



GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2009 the examination paper consisted of three sections: Section A required a response to one text, Section B required a response to a prompt related to a selected Context and Section C required completion of two different tasks in response to unseen material. In Section B all set texts were used in student responses.

Assessment is holistic; assessors relate student performance directly to published examination criteria. Their 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 in intensive assessor training before and during the marking process. Teachers and students should be aware of the exam specification, assessment criteria, the descriptors and past examination papers, which are published on the VCAA website.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

Section A – Text Response

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	2	7	13	20	22	18	10	4	1	5.7

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 20 prescribed texts. This was the second year of the new study, in which knowledge of the text includes the ways in which authors use structures, features and conventions to construct meaning, and the assessment descriptors include ‘...consideration of its concepts and construction’.

The best responses demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the topics and texts through an ability to craft a meaningful, analytical and relevant discussion in direct response to the chosen question. The best responses were able to skilfully weave knowledge of the text into the fabric of the analysis. This year more student writing reflected an understanding of the changes to the *VCE English/English as a Second Language Study Design*. Increased reference to the construction and interpretation of text indicates that the focus on these areas has been stronger; however, these areas still need improvement as many students still focused simply on the plot.

The most popular texts and their mean scores are shown in the table below.

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Look Both Ways</i>	30.1%	5.6
<i>The Kite Runner</i>	15.6%	5.9
<i>Sky Burial</i>	11.2%	5.4
<i>Maestro</i>	9.5%	5.8
<i>Citizen Kane</i>	7%	6
<i>Romulus, my Father</i>	6.8%	5.3

Students generally engaged with the texts and used quotes appropriately. They also demonstrated good essay structure through clear introductions and the use of topic sentences in paragraphs. Stronger responses were characterised by a sharp focus on the key words in the topics, selective and considered use of the text, and ideas expressed with strong language skills. There were very few short or incomprehensible responses. In planning, students need to brainstorm all the key words as well as pay particular attention to modifying words and comparatives within the question. Students also need to be able to explore how texts are constructed and the effects of the writer’s choices in developing a narrative.

Look Both Ways was clearly the most popular choice of text, with about 20 percent more responses to Question 1 than Question 2. Both topics enabled students to deal with the text confidently. In responding to Question 2, students demonstrated a clear understanding of Watt’s film techniques and used well-chosen examples from the film to support the concepts being discussed. Responses to Question 1 generally discussed characters and wrote about them ‘facing death’. Better responses used less predictable examples. This text also produced a lot of ‘learned’ response. All responses are assessed according to the criteria but ‘learned’ responses often lacked a sharp focus on the set question.



The questions on *The Kite Runner* were also popular. Responses generally showed a good understanding of the characters and both questions enabled students to discuss their knowledge. Most responses to Question 1 ignored the reader focus and wrote about the characters. Comparatively few responses addressed the word 'only' in the question. The best responses challenged this word, arguing that characters first had to perform an act of atonement before they could forgive themselves. It was clear that many students had discussed 'redemption' in their class work, but not the idea of 'forgiving ourselves'. Weaker responses to Question 2 simply retold the story without including any analysis. Many looked for shared qualities but did not comment on differences. Occasional misreading of the topic led some students to argue that they had little in common while others talked about similarities and differences. The best responses compared Amir and Baba in the same paragraph and dealt with them thematically, for example, betrayal, acts of atonement and acts of bravery.

The first question for *Sky Burial* was far more popular than the second, drawing twice as many and producing some thoughtful responses. Some students appeared to interpret the question as 'live in Tibet', others as 'more about Wen than Kejun'. Both interpretations resulted in responses with more limited discussion than responses which used the breadth of scope offered by the question. In the second question, students tended to describe rather than discuss. Some linked the environment to religion and then looked at Wen's adaptation. The question invited students to explore the many aspects of communication and effective responses were able to do this.

The first question for *Maestro* was also the more popular of the two. Responses demonstrated close knowledge of the text but some students appeared to read the topic as 'one cannot achieve success without relationships with others.' The second topic drew some insightful responses. Most students addressed Paul's changing attitude but seldom linked it to the reader, while some did not address the reader's understanding of Keller and wrote about Paul's view of Keller only.

As part of their examination preparation students should spend time looking at how a text is constructed, the point of view of the author and the message for the audience, rather than simply looking at what happened, the themes and the characters. Students should be instructed how to make reference to structural features and explore different themes and ideas.

Student Response – Example 1

This response is controlled and well structured. It explores Paul's view of Keller, and how this changes, and repeatedly brings the discussion back to how this influences the reader's understanding of Keller. The response not only maintains relevance but reflects the expectations of the new study design. The minor lapses in expression are common in ESL student writing.

'First impressions?

Misleading, of course.'

How does Paul's view of Keller influence the reader's understanding of Keller?

From 'Adolf' Keller to 'Maestro with an uppercase', the reader of the novel 'Maestro' see Keller through Paul's eyes. Information about Keller is trickled teasingly, bit by bit, to the reader. Throughout Paul's adolescence, his views of Keller change dramatically, allowing the reader more insight into the truth behind Keller. Paul's first experiences with Keller leads him to think of Keller as a 'Nazi', but with Keller being called the 'Maestro', the reader is drawn into wondering who Keller really is. As Paul gets older, he discovers more about Keller through lessons, and it is the only source of information on Keller for the reader. Finally with Paul as an adult, which is when he writes the story, he shows that he 'came to love this man, to depend on him.' Keller is a different person inside.

The first impressions of Keller are given when Paul meets him. His face 'an incandescent, boozier's glow', his hand 'a pianist's hands? Impossible'. But by adding 'misleading' to describe his appearance, the reader is given the first clue that Keller is not who he seems to be. Again, after his first few lessons and likening Keller to Hitler, Paul throws in the fact that he came to love Keller. At this point in the novel, Keller is shrouded in mystery as two versions of him, contrasting, are given by Paul from two different times.

Several lessons in, the reader sees (through Paul's views yet again) that Keller's teaching methods are quite unique. After the discovery of 'the genetic line back to Liszt', the reader is forced to show reverence towards Keller. However strange his techniques are, there are positive connotations towards that feeling of 'strange'. Paul's initial distaste of Keller's 'somewhat oriental' advice disappears, as he begins to use them himself, although he still shows impatience when Keller repeats himself. This similarity between Paul and Keller tells the reader that Keller was very alike Paul when he was young. This is later given support as he confessed he was 'too insensitive' or 'who would harm Eduard Keller?'

The adult Paul was still intent on finding out more about Keller. He takes the reader with him to Vienna, where all he knew about Keller ('maybe they were talking about two different men') met Henisch's version. This huge contrast should bring the reader to



take a side, but Henisch's friendship with Keller, together with how the reader considers Paul's view of Keller to be correct, leads the reader to take the next best option – that Keller has experienced something traumatizing, and that he has taken a U-turn in his life, his behaviour, his thoughts and his attitude towards the outside world. The respect that Paul now shows towards Keller naturally leads the reader (who does not doubt Paul) to respect Keller too.

All in all, viewing Keller through Paul had a sense of bias. But Goldworthy's timely hints that signified otherwise has given the reader a better chance of understanding Keller. Without Paul, Keller would be a picture, unmoving, sketched in pencil. This gradually changing view of Keller has actually given the reader a better understanding of Keller, as opposed to if all information on him was given together. The reader witnesses Paul paint the picture of Keller with many crossing-outs in between, where the process is as important as the finished product.

Student Response – Example 2

This mid-range response to *Sky Burial* is organised, structured and demonstrates satisfactory language control. It displays adequate knowledge of the text and its ideas are well supported and relevant. The response stays on the topic throughout.

'In the silence of the Tibetan landscape, Shu Wen learns that communication can take many different forms.' Discuss.

There are many different communication in the world which can be determined by cultures, religions, nationalities, traditions and philosophies. Therefore, communication can take many different forms as determining many different things. In the book 'Sky Burial', the main character of Shu wen clearly shows that as a young Chinese woman how a communication can takes many different forms through her journey for search her husband for about thirty years in Tibet.

During Shu Wen's journey, she makes a Tibetan friend, Zhouma. She lived in China before so she can speak Chinese very well so it helps Zhouma and Shu Wen become a good friend. By Zhouma's helping, Shu Wen and Zhouma can stay with a Tibetan family. They have their own communication and it takes many different forms such as singing, eye contacts and gestures. Their communication is unfamiliar for a Chinese woman. Even they don't have conversation a lot. They usually keep in silence. Even though they have conversation, Shu Wen can't understand Tibetan language. Even the Tibetan family never try to speak with Shu Wen.

Because of the silence in the Tibetan family, Shu Wen feels like an animal of them by protected, gently treated, watered and fed. Their communication makes her more lonely and apart from the family. However, one day Zhouma tells her the head of the family, Geia prayed for Shu Wen. She was deeply moved by that. She realize the Tibetan family care about her in another way of communication. Because of the different form of the communication, Shu Wen misunderstand they ignore her by unable to speak Tibetan and just accept her presence. However, the silence is a way of their communication and respect to Shu Wen as one of them.

When Shu Wen adapt Tibetan's lifestyle, Zhouma has kidnapped by strangers. Shu Wen loses a person who only can communicate in her form and explain the tibetan's communication or culture to her. Now, she needs to find the different form of their communication by herself. However, as soon as she finds a way to communicate with them instead of speaking their language. She is expressed her feelings by gestures and drawing. The tibetan family and Shu Wen's relationship finally develop the different forms of communication. From the findings, She Wen learns how she can adapt and bring a new communication in different forms.

Shu Wen also learns that through nature, beliefs, faith and spirit she can take another form of communication. She able to more understand the Tibetan family's communication in the silence from the understanding of their religion, culture and beliefs. She learns communicate with nature, spirit and beliefs as well, not only communicate with people. She also understand a form of singing as communication. Om who is the oldest son in the family member, he is usually singing instead of having conversation with the family. As Shu Wen's understanding of different communications, she knows Om's feelings or condition through he communication as his singing.

Shu Wen finds difficulties with different form of communication as compare to hers with the Tibetan family. However her understanding of their culture, religion, lifestyle and faith, she learns that communication can take many different forms such as gestures, drawing and singing. Therefore, she understands their silence which is one of their communication as well. Accepting the silence, she also can learn to communicate with nature, spirit and beliefs as in different form of communication.

Section B – Writing in Context

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	3	5	12	17	21	17	12	6	2	1	4.9

Students were required to complete an extended written response which was an expository, persuasive or imaginative piece of writing. They were required to base their response on the ideas in the prompt and draw directly from the selected text studied in the Context. The most obvious weakness was a tendency to write another text response, using



the prompt as a text response question with little or no reference to ideas outside the selected text. These responses began with a short introduction then gave a long analysis of the text and a brief reference to the prompt. There was also a broad range of writing beyond 'text response', which included reflective and personal pieces as well as creative pieces. Some students ignored the prompts and wrote to the Context and some were restricted to personal experience. Their writing was more focused when the response had a clear idea of its form, purpose and audience. Some students used the prompt from one Context with a text from another Context.

Assessment was based on the interrelationship among:

- the quality of ideas, as formed through the Context and text
- understanding of the implications of the prompt
- the quality of writing.

There were very few high-quality imaginative responses. Some imaginative responses did not acknowledge the prompt or included only a brief reference to it. Expository essays that discussed the prompt, making relevant personal references and references to the text, were perhaps more manageable for ESL students in an examination. Students without strong language skills did much better with personal reflective writing and teachers are encouraged to teach appropriate skills for this style of writing.

Over half of the responses were to Context 4, Exploring issues of identity and belonging. *Witness* was the most popular text, used in 52 per cent of responses to this Context, while *Bombshells* was used in 23 per cent of responses. Students generally addressed the ways in which there is pressure to conform and the difficulties and practicalities of being true to oneself. They were generally able to provide examples from the text and other sources to support their ideas. All texts worked well for this prompt. Some students challenged the idea that retaining one's identity is the greatest achievement, arguing, for example, that Holden Caulfield's attempt to do so (which caused his alienation from others and refusal to belong to groups around him) causes his mental breakdown. Some had trouble addressing the 'world' part of this prompt. Some read the prompt as 'to be true to yourself is the greatest achievement' or 'true to yourself in a world that is constantly changing'.

Context 3, Encountering conflict, was chosen by 30 per cent of students. In this Context *The Crucible* was the most popular text, used in 68 per cent of responses, while *The Secret River* was used in 16 per cent of responses. Some students had trouble unpacking the prompt; some read it as 'victims learning what is important'. Some had a problem identifying victims in the texts. Many started with 'conflict is an inevitable part of life....' and did not address the prompt at all. Some students mistakenly referred to natural disasters as conflicts. Others did not deal with meaningful issues, limiting their sources to fights with friends and siblings. In some responses, examples drawn from Nanjing and the Cultural Revolution were not linked to the prompt.

Context 1, The imaginative landscape, was chosen by 10 per cent of students. *Fly Away Peter* was the most popular text, used in 68 percent of these responses. This prompt could be seen as challenging but it was quite well understood by students including those with average to low-level language skills.

Context 2, Whose reality?, was chosen by only 5 per cent of students. *A Streetcar Named Desire* was used in over 70 per cent of these responses. Some responses addressed the first part of the prompt but had difficulty linking in 'we see them as we are'.

It is recommended that the Section B response be taught as a **writing** task and not as a **text** task. The focus of this piece of writing should be working with the ideas of the prompt and/or stimulus material. The Context is about exploring ideas and students need practice teasing out ideas in the classroom before they tackle the selected text. The selected text will be a source of ideas to explore later in their study. In the best pieces of writing the text does not dominate. Models of student writing should be used to explore how connections between texts, the prompt and/or stimulus material and students' own experiences are made. This task rewards students who read widely, consider ideas carefully and synthesise them. Students need an 'idea bank' and an 'example bank' from which to draw on for this writing. Not every item in the 'bank' can be used with a particular prompt or stimulus. Students should be encouraged to keep their own files of material during the year, including keeping reflections in a journal. Teachers should provide students with a number of activities which encourage students to write a variety of pieces in different forms and styles. Choosing to write three short pieces in different forms for the school-assessed coursework task is one way of doing this. In this way students learn about the relationship between the form of a piece and its purpose, audience and language. Teachers could also model different ways in which the ideas of the chosen text could be incorporated into a piece of writing.



Student Response – Example 1

The following is a strong response to Context 4 which demonstrates the potential of this task to draw on very different writing skills than those required for Section A. The response is sustained and thoughtful. It provides evidence of considering the prompt beyond the text and draws appropriately on texts and other sources.

'Life is a game that one must play according to the rules', it demonstrates that our society often promotes and demands individuals of unquestioning obedience and conformity. Being involved in a broader community, such as family, religion groups and interest clubs, we feel pressured and obligated to alter our identity in order to be accepted. It is out of fear of being isolated and excluded that we feel the need to put on masks to disguise our true self. Therefore, although the experience is rather difficult, sometimes retaining a true identity can be truly rewarding.

In the modern society, we are often bombarded with images and messages of what we should be and how we should think. We are expected to live up to the social standards and comply to all societal conventions without doubts. Being an eighteen year old I feel urged to take on the role of an adult. Parents and teachers expect me to think wiser and more independent once I reached the age. In Christina Aguilera song 'Reflection', it portrays a soul that is learning to be 'free to fly' from the stereotypical identities that she is forced to construct. 'I'm living in a world where I have to hide my heart and what I believe in'. The values that we hold and the unique perspectives we have are to be abandoned in conformity. It is rather difficult for individuals to express themselves under the pressure of the community.

Psychologist Don Ruiz once stated that 'our biggest fear is to take risk to be truly who we are'. Each and every one of us are different, we have dissimilar interests, values and outlook on the world. We are also diverged by the responses and reactions to the issues happening around us. We fear that if others were to meet the real self, they would criticise and reject us for our 'out-of-norm' identity. In Joanna Murray-Smith monologue, 'Bombshells', Winsome is afraid to reveal her true self to her fellow widows friends. Despite that her world is sparked with joy after her encounter with young student Patrick, she is reluctant to share the experience with her peers. Winsome understands that she is considered ineligible to have relationship with men. She would be despised if she was to tell the incident. It illustrates that our need of a sense of belonging is so powerful that it costs our own happiness of being true to ourselves. Nowadays, thousands of teenage girls are prone to eating disorder and anorexia due to their fears of being left out by their friends. They require the sensation of being cared for and supported overrides their physiological needs. They are paranoid that if they are overweight their peers would judge them differently. Hence, it is fear that render us unable to express our true self, or even lose sight of who we are.

Even though being true to oneself in the society we are submerged in is difficult, the sense of self that we retained is a worthwhile outcome. People need to be immuned to influences and reject the pressure to conform in order to express themselves. In J.D Salinger's novel 'The Catcher in the Rye', he presents a social misfit, Holden, who declines to follow the societal rules. As he regard his peers to be 'phony' he, he recognises his values of being innocent and honest. By standing firm in his own identity and rejecting to absorb influences, leads him to feel content of the image he has created. Similarly, pop icon Madonna, ignores the social boundaries and creates a world of her own. In 1992, she published a pornographic 'coffee-table' book. Although it drew enormous controversy, she explains that 'there are a lot of people who don't say what they want, so they don't get what they want.' Remaining true to her values and strong opinion allowings her to be content as she achieved what she considers meaningful in life. Being true to oneself is one of the most challenging yet greatest achievement in life.

In essence, we are living in a world that demands us to change our identity. The society provides pressure that we feel as though as it is our responsibility to take on certain roles and personas. Our inner fears of being alienated by the people that we are associated with further encourage us to put aside of our real self. Yet, to be true to ourselves is nevertheless essential. We need to understand our desires and needs, to that we may achieve a satisfactory living.

Student Response – Example 2

This mid-range response uses the text and the student's own experience to demonstrate a clear understanding of the prompt. The score for this piece was limited by the language skills and the lack of development of ideas rather than any lack of understanding of the prompt.

We live in a specific time and place yet, simultaneously, we experience an internal life that is not limited by time and place. In Fly Away Peter, writer David Malouf uses Jim as a main character to show that people in a specific time and place yet, but at the same time, they experience an different life time inwardly, and in their mind there is no limited by time and place. When Jim is in the war, he often scared by the dangerous situation and the corpses and when he scares, he always imagine the landscape back in Australia, the hometown to get rid of the scare. He imagines he was so happy and so innocent.

In the hometown he was recording birds, play with birds almost everyday. So when Jim in the war situation at that time, simultaneously, he experience an internal life that is not limited by time and place. I also have the sane experience.

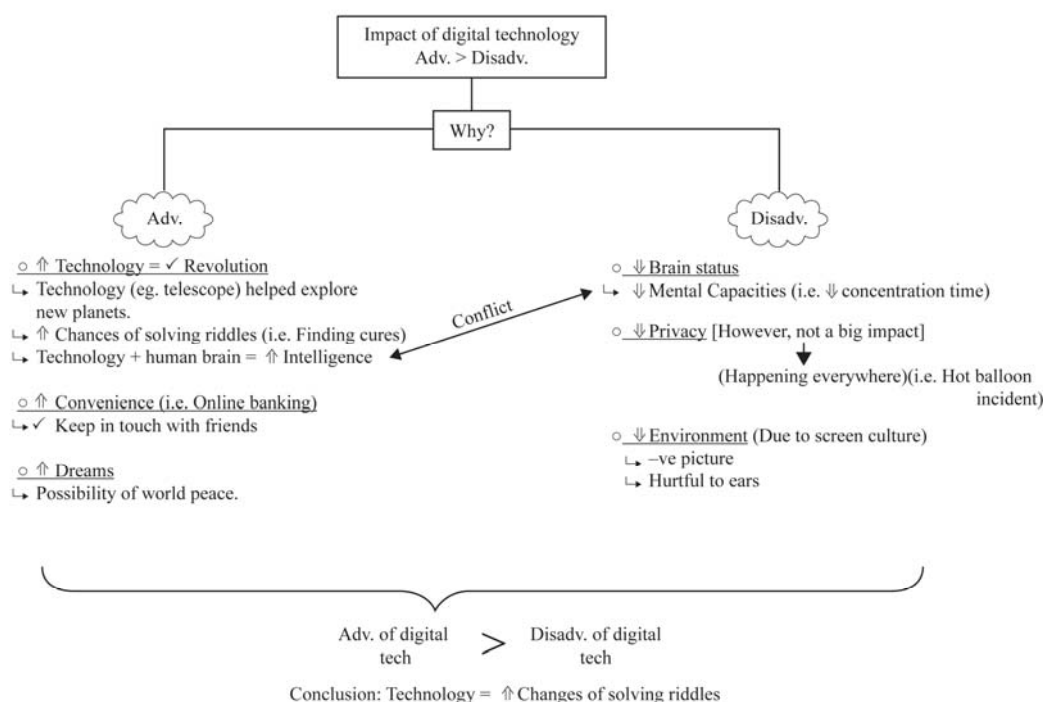
I lived in China before I came to Australia. In China, my life was not very happy... So I didn't have my friend in China. However when I come to Australia, I start feel the people surround me are different as the people in China. They are friendly, no purpose, no lies and they are give me a feeling of friendship. I have my first friend, a real friend here. We live together in a same homestay, we eat food together, do our homeworks, go sports, and chat. We don't even keep secret to each other.



Student Response – Example 2

This response demonstrates similar skills to Example 1, but uses a different method of presentation.

PART 1



Part 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	7	8	11	13	17	17	12	8	5	2	1	4.2

In Part 2 some students struggled with the distinction between argument analysis and language analysis. Better responses were able to use the main points in the material as a way of structuring the analysis of language, and show how language is used in argument. Others simply worked through the passage without any apparent connection to the main ideas in the material. Most students wrote something of value with some analysis. Weaker responses simply gave a description of what the writer was saying, writing only about ‘argument’. A small but significant number of responses indicated a lack of awareness of changes to this part of the examination, for example, by identifying five examples (or five techniques) in a chart rather than writing a response in prose. Some were not able to identify that the podcast was a different voice, instead seeing it just as another argument supporting Voxi’s contention. Most were able to make meaningful observations about the image, some in more depth than others.

Teachers should use model answers as a guide to explaining what this task requires. It should include practising note-form responses with shorter one-sided pieces. These skills are developed through practice and could be connected to other areas of study, for example, using material related to the Context study, and practised from early in the year. Short letters from the media which present only one point of argument using several persuasive strategies are a useful starting point for Part 2. Generic explanations of language devices are insufficient as knowledge of a writer’s possible tactics must be applied directly to the unseen passage.

Student Response – Example 1

This high-range response, although well written, makes some tenuous conclusions. Each paragraph uses a point of argument to launch into an analysis of how the writer uses language to attempt to persuade.

The writer asserts that digital technology is not a drama since modern technology has already changed the way we lived. By listing down several technological devices such as ‘microscope’, ‘telescope’ and ‘calculators’, the writer attempts to coerce the reader into believing that we have already ‘revolutionised human experience’. This positions the readers to think that digital technology is nothing different from what we already have, but simply an enhancement of it. This will most likely makes the readers feel confident towards digital technology and reduce their apprehension towards the unknown. Thus, most readers will be in support of having digital technological.



After increasing reader's confidence, the writer points out that digital technology can help to solve many problems. By stating that this new technology will 'find cure faster, find ways of preserving the planet, end war and violence', the writer attempts to draw reader's attention to our existing crisis. Readers are coerced to be positively alarmed of many current problems and feel a need to address those crisis. The highly negative words such as 'war' and 'violence' will paint a vivid picture of catastrophe and disaster in readers mind and evokes fear among the readers. Hence, most readers are enticed to feel a sense of urge to solve existing crisis to cease those disasters and hence agree to have digital technology.

Furthermore, the writer concludes that digital technology will increase human intelligence and thus help to solve existing problems. By stating that digital technology can allow us to become 'even more intelligent', the writer appeals to reader's desire to appear smart. The readers may feel delighted to know that digital technology can increase our intelligence and thus be interested in it. The visual which illustrates human brain being installed digital information which has light shining out further increase readers confidence towards digital technology. The light appear as the glimpse of hope which sways the readers to feel that digital technology will brighten their future. Hence, most readers will feel positive towards digital technology and support it.

Student Response – Example 2

This mid-range response has some awareness of the task and moves between explaining and an attempt at analysis. It reveals some understanding of how writers attempt to persuade but struggles to apply it accurately to the passage.

Voxi enthusiastically delivers the message that technology is better and brings faster and more efficient life in the opinion piece on the Magazine 'Digital Technology' (23 May 2009). The author strongly persuades that we shouldn't be afraid of technology, especially to the older people.

The appeals of technology is highlighted and as the major contention. The author proposes the question of why 'afraid of' technology directly at the beginning of the article, which sets the people who afraid of the technology at the opposite side against the people who 'excited by new things'. It arouses the readers to want to follow the technology and sets up the metal prepares for the delivering the point of the view.

The language used is forceful and encouraging as the use of inclusive language and exclusive language. The 'we' and 'you' groups the readers into the people who are afraid of technology and the people who are not. It lets the readers to get involved with the discussing which is easy for the author to simple attack the opposite group to obtain the credible support to the other. It gives rise to the afraid technology group a sense of joining the other one by proposing the shared benefits of technology of 'we'. '(solving) the riddles of the universe, (finding) cures faster...'

A photograph of 3D technology editing human brain is presented to appeal technology and demonstrates the developing of intelligency as layers of steps showing rising up. On the other hand, it expresses the skills of technology of editing photos. A list of what technology has brought reinforces the fact of the urgent craving of getting faster and being more 'efficient' life. Towards the end citing an anecdote of people seeing 'a hot air ballon' at the other side of the Earth through interest, it appeals to self-interest and brings interesting to the article while effectively conveying the idea of technology benefitis the limit on time and space. It gains a credible and entertaining support to the 'technology'.

'Keyed in' introduces a way to '(Key) in' technology. It presents a powerful and substantial piece. Voxi encourages to accept technology by portraying a better life in 'future' and sharing the 'look of it' at the end.