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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Candidates appeared to find both reading passages interesting and accessible. Examiners report that, in general, **Questions 11** and **12** were particularly well answered and that **Questions 8** and **10** caused candidates the most difficulty. Presentation was of a generally satisfactory to good standard although there are still some Centres where the handwriting of candidates is extremely difficult to read; it is certainly worth candidates bearing in mind that although legibility is not, in itself, an assessment criterion, it is bound to affect assessment if the Examiner cannot read what has been written. Similarly, there are still a small number of Centres where candidates appear not to have submitted answers to the multiple choice questions. If, as seems likely, these candidates have answered these questions on the question paper itself, then it is of the utmost importance that these question papers, identifiable as those of individual candidates, should be included in the envelope with the rest of the answer scripts; to achieve a grade C on this paper candidates must score highly – losing 6 marks through such an oversight will put the achieving of this grade virtually out of reach.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Questions 1-6

The correct sequence of answers for the multiple choice questions was CDCCCB. Most candidates scored between 3 and 5 marks on this section although only a very small number succeeded in identifying all six correct answers. **Question 5** was the one most frequently answered incorrectly, largely due to an inability to locate the comment in its context from Sarah Bailey's comment immediately following the phrase 'empty gesture' in the reading passage.

Question 7

Give **three** ways in which disabled athletes have been made to feel equal with able-bodied competitors.

Many candidates succeeded in identifying at least three of the possible four points which could be made in answer to this question. These points were:

- their medals will count towards their country's final total
- they will take part in processions
- they will live in the athletes' village
- they will compete in the same stadium/at the same time.

Question 8

Explain carefully what Mike Todd means when he says that disabled competitors will

- (a) compete at the top level
(b) be recognised for their achievement.

This question was not well answered and it appears that many candidates failed to observe the instruction on the question paper to answer by using their own words as far as possible, as there was a considerable amount of lifting from the passage which did not always indicate that the important points had been understood. There were, in fact, two points to be made for each of the two sections of the question. Disabled athletes would 'compete at the top level' by competing *alongside* (but not in the same events as) the best *able-bodied* athletes. (To gain the mark here it was necessary to identify that these other athletes were able-bodied.) The second point to be made was that they would be competing in the world's greatest competitions.

In order to explain what was meant by disabled athletes being recognised for their achievement, it was necessary to state the two senses of the word 'recognised': (i) their faces would be known by a large number of people after they had been seen on television and photographed in newspapers and (ii) their efforts would be acknowledged and praised by the public in the same way that those of able-bodied athletes are and their medals would be given equal status in the public eye.

Question 9

What are the **three** points that Maria Eagle makes?

The three points made are:

- the arrangements are a good start
- there is still some way to go in terms of letting disabled athletes play a full part
- it is a clear sign that people's views of disabled athletes are improving.

Most candidates successfully showed an understanding of the first and third of these points; however, those who merely lifted Maria Eagle's words that the Manchester Games have not addressed all the wider issues of inclusiveness and accessibility did not give clear evidence that this statement had been understood.

Question 10

If you were the disability adviser to the Games in your own country, what improvements to the changes made in the Manchester Games would you make? Use only ideas expressed in the passage.

The success of candidates' responses to this task depended mainly on how much importance they attached to its second sentence. Those who did so usually managed to identify some of the points made by many of the people referred to in the passage such as there should be more events; there should be events for the severely disabled; there should be different races for different classifications of disability; that the ways of identifying the winners should be more easily understood by spectators. There were four marks available for this question and candidates who showed clear understanding of some of these points were rewarded with full marks. However, many more candidates appeared to forget that this question was in the comprehension section of the paper and simply wrote a personal response with no reference to any of the points made in the passage which meant that, unfortunately, it was not possible to reward them at all.

Part 2**Question 11**

Write a summary of all that you know about Natalie in three parts

- (a) her life before the accident
- (b) her life as a swimmer and as a person after the accident
- (c) her hopes for the future.

Examiners report that the improvement in candidates' summary writing technique which has been noticed over the last two or three years is being sustained and that most are now scoring at least four of the five marks available for written expression on the Core tier paper. There is considerably less evidence of indiscriminate lifting from the original passage than there has been in the past and even those candidates who fail to identify many of the required points are, nevertheless, aware of the need to be concise and focused in their responses. It was also felt that candidates responded well to the requirement to write three brief paragraphs although a small number did not heed the requirement to do so. Others mentioned relevant points but, unfortunately, included them in the wrong section so it was not possible to credit them. The key points for each section were as follows:

- (a) Natalie came from Cape Town/South Africa. She had a fear of water but overcame it. She joined her local swimming club at the age of six. She trained every day. She swam for her country in the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur at the age of 14. She rode a motor scooter.
- (b) After her accident she started swimming again after only three months. She could swim only in circles and was unable to kick with her good leg. She had to learn how to cope with an artificial leg. She was not self-conscious. She is a role model to other athletes. She has not changed since her accident. She was the first disabled person to compete in able-bodied events.
- (c) She intends to finish her studies and go to university. She hopes to become a geneticist. She will continue competitive swimming.

In general, candidates scored well on sections (a) and (c) and less well on section (b). This was due largely to a failure to focus sufficiently on the second half of this part of the task (her life as a person after the accident). It should be emphasised that precision of detail is especially important in answering this task; for example, it was not sufficient to say that Natalie competed in both disabled and able-bodied events; the important point was that she was the first person to do so. A common misreading of the passage (which also confused some candidates' responses to **Question 12**) was that Natalie needed her artificial leg for swimming. The point most frequently omitted point was that she rode a motor scooter.

Question 12

Imagine you are Natalie du Toit and that you are about to compete in the Games.

Write a letter to a friend.

In your letter write about

- your thoughts and feelings about what has happened to you
- your plans and hopes for the future
- what you have learned about yourself as a person.

In general candidates responded well to this task and showed a pleasing empathy with Natalie's character. The best responses showed that they understood Natalie and her likely frame of mind as she prepared to compete for the Manchester Games (the understanding of context was a key point in determining how well the candidates had understood the task) and as she reflected on the events of the past year. Such responses adopted exactly the right tone for a letter to a friend, and included imaginative and relevant personal material. In particular, these responses showed a clear awareness of the requirement to write about *thoughts and feelings* and to produce convincing insights into what Natalie had learned about herself as a person, by drawing on and embellishing details which were contained in the passage. Less successful responses came when candidates replaced feelings and aspirations with narrative; in these cases, widespread lifting was evident and the response became little more than a summary of the whole passage. The least successful responses came from candidates who apparently failed to understand the instructions for the question and consequently produced largely irrelevant responses with very little or no use made of the stimulus material

Conclusion

Most candidates appear to have performed to the level of their capabilities in this examination and there was much good work to commend, in particular in responses to **Questions 11** and **12**. Centres have obviously worked hard at developing candidates' writing skills and summary writing technique. What is important now, especially with the future change in format of the exam, is to concentrate closely on the importance of close reading of the questions as well as the passage and on the need to focus clearly on the precise details required for fully correct answers.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June 2005 examination session. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

<p>Paper 0500/02 Reading and Directed Writing</p>

General comments

Examiners reported that candidates were well prepared for this year's paper and that there were few rubric infringements. There were also fewer failures to answer the questions as set. Most candidates gave themselves sufficient time to answer all three questions, but there were examples of answers to the last question that were written in a hurry. Some candidates' expression was very weak so that it was not always possible to follow the detail of their arguments, or points made in the summaries. Some candidates were not bona fide first language entries.

Specific points that need attention in some Centres are:

- Candidates should never copy whole phrases and sentences from the passages. Examiners understand that it is not always possible to use one's own words, but there were examples of extensive lifting, which resulted in the loss of marks.
- Only the summary question is meant to be a retrieval of points from the passages. The other questions require the development and manipulation of ideas and details from the passages, and comparatively low marks are given for answers that do no more than to identify material and, in some cases, to write a second summary.
- While there were many examples of scripts that were well presented and handwritten, Examiners complained of others that were very difficult to read and, in rare cases, offensively untidy.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1

Summarise: (a) the changes made to the rules and the arrangements concerning disabled competitors at the 2002 Commonwealth Games according to Passage A and (b) the views expressed in both Passage A and Passage B in favour of the changes and their importance.

There were twenty-five possible answers to this question, of which candidates had only to find fifteen to score full marks for content. Although this may seem generous, comparatively few candidates scored all fifteen, perhaps because there was a good deal to read and to understand. The first section of the question was easy. The second, which involved the understanding of comparatively complex arguments, was more difficult.

Good candidates dealt well with Passage B and understood advantages of the changes that would affect the athletes, the spectators and the sport. Although it was not a requirement of the question, there was some evidence that they had changed the order of the points as they appeared in the passages and had re-grouped them to make their summary more coherent. These candidates had the confidence to use their own words well.

Less good candidates scored a good number of points but tended to summarise the whole or most of the passages rather than those portions that answered the question. They did not confine themselves to changes in the first part of their answers, and included views against the changes in the second. Because of this lack of focus on the question, there was sometimes little space left to make the points that were of most value in the mark scheme.

Weak candidates had little idea of what a summary was and gave their own views of the changes. Some of these discursive answers made a few points more by accident than design.

There were five marks available for aspects of the presentation of the summary: concision, focus on the question and on the passages, the use of own words and the length of the summary. On this occasion, focus was more of an issue than concision. Examples of lack of focus have been given above. Most candidates demonstrated concision in at least part of the summary, usually the first. They were more likely to get lost in words later on, but there were some answers that dealt with the views particularly well, using own words to express points clearly and economically. These candidates often scored several points in a few lines near the end. There were complaints from Examiners about candidates who copied extensively from the passage and who gave little evidence of understanding what they had read. They were also candidates who wrote at excessive length, sometimes covering two sides with average handwriting.

Some spent too much time elaborating and explaining points and there was a good deal of repetition. However, it was good to see very few generalised, lengthy introductions. Most candidates started to score marks in the first three of four lines of their answers. It was not necessary to give the names and positions of the people whose views were quoted.

Centres are reminded that a word limit is not given because candidates have no time to count each word. Therefore a rough guide to length is given, 'about a side in total, allowing for the size of your handwriting'. Given that the average writer uses eight or nine words to a line, a side imposes conciseness and the use of own words. However Examiners, who also have no time to count words, do not react until they see candidates who have clearly written at a length that suggests that what is there is nothing like a summary at all. First and foremost, what they look for is a conciseness of style: summaries that are 'wordy' get fewer marks out of five. The example given below, demonstrates concision at its strictest.

There were comparatively few candidates who were sufficiently disciplined and skilled in this type of writing to score all five marks. The average was three or two and some candidates were given no marks at all. This is clearly an area for work and improvement.

As usual, here is a specimen answer that demonstrates some of the points made in this report. Candidates would not have to summarise at this level to score full marks.

The changes at the 2002 Commonwealth Games gave equality to disabled competitors whose races were arranged at the same peak times as those of able-bodied athletes in the same competition, not in their own meetings as in the past. Their medals counted towards their countries' score and they mixed with the able-bodied at all times. Ten events of their own were timetabled, and all eligible athletes took part in the same races. Views expressed in favour of the changes were that it was good that they performed at the highest standard with world famous athletes and that their success was recognised in front of huge crowds. The disabled athletes gained more inclusion and hoped that it would further their cause in society as a whole. It was thought to be morally right and that it gave the disabled more confidence. The term 'disabled' would become more positive, and they would be admired for achieving against the odds. There was less patronising and political correctness. Spectators benefited too, feeling the thrills that came from magnificent performances and being prompted by example to tackle their own problems. Finally, the changes cost little.

Next year, from June 2005, the summary will remain the same, but will be the last question in the paper. It will still be based on two passages, and candidates should be warned that they must show evidence of having read all of both passages, despite the fact that they will answer the first two questions on Passage A.

Question 2

Write a letter to the organisers of an athletics competition expressing your own views and concerns on the issue of the equal participation of able-bodied and disabled athletes. Base the content of your letter on material from both Passage A and Passage B. In your letter, consider and develop these points: that the decisions made have 'turned sport upside down'; that traditionalists will not like the changes; that some disabled athletes do not think enough has been done. Begin your letter: 'Dear Organisers...'

Very few candidates failed to use material from the passages in their answers. The best combined ideas and details into coherent and progressive arguments. They were marked on their ability to make sense of what they had read and to engage with the discussion. A few candidates invented irrelevant ideas of their own that could not be credited. Examiners expected originality to arise from the reading material.

Really good answers gave an overview either to the topic as a whole or to individual sections. Examples of these were, in the third section, that disabled athletes should accept that the changes were radical enough and that they should allow time to make them work successfully. Traditionalists were those who feared change but who would be forced to see that the gains outweighed the losses. At the same time, good answers developed arguments about 'first past the post' and the ruthlessness of competition. It did not matter which side candidates took. There were those who wrote very cogently against combined athletics competitions and who believed that the disabled should have their own meetings. While some of the best answers took this view, some candidates lost the opportunity to use some of the material because they combined the first two sections. Others believed fervently with what had been done and wanted to convert the traditionalists. They often used a very wide range of the material.

Good answers had powerful and clear introductions, and some candidates managed to make cogent comments in their final paragraphs, which earned extra marks.

Less good candidates provided material to go with the sections of their answers but failed to develop them. Some found two or three points and wrote them down much as they appeared in the passages. They lacked any original thought and were often not linked. It was important in these answers to provide fluent arguments. In answers such as these, some of the material was not well chosen. For example, the argument against 'winner is the last past the post' was not best related to the third section, but rather to the objections of the traditionalists. It was noticeable that only the better answers picked up and developed the idea of ruthlessness in sport. Hence weaker answers were those that neither chose their material judiciously nor developed them beyond the way in which it appeared in the passages.

The poorest answers were those that had little to say. It was quite common for a letter to say nothing of value about the criticisms of the athletes, because by that time, candidates had run out of energy. However, some candidates were very brief on detail in any of the three sections, preferring instead to write generalised pieces on how good the changes were.

It is important that candidates remember that they need to use ideas from the passages in this question, but that they also realise that they need to develop and argue for or against those ideas from their own point of view. This question is totally unlike a summary.

The five marks for aspects of writing were for arguing coherently and persuasively and there were many candidates who impressed with the strength of what they had to say. Conversely there were candidates whose arguments were muddled and unclear and whose paragraphs were made up of badly linked sentences. Some of these candidates did not have enough language to engage in this sort of debate.

This question effectively becomes the first question in Paper 2 for June 2005 onwards. It will be the same type of question, but candidates must understand that it will be set on Passage A only. The result of this will be that the scope of the answer will be narrower than at present. At the point when they answer this question, they will not have encountered Passage B and should not have read it. Questions set will have the same variety that Centres have been used to over the years.

Part 2**Question 3**

Feddi's work experience: You are Feddi's supervisor. Write a formal report on his work experience. Although it is addressed to his teacher, you know that Feddi will be given a copy. In your report, assess Feddi's value as a potential employee, explain the good points that Feddi could develop and show how Feddi could overcome his weaknesses.

The reading material for this question was in the form of a diary, written in note form. The three sections of the answer indicated that candidates should re-order the notes into Feddi's strengths and weaknesses. The formality of the report did not appear to cause candidates any difficulties since the question showed how the answer was to be set out, and it was to be addressed to a teacher. The words 'formal report' reminded candidates that their tone should be formal.

The best answers were those that started confidently, either giving an overview of Feddi's performance, immediately creating a balance between the strengths and weaknesses, or immediately pointing out the most important features of the week's work experience. The reports went on to deal with the strengths and weaknesses separately, giving advisory comments and evaluating Feddi's performance from a supervisor's view. Sometimes the most practical advice was presented at the end, showing how Feddi could overcome his weaknesses. These reports were coherent and fluent and tackled the question of whether Feddi was yet a good employment prospect. These candidates picked up the implications of his being bored with mundane tasks and his excellence in charge of a computer.

Candidates who scored approximately half marks separated the strengths from the weaknesses and addressed the three sections of the report, but their use of the material was mechanical. Their answers often read like lists, the introductions were very ordinary, and they gave little advice. There was a certain amount of evaluation in these answers, normally in a short paragraph at the end. The weakness here was the lack of useful comment and the failure to demonstrate a balance. For example, some answers started off with a eulogy and suddenly turned into a strong attack on his lateness and rudeness. There was no attempt to reconcile the two.

Weak candidates did not use all the material. They frequently started off with some account of Feddi's strong points and largely ignored the weaknesses, which needed to be taken seriously. It was interesting how many of these candidates ignored the matter of his appearance in front of customers, or who thought that lateness was a passing fad of the young. These candidates were likely to praise him for his impeccable manners or his dress sense. They had either misread the material or had a strange idea of the adult world of work.

The weakest of all were those who copied out the material in its original note form. It is difficult to understand how they could believe that 'formal' indicated the sending out of rough notes.

Up to five marks were available for the use of an appropriate tone and the accuracy and style of the report. Many candidates wrote in very awkward prose or did not make an appropriate choice of words. There were many mistakes, particularly of sentence separation and of spelling. Really good candidates with a sound sense of style and a wide range of vocabulary shone through and easily scored all five marks, but there were also some very poor performances.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June 2005 examination session. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

<p>Paper 0500/03 Continuous Writing</p>

General comments

Most candidates chose to write narratives. **Questions 1, 3 and 7** were very popular. The discursive questions were also popular, although they were not so well answered as the narratives. Of **Questions 2, 6 and 7**, **Question 6** was best answered. There were some responses to **Question 9**, the picture, but very few for **4 and 5**, the descriptions.

Some candidates did not have enough language to sustain their responses and there were some very faulty scripts. The correct use of tense, the use of full stops to separate sentences, and spelling were all problems. Candidates should remember that two important discriminators in writing are the use of a wide range of appropriate language and the ability to construct a variety of sentence types, some complex.

Examiners frequently commented on the importance of planning before starting to write. This was particularly important in the writing of discursive essays. Here plans helped candidates to check whether they had enough varied argument to ensure that they could write a complete essay and to consider whether their ideas were in a convincing order. Many essays, particularly the more abstract ones, started well for perhaps two or three paragraphs, but then became repetitive, over-generalised and confused as the candidate ran out of material. Examiners reported that they could mark the exact point where this happened.

A plan was equally important for a narrative. Here it required more sophistication than an indication of the succession of events. For example, it could remind candidates where a descriptive passage could be inserted or how to build atmosphere and tension and to build up to a climax. Too many narratives were only successions of events and there was a particular problem where candidates spent too long over the introduction to the story. This caused frustration to the reader who wanted to find out what the real story was. It also meant that, by the time that the writer reached the climax, there was little time left so that the end, instead of being the neatest piece of the writing was often the most hurried and ineffective.

Another issue was length. Some candidates wrote at very great length and the quality of their work suffered as a result. It was common to see a first paragraph that was immediately interesting from the point of view of vocabulary and was fluent and careful. By the end of the writing, the work had become monosyllabic, was written in simple sentences and probably had sentence separation errors. Candidates should know how much they can sensibly write in the time allowed and should keep broadly to the limits suggested in the examination paper.

One Examiner reminded candidates that they should be careful not to use over-inflated vocabulary, especially when they are not quite sure of its usage or even meaning. She gave examples such as: 'Her harmonious freckles formed a pattern that sprouted from every inch of her off-colour skin', and 'streams of squeamish hummingbirds filled the island with their iridescent colours.'

Centres are reminded that their candidates need plenty of instruction and practice before they enter this examination. In particular they need to know the conventions involved in writing narratives and essays.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Describe a time when you felt special.

This was a very popular question and there were many stories about falling in love, birthday parties and being a football star. The Examiners noted that there was a lack of originality in choosing ideas to form the content. The girl who wrote about her being a 'special needs' person, who went to a dance and to her amazement found the man of her dreams, went far beyond the scope of most of the love stories. Her reflections on herself and what she thought was her impossibly good fortune were both entertaining and moving. Her voice and her use of language made the writing more effective. Some of the more simple topics, like helping the family or success at school, were successful because they involved a good deal of reflection and analysis. Events seen from a child's point of view were nostalgic and were sometimes improved by scene setting. The least good narratives were those that were just series of events.

Question 2

Which do you feel you could live without – love or money?

Of the many candidates who responded to this question, most chose love. However, a surprising number were adamant that money was more important, and only a few were wise enough to reject the question and to choose both. There is no doubt that the most successful answers were those that wrote about love and money separately and then compared them at the end. Those who did not were soon entangled in a net of complex argument that rarely led anywhere. The secret was to be as practical as possible and to avoid the abstract. Some candidates used brief narratives to support their arguments. Planning was essential, and many candidates who started well, rapidly ran out of anything to say.

Question 3

Write a story entitled 'The Gift'.

This was another example of a popular question that tempted candidates to write about unimaginative subjects. Most were about birthday presents, and here was another opportunity to write about surprise birthday parties. One candidate wrote an appallingly self-centred piece about getting upset about not having received a new, red BMW, which subsequently turned up on the drive. More imaginative was a story about a grandfather whose gift, after much waiting, turned out to be an empty box with a moral. Other candidates wrote slightly more entertaining pieces about supernatural powers, such as being able to stop everybody in their tracks and do horrible things to them. A better example was about the capacity to prevent wrongdoing and violence. There were some well-written pieces about God's gift and some adults wrote about the gift of a baby. Again, the worst writing consisted of strings of events.

Question 4

Imagine a film of your life so far. Describe two scenes: the images you would see of yourself and the images of those around you.

Few candidates attempted this question. One superb answer pictured the writer in a scene with her friends when drunk and in another with her family when nobody paid any attention to her. It was written as a film would show it and the camera made a belated appearance right at the end. Maybe the problem was that few candidates had studied the way film works, since there were errors of understanding. One candidate wrote about a film that was important to her, and others wrote accounts of their lives. This was a pity since this question was easily the most imaginative on the paper.

Question 5

Write in any way you choose in response to these lines of poetry.

These lines by Yeats attracted few candidates. Again this was a pity since the imaginative opportunities were considerable. The contrast between the bright lights of the house in the middle of the night and the awakening to gales and ruination could have led to some excellent dream sequences or some mature consideration of dreams and reality. As it was, there was one excellent science fiction story and several pieces that evoked isolation, loneliness and abandonment.

Question 6

'Killing animals for sport is no different from killing them for food.' Give your views on this topic.

This topic was the best answered of the three discursive questions. Candidates who answered it knew plenty about the issue and about conservation, which was more important than cruelty. There was a wide variety of opinion, most of it thoroughly argued, and most candidates agreed that killing for sport was less defensible than killing for food. One argument for killing for sport was that the kill could be taken to villages for food. One candidate posed the question of the killing of the rare leopard that paid a weekly visit to a village to kill a calf. There was little in this question that was abstract, and candidates who argued from the mists of time were less effective than those who wrote about the present day.

Question 7

'As he sketched three faces on the back page of the tattered notebook, he swore he would find out no matter what...' Continue this story.

This question was very popular and there were some good narratives, which included flashbacks and time lapses. However, it was difficult to manage, and many candidates tried to deal fully with events that happened before the drawing of the pictures and left themselves too little time to write about what happened after. The best technique was to be concise about the first set of events. Most of the stories were about revenge, although some of the pictures were of the protagonist's family rather than the criminals. The greatest weakness was that many of the stories were lists of events and attempted to take in too great a time-scale.

Question 8

Is it unfair to criticise people who smoke?

Like **Question 6**, this topic offered opportunities to candidates who knew something about the effects of smoking and passive smoking. Many of the answers were really about whether people should smoke or not, but better candidates were able to superimpose the moral question of unfair criticism on the scientific background. In general, candidates who attempted this question had plenty to say, but again, a plan was essential, and there were essays that were better in the first half than in the second.

Question 9

Use the photograph as an idea for a story or a description.

This was moderately popular and led to writing about awards and agreements, business, graduation and politics. One candidate wrote about a person who went from a children's home to some bad foster parents and finally was made welcome by kindly foster parents. Each transaction was marked by a different handshake. Another candidate wrote convincingly about how handshakes could signify good or evil in different contexts. In these examples, the handshake was significant to the writing, but some candidates wrote a story where the handshake was only incidental. In a few cases, the idea of the handshake was used to save someone from a terrible fate.

Further general comments

The Examiners make their recommendation for practice writing as follows:

Question 1 (with some discussion as to content), **Questions 6, 7 and 8**. **Questions 4 and 5** should be used to test the imaginative powers of candidates, but only after discussion and some guidance by teachers.

Teachers are reminded of changes to this component from the May/June 2005 examination session. Full details are given in the 2005 syllabus booklet.

Paper 0500/04

Continuous Writing (Coursework)

General comments

There was much good writing which fulfilled the educational purpose of the writing folder: to develop the talents of each candidate as a writer. Tasks were generally well set, and there were few examples of assignments that did not challenge candidates to reach appropriate grades. Candidates whose work did not meet the requirements of the syllabus, usually because they submitted two similar discursive pieces, were few and far between. Proofreading was still a weakness, but less so than in previous sessions. Internal assessment was generally satisfactory, although some Centres still failed to take sufficient account of errors and awkward style. Some Centres underestimated the quality of candidates whose range of language was wide and lively. In general there was plenty of lively composition, and it was clear that some Centres had given thought to the importance of personal opinion and experience as the basis of the writing. Most of the work was a pleasure to read and the Moderators thank all teachers who prepared it so thoroughly and who carried out effective internal moderation procedures.

Comments on specific aspects of the work

Argumentative and informative writing

In general, argument proved more challenging than information, and where the writing was persuasive it was usually more effective. To provide a persuasive voice, more Centres than usual set the words of speeches rather than essays, and it was evident that some attention had been paid to the use of meaningful rhetoric rather than using high sounding language for the sake of itself. Candidates did not make the serious mistake of leaving logical argument behind in favour of general encouragement. For example, a piece entitled 'Women, stand up' presented women with a number of issues concerning their lives and at the same time, was powerfully, realistically and entertainingly one sided.

Compare this approach to the first piece with many standard essays on 'established' topical issues (e.g. capital punishment; smoking). Too often material for such essays seems not entirely original, particularly if it is a series of facts and arguments that suggest a level of maturity that is not necessarily the candidate's own. Additionally, such pieces are often presented without conviction or *personal* viewpoint and are thus boring, the province of some other study than English. At least there was evidence that candidates had a wide range of choice in arriving at these well-worn, fusty titles.

One Centre started off on the right foot by calling current affairs-type topics 'Hot Issues', which the Moderators liked very much since, if they were hot, that suggested that there was something controversial to argue about. Since one of the topics was the effect of crop-spraying on local health, the candidate who described exactly what had happened had the opportunity to write graphically and with some vigour. The setting of topics which have local significance or which affect the thinking and feelings of individual candidates is often much better than relying on topics of second-hand, though worthy importance.

Some Centres set other assignments for this piece such as leaflets/brochures and newspaper reports. The quality of the leaflets was higher than in the past. There was more sustained writing so that it was easier to make an assessment particularly at the higher level. However, the newspaper reports were nearly all disappointing both in content and language. The level of writing was generally flat and the task – representing an incident and collecting eye-witness reports – not sufficiently challenging to attract high marks. Of the three pieces, this was frequently the most disappointing. One way round the problem would be to add an editorial feature or a leading article and submit the two pieces as one unit. From 2005, Centres could use a newspaper report as the basis of some original comment for the third piece, assessed for both reading and writing.

Expressive writing

There was some improvement in the writing of stories. At a high level, it was wise to try to give the reader more to enjoy than a cops-and-robbers story or a simple love story. The Moderators have frequently suggested to Centres that they teach some of the features of fiction before embarking on story writing. Good candidates were able to manage tension and atmosphere.

One teacher had the splendid idea of writing a story based on someone who followed a friend or relative who was acting strangely. A candidate wrote a story of how 'she' followed her brother who became more and more disturbed as he walked through the streets shouting meaningless things into his mobile phone. No reader could have guessed his problem, an unpaid debt of just £10, which led to a savage beating. A more humorous version was the story of a strict granny who when followed was seen to break all the rules she imposed on her grand-daughter, such as do not drink, do not gamble and (of course) do not fall in love.

Another story, which built up atmosphere and tension was a simple tale told entirely from the bedroom of a little girl whose brother came home after a long time away one late night. In the story she (and the reader) heard him arrive, enter the house, settle down to talk to his father, and all the time she must wait until finally, he entered her room and gave her a present of an adorable puppy. It was brilliantly done with no hint of sentimentality.

The best stories therefore, were those that gave the reader something entertaining, and that, of course, included how the story ended.

There were also plenty of excellent childhood memories, and one Centre set the opening of a novel.

The third piece

There were no surprises here, but this time more Centres made good choices of candidates' own poems. They got them to write their own accounts of how they came to be written; there were fewer bad pop songs than in previous sessions. There were some much better film reviews, occasionally presented in an authentic media style. They were a great change from critical essays, which could be very uninteresting unless there were some personal judgements. Many of the literature-based tasks were little more than straightforward essays and lacked life. However, the grouping together of war poems by Sting, Zephaniah and Owen produced a very lively response. This grouping was very original. It is also right to say that some weaker candidates actually raised their overall performance by including a literary response, since there was more to say and a more secure framework in which to say it.

In this session there was an increase in the writing of playscripts. This is to be applauded, but it would be wise if they were performed between the first and second draft.

If tackling playscripts, candidates should ensure that the dialogue is lively and interesting. Ordinary speech should be avoided in favour of a heightened imitation of ordinary speech. Some characters spoke like books of essays. It is better if the length of spoken contributions varied from one word to a brief paragraph as is dramatically appropriate.

Secondly, candidates should have some idea of what makes a play dramatically effective. The best scripts used speech to surprise an audience, to make them sad or even angry. Stage effects such as a sudden noise, or the entrance of a character created interest. Speech carried information, such as a piece of the plot or an indication of character.

Thirdly, at this level it was better to write one or two scenes of some length, not a TV script with scenes lasting for three or four contributions. Using a play from a book was in most cases better than trying to write a soap opera.

Like all the types of writing discussed in this report, it is necessary to experience, teach and discuss the genre before allowing candidates to practise it. By such teaching, candidates will become more aware of the many different types of writing in which they may well be expert some day.

Postscript: 2005

Centres are reminded to consult the syllabus booklet, since there are changes to this component in 2005. The main one concerns the third piece, in which candidates must analyse and evaluate a short written text, set by the Centre. The text must contain fact, arguments and/or opinions. The new Coursework Training Handbook gives a large number of examples of ways of tackling this. It is suggested that the text should be relatively short from any appropriate source. A copy must be sent to the Moderator; it can be a transcript of a broadcast.

The folder will be marked out of 40 for writing and 10 for reading, according to new criteria contained in the syllabus.

The other key change is that one of the pieces must be accompanied by an early draft.

<p>Paper 0500/05 Speaking/Listening Option</p>
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General comments

Moderators report that almost all tests were conducted competently, and that administrative procedures were completed generally well, with many Centres making a conscious effort to ensure swift and efficient external moderation.

This session sees the end of the role plays. Centres are reminded that the new test format should be used (as detailed in the 2005 syllabus) for March/April next year. This final report has been written with this in mind.

- Centres have been more accurate in their calculation of the final mark of 10 – there were one or three errors in rounding up, and only one Centre which converted to a mark out of 100. Please take note, however, that for the next session, the *new total mark will be out of 30 – 10 marks for Part 1 (the Individual Task) and 20 marks for Part 2 (the Discussion).*
- Most Centres recorded only what is necessary – that is, the two parts of the test. This remains the case for the new format – only the Individual Task and the ensuing Discussion need to be recorded, with no pausing of the tape. The new test is intended to be continuous.

Comments on specific aspects of the oral

The role play

As in previous sessions, a number of teachers handled the role plays with expertise, adopting realistic and authentic roles and allowing candidates every chance to respond appropriately and to extend the role playing. It was apparent at these Centres that role playing, and in particular, strategies of response, had been practised.

There was again a variety of styles of role playing, from the very realistic and serious approach, to the quite informal and often casual approach.

Centres are reminded again that role plays should NOT be conducted for the new format.

The conversation

Moderators are happy to report that this session again saw more examples of interesting conversations about topics and issues to which candidates had clearly given a great deal of thought. In these cases, evidence of planning and preparation was apparent, and the test served as a means by which candidate and Examiner could conduct a discussion.

There were fewer topics which were purely factual or anecdotal, and more which were 'open' (often of a social or political nature) stimulating debate and producing discussion. Many Examiners were happy to engage in *lively discussion*.

It follows, therefore, that candidates arriving at the test venue who have not prepared properly will, in most cases, struggle to satisfy the rigour of the assessment criteria.

It is very good news that there is continuing improvement in the conduct of the conversation/discussion phase. From now on, there is even greater emphasis on (and more marks for) this part of the test.

As Part 2 is now an extension of Part 1, Examiners will need to ensure two main things.

- That they are well-equipped to sustain a discussion with candidates about candidates' chosen topics/presentations. It is suggested that to achieve this, Examiners find out about the content/style of Part 1 of the test in good time – preferably some time before the examination is taken.
- That they are familiar with the revised assessment criteria for the examination from 2005. Centres are reminded that completely new sets of criteria have been written, and they should not use the current assessment criteria.

Assessment

Moderators again reported a very pleasing degree of accuracy in the application of the assessment criteria. In the majority of cases, there was no need to make any adjustment to the marks awarded. Where adjustment was made it was very slight.

A brief word about integration of the Tests, and Coursework

Some of the Centres which opt for Component 06 (Speaking and Listening as three separate components) might like to consider this observation by Moderators. The new format appears to present opportunities to integrate and incorporate *the test itself* into regular class work.

Teachers might like to include an assessed speaking and listening activity into a wider scheme of work – this activity could be the 0500/05 test. This might be part of the study of a text, a play or some poetry. If non-fiction is preferred, a presentation (and linked discussion) may well form part of a unit on media texts, for example.

Moderators feel that there is much more scope now for developing (and assessing) speaking and listening, and doing this as a natural part of the language learning process or learning about literature.

Final comments

Moderators would like to encourage Centres to work even more closely with candidates in selecting and developing appropriate topics for presentation and discussion. This will enable candidates to give of their very best under the new format/structure.

At Centres where the above is not possible, arrangements need to be made so that Examiners can consult with candidates *prior to the test*. This could be achieved by: meeting candidates before the examination day; scheduling the tests for an afternoon session, and using the morning to become familiar with the candidates and their topics; allowing considerably more time for each test and using fifteen minutes or so to go over a candidate's topic, so that there is no searching/pausing by the Examiner *during the test itself*. If this is the preparation mode selected, Centres should *not* record it.

The above three suggestions are given to help Examiners (they are not prescribed or required) and serve to illustrate the ethos underpinning the new format.

Finally, Moderators are confident that the new format will enable more candidates to exhibit their language skills – the role plays were felt to be restrictive in many cases – and that assessment will be fairer and more objective.

Please remember to use the revised 2005 syllabus as the point of reference for conducting and assessing this component in future.

<p>Paper 0500/06 Speaking/Listening Coursework</p>
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General comments

There were no entries for this component for this session.

A note about the component from 2005.

Centres submitting Coursework for moderation in May 2005 should note that there are new requirements, arising from the modifications made to the syllabus. Candidates will need to complete three specific tasks: an individual task, a pair-based task and a group activity.

For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres should submit *only* a recording of each candidate completing **Task 2 – the pair-based activity**. There is no need to send in examples of group work, or recordings of candidates' presentations or talks (**Task 1**). Larger Centres will, of course, still send a representative sample of their candidates' work.

Those Centres which usually enter candidates for this component might like to read through the report above, relating to the Speaking and Listening Test (Component 5). The re-structuring of the test, along with the production of new sets of assessment criteria, may prove attractive to teachers and candidates who have formerly opted for Coursework activities. The new format of the test does allow for easier integration into a normal course of study/scheme of work.