

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11

Writing

Key Messages

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about its particular focus.
- In **Section 1** tasks it is important to develop the bullet points as evenly as possible.
- Candidates should pay particular attention to commonly confused words, for example, they/there, seat/sit.
- Greater focus on correct use of possessive pronouns is strongly recommended.
- It is essential to write in full sentences, even in informal writing – for example, 'I hope your family are all well' rather than 'Hope your family are all well.'
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.

General Comments

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be at least on a par with that of previous years. The instructions for **Section 1** were understood by most candidates, although a small minority of candidates was confused about to whom the item should be delivered. The questions in **Section 2** were quite evenly divided, with fewer candidates than usual opting for a narrative approach. This was mainly due to the popularity of the descriptive question, where many candidates felt secure describing two settings of importance to them, and the clear interest in, and knowledge about, medicines, which drew candidates to **Question 4**. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements, all of which is very encouraging given the recent changes to the exam format, and it demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing which was a joy to read. Few prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates, and there are significantly fewer candidates who come to the exam with prepared essays which are fitted to an essay title and sound awkward, especially when a prescribed sentence has to be included. The increase in Americanisms which can sometimes suggest the wrong register with the use of expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' continues, and is clearly inadvisable. Text messaging language and abbreviations need to be avoided, even where the directed writing in **Section 1** involves writing to a friend.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section 1

In the Directed Writing task equal marks are given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. In this session candidates were asked to write a letter to a friend, apologising for their failure to deliver an item of value to the friend's relative. In particular, the candidates had to explain when and how the item got lost, what attempts they had made to recover it, and they also had to make an offer to replace the item or pay for it. This was a scenario that was not necessarily within the everyday experience of the candidates, so they had to use their imagination to create a convincing scenario, although many seemed very familiar with the notion of being careless and needing to apologise. The scenario allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

Section 1 is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing a letter to a friend, but they were free to choose the exact relationship and the events leading up to the loss of the valuable item. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to address:

- when and how the item was lost;
- their attempts to find or track down the item;
- an offer to replace or pay for the item.

In the first bullet point it was essential to offer a clear description of when the item was lost. It did not need to be a date or time, but something that the recipient of the letter would clearly understand, for example, 'On my way home from my visit to your house...', or if the letter was dated, 'Last Saturday...'. This bullet also required a developed description of the events leading up to the loss. The second bullet point required a reasonably detailed and appropriate description of the events following the loss of the item in terms of attempting to find it, and the third bullet point required a clear offer to replace the item or financially compensate the friend.

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

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

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the highest marks went to those who kept their focus on the context and purpose of the letter and shaped their response according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point posed few problems in terms of how the item was lost. There were some very inventive ideas mainly focusing on crowded buses or incompetent airlines. A number cited a theft or confusion over a piece of baggage. Occasionally the circumstances were highly dramatic – a robbery by bandits, for example, which did not quite comply with the notion of a letter of apology. In terms of the requirement in this bullet point to identify when the item was lost, the responses were less successful. Many offered a vague term, such as 'on my way home' or 'during my bus journey' which was not really sufficient. The most successful answers were clear in terms of identifying a moment that the recipient of the letter would understand, for example 'The day after you gave me the item' or 'On my return journey after staying with you'.

The second bullet point was generally well done. Many responses described frantic attempts to track down the lost item through searches of places and people, appeals to lost property departments, reports made to the police and follow-up telephone calls. Very few candidates did not respond to this bullet although occasionally it was too brief and undeveloped, seemingly doing little beyond looking around.

Again, the third bullet was usually addressed well, with the stronger candidates offering an alternative solution – either replacement or repayment – or even outlining how they planned to replace the item or save up the necessary funds. A few candidates disadvantaged themselves through their choice of valuable item – offering to replace an antique family heirloom was not entirely convincing, for example. Although there was no compulsion to identify the item, the vast majority of candidates did so, and their choices were often interesting and offered scope for the development of the bullet prompts. The favoured items were evenly divided between jewellery, mobile phones or laptops, although many good answers focused on items that were less valuable materially, but were harder to replace due to their sentimental value. This often added weight to the sincerity of the apology.

A few candidates misinterpreted the instructions, sometimes thinking it was the friend being written to who was the intended recipient of the item, or that they had been given an item to post or send by courier. Even with this confusion there was usually enough understanding of the purpose of the letter to gain some credit in terms of **Task Fulfilment**.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and candidates were comfortable with the informal style of a letter to a friend. Many candidates started their letter with a personal touch – asking to be remembered to family members for example. Occasionally the tone was too jolly for a letter of apology, but at times it was also too formal. Others were excessively apologetic and became rather repetitive. Most made good use of paragraphs to reinforce the organisation but there were still a large number who could have improved in this area because they wrote the piece as one paragraph, a common mistake in this section every year.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the friendly but apologetic tone very well. A significant number of candidates wrote rather short responses, only just reaching the lower word limit; it is unlikely such undeveloped responses will gain marks in the higher bands. Linguistically, most

candidates were at ease with the situation and purpose of the writing and were able to produce a convincing piece of work.

Section 2

1. **Describe two locations, one in the countryside and one in a town or city, which are special to you. (Remember you are describing the contrasting scenes rather than what you do there.)**

This was a reasonably popular title and a number of different locations featured. The majority of candidates coped well with the need to describe contrasting settings, although a minority did not offer a rural and urban scene, instead offering two locations in the same city. There were some very moving descriptions which strongly conveyed the candidates' affection and pride for their home town, or a particular place where they had spent time on holiday or with relatives and friends. The candidates who did best were those who embraced the need to describe rather than use the chosen settings to write a narrative account of spending time there. Most candidates did find it helpful to be reminded of this requirement in the wording of the question and there was a richness of vocabulary in detailing the different scenes. For many a personal knowledge of the chosen places was a source of inspiration when describing, with good candidates able to demonstrate the use of adjectives especially in recreating the atmosphere and their feelings of contentment and belonging. Those who did less well in general were those who did not provide a contrast in their settings or used them to write a narrative account of an event taking place, as they missed the point of this title. A few candidates misunderstood the title and instead wrote about the relative merits of living in the countryside or in a city. Mostly these responses had enough relevant detail to credit, although it led to a rather discursive approach to a clearly descriptive task.

2. **'Being very popular brings as many disadvantages as advantages.' What is your opinion?**

This was another very popular title and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. The vast majority of candidates interpreted the notion of popularity in terms of fame, success and sometimes celebrity status, which was fully acceptable. Most of the responses to this question offered a balanced viewpoint, looking equally at how success and fame can bring many advantages such as wealth, privileges and status, but acknowledging that it can also lead to loss of privacy, arrogance, a lack of trust and sometimes the need for protection due to threats against individuals. Less successful candidates had fewer ideas about the topic and therefore lacked conviction tending to include rather repetitive points without offering developed consequences or examples. Sometimes weaker candidates repeatedly used the wording of the question resulting in a rather laboured and stilted response. Occasionally candidates were not entirely sure of the meaning of popularity and therefore struggled to write convincingly. Again, it was impressive to see how many personal experiences could be successfully utilised by candidates and it was clearly a title for those who had strong convictions and opinions, as they could sustain their arguments with deepening evidence over a number of paragraphs rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view several times. It proved once again that only candidates with the ability to structure a cogent argument should attempt the discursive title.

3. **Write a story which includes the sentence: 'The job was extremely hard and the weather made it more difficult.'**

This was a very popular title as the narrative titles normally are. Favourite ideas explored included some very moving stories about individuals forced to take punishing work during hard financial times, or those who accepted a job in a foreign country without realising the true nature of the conditions. Other candidates preferred to stick to their own experiences and explored situations where they were given gruelling punishments for misbehaviour at school in terms of hard labour in the school grounds during a heatwave, or picking up litter on a windy day. The best essays were those that were able to integrate the demands of the job being undertaken with a full and convincing exploration of deteriorating or dramatic weather conditions. There were some very good accounts which related the topic to the need for determination, courage and fortitude in very demanding circumstances. Less successful candidates spent a great deal of time building up to the required sentence but without convincingly linking the weather conditions to the difficulty of completing the job. The weakest responses of all were those which simply told a narrative story which lacked an adequate sense of reflection. It was noticeable overall at all levels of response how well candidates integrated the given topic sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness, apart from those who merely tagged it on the end of an essay about a day at work.

4. Medicines.

This was a popular topic inviting a wide range of responses. Of course, any response was possible here but few candidates chose to treat it as a narrative title. If they did they tended to write a story in which medicine played an important part, often describing the great lengths a family member would go to in order to obtain the correct medicine for a dying relative, or a moving account of an illness needing life-saving drug treatments. The vast majority of candidates took a more discursive approach, exploring and acknowledging the importance of medicines in the modern world. These responses often displayed extremely detailed knowledge of how medicines are developed through painstaking research and their various uses to fight particular conditions. Other candidates wrote about whether traditional treatments could ever be as effective as medicines developed in laboratories, again displaying real interest in the subject matter.

5. Write a story in which someone behaves completely out of character. (Remember that you should include details of the person's usual character before the incident which leads to unusual behaviour.)

Stories usually involved a friend or relative undergoing a sudden change of character, usually for the worse. The change of character was usually attributed to peer-pressure or drug abuse. Sometimes it was due to an unfortunate relationship, or the arrival of a new student at school who proves to be a bad influence. Occasionally stories explored a tragic circumstance such as a death in the family and its subsequent effect on the individual concerned. Many stories ended with a tragic death, but in others the change of character proved temporary and things were resolved happily. The best responses fully explored the circumstances offering a convincing and credible scenario, often utilising a distressed and confused narrative persona to express feelings of shock and disbelief. These stories were able to pose questions and reveal information gradually thus building up a dramatic narrative. Weaker responses were less structured and more predictable, offering little in terms of building up tension and conflict, instead dealing with more predictable scenarios.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Composition

Key messages

- In **Section 1** candidates should be familiar with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use them as a checklist. Even candidates getting a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- In **Section 1** a fairly balanced response to the bullet points is helpful.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of many candidates.
- Candidates should clear up confusions between 'everyday' and 'every day'; 'less' and 'fewer'; 'bestfriend' (or 'besfriend') and 'best friend'; 'avoid' and 'prevent'; 'take' and 'bring', 'wish' and 'hope', 'doubt' and 'suspect'.
- Repetitive vocabulary as sentence openings should be avoided.
- There is an increasing but unnecessary use of the word 'itself' in some Centres, as in the sentence 'The robbery took place at my house itself'.

General comments

This examination was the second Winter exercise with the Directed Writing as **Section 1** and the Creative Writing as **Section 2**, with both parts worth the same marks. It was also the second year of Task Fulfilment in **Section 1**. The overall standard of the vast majority this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. There were relatively few examples of Band 1 writing but equally there were relatively few in Bands 7 and 8. **Section 1** was done well by the vast majority. This year, in **Section 2** all of the titles had their followers. Time management for the vast majority was very good. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports with a lot of very good writing.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Directed Writing

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that their house had been broken into while they were away. As a result they had to write a letter to the Police outlining the situation and to report the crime. This was not necessarily within any candidate's personal experience but was straightforward to imagine and the vast majority of candidates responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. There were very few, if any, misinterpretations of the task, although there were candidates who thought 'broken into' meant 'broken' and so wrote too much about vandalism and the destruction of their house. The scenario allowed for a wide variety of individual circumstances and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

As is always said with this question, **Section 1** is directed writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. Candidates must accept the need to follow instructions and this year had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear indication of when the crime was committed and how long the candidate had been absent from the house when the crime was committed;
- detailed information about the stolen items which would be helpful to the Police;
- details of any clues found at the scene and suggestions that might lead to the capture of the thief or thieves.

In the first bullet point it was essential to be as specific as possible about the time of the crime, although it was accepted that expecting an exact time was impossible in the circumstances. Often, mentioning a time of leaving and a time of return, satisfied both aspects of the bullet point. The second bullet point depended on supplying as many details as possible so that the Police would be in no doubt about the particular item.

Bullet 3 had to relate directly to clues found on the spot and, although it was the job of the Police to catch the thieves, candidates were expected to supply sensible suggestions as to how the thieves could be caught, based on the evidence found.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make clear that candidates will be judged under headings of clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience; a correct format for the piece of writing; appropriate tone and register; the use of information to justify personal opinion, as well as the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points. As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the strongest responses were those which kept their focus on providing information that was going to make the job of capture easier for the Police. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas, or responses to the bullet points, that will gain most marks. Therefore, the most successful candidates gave precisely the time of the crime even if a little guesswork was involved; candidates usually chose from having gone shopping, having gone to a social function or to school or work or attending to a sick relative away from home. The time away was often implied by the times of absence. A large number of responses fell short in this respect by being vague about the time of the crime and/or the time away. It was not enough to say 'yesterday' or 'last week' if no date was given at the head of the letter. The second bullet point was the opportunity for the fullest detail. The best responses restricted themselves to a limited number of stolen items, perhaps three or four, but gave all the details possible that the Police might need. Therefore, brand names, colours, materials, size and code numbers were given; for example, many candidates lost jewellery and gave details of the precious stones, the colours of the gems and the exact layout of the stones so that a clear picture was produced. Cost was also a useful consideration to add a sense of urgency to the investigation. It was disappointing to see many responses miss out a little on this bullet point by simply listing the items with no detail and this would have made the pursuit of the items almost impossible; often, unfortunately, a very long list was seen as a substitute for the detail. For the third bullet point, fingerprints and footmarks, traces of blood, car number plates, cigarette ends, mislaid mobile phones and identity cards were all very popular clues left by the criminals. A significant number of responses did not cover the second part of this bullet and suggest how the Police could catch the thieves, but those who did came up with some ingenious suggestions – checking identity cards and mobile phone records, using DNA analysis of blood traces, CCTV footage, and searching through Police records for fingerprint matches were good suggestions because they were directly linked to the clues that had been found. Slightly less assured were those which mentioned that strangers had been seen near the house or neighbours or servants or a family member had been acting oddly, but they did not give further details. Weaker suggestions were more like suspicions than clues (the writer perhaps did not like a certain neighbour and therefore felt they must be guilty) and such suggestions carried less weight. Weakest of all were those which suggested unrealistic solutions such as searching everyone in the city or staking out the neighbour's house for days, often with the candidate as part of the team.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **audience** through an acknowledgement in the greeting ('Dear Sirs') and in the first paragraph that the candidate was writing to the Police for a specific reason. This sense of audience was enhanced in a later bullet point when advice was given as to the capture of the thieves. Some candidates forgot as their letter went on that they had opened with the plural 'Sirs' and reverted to a singular audience rather than a general one. The **register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal by most and only a very few lapsed into a casual approach. There was some very pleasing, appropriate vocabulary, as in 'investigation', 'detection', 'perpetrators'. It was good to see that most candidates avoided the temptation of writing a **narrative** but some weaker responses provided a story rather than a factual account. Rather than merely report the theft and be specific about the items lost, they embellished the account with atmospheric descriptions of journeys, social events, the dark nights and heart-rending accounts of how family members felt. In a number of cases this year, this led to overlong responses to **Section 1** which in turn led to a number of short **Section 2** responses.

Most candidates employed an 'appropriate' **format** with the formal letter ending (usually 'faithfully' but also 'sincerely' and 'truly') following the guidance given in the rubric. Many candidates added a subject heading after 'Dear Sirs' and this was accepted as appropriate in the circumstances. However, this was intended to be a letter to the Police and a significant number of candidates ignored this wording and set their text out as a report or a mixture of a letter and a report. Therefore, whilst most candidates ended the letter appropriately, a significant number ended the letter inappropriately ('Regards', 'From') or ended it as a report with just a signature and a date. A significant number wrote 'Your faithfully'. A few ignored format completely. Organisation hardly varied, with candidates logically and sensibly following the bullet points in the order given. A very small number made use of paragraph headings to reinforce the organisation and, although this looked more like a report, in the circumstances again, it did not cause a problem.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, accurate, helpful **tone** and approach very well. The best responses were characterised by the use of a polite tone and the use of viable solutions.

Linguistically, candidates found little difficulty in describing the home circumstances and the possessions they were familiar with to produce a convincing piece of work. For the same reason, spelling was generally good. As far as vocabulary was concerned, there were many confusions between 'steal' and 'rob', 'wish' and 'hope', 'robbery' and 'robber', and 'neighbour' and 'neighbourhood'. There was also considerable overuse of awkward plurals, as in 'furnitures', 'jewelleries', and 'stuffs'. Many less able candidates found difficulty in switching from past to present and future tenses as they were undecided as to whether their predicament was one in the past with the robbery or one in the present with their loss.

Section 2 Creative Writing

1. **Describe the celebrity you most admire and the celebrity you least admire. (Remember that you are describing the people and not just why you admire or do not admire them.)**

This was a popular question in many areas of the world. A small number of candidates confused the word 'celebrity' for 'celebrations' or chose someone they knew quite well but who did not fall into the category of 'celebrity'. However, the vast majority chose wisely from a large range of well-known personalities and did a very good job of conveying their admiration or dislike. The most popular choices, for both approval and disapproval, were Hollywood and Bollywood stars, pop singers (such as Michael Jackson, Lady Gaga, Marilyn Manson and Miley Cyrus) and footballers, usually Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi. Some candidates suggested an understandable bias in favour of the footballers and generally took sides according to whether the player played for a side they supported or not. On the other hand, most candidates argued very well in favour of or against the celebrity and demonstrated a great deal of knowledge about the people. Characters who were liked were obviously thought to be excellent at their chosen profession, whether it was someone with an excellent singing voice or a highly proficient dancer or sportsman or woman; characters who were disliked were not so blessed according to the writer. A consistent feature of those who were admired was their charity work. Certainly, most candidates, with their specialist knowledge, found it very easy to describe the personality as the question had asked and this provided the basis for a successful answer. Therefore, physical appearance, and whether it appealed to the writer or not, was very much in evidence as were comments about the personality of the celebrity. Candidate who could use adjectives effectively did very well in such circumstances. The best responses mainly divided their time equally between the liked and disliked characters while weaker candidates spent little time on those they disliked. Some concentrated a little too much on biographical details without comment and some thought the word 'least' meant 'less' and so spoke about two admired personalities, a favourite and a second favourite. There was also an overuse of 'He' and 'She' as sentence openings by those with weaker linguistic ability.

2. **'Young people today have no interest in politics.' Do you agree?**

This topic produced very few responses compared to the other questions but this is very much the way in this exam. When choosing a discursive topic candidates are advised to ensure they have enough vocabulary and ideas to attempt a successful response. Many such candidates used the opportunity to say whether they liked or disliked politics but merely having a like or dislike of politics did not constitute an answer to the question as it was about young people in general. Those who appreciated this produced some very thoughtful, mature, interesting material, either by agreeing with the topic or disagreeing, or indeed by seeing a rather mixed picture. One very powerful idea was repeated by many when they said that politics should be taught as a subject in all schools. Politicians did not come across in a very flattering way with most candidates, being seen either as corrupt or not interested in young people except when they wanted votes. Politics was also seen as mainly of interest to older people rather than young ones. Young people were seen to have far too many other interests to be worrying about politics, such as schooling, making friends and getting a job and these pursuits were generally seen as being nothing to do with politics. Some very good candidates were able to see a wider picture and so urged young people to take an interest in politics as it would affect many aspects of their future lives. This was a serious topic and all who attempted it treated it as such so that the tone and register were generally appropriate. The difference between a successful and a less successful response was usually a matter of how well the argument was sustained. Also, some candidates limited themselves by thinking the question was merely asking if they wanted to be politicians. Linguistically, there was quite a bit of confusion amongst weaker candidates as to whether 'politics' should be treated as singular or plural and so agreement

problems were common. Also, there was some confusion between the words 'politics' and 'politicians'.

3. Write a story which includes the sentence: 'No-one could understand why she failed to turn up.'

This question was an extremely popular one and it produced a number of very good narratives. There were a vast number of occasions and places where a character was expected to be for any number of reasons before eventually not 'turning up'. These included the airport, a birthday party, sporting events, revision meetings and exams. There were some very serious and moving events as well, with people failing to turn up at the hospital bedside of a sick relation. By the very nature of the given quotation, it was mostly normally placed either at or towards the end of the essay to provide a dramatic finale. Strong characterisation of people placed in difficult circumstances were in evidence in the better essays.

A large number of candidates did not take the expression 'failed to turn up' at face value to mean 'not putting in an appearance' but rather they took it at a more colloquial level and interpreted it as meaning that someone did not put in a good performance. Some took the expression to mean 'he/she failed'. The problem with these was that in order to perform badly or fail they did indeed have to 'turn up' which was something of a contradiction. However, these interpretations were largely given some benefit of the doubt although they resulted in a loss of narrative climax. Good narratives made excellent use of properly punctuated dialogue in this essay but weaker responses could have used speech more in order to vary the narrative and add life to it.

4. Dreams.

This was a very popular title indeed, which is quite unusual for the single word title. Furthermore, there were many different approaches to the title. There was the straightforward, discursive approach with candidates either dealing philosophically with dreams and their part in our lives or detailing different kinds of dreams, whether good or bad. There were also very many candidates who outlined their own dreams in an autobiographical approach and told us about their ambitions for school and jobs, making or winning money, bringing pride to their parents, and marriage. There were just as many candidates who told a narrative about someone with fulfilled or thwarted dreams, usually with the addition of a moral to the effect that hard work brings its own reward. All of these approaches were valid and gave a great deal of interest to the topic. One approach which seemed much weaker than the rest was the idea of writing a story and then simply revealing in the last sentence that they were woken up and 'it had all been a dream'. This was a very thin link to the title, often bordering on irrelevant. One significant drawback for a very great number of candidates, in whichever approach, and often regardless of general linguistic ability, was the failure to ensure the correct agreement when using the word 'dreams'. There were countless examples of expressions such as 'A dreams ...' and 'dreams is...' and it was a reminder that all candidates would do well to look at the single-word title and be careful about its use in the singular and/ or the plural. Another point to be aware of with single-word titles is the danger of repeating the word, often as the first word in a sentence.

5. Write a story in which fear of flying is an important part. (Remember that you should include full details of the fear, to show how it is an important part of your story.)

This was not a particularly popular question and was certainly not as popular as the other narrative question. Candidates who chose it tended to write stories with a common theme. The narrator had usually had a bad experience of flying when young. Perhaps a relative had died in a plane crash or perhaps the narrator had been the victim of turbulence on a flight or it might just have been that the narrator had witnessed a number of plane crashes on Discovery Channel documentaries. Whatever the circumstances, these were useful and convincing ways of emphasising how the fear had come about, as the candidate was urged to do in the question. Whatever the cause of the fear, most candidates were very good at describing the emotion as it occurred when they eventually boarded a flight or contemplated the prospect. There was much anxiety, perspiring and even being sick as the narrator struggled to defeat the fear of flying and such graphic details were very successful in conveying the reluctance of the narrator to board the plane. Some, of course, gave in to the fear and had to get off the aircraft. Many though were forced to overcome the fear because they had to attend family events abroad or were having to parachute. One candidate wrote a very successful narrative about being in the armed forces and having to emulate a successful father and make him proud by becoming a fighter pilot.

Even though there were a number of very affecting and successful stories, there were also a significant number which indicated a misunderstanding of the question. One or two candidates misread 'flying' for 'fleeing' and wrote nightmare-like stories about having to escape from someone. More seriously, a large number of candidates who did this question ignored the idea of flying completely and just wrote a story involving some kind of other fear; in such cases it was difficult to see the essays as being as successful as those which included some aspect of flying.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21 Comprehension
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Key messages

- In those questions which require candidates to answer in their own words, many showed an ability to identify the key words. There remains a need for them to develop greater skills in substituting these key words with their own.
- They should learn how to provide answers which require some processing or distillation of the text; that is, answers which are extracted or derived from the ideas in the text. To deal with a passage written as a first person narrative, candidates should practise answering questions in the third person and understand that a question cannot be answered by lifting another question from the passage. They should focus on looking beyond the literal in inferential questions, while always drawing their inferences from a sensible context linked to the text.
- For the summary, **Question 1**, candidates should practise differentiation between 'note' style and 'continuous writing', as suggested by the instructions; this will enable them to focus on and fulfil the requirement of each rubric in the most efficient way.
- Some of those questions which test the candidates' ability to respond to the ideas of the text require that they learn to differentiate between subjective observations and those which are objectively verifiable.
- Questions sometimes include emboldened words, as a guide for candidates. They should learn to recognise the importance of such emphasis to a successful answer.

General comments

Most candidates attempted all the questions and completed the paper without any issue with time. In **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)** the majority responded neatly and carefully, within the guiding parameters of the answer booklet and are to be commended for their careful presentation. A minority continued answers outside these parameters, or used separate sheets in addition to the booklets; this last can result in parts of a response not being seen by the Examiner.

The candidates answered questions on two passages, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. The variety of subject matter provided the opportunity for questions which stretched and discriminated amongst candidates, allowing the best responses to demonstrate an ability to deal with the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. This was reflected in a wide range of marks.

The first passage, 'Animals in Captivity', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas; the second, 'Akira', tested their reading for meaning. Twenty marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Animals in Captivity' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas; in this case to distinguish fact from opinion and a true statement from false ones. There was also an opportunity to respond to the text by drawing on their own knowledge and experience.

The second passage, 'Akira', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the paper could be gained here.

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

In **Question 1(a)** a bullet point format was used in the main, following the style of the first (given) point in each answer box and the result was a clear list of selected ideas. Only very few lost marks because they put content points in the wrong boxes; most candidates carefully followed the guidance provided in the headings, and separated clearly the advantages and disadvantages of keeping animals in captivity.

In **Question 1(b)**, originality of expression was not always in evidence when writing up note form content points in formal, continuous prose. However, among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures, there were some commendable results. Many candidates attempted at least to rework the relevant details from the passage, with the substitution of single words of their own. Lifting random patches of text sometimes caused difficulty and resulted in fractured sense. The overall standard of written English, including spelling and punctuation was generally good, and in some cases impressive. Common errors in this question included singular/plural agreement of both nouns and verbs, as in 'These animals helps families...' or 'Nutritional expert are employed...' and misuse of the definite article: '... encourage the people to care for planet...' A fairly common clumsy construction involved the use of 'like', e.g. 'There are many disadvantages like they are kept...', while there were many instances of sound, if simple, sentence structure, there were also noticeable sentence separation errors, where the full stop was ignored.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Reading for Ideas

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of keeping animals in captivity. The summary had to be based on all but the first, brief and introductory paragraph of the text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, choosing to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration.

Excluding these provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 19 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points. Most candidates listed the points either in note form or in short sentences, usually under bullet marks, which allowed them adequate space to record all their responses. A small number copied whole sections of the passage, reducing their ability to isolate the points while increasing the potential for including irrelevant text and running out of space. There is no evidence to suggest that such a strategy yielded more marks. Where marks were denied it was usually because a key word was missing from the point. 'Animals get stressed', for example, omitted the crucial adjective 'Large animals...'

Paragraphs 2 and 3 referred to the advantages to be gained by animals which are kept in captivity, and by humans who visit or are involved with them in other ways. There were 11 points which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 6 content points, concerned with benefits to the animals and the potential for research into animals in general. Most candidates recognised the importance of nutritionists in zoos and safari parks, and the majority mentioned that life expectancy is often longer there than in the wild. Provision of a safe environment was noted, though an important result of this (the prevention of the extinction of rare species) was not always stated. The point concerning common links between humans and animals was widely made and many candidates also noted the potential for research into this and animals in general.

Paragraph 3 contained 5 points concerned with the benefits experienced by those who visit zoos and safari parks. A good measure of success was achieved in recognising that people learn more about the natural world; that they are encouraged to play their part in caring for it; that families enjoy coming together for a day out and in a venue which provides relaxation and entertainment. Less successfully expressed was the point about cost: that the relative cheapness of such a visit was to be contrasted with the expense of visiting the animals' natural habitats; that contrast could not be made merely by saying 'It's cheap to go there.'

Paragraphs 4 and 5 provided 8 possible points to fulfil the second part of the rubric: the disadvantages of keeping animals in captivity. From Paragraph 4, candidates could select 5 points, all concerned with the negative effects on the animals: their being deprived of natural habitats; the curbing of natural instincts; an unnatural climate; fewer breeding animals in the wild; and the failure of captive animals to breed. The first three of these points were regularly selected from among a number of distractors in the text. The distinction

between breeding opportunities in the wild and in captivity was not always made clearly enough in the final two points.

The last 3 points of disadvantage appeared in Paragraph 5 and candidates were quite successful in eliciting these, showing some ability to ignore most of the distracting material. A comparative idea was necessary in explaining the first point in the paragraph: that some animals do not live *as long* in captivity as in the wild; to say that their lives in captivity are 'short' was inaccurate. Similarly, the *size* of those animals which become stressed in captivity had to be included - 'elephants' or 'large animals' were acceptable. The final three words of the text provided two alternatives for the last possible point: 'cruelty and exploitation' were regularly offered.

A number of candidates were awarded maximum marks and a large number scored half marks and above. Very few candidates wasted the space available by reproducing the given points in each box and only a small minority wrote in continuous prose rather than offering more succinct points. While notes or brief sentences are ideal in this task, all points nevertheless need to be fully made, and clear enough to be fully understood by another person. Where marks were lost it was often because points were incompletely made, e.g. referring to 'a ready supply of food' being available to animals, but with no mention of the nutritionists who supply it. Similarly, stating that 'people can afford to go to zoos' omitted the crucial idea that ordinary people, rather than just the rich, can afford to do so.

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

The task set in **Question 1(a)** of reading to seek out the relevant information helped candidates to focus on what was important when they came to write their summaries in **Question 1(b)**. It was, therefore, rare to find them wasting words on irrelevance. Even more rare were instances of candidates straying from the text to offer their own views or experiences.

Encouragingly, almost every candidate attempted and completed the exercise comfortably within the given space, generally adhering to the rubric. The attempt to use own words was clearly recognisable in many scripts, a number of candidates using them in a sustained manner and in a style which was often accurate, containing original complex structures. Many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, without being innovative or original in their use of English. Those who copied chunks, wholesale, from the text and attempted to link these found it difficult to control sentence structure fluently. There were occasional examples of the attempt to use own words proving unwise; the over-ambitious use of vocabulary did not always match the meaning of the original, as in 'Animals have lost their hometown', 'wild habitats are destroyed at deseperating rates' and 'they are ripped off of their homes.'

Though content points do not score in **Question 1(b)**, offering only very few in this part of the question would be reflected in the language mark. Including only perhaps 5 or 6 points here would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words. Commendably, very short answers were extremely rare; hopefully candidates recognise that such brevity can never justify a high mark because they cannot demonstrate sustained use of own words or completely accurate English. A few candidates who were competent and confident enough, reshaped and recast the original text, using original complex sentences and other variety, to gain many, or full, marks for style.

In **Questions 2, 3 and 4** candidates were tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. **Question 2** asked for the two opinions which appeared in paragraph 4: that 'baby pandas are undeniably cute' and that 'it is downright stupid to have polar bears and tigers living at identical temperatures.' Candidates had to focus on the trigger words which suggested the idea of subjectivity rather than objectivity; these were 'undeniably' and 'stupid'. While candidates were free to use their own words to express these opinions, those who selected them correctly usually quoted from the passage; a wise decision. Sometimes, however, excess lifting blurred the 'opinion' with objective facts; e.g. the addition of global celebrations at the birth of a baby panda, or the generalisation that animals 'experience an unnatural climate.' Some candidates gave *their* opinions rather than those of the text, while many transcribed simple statements of fact such as 'their natural instincts are curbed', or 'they often fail to breed.' Few candidates offered both opinions correctly.

Question 3 asked candidates to give, from their 'own knowledge or experience', further examples of an advantage and a disadvantage of keeping animals in captivity. Alternatively, they could give two advantages or two disadvantages. The more thoughtful candidates suggested a range of valid ideas. These included, on one hand, the prohibitive cost of running zoos and the loneliness of the animals and, on the other, the

financial advantages in attracting tourists and the protecting of wild animals from poachers. A few candidates confused the zoo or safari park 'captivity' of the text with the idea of domesticated animals as pets. A noticeable number ignored the clear instruction: 'Do **not** refer to specific examples from the text'. They failed to score by offering precisely such examples, e.g. 'learning about nature'.

In **Question 4** candidates were asked to tick the box against the one correct statement from three given, based on information from the whole passage. Most candidates got this right, indicating the middle box and showing understanding that 'society in general is undecided about keeping animals in captivity.'

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

The content of the narrative passage focused on the friendship and 'adventure' of two young boys trying to discover the secret behind one of their servants. **Question 5(a)** asked what the relationship was between the title character, Akira, and the elderly 'Ling'. A clear majority settled into **Section 2** well by saying, correctly, that Ling was a servant of Akira's family, or that it was a master/servant relationship. A few overlooked this and picked on the 'attitude' of Akira towards Ling, which was the subject of another question, or missed the point entirely, suggesting that they were friends or neighbours.

Question 5(b) asked for the **one** aspect of other servants which made them popular with children. This required candidates to recognise the inference implicit in the description of Ling as being 'unlike other servants', because 'he rarely smiled at children' and to deduce that they did smile. Any excess of text which referred to their not scowling or shouting detracted from the '**one**' aspect and spoiled the answer.

Question 5(c) was the first of the questions in which candidates were asked to 'Answer in your own words.' Once again, the emboldened instruction was not always adhered to. Here was the question, sometimes answered at **Question 5(a)**, which asked about Akira's 'attitude' to Ling and why it 'puzzled the writer'. The passage clearly led the reader to the two words which, the available marks suggested, had to be recast: '...I was *puzzled* by the consternation shown by Akira whenever the servant came within his vicinity.' Though many identified the key words – 'consternation' and 'vicinity' – they frequently appeared in responses, with no attempt to recast them. 'Fear', 'tension', anxiety' and similar synonyms for 'consternation' were seen but substituting for 'vicinity' proved a challenging discriminator. 'Whenever he appeared' was frequently offered but this does not necessarily carry the sense of closeness inherent in the key word.

In **Question 6(a)** candidates were asked to explain how Akira behaved in Ling's presence, before he 'grew older'. This necessitated an understanding of the inference conveyed by the words 'the sight of Ling *no longer* caused my friend to freeze.' Weaker candidates, and even some stronger ones, merely repeated the idea of 'fear' from the previous question. It is unlikely that adjacent questions would require identical answers, and candidates would be wise to re-read precisely the terms of both questions if they find that they have offered two such responses.

Question 6(b) was another which demanded answers in the candidates' '**own words**', and which once again challenged all but the very best candidates. Asked what it was that Akira recited to the writer 'in a curious monotone', it was not difficult to pinpoint the key words in Paragraph 2 which required substitution; the question was a direct quotation from the text, which continued '...the most appalling revelations concerning the old man'. Many candidates ignored the direction that answers to **Question 6** would be found in the second paragraph and moved into the next one to offer details of the 'revelations'. To some extent, in doing so, they anticipated the following question. 'Appalling' carries a force greater than simply 'frightening', 'scary' or even 'terrible' (which is often used quite casually to mean 'unpleasant'). Thus, a modifier such as 'very' was necessary if these words were given. There were those who suitably suggested 'shocking', 'terrifying' or similar synonyms, but they did not always find a suitable alternative for 'revelations'. This word carries the suggestion of 'secrets', things not previously known, so while 'things about him' did not score, '*surprising things...*' or '*things he had found out / discovered* about him' did. Succinct, fully correct answers such as 'shocking disclosures' were very rarely seen.

Question 7(a) carried a limit on the number of words which could be used to describe Akira's '...family's darkest secret.' When a few candidates ignored this and tried to lift the text, they exceeded the 12 allowed words by 2; most, however complied with the limit. Introductory words such as 'The family's darkest secret was that...' were unnecessary and Examiners did not include them in the word count. Still, a little skill was needed to distil the fanciful idea that Ling could turn severed hands into spiders. The majority recognised that Ling was the agent in the 'secret' but many missed the crucial fact that the hands were supposedly 'severed' or cut off.

Question 7(b) asked candidates to find ‘the **single** word used elsewhere’ in Paragraph 3 which was linked to the idea of ‘secrecy’ mentioned in the previous question, ‘conspiratorially’ being the answer. ‘Entrusted’ was a popular choice, perhaps because of its relative proximity to ‘secret’ in the text. ‘Discovered’ and ‘potion’ also appeared. Many apparently failed to look at the whole paragraph to find the word – which occurred in the first line – assuming, perhaps, that it would appear as a *continuation* of the ‘idea of secrecy’, rather than as a *link* to it.

Question 8(a) required candidates to give the two ways in which Akira showed his nervousness when he went near Ling’s room. The writer recognised as nervousness the fact that Akira ‘pushed himself along the corridor towards’ Ling’s room, as well as in his face which was ‘shining with perspiration’. A good number of candidates thought about the situation and provided the correct explanations, though inclusion of the first person introduction; ‘I would stand and watch as...’ sometimes spoiled the correct answer. Many others lifted randomly and suggested that his ‘grinning broadly’ or that ‘he glanced back’ were signs of nervousness. If candidates used the text structure ‘*whenever* he glanced back’ and continued to say that his face ‘was shining with perspiration’ they showed a clear understanding; if they offered the two equal clauses, beginning ‘He glanced back at me *and* he was perspiring’, there was no clear indication as to which of these things showed Akira’s nervousness, and so this was not considered to be a correct response.

Question 8(b) asked for the result of Akira’s ‘goading and bullying’. This was that the writer eventually followed him ‘towards that awful room.’ The information had to be inferred from the writer’s question: ‘Would I ever have been able to follow him if it had not been for all his goading and bullying?’ Candidates had to realise that he *did* follow Akira towards the room, *because* of that goading and bullying; the better candidates recognised this fact. Some candidates confused the two boys and seemed to think that it was Akira who was being bullied, resulting in his ‘grinning broadly’ or glancing back. The link between Akira’s unwilling push ‘towards’ Ling’s room and the writer ‘being able to follow him’ meant that answers which said he followed or accompanied him *into* the room were inaccurate. Another discriminating question, this reinforced the view that inferential questions are still some of the most demanding for candidates.

Question 9 required an explanation of Akira’s ‘triumphant flourish’ of the hand. The fact that he was ‘delighted’ to have overcome his fears and actually gone into Ling’s room was included by many, but few recognised that this was not the reason either for his triumph or his ‘flourish’. There were two parts to the answer, here: one focused on the ‘flourish’ of the hand, a physical pointing or indicating, or the idea that he had seen or found something. The second, which resulted from his finding the potion, was the ‘triumphant’ feeling that he had been proved right and would not, now, look ridiculous, as he had feared he would. The idea of seeing or pointing at the ‘potion’ or a ‘sinister’ feature was made quite often; his sense of relief at being proved correct or at not looking ridiculous was less frequently seen.

Question 10(a) sought the two reasons why the writer did not ‘ridicule Akira’s attempt to preserve a fantasy’. The text said that he *might* have mocked this attempt implying that he did not do so. The first reason preceded and was linked to the question words by ‘Otherwise...’; the second came after them, introduced by ‘Moreover...’ Generally, candidates understood the purpose of these link words and identified the reasons. Many candidates recognised his ‘fear’, but often failed to include the fact that, by now, it was merely ‘a *residue*’ of fear; just a *little* fear *still* within him. Even more picked up on his anxiety over a ‘more likely eventuality...’, but a large number stopped short of explaining what that eventuality was: that they might be discovered in the room. More thoughtful reading of the text was needed.

Question 10(b) related to Akira’s ‘hissed’ command and asked for the effect created by this word, which would have been lost by using the word ‘said’. More than half the candidates attempted an explanation of that effect, correctly identifying a sense of fear, secrecy or urgency in the metaphorical use of ‘hissed’. Many, though, suggested that his words were said ‘in a low tone’, were ‘whispered’ or said in a hurry. Such answers required the addition of *why* this was so: because he did not want anyone to hear him, or because of the necessity to get out. Only very few answers suggested the literal explanation that Akira merely made a noise without words, or offered the simile of a snake.

Question 11 was the final inferential question, in two parts. **Question 11(a)** was answered correctly by most candidates, who appreciated that Akira’s reluctance to talk about their achievement was the result of ‘some difficulty’. Thus, they were able to explain that, if his ‘difficulty’ had not arisen, he *would* have talked about it. A few failed to specify that his ‘behaviour’ would have included speaking, boasting or bragging; this was the point, rather than his merely ‘acting excited’ or ‘proud’.

Candidates fared less well in **Question 11(b)**. Asked to give ‘the wider repercussions’ of the boys’ theft, candidates had to understand, first, that the writer appreciated Akira’s concern over these repercussions. Then they had to recognise that his words of encouragement implied just what the unanticipated

'repercussions' were: the need to return the bottle to Ling's room before he got back. This was the most challenging question on the paper and as such produced very few succinct, correct responses. The answer could, however, have been inferred from Paragraph 7, while the frequent suggestions that they would lose their hands, end up with spiders instead of fingers or, simply, be punished could not.

Question 12 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding, in context, but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. This proved to be a difficult test. Many candidates attempted *embarrassed* well, and scored with the synonyms 'ashamed' or 'humiliated', although an occasional wrong answer was 'shy'. *Glanced* was also chosen frequently and answers usually added, correctly, 'quick' or 'brief' as a qualifier for 'looked'; alone, 'looked' was inaccurate and 'a short look' was somewhat ambiguous. *Evaporated* was another popular choice and a variety of acceptable alternatives appeared, the most frequent being 'vanished', 'was gone' / 'lost', 'disappeared' and 'dissolved'. This last was acceptable but other, more scientifically literal attempts, such as 'changed from a liquid to a gas' were not. *Obsession*, when attempted, was most often replaced with 'addiction', 'passion' or 'cannot stop thinking about', all of which gave the right idea, but the weaker 'wanting to do it a lot' or 'habit' were not forceful enough. The apparently simple *curious*, though attempted quite often, was rarely recast with its contextual meaning of 'odd', 'strange', 'unusual' etc. Synonyms such as 'wanting to know' or 'finding out' were typical and showed the need to take context into careful consideration in this question. The same problem revealed itself in some attempts at *resolve*, with candidates offering 'worked something out' or 'solution', but a few correctly gave 'courage'. 'Strength' was a common unsuitable alternative, perhaps resulting from the fact that the boys physically 'linked arms'. *Exaggerated* produced some acceptable synonyms in 'more than needed', 'overdone' and 'excessive', but the precise image in the text was lost with attempts such as 'extra', 'great' and 'extreme'; these mean little more than 'much'. *Listlessly* was the least frequently chosen word and was rarely, if ever, adequately substituted; 'aimlessly' was offered, usually, but did not carry the sense of lethargy or lack of energy or enthusiasm which the word implies.

The practice of trying to explain a word by putting it into a sentence has all but disappeared and the 5 lines provided for answers usually discouraged candidates from attempting to recast all eight words. There were still those who offered two or more synonyms for each word; they must realise that only the first word or phrase offered as an answer will be credited and should therefore decide on their response with care.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22 Comprehension
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Key messages

- In those questions which require candidates to answer in their own words, many showed an ability to identify the key words. There remains a need for them to develop greater skills in substituting these key words with their own.
- They should learn how to provide answers which require some processing of the text, and how to manipulate or get behind the ideas of the text rather than simply lifting from it. To deal with a passage written as a first person narrative, candidates should practise answering questions in the third person and understand that a question cannot be answered by lifting another question from the passage. They should focus on looking beyond the literal in inferential questions, while always drawing their inferences from a sensible context linked to the text.
- For the summary, **Question 1**, candidates should practise differentiation between 'note' style and 'continuous writing', as suggested by the instructions; this will enable them to focus on and fulfil the requirement of each rubric in the most efficient way.
- Some of those questions which test the candidates' ability to respond to the ideas of the text require that they learn to differentiate between subjective observations and those which are objectively verifiable.
- Questions sometimes include emboldened words, as a guide for candidates. They should learn to recognise the importance of such emphasis to a successful answer.

General comments

Most candidates attempted all the questions and completed the paper without any issue with time. In **Questions 1(a)** and **1(b)** the majority responded neatly and carefully, within the guiding parameters of the answer booklet and are to be commended for their careful presentation. A minority continued answers outside these parameters, or used separate sheets in addition to the booklets; this last can result in parts of a response not being seen by the Examiner.

The candidates answered questions on two passages, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. The variety of subject matter provided the opportunity for questions which stretched and discriminated amongst candidates, allowing the best responses to demonstrate an ability to deal with the familiar as well as the unfamiliar. This was reflected in a wide range of marks.

The first passage, 'Air Travel', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas; the second, about Christopher, tested their reading for meaning. Twenty marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Air Travel' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas; in this case to distinguish fact from opinion and to differentiate between true and false statements.

The second passage tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their ability to answer in their own words, and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the paper could be gained here.

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

In **Question 1(a)** a bullet point format was used in the main, following the style of the first (given) point in each answer box and the result was a clear list of selected ideas. Only very few candidates lost marks because they put content points in the wrong boxes; most candidates carefully followed the guidance provided in the headings, and separated clearly the advantages and disadvantages of air travel. Disadvantages and advantages scored about equally in most cases. When points were not made, it was less because they were not attempted and more because of the omission of crucial words / ideas which were being insisted upon in order to make the point fully.

In **Question 1(b)**, originality of expression was not always in evidence when writing up note form content points in formal, continuous prose. However, among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures, there were some commendable results. Many candidates attempted at least to rework the relevant details from the passage, with the substitution of single words of their own. Lifting random patches of text sometimes caused difficulty and resulted in fractured sense. The overall standard of written English, including spelling and punctuation was generally good, and in some cases impressive.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Reading for Ideas

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the advantages and disadvantages of air travel, as described in the passage. The summary had to be based on the second to the fifth paragraphs of the text inclusive, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, choosing to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration.

Excluding these provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 20 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points. Most candidates listed the points either in note form or in short sentences, usually under bullet marks, which allowed them adequate space to record all their responses. A small number copied whole sections of the passage, reducing their ability to isolate the points while increasing the potential for including irrelevant text and running out of space. There is no evidence to suggest that such a strategy yielded more marks. Where marks were denied it was often because a key word was missing from the point. 'Makes family holidays easy', for example, omitted the crucial idea contained in 'makes family holidays overseas easier'.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 referred to the advantages of air travel, and there were 10 points which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 4 content points, concerned with benefits to passengers: air travel encourages people to be tolerant of others, it is within the budget of ordinary people, family holidays overseas become easier, and it is possible to make or maintain contact with loved ones living abroad. There was much success with the making of these points.

Paragraph 3 contained 6 points concerned with the employment benefits air travel brings, and the favourable comparison of air travel with other forms of transport. Jobs are created in airports, communities in depressed areas near airports are able to develop, small businesses can send employees to other countries or other parts of the country to work, and individuals can commute from one city to another or from one country to another to work. In addition, air travel reduces pressure on other forms of transport and is beneficial because of its speed. There was a reasonable degree of success with these points, although the omission of the qualification that it was airports in *depressed* areas that benefitted, or that these areas were *near airports*, often denied the point, as did the omission of the fact that jobs were created *in* airports, and not just the lift of 'airports spring up and employment is created'.

Paragraphs 4 and 5 provided 10 possible points to fulfil the second part of the rubric: the disadvantages of air travel. From Paragraph 4, candidates could select 6 points, the first 3 being that runways are built on the countryside, as are terminal buildings, and air travel damages the ozone layer. There was much success with the latter point, but many candidates were unsuccessful with the first 2 points because they referred only to the effect the building of runways and terminals had on picturesque views and not on the destruction of the green belt. Candidates were then able to select a further 3 content points from paragraph 4: air travel facilitates smuggling, a point which the majority of candidates made, there are few if any survivors in a plane crash, and people are encouraged to buy holiday homes abroad, which causes further damage to the ozone layer. There was little success with this last point as the few candidates who even attempted it often failed to make the link between the holiday homes and the effect on the environment; it is not the purchasing of homes per se which is the problem but the damaging effects of the owners travelling there by plane.

The last 4 points of disadvantage appeared in Paragraph 5 and candidates were quite successful in eliciting the first 3 of these: the journey to the airport adds to travel time, and security checks are both time-consuming and stressful. The final point, that flights are often delayed and passengers feel imprisoned in the airport was less frequently made. Many candidates merely lifted the passage in lines 41–42, and no credit can be given to candidates who answer a question with another question. Another problem in this area was the reference to flights being delayed without the effect of this delay.

A number of candidates were awarded maximum marks and a large number scored half marks and above. Very few candidates wasted the space available by reproducing the given points in each box and only a small minority wrote in continuous prose rather than offering more succinct points. While notes or brief sentences are ideal in this task, all points nevertheless need to be fully made, and be clear enough to be fully understood by another person. As stated above, where marks were lost it was often because points were incompletely made, e.g. referring to 'flights are delayed' but with no mention of the effect on passengers.

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

It appears that the task set in **Question 1(a)** of reading to seek out the relevant information helped candidates to focus on what was important when they came to write their summaries in **Question 1(b)**. Still, some candidates wasted words on irrelevance, such as drug smuggling being a life-destroying activity. Some others strayed into paragraph 6 because they had not read the rubric properly, which fixed the parameters at paragraphs 2 to 5 inclusive. There were also some rare instances of candidates straying from the text to offer their own views or experiences.

Encouragingly, almost every candidate attempted and completed the exercise comfortably within the given space, generally adhering to the rubric. The attempt to use own words was clearly recognisable in many scripts, a number of candidates using them in a sustained manner and in a style which was often accurate, containing original complex structures. Many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, without being innovative or original in their use of English. Those who copied chunks, wholesale, from the text and attempted to link these often found it difficult to control sentence structure fluently. There were occasional examples of the attempt to use own words proving unwise; the over-ambitious use of vocabulary did not always match the meaning of the original.

Though content points do not score in **Question 1(b)**, offering only very few in this part of the question would be reflected in the language mark. Including only perhaps 5 or 6 points here would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words. Commendably, very short answers were extremely rare; hopefully candidates recognise that such brevity can never justify a high mark because they cannot demonstrate sustained use of own words or completely accurate English. A few candidates who were competent and confident enough reshaped and recast the original text, using original complex sentences and other variety, to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Common errors concerned agents, tenses, and agreement. Additionally, language errors often occurred because of breakdown of sense when imperfectly understood phrases from the passage were inappropriately stitched together. There was also considerable confusion between 'facilities' and 'facilitates', and the expression 'more easier' appeared quite frequently. Some candidates used connecting words such as 'moreover' and 'nevertheless' in a somewhat random fashion, and phrases such as 'on the contrary' were sometimes used inappropriately. Another issue was wrong use of articles, as in 'the air travel', and the use of plurals for uncountable nouns, as in 'air travels'.

In **Questions 2** and **3** candidates were tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it. **Question 2** asked for the two opinions which appeared in paragraph 5: that security checks are an invasion of privacy and that there is nothing worse than the feeling of being imprisoned in an airport. Candidates could use their own words or lift from the passage, which meant that the lift of 'what could be worse than the feeling of being imprisoned in an airport?' was rewarded here, although not as a content point in **Question 1(a)**. Candidates had to focus on the trigger words which suggested the idea of subjectivity rather than objectivity; these were 'stressful' and 'worse'. Sometimes, however, excess lifting blurred the 'opinion' with objective facts; e.g. the addition of 'time-consuming' for security checks, or 'sometimes flights are delayed, and when this happens' at the idea of feeling imprisoned in the airport. Some candidates gave *their* opinions rather than those of the text, such as 'it would be a good idea to employ more staff in airports', while many transcribed simple statements of fact such as 'runways are built on lush countryside', 'it damages

the ozone layer' or referred to the increased travel time in getting to the airport and not having security checks on trains. Few candidates offered both opinions correctly.

Question 3 asked candidates to decide whether each of three statements from paragraph 6 was true or false; the first was true and the others were false. This was generally successfully attempted and, where only two were correct, the wrong answer tended to be to say that the third statement was true.

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

The content of the narrative passage focused on the protagonist, Christopher, overhearing an argument between his parents and trying to eavesdrop when he was supposed to be studying. **Question 4(a)** asked what was lacking in the room because it was raining, the answer being 'light' or 'sunlight', which had to be inferred from the statement that the room was 'gloomy'. Fewer candidates than normal settled into **Section 2** well by giving a correct answer to the opening question, with 'gloomy' being a popular incorrect one. Some took 'gloom' to refer to mood and suggested a lack of happiness or joy.

Question 4(b) asked for the reason why it was pretentious to call the room where Christopher worked a 'library'. Candidates had to know or work out the meaning of 'pretentious', as showing delusion of grandeur which does not in fact exist, in order to make the link to the smallness of the room. If the focus of the answer was the books in the room then no credit could be given.

Question 4(c) was a literal comprehension question which asked candidates to give two pieces of evidence which showed that Christopher's education was important to Mei Li. It was noticeable that some candidates were under the impression that a request for 'evidence' is actually inviting them to produce a quotation from the passage, and respond accordingly, using quotation marks. This evidence lay in lines 7–9, but lifting from the text did not answer the question because the language of the text was couched in a question. Discerning candidates, realising that questions cannot be answered by other questions, re-cast the text to present the evidence as being that Mei Li stood over Christopher as he worked, or that she supervised his education, and that she never sat down. Another issue involved in answering this correctly lay in the fact that the passage was written in the first person and that this had to be changed to third person if the answer was to be correct. Thus 'she stood over me as I worked' did not answer the question.

Question 5(a) was the first of the questions in which candidates were asked to 'explain in your own words.' The emboldened instruction was not always adhered to. The question asked why it was surprising that Christopher's father came into the library. The passage clearly led the reader to the two words which, the available marks suggested, had to be recast: '...my parents knew that they should not *interrupt* us unless it was *vital*.' Though some candidates identified the key words – 'interrupt' and 'vital' – these words sometimes appeared in responses, with no attempt to recast them. 'Stop', 'disturb', 'distract' and similar synonyms for 'interrupt' were seen but substitutions for 'vital' proved a challenging discriminator, with acceptable synonyms being 'crucial', 'essential', and 'urgent'. 'Important' was a common wrong answer, which could not be rewarded because it was too weak to convey the sense of urgency inherent in 'vital', although 'very important' was an acceptable response.

In **Question 5(b)** candidates were asked to explain what other aspect of Christopher's father's behaviour was surprising. There was some blurring with answers to this question and the preceding question but careful reading of the two questions – **Question 5(b)** and **Question 5(c)** – shows that there are distinct answers here which can be supported by the text. The answer to **Question 5(c)** was that Christopher's father seemed not to see Christopher and Mei Li, or that he was oblivious of their presence. This near-lifting was sufficient to make the point, although candidates had to make the change from first to third person in order to write an answer which was sensible. If they also referred to the father striding through the library or closing the door firmly behind him, this might or might not have been regarded as a neutral extension to the correct answer; if the focus was still on the father being oblivious, this was sufficient to score, but if the focus was blurred or distorted the candidate was not successful.

Question 5(c) was another literal comprehension question in two parts which asked candidates to explain why Mei Li reprimanded Christopher. Many candidates appeared to have a good understanding of the situation and it was not uncommon for both marks to be gained. Although the answers lay in lines 15–18, they could not be made by lifting from the text. The first reason for the reprimand was that Christopher was eavesdropping, or listening to, or trying to hear, his parents' argument; 'whenever I tried to hear a little more' was not sufficient. The second reason for the reprimand was that Christopher was not working, or doing his homework; the lift of 'my pencil hovered too long over my sums' was not a sufficient answer, but the change of first to third person was considered an adequate response. Some candidates misunderstood Mei Li's

intention here and wrote that she was trying to stop him hearing the argument; this was a distortion of the answer as he could already hear his parents, but Mei Li was trying to prevent him from listening.

Question 6(a) asked candidates to find 'the **single** word used later' in Paragraph 3 which continued the idea of 'fearful', 'apprehensively' being the answer. 'Hurry' was a popular wrong choice, perhaps because of its relative proximity to 'fearful' in the text. However, 'flee', 'feeble', 'muffled', and even 'angry', 'deception', 'sanctuary', and 'despondent' also appeared.

Question 6(b) was an inferential question asking candidates why Christopher might have returned to the table every few seconds, the answer being that he was worried Mei Li might come back, or he did not want Mei Li to find him out of his chair. This was generally well done; where candidates failed to make the point it tended to be because mention of Mei Li had been omitted, or an incorrect link had been made to Christopher's parents.

Question 6(c) was a demanding question which asked candidates to explain why Christopher's deceit was 'feeble'. The answer lay in inferring that it was silly or ridiculous to measure a room with a ruler, or one would not use a ruler to measure a room, or that it was obvious one could not measure a room with a ruler, or that Mei Li would not be taken in by the excuse. Merely to offer a synonym for 'feeble' such as 'unconvincing' did not answer the question, which asked for an explanation as to *why* the deceit was feeble or unconvincing. Some candidates merely offered a synonym for 'deception', such as 'he was pretending to measure the room'; this did not get behind the meaning of the question either.

Question 6(d) was the second of the questions in the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, and, as with **Question 6(c)**, this challenged all but the very best candidates. Asked in what way the anger of his father differed from the anger of his mother, candidates were to focus on the key words 'righteous' and 'despondent'. Some were able to do that but got further in that synonyms were not offered. Acceptable synonyms for 'righteous' were 'justified' or 'virtuous' or, alternatively, candidates could use the key word expressed differently, as in 'she knew that she was right' or 'she was convinced that she was right'. Acceptable synonyms for 'despondent' were 'sad' or 'miserable'; surprisingly few candidates were able to offer a correct answer here. Some were concerned with the volume and intensity of the anger displayed, or explained the reasons for the parents' differing reactions. The closest, but incorrect, answers to the 'despondent' tone were 'defensive' or 'guilty'.

Question 7 was a literal comprehension question asking candidates to explain why Christopher was not upset by his parents' disagreements, the answer being that they did not affect his life, and that he was used to them. Although this was a relatively straightforward question where the answer could be found at lines 33–34, some distillation of the text was needed, and straight lifting did not work. First of all the first person had to be changed to third person, and secondly the question form of the second limb had to be changed to a statement. Popular wrong answers were that Christopher did not concern himself with the arguments, which was no more than a re-casting of the question rather than an answer to it, and a description of the disagreements, such as 'they did communicate' or 'they did not communicate at all'.

Question 8(a) required candidates to explain the effect that 'theatrical' gave that would not have been achieved by 'hearty', and in that respect this was a question testing candidates' ability to appreciate the way writers make use of language, or writer's craft. Acceptable answers were that it suggested the laughter was fake, false, pretend, exaggerated or insincere. Popular wrong answers referred to 'joke', 'sarcasm' or 'kicking his feet in the air'.

Question 8(b) asked for an explanation of how Akira's comparison of families to sun-blinds showed what happened if children did not play their part in family; in this respect candidates were being asked to de-code a image. Acceptable answers had to link the broken blinds to broken families, so credit was given to answers which referred to broken or scattered families, or to families where the members had separated. Correct answers had to incorporate entire families and not just parents and not just children; therefore the idea that parents would divorce or split up was insufficient. Many struggled to offer anything more than the slats ending up on the floor. There was rarely a clear recognition that an image had to be decoded.

Question 8(c) required candidates to make a general point and a particular point; this was a discerning and separating question. The general point was that Akira had said that all parents' arguments were about, or triggered by, their children, while the particular point was that Christopher knew that his parents' argument had not been about him, their child, or that he knew that their argument had been about business, or money and therefore, by implication, not about him. More candidates were successful with the particular point than with the general one, very often failing to give the correct particular information because they gave the particular point again by writing that Akira had said that when Christopher's parents argued it was about their

child, and not referring to all parents arguing. Some candidates spoiled their answer here by writing that Christopher felt his parents had been arguing about him, whereas the text makes it quite clear that he never thought that.

Question 9 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding, in context, but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. This proved to be a difficult test, with a very small minority of candidates offering five correct synonyms. Many candidates attempted 'frustratingly' well, and gave the correct synonym 'annoyingly' or 'disappointingly', although many offered, incorrectly, answers linked to stress or anger. 'Inevitably' was also chosen frequently, with acceptable synonyms being 'unavoidable', 'unpreventable' or 'unstoppable'. Candidates were less successful with 'muffled', where correct synonyms were 'unclear', 'faint' or 'indistinct'. 'Paramount' was a popular choice, but most candidates failed to pinpoint the superlative nature of this word, writing, incorrectly, 'very important' or 'extremely important' rather than 'most important'. The other four choices were less frequently made, and few attempts were successful; synonyms for 'sanctuary' were 'safety' or 'haven'; synonyms for 'broached' were 'introduced' or 'brought up'; synonyms for 'earnestness' were 'seriousness' or 'sincerity'; synonyms for 'heralded' were 'introduced' or 'preceded'. Popular wrong answers for 'broached' were 'talked about' or 'discussed' and popular wrong answers for 'heralded' were 'resulted in' or 'created'.

The practice of trying to explain a word by putting it into a sentence has all but disappeared and the 5 lines provided for answers usually discouraged candidates from attempting to recast all eight words. There were still those who offered two or more synonyms for each word; they must realise that only the first word or phrase offered as an answer will be credited and should therefore decide on their response with care.