

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0990/12

Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- attempted all parts of all questions, paying attention to the marks allocated to each question and organising their response time accordingly
- followed task instructions
- read the details of questions carefully
- based their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- responded appropriately to the command words in questions
- focused on the particular evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each question
- avoided repetition of the same idea(s) within an answer
- used their own words where appropriate, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- planned the ideas they were intending to use in longer answers
- checked and edited their responses to correct any unforced errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated that they were familiar with the format of the Reading paper and the general demands of each of the three questions. There were very few instances where whole tasks had not been attempted, though occasionally responses to part questions were incomplete or missing and/or answers were uneven, limiting the possibility of scoring higher marks. Occasionally, candidates attempted to base their answer on the wrong text and/or offered ideas indiscriminately. There were some candidates who missed opportunities to target higher marks by offering mechanical answers that simply played back sections of text with little modification and/or by paying insufficient attention to the details of the question as set.

Candidates appeared to find all three Reading texts equally accessible and engaging, though a failure to recognise the order of events in Text C was evident in some responses. There were relatively few examples of significant misreading across the cohort, though opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas were often missed as a consequence of less careful reading of detail in both texts and tasks. Across the cohort as a whole there were excellent answers to all three questions, with many going significantly above and beyond the expectations for level 5, though candidates do need to ensure that they do not spend too long on one question at the expense of any of the others. For example, it was not unusual for the response to **Question 2(d)** (worth a maximum of 15 marks) to be longer and/or more carefully crafted than the response to **Question 3** (worth up to 25 marks), or for the answer to **Question 2(c)** (worth just 3 marks) to offer more extended explanation of meaning and effect than the response to **Question 2(d)**.

In many of the least effective answers, a failure to complete all aspects of a task and/or a loss of focus on the rubric limited the evidence of understanding and skills offered, or resulted in redundant material: for example, a few candidates offered choices from paragraphs other than 1 and 2 in the language question **2(d)** (sometimes repeating material from the section of text used in **2(c)**). Explanations that were not based on relevant examples could not be credited. Others did not pay attention to the task guidance and so offered just three examples overall in **2(d)** limiting the material for discussion and missing opportunities to target higher marks as a result. Similarly, there were some less well-focused responses from candidates who had scored well in the smaller sub questions but missed opportunities to target higher marks in other higher tariff tasks. For example, some wrote considerably more than the maximum of 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)** or wrote their response to **Question 3** in a different form, or from a different perspective, from that specified in the task guidance. Others unwisely focused solely on the number of words they had written at the expense of other aspects of their answer – spending time counting individual words

and/or writing out a full draft version of their answer is unlikely to be an efficient use of time in the context of an examination. Candidates are reminded that the word guidance offered in **Question 2(d)** and **Question 3** is not a requirement of the task in itself: the guidance is offered to help them organise their time efficiently and offer sufficient evidence of their skills and understanding to target higher levels.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in **Questions 1 (a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates were careful to follow the line or paragraph references in the questions to help them to move down Text A in order and direct their attention, though a number of the least effective responses tried to answer questions based on one part of the text from another and/or by unselective copying. A few candidates had not remembered that in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from Text A in order to evidence their Reading skills and should not be based on their personal opinion or outside knowledge.

Less effective responses attempted to include extra guesses in their answers to **Questions 1(a)–(e)** taking up valuable examination time by doing so and often diluting evidence of understanding. Others simply copied out sections of text with limited modification – often negating any suggestion of understanding by doing so. A number of otherwise more effective candidates offered circular answers in one or more of their responses, repeating some or all of the language of the question where own words were specified as required, and/or addressed only part of the question in their answer. Such responses provided limited evidence of understanding as a consequence and these candidates missed out on marks they might reasonably have been expected to target: for example, in **1(b)(i)** by suggesting ‘this means a very small amount. In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on the language of Text B and/or copied out chunks of text (much of which was not relevant to answering the question) limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result.

In **Question 2** candidates needed to identify (in **2(a)**) and explain (in **2(b)**) words and phrases from the text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. More effective answers were careful to refer back to Text C to locate specific relevant choices and consider their meaning in context. In **Question 2(a)** answers that did not indicate clearly the word/phrase that matched the sense of the underlined word/phrase in the question were not providing secure evidence of their understanding. A few candidates attempted to answer **2(a)** in their own words rather than selecting from the text as instructed. Some candidates did not offer answers for all parts of **2(b)**, necessarily missing the possibility of scoring full marks. Likewise, opportunities for marks were missed by a few candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify just one example from the text in their explanation and/or attempted to offer a generalised overview of the whole extract. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should ensure that they have explored and explained the meaning of each of the words they have chosen in some detail before they move on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most candidates were able to suggest three potentially useful examples for analysis in each half of the **2(d)** task and offer a little basic effect/meaning in context, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently precise or detailed in the examination of their choices. Less effective responses often offered vague, repeated and/or generalised comment. In less effective answers, labelling of devices without explanation of how these examples were working in context, meant opportunities to target higher levels were overlooked. A small number of candidates did not address the **Question 2(d)** task effectively, offering little relevant comment, repeating rather than explaining the language of the original and/or identifying few or no clear choices in one or both halves of the question.

In **Question 3** most responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets, though a few candidates lost sight of the task – for example, writing speeches to new game reserve owners or scripting interviews with Frances the narrator rather than her husband Lawrence as directed. Candidates are reminded that responding to the specifics of task as set for that particular text will offer them the widest range of opportunities to demonstrate skills at higher levels in any extended Response to Reading question. Responses across the cohort covered the full range of levels of achievement, with top level answers showing evidence of having established the order of events in the narrative carefully before using, interpreting and developing a wide range of ideas to address all three bullets equally well, integrating key details from the text appropriately. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities as a consequence of uneven focus on the bullets, a lack of planning beforehand and /or offering a narrow range of ideas from the text overall. Less effective responses either offered only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with limited or no modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text in order to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and should be avoided.

Though Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these two questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity, organisation and register of their writing. Where meaning becomes unclear due to inaccurate writing this is likely to limit achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. When responding to **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**, it is advisable to factor in time to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Comprehension and summary task

Questions 1 (a)–(e)

Short answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read and respond to Text A: The forest elephant. More effective responses paid attention to the paragraph references and command words in the instructions to demonstrate efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong or unfocused explanations. The least effective responses often repeated the language of the text where own words were required and/or relied on copying longer sections of text with little or no modification to address the question as set.

Effective responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions to show what they could do and understand. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through Text A from the beginning, picking up on pointers where appropriate to help them to identify relevant material. Occasionally, opportunities to evidence understanding were missed where explanations offered were unclear or partial and/or injudicious selection changed the meaning from that of the original text – candidates are reminded that whilst Writing is not assessed in **Questions 1(a)–(e)**, answers do need to be sufficiently precise and clear to communicate details from the text accurately.

(a) **Which type of African elephant can many children identify just from a picture, according to the text?**

In **Question 1(a)**, almost all candidates recognised the reference was to the savannah elephant only, though not all made efficient use of time when responding to this question. Some copied out the whole of the question stem at the beginning of their answer. Though this approach was acceptable, simply writing the key words of their answer was sufficient.

(b) **Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**
(i) ‘Very little’ (line 4)
(ii) ‘highly elusive’ (lines 4 and 5).

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where answers failed to score both marks it was sometimes the result of offering a partial explanation only and/or a failure to consider meaning in context, for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** offering a meaning for ‘little’ (such as in connection to the animal’s size) that did not relate to its specific use in this text and/or offering a relevant meaning for ‘elusive’ but not dealing with/repeating the word ‘highly’. In **1(b)(i)** some effective answers covered both aspects of the phrase by offering alternatives that worked well in context such as ‘not much’/‘hardly anything’.

(c) **Re-read paragraph 3 ('In March 2021 ... their preservation.').**

Give two possible reasons why the IUCN updated the forest elephant's status to 'critically endangered'.

In **Question 1(c)** many candidates re-reading paragraph 3 closely were able to identify all three reasons in the text – though only two were required to score maximum marks. Most had understood that it was the dramatic drop in numbers that prompted the IUCN to update the forest elephant's status and/or that the move was designed to raise public awareness. Many also suggested that the decision was a reaction to previous inaction, recasting the final sentence to communicate that idea clearly. Copying phrases/sections of paragraph 3 indiscriminately diluted evidence of understanding in some answers: for example, 'let alone taken steps to aid their preservation' on its own did not communicate understanding of a reason for the change in the elephant's status.

(d) **Re-read paragraphs 4 and 5 ('Genetic analysis ... curved tusks.').**

- (i) **Identify two methods by which scientists could tell that the savannah elephant and the forest elephant were different types.**
- (ii) **Explain how the physical features of forest and savannah elephants are different.**

Candidates who paid attention to command/key words in the question were best placed to offer creditworthy responses and make efficient use of their time. Effective answers were able to distinguish between the methods used by scientists (targeted in part (i) and the differences in physical features of the two elephants (required for part (ii)). On occasion, candidates offered suggestions in their answer to one part of the question that would have been more appropriate to the other. Responses to 1(d)(i) scoring just one mark had often spotted genetic analysis, but then lost sight of the question, moving on to describe features rather than methods. Likewise in 1(d)(ii), candidates paying attention to the word 'different' were careful to compare the description of each elephant in the text, reworking information to offer secure evidence of close reading and score the maximum 3 marks. At times opportunities to score were missed where information was copied or used incorrectly: for example, some suggested that savannah elephants had thicker, more curved ears/tasks.

(e) **Re-read paragraph 6 ('If we care about ... many other animals.').**

Using your own words, explain how the rainforest may be affected if the forest elephant ceases to exist.

In **Question 1(e)** the most effective explanations reworked the relevant information from paragraph 6, using their own words as appropriate, to identify three distinct effects on the rainforest if forest elephants did not exist. Some candidates offered evidence of their understanding of what would be lost – clearly outlining the current role of forest elephant – others explained how things would be without them; either approach was acceptable.

(f) **What makes volunteer tourism in an elephant park worthwhile for the animals and for the human volunteers, according to text B?**

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible. Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from Text B: Volunteering with elephants and some understanding of the requirements of the selective summary task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea, misreading and/or inclusion of extra details meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks. A failure to recast information from the passage to address the question sometimes diluted evidence of focus and/or understanding in less effective responses.

Where responses were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words and to keep their explanations concise. Overview was evidenced in some of the most effective answers where relevant ideas had been carefully selected from different parts of the text and organised helpfully for their reader – for example, to first deal with positives for the animals and

then to move on to how the human volunteers might benefit. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy and/or points that argued against experiences in elephant parks. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to demonstrate their understanding and effectively address the selective summary task.

The most effective responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned a route through the content of their answer before writing their response. Many had produced and followed a useful bullet point plan. There were some extremely effective and well-crafted responses that demonstrated both concision and precise understanding over a wide range of relevant ideas. In partially effective answers, excess often arose from attempts to offer unsolicited advice to anyone considering volunteering and/or focus was lost due to misreading of details such as who was paid for volunteering. Some reading less carefully did not make the distinction between volunteers working at the park and tourists visiting on a day trip. On occasion, there was repetition of ideas as the result of an unnecessary introduction or conclusion to the response.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible – without changing or blurring the original idea – and to organise points helpfully for their reader. However, some candidates overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task and offered lengthy explanation, with a few candidates continuing to write far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others adhered to the advised length of the response but took far too long to explain just a few, sometimes repeated, ideas.

The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to select only those ideas relevant to the focus of the question, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – for example, the argument that some ‘projects are unethical and frankly damaging to the well-being of elephants’ and/or the anecdotes around the behaviour of shy/brave members of one herd.

More effective responses were not dependant on the structure or language of Text B to communicate their ideas and were consequently able to offer more concise explanations. They remembered to keep in mind the dual focus of ‘animals’ and ‘human volunteers’, centred on worthwhile/positive aspects only and ignored/recast anything appearing in the original text as a disadvantage or less appealing possibility.

Less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer an own words version of the whole text in the order it was presented and often repeated ideas and/or included unnecessary or inappropriate detail as a result. In these answers, excess was often a significant feature limiting achievement. A small number of candidates misread or miscopied details in the text, for example suggesting incorrectly that volunteers could buy fruit and vegetables, set animals free and/or singlehandedly improve the image of conservation. Many missed opportunities to target own words and indicate more secure understanding by failing to reword phrases from the text such as ‘my self-confidence soared’ and ‘good balance’. Some copied out rather than interpreted phrases where the relevant idea was more implicit and needed to be teased out – for example suggesting that ‘picking up elephant dung for research’ was an advantage for anyone volunteering rather than showing understanding that the research aspect was what made this activity worthwhile.

The least effective responses were almost entirely reliant on the language of the original. Candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text and splicing them together is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(f):

- after reading the task instructions, re-read Text B to identify all those ideas that are potentially relevant to the focus of the question
- discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the specific focus of the question
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan - check that they are distinct and complete

- identify in your plan where you have repeated ideas or listed similar examples which could be covered instead by one ‘umbrella’ point
- return to the text to ‘sense check’ any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- organise and sequence your ideas to make them clear to your reader; do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the original text
- explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the text themselves would understand
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- check back after writing your answer to ensure that you have included all of the ideas you planned to, but not repeated anything
- you do not need to count every word, but you should keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ and aim to be concise.

Question 2

(a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) Different terrains and landscapes were spread far and wide over River Game Reserve.
- (ii) The rain on the night that the elephants arrived was extremely heavy.
- (iii) The elephants escaping the game reserve were moving quickly and with heavy footsteps towards their former home.
- (iv) Celia was strong enough to have pulled Lawrence into the elephant enclosure.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified the correct word or phrase from Text C: River Game Reserve to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example in each part of **Question 2(a)** – simply and efficiently giving the exact word or phrase only as their answer. Candidates should note that it is not necessary to write answers to **Question 2(a)** in full sentences and providing only the words required to answer the question is likely to be a more efficient use of their examination time.

Marks were sometimes missed where answers were unfocused – for example, offering responses that covered only part of the meaning of the underlined phrase, or adding in extra words from the text that went beyond the meaning of the underlined words, such as ‘a beautiful mix of river, savannah and forest’ in **2(a)(i)** or ‘through the wires’ in **2(a)(iv)**. Very occasionally, candidates had misread the instruction to ‘identify a word or phrase from the text’ and tried to offer an explanation of meaning in their own words. A few unsuccessful answers to part **ii** were given in relation to the size of the trucks (such as huge/articulated) rather than the rain.

(b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

Just as the trucks pulled into the game reserve, a tyre exploded, and the vehicle tilted dangerously in the mud. My heart froze at the elephants’ terrified trumpeting and screeching. It wasn’t until dawn that we managed to get them into the secure enclosure.

- (i) exploded
- (ii) froze
- (iii) screeching

In **Question 2(b)**, some answers offered just one carefully chosen word or phrase as their answer, whilst others offered longer explanations as evidence of their understanding. Either approach could be creditworthy, though candidates should be careful not to dilute evidence of understanding by offering several suggestions and extra guesses of different meanings that are contradictory and/or not in line with the text. Effective answers had considered the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined, recognising for example that froze was being used figuratively to suggest that it felt to Francis like her heart had stopped and was not connected to cold temperatures or ice. A number of candidates were unsure of the precise meaning of ‘screeching’ – for example, suggesting incorrectly that it meant stopping suddenly or too generally that it was a noise made by the elephants. Many were able to offer a reasonable suggestion for the meaning of exploded in part **(i)** though not all managed to communicate understanding of the force involved and so couldn’t not be credited – for example suggesting far milder, less accurate, guesses such as punctured, deflated or cracked.

(c) Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests Lawrence's feelings about the situation with the elephants.

Use your own words in your explanation.

Night after night, Lawrence stayed as close to the secure enclosure as he dared, singing to those angry elephants, talking to them and telling them stories until he was hoarse. With tender determination and no shortage of foolhardiness, Lawrence breached Celia's terror of humans and gained her trust.

In **Question 2(c)**, those candidates who had focused clearly on using just one example taken from the text extract as instructed were best placed to demonstrate their understanding. Some underlined or bracketed their chosen example in the text, others copied it out as a subheading for their explanation; either approach was acceptable.

Effective answers included those which began with an explanation of the meaning of the key word(s) in their example, ahead of going on to explain what those meaning(s) suggested about Lawrence's feelings at that point. Many responses centred their answer around all/part of the description of Lawrence 'singing to those angry elephants, talking to them and telling them stories until he was hoarse' though not all were able to find their own words to explain it and instead repeated phrases/words from within the extract such as that it showed determination and/or how he wanted to gain their trust. Other candidates selected 'tender determination' as their chosen example and were generally able to exploit this to good effect, suggesting something of the mixture of compassion and sheer grit it indicated. Some who had selected the whole image of 'tender determination and no shortage of foolhardiness' missed opportunities to target higher marks by not explaining/understanding the oxymoron. Some misinterpreted the phrase 'no shortage of foolhardiness' to mean that Lawrence was not being foolhardy and should have been. Relatively few candidates chose to explain the word 'dared' – even when they had selected the example 'stayed as close to the secure enclosure as he dared', though those who did were often able to unpack it particularly effectively and score full marks.

The most effective responses had carefully noted the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less effective responses often attempted to discuss more than one example – time that might have been more profitably spent in **Question 2(d)** where there were up to 15 marks available. Some less effective responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted unwisely to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms. On occasion, opportunities were missed to offer evidence of understanding of Lawrence's feelings by selecting an example that did not relate to his feelings – for example 'gained her trust' was selected and misrepresented as evidence that Lawrence trusted Celia.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 1 and 2.

- Paragraph 1 begins 'Whenever Celia, the lead elephant ...' and is about Celia and her elephant babies visiting the narrator and Lawrence's home on River Game Reserve.
- Paragraph 2 begins 'Celia has a soft spot ...' and is about Celia's attitude to Lawrence.

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

Effective responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of **six** choices (three relevant selections from each paragraph) often beginning by explaining the literal meaning of the choice and then moving on to explore effect. Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language through detailed discussion of focused choices centred around images, individual words or phrases. Where candidates had considered all of the key words in slightly longer choices they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses, though candidates do need to be careful to choose and explain examples of interesting or powerful language use precisely and deliberately, rather than simply offer whole sentences from the paragraph with a general comment in the hope there will be something useful in there. Occasionally some candidates did not indicate any clear choices for explanation, offering instead a general summary of each paragraph that did not address the task and could not be credited.

Some candidates used each of their choices as a sub-heading for their explanation of it to good effect, though candidates repeating the language of the text within their explanations missed opportunities to target higher marks. The most effective responses considered words within their choices individually, as well as suggesting how they worked within the longer phrase and/or in the context of the description as a whole. Rather than selecting the first three choices in each half they came across, or the most ‘obvious’ literary devices, effective responses often set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain. Some of the most effective responses spent some time exploring interesting contrasts between how the words were working in this context and their initial expectations of those words – for example noting that ‘gossipy catch-up’ might usually refer to casual conversation between close human friends, yet here the interaction was between a human and an elephant. The best responses had often recognised that the romanticised and amusing presentation of the relationship was coming to readers from the perspective of Frances. Responses at level 5 frequently analysed their choices precisely and offered answers that were balanced across both parts of the question. In the mid-range, answers were often uneven in favour of one paragraph or the other and opportunities were missed where the same or very similar general suggestion was offered for more than one choice.

Choices from paragraph one often centred around the idea of the elephants’ curiosity with candidates recognising that their motivations were being offered to us as if they were capable of human thought. Not all however had understood that although the visits being described came in paragraph one of the text these events were happening a considerable time after the elephants’ arrival, with the elephants now perceived by Frances as presenting little or no actual threat to either humans or the cat. ‘Immediately curl up like periscopes’ was a popular choice – though where it had been chosen simply as it was an example of a simile candidates sometimes found difficulty in explaining it. Some answers suggested that there might be military associations in the use of periscopes to scan – connecting with the idea of spying on a target ahead of a mission – but missed opportunities to connect to other choices in the paragraph such as ‘daring(fruit) raid’ or ‘charge’ to offer an overview. Likewise images connected to the ‘exuberant elephant babies’ movement and/or physical presence in paragraph one were identified by many, though fewer considered precisely the nature of the features and actions described, with only the most effective answers explaining precisely how ‘gangling’, ‘floppy’ and ‘swinging’ might suggest their uncoordinated, carefree immaturity. A number commented generally that the baby elephants sounded ‘cute’/like toys but did not always support that suggestion with close reference to relevant words such as ‘bundle’, ‘tiny’ and ‘floppy’.

Occasionally, limiting their comments to an explanation of just one word within longer choices meant some candidates offered partially effective explanations only – for example, not all considered the word ‘appetising’ in ‘appetising whiff’ and so overlooked what it suggested about the elephants’ intentions regarding the fruit. Many less effective answers dealing with the popular choices of ‘blissful slumbers’ and/or ‘rudely disturbed’ did little more than repeat /replay the wording of the text, sometimes going on to demonstrate misunderstanding by suggesting incorrectly that the baby elephants chased Lawrence.

More general initial comments around the endearing relationship between Celia and Lawrence as described in paragraph two were carefully supported by examination of relevant choices in a good number of answers, with some candidates then going on to compare and contrast effectively the potential power of the beast as suggested by rumbles and the control/affection implied by the careful/relaxed movement of the animal. Others limited their success overall by simply repeating over and over in relation to paragraph two, the idea of the Celia and Lawrence having a comfortable friendship/the two caring for each other, without discussing how, in what way(s) or why a particular image suggested that. Some misinterpreted ‘ambles’ as suggesting a quick forceful movement and/or offered the incorrect idea that Celia loved Lawrence so much she was struggling through dense scrubland to be with Lawrence.

The least effective answers to **2(d)** offered generic empty comments such as ‘The writer’s use of language is very effective’ and ‘The writer has used lots of adjectives and images to describe how the elephants visit the house’. Comments like these are not helpful to candidates since they do not evidence any understanding of how language is working in a particular given section of the text and can create a false sense of security, meaning candidates move on without saying anything more concrete. Satisfactory responses to the task offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each example they had chosen, whilst stronger answers also identified effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, using explanation of precise meaning/what you could ‘see happening’ in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect. Less effective

responses often only labelled devices and/or offered no more than a generic explanation of the writer's reasons for using them.

Repetition of the vocabulary of the text to communicate ideas in the explanations offered was common in less effective responses – in particular, 'soft', 'scent' and 'greeting' were often repeated. Repetition of the same generalised explanation for each choice by some candidates often meant that they missed opportunities to present more convincing evidence of their understanding. Likewise labelling of devices was offered by some candidates in place of more fruitful exploration and explanation of the language itself, meaning opportunities to target higher levels were missed.

In **Question 2(d)**, it is the quality of the analysis when considering how language is being used which attracts marks. Candidates are reminded that their Writing skills are not being assessed in this question. They should be encouraged to work at the very edges of their vocabulary range as they explore and explain each choice – reaching to find the right words to help explain their choice precisely, rather than limiting their answer to those words they are sure they can spell correctly, could be helpful for some candidates.

Answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are unlikely to be useful and/or result in very thin general comments at best. Opportunities were missed in a small number of answers where choices were from one paragraph only or only three choices were offered overall. The most effective answers were often able to 'talk their reader through' their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, ahead of arriving at an understanding of how and why these particular words might have been used by the writer in this context.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- make sure that the quotations you select from the text are precise; do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- copy words and choices correctly from the text
- in each part of **2(a)** make sure that your selection is from Text C and is clearly identified; remember you are looking for just a word or phrase to match the sense of the underlined words in the question
- in **2(b)** be careful that your explanation is consistent with how the word is used in context (if unsure, try substituting your answer in the text to check it)
- in **2(c)** try to say three separate things about your one chosen example
- in **2(d)**, choose 3 examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (6 choices in total)
- only offer an overview in **2(d)** if you have spotted that there is a relevant connection between your chosen choices in a paragraph
- where you are trying to explain meaning, read your answer back to check that your explanation makes sense
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as 'the writer helps us to picture the scene'; you need to say how your chosen example does this to show your understanding
- make sure your explanations in **2(d)** deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- when you are unsure how to explain the effect in **2(d)**, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) in the choice and work from there
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

Question 3

You are Lawrence. You are interviewed about the elephants in River Game Reserve for a magazine article about animal conservation.

The interviewer asks you the following three questions only.

- How did you come to be responsible for the elephants and what were your concerns before they arrived?
- What challenges did you face when the elephants came into your care and how did you deal with them?
- How are the elephants settling now and what advice would you give other game reserve owners about elephants?

Write the words of the interview.

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with Text C, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to adopt the perspective of the narrator's husband, Lawrence, in this extended Response to Reading task. The task guidance invited candidates to write the words of Lawrence's interview with a journalist writing an article about animal conservation for a magazine. Some candidates missed the opportunity to offer and develop a range of key ideas appropriately by opting instead to answer the question as Frances and limited the development they were able to offer as a result.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood both the narrative and task in at least general terms. Some in the mid-range though misused potentially useful details and information in their explanation of how the elephants came to be at the reserve (bullet one) and/or confused timescales – for example, suggesting that Lawrence had first met the elephants when they attempted a fruit raid on his house and/or that Lawrence and Celia had been firm friends before her herd moved in. Some moved away from evidence in this text completely to suggest that Lawrence had been volunteering at an elephant park and/or had bought a reserve where elephants were previously being exploited or mistreated. Where candidates had planned their response beforehand they were often able to draw on relevant ideas and details from throughout the text to address each bullet effectively, with some choosing to begin their answer with bullet 3 by offering advice to other game reserve owners supported by evaluation of Lawrence and Frances' own experience as detailed in the text.

In mid-range answers, ideas for bullet two were often only touched on through recounting some of the details of the elephants' arrival in the trucks and subsequent escape, whereas more secure responses were able to offer development by interpreting the experience from Lawrence's viewpoint looking back. In bullet three, some candidates did little more than repeat the question asserting that the elephants were settled now, without any details in support of that and/or a failure to address the second part of the question re advice. Candidates responding to the text and task more carefully were able to pick up on suggestions that though challenging and potentially risky, the experience of adopting the elephants was something had Lawrence found rewarding, with the elephants now acclimatised and feeling like part of the family. Many were able to advise against underestimating the intelligence of the animals and also teased out a range of ideas effectively by considering the subtle differences in behaviour and response between the herd as whole, the baby elephants and the lead elephant, Celia. The best answers often recognised that the process of settling in the elephants had taken several years and were able to suggest both the patience required and the effect that the twists and turns in that process had had at various points on the feelings of the humans involved.

Responses that relied on mechanically tracking back through the text and replaying the passage often offered a more limited range of ideas overall, missing opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas and suggestions. The least effective responses copied sections of text with minimal modification and/or included inaccuracies as a result of misreading of key details and information for example, some reading less closely suggested that Celia was Lawrence's wife and/or that Frances was Lawrence's husband.

The best answers showed evidence that candidates had identified relevant ideas and details from the text before writing, considering which bullet the information they had located best suited and how the perspective of Lawrence, might differ from/add to that of the narrator Frances. For example, some answers suggested that Frances' amused recollections were somewhat different from her initial feelings and that she had needed time to become relaxed and trusting of the elephants.

On the whole, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of an interview and many were able to write reflectively, establishing and maintaining an appropriately formal/casual register according to their interpretation of the scenario. Occasionally, candidates chose to write as if Lawrence was on a TV or radio show, which though outside the details of the task did not generally get in the way. However, where candidates lost sight of both the form and purpose for writing for example writing a speech for new reserve owners and/or a letter home about their experiences of working with elephants, responses were likely to be less effective. In the least effective responses, overreliance on the language of the text limited success and/or expression became awkward as a consequence of poor control and/or inconsistencies of style. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to read back through their response to correct any mistakes or weaknesses in their use of language – for example to ensure that meaning is clear and that the register sounds consistently appropriate. In the least effective answers, copying whole sections of text was not uncommon. This adversely affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- remember to base your answer on the ideas and details you find in Text C only
- keep in mind the audience, form and purpose for your response
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain that in your answer
- do not invent information and details beyond the scope of the passage; look for the clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements about characters and situations
- give equal attention to each of the three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas
- plan a route through your answer beforehand: you can choose not to follow the order of the bullet points and / or link ideas from each
- do not copy directly from the text: use your own words as far as you can to express ideas
- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas allows you to better show your understanding, for example by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0990/22
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were fifteen marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

Scripts awarded high marks showed evidence that candidates were able to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise responses effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions or engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should determine the style adopted
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task.

General comments

Most candidates were familiar with the format of the examination paper and understood what was required for both the directed writing and composition questions. There were only a few very brief scripts, incomplete scripts or scripts in which the instructions regarding which questions to answer were not followed. There were a small number of responses to **Question 1** which were entirely copied from the texts, though Examiners noticed an increase in the number of **Question 1** responses which contained only a few comments which were not copied from the texts. A few scripts included no response to **Question 1** but nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted it, as well as either a descriptive or narrative writing task. Most responses were written in candidates' own words. Some lifting of phrases or sentences was fairly common but where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing.

In **Section B**, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were stories submitted for the descriptive writing tasks which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure. **Question 5** was sometimes addressed in more of a descriptive than narrative style and some responses to this question were simple accounts of holidays rather than developed narratives. These approaches sometimes limited the Content and Structure mark available because the mark scheme directs Examiners to reward features of narrative writing.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the question of whether young people should or need to learn to cook for **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for an article with an audience of young people. The register required here was interpreted in different ways with some responses more formal in style while others adopted a conversational tone which showed an awareness of what would engage a younger readership. In a less appropriate attempt to adopt a suitable register, some used an overly colloquial, less accurate style, using words such as 'kinda' and 'gonna'. Effective responses made use of more subtle stylistic devices to show an understanding of young people, their lives and concerns.

The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response. Some opinion was usually given, based on ideas in the texts, about whether learning to cook was necessary in the modern world, with a minority simply reporting the facts and ideas in the texts with no comment on them. More effective responses tended to comment on specific ideas in the texts rather than offer general impressions about cooking and to probe some ideas in the texts rather than reproduce them. Rather than outlining the various attitudes about

learning to cook which appeared in the texts, some interesting discussions addressed the ways in which modern life made such skills redundant, an unnecessary waste of time or simply a personal hobby.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. There was often at this level some misunderstanding of which named protagonists held which beliefs, for example, and some salient ideas in the texts were not quite addressed, such as whether learning to cook was necessary nowadays. There was some assertion rather than argument, particularly with reference to the assumed unhealthy nature of ordered food.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Effective evaluation often addressed ideas about cooking for family and friends helping to create a happy home environment or the ways in which learning to cook helped young people transition into independence and adulthood. Less well considered responses sometimes gave a summary of the ideas in the texts but without the focus on how learning to cook would affect the lives of young people. The structure and organisation of ideas required in an article, often including some rhetorical sub-headings or clear lines of argument, were used more effectively in better responses to persuade and argue a case. Less effective responses were often written in a straightforward style with less consistent awareness of the audience and purpose of the task.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. There were some imaginative descriptions of streets and roads for **Question 2**, some showing detailed familiarity with specific highways in candidates' towns and cities and focused on the stark contrast between the conditions before and during the rainstorm. Less effective responses to this question were sometimes framed narratively with overlong preambles about why the narrator was travelling on the road and less detailed observation of what could be seen and heard. For the second descriptive question, there were some highly original interpretations, such as moving house and carrying pianos under the watchful eyes of curious neighbours or, more metaphorically, carrying the crushing burden of fear and isolation at school. Ineffective responses here described quite ordinary scenes or ones which lacked context, such as carrying a large box into a house. Some responses focused on the strain on the body of carrying such objects but fairly quickly ran out of ideas and language with which to describe such effects.

Both narrative writing questions proved popular across the range of abilities. In **Question 4**, the title was used in a very wide variety of interesting ways. Effective narratives were sometimes constructed around the idea of a moment of enlightenment in which the phrase in the question ('I saw the light') was used figuratively, although many effective responses used the idea of seeing the light more physically as ambulance headlights, emergency room lights or torchlight in the darkness. This use of light to help structure the narrative's resolution was often important in the creation of a believable response to this question.

Question 5 elicited some highly engaging and well-constructed narratives. Effective narratives featured islands which were significant in different ways and gave stories more than an interesting backdrop. Shipwrecks or more commonly plane crash scenarios featured often, though, as always, only effective writers were able to evoke believable characters and landscapes in such extreme circumstances. Ineffective **Question 5** responses tended to be simple chronological accounts of holidays on rather stereotypical tropical islands in which the activities on each day were recounted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Write an article for a teenage magazine with the title ‘What’s the point of learning to cook?’

In your article you should:

- **evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions given in both texts about young people and cooking**
- **give your views on whether or not young people need to cook and want to cook.**

Base your article on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. Where the article was also accurate and ambitious in vocabulary and style, with a clear understanding of the appropriate style and register for the specific task and audience, Examiners awarded high marks for Writing.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the implications of ideas in the texts, with the highest Reading marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views evaluatively and with confidence. The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates’ achievement in the Reading component of the mark. These implicit ideas often involved the changing landscape of modern life, the proliferation of food delivery apps and whether the benefits of learning to cook justified the amount of time and commitment required. Many responses, for example, discussed the ease with which food could be delivered and some thoughtful candidates assessed the implied criticism of young people in Text A for their use of modern technology as unfair or unfounded. One candidate suggested that Text A’s writer showed a distaste for young people’s use of technology which ‘shed more light on his own insecurity as a chef than on young people’s ability to make a choice about cooking for themselves, a choice previous generations simply did not have.’ Similarly, some candidates sensitively discussed the unrealistic demands of cooking and the sense of guilt induced in Text B’s writer as unnecessary and undesirable in this day and age when only aspiring chefs needed to learn to cook.

Inferences which could be drawn from some ideas in the texts were also used in more effective responses. Some, for example, emphasised the boost in self-confidence and self-esteem that learning to cook could give a young person as well as the opportunities it provided to show practical care and affection in ways which helped families to bond together.

One less common but valid inference challenged the idea that learning to cook was more economical than relying on deliveries. The waste of ingredients and time implied by the anecdote and the comment that there was ‘lots of room for error’ in Text B undermined for some candidates the assertion that cooking for oneself was cheaper. Some further argued that to spend many hours learning to cook was unjustified when there were more pressing demands on young people’s time in terms of academics and careers. Similarly, while some emphasised the benefit to the individual’s confidence in learning to cook, another valid inference was made that the sense of inadequacy and humiliation felt by the writer of Text B made learning to cook a riskier choice.

In less effective responses where sensible use was made of the texts without such probing and challenging of ideas, there were often opinions about whether young people should learn to cook based on the various attitudes discussed in the texts. Some straightforward reproduction of explicit ideas often concluded with a judgement about the appeal of learning to cook for young people, usually suggesting that being able to cook would be useful in the future. Some concluded that there was no reason any more to learn to cook because delivery apps were much more convenient. In many middle-range responses, fairly simple compromises

such as cooking for yourself on some days of the week but allowing for deliveries on other days showed a clear understanding of the topic as a whole but lacked evaluation of specific ideas in the texts.

Marks for reading

The most effective responses adopted a consistently evaluative, critical stance and read effectively between the lines of the texts, drawing inferences and making judgements about how the modern world had changed the equation in the debate about whether young people should learn to cook.

Most responses in Level 5 or 6 for Reading included reference to various ways in which being able to cook improved young people's self-esteem, independence in the future and their relationships with their family and friends. More nuanced and developed ideas included people's tendency to have a rosy view of the past in which the ability to cook contributed to a rather idealised family life which was not entirely credible. As one candidate wrote, 'Learn to cook if you want but be under no delusion that it will transform your life into some Hollywood movie. There'll be a kitchen full of dishes and not everyone will like what you've cooked.' Another candidate commented on the place of home cooking in creating this nostalgia: 'No warm feelings of togetherness and loving family life were ever created by a call to a delivery app but at whose expense will such a lovely picture be created?' The extent to which these kinds of ideas were addressed often determined whether a response could be given a Level 5 mark for Reading and in some cases a range of more evaluative comments merited a Level 6 mark.

Responses awarded marks in Level 5 characteristically offered one or two evaluative ideas but sometimes with less consistent probing and challenging of ideas in the texts. There were often sensible ideas about how individuals might benefit from learning to cook, such as opening up career opportunities as a chef, but wider considerations about how modern technology had changed perceptions about the need to learn to cook or the meaning of cooking in modern life were less well addressed. Most candidates did not understand or detect the deliberate irony in Text A's evocation of the past and how young people used to cook, tending to take at face value the idea that all young people were willing and able to cook in the past.

Where some comment or opinion was offered, mostly without specific reference to particular points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks in Level 4 were usually awarded. These comments were usually less selective and included some details which were factually accurate but not evaluative, such as the availability of online recipes, and in some responses the anecdote in Text B was rephrased but not really commented on. More general, if valid, ideas were also typical at this level with many responses including suggestions about how frequently food delivery apps should be used. At this level, there was often also some misreading of details so that Jimmy Marron and the writer of Text B were thought to be the same person and Lawrence, the host in Text B's anecdote, was also confused with the writer of the text.

Examiners usually awarded marks in Level 3 for Reading where there was some coverage of the texts, and some selection of ideas from them, but these were listed or simply recorded. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but limited comment on them. Where there were some brief opinions, usually at the end of the response, they tended to be more general and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts. The regretful tone of Text B was sometimes replicated but without considering its implications and there was sometimes some drifting from the main focus of the task to a discussion of the perceived poor nutritional values of delivered food, a point not made in the texts.

Comments made at this level were given mostly in candidates' own words. Less effective responses tended to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in low Level 3 and below contained much copied material. In a few cases the entire response was copied from the texts. Where a mark of 6 was awarded, some firmer roots in the passages were needed, whereas 5 was generally given for thin or lifted responses in which there was some secure grasp of the ideas in the passage.

Marks for Writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for an engaging, informative article for an audience of young people. Most responses showed a clear understanding of the required, largely formal but engaging register, even where technical writing skills were ineffective, and this allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Some high scoring

responses used a rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in a more combative or humorous way. These responses made their case effectively and with some impact. At the highest level, responses were more subtle, often adopting a direct, personal tone which gave a sense of a shared landscape between the young person writing the articles and those reading it. One candidate, for example, appealed to the reader's perception of how young people wanted to live: 'I do not know about you but I have better things to do than make a complete fool of myself while trying to cook. There'll be time to learn to cook later but there's a life out there to be lived right now!'

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks for Writing in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage young people often worked well. Conversely, some responses were generally accurate but were largely summaries of the reading material rather than adopting the style of an article or the register appropriate for a young audience. Sometimes, in reaching for an engaging, age-appropriate style and register, colloquialisms and slang were used, detracting from the maturity required by the arguments and the circumstances of examination writing.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent style. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for Examiners to reward. These kinds of responses were fairly rare though perhaps more common than previously. Phrases and words from the texts were often copied but in some cases several sentences were also copied. More commonly, a range of expressions was lifted to express some ideas which could then not be credited for either Reading or Writing. For example, the reference to 'Any enthusiasm has drained away' in Text B was lifted without grammatical adaptation. In more effective responses, ideas were incorporated into the writer's own style and selected for their usefulness to the overall argument rather than copied.

Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the introductory paragraph and the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a cohesive piece, though this was rare. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered to some degree in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more dependent on the sequencing of the original texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas, with some contradiction of points taken from each text. The idea that While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were asserted and imposed on the structure of the original texts rather than argued for.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as subtle in tone and register was given a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were not only engaging in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader. Some complex sentences structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation within sentences.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually fairly plain, the language used was generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There were lapses in the use

of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical mis-agreement, often between plurals and verb forms. Common spelling errors in this mark range included some frequently used words such as 'convenient', 'delicious' and 'delivery'.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tenses or too much lifted or copied material often kept Writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was quite common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Level 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content or the style of the response was the candidate's own.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- **be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts**
- **look for contradictions in the arguments and point them out**
- **group ideas from both texts together and discuss them rather than repeat them**
- **think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience**
- **check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.**

Section B

Descriptive writing

Describe a busy road before and after it rains.

Describe moving something heavy.

The first descriptive writing question was a very popular choice for candidates and Examiners awarded a wide range of marks for these responses. A sense of place at a specific time before a rainstorm, brought to life in some vivid ways in the most effective responses to this question, was often key to the success of the piece. Some named city streets and highways were described in detail with a strong sense of familiarity on the part of the candidates. These descriptions included some vivid pictures of pedestrians walking along the road, such as the saffron robes of monks 'like bright flashes of colour amid the drab grey of morning commuters' and the street vendors hawking their wares in various stalls alongside the road. Such descriptions gave candidates opportunities for other sense impressions such as the 'rich dark scent of strong coffee' or a fleeting waft of perfume from a passer-by, though many responses included references to the smell of exhaust fumes or the melting tarmac of the road in blistering heat. The atmosphere of boredom or irritation shown by drivers in heavy traffic was a productive focus for many writers. In one response, for example, the distant rumble of thunder 'broke through the torpor of the man driving to work on the same busy road for the thousandth time, like a line of a song long forgotten'. The wandering attention of another driver was described in interesting detail: 'A scruffy bird pecking at the cracks between paving stones caught his eye, reaching into his memory for better times, sunnier times, with his children on the beach chasing seagulls off the picnic stretched out on a blanket on the sand.'

In some responses, figurative language was used to good effect. A quiet country lane on which a lone car travelled was described as 'a ribbon of tranquillity meandering through the green countryside' and on a much busier city road the heat of the sun 'bore down malevolently on the seething, sweating masses below.' The implied contrast in the task – 'before and after it rains' – gave many candidates an opportunity to create cohesive, well-constructed descriptions in which details described before the rain became transformed after the storm. The potholes in the road, for example, created 'slaloms of obstacles to swerve around' before the rain whereas once filled with rainwater they became 'bone-crunching lakes hidden under the gushing river of water' after the storm. Street vendors, previously vying for pedestrians' attention, now rushed to save their produce as they scurried for cover. In some responses, the rain was a welcome relief from searing heat and the language and images used to provide the contrast underscored this sense of relief: 'The young delivery driver, sweltering in his over-packed, cheap car, wound down his window and breathed in the cool air, smiling under the splashing rain as if it was a gift from God.' These contrasting details often helped to give responses an effective structure.

Question 3 was a less popular choice but elicited a range of different kinds of heavy objects or sometimes moods and states of mind, all carried with difficulty. In more concrete descriptions, objects such as heavy pieces of furniture featured commonly, such as a piano which had to be winched through an apartment window or a huge box whose contents were only revealed at the end of the piece to contain a litter of puppies. Descriptions of strained sinews and aching muscles were sometimes effective though some candidates quickly exhausted their vocabulary and images to describe the effect on the body of carrying a heavy object. In other descriptions, the idea of 'moving' was interpreted more loosely and sometimes gave more scope for detail. One highly evocative piece, for example, described a suburban street in which a removal van arrived, much to the fascination of prying neighbours, from which a magnificent piano was carried onto the pavement. The focus here was on the effects created on the neighbours, the family moving their belongings into the house and the sights, sounds and other sensations created by the moving of the piano.

The question was sometimes interpreted more metaphorically. There were some evocative responses describing characters carrying the heavy burden of guilt, depression or loneliness. These were often made effective by setting them in specific places and contexts, such as the description of an isolated and frightened child navigating a day in school. The sense of a heavy burden of anxiety and fear was brought alive by some interesting images, such as the 'crushing weight of misery' which was described as 'pushing my shoulders down and my eyes to the floor.'

In both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created engaging, evocative scenes in the best responses. Where they were sustained and developed and showed skill in building a detailed, convincing overall picture, Examiners could award marks for Content and Structure in Level 6. These consciously crafted pieces held the reader's attention by linking the different elements described in an interesting, cohesive response. Level 6 responses often employed this cohesive structure, as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images or extended motifs which held the piece together.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but usually more predictable or less ambitious. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas or, as was sometimes the case for **Question 3**, were a little brief as candidates ran out of ideas to describe the same effects.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to become more narrative in intent, and while most responses at this level were organised and paragraphed, the details included were simple and there was less use of images or a range of vocabulary.

A lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing was evident in responses at Level 3, although they were sometimes fairly accurately written. These were often entirely narrative or brief and undeveloped.

Narrative writing

Write a story including the words '... I saw the light ...'.

Write a story with the title, 'The island'.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range though **Question 4** proved to be a more common option than **Question 5**. There was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses as candidates took the opportunities offered by the open questions to determine the genre, style and content for themselves. Examiners occasionally saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title, which sometimes seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations or were pre-prepared. In some cases, this lack of relevance affected the mark for Content and Structure because the words to be included in the narrative in **Question 4** responses, or the island setting in **Question 5**, were incidental rather than integral to the narrative as a whole.

Effective responses were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension, mystery or drama and to vary the pace of the story were essential elements of more effective responses to both questions. In **Question 4**, more effective responses often used the device of seeing a light as a form of rescue from difficult situations. These varied across the ability range though similar scenarios were used in responses which were both less effective and highly effective. For example, accidents or finding oneself lost in various circumstances were common threads in **Question 4** responses but the

success of the piece often relied on how well realised the characters were or how well the descriptive elements in the narrative helped to bring alive the setting and make credible the scene depicted. Flares in war zones, seeing a welcome light while trying to find a way back to familiar places or people, realising that the light was in a hospital as the narrator came round after an accident: these all featured in many responses though in more high-scoring ones the story was well-developed and structured to engage the reader. In one response, twin sisters whose different characters were depicted with economy and clarity swapped seats and jerseys in a car which then crashed. The story ended with a chilling detail as their mother pulled away from the narrator, the surviving daughter, realising that the light in the hospital was shining on the face of her favourite, now dead twin. Here, as in many effective narratives, the characterisation ensured that the dramatic story was credible and genuinely engaging. In another effective response, an arrogant, over-competitive swimmer, coached by his father, saw another bright, hospital light after learning a lesson in humility in a race in which he was injured. One intriguing use of a light in the cockpit of a plane gave way to a nightmarish scene of an airplane crash, complete with vivid details of the narrator's sensations. This well-realised, compelling segment was revealed at the end to be the fevered imaginings of a newly trained pilot embarking on her first proper flight.

Some more figurative use was made of the 'light' idea in the task and these narratives were often quite effective. Realising that a character or situation was not what was assumed, leading to a moment of revelation or sudden enlightenment often worked quite well as the basis for an effective narrative if, as always, the candidate paid attention to scene-setting and characterisation rather than simply relating events.

Most narratives addressing this question were chronological accounts with varying degrees of development, characterisation and shaping although some candidates chose more ambitious structures, telling the story from the vantage point of hindsight or from two different characters' perspectives. While such structures were more difficult to control, Examiners could often reward these approaches for their ambition and engagement.

More commonly in the middle range, narratives were fairly straightforward accounts in which events tended to dominate and there was more limited attention paid to characterisation and setting. Plotlines often involved more mundane or, conversely, rather unlikely, extreme scenarios. These narratives were often organised and somewhat cohesive but did not really engage the reader.

Examiners saw some stories which were not always well-adapted but based on previous questions or which sometimes had limited relevance to the task in hand. Content and Structure marks were sometimes detrimentally affected in these cases.

For **Question 5**, there were many different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability. In many responses, the setting of an island was essential to the narrative, providing some sense of jeopardy or an inability to escape from difficulties. Many protagonists found themselves on the island as a result of storms or the malfunctioning of boats, while many others involved plane crashes. As mentioned above, these scenarios were common to responses across the mark range but effective responses relied less on events and more on characterisation, the withholding of some information to create intrigue and descriptive elements which brought the island setting to life in a credible way. In one response, the island became a restorative, healing environment for a character who was mocked as a failure by others, including his family, in an incident told economically to highlight the character's sense of hopelessness and victimhood. Stories about airplane crashes on deserted islands, another common scenario, were made more effective by strong descriptions of the surroundings and a clear sense of one or two characters, their motivations and personalities, rather than a series of events. In one response, the apparently lone survivor from a plane crash was terrifyingly woken from fitful sleep by another and the relationship between them which developed created real interest for the reader until they were rescued.

Less effective responses to this question tended to make more predictable use of the island setting and although many in the middle range were organised and sequenced fairly cohesively, characters lacked some subtlety and depth compared with the more well-realised scenarios mentioned above. Most plotlines at this level involved similar themes such as airplane crashes but holidays on idyllic islands also featured, sometimes with zombies or other murderers. These turns of events were often not properly signalled and the characters were often not developed enough to engage the reader's interest and sympathy.

Ineffective responses to this question were typically simpler versions of these scenarios in which there was some organisation but little sense of character emerged or where brevity and simplicity precluded Examiners from awarding higher marks for Content and Structure. Simple accounts of holidays in island resorts were common in the lower mark ranges.

Examiners awarded marks in Level 6 for Content and Structure for narratives which created convincing, interesting scenarios and characters in responses to both questions. While the events in a story were important in creating such credibility, Level 6 responses paid attention to characterisation and how events were driven by character traits, choices and relationships.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless cohesive and reasonably credible for the reader. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed, relevant story. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts but contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying, if not always engaging, resolution. Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks in both narrative questions, for Level 5 marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than ineffective organisation were typical at this level. In **Question 4**, for example, these resolutions sometimes involved simple accounts of getting lost in forests, caves or haunted houses from which characters were rescued by others carrying torches. At this level there was a tendency to say simply what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by characterisation and setting. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing credible characters. While the majority of less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

High marks for Style and Accuracy for all composition questions were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6 and where it was coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. Correct punctuation of speech was rare, even where responses showed a high degree of accuracy otherwise.

Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate while Level 4 responses were plain in style and there was a more limited range of vocabulary. Speech punctuation was almost always problematic at this level, creating confusion for the reader, although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as ineffective sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors.

Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 marks, such as mis-agreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary. Switches between tenses were very common in both descriptive and narrative writing at this level. In descriptions, tenses sometimes fluctuated between past and present and in narratives there was often confusion between different forms of past tense. For example, 'She had seen the island in the distance' was used where 'She saw the island in the distance' was grammatically required. Occasionally, the use of obscure, archaic vocabulary, the meaning of which was not well understood, seriously affected the clarity of the writing and resulted in lower marks for Style and Accuracy.

Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A common reason for keeping an otherwise clearly written story out of Level 5 was ineffective demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed but sometimes sentence separation was missing altogether.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative**
- **consider imaginative ways to tell your story, not just a chronological account**

- **characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader; do not rely on actions**
- **check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes: accurate speech punctuation will help to lift your mark**
- **use complicated vocabulary only where you can do so with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/03
Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and context for each of the three assignments
- read critically and thoroughly evaluated the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions, and attitudes they identified in a text in **Assignment 1**
- assimilated ideas from a text to provide developed, thoughtful and sophisticated responses in **Assignment 1**
- supported their analysis, evaluation and comments with a detailed and specific selection of relevant ideas from a text in **Assignment 1**
- wrote original and interesting responses which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of events and situations
- wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect in all assignments
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of argument, description, or narrative
- demonstrated a high level of accuracy in their writing
- engaged in a process of careful editing and proofreading to identify and correct errors in their writing.

The best practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was when:

- centres followed the guidelines and instructions set out in the Course syllabus and the Coursework Handbook
- centres used the centre checklist and included it with their coursework sample as requested
- an appropriate text was used for **Assignment 1**, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond
- centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience
- teachers gave general advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- following feedback, candidates revised and edited their first drafts to improve their writing
- candidates checked, revised, and edited their final drafts to identify and correct errors
- teachers provided marks and summative comments at the end of the final draft of each assignment which clearly related to the appropriate mark level descriptors
- teachers indicated all errors in the final drafts of each completed assignment
- centres engaged in a process of internal moderation and clearly indicated any mark adjustments in the coursework portfolios, on the Individual Record Cards, and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms.

General comments

A significant number of candidates produced interesting coursework portfolios which contained varied work across a range of contexts. There was evidence to show that many centres set tasks which allowed candidates flexibility to respond to subjects related to their personal interests or experiences. The majority of coursework portfolios contained writing of three different genres. There were very few incomplete folders seen by moderators.

Moderators reported an improvement in the number of centres following the instructions in the coursework handbook and in this session most centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. The Moderation Team reported that many centres provided summative comments closely related to the mark schemes at the end of each completed assignment. These were extremely helpful in helping moderators to understand how and why marks had been awarded and centres are thanked for following the process as instructed in the Coursework Handbook.

The major concern for all moderators was that some markers of the coursework portfolios did not indicate errors in the final draft of each assignment and/or provide a summative comment which referred to the marking level descriptors to justify the marks awarded. Some folders had no teacher annotation or marks on the assignments at all. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for adjustment of marks by moderators.

Administration

Successful administration was when centres:

- completed the centre checklist and included it in the coursework sample
- annotated all errors in the final draft of each assignment
- carried out a thorough process of internal moderation which was clearly signposted on the assignments themselves as well as on all relevant documentation
- supplied marks and specific comments relating to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- accurately completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and ICRC, including any amendments made during internal moderation and listed the candidates in candidate number order on BOTH documents
- ensured that each coursework folder was stapled or tagged and securely attached to the Individual Candidate Record Card (ICRC)
- submitted their sample of coursework folders without using plastic or cardboard wallets.

Internal Moderation

Centres who followed the instructions for carrying out internal moderation as directed in the Coursework Handbook are thanked for engaging in this important process. There was a general trend of greater accuracy of marking by centres where there was clear evidence of internal moderation than centres where no internal moderation process was evident on the coursework folders and documentation.

Some centres did not record changes made at internal moderation on the candidates' Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRCs) which caused some confusion about the final mark awarded to candidates. Centres are requested to ensure that any changes made at internal moderation are signposted clearly on the work itself then also recorded on the ICRC as well as on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF). This is essential to ensure that the correct marks are recorded for all candidates.

Using the coursework handbook

A cause of concern for all moderators was that some issues persist even though there are clear instructions in the Coursework Handbook, and the same concerns have been raised in previous Principal Moderator Reports. To ensure effective and accurate marking is achieved, and that all paperwork arrives safely for moderation, it is essential that all the instructions given in the Coursework Handbook, and on the relevant forms, are carefully followed. Centres are now required to complete a checklist and include it with the sample to ensure that all administrative procedures have been followed correctly.

Below highlights the three most significant issues related to the administration and annotation of candidates' work which led to mark adjustments by moderators:

1 Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment

- Some of the assignments showed little or no evidence of complying with the instruction in the Coursework Handbook that markers should indicate all errors in the final draft of each assignment. This process helps markers to effectively and accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work and to apply the most appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. If this process does not take place, it is difficult for markers to make a balanced judgement. In several centres there was

evidence across all three assignments that markers had awarded marks from the higher levels of the assessment criteria to work containing frequent and often serious errors that had not been annotated by the marker. This inevitably led to a downward adjustment of marks by the moderator. It is important for all who mark the coursework portfolios to fully understand the importance of indicating and taking into account all errors in the final draft of each assignment. To avoid adjustment of marks for accuracy, it is essential that centres engage in this process and clearly indicate errors in their candidates' work.

2 Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

- Some centres did not attach the portfolios of work to the ICRC in accordance with the instructions in the Coursework Handbook and point 4 on the electronic version of the ICRC (although this was a smaller number than in previous sessions).
- Some confusion was caused when a small number of centres included ICRCs for the whole cohort as well as the ICRCs for the sample sent; centres only need to send the ICRCs (securely attached to the coursework portfolio) for the candidates in the sample submitted for moderation.
- On some folders there were errors in the transcription of internally moderated mark changes, or it was unclear which mark was the final one. Where internal moderation has taken place, any mark changes should be transferred from the assignment to the ICRC to ensure that the moderator has a clear understanding of all mark changes.

3 Coursework portfolios

- Moderators reported that some centres used plastic or cardboard wallets to present candidates' work as an alternative to securely attaching the individual assignments to the ICRC; this caused extra work for moderators and increased the risk of work being mislaid. Centres are requested not to place coursework folders into plastic or cardboard wallets and are reminded of this on the coursework checklist.
- Some centres included more than one rough draft; this is unnecessary and can lead to confusion. Please ensure that the rough draft included is clearly labelled as a draft.
- Occasionally rough drafts contained annotations and specific feedback; centres are reminded that when markers offer feedback on rough drafts, it should be general advice. No errors should be indicated, and the marker should not offer corrections or improvements. Overmarking of rough drafts can be raised as malpractice by moderators.
- Some centres included documentation not required for the moderation process; the only paperwork that should be included in the sample is clearly indicated in the Coursework Handbook. There is also a checklist for all submissions which centres should complete and include with their coursework sample.

Comments on specific assignments:

Assignment 1

Candidates were successful when:

- they responded to interesting and appropriate texts which contained engaging content
- they demonstrated analysis and evaluation of the individual ideas and opinions identified within a text
- the form, purpose and intended audience of their writing was clear to the reader
- they wrote in a fluent, accurate and appropriate style.

Moderators commented that most candidates responded to texts which were of an appropriate length and challenge, and which appealed to the interests of the candidates. Successful texts included articles exploring issues relevant to young people, for example, online schools, social media, national issues in the candidates' own countries, and environmental issues. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated, texts expressing hateful or offensive opinions, long informative texts on a given topic, or texts which were of limited personal interest to the candidates. Texts selected for **Assignment 1** should be an appropriate length, explore ideas and offer opinions, and use rhetorical or literary devices designed to provoke or sustain the reader's interest to ensure that the text offers scope for candidates to fully engage and respond to it in a sustained piece of writing. Centres are encouraged to use a good range of relevant and up-to-date texts for **Assignment 1**. Other less successful texts were ones where the candidate fully agreed with and endorsed the writer's views and opinions because they offered few opportunities for evaluating ideas and opinions, as required by the mark scheme. It is also crucial to select texts for their quality of written communication: moderators reported seeing a small number of poorly written texts taken from a variety of websites. Many of

these were too long and tended to be informative, offering very little scope for rigorous evaluation or analysis. Moderators also reported seeing texts which contained potentially offensive material despite this being mentioned in previous reports. This may indicate that candidates were allowed to make their own text choices, but centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that all texts used for **Assignment 1** are fit for purpose, and this includes avoiding offensive or unsuitable material. Disagreeing with completely unreasonable or offensive viewpoints also provides fewer opportunities for rigorous evaluation and can be far less challenging for able candidates. Responses which attack the writer rather than engaging with the ideas and opinions should be avoided.

Some centres set one text for a class or sometimes whole cohort. When this approach was adopted by a centre there was usually a tendency for candidates to produce responses which were very similar in content and structure due to heavy scaffolding. This made it difficult for candidates to create the original and sophisticated responses expected of the higher-level assessment criteria and was sometimes a reason for adjustments of marks. Centres are advised that teaching a text to a whole class and offering a scaffolded plan for the response may be a useful teaching strategy for initially developing the necessary skills and knowledge for **Assignment 1**, but this approach should not be used for the final coursework submission.

If centres are unsure about how to approach and set tasks for **Assignment 1**, they can refer to the Course Syllabus and the Coursework Handbook. Both documents provide advice and guidance about task setting and text selection and can be found on the School Support Hub via the main Cambridge website.

Reading

Although some centres were accurate with their marking of reading, as in the previous moderation sessions, there was a significant trend for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria. Candidates who successfully met the higher-level assessment criteria were those who demonstrated a consistently evaluative approach to most of the ideas and opinions in a text, and provided a developed, sophisticated response which made direct reference or included quotes from the text. Candidates who engaged in a general discussion about the topic or subject of a text, or those who did not thoroughly evaluate a text, tended to produce work which more appropriately met the Level 4 assessment criteria in Table B (reading). The most common reasons for adjustments to a centre's marks for reading were when moderators identified a trend of candidates engaging in a general discussion about the topic of a text/s, or when the number of points covered were 'appropriate' rather than 'thorough'.

Writing

Many candidates responded to texts in an appropriate form and style. Letters were the most popular choice of form, and many candidates demonstrated some understanding of audience and purpose. When candidates were less successful with writing, it was often because the form, intended audience and purpose of the writing was not clear. This made it difficult for the candidates to meet the highest-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments to writing marks for **Assignment 1**. Successful responses to **Assignment 1** tasks were those in which the writing was highly effective, almost always accurate, and consistent throughout in the application of form and style. Work which showed insecurity with form and style, such as the omission of an appropriate ending to a letter, a limited or inconsistent use of rhetorical devices for speeches, or lack of clarity of the intended audience, tended to meet the assessment criteria for Level 5 or below, Table A (writing) or below. The moderators noted that there was a general tendency for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria.

Another common reason for the adjustment of marks for writing was because of the accuracy of the candidates' writing. When errors impaired meaning, such as the incorrect construction of sentences or use of grammar, typing errors, or the incorrect selection of words from spellcheck, the overall quality and efficacy of the discussion was affected. Errors such as these are classed as serious and make it difficult for candidates to meet the higher-level assessment criteria; this type of writing is more characteristic of writing achieving marks from the middle to the lower levels of the assessment criteria. Moderators also noted a tendency for centres to over-reward vocabulary that had some merit in its selection but was not always used precisely or effectively in the response.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 1

- thoroughly explore, challenge, and discuss the ideas in the text
- avoid making general comments about the topic or subject of the text, instead, ensure that comments are specifically related to the ideas, opinions or attitudes identified in the text
- avoid criticising or attacking the writer: focus on what the text says
- look for, and use inferences made implicitly in the text
- look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the text and comment on them
- develop points to create a thorough, detailed, and clear line of argument or discussion
- make sure that the audience and purpose is clear and adapt the written style accordingly
- proof-read assignments to ensure punctuation, vocabulary choices and grammar are correct.

Assignment 2 (description)

The majority of tasks set for **Assignment 2** were appropriate and encouraged candidates to write in a descriptive style. Many students wrote engaging and vivid descriptions from experience or their imaginations, which were a pleasure to read. Moderators also noticed that there were relatively fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions, but this is still a regularly observed flaw in descriptive writing assignments, sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which invited candidates to describe an experience or holiday which tended to lead to tasks more suited to narrative writing. Centres are reminded to set descriptive tasks and remind candidates to avoid using narrative writing techniques in their responses.

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those where the candidates had carefully selected vocabulary to create a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place or person, and which were well sequenced and carefully managed for deliberate effect. Successful responses included descriptions of towns or cities in which candidates lived, important rituals or festivals, or significant settings or places. Less successful tasks were those which asked candidates to describe events or scenarios of which they had no personal experience, or settings and situations in which the candidate clearly had no interest or engagement. Many of these responses relied on unconvincing descriptive writing which did not engage the reader. This type of writing is characteristic of work achieving marks from the middle to lower levels of the assessment criteria, although it was noticed that many centres awarded marks from the higher-level assessment criteria. This was quite often a reason for adjustment of marks from Table C (content and structure).

Whilst many candidates showed a secure and confident understanding of language, there was still a general tendency by a number of centres to award marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to work which contained ineffective overuse of literary techniques. Some moderators commented that this seemed to be actively encouraged by some centres. To achieve marks from the higher-level assessment criteria, candidates need to demonstrate a confident and secure understanding and use language for specific effect. This is difficult for candidates to achieve if they over-use adjectives, include inappropriate images or idioms and/or use obscure or archaic language. The overworking of language and/or use of unconvincing imagery was a common reason for moderators adjusting marks downwards.

Another common reason for adjustments to marks was when moderators identified a trend of awarding marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to writing that contained a limited range of sentence structures, incorrectly constructed sentences, or contained frequent errors with punctuation and grammar. Writing that achieves marks from Levels 5 and 6 of Table D (style and accuracy) is expected to be consistently accurate, consistent with the chosen register, and demonstrate an ability to use a range of sentences for specific effect. The moderators saw some writing which displayed these characteristics, but a significant number of the assignments receiving marks from centres from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D more frequently displayed the characteristics of writing expected from Level 4 or below. Many candidates ‘told’ the reader about the scene being described, rather than engaging the reader with a careful and precise use of vocabulary and images. The moderators also noticed a general trend for candidates to use repeated sentence structures and create almost list-like descriptions.

In addition, the work of a significantly large number of candidates contained frequent and serious errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of the candidates’ work. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, tense inconsistencies, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and grammar errors. Quite often, the meaning of sentences was blurred, or meaning was lost altogether. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as ‘minor’. As mentioned earlier in this report, the absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult for the moderators to determine whether errors had been considered when marks had been awarded; moderators noted that on some weaker

assignments no errors had been annotated and the summative comment declared a high level of accuracy. Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which ‘best fits’ the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that errors are identified and indicated by the markers. Engaging in this process allows markers to effectively balance the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and apply marks that are most appropriate to their candidates’ work.

Information and guidance on how to apply the mark schemes are given in the Coursework Handbook. Examples of good tasks and exemplification of the standard of work expected at the different levels of the mark scheme are also provided in the Coursework Handbook.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 2

- use a range of vocabulary suited to the context and content of the description
- create images appropriate for the context and content of the description
- create an engaging imagined scenario using language designed to have an impact on the reader
- avoid slipping into a narrative style
- proof-read responses to identify and correct common errors such as missing articles and prepositions, switches in tenses and typing errors
- avoid repetitive sentence structures; instead use a range of sentences to create specific effects.

Assignment 3 (narrative)

Much of the task setting for **Assignment 3** was generally appropriate and moderators saw some engaging and effective narratives which were well controlled and convincing. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which did not invite narrative responses as they were too informative. Successful narratives were those in which candidates created stories characterised by well-defined plots and strongly developed features of narrative writing such as description, strong characterisation, and a clear sense of progression. The narration of personal experiences and events, or responses where candidates were able to create convincing details and events within their chosen genre, tended to be more successful. Candidates were generally less successful when their understanding of audience and genre was insecure, and the resulting narratives lacked credibility and conviction. Moderators commented that this sort of writing was often seen when candidates were writing in the genre of detective or murder mystery stories. Stories such as these, although containing a definite beginning, middle and ending, were often unrealistic and incredible, or lacked development of character or plot. Some responses failed to conclude properly, ending with an unconvincing or unsatisfactory cliff hanger. This sort of writing is classed as ‘relevant’ or ‘straightforward’ and should expect to be awarded marks from Level 4 or below from Table C (content and structure). Moderators noticed that there was a trend with a significant majority of the work sampled for centres to award marks from Levels 5 and 6 to writing which more appropriately fitted the Level 4, or below, assessment criteria. This was quite frequently a reason for marks being adjusted.

When moderators saw very accurate work containing precise well-chosen vocabulary, and which maintained a consistent register throughout, they could agree when centres awarded marks from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D (style and accuracy). As with **Assignments 1** and **2**, moderators noticed a significant trend for centres to award marks from the highest levels of the mark scheme to work which contained frequent and persistent errors and which more accurately met the assessment criteria from Level 4 or below in Table D. This was a common reason for the adjustment of marks. The comments made for **Assignment 2** with regards to accuracy and the annotation of errors are also relevant to **Assignment 3** and should be noted by all who mark coursework.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 3

- create stories that are realistic, credible, and convincing
- remember that characters’ thoughts and feelings help to engage the reader
- avoid clichéd scenarios and consider an individual and original selection of content
- carefully proof-read and check assignments for errors in punctuation, the use of prepositions and articles, tenses, and in sentence construction.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

Paper 0990/04
Speaking and Listening Test 04

Key messages

Centre administration was of a high standard with Summary Forms completed accurately and recordings uploaded appropriately.

Timing within the test remains a serious area of concern for a number of centres.

Part 1 should last for 3 – 4 minutes. A significantly short **Part 1** response will affect the mark that can be awarded. Equally, an overlong response to **Part 1** will also affect the mark awarded.

Part 2 should last for 7 – 8 minutes. It is the responsibility of the Examiner to ensure the correct timing is adhered to. Conversations that run for significantly less than the minimum 7 minutes required do not allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available because certain descriptors in the higher levels cannot be satisfied.

Part 2 should consist of a conversation between the candidate and the Examiner. If an audience is present, it should be passive and play no part in the performance of the test.

Part 2 is designed to be a conversation so if it is conducted as a series of unrelated questions, it is not an appropriate model to use for the most successful outcome. Questions should be used to prompt candidates to explore ideas and opinions related to the topic content introduced in the **Part 1** talk but a **Part 2** that consists solely of questions followed by answers is not a natural conversation and cannot be credited as such when awarding marks.

Centres should avoid grouping marks in the top level unless this is strongly evidenced in the candidates' performances. Centres that simply award marks in Level 5 for either **Part 1** or **Part 2**, without recourse to applying differentiation where it is needed, actually disadvantage those candidates who may have performed to a higher level. This was particularly noticeable in **Part 2**. The way that moderation works means that inflating marks for those candidates who do not justify them through performance will almost certainly mean downscaling is applied.

Administration – General comments

For most centres, administration of the test was diligent, accurate and easy to follow. Summary forms were completed to a high degree of accuracy and samples uploaded to SfA were of a very good sound quality.

Where there were issues, the following guidelines will help to clarify administrative requirements:

- Each candidate's test requires a full formal introduction to be made by the Examiner prior to the beginning of **Part 1**. This introduction should include the centre name and number, the candidate's full name and candidate number, the date on which the test is being recorded and the name of the Examiner. This is important information for the Moderator. The overwhelming majority of centres were compliant with this requirement and are to be congratulated for their diligence.
- Whilst it is perfectly acceptable for centres to create their own version of the Summary Form (the OESF), it is important that any such version includes all the same information required on the form provided by Cambridge. A form that does not have a full breakdown of the marks for each candidate in the cohort is not acceptable. All forms should have, therefore, a breakdown of the marks that includes a mark out of 20 for **Part 1**, a mark out of 10 for **Part 2** Speaking, a mark out of 10 for **Part 2** Listening and a total mark out of 40. A form that truncates **Part 2** into one mark out of 20 is not acceptable for the Moderator.

- Centres are reminded that for moderation to take place effectively and efficiently summary forms are required that show the breakdown of marks for the whole cohort of entered candidates and not just those in the sample requested. Centres should check whether all the OESFs for their entered cohort have been uploaded to Submit for Assessment successfully. Failure to upload all the correct OESFs means the moderation process is delayed.
- It is the centre's responsibility to check the quality of the recordings being made, preferably as an ongoing process during each recording session, to ensure that the recordings are clearly audible and without interference. On a few occasions, the Examiner was clearly audible but the candidates were not, presumably because of the Examiner's proximity to the microphone but not the candidates. Any problems with the quality of recordings should be reported to Cambridge immediately so that candidates are not adversely affected by such issues.
- A very small percentage of centres uploaded videos of their candidates performing their tests. The use of videos is discouraged.

Conduct of the test – General comments

Overall, across the component entry, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given plenty of opportunities to express their ideas and demonstrate their range of oratory skills productively. There were centres, however, who did not follow the rubric set out in the syllabus but still awarded highly inflated marks for their candidates. Subsequently, upon moderation, scaling was applied, and these marks were reduced.

Where there were concerns regarding the conduct of the test affected centres should heed the following advice:

- It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the Examiner's formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the Individual Talk. If an Examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is done before the recording is started. Examiners formally starting the test then engaging in 'off topic' conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their **Part 1** task is strongly discouraged. Any pleasantries exchanged should be completed before the recording is started and the formal introduction is made.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the Examiner's responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met so that candidates are given the fullest opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Short conversations will mean the full range of marks available for **Part 2** cannot be awarded.
- If a candidate has exceeded the maximum 4 minutes for **Part 1** the Examiner should not compensate by shortening the time allowed for **Part 2**. Candidates must be allowed the required 7 – 8 minutes to complete a full response to **Part 2**, irrespective of the length of the talk in **Part 1**.
- It is also important that the conversations offer sufficient challenge to allow candidates to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Focused questioning and prompts are needed to move the conversation forward, together with an adaptability on the part of the Examiner to absorb the candidate's previous comments and to extend the conversation as a result. A **Part 2** that is merely a question-and-answer session is not a natural conversation and as a consequence is limited in terms of the marks that can be awarded.
- Examiners who rely on a pre-determined set of questions disadvantage their candidates, in particular with regard to the mark for Speaking in **Part 2**. A question from the Examiner should lead to an answer from the candidate which then may lead to a comment or prompt from the Examiner that is connected to the same content matter. This will in turn lead to another connected response from the candidate; and so the conversation develops naturally.
- Examiners who dominate conversations or who frequently interrupt candidates during the conversation do so to the disadvantage of those candidates. Good Examiners prompt candidates then allow them the opportunity to respond in full and to develop their ideas before moving the conversation forwards again.
- An audience is permitted to witness a test being conducted but it must never play any active part in its performance. The audience must not interact with the candidate or Examiner under any circumstances and the audience should certainly never be allowed to ask the candidate questions during **Part 2**.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1 – Individual Talk

The following comments by Moderators reflect performance in **Part 1** in this series:

Successful topic areas for more able candidates included: talks on, for example: ‘Argentina’ from a candidate who was clearly proud of his country; talks on more unique interests such as ‘Authority’, ‘Bad Habits’, ‘Beyond Books’, ‘Fast Fashion’, ‘Blended Families’, ‘The Value of Travel’. The common thread in all of these is that they reflected the candidates’ interests and intellects.

Higher level candidates used rhetorical devices, imagery and other effective language techniques.

*Choosing a challenging, interesting topic and then researching and planning your talk makes for a successful **Part 1** and gives plenty of scope for the conversation in **Part 2**.*

A clear focus is paramount to delivering a top-level talk whereas vague titles tend to be wishy-washy and rambling especially if there has been little preparation.

*Most of the issues with **Part 1** were to do with timing – some extremely long and others extremely short. Preparation is key – not just with how to get points across but also to keep to the time limits.*

More concentration on using techniques/language devices is needed to help candidates deliver presentations in more interesting and original ways. This would help middle range candidates improve their marks.

Almost without exception, the responses to **Part 1** were in the form of a presentation. This format remains a safe and acceptable one, particularly if an attempt to analyse and reflect on personal experiences is included. For many candidates this choice remains a safe and productive way to achieve a good mark in **Part 1**, but only when well-timed and clearly structured.

Less successful responses to **Part 1** tended to lack focus because a strong structure had not been created and time constraints had not been considered. Largely narrative responses that follow a linear path, such as talking through the events of a holiday or simply restating facts about a topic choice, tend to be unimaginative and rarely achieve higher than Level 3. This is why topics such as ‘My Favourite Football Team (or video game, K-Pop band, movie, hobby)’ do not tend to be very successful. Generally, these kinds of topic only become more successful if there is an added element that expands the talk beyond adequate. For example, ‘How My Hobby Has Been Life-changing’ immediately introduces more sophisticated elements into the talk through introspection, analysis and evaluation.

Candidates should be applauded for their considerable efforts when preparing their talks. However, learning a talk word for word and trying to deliver it verbatim can sometimes lead to issues with fluency and effect. In essence, the **Part 1** talk is a performative piece, so it is important that candidates use a wide range of devices to ensure (imaginary) audience interest. Simply reciting a learned piece without considering the impact on the listener is counter productive.

Very strong performances in **Part 1** successfully combined excellent knowledge and development of a topic, a tightly defined structure timed accordingly and a confident delivery style. It should be noted that the bullet point descriptor ‘lively’ in Level 5 does not have to mean that a candidate delivers an animated performance. A candidate who delivers a talk in a confident and assured tone without being overtly ‘lively’ can perform equally well for the second descriptor in Level 5. Subtle changes of tone can be very effective in fully engaging an audience.

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that worked well include:

Drumming
My passion for horse riding
Artificial Intelligence – its impact in medicine
Turning ideas into reality
Multilingualism
The value of travel
Impact of tourism on the environment
Time Travel

Gender discrimination
Traditional books v e-books
African penguins
Luxury consumption
Authority
The dangers of fast fashion

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that were less successful include:

Video Games
A.I.
Global warming
Social media
Sport
Gaming
My holiday
My favourite celebrity
Football
Hobbies
British history

It should be considered that any of the topics named in either of the above lists has the potential to be either successful or less successful, but topics that are too vague, too generalised and poorly thought through lead to poorer performances. The topics 'Football' and 'Social Media' are particularly prone to performances that rely more on perceived general knowledge than focused preparation. It does not follow that just because a candidate plays or watches football or spends time on social media the talk will be automatically interesting, well-structured or successful.

Part 2 – Conversation

The following comments from Moderators reflect performance in **Part 2** in this series:

Some Examiners are extremely good at extending and enhancing points made by candidates which result in very engaging and interesting discussions which enable the candidates to demonstrate their skills. Others, however, are still inclined to write a number of questions to ask while the candidate is speaking and then work through these without building on how the candidates respond.

Many discussions were lively and interesting. Examiners seemed better at asking shorter, open questions allowing candidates to move discussions into more conceptual areas where they were able to, thus satisfying the criteria for the higher grades. Fewer Examiners dominated discussions to the extent that they have in many previous sessions.

*Candidates who had relied on cue cards or visual aids in **Part 1** were often stronger in **Part 2** when more natural, spontaneous speaking skills could be assessed.*

Successful **Part 2** conversations were well conducted and Examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions which enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. Often the use of prompts, instead of a steady stream of questioning, was more effective in eliciting developed responses from candidates.

Unlike in **Part 1**, the Examiner can influence the quality of the candidate's performance in **Part 2**. Concise but challenging prompts often led to candidates developing their ideas more successfully than when a question was convoluted or closed. Some Examiners struggled to inspire candidates with closed questioning and by offering too many of their own ideas during the conversations. Indeed, where a candidate was moved down a level during moderation, it was sometimes due to a lack of detailed response, caused by uninspired questioning. The use of pre-determined questions or a perfunctory question-and-answer technique limits the candidate's ability to engage in a real conversation where responses are elicited by what is said immediately before.

Poor timing is also a major contributor to candidates achieving fewer marks than they could in **Part 2**. A **Part 2** that lasts for significantly less than the minimum of 7 minutes required cannot fulfil the descriptors in Level 5, and most likely not in Level 4 either. The descriptors for **Part 2** are assessed on the basis of a full **Part 2** being performed. Allowing only 2 – 4 minutes for **Part 2** does not provide the necessary evidence of consistent and detailed responses required. In effect, short conversations limit the range of marks that can be awarded.

It should be noted that the ‘changes (alterations) in the direction of the conversation’ descriptor does not mean that Examiners should steer the conversation away from the central topic to something completely different. ‘Changes in the direction’ can mean introducing a new perspective on the topic or challenging a previously stated opinion but any ensuing conversation should still be focused on the topic presented in **Part 1**.

Advice to centres

- Make sure candidates know the timings of the test. Ensure that their Individual Talk is 3 – 4 minutes long. If necessary, you can help them in the test by interceding before 5 minutes and initiating the conversation.
- When considering the timing of **Part 1**, please remember that **Part 1** begins when the candidate starts speaking and does not include the Examiner’s introduction.
- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test. At the planning stage a gentle suggestion to choose an alternative topic may be very beneficial in some cases.
- Try to dissuade candidates from simply reciting off a memorised talk in **Part 1** that may have artificial fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.
- Ensure a full 7 – 8 minutes is allowed for the conversation in **Part 2**. The Examiner can control the timing of this. Short **Part 2s** cannot access the full range of marks available.
- It is important that Examiners bring out the best in their candidates during the discussion with a move away from a question-and-answer approach. Responding to points made by the candidate and probing further into their answers will enable a more fluent and meaningful discussion.
- Administering the conversation in **Part 2** can be quite challenging for Examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the Examiner but they should not be restrictive, and the candidate should have no prior knowledge of them.
- Scaffold questions strategically to encourage higher level responses from more able candidates. This will help them to access the higher mark ranges.
- Avoid saying too much yourself in **Part 2** – Examiners can speak too much. In addition, interrupting too keenly with another prompt can affect the candidate developing their own ideas. Always expect the candidate to be about to expand on ideas before giving the next prompt/question.
- Be careful not to make judgements based on personal interpretations of a comment made by a candidate. This is a test of speaking and listening not the perceived accuracy of what is said.

Advice to candidates

- Choose your topic carefully so that you can not only speak for the full amount of time in **Part 1** but also have enough knowledge and interest to fully participate in the ensuing conversation.
- Practise your presentation but do not learn it word for word.
- Have bullet point notes (but not full sentences) to help prompt you in **Part 1** but not the ‘full speech’. You will be tempted to read it or, at the very least, deliver it without appropriate liveliness and intonation. ‘Talk through’ each bullet point in a confident and enthusiastic way.
- Structure your Individual Talk carefully, making sure that it develops points and stays within the 3 – 4 minutes allowed. Long talks do not earn more marks! On the contrary, an overlong talk will be regarded as not being ‘well organised’ (a bullet point required for Level 5 marks).
- Respond to the prompts and questions from the Examiner in **Part 2** as fully as possible by developing your ideas, giving examples and leading off into other aspects of the topic if you can.
- Prepare for **Part 2** of the test by predicting some of the questions that the Examiner may ask but do not prepare memorised responses.
- Watch good examples of speeches/presentations/talks to learn how good speakers make their speeches engaging and interesting and how they incorporate effective language devices. Try to copy these techniques.

- Practise simulations of **Part 2**. There are as many marks available for **Part 2** as for **Part 1** so treat each part as equally important.