

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

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<p><b>Paper 0990/11</b> <b>Reading</b></p>
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## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through the texts and tasks in the order set
- followed task instructions carefully and based their responses on the correct text and/or section of text
- responded appropriately to the command word(s) in the question
- attempted all parts of all questions
- paid attention to the marks allocated to each question and organised their response time accordingly
- focused on the particular evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each question
- avoided repetition of the same idea within an answer
- did not introduce material/ideas that were not directly related to or rooted in the text
- 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 responses
- checked and edited their responses to correct any unforced errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

## General comments

Candidates' responses indicated that they were broadly familiar with the format of the Reading paper and the general demands of each of the three questions. There were few instances where whole tasks had not been attempted, though some responses to part questions were incomplete or missing and extended responses were often uneven, limiting the possibility of scoring higher marks. There were some candidates who missed opportunities to target higher marks by offering mechanical and/or limited responses that simply played back sections of text with little modification in the higher tariff questions. Some missed opportunities to evidence their reading skills convincingly by paying insufficient attention to the details of questions as set.

Almost all candidates appeared to find all three Reading texts equally accessible and engaging. There were few examples of significant misreading of explicit ideas across the cohort, though opportunities to evidence understanding of implicit ideas were missed by some as a consequence of less careful reading of detail. There were many excellent responses to all three questions, with candidates often going significantly above and beyond the demands of level 5. It is though important in timed conditions for candidates to ensure that they do not spend too long on one question at the expense of any of the others, and not all remembered this. For example, it was not unusual for the response to **Question 2(d)** (worth a maximum of 15 marks) to be far longer and/or more carefully crafted than the response to **Question 3** (worth up to 25 marks), whilst a few candidates wrote more/as much in their answer to **Question 2(c)** (worth a maximum of 3 marks) as they did in **Question 2(d)**.

In many of the least effective responses, 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 3 and 7 in the language question **2(d)**, or offered explanations of more than one choice in **2(c)**, and so included explanations that could not be credited. Similarly, there were some less well-focused responses from candidates who had scored well in the smaller sub questions but missed opportunities to target 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** from a different perspective from that specified in the task guidance.

Some less effective responses were focused solely on word count 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 to

**Question 1(f)** 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(f)** the task details offer a reminder of the need for concision (Your summary should not be more than 120 words). Responses to **1(f)** that were far longer than that were likely not only to limit their success in that task but also to create unnecessary time pressure during the rest of the examination.

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, imagination or experience.

Less effective responses attempted to include extra guesses in their responses 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 responses 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 ‘people would go back for the things later’. In **Question 1(f)** some candidates relied heavily on the language of **Text B** and/or copied out chunks of text, 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 responses were careful to refer back to **Text C** to locate specific relevant choices and consider their meaning in context. In **Question 2(a)** those who copied out longer sections or sentences from the text, rather than identifying precisely the exact word/phrase that matched the sense of the underlined word/phrase in the question, were not providing secure evidence of their understanding. Likewise, opportunities for marks were missed by a few candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify 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 explore and explain the meaning of each of the words they have chosen in some detail before moving on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most candidates were able to identify 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 clear, careful or detailed in the examination of their choices. In less effective responses, vague and generalised comment and/or labelling of devices without explanation of how these were working in this instance meant opportunities to target higher levels were missed. A number of candidates did not address the **Question 2(d)** task effectively, often repeating rather than explaining the language of the original text and/or identifying few or no clear choices in one or both halves of the question.

In **Question 3** most candidates had recognised the need to respond with the words of a speech and most had at least attempted to include ideas from the text relevant to all three bullets. A few candidates lost sight of the task and/or text – for example, writing their speech from the perspective of the original narrator in the text rather than from her son Charlie’s viewpoint, or offering a very general response on the topic of conservation / beaches from their own perspective. Candidates are reminded that responding to the specifics of the task as set 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 responses offering responses that used, interpreted and developed a wide range of ideas to address all three bullets equally well, integrating key details from the text. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities as a consequence of uneven focus, 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.

Candidates should remember that 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: Treasure hunting**. 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, muddled 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)**, responses do need to be sufficiently precise and clear to communicate details from the text accurately.

##### **(a) What two things give people the idea to search for treasure, according to paragraph 1?**

In **Question 1(a)**, most candidates picked up on the signposts in the text to recognise that the two things that ‘Certainly inspire’ people to search for treasure were identified in the second sentence of the paragraph. A few copied out all/part of the first sentence and missed out on a straightforward mark for selection as a result. Some candidates made use of the question stem to help focus their answer, whilst others worked more economically and simply wrote the key words of their answer – either approach was acceptable.

##### **(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

###### **(i) ‘... to recover later.’ (lines 6–7)**

###### **(ii) ‘... concealed around the globe.’ (line 7).**

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where responses failed to score both marks, it was sometimes the result of offering a partial explanation only, for example in **Question 1(b)(ii)** offering a meaning for ‘concealed’ and/or ‘globe’ but repeating rather than explaining any sense of ‘around the’. In **1(b)(i)** effective responses often explained ‘recover’ simply as meaning ‘retrieve’, ‘collect’ or ‘come back to get’. A few misread ‘recover’, not considering context, and so suggested incorrectly that this referred to ‘replacing the outer layer of material around something’ or ‘feeling better after an illness’. In **1(b)(ii)** effective responses tackled both aspects of the idea, dealing first with concealed (most popularly explained as hidden) and then ‘around the globe’ (often explained as ‘all over the world’ or ‘in lots of different places on the planet’). A few missed opportunities to score both marks in **1b(ii)** – for example, by guessing ‘found’, ‘discovered’ or ‘spread’ as a meaning for concealed and/or repeating ‘around the’ without explanation of this key aspect. Effective responses to both parts of **1(b)** were able to evidence that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of each question.

**(c) Reread paragraph 3 ('So, how ... of the treasure.').**

**Give two different ways treasure hunters should get the information they need to start their search.**

In **Question 1(c)** candidates rereading paragraph 3 closely were able to identify two distinct ways advised in the text; most recognised the explicit advice that this should be done 'By reading' (reference to the example(s) of books and/or old maps could be credited). A few had not read carefully however and so offered 'pay(ing) for information' as a recommendation; this was not in line with the text and where included in an answer indicated that the advice in relation to residents had been misinterpreted.

**(d) Reread paragraphs 4 and 5 ('Treasure hunters ... work again.'").**

- (i) Identify two reasons why people who have been inspired to hunt for treasure might not set out straight away.**
- (ii) Explain why some people might not be persuaded to take up treasure hunting by Alex Rohn's claims.**

Candidates who paid attention to command / key words in the question and reviewed the two paragraphs in the light of those were best placed to offer creditworthy responses and make efficient use of their time. Effective responses in **1d(i)** spotted that the reasons delaying people who were inspired to set out on a search were given in paragraph 4 of the text and identified that Alex Rohn's claims were covered in paragraph 5. In **1d(i)** effective responses needed only to identify two of the three reasons given and most were able to do so, though a few responses offered incomplete ideas that did not evidence understanding securely – for example writing one-word responses such as 'information'. In **1d(ii)**, candidates interrogating the text effectively considered both what Alex said and what was said about Alex – with those scoring the maximum 3 marks having recognised the details and implications in the text that casted doubt on Alex's credibility as an expert.

On occasion, candidates offered suggestions in their answer to one part of question **1(d)** that would have been more appropriate to the other – for example, suggesting erroneously in **1d(ii)** that people might not be persuaded by Alex's claims since they needed time to get the information or money for a search. Others missed opportunities as a consequence of less careful reading of the question – for example explaining why people might be persuaded by Alex, rather than why they might **not** be.

**(e) Reread paragraph 6 ('If your heart's ... equipment.').**

**Using your own words, explain why now may not be a good time to take up the hobby of treasure hunting.**

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 reasons in their explanation. Many identified issues around the cost of the modern equipment required or the difficulties accessing the locations of any remaining treasures. Some made explicit the suggestion that most, or all, of the easy to find treasure would already have been discovered in previous decades by the teams of dedicated hunters, leaving little behind for anyone taking up the hobby now. Occasionally, candidates offered responses suggesting why now would be a good time to take up treasure hunting – citing the existence of advanced technology as a positive – indicating less careful reading of both task and text.

**(f) According to Text B, what concerns, worries and objections might there be about the hobby of metal detecting?**

**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: Metal detecting** and some understanding of

the requirements of the selective summary task with relatively few introducing ideas or opinions from outside the text. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of responses seen, though repetition of the same idea, misreading and/or inclusion of unnecessary detail 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 where appropriate and to keep their explanations concise. Overview was evidenced in some of the most effective responses where relevant ideas had been carefully selected from different parts of the text and organised helpfully for their reader. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy. Some offered points that argued against any concerns, worries or objections and/or offered advice for anyone considering taking up the pastime; neither of these approaches was in line with the task as set and likely to result in less effective responses as a consequence. Some candidates attempted to rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text to communicate ideas, diluting evidence of their skills and understanding as a result and affecting their marks for both reading and writing. 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 bullet point plan, editing out obvious repetitions and efficiently grouping together similar ideas. There were many extremely effective and well-crafted responses that demonstrated both concision and precise understanding over a wide range of relevant ideas. In partially effective responses, excess often arose from attempts to comment on the concerns of others, lists of examples related to the same point and/or 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 use only those ideas relevant to answering the question, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – for example, some lost focus and spent time detailing the plot of the television programme ‘Detectorists’ and/or highlighting stories of valuable finds reported in the media.

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 ‘negative’ focus of concerns, worries and objections only and ignored/recast anything appearing in the original text as a comment on, or counter argument to, these. 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 responses, excess was often a significant feature. In low to mid-range responses, some candidates simply linked lifted phrases, missing opportunities to target own words and indicate more secure understanding by failing to reword phrases/sections from the text such as ‘digging in public spaces creates trip hazards’ and ‘divorcing those objects from their context and most of the information that makes them valuable’. 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):**

- read the task instructions carefully – identify the focus of the question and how it relates to the perspective in the text

- reread Text B to identify just the 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
- check whether there are repeated ideas or examples which could be covered 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
- do not comment on ideas or add examples/details/opinions of your own that are not in the text
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- check back to ensure that you have included all of the ideas you planned to but not repeated anything
- though it is not necessary to count every word, you should keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ and aim for concision.

## Question 2

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

- (i) The boys and their mother have to pass through and around the delicate hills of sand to get access to the beach.
- (ii) The goods carried by the ship that sank were never found, but the people on board were saved.
- (iii) It is not unusual for the narrator to discover everyday items that have been thrown away without thought on the beach.
- (iv) Previously, vehicles were allowed on the beach.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified the correct word or phrase from **Text C: The beach** to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example in each part – simply and efficiently giving the exact word or phrase only as their answer. Candidates should note that it is **not** necessary to write responses to **Question 2(a)** in full sentences and they need only to offer the word or phrase selected from the text as their answer. Some candidates added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire question in each case, substituting the word or phrase from the text and then bracketing or underlining the relevant section of their answer.

Marks were sometimes missed where responses 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 ‘cars’ in **2(a)(iv)** or ‘fragile dunes’ in **2(a)(i)**. Occasionally, candidates had overlooked the instruction to ‘identify a word or phrase from the text’ and tried to offer an explanation of meaning in their own words.

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

On this dazzling afternoon, cycling along the sea’s edge is exhilarating and our laughter sends seagulls scattering skywards. The new path we’re following ends abruptly and we’re stranded on the wrong side of a channel of water.

- (i) **dazzling**
- (ii) **exhilarating**
- (iii) **abruptly**

In **Question 2(b)**, some responses 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 responses had considered the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined, recognising for example that ‘abruptly’ suggested a sudden, unexpected end to the path rather than something that ended quickly as less precise responses suggested. A number of candidates were unsure of the meaning of ‘exhilarating’ – for example, suggesting incorrectly that it meant breathless or exhausting. Some missed the suggestion of very bright sunlight in ‘dazzling’ and offered only generic adjectives such as wonderful or awesome which were too general to credit.

- (c) Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests her feelings as she attempts to cross the channel of water on her bicycle.

Use your own words in your explanation.

**I show the boys that, like life, if you approach it full on, you can most times power through on sheer determination. But today the channel’s deeper than it looks. I’ve misjudged it massively. My bike comes to a graceless halt midway, balances briefly, then falls flat on its side, depositing me spectacularly in fifty centimetres of water.**

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 their chosen example in the text, others copied it out as a subheading for their explanation; either approach was acceptable.

Effective responses 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 the writer’s feelings at that point. Many responses centred their answer around all/part of the image of the writer’s belief that ‘like life, if you approach it full on, you can most times power through on sheer determination’ and were generally able to exploit their chosen example effectively, often suggesting something of the optimism and self-belief it suggested. Some who had selected the whole image still missed opportunities to target higher marks by not explaining how ‘power’, ‘sheer’ and/or ‘full on’ helped to contribute to the sense of commitment to succeed in life. Those who selected ‘depositing me spectacularly in fifty centimetres of water’ were often able to unpack it particularly effectively and score full marks showing understanding of the drama and amused embarrassment communicated in the choice of vocabulary and implied tone.

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. Others chose less interesting selections from the text (for example, ‘the channel’s deeper than it looks’ or ‘But today’) that offered little/no opportunity to explore how the writer’s feelings were conveyed or chose a potentially useful example but then offered explanations better suited to another. On occasion, opportunities were missed to offer evidence of understanding through circular responses that simply repeated the language of the text or misreading of key words – for example, some candidates attempted to explain the writer’s ‘sheer determination’ as showing how determined she was to power through.

- (d) **Reread paragraphs 3 and 7.**

- **Paragraph 3 begins ‘From this distance ...’ and is about the wreck.**
- **Paragraph 7 begins ‘Treasure hunting ...’ and is about the egg cases of fish.**

**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 three relevant selections from each paragraph – six in total – 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 appeared to attempt to adopt a more formal, academic register when writing their response to **2(d)** which was not always helpful to their explanations. The most effective responses simply offered clear explanation of their ideas – often as if explaining orally each quotation to their teacher or fellow learners and avoided repeating the same idea over several choices (finding different words to express it where they felt it was equally relevant).

Some candidates used each of their choices as a sub-heading for their explanation of it effectively, 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 descriptions of essentially the same objects within the paragraph, for example unpicking the two opposing descriptions of ‘mermaids’ ‘purses’. Responses at level 5 frequently analysed their choices precisely and offered responses that were balanced across both parts of the question. In the mid-range, responses 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 and/or words from choices were recycled in responses rather than explained.

Choices from paragraph 3 often centred around the idea of the wreck appearing to have been deliberately placed on the sand for dramatic effect – many candidates selected choices containing the words ‘prop’, ‘stage’ and ‘magic’ though some relied on repeating other words from the paragraph such as ‘unreal’, ‘thrill’ and ‘astonishing’ in their explanations, diluting evidence of understanding by so doing. A number of candidates had misread the game of hide-and-seek as something the two boys were playing and/or tried to explain sweeping as the movement of a broom (not relevant to this context).

Images connected to the wreck as the carcass of a huge prehistoric creature were popular choices, identified by many, though fewer considered precisely the individual words within the choice– with only the most effective responses explaining precisely how ‘picked clean of its flesh by the sea’ helped to underline that there was nothing at all left of the external fittings of the ship.

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 ‘cartoon’ in ‘clamber on board like marauding cartoon pirates’ and so overlooked what it suggested about the writer’s interpretation of her boys’ behaviour. The least effective responses to **2(d)** offered generic empty comments such as ‘The writer has used metaphors and similes to help create a picture in the reader’s mind of what it was like to be there’. 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 creditworthy. Functional responses to the task offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each example they had chosen, whilst more effective responses also identified effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, using explanation of precise meaning in context and going on to explore connotations and associations as the starting point for their explanation of effect. For example, many were able to explain the unpleasant image of the dried-out egg cases by working outwards from the meanings and associations of ‘blackened’ and ‘hardened’, though not all tackled ‘desiccated’ and some appeared to have misread it as ‘dissected’. Less effective responses often only labelled devices and/or offered no more than a generic explanation of the writer’s reasons for using them.

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, rather than limiting their answer to those words they are sure they can spell correctly, could be helpful for some candidates. Likewise consideration of shades of meaning might help some candidates to improve the precision of their explanations and move towards effect, targeting higher marks – for example, in paragraph 3 the description of the wreck as ‘enormous’ did more than suggest it was merely ‘big’ and in paragraph 7 the use of the word ‘tiny’ to describe the fish went further than suggesting it was just ‘small’.

Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear, accurate 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 this session were missed in a few responses where choices were from one paragraph only and/or only three choices were offered overall. The most effective responses 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:

- 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 from Text C is clearly identified and matches the sense of just 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 uses personification to interest the reader’ – you need to say how your chosen example does this to show your understanding
- make sure your explanations 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, 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 responses – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

### Question 3

**You are Charlie. Years later you work for an organisation which protects natural environments. As part of your work, you give a speech to persuade young people to protect your local area.**

**In your speech you:**

- **describe how you spent your afternoons on the beach as a young boy and what you enjoyed best about those activities looking back**
- **explain what you learned from your mother about the beach, its history and its people**
- **suggest how and why you were inspired to protect natural environments and what you think young people can do to help this beach.**

**Write the words of the speech.**

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 Charlie, one of the narrator’s sons, and reflect back on the explicit and implicit ideas conveyed in the passage in this extended Response to Reading

task. The task guidance invited candidates to present a speech persuading young people to protect the local area.

Generally, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a speech and many were able to write persuasively, using an appropriate register for their imagined audience. The best responses used and extended the speaker's experience to connect with young people, blending personal memory with a call to action. Occasionally, candidates allowed rhetoric to take over and lost sight of the text and task, developing passionate arguments for blue whales, dolphins and turtles and inventing detailed accounts of ways to reduce carbon footprints that strayed too far from the passage to evidence reading skills.

Some candidates invented complicated backstories for why Charlie had been inspired to protect natural environments that were not rooted in the text, for example suggesting the death of his mother through illness and/or sale of treasure discovered in the shipwreck as reasons for wanting to help the world/reduce global warming. A few candidates missed the opportunity to offer and develop a range of key ideas appropriately by opting to write their speech as Charlie's mother 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. Most were able to recount how Charlie had spent his afternoons on the beach as a young boy citing bicycle rides, treasure hunting for natural and man-made objects and playing pirates with his brother, though a number missed opportunities to develop ideas by not reflecting on those experiences as bullet one invited them to do. More effective responses found natural links when developing ideas for bullet one to ideas relevant to bullets two and three and were often able to use those connections to shape their speech effectively. For example, some reflecting on the most enjoyable moments looking back cited the comic timing of his mother's fall into the channel and went on to reflect on her optimism and enthusiasm as inspiring their own determination and approach to life. Others recalled the vulnerability of the baby skate they discovered together and linked that to the fragility of the dunes they purposefully cycled around rather than over and/or the beauty of nature before moving to explain the change in rules concerning cars on the beach.

Some in the mid-range moved on too quickly in bullet one and/or two to make full use of the ideas they had identified and target higher marks, for example many mentioned finding the shipwreck and car though did not reflect or comment on either experience. More effective responses had often considered what one or both of these might suggest about the power of nature and/or weaknesses of humankind and often went on to link to relevant points about tides/weather or the 'physical culture' of generations before them that the beach concealed and might reveal.

Where candidates had planned their response beforehand, they were often able to draw on relevant ideas and details from different parts of the text to address all three bullets effectively. There were some particularly effective responses that showed thorough evaluation of the text and expertly weaved in detail to produce a convincing and persuasive speech. Meanwhile responses that simply 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 thought hide-and-seek was a game played by the two boys and/or suggested that the brothers had discovered actual fossilised remains of a large extinct animal on the beach. Some very general responses recognised the need to refer to the beach but had moved away from evidence in the text completely – for example to suggest that Charlie remembered playing on the beach with groups of friends, making sandcastles and/or surfing – none of which were referenced in, or suggested by, the text so could not be credited as evidence of close reading skills.

Where candidates copied sections of text and/or replayed phrases that were not securely understood, responses were generally less effective; expression often became awkward and/or there were inconsistencies of style that also affected the writing mark. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to read back through their response to correct any mistakes or inconsistencies in their use of language – for example to ensure that meaning is clear and that the register sounds consistently appropriate. In the least effective responses, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of whole sections of text not uncommon in these responses. This 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
- keep the audience and purpose for your response in mind throughout 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 0990/12  
Reading

## Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read the introductions to each text carefully
- followed question instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words
- considered the marks allocated to each question and developed their responses accordingly
- understood the different requirements of the extended response questions
- paid attention to the guidance offered to help them focus their responses – for example, writing no more than 120 words in the summary, using just one example from the given text extract in **2(c)**, and selecting three language examples from each paragraph in **2(d)**
- avoided unselective copying and/or lifting from the text where appropriate
- used their own words where specified in the question
- planned the ideas to be used and the route through extended responses before writing
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition of ideas in all questions
- checked and edited their responses to correct any careless errors, incomplete ideas, or unclear points.

## General comments

The vast majority of candidates attempted every question on the reading paper; examiners reported seeing very few incomplete papers. Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format and question types on the paper. The texts proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates, and they responded positively to both texts and questions. There were relatively few examples of misunderstanding in terms of task requirements, and time-management was generally effective. Occasionally a failure to follow the rubric, or complete a task fully, limited opportunities to demonstrate understanding. This was most common in **Question 1(d)(ii)** and **1(e)** where some candidates did not attempt to find three points, in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates included a limited range of ideas in their responses or ignored the 120-word guidance, in **Question 2(c)** where a number of candidates did not select a clear example from the text provided or selected more than one, or in **Question 2(d)** where some candidates offered three choices of language in total rather than three choices from each paragraph as specified in the task or focused on the wrong paragraphs in the text.

In **Question 1**, the most effective approach taken by candidates was to work through the questions in the order presented, carefully noting the number of marks allocated and the space provided for their responses as helpful indicators of how detailed their responses needed to be. They also referred carefully to the lines or paragraph specified in each question moving efficiently through the text as directed. Less effective responses to **Question 1** tended to lack focus on the text or lacked relevance to the question. At times candidates used the language of the text where they had been asked to use own words – for example in **Question 1(b)(ii)** by explaining 'conventional' but lifting the word 'options' instead of offering an alternative to show understanding of the whole phrase. In **Question 1b(i)** many candidates found it difficult to fully explain 'sample delicacies' offering vague explanations such as 'food' or 'dishes' for delicacies and therefore not showing sufficient understanding to be given both of the marks available. This was sometimes an issue in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates copied phrases (or whole chunks of text) rather than remodelling the language of the text in their response. Even where copying is selective, it should be avoided in **Question 1(f)** to demonstrate evidence of full understanding for the Reading mark and produce an effective response to the task. Many candidates also included too many examples and details from the text, such as references to 'Chris' or the complete list of the advantages offered in a school minibus converted into a home. This made copying the original wording of the text more tempting and often led to the inclusion of excess material or sometimes indiscriminate selection of ideas.

In **Question 2** candidates were required to explain carefully selected words or phrases from specified sections of the text. **Question 2(c)** supplied a short section of the text to select from ahead of the longer response selecting from two paragraphs in **Question 2(d)**. More effective responses were able to consider meanings in context and as well as the effects of the powerful language identified, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose in a clear overview of the featured paragraphs. Middle-range responses tended to focus on the meanings of the language choices showing mostly clear understanding, although at times they tended to be literal rather than considered within the context of the whole text. Less effective responses struggled to develop viable explanations sometimes repeating the language of the text in the explanations or identifying literary techniques with varying degrees of accuracy but then offering general comments about the techniques rather than focusing on the words themselves. These responses did not always choose appropriate language to discuss or only selected three examples in total.

In **Question 3** the majority of responses addressed all three bullets in the question, although some candidates found it challenging to develop the ideas from the text. Most candidates wrote as Vic, although some adopted a rather vague voice, referring to Vic in the response rather than using his voice and perspective. The most effective responses produced a convincing letter adopting an appropriate voice for Vic reflecting on his experiences during the trip in the bus as well reflecting on what he had learnt from the experience. More effective responses developed the ideas and details in the text selectively to work through the bullets logically. They were able to explain what preparations were done before starting the trip, outline all the challenges faced and how they were managed, as well as reflecting on lessons learnt for the future. Responses in the middle range tended to use the text rather mechanically often paraphrasing closely rather than selecting ideas and details to use in their own writing to demonstrate understanding. These responses tended to focus on the first part of each bullet point, thus losing opportunities to develop the ideas in the text through offering more developed explanations and advice. Less effective responses tended to lack focus on the text covering only the main ideas and sometimes inventing material that moved too far away from the text itself. Some responses included a great deal of fabricated material about how Vic became part of the group, often reminiscing about fictional past events and trips with Roger. Other less effective responses copied unselectively thus providing little evidence of understanding.

Paper 1 is primarily an assessment of Reading, however 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – 5 marks in **Question 1(f)** and 10 marks in **Question 3**. In these questions, candidates need to pay attention to the quality and accuracy of their writing to maximise their achievement. Candidates are advised to plan and review their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style and to correct errors that may impede communication.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Question 1**

##### **Questions 1(a) – (e)**

In response to Text A candidates were asked to response a series of short answer questions. More effective responses paid careful attention to the command words in the instructions as well as the number of marks allocated to individual questions. These responses demonstrated sound understanding by selecting appropriate details and evidence from the text in concise, focused responses. Less effective responses tended to write too much or failed to follow the instruction to use own words. Some candidates offered several possible responses thus using time inefficiently and diluting evidence of understanding.

##### **(a) What were the first food trucks called, according to the text?**

This question required candidates to be selective and focus on paragraph 1 only. Most candidates identified and 'chuckwagons' to get 1 mark. Occasionally the mark was not awarded because of too much excess information from the text.

##### **(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

###### **(i) 'sample delicacies' (line 2)**

###### **(ii) 'conventional options' (line 3).**

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were instructed to use their own words to evidence understanding of the phrases in the question. Where responses failed to achieve both marks available for each

phrase, it was usually due to the candidate's partial use of the words from the text. For example, in **Question 1(b)(ii)** a few candidates used the word 'options' in their explanation of 'conventional' (such as 'the usual options' thus partially addressing the task. Some offered vague words to explain 'delicacies' such as 'food' or 'dishes' which did not explain the meaning in context clearly enough. Candidates should be aware that the 2-marks offered for each sub-section of **Question 1(b)** require all parts of the phrase to be explained clearly and precisely in the context of the text.

**(c) Reread paragraph 2 ('Unlike modern ... journalists.').**

**Give two differences between modern food trucks and chuckwagons.**

To achieve both marks for this question candidates were required to offer two clear differences between modern food trucks and chuckwagons, but many candidates simply offered two characteristics of chuckwagons or modern food trucks with no element of comparison. Some candidates wrote a characteristic of chuckwagons on one line and an opposing characteristic of modern food trucks on another line and therefore could be credited with 1 of the 2 marks available. The most effective responses clearly identified two differences such as 'Unlike modern food trucks, chuckwagons sold items other than food and drink', or 'Modern food trucks just have chefs but a person running a chuckwagon would have many other roles'.

**(d)(i) Reread paragraphs 3 ('The modern ... parked.').**

**Identify two reasons why food trucks are becoming more popular with customers.**

To respond to **Question 1(d)(i)** candidates needed to focus on what customers like about food trucks. Many candidates did not read the question carefully enough and offered general benefits of food trucks without focusing on the customer. They often offered material more suitable for **Question 2d(ii)**. Where candidates had read the question carefully, they were usually able to identify two reasons for their popularity with customers and gain both marks available. The most common response was due to nostalgia, followed closely by innovation and technology. Some candidates identified that street food has become more fashionable, but others were too vague and did not include street food in the point. Fewer candidates offered the idea that they can be found easily by customers.

**(ii) Reread paragraphs 3 ('The modern ... parked.').**

**Explain why many business people prefer operating mobile food trucks to running restaurants in permanent locations.**

In **Question 1(d)(ii)** candidates also sometimes failed to read the question carefully enough and focused on the customer instead of the business owner. This was more common where **Question 1d(i)** had also not been read carefully. Most candidates were able to explain that running a food truck is cheaper than having a permanent restaurant and many candidates referred to the ability to perfect a limited number of menu items. Some candidates identified the potential to serve food at a range of large events, but some were too vague on this point, simply offering a basic meaning of mobile as being able to move around rather than explaining why this is an advantage for the business owner.

**(e) Reread paragraph 4 ('Successful food ... ready!').**

**Using your own words, explain why it might be challenging to establish a unique food truck business nowadays.**

This question required candidates to show both explicit and implicit understanding from their reading of paragraph 4. Most candidates were able to achieve one mark, a reasonable number gained two marks, but fewer gained all three. The most common correct idea was that converting a food truck can be expensive, followed by the idea that all of the potential food options have been covered already. The point in the mark scheme explained clearly by fewer candidates was that the number of unusual or gimmicky vehicles/concepts already on the market, makes it challenging to find something original. Many simply repeated that there are many unusual ideas out there without clearly identifying it as a challenge. Some candidates simply repeated the question claiming it was challenging to establish a unique food truck. Candidates should be aware that to gain the full 3

marks in this question at least some remodification of the ideas in the text is necessary. There were very few examples of candidates copying out the paragraph completely in this session.

**(f) According to Text B, how and why are old buses being used?**

**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.**

This question was based on Text B and required candidates to select relevant ideas from the text and organise them into a focused summary which addressed the task. Most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of the text and offer some relevant ideas about how and why old buses are being used. The most effective responses were carefully planned, organised and coherent, focusing sharply on the task by referring to a wide range of ideas from the text, reordering the material where necessary to aid fluency and achieve logical progression, avoiding repetition and re-modelling the wording of the text to use own words effectively. These responses were often preceded by a bullet-pointed plan in which ideas from the text were noted briefly before being included in a fluent own-words response. Responses in the middle range tended to include a more limited range of relevant ideas, the most common being helping the homeless, using them as libraries, theatres and museums, converting minibuses to homes, advertising, and creating a pop-up shop or a café/office. A number of candidates failed to spot similar ideas such as helping the homeless and running musical events for elderly people with dementia as both aiding the community, or recycling buses being environmentally friendly and converting minibuses into homes reducing the carbon footprint, which could have been summarized into one environmentally friendly idea. This led to repetition. There was often inclusion of excess material even where an effective range of ideas had been considered, particularly when including both community ideas with full details or outlining all the living spaces offered in a converted minibus as well as citing that it can be used as a holiday home. Some less effective responses closely paraphrased the whole text resulting in repetition as outlined above but also the inclusion of irrelevant ideas and details.

Length was often an indicator of the level of the response, with some responses being too short due to a small number of relevant ideas identified, and others very long and wordy due to unnecessary information or quotations to exemplify comments. The most effective responses tended to adhere to the advised length through adopting a concise and focused approach to the task while adapting the style to produce a plain, informative text. Less effective responses were either very brief due to a very limited number of ideas being considered or were excessively long and unselective. Occasionally less effective responses adhered to the advised word count but took far too long to consider a few ideas by including unnecessary details and/or comments. In most responses there was an attempt to use their own words although a surprisingly large number of candidates did rely on lifting phrases from the text. The most commonly lifted sections of text/phrases were, 'they can't be buses forever', 'bringing arts to communities via mobile libraries, theatres or museums', 'educate, raise awareness and maybe save a life or two along the way', 'stopping in zones where homeless people tend to gather', 'musical events for elderly people suffering memory loss', 'working together can make a difference', 'renovated to accommodate four adults, complete with cooking facilities and a bathroom', '3D-paint your advertisement all over their vintage vehicle and drive it around', and 'bus that's been transformed into an office and café'.

Many responses strung together these lifted phrases, so were at best partially effective due to the reliance on the wording of the text affecting the evidence of reading understanding. These responses often lacked a helpful structure as the ideas had not been reorganised to address the task. There was very little evidence of misreading in this task (although many thought that elderly people with dementia were enjoying a 1970s disco on a bus), but an issue in some responses was a tendency to include repetition of a number of points when trying to address the 'how and why' in the question.

**Advice to candidates on Question 1(f):**

- reread Text B after reading the question to identify potentially relevant ideas
- plan the response using brief notes to ensure a wide range of ideas from the text is selected
- avoid including unnecessary details which do not address the question
- organise the ideas, grouping them where relevant, to ensure that your response is coherent

- avoid repeating ideas
- avoid including a general introduction or summative conclusion
- use your plan rather than the text as you write your response to avoid lifting
- write clearly and make sure you express yourself fluently using your own words – avoid lifting phrases
- do not quote from the text
- do not add comments or your own views – use a neutral writing style
- try to keep to the guidance to ‘write no more than 120 words’.

## Question 2

- (a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**
- (i) **Any interested person watching might notice that this large bus was different from the buses they sometimes saw in their country.**
- (ii) **The bus company was still really helpful after the bus had been sold.**
- (iii) **The disastrous end to their journey was when the bus ended up in a river.**
- (iv) **The writer and their fellow travellers showed incredible immaturity to think that they could make such a journey without mishap.**

The most effective responses to **Question 2(a)** focused on the underlined word or phrase, located the correct version in the text and gave it as the response. A few responses copied the whole sentence from the question inserting the correct phrase from the text to replace the underlined phrase in the question, but this was a less common approach presumably because it wastes valuable time for the candidates. Responses that used the text more widely than in the equivalent phrase/sentence could not be rewarded even if the correct word/phrase was included, as candidates do need to exercise precision to demonstrate full understanding. Most candidates were familiar with the demands of this question, but a few seemed confused about how to respond, offering own words equivalents of the underlined words instead of locating them in the text. Where marks were lost, it was usually due to partially matching the underlined phrase, for example ‘breath-taking naivety’ (missing the ‘displayed’ for ‘showed’, or more commonly including too much of the text and therefore moving beyond the meaning of just the underlined phrase, for example ‘a curious spectator would see a bus’, or ‘until that fateful last day when it sank’.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**
- It’s difficult to envisage how cut off from our previous lives we were back then. Mobile phones and emails weren’t yet invented. There was no internet linking different countries and cultures. To phone home was expensive and public phones weren’t easy to find. I was away two years and managed to phone home twice.**
- (i) **envisage**
- (ii) **linking**
- (iii) **expensive**

In **Question 2(b)** the most effective responses covered the meaning of each word considering its context as used in the text. Many candidates were able to explain ‘envisage’ as ‘imagine’, but some candidates simply wrote ‘think’ which did not show full understanding. ‘Linking’ was usually effectively explained as ‘connecting’, and most candidates were easily able to explain ‘expensive’ as ‘costly’. These responses to **Question 2(b)** thought carefully about meanings in context and offered viable responses which would accurately replace the words in the text without altering the meaning. Some candidates seem to be under the impression that their explanations should only be a single word to replace the original which is not the case.



- (c) Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the attitude of the owner of the orange juice.

**Use your own words in your explanation.**

This is the story of that big, red double-decker bus. This isn't a children's story, and if you try reading it to children, they'll soon lose interest in the increasingly petty details of our daily life. In one early letter to my parents, I wrote: 'We had yet another meeting yesterday to sort out grievances.' This latest inquest had been into who'd drunk someone's orange juice from the fridge. The devastated owner knew some had been 'stolen' because he'd marked the level of the liquid in the bottle.

In **Question 2(c)** candidates were required to select one example of language from the specified section of the text and explain how it suggested the attitude of the owner of the orange juice. A significant number of candidates did not follow these instructions but instead offered a very general response with no focus on the writer's language and no language choice selected. Where a paraphrased version of a language choice was offered, it was occasionally possible to credit an explanation if they lifted a word such as 'petty', but they often lacked any focus on any specific words used by the writer and therefore could not be credited at all. The most effective responses offered a concise quotation then considered how the writer was able to convey the attitude of the owner of the orange juice. The most popular example was 'The devastated owner knew some had been 'stolen' and many responses explored the overly dramatic reaction suggested in 'devastated' recognising that the owner was acting as if heartbroken, as well as the use of 'stolen' suggesting that a trivial annoyance was being viewed as a serious crime. These responses often cited the immaturity of the orange juice owner.

Some responses, however, tried to explain 'devastated' with less powerful words such as 'sad' or 'upset' thus limiting the opportunities to tackle the exaggerated language effectively. Some responses explored 'this latest inquest into who'd drunk someone's orange juice' focusing on the phrase 'latest inquest' as suggesting that it was a regular occurrence which merited a formal investigation like a serious crime thus emphasising the owner's possessiveness and overblown sensitivity.

Other candidates focused on 'he'd marked the level of liquid in the bottle' and were able to explain the calculated trapping of the 'thief' revealing the stinginess and possessiveness of the orange juice owner. Some candidates failed to focus on the question selecting choices such as 'This is the story of that big, red double-decker bus', or 'This isn't a children's story' which were not related to the attitude of the orange juice owner. Only one example could be rewarded so offering more was a waste of valuable examination time that could have been spent on **Question 2(d)** where more developed responses are expected. A number of responses simply paraphrased the whole paragraph without selecting a language choice at all.

- (d) **Reread paragraphs 5 and 6.**

- Paragraph 5 begins 'Our world ...' and describes the inside of the bus.
- Paragraph 6 begins 'That bus ...' and describes where, when and how the bus travelled.

**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.**

The most effective responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three appropriate language choices from each of the two paragraphs indicated in the question. The most effective approach was to consider the meanings of carefully chosen phrases in the context of the text and then consider connotations, effects and impacts created by the writer's language choices. These responses often offered a clear overview of the writer's intentions in each paragraph. Less effective responses were sometimes written in note form and offered less developed analysis or repeated the same ideas about effects, often making generalised assertions rather than considering specific words more closely. Middle range responses were usually more effective when explaining meanings but struggled to explore the effects fully, and the least effective responses tended to offer

quotations (sometimes unselectively) but struggled to find anything relevant to say about them. Some candidates chose three language choices in total rather than three from each paragraph as clearly stated in the question leading to some underdeveloped responses. Some candidates chose inappropriate language choices – sometimes plain language offering limited opportunities.

The most effective responses selected phrases but also considered the individual words within them suggesting how they worked within the context of the whole language choice. Rather than identifying literary devices they engaged fully with the language, considering its impact and connotations fully and linking each choice to a coherent and developed consideration of the paragraph. In paragraph 5 many were able to explore their individual choices within the context of the unusual and cramped conditions on the bus. They considered the importance of the bus to the occupants as a temporary home through 'our world was inside that double-decker bus', often linking it to the overcrowded conditions suggested by 'an overloaded display case of rattling glass and metal on wheels', many also using this language choice to explore the poor condition of the bus, as well as the idea that the occupants were also on 'display' and attracting attention wherever they went. Many candidates also chose to explore Vic's formidable and unbelievable skills as a carpenter suggested by 'magicking snug bunk beds', or the phrase 'ingenious storage seats' citing his use of limited space to create functional and effective furniture. This was often linked to 'no sliver of space escaped' as further demonstrating that every inch of space on the bus had been utilised efficiently by Vic's designs. These choices could all be linked to an overview effectively yet considered independently offering candidates a great deal of scope for precise and developed analysis of the language used in paragraph 6.

In paragraph 6 many responses were able to appreciate the challenges posed by driving the enormous bus on such a long journey across varying and challenging terrains. Many candidates opted to discuss 'traversed deserts and climbed mountains' as evidence of the variation in landscapes and the adventurous nature of the journey. Another popular choice was 'rumbling across continents' as evidence of the great distances covered by the bus and its sturdy reliability suggested in the 'rumbling' of the engine. This was often linked closely to 'threatened to halt its determined march' and the impression of a bus that refuses to give up, no matter what, with military endurance and formidable strength. Many candidates focused on difficulties of driving the bus suggested in 'heavy, awkward vehicle' and linked this to 'less manoeuvrable than a whale in quicksand' implying that the bus is out of its natural environment and extremely difficult to control in some terrains. Many also appreciated the humour suggested in the image.

Where effects were less effectively explained, it tended to be due to repeating the same idea for all three language choices in the paragraph. In paragraph 5 this tended to be through repeating the idea of the lack of space and in paragraph 13 it tended to be repeating the idea of the bus being hard to control/drive. There were also candidates who used the language of the text repeatedly in their explanations: most commonly 'world', 'rattling glass and metal on wheels', 'stared and gazed', 'squeezing', 'magic', 'secretly', 'continents', 'lumps, bumps and obstacles', 'determined', 'march', 'a whale in quicksand' and 'fateful last day'.

There some evidence of misreading in the two paragraphs specified in the question: some candidates interpreted 'gutted' too literally and focused on the bus being permanently harmed or completely destroyed by a deliberate violent action; other candidates misread 'overloaded display case of rattling glass' and thought that the bus was full of glass items which were not properly secured; and a number of candidates misread 'sliver' as 'silver' which affected the candidate's interpretation of the whole phrase as they focused on how precious the space was. Some less effective responses also included very long quotations with general explanations rather than engaging closely with specific words. Very rarely were quotations included at all with a brief description of the paragraphs offered instead. Such responses did not address the question at all. In a very small number of responses, the wrong paragraphs were used so no choices could be credited, or candidates moved through every paragraph in the text, wasting valuable time: candidates are advised to look at the section of text supplied in the question as well as the paragraph number to ensure that they select language choices from the correct paragraphs. They should also be aware of where paragraphs end, especially where there is a page break.

Candidates are reminded that it is the quality of their language analysis which can be credited. Listing of literary devices or the selection of plain language from the text is unlikely to lead to an effective response.

#### Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- select three precise and accurate language choices from both specified paragraphs
- make sure explanations of meanings make sense within the context of the text – avoid literal meanings unless this is the case
- avoid very general explanations such as ‘this helps the reader imagine it’ or ‘this creates a strong visual image for the reader’ or ‘this is an example of powerful language and imagery’
- try to engage with the language at word level by considering meaning in context then connotations / associations of words and why the writer has selected them
- always start with the contextualised meaning then move on to the effect created by the language in terms of how it helps the reader’s understanding of the situation, characters, atmosphere, for example
- avoid repeating the same explanations of effects for each language choice: try to be more specific about analysing at word-level.

### Question 3

**You are Vic. Shortly after the whole trip ends, you write a letter to a friend telling them about your experience.**

**In the letter you should:**

- **describe the preparations for the trip and how you came to be involved**
- **outline the different challenges faced once the journey began and how these were resolved**
- **explain what you think everyone learned through the experience and looking back what you all should have done differently and why.**

**Write the words of the letter.**

**Base your letter on what you have read in Text C, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullets.**

**Write about 250 to 350 words.**

This question required candidates to write a letter from Vic (the skilled carpenter) to a friend describing and reflecting on his experience of the two-year adventure on the double-decker bus. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their letter. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and adapt it to fit the requirements of a letter written from Vic's perspective. The third bullet required candidates to infer what Vic feels he has learned from the experience as well as considering what he wishes they had done differently.

The majority of candidates were able to show general understanding of the text addressing the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support the response. Many of the responses were also able to develop the ideas by writing in a credible style for a letter to a friend, evaluating the ideas in the text and adapting them accordingly. Where candidates had followed the bullets carefully, they were often able to develop explicit and implicit ideas effectively to write a lively and amusing letter which captured the absurdity of the journey as well as the highs and lows experienced by the occupants of the bus. Most candidates addressed the bullet points in chronological order using them to structure the response coherently. Less effective responses tended to be unselective or closely paraphrase the text without adapting the style therefore offering a rather plain narrative account of the bus journey with little sense of Vic's perspective of the events. The least effective responses used the ideas in the text thinly, often offering very general ideas about in response to the first bullet mostly connected to acquiring the bus, listing some of the more obvious challenges for the second bullet, and offering an undeveloped response to the third bullet mostly citing the need to take more money for fuel without offering any further details or trying to develop the ideas in any way. Some less effective responses only addressed one or two of the bullets.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to describe the preparations for the journey and how Vic came to be involved. This gave candidates opportunities to look at the acquisition of the bus by Roger, the advert he placed to travel around the world, the need to refurbish the interior requiring Vic's carpentry skills and his subsequent alterations. The best responses considered the forming of the group through an advert, the old age and impractical height of the bus, the decision to paint it red, and the sterling work Vic did in a confined space to make it comfortable for the group. Less effective responses usually found a narrow range of ideas in this bullet and did not look for ways to develop the ideas. There was little evidence of misreading in response to the first bullet, although a large number of candidates thought Roger and Vic were old friends ignoring the reference to 'Roger's new friend, Vic' in the text. Some candidates spent time creating a back story for Vic and Roger which had no connection to the ideas in the text at all.

The second bullet offered many opportunities to identify the challenges of life on the bus and how the group resolved them. The best responses selected carefully and were able to remodel the material. They were able to look at the implication of silly arguments suggested by the 'theft' of the orange juice and link it to the limited space on board creating tension. They were also able to develop the suggestion of financial woes by referring to the boredom or physical difficulty of the 'manual work' they were forced to do. They also cited a feeling of isolation or home sickness created by the lack of ways to communicate with family and friends at home in an era before the creation of digital communication. Many candidates also considered the problems caused by the bus itself, citing its age creating mechanical issues, as well as its size making it very tricky to drive in some landscapes and conditions.

When responding to the third bullet, the most effective responses clearly organised the material into the positives of the adventurous journey and the shared experiences they had but weighing it against the foolishness of their lack of preparation due to their relative naivety. These responses picked out a range of clues from throughout the text to develop appropriate ideas, reflecting on the experience of different cultures, and their personal growth as they learnt to work together to overcome adversities. The best responses took a reflective approach and considered their lack of preparation in terms of finances, as well as the impracticality of the vehicle for the nature of the journey undertaken and their stupidity in attempting to float it across a river on a raft. Less effective responses tended to lack range in response to this bullet often simply referring to their lack of money and some misread the ending completely and thought that the bus made it safely across to continue to journey. Some responses did not address this bullet at all.

Many candidates seemed comfortable and familiar with the format of an informal letter to a friend with the best responses adopting an appropriately lively and entertaining tone and register. Middle-range responses tended to be written as a rather plain narrative relying heavily on the sequencing of the original text and sometimes were not written as Vic. The language used was mostly appropriate and some more effective responses were genuinely convincing. In less effective responses the language and voice were very plain but rarely inappropriate for the genre, although such pieces tended to lack a sense of purpose or audience. Some less effective responses wrote a completely fictional piece about a journey on a bus with other friends or family rather than using the text.

Generally, accuracy was effective with some skilfully written responses. Others struggled to maintain fluency resulting in some awkward expression caused by errors in grammar and punctuation. Candidates are advised to check through their work carefully to correct errors where possible. There were few instances of wholesale lifting from the passage, but some less effective responses were over-reliant on lifted phrases and sentences throughout the response.

### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read Text C carefully, more than once, to ensure sound understanding
- do not refer to ideas in Texts B and C
- pay careful attention to the written style adopted – for example, the register required for the purpose and audience of the task
- do not invent information and material that is not clearly linked to the details and events in the text
- give equal attention to all three bullet points
- briefly plan your response to ensure that you are selecting ideas relevant to all three bullets
- remember to look for ideas throughout the text for the third bullet
- avoid copying from the text: use your own words as far as possible
- remember to use ideas and details from the text but to adapt and develop them appropriately to create a convincing voice and new perspective
- leave some time to check through your response
- do not waste time counting the words: the suggested word length is a guide, not a limit.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

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Paper 0990/21

Directed Writing and Composition

## Key messages

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

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence 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 some very brief scripts, incomplete scripts and some in which copying of large sections of the reading texts made it difficult to assess the candidate's own abilities. Some lifting of phrases or sentences was fairly common; where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing. There were a small number of responses to **Question 1** which were entirely copied from the texts and a few scripts contained no **Question 1** response but nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination.

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, especially **Question 3**, which made it difficult for examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure. **Question 5** was sometimes addressed in a more discursive than narrative style. Where this was seen, the response was usually a discussion of different measures of success or different kinds of successful careers and again this sometimes limited the Content and Structure mark available because the mark scheme directs examiners to reward characteristically narrative features.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of volunteering by school or college students in the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses attempted an appropriate style and format for an article with an audience of young people, with varying effectiveness. The register required here was interpreted in different ways with some responses more formal in style while others adopted a conversational tone which sometimes showed an awareness of what would engage a younger readership. Some misunderstood this less formal register, however, and slipped into a colloquial, less accurate style, using words such as 'kinda' and 'gonna', which was inappropriate in the context of an examination. 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, based on ideas in the texts, was often given about how students would react to the instigation of a volunteering scheme in school, with only 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, such as the contradiction between compulsion and genuine volunteering. Sometimes, responses reflected the ideas in the texts in a more straightforward, practical way without addressing these wider ideas about the nature and value of volunteering in a school context. A common issue was that the scheme itself was not discussed and comments focused on volunteering without reference to what was being proposed. There was also some misreading of the scheme with candidates suggesting that, for example, the school should not compel students to give up their

evenings and weekends when Text A outlined how it would operate within the school timetable. More effective evaluation tended to probe some ideas in the texts and examine carefully the implications of the scheme on different groups, rather than record or summarise what was in both reading texts.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Some salient ideas in the texts were side-stepped rather than examined. For example, many candidates suggested that the scheme should be optional rather than compulsory but did not really justify this to show an understanding of the inevitable tension between freely giving up one's time and being made to do so. The details of the scheme were sometimes not well-understood at this level. Sometimes an assumption was made that teachers would resent having to supervise students in their volunteering work when Text A specifically precluded this. Most commonly, the implementation of the scheme to work within school hours was not completely understood. This meant that opportunities to examine and evaluate the implications of reducing teaching time or narrowing the range of academic or sporting experiences were missed.

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 the inherent contradiction between true volunteering and compulsion, some outlining how this would diminish its real value and others acknowledging that, while not truly voluntary, its impact on the students and others would nonetheless be beneficial. The structure and organisation of ideas required in an article, often including some rhetorical sub-headings or clear lines of argument, were used effectively in better responses to persuade and argue a case. Less effective responses were often written in a flat, reporting tone 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 many kinds of 'shelter' described for **Question 2** and Examiners accepted a very wide range of interpretations as long as the idea of 'sheltering' was essential to the response. Shelters for civilians during conflicts, animal shelters and huts found on walks to shelter from storms were amongst many interpretations which featured at all levels of achievement in these responses.

Less effective responses to this question were sometimes a little vague in depicting forest or other natural landscapes, often with the shelter only featuring tangentially after a much longer description of a journey. The purpose or nature of the shelter was sometimes unclear, giving rise to some confusion for the reader.

For the second descriptive writing question, there was a narrower range of interpretations of having to 'wait for a delivery' though some proved very effective in creating a sense of anticipation, nervousness or excitement. Whether the delivery awaited was a pizza, news through the post about examination results or news about the birth of a baby, the ability to evoke an atmosphere during the wait tended to determine how effective the description was.

Less effective responses here described relatively ordinary scenes and focused more on the narrator's actions while waiting, often unconnected to the idea of waiting and not really evoking an atmosphere of anticipation or a build-up of tension. While there were some effective responses which used the idea of waiting for a fast-food delivery, more thoughtful choices of what was to be delivered often elicited more effective responses.

Both narrative writing questions proved popular across the range of abilities. **Question 4** was a very common choice for candidates of all levels of achievement. Again, making a careful choice about what it was that 'could not be stopped' tended to help to determine how credible and well-constructed the narrative became. The sense of the inevitability of some action or consequence often helped to shape responses at the higher levels, including the narrator being unable to control an urge for revenge and the immense natural force of a tsunami.

This sense of jeopardy was often important in the creation of a believable response to this question.

Less effective responses tended to include the required phrase in a way which was less impactful or was incidental to an otherwise relatively straightforward narrative. While some at this level used credible scenarios, stories were sometimes mundane or lacked drama and pace.

**Question 5** elicited some, though fewer, highly engaging and well-constructed narratives, including some which used the idea of ‘success’ ironically in scenarios of bungled bank robberies or plans to steal examination papers. There was more of a tendency here to write discursively about the various journeys to success of sporting stars, often a discussion of different types of success or sometimes a simple set of exhortations to ‘never give up’ or to ‘do your best’. These kinds of responses showed limited narrative shaping and content for Content and Structure, even when organised and paragraphed.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A: Directed writing**

##### **Question 1**

**Write an article for your school or college magazine about whether or not a volunteer scheme for older students would be a good idea.**

**In your article you should:**

- **evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions about volunteering in both texts**
- **consider the effects a compulsory volunteering scheme in school would have on students, teachers and the wider community.**

**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.**

#### **Marks for Reading**

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. 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 the efficacy or otherwise of compelling students to volunteer as part of their school curriculum.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the ideas about the true nature of volunteering explored in Text B and whether it could be reconciled with the scheme proposed by the writer of Text A. The highest marks were awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates’ achievement. These implicit ideas often involved the effect of compulsion on the concept of volunteering and a range of impacts on students and others, such as the implication that students could develop independence because teachers would not supervise their efforts or that teachers would struggle to cover the syllabus because of re-timetabling to accommodate volunteering into the school day. Many responses, for example, reflected Text A’s implied criticism of younger generations for their selfish fixation on academic success but better responses used that implication to contest the idea that students could be compelled to be compassionate simply by including it in the curriculum. Similarly, the effect on teachers was sometimes explained fairly simply using the lack of supervision as giving teachers a well-earned rest from teaching – a valid use of implicit ideas – while others combined this notion with reduced teaching time to highlight the potentially detrimental effect on students’ academic achievement and grades.

There was sometimes some subtle grasp of the slightly assertive tone of Text A with some candidates offering a critique of the head teacher’s contradictory ideas that a scheme that did not work in the past could be made compulsory as a way to instil values of kindness and compassion in students. Some saw the scheme as a way for the school to raise its profile on the back of the unpaid labour of the students: as one wrote, ‘Its made so that the head master can toot his own horn and look in the mirror and say he is a good person.’



In contrast, the sarcastic tone of the parent at the end of Text B was almost always missed with many candidates taking literally the suggestion that students should be sent home for an afternoon to help their families with chores. Occasionally, however, there was a thoughtful discussion about the difference between helping friends and neighbours and disadvantaged strangers, with the true spirit of selfless volunteering only being shown in the latter case.

The safety and potential exploitation of students in their volunteer placements was considered thoughtfully by some candidates, inferred from the lack of supervision by teachers and the notion, based on careful reading, that the vetting of charities could not ensure they would be protected from other volunteers or their clients. A bad experience could mean that rather than instilling an 'ethos of service', the scheme could mean students never volunteered in the future.

In more effective responses, the inherent contradiction of compelling students to volunteer was properly considered alongside the implications of Text B's comment that the true impulse to help others which underpins volunteering would not necessarily be in evidence under the scheme. These arguments often made use of Text B's depiction of young people as self-conscious and ill-equipped to deal with vulnerable people, suggesting that compulsion would negate any benefit to all concerned as a result. While many candidates suggested an alternative, optional scheme would be better, these comments were not always rooted in a rationale based on ideas in the texts but rather as a personal reaction to the idea of volunteering. Where clear inferences were drawn from specific ideas in the texts, examiners could award higher marks for Reading.

The extent to which these 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 more evaluative ideas, often about the impact of a lack of supervision on students' independence or the dangers to their academic success in the light of fewer teaching hours.

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 scheme would cause more stress for students who would be concerned about preparation for examinations or that an optional scheme would be more acceptable to students. More general, if valid, ideas were also typical at this level with many responses listing the benefits of volunteering (rather than the scheme) for students, teachers and charities. At this level, there was sometimes a lack of close reading resulting in assumptions that leisure time would be affected or that students would be too exhausted after a long day at school to volunteer.

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 where these were listed or simply recorded, or there was some more obvious misreading. 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 generally about volunteering rather than the scheme and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts. Some assertions were based on misreading of how the scheme would work and who would be involved and responses at this level were usually brief.

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 mainly lifted responses in which there was some insecure 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 attempted to

adopt a style of mediation between conflicting interests, exhorting their fellow students to get involved with volunteering. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical style, presenting their arguments in a more combative way, especially when pouring scorn on the ideas underpinning the headteacher's scheme. These responses made their case effectively and with some impact.

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 with the arguments 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 seriousness of 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, though these kinds of responses were fairly rare. Phrases and words such as 'nudged out of their comfort zone', 'feely giving something that money can't buy' and 'learn to navigate their way through without supervision' were often used but in some cases several sentences were also copied. More commonly, a range of expressions was lifted to express salient ideas which could then not be credited for either Reading or Writing. 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 was 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. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses tended to introduce and summarise 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. 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. 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 relatively 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 disagreement, often

between plurals and verb forms. Common spelling errors in this mark range included some frequently used words in the texts, creating a jarring note when the topic covered meant there were frequent misspellings, such as 'volunteer' very often written as 'volenteer', misspelling of 'scheme', 'programme' and 'compassion'.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use 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 relatively basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was moderately 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; responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Level 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor 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, ineffective control of grammar, or misspellings of key words, which are in the passage
- check your spelling of key words which appear often in the texts.

#### **Section B: Composition**

##### **Descriptive writing**

**Question 2 – Write a description with the title, 'The shelter'.**

**Question 3 – Describe a time when you had to wait for a delivery.**

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates, though **Question 2** was much more often selected; examiners awarded a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions elicited responses describing a wide variety of scenarios which examiners could reward appropriately. A sense of a very specific place, brought to life in vivid ways, was often key to the effectiveness of the description of shelters in **Question 2**. Shelters from war and conflict, both now and in the past, featured strongly amongst more effective responses. The use of underground stations in several city locations during wars worked well for some who could make use of closely observed details in their depictions of the physical location and the sometimes terrified, sometimes bored occupants: 'The man, dressed as if he was just going to work at 2 am when the sirens rang over the city, sat on the ground reading a book. His back upright and his tie straight, he could have been in a public library if it weren't for the dim light and the seething mass of terrified humanity around him. His eyes scanning the page only paused for a split second as the falling bombs made impact on the ground above.'

Other scenarios included previously unnoticed huts or sheds in more rural landscapes. These were often sought out or stumbled upon by walkers during a storm. In some effective responses, the contrast between the raging storm and the saturated landscape outside and the safety and warmth of the inside gave candidates opportunities to develop the detail and impact of their piece. While this scenario sometimes elicited some clichéd or exaggerated ideas and images, in the most effective it was often a quiet understatement which characterised the writer's confident creation of a cohesive picture in the reader's mind: 'Inside, a drenched man, silent as a ghost, made no sound as he retreated into the shelter. The only sign of life was extinguished when he blew out the match he held in his hand, obscuring his face once more.' In a description of a hospital shelter during a war, the face of a nurse was described as 'frozen stern by the uncountable deaths she has witnessed. The nurse pulled a grieving girl from the body of a dead soldier 'with all the force of indifference.'

Some shelters were unusual interpretations of the task, such as pieces describing safe spaces such as a homely family kitchen for a bullied schoolboy or the bedroom of an autistic person for whom the world outside was overwhelming and frightening. In a few cases, the shelter was another human being who offered a kind of sanctuary and a sense of protection. Where these responses were consistently and effectively descriptive in content, examiners accepted such interpretations of the task.

**Question 3** also elicited responses across the mark range. As mentioned above, the most effective focused on creating a vivid atmosphere of anticipation, nervousness or excitement. Here, as well as in **Question 2** and many previous descriptive writing tasks, the selection of a particular scenario often contributed significantly to the effectiveness of the response. While many chose waiting for a fast-food delivery to arrive, some included some exaggerated ideas and images about desperate hunger. Where the style was sometimes fluent and accurate, the content seemed hyperbolic and extreme: describing waiting for the delivery of a pizza, one candidate wrote, 'Slowly, sepulchral tears slid lethargically down my forehead catching the opalescent light like tiny beads of glass. Sweaty and impatient, my hands clawed at the foggy windows.'

Time and its passing often featured in interesting ways in responses to **Question 3**. There was often the conventional ticking of a clock or the 'painfully slow, pitilessly, glacially slow' movements of the clock's hands as one candidate described it, to mark the discomfort of waiting in many responses as well as the different ways in which delivery apps in the hands of the person waiting affected them. One writer described the dot on the screen showing where the delivery driver was as a 'digital promise' and in another response, the driver chose a circuitous route to the writer's house, frustrating the writer who knew 'he'd now been five minutes from my house for the last half hour and that arrow on my phone screen had mocked and taunted me the whole time.'

Some scenarios seemed more appropriately selected than waiting for a pizza delivery, however, in order to give candidates an opportunity to describe a range of different kinds of intense emotions. In one response, a small boy waits for post from home after being sent to live with a distant aunt: 'Every morning my breakfast would turn to sand in my mouth. Play was stripped of its ancient charms and I spurned my friends who knew nothing, my childish heart wracked with the pain of abandonment unexplained.'

Hospital waiting rooms also provided a suitable location for dramatic arrivals of babies or sometimes the results of medical tests which could be momentous. Observable details of sight and sounds were diverse and precise in the most effective responses: one described the light as 'a little too bright' and the sound of the telephone ringing at the abandoned desk as 'jarring', yet when it stopped the 'weighted hush that fell on the room' was even more unwelcome. In responses where the tension was controlled but varied, shown through observed detail rather than hyperbolic language and imagery, the effects created were often very interesting and engaging.

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 were characterised by this cohesive structure, often provided by the narrator's reactions or a specific atmosphere, 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 a more predictable. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas, as mentioned above.

In both questions, where some responses lacked specific detail or the situation chosen was too mundane to sustain a more heightened range of ideas, marks for Content and Structure tended to be awarded in Level 4. Lower in the mark range, responses to both questions were relatively prone to narrative though Examiners rewarded description wherever it appeared. In the second question particularly, a minority of responses included narrative sections about what the writer did while waiting – making a cup of tea, phoning a friend, watching television – rather than evoking an atmosphere of anticipation or tension which was credible for the scene described.

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.

Some 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 sometimes entirely narrative and often brief and undeveloped.

### **Narrative writing**

**Question 4 – Write a story which includes the words, ‘... it could not be stopped ...’.**

**Question 5 – Write a story with the title, ‘The path to success’.**

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. **For Question 5**, examiners sometimes saw responses which showed some lack of understanding of the narrative genre.

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**, the required line in the question gave candidates an opportunity to construct a story around the idea of something or someone unstoppable and where this idea was used as a central point in the response, the narrative often proved more engaging and cohesive. These stories often featured unstoppable forces of nature, such as storms, fires and floods, or other kinds of forces, such as alien invasions, illnesses or psychological impulses, as well as overwhelming social pressures in the form of bullying or forced marriages. Abstract concepts such as justice or love were convincingly used by some skilled writers, though perhaps in the middle range of achievement these ideas were a little more difficult to sustain. These choices were often important in determining the effectiveness of responses, even where more technical skills were not as secure.

Effective responses also showed evidence of the thoughtful use of other characteristics of developed narrative writing which are important in creating stories which engage the reader. Sometimes, concise and evocative description, scene-setting characterisation were used effectively. In one response, some economically written scene-setting helped the reader to imagine a gothic scene: ‘The basement door yawned open. The candlelight licked the walls, casting twitching shadows like hanged men. Mother was sitting on the bed, her white, silk robe pooling around her like spilled milk.’

This economy of style and the use of images and striking ideas in narrative writing was typical of the most effective responses to this question. The confidence of understatement was a fairly rare but a clear indicator of an accomplished writer. Introducing an abstract concept as the ‘unstoppable’ force in the question, one candidate wrote: ‘Regret settled in like the rain outside: quiet, steady, undeniable.’

In the middle range of achievement, responses were cohesive but often a little more predictable, with chronological structures and less developed characterisation and setting. These often involved floods or fires and occasionally a fairly coherent narrative used the phrase in the question as an incidental detail or part of dialogue which did not fit comfortably in the story and seemed more suitable as responses to other questions.

The subject matter at this level varied widely and some responses used scenarios which were difficult to control for less confident writers: zombie incursions, alien invasions and attacks by viruses were some of the choices made in this range in which the scale and scope of the narrative often made it difficult to use characters and settings which engaged and interested the reader. Nevertheless, many cohesive, organised responses were given marks in Level 4 for Content and Structure where there was enough shape and cohesion to meet the criteria.

Less effective narratives for this question tended to be brief outlines of a sequence of events, often lacking credibility and development but with some overall clarity. These often employed similar content to more effective stories but there was very limited characterisation and the focus was almost entirely on events and actions. Occasionally, the story was almost entirely written in dialogue with little actual narrative.

For **Question 5**, the idea of a ‘path to success’ was used imaginatively in more effective responses. The notion of what constituted ‘success’ was challenged in some thoughtful responses. One candidate wove a convincing story about a girl who had been sent off to boarding school to fulfil her evident academic potential and forge a successful career. She came to realise that these values, promoted somewhat heartlessly by her parents, were less important to her than those of friendship, companionship and loyalty, as she lived through bitter loneliness at school: ‘I had no friends. Nights were spent pouring over textbooks in my dark room, tissues spread around me like the feathers of a moulting dove, soaked with the salty tears of a grief that comes from never having been a child.’

Other paths to success involved more subversive versions of the idea, such as successful heists pulled off against the odds or escaping from some kind of entrapment by guile and deception. Some of these included some closely observed characterisation and description which enlivened the piece. In one successful robbery of a large corporate company which had driven the narrator's father to his death by their corrupt practices, the unknowing 'look-out' for the robber was his own child who was unwittingly drawn in by playing a simple game of 'I Spy'.

In other effective responses, candidates chose an unusual or interesting point of view from which to tell the story. One narrative involved a grandfather who had trained a grandson in the art of deception and who told the story of his grandson's rise to a rather dubious notoriety with obvious pride and affection, creating some interesting, ironic dissonance for the reader. In another, a story which began with many of the standard images and vocabulary of another bank robbery turned out to be an attack on a chicken coop by a group of foxes, told through the voice of the leader of the pack. The real nature of the attack, as well as the real identity of the protagonists and narrator, were revealed in carefully seeded words and phrases which only created a clear, satisfying picture by the end. At the beginning, the preparations were described: 'The rest of the crew assembled, most of them lumbering in a torpid haze, but that would change soon.' The lock on the coop is then broken by one of the crew 'clawing' at it, as if they were a gang of incompetent gangsters – a detail which only made sense when the real scenario came slowly to light.

These different versions of what 'success' might mean and the use of interesting points of view and storytellers helped to showcase how to use a task or question in a more engaging way. In the middle range, responses were often cohesive and there was sometimes some characterisation and scene-setting, but the stories were more conventional 'rags to riches' tales or narratives in which much hard work contributed to sporting or academic success. In most, there were some fairly predictable obstacles on the way which jeopardised protagonists' paths – examinations were failed, start-up businesses collapsed, sportspeople sustained crippling injuries – but success was assured at the end. Where there was a little more care taken over creating credible characters or perhaps evoking the atmosphere of a sporting event, these stories were sometimes given marks for Content and Structure just into Level 5 but most were Level 4 narratives.

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 were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying resolution. Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks, 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 lower in 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 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 coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given.

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 although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as ineffective sentence control, sentence separation and grammar

errors. Moderately common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 marks, such as disagreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary. 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 both Content and Structure and Style and Accuracy because neither the story as a whole or the meaning of the language was clear.

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. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these issues also limited the marks available in the narrative writing.

**Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:**

- choose your plot carefully so you have time to develop characters and settings
- consider imaginative ways and points of view 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: only use incomplete sentences when you want to create a specific effect
- use complicated vocabulary only with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

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<p><b>Paper 0990/22</b> <b>Directed Writing and Composition</b></p>
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## Key messages

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

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence 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

Candidates were familiar with the format of the examination paper and understood what was required for both the directed writing and composition questions. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements seen. A small number of candidates did not attempt **Question 1** but wrote relatively competent responses to one of the composition questions. Most responses were written in candidates' own words although there were a few responses which were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert. 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 some stories and occasionally discursive or polemical pieces submitted for the descriptive writing tasks, which made it difficult for examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the desirability or otherwise of redesigning a neighbourhood into a 'city village' in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a formal letter to a city authority. The register required here was generally well understood, with a businesslike and persuasive tone and the use of some stylistic devices, although some responses used phrases which were inappropriately colloquial.

The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than excessively lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on or employing the ideas in the texts in a coherent response. Even in responses which offered only limited coverage of the ideas in the reading material, some opinion or recommendation was usually given about whether or not such a major change was desirable or workable, as given in the task, though not always probing or offering judgements about the ideas: only a very small minority simply reported the views and ideas in the texts with no comment whatsoever on them. More effective evaluation tended to challenge some ideas in the texts rather than reproduce them and also develop them thoughtfully to consider the impact on different groups of people.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Here salient ideas in the texts were not fully addressed, such as the morality or practicality of enforcing radical change to a settled neighbourhood. A number of responses at different levels of writing skills focused on the requirements of the first bullet point in the task, thus missing important evaluation opportunities offered by the second.



Most candidates 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. Less effective responses were sometimes little more than a summary in paraphrase of the two passages in the Reading Insert. The structure and organisation of ideas required in a letter, such as a focused and explanatory opening and a thoughtful and convincing conclusion, were well understood by many candidates, though there were also responses which were relatively flat and discursive in style after a brief introduction.

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. In this examination session the narrative and descriptive options were almost equally popular.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were effective, organised and sustained. The first question was slightly the less popular but produced responses across the mark range. In response to this option there were some many convincing evocations of moments of tension in a competitive situation, and while the chosen scenario was most frequently that of a sports competition or match, written in the first person, there were also effective descriptions set in chess games, dance competitions, online gaming and drama auditions: a few candidates made the best of their own situation by convincingly representing the anxiety of ‘freezing’ during an academic examination.

Less effective responses to this question were less likely to focus tightly on the moment but covered longer periods of time and activity in the match or competition, almost inevitably drifting into narrative, although Examiners rewarded description where they found it. Responses to the second descriptive option resulted in some highly effective and sophisticated depictions of artists of different kinds. Most were of painters, but also featured were sculptors, musicians and composers, dancers and couturiers. At various levels of achievement a more metaphorical approach was taken, with God or Nature being the artist. Some of these were most engaging, evocative and well-structured. A small number of responses were biographical pieces about well-known artists or discursive pieces about the nature of art. These offered assessment challenges to examiners but they rewarded descriptive content where they could.

The first narrative option was less popular than the second, but both produced responses across the range of abilities. In response to **Question 4** a large proportion of narratives involved excursions of different types, difficult hikes with school or college friends, and a considerable number of attempts to conquer Everest or K2. There were also journeys of growth or self-realisation. Less effective responses were often accounts of family holidays or lists of events and places encountered on their travels. In response to the second narrative option the idea of the ‘switch’ had sometimes only the most limited or almost incidental significance. Many narratives, at varying levels of achievement, were based on an actual, physical switch, while others involved stories of switching events and attitudes to alter one’s life path or progress. Those using the former approach produced many narratives of transportation to other worlds, or the finding of treasure. Often there were stories where bodies or personalities were switched, with frightening or humorous results: these were sometimes clearly derived from well-known movie franchises. Responses to both questions which were coherently constructed and which included credible characters and scenarios were always more effective. Less effective responses to both questions were over-packed with incident succeeded by an ambiguous or abrupt ending. Some highly effective responses created tension and pace, supporting the narrative detail with the deliberate manipulation of paragraph- and sentence length for effect.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section A**

##### **Question 1**

Imagine you live in a city which is considering redesigning your neighbourhood.

**Write a letter** to the city authorities, giving your views on the proposal to create a ‘city village’.

In your article you should:

- evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions given in both texts
- consider whether or not the proposal is desirable or workable and whether or not it will benefit different people in the community.

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 letter was also accurate and precise in vocabulary, with a clear understanding of the appropriate style and register for the specific task and audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded. More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. 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.

#### **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 the desirability or workability of such radical change to city layout and planning. Responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 effectively challenged the outright banning of polluting vehicles, forcing people including the old and the disabled to walk or cycle in possibly tropical heat or monsoon rain, the assumptions of designers that all residents would welcome or at least tolerate the massive disruption that major demolition and rebuilding would surely bring, and the idea that most people would value living in the type of community where, ‘everyone knows your business’. Some very thoughtful responses given marks in Level 6 stood back from the minutiae of the proposal to look at the concept as a whole: ‘What right have the city authorities and the designers –no doubt from outside – to determine how we should live? However ‘convenient’, they will create ghettos which restrict freedom and cultural growth.’

Elsewhere effectively argued responses challenged the notion of ‘minimal travel’ in Text A: ‘You might say that having all services close by would be helpful in an emergency, but are you really suggesting that a fully equipped and staffed major trauma centre will be provided in every neighbourhood? Will factories and industrial units be placed in every area so that workers can walk to their employment? I think not!’. There were a number of responses which managed to synthesise ideas from both texts to craft a fully developed response in the form of a letter, offering a range of evaluative points, and these could be awarded marks for Reading in Level 6 or high in Level 5. These showed a mature and thorough grasp of the subtleties of the issues involved. Where even a single evaluative point was firmly made examiners could award marks at the bottom of Level 5 if there was otherwise reasonable coverage of the reading material. Where coverage was more extensive and more evaluative points were made the response could move up the mark range in this Level. Examiners noted an increase in this examination series of brief responses which precluded the awarding of marks in Level 5 or above because they were not ‘thorough’ or ‘developed’ responses as required by the Mark Scheme, but where some comment on or development of key ideas in the texts was offered examiners could award marks in Level 4. A small number of responses were seen in which one or two points of the proposal were subjected to impressive analytical discussion and development but the

marks awarded were limited to mid- or lower Level 5, because the range of evaluative points was limited. These responses were often awarded high-level Writing marks.

Where some comment or opinion was offered, sometimes without specific reference to particular points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks at the lower end of Level 4 were usually awarded. These comments usually focused more exclusively on the pragmatic, reproducing some of the benefits of both approaches to the proposal. Examiners noted well-written responses which could not be awarded marks for Reading above Level 3; these sometimes lengthy and thoughtful responses about the importance of community, friendship and tolerance seemed only based on the writer's own experience, with little reference to the task in the question or to the specific ideas in the texts. They were sometimes very accurately written and employed an effective register and so had marks in widely differing Levels for the two components of the question. Where the beginnings of evaluation of explicit points were evident, marks at the top of Level 4 could be awarded, while in undeveloped or brief responses, a mark of 7 at the bottom of Level 4 could be given if a comment had some firm roots in 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 where these were listed or simply recorded, or comments were relevant but simple. A mark of 5 or 4 was usually given where answers were thin or partly lifted directly from the texts. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but little 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. There was also sometimes, at this level, misunderstanding of some details in the texts or an unbalanced grasp of ideas: some understanding of the writer's perspective in Text A was evident, but little or no reference was made to the ideas in Text B. These responses were sometimes muddled but also opportunities for evaluation were lost elsewhere because responses were limited to asserting that the redesigning of the neighbourhood should or should not go ahead, without relevant support from the texts or development with the writer's own ideas.

Less effective responses tended simply to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in low Level 3 and below contained much copied material. Some candidates neglected the direction in the task about considering different people in the community, thus missing many evaluation opportunities. Examiners also noted a marked degree of confusion about the proposal itself, perhaps arising from an imperfect grasp of the task: responses argued for or against the conversion of the whole city into a village or wrote about their rural home villages being made into cities.

## **Marks for Writing**

### **Style and audience**

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for a letter to city authorities, whose specific concerns and points of view could be imagined or understood. Most responses showed a clear understanding of the required register, even where technical writing skills were ineffective, and this allowed Examiners to consider marks in Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. At all levels of achievement having a distinct point of view supported the effectiveness of the writing because it could become impassioned and highly persuasive.

In the middle range of marks, examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and audience. These often maintained an effective register without resorting to the overly colloquial slang and even expletives of a few responses. In these, expressions such as, 'gonna' and, 'you guys' or overly loose sentence structures were used which were not appropriate for a response in the context of an examination where a range of writing skills is assessed. A small but significant minority wrote as if the proposal to redesign the neighbourhood was entirely their own idea which they were presenting to the city authorities: some were still able to develop and evaluate points from that perspective but for most it hampered the creation of a coherent response.

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 or argument. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for examiners to reward, though this kind of response was rare. More commonly, phrases and sentences were lifted and increasingly so as the response developed. In a small number of responses lengthy quotes from the texts were supplied; that inverted commas were used did not disguise the fact that too much of the response was not the candidate's own writing. At the lower level, awkward paraphrasing was seen with syntactically incorrect insertion of phrases from the text. In this

examination session several instances of inappropriate reference to 'Text A' and 'Text B' which would negatively affect the register were seen, although rather less so than in previous sessions.

## 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 first paragraph and the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a cohesive piece. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses, apart from the rhetorical flourishes or salutations, tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The point of view being developed determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than their sequence in the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed and usually avoided the repetition of similar ideas which appeared in both. 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 coherent judgement or recommendation 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. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were imposed on the structure of the original texts rather than argued for, and a concluding recommendation was often in apparent contradiction to the weight of selected points preceding it. It was not unusual to see responses which set out all the possible benefits and advantages of a city village, but concluded, 'So leave our neighbourhood alone -we like it as it is', or some similar exhortation. Some less effective responses were very long and involved a considerable amount of repetition; introductory paragraphs were often very laboured and artificial: they sometimes reworded the whole task and promised the recipients to reveal all the results of their research on the subject. At a similar level, conclusions often summarised all that had gone before in a very laborious, repetitive manner.

## Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a Writing mark in Level 6. These responses were not only engaging in style and convincing in their deliberations but fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and consciously used to persuade the reader.

Some complex sentence 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 precise. A range of relatively basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There was some grammatical mis-agreement, often between plurals and verb forms. Words commonly misspelt in this range included 'environment', 'convenient/convenience', 'amenities', 'business', 'benefit', 'society' and 'accessible'. Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use 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 relatively basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Here, the omission of definite or indefinite articles was relatively 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 nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

In this examination session examiners noted a reduction in the random use of capital letters, with only the very occasional response written wholly in capital letters.

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
- ensure that you understand the specific focus of the question to avoid misinterpretation or 'drifting'
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, ineffective control of grammar, or misspellings of key words, which are in the passages or given in the task
- do not lose marks by using capital letters randomly.

### **Descriptive writing**

**Describe a tense moment during a competition.**

**Write a description with the title, 'The artist'.**

Descriptive Writing was a very popular choice for candidates, with **Question 3** being chosen rather more often, and examiners could award a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions were interpreted in a variety of ways which examiners could reward appropriately. In the first task, there were many detailed, organised and effective descriptions of anxious moments in a range of situations, although the dominant scenario was that of sporting competitions, often international football or basketball matches. There were highly engaging evocations of critical points in the competition or the player's personal career. Where these responses eschewed narrative beyond that strictly necessary for context, and included original and convincing details and images, examiners could award marks in Level 6. Some of the most effective descriptions for **Question 2** summoned up crucial moments in chess tournaments, using images of sound and almost monochrome visual details, or conveyed the mental stress of the competitor which could not be alleviated by physical movement: 'He dug the heels of his palms into his eye sockets in a frantic attempt to calm his trepidated self.'

Descriptions, as is always the case, were more effective if they contained vivid and specific details rather than more general or stereotypical ideas and images. In the middle and lower ranges of achievement writers depended more on visual or stereotypical images: 'He ran faster than a cheetah'; 'The goalkeeper saved the ball like a lion pouncing on its prey'; 'The crowd roared.' In responses to the second question, a substantial number depicted painters, either in a studio or outside painting a landscape. The painting itself often became the main focus of the description rather than the artist, but images were often so convincing and evocative that examiners were able to award high marks for content and structure. Although the subject lent itself primarily to visual imagery including the resonant names of oil colours, tactile and olfactory images were also effectively employed: 'She ran her fingers over the thickly ridged impasto created by his palette knife....'; 'Instinctively she poured linseed oil that spat out a potent odour and diffused quickly through the room.'

For both descriptive writing questions, unusual, closely observed details created convincing, evocative scenes and atmospheres 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 engaging, cohesive response. Level 6 responses were characterised by this cohesive structure, often provided by the narrator's reactions or attitudes or a specific atmosphere, as well as carefully chosen detail and striking images. When writing in the descriptive genre, candidates often struggle to provide suitable introductions and conclusions, but in response to **Question 2**, at varying levels of accuracy of writing skills, numerous responses began in medias res, perhaps when a penalty shot in a match was imminent or a crucial chess move or ballet step was about to be attempted. Here the backstory was often effectively provided in flashback. Sometimes this effect was reduced by a later slide into overlong narrative. In responses to **Question 3** much less narrative preamble or scene-setting was evident: the writer often came across a painter or performer when turning a street corner, or opening a door into a studio: 'And there he was, utterly oblivious to my presence, his paint-daubed overall hardly distinguishable from the splattered floor around his easel.'

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details with well-managed structures, 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. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas. In response to **Question 2**, some writers struggled to employ effective structures without resorting to excessive narrative, for example detailing the progress of their

sporting career which had led to this important competition. Responses awarded marks in Level 4 for Content and Structure generally tended to become more narrative in intent although Examiners rewarded description where it was found. In responses awarded marks in Level 3, there was often some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing, even though some were fairly-accurately written. These were sometimes entirely narrative or the details included were mundane and stereotypical: 'The team was all in their red strip and the stadium was packed.' In other responses the scenario of an on-line gaming tournament was employed, and this could be challenging for the non-specialist to understand fully.

The most effective responses employed precise and varied vocabulary, striking images and personification, as well as a range of sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was occasionally wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by its imprecise use and lack of clarity. Occasionally, obscure, even archaic language sometimes revealed a lack of understanding of its meaning rather than a wide range of vocabulary. In a few responses, there seemed evident a determination to employ a learned corpus of vocabulary, where it was inappropriate or even impaired meaning.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences continued to affect marks given in the middle range, even where other technical aspects of style were more accurate. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included mis-agreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and the omission of definite and indefinite articles was also common and damaging to otherwise relatively accurate, if simple, styles.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

- try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content: choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus
- keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a specific atmosphere
- write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses
- use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.

### **Narrative writing**

**Write a story which involves an extraordinary journey.**

**Write a story with the title, 'The switch'.**

Narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range, and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses, numbers of which were awarded marks in Level 6 for both components of the answer. These most engaging responses often included vivid descriptive detail to create the setting and characters, essential elements of more effective responses to both questions. Examiners sometimes saw narratives which seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations or were pre-prepared: this was much more apparent in **Question 4**. Occasionally responses were seen which did not comfortably fit with either title, and where some lack of cohesion was evident. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 showed an ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension, mystery or drama and to vary the pace of the story.

In **Question 4**, many responses were accounts of a family holiday or of hiking adventures with friends. Those awarded marks at the top of Level 3 or in lower Level 4 tended to be straightforward chronological accounts, with little or no characterisation or convincing scene-setting. These failed to convince or engage the reader, often because of their unrealistic nature: friends bored during school holidays might decide on a whim to attempt a mountain climb which would deter all but the most experienced mountaineers, and by the next morning were at base camp with no apparent preparation or expertise. At this Level family trips to Disneyland or some exotic location were also seen, often unrelieved by any major incident or development. Level 5 responses revealed a wider range of scenarios, and included journeys of personal growth and development, sometimes poignantly evoking sadness and self-realisation. Another candidate wrote about a journey through the written words of her deceased grandfather's journal, revealing her father's secret life. There were several stories set at the time of the Partition of India, with exhausted refugees attempting journeys in both directions. One of these was awarded marks at the top of Level 6. In careful, spare prose it evoked the loss of home and fear of the future: 'The journey had taken pieces of us: a scarf lost, a prayer whispered, a photo of my father crushed at the last checkpoint.' This recounted not only a harrowing physical

journey, but also one of personal development, even transformation, as the teenage narrator gradually assumed responsibility for keeping older family members alive: 'I had crossed more than a border that day'. Another response awarded full marks was narrated by an Alzheimer's sufferer. Expertly using internal monologue and flashback techniques, the writer depicted the sufferer's journey through past and present times, ending most movingly with a painful moment of realisation when, believing he was ten years old and playing with his teenage sisters he heard his own aged and roughened voice calling to them. Examiners could reward such responses for their ambition and engagement, even where levels of accuracy were somewhat lower than those for content and structure.

For **Question 5**, there were many different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability, but several themes dominated at all levels of achievement: the discovery of actual switches, the operation of which had often spectacular results such as opening a portal to other worlds; fantasy stories in which bodies or personalities were mysteriously exchanged, leading to many kinds of adventures; pranking stories involving twins, and narratives in which the protagonist underwent some sort of an epiphany which changed the direction of their lives. To achieve high marks for content and structure, such narratives had to demonstrate convincing scene-setting and characterisation, and the creation of drama and tension. At the lower end of Level 5 and in Level 4 responses to **Question 5** fantastic or spectacular events were sometimes presented without any expression of fear or even consternation, as if finding oneself in the body of another was no more surprising than picking up their belongings by mistake; the resulting loss of credibility negatively affected marks for Content and Structure. Sometimes marks in the Level first considered by the examiner for an engaging tale could not be awarded because of ineffective endings or faults in the plot's resolution. This particularly affected some otherwise engaging and convincing responses to Question 4. Examiners noted an emerging trend for an action-packed or fantasy plot to end abruptly with, 'I realised it was all a simulation.' Also seen was an increase in the number of responses –small but significant—which included gratuitous violence or other disturbing material.

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 careful attention to characterisation and how events are driven by character traits and choices. This was often supported by the skilful employment of both direct and reported speech.

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 were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying, if not always engaging, resolution. For higher 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: here 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 characters as credible and rounded. 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 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 this was coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. 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 lacked some range in vocabulary. Speech punctuation and paragraphing were usually problematic at this level although the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as ineffective sentence control, faulty sentence separation and grammar errors. Some writers resorted to laying out dialogue in the style of a playscript in order to make clear who was speaking. Relatively common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in lower Level 4 responses such as mis-agreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes obscure vocabulary. 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. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these issues also limited the marks available in the narrative writing. Examiners noted the use of the language of on-line gaming in some responses such as, 'I had a clutch of 1v4', or 'I saw a double holding', which detracted from the reader's appreciation of their content.

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, apart from a chronological account
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader: do not rely only on events
- check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes, taking special care to avoid misspelling words given in the tasks: accurate speech punctuation and paragraphing will help to lift your mark
- use complicated vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.



# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9-1)

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<p><b>Paper 0990/03</b> <b>Coursework Portfolio</b></p>
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## 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 in their coursework portfolio
- read critically and thoroughly evaluated the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions, and attitudes they identified in a text for **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 assignments 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
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of arguments, 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
- a wide range of appropriate texts were used for **Assignment 1**, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond, and were relevant to their interests
- 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 (ICRC), and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms (CASF).

## 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. Most coursework portfolios contained writing of three different genres. Moderators reported seeing very few incomplete folders.

The majority of 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. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for adjustment of marks.

### **Administration**

Successful administration was when centres:

- used the coursework checklist to ensure all administration guidelines had been followed
- submitted their sample and documents by the deadline
- carried out a thorough process of internal moderation which was clearly signposted on the assignments themselves as well as all relevant documentation
- indicated all errors in the final draft of each assignment
- supplied marks and specific comments relating to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- accurately completed the CASF and ICRC, including any amendments made during internal moderation
- ensured that each coursework folder was stapled or tagged and securely attached to the ICRC, using the ICRC as a front cover
- submitted their sample of coursework folders without using plastic or cardboard wallets.

### **Internal Moderation**

Moderators reported further improvements in the number of centres getting the administration right this session. This can be attributed to the coursework checklist which when used ensures that centres follow all guidelines in the 0500/0990 Coursework Handbook.

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).

### **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.

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.

## 2 Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

- A number of 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.
- Some confusion was caused when 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

- A small number of centres did not collate the individual assignments into complete coursework portfolios but instead placed loose pages of work into the grey plastic envelopes and despatched them to Cambridge; this caused moderators some difficulties when assembling the coursework folders and increased the risk of work becoming lost or mislaid. Centres should secure each individual coursework folder using tags or staples with the ICRC securely fastened as a cover sheet.
- Moderators reported that several centres used plastic wallets or folders 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.**
- Some centres included more than one rough draft in each folder; 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.
- 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.

### Use of Artificial Intelligence

- Moderators reported seeing a number of responses where AI may have been used. This was particularly apparent where a draft had been improved considerably in terms of style and use of vocabulary, or where a response to one assignment appeared to attain a much higher standard than the other assignments in the folder.
- Centres are reminded that it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that all coursework assignments are the candidate's own work and that any use of generative AI for research purposes has been clearly acknowledged in the work. Centres are reminded that the inappropriate use of generative AI to create or enhance student work without acknowledgement risks being classed as plagiarism.

### Comments on specific assignments

#### Assignment 1

Candidates were successful when:

- they responded to interesting texts of appropriate length 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 many 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, single-sex schools, social media influencers, the pros and cons of having tattoos, climate change, the influence of fashion, the pros and cons of AI, and issues of local or national interest. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated, texts which were too

informative (and often long) 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 endorsed the writer's views and opinions because they offered few opportunities for evaluating those 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 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 or disturbing material. 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.

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 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 developing the necessary skills and knowledge for **Assignment 1**, but this approach should not be used for the final coursework submission; it is recommended that candidates are offered a choice of texts approved by the teacher.

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 many 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 Table A (writing) or below. The moderators noted that there was a tendency for some 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
- 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 fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions, but this is still a relatively common flaw in descriptive writing assignments, sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which invited candidates to describe a specific scene from a play, or chapter from a novel, which tended to lead to unoriginal responses, or 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 events in candidates' lives, 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 of 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 was a common reason for moderators adjusting marks.

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 significant 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 for specific effect.

### 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. These included accounts of Jack the Ripper or sometimes descriptions of film or book plots. 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 horror 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 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 such as punctuation, use of prepositions and articles, tenses, and construction of sentences.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

**Paper 0990/04**  
**Speaking and Listening Test**

## Key messages

Whilst the majority of centres adhered to the rubric of the test with regard to timing, some did not follow the requirement to conduct full tests. This is a serious concern. Where centres have conducted short tests, particularly for **Part 2**, the conversation, Moderators have been instructed to adjust marks to address the brevity.

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

**Part 2** should last for 7 – 8 minutes and 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 met.

**Part 2** should consist of a conversation between the candidate and the Examiner. It follows that a **Part 2** that is in essence a series of unrelated questions 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 and accurate. 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 may 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 OESF 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 are to be congratulated for managing internal moderation where more than one Examiner was involved in conducting the tests. However, these centres should be careful to enter the correct set of marks into SfA. On some occasions the original marks appeared in SfA even though changes had been made during internal moderation.
- 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. Any problems with the quality of recordings should be reported to Cambridge immediately so that candidates are not adversely affected by such issues.
- A small percentage of centres uploaded videos of their candidates performing their tests. This practice is actively discouraged.

### **Conduct of the test – General comments**

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

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- 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.
- 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 every opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills they possess.
- 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 should 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. Effective Examiners prompt candidates then allow them the opportunity to respond in full and to develop their ideas before moving the conversation forwards again.

### **Comments on specific sections of the test**

#### ***Part 1 – Individual Talk***

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

*Focused talks are more successful in that they allow the candidate to explore and go 'deep' into a topic. For example, instead of 'Music', I enjoyed listening to 'The Power of Music' and 'Music Invokes Memory'. Similarly, instead of the broader 'Pets' there was 'Protecting Domestic Pets'.*



*Many candidates had experiences of travel or living in different countries to draw on so there was plenty to talk about. However, this needs to be framed in a way that demands some reflection or evaluation rather than just an explanation of what happened.*

*Avoid **Part 1** talks which come across as over-scripted or over-memorised. Instead, aim for a more natural approach which engages the audience and retains some spontaneity.*

*Some candidates chose to tackle a specific aspect of their topic, and this benefited them greatly, allowing them to focus on a specialised area or point of debate.*

Almost exclusively, all the responses to **Part 1** were in the form of a presentation. This format remains a safe and acceptable one, particularly if there is an attempt to analyse, evaluate and reflect on personal experiences. For many candidates this choice remains a safe and productive way to achieve a high 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 factored in. Largely narrative responses that follow a linear path, such as talking about 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.

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 included:

The science of sleep  
Ethics of true crime shows  
Tourism in Jamaica  
Women in film  
Split decisions  
The dark side of football  
The fascinating world of fragrances  
Persistence  
Editing classic books  
The Butterfly Effect  
Marketing: A twenty-first century dilemma

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

Technology (Too generalised)  
Music (Too generalised)  
Social media (Too generalised)  
A.I. (Topical but without a clear focus)  
Neymar (Descriptive and without a clear focus)  
A typical day (Limiting and little to discuss in **Part 2**)

## **Part 2 – Conversation**

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

*There was some marking of **Part 2** which was lenient when they were considerably short of the required 7 minutes.*

*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.*

*A number of Examiners asked lots of closed or factual questions whereas more effective Examiners spoke less and asked more open questions such as ‘tell me about...’ or ‘tell me more about...’ and then referenced what had been said.*

*Candidates should choose topics they are already familiar with. It is detrimental to the marks when a candidate is answering questions in an area they have seemingly newly studied just for this component.*

*Candidates should try and provide detailed responses and avoid monosyllabic answers.*

*Most Examiners conducted the conversations effectively and encouraged candidates to extend and develop the topics.*

Generally, the **Part 2** conversations were well conducted and Examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions which enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. After initial questioning to stimulate the conversation, the use of prompts, instead of lots of further questioning, was often 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 included closed questioning and offered 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 unimaginative 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.

Issues with timing are 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 and will be awarded.

One issue remarked upon by several Moderators is that some of the formal conversations in **Part 2** became too informal and ‘chatty’. It is understandable that Examiners wish to put their candidates at ease, but a level of formality is still expected and is addressed in the second bullet point descriptor at each level regarding the accurate use of language.

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**

- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful. Ensure that the candidate’s 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 delivering 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.
- 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.
- Do not interrupt too keenly; another prompt given before the previous response is finished, or when the candidate pauses for thought, can affect the candidate adversely by limiting their capacity to develop their ideas fully.
- 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 and not the perceived accuracy of what is said.

### **Advice to candidates**

- Choose a topic you are passionate about and one you can talk about for 3 – 4 minutes then discuss in even more detail for 7 – 8 minutes without repeating yourself.
- Practise your presentation but do not learn it word for word.
- Have bullet point notes 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 overly long talk will be regarded as not being ‘well organised’ (a requirement 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.
- Watch examples of speeches/presentations/talks to learn how effective 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.