

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Writing

## Key messages

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

## General comments

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

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1**

The Directed Writing task is assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write a report to the Principal of their school about a retiring teacher, offering information for the Principal's speech at a ceremony to celebrate the teacher's career. In particular, the candidates had to name the teacher retiring and give an outline of his or her career, offer examples of what had made the teacher so popular and successful with candidates, and suggest events that should be included in the ceremony and why. This was a scenario that was within the imagined or practical experience of the candidates, the majority of whom responded well to the task. The scenario allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

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

- the name of the teacher **and** an outline of the teacher's career
- examples of what has made the teacher so popular and successful with candidates
- what events the candidates think should be included in the ceremony **and** why.

In the first bullet point it was essential to name the teacher and outline some specific details of their career, in the second bullet point they were expected to offer some clear examples of the reasons for the teacher's popularity and success with candidates and in the third bullet point there were opportunities to suggest appropriate events for the ceremony and why candidates felt that they should be included. Therefore, all three bullet points offered scope to develop ideas and explanations.

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

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

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks were awarded to responses which kept their focus on the context and purpose of the report and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. There were few candidates this session who misunderstood the situation, although a few thought that the teacher was moving on to another career, and some did not consider why their suggested events for the ceremony would be appropriate. This limited the scope for developing relevant content at times.

In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point was relatively clear and did not pose problems for the majority of candidates who offered a name for the teacher, and outlined some details about their career, such as their length of service, the subjects they taught and positions of responsibility held. There were a few candidates who did not name the teacher or who did not acknowledge that he or she was retiring rather than making a career move, thus including some irrelevant detail about the job that had prompted the move. Some candidates did not acknowledge that the teacher had had a long and successful career thus limiting scope for developing their introduction. Others named the teacher and the subject that they taught but offered no other details for bullet point 1. It is crucial that candidates read all the given information in the task, as well as the bullet points, very carefully to ensure that all the required information is utilised. The second bullet point was usually explained fully; many candidates referred to lively teaching methods and styles, the extra support offered to candidates to help them with examinations, and the contribution of the teacher to extra-curricular clubs, teams and trips. The third bullet point was sometimes less developed than the first two, with some candidates omitting reasons for their suggestions of what should be included in the leaving ceremony. Many responses made rather generic suggestions, such as a speech or a thank-you card. Some contained suggestions that were thoughtful but perhaps impractical, such as football tournaments or music festivals, but usually linked their suggestions to the teacher's extra-curricular contributions. The more successful responses usually alluded to the interests and expertise of the retiring teacher, offering thoughtful suggestions and fully developing the ideas.

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

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and most candidates were comfortable with the concept of writing a report to the Principal offering helpful information and suggestions. However, some candidates missed the finer detail in the task, therefore not addressing the situation and purpose fully. The register was kept suitably formal in most responses. Others occasionally were too informal, referring to the teacher's popularity with the candidates in a rather casual way, sometimes even suggesting that they allowed candidates to break rules and made lessons fun rather than focusing on teaching. However, the vast majority of candidates employed an appropriate format following the guidance given in the rubric by adopting a polite and informative tone. The best responses were able to balance the need to offer helpful information while discussing the teacher warmly. The majority of responses adopted an appropriate format for a report, addressing it 'To the Principal' as specified in the task and supplying a signature and date. A few candidates adopted the format of a formal letter rather than a report. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas as effectively in an alternative order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to improve performance.

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

## **Section 2**

### **Question 2**

**Describe the scene before and during an important celebration in your community. (Remember you can describe the atmosphere, the surroundings and the people).**

This was a reasonably popular title. The vast majority of candidates described weddings, celebrations of a birth, a specific festival or a religious celebration. The best responses were able to capture the essence of the celebration through describing the preparations in detail, capturing a sense of anticipation and excitement building and focusing on their own thoughts and feelings about the celebration. Many included vivid descriptions that made it possible for the reader to imagine the events unfolding. Some were also very moving, especially those who described celebrations of weddings, births or religious events. At times responses became rather narrative-like, with a rather linear approach to their own involvement in the events of the day rather than using description to capture the atmosphere. This often resulted in a lack of focus on description.

### **Question 3**

**What is the best piece of advice anyone has ever given you and what is the worst advice? Explain how each piece of advice affected you.**

This was a popular title with candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who had interesting ideas and opinions on the value of advice and how to recognise when it is appropriate. Most candidates balanced their response by addressing the question and considering examples and outcomes of both good and bad advice, although a number of responses only considered one piece of advice. Many candidates focused on helpful advice offered (mostly by parents) about school studies, the importance of being happy and achieving goals in life, and avoiding peer pressure and temptations, as well as poor advice (mostly from 'friends') about putting short-term pleasures before long-term goals, abusing alcohol or drugs, or disobeying rules that exist to protect rather than confine. Many responses cited the importance of listening to those with experience, but ignoring those without. Some responses became a narrative story about the consequences of receiving poor advice, losing focus on the question set. Many responses were thoughtful and sensitive about the issues facing teenagers today and how many could utilise their personal opinions and feelings in their responses to this question. Many candidates could explore their ideas with convincing evidence over a number of paragraphs.

### **Question 4**

**Write a story which includes the sentence: 'It suddenly became clear that they were not as lazy as everyone said they were.'**

This was a popular title and responses tended to focus on scenarios to do with school. Favourite themes included candidates who appeared to be lazy and disinterested who gained top grades in examinations, members of sports teams who suddenly improve their attitude to training and start winning trophies, or individuals entering competitions with no hope of winning but surpassing everyone's expectations of them. The best essays were those that built up to the prescribed sentence effectively and explored the reasons for the accusations of laziness. There were some really thoughtful and well developed plots involving voyages of self-discovery, unrecognised family circumstances, or the effects of social deprivation. Such responses focused on building up a sense of suspense about why the protagonists were viewed as lazy and feckless then revealing something to explain people's mistaken impressions of them. Many involved exploring shallow judgements made of individuals then discovering their struggles in very difficult circumstances. Most responses ended with the prescribed sentence which was appropriate in terms of the plot development and structure. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well the majority of candidates integrated the given topic sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness.

## Question 5

### Competitions.

This was a reasonably popular topic inviting a range of responses. Any approach to this question was possible and many candidates interpreted it widely looking at the influence of competitiveness in today's world. The best responses either treated it as a reflective title exploring the importance of success in today's increasingly competitive world, or wrote a narrative where a competition featured as an important turning point or denouement in the plot. There were some thoughtful explorations of why competition is of such importance in our lives and how a sense of competition can lead to advancement and progress, or dissatisfaction and insecurity. Weaker responses found little to say on the topic and tried to define and explore the word 'competitions', often resulting in rather repetitive and unconvincing responses. A few candidates used their knowledge of economics and business studies in response to this topic, which sometimes made their responses content-based rather than reflective.

## Question 6

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

This was a reasonably popular title which candidates clearly found engaging. Many stories focused on building up a tense atmosphere before revealing what was behind the locked door. Favoured settings were deserted houses, mysterious doors in the middle of forests or being locked in a vehicle. Many responses explored a sense of frustration and longing to solve a mystery, sometimes one that had puzzled the protagonist for a number of years. Some were quite chilling with gruesome revelations when the door was finally opened, but most of these were handled sensitively by candidates without including gratuitous violence. Some stories featured cars being used for criminal purposes or being locked in a moving vehicle and unable to escape. The better responses explored thoughts and feelings of curiosity and frustration fully, with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama and tension. Many responses incorporated effective descriptions of the setting and the door itself. Less successful responses were wholly narrative, focusing on events but not developing the thoughts and feelings of the characters or including any description to set the scene.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12  
Writing

## Key messages

- In **Section 1** candidates are advised to familiarise themselves with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use it as a checklist. Candidates who are awarded a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- Attention should be given to the full requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**, especially as there are sometimes two parts to a bullet point.
- In **Section 1**, candidates are advised to pay attention to the text type they are asked to produce and to be more aware of how to distinguish a report from a letter type.
- Recognising where to use full stops instead of commas would improve the work of many candidates.
- Appropriate use of capital letters is essential.

## General comments

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. While there were examples of high quality writing, there appeared to be fewer examples of candidates demonstrating Band 1 writing skills. Equally, fewer candidates were in Bands 7 and 8. There was evidence of inappropriate language ('gonna', 'wanna', 'pissed'). **Section 1** was done well by the vast majority, although there is always a need to ensure that each bullet point has been fully addressed. Time management was generally very good and there were very few examples of candidates not attempting a question or writing a short answer. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports. For example, paragraphing in **Section 1** continued to improve, whereas verb and tense errors and the misuse or non-use of direct and indirect articles remain in need of improvement. Candidates are advised to use direct speech sparingly as a way of varying the text. Where direct speech is used, the correct punctuation and lay out needs more attention, especially the use of speech marks. Sentence separation errors still gave cause for concern with commas used instead of full stops.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1 – Directed Writing**

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine there was a patch of unused ground on their school site. One suggestion was to make the site into a quiet garden. The Principal of the school wanted to discover students' views on this plan and also wanted students to suggest other possible uses for the piece of land. Candidates were required to find out this information and convey it to the Principal; the overwhelming majority responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. **Section 1** is directed writing and it is essential to follow the given instructions. This year, in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points, a perfect answer had to have:

- what students think about having a quiet garden
- what other ideas students have for using the piece of land **and** why it should be used in this way
- which of the suggestions the candidate would choose **and** why.

This year, for bullet point 1, any opinion, either positive or negative, was enough to secure the point but candidates should always be prepared to elaborate, within the 200–300 word limit. The weakest responses limited themselves to one view and relied heavily on lifting the given information '... where students can relax during school break times' as their reason. More successful responses were prepared to give both the negative and positive opinions, with some even giving these in percentage terms. Student opinion was nearly always positive with the majority prepared to welcome the idea of a quiet garden where students could

relax from their hectic schedules and enjoy the peace that such a garden would provide. Many elaborated by mentioning the various delights of such a place, including the birdsong and the smell of flowers. Some quoted scientific evidence to show that students needed such a calm break in order to motivate themselves for the rest of the school day. Some responses imagined the quiet garden being used for botanical studies while others saw the possibility of sketching and painting in this area. Those who viewed the prospect of a quiet garden as a negative thing wanted something more action-based on the site and suggested that the quiet garden would be 'boring'. Some said there were already places for quiet contemplation in the school, such as the library. Some felt the heat of the day at break time would not allow students to frequent the garden for very long and some saw the location as possibly leading to inappropriate meetings. If there was a misreading of this point it was that candidates saw the quiet garden as the Principal's firm intention rather than just a suggestion. Therefore some candidates were a little too deferential and felt that they had to praise this as the ultimate outcome. Although the examination is mainly testing writing ability, a small number of candidates needed to read the task rubric and the given context more carefully.

Bullet point 2 asked for details of the other suggestions students put forward as possible uses for the land. The responses to this were many and varied and in very many cases the suggestions split along gender lines. Boys tended to want sporting facilities to be allowed on the land. These included quite modest suggestions such as a cricket pitch and then progressed to something more ambitious like an activity play area and often went as far as a full athletics stadium or a fully equipped gymnasium. Very many of these ideas were rather ambitious, given they were within school grounds, but most were acceptable as convincing reasons were given for them – students felt that exercise was essential, more so than quiet contemplation, and that 'a healthy body led to a healthy mind'. Girls often preferred more academic uses for the land, including new libraries and laboratories or extensions to existing classrooms. Most candidates were happy to supply several alternative uses and there were calls for a new auditorium for assemblies and competition purposes and a venue where younger, often disadvantaged pupils, could be taught by older pupils. Whatever the suggestion, the greater good of the school and its reputation was a powerful motivation. Good responses to the task provided a few alternatives rather than giving a long list of unsupported suggestions. However, a number of responses did not provide alternative suggestions at all but said only what the quiet garden could hold. Cultivating plants was in keeping with a 'quiet' place but a play park with swings and rides for the younger pupils was the opposite of the original idea. Where this occurred, it became very difficult for candidates to explain why they wanted it without contradicting the quiet garden idea.

Bullet point 3 asked candidates to choose which of the suggestions they would like to see adopted. The vast majority were very clear about what they wanted and made a sensible choice based on the preceding bullet points. A significant number returned to the idea of the quiet garden as being the best idea while some chose an alternative. The most successful suggestions were providing financial help or planting the garden, although there was little consideration of how expensive the new facilities would be. Some responses said that students could undertake the building work, often of massive structures such as the gymnasium or auditorium. While not incorrect, such responses indicated the need for a little more realism in their suggestions. Some candidates did not identify their preferred suggestion, including several of the ideas for the one space. Some responses did not address the second part to Bullet 3 about how students could help which limited the mark for Task Fulfilment.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and candidates were clear about informing and persuading the Principal. Similarly, the **situation** was very well understood by the majority. Many thought that the Principal had decided on a quiet garden and that they had to agree with the idea, not realising that it was only a suggestion. Virtually everyone recognised the correct **audience** for this task, although some referred to the Principal in the third person. **The register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal and respectful by most. Similarly, the **tone** was mainly appropriate, although one or two were a little too insistent in their closing request to the Principal to accept the option they had chosen.

Good responses used the correct **format** – a formal report. The opening was given and successful responses often provided a suitable subject heading and also supplied the signature and date, whether at the top or the bottom of the text. However, some candidates opted for a letter format. Even though a letter format could well convey a report (and credit was given for this), the question clearly asked for a report which has certain conventions. Weaker responses employed a mixed format, starting with 'To the Principal' but ending with a letter valediction which, however formal, did not match the report opening. Some of the responses gave an inappropriate, informal valediction such as 'Regards'.

Most candidates organised their report by following the bullet points in the order given. As a result, there was a convincing move from the opening suggestion to the final conclusion. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1. Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when bullet 3 was answered fully.

There were very few short scripts in **Section 1**. A few responses introduced a lengthy narrative element detailing how they had carried out a survey, rather than getting to the results of the survey in Bullet 1.

Linguistically, most candidates were able to produce a convincing piece of work. Spelling was generally satisfactory, although there were some recurring errors: 'Principal' was sometimes written as 'Principle', which was unexpected as the word was in the question; a frequent error was 'quite' for 'quiet'. Paragraphing was also done well this year although in some responses shorter pieces of text were not paragraphed. There were some weaknesses in the use of capital letters (e.g. 'the principal'). Candidates are advised that attention to the correct use of tenses would improve the quality of their work.

## **Section 2 – Creative Writing**

### **Question 2 – Describe the effects of different types of weather on your neighbourhood. (Remember to describe the effects on people as well as on the surroundings.)**

The descriptive essay was not particularly popular with candidates this year but those who attempted it understood the need to describe for the majority of the answer. One candidate vividly observed the seasons from her balcony. Another gave a beautiful description of the sea through the changing seasons and weather; a highlight was watching the surging waves during the high Spring tides while grilling mushrooms on the roof-top. The question directed candidates towards their own neighbourhood so they benefitted from first-hand knowledge. Nearly everyone structured their answer in accordance with the different seasons they experienced or the different kinds of weather, rather than structuring according to the different senses. There were some vivid scenes involving extreme weather of all kinds but the best responses showed how the feelings of the people were interwoven with the different conditions. The pictures of people not daring to leave the comfort of their air conditioned rooms in high summer and wading through flash floods in winter were clearly evoked, as was 'Mariam's broth in Winter which gets people running to her house' and 'listening to Uncle Khalid's war stories in Winter while wrapped up in blankets'. The use of adjectives, personification and similes was important in conjuring up the atmosphere of the place. In the best responses all the senses were used and vocabulary, such as 'pungent' and 'stench', was often highly evocative. Weaker responses could not sustain the description and tended to concentrate on what the neighbours did. This kind of essay is most effective in the present tense, unless contrasting past and present events. Mixed tenses were a problem in a number of scripts.

### **Question 3 – What are the advantages and disadvantages of being part of either a large or small family? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

Again, this was not the most popular question but a significant number of candidates produced some very convincing arguments. Large families were seen as providing greater support for younger people. Older brothers and sisters were always available to give advice and tuition, as well as providing comfort in times of trouble. Larger families tended to have larger incomes and this was seen as a benefit by most. Furthermore, there was never a chance of being bored in a large family as there was always someone to play with or spend time with. The greatest disadvantage of a large family was having to share parental love. Arguments were likely to be more frequent but so were the opportunities to escape from the arguments. Smaller families could provide more concentrated parental love and greater resources showered on fewer children but there was the possibility of less earning power and a greater chance of a single child being spoilt. Ultimately, candidates tended to favour what they were used to in their own families and extended or joint families were regarded as more beneficial because they offer more interaction between family members. Some of the weaker responses could not develop their arguments and often repeated points. A number of candidates attempted too much in writing about both large and small families when the question only asked for one or the other.

### **Question 4 – Write a story which includes the sentence: 'I don't want any argument about this; we are going to see him now and that's final.'**

As always the narrative titles proved to be the most popular and there were many candidates who opted for **Question 4**. The given sentence in the title of this question was generally well integrated into the narrative. Good characterisation was obvious in very many scripts, together with humour, pathos and suspense. There was a wide range of subject matter. Many of the storylines relied on broken relationships of various kinds which led to someone not seeing another person for some time. A third party was often instrumental in bringing the two people back together, often reluctantly, and so had to insist on a meeting. Many other stories were about someone doing something wrong and having to face up to it, perhaps with parents insisting on going to see a Principal after some transgression in school.

**Question 5 – Water.**

This did not prove to be a popular question. Some responses adopted a discursive approach and referred to the benefits that water has brought, and continues to bring, to humanity and the animal and plant kingdoms. Issues of conservation and misuse were explored. Water was described as an essential for life and for the purposes of proper growth. It was seen as encouraging photosynthesis. On a somewhat sombre note, water was also seen as something wars are fought over. There were some very good narratives in which water was a major factor, perhaps on an expedition but equally the narrative approach often said very little about water itself; rather, it was a story in which water was merely incidental and so lacked a little weight.

**Question 6 – Write a story in which an unexpected guest arrives at a wedding.**

This question was very popular. The first half of these narratives generally detailed the background for someone not being invited to a wedding or someone who was apparently unable to attend the wedding. Such backgrounds described various arguments between family members which had led to someone not being invited. Subsequently, it turned out that bridges had been built and the person was able to attend the wedding, much to the joy of all concerned. Other storylines involved a sister or brother living or studying abroad who apparently could not attend and yet made a great effort and did arrive and made everyone's day. Whatever the storyline, the bride usually felt that the day had been made more special by the return of the 'outsider'. Some candidates also took the opportunity to include the name of their favourite pop star or sportsperson who graced the occasion, much to the surprise of everyone.



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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<p>Paper 1123/21 Reading</p>
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## Key messages

- Candidates are reminded of the necessity for initial careful reading of the two text passages and also of every question, to avoid the possibility of the same answer being given for different questions. Such lack of distinction was sometimes apparent between, for example, **Questions 4(a)** and **4(b)** and, less frequently, between **Questions 5(a)** and **5(b)**. The same material is never required for more than one answer.
- In **Question 1(a)**, many candidates showed a marked ability to select appropriate information, and points were usually presented clearly, under bullet points. When a single idea was split across two bullets, with no clear link between them, inevitably neither part was complete in itself. Candidates should also focus in this question on making the *whole point*.
- In **Question 1(b)**, there is still a need for greater care over the use or omission of capital letters. Their use after a full stop to begin a new sentence, and for proper nouns is a basic requirement.
- As continuous writing is required in **Question 1(b)** candidates are advised to avoid note form. Sentence structure can be improved with more practice in limiting the use of simple conjunctions such as 'and' or 'but', and including more complex clauses. Again, practice in the accurate use of other connecting words and phrases such as 'Thus' or 'On the other hand' will be helpful to prevent their inappropriate use.
- When copying from the passage, care should be taken that this is done accurately. Examples of inaccurate copying led, for example, to 'pears' for 'pearls', and the confused use of 'oysters' for 'pearls' or vice versa.
- The first, non-fiction passage frequently requires candidates to compare its subject – here, pearls and the pearl industry – in terms of time or perhaps place; of former times with the present day and sometimes within the context of different places or cultures. In doing so, there should be an awareness of appropriate, different tense use in relation to earlier times and the present day.
- In the vocabulary question there should always be an awareness of the precise context. Only in this way can candidates show discernment in their choice of synonym for words such as 'tackle' and 'mass', avoiding unsuitable alternative meanings. Wide reading of all kinds of texts, as well as practice through dictionary work, will be of great benefit to candidates.

## General Comments

Candidates generally offered neatly presented scripts, very few omitting any question. The excellence of the best candidates was impressive. Candidates demonstrated sound comprehension skills.

There were two reading passages, each of approximately 700 words, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. The variety of subject matter provided the opportunity for a range of questions which stretched and differentiated amongst candidates. This resulted in scores ranging from a few in single figures to many high totals, a few of almost full marks.

Both passages, the first entitled 'Pearls' and the second entitled 'Mr Lutchman takes some photographs', seemed to engage the interest of the candidates. The first explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. Of the 20 marks available for the summary question, 15 of these were awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Pearls' and 5 were awarded for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested the ability to read for ideas, in this case to decide whether each of 3 statements was true, false or not stated in the passage, and to identify 2 opinions, distinguishing them from the various facts of the passage.

The second passage tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here.

In **Question 1(a)**, using bullet points, the majority of candidates produced a clear list of selected ideas separated into the two boxes, and only very rarely were points made in the wrong box. It is always essential that candidates make the subject of a point clear; if no subject is given, this will be taken as the subject of the rubric. In the first box, this was 'pearls' or, depending on the context of the point, 'their production'. Marks were not awarded when candidates said that 'Pearls were used for medicinal purposes'; this was imprecise as it was specifically 'powdered pearls' which were used in this way. Similarly, 'Brought deserved wealth' was also inaccurate as it was the activity of pearl *fishing* which brought such wealth.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were many commendable attempts which used both original vocabulary and a variety of original structures. Such responses took ownership of the text and were secure in expression. Many, though, relied heavily on the words of the passage, with limited use of their own vocabulary. Some of these, however, managed to rework the text words into original structures and thus gained a higher score for their use of English than for use of their own words. Weaker responses were those which directly copied blocks of text; the attempt to link these often proved unsuccessful in terms of sentence structure and resulted in fractured syntax.

Both spelling and punctuation were good in the best scripts, and the overall standard of written English was in some cases impressive. Generally, candidates can still improve in the areas of appropriate tense use, appropriate use of definite or indefinite articles, the use of capital letters and the development of greater variety of structure, including complex sentences. Practice in this last area will allow for fewer simple and compound sentences using the repetitive 'and', 'but' and 'or', to bring greater variety with the inclusion of alternative, subordinating conjunctions such as 'although' and 'because'. Relative pronouns, such as 'which' and 'who' will provide further variety and effective style.

## **Comments on specific questions**

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

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the importance of pearls and the problems associated with their production in former times, and the main methods of pearl production in modern times and the benefits these bring, as outlined in paragraphs 2 to 7 of the passage. Candidates were advised to use note form, and were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, though not rewarded with a mark. Those who identified in excess of 15 content points could still be awarded only 15 marks.

Excluding those given, there were 18 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates followed the bullet point style of the given examples, and offered either note form or short sentence answers.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 provided evidence of the importance of pearls in former times, and contained 9 points which candidates could make. The first 3 appeared in paragraph 2: the fact that they were made into jewellery; that they were used to adorn clothing; and, lastly, that pearl fishing brought deserved wealth to those who engaged in it. Some answers included the long text description of how pearls were used as a centrepiece in rings, earrings, bracelets and necklaces. Such answers were acceptable as long as at least two of the accessories were mentioned to represent the idea of 'jewellery' as a whole. 'Pearls as an adornment of clothing' was invariably given, sometimes with the unnecessary addition of the reference to how art from around the world, particularly from Europe, showed this. The wealth, the good source of income or the 'lot of money' which involvement in the pearl fishing industry brought was seen as clearly important in most scripts.

In paragraph 3 candidates could find 2 further points which suggested the importance of pearls in ancient times, almost all recognising their importance as shown in religions. This was the simplest way of expressing the point; alternative methods of answering had to mention both Christianity *and* Islam, or the Bible *and* the Qur'an in order to show that pearls featured in more than just one religion. Those candidates who split this alternative way of answering across two bullets – Christianity being mentioned in one and Islam in the next – could not score because, to be complete, the point needed that idea of plurality. Detail of the references in these holy books was merely an extension of the point and was not needed for the mark. Many also recognised that powdered pearls were used for medicinal purposes, or as medicine. Some correct responses picked out the specific medical areas: to aid digestion or cure indigestion, or to cure mental illness.

Paragraph 4 concerned the problems associated with the production of pearls in former times and the remaining 4 points in the first section of the summary could be found here. The first problem was that hundreds of oysters were needed to be sure of getting perhaps only three or four pearls. Weaker responses did not carefully distinguish between pearls and oysters and offered the statement that 'hundreds of *pearls* (rather than 'oysters') were needed to get only a few *pearls*.' The next 3 points all related to specific difficulties encountered by the pearl divers: they had to descend to great depths on a single breath; they faced the danger of hostile or dangerous creatures; finally, holding their breath for too long caused their death by drowning. As the subject of each of these points was 'divers', and not pearls, it was necessary to include that fact for at least one of these points. There were a number of incomplete answers regarding the divers descending to great depths or to 'depths of over 30 metres': candidates often omitted the nature of the problem i.e. the *greatness* of the depths required and, more frequently, the fact that divers had to reach such depths 'on a single breath'. The idea of danger from the hostile creatures had to be made with the use of words such as 'risk' from 'hostile' creatures or the possibility of 'attack' by them. The essential detail of the final point in this section of **Question 1(a)** was the length of time for which the divers had to hold their breath. It was this which could cause their 'death' or 'drowning'. There were those who, in quoting the text, stopped short of giving the reason for the fatal consequences, offering only the fact that divers sometimes lost consciousness.

The second part of the rubric asked for the main methods of pearl production in modern times and the benefits these bring. The remaining 9 points were to be found in paragraphs 5, 6 and 7. The move from natural to cultured pearls was highlighted in the first, given point of the section and within this answer box 'pearls' were taken to be 'cultured', though for points which demanded a comparison between the two types there was a need for the distinction to be made clear. In paragraph 5, it was possible to find 5 points. The vast majority of candidates were awarded the first point, if not from the lift (or own words version) of 'Oysters are kept in farms with the intention of obtaining pearls from them' or through mention of the fact that '*pearl farming* took off, mainly in Japan'. The second point of the 5, offered by most candidates, could be credited either with the fact that the system which produces pearls in farms imitates nature, or with a description of that process i.e. the introduction of an irritant *under the oyster's shell*. The next point dealt with the clear benefit that there is no risk to human life when pearls are farmed. When this fact was lifted from the text, candidates sometimes extended the quotation and scored two points under one bullet, with: '...pearl farming took off ...because high quality pearls can be produced with no risk to human life.' Two further benefits were mentioned in this paragraph, the first being that cultured pearls are produced more quickly than natural pearls. This necessitated a clear comparison and while 'pearls' were taken to be the 'cultured' pearls of this section of the question, candidates had to include mention of 'natural pearls' as the other half of the comparison; 'Pearls are produced more quickly' was insufficient. The last benefit in paragraph 5 was that the process involves no unnecessary killing of oysters. Many added the reason for this – that every oyster produces a pearl.

The first of 3 points which candidates could select from paragraph 6 concerned the production of coloured pearls. Precision was essential here; saying, as many did, that coloured pearls can be produced by 'inserting a dye' is ambiguous and could mean that the dye is injected into the pearl itself. It was necessary to explain that the method of production involves inserting a dye *under the oyster's shell* and not 'under the oyster' or into the formed pearl. Only the best candidates recognised the next available point: that most of the chance or guesswork has been removed from pearl production. Better candidates were able to paraphrase this in notes such as: 'Pearls are guaranteed because the element of chance has been removed.' The third point followed on from this idea because, without having to guess whether a pearl has been formed, the industry is a stable form of employment, or offers work to many people.

Paragraph 7 included the final point, which concerned the fact that cultured pearls are much cheaper than natural ones. Here, once again, it was necessary to complete the comparison with mention of 'natural pearls' rather than leaving the attempt at 'Pearls are much cheaper'. An alternative and equally acceptable form of expressing this point was in terms of the final sentence of the passage: that owning or wearing pearls is no longer limited to the rich, or that ordinary people can now afford them. Suggesting that 'poor' people can afford cultured pearls had no real basis in the text and was regarded as a step too far.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to state, in no more than 150 of their own words, the importance of pearls and the problems associated with their production in former times and the main methods of pearl production in modern times and the benefits these bring.

The task was completed well by many candidates, with a significant number scoring full or almost full marks. Such scripts built on the notes from **Question 1(a)** in an organised manner, using the candidates' own words to a great extent and some impressively structured and stylish English. Many others tended to interlace manipulated elements of the text wording with their own and, in doing so, gained credit for some originality and variety of structure, including some successful complexity. Weaker candidates relied more heavily on the words of the passage, offering selected stretches of text with an occasional original word. When candidates had not read the passage carefully this was obvious in patches of distorted sense. The suggestion, for example, that 'They (*pearls*) were an art in Europe where they were admired by men and women' made little sense; nor did such confusion of eras and methods as: 'They needed to swim 30 feet deep with clips on their noses and grease on their bodies but this retrieval of pearls was no problem to Japan.' The inclusion of irrelevant material from the first paragraph limited some answers, as did a handful of fairly short responses which dealt with very few specific points from one era or the other, and offering patches of obliquely relevant generalisation such as: 'Pearls were important for lots of reasons in the past and even today'.

As mentioned in key messages, above, the distinction between past and present should be shown in appropriate use of tenses. Thus, 'Nowadays pearls were produced on farms' is incorrect, while 'Pearls were used as medicine and serve as a comparison to holy things' confuses two tenses in one sentence. The lack of a capital letter to follow a full stop was more noticeable than in the past, as was the inappropriate inclusion of them elsewhere, e.g. '...and Oysters are kept in farms to Obtain pearls from them... The oyster responds by Coating it in nacre'. Greater precision is necessary. Such errors marred the writing of a number of candidates. There were examples of the inappropriate use of connectives such as 'however', 'nevertheless' and 'thus'. These should be avoided unless confidently used in the correct context, as should clumsy links such as 'to add on...' and the frequent repetition of 'also'.

**Question 2 and Question 3** tested the candidates' ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. There was varying success with this part of the Paper.

**Question 2** asked candidates to decide whether each of three statements was true, false or not stated in the passage. The first – 'pearls are produced when a grain of sand gets under an oyster's shell' – was false; the text says this was '*wrongly* thought by some' to be the case. The second statement – 'a substance produced by the oyster makes mother-of-pearl' – was true; again, the text clearly states 'the substance produced results in ...mother-of-pearl'. The final statement, that '2000 years ago, all pearl fishers were Chinese' was not stated in the passage; the Chinese did indeed carry out 'extensive fishing of pearls', but there is no indication that they were the only people to do so. Where all 3 marks were not scored, the most common error was when this last statement was given as false.

In **Question 3**, candidates had to write down two of the writer's opinions, one from each of paragraphs 1 and 2. The first opinion was: 'Pearls (which) are the most beautiful (of) gems.' Very many recognised this as an opinion rather than a fact but sometimes the mark could not be awarded because, in copying, the word 'pearls' was omitted, leaving an incomplete attempt, or because of the addition of '...in the South China Sea...'. This excess limited the opinion to pearls found only in that sea. The opinion from paragraph 2 was that 'Pearl fishing brought deserved wealth (to those who engaged in it)'. This was more frequently successfully quoted or, in a number of cases, offered in the candidate's own words. Candidates are advised to ensure that they write the opinion beside the correct paragraph number in the question.

### **Section 2: Reading for meaning**

A narrative text, with its particular style and often less familiar vocabulary, is usually more challenging for candidates than a non-fiction passage. Nevertheless, candidates generally coped well with many comprehension questions involving figurative language, inference and vocabulary.

**Question 4(a)** asked what caused Mr Lutchman's sudden interest in photography. This was a literal comprehension question, and most candidates were correct in saying that Wilkie, or a friend or colleague, had a camera to sell. Weaker responses suggested that he wanted to photograph the sunset.

From the quotation given in **Question 4(b)** – ‘An idea caught Mr Lutchman’s fancy and soon became a temptation’ – most candidates were able to give the correct response when asked what Mr Lutchman was ‘tempted to do’. The ‘idea’ which he had was prompted by the camera being sold and he was tempted to buy it. The ‘idea’ and the ‘temptation’ are mentioned immediately after we hear about the camera; this should have signalled the link. Many responses suggested that he was tempted to take a photograph of the sunset, something only spoken of later, when Mr Lutchman was at home. Some weaker responses gave the same answer for the previous **Question 4(a)**. Two questions are never likely to ask for identical answers.

**Question 4(c)** asked candidates to select a single word from later in the paragraph which continued the idea of ‘temptation’. The answer, ‘alluringly’, was correctly selected in many cases; ‘enthusiastically’ was a frequent wrong answer. A few responses offered more than the ‘single’ word required.

**Question 5(a)**, the first in which candidates were to use their own words, asked for Mrs Lutchman’s reaction to her husband’s question. The first line of paragraph 2 tells us that she was ‘taken aback by the strangeness of this question’. The majority recognised ‘taken aback’ and ‘strangeness’ as the key words to be re-cast and they did well by suggesting ‘surprised’, ‘shocked’, ‘startled’, ‘amazed’, ‘caught off guard’ and other suitable synonyms for ‘taken aback’. Attempts to find an alternative for ‘strangeness’ were not so successful and some relied on using the stem of the key word e.g. ‘She thought his question was strange’; others made no attempt and simply referred to her surprise at ‘the question’. There were, however, a number whose re-casting was sound, with words such as ‘weird’, ‘odd’, ‘unexpected’ and ‘unusual’. Those candidates who did not pick out either key word often based their answers on what Mrs Lutchman went on to say, suggesting ‘sarcasm’ as her ‘reaction’; others referred to her actions in glancing ‘briefly at the sky and at her husband’; still others merely quoted her words: ‘Don’t do anything foolish’.

The next question, **Question 5(b)**, asked what advice candidates thought Mrs Lutchman was giving with the words: ‘Don’t do anything foolish.’ This was another instance of a few candidates offering the same answer to two questions. In saying, here, that ‘She was advising him not to do anything foolish’, they took no account of the question wording: ‘What advice *do you think* she is giving her husband?’ This flagged up an inferential question which required candidates to focus on what she was implying. Those who looked back to her comment about his needing a camera to take photographs, gave acceptable responses, suggesting that she was advising him not to buy a camera, not to spend a lot of money on a camera, or to think carefully before buying one. Several candidates gave correct responses but many thought she was advising just the opposite: that he *should* get a camera. Equally incorrect were those who thought she was telling him not to ‘steal’ a camera.

**Question 6(a)** again asked candidates to think about what emotion Wilkie wanted Mr Lutchman to feel when he offered a low sum for the camera and ‘Wilkie laughed loudly’. While a number thought that the emotion might be ‘stupidity’, most saw ‘embarrassment’, ‘shame’ or ‘awkwardness’ as the likely emotion. Similar words such as ‘humiliation’ and ‘disgraced’ were equally acceptable, but the idea that he was ‘bullied’ was not seen as an ‘emotion’; nor was ‘the payment offered was too low.’

**Question 6(b)** asked for ‘two other ways’ (i.e. other than laughing to embarrass him) in which Wilkie persuaded Mr Lutchman to pay \$100 for the camera. Candidates could select two from three possibilities, the one most frequently offered being that Wilkie said, or told him, that the camera was an excellent one, or that he described its additional features or its flash bulbs and light meters. The second way was when Wilkie mentioned that he would ‘tell the boys’ about Mr Lutchman’s low offer which would be a further embarrassment to Mr Lutchman. Finally, Wilkie says that the camera cost him \$200 dollars and was in excellent condition. The second was sometimes unsuccessful because Mr Lutchman’s ‘offer’ was not mentioned and, in the last possibility, answers were not credited unless both the original high cost and the perfect condition of the camera were included. There were some excellent attempts such as: ‘Wilkie tells him that the camera originally cost twice what he was asking for and it was in immaculate condition.’ However, many candidates did not respond accurately in terms of the wording of this question: it was essential for Wilkie to say or do something to persuade Mr Lutchman. The answer required words such as: ‘He told him...’, ‘He said that ...’ or ‘He frightened him by ...’.

**Question 6(c)** was the second in the Paper which asked candidates to select a particular word or phrase from the passage; this time it was a four word phrase which showed that Mr Lutchman realised the price being asked for the camera was too high. This was answered well, the vast majority selecting, correctly, 'Against his better judgement'.

In answering **Question 7(a)** candidates were required to explain in their own words why Mr Lutchman disliked the camera's instruction booklet. To do so they had to locate and paraphrase the key words 'incomprehensible' and 'baffling', which described his opinion of the words and drawings in the booklet. A few responses used the stem of the first key word, suggesting that 'the words were difficult to comprehend'; using the same stem cannot adequately explain the given word. The majority, however, understood and re-cast the idea as 'He could not understand the words', they were 'difficult to understand', or were 'unintelligible'. 'Baffling' meant that the drawings were confusing, bewildering, puzzling or made no sense to him, and the better responses offered these or similar synonyms. This proved the more difficult key word and answers such as 'astonishing', 'complex' and 'not clear' did not capture the essence of 'baffling'. Some candidates tried to merge both key words into one, with responses such as: 'He found the words and drawings complicated' or '...hard to understand'. The first of these gained no marks and the second just 1 mark for the key word 'incomprehensible'. Scripts which gave one-word synonyms, as in 'incomprehensible = unintelligible; baffling = puzzling', without the context of a sentence, were very rare.

Answers to **Question 7(b)** had to explain fully how Mr Lutchman's use of the 'large and impressively illustrated book' was different from its intended use. His use of it was usually recognised: he cut out a picture, or pictures, and plastered them on the (sitting room) wall. That he 'cut the pictures...', rather than 'cut out...' was taken as a slip and not penalised, but a few responses could not be awarded the first mark because they stopped short of adding that 'he stuck them on the wall.' The idea of using the 'book on photography', with all its 'impressive illustrations', to learn about photography, or as a guide, an inspiration or an example for his own photographs was explained only in better responses. Many others went as far as suggesting that it was meant 'to be read', but did not differentiate between this and any other book in terms of its purpose

**Question 8** asked for two ways in which Mrs Lutchman tried to comfort her husband over the failure of his photographs. This was a literal comprehension question: she said that nobody is perfect right away, or she implied that it takes time to learn something new; she then went on to say that it was not his fault, that it was maybe the fault of those who developed the photographs. The phrasing of the question required candidates to give the ways in which this was done; more answers included suitable introductory words such as 'She said that...', 'She suggested...' and 'She blamed...'. Many responses gave only 'Nobody is perfect right away' and 'It wasn't his fault' which did not describe the ways in which she comforted him. Her suggestion that he develop his own photographs in future was more an 'encouragement' to him than a 'comfort' and was not credited.

**Question 9** asked for two reasons why the Lutchman children had 'strained expressions on their faces' while being photographed. This was a literal comprehension question, and the answers were to be found in paragraph 6 where the situation was explained: a group of curious neighbours had gathered to watch what was happening and their father was losing his temper and howling at them to grin. The passage says a 'group' had 'gathered' and either of these words was sufficient to imply that there were a number of onlookers causing the children's embarrassment, visible in their 'strained expressions'. The idea of a number of neighbours was required for the mark. Their father yelling at them and losing his temper was the other reason, which was often given but it did not score if 'Mr Lutchman' or 'their father' was not specified as the subject. "'Grin! Grin!" he howled at them' was not enough, unless the first part of the answer had mentioned him specifically, as in 'A group of neighbours gathered to watch their father photograph them.' A number of candidates suggested the unsupported ideas that the children did not want to stand in line or their father's inexperience as a photographer.

**Question 10(a)** focused on writer's craft and asked for the effect created by the use of 'ebbing away' which would not have been achieved by the use of 'left him', in 'Mr Lutchman could feel his confidence ebbing away'. Candidates found a number of ways to describe the effect of this metaphor which, in its simplest form, meant that his confidence left him slowly. The vast majority gained the mark with answers suggesting that: his confidence was lost 'gradually', 'slowly', it 'faded away' or 'left bit by bit'.

Relating to the final paragraph, **Question 10(b)** asked why Mr Lutchman's roar of anger and distress was 'muffled'. It did not ask *why* he roared in anger and distress, but many candidates missed the significance of the inverted commas which highlighted the word 'muffled'. Their answers focused, incorrectly, on basins clanging or water flowing across the floor, drenching him. Those may have been the reasons for his roaring, but the reason for the 'muffled' sound had to be inferred from the description of Mr Lutchman's situation: he was under a bed, a blanket draped 'over his head'. Either of these facts was acceptable, as was reference to 'he' or 'his body', rather than 'his head', being draped, wrapped or covered in the blanket. The confined space and his mouth being covered were the issue. An unsupported answer which appeared was that he muffled his voice on purpose to avoid upsetting his wife or letting her or the children know what had happened.

**Question 11** was the customary vocabulary question, where candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Many candidates gained 3, 4 or 5 marks. Low scores were usually the result of candidates choosing to define words which they thought they understood but gave meanings which were not correct in context. One such was *casually*; better scripts offered the correct idea of Wilkie mentioning his camera 'in passing', in an 'off-hand' way, 'without making a fuss about it' or 'nonchalantly'. When context was not taken into account, 'accidentally', 'normally', 'not seriously' and 'informally' were wrong answers. Another word frequently attempted but often taken out of context was *tackle*; instead of understanding that Mr Lutchman was ready to 'attempt' or 'have a go at' photographing a subject, many gave the meaning as 'attack', 'overcome' or 'sort out'. The meaning of the word *mass* was correct only in the best scripts, where candidates visualised, from its use, the appearance of Mr Lutchman under the bed, as seen by his wife. Not many selected this word but some who did suggested a scientific meaning such as 'weight', or 'how heavy an object is'. *Delicately* was the most popular and the most successful choice, its meaning correctly understood as 'carefully', 'gently' or, on occasion, 'sensitively'. *Mounting* was often attempted, with some success, being defined as 'growing', 'increasing' or 'building'; these and similar synonyms were suitable adjectives to describe 'excitement'; incorrect attempts focused on other meanings of the word such as 'getting on top of', 'piling', 'height' and 'a lot of'. Most of those who chose *confining* understood exactly what was meant, so 'limiting' and 'restricting' were frequent synonyms, with 'dealing with just one thing' appearing as well. For *curious* there were several correct responses: 'wanting to know' was probably seen most frequently; 'seeking knowledge' and 'wondering about' were acceptable versions of that. 'Nosy' and 'inquisitive' were occasionally and fitted the context of the watching neighbours perfectly. While 'eager to find out' was correct, 'eager' alone was not; 'questioning' was inexact and certain other words suggested a surprising lack of understanding altogether e.g. 'anxious', 'ambitious', 'excited' and 'nearby'. The least popular choice was *disconsolately* and only about half of those who chose it understood it. Correct re-casting included 'dejectedly', 'unhappily', 'sadly' and 'miserably'. 'Unconsolably' depended too much on the stem of the given word and other answers were incorrect, for example: 'harshly', 'impatiently' and 'dissatisfied'.

Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, correct grammatical form was not insisted upon.



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Reading

## Key messages

Candidates are advised to read the two reading passages carefully before they begin to answer any questions. In **Section 1** it is likely that more than one reading of the passage will be necessary to fully understand, and to deal appropriately with, a subject and ideas which may be new to the reader in order to summarise the content. The same applies to the narrative passage of **Section 2**, where reading for meaning is necessary to appreciate both literal and implied meanings.

For **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to work on appropriate use of linking words, such as 'however', 'nevertheless', 'furthermore' and 'moreover', to ensure that they are used to suggest an alternative or contradictory idea to the one which has just been mentioned, or to extend that idea further. Candidates can also improve on sentence separation, recognising where a full stop is necessary between pieces of information which are complete in themselves.

In answering the vocabulary question, it is important to consider the context in which the words are used. Candidates can be helped to recognise the meanings of words within a specific context through regular, reading of both fiction and non-fiction texts.

While the vocabulary question was generally well done, those questions which require candidates to answer in their own words were less successfully answered. Candidates might be encouraged to highlight/underline key words in the question, e.g. one other way.

Candidates are advised to ensure that they answer questions as set when quoting directly from the text.

Candidates need to be more familiar with the difference between meaning and effect in order to tackle questions on writer's craft.

## General comments

The passages were accessible with some vocabulary and expressions to stretch the more able. There were very few incomplete scripts with minimal infringement of rubric. Some very impressive use of vocabulary was demonstrated, e.g. 'durable', 'micro-organisms', 'solidify'.

In **Question 1(a)** almost all candidates presented their selected information under bullet points, a practice which allows for clear, structured expression. There were fewer instances than in the past of a single point being spread across two bullets, something which results in the loss of the mark. There was some repetition of ideas but very few instances of ideas in the wrong box.

Most candidates attempted every question, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked.

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

The first passage, entitled 'Silver', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks awarded for selection of content points from the text of 'Silver' and 5 marks for the assessment of the candidates' ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions focused on true or false statements and identification of two from the text, one from paragraph 1 and one from paragraph 2.

In **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)**, a reasonably high number of candidates achieved the maximum 15 marks in **Question 1(a)** and few candidates scored below half marks.

Weaker responses to this first question omitted the necessary detail to express the main points. Equally high numbers achieved above average marks for style in **Question 1(b)**. In this question, where candidates had to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures, with a high number of full or almost full marks being awarded. Weaker responses used the words of the passage only.

The second passage, the story of 'Mr Lutchman and Gardening', tested the candidates' ability to read for meaning, with questions focusing on literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. Certain questions in this section challenged candidates.

### **Comments on specific questions**

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

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30 per cent of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the uses and importance of silver in former times, and the uses and advantages of silver in modern times, as outlined in the passage. The summary was based on paragraphs 2–7, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, and were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given as an example, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were not awarded it was usually because key words or phrases were missing, or because the candidate referred to irrelevant sections of the text. Occasionally, material from the first paragraph was introduced, e.g. 'silver was an essential trading component for Asian spices'; such ideas, taken from outside the given parameters, were not credited.

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

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 referred to the uses and importance of silver in former times, and there were 11 points which the candidates could make. Of these (excluding the first, given point) there were 3 points in paragraph 2: silver was made into coins, it was used in international trade, and ancient languages, or some languages, used the same word for both silver and money. It was incorrect to say, as some did, that silver was used as money; it was the coins which were used as money, so candidates had to write either that silver was made into coins or that silver coins were used as money. As not all languages used the same word for both silver and money, some qualification was needed, such as 'ancient' or 'some'.

From paragraph 3 candidates could select a further 4 points: silver was associated with gods or with religion, a point which most candidates made, although some thought that the gods were made of silver and worshipped as idols. This was followed by two content points about the Romans; there was no insistence on mention of 'The Romans' here, but if an agent was given, it had to be correct. The points were that wine was stored in silver containers to make it drinkable for longer, or to last longer, and silver coins dropped into water storage containers meant that fewer, or few, soldiers became sick. There were several details in each of these points and if the mark was not awarded it tended to be because a detail had been omitted, notably the reference to wine lasting longer, or the specific reference to silver coins and not simply silver, or silver containers and not 'wine was stored in silver'. The final point in this paragraph was the link to medicinal purposes, or the alternative version that silver healed wounds and cured diseases. Most candidates identified this point. Some candidates offered both alternatives.

In paragraph 4 the passage mentioned two other uses of silver in former times. 'Better' or 'quality' mirrors could be made by combining silver and mercury; where this point was not made, it tended to be because the reference to 'better' or 'quality' had been omitted, or because the reference to mercury had been omitted. The other point which could be taken from the paragraph was about silverpoint; silverpoint was used by artists, or silverpoint was a drawing technique, i.e. an alternative link to 'art'; candidates were free to give a definition of silverpoint – a drawing technique using silver wire – instead of using the technical term.

The second section of the rubric asked for the uses and advantages of silver in modern times, and the remaining 10 points were in paragraphs 5, 6 and 7. The first of these paragraphs began with mention of 'in modern times', signalling that information for the second answer box started here. Apart from the first, given point of the section, there were 2 other points available in paragraph 5: silver is used to coat telescope mirrors and to insulate glass. Candidates were more successful with the first of these points than with the second, for which some wrote that silver was an efficient method of reducing heat loss, without the link to the insulation of glass.

In paragraph 6 there were 4 content points. The first was that silver is used to purify water; either one of the alternative answers about silver helping oxygen to sanitise water, or silver preventing the need for chlorine in pools and spas, was also accepted. The second point in paragraph 6 was that silver mixed with mercury could be used to fill cavities in teeth, or to make amalgam to fill cavities in teeth, as amalgam is a combination of silver and mercury. Alternatively, they could refer to silver combined with mercury, or amalgams, being used in dentistry (thus establishing the 'teeth' context) to fill cavities. There was much scope for the omission of detail in this point, such as the reference to mercury or amalgam, or the 'teeth' context. Many candidates successfully found the next content point, which was that silver is used to make surgical instruments, or to make instruments to perform surgery or surgical procedures. The final point in the paragraph was that small electrical devices, or specifically hearing aids, use silver oxide batteries because they have long life or have a high energy-to-weight ratio; again there was scope to omit detail here, usually the reference either to long life or high energy-to-weight ratio. Many candidates offered the first sentence of the paragraph as a point ('silver can be beneficial to healthy living') but that was the topic sentence which introduced the health points to follow about clean water, dentistry, surgery and hearing aids.

The last 3 content points were in paragraph 7, all connected to the music industry: speaker wires are produced using silver because it improves sound quality, silver is used to make high-quality wind instruments, and some brass instruments are plated with silver. Specific reference to 'flutes' was acceptable for 'wind instruments', and 'trumpets' was acceptable for 'brass instruments'. As with other points, it was possible to miss marks here because detail had been omitted, notably reference to 'improvement of sound quality', or 'high-quality' 'wind instruments or 'brass' instruments.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the uses and importance of silver in former times, and the uses and advantages of silver in modern times, as outlined in the passage. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet. Almost without exception, candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. Very short answers were extremely rare.

Frequent errors occurred in:

- omitting the subject in a clause, e.g. 'As an insulator, helps to conserve natural resources.'
  - using commas instead of full stops
  - omission of auxiliary verb in the passive, e.g. 'Silver used as...'
  - absence of the definite article
  - use of the definite article where none was required
  - apostrophe error, especially confusion between 'its /it's'
  - incorrect prepositions, e.g. 'made by silver' and 'in medical purposes'
  - omission of 's' in third person singular verbs
- Many candidates did not use the past tense when talking about historic uses of silver; others did not use the present tense when discussing the current uses of silver

The passage allowed for good candidates to edit the material and manipulate phrases. Better candidates were able to re-phrase the text material in original ways, sometimes with fluency. Some candidates demonstrated very impressive vocabulary, while weaker responses 'used the words from the text with single words of their own. Better responses tried to refashion the syntax in original ways, and there were many examples of fluent writing. Weaker responses were phrased in simple sentences or used the structures of the original text. Quite often compound structures were used, linking simple text sentences with 'and' or 'but'. These contrasting abilities were reflected in the range of marks awarded.

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

**Question 2** was based on paragraph 1, and asked candidates to decide whether each of three statements based on the information in that paragraph was true or false. The question worked well as all combinations were seen. The first of these statements – that all civilisations were engaged in the mining of silver – was false, because the text stated that silver was a valuable resource for many (not all) flourishing civilisations. The second statement was that spices were traded for silver in Roman times, a true fact substantiated in the text at ‘Spanish silver mines provided the major supplies for the Roman Empire’. The third statement – Bolivia, Peru and Mexico were the only countries producing silver in the late fifteenth century – was false as the text refers to these countries accounting for ‘a huge proportion (not all) of the world’s production of silver. There was much success with this question with very many candidates correctly ticking all three appropriate boxes.

**Question 3** required candidates to select two opinions from the text, one from paragraph 1 and one from paragraph 2. There was a choice of two opinions to be found in paragraph 1, the first being that silver is more beautiful than gold, which has to be a subjective statement and therefore an opinion. However, if candidates lifted the text at ‘silver is a precious metal, more abundant and more beautiful even than gold’, they were not rewarded with the available mark as the word ‘abundant’ is objective and therefore spoiled an otherwise correct answer. The second possible opinion, and a much less popular choice, was ‘no single event in the history of silver rivals Spain’s conquest of the so-called New World’; it was felt that there was enough subjectivity in that statement to make it an opinion. In paragraph 2, the opinion was ‘people of good taste still choose to adorn themselves with silver’; there was more success in the selection of that correct opinion than of the first. Some candidates made a correct selection of the opinion in paragraph 2, but spoiled it by including reference to modern silversmiths being linked to centuries of craftsmen.

## Section 2 Reading for Meaning

As is usual, most candidates seemed to find this narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1. Questions required interpretation and appreciation of the writer's skill.

**Question 4(a)** was a literal comprehension question, asking what were the first signs of Mr Lutchman's interest in gardening. The popular correct answer was 'he bought himself a set of gardening tools', although 'he noticed his patchy lawn' was also an acceptable response.

**Question 4(b)** asked for the single word in paragraph 1 which showed that Mr Lutchman had more than just an 'interest' in gardening, the only correct answer being 'passion'. Candidates found this question challenging, with 'unpremeditated' being the most popular wrong answer, and 'enviously' also featuring as a wrong response.

**Question 4(c)** asked candidates why Mr Lutchman was 'envious' of his neighbour, and correct answers made reference to the fact that the neighbour had a healthy, or green, lawn or grass. The word 'garden' was accepted as a synonym for 'lawn' or 'grass'. It was possible to make the point by making a comparison between the neighbour's lawn and Mr Lutchman's lawn, but if candidates chose that version they had to make it clear that the neighbour's lawn was the better of the two. Thus 'he compared his garden to the neighbour's healthy garden and saw that the neighbour's was healthier' scored a mark, but 'he compared his garden to the neighbour's garden' or even 'he compared his garden to the neighbour's healthy garden' were incorrect as it was not clear that Mr Lutchman's garden was inferior.

**Question 5(a)** asked candidates to explain what Mrs Lutchman's threat was, the answer being that Mr Lutchman would go to jail, or be in trouble with the police, or be arrested for stealing public property or uprooting grass. Correct responses required both the crime and the consequence, although there were various ways in which each of those might be expressed.

**Question 5(b)** was the first question which required candidates to answer in their own words and asked what was meant by 'success stimulated ambition'. This was a discriminating question. Some candidates thought 'success' meant victory over the police, and other repeated the words 'success' and 'ambition'. There were two possible approaches to correct answers here. The first approach was the particular one linked to Mr Lutchman's actions; the second was to approach 'success' and 'ambition' in a more generalised way. This meant that correct responses to 'success' were 'he completed his plan' or 'he achieved what he set out to do', or 'he got the grass to grow'. This also meant that correct responses to 'ambition' were 'he wanted to do better', or 'he wanted to do more', or 'he wanted to get flowers' (now that he had grass.) If candidates opted for the generalised approach, they were rewarded for writing for 'success', expressions such as 'when things go well' or 'when work bears fruit' and for writing for 'ambition' expressions such as 'you want to do better' or 'you want to do more'. Candidates tended to fare better with 'success' than with 'ambition'. There were very many ways in which fully correct answers here could be written.

**Question 5(c)** asked for the two ways in which Mr Lutchman's domesticity was shown. The first was that he took his children on an excursion, or a trip, or simply 'out'. The second was that he spent his time playing with his gardening tools, or gardening. These answers could be given in either order, and could be made by judicious lifting. However, if candidates lifted 'it was the purchase of these items that prompted the excursion he took his children on' this was incorrect as it shifted the focus from the excursion to the items, and therefore did not answer the question. Instead of giving examples of domesticity, some candidates gave answers which defined 'domesticity', for example, 'he spent his time at home' or 'he became the happy family man.' Popular wrong answers were that he wore a straw hat or that he left his wife at home when he took the children out.

**Question 6(a)** was a literal comprehension question, asking what it was about the landscape on the day of the excursion which showed that it was dry and uncultivated, the answer being that it was reddish-brown or brown. Most candidates who answered this correctly lifted from the text: 'the colour changed from green to reddish-brown'. Incorrect answers tended to be those which gave a definition of 'dry and uncultivated' e.g. 'there was no rain' or 'nothing grew there'. Others made reference to the rice and watercress which showed misunderstanding of the question.

**Question 6(b)** asked for the two reasons why the sign saying 'plants for sale' was surprising. The first reason was the baskets were full of dead or dying plants, and the second reason was the garden was decaying or dead or rotten. There was scope here for juxtaposing the words 'dead', 'dying', 'decaying' and 'rotten', provided they were linked to 'baskets' in the first part and 'garden' in the second. Some candidates made reference to the gardener's behaviour rather than to the baskets or the garden; such answers tended to be answers to the next question, **Question 6(c)**. Some thought the aridity of the surroundings, the stony track or the faded sign were adequate answers.

**Question 6(c)** was another question about the strangeness of the sign outside the house, this time the section saying 'visitors welcome'. The surprising factor here was linked to the behaviour of the gardener: he shouted at them, he told them to stop, he told them it was private property, and in fact offered the opposite of the welcome suggested by the sign. Some candidates thought that the gardener was also the owner – and this was acceptable as there was nothing in the text to suggest that he definitely was not the owner. Similarly, if candidates confused the garden with the house, this was overlooked, although not strictly accurate.

The answer to **Question 7**, which asked for the logic of the gardener's generosity, was that he would sell the orchid at half price because it was half-dead; there was humour in this notion, which may or may not have been understood by candidates, but it was not essential to answering the question. Although the text referred to only one orchid, plural forms were accepted, as was 'plant' or 'plants' but not 'rose bushes', as they belonged to another part of the text.

**Question 8(a)** asked candidates to explain what Mr Lutchman was tempted to do, the answer being that he was tempted to steal the avocado tree. A popular incorrect answer was to say he was tempted to leave the tree outside the gate and collect it on the way home. This was incorrect as candidates had to infer the idea of theft from that sentence. Other incorrect responses were those which said 'he was tempted to steal it', without specifying what 'it' was.

**Question 8(b)**, was a question on writer's craft, and asked what effect was created by the word 'swooped' which would not be achieved by the expression 'bent down'. Acceptable answers were that 'swooped' created an effect of speed or suddenness. Many candidates gave an explanation of the way he bent down rather than the speed with which he did it. Popular incorrect answers were that the effect created was one of secrecy, cunning or concealment.

In **Question 8(c)**, candidates were asked for the one other way, apart from wagging his finger, in which the gardener's behaviour showed his disapproval. There was only one possible answer here, which was that he made scolding noises. Candidates who wrote that he tapped him on the shoulder, or that he tapped him on the shoulder as well as made scolding noises, were incorrect. There are many reasons why someone might tap another person on the shoulder, not just to indicate disapproval. However, 'scolding' would always be an indication of disapproval. Because the question specified one other way, candidates who offered more than one were infringing the rubric and could not be credited.

**Question 8(d)** was a discriminating question, and was the second question in which candidates had to answer in their own words. They were asked to explain 'what the gardener did to disguise the fact that he was making up the prices of the various items as he went along'. The key words were 'enumerate' and 'exaggerated'; the gardener counted, or added, the prices in an elaborate, or overdone, way. There were several synonyms for 'enumerate', such as 'calculate', 'tally' or 'reckon'; weaker synonyms such as 'spell out', 'itemise' and 'list' were also accepted, as well as 'tell', meaning 'to count'. Synonyms for exaggerated were 'emphasised', 'showy', 'excessive' or 'too much'; weaker synonyms such as 'artificial' and 'fake' were also accepted. Popular incorrect synonyms for 'exaggerated' were 'extra' or 'extreme'. Many candidates repeated the stem of the question, writing that the gardener was making up the prices as he went along, or sometimes thinking that 'making up prices as he went along' was the expression which had to be re-cast into own words. Careful reading of the question would have shown that this was not the case, as it asked what the gardener did to disguise the fact that he was making up the prices as he went along. Some candidates wrote that the gardener was putting up prices because Mr Lutchman tried to steal the avocado tree. Other candidates

searched for the answer in the section following rather than preceding the 'wagging of the finger' and this led them into the territory of the next question, by writing that he enumerated the prices.

There was much success with **Question 9**, in which candidates had to explain the irony in the fact that Mr Lutchman planted the avocado tree in the backyard. Irony lies in expecting one thing but getting the opposite, and the full irony of Mr Lutchman's situation was that he was concerned that the tree might be stolen and yet he had previously tried to steal it himself. We might have expected him not to be worried that the tree could be stolen but, unexpectedly, he was. Good answers brought out the irony as outlined above. However, leniency was shown to candidates who perhaps did not fully understand the irony or, if they did, were less skilful in expressing it. This meant that answers such as 'he was worried it would be stolen because he had tried to steal it or 'he was worried it would be stolen and he had tried to steal it' were given both available marks. It was also possible to score one mark without an attempt at the second, and therefore without an attempt at explaining irony. Thus 'he was worried it would be stolen' (alone) was seen as half the answer and therefore rewarded accordingly. Therefore, while many candidates did not quite grasp the irony, they managed to secure 1 point with the idea of the tree being 'less likely to be stolen'. When answered well there were some very precise answers demonstrating complete understanding of the question and the subtleties of the difficult concept of irony.

**Question 10** was the vocabulary question in which 5 words were to be selected from 8 and their meanings, in the context, given in a word or short phrase. The most frequently correct answer was 'started', 'began' or 'commenced' for 'set to'; more colloquial expressions were credited, such as 'went ahead' or 'got cracking' or 'went to'. Another frequently correct answer was 'continued', 'carried on' or 'kept going' for 'persisted', although 'resisted' was a popular incorrect response. Most candidates who attempted 'encouraged' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'motivated', 'supported', or 'persuaded'; 'influenced' and 'impressed' were frequently offered incorrect responses. For 'dilapidated' a mark could be scored for 'in poor condition', 'broken down' or 'run down', although 'damaged' and 'destroyed' were considered not to have quite the same focus. 'Old' was sometimes incorrectly offered. There was less success with attempts at the other four words for selection. Synonyms for 'reluctantly' were 'unwillingly' or 'not wanting to'; 'hesitantly' was a very popular incorrect answer. Correct synonyms for 'comprehension' were 'understanding' or 'realisation'. Answering this correctly pointed up the importance of reading the word in the context in which it is found; many candidates confused 'comprehension' as it was being used in the passage with the word when used in an examination context, giving answers such as 'answering reading questions' or 'summarising points'. 'Industry' was almost never attempted, where acceptable synonyms were 'work' or 'endeavour' or 'effort'. Again, the importance of looking at words in context was shown here, as the majority of the candidates who attempted this word wrote that it meant a factory or a work place. 'Unpremeditated' was a fairly popular choice, but rarely answered correctly, with 'unexpectedly' or 'suddenly' being popular incorrect answers; correct answers were 'unplanned', 'not thought out' or 'out of the blue'.

The full range of marks was seen here, with several instances of all five marks being scored and several cases of no mark being gained. Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, there was no insistence on correct grammatical form.