

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/01

Composition

General Comments

The choice and range of questions allowed candidates to show their true ability in this component. Nearly all the questions in **Part 1** found favour with a large number of candidates, although the narrative choices were most popular. **Part 2** produced very little difficulty for the vast majority of candidates. There was generally an improvement in performance once again. There continues to be a shortage of scripts at the very highest level but also very poor scripts were comparatively rare. There were hardly any rubric offences and certainly there were very few scripts that were irrelevant or short. Lengthy first drafts are now disappearing, much to the benefit of most candidates. Spelling was also considered to have improved again.

Some linguistic problems persist and the same comment must be repeated from last year's report; candidates can struggle with verb forms and tenses and there is increasingly the overuse of commas to separate sentences.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1. Describe the scene when a group of young people meet to go on a journey.

This proved to be a fairly popular question but not always for the best of reasons. The scenario was well within the experience of most candidates as the word 'journey' had quite a loose interpretation and a trip of any reasonable length could have been used. The whole point was that the emphasis was on the meeting prior to the journey and the preparations that would have accompanied it, rather than the journey itself. Furthermore, this question (as so often with the first essay choice) was intended to give scope to those candidates who enjoy the power of description rather than those who wish to indulge in narrative or discursive writing.

So it was those candidates who concentrated on the idea behind the journey, the justification of it and the gathering beforehand who were rewarded more highly. The most successful essays painted an elaborate picture of the location – very often it was a bus station, a railway station or an airport, but there were also good examples of community halls or a friend's house being the meeting place. In the words of one Examiner, the best answers 'brought the scene to life delightfully' and were 'engaging and atmospheric'. Most, of course, were very modern, but one particularly successful interpretation recreated a 1960s location and drew on the imagery of film to bring it to life. Descriptions of the individuals involved were helpful, their individual expectations, their appearance and their level of involvement in the particular preparations that made this journey special.

Unfortunately, the number of candidates who took the above approach was all too small. Far too many candidates, the majority in fact, used the title as an opportunity to write about an adventure, real or imaginary, personal or otherwise, and in fact the meeting and preparations for the journey were far less important. Where the essay was approximately half meeting, half story, the Examiner would have enough descriptive material to form a sound judgement of the candidate's ability. The pity was that in a lot of cases the meeting amounted to little more than an opening paragraph which merely set the adventure in context. Scripts of this sort were either certainly or very close to being scripts lacking in relevance. Another difficulty which arose was when some candidates with a French background assumed the word 'journey' meant 'day' and the idea of travel was largely or entirely lost.

Question 2. Good manners.

This was not a popular question at all, and where it was attempted the interpretations were predictable. Good manners were universally seen as a virtue, and most essays went on to list examples of various forms of polite, courteous behaviour in different contexts. Good manners in relation to grandparents, school and the work place were explored and praised – few if any explored the irony of the well-mannered person who might lose out in a harsh and cynical world. Really able candidates did a very good job of demonstrating how good manners can change subtly in different circumstances; they understood the concept of manners and behaviour and related them to upbringing, education and impact on society. Weaker candidates found it difficult to discuss the topic in the abstract and so fell back on a series of anecdotes illustrating someone displaying good manners. It was still possible to award the correct linguistic mark, but content-wise some of the potential of the question had been lost. Similarly, some weaker candidates who confused 'good manners' and 'good behaviour' appeared to pad out their essays where the ideas were not sufficient. In fact, it cannot be stressed often enough that weaker candidates should be advised to stay away from a discursive essay unless they are absolutely sure that they have the development in the content to write the required amount – otherwise the essay becomes extremely repetitive in ideas and language with, in this case, the expression 'good manners' being repeated ad infinitum. Candidates who were weaker linguistically also had a problem when it came to deciding on tense agreement. Should they treat 'good manners' as singular or plural or, in far too many essays, as an awkward mixture of both?

Question 3. Who is more important in a family, the mother or the father?

This proved to be a very popular question indeed, far more popular than the opinion essay generally is. This year, candidates found the argument obviously more personal and universal than in previous years and so appeared to relish the opportunity to write about something so close to their hearts – although it was easy to sympathise with one particularly mature candidate who suggested it was close to being a cruel subject about which to make a choice and he/she sincerely hoped that the one parent would never get to see the conclusion he/she had written!

Candidates in general demonstrated a good sense of structure in this topic, moving sensibly from an opening statement about the importance of both parents in a successful upbringing to a discussion of the individual merits of both before deciding on which parent was the more important. Where candidates did feel able to make a choice, it was generally in favour of the mother (both boys and girls paying tribute to the special closeness resulting from pregnancy and birth), but what was most obvious was the number who felt it was, after airing all the considerations, a matter of equal merit and this produced a pleasing sense of unity in the structure of the essay. Better answers combined generalisations with personal experience, and such candidates had some fascinating insights into the changing roles of women, and sometimes of men, and so went beyond the rather stereotypical roles that featured totally in the essays of some weaker candidates. Apart from the reference to 'nuclear' and 'extended' family models, the writing was fresh and heartfelt and mercifully free of sociological jargon.

Question 4. Write about an occasion when you discovered you could do something you had been afraid of doing before.

This was a very popular question, as the story-based essays normally are. It was well within the experience of all but the most confident of candidates and many different types of scenario were recounted. There were some who had had a life-long fear of swimming or heights (climbing trees, buildings or mountains), or those who had the deep fear of speaking or performing in public. It was very easy to empathise with all these universal fears, and the majority of candidates successfully conveyed, early in their work, the history of such a fear from early childhood, although not many delved into the cause of such fears. The conquering of the fear was almost invariably the need to rescue a loved one from water or heights, or the need to substitute for a star performer in a school or public event. The anxiety at the crucial moment was all too palpable – the perspiration, the beating heart, the uncertainty caused by years of fear – and candidates had clearly lived through such moments. The emphasis on such emotions brought life to the best essays, whereas some were content to rush through this final experience and this gave a feeling of anti-climax to the work. The topic did seem to encourage the use of a wider vocabulary.

Question 5. Write a story which includes the words: 'We all had different ideas about what to do with the parcel'.

This was the most popular question this year. Stories started rather predictably with a knock on the door and the writer would find that someone (usually the postman) had mistakenly left a parcel outside the front door. Several family members or friends would advise about what to do (the writer always wanted to hand in the parcel to the police) and eventually everyone would come round to seeing the writer's point of view. Very often a reward would be given, either by the police or the rightful owner. As a vehicle for showing the candidate's linguistic ability, this storyline worked well enough and better candidates were able to convey the surprise at first discovery, the anguish of deciding what to do (especially if the parcel contained valuables) and the sense of relief or joy at the final resolution.

In general, the quotation in the question was very well integrated. Too many candidates felt they had to go to the other extreme and produce a rather more sensational version of events with a parcel discovered at the roadside, that parcel being a bomb and the writer lucky to escape with his/her life. Again, this was successful enough, especially if the outline was filled with realistic detail and a proper sense of dread. Some essays, on the other hand, were startlingly unrealistic. Most difficult to respond to was the storyline which had the sudden arrival of an unexpected parcel, tremendous indecision as to what to do, overblown bravery on the part of the writer in volunteering to open the parcel – only to remember that it was indeed their birthday, something forgotten until that moment. This presented a sense of anti-climax: in fact it would be worth saying here that, in general, too many essays end with suddenly remembered birthdays or waking from a dream, a formula that can be as unhelpful as the prepared opening about waking up with birds singing and the sun streaming through the curtains. On the other hand, the use of dialogue in this question was refreshing and brought immediacy to the narratives.

Part 2

In **Part 2**, candidates were asked to imagine they had recently seen a photograph which contained a surprising or worrying detail and they had to write a letter to a friend about this discovery. A large number of candidates responded extremely well to this task and were able to gain all five Content points very easily. The scenario allowed for a wide variety of discoveries within the photograph and this contributed greatly to the interest of the responses.

It cannot be said often enough that **Part 2** is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Part 1**; candidates had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear mention of a specific school-related occasion
- clear details about where the photograph was taken, not where it was discovered
- a clear description of what was seen in the photograph that was of interest
- a convincing reason for concern (happy or unhappy) related to what had been seen in the photograph
- some definite future action, again clearly related to what was in the photograph.

Where candidates failed to gain the Content points, they were usually guilty of simply omitting the point or misreading the question or the scenario. While most candidates mentioned Teachers' Day, Music Day, Prize-giving (too often it was 'price-giving) or the anniversary of the founding of the school, some candidates mistakenly referred to any occasion, even the candidate's own birthday party, which had no connection with a school location. Particularly unfortunate was to have the photograph hanging in a school exhibition but not actually being a photograph of a school occasion. On many occasions, 'photograph' was read as 'photographer'.

There was a huge variety in the locations suggesting where the photograph had been taken – school itself, a museum on a school-related trip, more specifically the Principal's office or the School auditorium – but far too many candidates missed out on this mark by not mentioning a location at all, wrongly assuming that just because it was a school occasion it would have taken place in school but this is not necessarily so, as proved by those who wrote that Prize-giving for them was held in a nearby prestigious venue.

The greatest variety in the responses came in what was seen in the photograph. This stretched from robbers in the background to bee hives in a tree to long lost brothers to 'inappropriate' behaviour (including drugs, alcohol and hand-holding) with or without a teacher and even to ghosts. As long as there was surprise, concern or worry, these interpretations were all valid. The reasons for concern were always very

solid ones and future action (and future it needed to be, otherwise there was little point in seeking an opinion/help) was usually telling the Principal.

As far as the linguistic mark was concerned, this was very much tied to the linguistic mark given in **Part 1**. A friendly tone was required, nothing too formal here, but also no requirement to descend to text messaging as it was still a letter. Given cultural differences, a wide range of letter endings were accepted but had to have both a valediction and signature. 'From' is considered insufficient as a valediction and too many candidates used this. Particularly unfortunate were a small number of candidates who too literally followed the advice in the question and signed off 'Yours appropriately'. A great problem with too many of the **Part 2** answers was the inability or unwillingness to paragraph the response, which was a pity when the bullet point should have shown the way. Whenever photographs were mentioned, even the better candidates had great difficulty in handling the passive construction, so they would say 'We took a photograph on the stage' instead of 'We had our photograph taken on the stage.'

Guidance for teachers preparing candidates for future examinations

Much of the advice for improved performance would be the same as that given in previous years. This year again, there was less obvious rehearsed material and candidates did better as a result. The lesson from this year's **Part 1** responses is that the descriptive essay should only be attempted by those who have a talent for such writing. The **Part 2** exercise this year proved that all the bullet points should be attempted as just by addressing the issue the candidate will gain a point. In letters, there is a tendency to drop personal pronouns as in 'Hope you do well in your exam...', rather than starting with 'I hope..', which does not sound convincing. Texting language continues to be an issue with a minority of candidates and there is an overuse of the word 'gonna' in a significant number of cases. Similarly, 'pen off' is still considered more than awkward by Examiners as a means of signing off in the letter.

Final Comment:

Despite the need to comment on shortcomings in order to be helpful, as always, the marking of this component was a pleasure because of the many insights it allowed, and Examiners overwhelmingly commend the achievement of the candidates who took the examination. There is a very great deal of excellent expression and vocabulary amongst the candidates who take this examination. Where grade A writing was seen, it really was of a very high standard indeed and a credit to both candidate and teacher.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/02
Comprehension

General comments

As with last year, this Paper offered a narrative topic which seemed to be accessible to most candidates and to engage their interest. It was felt that a family setting was appropriate and within the understanding and experience of most candidates. The majority attempted all questions and completed a summary of the required length.

The performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Almost the entire range of marks was seen. Examiners reported very few rubric infringements.

Candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper, although not all managed to offer both a rough draft and a fair copy of their response to the summary question. Some candidates who did manage to produce both a rough and a fair copy did not delete the rough copy, suggesting that it was the rough copy they wished to have marked; such candidates jeopardised their chance of success and gave extra work to Examiners.

The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text and assessment of the ability to express these points fluently and in own words. As in previous years, the type of question giving most difficulty was the question which required candidates to answer in their own words; some candidates seemed to ignore this rubric or, even when they identified the key words for recasting, found it impossible to find synonyms. However, Examiners continue to report a pleasing reduction in the number of candidates simply ignoring the rubric instruction to use their own words.

A few candidates wasted time by copying out each question before answering it, or by copying out the entire stem of the question in their answer. A few candidates wrote in the margin of the paper: this made marking and correct totalling of marks difficult for Examiners.

Many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and handwriting, and the fact that spelling and punctuation were generally very good.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1(a) was designed, as the opening question, to ease candidates into the examination with a fairly accessible test; the vast majority of candidates scored this easy opening mark by writing that Yusuf met Ali, or his cousin, at the shopping mall.

Two marks were available in **Question 1(b)**, one mark for the answer that Yusuf stammered and one mark for the answer that he blushed. The question did not specify that the two pieces of information should be numbered, but most candidates sensibly numbered them, or at least indicated the separation by the syntax of their answer. This question proved to be a remarkably good discriminator so early in the paper, since, although it was perfectly straightforward for able candidates, who gained both marks, many weaker students were completely baffled by it. Answers offered by such candidates included 'He retained the cheeky grin of his childhood', 'the very mention of his name was a source of embarrassment', reference to his family's emigration to Australia and the fact that Ali was now a teacher. Some candidates offered suggestions as to why Yusuf was embarrassed rather than how it was clear that he was.

The mark for **Question 1(c)** was scored by candidates who picked up the nuance of 'old, familiar'. Many candidates wrote that Yusuf's memory of the day was unforgettable, or that he remembered it well; correct answers were expected to focus on the memory and not merely the event. Thus answers such as 'he remembered the event' were not sufficient as they only repeated the question rather than answered it: a response to the quality of memory was needed. Weaker candidates did not understand the image at all.

Many candidates failed to score the mark for **Question 2(a)** because they ignored the rubric instruction to give one piece of evidence which showed that Grandfather's habits never varied; many candidates spoiled an otherwise correct answer by offering more than one piece of evidence, sometimes through unwise lifting from the passage and sometimes through what was probably some instinct to 'play safe' with their answers. There were two possible options in correctly answering this question; one was to write that Grandfather rarely left the house, and the other was to write that he always sat in the same chair. For the first option, candidates could lift from line 10 ('Grandfather lived in our house and rarely left it') but, if they strayed into a reference from the following section of the passage, the mark was denied. If the candidate correctly wrote that Grandfather always sat in the same chair, and then copied 'watching family members come and go' or 'listening to their conversations', the mark was not withheld, but if they presented 'watching family members' or 'looking out of the window' as separate answers, (e.g. 'he always sat on the same chair and he watched family members come and go') then the mark was withheld. Similarly, the mark was denied to candidates who wrote that Grandfather seldom left the house and always sat in the same chair; although both of these answers were correct, the rubric asked for one piece of evidence, not two.

Question 2(b) was the first of the two questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. It presented the original difficulty that the candidates were required to isolate the key words for re-casting, namely 'experience' and 'wisdom'. Many candidates were successful with 'wisdom' offering correct synonyms such as 'knowledge', 'understanding' or 'intelligence'. However, 'experience' proved more difficult and correct synonyms such as 'he had done many things' or 'what he had done in life' were less commonly seen; the main difficulty with re-casting this word was that there were few single word answers; instead, using phrases was the best method to adopt. A common wrong answer was 'old'; although experience may accompany old age, the two terms are not synonymous.

Two marks were available in **Question 3(a)**, one for each correct limb. The first reason why the mother had beads of perspiration on her brow was because she was working hard, or using up a lot of energy. The mark could be scored by lifting, in whole or in part, from the passage at lines 16-17 ('Beads of perspiration stood on my mother's brow as she busied herself energetically in the kitchen, putting the final touches to her preparations for the big occasion'), but straying outside those parameters denied the mark. Very many candidates were successful here, but far fewer scored the mark for the second limb. This mark was scored for the correct answer that the mother's perspiration was caused by the steam or heat in the kitchen or coming from the pots or the food. The mark could be scored by lifting from the passage at lines 19-20 ('The pots on the stove simmered and bubbled, sending clouds of hot steam around the kitchen') but straying outside this lifted section denied the mark. Some candidates answered wrongly in this question that the mother's perspiration was caused by stress or anxiety, or by the fact that she had no-one to help her; however, there was no evidence in the text to support such assertions and they consequently were not awarded. Most candidates scored the mark in the relatively straightforward **Question 3(b)** by writing that it was possible to tell that a large number of guests were expected because the mother was taking a huge supply of plates and glasses from the cupboards; some spoiled their answer by writing that she took huge plates and glasses from the cupboard.

Very many candidates gave a correct answer to **Question 4(a)**, namely that the arrival of the guests happened suddenly because they were punctual or on time or, as the passage said, that they arrived at the appointed time. Those who wrote that they arrived at the same time were not rewarded, although this was not enough to deny the mark in an otherwise correct answer. The mark for **Question 4(b)** was awarded to candidates who offered the single word 'routine'; some candidates spoiled their answer by writing 'routine exclamations', which was a rubric infringement and could not be rewarded. Other wrong answers were 'taller' and 'chatted'; others offered 'terribly', which showed how much the children were bored rather than why they were bored, which was the question asked. Other candidates who did score the mark wasted time by couching their answer in an elaborate sentence which copied out the stem of the question.

Question 5 was the most difficult question on the Paper and successfully fulfilled its purpose of differentiating candidates. **Question 5(a)** was the second of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. The trigger to understanding 'why Yusuf decided to tell Ali about his watch' was the word 'because' at line 30, which in turn was designed to lead the candidates to the answer: he was trying to compensate for his inferior bicycle. Thus the key words for re-casting were 'compensate', with synonyms such as 'make up for', 'redress the balance' or 'pay back', and 'inferior', with

synonyms such as 'cheaper', 'not so good', or 'second-rate'. Wide and generous interpretation of the words was allowed here, such as 'get revenge' for 'compensate'; the idea of 'inferior' could be reinforced by focusing on Yusuf's bicycle ('it was less impressive' etc.) or Ali's bicycle ('it was better' etc.) and this could be expressed in either comparative or superlative form. ('Ali's bicycle was better' or 'Ali's bicycle was the best' etc.) Candidates fared better with synonyms for 'inferior' than they did with synonyms for 'compensate'. Some failed to score because they concentrated on the generally provocative attitude and behaviour of Ali, trying to put into their own words the opening sentence of paragraph 5: 'Ali never lost an opportunity to show what he perceived as his superiority over me'. They thus concentrated on the idea of general superiority rather than the idea of owning better possessions. Others gave answers concerned with Ali's jealousy and the fact that he had no watch, which would have merited two marks had they been offered as an answer to **Question 5(b)**.

Question 5(b) was also a discerning question designed to differentiate candidates, and this is what it succeeded in doing. Candidates were required to focus on the watch and not the bicycle, whereas in **Question 5(a)** they were required to focus on the bicycle and not the watch. The word 'fully' in the question, combined with the allocation of two marks, suggested two limbs to the answer. The first limb could be scored by lifting: Yusuf was self-satisfied because he saw 'the envious glint in Ali's eyes', although clearly an own words interpretation was acceptable, such as 'Ali was jealous'. The second limb was that Ali did not have a watch: this point had to be inferred and the mark could not be scored by lifting. Consequently, the first mark (for the reference to envy) was scored more often than the second. Some candidates came close to the second mark by writing that Yusuf had a better watch than Ali, whereas the accurate answer was that Yusuf had a watch and Ali did not.

Question 6 was a question testing both vocabulary and appreciation of the writer's craft. Candidates had to know or to infer that the extra effect created by the word 'clattering' was related to sound or noise. Consequently, the mark could be scored by merely making a reference to noise; however, this noise was not the sound of talking or conversation - perhaps some candidates confused 'clattering' with 'chattering'. Candidates who referred to talking did not score the mark, but the mark was not withheld in an otherwise correct answer. Popular wrong answers were 'moving about busily' and 'moving in all directions'.

Question 7 proved to be within the grasp of the vast majority of candidates and was a straightforward test between the difficult **Question 5** and the challenges of the summary question. The mark could be gained by writing that Ali was cheerful because he was showing off to Yusuf's brothers, or merely that he was showing off; the mark could also be scored by lifting at line 49: 'demonstrating his skills'. Where candidates failed to score the mark here, it tended to be because they wrote that Ali was better at riding a bicycle than Yusuf's brothers; this did not score the mark because it could not be substantiated by the text.

The mark could be scored in **Question 8** in a variety of ways. The 'truth' that Grandfather knew was that Yusuf was lying, or that the watch had not been stolen or that Yusuf was trying to frame Ali or get him into trouble. The question was generally well answered. Weak or vague responses such as 'he knew what was going on' were not accurate enough to score the mark. Similarly, answers such as 'he knew that Ali had been accused of theft' did not score because, although this fact was true, it was not a 'truth' specific to Grandfather.

Similarly, **Question 9** could be answered in a variety of acceptable ways. The mark could be gained by writing that Yusuf wanted to tell Ali the truth, or to tell him that he lied about him, or that he had tried to get Ali into trouble. As with **Question 8**, there were several vague answers which could not score, such as 'Yusuf had caused the problem' or 'Yusuf wanted to say he was sorry', without specifying the crucial details concerning the 'truth'. Answers such as 'he had accused Ali of stealing' could not be rewarded, because this information was not new to Ali. Weakest of all were those answers which betrayed incomprehension by simply lifting from the passage, e.g. 'It was impossible not to think of Grandfather' or 'I realised at the time that Grandfather wanted me to confess my lie but I had neither the courage nor the humility to do so'.

Question 10 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. Examiners reported a reasonable spread among the words and phrases chosen by the candidates. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered: 'greatly' or 'immensely' or even 'a lot' for 'enormously'; 'dashed' or 'hurried' or even 'ran' for 'shot'; and 'at the same time' for 'simultaneously'. A popular wrong answer for 'enormously' was 'largely'; this is an attractive answer, but means 'mostly' rather than 'greatly' and is therefore incorrect. The least popular choices were probably 'volunteering', meaning 'offering' or 'doing it willingly', and 'perceived', meaning 'saw' or 'knew'. Popular wrong answers for 'volunteering' were 'wanting' or 'wishing'. Candidates scored reasonably well by offering synonyms such as 'confusion' or 'havoc' for 'chaos', and synonyms such as 'impatient' or 'anxious' for

'eager'. The mark for 'in full swing' could most easily be scored by writing another phrase or a single synonym – 'everyone was enjoying themselves' or 'everyone was having a good time'; popular answers here were 'busy' or 'crowded' or 'at its peak'. Examiners reported a full range of marks for this question. They also reported, as usual, some candidates giving the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, but such cases were very few. As ever, there were some candidates who offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. Another misconception among a few candidates was that all of the words would need to be tackled, or perhaps that the best five of eight would be credited; such candidates must understand that only the first five attempts will be looked at by the Examiner.

The final question on the paper, **Question 11**, was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise what Yusuf did in his attempt to punish Ali, the search which followed and how the search ended. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. They were to draw material from lines 33 to 74, which was paragraphs six to nine inclusive; many candidates ignored this rubric and used irrelevant material from paragraph ten. There were twenty content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question, often with a rough draft and a fair draft. However, as indicated earlier, there continued to be the incidence reported of candidates failing to cross out their rough draft, thus failing to make it clear to the Examiner which version was to be marked. A very small number of candidates forfeited their Style mark by writing their summary in note form rather than continuous prose.

There were seven content points available in paragraph six. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that Yusuf took his watch out of the drawer. The paragraph went on to explain that Yusuf took his watch outside, hid it under Ali's sandal, returned to his room, checked that his watch was not in the drawer, went to the kitchen and told his mother that Ali had stolen his watch. Better candidates fared well here in that they successfully altered the first person narrative of the original text to third person, and also changed some direct speech into reported speech.

In paragraph seven, another two content points were available. Yusuf's mother told his brothers that the watch was missing and they went to Yusuf's room to look for it. Many candidates wasted words here by giving irrelevant information about Ali riding Yusuf's bicycle or Ali's mother taking him roughly by the arm – none of this was related to the rubric need to describe the search, and was therefore not relevant. Many candidates wrote that Yusuf's mother told his brothers to search the room, which was inaccurate and therefore did not score a mark.

A further five marks were awarded in paragraph eight to candidates who wrote that Yusuf's brothers emptied out his drawers, searched through his cupboard and searched through his books, that they caused chaos and that they were joined in their search by their mother, or that their mother looked under the bed or the pillow. Candidates' attempts to summarise the search sometimes meant that Yusuf's mother's search and that of his brothers were treated as simultaneous and identical, rather than differentiated. A mark was awarded as an alternative to candidates who chose to summarise the details of the search by writing that the brothers made a thorough search, or that they searched everywhere, rather than the specific details about the drawer, the cupboard or the books.

In paragraph nine, six marks were awarded to candidates who wrote that Yusuf returned to the party, that Grandfather called him over, that Grandfather told him he had heard that his watch was missing or, alternatively, that Grandfather knew the truth, that Grandfather led Yusuf outside, that he took the watch from under Ali's sandal and that he put it into the saddlebag of Yusuf's bicycle. Many candidates missed a mark in this area because they wrote that Grandfather told Yusuf that he knew the truth; this was incorrect and an attempt at the information in paragraph ten in any case.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to use own words, rather than those of the original text, varied from candidate to candidate and even from Centre to Centre, but that in general candidates are becoming more skilful at recasting the original text in their own words. Many managed to amass a good score for content points without resorting to inordinate lifting, and with good basic expression and reasonably successful handling of their own reconstruction of the relevant material. Nevertheless, many candidates wasted words on irrelevant

material such as Ali's showing-off on the bicycle, his mother's punishment of him, and the reference to the burning food and the awakening baby sister. There was a much lower incidence of copying than in previous years. However, there were still some very weak candidates who lifted almost indiscriminately from the text, producing little more than a random transcript which scored badly on use of own words and, inevitably, little to pick up relevant content points. Some other weaker candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points. It seemed that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, as has been reported in previous years, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentence, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Some candidates wrote a generalised account of the narrative, stressing the relative characteristics of Yusuf and Ali, for example, or giving the morale of the story – boasting never pays, or boasting needs to be tackled etc. – rather than confining themselves to the rubric. Such generalisation results in few content points being scored, as content points are quite specific. It seems that such generalised relevance is often found in substantial numbers of scripts from the same Centres.

Common errors reported were the usual failures of agreement in singular and plural, misplaced or omitted prepositions, omission of definite and indefinite articles, and inconsistent and illogical verb tenses. As already indicated, spelling and punctuation were generally very good, and handwriting clear, although Examiners again reported a few problems with some handwriting being so small as to be almost illegible.