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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Overall, this paper appears to have been well received by candidates. Most were able to score consistently across the different sections and Examiners commented in particular on the quality of the responses to **Questions 11 and 12**. Very few candidates failed to complete the whole paper; indeed, relevant and competent responses to **Question 12** were often far longer than the rubric suggested. Handwriting and presentation were generally of a satisfactory to good standard, although there are still some candidates from some Centres whose handwriting is virtually indecipherable. By far the majority of candidates treated the examination seriously and produced conscientious responses to all questions. There were, however, a number who appeared unwilling to write in a register appropriate to a formal examination and Centres would be advised to emphasise to their candidates that inappropriate use of slang terms (or worse) is not the best way to score highly in this examination. In contrast to candidates who responded in this way, there were just as many who produced answers of a very high standard indeed and who might have been able to achieve a potentially higher grade had they been entered for the Extended Tier Paper. As always, there were some candidates who apparently answered **Questions 1-6** on the question paper itself and then omitted to submit this with the rest of their answers. As has been stated in previous reports, rising throwing away up to 6 marks in this way makes it very difficult indeed to achieve an overall mark equivalent to a C grade for this paper.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1-6

The series of multiple choice questions discriminated well; only a few candidates succeeded in answering all six questions correctly, but most scored at least 2 of the marks available. **Questions 1 and 6** seemed to be the most difficult. The correct answers were BAABCD.

Question 7

Most candidates succeeded in scoring some of the 4 marks available for this question, and a pleasing number were able to achieve the maximum mark. The points required by the mark scheme were (i) the climbers thought about their families/home/Portofino (ii) Bonatti was thinking of what to do next (iii) they tried to get comfortable/dry/were feeling thirsty/ate snow (iv) they were sharing the adventure/getting to know one another (v) they were keeping cheerful/telling jokes. This was a task which required candidates to select relevant details from the passage and, as already mentioned, many did so successfully; however, there were others who lost marks through what appeared to be sheer haste such as by referring to 'Profino, a town which he *had* visited.'

Question 8

Most candidates had some idea of what was meant by the phrase 'my inmost self' although not all explained it fully. An explanation stating that it referred to private or personal thoughts was rewarded with 1 mark; those who also mentioned that these were thoughts not communicated to any of the other climbers scored both.

Question 9

Again, this question required candidates to select and retrieve details from the passage and a pleasing number showed the ability to do so logically and correctly. Many scored 3 or 4 marks; a large number of those who failed to do so did not discriminate four discrete points but, instead, considered the different options within one point to be distinct from each other. The reasons given in the mark scheme as to why the descent was dangerous *for Bonatti* were: (i) he had no ice axe (ii) he was lost/could not see clearly/was route-finding (iii) he could find no holds (iv) he was unable to communicate with the other climbers.

Question 10

This question, too, was generally well answered although some candidates lost a mark by stating that they knew Bonatti was the leader because they were told so in the introduction. Although the information was mentioned there, it must be emphasised that questions are set only on the passage; details given in the italicised introductory paragraph are to help the candidates understand the context of the passage but are not part of the material which is tested. There were, in fact, five points in the body of the passage which conveyed Bonatti's leadership qualities; these were: (i) he made judgements about the state of Oggiani (ii) he worked out the safest way to go down (iii) he made the decision not to climb to the summit (iv) he gave the orders to start the descent (v) he led the way down. Although, on the whole, candidates scored well on this question, Examiners mentioned that a significant number of them answered at great and unnecessary length, often writing up to two or three sides of detailed explanation when a direct, short answer would have been equally as productive.

Question 11

A pleasing feature of candidates' responses to this task was the evidence of improved summary writing technique; the virtues of focusing clearly on the requirements of the task and expressing the key points concisely in the writer's own words were exemplified in the best answers. Less successful responses tended to be less discriminating in the selection of relevant details and a significant number of candidates lost marks through failing to distinguish whether particular points belonged to part (a) or part (b) of the question. Others succeeded in identifying appropriate sections of the passage but then made only generalised references to them without clearly stating the specific points required by the mark scheme. This task is marked on a mark per point basis up to a maximum of 15 with a further 5 marks being available for written expression/summary writing technique; however, these 5 marks are very important in discriminating between the performance of candidates and those who resort to whole-scale lifting of passages direct from the original will not score highly in this aspect. It is, therefore, important that candidates spend some considerable time in reading both the original passage and question carefully in order to identify and select the precise details required to give a clear indication of the quality of their reading skills and then ensuring that their answer is expressed in such a way that this understanding is equally clearly communicated to the Examiner.

The key points concerning the activities of the Miao people at work, at leisure and in their everyday lives were that they dress up on ceremonial occasions; they sing songs, play musical instruments, dance and drink rice wine. Their children go to school and young children are carried on their mothers' backs. The people keep song birds, go to market and sell products there. They plough fields with buffaloes and grow rice maize and other vegetables. They eat meals of meat, chillies and sunflower seeds while sitting on the floor and they also listen to radios.

The different features of their buildings are that their frames are made of bamboo and their huts have curved, tiled roofs. The school house is made of modern red brick and there is a ruined castle near the village. The houses in Shimeng have baked mud floors, brick hearths, electric light and a room for the buffalo within the house.

Question 12

Again, many candidates responded well to this task. Most adopted an appropriate tone and register for a letter to a friend and, in general, written expression was of a sound to good standard. The most common errors were failure to separate sentences correctly by using full stops, inconsistency in tense sequences, and inappropriate use of the conditional when a simple past tense was required. Responses in which these errors were a regular feature were not placed in the highest bands for written expression; however, there were only a very few examples of writing which was so inaccurately expressed that understanding was seriously impeded.

The generally consistently satisfactory level of written expression makes the ways in which candidates treat the content of their writing particularly important in discriminating the level of their responses overall. As already mentioned, one criterion here is how successfully they adopt a tone appropriate to the genre in which they are required to write. Other key factors are how successfully relevant details are selected from the original passage and how convincingly these are developed (in the case of this year's question) into conveying the writers' imagined experience. The most common failings in response to this type of task are either to treat it as merely another summary question and to do no more than repeat what is already in the passage or to take the opportunity to engage in a purely creative writing task and ignore the source material altogether; the most successful answers – and there were an encouraging number of them in this examination – are those which make use of the material and show a good awareness of the precise demands of the task by adding considered comments about how they had been affected by the experience.

Conclusion

This paper seems to have been successful in allowing candidates to perform to their potential. The impression received by Examiners is that the improvement in writing and reading skills noticed over the last two years is being sustained and the hard work put in by Centres is certainly beginning to pay dividends. If teachers continue to emphasise the importance of close reading of both passages and questions and concentrating on careful and accurate expression and if candidates continue to practise these, then there is every reason to believe that standards will continue to rise.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June examination session 2005 onwards. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

Paper 0500/02

Reading and Directed Writing (Extended)

General comments

There were many excellent scripts and examples of the award of full marks for answers to all three questions. By contrast, candidates scoring the lowest marks did so because they did not understand that this was primarily a reading paper and that they were required to show evidence in all their answers of having read thoroughly and correctly. All the Examiners stressed the importance of training candidates to use and develop ideas from the texts set for study and to support them with details from the texts.

Most candidates finished the paper without rushing through their answers to the third question. Handwriting varied. Some was very neat, but some looked careless and was difficult to read. This may have been the result of hurrying through the paper without stopping to think out or plan answers.

There was evidence of a good deal of interest shown in the subject matter of the three passages. As is quite common, candidates did not often appreciate the extremity of the situations described in the first and second passage. If they trained themselves to use their imaginations, as **Question 3's** Uncle Nathaniel suggested, they might learn to share such descriptions of amazing experiences.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

It was not difficult in this question to find relevant points: the mark scheme contained twenty five answers and candidates had only to find fifteen to score full marks for content. However, the passages were quite dense and Passage A was a narrative, so that some adaptation was necessary in order to make relevant points. Candidates who left Passage A in the form of a narrative did not lose marks provided that each fact was quite clearly a hazard or a hardship. Unrelated facts were disallowed.

Most candidates understood what was required in order to write a summary, but some still wrote discursively, describing the experiences in general terms. Other wrote at great length and frequently explained and described each point exhaustively. A few candidates wrote long introductions and concluding paragraphs instead of getting straight on with the summary of relevant points. Candidates need to be clear from the outset as to what is (and what is not) appropriate in a summary exercise of this kind.

This session there were fewer examples of irrelevance and over-length work than in previous sessions, and there were very few instances of copying from the text. However, Centres are reminded of the importance of teaching candidates never to copy whole phrases and sentences unless told to do so.

Some candidates saw the connection between the two passages and so tried bravely to write comparisons and contrasts between the two. They almost always left out scoring points because they did not fit into the pattern of comparisons. Candidates are advised always to treat the two passages separately where there is no instruction to compare and contrast.

The first passage was slightly more difficult to summarise than the second and there were numbers of candidates who did not read all the way through. Some gave up after summarising the first part of Passage A and only resumed their reading at the end. Most candidates read the whole of Passage B, but interestingly did not pick up the point about painful eyes in the last few lines.

Where candidates did not do well in this question the two main reasons were that they did not make enough points and that they produced answers that were too wordy. The following example shows how the facts in the summary could be grouped and expressed in a small number of words:

The hazards and hardships of mountaineering are sometimes caused by the savage storms that can trap you, protected only by your tent, which is vulnerable to high winds. There you can suffer from overcrowding, sleeplessness and lack of air, and feel the sense of isolation from your loved ones. Water may be in short supply and eating snow burns the mouth. When you do venture out, you may have to leave equipment behind and the snow and mist may restrict vision so that as you descend, you feel in the middle of nowhere. You have to concentrate on every detail of the rock-face and even then, there may be no footholds. There are long periods of waiting and communications between climbers are unreliable.

Travellers over snow and ice have to pull heavy weights and can easily start to sweat, leading to hypothermia. Pulling the sledges is made worse by friction caused by damaged snowflakes. Radios are not dependable for communication and there are dangers along the way such as crevasses. All this is enough to cause a lack of morale. The weather is also unkind. High winds destroy tents and blizzards fill mouths and noses with snow. The sun causes goggles to mist and, if you take them off, you suffer from snow blindness, which can be very painful for the eyes.

Question 2

At the end of this question, candidates were told to 'use ideas and details from both passages. You may add your own ideas, but they must be based on what you have read.'

There were many excellent answers, some of which scored full marks. In the conversations these used ideas from the passages and supported them with explanatory details. Some candidates invented questions that were supplementary to the three cues given in the question, but these rarely added anything to the answer as a whole.

The conversations started with the cue: 'There must have been some moments when each of you wished you had never set out'. Good candidates chose the really horrific details such as hanging on the end of a rope without vision or other communication, being trapped on the ledge while the storm raged outside the tent and suffering from snow blindness. The best candidates added thoughts and feelings that the two adventurers might have had at these moments.

Good candidates mentioned those qualities that tied in with the ideas in the passage, such as leadership, bonding with the team, exercising judgement (e.g. about the best moment to call off the climb), and physical strength (for managing the weight of equipment and food). Again the best candidates extended these ideas a little rather than just listing them.

Finally, the last cue about endurance and luck led to some excellent debates, chiefly about luck. Fiennes argued that good planning meant that one was prepared for anything, but Bonatti said that nothing could prepare for the extremes that they endured, and quoted Oggioni for good measure.

In writing such answers, candidates were only doing what they were told to do, but it was also clear that they had been taught to use the passages in such ways.

This was unfortunately not the case with candidates from some Centres, who answered the question as if there had been no passage to read and as if they had never realised that this was largely a paper testing reading and not an opportunity to write rather weak creative English. Hence the candidate who wrote at length about an encounter with a polar bear scored no marks for approximately a quarter of his answer.

Those scoring less than half marks for content frequently ignored the first cue and merely commented on the fact that there were some moments when they wished they had stayed at home. At this point their answers often gave a brief mention of their sadness at missing their loved ones. When discussing the qualities, they usually presented a random list of likely qualities they thought such people should have, without showing any recognisable links with the passages. One common quality was to have a good head for heights, which was too axiomatic to score any marks. Their discussion of endurance and luck was probably the weakest section and consisted of general comments about the two qualities. This section was often the weakest since candidates were frequently in a hurry to finish and because nothing new was added to the answer.

Some candidates started well with the 'moments' cue and then faltered into generality for the rest of the conversation.

There were again some candidates who wasted time and space with social niceties such as 'Call me Walter' and invitations from one to the other to join up for another expedition.

There was much mixing up of the two characters. It was commonly thought that they were members of the same climbing team.

As in all the questions, five marks were available for aspects of writing. In this case the structure of the conversation was important. Candidates who relied on the presenter asking questions to the two explorers in turn had fewer marks than those who made their characters interact, as in a real conversation. Marks could also be gained by using language that brought the nature of the experiences to life.

Question 3

This question also required candidates to use and discuss ideas from the text. Again, there were some first class answers that at their best contained thoughtful commentary on the delights of reading, the needs of the environment and the benefits and dangers of the internet. The requirements of the question were partly contained in the letter itself: 'explaining carefully why you have decided on one and why you have rejected the others. I expect you to base your ideas on what I have written and develop some of the reasons I have given above.'

Candidates were allowed to make whatsoever choice they like and were marked on their ability to tangle with Uncle Nathaniel's arguments. Some candidates wrote poor answers because they made little or no reference to any of Uncle Nathaniel's ideas, but invented their own. Others justified their choice of present but did not explain why they had not chosen the others. Some candidates made satisfactory use of the passage, but only repeated Uncle Nathaniel's ideas and did not develop them in any way. Some of the letters took the easy way out and used negative arguments such as not wanting books because there was a good library at the University or not having the Internet because access was provided free. In some cases the bicycle was rather rudely turned down because 'no one of my age rides bicycles these days and because my mother has just bought me a car.'

Good answers did not take such simplistic viewpoints. If the bicycle was turned down, it was only after the writer made her or his attitude towards the environment quite clear, usually explaining what practical steps were being taken to understand and assist environmental problems. The same was true of matters of health. There was much explanation of exercise regimes (the most common was walking) and assurances that all was in hand. Candidates who chose the books sometimes added something about using the imagination in conjunction with the printed word and comparing books with television.

There was some enthusiastic writing about the Internet, particularly about keeping up to date and knowing what was going on in far corners of the world. The worldwide club was interpreted in several different ways.

Some of the attitudes were worrying. Commonest was that the individual was powerless to help the environment so should not try. There was much feeling against books because the Internet was so much easier and quicker to use. There was a lot of the 'one click and you are there' mentality, which suggested that it was much easier to download and print out information than to have to work for it by reading. One or two candidates went so far as to say they would copy out material for their University work. Judging by the paucity of material in some of the letters, it may be that reading is fast becoming too much trouble for some teenagers. This was reflected in a number of the answers to this question.

There were five marks available for the quality and tone of the writing. Most candidates were able to adopt a suitable, informal tone for one who was older. Those who wrote in a formal tone did so sensibly and well. Worryingly, some were distinctly *too* informal and even cheeky, and did not consider 'the whims of an old uncle'. That, together with a refusal to enter into the old man's mind, would have, in a comparatively small number of cases, ensured that the present would have been withheld for three years.

To conclude, overall most of the writing was of a good, secure standard.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June examination session 2005 onwards. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

Paper 0500/03 Continuous Writing
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General comments

As one Examiner put it, candidates were spoiled for choice. The questions were very accessible and according to another Examiner, 'relevant to life experiences and expectations'. As a result, all the questions attracted some attention, although, as usual, some topics were much more popular than others. **Question 3**, *The Picture*, was commonly chosen and the photograph of the hands clasping the rope produced many, varied responses. On the other hand, **Question 5**, the lines of poetry, which offered candidates the chance to write a dramatic story about a broken relationship, was rarely attempted.

As usual, it was difficult for Examiners to make any general comments on areas for improvement since the standard of writing varied so much between candidates and from Centre to Centre. On the whole, success had much to do with how much language a candidate had. There were some who had not progressed sufficiently to succeed as a first language user and who only used a restricted range of vocabulary.

However, many candidates could have scored higher marks if they had been more thoroughly trained to write 350-500 words under examination conditions. There was much evidence of writing that had been undertaken without much thought or planning.

The first area for improvement is structure. Stories needed careful planning so that the introduction was not too long. Some candidates did not get to the point of the story quickly enough. They then had to consider how to build up the atmosphere or the tension of their work so that they reached an appropriate climax. Often this climax was not well sustained. Typically, it was understated or not enough space was devoted to it. Lastly the ending had to be considered, and there were many cases where the last few lines did not make an impact, often because the candidate was running out of time and had no opportunity to consider how to phrase what could be one of the most effective points in the story.

In discursive writing, the plan is essential. There should be a rule of thumb about how many sections an essay might have, and candidates should be aware that the argument must be made up of separate material that should be progressive. It was generally easier for candidates if they could organise their views into two sections, roughly 'for and against'. This created a natural if simple structure. In **Question 8**, about mobile phones, there were plenty of points to be made on either side and, if conveniently developed, they made a clear and thoughtful essay. In **Question 4**, '*Honest people never win*', it was quite easy for candidates to start with what they thought was the present status of honesty in society, and then argue for the significance of personal integrity. Oddly, not all candidates followed this sort of procedure and, particularly in **Question 4**, went round in confusing circles.

There was evidence that once the structure was clear in candidates' minds, they had less trouble with other problems like, for example, finding the right words.

The other area for improvement was expression. The notion of drafting is not applicable in examination writing. The first draft has to be in the head. Some candidates treated their only copy as an opportunity to put down whatever they wanted and to go back afterwards and make copious editorial changes. These were usually very untidy and frequently led to other errors such as missing out words. Candidates should be trained to think ahead, about which words to use and how to sequence and build up a paragraph. Examiners noted that there were examples of very poor paragraphing. Some answers to **Question 4** consisted of up to thirteen paragraphs.

Much of the work was quite carefully written and many candidates showed the ability to spell. Punctuation was less good and candidates whose understanding of sentence separation was poor often made copious mistakes. Dialogue was poorly punctuated and paragraphed. There was a growing habit of wrongly linking words such as 'atfirst' and 'aswell', and the most pervasive of all, 'alot'. There was little evidence of the language of the email, but some expressions such as 'one more time' instead of 'once more', 'one last time', which is meaningless, 'free up' for 'free', and the inappropriate use of 'wanna' and 'chill out' were noted by one Examiner.

Most candidates wrote within the advised word limits. Those who did not frequently failed to sustain any sense of style or even structure and were strongly advised not to attempt undue length in such a short time. It was common to note that the language and sentence structures of the first paragraph were considerably better than in the later parts of the writing. There was sometimes a major failing in the quality of writing on the last half page.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

What do you most look forward to during the next two years?

This was a highly accessible question. One Examiner wrote that she wished that she had been given the opportunity to think ahead at this stage in her schooling. Much of the work was competent, carefully explained, developed and mature. Candidates generally wrote about the next stage in their education, with university in mind. There was much turning over of new leaves. There was plenty of writing about independence, getting away from home and passing driving tests. Some interpreted the question as a chance to write about their coming summer holidays. Some of the best writing was from candidates who expected to go to another country for their further education.

Though not all of the writing was exciting for the reader, it was acceptable because of the genuine thoughts of the writer and for careful and logical thinking. However, some candidates ran out of material. Those who restricted their ideas to education finished up by saying rather little or the same thing twice. Sometimes the plan ran out half way through.

Question 2

A friend comes to stay with you. Describe places you would like her/him to see and people you would want her/him to meet.

Good candidates were those who wrote with the reader in mind. At their best they wrote effectively descriptive accounts of places and added reasons why the friend would enjoy them. There were also some good cameos of friends, but sometimes the candidate was sidetracked into writing about other special people at length, instead of thinking of the friend who was to visit. Good scripts were lively and genuine.

Some scripts were dull and ordinary, lacking description and (as was apparent in the best writing) a sense of pride in the home town or area. The writing was more like a list of people and places, often mixed up for no good purpose. Candidates should remember that they have a duty to the reader who, in this case, needed partly to be informed, but mostly to be entertained.

Question 3

Write a story entitled 'The Picture'.

This was the most popular question and it produced some of the most entertaining and lively writing. Many of the stories were akin to Wilde's famous story. Eyes moved and havoc and mayhem in the house resulted. Some pictures brought bad luck and had to be destroyed (though they often returned like a virus in a computer). Pictures came alive and took you back to talk to distant relatives. Pictures were stolen, there were pictures that had not to be looked at but turned out to be symbolically blank.

Here there was more thought for the entertainment of the reader. Pictures were well described and the thought and feelings of the characters were sometimes gripping. As usual, there was some poor writing, mainly because candidates were preoccupied with including too many events at the expense of atmosphere, tension and everyday description.

Question 4

'Honest people never win.' What are your views?

This task was a challenging one because of the abstract argument that was needed. This does not mean it was unfair since there were some excellent answers. Nor was it difficult to create a structure, for example: We live in a dishonest society. People cheat in tests (developed and exemplified); more importantly, people cheat in relationships (developed at a little greater length); criminals cheat on society and politicians are dishonest globally and to their people. We can see that they all win in a manner of speaking. Does that mean we have to join them? What do we 'win' by being honest in terms of our peace of mind and the trust that others place in us?... There was plenty to write about, and it was open to candidates to add personal anecdote and reference to support their arguments. Indeed one might argue that all candidates for this examination should be able to do this sort of exercise as a matter of course.

However, many scripts were not good. There was little structure, but a good deal of confusion caused by candidates who over reached themselves in terms of language and engaging in abstract thought. They never escaped the word 'honesty' which they repeated time and time again. Not did they realise that the more complex the topic, the more important it is to use comparatively simple language wherever possible. These candidates generally ran out of anything new to say after a side or a side and a third.

Question 5

'If the darkening sky...' Write in any way you choose in response to these lines of poetry.

This quotation was about speaking without thinking. Here was a chance for a very dramatic story about the effect that thoughtless words have on a relationship, in this case between lovers, partners or parents and children. It was not often attempted, which was a pity since it was not hard to do successfully. Some candidates enhanced their writing by developing the idea of the darkening sky (e.g. as a storm) or making it into a symbol.

Occasionally, candidates wrote as if this was an exercise in literary criticism. Examiners were happy to accept the approach, but it is not recommended. There is little to say in relation to this very short extract, and candidates invariably ran out of material.

Question 6

Describe a time when you were frightened by the place you were in.

Again, the success of answers to this question depended on the ability of the candidate to write with the reader in mind. Much of the writing was very effective, genuine and based on something frighteningly real. There were nightmares, places where criminals lurked, rooms in houses and forests. These were accompanied by the feelings of fear, occasionally quite disturbing. In most cases this question touched the imagination, but in some it may have touched a nerve.

Question 7

Write a story in which food plays an important part.

This question was not commonly done. This was, again, a shame, since, as one Examiner put it, 'Food is a powerful political issue'. Answers were about obesity, bulimia, starvation in many countries in the world, and even school canteens. There were some very effective descriptions of colour, smell and memories. Despite its rarity, Examiners did not note any reasons why candidates responded poorly to the topic.

Question 8

Some people think that mobile phones should never have been invented; others could not exist without them. What do you think?

This question was answered much better than the one about honesty. It was after all, a real 'teenage topic' and had the additional interest of allowing candidates to discuss cell phones as fashion statements and even entertainment and information centres, all in miniature. There was also the issue of anti-social behaviour. There were many first-hand ideas available.

By and large it was answered well. Candidates mainly took both sides of the argument and developed some of their ideas at length. Some surprisingly came out against mobile phones on the grounds that one could never be left in peace and that people spent all their time text messaging and were obsessed by the machines.

Poor answers were those that were not well structured and consisted of numbers of short snippets of argument. In this type of writing it was essential that the candidate demonstrated the ability to extend an idea and to sequence thoughts and sentences.

Question 9

Use the photograph opposite as an idea for a story.

The responses to the picture were very varied and original. Most were literal, but there were rare examples of symbolic use, such as climbing through the challenges of life. Some of the best writing was about the challenge of climbing up a rope, perhaps for one's life, or simply in the school gym. Such attention to detail and feelings produced good writing. Some of the answers were based on the mountaineering passage that was set in the reading and directed writing paper the day before. This picture was an effective stimulus probably because it was not, as has often been the case previously, character led.

Less good answers were those that relied too much on events and not enough on description and on thoughts and feelings.

Final comments

It has been the custom to recommend which of the questions are particularly suitable for classroom use. On this occasion, the Examiners felt that all could be used, but particularly in conjunction with thinking about a sense of audience. It is recommended that candidates should think about how you make a story catch the attention of a reader, what sort of features a good description should have, how in general you entertain readers, and how you use a discursive topic more to persuade than to inform.

The Examiners also recommended that more emphasis should be placed on different types of structure for stories, description and discursive writing.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June examination session 2005 onwards. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

Paper 0500/04

Continuous Writing (Coursework)

General comments

Nearly five thousand candidates submitted folders for this component. They reflected a great variety of concerns, interests, and views on local matters and issues of world-wide significance. Many Centres were clearly in the business of developing each individual as a writer, which is what this component is about.

Generally, candidates fulfilled the requirements of the syllabus, which are, through the three pieces of work, to provide a real variety of writing in different genres and styles. Occasionally, candidates provided two essays as pieces one and three. Centres are reminded that this makes assessment very difficult, since there are effectively only two pieces in the folder; where the third piece is the same or even similar to another, there is nothing new to set against the criteria. Where the error was made, Moderators did not normally penalise the candidate, but commented on the problem in the report to the Centre. It is therefore up to the Centre to carry out a careful check when internal moderation takes place. Individual teachers should supervise each candidate's choices of topic when the final folders are compiled.

The Moderators frequently made minor adjustments to bring a Centre's sample into line with the CIE standard. This was often only over part of the range of marks in a sample and was typically limited to plus or minus one or two marks. This is a normal procedure and does not reflect on the professionalism of teachers. Some Centres whose marks were unchanged in 2003 may have found that an adjustment was made this year. This again is quite normal for a variety of reasons.

The Moderators were grateful to Centres for their hard work during internal moderation. Departments made a number of adjustments to the marking of individual teachers in order to bring them into line with Centre standards. In some cases the adjustment was either too small or, in more rarely, too great. However, no Moderator reported difficulties in completing their work because teachers were applying different standards. The internal moderation process can be made easier by organising standardisation sessions earlier in the course.

Comments on specific aspects of the work

Task setting

Probably the safest and most effective combination of tasks was that of an argumentative piece, a story and some writing based on or arising from media.

Arguments were best when they were closely linked to the candidate's own concerns and interests. Where candidates tried to write on a topic which did not really concern them, the result was often dry and derivative. For example, where a whole class had written about the same topic, it was patently obvious that they had all used the same stimulus material, and often the only way to differentiate between them was the fluency with which they had managed the material.

More candidates tried writing the argument in the form of a speech, and there were some very good examples. Here it was important for the candidate in addressing an audience, to avoid general comment that did not develop argument and that was not really relevant to the topic. The difference between this and an essay was, of course, the use of rhetorical device rather than just filling the page with vacuous remarks. Moderators noticed the great improvement in this type of work and encourage Centres to teach the technique more widely.

Examples of successful pieces of work are as follows, but of course, it was not so much the topic that counted, but the execution of it.

- Artificial intelligence
- Formal letters and debate speeches on the conflict in Iraq
- An anti-school speech
- Benefits of studying locally (Ascension Island)
- The Maltese environment
- Illegal immigration in Malta

The point about all these topics was that the candidates had a real, personal interest in them and did not rely on 'research'. A later part of this report deals with the real dangers of the practice of downloading material from the internet.

There were some excellent stories, nearly all, one suspects, the result of reading and studying other short stories, for example, crime, supernatural, sci-fi, stories about relationships and stories about dangerous situations. These stories impressed the Moderators because they handled plot and atmosphere well and because they had a sense of climax and ending. These are things that do not happen naturally but need discussion and study. The really good stories had a sense of the importance of good, lively dialogue that fulfils a function.

Some excellent writing occurred under these titles:

- The surfer
- Escape from the Titanic
- An alternative ending to 'Of Mice and Men'
- An account of the birth of the candidate's own baby
- Jacob's Ladder; an account of the climbing of 700 steps
- The assassin
- Earthquake (real experience)
- A monologue by an executioner

Most of the monologues this year did not fall into the trap of incoherence that has been noted before. Like the words of the speeches, this sort of writing needs careful structure and a sense of purpose. What is different, and often refreshingly so, is the type of language and the linguistic structures that are used. Here again, there was evidence of good teaching before writing.

The third piece usually took the form of writing in a literary or media genre, literary criticism or the candidate's own poetry.

Moderators were pleased to read candidates' own poetry, some of which was of a high quality. The writing was much more suitable for folder work when it was accompanied by a rationale, another example of personal and original work. The Moderators also advise teachers to help candidates to choose what is to go in the folder, when the consistency of different poems is in doubt. Finally, the least good poetry was love poetry about the candidates' boy and girl friends, and some of the song lyrics were poor.

Some examples of successful third pieces were:

- An advertisement for ending child labour
- An informal diary of someone's work experience
- A leaflet about becoming a member of the school boarding house
- A Harry Potter book review
- The country Monkey (a story for children clearly written by an adult mind)
- Farmer Jones's speech from 'Animal Farm'

Some of the literary criticism was very dull and did not work well as part of the Language folder because it lacked a sense of personal response and zest, i.e. it did not produce good *Language* work.

Assessment

There were no serious issues to report. As usual, many Centres were reluctant to mark above 38 even where many of their candidates were in the top mark band. However, not all of these folders at 38 were of the same quality. Some were over-marked, the candidates having made too many errors for this high standard, or having written too simply in terms of language or sentence structures. Occasionally the tasks were not sufficiently challenging or complex. On the other hand there were candidates whose control of language was excellent but had been under-marked.

Many candidates clearly did not proofread their work and this was not always noted.

All teachers are reminded of the importance of noting candidate error and of commenting on the quality of each piece in relation to the criteria. There were still some Centres that did not give evidence of having read the work carefully. The Moderator was left wondering why particular marks had been given.

Plagiarism

Centres are reminded of the importance of checking fully and carefully that the work has been done honestly. Teachers should be vigilant about candidates who produce very erudite informative pieces but, in the same folder, stories that were two mark bands below in terms of linguistic ability. Candidates can receive no reward for extensive quotation from other people's work that had been downloaded and printed out.

This practice completely destroys the intention of coursework, which is to become a writer of some merit, expressing original and personal opinion.

The more teachers suspect that this has happened, the more they should supervise the work. For example, the discussion and planning of an assignment can be done in class and each candidate's intentions checked. Where there is any doubt about the candidate's ability to select material from an outside source and to paraphrase it, the teacher should insist on seeing original printouts. Finally, candidates should be taught how to make their work original and personal.

One example of a task that was clearly not personal was a history essay on Hitler. It was very unclear how the writing of this piece came about. It was also very dull.

By contrast, one candidate wrote on her Individual Candidate Record Card the following, which did not leave anything in doubt:

- "1 Euthanasia has become a heated topic in our society. I thought of giving my opinion regarding this issue.
- 2 Miss World is an annual event. This piece is my idea of what I think are the contestants' experiences.
- 3 Conflict between child and parent is common once in a while. This is an account of the feelings experienced, but never written down."

So the message to Centres is as follows: in developing your candidates as writers, remember the importance of personal opinion and reaction, and originality of thought.

Postscript: 2005

Centres are reminded to consult the syllabus booklet, since there are changes to this component in 2005. The main one concerns the third piece, in which candidates must analyse and evaluate a short written text, set by the Centre. The text must contain fact, arguments and/or opinions. The new Coursework Training Handbook gives a large number of examples of ways of tackling this. It is suggested that the text should be relatively short from any appropriate source. A copy must be sent to the Moderator; it can be a transcript of a broadcast.

The folder will be marked out of 40 for writing and 10 for reading, according to new criteria contained in the syllabus.

The other key change is that one of the pieces must be accompanied by an early draft.

Paper 0500/05
Speaking/Listening Option

General comments

Moderators remarked that the standard of performance was generally secure and, once again, sometimes impressive.

Administrative procedures were completed generally well, with most Centres helping to make the external moderation process as easy as possible. It is pleasing, therefore, to have to focus on only two areas that require further attention:

- The Moderators found that they had to complete a number of Amendment Forms because marks had been transcribed incorrectly; recording marks out of 100 is the most common error, but Moderators also saw totals out of 20 and 30. The final mark entered on the Mark Sheet *should be out of 10*. The method of arriving at the final mark is explained in the teacher's/Examiner's Notes booklet on page 12 and also on the reverse of the Summary Form. If Centres are using photocopied Summary Forms, it would be wise to copy both sides of the form.
- A few Centres are still conducting a 'warm-up' phase before the main test. Please note that this is not necessary; indeed, *Centres need record only the two parts of the test*. There is no need to record any instructions to candidates, or any periods of silence while candidates are considering the role play cards. When additional material is recorded, it makes the task of external moderation more cumbersome.

Comments on specific aspects of the oral**The Role Play**

As in previous sessions, a number of teachers handled the role plays with expertise, adopting realistic and authentic roles and allowing candidates every chance to respond appropriately and to extend the role-playing. It was apparent at these Centres that role playing, and in particular, strategies of response, had been practised.

There was again a variety of styles of role playing, from the very realistic and serious approach, to the quite informal and often casual approach. In all cases, it did not matter which style an Examiner or candidate adopted. The main aim of this section is to test the candidates' skills in fulfilling their roles convincingly.

The Conversation

Moderators are happy to report that this session again saw more examples of interesting conversations about topics and issues that candidates had clearly given a great deal of thought to. In these cases, evidence of planning and preparation was apparent, and the test served as a means by which candidate and Examiner could conduct a discussion.

There were fewer topics which were purely factual or anecdotal, and more which were 'open' (often of a social or political nature) stimulating debate and producing discussion. Many Examiners were happy to engage in lively discussion, *which should be the aim of this part of the Test*.

It follows, therefore, that candidates arriving at the test venue who have not prepared properly will, in most cases, struggle to satisfy the vigour of the assessment criteria.

Moderators are very happy to report that *in all cases* the conversations were conducted in a competent manner and candidates spoke easily and at length about their chosen topics. There were no speeches, and this is excellent news.

Assessment

Moderators again reported a very pleasing degree of accuracy in the application of the assessment criteria. In the majority of cases, there was no need to make any adjustment to the marks awarded.

Final comments

Moderators would like to encourage Centres to move the component forward by working more closely with candidates in selecting and developing appropriate topics for discussion, thus strengthening the second part of the test.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June examination session 2005 onwards. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

Paper 0500/06
Speaking/Listening Coursework

General comments

In the ideal portfolio of coursework, a Moderator would perhaps see a candidate completing three *different* tasks, each with a different audience in mind. It would be very pleasing to see that candidates have been involved in group discussions and pair-work, in addition to making individual presentations.

Moderators report that this is now being achieved by most Centres opting to enter candidates for this component.

Comments on specific aspects

Tasks

The tasks chosen by most Centres were suitable and varied, enabling candidates to demonstrate their language skills fully.

Some Centres, however, should avoid setting tasks which are similar and should adopt an approach which seeks to offer *three quite different tasks*.

Procedural obligations

Procedures were followed generally well. Tape quality was fine and sampling was accurately presented. Centres who offered precise and explanatory comments (written on the Candidate Record Cards), accompanying each task undertaken by each candidates, helped to make the process of external moderation very efficient. Moderators invite all Centres to provide any comments on candidate performance and/or explanations as to how a mark has been arrived at.

Assessment

Assessment was applied by most Centres with a good degree of accuracy.

Advice to Centres

A Moderator is seeking to fulfil two main duties while listening again to a Centre's coursework: initially to confirm the Centre's interpretation and application of the assessment criteria, but also to confirm that a variety of appropriate tasks have been completed.

For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres should submit *a recording of each candidate engaged in a discussion, a conversation, or a role play*. This might be with a teacher/Examiner or it might be with another candidate. (Larger Centres will, of course, send a representative sample).

It is *not useful* for the External Moderators to receive presentations or speeches as the only examples of oral coursework.