

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both texts closely
- read the questions and followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills required, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension, **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language, **Question 3** is assessing the ability to select and use information for specific purposes
- used textual details to make valid inferences about a named character's feelings and opinions, for **Question 1(f)**, **Question 1(h)** and **Question 3(b)**
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(f)** and **Question 2(e)**
- avoided unselective copying from the text
- attempted all parts of all questions, using the marks and answer spaces as laid out on the question paper to gauge the length of response expected
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses.

General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for most part, were clearly written although occasionally illegibility hampered reading. If a response is incorrect, a line should be drawn across it. Writing over an answer which has been erased results in illegibility. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page and not write their answers on any blank page or in any blank space in the question booklet which may be easily missed.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages. The first passage, **Text A**, a narrative text called *The circus train*, tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and 16 marks were allocated to this question. **Question 2** tested understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect and nine marks were allocated to this question. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each sub-question. Candidates seemed to find the text accessible, and it provided sufficient depth to allow for linguistic analysis. There were noticeably fewer instances of candidates not attempting questions.

Several candidates performed very well on **Question 1**, particularly for their understanding of explicit ideas. Unless own words is specified, text vocabulary is generally recommended in **Question 1** responses.

While candidates were successful in identifying explicit details in the text, making inferences was often less successful. This was particularly evident in **Question 1(e)** when candidates did not always use the information in the text to make creditworthy inferences.

Not all candidates were entirely confident answering **Question 2**. Repetition of the words of the questions was fairly common. Candidates should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal details and consider the suggestions and connotations of words and images. Candidates, overall, were able to attain at least one mark in **Questions 2(a)** and **2(b)**, but candidates were less successful with responses to **Question 2(c)**. **Question 2** asked for an *impression* (in **Question 2(a)**), an *effect* (in **Questions 2(b)** and

2(c)), and what is being *suggested* (in **Question 2(d)**). This means that repeating or paraphrasing the words from the specified extract is insufficient for an explanation of how language works. No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective.

Writing is not assessed in **Question 1** and **Question 2**, but answers do need to be sufficiently precise to communicate details and ideas from the text accurately.

Question 3 was based on the shorter second passage, **Text B**, *Climbing Mount Everest*. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words in candidates' own words. This selective summary required candidates to gather only those key ideas relevant to the task, as outlined in **Question 3(a)**, and do so efficiently, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)**. This means that to reach Writing Levels 3, 4 and 5, ideas had to be communicated clearly. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. In Reading, some candidates found it difficult to separate irrelevant content from content which would have helped them fulfil the task.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. Careful reading of both the passage and the question would have made the correct perspective evident. To achieve a high mark, relevant ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that a response does not have a lengthy introduction.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 Comprehension

- (a) The first question was answered successfully by many candidates who correctly selected the detail 'whistle' (with or without the inclusion of 'shriek') as being the warning sign. Fewer candidates selected the alternative correct response of 'rattle'. In a small number of cases, the mark was withheld due to the inclusion of excess information about the 'thumping'/'exploding' of the engine.
- (b) In **Question 1(b)**, the rubric made it clear that use of *own words* was necessary to evidence understanding of both 'scanning' and 'desperately' in the context of the passage. Successful answers offered creditworthy meanings for both words, such as 'looking', 'searching' or 'trying to find' for 'scanning', and 'anxiously', 'eagerly', or 'urgently' for 'desperately'. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was usually the result of having explained just one aspect of the phrase or repeating the words in their answer. Providing a synonym for 'desperately' was less successful, with many candidates referencing speed or focusing on the narrative detail that Jacob was 'looking for something to hold on to'.
- (c) (i) Many candidates correctly selected a straightforward lift from the text to answer: 'You like circuses?' A common incorrect response referred to Camel's 'toothless cackle', or his subsequent question 'Kid, do not tell me you did not notice?' In addition, some candidates confused the speaker and incorrectly selected 'Who's he running from, Camel?'
- (ii) Many candidates successfully selected the detail from the text Jacob had not noticed he'd boarded a circus train. A frequent incorrect response linked Jacob's confusion to the fact that he was being questioned or felt under pressure. In addition, several candidates re-worked the question and simply wrote that Jacob was 'confused'. Other common incorrect answers alluded to it being the dark or that the confusion was caused by Camel suddenly laughing.
- (d) An answer to this inferential question lay in the detail that Jacob felt that the situation he found himself in was threatening/intimidating. Candidates had to consider the connotations of the particular image and its effect, thus inferring that 'Jacob felt afraid' or 'he was being bullied'.

Candidates who did not gain a mark incorrectly focused on the repeated nature of the questioning, without any specific reference to the image.

- (e) The first task, for one mark, was to infer Uncle Al's initial *impression* of Jacob. A range of responses were acceptable provided they captured a sense of Uncle Al's *dislike* or *scorn* towards Jacob. This meant that answers such as (he thinks Jacob is) 'young', 'useless' and 'privileged' could score. The impression should be precisely identified and written in the designated space. Often a lift, rather than inference, was offered, such as he thought he was a 'college boy' which was not a creditworthy impression.

The second task for two marks was to provide two supporting *details* from the text. Most candidates selected at least one correct text detail. Careful selection is necessary, and there was evidence of some candidates confusing the characters. The supporting details should be provided in the form of quotations from the text. Attempts at paraphrase were not always successful. If two correct supporting details were given with an incorrect impression, only one mark was awarded.

- (f) Another inferential question, requiring candidates to deduce that Camel and Uncle Al have realised they have misjudged Jacob and that an opportunity exists to make use of him/his skills.

Many candidates picked up one mark by correctly offering that the two men thought that Jacob could be of use by treating the sick giraffe, or that he had skills. Specific reference to his veterinary studies was less successful and led to many incorrect answers focusing on the men wondering why Jacob had not completed his exams or that he was lying.

- (g) Close reading of paragraph 5 enabled many candidates to correctly identify the two details required (the pus in her nose and her inability to move/stillness). Some candidates described the giraffe's delicate neck/body shape/distinctive markings, none of which is related to illness and therefore scored zero.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g)

- Read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words.
- Check how many marks are allocated to each question.
- Read all the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer.
- If there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to get an idea of what is going on.
- Avoid lengthy copying from the text.
- Carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question.

- (h) **Question 1(h)** is a three-mark question which focused on Jacob's feelings about the circus train. The first task was to explain in own words Jacob's different *feelings* about the circus train. Candidates need to have read the whole passage to be able to select those sections which are relevant to the question ('feelings about the circus train and everything and everyone it carries').

Three feelings are required, and responses covered a range of relevant feelings, such as shock, confusion, hope, determination and fear, thus demonstrating secure understanding. The question asks for 'different' feelings so 'fear', 'worry' and 'anxiety' could only be credited once since these feelings are too similar.

The question then directed candidates to find three supporting text details (three quotations) to provide evidence for Jacob's three different feelings. One text detail in the form of a quotation copied from the text is required for each feeling. Line and paragraph references are to be avoided, and the supporting detail should be quoted in full. Some examples of correct responses to

Question 1(h) follow:

- Jacob feels afraid, 'like a mouse being bounced between two cats'.
- amazed: 'the most elegant creature'.
- 'I must look puzzled' – confused.
- sympathy for the giraffe, 'she looks sad and imprisoned'.

Some responses included an impressive range of vocabulary to describe Jacob's feelings and supported each one with appropriate detail from the text. Candidates are advised to set out their responses clearly, with each feeling and corresponding supporting detail clearly identified.

Although a precise and accurate paraphrase is acceptable as a text detail, this approach is not advised as paraphrasing can all too easily result in generalisation or a lack of focus or detail.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences about feelings. These responses were characterised by lifting and narrative rather than explanations of Jacob's feelings. For example, a response which reads 'Jacob feels like a mouse being bounced between two cats' is a text detail which narrates the events and makes no observation about his feelings. The addition of an appropriate identified feeling, for example, 'he feels scared', would have made this a successful response.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(h)

- Identify the sections of the passage and the character which are relevant to the question.
- Consider the different feelings of the character in these sections.
- Use own words to describe three different feelings.
- Select evidence to support each feeling; this means a text detail in the form of a quotation.
- Make sure your supporting text detail is clear, relevant and not overlong.
- Present the answer clearly with each feeling supported by a relevant text detail.
- Prepare for this question by reading literary texts and try to describe the feelings of characters.
- Practice grouping similar/different feelings.
- Build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

Question 2 Use of language

- (a) The best responses focused on individual images and vocabulary. Many candidates successfully identified the idea of heat, with only a few incorrectly focusing on the sun still appearing late in the day rather than the resultant intense heat. Additional correct responses included the sense of the environment being 'barren'/'looked dead'/'wilted'.

When describing the appearance of the grass, some candidates referred generally to the change of landscape or the grass being wilted through lack of water, but often key words from the question like 'dry' or 'flat' were repeated, denying the mark.

- (b) This question required candidates to provide two effects of the phrase 'popped up like mushrooms' for two marks. Success depended on considering the connotations of 'popped up' and 'mushrooms' both individually and together, without being distracted by 'at the edges' and 'near the track'. Many responses recognised that 'popped up' suggests a sudden appearance, out of nowhere, or unexpectedly and any of these ideas scored a mark. The word 'mushrooms' suggests the tents were great in numbers, packed closely together and similar in (domed/circular) appearance. The phrase also suggests a magical/fairytale appearance. Candidates were generally successful in explaining the sudden appearance and great number of the tents. Less successful responses focused on their location by the track. Others made comment on technique alone, stating it was 'a simile for poetic effect'. Often, incorrect responses relied on the text vocabulary, such as 'shaped like mushrooms', which did not evidence understanding of the specific shape of a mushroom.
- (c) The focus of the question was on the *effort* Jacob had to make to see inside. Candidates had to explain that 'peer' implies a careful/close way of observing, or difficulty/straining to see, to score the mark. Many candidates incorrectly focused on the size of the hole or that Jacob could only use one eye/did not want to be seen. Some candidates offered 'looking' without the necessary addition of *closely* or *with interest*.
- (d) This question required candidates to recognise the implication that Camel has Jacob's best interests at heart. Most candidates scored the mark by saying that Camel 'cared for' or 'pitied' Jacob, showing 'empathy' or 'concern' in advising him to leave. Incorrect answers were occasionally seen where candidates failed to pinpoint the feeling and made a literal statement about what Camel was trying to do, that he was 'trying to convince Jacob to go home'.

(e) Example

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write this example, and quotations should not exceed this line. Many examples were carefully selected, such as 'hypnotise the captive audience' or 'the crowd erupts with glee', but often the example selected was excessively long. An example must be carefully chosen since it needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two ideas to be confidently explained. Ellipses and line references were sometimes offered but these are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be the

words in the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as metaphor. The question focuses on the reactions of the audience in the big top. This means quotations about the animals alone, such as 'her skin is mottled and cracked like a scorched riverbed', were not acceptable.

Explanation

There were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected example and two marks were available for this part of the question. An explanation had to be written in own words to demonstrate secure understanding. Several candidates scored at least one mark for the explanation.

Successful explanations focused firmly on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the quotation. For example, some candidates who selected 'hypnotise the captive audience' explained that this suggested the audience being spellbound and unable to move/look away – thus concisely providing two ideas for two marks. Understanding the meaning of a key word is an effective starting point for understanding an effect of that word. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very good explanations was 'a collective intake of breath' with candidates commenting on the audience responding as one in fear for the trapeze artist's safety. Both these examples demonstrate the effective practice of candidates homing in on individual words ('hypnotise', 'captive' and 'collective') and thinking about what each one suggests. It is this close analysis which is key to success.

Less successful explanations were characterised by repetition of the language in the extract, or of a similar explanation. For example, the words 'happiness' and 'excitement' were often used to explain 'wild whoops of delight' resulting in only one mark for the explanation as these two ideas are too similar and are both related to the word 'delight'. Candidates had to go on to provide an explanation for 'wild whoops' e.g. energy/uncontrolled, to score the second mark.

Candidates' explanations must only focus on the example they have selected. If a candidate selects 'glowing and pulsing', the explanation should focus on the energy/unity/happiness. Instead, less effective responses discussed how physically close to one another the audience members were (an attempt at explaining 'packed solid') which was not creditworthy since there is nothing to suggest the audience's *reaction*.

Advice to candidates on Question 2

- Select the **Question 2(e)** example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly.
- Consider the meaning of a word before going on to consider what a word suggests and its effect.
- Home in on individual words within a quotation or extract rather than making general comments.
- Think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words.
- Use own words to explain effect.
- If a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things.
- Practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

Section B

Question 3

(a) Summary task

In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: the arguments against climbing Mount Everest nowadays. Successful responses focused on the task and selected a wide

range of relevant points and used these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material and sensibly ignored details about the lack of recognition given to the Sherpas, or the positive impact of the tourist industry on the Nepali economy, which were irrelevant to the task.

Several relevant content points were easily identified by most candidates. These more straightforward content points included the large number of people climbing the mountain, that it is no longer impressive, that Sherpas make it easy, and that microplastics have been found on the mountain. Some content points proved less accessible, requiring careful selection and attention to detail, for example, the necessary inclusion of people *paying/hiring* Sherpas/people rather than simply stating that they guide/help them, alone.

Weaker responses were characterised by irrelevance and repetition. Instead of selecting and presenting the key ideas economically and concisely, these less successful responses often relied too heavily on lifting sections of text, including dialogue, which is not skilful or careful selection. In addition, the summary must not include personal opinion, advice or evaluation.

Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as 'high-tech', but they should not copy sentence structures or whole sentences. Most candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives such as 'pollution' for 'microplastics', and 'lacked experience' for 'are not necessarily professional'. Successful summaries also wrote with a formality and clarity required for a concise summary style.

Less effective summaries included significant stretches of copied text, often spliced together, and occasionally there was not much which could be assessed as original writing or reworking which meant that these summaries could not achieve above Levels 1 or 2.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas such as 'social media posts show people lining up to climb the mountain, which is not even a notable achievement anymore...'. Avoiding a lengthy introduction and conclusion also helped achieve concision. Some candidates wrote considerably more than 150 words. Others adhered to the recommended length but took too long to explain a few ideas.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, achieved by the use of varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions and punctuation that was accurate and helpful. These summaries were well-crafted and well-organised with appropriate linking devices such as 'moreover' and 'likewise' correctly used to guide the reader through the summary. Level 3 responses also demonstrated use of adverbial connectives such as 'furthermore' and 'in addition' to shape the content, though when overused and placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, these did not necessarily aid organisation. Candidates should write formally in summary writing. This means avoiding phrases such as 'in the same vein', 'on the flip side' or 'on top of that'. At the lower levels, summaries lacked clarity due to errors in grammar, awkward expression and little evidence of organising the content.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(a)

Reading

- First read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content.
- Read the question and make sure that you understand the task.
- Read the text again, underlining or highlighting the words and phrases which are relevant to the task.
- Ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations, examples and alternative viewpoints.
- Do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail.
- Do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content.

- Look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways or examples; these repeated ideas or examples could be covered as one point.
- Do not include content which is not in the text, including personal opinion or evaluation.

Writing

- Think of a sensible order for the points underlined/highlighted; this may be in a different order from the original text.
- If points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision.
- Use own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary.
- Do not lift whole phrases or sentences.
- Write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures.
- Organise content so ideas connect and flow from one point to the next.
- Use a formal writing style.
- Do not write more than 150 words.
- Do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

(b) Short response task

In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They have to demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question makes it clear that the perspective candidates are to take is 'a local business person living near Mount Everest' so it is logical that they would *not* support banning foreign tourists from climbing Everest. This question tests reading skills. Candidates who performed well in this question returned to **Text B**, and considered the positive impact that allowing tourists to visit the area to climb the mountain has.

To reach Level 3, a response had to consistently demonstrate the correct perspective supported by *detail* from the *text*, such as 'it is good for business, we provide eateries and guesthouses', and *develop* this with sensible inference: 'our businesses would shut down without their custom'. A single idea or detail from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each one could have some inferential development.

Level 2 responses were characterised by some understanding of arguments against a ban on tourists climbing the mountain. Two or three marks could be scored with just details from the text: 'Tourists contribute to the local economy and the livelihood of local people', or just developments of ideas: 'We should educate tourists and bring in specific rules to minimise their negative impact'.

Level 2 responses were not always fully secure in their understanding of the task or the text, often writing about both reasons for *and* against a ban on tourists. Thus, these responses, while being generally relevant, lacked the consistent viewpoint needed for Level 3.

Level 1 responses showed some awareness of the correct perspective: 'I do not think we should completely ban tourists' but were then either very brief or failed to include relevant content.

Some candidates adopted the wrong perspective. These responses gained no marks.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(b)

- Read the question carefully and identify whose perspective you are to identify with.
- Highlight or underline the relevant **section(s)** in the text where the person is mentioned.
- Decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if they agree or disagree with the statement.
- State an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text.
- Extend and develop the ideas with inference.
- Write in the first person.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12 Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both texts closely
- read the questions and followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills required, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension, **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language, **Question 3** is assessing the ability to select and use information for specific purposes
- used textual details to make valid inferences about a named character's feelings and opinions, for **Question 1(f)**, **Question 1(h)** and **Question 3(b)**
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(f)** and **Question 2(e)**
- avoided unselective copying from the text
- attempted all parts of all questions, using the marks and answer spaces as laid out on the question paper to gauge the length of response expected
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses.

General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for most part, were clearly written. If a candidate wishes to change a response, a line should be drawn across the incorrect part. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page and not write their answers on any blank page or in any blank space in the question booklet which may be easily missed.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. The first text, **Text A**, a narrative text called *The Raven*, tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and 16 marks were allocated to this question. **Question 2** tested understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect and nine marks were allocated to this question. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each sub-question. The text seemed to be accessible to candidates with some vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

Several candidates performed very well on **Question 1**, particularly for their understanding of explicit ideas. Unless own words is specified, short quotations from the text is generally recommended in **Question 1** responses, such as **Question 1(c)(i)** when 'stealing' was the correct answer. In **Question 1**, some candidates copied out lengthy sections of the text so the response was not clearly focused on the question. This was particularly evident in **Question 1(d)**, **Question 1(c)(ii)** and **Question 1(g)**.

While candidates were more successful in identifying explicit details in the text, making inferences was often less successful, such as for **Question 1(e)** when candidates did not always use the information in the text to provide a correct response.

Not all **Question 2** responses were entirely confident. Sometimes **Question 2** sub-questions were answered as comprehension questions rather than being considered for the effect of the language used. Candidates should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal details and consider the

suggestions and connotations of words and images. **Question 2** asked for what is being *suggested* (in **Question 2(a)**), an *effect* (in **Question 2(d)**) and an *impression* (in **Questions 2(b)** and **2(e)**). This means that repeating or paraphrasing the words from the specified extract is insufficient for an explanation of how language works. No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective.

Writing is not assessed in **Question 1** and **Question 2**, but answers do need to be sufficiently precise to communicate details and ideas from the text clearly and without ambiguity.

Question 3 was based on the shorter, non-fiction text, **Text B, Sneakers**. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words. This summary task required candidates to gather only those key ideas relevant to the question, and do so efficiently, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)**, making a total of 20 marks for this question. To reach Writing Levels 3, 4 and 5, ideas had to be communicated clearly. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. In terms of candidates' performance on Reading, weaker responses did not distinguish between what content was relevant to the question and what was irrelevant. The summary should only include content points from **Text B**, without personal opinion or personal experience.

The second task in **Question 3, Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. Careful reading of both the text and the question will indicate the correct perspective to use in the reply. To achieve a high mark, relevant ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that the response is focused and without a long introduction.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 Comprehension

- (a) Key to success in this explicit comprehension question was recognition of the connection between the word 'amusing' in the question and the word 'comically' in paragraph 1, noting that it is the bird's head that Rex finds amusing. An answer which also included reference to the bird's feathers, throat or eyes did not evidence careful selection.
- (b) In **Question 1(b)**, the rubric made it clear that use of *own words* was necessary to evidence understanding of both 'squawks' and 'protest' in the context of the text. Successful answers offered creditworthy meanings for both words, such as 'screech', 'loud' or 'noisy' for 'squawks', and 'resistance', 'rebellious' or 'not wanting' for 'protest'. Synonyms had to be appropriate; words such as 'yell' or 'shout' were not appropriate for a bird's 'squawks'. Two marks could not be awarded if just one aspect of the phrase was explained or words were repeated in the answer. Some responses incorrectly focused on narrative detail, such as the bird 'revealed a bright-red throat', instead of the meanings of both 'squawks' and 'protest'.
- (c) (i) This question was well answered with most candidates correctly identifying that 'stealing' is what the bird does which is 'mischievous'. Often this was presented as an acceptable lift which clearly answered the question: 'He'd begun stealing shiny items'.
(ii) The second part of **Question 1(c)** was less successfully answered. Lifting from the text did not explain that the bird's mischievous behaviour caused the parents to be embarrassed or ashamed, or the neighbours to become annoyed and complain. Therefore, 'he steals items from increasingly annoyed neighbours' or 'the boys' embarrassed parents contacted us' were not creditworthy since these did not answer the question.
- (d) Close reading of paragraph 3 enabled candidates to identify two out of four possible features which would make the bird's return to the wild difficult. Effective responses stated that this bird 'cannot find its own food', 'cannot spot predators', 'has been treated as a pet' and 'kept in captivity'. Not all candidates adapted the text details to answer the question. Candidates must take care when

copying text vocabulary to ensure meaning is not distorted, such as the incorrect use of the word 'captivated' for 'captive'.

- (e) Effective responses paid attention to the command words *Explain why* and recognised that the reason Odin gave a 'petrified croak' was because he was frightened of the wild raven, proving Rex's concern in the previous paragraph. More often, incorrect responses were in answer to a misinterpretation of the question as 'What did Odin do?' such as 'scampering' to the barn. Some responses seemed to show a misunderstanding of the events at this stage in the story and suggested Odin was trying to protect his sandwich and scare away the wild raven.
- (f) The first task for one mark was to infer how the children visiting the centre *felt* about Odin. A range of responses were acceptable provided they captured a sense of being frightened or worried, for example, 'panic', 'shock' or 'terror'. Feelings such as 'annoyed' or 'surprised' did not convey a suggestion of fear or anxiety. Text was often lifted such as 'disconcerting', which was not creditworthy. Occasionally, candidates misread the situation and offered 'excited and 'happy', suggesting less careful reading of the paragraph.

The second task for two marks was to provide two supporting *details* from the text. These details should be presented as quotations from the text. Many candidates selected two correct text details. Careful selection is necessary since 'dancing around' or 'eyes gleaming' convey no sense of threat without the addition of 'beak open'; however, 'shouts of alarm' and Odin 'revelling in the mayhem' do support the children's feeling of terror and anxiety.

- (g) There were several ways a response could score two marks. Many candidates recognised that Julie was annoyed by Odin imitating or copying Rex. However, unless a response made it clear that it was Rex's *voice* that was being copied, then the response could not score. Some candidates provided this answer as an acceptable lift from the text: 'Odin had mastered the irritating art of imitating my voice.' Further reasons that Julie is annoyed with Odin are that she is being tricked or fooled by the bird, or that she is 'busy', and candidates who inferred that he is wasting her time also scored. There was less success with the final possible answer – he does this 'on several occasions' – because the wrong context was given. It is the fact that he tricks Julie often which annoys her and not that he escapes from his cage 'on several occasions'.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g)

- Read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words.
- Check how many marks are allocated to each question.
- Read all the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer.
- If there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to get an idea of what is going on.
- Avoid lengthy copying from the text.
- Carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question.
- Recast the text when it is necessary to precisely answer the question.

- (h) **Question 1(h)** is a three-mark question which focused on how Rex's feelings about the bird change over time. The first task was to explain in own words Rex's different feelings about Odin.

Responses should cover a range of relevant feelings to demonstrate the *change*, such as amused, worried, annoyed, sad and relieved. Often, two or more similar feelings were offered but they could only be credited once: for example, Rex feels 'worried' and 'anxious'. Feelings must also be appropriate; for example, the text does not support feelings of *fury* or *panic*.

The question then directed candidates to find three supporting text details (three quotations) to provide evidence for Rex's different feelings. One text detail in the form of a quotation copied from the text is required for each feeling. Line and paragraph references are to be avoided and the supporting detail should be quoted in full. Some examples of correct responses to **Question 1(h)** follow:

- Rex feels surprise when he sees the bird 'was huge'.
- Worried: 'We'll never get rid of him'.
- Rex is 'mournfully avoiding the remains of the cage' because he misses Odin.
- Rex is fond of the bird when he says 'Odin come to Daddy'.

Some responses included an impressive range of vocabulary to describe Rex's feelings and supported each one with appropriate detail from the text. Candidates are advised to set out their responses clearly, with each feeling and corresponding supporting detail clearly identified.

Although a precise and accurate paraphrase is acceptable as a text detail, this approach is not advised as paraphrasing could result in generalisation or a lack of focus or detail. For example, 'Rex is annoyed because *Odin upsets the children in the playground*' is too general to be credited as a paraphrase of 'revelling in the mayhem'.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences about feelings. These responses were characterised by lifting and narrative rather than explanations of Rex's feelings. For example, a response which reads 'Rex wanted the bird to return to the wild' is a text detail which narrates the events and makes no observation about his feelings. The addition of an appropriate identified feeling, for example, 'he feels concern', would have made this a successful response.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):

- Identify the character and the sections of the text relevant to the question.
- Consider the different feelings of the character in these sections.
- Use own words to describe the different feelings.
- Select evidence to support each feeling; this means a text detail in the form of a quotation.
- Make sure your supporting text detail is clear, relevant and not overlong.
- Present the answer clearly with each feeling supported by a relevant text detail.
- Prepare for this question by reading literary texts and try to describe the feelings of characters.
- Build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

Question 2 Use of language

- (a) This question asks candidates to consider the structure of the narrative. The sentence 'Later that month, I was nearly proved wrong' requires candidates to refer back to the previous sentence to read about what Rex was 'nearly proved wrong' – his belief that Odin was never going to leave them. This was correctly expressed in many ways: Odin did leave them; he escaped, he flew away; he became lost. Some responses incorrectly slipped into narrative about the storm, without identifying Odin's disappearance, or randomly referred to a climax or turning point which did not recognise the prediction that Odin would leave them.
- (b) Candidates performed very well and many were able to provide two creditworthy impressions. The best responses focused on individual images or vocabulary such as the impression of *devastation* or *chaos* conveyed by the words 'carnage' and 'havoc', or the impression of a *battle* or *war* suggested by 'army'. Some responses gave an overall impression of the extract: the storm was *violent* or *terrifying*, and this, too, was creditworthy. Less successful responses were characterised by repetition of the text: *it was worse than they expected* or *everything was torn apart*, but these did not evidence understanding of the effect of the language.
- (c) Few responses recognised the implications of 'lifted' to suggest movement *upwards* which is not conveyed by the word 'moved'; consequently, several responses describing the cage being *pushed over*, *thrown* or *flung aside* could not score. Instead, answers should have focused on the cage being picked up, pulled up or raised – conveyed by the word 'lifted'. There was more success explaining an alternative correct answer that the word 'lifted' showed the *force* or *strength* of a wind which could lift a cage from concrete blocks.
- (d) Many candidates scored at least one mark by providing a synonym for the word 'brave' in context: 'Rex and Julie were *courageous*' or 'they showed *strength*'. Successful responses recognised the positive connotations of the word and developed ideas for a second mark by, for example, suggesting that Rex and Julie were determined, overcame sadness, were making a fresh start or were not giving up. It was also correct to suggest that the task ahead was difficult, requiring a lot of effort. Weaker responses lost focus on the effect of the word 'brave' and provided narrative about the storm and Rex and Julie's intention to start rebuilding, often implying that they felt defeat, not strength.
- (e) **Example**

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write this example, and quotations should not exceed this line. Many examples were carefully selected, such as 'weak cheeping revealed the smallest shadow' or 'indestructible raven', but in some cases the example selected was excessively long.

An example must be carefully chosen since it has to demonstrate effective use of language. It needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two ideas to be confidently explained. For this reason, phrases such as 'he was not in a trusting mood' or 'Normally he hated being picked up' were not acceptable. Sometimes a single image, such as 'shadow', might work, but, generally, selecting a short sentence, part of a sentence or a phrase is advisable. Ellipses and line references were sometimes offered but these are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be the words in the extract and should not be a paraphrase or a technical term such as metaphor or personification.

Explanation

Two marks were available for this part of the question and there were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected example. An explanation had to be written in own words to demonstrate secure understanding. Several candidates scored at least one mark for the explanation.

Successful explanations focused firmly on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the quotation. For example, some candidates who selected 'like a bundle of black rags' explained that this suggested his messy appearance and his lifelessness – thus concisely providing two impressions for two marks. Understanding the meaning of a key word (in this case *rags*) is an effective starting point for understanding an effect of that word. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very good explanations was 'weak cheeping revealed the smallest shadow' with candidates commenting on Odin's frailty and that he has shrunk in size. Both these examples demonstrate the effective practice of candidates zooming in on individual words ('bundle', 'rags', 'weak' and 'smallest') and thinking about what each one suggests. It is this close analysis which is key to success.

Less successful explanations were characterised by slipping into narrative and repetition of the language in the extract. For example, the word 'shiver' was often used to explain 'shivering violently'. A successful response would have explained that Odin was trembling uncontrollably. Candidates must remember that credit cannot be given for repeating a similar impression. For example, a response explaining that 'seriously shaken' suggested that Odin was *scared* and *traumatised* could only be credited for one of these impressions.

Explanations must only focus on the example selected. If a candidate selects 'indestructible raven', the explanation should focus on Odin's strength and ability to survive and not on his desire for comfort which is the impression of the words following the selected example.

Advice to candidates on Question 2

- Select the **Question 2(e)** example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly.
- Consider the meaning of a word before going on to consider what a word suggests and its effect.
- Zoom in on individual words within a quotation or extract, rather than making general comments.
- Think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words.
- Use your own words to explain effect.
- If a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things.
- Practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

Section B

Question 3

(a) Summary task

In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: the reasons why so many people buy sneakers made by the big brands. Successful responses selected a wide range of relevant points and *used* these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material and sensibly ignored details about the carbon footprint of sneakers and Vida sneakers which were irrelevant to the task.

Several relevant content points were easily identified by most candidates. These more straightforward content points included 'sporting endorsements' and 'limited edition' sneakers. Some content points proved less accessible, requiring careful selection and attention to detail, for example, recognising that 'office workers, doctors, candidates and even presidents' suggest a *range* of people wear sneakers and not just *a lot*. People 'from all walks of life' was another way of capturing this idea but this was often misinterpreted as sneakers are bought for walking. Similarly, the text tells us that people do not buy sneakers because celebrities wear them, but because celebrities turn them into a *fashion* or *status symbol*.

Weaker responses were characterised by irrelevance and repetition, often writing about a single point over many lines: sporting endorsements, contracts signed with top athletes, wearing the same sneakers as a sporting hero – these are all the same idea. Instead of selecting and presenting the key ideas economically and concisely, less successful responses often relied too heavily on lifting sections of text, which does not demonstrate skilful or careful selection. Some weaker summaries included personal opinion and evaluation, often referring to brands or celebrities they are familiar with.

Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as 'status symbol', but they should not copy sentence structures or whole sentences. Most candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives, such as *an investment* for 'personal income can be made from resale', and *top athletes promote sneakers* for 'sneakers advertised by his sporting idol'. Successful summaries also wrote with a formality and clarity required for a concise summary style.

Less effective summaries included significant stretches of copied text, often spliced together, and occasionally there was not much which could be assessed as original writing or reworking which meant that these summaries could not achieve above Levels 1 or 2.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas such as 'collectors often trade limited edition sneakers'. Avoiding a lengthy introduction and conclusion also helped achieve concision. Some responses were considerably longer than 150 words. Others adhered to the recommended length but took too long to explain a few ideas.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, achieved by the use of varied original structures including relative pronouns and conjunctions, and punctuation that was accurate and helpful. These summaries were well-crafted and well-organised with appropriate linking devices such as 'moreover' and 'likewise' correctly used to guide the reader through the summary. Level 3 responses also demonstrated use of adverbial connectives such as 'furthermore' and 'in addition' to shape the content. When overused and placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, however, these same connectives did not always aid organisation. Candidates should write formally in summary writing. This means avoiding phrases such as 'in the same vein', 'on the flip side' or 'on top of that'.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(a)

Reading

- First read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content.
- Read the question and make sure that you understand the task.
- Read the text again, underlining or highlighting the parts which are relevant to the task.
- Ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations, examples and alternative viewpoints.
- Do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail.
- Do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content.
- Look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways or examples; these repeated ideas or examples could be covered as one point.
- Do not include content which is not in the text.

Writing

- Think of a sensible order for the points underlined/highlighted; this may be in a different order from the original text.
- If points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision.
- Use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary.
- Do not lift whole phrases or sentences.
- Write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures.
- Organise content so ideas connect and flow from one point to the next.
- Use a formal writing style.
- Do not write more than 150 words.
- Do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

(b) Short response task

In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They must demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question makes it clear that the perspective candidates are to take is Matthew Chang, 'director of the footwear brand Vida', so it is logical that he would speak positively about Vida sneakers. He will challenge the claim that Vida sneakers are boring or he might accept that they appear boring but have other benefits. This question is testing reading skills. Candidates who performed well in this question returned to **Text B**, specifically the sections where Matthew Chang and Vida sneakers are mentioned, and considered the evidence to support his perspective.

To reach Level 3, a response had to consistently demonstrate the correct perspective supported by *detail* from the *text*, such as 'Vida sneakers are durable', *and develop* this with sensible inference: 'they will not need to be replaced for a long time so save you money'. A single idea or detail from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each one could have some inferential development.

Level 2 responses were characterised by some understanding of the appeal of Vida sneakers. Two or three marks could be scored with just details from the text: 'Vida sneakers are environmentally friendly, created from recycled material and are becoming popular', or just developments of ideas: 'We reject fast fashion unlike the big brands who are more focused on profit'. Level 2 responses were not always fully secure in their understanding of the task or the text, occasionally writing both critically and positively about Vida sneakers, or including repetition. Thus, these responses, while being generally relevant, lacked the consistent viewpoint needed for Level 3.

Level 1 responses showed some awareness of the correct perspective: 'Vida sneakers are not boring' but were then either very brief or did not include relevant content.

Some responses demonstrated misunderstanding of **Text B** and the task. These responses wrote negatively about Vida sneakers or confused Vida sneakers with big brand sneakers and gained no marks.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(b):

- Read the question carefully and identify whose perspective you are to identify with.
- Highlight or underline the relevant **section(s)** in the text where the person is mentioned.
- Decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if they agree or disagree with the statement.
- Avoid long introductions repeating the question.
- State an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text.
- Extend and develop the ideas with inference.
- Write in the first person.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21 Writing
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Key messages

- **Section A** is marked for Reading as well as Writing and so candidates need to read both given texts thoroughly and select several points from each.
- Candidates would benefit from explicit focus on the difference between development and evaluation. Development adds relevant information or examples; evaluation involves judgement, prioritisation or challenge. Strong **Section A** responses integrate both throughout, rather than adding them mechanically at the end.
- Candidates should avoid copying whole sentences from the given texts for **Section A**.
- In **Section B**, candidates should be aware of the mark for Content and Structure and aim to produce effective pieces, making appropriate use of descriptive or narrative features depending on the question they have chosen. Narratives require purposeful structure, credible tension and resolution; descriptive tasks require sustained focus on atmosphere and sensory detail, without drifting into narrative
- In **Section B**, candidates must not include inappropriate material and avoid reference to graphic violence and/or sexual activity.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- Candidates are advised to adhere to the suggested wordcounts for each section.
- Candidates should remember that the majority of marks in this exam are for Writing and Style and Accuracy, and that they therefore need to proofread their work for meaning and accuracy.

General comments

- The vast majority of candidates were fully engaged with the questions and demonstrated understanding of what they needed to do.
- The best responses demonstrated highly accurate writing and a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Vocabulary was impressive, with many responses including a wide range of words appropriately.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors include confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and lack of full stops and commas to punctuate sentences.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section B** questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Directed Writing

Question 1

This question required candidates to respond to two texts giving different views on how their school should spend some money it had received. Kwame, captain of the school basketball team, thought that the money should be spent on improving the sports hall and Miss Akello, a teacher, thought that the money should be spent on improving the school library.

The writing format required was a report for the school principal about how the money should be spent. It was clear that all candidates were familiar with school facilities like sports halls and libraries and responses demonstrated engagement with this topic.

The question bullet points required candidates to do the following:

- evaluate the ideas and opinions in **both** texts
- give their views about whether the money should be spent on improving the sports hall or the library, based on what they have read in the texts.

To score highly for Reading, candidates had to clearly identify several ideas from each text and develop and evaluate some of these. Some candidates successfully developed and evaluated a small number of ideas from the texts but could not achieve a high mark for Reading because they had not selected a wide range. Candidates are encouraged to select at least three to four ideas from each text.

Almost all responses selected ideas from both texts, for example points from Kwame about the health risks of the current library and how an improved library would benefit students' mental health and ability to study. From Miss Akello's text, responses often referred to the idea that updating the library facilities would enable candidates to develop their research skills and find new interests. Occasionally responses could not be credited for selecting ideas due to imprecise wording of the ideas. For example, some responses stated that it was important that the library provided a range of information but missed out on Miss Akello's point that this needed to be up to date.

Balance was required in the selection of ideas; candidates need to choose several ideas from each text. A few responses included one idea (e.g. the fact that developing the sports hall would allow the school to host more events) and developed this at length rather than considering a range of ideas as is required of the task. Candidates would benefit from reading each of the two texts very carefully and taking time to jot down or underline the points they want to refer to from each text. It was important that candidates rooted their responses in ideas in the texts. Some responses included candidates' own personal thoughts, e.g. about the benefits of sports halls and libraries generally without rooting these ideas in the texts. This had an impact on the mark that could be awarded for Reading.

Often responses discussed ideas in Text A first and then went onto Text B which is an acceptable approach as long as ideas from both texts are considered in detail. Candidates needed to do more than just lift or paraphrase the ideas from each text. It is acceptable for candidates to use some of the words from the texts, but they need to use their own words to demonstrate development and evaluation. Own words should also be used in introductions and conclusions as candidates are writing as themselves rather than as Kwame or Miss Akello.

Development of ideas generally came in the form of referencing candidates' own experience of sports halls and libraries. For example, some responses developed Kwame's idea about the health risks of the current sports hall by talking about an injury that they or a friend had suffered. Similarly, responses could develop Miss Akello's idea about the current resources in the library being out of date by saying that the candidate had failed a test as they had relied on outdated material for revision. Another way in which responses could demonstrate development was by offering solutions to some of the issues raised in the two texts, e.g. by suggesting that the sports hall should be developed first and that the events held in the new sports hall could raise money to pay for library improvements. Development was quite thin in many responses and candidates are reminded that they need to do more than simply repeat ideas.

Most responses showed sufficient development of ideas to achieve Level 3 for Reading; demonstration of an evaluation of ideas in one or both of the texts is required in order to achieve Level 4 or 5 for Reading. Evaluation means offering judgement of the validity of the ideas expressed by Kwame or Miss Akello. This can take the form of agreement or disagreement with an idea and an explanation of why, e.g. that there was no need for the library to have new resources as students can use their own devices.

Other responses demonstrated evaluation by prioritising one idea, e.g. 'Kwame makes a compelling point about how a new sports hall could improve the school's reputation.' Another way of achieving evaluation was stating how one idea outweighed another, e.g. 'While it is true that an improved library could help candidates with their study, this is less important than the health benefits of a new sports hall.' The most successful responses considered the two texts together and offered development and evaluative comment throughout. These responses often framed the evaluation in terms of how it related to the school's priorities, e.g. the need for improved academic results.

Other responses evaluated potential bias in the viewpoint of the two writers, e.g. pointing out that Kwame was bound to be in favour of developing the sports hall as he was captain of the school basketball team. Candidates are encouraged to use phrases that demonstrate a prioritisation of particular ideas or a comment

on their validity, e.g. 'Miss Akello makes a strong point when she says,' 'I agree with this because,' or 'I disagree with this point as Kwame does not take into account...'

Most responses made an attempt at evaluation in their conclusions, but not all were successful. Some responses stated a personal opinion but did not go beyond that, e.g.: 'I believe that we should spend the money on the sports hall as most students prefer playing sport rather than reading.' These kinds of responses could not be credited with evaluation as the response did not link opinion with specific ideas in the text. Stronger conclusions linked the recommendation to one or more ideas from the texts, e.g. 'I believe that we should spend the money on the sports hall as this will improve our relationship with the community and they will support us in future.' This is credited for evaluation as it offers judgement of an idea in the text.

With regards to Writing, most responses demonstrated a range of writing skills and produced relevant content that was often developed and effective. The structure of responses was generally secure with a consideration of each option in turn with the best responses combining and assimilating ideas. Most responses also included an appropriate introduction stating what would be written about and a conclusion summing up ideas presented. Candidates are encouraged to write concise introductions and conclusions; lengthy ones are not needed.

Almost all responses were in an appropriately formal style for a report to the principal. Features of report format that were commonly seen were a heading and subheadings. The strongest responses adopted a persuasive tone and included some successful detail about how the candidate's favoured approach would add to the prestige of the institution. However, there were also a few responses that used inappropriately informal expressions such as 'wanna' and 'gonna.'

With reference to spelling, punctuation and grammar, spelling was generally strong, with confusion of homophones being the most common error. Errors were commonly seen in words like 'there' and 'their', 'too' and 'to' and 'your' and 'you're'. There was often appropriate use of idiomatic expression, but this was overused in some cases and this reduced the coherence and flow of the response. Some candidates over-relied on words provided in the two texts and so received little credit for vocabulary. Stronger responses included synonyms for at least some of the words in the text, e.g. 'image' for 'reputation' and 'renovate' or 'upgrade' for 'improve.' There were some examples of misspelling of words from the stimulus text. e.g. 'library.'

Grammar was often the weakest area and there were frequent errors in the use of tenses and articles. These errors made some responses difficult to understand. Paragraphing was a strength in most responses and sentence structures were generally accurate, including the use of complex sentences. There were sometimes issues with sentence separation in weaker responses though, with commas being used instead of full stops, or little punctuation being used at all. Another issue with punctuation was candidates making errors in the use of capital letters, both at the start of sentences and often by using the lower case 'i' when writing about themselves.

Candidates are recommended to proofread their work carefully to help them find and correct errors. Spending five minutes doing this after each task would increase the Writing mark for most candidates.

Section B: Composition

The first **Section B** mark is for Content and Structure. This is awarded for how effectively the candidate responds to the task, including the use of descriptive or narrative features and the clarity of the structure and how this is organised for effect.

There is a wide range of descriptive and narrative features that candidates can be credited for. Descriptive features include use of the senses, contrast, use of figurative language such as similes and metaphors and the use of sound devices such as onomatopoeia and alliteration. Narrative features include a clearly established setting, development of characters, control of time frame such as flashbacks and an effective climax to a story. The features used must be appropriate for the question chosen, i.e. descriptive features for **Questions 2 and 3** and narrative features for **Questions 4 and 5**.

It is important to note that candidates will not necessarily get a high mark by including numerous features in their **Section B** responses. The key point is how successfully features are used to make a piece effective. That said, responses that merely list events and include very few descriptive or narrative features will always be limited as they will be adequate at best, rather than effective.

The second mark awarded for **Section B** is for Style and Accuracy. This mark is awarded for the quality of a candidate's writing in terms of their use of sentence structure and vocabulary and the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Candidates are rewarded for using a wide range of sentences accurately, the effective use of a wide vocabulary and for accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The vast majority of candidates wrote complete **Section 2** responses. A few candidates did write very brief responses though and this suggested that they had spent too much time on **Question 1**. There were also some candidates who wrote very long responses that went far beyond the recommended 350 to 450 words. These responses often found it difficult to maintain control and this could lead to a lack of cohesion and an increased error count. Candidates should be encouraged to spend more time concentrating on the quality of their written work rather than on the quantity.

Question 2

Describe a town or city centre at a busy time of day.

This descriptive task was a popular one and there were some very well-developed descriptive pieces. It was clear that most candidates had experienced a busy town or city centre and were able to write from their own experience. There was also a strong focus on all of the many individual activities taking place and these helped to build a detailed picture.

Effective pieces tended to bring to life the sights, sounds and sometimes the smells of a busy area, giving the reader a vivid sense of what it would be like to be there. There were references to car horns honking, street vendors shouting, the tempting aromas from food stalls and the sight of crowds of people. Successful responses often used interesting descriptive touches, such as carefully chosen adjectives, striking imagery and language features such as similes, onomatopoeia and personification. There was impressive use of vocabulary such as 'commotion,' 'cacophony,' 'stampede' and 'congestion.'

Less successful responses often narrated the events that happened during a visit to the town or city centre, without describing the place itself. Typically, these responses would focus on what was bought during a shopping trip or tell a narrative about getting lost, where description was secondary. Other weaker responses focused on facts about the place, e.g. the population size and traffic and crime problems. The focus of this task should be on description, rather than on narrative or facts. The control of tenses was a weakness in some compositions. Switching between present and past tense made some responses confusing.

Question 3

Describe the scene at two competitions, one which takes place outdoors and one which takes place indoors.

There were some interesting responses to this task, and a large range of indoor and outdoor competitions were described. Many responses featured sporting events, but all forms of competition were acceptable. Competitions included outdoor football and other sports matches and indoor competitions such as chess, table tennis, art, and beauty contests. All of these had the potential to deliver a strong description.

Candidates often treated this task as a comparison, picking two very different competitions, e.g. a loud and passionate football derby game and a quiet and intense chess match. Others focused entirely on description of the two events. Both of these approaches are valid.

The best responses described each competition in detail and built up a picture that included the atmosphere at the event as well as what could be seen heard and smelt. There was a successful shift in focus between the whole picture such as the crowd and then personal details, e.g. about individual competitors. Less successful responses often detailed or narrated the events that took place, e.g. writing about how the score changed at a basketball match. The focus of this task must be on description, rather than narrative.

Question 4

Write a story about someone who decides to give up something important to help a friend.

This was the most commonly answered question in **Section B** and the topic allowed for a wide range of responses. The things that were given up ranged from the very dramatic, e.g. a kidney, to the more realistic,

e.g. students giving up on going to their dream university so that they could stay home and look after a friend. Illnesses and accidents were common themes in many stories.

There were many enjoyable stories and many responses included appropriate features such as effective use of dialogue, characterisation and the build-up of tension. The thing that was given up could feature at any stage of the story, but most candidates tended to use it as a climax, after describing what made this necessary.

Stronger responses included the establishment of a solid scenario and also featured successfully developed characters. These responses offered a clear progression of events that the reader could follow easily. The best responses were often rooted in candidates' direct experience of school or home life, with what was given up being related to these.

Weaker responses failed to develop believable characters and often consisted of a list of events, with something suddenly being given up at the end, sometimes for no obvious reason. These responses were also often quite unrealistic; candidates would do better to write from personal experience.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the words: 'He turned the corner and was pleasantly surprised by what happened next.'

Candidates were able to use the sentence in a variety of ways and many wrote well-crafted and interesting stories. The sentence could be added at any point in the story and lent itself nicely to being a final twist. Some candidates seemed to have misread the sentence as what happened after turning the corner seemed to be more of an unpleasant shock than a pleasant surprise.

There was a wide variety of stories from surprise parties to escapes and bank robberies, sports matches, study and work scenarios. Many candidates wrote enjoyable and well-constructed narratives, with responses often making effective use of features such as dialogue, flashbacks, and time shifts. Other responses successfully used the opening paragraph as a teaser of what was to come and then returned to this at the end. Another successful technique was for the story to begin with a dramatic moment and for the response to then reveal what had led to this happening.

Less successful responses could be confusing as the narrative structure was sometimes difficult to follow. Another feature of weaker responses was a lack of development of character and weak beginnings and endings. It is always more effective to start a story with something dramatic to hook the reader rather than a description of someone waking up and starting their daily routine. Other responses appeared rehearsed and did not really relate to the given statement; this was not a successful approach. Candidates need to ensure that what they are writing relates to the given sentence.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22 Writing

Key messages

- Candidates are encouraged to read questions carefully and ensure they address *all* elements of the task (e.g. *evaluating* ideas and opinions in **Section A**, *two* birthdays in **Question 3**, a *busy* time in **Question 2**).
- To access higher Reading marks, candidates are encouraged to prioritise precise use of the stimulus texts in **Section A**. Selecting a wide range of ideas from the texts and avoiding both over-reliance on personal opinion and superficial paraphrasing will help candidates to raise the level of their response.
- Candidates would benefit from explicit focus on the difference between development and evaluation. Development adds relevant information or examples; evaluation involves judgement, prioritisation or challenge. Strong **Section A** responses integrate both throughout, rather than adding them mechanically at the end.
- Candidates are encouraged to adopt and sustain a clear viewpoint in their **Section A** response as overly balanced or non-committal responses often limit an ability to demonstrate evaluative depth. Candidates would benefit from developing their confidence in taking a position and justifying it.
- In **Section A**, candidates must sustain the conventions of the required text type throughout. Audience awareness should be maintained from opening to conclusion.
- Overlong responses in both sections frequently lead to loss of control, repetition and technical errors. Concise, well-shaped responses are consistently more successful and, as such, candidates should be reminded to focus on quality over quantity.
- Effective planning of **Section B** responses supports focus, balance and strong endings. Candidates should avoid lengthy scene-setting and ensure sufficient time to develop climactic moments and conclusions.
- Candidates would benefit from strengthening narrative shaping skills and descriptive control in **Section B**: narratives require purposeful structure, credible tension and resolution; descriptive tasks require sustained focus on atmosphere and sensory detail, without drifting into narrative.
- Consolidation of technical accuracy, especially sentence demarcation would help many candidates raise the level of their response. Common weaknesses include comma splicing, tense inconsistency, subject–verb agreement errors and insecure punctuation of direct speech.
- Vocabulary should be chosen for accuracy and effect, not complexity alone. Over-ambitious or misapplied lexis can weaken clarity and impact.

General comments

The majority of candidates demonstrated their skills effectively across the full ability range. Time management was generally strong, with almost all candidates completing both questions. Unfinished or very short responses were not frequently seen.

Presentation standards were generally good. Most responses were neat, clearly organised and paragraphed, making them easy to follow. Handwriting was usually legible, although a minority of responses were difficult to read because of very small writing, poorly formed letters, or densely packed paragraphs without spacing. Excessive crossing out, elaborate cursive handwriting and unclear methods of correction (such as bracketing rather than clear deletion) also occasionally hindered readability. Candidates are reminded of the importance of clear presentation, effective paragraphing and unambiguous correction of errors.

Candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the structure and requirements of the paper. Most attempted **Section A** first, which tended to support effective time management; where **Section B** was attempted first, occasional time pressure was more evident later in the response. There was clear evidence of planning in many responses, particularly for **Section A**, with some candidates listing ideas from both texts and crossing them off as they were incorporated. This systematic approach was generally helpful, though in some cases it resulted in responses that were rather mechanical and lacked more sophisticated synthesis.

Most candidates understood the need to integrate ideas from both stimulus texts, and many were able to use their own words with confidence. Stronger responses selected key ideas from one text, evaluated them using linked ideas from the other, and developed these points effectively. Weaker responses tended either to rely too heavily on lifting material directly from the texts or, conversely, to prioritise personal opinion with only minimal reference to the stimulus texts. While many candidates attempted evaluation, some struggled to move beyond stating advantages and disadvantages, or produced evaluation that was insufficiently grounded in the texts.

In **Section B**, narrative questions were the most popular, with **Question 5** attracting the greatest number of responses, followed by **Question 4**. Descriptive questions were less frequently chosen, and **Question 3** was the least popular. Most candidates produced writing of an appropriate length; however, a minority wrote at excessive length, often repeating ideas or introducing irrelevant material. These overlong responses frequently showed declining accuracy and quality and where this was the case, it impacted on the mark awarded for Style and Accuracy. This underlines the importance of quality and precision over quantity.

The content of responses was generally appropriate and well-judged for the examination context. Candidates showed awareness of the need to adapt narrative techniques and descriptive detail to the specific task. However, a small number of responses contained material of an offensive or disturbingly graphic nature, and centres are strongly advised to remind candidates that such content is not appropriate for this examination.

Candidates generally adopted an appropriate tone, format and sense of audience in **Section A**, and most showed good understanding of the stimulus texts. Introductory paragraphs were often effective, and many responses demonstrated careful consideration of the ideas presented. While some candidates argued persuasively for one side of the debate, others were less decisive, which often limited the overall effectiveness of their response.

Emphasis on precise use of the ideas in the stimulus texts, clear evaluation, concise writing and legible presentation will further support candidates' performance.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: General comments

Overall, candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the task requirements in **Section A**, and many responded confidently to the Directed Writing task. Almost all recognised that they were required to write a speech and generally adopted an appropriate tone for addressing their teacher and classmates. Most responses opened with the prescribed '*Good morning, everyone*', and many ended by thanking the audience, indicating secure awareness of audience and purpose.

Stronger responses sustained this sense of audience throughout, using direct address, rhetorical questions and inclusive language to engage listeners. In a few weaker responses, however, awareness of audience was inconsistent: some drifted into essay-like third-person commentary, narrative or report-style writing, while others included letter or email conventions such as '*Yours sincerely*' or statements such as '*I am writing this letter...*'. Candidates are advised to maintain the conventions of a speech from beginning to end.

Structurally, most responses adopted this generally effective approach: an introduction, followed by discussion of ideas from one stimulus text and then the other, followed by a concluding paragraph offering a personal opinion. This structure was particularly helpful for less confident candidates; however, it often resulted in formulaic responses and, in some cases, led candidates to remain non-committal, summarising both viewpoints without developing a clear stance. The strongest responses moved beyond this structure by integrating ideas from both texts, grouping points thematically, and embedding evaluation throughout rather than reserving it for the conclusion. These responses typically adopted a clear position and sustained it, critiquing opposing arguments as part of a coherent line of reasoning.

Engagement with the stimulus material was generally sound. Most candidates selected relevant ideas from both texts, and there was little evidence of wholesale lifting. Weaker responses, however, relied heavily on paraphrasing or rewording the texts with minimal development or evaluation, while a small number lifted phrases or sentences directly. More successful responses demonstrated selective use of the material, often integrating it smoothly into their own argument. Some adopted imaginative framing devices, such as presenting the contributors as guest speakers, past students or people they had interviewed, which helped to contextualise the ideas and make the speech feel more authentic.

Evaluation and development remain key differentiators. While many responses stated agreement or disagreement with the proposition, a noticeable minority avoided committing to a clear position, instead concluding that 'both sides have merits' or that 'it is up to the individual to decide'. This reluctance to take a stance often weakened the persuasiveness of the speech and limited evaluative depth. Stronger responses compared and contrasted the ideas more effectively, for example weighing the financial costs of university against the long-term wage benefits of qualifications.

Persuasive techniques were used with varying success. Rhetorical questions were the most common device, and when used judiciously they contributed positively to engagement and evaluation, for example: *'What is the point of spending large sums of money if you could start earning and gaining experience straight away?'* Stronger responses also used emotive language, anecdotal evidence and inclusive pronouns to good effect. However, many responses were relatively light on persuasive devices and read more as balanced discussions than speeches aimed at influencing an audience.

Most responses were of an appropriate length, though a significant number exceeded the recommended indicative wordcount. These extended responses often included unnecessary personal anecdotes or repetitive points, which did not enhance performance and occasionally weakened organisation or clarity. In a small number of cases, overlong **Section A** answers appeared to reduce the time available for **Section B**.

Overall, candidates generally handled **Section A** well, showing familiarity with the demands of the task and confidence in integrating stimulus material. To further improve performance, candidates are encouraged to sustain an awareness of audience, adopt a clear position, use of a wide range of ideas from the stimulus texts selectively and concisely, and integrate evaluation and development throughout the response.

Section A: Reading

Most responses demonstrated a secure understanding of the content. The topic proved accessible and relevant, enabling many candidates to respond with interest and clear personal perspectives. It was rare for candidates to rely on only one text, although some made minimal use of Text A and found it easier to extract ideas from Text B. In a small number of responses, candidates drifted away from the stimulus material altogether, using the extracts only as a trigger for extended personal opinions; in such cases, Reading marks were inevitably limited, even where the writing itself was fluent.

Most responses identified at least a sufficient number of ideas from the stimulus texts, with most going beyond this to select a range or wide range of ideas from across both texts. A recurring issue, however, was imprecision: responses frequently generalised instead of conveying the specific idea required. For example, the notion of earning 'more' money was often reduced to earning a 'good' salary, and the idea about starting to earn immediately after school was regularly omitted. Some responses were distracted by the narrative detail of Arham's entrepreneurial journey, sometimes summarising his personal story at length rather than extracting the ideas required.

Some strong responses which included extensive development and evaluation did not refer to the required range of ideas required to gain a mark in Level 4 or above. It is important that candidates select and reference a wide range of ideas; to this end, candidates may benefit from planning strategies that allow them to 'tick off' ideas as they are used.

Most responses were in candidates' own words. In weaker responses, paraphrasing involved only minimal substitution of words, making the response read as superficial rewording rather than genuine synthesis. Conversely, some responses integrated vocabulary from the texts more deftly, rearranging and embedding it within original sentences; when done skilfully, this allowed the ideas to be conveyed without wholesale lifting.

Development was variable and remains an area for improvement. In stronger responses, candidates extended ideas logically, using examples, hypothetical scenarios or thoughtful commentary. Common, creditworthy developments included: the financial implications of debt (including stress and wider family burden), scholarships and bursaries, the possibility of combining study with part-time work, apprenticeships as an alternative route, and careers where degrees are essential (e.g. medicine and law). Some candidates also brought in broader contextual ideas, such as automation and Artificial Intelligence, social mobility, or the academic–vocational divide. In weaker responses, development was more limited, often as brief add-ons such as *'the cost of transport, extra classes and textbooks makes university expensive'* or *'I have learnt skills such as problem-solving, communication and teamwork at university'* which, while creditable, was less successful. Some responses introduced unrelated material, such as university safety, which did not strengthen the argument and sometimes distracted from the required reading focus.

Many responses made an attempt at evaluation, most commonly signalled through phrases such as *'One of the biggest issues...'*, *'The most important concern is...'*, *'Some people claim...'* and rhetorical questions. When used appropriately, rhetorical questions helped to create a persuasive, evaluative tone; however, in some responses they became repetitive or exaggerated, functioning more as emphasis than judgement. The most effective evaluation went beyond assertion and engaged with the strengths, limitations and implications of ideas, for example: challenging the assumption that a business will succeed or that promotion is guaranteed; recognising that university costs may be mitigated through scholarships or part-time study; noting that degrees do not always lead to higher paid employment in a difficult economic climate; weighing immediate earning against longer-term opportunities such as networking or job security.

Some responses were heavily 'balanced', presenting both sides and ending with conclusions asserting that the audience must take the decision which was best for them, an approach which reduced opportunities for prioritisation and decisive evaluative judgement. More successful responses either adopted a clear stance or, if acknowledging both routes, made a reasoned judgement about which arguments were stronger for particular circumstances.

To strengthen Reading performance in **Section A**, it is important that candidates select a wide range of ideas, including the less obvious points (e.g. 'earning more' and 'earning immediately'), precisely, and that they re-express ideas using their own words, rather than relying on superficial word substitution or lifting. The use of concrete development, such as providing specific examples is key, and candidates are encouraged to provide integrated evaluation, through challenging assumptions and adding judgement as they discuss each idea, rather than saving evaluation for their concluding paragraph.

Section A: Writing

Overall, the standard of writing in **Section A** was secure. Higher-level responses demonstrated greater command of sentence structure, punctuation and vocabulary, while weaker responses were characterised by frequent grammatical errors and over-reliance on the language of the stimulus texts.

Many candidates conveyed ideas using short, straightforward sentences, often assigning one idea per sentence. This approach supported clarity but limited stylistic range. Where responses attempted more complex sentence structures, success was mixed: stronger responses controlled embedded clauses and sentence variety effectively, while weaker attempts resulted in jumbled syntax, comma splicing or loss of meaning. Common grammatical issues included: inconsistent or incorrect tense use, sometimes shifting mid-paragraph; subject–verb agreement errors; confusion between first- and third-person perspective, particularly when ideas from the texts were adapted; incorrect or missing articles, notably forms such as *'going to the university'*. Control of the simple past tense was a particular weakness among less confident responses. These errors occasionally disrupted clarity.

Punctuation was limited in range in many responses. Commas were often overused or misused, leading to frequent comma splicing. Apostrophes were inconsistently handled, particularly in possessive forms and plurals, and homophone errors (*their/there*, *your/you're*) were common. At the higher levels, there was evidence of more ambitious punctuation, including colons, semi-colons, dashes and, occasionally, ellipses. When used accurately, these features enhanced fluency and control. However, semi-colons were often used incorrectly, sometimes as a substitute for commas rather than to link related independent clauses.

Vocabulary was a notable strength in many responses. Even those with weaker grammatical control often attempted ambitious lexis, including topic-specific and abstract terms such as *entrepreneur*, *networking*, *independence*, *dedication*, *tertiary*, *preposterous*, *exorbitant*, and *career-oriented*. Motivational or assembly-style language was common and often appropriate to the speech format. However, precision of vocabulary use varied. Some responses overreached for polysyllabic or figurative language without full understanding, resulting in awkward phrasing or unintended meanings. Others relied too heavily on vocabulary drawn directly from the stimulus texts, which limited the opportunity to be credited for a wider lexical range. Stronger responses balanced ambition with accuracy, selecting vocabulary that was both precise and effective for persuasion.

Spelling was generally secure, particularly for key topic vocabulary. Errors were more common in everyday words and inflections (*achieve*, *pressure*, *suggest*, *companies*). Longer responses often showed an accumulation of errors, suggesting that some candidates sacrificed accuracy for volume. In contrast, more concise responses tended to maintain better control and clarity.

Most responses were organised into paragraphs, which supported coherence and readability. Discourse markers and connectives were widely used (*however*, *furthermore*, *moreover*, *on the other hand*), and while these often helped guide the reader, they were sometimes repetitive or used inaccurately, particularly when signalling contrast.

Most responses demonstrated an awareness of appropriate register for a speech. To improve performance further, candidates would benefit from consolidating accurate control of simple sentence structures before attempting greater complexity, improving consistency in tense, agreement and person, revising sentence demarcation and the correct use of commas and apostrophes, using ambitious vocabulary precisely rather than excessively, and reducing reliance on the language of the stimulus texts in favour of their own expression.

Stronger responses showed that when grammatical accuracy, controlled complexity and precise vocabulary come together, the result can be convincing, fluent and persuasive speeches.

Section B: General comments

In **Section B**, narrative tasks were by far the most popular and generally the most successful. **Question 5** was the most frequently chosen, followed closely by **Question 4**. Descriptive tasks were less commonly attempted and, overall, less successful, with **Question 3** proving the most challenging for candidates.

Question 5 generated a wide range of engaging responses, often centred on lost or stolen items of personal or sentimental value, arguments between friends or siblings, or moments of tension linked to exams or important events. Most responses were able to incorporate the given sentence, with the most effective ones embedding it naturally within the narrative rather than placing it awkwardly at the beginning or tagging it on at the end.

Question 4 frequently involved the discovery of a mysterious object, such as a family heirloom, photographs, or a box in storage. Stronger responses demonstrated imagination through time shifts, flashbacks, or more unusual interpretations.

Though attempted by relatively few candidates, **Question 2** tended to be more successful than **Question 3**. The strongest responses created vivid atmosphere through sensory detail, capturing movement, sound and mood in busy settings. Where **Question 3** was attempted, many responses drifted into narrative, listing events rather than describing them, or including only one celebration instead of making the required contrast. Nevertheless, a small number of strong responses demonstrated effective descriptive control and emotional depth.

The most successful narratives were planned and focused, integrating character, setting and plot development effectively and leading to a convincing resolution. Stronger responses showed thoughtful pacing, selective detail, and well-developed characterisation, using flashbacks or reflective endings to good effect. A number of memorable responses explored themes such as loss, memory, or moral learning.

Less successful narratives were characterised by excessive or irrelevant detail, such as lengthy descriptions of daily routines or background information, before the story proper began. Other common weaknesses included unrealistic plot developments, overlong dialogue, repetitive events, and abrupt or unresolved endings. Candidates would benefit from planning stories more tightly and focusing on what is essential to the narrative arc.

Strong descriptive responses demonstrated clear strengths: atmospheric openings, controlled figurative language, subtle shifts in perspective, and sustained focus on place or moment. In contrast, weaker descriptions frequently became narrative in shape, lacked sensory detail, or failed to maintain a consistent descriptive viewpoint. Candidates need to be able to distinguish clearly between narrative and descriptive writing and to sustain descriptive focus throughout.

Across **Section B**, accuracy of writing varied. Stronger responses showed confident and sometimes ambitious vocabulary, with effective use of figurative language to convey thoughts and feelings. At lower levels, fluency was often undermined by weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar, particularly inconsistent tense use, run-on sentences, and errors in direct speech punctuation. Some responses were lengthy and detailed but lacked basic accuracy, which limited achievement. Proofreading and greater attention to technical accuracy would significantly improve performance for these candidates.

Question 2: Describe the scene in a restaurant or café at a busy time.

For **Question 2**, responses showed a wide range of quality. Stronger responses maintained a clear descriptive focus throughout and successfully conveyed the atmosphere of a restaurant or café at a busy time. These responses created vivid, immersive scenes through well-chosen sensory detail, movement and shifts in focus. Effective descriptions often zoomed in on small but telling observations, such as the behaviour of waiting staff, queues at the counter, arguments between customers, or the reactions of children and families. Sound and movement were handled particularly well, with images of staff ‘*dashing*’ between tables, plates clattering, and overlapping conversations contributing to a convincing sense of bustle. Some responses were effectively structured by moving from outside to inside, or from the general scene to specific details, sometimes ending with a subtle change in mood as the space emptied or the noise subsided.

Less successful responses struggled to maintain a descriptive approach. A common weakness was drifting into narrative, often explaining why the writer was visiting the restaurant, describing the ordering process, or recounting events in chronological sequence. In such cases, description was frequently limited to food, with little sense of place, people or atmosphere. Other weaker responses relied on lists of sensory details (what could be seen, heard or smelled) without shaping these into a coherent or engaging picture. Some responses overlooked the requirement to describe the restaurant or café during a busy period, resulting in scenes that lacked energy or activity.

The strongest descriptions balanced sensory detail with observation, creating atmosphere through action and behaviour rather than through adjectives alone. Overall, although **Question 2** was not widely attempted, those candidates who remained focused on description and sustained an atmospheric portrayal of a busy restaurant or café were able to produce engaging and effective responses, often achieving higher-level marks. To improve performance on this task, candidates would benefit from practising sustained descriptive writing, resisting the temptation to narrate events, and ensuring that all elements of the task, in this case, the sense of a *busy* time, are fully addressed.

Question 3: Describe a birthday celebration you remember from your early childhood and a more recent one.

Question 3 was less popular than the narrative options and was generally more challenging for candidates. The task required candidates to describe two birthday celebrations, an earlier celebration with a more recent one, and this requirement was not always fully met. A common weakness was a failure to address both parts of the task. Many candidates described only one birthday, usually from early childhood, or devoted the majority of their response to the earlier celebration, with the more recent birthday mentioned only briefly or not at all. Where two celebrations were included, the imbalance in detail often limited the effectiveness of the comparison and reduced opportunities for higher marks.

Less successful responses frequently drifted into narrative. These responses often listed familiar elements such as cakes, decorations, guests and presents, but without sufficient depth, imagery or control. In some cases, candidates wrote about someone else’s birthday, which further weakened relevance to the task.

Stronger responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the task and used contrast effectively to shape their writing. These responses often mirrored the structure of the two celebrations, describing similar elements, such as candles, guests, food or emotions, in each birthday in order to highlight change over time. Childhood celebrations were commonly portrayed as noisy, busy and joyful, filled with extended family, games and excitement, while more recent birthdays were described as quieter, smaller and more reflective.

In some of the most successful pieces, this contrast was handled with sensitivity, exploring themes of memory, loss, growing up and shifting priorities.

Effective descriptions used metaphor, sensory detail and emotional reflection to bring scenes to life. A number of responses evoked vivid images of early celebrations, with attention to colour, sound and movement, before moving to a more subdued recent event, such as a simple family gathering or a low-key celebration with friends. Where candidates successfully compared the exuberance of childhood with the restraint or reflection of later birthdays, the results were often poignant and convincing.

To improve performance, candidates would benefit from ensuring that the two elements of the question are described with reasonable balance, maintaining a descriptive rather than narrative focus, using contrast deliberately to structure the response, and developing atmosphere, emotion and detail rather than listing events.

Question 4: Write a story in which someone finds an interesting object in a box in a storeroom.

Question 4 was a popular choice and inspired some of the most successful and imaginative responses in **Section B**. Many candidates produced engaging narratives centred on the discovery of an ‘interesting object’ in a storeroom.

Common scenarios involved clearing out a family home, moving house, or exploring a neglected or locked storeroom, often leading to the discovery of objects linked to family history. Popular choices included letters, diaries, photographs, jewellery, heirlooms, and artefacts belonging to parents or grandparents, sometimes connected to wartime experiences or long-held secrets. More imaginative responses featured magical or fantastical elements such as enchanted mirrors, time-travelling objects, ancient maps, or mythological artefacts. Some candidates successfully located their narratives in historical, fantasy or science-fiction settings, demonstrating ambition and confidence.

The strongest responses ensured that the object discovered was central to the narrative and carried emotional or thematic significance. Effective stories built suspense prior to the discovery and explored the consequences of finding the object, whether revealing hidden family truths, triggering memories, or prompting moral or emotional reflection. Many candidates demonstrated secure control of language, using vivid description to evoke atmosphere in the storeroom itself, such as dust, darkness, confined space and smell, before shifting focus to the object and its impact. Some responses employed structural techniques effectively, including flashbacks or framing devices, beginning with the aftermath of the discovery and then returning to earlier events.

Less successful responses often spent too long on scene-setting or background information before reaching the storeroom, leaving insufficient space to develop the discovery and its significance. In some cases, the finding of the object itself became the climax, with little exploration of its meaning or consequences. Other weaknesses included overly complex plots with too many dramatic twists, lack of coherence, or abrupt and unresolved endings.

Despite these weaknesses, even less confident responses showed engagement and enthusiasm, and many responses contained effective moments of description or tension. To improve further, candidates would benefit from tighter planning, ensuring early arrival at the key setting, sustained focus on the significance of the object, and clear resolution of the narrative.

Question 5: Write a story which includes the words: ‘Stop lying to me. I know you took it!’

Question 5 was the most popular question in **Section B**. The given line of dialogue provided a clear focus and readily generated narratives based on relationships, conflict and emotion. In general, responses were appropriately structured and easy to follow, and many candidates handled the prompt with confidence.

The most common scenarios involved the loss or theft of a valued item, such as mobile phones, ID cards, jewellery, watches, clothing or schoolwork. These incidents were frequently set in familiar contexts, particularly schools, homes or social settings, and typically involved friends, siblings or classmates. Jealousy, misunderstanding and betrayal were recurring motives, and many narratives centred on the breakdown and, in some cases, repair of relationships. A smaller number of responses explored more unusual ideas, including crime-related plots, horror elements, or unexpected items being taken, which added variety and interest when handled with control.

Most responses embedded the given sentence effectively, often using it as a moment of confrontation or tension near the climax of the story. Some responses opened with the line and then unfolded the narrative as a flashback, which worked well when clearly structured. Less successful responses either inserted the line awkwardly, without advancing the plot, or placed it at the very beginning or end with little integration into the narrative. Occasional errors in punctuating the given dialogue were noted, suggesting that further practice with direct speech would be beneficial.

Stronger responses demonstrated clear narrative shaping, with purposeful pacing, developed characterisation and a sense of build-up before the confrontation. Techniques such as flashback, circular structure and reflective endings were used effectively, and many stories concluded with a moral or lesson learned, for example about trust, honesty or the consequences of making assumptions. Particularly successful narratives included twists in which the accused character was innocent, the narrator was at fault for misplacing the item, or responsibility was revealed indirectly through behaviour or evidence.

Weaker responses relied on thinly developed conflicts, lacked credibility, or rushed the ending after lengthy exposition. A minority of responses included inappropriate or excessively violent material, which was not suited to the examination context.

Overall, **Question 5** was one of the most successful question in **Section B**. Its focus on dialogue, relationships and everyday conflict enabled candidates to produce fluent, engaging narratives with clear direction. To improve further, candidates would benefit from crafting tension more subtly, ensuring the given line of dialogue drives the plot, and developing motivations and consequences in a more nuanced way rather than relying on predictable or overly convenient resolutions.

Section B: Content and Structure

Overall, responses demonstrated a secure grasp of basic narrative and descriptive structure in Section B. Most responses were clearly sequenced and of an appropriate length, allowing candidates to develop ideas and reach a conclusion. The most common and effective organisational pattern was a clear three-part structure: an opening to establish setting and/or character, a developed middle section focusing on the main event or description, and a concluding paragraph offering resolution or reflection.

Many responses showed ambition in their openings. A number used **flashback or flash-forward** effectively as a narrative hook in the narrative questions. For example, in **Question 5**, opening with the given line of dialogue and then returning to earlier events worked well, while in **Question 4**, beginning with a comment such as regret at having opened the box immediately created intrigue. Some responses addressed the reader directly (e.g. *'You're probably wondering how this happened...'*), which, when used sparingly, helped to establish narrative voice and engagement.

Weaker responses often began with clichéd linear openings, such as waking up in the morning and describing routine activities. While these introductions did not always prevent a successful narrative from developing later, they frequently delayed focus and reduced the impact of the opening. More successful responses established character, tension or atmosphere from the first line through action, dialogue or reflection.

Most narratives followed a chronological structure, which was generally effective and appropriate. Some candidates experimented with non-linear structures, including flashbacks or mirrored beginnings and endings. Where these were clearly signposted and controlled, they enhanced cohesion.

Narrative development was strongest when plot, setting and character were integrated rather than treated separately. Characterisation was often effective, particularly in **Question 5**, where relationships and conflict were central. Direct speech was frequently used to reveal character and advance the plot, though in some cases it was overused or insufficiently purposeful. Descriptive responses were most successful when focus on atmosphere and sensory detail was sustained, rather than allowing narrative action to dominate.

Endings are an area of relative weakness. Stronger responses offered reflective or cyclical conclusions, linked clearly to the opening or to a lesson learned, for example by revisiting a key image or moment. Some successful responses featured effective twists or subtle shifts in perspective.

Weaker responses often had rushed or predictable endings, particularly where too much time had been spent on exposition in the opening. In a small number of cases, endings were abrupt due to limited planning or time pressure.

In descriptive tasks, the most successful responses maintained a clear descriptive purpose, moving from general impressions to specific details or to contrast moments or settings. In less successful responses, narrative content dominated description, or the response became a list of observations rather than a shaped piece of writing.

Content was almost entirely appropriate, with only very occasional references to violence or distressing themes. Most responses demonstrated awareness of audience and purpose. Short sentences or single-sentence paragraphs were sometimes used effectively for emphasis, though in weaker responses these became overused or substituted for more developed content.

To help raise the level of their responses, candidates would benefit from planning narratives more tightly to avoid unfocused or overlong openings, using non-linear structures only where they clearly enhance meaning, developing endings with the same care as openings, and ensuring descriptive tasks remain descriptive in focus.

Section B: Style and Accuracy

Overall, candidates demonstrated a secure level of technical control in **Section B**. However, **Section B** also revealed underlying weaknesses in grammar and punctuation that were less apparent in the more scaffolded writing of **Section A**.

Spelling was mostly sound, especially for common vocabulary, though repeated errors did occur in some responses (*alot*, *definatly*, *occured*). More successful responses often included sophisticated and expressive vocabulary, contributing positively to atmosphere and tone. Effective examples included words such as *ominous*, *ferociously*, *charismatic*, *distinctive*, and *controversial*, as well as vivid phrasing to convey tension or mood.

However, ambition sometimes worked against accuracy. Some responses included adventurous vocabulary without full understanding of meaning or context, resulting in awkward or inappropriate expressions (e.g. metaphorical phrases that did not quite fit, or incorrect synonym choices). Candidates would benefit from prioritising precision and clarity over complexity, ensuring that vocabulary choices serve the narrative or descriptive purpose. Sentence construction was variable. Many responses employed a reasonable range of sentence types, and some varied sentence length effectively to control pace and emphasis. At higher levels, responses demonstrated confident manipulation of structure, including short impact sentences and more extended constructions.

The most common grammatical weaknesses were inconsistent or incorrect tense use, particularly shifts within narratives that should have been written in the past, subject–verb agreement errors, and incorrect verb forms or verb choice.

In longer responses, accuracy often deteriorated as candidates prioritised content and pace over control. Run-on sentences, comma splicing and minor sentences used unintentionally were frequent in weaker responses.

A limited but generally secure range of punctuation was noted: capital letters, full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks and apostrophes. Apostrophe errors, especially with plurals and possession, were still evident, and comma splicing remained one of the most persistent issues.

There was some evidence of more ambitious punctuation use, including ellipses, dashes, one-word paragraphs and attempts at colons and semi-colons. Where used accurately, these features enhanced tension and fluency. However, semi-colons were often misused as substitutes for commas, and understanding of their function appeared insecure. Direct speech was a key feature in many narratives and while some responses handled dialogue punctuation confidently, others struggled with inverted commas, reporting clauses and sentence boundaries.

Style was generally appropriate for the chosen task, with many responses adopting a confident narrative voice. **Section B** allowed greater freedom of tone, and candidates often wrote with energy and engagement. However, inconsistency of tone sometimes emerged, particularly where responses included overly formal connectives (*moreover*, *furthermore*) into narrative or descriptive writing, which felt stylistically inappropriate.

Very long responses frequently undermined accuracy and control, with errors accumulating across paragraphs. More concise, carefully shaped responses were often more effective.

Responses to **Section B** showcased candidates' creativity and willingness to experiment with language, but technical accuracy remains a key discriminator between levels. To improve performance further, candidates would benefit from maintaining consistent tense, particularly in narrative writing, consolidating sentence demarcation and avoiding comma splicing, improving accuracy in punctuating direct speech, selecting ambitious vocabulary judiciously and appropriately, and focusing on accuracy over length.