

FIRST LANGUAGE

Paper 0500/01 Reading Passage (Core Tier)

General comments

On the whole, candidates responded well to this paper. Most responded with interest and some enthusiasm to the situation presented in the reading passage, especially in their responses to **Question 2**. All questions appeared to have been understood clearly by a majority of the candidates and although at times their answers were inhibited by limitations of vocabulary, nearly all attempted all questions on the Paper and showed a good understanding of the main issues. Most candidates used their time well and there was very little evidence of haste and incomplete responses. Presentation was generally of a satisfactory to good standard although the handwriting of some candidates proved very difficult to read. Examiners commented that the problems caused by such scripts are not due to rushed or careless handwriting but more to a failure to form letters clearly, with the result that those reading the papers often had to guess at the intended meaning. In an examination which tests written English it is important that candidates' communication is as clear as possible. A significant number of candidates produced scripts which were on the C/D borderline; sadly, however, some of them lost what could have been vital marks when it was not possible to read key words in some of their answers. Centres are advised to give warning to their candidates about the importance of legibility throughout the whole script.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This question, which asked candidates to identify one word in the first sentence of the passage that showed that the narrator did not want to be heard, caused very few problems. Nearly all candidates correctly selected the word *softly*. There were some, however, who failed to score the available mark because they opted to write out several consecutive words lifted from the passage without making it clear to the examiner precisely which word was the chosen one. Responding precisely to the wording of the question is very important.
- (b) For this question, candidates needed to explain what was surprising about the narrator's state of mind in the first paragraph. It carried three marks and it was important that candidates indicated a clear understanding of all the implications involved in what the writer was saying. The narrator made it clear that he was expecting to find a box which would make him very rich. However, his state of mind was surprising because he was feeling unexcited at this prospect and was going about his task in a dispassionate and almost mechanical way. Most candidates achieved one or two marks but only a small number produced sufficiently detailed and clearly explained responses to gain the maximum three marks.
- (c) Part (c) required the identification of two words from the second paragraph which suggested that the window of the house was difficult to open. Most candidates successfully identified two of the following words: *stubbornly*; *raspingly*; *yielded*.

- (d) Here candidates were required to explain where the cash box was hidden and how the writer found it. This caused problems; some candidates were not sufficiently precise in the details they gave. A large number stated that the box was in the corner of the room and that the writer found it easily. The more successful realised that a good explanation required more detail than this and stated correctly that the box was in a hole in the floor under a loose board and that the narrator found it by passing his hand over the floor.
- (e) This question required candidates to give a detailed explanation of the change that the writer felt had come over the room in paragraph four and how this change affected his state of mind. A pleasing number of candidates explained with clarity that there was an indeterminate and not easily identifiable change in the light, the temperature and the air within the room and that the effect of this was to leave the narrator feeling frightened and/or bewildered. Those who failed to score full marks on this question tended either to overlook the requirement to explain the effect on the narrator or described only one of the elements which changed.
- (f) Part (f) asked for an explanation of the writer's use of the word *stretchings* to describe the spiders' webs in the room. There were two marks available, which was an indication that two points of explanation were required. Many candidates correctly explained that the word suggested the great length of the webs, but considerably fewer pointed out that the word also contained suggestions of their strength and resilience. Some candidates were limited by their range of vocabulary and could not find a suitable synonym for the word and fell back on saying that the webs were stretched out, which was an insufficient response.
- (g) This question, worth six marks, proved an effective discriminator, and allowed those candidates who had a good appreciation of the effects of language to score well. Candidates were required to choose and explain three details from lines 9 – 25 through which the writer suggests a sense of uneasiness and fear. Selecting appropriate details did not cause much difficulty and many candidates achieved three marks by doing this. However, explanation of the implications of these details which created a feeling of uneasiness proved more difficult. Again, it should be emphasised that it is important that candidates chose three distinct examples. Although it was acceptable to select phrases such as *I made my way quickly to the hall* and *I had a sudden urge to have done with my task* to illustrate the writer's uneasiness, they both indicate his desire to get things over and done with quickly and, consequently, could be awarded only one mark for explanation.
- (h) This question asked for an explanation of the phrase *my senses were already disarranged*. Most candidates tried with varying degrees of success to explain 'disarranged' but only a few succeeded in relating this explanation to the writer's reference to 'senses'.
- (i) Similarly, this question asked for an explanation of *with a mild but unwavering interest* and proved to be challenging. Only a very few candidates explained successfully that the man's interest in the narrator was both passive and constantly focused.
- (j) The summary of what the passage said about the appearance of both the outside and the inside of the house was generally well done, with many clearly focused answers scoring full marks. The required details were any seven from the following:
- 1 (Iron) gate
 - 2 Weed-tufted, (gravel) drive
 - 3 Derelict flower bed
 - 4 Closed door
 - 5 Deep porch
 - 6 Coated with dust
 - 7 Deep window ledge
 - 8 (High), dirty windows in room
 - 9 Dusty, smelly, shadowy room
 - 10 Spiders' webs
 - 11 Fireplace

- 12 Bare floorboards
- 13 No/not much furniture

Question 2

Imagine that you are the man who is sitting watching from the corner of the room. Write your story.

In your story:

- *Explain why you are there.*
- *Describe what you have seen and heard.*
- *Explain what happens after the man searching for the box sees you.*

You should base your ideas on what you have read in the passage, but do not copy from it.

This question proved to be a good stimulus for candidates to display their writing skills. The best responses made good use of the bullet points and used the description of the house given in the passage as a basis for their writing. They also produced original, inventive and convincing explanations of why the character was sitting in the chair which effectively sustained the implications of the original narrative. Candidates at this level had no problems with recounting details from a different perspective and appeared to welcome the challenges set by this requirement. Many responses were a pleasure to read not just because of their content but also because of the candidates' competence in using English accurately and with a sense of style.

Less successful responses produced stories which had only a tenuous link with the events hinted at in the original and tended to subside into gangster shoot-outs which lacked conviction. The least successful did little more than re-tell the story, often from the narrator's perspective, without adding any original details.

There was much competent and soundly-expressed writing in which candidates consciously strove to produce a range of sentence types and vocabulary. Others were less secure in their expression with particular difficulties in separating sentences correctly and in punctuating direct speech. Spelling was variable; the best candidates used correctly spelt, sophisticated vocabulary, while the less successful had problems with consistent spelling of everyday words. However, there were very few scripts which made little or no sense. The improvement in candidates' writing skills which has been remarked upon in previous reports seems to have been sustained.

In conclusion, centres and candidates can be congratulated on the way in which they prepared for and performed in this examination. There were a pleasing number of very good responses and a large number which were almost very good. The difference lay mainly in the amount of detail and the precision of focus included in responses to the questions on the reading material.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/02

Reading and Directed Writing (Extended)

General comments

This paper, with its passages describing the Patagonian desert, proved to be challenging for some candidates. **Question 1** was generally well done. **Question 2** was answered more successfully than last year, but more work still has to be done to prepare candidates for explaining why writers use particular words. The answers to **Question 3** were not always presented as summaries, and it was clear that some candidates had not practised this exercise adequately.

Some candidates misinterpreted **Question 3** and summarised part of the passage that was not intended. This problem was immediately apparent to Examiners, and additional points were added to the mark scheme before marking began. No candidates were unfairly penalised because of this.

There were many examples of excellent scripts that were awarded more than 40 marks out of 50. At least one candidate scored full marks. However, many candidates who were awarded marks in the twenties and low thirties would have done better if they had not exhibited one or more of the following:

1: Copying/lifting: Successive reports have made it clear that candidates who lift whole phrases and sentences from the passages set for study will gain few marks. The reason for this is that copying gives no evidence of understanding. This includes the use of quotations in, for example, the summary. The only place where words and phrases must be quoted is in **Question 2**. There were, however, many examples of widespread copying in both **Question 1** and **Question 3**, and sometimes this was a feature of a whole centre's work. Teachers are asked to make this point abundantly clear to candidates and to explain why it is important.

2: Length of answers: Apart from the summary, no penalty was applied to overlong answers. The guidance given in **Question 1** is to help candidates understand roughly how much they have to write. There is much to do in this Paper and candidates have to regulate their time. Some candidates wrote at great length in answer to **Question 1** and were already at the limit of their time allowance. **Question 2** was allocated half the marks of each of the other two questions, and a quality answer could easily have been written on one side, not three sides, as some candidates thought. The result of writing overlong answers was that candidates did not give themselves time to read Passage B methodically enough to write a proper summary. Candidates who wrote at great length generally sacrificed quality for quantity. Examiners were looking for well thought out answers written with perception and attention to detail.

3: Language: Centres are reminded that this is a First Language examination and candidates are expected to have sufficient command of vocabulary both to understand what they read and to express themselves with some exactness. Many candidates clearly had difficulty. Examples from the first passage included the description in paragraph two, which was often copied wholesale, the word 'sea' in the same paragraph, which was not understood figuratively, and 'jangly' (which was understood as 'decorative'). 'Tormented' was nearly always copied, so that candidates could avoid considering its use. The expression 'When the brick houses gave out' was commonly misinterpreted as 'fell down'. Of course, candidates were not penalised for getting a particular word or expression wrong, but a good number gave the general impression that they did not have a sufficiently wide vocabulary to appreciate the detail of the passage, and that affected the marks.

It was also noted that while the general standard of presentation and care was good, a number of candidates wrote very untidily.

Most candidates completed the paper, but it was obvious that some had not given themselves time to read the second passage other than superficially or to consider which points they should include in their summary. One or two candidates wrote 'time ran out', which was helpful to Examiners.

Comments on specific questions**Part 1**

Question 1: Imagine you are the writer of Passage A. Write a diary entry in which you explore your thoughts and feelings about the trip so far. You will be sending your diary entry to your friends and family. In your entry include the impact of the landscape and your reactions to people and places.

Chatwyn tells the story of his travels without any explicit reactions or feelings. There are hints, and the good candidates picked these up from the wording of the passage. Hence the question invited candidates to put in what Chatwyn had left out. Many candidates did not consider the wording of the question, which was quite clearly to 'explore', that is to go further than merely state thoughts and feelings. At no point did the question suggest that retelling the story of what happened in the passage was adequate.

- The weakest candidates copied out as much of the passage as they could in the time. These candidates did not score any points for reading.
- Slightly better candidates wrote their own versions of the story with occasional lifting. They scored under half marks.
- Average candidates wrote mostly narrative in their own words and added expressions such as 'I was amazed', 'I was shocked' or even 'it impacted me'. None of these reactions were developed, however. They scored 7 or 8 marks out of 15 for reading.
- Above average candidates worked fairly exhaustively through the passage but started to comment on details. For example, they developed their reactions to the man seen walking out of the village with his hat over his eyes or what the children did to keep themselves amused. These candidates were able to score between 9 and 11 marks.
- The best candidates selected parts of the text and commented on them, starting from their thoughts and feelings and using details to support their creative thinking. For example, they developed their thoughts about the hotel, their contrasting reactions to the different landscapes mentioned in the passage, and their feelings about the poverty of the village. The secret of a good answer was not to try to mention everything, but to select and to write the diary entry in a different manner and from a different perspective to the original.

Teachers should also remind candidates of the following:

- **Question 1** always requires answers that use the content of the passage but present it in another form. Candidates need to think creatively around ideas and details of the original.
- Candidates should not add material of their own unless it clearly helps to interpret the original. In this case, some candidates drifted into creative writing, for example, to write a character sketch of the woman who showed Chatwyn to his room. This was not suggested in the original and it was difficult to see what this added to one's understanding of the passage.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the hotel in Bahia Blanca and the housing of the village, in paragraphs 1 and 4, and (b) the woman and her son in paragraph 3. By referring closely to the language used by the writer, explain how he makes these descriptions effective.

The answers to this question were better than those of the previous year. For (a), the words describing the hotel were well explained, those describing the housing a little less so. Part (b) was not generally answered well. Some answers were far too long and contained general comment that obscured the worthwhile explanations of specific words and phrases.

Candidates needed to comment on actual words and phrases rather than on the language as a whole. The following are examples of generalised comments that did not score marks:

- 'The writer uses lots of adjectives that make the descriptions more interesting.'
- 'Most of the words are very short and make you feel as if you are actually there.'

Some candidates identified relevant words and phrases but went no further and scored a maximum of 3 out of 10 marks. Some candidates gave the meaning of the words they chose or identified linguistic devices (such as alliteration) without explaining why the writer used them. These candidates could score up to six out of ten marks. The best candidates explained what the use of the word made them imagine or think as they read them. They did not have to think especially deeply to score high marks.

The following examples give further exemplification:

Example 1

- The earrings were 'jangly' = identification (potentially up to 3 marks if typical of the whole answer)
- This means that they made a noise = meaning (potentially up to 6 marks)
- When I read the word 'jangly' I think of large pieces of metal making a hard noise as they hit together = effect (up to 10 marks)

Example 2

- The dwellings were 'shacks' and that they were 'patched out of packing cases, sheet plastic and sacking' = identification (potentially up to 3 marks)
- This means that the shacks were made of little more than waste materials = meaning (potentially up to 6 marks)
- This description indicates the extreme poverty of the Indians. 'Shacks' suggests a shanty town. What follows shows that the dwellings were flimsy, the walls cardboard, the windows plastic sheets and the only comfort the sacking = effect (potentially up to 10 marks)

The following specimen answer provides more than is necessary for 10 marks.

(a) Chatwyn uses brief description to express the oddity of this hotel. He describes the bar-room as 'green and brightly lit and full of men playing cards', which gives an impression of liveliness. 'Green' suggests bright green to me; it contrasts with the aggressive purple of Chatwyn's bedroom. He says that this is 'airless' an exaggeration that suggests that he must have felt he was going to suffocate.

Chatwyn's simple use of colour continues in his account of the village. Here the stovepipes of the brick houses are 'black', an unappealing, drab colour, and the electric wires between the houses a 'tangle'. This makes me think that the place is not well maintained and the appearance is messy. Much worse are the 'shacks'. Shacks constitute a shanty town and the simple materials, 'packing cases, sheet plastic and sacking' shock me into imagining the terrible conditions that these poverty stricken Indians must live in.

(b) Into this drab place steps the woman with the 'jangly' earrings. When you say this word it sounds like the noise of metal clanking together, so we hear her. We also smell her because 'she chewed garlic'. Above all we see her because her earrings are 'gold' and she wears a 'hard, white hat' and because she does not get off the bus – she 'manoeuvres' herself. This word suggests clumsiness and difficulty, so much so that the boy is embarrassed or afraid for his mother and has a 'look of abstract horror'. Chatwyn uses the word 'bulk' to describe her weight, an ill-mannered word which we would not use if we had any sympathy for this woman.

This answer explains some dozen words and phrases from the passage and yet it took up only one side of average handwriting. Clearly, no candidate should have written at great length for only 10 marks; answers were marked for quality of thought and perception, not for quantity. If the explanations were truly of effects, candidates needed only to explain around four examples from the first part and three from the second. Finally, candidates did not often use the right sort of vocabulary to introduce effects. Expressions such as 'gives the impression', 'suggests', and 'makes me think/imagine', where used, put candidates in the right direction for a good answer.

Question 3: Summarise the features of the desert areas beyond the village areas and the cultivated plantations described in (a) Passage A and (b) Passage B.

While there were some excellent summaries that scored full marks, some candidates continued to give evidence that their knowledge of writing summaries was limited.

Common faults were:

- Writing a commentary rather than a factual summary. This is writing to inform, not writing to comment. The answer should consist only of relevant facts.
- Copying out whole phrases and sentences from the original.
- Writing extended introductions and conclusions. Ideally the answer should start with a sentence which draws on the wording of the question.
- Writing more than a page of average handwriting. Candidates were not penalised unless their summaries were clearly too long. Those who wrote two or occasionally three sides were awarded no marks for aspects of writing.
- Writing long explanations, for example, from the second passage, about the wind, where it was only necessary to say that it was violent.
- Using long quotations as if the paper were a literature paper.
- Comparing the two passages. The passages are meant to be treated separately as (a) and (b). Candidates who compared them scored comparatively poorly because there few comparisons to be made.

Centres will see from this list that the summary has to be prepared for and taught carefully.

In addition, candidates did not always read the second passage thoroughly enough to find a sufficient number of relevant points.

The following specimen answer demonstrates the technique of answering a summary question. It goes far beyond what was necessary to score full marks.

In the first passage, Chatwyn describes the fast-moving silver clouds and the colourless line between land and sky. Everywhere there are grey-green thorny plants growing on terraces of land. There are also salt pans that create white dust. Dead grass can be seen and heard as the wind whistles through it. The more you go into the desert, the less life there is, but near the village a river flows and there are plantations. There are brilliant white cliffs and the water carries melted snow from the mountains.

In the second passage the writer stresses the remoteness of the land with its huge expanse of sky and its flat steppe lands. Here among the mountains, the wind is wild, making trees grow flat and stripping rocks of all vegetation. The land is biscuit coloured and the soil no more than dust. No proper roads exist, only trails with potholes in them. There are grasses and bushes, but little grows since the rain never reaches the ground because of the heat. You might see a sheep, but the area is largely unpopulated.

This example occupied less than a side of average handwriting and it contains twenty six points from the mark scheme based on a thorough reading of both passages. Only fifteen points were required for full marks for reading. This summary makes a conscious attempt to use 'own words' where possible and it is consistently focused on the question; it is exceedingly concise. There are no unnecessarily long explanations and no introduction or ending. The summary consists of facts from the passages and there is no commentary. Facts have been reordered to create a coherent piece of writing and, where possible, points have been grouped together for clarity. This last feature is common in good summaries, but Examiners do not expect candidates to include it at this level.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/03

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

There was a wide range of quality in the answers to this paper. Candidates whose English was assured had no difficulty in maintaining a consistent standard. There were, however, examples of scripts where candidates had worked hard to complete **Question 1** but had lost concentration in the composition section. This was most obvious from the accuracy of the scripts. Candidates whose ability to form sentences was limited often had a weakness in the use of full stops. Many candidates started their composition well, giving evidence of a range of vocabulary and sequencing their sentences in well-constructed paragraphs. After a while, however, there was then a marked reduction in quality. This was sometimes due to the lack of a strong plan and lack of concentration.

Candidates did not always use paragraphs in either of the questions. Another common fault was to put a paragraph at the beginning and the end and everything else in a single paragraph in the middle.

Some candidates wrote at considerable length and there were rare occasions when they were able to sustain the quality of the writing to the end. However, the circumstances of **Question 1** where candidates were addressing a group of teachers did not require length. Writing at length also led to some rambling and shapeless stories. Candidates in a hurry often wrote untidily, and the quality of their sentence structure was affected.

There was no particular evidence that candidates had run out of time.

Stylistically the most obvious failings were structuring sentences and using a wide range of vocabulary. Some candidates were commendably accurate, but there were examples of bad spelling and punctuation. There were missing full stops and even more missing commas. Tense was a problem for some candidates, both in drifting between past and present and in making errors in the sequence of tenses. There were only a few examples of text language, most commonly 'u'. Nearly all candidates showed ability to write formally in their answers to **Question 1**.

Comments on specific questions

Section One: Directed Writing

Question 1: Your teachers are organising a celebration at your school and have suggested three possible types of celebration. Your classmates have selected one of these as their favourite (*you may choose which option this is*) and ask you to represent them at a meeting with the teachers. Write what you would say to the teachers to persuade them that the students' choice would be the most successful celebration.

Candidates were given a page of written material that contained the options and various comments about the problems encountered in previous years and what students felt was needed. Candidates were required to use this material to evaluate the potential success of their chosen option and to show how the problems of previous years would be overcome. There were ten marks available for using this reading material, which included nine identifiable points.

Candidates who wrote a coherent presentation and integrated most of the points, even briefly, scored high marks out of ten. Alternatively, some candidates took a smaller number of points and developed them into convincing arguments. Many candidates were able to explain matters of cost and arranging the right date, but some also explained the democratic process whereby the decision was taken and how the reputation of the school was to be protected. Strong candidates included references to the part their 'beloved' teachers could play (such as sitting out and chatting while all the young ones danced the night away).

It was not advisable to spend most of the answer explaining how money might be raised for the 'prom' or indeed to rehearse all the details apart from venue, menu and music, which were included in the material. This tended to drift away from the passage and to take up valuable time when other aspects needed to be argued.

Weaker answers included very little of the material or made brief reference in a very mechanical way. Repeating Sophie's, Tomas' and Ms Chand's words from the printed material did not usually work since it was merely a repetition and their arguments were rarely developed. Examiners were looking for an evaluation of points made in the material and not just repetition.

There were fifteen marks for writing. Centres should remember that in awarding this mark, Examiners did not just look for technical accuracy and a fluent style. Structure was also important. An introduction was nearly always followed by an announcement of which option had been chosen. A case for its success could then be put forward, followed by a demonstration that problems could be overcome. The presentation could then end with an assurance that the teachers' support would not come amiss. It is worth pointing out that this structure was given to candidates in the wording of the question.

Given that this was a spoken presentation, a clear structure, without rambling or undue repetition, was essential, otherwise teachers and other listeners would not have been able to follow. There were some scripts that were both structurally and linguistically clear and these would have been fit for purpose. One that was given the full mark for writing lasted just over a side and a half; teachers were judged to be busy people who had to be persuaded quickly and using the right sort of language.

A sense of audience was also important. Most candidates satisfied themselves and the Examiners by writing in a suitably formal, well-mannered register. Some came to life at the end and issued an impassioned plea for support (one candidate ill-advisedly tried a threat). Very few took the opportunity of using the first paragraph to make their audience take note, and addresses to the teachers were very rare in the middle of the presentation.

Candidates should always bear in mind the importance of structure and a sense of audience in an exercise such as this.

Section 2: Composition

Centres are reminded that two marks were given for this exercise, one for content and structure and one for style and accuracy. A candidate scoring high marks for content and structure did not necessarily score the equivalent mark for style and accuracy.

Question 2(a): 'Advertising aimed at children and young teenagers under 16 should be banned.' What do you think?

Candidates attempting this question had some good ideas and generally made some attempt to develop them. However, a weakness was that the range of ideas was frequently limited. A common problem was that the first side consisted of two good paragraphs but that the material ran out thereafter. A symptom of this was the appearance of one-sentence paragraphs that did not add to the argument. There were, of course, arguments on both sides of the issue and, from the point of view of structure, candidates who tackled both sides were at a slight advantage. They could introduce the topic as a controversy, write two paragraphs *for* and two *against* and finally offer their own views.

Question 2(b): Competitive sports should be a compulsory part of the school curriculum because they teach lessons about life which all children need to learn.' What do you think?

Candidates often missed the word 'compulsory', which was not important except that it added bite to the argument. Clearly compulsory sports were a good deal less liberal than a relaxed attitude towards exercise. One or two candidates also missed 'competitive' and wrote about sport in general, lacking precision in their argument. However, this topic was more successfully completed than **2(a)**. There was a much wider selection of points and many of them were well developed. Candidates who looked at both sides of the issue were sometimes stronger (both in quality and in length) in one than the other. It was important to balance the two sides of the argument.

Question 3(a): 'The Reunion.' Describe a moment when two people meet each other after a long time apart.

Not all candidates remembered that descriptions are not narratives, and so wrote a preamble about the past, or how a person was travelling to the reunion. Very few candidates failed to write descriptively when it came to the meeting, but the Examiners reminded everybody to read the question carefully. This one asked for 'a moment'. One candidate answered the question well by being a bystander in a café and observing two people meeting. She was able to see but not hear the encounter. This was a very mature answer, but then so were most of these descriptions, which were very enjoyable to read.

Question 3(b): 'My favourite time of day.' Describe what you see and/or hear and/or feel that makes you enjoy this time the most.

Candidates attempted this topic quite well and used a range of attractive and redolent language. Most of the times were in the late evening or at daybreak. One or two were obviously real. Some candidates did better because they felt strongly about their chosen time and were at no point simply going through the motions. One candidate wrote about the early afternoon when he returned home from school and had a few hours before he needed to start his homework. Another wrote imaginatively about being awake in the middle of the night when everyone else was asleep. Both these had plenty of imagination based on reality.

Question 4(a): 'The Short Cut.' You are very late and you need to get home quickly. Up ahead is a short cut, but you have been warned not to use it. If you do not get home soon there will be serious trouble... Write the story about what happens next.

This was the most popular option. Some of the stories were very childish and included encounters with strange beasts and terrible criminals. Sometimes terrible events followed each other in such quick succession that the reader could not be convinced that they were true. There were witches and hunchbacks and Dad dressed up as a joke. Mature stories built up the atmosphere and the tension with a series of clever devices and then offered a climax that was carefully presented. The events were striking but always believable because they were not exaggerated. Sometimes the fear was all in the head and the climax one of the narrator's making. Few started at the beginning of the short cut as the rubric directed, and some candidates spent so much time with their introductions that the writing was almost over before they reached the short cut. Again, this was a matter of reading the question carefully and following the wording. Some candidates wrote in an original and interesting voice both in the first and third person.

Question 4(b): Write a story in which missing a chance or missing an opportunity is central to the plot.

This was less popular than **4(a)** but it was generally well done. The most usual answer was based on the chance of a relationship that never happened. One moving story was about a reunion between two people who, years before, were meant to be in love but who had drifted apart. This was the story of a chance meeting years afterwards which did not work. Another answer, which consisted of at least a dozen reasons for being late for an interview, was not convincing. Again, it was important that the plot showed some maturity.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04

Continuous Writing (Coursework)

General comments

Moderators wish to congratulate Centres on their excellent portfolios. The assignments were appropriate and generally well chosen. Assessments were mostly accurate and internal moderation was carried out effectively. Presentation of work was mostly of a high standard.

The best Centres were those which understood that the primary benefit of coursework is to allow candidates to develop as writers. Hence it was essential that they wrote in a variety of styles and from personal points of view. The third assignment specifically encouraged them to engage with opinions from a reading passage, giving their own opinions and developing their skills in building arguments. Their stories came from their own imagination, not only 'making things up' but using writing to explore understanding of their own environment.

The major weakness in portfolios from some Centres lay in the interpretation of the first assignment. This was often in the form of an American research essay where candidates sought information from a number of websites about topics that were not immediately close to their own experience. Some candidates were able to make such essays their own, but generally this work was not colourful and, on several occasions, Moderators suspected that it may not have been original.

Drafts: Moderators would like to see some progress in good practice concerning drafts. Candidates should follow the advice of their teachers in revising, editing and correcting early drafts. The most important of these is to revise. For example, some sections of the writing may be too long, the ending of an assignment may benefit from rewriting, or a story may take too long to get to the point. Editing can improve vocabulary, strike out unnecessary words and build up sentence structures. Moderators were disappointed that there were not more teacher comments on early drafts or indications by the candidate where changes were to be made. Moderators also noted the occasional draft that had been corrected by the teacher. This is not permitted, although general comments such as 'check for full stops' could be written at the end of the draft. The point of the re-drafting is to encourage the idea of work in progress, so that candidates' writing will improve further.

Assessment: This showed an improvement this year - there were fewer Centres that bunched their marks together, especially at the top end of the scale. Moderators normally adjust marks for linguistic reasons, especially for range of vocabulary and quality of sentence structure. This year it was easier to moderate since Centres had often used a more realistic range of marks. In fact, the marks at the bottom of the range were occasionally raised due to evidence of a range of vocabulary. This was a strength in most Centres. Sentence structures remained a comparative weakness - some candidates gave no evidence of being able to write other than in simple sentences.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

In order to achieve variety of writing types it is important that Assignment 1 is different from Assignment 3. The third piece was better where the writing was to persuade, argue or comment. To achieve variety, the first piece was writing to inform, analyse or review.

The best writing was about subjects that mattered to the candidates or were within their experience. There was an informative/descriptive account of a Mauritian wedding, and several candidates in one Centre wrote good pieces reviewing the Rainforest Music Festival. One centre chose local issues such as the development of the Auckland waterfront. School topics included introductory leaflets to the school for prospective students, a letter to the Principal about changes to the school day, another about school fees

and a piece about boarding education. Some topics that arose out of candidates' special interests were 'Metal v Plastic', 'Sliding on Snow' and 'Fly-fishing'. These three were particularly interesting and attractive to read. There was some good, original writing comparing a film with its original book, and an excellent piece on Harry Potter. A piece entitled 'If I could live in another country' was successful, and perhaps the oddest topic of all was 'Coconuts' revealing the myriad of uses to which they could be put.

However, Moderators encountered a number of essays which were neither personal nor original in thought or content. Topics about rock music did not generally produce good writing. There were also essays about pollution, euthanasia, capital punishment, smoking, and cloning, most of them complete with statistics and some of them not very inspirational. Some essays were accompanied by three or four website addresses, which may indicate that this exercise was closer to being a reading than a writing assignment.

Assignment 2

There were some excellent stories. One Centre experimented by including extracts of a different genre of writing to structure their stories, for example, a letter or an entry from a diary. One candidate managed to include several different extracts in her intriguing story. Other Centres had clearly studied stories to understand how they built up tension and created atmosphere and how they led to a convincing climax.

Titles for stories included 'The Darkness Within', 'Thunder Tiger' (about building a car), 'You're late!', 'The Ghostly Bellringer', 'A Hole in Time', 'Looks that Speak' and 'Thanatophobia'.

There was a good deal of excellent personal writing as well. This was generally autobiographical and was successfully completed under such titles as 'A childhood memory', 'Time of my life', or 'A day to remember'. It was clear that the teacher had enthused the class and taught them some useful techniques of this type of writing. Centres are advised to think carefully about setting 'A life in the day of...' since the style and structure of original articles does not always provide sufficient challenge for the best candidates.

As usual there were playscripts, poems, diaries and letters. The letter to a missing father was very moving and the dog's speech amusing. Some of the poems, which were submitted with commentaries, were good, but others were not really poems at all. In general, poems about boy and girl friends were not very successful.

Assignment 3

Some teachers allowed candidates to choose their own articles and others chose one article for the whole group. Where one article was used it did not affect the originality of the responses except where it had been excessively 'taught'. Where candidates chose their own articles, some were more appropriate than others.

Some articles were inappropriate for the following reasons:

- They were too long and candidates could not find their way through them. One side of newspaper size print was sufficient, with a maximum of two sides including graphics or large headlines.
- There was no argument in them, so candidates were tempted to summarise the information rather than engage with opinions.
- They came from the Internet, were informative, and had little real structure.
- They were newspaper stories, quite short, and of little substance.

A good article proved to be one that was controversial, for example, an article supporting experiments on animals or arguing that it was right to exclude a girl from school because she insisted on wearing a nose stud. In such cases, it was easy for a candidate to isolate parts of the article (by highlighting) that could be used in a reply. Candidates were then able to put a case against what they had read, and produce personal writing.

An article that the candidates agreed with was equally valid. For example, articles on the use of steroids and on ethical tourism allowed candidates to refer to the original and then develop the arguments for themselves. An article on Hollywood's 'African' films excited a good deal of interest.

Good tasks were another article, a speech or, better still, a letter. This could be written to the writer of the original, which meant that it was less likely that the candidate would just repeat the writer's points, the editor of the newspaper, or a character named in the article.

The mark out of ten awarded for reading was often too high. Nonetheless, teachers were right to give high marks to candidates who used ideas and arguments from the original throughout their responses. Their responses demonstrated understanding in the way their ideas were developed.

The greater extent to which candidates repeated the content of the article, the lower the mark. Some candidates wrongly summarised the article and others quoted it but with little comment. Candidates who used the article as a stimulus and who did not relate their own ideas to those in the original gained few or no marks.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05 Speaking/Listening Option

General comments

Moderators report that the new tests are now well established, with the majority of Examiners managing the new format competently and with a good deal of confidence.

Administrative requirements have been adhered to remarkably well – Moderators have no issues to raise relating to procedural matters.

Comments on specific aspects of the Test

Part 1 – The Individual Task

Moderators reported that the topics chosen still tend to be of two main types:

- 1) The personal, perhaps anecdotal or autobiographical piece, and
- 2) The informative, fact-based presentation.

Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches, monologues, dramatic performances and role-play of media/news/documentary reports, for example, are uncommon. There are, however, an increasing number of presentations of a literary nature.

Some examples of topics chosen this time: *Skinny* is the new beautiful, Japanese animation, Fairies and goblins, Superstition, The cell phone generation, Humans – a species apart, Architecture and nature, E-bay, Colombian coffee, The Harry Potter films, The Cold War, Judo, Stalin, Hockey in Argentina, Volcanoes, Elvis Presley, Technology and security, Andy Warhol, Celibacy in the priesthood, and Playing the drums.

Moderators would again like to emphasise the possibility of differentiating tasks according to the interests and abilities of candidates. For example, it is permissible for a weaker candidate to select a more straightforward topic and to aim for a safe, competent presentation, perhaps accepting a Band 3. It is advisable, on the other hand, for a stronger candidate to select a topic which is more complex and is likely to result in a more sophisticated level of discussion. More challenging topics will also require more sophisticated presentational skills and a wider deployment of language devices, which are needed if Band 1 is to be attained.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or an accepted, perhaps mundane topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out to explore, to challenge, to be creative, is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will often result.

Part 2 – Discussions

It was very pleasing to hear evidence that the majority of candidates were well prepared for this examination. Moderators are pleased that in almost all cases, Examiners were very much part of the discussions, and that discussions were generally productive extensions of the Individual Tasks. It was clear in many cases that candidates had anticipated Examiners' responses and had planned for focused discussion.

A small numbers of Centres are reminded that candidates must be allowed to complete **Part 1** of the test unaided and uninterrupted.

Assessment

For **Part 1**, Centres are reminded that “lively delivery sustaining audience interest” is necessary, and that “a wide range of language devices” should be present for Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian informative talk, which is secure and safe, is likely to satisfy the criteria for Band 3. For higher reward, the candidate needs to be attempting something more challenging, more creative, more ambitious. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.

For **Part 2**, we are assessing listening skills using an independent set of descriptors. The essence of a good listener is that he/she will choose the right moment to respond and will respond accurately and in some depth, hopefully adding to the conversation. If a candidate responds to most of the Examiner’s prompts soundly, this is likely to result in a Band 2 mark (7–8). For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward. This involves the integration of speaking and listening skills.

Moderators noted less leniency in the marking this session and therefore, greater accuracy.

Requests to centres

- As previously stated, most of the **Part 1** Individual Tasks were straightforward informative pieces. While this is acceptable (and in many cases, was done very well), Moderators would like to point out that a wider variety of approaches is encouraged. There is no restriction, for example, on the use of literature, so monologues in character, dramatic or poetic performances, **using original content**, are fine. Indeed, this might offer useful integration with texts being read for IGCSE Literature, for example.
- In a very small number of cases, the interpretation of ‘postcard-sized cue card’ was rather generous. Centres are reminded that candidates must not read from a script in **Part 1** – a few hand-written notes is what is expected here, written on a piece of paper about the size of a postcard.
- Moderators would like to receive an additional document from Centres if possible: a list of the topics that candidates have chosen for **Part 1**. This should be sent in with the sample tape(s) and other documents.

Final comments

Moderators enjoyed listening to samples and recognise the amount of effort made at many Centres by candidates and teachers in presenting interesting and appropriate work.

Centres are invited again to be more creative and ambitious in the choice of topics in **Part 1**. Perhaps a way forward here is for candidates to attempt to deploy a wider range of presentational devices. This may help broaden the types of presentation given.