

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Composition

Key Messages:

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about its particular focus.
- In **Section 1** tasks it is important to develop the bullet points as evenly as possible.
- Register and tone are important aspects of Directed Writing and need consideration.
- Greater focus on the accurate punctuation and layout of speech would improve performance.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.

General Comments:

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most candidates but some underestimated the demands of the question. The narrative questions in **Section 2** were generally more popular than the others and this is a sensible approach for many candidates who are clearly comfortable writing narratives. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements, all of which is very encouraging given the changes to the exam format last year, and it demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing. Few prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. Other responses included prepared essays which either were not wholly relevant to the set questions or which could not include a prescribed sentence in a natural way. Candidates are advised that the inclusion of text messaging language, abbreviations and expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' can sometimes suggest the wrong register and are best avoided.

Comments on specific questions:

Section 1

For the second year the Directed Writing task was assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write a speech to their class bidding farewell to a best friend and classmate moving overseas. In particular, the candidates had to offer reasons for the move, and outline what they and the class would miss most about their friend. This was a scenario that was within the everyday experience of the candidates, the majority of whom responded extremely well to this task. The scenario allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

Section 1 is Directed Writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing an effective speech for the specified audience, which included both the teacher and the class, in addition to the subject of the speech. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year, responses needed to include:

- the name of the friend leaving and the specific overseas destination
- the reasons for the move overseas
- what the speaker personally, and the class, would miss about the friend.

In the first bullet point it was essential to offer the first name of the friend and give a clear indication of where they were moving. It also had to be clear that they were moving to a different country. The second bullet point required a reasonably developed and appropriate reason (or reasons) for the move and Bullet 3 required a full explanation of what would be missed by the class and wider school following the friend's departure.

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

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

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks were awarded to responses which kept their focus on the context and purpose of the speech and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point posed few problems and the majority of candidates offered a clear name and a specific overseas destination. There were limited opportunities for further development here, therefore candidates needed to think carefully about the remaining two bullet points. The second bullet point invited a much wider variety of responses: the most successful responses explained clearly the reasons for the move, often considering an educational scholarship linked to sporting prowess, or a family reason, such as a career move for a parent. Others cited a tragedy in the family overseas, or a return home following a period of time living in their current location. All of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question, either overtly or by strong implication. A few responses offered no development in this area, sometimes limiting their response to this bullet point to a single sentence, or offering a very vague reason for the move, such as 'to continue his education'.

When addressing the third bullet point sensible suggestions were made as to what the candidates might miss about this particular student - the more developed responses drew on clues in the task, focusing on work carried out to enhance the school's sports performance or encouraging younger students as Captain of the Sports Club. They also focused on the notion of a personal best friend and were able therefore to offer a personal eulogy of a valued friendship, as well as citing more general personal qualities that contributed to the whole school. Therefore, the stronger candidates usually were able to amplify the second and third bullet points well and the best responses were those which included additional material while using the clues in the task.

The best responses did not just refer to a parental career move, but also developed why it would be so beneficial for the whole family, often citing good sporting or educational opportunities as a welcome by-product. Those who focused on a sporting scholarship often developed it by citing the many achievements gained in their current school as excellent reason for such an offer, and referred to future opportunities that could be supported by such a move. Other responses needed to incorporate more detail in the second and third bullet points. The bullet points do not always have to get equal treatment but it is also true that the answer should not be too unbalanced because otherwise a bullet point might not be adequately developed.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and candidates were comfortable with the classroom setting for their speech. However, some candidates missed the opportunity to embrace the diversity of the audience by acknowledging Mr Johnson's presence in the classroom, or take occasional opportunities to change their address from the whole class to focus directly on the student leaving for added emphasis. The register was kept suitably formal in most responses. Others occasionally were too informal, referring to silly behaviour in class or playing pranks on teachers as reasons for missing the student, when it is likely that Mr Johnson may not be wholly impressed by such references. The vast majority of candidates employed an appropriate format following the guidance given in the rubric by adopting a friendly and affectionate tone. The best responses were able to balance personal feelings of regret for losing a best friend with a wider acknowledgement of the loss to the class/school, but optimism and support for the friend's future plans. Less successful answers became rather emotional and sometimes gushing, often focusing on the feelings of the orator rather than addressing the bullet points in detail. The majority of responses adopted an appropriate format for a speech, using the opening specified in the task, although occasionally it became, 'Dear Mr Johnson and friends' indicating a little confusion. Some less successful responses included an inappropriate ending for a speech by putting 'Yours sincerely,...' or 'Your best friend'. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to improve performance.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the formal but friendly tone very well. Other responses were rather short only just reaching the lower word limit. Candidates need to ensure that they address the word length requirements in their responses. Linguistically, candidates were at

ease with school-related vocabulary and writing about a close friend: most found little difficulty in describing features they were familiar with to produce a convincing piece of work.

Section 2

Question 1

Describe some of the different members of the crowd present at an entertainment event. (Remember that you are describing the people and not telling the story of the event.)

This was a reasonably popular title. A number of different entertainment events featured and the favourites were concerts, parties and religious festivals. Planning and organisation were quite straightforward with this title and the majority of candidates coped well with the need to describe the different types of people in attendance. There were some unusually sensitive descriptions of individuals, often linking their dress, body language and facial expressions to the event itself and their enjoyment of it. In fact, the best responses were those which embraced the need to describe rather than simply narrate the events of the occasion. Most candidates found it helpful to be reminded of this requirement in the wording of the question and there was a richness of vocabulary in detailing the different types of people present. The seemingly endless variation in clothing, hairstyles and behaviour associated with all of the entertainment events was a source of inspiration when describing, with good responses demonstrating the use of adjectives, especially in recreating the atmosphere. Others described the event itself, rather than the people present, as they were more concerned with narrating events rather than describing.

Question 2

‘Young people should obey their elders without question.’ What is your view?

This was another very popular title and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who clearly had a strong opinion on the subject. Therefore, there were a great number of responses which agreed strongly with the sentiments expressed in the title and which were extremely critical of young people who fail to respect the wisdom of age and what they could learn from listening carefully to the advice of their elders. These responses often cited a lack of respect for the older generation as responsible for increases in violence, crime, illegitimacy and drugs in society. The writers tended to distance themselves from such attitudes/behaviour and often condemned them in strident terms. Other responses offered equally strong opinions that young people need to stand up for themselves in an ever-changing society where the older generation may not always be aware of the issues and pressures faced by young people. A number pointed out the importance difference between obedience and respect, arguing that respecting the older generation does not always mean blind obedience. There was an admirable sense of passion about such writing in the best essays which presented admittedly one-sided views in a persuasive way with a lot of illustration from their own experiences. Less successful responses lacked conviction and tended to include rather repetitive points without offering developed consequences or examples. Perhaps the most successful responses overall were those which presented a balanced view, seeing the complexity of the need to respect others but also able to see that on some occasions young people may have good reason to question their elders, and decide for themselves whether the advice they offer should be obeyed. Again, it was impressive to see how many personal experiences could be successfully utilised by candidates and it was clearly a title for those who had strong opinions, as they could sustain their arguments with deepening evidence over a number of paragraphs rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view.

Question 3

Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘You want me to lead the group but I don’t think I have the right qualities.’

This was a very popular title. Favourite themes included being asked to take responsibility for a group lost on a hike due to an injury befalling the leader, or a situation in war where a soldier is asked to take responsibility for leading a group to safety in battle. Other candidates preferred to use their own experiences and explored situations in school where they were asked to organise a competition entry, or lead a choir or sports team. The best essays were those that drew the greatest contrast between before and after, and those which were able to convey the emotional impact of the request to take a leadership role. The most sophisticated responses dealt sensitively with feelings of inadequacy and the overwhelming sense of being pushed beyond

your personal limits. There were some very good accounts which related the topic to the need for determination, courage and fortitude in the process of self-discovery. Less successful responses spent a great deal of time building up to the required sentence in their narrative, failing to really explore the potential in terms of overcoming self-doubt and spending very little time exploring its challenges. The weakest responses were those which simply told a narrative story which lacked an adequate sense of reflection. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well the majority of candidates integrated the given topic sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness.

Question 4

Promises.

This was a reasonably popular topic inviting a wide range of responses. Any approach to this question was possible. The best responses treated it as a discursive title and dealt with the topic in a philosophical way, often exploring the dangers of making promises and the frailty of human nature and, at times, of relationships. Other strong responses focused on politicians' repeated promises during election campaigns leading to some impassioned appeals for more honesty and transparency in such circumstances. Many described occasions where parents had failed to keep an important promise, sometimes through tragic circumstances, and at other times through fickle behaviour. Other responses were romantic stories, or personal accounts where a failure to keep a promise had caused great heartache. Some of the sentiments expressed were impressive in their honesty, sincerity and frankness. Less successful responses were rather general stories with a promise featuring in the narrative but not as the central theme of the response. Such responses were usually less convincing than those which embraced the title fully.

Question 5

Write about an occasion when a group of neighbours turned against a local official.

This was a less popular title, possibly because candidates had seen an attractive title early in the list of options. Stories usually involved a corrupt official whose misdemeanours were discovered by members of the local community. Some of the narratives became highly dramatic often featuring rather violent consequences. In these responses the violent retributions often became the dominant thread of the narrative at the expense of plot and character development. The better responses were more measured and thoughtful in their approach, sometimes exploring an official caught up in difficult circumstances through no fault of their own. Such situations were treated in a number of ways with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama of it all and some seeing humour in the situation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Composition

Key messages

- Candidates should aim to avoid making spelling mistakes with words that are given in the questions.
- A greater focus on the proper punctuation and layout of speech would improve performance.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve the quality of many responses.
- Candidates should be aware that the proper use of full stops (not just commas) is a crucial part of the descriptor for Language Band 3 and above. Also, the use of dashes instead of full stops is best avoided.
- Candidates should not overstretch themselves with vocabulary. It is far better to write naturally unless the use of a difficult word is fully understood.
- The use of 'And', 'But' and 'So' as repeated sentence openings should be avoided.
- Candidates are advised to pay attention to the word limits required for Sections 1 and 2, and ensure that they stick closely to them. Essays that are too long or too short tend to penalise themselves.

General comments

The general standard of performance this year seemed to be slightly up on that of previous years, mainly because of a more consistent response to **Section 1** Directed Writing, about which candidates appeared to be very knowledgeable and for which they had appropriate vocabulary. Some responses gave very full answers to the Directed Writing task at the expense of the Creative Writing task. Candidates need to ensure that they adequately address both tasks. The narrative questions in **Section 2** continue to be the most popular choices but candidates need to ensure that given sentences are included realistically and accurately, rather than merely tagged on to any story. Overall, there were very few rubric infringements of any sort. The strengths and weaknesses of linguistic ability were very similar to those of previous years: some of the spelling and vocabulary of the best candidates is truly impressive and also there are now very few candidates who fall into the lowest bands linguistically. Furthermore, the advice about not using prepared openings is being heeded and there was no obvious increase this year in the use of text speak. However, the use of the expressions 'gonna', 'wanna' and 'pissed' or 'pissed off' to show annoyance is increasing and it must be stressed that such expressions are inappropriate in this context. Other trends noticed this year were the increased insertion of the words 'like' and 'that' into sentences as in 'I was like walking round the airport' and 'As you know that we are meeting to celebrate this occasion'. Such insertions are better avoided.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

This year, for the second time, the Directed Writing task was assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to imagine making a speech in front of the School Principal, guests, staff and students at the start of an environmental project. This was a school-based scenario that appealed to candidates, the majority of whom responded extremely well to this task. The scenario allowed candidates to make use of their extensive knowledge about an issue of enormous importance to everyone. As is always said with this question, **Section 1** is Directed Writing and so is more of a reading task than **Section 2**. Candidates needed to be aware that they were focusing on a tree-planting ceremony which served as both a start to the project but also as a symbol of wider environmental concerns. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year responses needed to include:

- a strong, clear indication of what the speaker hoped the project would achieve. This might be on a local level or might be much more national or even global in its concerns

- precise details of the importance of the project, whether it would be to provide something visual or something to do with immediate or long-term health benefits
- an indication of how the audience could support the project, possibly financial, possibly practical.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged under headings of clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience; a correct format for the piece of writing; appropriate tone and register; the use of information to justify personal opinion and the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the **development of the ideas** that will gain most marks. Therefore, the most successful responses explained clearly the aims of the project, selecting from realistic local issues such as the improvement of the school grounds or neighbourhood areas to the wider concerns of saving the planet from global warming, deforestation and so on. All of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question, either overtly or by strong implication. Sensible suggestions were then made as to why this project was important, usually because of adding beauty to the surroundings or the saving of the planet for future generations. The audience was asked to help by donating funds, subscribing to the scheme or by planting a tree themselves at home. If they could manage none of these, then moral support would do. Candidates usually were able to amplify the first and second bullet points and those who did particularly well were those who kept a close link between what they hoped to achieve and how this would improve the situation and lead to the audience being able to help. Good answers also included well-chosen additional material which supported bullet points 1 and 2 by supplying scientific or geographical evidence.

Less successful responses were often too ambitious in their hopes and improvements. Whilst it was good to see such idealism (and such altruism in hoping to serve future generations), it was too far-fetched to suppose that planting a relatively small number of trees in the school grounds, in itself, would cure global warming. It is a difficult task to answer 'in detail' and yet stay close to the word limit. As a rule, it is better not to try and list all the possibilities throughout the three bullet points, but to do fewer (at least two points per bullet point) and do them in more depth and with convincing examples.

Generally, there was a good awareness of **audience** through following the guidance to address the various attendees at the beginning. Some responses began each paragraph by addressing a different part of the audience ('Respected guests..') and this was effective when done well. However, some appeared to concentrate their remarks too obviously just on the students and some lapsed into referring to 'the audience' in the third person in the final bullet point. The majority had a good general sense of the **situation** but other responses had difficulty linking the actual tree-planting ceremony to the wider concerns of the project. Yet others said the ceremony had taken place days before or would take place later in the week which did not convey the immediacy of the event. Stronger responses could see the event either as a vital part of the project (more trees for more oxygen) or as symbolic of growth and renewal. Some did not mention it all or saw it as merely incidental. The **tone/register** was kept formal by most although there were occasional lapses into over-familiarity – the use of the term 'you guys' seemed to be addressed to only one part of the audience and 'you people' seemed a little too casual. Some *responses* were too forceful in the third bullet point ('you have to', 'you must', 'I expect you to' and 'I insist'), virtually demanding support, when words like 'perhaps' and 'maybe' would have been more helpful. Many candidates recognised that thanking members of the audience and/or individuals was a good opportunity to make their responses sound like a speech.

Many candidates employed an 'appropriate' **format** with the most successful responses employing rhetorical devices (usually questions) to engage with the audience, thus giving the writing the genuine feel of a speech. A few, less successful responses included a letter valediction and/or signature to the text, which was inappropriate for the format. **Opinion and justification** were easy to cover in explaining, as most did, something about how greater environmental concern would lead to benefits for all. Organisation varied only occasionally with virtually everyone following the logical structure of the bullet points, although some dealt with aims and importance together as each issue arose.

Overall, the vast majority of responses to **Section 1** were lengthy and captured the enthusiastic, informative approach very well. The use of rallying calls such as 'plant a tree today for a better tomorrow' was a nice touch. Linguistically, candidates were at ease with this vocabulary, being well versed in it from other subjects and from the media (although 'plantation' was used too often for 'planting' and trees were often just 'cut' whereas 'cut down' would have been more acceptable). Spelling was generally good although there were some misspellings of words given in the question, especially 'environmental', 'committee', and 'Principle'. The majority of responses were convincing pieces of work. Others needed to show more evidence of own words rather than lifting the wording of the question. Candidates are reminded that a useful rule for this section is one paragraph for each bullet point plus an introduction and conclusion.

Section 2

1. Describe the two people who have helped you most during your extra-curricular activities?

This was not a popular choice of topic and certainly not among the stronger candidates who were, perhaps, more aware of their own strengths rather than what had been given to them by others. Those who did attempt this topic did so in a straightforward manner, dividing the material into two and approaching their mentors with huge admiration and gratitude. All these people gave confidence, taught technique and were ready to help when it was most needed. There was always a great feeling of sincerity behind what was said. Sport was by far the greatest area of activity but music, drama and debating also featured. P.E. teachers were much in evidence but so were parents, outside coaches and friends when it came to help. The most successful candidate gave descriptions of the people concerned as well as their characters, thus detailing their abilities and giving examples and anecdotes to add life. Weaker candidates tended to speak more about themselves or offered only the narrative of events leading to success or flat descriptions of general appearance or style of clothing. Structures were straightforward, this title lending itself to a chronological approach to hold the descriptions together.

2. What changes would you like to see take place in your country in the next five years?

This title was very popular across the ability range and produced some extremely mature work. All the candidates who attempted this wrote with enormous strength of feeling and with an impressive idealism. It was clear that most acted out of a love of their country, with only the minority simply wishing for enhanced shopping opportunities. Those who approached the topic in a political or a social way were keen to see improved justice in their country. Most were looking for a greater representation from political leaders. Other major concerns were a pressing need to provide better educational facilities for the poor, especially in the rural areas. Equally important were better health facilities, equality in both education and employment opportunities for women, a more effective infrastructure, an overhaul of the electricity industry to avoid the daily 'load-shedding', a fair justice system and greater democracy. All wanted to see an end to terrorism. A good number of candidates took their cue from Section 1 and included a desire to see an improvement in environmental conditions. There were also many who were consumerist in their approach and wanted more entertainment and shopping complexes, better car production and wider roads. The stronger candidates demonstrated great knowledge, both general and personal, and took the opportunity to develop each point in a convincing manner with adequate illustration. They may have covered fewer points but this was often to their advantage. Weaker candidates merely listed their desired changes with little development. Some candidates found it difficult to handle the conditional tense consistently. There was much confusion of 'will' and 'would'. Inevitably, many less confident candidates relied on the wording of the question and opened most paragraphs with: 'Another change I would like to see in my country.....' Better candidates avoided this by using a variety of links.

3. Write a story which includes the sentence: 'I could not believe it when my neighbour walked straight past me without saying a word.'

Narratives are always popular and this one certainly was. Most candidates relied on a straightforward chronological storyline which involved some sort of misunderstanding, accident or mistaken identity. There were many stories of new neighbours who changed after a while and of cricket balls breaking the neighbour's window and many where bereavement caused the neighbour to act in an uncharacteristic way. Often a twin had caused the confusion. Given that these stories could be told with a minimum of characters gave them a directness and pace which worked to their advantage. It was also enormously helpful if the sentence in the question was woven in convincingly. These were characteristics of the better scripts. Weaker candidates often confused the issue with too many characters or complicated plots. Weaker still were stories where the given sentence simply did not fit into the context, either because it was perfectly obvious and understandable why the neighbour ignored the narrator or because the tense in the sentence did not fit with the rest of the essay or paragraph. In most narratives a happy resolution was achieved and friendship restored; some who described committing some misdemeanour in the neighbour's house or garden could not believe their luck when they were simply ignored. Particularly notable was one very powerful story from a candidate who wrote with great sensitivity about later learning his neighbour was showing early signs of dementia. Characterisation (often simply a telling adjectival detail of appearance or mannerism) was what marked out the better scripts as did the inclusion of speech, properly punctuated, to give a sense of drama and immediacy to the action.

4. Memories.

This particular one-word topic was far more popular than is usually the case, mainly because candidates immediately saw the narrative possibilities. Remembrances from all stages of their lives formed the basis of many essays. Many were amusing, although too many candidates every year rely on the surprise party story. Many were sad, even tragic, with the loss of family members or illness. The strength of these reminiscences came from their personal nature (often spent with loved ones, often grandparents, family holidays, earlier School days or simply a day at the beach) and because, in the best, they did not attempt to include too many episodes. Those who decided against a purely narrative method wrote in a discursive way about memories, the pleasures and pains and the place they had in an individual's life. Often, though, the philosophical approach did lead to the candidate being short of ideas or linguistic range compared to those with the narrative approach. The best essays always had good introductions with the memories being prompted by an event or a picture and sometimes the narrator adopted the persona of an elderly person looking back so that there was an added poignancy in the lessons learned. Also, tenses moved effectively between present and past and included the pluperfect whereas less successful candidates found this difficult and were inconsistent in their use of tenses. There was occasionally confusion between 'memory' and 'memories' while weaker candidates did struggle linguistically with 'memories' in the plural as in 'memories is...' which was often repeated as a paragraph opening.

5. Write a story about an unexpected arrival at the airport.

This narrative title was not as popular as Question 3 but still had a good number of candidates who tried it. There was a strong similarity between the essays with the unexpected arrival being either a brother who arrived with a foreign wife, a father who returned early from work overseas or the narrator's favourite celebrity who turned up without notice. There were many stories about people who could not come to visit and then did. A weakness of a number of essays was to leave the arrival until the very end so that there was a long preamble to the climax with the writer taking an age to get to the airport. This had a chronological clarity but often lacked interest in the mention of dressing to go and the traffic jams as well as the plane being delayed. Those who included the arrival early on and followed it with dramatic consequences ended up with more interesting versions. Certainly there were many storylines with the expected plane crashing, only for the narrator to find the person they were meeting had come on a later flight. Similarly those who took an unusual approach (such as the candidate whose plane developed difficulties in mid-flight and so made an unexpected return to his home airport) created added interest. Because it was an essay with a strong chronological movement, the use of tenses by candidates of all abilities was more impressive. On the other hand it was the question which highlighted the confusion between direct and indirect speech for weaker candidates.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21 Comprehension
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Key messages

In those questions which require candidates to answer in their own words, many showed an ability to identify the key words in such questions. There remains a need for candidates to develop greater skills in substituting these key words with their own.

They need to learn how to provide answers which require some distillation of the text; that is, answers which are derived or extracted from the ideas in the text. To deal with a passage written as a first person narrative, candidates need to practise answering questions in the third person. Some questions on the writer's craft require that candidates learn how to decode figurative language. They should focus on looking beyond the literal in inferential questions, drawing their inferences from a sensible context linked to the text in order to demonstrate their comprehension. For the summary, **Question 1**, candidates are advised to practise differentiation between 'note' style and 'continuous writing', as suggested by the wording of the instructions; this will enable them to focus on and fulfil the requirement of each rubric.

General Comments

We are now into the second year of the revised paper structure for the examination, and candidates appear to have been well prepared by their teachers for questions based on two different passages, and for the types of questions which might be asked. The majority responded neatly and carefully, within the guiding parameters of the answer booklet. A minority continued answers outside these parameters, or used separate sheets instead of, or in addition to, the booklets; this can result in parts of a response not being seen by the Examiner. The practice - especially in **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)** - of writing draft answers in pencil, before going over them in pen, is one which can cause problems with legibility and is best avoided.

Most candidates attempted all the questions and completed the paper without any issue with time. The variety offered by a non-fiction and a fiction passage provided the opportunity for questions which stretched and discriminated amongst candidates, allowing the best responses to demonstrate an ability to deal with the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. This was reflected in a wide range of scores.

The first passage, 'Theatre', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas; the second, 'Octavia', tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Theatre' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas; in this case to distinguish fact from opinion and a true statement from false ones. The last question in **Section 1** gave the opportunity to offer a personal response to a theme in the text.

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

The answer booklet's writing frame format for the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess or copying verbatim at length. Little irrelevance was noted, nor was there much evidence of candidates diverging from the rubric.

In **Question 1(a)** most responses used a bullet point format, following the style of the first (given) point in each answer box and the result was a clear list of selected ideas. Others had content points in the wrong boxes and could not, therefore, be credited with the mark. The two boxes, with their clear headings, are intended to guide candidates to separate the two different aspects required in the summary. The best responses took account of this and did not confuse or repeat the content between them. The slash mark (/) was sometimes used between notes, but whether to link or to separate adjacent ideas was sometimes

unclear. A single, clear point per bullet should be aimed for, to avoid confusion. Where candidates continue the question on a separate sheet, they need to clearly identify to which box these extra points relate.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures. Others needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks. Many candidates attempted to rework the relevant details from the passage, with the substitution of their own words here and there where possible. Those who lifted random patches of text sometimes had difficulty in linking them and the result made only fractured sense. The overall standard of written English, including spelling and punctuation was generally fair, and in some cases impressive. There were also many instances of sound sentence structure. Candidates can improve on use of tenses: this question benefited from introducing the present tense to describe the reasons for the continuing popularity of theatre today included the use of the past tense throughout, rather than using the past tense throughout. Candidates need to work on noun-verb agreement, as in 'Christians also uses these plays..' and 'Drama provide individuals with ...'. and sentence separation, i.e. using full stops instead of commas.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Reading for Ideas

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the information in the passage which described the 'stages in the development, and rise in popularity, of theatre, and the reasons for its continuing popularity'. The summary had to be based on the whole of the text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, choosing to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration.

Excluding these provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 21 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most responses listed the points either in note form or in short sentences, usually under bullet marks, which allowed them adequate space to record all their responses. Others copied whole sections of the passage, reducing their ability to isolate the points while increasing the potential for including irrelevant text and running out of space.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 referred to the stages in the development, and rise in popularity, of theatre and there were 11 points which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 1, there were 6 content points, all linked to the beginnings of theatre in ancient Greece by the introductory ten words, which provided a Greek context. All candidates recognised that the move from storytelling by a chorus to dramatic impersonation by an actor was a major step in its development and understood that, with added actors, plots somehow became more complex. The popularity of comedy was unfailingly noted, as were the importance of performances during Spring festivals and the playwriting competitions held. That these last two facts exemplified another step in theatre's increasing popularity - the link between religion and drama - was not always mentioned. Paragraph 2 moved the focus to Rome and offered just 1 point among distracting material: that sub-plots developed there. Paragraph 3 showed the extension of drama to France and England through 3 points about travelling actors, the Christian church's use of plays and the building of permanent theatres; a fourth point referred to worldwide development.

Candidates generally showed an understanding of theatrical development, though a number lost marks by omitting mention of the geographical development across Europe and the world.

The second section of the rubric required the reasons for the continuing popularity of theatre, and there were eight available content points. In Paragraph 4, candidates could make 5 points: the relaxation offered by theatre; the fascination experienced by 'suspending disbelief'; the audience's enjoyment of actors' skills; the potential for valuable empathy with the characters' stories; and the benefit of catharsis. The third and fourth of these points required a clear reference to the audience, or an equivalent agent, though passive forms such as 'The skills of actors are enjoyed' were acceptable. Paragraph 5 contained the last 3 points and most supplied the ideas that theatre trips offer the opportunity for families to get together, to be part of a tradition and to experience a spectacle as well as a play, through new technology.

There was a small number of candidates who were awarded maximum points and a large number scored half marks and above. Candidates are advised to avoid repeating the given point in each box. While points could be made by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form, as indicated above, rather

than in continuous prose, all points nevertheless need to be fully made, remembering that they should be clear enough to be fully understood by another person. Where marks were lost it was often because points were incompletely made, e.g. referring to 'permanent buildings' being created, but with no mention of their purpose as theatres. Similarly, stating that 'the cleansing experience' is good for mental health omitted the crucial idea of that '*emotional* cleansing experience', which is 'catharsis'.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the stages in the development, and rise in popularity, of theatre, and the reasons for its continuing popularity. They were to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

The majority completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. The best responses came from candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. Others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, without being innovative or original in their use of English. The weakest responses were those which included copied chunks from the text and it proved difficult to link these while controlling sentence structure fluently. A large majority of candidates attempted the question and adhered to the rubric. A rare exception was when the note form 'slash' of **Question 1(a)** was carried over to **Question 1(b)** ('Myths/legends were sung/chanted by chorus/chanting'), interrupting the attempt at 'continuous writing'.

Although there is a new syllabus, the method of assessment for this task remains unchanged. The best candidates who were competent and confident enough, grappled with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentences, to gain many, or full, marks for style. Commendably, very short answers were extremely rare; candidates need to recognise that such brevity can never justify a high mark because they cannot demonstrate sustained use of own words or completely accurate English. There were noticeably few reported instances of generalised summaries which lacked the precision required to make content points. Where this occurred, it was often in responses which had answered **Question 1(a)** in continuous prose; perhaps in an attempt to produce something different, for **Question 1(b)**, such responses tended to include irrelevance or made oblique references rather than specific points. Candidates are advised to focus on correct tense use, subject/verb agreements, sentence separation and prepositions. Spelling was generally accurate, although there was some confusion of 'were' and 'where'.

In **Questions 2, 3 and 4** candidates were tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. **Question 2** asked candidates to decide which one of three statements, based on the passage, was true. The majority ticked the third box, correctly, recognising the importance of religion in ancient Greece and ignoring the other two statements offered, as distortions of the text. Candidates are advised not to tick more than one box.

Question 3 asked for two opinions from paragraph 4. Candidates could select any two of three observations which were subjective rather than objectively verifiable: that 'live performances are always better than films'; that 'theatre acting is much more challenging than acting in front of a camera'; and the notion that audiences admire actors' skills as much as did the ancient Greeks. The first two options were the most common responses. The third option, which required the comparison with ancient Greece, needed to include reference to the comparison i.e. the very thing which cannot be objectively proved. Candidates were not required to give their own views or to comment on the opinions.

Question 4 asked for two examples of common experiences which families might enjoy during the 'national holidays' mentioned in the text. Where candidates recognised the personal nature of the response required, and offered examples from their own lives or knowledge, they were successful. Picnics, hikes, eating out together and visiting home villages to see relations were common and acceptable answers. Those who suggested holidays abroad had failed to read the time limitation set by 'national' holidays. Weaker answers were often too general: 'getting to know your family' or 'spending time together', rather than offering something specific for such an occasion. Candidates should not include examples mentioned in the passage.

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

Question 5(a) asked for the 'unusual' feature of the weather and a large majority of candidates understood that, in the context, 'unseasonal' was the clue. The 'frost' was then identified correctly. Other responses included reference to the more usual features of autumn, the 'rain' and 'damp' and could not be credited with the mark.

Question 5(b) required two reasons why the baby caught cold. Most candidates scored at least one of the two marks and about half gained both. Others needed to give complete reasons, i.e. the baby suffered cold, wet hands *because* she chewed her gloves and a damp chest *because* she dribbled on it. Occasional references to the mother not knowing how to keep her child warm were insufficient; the answers lay in the result of that inability.

Question 6(a) asked for the single word in the paragraph which reinforced the idea that the writer 'hated going to the doctor', the answer being 'endured'. This was a discriminating question and the best responses understood its implication of having to suffer something undesirable. Other responses included 'subsequently', 'bothering', 'unnecessarily' and even 'hate'. Candidates are advised that when the rubric specifies a one word answer, they should follow this instruction.

In **Question 6(b)**, many candidates succeeded in gaining the two available marks for writing that 'she did not want to bother the doctor' and did not want to sit 'in the freezing cold waiting room'. Other responses focused on what the writer had previously found were necessary, 'inspections and vaccinations', rather than focusing on what she now expected to hate.

Question 6(c) was answered correctly by using the third person rather than the first person of the text, and explaining that the writer decided she must take the baby to the doctor's because it was not her health which was in question, but her daughter's. It was not enough to say that the baby 'was ill' without making clear that the focus was the baby rather than the illness. The brief, but equally correct, response was that 'she felt it was her duty'.

Question 7 again required two reasons to gain two marks. Candidates had to distil their answers from the text, avoiding the wording of Lydia's direct speech to use the third person. The inference that 'weather like this' was too cold or wet to take the baby out had to be stated; some responses referred merely to 'such weather'. The second reason, that the baby was 'flushed', or 'had a temperature' was identified correctly by the majority.

Question 8(a) required discerning scrutiny of the text by candidates, which stronger ones were able to do. A minority denied the question, by inaccurately quoting that the writer's life 'had *not* changed for ever', instead of explaining how it had. To answer accurately, it was necessary to recognise that the events of the passage were taking place at an earlier time, when her life 'had not yet changed for ever'; when she had never thought of taking the child's temperature. Once this was understood, candidates identified the 'change' as the need to take Octavia's temperature, or use a thermometer, regularly or constantly. This proved to be a discriminating question and it was encouraging to see that stronger responses had decoded the image of a thermometer being 'as necessary as a spoon or a saucepan', though the image itself was also an acceptable answer.

In **Question 8(b)** candidates had to answer in their own words, after first identifying the key words which suggested what the writer expected would happen. The passage led the reader to the two words which, the two marks suggested, it was necessary to recast: '...I had half *expected* a lecture on my indolence'. Suitably correct synonyms for a 'lecture' included 'scolded' (the most common), 'a long talk on', 'rebuked' and 'told off'. The stronger responses provided 'laziness' as the correct synonym for 'indolence'. Others, having identified the key words, repeated them in the answer or went back to 'annoyed' and suggested that the secretary would 'yell', 'shout' or 'get mad'. Such responses were not credited.

Question 9(a) was one which required candidates not only to recognise what the baby's actions were, but also to infer how those actions suggested her 'innocence'; her lack of awareness that something was wrong with her. Many candidates succeeded in identifying that Octavia 'smiled and wriggled with delight' but fewer went on to include the inferential suggestion of 'innocence' in her doing so 'while being examined by the doctor', or when 'a stethoscope' was put on her chest. A number misread the sentence structure and suggested the smiling and wriggling were the result of her vest being 'pulled up', rather than occurring 'as he put the stethoscope' on her ribs.

Question 9(b) required a 'full' explanation of why 'the writer says that the doctor did not mean what he said', and the two marks available suggested that two ideas were required here. Candidates needed to say that the writer could 'see' in his face or body language that 'he had not finished' or that she knew something more was to be said; that he had paused before 'he added' something else. There was no indication that he had not finished 'examining her'. The second idea related to what the doctor 'added': that he was going to make a hospital appointment for her. This, as was sometimes mentioned, implied that there was something 'to worry about'. A good number gained at least one mark, while others were not quite specific enough in

defining it as a 'hospital' appointment; another appointment with that same doctor would not seem so serious.

Question 10(a) was an inferential one, necessitating that candidates looked for some link in the text which would explain 'exactly' what the writer was frightened of.

A fair number carefully read the whole paragraph to find that link in the reference to her relief that the doctor 'could not be expecting her to die before next Thursday'. In other words, that is what she feared; that her daughter was going to die, or that she was at least very seriously ill. Others said she was 'afraid of the truth' or of asking 'him what was wrong'. Candidates should have explained what that truth was, or *why* she did not want to know what was wrong'. In that way, her fear would have been explained 'exactly'.

Question 10(b) related to the doctor's voice 'coming at' her, asking for the effect created by the phrase 'coming at'. A number of candidates, clearly well prepared for questions on the writer's craft, suggested that this was an example of personification; that, however, does not explain the effect of the words. Again a discriminating question, many interpreted the image in a physical sense and said the doctor was moving towards, attacking or threatening the writer. A minority recognised the rather less aggressive idea that the doctor's words would be something unpleasant, or something she was trying to avoid hearing. The other possible response focused on the state of mind of the writer and most of those who gained the mark understood that she felt helpless, vulnerable or frightened.

Question 11(a) was the second one in which candidates had to answer in their own words. Many candidates identified the key words to be substituted ('undefined anguish') but did not answer in their own words. Candidates are advised to read questions carefully and to ensure that they follow the instructions given. Stronger responses deduced the meaning of the key words from the context of tears, that the writer's 'state' had changed to one of 'sadness' or 'misery'. 'Undefined' was a challenging word, requiring recognition that to 'define' something is to explain it; thus, her anguish could not be explained.

Question 11(b) asked candidates to explain the writer's description of her former life as having been 'a summer afternoon' and several popular, correct interpretations of the image were seen. That her life had been 'happy', 'relaxing', 'pleasant', 'enjoyable' or 'unworried' were the most frequent. Some, however, offered very general responses such as: 'All the days before were amazing'; others concentrated on the weather e.g. 'It had warm weather and no colds'. The attempt to decode the image was apparent, in many cases.

Question 12 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding, in context, but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or phrases from a choice of eight. Marks ranged from 0 to 5 here, though only a very small minority scored full marks. Most candidates who attempted *resisted* scored the mark for the synonyms 'fought off', 'withstood' or 'held back', although a popular wrong answer was 'refused'. Candidates scored a mark for writing 'later' or 'after' for *subsequently*, but 'next' and (perhaps because of the similar sound) 'suddenly' were incorrect answers. *in question* was attempted with successful responses including 'at stake' and various forms of 'what it was about'. (Precise grammatical form is not the most important thing in these answers, as Examiners are looking only for a clear understanding.) Answers such as 'at risk', 'in danger' and 'on the line' appeared quite often but were not rewarded, as they gave a too serious suggestion. *illumination* was rarely attempted but produced 'enlightenment' and 'realisation' as good responses. ('idea' and 'thought' were too weak.) 'Shocked' and 'astonished' were correctly and frequently offered for *astounded*, with 'flabbergasted' a delightful alternative, but 'surprised' did not score unless it was qualified with 'very'. There were few responses to *absently* and those there were tended to give, incorrectly, the idea of 'not knowing' or 'unaware', rather than 'without thinking'. *mustered* was a popular choice and many succeeded, usually with 'gathered', or occasionally with 'summoned' or 'called up'. 'Called' or 'called out' did not score, nor did the popular choice, 'gained'. For *paralysed*, many offered 'motionless' or 'without moving' but a few recognised the difference between such voluntary stillness and the enforced nature of 'immobilized' or 'unable to move', thus gaining the mark.

Some responses offered two or more synonyms for each word; candidates are advised that only the first word or phrase offered as an answer will be credited and should therefore decide on their response with care.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22 Comprehension
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Key messages

Candidates need to develop greater skills in answering those questions which require them to answer in their own words, first learning how to identify key words in such questions. Although marks are given in such questions for correct synonyms for key words in the text, these synonyms should be couched in sentence form, so that writing: 'threat - danger, fatality – death' was not a satisfactory way to answer **Question 6(c)**.

Candidates are advised that a question cannot be answered by lifting another question from the passage. They should focus on looking beyond the literal in inferential comprehension, while at the same time drawing their inferences from a sensible context linked to the text.

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

Some candidates included the Insert, i.e. the material containing the two passages on which the questions were set, with their question paper booklets. This is also a practice which should be discontinued.

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised that content points cannot be scored if they are spread over two bullets with no obvious link, or if they are put in the wrong boxes.

General Comments

Candidates were to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet. Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 1, as Passage 2 required understanding of some quite difficult implied meanings.

Most candidates completed the paper and appeared to have been well prepared by their teachers, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked. In general they coped well with the layout of the answer booklets, which in turn seemed to provide adequate space for what they wanted to write.

Both passages, the first entitled 'Shopping' and the second entitled 'The Hospital', seemed to engage the interest of the candidates and to stretch and discriminate amongst them, and this was reflected in a wide range of scores. The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Shopping' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish true statements from false ones, to distinguish fact from opinion, and to respond to the text by drawing on their own knowledge and experience.

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

The format of the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or producing both fair and rough copies. There was very little irrelevance noted or evidence of candidates diverging from the rubric.

In **Question 1(b)**, In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained

attempt to use their own words and original structures. Others needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks. Both spelling and punctuation were good. The overall standard of written English was impressive. Candidates can improve on the incorrect use of prepositions; the problem of noun-verb agreement, as in 'shopping become a form of relaxation'; the omission of definite or indefinite articles, even by the best candidates, as in 'parents can work in supermarket' or 'it is waste of time', or intrusive use of the article where none was required; agreement between the article and noun; the use of the singular where a plural was required, as in 'deputy might cause problem', 'family member work which creates problem'.

Comments on specific questions: Section 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of extended shopping hours. The summary had to be based on all but the first, brief and introductory paragraph of the text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied it was usually because key words were missing. Many responses were able to reach the maximum 15 marks but the exercise was fully discriminating as the whole range of marks could be found.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 21 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences; few responses presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point, understanding that there is little evidence to suggest that such a strategy yields more marks. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, most candidates used bullet points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 referred to the advantages of extended shopping hours, and there were 10 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 5 content points, (excluding the provided first point) outlining advantages of extended shopping hours. It creates more jobs, students can work without compromising their studies, and parents can work when their spouse is not working. It was not enough to refer to students or parents working, as they could work anyway even without extended hours. The points were that students could combine work with study, and parents could take turns at being out at work. This last point led into the next one, namely that childcare arrangement could be avoided if one or other of the parents was at home because they worked at different times; because of its link with the idea of one parent working when the other was at home, the mark could not be scored without at least an attempt at that point. Finally, the paragraph made the point that shop owners made more money if their shop was open for longer, and most candidates made this point.

In Paragraph 3, another 5 points were available: the load is spread for the shopping centres, or people do not fight for parking spaces, people have more time to browse and shopping is relaxing or therapeutic. Malls, or round-the-clock shopping outlets, offer a wide range of goods, and malls are also a family day out. There was much success here, except with the point about shopping malls offering a wide range of goods; often the agent was missing and the mark could not be awarded.

Candidates found the second section of the rubric challenging. It asked for the reasons for the disadvantages of extended shopping hours, and there were 9 available content points, (excluding the first, which was given.) In Paragraph 4, candidates could make 4 points (excluding the provided first point): children miss out on recreational or educational excursions, family bonding is removed or decreased, children are not taken to parks or playgrounds, and this results in increased childhood obesity. As with the dependence of the point about avoiding childcare arrangements on an attempt at the point about one parent working while the other is not working, so too there was a dependency of the point about children lacking exercise and becoming obese on the failure of their parents to take them to parks.

In Paragraph 5, there were a further 5 disadvantages of extended shopping hours. Employees' family life is interrupted, employers have to appoint a deputy because they cannot be in the shop all the time, and if they close the shop they will lose business. Many responses confused the agents – employees and employers – or missed out the agent altogether. The final 2 points were that people have a fixed amount of money to spend, and that people waste time shopping when they could have been doing more useful things. There was some confusion over agent or missing agents in these points.

There was a small number of candidates who were awarded maximum points and a large number scoring 9 marks and above. Candidates are advised to avoid reproducing the given content points. Although points could be made by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form, as indicated above, rather than in continuous prose, these points nevertheless need to be fully made with, as indicated above, appropriate agents.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the advantages and disadvantages of extended shopping hours. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

It appears that the task set in **Question 1(a)** of reading to seek out the most relevant information does prove helpful to candidates when they set about writing their summaries in **Question 1(b)**. Instances of irrelevances (such as the checking of watches or the employees required for restricted hours) were few. Examples of responses which strayed from the details of the original text into comments of their own on the topic occasionally occurred.

Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were a number of candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. The general use of own words was noticeable, with, many candidates being innovative or original in their use of English; many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, while others moved blocks of text around rather than re-wording detail, or copied from the text. There were occasional examples where attempts at use of own words proved unwise in that the over-ambitious vocabulary did not entirely match the meaning of the original, as in 'sumptuous childcare arrangements' and 'dashing shopping malls'.

Encouragingly, nearly all candidates attempted the question and adhered to the rubric. Candidates are advised that very short answers cannot justify a high mark, since they cannot demonstrate a sustained use of own words or completely accurate use of English; for that reason, short answers are penalised under Style, as well as being self-penalising.

Although there is a new syllabus, the method of assessment for this task remains unchanged. Furthermore, Examiners were not checking the number of content points in **Question 1(a)** against the number produced in **Question 1(b)**. But if many fewer points were made in **Question 1(b)** than in **Question 1(a)**, this would be reflected in the language mark. Writing only, for example, 6 content points would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words, whereas, conversely, writing 15 content points might be sustained use of own words, though not necessarily. The best responses came from candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentence, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Questions 2, Question 3 and Question 4 were the questions testing the new assessment objective in the revised syllabus, Assessment Objective 4, Reading for Ideas, where candidates are being tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. This section in general was well done.

Question 2 asked candidates to tick the box against the one correct statement based on information given in Paragraph 2; most candidates scored the available mark here.

Question 3 asked for two opinions from paragraph 4, and there were four to choose from: the 'shop till you drop' mentality actually decreases the opportunities for family activities, the 'shop till you drop' mentality suggests silly or robot-like behaviour, recreational excursions are valuable, and there is nothing more depressing than seeing the long faces of parents pushing children round shops.. Candidates had to focus on the trigger words which heralded the idea of subjectivity rather than objectivity, and these words were 'actually', 'silly', 'robot like', 'valuable' and 'depressing'. Candidates were free to use their own words equivalent, and to present their answers in either order. Candidates were not required to give their own views or to comment on the opinions.

In **Question 4** candidates were to give two examples of 'recreational excursions', from their own knowledge or experience, and there were very many acceptable and imaginative responses here, ranging from trips to museums, trips to historical sites (often with an example provided) visiting grandparents, and going out to restaurants. Others gave examples from the text: trip to an art gallery, to a playground, or to a park or overlooked the fact that excursions involve going out of the home, and offered answers such as 'watching television together' or 'having dinner together'. Such responses were not credited with the mark.

Comments on specific questions:

Section 2

Most candidates seemed to find this text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1. There were some general comprehension problems here, centring around the gender of the writer and/or the baby, and the idea that the baby was to be born in the morning, a possible confusion between 'poignant' and 'pregnant'. The fact that Octavia was the baby's name was not always understood.

Question 5(a) asked what was going to happen to the baby in the morning, and was designed to be a relatively accessible opening question on the second passage; it turned out to be thus, as the vast majority wrote, correctly, that she was going to have an operation.

In **Question 5(b)**, two marks were available for any two of three correct responses. Focusing on 'small' gave the answer that the baby, or her clothes or belongings, or even things, were small, focusing on 'requirements' gave the answer that she did not need much, while focusing on 'pitifully' gave the answer either that the mother felt sympathy for her baby or that the baby was vulnerable. Most candidates scored the first of these three points. There was a fair degree of success with the second option. Few responses referred to the idea based round 'pitifully'.

Question 5(c) asked for the two ways in which the writer's behaviour showed her nervousness, the answers being that she was speechless, or could not speak and that she did not ask to see the baby again. Additions such as 'she could not believe that a mere recital of facts' and 'she went home and wept copiously' were regarded as neutral extensions and did not negate the mark, which meant that candidates scored well. However, the object had to be supplied in the second limb, so that 'she did not ask again to see her' rather than 'she did not ask again to see the baby' were denied the mark, as were answers which did not make the transition from first person to third person, that is 'I' in the text to 'she' in the answer.

Question 6(a) asked for the two things which worried the writer about the way the baby may have been treated in hospital. The answers lay in distilling the two questions 'Would there be a nurse with Octavia at all times?' and 'Would they feed her properly?' As questions cannot be answered by other questions, candidates were required to convert these questions into statements such as 'a nurse would not be Octavia at all times' and 'Octavia would not be fed properly'. More practice with this type of conversion is needed as many candidates found this challenging

Question 6(b), was the first of three inferential questions on the paper, asking why 'earlier concerns seemed now trivial'. Marks were given here to candidates who appreciated the serious concerns of the writer before the operation, namely that she was worried that baby might die. A popular answer was that she had been worried about the operation; this was considered to be too imprecise an answer and therefore did not score the available mark. Many responses gave a definition of 'trivial', writing that the things seemed unimportant, or she had not been worried before; such answers failed to address the question.

Question 6(c) was the first of the questions where candidates had to answer in their own words, after first inferring that life had gone back to normal because the threat of fatality had been removed. Acceptable synonyms for 'threat' were 'risk', 'danger' or 'possibility'; the mark could also be awarded for simple words or constructions like 'could' or 'might have'. Acceptable synonyms for 'fatality' were 'death', 'loss' and 'not surviving'. Conversely, the mark could be awarded for the fatality idea in reverse, so that 'there was no danger to her life' was sufficient to score both available marks. Many responses offered a too general answer about Octavia being better now.

Question 7(a) asked candidates to find a single word in the paragraph which continued the idea of 'inactivity', the answer being 'lethargy'. 'Settle' was a popular incorrect answer here, incorrect because it is possible to be settled without being inactive, and because the question wording 'continues' suggest a synonym later in the paragraph and not earlier. In this type of quotation question, candidates should work on linking the key word in the question, in this case 'inactivity', with all the key vocabulary in the area of the question, trying to make an appropriate match.

Question 7(b) was a literal comprehension question in which candidates tended to score at least one of the available marks. The question asked for the two reasons why it was imperative for the writer to see her baby, the first being that they had endured the longest separation of their lives, and the second being that the writer thought the operation had not been a success. Candidates were free, but not obliged, to use their own words, although most relied on the text. Where the marks were not awarded, it tended to be because

the question form (Had the operation not been a success?) had been used, or because reference to both the mother and the baby had not been used, so that 'she had endured the longest separation' was not enough, unless 'from the baby' was added, or the pronoun 'they' was used. It was also necessary to re-cast the text in third person, by changing it from first person, and so verbatim lifting did not work here.

In **Question 8**, many candidates scored the first available mark, but the second part of the answer was a discriminating one. Showing the writer the surgeon's report was the first part of the nurse's 'silly mistake'; very many responses made this point, and where they did not it tended to be because they wrote that she 'showed the report' without the qualification that it was the surgeon's, or a medical one. In order to score the second mark, candidates had to infer that it was silly to show this report to the writer because she might have understood it, or because she did not know whether or not she would understand it, or because she might have had medical knowledge. Candidates found making this inference challenging and wrote that the writer did understand the report, or that she had medical knowledge; this was the opposite of the correct answer and therefore did not score the mark.

Question 9(a) was another inferential question which many candidates found challenging. The sensible inference here had to focus either on the behaviour, actual or anticipated, of the writer, or on the status of the nurses. Acceptable answers focusing on the writer's behaviour were that they thought the writer would ask to see her baby, or that she would make a fuss; a popular wrong answer was that the writer told them she had no intention of not seeing her baby; this was unacceptable because the sequence of events in the text denied the sense of this answer. Acceptable answers focusing on the status of the nurse were that they were only junior nurses, or that they were inexperienced, or that the senior nurse was not there to deal with it. There were a lot of generalised references to fear which could not be awarded the mark. There were those who suggested that the nurses were 'new' – not the same as 'junior', necessarily – and others who referred to the state of mind rather than the possible actions of the writer.

Question 9(b) was the second of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, although this was not a conventional own words question requiring the re-casting of two key words from the text. For the first available mark, candidates had to re-cast the general idea of 'whole building behind them'; this could be done in a variety of ways, e.g. 'they had the support of the staff, or the doctors, or the other nurses, or even the hospital', or 'the doctors were, or the weight of authority was, on their side'. For the second available mark, candidates had to re-cast 'intention', with a synonym such as 'desire', 'wish', 'determination' or 'purpose'. Candidates are advised to ensure that in own words questions they do not copy key words directly from the text.

Question 10, where candidates had to infer the reason why the surgeon was 'white with anger' turned out to be, as intended, a discriminating question which only the best candidates answered correctly. The key was that the surgeon's anger was directed at the nurses and not at the writer, and any answer which suggested that the writer was the focus of his anger was not awarded the mark. Acceptable answers were that he was angry because the nurses had not allowed the writer to see her baby, or that she should have been allowed to see her baby, or that he was angry because the nurses, or the senior nurse, had allowed the commotion to occur. The support for this as the correct inference lay in understanding that when he told the writer 'Of course you can see the baby' he was suggesting that she had been badly treated. Responses which referred to the noise made by the writer were not awarded the mark.

Question 11 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Most candidates who attempted 'appointed' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'arranged', 'given' or 'decided'; in fact there were more than twenty acceptable synonyms here. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered 'gathering' for 'summoning' and 'became stern', or 'became harsh', or 'became tough' for 'hardened', although there were many popular wrong answers too, such as 'became loud' or 'became angry' or 'became serious'. Words less frequently chosen were 'poignancy', where candidates scored a mark for writing 'pain' or 'sadness', and 'copiously', where the mark could be scored for simple synonyms such as 'a lot' or 'extensively', although popular wrong answers tended to be 'constantly' or 'continuously'. Another word less frequently chosen was 'preoccupied', where correct synonyms were 'distracted', 'obsessed' and 'taken up'. 'Preoccupied' was a fairly popular choice but seldom correct, with 'busy' a frequent wrong answer. Very few candidates attempted 'vehemence', meaning 'anger' or 'rage', or 'tedious', meaning 'boring' or 'tiresome'. Because understanding only is being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form was not insisted upon. Candidates can improve their performance by ensuring that they select five words only and explain the meanings of those words. Only one synonym should be offered as where more than one is given, only the first will be considered.