of the test was diligent, accurate and easy to follow. Summary forms were completed to a high degree of accuracy and samples uploaded to SfA were of a very good sound quality.

Where there were issues, the following guidelines may help to clarify administrative requirements:

- Each candidate's test requires a full formal introduction to be made by the examiner prior to the beginning of **Part 1**. This introduction should include the centre name and number, the candidate's full name and candidate number, the date on which the test is being recorded and the name of the

examiner. This is important information for the moderator. The overwhelming majority of centres were compliant with this requirement and are to be thanked for their diligence.

- Centres are reminded that for moderation to take place effectively and efficiently OESF summary forms are required that show the breakdown of marks for the whole cohort of entered candidates and not just those in the sample requested.
- Centres are to be congratulated for managing internal moderation where more than one examiner was involved in conducting the tests. However, such centres should be careful to enter the correct set of marks into Submit for Assessment. On some occasions the original marks appeared in SfA even though changes had been made during internal moderation.
- It is the centre's responsibility to check the quality of the recordings being made, preferably as an ongoing process during each recording session, to ensure that the recordings are clearly audible and without interference. On a few occasions, the examiner was clearly audible, but the candidates were not, presumably because of the examiner's proximity to the microphone but not the candidates. Any problems with the quality of recordings should be reported to Cambridge immediately so that candidates are not adversely affected by such issues.

Approach to the test

Overall, across the component entry, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given plenty of opportunities to express their ideas and demonstrate their range of oratory skills productively. There were centres, however, who did not follow the rubric set out in the syllabus but still awarded highly inflated marks for their candidates. Subsequently, these marks were reduced upon moderation.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the examiner's formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the Individual Talk. If an examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is completed before the recording is started. Examiners formally starting the test then engaging in 'off topic' conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their **Part 1** task is strongly discouraged. Any pleasantries exchanged should be completed before the recording is started and the formal introduction is made.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met so that candidates are given every opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Centres who consistently disadvantage their candidates by conducting significantly short **Part 2s** may be considered to be participating in malpractice through maladministration of the test.
- If a candidate has exceeded the maximum 4 minutes for **Part 1**, the examiner should not compensate by shortening the time allowed for **Part 2**. Candidates must be allowed the required 7–8 minutes to complete a full response to **Part 2**, irrespective of the length of the talk in **Part 1**.
- It is also important that the conversations offer sufficient challenge to allow candidates to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Focused questioning and prompts are needed to move the conversation forward, together with an adaptability on the part of the examiner to absorb the candidate's previous comments and to extend the conversation as a result. A **Part 2** that is merely a question and answer session is not a natural conversation and as a consequence is limited in terms of the marks that should be awarded. Examiners who solely rely on a question and answer strategy disadvantage their candidates, in particular with regard to the mark for Speaking in **Part 2**.
- Examiners who dominate conversations or who frequently interrupt candidates during the conversation do so to the disadvantage of those candidates. Good examiners prompt candidates then allow them the opportunity to respond in full and to develop their ideas before moving the conversation forwards again.

Comments on specific sections of the test

Part 1 – Individual Talk

Once again, almost exclusively, all the responses to **Part 1** were in the form of a presentation. This format remains a safe and acceptable one, particularly if there is an attempt to analyse, evaluate and reflect on personal experiences. For many candidates this choice remains a safe and productive way to achieve a good mark in **Part 1**, but only when well-timed and clearly structured. Less successful responses to **Part 1** tended to meander because a strong structure had not been created and time constraints had not been factored in. Largely narrative responses that follow a linear path, such as talking through the events of a holiday or restating facts about a topic choice, tend to be unimaginative and rarely achieve higher than Level 3. This is why topics such as 'My Favourite Football Team (or video game, K-Pop band, movie, hobby)' do not tend to be very successful. Generally, these kinds of topic only become more successful if there is an added element that expands the talk beyond adequate. For example, 'How Rugby Has Taught Me To Be Disciplined' immediately introduces more sophisticated elements into the talk through introspection, analysis and evaluation.

Very strong performances in **Part 1** successfully combined excellent knowledge and development of a topic, a tightly defined structure timed accordingly and a confident delivery style. It should be noted that the bullet point descriptor 'lively' in Level 5 does not have to mean that a candidate delivers an animated performance. A candidate who delivers a talk in a confident and assured tone without being overtly 'lively' can perform equally well for the second descriptor in Level 5. Subtle changes of tone can be very effective in fully engaging an audience.

In summation, three factors most limit performance in **Part 1**:

- Poor timing – either short of the minimum 3 minutes required or overly long and exceeding 5 minutes
- Poor structure so the talk meanders without a specific ending in mind
- Poor choice of vocabulary – including informality, language slippage and grammatical mistakes

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that worked well include:

Cities without cars
How fashion reflects culture and identity
Living on autopilot
An 'I love you' hyper-inflation
Tennis – My personal journey
The benefits of owning a cat
The dark side of sport
Influencers
Why failure is key to success
Underestimating animals
Wristwatches
Elizabeth Bennet speaking to her grandchild – Imaginative first-person response using original material
The psychology of happiness
A.I. and copyright infringement
(The power of) Unspoken words
Financial literacy

Any topic can work well if planned carefully. The key is to have some interesting things of a more analytical nature to say, thus avoiding straightforward narrative or factual accounts and a loss of audience interest.

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that were less successful include:

Social media
Football
My holiday in ...
Climate change
Bullying

Hobbies
Gaming
Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)
My first pet

All these topics were too generalised without specific focus resulting in weak performance in **Part 1**. The effect in **Part 2** was also noticeable because the conversations lacked any particular focus and often meandered into unrelated areas.

Part 2 – Conversation

The general trend for **Part 2** was that the conversations were well conducted and examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions which enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. After initial questioning to stimulate the conversation, the use of prompts, instead of a steady stream of further questioning, was often more effective in eliciting developed responses from candidates.

Unlike in **Part 1**, the examiner can influence the quality of the candidate's performance in **Part 2**. Concise but challenging prompts often led to candidates developing their ideas more successfully than when a question was convoluted or closed. Some examiners struggled to inspire candidates with closed questioning and by offering too many of their own ideas during the conversations. Indeed, where a candidate was moved down a level during moderation, it was sometimes due to a lack of detailed response, caused by uninspired questioning. The use of pre-determined questions or a perfunctory question and answer technique limits the candidate's ability to engage in a real conversation where responses are elicited by what is said immediately before.

Poor timing is also a major contributor to candidates achieving fewer marks than they could in **Part 2**. A **Part 2** that lasts for significantly less than the minimum of 7 minutes required cannot fulfil the descriptors in Level 5, and most likely not in Level 4 either. The descriptors for **Part 2** are assessed on the basis of a full **Part 2** being performed. Allowing only 2–4 minutes for **Part 2** does not provide the necessary evidence of consistent and detailed responses required and will be considered barely adequate at best. In effect, short conversations limit the range of marks that can and will be awarded.

Another issue remarked upon by several moderators was that some of the formal conversations in **Part 2** became too informal and 'chatty'. It is understandable that examiners wish to put their candidates at ease, but a level of formality is still expected and is addressed in the second bullet point descriptor at each level regarding the accurate use of language. Indeed, in both parts of the test there seems to be more and more instances of informal language creeping in such as 'you know', 'guys' and the constant repetition of 'like'. Such informality does affect performance and the marks that can be awarded.

In summation, three factors most limit performance in **Part 2**:

- Short conversations below the minimum required 7 minutes
- Examiners using a question-and-answer style that precludes conversation and limits access to the full marking grid criteria
- Candidates not talking at length and therefore, not developing responses sufficiently to access Level 4 or above in the marking grid criteria.

Advice to centres

- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful.
- Make sure candidates know the timings of the test. Ensure that their Individual Talk is 3–4 minutes long. If necessary, you can help them in the test by interceding before 5 minutes and initiating the conversation.
- When considering the timing of **Part 1**, please remember that **Part 1** begins when the candidate starts speaking and does not include the examiner's introduction.
- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test. At the planning stage a gentle suggestion to choose an alternative topic may be very beneficial in some cases.
- Try to dissuade candidates from delivering a memorised talk in **Part 1** that may have artificial fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.

- Ensure a full 7–8 minutes is allowed for the conversation in **Part 2**. The examiner can control the timing of this. Short **Part 2s** cannot access the full range of marks available.
- Administering the conversation in **Part 2** can be quite challenging for examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the examiner but they should not be restrictive, and the candidate should have no prior knowledge of them.
- Scaffold questions strategically to encourage higher level responses from more able candidates. This will help them to access the higher mark ranges.
- Do not interrupt too keenly; another prompt given before the previous response is finished, or when the candidate pauses for thought, can affect the candidate adversely by limiting their capacity to develop their ideas fully.
- Be careful not to make judgements based on personal interpretations of a comment made by a candidate. This is a test of speaking and listening and not the perceived accuracy of what is said.

Advice to candidates

- Choose a topic you are passionate about and one you can talk about for 3–4 minutes then discuss in even more detail for 7–8 minutes without repeating yourself.
- Avoid topics that might seem topical but in which you have little personal interest. For example, do not choose 'A.I.' just because you think the moderator will be impressed because this almost always ends in a poor performance in the test.
- Practise your presentation but do not learn it word for word.
- Have bullet point notes to help prompt you in **Part 1** but not the 'full speech'. You will be tempted to read it or, at the very least, deliver it without appropriate liveliness and intonation. 'Talk through' each bullet point in a confident and enthusiastic way.
- Structure your Individual Talk carefully, making sure that it develops points and stays within the 3–4 minutes allowed. Long talks do not earn more marks! On the contrary, an overlong talk will be regarded as not being 'well organised' (a bullet point required for Level 5 marks).
- Respond to the prompts and questions from the examiner in **Part 2** as fully as possible by developing your ideas, giving examples and leading off into other aspects of the topic if you can.
- Watch good examples of speeches/presentations/talks to learn how good speakers make their speeches engaging and interesting and how they incorporate effective language devices. Try to copy these techniques.
- Practise simulations of **Part 2**. There are as many marks available for **Part 2** as for **Part 1** so treat each part as equally important.