

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2002 the examination paper consisted of Section 1 (a response to one text) and Section 2 (completion of three different tasks in response to given material). In Section 1 the quality of responses was similar to previous years, with very few students submitting no response, more than one response or a very short response.

Marking policies

Assessment is holistic, using the published criteria. The process requires assessors to relate student performance directly to these criteria. These judgments are assisted by the use of a set of descriptors. Both the criteria and the descriptors are fully explored and directly related to the range of student responses during intensive assessor training before, as well as during, the marking process. Teachers and students should be aware of both the assessment criteria and the descriptors. For 2002 these were published on the VCAA website in Supplement 2 to the February 2002 *VCE Bulletin*.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Text response

Students were required to produce one piece of analytical or expository writing in response to one text. There were two topics for each of the prescribed texts. The layout of the English (ESL) paper remained similar to previous years and did not appear to have created any misunderstanding about task requirements, even for the many ESL students who are taught in mainstream classes.

Students' understanding of the task and confidence in writing appeared to be comparable with previous years. More successful responses were carefully crafted to respond to the key words in the question and supported with appropriate use of examples from the text. Most students limited the use of direct quotes to short phrases which were appropriately chosen to support their responses. Students generally displayed very good knowledge of the text even when they had difficulty writing to the requirements of the question set. For authenticity, all examples of student work included in this report still contain the student's errors in spelling and grammar.

Responses were limited to a small number of texts. Two thirds of responses were on four texts, *Dead Letter Office*, *Medea*, *The Divine Wind* and *Night*. All four texts produced a wide range in the quality of responses. *Only the Heart*, *Cabaret* and *The Outsider* accounted for a further 15 per cent of responses. There were no ESL responses to *No Great Mischiefs* or *Frontier*. In addition, five other texts attracted only one or two responses.

The most popular texts and their mean scores (out of 10) were:

<i>Dead Letter Office</i>	23.4%	5.3
<i>Medea</i>	22.2%	5.59
<i>The Divine Wind</i>	11.1%	5.94
<i>Night</i>	10.5%	6

The overall mean score for the text response was 5.66.

Dead Letter Office

- i. The past means a lot to Frank and Alice.
Do they help each other to move into the future?
- or**
- ii. 'Many of the characters in *Dead Letter Office* cannot solve their problems because they lack the courage to take risks.'
Discuss.

Both questions on *Dead Letter Office* were accessible to a range of students. This resulted in a lot of story telling and very little analysis in many of the less successful responses to the first question. Students focused too much on the past and did not answer the question of 'moving into the future'. This was the more popular question and many students got caught in the trap of explaining, in much detail, why the past meant a lot to Frank and Alice but not addressing the question of whether they help each other to move into the future. In Question 2, some students tried to deal with too many characters, including some for whom the film gave insufficient information to address this question. Other students wrote about the need to take risks to solve problems but without any reference to the idea of 'courage'.

Medea

- i. 'In *Medea*, no character has any admirable or heroic qualities.'
Discuss.
- or**
- ii. 'Although there is a lot of cruelty in the play, the characters are motivated by love.'
Discuss.

Both questions on *Medea* produced very successful responses. Students clearly agreed or disagreed with the firm statements made in the questions. The first question enabled students to draw on many aspects of the text. The 'no' in

the question was overlooked by many students who only discussed whether or not Medea had any admirable or heroic qualities. Some responses discussed both Jason and Medea while others included minor characters as well. Most responses focussed on 'admirable', either ignoring or misunderstanding 'heroic'. In the second question some responses simply discussed Medea's actions superficially and said it was all because of love, without any discussion of the notion of love and how Medea changes. While it may have been that the question lent itself to answers structured by the chronological events, some students did not think through their answers so finished up saying Medea was a great mother and other silliness. Some responses focused more on cruelty than love and weaker responses seemed unable to deal with the two components. However, some excellent responses explored the nature of 'love', the range of love qualities and tested them against a number of characters, not just Medea.

The Divine Wind

- i. 'The characters in this story never learn to live with their disappointments.'

Discuss.

or

- ii. '*The Divine Wind* shows how difficult it is for communities to accept cultural differences.'

Discuss.

The questions on *The Divine Wind* provided opportunities for deep thinking about the text. Responses to the first question focussed on Ida and some struggled to discuss Hart in relation to this question as his disappointment seemed less tangible. The better responses to the second question discussed the community of Broome and how the war changed friendships and perspectives. Many interpreted 'cultural difference' purely as 'racism' and many wrote more about individual characters than communities. Some responses showed an excellent knowledge of inter-race relations. The most successful responses showed good knowledge of the socio-historical context of the novel and wrote coherently constructed responses to the question.

Night

- i. 'At the start of the text, Elie holds strong religious beliefs. By the end of the story, he has lost his strong beliefs.'

Why?

or

- ii. 'In *Night*, the instinct to survive is stronger than any other force within people.'

Discuss.

Both topics on *Night* were handled well. Some responses to the first question focussed on Elie at the start and end of the story but made no discussion of the transition. More successful responses were able to document the changes and even use quotes in relation to these scenes. Some excellent responses tracked Elie's loss of religious faith and how it was replaced by faith in his father. Students generally handled discussion of 'survival' in the second question but not always in the context of 'any other force'.

The wording of most questions appeared to work well. Overall, students demonstrated engagement with the ideas of the texts, good essay structure and obvious confidence in how to approach the task. There were very few responses that appeared to be pre-learnt or based on past papers or practice questions. In some cases there was an over-reliance on story telling and insufficient analysis or a tendency to focus on only one aspect of the question. In planning students need to brainstorm all the key words as well as pay particular attention to modifying words and comparatives within the question. However, some plans were so extensive that the plan really was the essay and students ran out of time to finish the 'final piece'.

This introduction to *Dead Letter Office* Question 1 addressed all the prompts in the question and indicates the perspective from which the student will respond:

The film *Dead Letter Office* tells the fictional story of Frank and Alice's journey to discover their future. Both characters were held back from life by their past. Although one is look for her past while the other is hiding from his, the two characters manages to help each other to move on. Unintentionally, Alice leads Frank to acknowledge his pain and Frank taught Alice important lessons about life. In turn, the two moved out of their past and moved on together towards their future.

The response then looked at how their past continued to occupy their lives and dominate their actions and thoughts, including discussion of film techniques which reinforce this, concluding with this sentence:

For both characters, their past have shaped them, caged them, leaving them with the inability to move on alone.

The response then explores the ways in which they helped each other move into the future:

Yet with the help of Alice's actions and restlessness, Frank was able to gradually express his feelings, rediscover his fear and conquer the past to reach the future. Frank was illustrated as a cold and distant boss in the film. A person that no one can get close to or understand. Yet from Frank and Alice's first meeting, the audience can see Alice trying to reach across the table to shorten their physical distance. With her experience in dancing, she has tried to persuade Frank to remember his past joy at dancing.

After exploring the way in which Frank helps Alice, the response concludes:

In a way, Frank and Alice's lives were completely occupied by their past until they met each other. With help and support from each other, the two characters were able to move on with their lives. Frank, with Alice's reckless meddlings with his life, has confronted his past. Alice, with the help of Frank has awoken from her fairy tale dream of her father. Through their experiences, Alice and Frank have discovered things that values more than their past and were able to move on without the anchor of their past holding them back.

Familiarity with the assessment criteria and how to develop the skills to meet them is essential. Thorough knowledge of the text is critical so students need to read or view their texts many times before the examination and complete many activities designed to help them become aware of the major themes and issues. Students may be less inclined to just retell the story if they have developed some ideas about the text. In the examination, students demonstrate their knowledge of the text by the way they are able to select examples to support the key points of their essay. It is important to choose texts that have concrete issues for ESL students to grasp and discuss.

As well as knowledge of the text, students need to understand the requirements of a well-structured essay. In particular, how to develop a point of view with one main point in each paragraph directly linked to the topic and supported by text examples. Students should be familiar with the basics of analysing the question, focusing on key words, awareness of words that might modify; e.g. 'all', 'only', 'no', and planning the response. Students also need to know how to 'unpack' the prompts and to take into account all parts of the question. ESL students will often need assistance in acquiring a range of vocabulary appropriate for discussing the text they have chosen and which they can draw on to write expressively and effectively in examination conditions. Students also need to be taught how to recognise and decode the different types of questions asked on texts, e.g. Discuss, Do you agree, questions which include 'why' or 'how'.

Section 2 – Writing task

Students were presented with a number of items related to one topic. They were required to complete three tasks in response to this unseen material. The tasks were:

- a note form summary of a section of the material
- an analysis of language used in one of the given texts
- a response to the main issue raised by the texts.

Each task is of equal value and three separate scores are given. In 2002 the instructions to students and the tasks were printed before the task material. In addition to this, the use of banners above the material to be used for each task meant that very few students completed tasks on the wrong sections of the material.

There were generally favourable comments made on the topic and the layout of this task on the paper. From their responses the students could obviously relate to the topic. For some students familiarity with the topic led to a tendency to focus on first hand experience rather than the material provided.

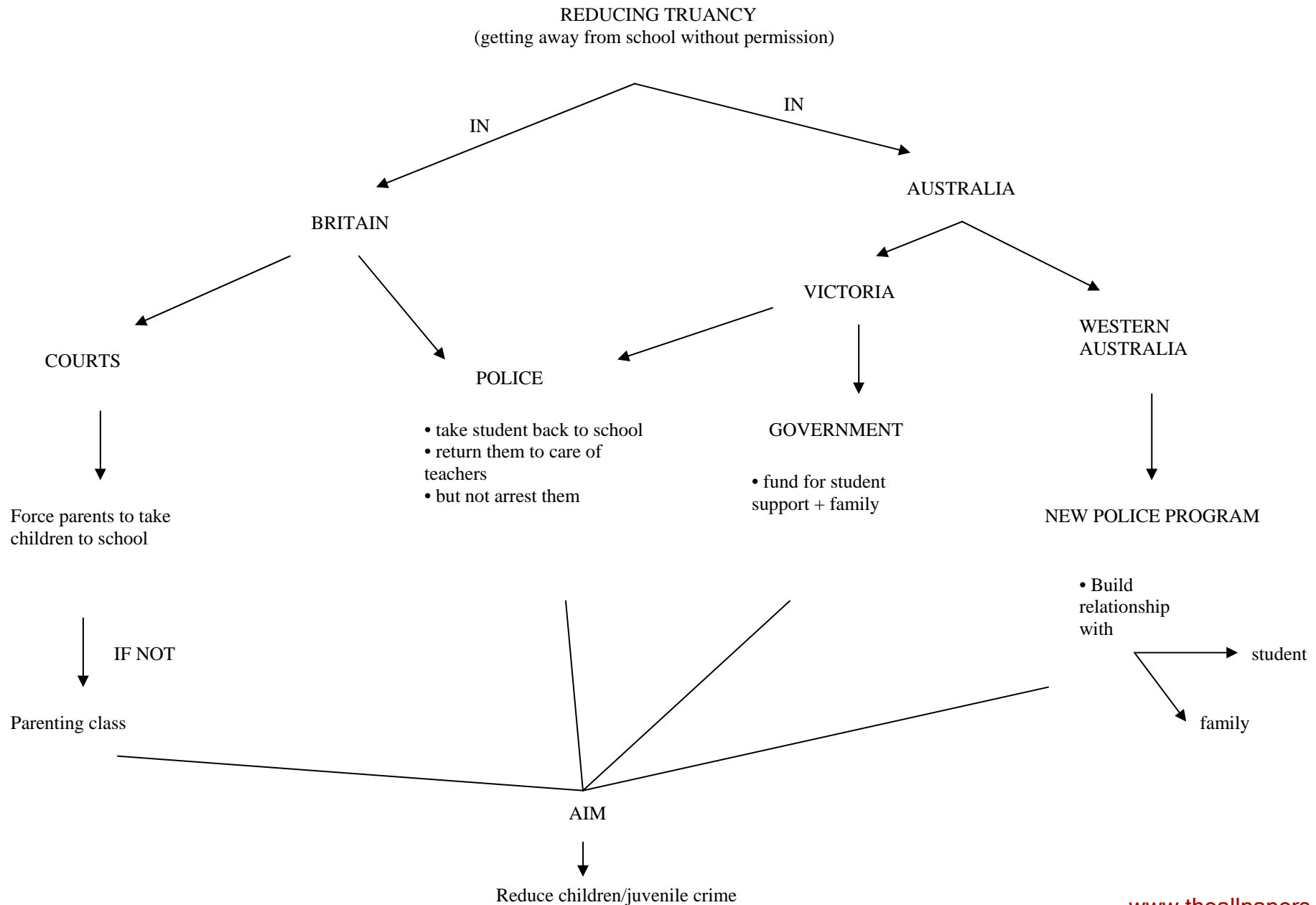
As in past years there was a lot of variation in approach to the note-taking task. Most students could identify the main points and the contention. Some had difficulty seeing both texts as based on the same issue, i.e. the resolution/management of the truancy problem and consequent reduction in juvenile crime. The material lent itself to very good summaries with obvious links between the two pieces of writing. Nevertheless, many students still summarise the two pieces separately. This year's material enabled students to do more than just arrange their summary in a for/against or yes/no format. Indeed students trying to do this layout struggled with the task and some tried to rearrange the material to suit this format. Some responses used whole sentences as well as weaker responses merely listing all the information without selecting the main points or showing any categories or links. In some responses going 'arrow crazy' detracted from rather than added clarity to the response.

Overall, students seem to have been well prepared for the note-taking task but it was easy to pick those who had no idea of how to approach it. However, greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing more than one strategy for making notes, e.g. if there is more than one item to be used look for common words/ideas in the articles. Students should write one summary with an 'umbrella' heading, making links between the articles so that information is not repeated. As it takes time and practice to develop note taking skills, students need to be introduced to the skills before entering Year 12 and encouraged to use them as a regular part of their work.

These examples show something of the variety of approaches used by students.

Example 1

This example is structured around the links between the articles and, despite the unnecessary explanation of 'truancy', is concise. The understanding and processing of the material is obvious.



Example 2

This excellent example also successfully processes the information but is structured around actions being taken in various places rather than actions which link the articles.

Truancy

In Britain:

new legislation – solve truancy problem



how?

- police resistance:
 - send them back (not arrest)
 - look after them
- courts involvement:
 - forcing parents
 - parenting classes

Aim: To reduce children's street crime.

How about Australia?

In Victoria: (-same truancy problems)

- problem: highest rate in history, e.g. For 9 and 10, one day / two weeks
- solution: police assistance (transporting children)

In Western Australia: (-same, but successful)

how to achieve?

- building relationships
- encouragement

State Government: (student support and welfare)

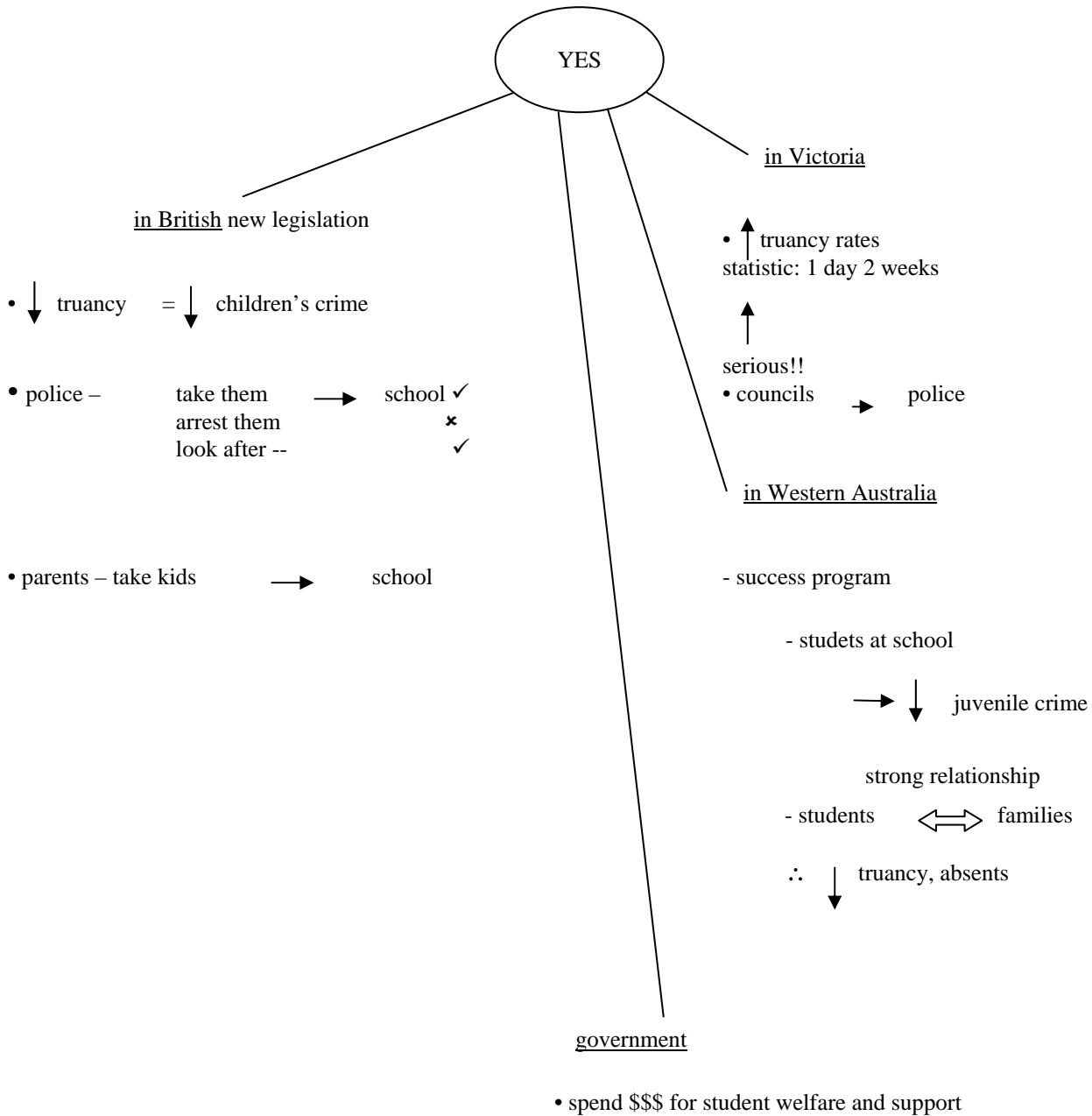
\$56 Million

Aim: To reduce school absenteeism

Example 3

This example uses another approach by turning the issue into a question and summarising the material from both articles in answer to this question.

Any strategies on truancy?



Example 4

This is a very good example which shows a clear understanding of the material, ability to select the main points but does not re-arrange the material in any way. However, it very effectively uses some generally recognised abbreviations.

British new legislation – solve problem on truants

if
student absent w/o permission
police – take them to school
– x arrest

) look after

courts – force parents to take kids 2 school
if not ... attend parenting class

∴ ↓ children’s crime

Yr 9 and 10 – absent 1 day
14 days



school – police 2 patrol shopping ctr & station



Western Aus – succes keep student @ school

∴ ↓ crime & ↑ relationship b/w student & family ☺

State Gov -- \$ 56 million student support & welfare

∴ ↓ absence = school welfare = no truants

Students appeared to find Task 2 more difficult with this year’s material than they did with last year’s. Those who could identify examples were generally able to tackle the ‘effect on the reader’ successfully. Many students still just explain what has been written rather than how the example persuades.

Students were required to select five examples of different types of persuasive language use, and to explain how each example works to persuade the reader. How does this language make the reader feel and why does this persuade the reader to agree with the writer’s point of view? Students are not asked to comment on the success or failure of the examples or present an argument for or against the point being made.

Example 1

The explanations are longer than necessary, with some very colourful language. They vary in quality, but mostly show a clear understanding of the task.

EXAMPLE OF
PERSUASIVE
TECHNIQUE.\

EFFECT ON AUDIENCE

1. ‘I’m not sure they need to be chained to their desk all day, seven days a week, looking at the blackboard.’

Mr. Frost is using hyperbolic language to portray school as a horrible place. His exaggeration of the conditions at schools is aimed at creating shock among the audience. The phrase “chained to their desk all day” portrays a picture of lack of freedom and strictness beyond logical proportions. The audience will therefore feel shocked at the situation at school for their and other people’s kids.

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| 2. 'we call these days off "mental health days"' | Here the speaker is using litotic language to curb the negative stigma associated with not going to school. He alters the usual term 'wagging' to 'mental health days' to create a sense of appeal to the whole idea of not going to school. This is to cause the audience to feel that not going to school is not bad. The reader will then feel content that their children are not doing anything bad by missing school once in a while. |
| 3. 'school isn't always the safe, happy place adults like to think' | The speaker is trying to portray the school as a horrible place for children. This statement creates the air of doubt in the audience's mind of the value of the school and the ideals it upholds. The use of the word safe, preys on the audience's initial desire for children – to be kept safe. The audience will feel a sense of disgust towards school and angry at the people that want them at school. |
| 4. 'but when kids show some independence to learn away from school they are called truants.' | Mr. Frost is trying to demonstrate the hypocrisy of the school's policy. The fact that schools try to teach independent learning but don't want children to put it in practise demonstrates their hypocritical nature. Mr. Frost is belittling the school to exhibit to his audience their poor ideals and also to help quash any arguments they may have opposing his. The audience will feel disrespect and a sense of confusion towards the school's contradicting stance and action. |
| 5. 'nor part of the prison system' | The use of the metaphor is to create a sense of entrapment for the children of school. He uses the audience's preconceived notions of prison life to spur them into a sense of action to get their kids out of the atrocious conditions. The words also paint a picture of a very drab, evil, monotonous place unassociated with children. The audience will develop a sense of purpose to help the kids out of school and its confines due to its portrayal as a prison like structure. |

Example 2

Although stilted in places, these explanations show an awareness of the effect of the speaker's language.

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| 1. 'I've got three kids ...' | The speaker is using personal experience. He is attempting to persuade the listener by showing that he is directly effected and involved in the issue. The listener may then be more likely to agree with his view on truancy because he has kids and is personally affected. He is speaking as if he has authority on the issue. |
| 2. 'chained to their desks' | Here the speaker is exaggerating the negative side of the school environment. This puts a very negative light on the schools and makes the listener view them as an unpleasant place. The listener is more likely to agree with him if they see school as a horrible place to be. No one can blame the kids for leaving. |
| 3. 'most of us ... haven't we?' | The speaker is trying to get the listener on his side by making them part of the issue. He does this by saying 'us' and 'we'/ He makes the listener think about the time when they were young. He tries to put them in the kids shoes to show them that they didn't want to be at school either. All kids are the same. |
| 4. 'in out house ... "mental health days" ...' | Humour is used by the speaker to persuade the listener. By making a joke about days off he makes the listener more at ease, shows them that it's not so bad. The listener is more likely to agree with him if he makes them see the funny side. Make them not panic. He makes them feel that the issue is taken too seriously. |
| 5. 'They're not childcare centres nor ...prison system.' | Here the speaker compares schools to prisons and childcare centres. This makes the listener feel as if the schools are acting inappropriately, and not doing their job correctly. The listeners are more likely to agree with him if they think the schools are doing wrong. No one wants to send their kids to prison or childcare instead of school. |

Students need to know exactly what is expected of them in this task. Students must explain the persuasiveness of the language, not the example itself. Students should be familiar with sentence stems which will lead them to do this, e.g. 'the speaker/writer persuades the audience by ...; the audience is persuaded because they...; The rhetorical question persuades because ...; When the writer/speaker uses 'we', the audience feels ...' Students should know how to put

themselves in the audience's shoes and think about how the language makes them feel rather than just labelling techniques. Having a framework to use with each example, knowledge of sequencing and appropriate use of connectives between the examples and understanding why the writer uses the language and the effect on the audience are also helpful. In addition, students should be familiar with the application of nouns and adjectives which describe feelings. ESL students in mainstream classes need to know and practise using the specific skills for this task. Students who have good analytical skills are able to meet the requirements of the task, even if their expression skills are basic.

Task 3 asked students to write a letter. Overall, these responses were disappointing. Some misread the requirements of the task and wrote as a parent. Others wrote short, glib letters and did not seem to understand the requirements in relation to audience and purpose. Many responses focused on the reasons for truancy with only passing reference to ways of managing it. Some students confused school council and school counsellor. The topic seemed to lead some to anecdotes about their own experiences at the expense of giving management advice. The most successful answers linked a reason for truancy with a proposed solution, with the emphasis on the management/solution of the problem rather than the reason for it. Less successful answers included simplistic solutions such as parties for students every week, suggesting that schools should become a fairground and/or teachers should be in two places at once, manning the gates to catch escapees or patrolling the mall.

Many responses still include large slabs copied directly from the task material. Students must learn to answer this task in their own words. They should be aware of the assessment criteria printed on the examination paper. In this task they are being assessed on their ability to present a point of view. 'Knowledge and control of the material presented' does not mean writing out the task material. It does mean understanding the information and using ideas from it to support the point of view the student is presenting. Students should be encouraged to use the planning skills they apply to the text response task to plan before writing in this task.

The structure and tone of this example are appropriate to the audience and purpose. The response is relevant even though the suggestions for managing truancy are very general.

The president of the School Council

Dear Sir/Madam,

The debate about how to control truancy has intensified at our school recently. While normally the issue is only discussed among the teachers, it is comforting to know that the School Council also values our, the students' view. After all, it is the students who are most concerned in this issue. Personally I believe that more effort should be put into understand the reasons of truancy and to address the causes, because painstakingly keeping students at school is futile and will only result in higher absences.

There are many reasons why students don't want to be at school. The simple ones can be "don't feel like it", not motivated to come, while the more disturbing ones can be bullying at school, low grades and unhappiness at home. Therefore it is important for us to understand the cause and treat the problem accordingly. Teachers should be more aware of students' personal problems and extend more understanding and the students should be encouraged to talk to others. And hence we work together towards a solution to truancy.

On the other hand, simply keeping students at school is sidestepping the problem and treating the effect rather than the cause. No one can force us stay at school, not teachers, parents or the police. School is not a prison and students shouldn't be locked in. And keep us in by force can only result in further rebellion and unwillingness to come to school. And more students will avoid coming.

Studying at school should be fun. And there is no use if we stayed at school and did not enjoy it. It will only waste everyone's time and we would be better off staying at home. So fighting truancy by force is not a problem, only making the school more "attractive" will make the students more willing to come to school.

Lastly, thank you for the opportunity that allows students to have a say in this matter. I sincerely wish you will also take our opinion into serious consideration.

Yours sincerely,

(name)