



## GENERAL COMMENTS

The English examination assessed student achievement in the skills and outcomes indicated in the current *English VCE Study Design*.

The examination consisted of two sections. The first section (Text response) had two parts and students were required to complete one response from each part. The second section (Writing task) also had two parts. The first part concerned the analysis of language use, while in the second part students were required to complete one piece of writing in response to a choice of three different options in form and purpose.

Assessment was based upon criteria and was applied holistically. Scores were awarded that reflected the assessors' judgement of the **whole** answer in balance and students were ranked over the full range of available marks. The descriptors of the 'Expected Qualities for the Mark Range – EXAMINATION' can be found on the VCAA website by following the link to the Exam Criteria from the English Study Page. These descriptors are based on the criteria and are general indicators of what might reasonably be expected for the specified mark ranges in each section of the examination. Assessors used the descriptors to make specific judgements about the characteristics of responses in the 2006 examination.

Students responded well to this examination and most presented four completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of the required knowledge and skill. Both the quality and quantity of work produced under the timed conditions of the examination were quite sound, and, at times, impressive. Students' growing awareness of the value of close textual knowledge and careful management of response structure indicates sound teaching and learning.

On the other hand, teachers and students should note the following information.

- Too often, planning notes were overly detailed. Plans are primarily for the benefit of the student, not for the assessor, and notes are only examined by the assessor in the worst case scenarios. Students should avoid spending time on excessive planning, which may be detrimental to the actual response.
- This is an English examination, and strong language skills are both expected and necessary for success. This year there seemed to be a greater awareness of register, which suggests that teachers and students have noted the advice offered in previous Assessment Reports.
- Students should continue to be reminded of the importance of engaging with the actual elements of the question. Too often students obviously referred to previous years' topics rather than grappling with the specifics of the topic offered in this examination. Students need to contemplate the specific issues offered by the topic presented to them and consider the implications of the topic before they begin writing. Adopting a purely investigative style of response is very challenging and does not always succeed – although top answers that used this approach were superb.
- Students should organise their time so that enough time is left to proofread their work. While it is accepted that there is obvious pressure in an examination, handwriting must be legible.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The student responses provided below are presented for illustrative and informative reasons, and they may form the basis of profitable discussions. These examples should not be taken as 'the best' that is possible or as 'perfect'; indeed, none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. They are, however, typical of the range expected from students who are working under examination conditions to produce a first draft piece of writing. Readers will obviously be able to make many more observations about the quality of these responses beyond the brief comments offered herein.

Two top level responses are provided as examples from each of the Text response parts and for the Writing Task. The first was seen as exceptional, scoring top marks, while the second was 'very good' and scored close to the top score.

**Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or content.**



## Section 1 – Text response

### Part 1

For Part 1, the most popular texts and their mean scores, out of a possible 10 marks, were as follows.

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Gattaca</i>	14.80%	5.40
<i>I'm Not Scared</i>	9.10%	5.65
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i>	8.87%	5.30
<i>Lantana</i>	8.47%	5.70
<i>The Quiet American</i>	5.54%	6.59

The least popular texts for this part included *Voices and Visions from India*, *Fine Line*, *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* and *Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems*.

The highest mean scores for Part 1 were achieved by students who wrote on *Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *i for Isobel* and *The Plague*.

Part 1 of the Text response section assessed students' ability to develop a 'sustained interpretive point of view about a text'. This part was generally very well done. In particular, textual knowledge, such as narrative detail and understanding of the key characters and their motives, was well demonstrated. Students generally wrote equally well across all genres. In particular, the non-print texts were handled well and most students clearly demonstrated an understanding of the manner in which the visual aspects of this genre add meaning to the text. This was true of the most popular text, *Gattaca*, where the topic directed students very clearly towards this discussion.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. There are often many approaches to answering a topic, all of which may be equally valid. Students who approach the same topic quite differently can be rewarded for insightful interpretation of the topic, carefully selected textual evidence to support their proposition and a well written, fluent and expressive piece of writing. Ultimately, the quality of investigation is far more important than coming to a definitive or absolute position.

Students should be prepared to challenge aspects of the topic or explore qualifications (consider the topics offered for *Generals Die in Bed*, *Hamlet* and *i for Isobel*). Some students fell into the trap of simply agreeing with the central proposition of the topic and offering a series of basic examples which supported the general notion, with little or no analysis and exploration. All topics should be viewed critically, not as simple exposition.

Students should be reminded that the focus of their response must stem from the topic set. While it is important to have an excellent knowledge of the text (and many students showed commendably detailed knowledge), the finished piece of writing must still be a direct and specific response to the proposition that has been presented to them. For example, the Part 1 topic on *Lantana* asked the question 'To what extent are the decisions made in *Lantana* based on a fear of loss?' Although it may have been valid to comment on how decisions appear to have been made, 'fear of loss' needed to be the central discussion of the response.

Collections offer a special challenge – students need to find threads of meaning, patterns and connections, all in the context of the topic itself, and then pull it all together into a unified response. Students should practise this type of response in advance. Some students seemed to predetermine the selection of particular short stories, poems or lyrics without considering how they support the ideas of the topic. In these cases the responses often seemed forced and artificial, losing their connection with the ideas offered in the question.

Lyrics from songs appeared for the first time in 2006 and Paul Kelly was popular with many students. It is timely to remind students that the focus of this work, in respect to the English course, is the lyrics themselves. A successful sample response on this text is in Part 2 of this report.

Finally, the judicious use of brief quotations embedded within responses continues to improve, with students recognising the precision of reference and the very real thesis support that quality textual reference can afford. It should be noted, however, that learned textual references do not enhance an essay when they are used simply as 'padding', without demonstrating any actual textual awareness.



The response below is an example of a high-scoring student response.

*The Kite Runner*

**Baba says: "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything". Is this true of Amir?**

*The Kite Runner* follows the journey from Kabul to California through the eyes of the protagonist, Amir. Amir is in search of his own identity throughout the text and is often consumed with winning the approval of his father, Baba. In doing so, he betrays his loyal friend, Hassan who always 'stands up' for him as Amir cannot do it himself. The notion of 'stand up for himself' is portrayed by Hassan as not just physically, but also emotionally confronting the problems which face Amir. Instead of vindicating himself, Amir pushes Hassan and Ali further away and escapes his guilt in the form of pursuing a writing career in California. However, when he realises the sins of Baba, the affection and approval that he once craved seems meaningless to Amir and it is the pest of unatoned sins which brings him back to Kabul. Here Amir learns to forgive his father and himself which is a precursor to gain an understanding of himself. Although Amir shows acts of cowardice and disloyalty in his childhood, it is his ability to learn forgiveness and his motivation to save Sohrab at the end of the text which proves that, despite Baba's ideal, Amir does become a man who stands up for something, giving him purpose and redemption.

Amir is confused about who he is as a person, and in search for Baba's affection, he fails to stand up for himself as a boy and most importantly, Hassan. Despite Hassan showing Amir nothing but his 'goddamn, unwavering loyalty', Amir fails to return the gesture. The climax of his betrayal is when he idly watches the rape of Hassan as 'maybe he was the lamb I had to slay to win Baba's affection'. The state of the Pomegranate Tree is not only used by Hosseini to symbolise the political situation, but also is a motif which represents the fall of Amir's friendship to Hassan as the tree 'hasn't borne fruit for years'. This break in friendship is the ultimate example of how Amir can not stand up to correct his own guilt as a boy and eventually labels himself as 'a monster' as he causes Hassan and Ali to leave and 'did not cry'. This inability to stand up for himself is linked to the cruel streak of Amir. Hosseini further uses the symbol of kite flying as Amir must bleed, suffer and cut the strings of everyone else in hope to gain Baba's approval. It is ironic that Amir acts in this way in believing that it will strengthen the relationship with his father, yet Baba's true wish would be for him to treat Hassan the exact opposite to the way he does and stand up for himself. What encapsulates Amir's inability to 'stand up' is when he begs his father not to defeat a girl on the truck which Baba snaps 'haven't I taught you anything?' The influence of Baba on Amir, has caused him to be confused of his identity and as a result Amir fails to stand up for himself as a boy and as a young man.

It is the move to America and the realisation of Baba's sins which allow Amir to be placed on a path to redemption and a way to stand up for himself. The first time that Amir truly gains Baba's approval is shown when he celebrates his graduation in the American bar. The relationship he sparks with Soraya is also important in his journey while in California as it is the first real loving connection he had with someone of equal status. However the combination of Baba's death and Soraya's confession of her past helps Amir realise his problems of the guilt he ran away from. Furthermore the strong theme of green, the colour of Afghanistan, for his wedding is symbolic that he still has problems to face in Kabul. The ultimate epiphany though is the realisation that Baba's affection is not what he truly wanted, as he describes himself as a father figure to be 'just like Baba, but nothing like him'. It is the call from Rahim Khan which forces the return of Amir to Kabul. Here Hosseini explores a reason as to why Amir must eventually stand up for himself as a man.

The only way Amir truly learns to forgive and gain an understanding of his own identity is through standing up for himself and Sohrab as a man. Rahim Khan not only offers Amir 'a way to be great again', but has been the nurturer of Amir's creative side as he lost his mother to 'death during child birth'. However it is only until Amir is beaten to an inch of his own life by Assef where he can feel true empathy about what it is like to stand up and be courageous, just like Hassan and Baba. The fight is also important as it leaves Amir with injuries to his eye socket, hare lip and lung; coincidentally three injuries similar to that of Assef, Baba and Hassan. Hosseini suggests the Amir is left with these three scars which symbolise the people who have shaped Amir. He learns to forgive Baba for his neglect of 'living in the same house, but in different spheres of existence' and importantly he forgives himself for the treatment of Hassan and the saving of Sohrab sparks a new beginning. Adopting Sohrab back to America is also Amir's first altruistic act and gives him the identity he has been searching for. By this stage, Amir has finally learnt to stand up for something, despite his shortcomings as a boy.

Amir's journey is one of vindication and redemption. The reason why he feels the need to vindicate himself is because he feels he has dishonoured his father through not standing up for himself or Hassan. However, the path offered by Rahim Khan enables him to empathise with the people who influenced his life and thus forgive his father and himself. It is this understanding of himself which causes him to finally 'stand up for anything' in the form of Sohrab as he progresses to an apparent fulfilling and purposeful life as a writer, husband, father and man. Amir is able to disprove that although he fails to stand up for himself as a boy, he succeeds in becoming a man who can 'stand up for anything'.

Assessor comments

- The student assuredly addresses the topic and builds a proposition, appropriately qualifying a key notion.
- The student makes very good use of the text to support the ideas. There are a sufficient number of quotations which augment the textual detail. The student does not fall into offering narrative, as was common with responses on this text.
- The response is crafted so that it builds towards a distinct view in relation to the topic; it is well structured.
- The language, vocabulary and expression are strong, although not without problems.



The following is an example of a very good student response.

***I'm Not Scared***

***Near the end of the novel Michele tells Filippo, "There's nothing to be scared of".***

***To what extent does fear motivate the characters in this text?***

*I'm Not Scared demonstrates the role fear plays in people's lives and their respective decisions. It is shown through the novel to be an extremely powerful and underlying contributor to many of the situations that the characters find themselves in, and also the paths they chose to follow.*

*Pino, Teresa and the other adults of Acqua Traverse show perfectly the role fear plays. Although, to begin with, the kidnapping of Filippo was done out of greed and a desire for more, by the end of the novel it is ruled by fear. Fear of not only being caught, but also fear of what could happen to them once they were. Michele compares this fear the adults have to that of green lizard who '...spits to try and scare you because really they are more scared of you,' and how by the end of the novel the adults are so consumed by this fear that Pino ends up shooting his own son and the adults of Acqua Traverse end up losing more than they sought to gain.*

*On the other hand, other characters are motivated by a different kind of fear. Antonio Natale, or 'Skull', despite his cruel and supposed tough exterior is really controlled by his fear of not being accepted. His constant need for reassurance and his bullying of Barbara are all a result of the fear he feels that he may be overthrown as 'boss' of the children's group and that he may not be accepted by the others. In turn, however, the actions as a result of Skull's fears lead to the fear that the other kids have of him. Michele often speaks of how the other kids simply went along when Skull's sadistic mind got to work" and how only Salvatore seemed to have the ability to stand up to him. While Michele shares this fear of Skull, he also has a certain amount of fear concerning other things.*

*Throughout the novel, Michele's fear of monsters is ever present. Whenever he is afraid of something he compares it to a fictional monster or character which makes the fear seem more real to him. This constant fear of monsters is soon 'foiled' by Michele's father when he tells him 'it's men you should be afraid of, not monsters' and Michele comes to realise that the adults of Acqua Traverse are the materialisation of his fears, not monsters. However, unlike the other characters in this novel, Michele is able to use these fears in a positive way, as opposed to the negative way of the other characters. By the end of the novel Michele is able to harness this fear and use it to motivate him to rescue Filippo, something not even his parents were able to do. Being as brave as 'Tiger Jack' and using his fears as motivation, Michele is able to constructively show the strength that can come from these fears.*

*Fear plays a large and sometimes detrimental role in many of the characters lives and leads them to do things they may not have otherwise done. Although for a majority of the characters fear has a negative influence, for Michele, fear proves to be the thing that helps him most, and that helps him make better decisions than most of the other characters in I'm Not Scared.*

**Assessor comments**

- A well written response which develops the idea of fear but also is aware of the key notion from the topic, 'motivate the characters'.
- The topic is appropriately qualified and different aspects of fear are examined.
- Very good textual knowledge is shown.
- The characters are well discussed although there is room for greater depth and detail.
- Several appropriate quotations are used, but there is room for further use.
- There is good control of language and expression, but it is not without problems.
- There is an assurance about the response.

**Part 2**

For Part 2, the most popular texts and their mean scores, out of a possible 10 marks, were as follows:

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Gattaca</i>	31.85%	5.23
<i>Lantana</i>	12.26%	5.71
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i>	6.19%	4.90
<i>King Oedipus</i>	5.40%	5.60
<i>I'm Not Scared</i>	4.91%	4.73

The least popular texts for this part included *Voices and Visions from India*, *Baghdad Blog*, *Fine Line*, *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* and *Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems*.

The highest mean scores for Part 2 were achieved by students who wrote on *Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems*, *The Plague*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Quiet American*.



Part 2 of the Text response section enables students to draw on their own experience and life views as they work with the ideas and values in the text. However, students need to thoroughly understand what a text is doing and how it works (which is assessed in Part 1) in order to do well in their Part 2 response.

Part 2 offers the opportunity to work with the text and its wider social, political and cultural contexts. This is the raw material which will likely have some part in creating students' own reflective positions as they mature. Such notions and concepts as may be canvassed here stay on long after plot and character fade. Studying the ideas in texts thus enables students to draw on their experience and assists them in formulating their positions in relation to the world of ideas and the decisions necessary in it. It works with and explores responses to abstract, underlying notions which are at the core of the texts.

Most students were able to tackle the basic propositions of the questions to some degree. The best answers were superlative pieces of writing that highlighted students' maturity and ability as they responded to the texts and topics by formulating their own positions.

The following introduction for a Part 2 response on *Lantana* started in a positive direction because of the student's ability to employ the imagery on the screen while responding to the essence of the topic set.

*In the eponymous named film Lantana, truth became a concept as remote and twisted as the body hidden within the deceptively dangerous tangles of the innocent-looking lantana plant. Similarly, extricating the truth from the heart of the relationships within Lantana was as challenging as locating and removing the lifeless body from the depths of the lantana plant – a process that could not be successfully accomplished without a price being paid, damage being done. The reality of the explosive, dangerous and painful nature of the truths within the relationships and marriages of Lantana caused deceit to appear an easier option, however, in reality; it could only avoid the emergence of the truth for a temporary period of time.*

The examination itself states that 'Part 2 requires a developed and sustained discussion that analyses the underlying social or cultural values embodied in a text.' In 2006, better students **did** demonstrate an understanding of the core concepts embodied in the topic. It is evident that successful students took time to think adeptly during the actual examination as opposed to coming in with prepared, pre-learned essays. Genuine thought about the text is essential, and more lateral thought and discussions should be a regular part of class discussion throughout the year.

While most students appear to have taken previous advice, some, to their detriment, failed to focus on the text but rather inappropriately used examples from **outside** the text. A single reference may be illustrative, but paragraphs exploring external situations are not within the guidelines of the task. However, **never** actually leaving the text is clearly equally incorrect.

The following is a full example of a high-ranking student response.

*Don't Start Me Talking: Lyrics 1984–2004 (Paul Kelly)*

*"A little shelter, a friendly fire, some company under the bridge"*

*'Paul Kelly's lyrics show that companionship and a sense of belonging are essential for a life of contentment.'*

*Discuss.*

*In his anthology Don't Start Me Talking, Paul Kelly gives voice to marginalising, popularised, abused and adored Australians. His poetry, originally intended as lyrics for his music is written as free flowing verse and is unburdened by strict poetic structure. Kelly shows that for a life of contentment, companionship and a sense of belonging are essential. As such, companionship in the form of friendships and relationships are important as is the feeling of fitting into a particular environment. Kelly explores the detrimental effects when these do not occur. Specifically he targets injustices perpetrated against indigenous people and abuse against the powerless. Kelly asserts, however, the joyous experiences when these things do occur through the importance of place and positive relationships.*

*Paramount throughout Kelly's lyrics are injustices perpetrated against indigenous Australians who had their sense of belonging taken away by white Australians. Culture and land are of paramount importance to indigenous people. 'Special Treatment' depicts the issue of the stolen generation. The stolen generation is a term used to describe the forcible removal of Australian Aboriginal children from the family by Australian Government Agencies until 1969. Over 100,000 children had their lives destroyed and sense of belonging taken away through this policy. 'They were split up against their will' couple with 'strangers came and took away their child' describes the inability of white man to accept indigenous people. The child in this story depicts his experience having grown up separate from his family and rightful heritage. 'I never learnt mother's tongue' is Kelly's sad portrayal of the demise of culture. The child was unable to grow up happy and content because they were confused over where they belong.*

*Furthermore, Kelly explores the ramifications when the abused are left powerless and lost. 'These Lies' tells the story of a young girl subject to her grandfather's abuse who stole her childhood and innocence. The girl's youthful ripening is evident in the words 'summer's sweet and budding fruit' but this is brutally cut short by 'winter's icy fingers'. Kelly displays the abuse as tragic and unconscionable grandfather and the innocent sense of belonging.*





Similarly, 'Sweet Guy' displays the situation for women trapped in violent relationships. 'I ran for cover but I ran too slow / I was stitched by strangers' displays the abuse this woman was subject to. Relationships are supposed to provide comfort and contentment but not only is this woman subject to her partner's violence but his behaviour is erratic and unpredictable. As with many women trapped in violent relationships she bemoans her powerlessness. 'It's something that's right out of my hands' and feels unable to extricate herself from the situation. Her life is certainly not content because she has been taken advantage of and her partner has stolen her sense of belong, replacing it with abuse.

Conversely, Kelly demonstrates the importance of place to display the sense of belonging a familiar place can bring. 'The Pretty Place' is truly a celebration of place. 'From silver dawn to golden setting sun' displays its timelessness; that although the Pretty Place is gone the memories will always remain in the mind of the narrator. 'Take me where the water flows and bumps along on pebbled stones' couple with 'tale me where the fishes swim and shimmer in and out of vision' displays the happiness and beauty found in their Pretty Place. As a result of his happy, content life which involved this Pretty Place, the narrator is ready for life after death, 'In my mind I see the light.' Kelly depicts this sense of belonging as essential at having created a life of contentment.

Similarly, Kelly reminisces over less joyful memories associated with place. In 'Adelaide' Kelly laments the stagnation of a town, 'Sitting in the same chairs they were sitting in last year.' There is something eerily comforting about seeing the 'hedges all in a row.' Kelly shows that although you can turn your life on your birthplace there is something reassuring about knowing that the memories will always live on and knowing that you can always go back to a place you belong.

In addition, Kelly shows the importance of companionship through child and adolescent relationships. In 'Melting' love is implied. Children dazzle over the simple things in life. Memories such as 'At the back of my grandmother's house there was a hill' provide predictability and comfort of routine. Relationships with people and places within these lyrics fuel experiences for children which they can form their values around. Similarly 'Roll On Summer' provides evidence of the benefits of companionship. These lyrics depict the innocent nature of adolescent love, especially falling in love with a girl for the first time. Not only does the familiarity of 'VB' and 'fish and chips so hot and salty' provide comfort but companionship in the form of a girl, 'Sally' evidently sparks positive emotions and contentment. When summer ends, so does the relationship. 'It's time to come in' describes this but the boy in the lyrics has benefited from the companionship he found at the beach that summer and has subsequently been contented and able to see it as a happy inventory.

In conclusion, Paul Kelly explores many experiences of companionship and a sense of belonging to show they are essential for a life of contentment. Particularly evident is Kelly's harsh depiction of injustices perpetrated against Indigenous Australians who had their sense of belonging and identity taken away as a result of British invasion. Additionally, Kelly highlights the consequences of violent abuse for those whose innocence and companionship are stolen away. Kelly also muses over the importance of place and the invaluable quality of feeling connected to a particular place. Finally, Kelly lauded over companionship in the form of adolescent and childhood relationships and how essential they are for a life of contentment.

#### Assessor comments

- It is evident throughout that the student is responding to the ideas presented in the topic.
- There is a detailed exploration of companionship and sense of belonging, and appropriate songs have been chosen to support that exploration.
- The student has reached conclusions in respect to the individual ideas presented.
- There is sufficient detail and adept use of quotations.
- Excellent and confident control of language and expression.

The following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

#### **Generals Die in Bed**

**'This text demonstrates that in dangerous situations individuals are protected more by their rank than by their courage.'**  
**Discuss.**

The individual takes on a porous quality in Generals Die in Bed, a quality which negates conventional perceptions of rank or courage. 'We are lost', says the narrator: the absurdity and tumult of war makes virtually all aspects of existence a matter of chance. But it is undeniable that in the text the officers take on authoritarian, malevolent qualities which protect them from the actualities of the first properly technological war of 1914–18. 'There are those that make war and those that fight 'em, pal,' says one soldier. The very title of the novel hints rather sardonically at the way the officers live, and juxtaposes the way they live (and die) with the hideously futile, violent and undignified way many of the narrator's comrades meet their ends. 'The Generals have a bloody good time fifty miles up the line' – one of the ubiquitous marching songs perhaps the most telling about the way a high rank is one of the few tangible protections in the war. But the very nature of individuality is incompatible with war, and thus whether one lives or dies becomes a matter of happenstance exhibited in such events as the shooting of Captain Clark. Though rank is a protective device in war, it is principally the way one acts (and the circumstances one encounters) which dictates how and if one will survive.

Rank is the most prominent 'structure' in the book and also the most detested aspect of life within a fighting force. Angered comments follow each of the officers, and the sparse amount of conversation in the trenches dwells largely on the attitudes and impositions of the officers. The most prominent reason behind this dislike (and this is to ignore the fateful way many of the officers – the obvious example being Clark – conduct themselves) is that an inherent factor of high rank is the guarantee of position away from the line. The voice of Charles Yale Harrison's hauntingly anonymous narrator is very effective in setting the experiences of the ordinary shock-troops beside the grandiosity of visage and hypocrisy of the officers. While the men 'lie and rot



*forever' in collapsing trenches, the episode of a visit by a General highlights the glow of his polished shoes. The narrative voice has a cinematic fragmentary cadence, which highlights the nullity of consciousness and the loss of identity caused both by the tempest of war and the degrading manner the officers treat the men. 'I do not want to die.' The text's simplicity and unequivocally bare tone ironically reflects the General's high lifestyle. While innocent, everyman, like Brown and Fry, who is 'always bumping into things', can be wordlessly sacrificed on muddy fields, the propagandise and hollow voices of the officers urging them to remain – and guarantee the fact that a high rank is the one protection from pestilence and horrific death.*

*The narrator of Generals Die in Bed embodies many heroic qualities; through often this courageous quality is the result of a basic animal need to survive. The artifice of the 'personae' which masks the degradation of all wars effectively cancels out the image of heroism as desperate act. The narrator encounters a rat on his first days in the trenches – he notices that 'it is fat,' and 'wonders why'. This predictive vignette depicts how, in the curiously abstract and hallucinatory pages of the 'Bombardment' chapter, every man is thrown into a pit of chance, where the only meaning taken on by their actions is found in their death of their survival. In one scene, the narrator ruminates on God and religion. 'I remember I do not believe in God,' and yet he prays anyway. While high rank could be seen as a guarantee of living through such experiences of even foregoing them, the more sympathetic colonels in the novel are evidence that the maelstrom of senselessness that was World War I, and is every war that has ever been fought, cannot be avoided entirely. The narrator, who is eventually regarded as a heroic fugue (and is awarded a medal following his capture of German troops in the hellish trench episodes) relies on his ability to deal minute-to-minute with the war around him, the comparative imaginism of his broken first-person account evidence of the way the meaninglessness of happenstance in battle (and whether one survives as a result) is synonymous with the label, 'courage', and is often the only thing a soldier can fall back on.*

*The novel cumulatively evokes an anomaly between the ideology of war held by the populace, the war-makers and the officers, and the brutally, random world in which the soldiers live. In the emotionally affecting chapters of 'Leave in London', the narrator talks of 'how much I hate these people,' the citizens who see war as a glorious act of affirmation. The fact that there is a difference between the image of war and the war itself is telling and it shows how, though courage is often the saviour of life, and rank a shield behind which the people 'who should be made to remember' hide, there is no difference against the chaos of war.*

#### Assessor comments

- While some students had difficulty exploring the connections among 'protection', 'dangerous situations', 'rank' and 'courage', this student has pulled the ideas together extremely well.
- The essay demonstrates the student's capacity to step back from the text but, at the same time, use the text to support and illustrate the ideas.
- Excellent textual knowledge and ability to select appropriate examples.
- Strong vocabulary and fluent writing.

## Section 2 – Writing task

The writing task scenario was topical and of interest to students. It provided an opportunity to reflect on an issue relevant to their world. The issue allowed for many varied responses to Part 2, in which students were quite effective in presenting a point of view.

### Part 1

There were two pieces for analysis in 2006. The first was an article from a magazine for young people which provided financial advice. The second was an editorial from a distinctly different magazine, entitled 'Life Issues'. Virtually all students responded to both pieces and most presented fairly complete answers to both Parts. The mean score for Part 1 was 5.24 out of a possible 10.

The best responses to Part 1 deliberately set out to explore and analyse the way **language** was used in presenting each of the two pieces. These students were often able to refer to the difference between each piece in a concise and clear movement from one to the other.

Students who did not understand the thrust of the text, or could not contextualise the material, found this year's task to be difficult. This initial challenge then often led to a series of meaningless argument technique identifications – simple labelling. Despite previous advice to the contrary, some students even jotted down meaningless lists through learned acronyms on the note page with an accompanying list of techniques to look for. Many seemed fixedly determined to offer argument evaluation. The task is not simply to identify techniques and evaluate arguments; this has little to do with demonstrating an understanding of how the language choices are operating. Moreover, a formulaic approach tends to induce a lotus like confidence that retelling and simple summary is appropriate. Students must be continually reminded that this task is clearly defined in the actual task statement: 'In a coherently constructed piece of prose, analyse the ways in which language is used to present a point of view...'



It was critical that students considered, identified and reflected upon the target audience of each piece and the resulting tones that stemmed from an article in a magazine advocating investment and an editorial in a lifestyle magazine.

The skills nurtured in Outcome 1 should be built upon so that students can talk with accuracy and meaning, in their own terms, about how language is being used. They must also be reminded that the expectation is 'a coherently constructed piece of prose'; that is, a single piece of writing with an introduction and a conclusion. The construction of the remainder of the response is at the student's discretion, but it too must abide by the standards of a formal piece of writing with appropriate paragraphing and punctuation.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*In addressing the issue of whether money can buy happiness, the author of the article in 'Starting Out' excitedly contends that there are many ways in which young people can use money to gain more ease and happiness in everyday life. Conversely, the 'Life Issues' editorial argues that evidence shows lasting happiness to be unlikely to result from wealth and that more important things in life generate happiness.*

*With the title 'Making Money Work for You...' and repetition of the phrase in the opening question 'why not make your money work for you?' the author of the article intends to coerce young people into believing that wealth can be gained without much exertion on their part and conjures the image that money is not simply an inanimate and shallow value.*

*In associating the 'things that make you happy' with the phrase 'good, sound safe advice' of financial websites, the author aims to associate happiness with finances in the minds of young people and instil a feeling of trust in the advice of people such as himself. Having positioned readers in such a way, the author begins suggestions of 'compound interest', immediately aiming to dash ideas that it may be 'boring' with an excited tone, the use of an exclamation mark and repetition of the phrase 'it could really work for you!' The mention of a perceived reasonable amount of money aims to instil in readers the idea that with 'only \$1000' they could potentially join the exciting suggestions of the author.*

*The author continues by associating good financial plans with feelings of 'not worry[ing]' and further 'excitement' in an attempt to manipulate readers into accepting his suggestions as making life easier and more fun.*

*With a series of questions such as 'mobile phone? Ipod?...' the author aims to appeal to the perceived desires of young people, intending to show these as being perfectly achievable.*

*Having set up the perceived excitement and benefits of his suggestion, the author briefly mentions the downfalls, down playing them as being 'little' as compared to 'future financial happiness' and petty through the use of phrases such as "'must have" new hair product' – the quotation marks implying that they are not, in fact, 'must haves'. This aims to show the benefits of such plans as far outweighing any pitfalls.*

*Concluding with the phrase 'what price happiness', the author intends to leave readers with a sense that his suggestions are necessary if one is to ever gain such happiness and imply that the price is small in comparison to perceived gain.*

*In contrast, the editorial adopts a reasoned, almost regretful tone as seen through the phrase 'unhappiness is an endemic in affluent societies.' This aims to show the disappointment in the idea that money may ever buy happiness and instil similar disappointment in readers.*

*Employing the use of data of 'a recent OECD survey,' the magazine intends to push readers towards comparing themselves to Mexico – a much poorer country – and questioning themselves as to why they may be unhappy, while the use of data aims to build the credibility of the magazine's argument.*

*Listing these solutions with the terms 'in the first place' and 'secondly' the editors aim to portray the 'downfalls' of wealth as clear and logical, intending to push readers towards feeling that they must agree with them if they, too, are to appear logical and reasonable. With the imagery of 'life satisfaction evaporates', the editorial aims to show this as an unstoppable and almost inevitable consequence of adapting to higher incomes and satisfaction from wealth as elusive.*

*With a series of questions such as 'Is it found in good health? ... at home with family and loving relationships?' the editors aim to place the readers in a position to question their own values. Portraying the many values challenged as seemingly more noble than the value of money which has already been questioned itself, the editorial intends to show them as having much more potential to lead to true happiness.*

*With the suggestion of happiness as 'ephemeral', the editors urge readers to value and cherish it, while the cliché 'the rich and famous' aims to arouse negative connotations in relation to perceived shallow behaviour of the rich. In concluding with the phrase 'one should be content to count one's blessings', juxtaposed against the 'rich and famous', the editors aim to leave readers with the feeling that valuing things other than money is far superior, and that they should consider the stem of happiness as being other than financial.*

#### Assessor comments

- The student readily demonstrates an understanding of the context and purpose of each article so that the subsequent detailed analysis is relevant and applicable.
- There is a clear processing of the material and a sharp focus on language use.
- The intended impact of language on the reader – in respect to its context – is lucidly presented.





- The student possesses an excellent control of language and the piece is fluent and well written.
- There is an effective linking paragraph between the two pieces.

The following is another example of a high-scoring response.

*The article published in Starting Out, 'Making money work for you', seeks with an enthusiastic and authoritative tone, to influence its young adult readership to believe that financial stability and material wealth is something worth pursuing, as it equates eventual fulfilment. Conversely, the Life Issues editorial seeks to persuade its audience that happiness does not arise from monetary or material possession, and calls readers to find a more permanent state of fulfilment by gathering those things that bring true satisfaction.*

*The Starting Out article opens by engaging its readership, asking them a rhetorical question and involving them in its stance. By asking, 'Why not make your money work for you?' the article opens up a realm of possibility for its young readers, who view the notion of effortless gain as attractive. The article also asks them to conjure images of the things that make them 'happy', immediately moving its audience onside as it assumes that these things are material goods and financial stability. The connotations of the 'good things: that can be '[enjoyed]'' suggest, with their nuances of easy comfortable living, that money can indeed bring happiness and relaxation. In a further appeal to its readership's desire to lead an easier life, the article reminds them that, 'All you need is \$1,000,' suggesting that this financial idea is simple – which when coupled with, 'you do not need to give up everything,' moves them to believe that it would almost be nonsensical to miss this opportunity that promises great gain for minimal effort. In an attempt to remind readers of the necessity of money for the things that make them happy, the article lists the various pleasure items that require finances to obtain, and in an appeal to readers' sensibility, does conclude that there may be some initial 'pain'. The significance of the down played, however, described as 'little' to attest to the triviality of such sacrifice. 'Little' is repeated to describe the minimal sacrifices that must be made, and thus readers see that eventual fulfilment is worth these small and initial things to give up.*

*In contrast with the article, the Life Issues editorial cautions readers against finding fulfilment in monetary wealth, as it uses the loaded language and connotations of 'evidence' to suggest that affluent people will not be able to stave off the disease of unhappiness with their finances. By drawing upon the 'recent OECD survey' and its findings, the editorial lends credibility to its argument, suggesting to readers that whatever points are made are valid in that they are supported by a reputable source. The comparison forged between Australia and Mexico, seeks to highlight in readers' minds the disparities between the individual incomes of the respective states – which only makes the fact that Australians are no happier due to their material wealth all the more prominent. The editorial makes several allusions to the transitory nature of satisfaction and happiness, calling it 'ephemeral' to remind readers that it is not a concrete object that can be held or possessed by touch – and thus is not represented by money or material goods. By saying that it 'evaporates', this notion of an intangible and fleeting possession seems to make it appear all the more necessary to obtain and hold onto. The repeated rhetorical questioning, which in each sentence subtly suggests an appealing option by which to seek life fulfilment, leads readers to ask themselves what it is that they want and need for satisfaction, involving them in the debate and prompting them to recognize the importance of things other than money.*

*The article concludes with a call to readers to sacrifice the 'little things' at present to enjoy a future state of permanent happiness, as brought about by monetary wealth, reiterating that fulfilment comes from financial gain. In contrast, the editorial suggests that 'one should be content to count one's blessings', showing readers that true happiness lies in good acts and relationships, and warns them away from seeking the cold goal of money – which by no means guarantees them satisfaction.*

#### Assessor comments

- There is clear capacity to step away from the specific language and demonstrate a good sense of purpose for the articles.
- There is a strong sense of how specific language is being used to influence and persuade readers.
- While not having a detailed distinction between the pieces, an understanding of the purpose of each is clear.
- The response is assured and well written.

## Part 2

Option	% of students	Average score out of 10
Speech	47%	5.46
Essay	12%	5.39
Letter to the editor	40%	5.2

This part of the examination produced many engaging responses. Students had a great deal to say about the tension between money and happiness. For the most part, students clearly understand the expectations for this section and it seemed there was an improvement in creating appropriate tone and register for the writing they selected.

The best answers for this section were lively, provocative and sensitive, many finding the qualification that money was necessary for basic survival but that accumulated wealth did not assure happiness.



There seemed to be a better awareness of register for different forms of writing, perhaps the best that has been seen across the breadth of responses. This seemed particularly true of speeches, where many responses could be read as an effective oral presentation. Students should be aware, however, that while an occasional stage instruction may be constructive, too much of a focus on this can detract from the calibre or content of the argument. Directions such as ‘pass the bouquet of flowers to keynote speaker’ or ‘acknowledge the baby in the audience’ do nothing to support the focus of the task – to present an intelligent point of view.

Adopting a particular persona can be successful but students should keep in mind that the persona needs to be credible, authentic and realistic. As well, students should recognise that their writing must be in a sustained register in keeping with the character or persona adopted. A persona needs to be carefully crafted. An implausible persona is more trouble than it is worth!

The material offered to students should be carefully considered and drawn upon judiciously and selectively, ‘as you think appropriate’. Students can do themselves an injustice by simply quoting – without internalising – portions of this material.

Authentic writing is sought, valued and to be encouraged. Students should never presuppose what position they believe assessors wish them to take in respect of the viewpoint. A clear and succinct view in accurate form is sought, not a rambling undefinable narrative or some imagined politically correct stand.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

***You are to speak at a public forum on the topic ‘Can Money Buy Happiness?’  
Write a speech expressing your point of view on this topic.***

*To quote the immortal words that great Greek philosopher, Aristotle, ‘Happiness...is more often found with those who...have only a moderate share of external goods, then among those who possess external goods to a useless extent but are deficient in higher qualities.’ Words that ring true today, even after all those years ago when he wrote them I’m sure you will agree.*

*Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. My name is Doctor Jack Thompson, from the National Psychiatric Institute where I have been the director for the past five years. Today, I wish to tell you why it is that money cannot and will not ever equate to happiness.*

*Happiness is, obviously, a commodity that cannot be bought with money. The largest bank accounts in the world do not belong to the happiest people in this earth – and similarly, you will find some of the most fulfilled people ever in those strata of the world populace that live below the poverty line. Indeed, in Australia our gross national income has been markedly rising ever since we became a nation, yet I can assure you that in this time the number of depressed Australian citizens has also exploded by phenomenal proportions. Suicide levels are up, part of a steady rise nationwide. It would seem that, as we get richer, we also get sadder.*

*Many people incorrectly believe that money can afford them happiness and fulfilment – gaining them power, leisure, social standing, and, in some cases, freedom. Yet the majority of us know that this is not true. Perhaps there is some small satisfaction in watching our share portfolios rise in value – but compare this to the birth of your first child, ladies and gentlemen, and tell me which one brought the warmer glow to your heart? Did you think you were fulfilled when you bought your new car, or payed off the last instalment of your mortgage? Or was that grin merely a mild side effect compared to the enormous smile you had plastered across your face when you got married, or watched your child get married? The simple truth, I think we all know, is that happiness comes from far deeper, much more humane things than money.*

*While it is true that all of us need money to survive, to spend on daily necessities and...tax, I’m certain you all agree that it by no means equates true satisfaction. Perhaps the key is finding some of those things we know really light up our lives – love, relationships, charity, a healthy lifestyle – and working toward them.*

*To return to Aristotle’s advice, let us become Australians ‘cultivated in...mind and...character,’ and become better and happier people for it. This world focuses too much on material wealth, and as a result, depression has become a disease of pandemic proportions. Don’t fall into that trap. We know what gives us true happiness – and I know money does not even appear on the lists for many of us.*

*Thank you.*

#### Assessor comments

- There is a thoughtful opening, which is then revisited in the conclusion. While the quotation is quite long, it is, nevertheless, effective use of the material.
- The response possesses a strong voice that is sustained throughout the speech.
- Assured use of language.



The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*You have read the Editorial in Life Issues on page 13.*

*Write a letter to the editor of this magazine expressing your view on whether money can buy happiness.*

*To the Editor of 'Life Issues',*

*Having read last month's edition of 'Life Issues', I have been left with much to think about. I am a youth worker who every day sees the evidence of poverty in the lives of countless members of society. I can see that perhaps with a little more money and opportunity, many of the kids I see would not be in the situation that they are in today. Money would, to some extent, help them. But this is not to say that money can buy happiness.*

*While extreme poverty can render people unhappy and desperate, there is no shortage of tabloid magazines willing to attest to the fact that some of the richest people in our world are the ones with the greatest unhappiness and problems, both mental and social.*

*Some money is needed in order to maintain the bare necessities of life – food, water, shelter, education. Yet the material possessions can in no way substitute for what really makes us happy. I believe that many people see money as a means of gaining happiness, but they do not realise that the material possessions they see as giving joy are only such because they carry associations. Holidays are associated with relaxation, houses with family and friends and other material possessions with love, health or recognition. It is these things, which cannot necessarily be bought, the simple things, which bring us the real happiness.*

*I have seen teenagers with no money, no place to live, laughing in the company of friends and savouring the simple joys of life. Money will never be able to buy such things.*

*If we base all of our values upon material possessions this is when the desire for money becomes tragic. I don't believe that money equates to unhappiness, as such, but that it can never truly bring happiness on its own. It is the values that can never really be bought (despite perceived associations between them and material possessions which will truly bring joy. Love, friends, health, comfort, happiness.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alex Murphy*

*Senior executive of 'Youth Australia'*

#### Assessor comments

- From the start there is a clear understanding of a letter as a response.
- Embedded within the letter is a strong sense of directing the readers' views, warning about over-reliance on money.
- The student is prepared to make sensible qualifications.
- Astute selection of language and sustained tone.