

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/11  
Writing 11

## Key messages

- Candidates should ensure they identify the key words in each task to enable them to satisfy the requirements of the question. This is particularly important in **Section 1**, especially when the word **and** is in bold type, indicating there are two parts to the bullet point.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- In **Section 1**, candidates should ensure that they use an appropriate format and style for the required text type.
- Candidates are advised to adhere to the suggested wordcounts for each section.
- Candidates should remember that the majority of marks in this exam are for; they are encouraged to proofread their work for meaning and accuracy.

## General comments

- The vast majority of candidates appeared to be fully engaged with the questions and there were very few short or irrelevant responses.
- The best responses featured highly accurate writing, demonstrating a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Vocabulary continues to be impressive, with many candidates using a wide range of vocabulary appropriately.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors include confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and a lack of full stops and commas to punctuate sentences. Candidates should avoid the use of slang expressions in their responses.
- **Section 1** was executed well by the large majority of candidates with the bullet points being generally well addressed.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section 2** questions. The wide range of options meant that candidates were seemingly able to find a topic they were interested in writing about.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1: Directed Writing**

#### **Question 1**

The question required candidates to write a speech for a school assembly. The speech was about a talented classmate who had been chosen to represent their country in an international competition. The purpose of the speech was for candidates to explain the competition and appeal for help in providing funding for their classmate's travel and accommodation costs. The audience was candidates and teachers who would be present at the assembly.

Candidates appeared to be familiar with the situation and purpose of the task and almost all showed awareness of the genre conventions required of a speech at a school assembly. It was very rare for candidates to write in the wrong format, but there was the occasional example of a letter or an article.

The following points had to be included:

- the name of the classmate **and** details of the international competition
- details of the event they were planning
- how they would like other candidates to become involved in the event.

For **bullet point 1**, candidates had to give the name of the classmate **and** details of the competition. As the **and** was in bold, candidates had to address both parts of the bullet point and the large majority did this. Almost all candidates managed to name their classmate. In some cases just a first name was given and this was acceptable as the audience would presumably know who was being referred to. Most responses also included some information about the classmate's accomplishments to help capture the audience's interest.

The second part of the bullet point was also generally done well. There were a huge variety of international competitions referred to including sports events such as football tournaments, academic events such as debate competitions and musical events such as talent contents. Most responses also provided useful supporting detail such as where the competition would take place and how long it would take. Some responses did not fully address the second part of the bullet point giving little to no detail about the event, sometimes just repeating 'international competition' from the question. One or two others just described an upcoming event at their school which did not have an international element.

For **bullet point 2**, candidates were instructed to give details of the event they were planning to raise funds. A wide variety of fundraising events were described. Popular options included a fun day, a colour run, a talent contest and a concert. The best responses gave details of how the event would operate as well as entry costs and timings. Other responses described setting up a fundraising campaign and collecting money inside and outside the school and this was also accepted as an event. Some responses neglected to address this bullet point in detail and referred to raising money without specifying an event for doing this. One or two conflated the international competition and the fundraising event and these were occasionally blended into one activity.

For **bullet point 3**, candidates were required to say how they would like other candidates to be involved in the event. Most responses included reasonable detail and suggested various ways in which other candidates could volunteer to help, e.g. by collecting money, running stalls or making things. A number of responses suggested asking other students to give donations or attend the event but did not develop the point beyond this. The stronger responses made it clear that students were being invited to take an active, rather than a passive, role in planning the fundraising event. A few responses omitted this point entirely.

Balance is required in selecting material for Task Fulfilment and it usually works best to write roughly the same amount for each bullet point. Candidates are better served by expanding on a few points in detail, rather than by listing numerous points. Also, responses are not enhanced by the addition of overlong introductory and concluding sections that are not directly related to the task.

The large majority of responses included some features of speech format. Most responses were introduced with a reference to the speaker's name and an acknowledgement of the Principal's generous permission for the speech to take place. Stronger responses also included regular appeals to the audience, e.g. 'Come on everyone we can do this!' Enthusiasm and a positive tone were features of successful responses. Most speeches ended with polite, persuasive and appropriate calls for support, thanks for the audience's attention and anticipated help in providing or raising funds.

There was a good sense of audience in most responses with candidates understanding that they were delivering a speech to their peers and their teachers. There were often amusing references to the audience being surprised to see the candidate on the stage as well as understandable pride being expressed in the achievements of the classmate. Features such as rhetorical questions and direct address were also appropriately used to make the speech more persuasive.

With reference to language, spelling was generally strong, with confusion of homophones being the most common error. Errors were commonly seen in words like *there* and *their*, *too* and *to* and *your* and *you're*. By contrast many candidates employed a wide vocabulary and showed an impressive ability to spell difficult words correctly. There was often appropriate use of idiomatic expression, but this was overused in some cases, and this reduced the coherence and flow of the response.

Frequent errors in the use of tenses and articles made some responses difficult to understand. Punctuation was generally accurate and paragraphing was a strength in most responses. However, some responses showed weak sentence control including very long sentences which would have benefited from greater demarcation. Capitalisation errors were also observed, in particular in the use of the lower case 'i' for first person.

Candidates are recommended to proofread their work carefully to help them find and correct errors.

## Section 2: Composition

The vast majority of candidates wrote complete **Section 2** responses. A few candidates did write very brief responses though and this suggested that they had spent too much time on **Question 1**. There were also some candidates who wrote very long responses that went far beyond the recommended 350 to 500 words. These candidates often found it difficult to maintain control of their responses and this could lead to a lack of cohesion and an increase in communication-impeding errors.

### Question 2

**Describe two events you went to, one of which was much better than you expected and one of which was disappointing. (Remember you are describing the places, the atmosphere and any people, as well as the events.)**

The descriptive task proved fairly popular. A wide variety of occasions were described, including weddings, parties, concerts and sports matches. A common theme was expectation; the more promising the event, the more disappointing it was, and vice versa.

The best responses employed the full range of senses to give accounts of their surroundings and made effective use of detail to bring the events they were describing to life. Stronger responses included detailed appropriate description of the venue, people, clothes, entertainment and food. Vocabulary was often very impressive and included words like *vibrant*, *anxiety* and *anticipation*. Successful use of contrast between the two events was also a feature of strong responses.

Less successful responses often relied too much on narrative, sometimes spending more time narrating what happened at the events, rather than describing them. The focus of this task should be on description rather than on narrative. The control of tenses was a weakness in some compositions. The present tense was used well by most but others used the present and past tense inconsistently.

### Question 3

**'In order to have a positive effect on society, it is far more important to be kind than to be clever.' Do you think this is true? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was the least commonly attempted of the **Section 2** tasks, but candidates who did attempt it often wrote well on the topic. Most candidates argued that it was better to be kind than clever as kind people are more likely to have a positive impact on the world around them.

Reasons given for this included the fact that kind people improve the lives of others as well as their own. By contrast, clever people are often seen as being selfish and looking down on others. Some candidates did make the case that society would not progress without clever people as there will always be a need for scientists to make new discoveries and engineers to build things. A few candidates argued effectively that it was better to be both clever and kind.

The topic allowed candidates to use examples from their own experience and employ argument and counter argument appropriately. Weaker responses tended to just describe the candidate's experience of people being kind or clever without making a comparison between the two qualities.

### Question 4

**'Most young people think that solving environmental problems is the responsibility of older people.' Do you agree? Give reasons and details to support your view.**

This was the more popular of the discursive tasks, probably because it is a topical issue, and there are a wide variety of views on the subject. Opinions were balanced with candidates being split as to whether older or younger people should take the lead in solving environmental problems. Commonly given reasons for older people taking responsibility included the fact that older people had caused the problems as well as the fact that they had more experience and were more likely to be taken seriously.

Reasons given for young people taking responsibility or for taking a more balanced approach included the fact that younger people were the ones who would be affected most by climate problems and also the fact that younger people would have more energy for implementing practical solutions.

Another approach that was taken in some responses was to interpret environmental problems as problems that occurred locally, such as traffic problems and water and power supply issues. This was an acceptable approach to take as long as the response focused on the role of older and younger people in solving the problems referred to.

As with **Question 3**, many candidates performed well on this task and examined both sides of the argument in detail, before reaching a balanced conclusion. Weaker responses sometimes did little more than express a preference without fully qualifying it. Others lacked structure and sometimes became repetitious as candidates repeated the same points, rather than developing their arguments. It is important that candidates consider how much they have to say on a topic before opting for one of the discursive tasks. Planning would help candidates with this.

### Question 5

**Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘As they arrived at the station, their cousin appeared from nowhere.’**

This was the most popular of all of the **Section 2** tasks. Candidates were able to use the sentence in a variety of ways and many wrote well-crafted and interesting stories. The sentence could be added at any point in the story, with most candidates using it to provide a plot twist at the end. ‘The station’ was often interpreted to be a bus, train, petrol or police station.

A common theme was a cousin going missing and then turning up unexpectedly at the station after a frantic search. Many of these narratives were well-constructed with effective use of features such as dialogue and inventive beginnings and endings. There was also often good use of supporting detail to build up the tension, e.g. the fact that the cousin had become involved in crime and was on the run from the police or gang members.

Less successful responses could be confusing for the reader where the narrative structure was difficult to follow. Some stories included sexual assault and graphic violence; this should be avoided.

### Question 6

**Write a story in which misunderstanding a message plays an important part.**

This was another popular question. The misunderstanding took many forms – from friends falling out because of an unclear text message to bank robberies going wrong because the instructions had not been clear. The task allowed candidates quite a lot of freedom. Many responses effectively featured dramatic events ensuing after the misunderstanding. Some candidates provided a clever twist by which the misunderstanding saved the day, e.g. by preventing the protagonist from boarding a flight that crashed.

The best responses contained varied sentence types and lengths, as well as linked paragraphs. The precise use of a wide range of vocabulary also lifted responses. Weaker responses tended to focus on one simple event, for example two friends falling out, and would only describe this in quite basic detail.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/12  
Writing 12

## Section 2

### Key messages

- Candidates should give attention to the **full** requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**; the word **and**, in bold type, indicates two parts to the bullet point, both of which should be addressed.
- In **Section 1**, candidates should pay close attention to the required format and ensure that they show awareness of this throughout their response.
- Where introductory paragraphs are included in the Directed Writing, they should be as brief as possible, and should not rely on a large amount of lifting from the question wording.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority of candidates.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and a more varied use of punctuation (colons, semi-colons, and exclamation marks) would raise the level of most responses.
- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible, ensuring that words are spaced adequately, as poor handwriting can cause difficulty in assessing the work.
- Candidates should be encouraged to plan their responses.
- Descriptions of (often gratuitous) violence are not appropriate for this exam. Of particular concern this year were the number of scripts referencing violence against women. While writing such as 'Her friends could only watch, helpless, petrified, as her inert body was dragged through the mud' might impress linguistically, material of this nature is not appropriate for this exam and candidates should be instructed to carefully consider whether the content of their narrative is suitable before beginning to write.

### General comments

There were very few short or incomplete scripts this series suggesting that candidates felt confident in responding to the paper. Presentation continued to be an issue for some candidates, particularly with regards to spacing between words, handwriting so small that it was difficult to read, and multiple crossings out. There is still a tendency for some candidates to produce responses which far exceed the indicative word count, and this should be discouraged as it often leads to less focused (and therefore less successful) pieces.

The vast majority of candidates responded well to the requirement of Task Fulfilment in **Section 1**, completing the task in a satisfactory way. A significant number of candidates moved beyond this, producing a well-organised response which showed very good understanding of purpose, clear awareness of the situation, and which developed all the required points in detail.

The majority of candidates showed good awareness of text type in the opening of their response, using the given 'Good morning, everyone,' and adding an introductory paragraph which referenced the audience, however fewer sustained this awareness throughout their response. In an attempt to signal that they were writing a speech, some candidates offered bracketed directions such as '(adjusts microphone)' or included questions and answers from 'the floor' and while this was a clear attempt to show awareness of text type, candidates should be encouraged instead to make use of speech features such as rhetorical questions inviting the audience to empathise with their experiences, for example 'Would you like to know what else helped me?', 'Seems so heavenly, right?' etc. Some candidates used humour effectively to engage the audience and, in more successful responses, there was a balance of appropriate formality with embedded informality.

In **Section 2**, the Narrative titles (**Questions 5 and 6**) proved the most popular. **Questions 3**, the first of the Argument titles, was the least frequently attempted by candidates this session, while **Question 4** was the more popular of these two titles.

Candidates produced responses which were close to, or surpassed, the indicative word count. However, as with **Section 1**, candidates should ensure they focus on the quality of their response, rather than producing over-long pieces which lack the necessary cohesion and focus.

As far as the use of language is concerned, candidates are advised to check their work thoroughly as marks are lost through carelessness, particularly in the use of verbs, tenses, direct and indirect articles, and agreement. Having said this, the range of vocabulary seen from some candidates this year was ambitious, with examples such as ‘panoply’, ‘artisanal’, ‘pusillanimous’, ‘endemic’ and ‘paradisical’ impressing. However, there were also examples of good vocabulary used in the wrong context such as ‘it is conspicuous that these were the best days of my life’ or ‘the euphonious smell of the wildlife’. It should be remembered that while ambitious vocabulary does impress, it is important that it is used sensitively and appropriately, otherwise it can sound unnatural and detract from the flow of the response. It is also important that candidates are aware that ambitious vocabulary is not a substitute for grammatical accuracy. There was widespread use of idiom this year – ‘in a nutshell’, ‘whale of a time’, ‘not my cup of tea’, ‘the cherry on top’ and ‘raining cats and dogs’ – and while mostly used in the correct grammatical form, over-reliance on these can lead to responses sounding less natural.

### **Comments on specific questions**

#### **Section 1: Directed Writing**

##### **Question 1**

In **Section 1**, the majority of candidates performed well on Task Fulfilment. The task required them to imagine that they had spent part of their recent long vacation at an adventure camp, doing a wide range of activities with other young people and to write a speech to be delivered to their class outlining details of how this camp was beneficial and which aspect they disliked. There were many developed discussions which outlined a range of benefits and specified several dislikes with clear justification as to the reasons for these, however less effective responses spent a lot of time outlining the preparations for, journey to, and activities at the camp before addressing the second and third bullet points in a less detailed way. Some candidates also listed benefits and dislikes with little elaboration and where this was the case, the response was less successful. Those candidates who were the most successful here outlined two or three ideas for each of bullet points two and three, developing these in detail. Taking time to plan their response before beginning to write, considering carefully the purpose and situation would help candidates to produce more successful responses. Some candidates mistook the idea of an adventure camp for that of a camping trip with family or friends, but this did not preclude them from being able to address all three bullet points. In some cases, where candidates had written about a family trip, disagreements with parents became too much of a focus and these responses also tended to be those which provided extensive background before they arrived at the camp, leaving little time to address bullet points 2 and 3 in detail.

Many candidates used a first paragraph (often utilising the words of the situation provided in the paper) to introduce the purpose of the speech and finished by thanking the audience for their attention. More successful responses used this concluding paragraph to suggest that those in the audience might like to consider attending a similar adventure camp in their next holiday and showed good awareness of situation by thanking their English teacher for providing them with the opportunity to deliver their speech. Another feature of more successful responses was the embedding of nods to the audience within the body of the speech, perhaps through the use of rhetorical questions or reference to shared experience.

The majority of candidates used the bullet points to effectively structure the middle of their speech, producing a paragraph per bullet point. The bullet points required candidates to include:

- where the camp was and how long they were there for
- how staying at the camp benefitted them
- what they disliked about the camp **and** why.

For **bullet point 1**, the vast majority of candidates indicated where the camp was, with some being specific in not only naming the camp but concisely giving geographical position (‘Located in the heartlands of our island, the Border Mountain Camp . . .’), while some candidates provided more vague locations such as ‘in America’, ‘in a mountainous area’ or ‘beside the beach’. Weaker responses were limited by a lack of specificity (‘in the country’, ‘not far from here’).

The majority of candidates specified how long they stayed at the camp, with responses ranging from the very precise ('11–18 September 2023', 'five days and four nights') to those which used the preposition 'about' or the adverb 'almost' to indicate a vaguer addressing of the point ('about two weeks', 'almost 15 days'). More linguistically impressive responses, rather than simply repeating 'the camp lasted for . . .', provided examples such as 'I decided to opt for a one month stay.'

A small number of candidates omitted this bullet point altogether and thus, despite often sustained responses to the other bullet points, limited the mark they were able to achieve for Task Fulfilment. In these cases, candidates often spent time detailing the preparations for and the journey to the camp instead.

For **bullet point 2**, a vast array of benefits were offered, both practical and character building. These included teamwork, increased confidence, developing from an introvert to an extrovert ('breaking that shield of timidity'), disconnecting from the world, and friendship. Candidates also discussed knowledge gained about nature for a science project or other school subject. Developing life skills, such as decision making, problem solving and communication also featured in a significant number of responses, while appreciation of the beauty of the environment as in 'Those resplendent panoramic views were really photogenic' was also often mentioned. Getting fit, cooking, singing and dancing, and making memories were practical benefits, whilst meditation and yoga provided those of a more spiritual nature. Becoming more self-assured, making friends, and having fun were also popular suggestions. Many candidates discussed mental health benefits from being close to nature and free from social media. Weaker responses included long lists of activities, from which the implied benefits needed to be extracted, or lengthy but unfocused accounts of what happened on each day of the camp, omitting to draw any clear benefits.

For **bullet point 3**, although the response to this was often less well-developed than that for bullet point 2, the vast majority of candidates specified at least one dislike. The most popular dislikes were mosquitoes, the quality or lack of food and sanitary arrangements. The lack of privacy, particularly regarding sleeping conditions was disliked by a significant number of candidates, who bemoaned that they 'had to sleep close to each other' which was an issue because 'some people had bad breaths' or were 'noisy nappers'. Others considered the limited size of the camp at large to be an issue as they were 'stuffed like animals in a box' or 'like too many pickles in one jar'. Lack of resources and poor management of the camp, as well as issues with badly behaved participants who stole, bullied, and smoked without consequence were also sources of irritation. The weather featured in a large number of responses, with the camp being situated somewhere that was too hot, or activities being curtailed due to the rain which frequently also leaked into the inadequate tents. While the majority of suggested dislikes were sensible and pertinent to the situation, a number of candidates attempted to insert seemingly pre-prepared responses on topics such as littering and these suggestions seemed less convincing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, disconnection from social media and being deprived of electronic devices also featured in this bullet point, being seen here as a negative which resulted in homesickness due to being unable to contact parents and fear of missing out on what was happening in the world beyond the camp. Better responses to this bullet point were clear and precise in joining the 'why' to the 'dislike', for example, 'The only complaint I had was regarding the food; it was bland and repetitive.' but a small number of candidates either did not offer a reason which was clear, or omitted entirely the second half of the bullet point.

Most candidates' speeches showed very good awareness of purpose and situation, with many using an introductory paragraph to establish their reason for 'standing before you today' and to thank their English teacher for 'giving me the opportunity to share my experience at an adventure camp', and providing a concluding paragraph thanking the audience for 'lending your ears' and often suggesting that attending a similar camp in future would be something worth considering. For the majority of candidates, audience was also secure, with the use of direct address, however many candidates would benefit from demonstrating a clearer awareness of audience in the main body of their response as this was not always present. Those who did address the audience throughout did this in a variety of ways, from the informal 'you guys', to 'my dear fellows', 'beloved classmates' and 'My dearest audience'. There were also some examples of alternatives to the standard 'Thank you for listening', such as 'Long lives teacher, long lives candidate' and, in the case of one candidate who invited questions from the floor, a warning that 'I am here to give answers, not hope'. While these alternative concluding statements somewhat strayed from the traditional expectations of a speech, they were an attempt by the candidates to show awareness of the required format. Tone and register were well-maintained with most candidates producing writing which included a suitable level of formality. Both bullet points 2 and 3 provided plenty of scope for candidates to offer opinion and justification.

Generally, ideas were well-structured, with the use of discourse markers such as 'firstly', 'in addition', 'moreover' and 'furthermore' being used appropriately and, in some cases, the pertinent employment of rhetorical questions used to signal movement from one bullet point to another. The majority of candidates began with a suitable introduction and provided a paragraph for each bullet point before rounding off their

response with an appropriate conclusion. Most candidates were able to mark sentence separation, with capital letters used accurately to begin each new sentence. Comma splicing continues to be an issue for some candidates, as does the incorrect use of commas preceding subordinate clauses, however accurate use of commas following conjunctive adverbs, such as 'Firstly', 'Moreover', 'Additionally', etc. was in evidence in a large number of responses. Where rhetorical questions were used, these were almost always accurately punctuated, and a number of candidates effectively used exclamation marks to indicate strong feelings, particularly regarding their dislikes – 'The toilets were disgusting!' – or to inject an element of humour. Apostrophes for omission were generally used accurately, while the use of apostrophes to indicate possession was less secure. Errors in irregular verb forms (particularly extending the regular past tense ending of –ed to the irregular verb 'teach') as well as omissions of the direct and indirect articles, at times, hindered communication. The use of plural for singular continues to be an area of difficulty for many candidates, often also leading to issues with agreement. There continues to be an issue with homophonic error for a number of candidates, with confusion of 'there'/'their', 'here'/'hear', 'past'/'passed' and 'your'/'you're' the most common slips, and examples such as 'the camp was in the middle of the jungle and made us pray for the mosquitoes' affecting meaning.

## **Section 2: Composition**

### **Question 2**

**Describe a typical lunch break at your school. Remember you are describing what people are doing (such as chatting to friends, playing sport or eating), where these activities are taking place, and the atmosphere.**

Some candidates produced descriptions of a typical lunch break at their school which really transported the reader to the school and brought to life the sights, sounds and smells vividly. Successful responses to this task featured a range of well-crafted images throughout with different focal points for each paragraph, moving through different phases of the lunch break or describing various groups of students and teachers in turn. The writing produced was, at times, enthusiastic, passionate, and even amusing. Many opened with the in-class restlessness as the clock ticked toward the bell, likening the classroom to a prison from which escape was eagerly anticipated, and followed this with the mad dash to make it to the canteen in time to beat the queue. There was focus on the way the playground 'completely transformed during the lunch break' as various groups filled the space chatting, studying, 'relishing their meal' or playing sport. There was often a focus on gossiping which teachers were involved in too. There were isolated references to teachers or rector patrolling to ensure there were no fights, with one candidate noting that the temper of one of these characters was 'as short as the hairs on Popeye's head'. The best candidates here brought their response to a close with the sound of the bell recalling candidates to lessons, with the mention of stragglers reluctant to return to class a well-observed and realistic touch. Weaker responses were more narrative in nature and struggled to move beyond offering lists of the activities taking place with little, if any, exploration of the atmosphere. Candidates chose to answer this through either the third or first person, either of which was acceptable, however the use of the first-person approach did more frequently lead candidates towards producing a more narrative, rather than descriptive, response.

### **Question 3**

**'The benefits of healthy eating are now so well understood that no one has any excuse to eat an unhealthy diet.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

Candidates who attempted this question focused on temptation and choice. The vast majority agreed with the statement and had little sympathy with people who did not understand the consequences of unhealthy eating, largely because of how prevalent education on this topic is on social media. The mantra 'Health is Wealth' was frequently cited and candidates touched on ideas both from recent government campaigns and from their own education. Some responses made excellent use of technical vocabulary and real-world examples to support their views, as well as persuasive devices such as statistics and expert opinions. The benefits of healthy eating were clearly understood and discussed with reference to lifestyle, obesity, and diseases such as 'cardiovascular problems' and 'diabetes'. There was frequent discussion of the temptation of fast food, with recognition of its addictive power, but also consideration of financial aspects, conceding that unhealthy food is often a cheaper, not to mention more convenient alternative for time-poor individuals. This question garnered the most notable use of invented words such as 'reboost', 'perspirated' and 'sugaries' and sentence structures, as well as ideas, were often repeated. Many candidates who chose this question seemingly ran out of ideas and planning in advance of attempting this question would have helped these candidates to ensure that they had enough material to produce a suitably sustained and developed response. In general, responses to this question were well structured, with effective use of discourse



markers and, in some cases, neat transitions to the second half of the essay where the alternate view was considered, for example, 'One argument to counter this...'

#### Question 4

**'It is better to have one or two really close friends than lots of different friends.' What is your opinion? Give reasons and details to support your view.**

Of the two discursive tasks, this question was attempted by more candidates than **Question 3**. This was perhaps because this question allowed candidates to easily engage with their own experience of either having a small number of close friends or lots of different friends and use personal anecdotes in support of their ideas. Those who suggested that having one or two close friends was preferable suggested that this would help avoid betrayal and lead to greater trust, while having a wider friendship group was seen as more likely to result in 'backstabbing'. Some candidates focused on the idea of quality over quantity, with one memorable example suggesting that 'having one true friend is better than a larger group of snakes'. Other reasons in favour of a small friendship group included it costing less money because you do not need to buy as many presents and greater ease in making travel arrangements, as when you carpool, everyone can easily fit in one car. Being able to rely on the support of a small group of friends, as well as the happiness inherent in sharing interests or hobbies were also cited as reasons in support of this point of view. Those who argued in favour of a larger group of friends, often suggested that this would help avoid social isolation in the event of a falling out, as well as providing a wider support system in terms of range of expertise. Some candidates even discussed the illusionary nature of online friendships through social media and how this could be linked to cyber criminality.

#### Question 5

**Write a story which includes the sentence: 'Even though the weather was bad and their clothes were unsuitable, they knew they had to go.'**

This question was the most popular in **Section 2**, with the best responses featuring fast action and dramatic narratives. Situations chosen were wide-ranging and candidates produced narratives across a range of genres including mystery, romance, and thrillers. There was often a sudden event which caused a change of plans and so clothes were inappropriate, with example triggers such as illness, death, rejection in a relationship, the birth of a baby, a serious accident, an unexpected downpour and a car chase. While the best narratives seamlessly embedded the given sentence, there were a significant number of candidates who clearly had a story in mind that they wanted to tell and inserted the given sentence in a way that was not cohesive. Some candidates adapted the sentence to change the person from 'they' to 'I'/'we' which was acceptable, however some wrote in first person and inserted the sentence still in third person which jarred slightly. There was some interesting use of comparison, for example, 'I got scared that if it was rainy, my clothes would get wet and my hair would deform like a monster' and 'orchestra of the birdsong'. As in **Section 1**, the main linguistic issues were subject/verb agreement, verb forms and tense inconsistencies. Many candidates included direct speech in their writing, however this was often not accurately punctuated, with the punctuation inside the closing speech mark frequently omitted and capital letters erroneously used for reporting clauses. Additionally, many candidates wrote their direct speech continuously, rather than beginning a new line for each new speaker, which sometimes led to difficulties in comprehending who was speaking and to whom, thus causing confusion and disrupting the narrative. Some weaker responses were significantly above the indicative word count but lacked any real control. In these cases, focusing on quality of writing over number words would have resulted in a better outcome.

#### Question 6

**Write a story in which a lost phone plays an important part.**

This question was the second most popular question in **Section 2**. The importance of mobile phones in candidates' lives was obvious from the responses seen here, with statements such as 'If you lose your mobile phone, you feel like you've lost your mind.' indicating the anxiety and heartfelt despair surrounding their loss. Many candidates produced narratives which frequently focused on the expense, fear of punishment, losing schoolwork and lack of communication with others, while other candidates were more ambitious in terms of content, writing thrillers about gangsters who had lost their phones which were subsequently used to prosecute them, tales of kidnapping and even zombies. Narratives in both first and third person were seen in response to this question with equal success. In some narratives, the main character lost their phone, while in others they found a phone which was lost and both angles worked effectively. The best responses included some impressive writing, with examples such as the description of

‘a grey-haired man who looked as if the sun had cooked most of his juices’ and the intriguing opening,  
‘Drawn by the allure of supernatural mysteries...I embarked on a perilous journey.’

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/21  
Reading 21

## Key messages

- Candidates are strongly advised to read both of the texts and all of the questions very carefully to make sure they know what is being asked and where to find the appropriate information. In both sections of the paper, concentrated reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.
- Candidates should pay close attention to the wording of every question when considering what information is required in response. To ensure their answers are focused, candidates are encouraged to underline or highlight key words, e.g. **Question 1(a)** 'the disadvantages of intensive farming methods in modern times.'
- Candidates need to follow the rubric of each question carefully, for example, 'Which one word...' in **Question 7** meant that only those who gave the single correct word were successful. Or in **Question 6(a)**, 'The writer's mood 'altered'. (i) What was her mood to start with? (ii) What does her mood become?' refers to two specific points in time which should not be mixed up. Candidates should also be guided by the number of marks available, for example in **Question 1(a)** there are 12 marks available, so candidates should try to make 12 clear relevant points.
- In **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, candidates are reminded that their responses should be based on the passage and not on personal opinion or additional knowledge. Candidates should also keep looking back to the question to avoid additional unnecessary detail and repetition. Clear, concise points are as important in **Question 1(b)** as in **Question 1(a)**; candidates should focus on writing only the key information required by the question to avoid irrelevance and over-long responses.
- For **Question 1(b)**, responses showed an awareness of the importance of linking devices to establish coherence. These should be appropriate and used selectively. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso' should be avoided. Similarly, expressions such as 'moving on' or 'alongside' do not fit into a skilful or stylish formal summary. A high degree of fluency and clarity can be achieved with the accurate use of relative pronouns and conjunctions. Candidates are advised to use their own words and structures, and they should be discouraged from copying complete sentences from the passage, while accepting that some more specialised vocabulary, for example, 'intensive farming', 'eco-system' or 'monocultures' would require too much explanation if not used. Own word vocabulary choices should be precise, appropriate and keep the clear meaning of the original. In **Question 4(c)** and **Question 8(a)**, those candidates who provided suitable synonyms which worked in the given context were most successful; they avoided any form of the given word, for example, 'achieved' in **Question 4(c)**, and did not rely on using words from that part of the text.
- In **Question 10**, candidates are required to show understanding of both literal and inferential writing, making a clear distinction between the 'meaning' and the 'effect' of the given phrases. Further practice in the approach to these writer's craft questions would be beneficial. Candidates would also benefit from regular reading and analysis of fiction texts to examine what feeling or atmosphere is created by the choice of words used or what the words tell us about the character's emotions. The impact or connotations of particular words or images need to be explained, rather than just described as 'an image' or 'to create atmosphere' alone.

## General comments

Candidates answered questions based on two passages of approximately 700 words each, the first non-fiction, entitled 'Farming' and the second fiction, entitled 'The Novel'.

If a response needs to continue on additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number and part which is being continued. If they use space elsewhere in the question paper booklet, they should explain this in the original response space saying where to find their work. It is better to use additional pages or a blank space than to use margins or squeeze answers into the bottom of the page,

as these are not always visible. Candidates are encouraged to clearly cross out previous attempts at a response, rather than try to rub out their words and write over the top.

The first passage explored candidates' ability to read for ideas. 22 marks were available for the summary question: 12 marks for the assessment of the ability to select content points from the text 'Farming' and 10 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a summary which was relevant, logically organised and easy to follow. Most candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**, while some responses, which were in excess of the recommended length, lacked relevance and were less fluent, also hampering performance on coherence. Most candidates were able to balance the two sections of the text, the development of farming and the disadvantages of intensive modern farming methods, which allowed them to write a more relevant summary.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates used the suggestion in the rubric that they use bullet points for their notes. The strongest responses identified key overarching points, without the inclusion of lengthy explanations, or the inclusion of the writer's advice, for example stating the dangers of 'crop dusting' without going on to advise farmers to use more natural products

**Question 1(b)** asked candidates to summarise their notes from **Question 1(a)**. The skill of summary writing involves the selection of the main points from a given passage without lengthy or unnecessary introductions and conclusions. The strongest responses rephrased and synthesised a wide range of content points fluently and coherently, moving from one idea to the next using a variety of concise linking devices. Acceptable responses selected parts of the original passage, rearranging and adding to them, to ensure a coherence of their own.

**Question 2** assessed candidates' ability to distinguish fact from non-factual statements, in this case to write down the writer's advice from three paragraphs in the text.

The second passage, 'The Novel', assessed reading for meaning – candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary and of key phrases by the use of their own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the paper could be gained here, with the most successful candidates clearly focusing on retrieving information or inferring details from the passage in response to the questions asked.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### **Section 1 Reading for Ideas**

#### **Question 1**

**Question 1(a)** was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down 'the ways in which farming methods developed in former times and the disadvantages of intensive farming methods in modern times', as outlined in the passage. Candidates were advised to write their answers in note form, and they were free to use either the words from the text or their own words. The first content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration; these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Although points should be presented in their correct sections, the order within each section is not considered; there is no need to write between the lines or use arrows to show that one point comes before another.

Candidates seem to have followed the first section of the passage better than the second and were able to successfully identify a good number of main points. For some candidates, this helped to prevent irrelevance being carried forward into **Question 1(b)**. As indicated by the given point for the 'disadvantages of intensive farming methods in modern times', stronger responses recognised that simply listing the disadvantages was not sufficient – an indication of why these factors were disadvantageous was required. For example, 'crop dusting' required the explanation that it 'damages human health' to fully make the point. However, in the first section, stronger responses realised that concision was possible by simply naming the developments, for example 'plough' or 'mechanical agriculture' without the use of examples, or lengthy descriptions of each tool or method. This again was conducive to a more concise summary in response to **Question 1(b)**.

Excluding the given content points, there were 14 content points available for selection. The best responses were expressed concisely, almost always in bullet points, with a large number of possible points offered. To gain 12 marks, candidates need to offer at least 12 main points over the two sections. Several of the points,

particularly in the first section, were clearly highlighted in the text with phrases such as ‘a major breakthrough’, ‘the invention of’ or ‘a later development’.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 described ‘the ways in which farming methods developed in former times’. Excluding the first given point, there were seven content points which candidates could choose from in the first section. This section was more accessible for candidates than the ‘disadvantages’.

The short paragraph 1 contained only the given point, ‘people started to live in settled communities and grow their own food’.

Paragraph 2 started the discussion of the key points for candidates to select. It contained three content points. More skilled responses went for simplicity: picking out ‘ploughs’, ‘seed drills’ and a ‘flail’ as the main developments, without any additional description.

Paragraph 3 contained two linked content points describing how farmers in the past avoided reducing the nutrients in the soil by using ‘crop rotation’ and the practice of ‘leaving land empty, or fallow’. Stronger responses realised that the descriptions of what the farmers actually did, or references to scientific reasons, amounted to unnecessary additional detail, so were able to provide concise bullet points here as well.

Paragraph 4 provided two content points. The first point described how the Industrial Revolution introduced ‘mechanical agriculture’. The second point was clearly indicated in the passage, describing the ‘combine harvester’ as ‘the most important development’. Successful candidates avoided excessive description of its functions.

In the second section of the summary, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7, the rubric asked for ‘the disadvantages of intensive farming methods in modern times’ with seven more content points across the three paragraphs. Successful responses focused on the requirements of the question, ‘the *disadvantages* of intensive farming methods’, rather than bringing in the candidate’s own knowledge of environmental issues or modern farming.

Paragraph 5 provided the given point, ‘(uses) chemical fertilisers which contaminate the water of rivers and lakes’, demonstrating the need for both an action (using chemical fertilisers) and the consequence (contaminating the water) in stating most points in this section. Two further points continued the theme of how intensive farming can cause pollution: ‘toxins (in the soil are) produced by (chemical) pesticides’ and ‘crop dusting (can) damage human health’. Stronger responses demonstrated an understanding that both parts of each point were required to make the point fully, by selecting the ‘pesticides’ and the ‘crop dusting’ as the invasive elements of intensive farming which cause ‘toxins’ to be produced and human health to be ‘damaged’. Careful readers saw the need for precision in their bullet points, as ‘crop dusting’ is not the same as ‘dusting’ on its own.

Paragraph 6 continued initially on the environmental theme about the effects of ‘cutting down trees’. This was a more challenging point, although placed clearly at the beginning of the paragraph. Only a minority of candidates recognised the need to include all three parts to this point: ‘cutting down trees’ (ably re-cast in own words as ‘deforestation’ by some); ‘for intensive farming’ (the reason why the trees were cut) and ‘threatens our eco-system’ (the consequence of the deforestation). The next point was the more straightforward ‘unemployment levels increase’ as a clear disadvantage of intensive farming, or ‘machines replace people’. The final two points concerned the treatment of animals in modern farming methods. Whilst they both concerned how animals are kept indoors, in confined or cramped, unhealthy spaces, only the small minority of candidates differentiated between the two, firstly seeing these conditions as ‘cruel and inhumane’ for one point, then realising ‘these spaces...allow for diseases to spread easily from animals to human beings’ as a separate disadvantage. Successful responses showed an understanding that merely being ‘indoors’ was not sufficient, and the way the *animals* are confined or cramped was key to making the point, as were the diseases being transmitted from animals *to humans*, not simply the ‘spreading’.

Paragraph 7 included one final content point about how ‘monocultures’ – ‘specialising in growing only one crop’ and ‘harvesting crops more than once a year’ can both lower ‘biodiversity’ or ‘reduce key nutrients *in the soil*’. Again, stronger responses demonstrated an understanding that it was important to specify what action farmers are taking and the consequence in full to explain this last disadvantage successfully.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes from **Question 1(a)** to write a summary of ‘the ways in which farming methods developed in former times and the disadvantages of intensive farming methods in modern times’. They were advised to write 150 – 180 words and to use their own words as far as possible in a piece of continuous writing. Marks were awarded for producing a relevant, well organised and easy to follow summary. Most candidates completed the task to an appropriate length. More skilled

responses carefully selected points from **Question 1(a)**, ensuring concision with the use of precise language and structures which also ensured a fluent, well-organised summary. The most impressive responses focused on synthesising and linking content points, without any loss of meaning, using their own vocabulary and structures, for example 'farming developed further with the invention of seed drills and the flail'. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question. They also recognised that some more technical vocabulary from the passage, for example 'crop dusting' or 'crop rotation' can be lifted to avoid losing clarity of expression or lengthy explanations'. The best responses also achieved an impressive coherence with a range of stylish and skilful linking devices, including varied and appropriate adverbial connectives and original complex structures, introduced by 'which' and 'who', for example. The repetitive use of 'and' or 'also' to link content was avoided in these skilful and impressive summaries, and punctuation was accurate and helpful. They also avoided lengthy introductions to each section, drawing conclusions or providing additional material or opinions from their own experience.

## Question 2

In **Question 2**, candidates were asked to re-read paragraphs 5 and 6, then write down two pieces of advice from paragraph 5 and one from paragraph 6. The most successful candidates followed the rubric to 'write down' the advice as it is given in the text without missing, or adding, words or phrases. They realised that if a word is missed, it can change the overall meaning and additional material can change the focus of the advice. They also understood the need to provide the correct agent, for example distinguishing between 'farmers' and 'we' in the two paragraph 5 pieces of advice. There is no need to re-phrase or paraphrase the advice, as the question asks what the writer of the passage has said so it can be copied out directly.

The first piece of advice in paragraph 5 was 'We (really) ought to become (more) informed about the (many) criticisms of intensive farming'. The second piece of advice was addressed to farmers: 'Farmers should (therefore) opt for (more) natural or organic products in the treatment of their crops.' The majority of candidates successfully included 'in the treatment of their crops', identifying that this gave the context for farmers needing 'natural/organic products'

In paragraph 6, the writer advised that 'We (do) need to balance this with an awareness of the origins of our food.' The majority of candidates avoided adding 'not' in the sentence, which gave the opposite advice.

## Section 2 Reading for Meaning

In dealing with a narrative text, candidates will often encounter less familiar vocabulary and will be expected to show an understanding of figurative language and inferred as well as explicit meaning. Some candidates found this narrative text much more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1, whilst others had clearly understood and followed the story well.

## Question 3

**Question 3(a)** was a literal comprehension question asking candidates for the decision the writer had to make. The majority of candidates, through careful reading of the question, realised they needed to provide both possibilities for the writer, either to 'give up...or try to get my degree' from line 2 of the passage rather than to explain what she actually decided.

**Question 3(b)** asked why the writer could not 'take in "any of the words" from the books'. The simplest response was spotted in line 1 of the text: 'I found it difficult to concentrate (on my studies)' by many candidates. They recognised the subtle difference between 'not concentrating', which is a choice, and 'not being *able to* concentrate' which is not, showing her difficulty. Others chose to infer that she would be distracted by thinking about the decisions she was making or gave other suitable suggestions of her mind being full of other thoughts.

## Question 4

**Question 4(a)** asked candidates to infer why 'the writer changed' details in her book. This was generally well answered, with many candidates understanding the need for privacy or anonymity. Candidates need to look objectively at the motivations of the characters in narrative passages, and not impose their own viewpoints. For example, there is nothing in the text to indicate that the writer is ashamed in any way of her poor background. They also need to think logically about what is happening at this point in the story, having read the whole passage; this allowed successful candidates to avoid saying that she wanted to disguise the fact that she was the author – later we hear that she dreams of her name being on the cover of one of the books in the library, so is proud of having written a novel.

**Question 4(b)** proved a much more challenging literal question. It required candidates to look at the sequence of events in the narrative carefully – the writer needed a ‘remedy’, so she bought the notebook, then started to write about her neighbourhood. She spent ‘20 days entirely absorbed in her writing’ which made her feel calmer. Stronger responses appreciated that the writer’s absorption in the writing was the key to her feeling calmer, being totally focused, rather than giving more generalised responses about simply buying the notebook and writing about her past.

**Question 4(c)** was the first ‘own words’ question in which candidates were asked to explain how the writer feels about getting to university given her description of it as ‘an astonishing achievement’. The key lay in capturing the meaning of the words ‘astonishing’ and ‘achievement’ rather than it being a straightforward comprehension question about her feelings. Success was achieved by those who focused on these two words, rather than generalising about possible feelings of pride, or explaining details about being the first member of her family to get to university. Stronger responses avoided derivatives of the given words, or words from the text, for example ‘getting there’. Of those who gained the marks, many offered ‘amazed’ and talked about her ‘success’ with some offering ‘accomplishment’ or the idea of ‘reaching a goal’. Where they find the vocabulary in ‘own words’ questions challenging, candidates be encouraged to express the *given phrase* in more broad terms.

### Question 5

In **Question 5(a)**, candidates were asked to explain what the words ‘usual candidate rituals’ tell us about the writer’s graduation day. Candidates needed to respond to the specific words ‘usual’ and ‘rituals’ rather than supply their own opinion that these events were ‘boring’. Successful responses understood that the graduation was normal, or that traditional activities took place, and that it was not just another ordinary day.

**Question 5(b)** allowed the vast majority of candidates to give two literal responses to the two ways requested showing how *the tutor* made the writer sorry about handing over the notebook. They realised that the actions had to be by the tutor, so ignored references to embarrassment from the writer or it not being ‘typewritten’ and described the tutor looking ‘puzzled’ and later forgetting to pick up the notebook or having to be reminded to get it.

### Question 6

**Question 6(a)** proved a more challenging literal comprehension question: ‘Why was the writer so surprised that the publisher wanted to print her story?’ The challenge lay in not being distracted by the writer’s immediate response – ‘blurring out’ that she had not even re-read it – and instead focusing on the source of her surprise, the fact that it was ‘the (very) first thing I had ever written’.

**Question 6(b)** required careful reading to understand the importance of the order of the responses. Initially, the writer was ‘overwhelmed with joy’ or even ‘excited’. But then her ‘mood altered’, she becomes gloomy, or anxious and worried.

### Question 7

In **Question 7**, candidates had to write the single word used later in Paragraph 5 which gave the opposite idea to moving ‘absent-mindedly’. It is important with questions which ask for ‘one word’ or ‘one idea’ that candidates stick to this requirement; most candidates followed this. Being ‘absent-minded’ is about being easily distracted and successful candidates chose ‘focused’ from the writer’s time in the library at the end of the paragraph. ‘Catalogued’ does have the idea of organisation, but would not be applied to a person.

### Question 8

**Question 8(a)** was another ‘own words’ question, about the writer’s parents. Although the question asked about the parents’ reactions to the writer’s success, the phrase itself separated the mother from the father and showed two different reactions. This challenged the majority of candidates. Successful responses avoided generalities of being happy and proud, and focused on the key given words: ‘incredulous’ and ‘brag’. The father ‘bragging’ provided more correct responses, with successful responses identifying that he wanted to share her success *verbally* with the neighbourhood, by boasting or simply telling everyone. ‘Amazed’ or ‘shocked’ were the most effective re-casts of the mother’s incredulity. It was vital to repeat the given words, particularly ‘brag’.

**For Question 8(b)**, candidates were asked why the writer ‘doubted’ she ‘could ever write another’. With all comprehension questions, it is useful to look back over the paragraph or section of text and check whether the information required is there. In this case the writer had previously told us that she had ‘put my whole heart into’ writing the novel, hence it would be impossible to do it again.

**Question 9** tested the understanding, in context, of words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. With all questions which test vocabulary, contextual checking is all-important as words can have different meanings when used in different circumstances.

In response to **Question 9(a)**, a small majority of candidates recognised ‘asked’ for ‘quizzed’, with ‘tested’ proving a tempting wrong answer. In **Question 9(b)**, a ‘remedy’ is sometimes a ‘medicine’, but those who chose ‘cure’ realised that ‘medicine for my problems’ would not make sense, whilst we can ‘escape’ problems, an ‘escape’ is not a kind of ‘remedy’.

**Question 9(c)** and **Question 9(d)** were a little less challenging. Both required going back to the narrative to find the correct alternative. For ‘timidly’, ‘fearfully’ did not fit the obvious relationship the writer had with her candidate. For ‘pounding’, the word itself indicates a heavy rhythm, not to be confused with ‘skipping’ which is lighter in feeling, thus the correct answers were ‘shyly’ and ‘thumping’, respectively.

**Question 9(e)** was the most challenging. In the context, a ‘considerable sum of money’ is ‘large’. ‘Fair’ was possible, but would not have resulted in the mother’s incredulity, nor would ‘thoughtful’ (a response perhaps inspired by ‘considerate’, which does not have the same meaning as ‘considerable’). This part of the question demonstrated most clearly how important it is for candidates to refer back to the passage when faced with demonstrating understanding of a given word or phrase.

## Question 10

This section is dedicated to the appreciation of the writer’s craft by testing the candidate’s understanding of the meaning and effect of selected phrases. Many candidates found this challenging and appeared unsure of what was being asked, with some not making any attempt at answering. It is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question. They should avoid offering an effect as a meaning and vice-versa, or giving more or less the same answer for both.

Meaning only looks at the words in the phrase, asking for an alternative way of saying the same thing within the context of that part of the passage. It is important that candidates avoid using words from the quotations or any derivatives as these do not allow them to demonstrate understanding, for example using ‘aroma’ in **Question 10(b)**. Explanations of the effect need to focus on the language choice in the quotation and not the wider literal context of the narrative or repetition of the meaning. Successful responses for effect concentrated on how the writer had chosen to influence their reader’s view of the characters’ words and actions through their choice of language, rather than making a general observation.

**Question 10(a)** directed candidates to give a meaning and then the writer’s intended effect of the publisher saying ‘Do not touch a comma’. The meaning was mostly paraphrased well, with candidates expressing the idea that the writer should not change anything or make any corrections. Fewer candidates successfully identified the effect of this as the publisher thinking the novel was perfect, or that he loved it, or that the writer is a very good writer. Successful responses conveyed the right degree of approval, avoiding understatement or the idea that the publisher was trying to placate the writer, or even that he was being demanding.

For **Question 10(b)**, the given phrase was from the writer entering the library: ‘the aroma of the books enveloped me’. Candidates generally found effect easier to explain than meaning here. Synonyms for ‘enveloped’ proved challenging. The more successful responses realised the need to give both parts of the meaning – both ‘aroma’ and ‘enveloped’, and avoided sliding into effect by not saying the smell of the books welcomed or comforted her, but that the smell surrounded, covered or was all around *her*. This meant that the idea of her being welcomed, calmed, at home or comforted could be given for the effect (how does the smell of the books make the character *feel*?).



# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 1123/22  
Reading 22

## Key messages

- Candidates should try to gain a clear, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions through close reading before they begin to answer each section. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.
- Candidates might find it helpful to underline or highlight key words in the question, e.g. **Question 4(b)** ‘Give two reasons...’. This will ensure the answers are focused and creditworthy.
- To achieve high marks for **Question 1(a)**, selecting the content points, and **Question 1(b)**, writing a summary, candidates are advised to focus on identifying, specifically, the main overarching points from the text without the unnecessary inclusion of examples, repetition and extensions of those points.
- While candidates need to be encouraged to write succinctly and to avoid copying lengthy extracts from the text when answering **Question 1(a)**, they must also be aware that brevity can exclude key information. For example, ‘used in rituals’ omits the reference to war which can distort the meaning.
- Candidates are encouraged to write to the recommended length of between 150–180 words in **Question 1(b)** summary; overlong or short responses are self-penalising since they cannot satisfactorily fulfil the criteria for Relevance or Coherence.
- For **Question 1(b)** summary, it is essential that linking devices are appropriate and used selectively. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as ‘moreso’ and ‘to add on’, are to be avoided. Similarly, expressions such as ‘moving on’, ‘in a nutshell’, ‘by the way’ or ‘alongside’ are neither skilful nor stylish and are not appropriate for a formal summary. A high degree of fluency and clarity is achieved with the accurate use of relative pronouns.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to use their own words and structures, and they should be discouraged from copying complete sentences from the text. ‘Own word’ vocabulary choices should be precise and appropriate. For example, the word ‘revenue’ is a sensible alternative for ‘income’, but ‘celebration’ is too far from the meaning of ‘ritual’. Own word alternatives which are longer than the original should be discouraged, such as ‘items for import and export’ for ‘trade’.
- Accurate punctuation in **Question 1(b)**, particularly the accurate use of commas and full stops, can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.
- To assist candidates in understanding Passage 2, regular reading of narrative texts and consideration of both explicit and inferential questions about characters and situations will help a great deal with all types of question in **Section 2**.
- There was some misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the questions in Section 2. Candidates need to consider exactly what is being asked. Simply lifting from the passage rarely works; candidates need to rephrase the text in such a way that the question is clearly being answered.
- If a question asks for ‘own words’, such as **Question 5** and **Question 7(a)**, candidates should avoid repeating the key words in their response or relying on words in the passage, and instead provide suitable synonyms which work within the given context.
- In responding to the final question on the writer’s craft, understanding of both literal and inferential writing is required. It was not always evident that candidates could distinguish between *meaning* and *effect*. If a question asks for the *meaning* of a word or a phrase, candidates are advised to provide a straightforward literal meaning. For the *effect* of a word or a phrase, candidates should go beyond the literal and comment on the impact or connotations of particular words or an image. Candidates might ask themselves what feeling or atmosphere is created by the words or what do the words tell us about the character’s emotions.

## General comments

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages, each of approximately 700 words: the first entitled ‘Salt’ and the second entitled ‘A Summer Job’.

Responses were, for the most part, clearly written. A few candidates who wrote to excess – in **Question 1(a)** particularly – found themselves writing at the side or at the bottom of the page which can cause illegibility. If the candidate's response does not fit in the space provided, the response must continue on an 'additional page' rather than being written in a random space in the question paper booklet.

The first non-fiction passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second fiction passage tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary **Question 1**, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the passage, 'Salt'. 10 marks were awarded for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a piece of writing which was relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Part of the skill of summary writing is writing concisely; many responses exceeded the maximum word limit of 180 words.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates wisely adhered to the suggestion in the rubric that they might find it useful to use bullet points for their notes. Generally, candidates were selective in extracting the relevant information. Others found it difficult to separate the overarching points from the examples. In these cases, candidates often incorporated irrelevance or ran out of space – both resulting in a loss of potential marks.

In **Question 1(b)**, there was a maximum of 16 content points, including the given points, candidates could refer to. To achieve Bands 4 or 5 for Relevance, it is expected that candidates include a wide range of the available points. For Bands 4 and 5 Coherence, the summary must demonstrate significant stretches of fluent, concise and accurate writing, with minimal errors in Band 5 summaries.

A further question, **Question 2**, allotted three marks to the testing of the candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to identify three pieces of advice in two different paragraphs of the passage.

The second passage, 'A Summer Job', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here.

### Comments on specific questions

#### **Section A**

#### **Question 1(a)**

This was the first part of the summary question carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the ways in which salt was important in former times, and the ways in which salt is important in modern times, as outlined in the passage. Candidates were to write their answers in note form and were advised that own words were not necessary. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding these given points, there were 14 content points. Only a few candidates achieved 10 or more marks. These successful responses were expressed concisely, used the suggested bullet points and avoided repetition, unnecessary examples and additional information, ensuring at the same time that key words essential to making the point were included. Less successful responses offered irrelevant material, particularly repetition. Examples of such are given in dealing with the individual points below.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 included eight ways in which salt was important in former times, excluding the given point. Paragraph 1 focused on salt's role in the ancient world beginning with the point that *salt producing areas became centres of civilisation*. This point was not always presented accurately with a number of responses blurring meaning by stating 'salt became centres of civilisation'. The next point that salt was an article of *trade* was often identified correctly. It was unnecessary to mention who was trading (the Greeks and Romans). The final point in the paragraph was more challenging since to demonstrate understanding, it required several details to be included to score – *salted fish, tomb, food and afterlife*.

Paragraph 2's focus was the use of salt in war. To simply state it was used in war was too general and did not show close reading skills. The first point that it was *a cause of war* was often missed. Several candidates successfully attempted the next point stating that salt was *used in rituals in war*. Having identified *rituals in war*, many responses carried on to lift the example of Scipio in Carthage or the irrelevant detail of it being 'a symbolic gesture', negating their answer. Similarly, any reference to the American War of Independence in the following point, salt was *a weapon of war*, could not be credited unless this was cited as an example with 'such as' or 'for example'.

Paragraph 3 had two further content points about salt's importance in the past and these focused on finance. The first of these points was that there was a *salt tax*. It was incorrect to refer to the French Revolution or 'civil unrest' because these are extraneous to the overarching point. For the second point about finance, the best answers succinctly stated that salt was used as *currency* or *money*, but too often candidates brought in much irrelevance about a specific time period (the thirteenth century) or the example of Tibet.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the importance of salt in modern times, as outlined in the passage, and there were a further six content points, excluding the given point, to be found in Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6.

Candidates found the first of these points difficult because it is embedded in examples. Many candidates lifted at length, but the discerning candidates recognised the excess details and ignored these, correctly selecting the overarching point that salt is important for *beauty and health*. There was more success with the following point from Paragraph 5 that salt is important in the *production of chlorine*; any reference to the fact that chlorine is involved in the manufacture of other products denied the mark because the focus on salt had been lost. That salt is used as a *cleaning agent* or that *salt is softer and cheaper than chemical cleaners* was the next point. A few candidates offered both answers in separate bullets; this repetition could only gain one mark. The final point in the paragraph was successfully identified with only a small number neglecting to mention *what* salt keeps roads safe from: ice. Some candidates captured this idea very succinctly with 'de-ices roads'. The first point in Paragraph 6 could also be given in the first half ('in former times') since the passage tells us that salt was a *huge source of income* both in 'former' and 'modern' times. The adjective 'huge' is essential in capturing salt's importance and this was occasionally missed. The final point was rarely identified, but *salt made its way into many languages* was also a valid content point. Occasionally, 'Roman soldiers were paid in salt' was placed in the first half; however, this is an example of the overarching point that the word 'salt' became part of our language.

### Question 1(b)

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates who scored highly in **Question 1(a)** were often able to transform their notes into a relevant summary which did not rely on excessive copying of the text. There was a maximum of 16 content points, including the given points, candidates could refer to.

The most impressive Band 4 and Band 5 efforts were from candidates who included a wide range of relevant points, made them with clarity, and avoided unnecessary examples and additional details. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question.

Less secure responses, many relying on copied sections of the text, included irrelevance, such as details about swimming in the sea and salt cakes in Tibet, as well as unnecessary conclusions summing up the importance of salt. These responses sometimes repeated points: having identified that salt is a cleaning agent, some went on to describe salt being softer than chemical cleaners.

Candidates are advised to use their own words and those who did use them, together with constructions to link the main ideas, created a fluency which was easy to follow. The best responses demonstrated an impressive coherence using a range of stylish and skilful linking devices, including varied and appropriate adverbial connectives and original complex structures introduced by 'which' and 'who'. Points were often concisely synthesised, such as 'salt was both a cause and a weapon of war'. The repetitive use of 'and' or 'also' to link content was avoided in these skilful and impressive summaries, and punctuation was accurate and helpful.

Despite the guidance to 'use your own words as far as possible' and to not exceed 180 words, the less successful summaries often featured indiscriminate copying from the passage and ignored the word limit. It was also common for some adverbial connectives such as 'nevertheless', 'subsequently' and 'likewise' to be used incorrectly with no precise connection to what had just been written. Others, such as 'in addition', 'moreover' and 'furthermore', were placed at random or mechanically at the beginning of a new sentence. The quality of coherence was also impacted by awkward attempts to link ideas with phrases such as 'by the way', 'on the flip side of the coin' or 'adding on' which are not appropriate for a formal summary. The use of 'next' and 'then' is also a limited way to link content. Weaknesses in grammar and punctuation impacted on the fluent presentation of points.

### Question 2

In **Question 2**, candidates were required to select and write down three pieces of advice given by the writer, one from Paragraph 4 and two from Paragraph 5. In some cases, candidates did not appear to fully understand what constitutes advice. It is important that candidates follow the rubric and 'write down' the advice as it is given in the text without omissions, additions or the use of ellipsis. If a word is missed, it can change the overall meaning. The key here is to identify structures which offer clear guidance and advice as to how individuals should act.

In Paragraph 4, the writer advises '(When shopping) it is good practice to look at packaging to check the amount of salt (the food contains.)' The main difficulty for candidates was distinguishing between the advice given by the writer and, in this paragraph, advice from the 'health professionals'. Consequently, several candidates gave the advice from the health professionals that we should limit our salt intake and this could not be credited.

There was more success identifying the advice in Paragraph 5 that 'we should all be on the lookout for non-chemical, eco-friendly products', with the key indicator 'should' helping candidates locate the correct answer. It was essential that 'all' was included since to make an impact, everyone has to act. Candidates who were prompted to select the final sentence in the paragraph because of the use of 'should', were not alert to the fact that this advice is from 'critics', not the writer. The correct answer lay in the penultimate sentence in the paragraph: 'we need to listen to critics who say that salt damages vehicles.'

## Section 2

Generally, candidates found that responding to the detailed demands of the questions on the narrative passage was more challenging than dealing with those in the first, factual passage. Some candidates did not attempt the final writer's craft questions which had four marks in total.

**Question 3(a)** was a straightforward literal comprehension question asking why the writer went to the doctor's wife to ask for a summer job. The answer was clearly indicated in the second sentence and many candidates correctly identified that she had worked for her the summer before. A small minority missed the time detail of 'last summer' or 'the previous holiday', and some occasionally selected 'to satisfy her mother' from the opening sentence. Although this might explain why she was looking for a job, it failed to recognise why she specifically went to the doctor's wife.

**Question 3(b)** was another literal comprehension question. This question required candidates to scan the whole paragraph for the two reasons why the job was 'good news'. There was much success in recognising that the writer would be given more money than before, but the other reason earlier in the paragraph, that she could start the next day or immediately, was regularly missed. Candidates are to be reminded to read the whole paragraph and to carefully select the relevant content from the passage; answers which went on to include that the daughters 'could spend more time' with the writer became unfocused and were not creditworthy.

**Question 3(c)** was an inferential question asking why the mother might have caused the writer's 'change in mood'. A correct answer had to identify 'her mother' and the comment she made that 'it was not a real job'. It was also acceptable to write that her mother was 'negative', 'dissatisfied' or 'belittling', but 'rude' or 'unhappy' did not demonstrate precise enough understanding. Several candidates found the question challenging since not all recognised the nature of the relationship the writer had with her mother and wrote that 'her mother said she was lucky' or that 'she was pleased she was earning money'.

**Question 4(a)** was an inferential question asking why the writer said that she had 'a thousand things' in her bag. Many candidates went back to the text to read the phrase in context, realising that the hyperbole was indicating that she brought *a lot* of items for the girls, or the fact that the children needed a *great number* of things. Some answers specified 'toys' or 'towels', but these were invented details and were not in the passage. The phrase relates to the items the girls needed so reference to 'the writer's books' was irrelevant. It was not enough to lift from the text that she brought 'all the things' the girls needed. Similarly, 'everything' or 'anything' were also insufficient to capture the large amount since 'everything' the girls need might not be a lot. Only a few candidates scored with the alternative response focusing on the language device: she is *exaggerating*.

**Question 4(b)** was a two-part literal comprehension passage asking why the writer went home 'exhausted'. Many candidates scored at least one mark here. The first answer focused on the books and several responses correctly stated that the books she read were very difficult or that she was not used to the intellectual demands of the reading. Simply to write that she had to read books was not enough to explain why this was exhausting. Other answers focused on the contents of her bag being heavy to carry or sitting in

the sun was exhausting but these ideas are not text-based. The second point was more straightforward and could be found at the end of the paragraph: the girls required a *lot* of attention. It was not enough to state that she had to take care of the girls without conveying the idea that the attention was 'constant' or 'a great amount'.

**Question 5** was the first 'own words' question and candidates were asked to explain Marisa's behaviour when she *uneasily ventured* to say a few words to the girls and the key lay in capturing the meaning of the words 'uneasily' and 'ventured'. Those candidates who recognised that this 'own words' question required synonyms in a sensible context for the two words performed well. There was more success with 'uneasily' with alternatives such as 'uncomfortably', 'uncertainly' or 'awkwardly' gaining a mark. 'Ventured' proved more challenging, but a few candidates did show understanding with she 'tried', 'forced herself' or 'was brave enough' to speak to the girls. The question was occasionally misunderstood and misread as 'Why was Marisa uneasy?' with incorrect answers speculating on Marisa's lack of experience with children.

In **Question 6(a)**, candidates were asked for one word in Paragraph 4 which repeated the idea of 'unwillingly'. This was answered reasonably successfully with 'reluctant' which captures Marisa's lack of enthusiasm in looking after the children. Some candidates automatically selected the adverb 'certainly' because of the 'ly' suffix without considering its appropriateness. Candidates are advised to read the question carefully since there were a few responses which gave more than one word. If a phrase is given as an answer, the individual word must be indicated such as in 'Marisa's reluctant grasp'.

**Question 6(b)** was a literal comprehension question asking what caused Linda to cry and the correct answer was fairly well identified: she had hurt her chin. As a close reading task, it was essential to identify where she was hurt (her chin) so the general observation that Linda was hurt or injured was not acceptable. Furthermore, 'maybe one of her sisters had pushed her' or 'maybe Linda had leaned over too far' were also not creditworthy since this is the writer speculating from a distance, not the actual cause.

**Question 6(c)** was an inferential question asking why the sisters were 'looking elsewhere'. Any answer which recognised that the sisters were guilty and were trying to avoid blame was acceptable. 'They were pretending they were not involved in the accident', 'so that they weren't suspected' and 'they were trying to look innocent' were all creditworthy answers. Answers which included words like 'innocent', 'guilty', 'in trouble', 'suspected' or 'blame' did not need to make reference to the incident itself, since these words alone capture the fact that the sisters had done something wrong. Therefore, 'to look as if they were not involved' was incomplete, leaving us asking involved in what? Many answers gave the lift 'as if all this had nothing to do with them' but this could not score since it is unclear what 'all *this*' is – a reminder that simply copying from the passage does not always work.

**Question 7(a)** was the second question which required candidates to answer in their own words. The meaning of the phrase 'no way worthy' and the word 'commotion' had to be captured, and, as with **Question 5**, this had to be done within a sensible context. There were some good responses as candidates recognised that Linda's extreme reaction (the 'commotion') was out of proportion ('no way worthy') to the actual size of the injury and this was captured in many ways: 'her cut was small but she was crying'; 'she was making a scene over a tiny injury'; 'her tantrum was an overreaction'. Candidates need to recognise that 'own words' questions are not literal comprehension questions. Many candidates incorrectly described what literally happened – she had hurt her chin – repeating the answer to **Question 6(b)**.

**Question 7(b)** asked candidates to select the word which tells us it was not easy to calm Linda down. Candidates found this challenging, and several misunderstood the question. Instead of looking at the part of the passage which focuses on the writer trying to calm Linda – and selecting the correct answer 'somehow' – many looked for evidence that Linda was not calm and wrote 'commotion'. Other common incorrect answers were 'ran', 'attendant' and 'antiseptic' which reflect the urgency of the situation, but not the difficulty in calming Linda down.

In **Question 8**, candidates were asked why the doctor's wife decided that 'there was no need' for the writer anymore. The text tells us the reason the doctor's wife gives is that her children have had too much swimming. Discerning candidates realised this was an excuse to hide her annoyance and concern and provided a range of acceptable answers focusing on the writer's irresponsibility, the fact that her daughter was injured while in her care, or the mother's fear that an accident could happen again. However, many candidates missed this inference and copied 'her daughters had had too much swimming' which was incorrect unless it was also identified as an excuse to mask the doctor's wife's concern.

**Question 9** tested the understanding, in context, of words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage

and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. This was generally well answered, and several candidates scored four marks or more. The most successful response was for **Question 9(e)** where 'usual' was recognised by nearly all candidates as closest in meaning to 'customary' – the writer arrived to collect the girls at the *usual* time. Unsuccessful responses to **Question 9(a)** selected 'help' or 'comfort' instead of the correct answer, 'please'. It is important to read the chosen word in context and assess its sense. In this case, it is unclear how a summer job might help or comfort her mother. Key to selecting the correct meaning for the verb 'embraced', in **Question 9(b)**, was the accompanying adverb 'affectionately'. Thus, 'they *approached*' or '*surrounded* me affectionately' would not be appropriate choices. The only word suggesting the physical intimacy of 'embraced' is 'hugged' which over half of the candidates correctly selected. **Question 9(c)** was well answered by those who understood the connotations of the word 'scorching' with its suggestion of burning. These candidates selected the word which most successfully conveys this idea: 'flaming'. 'Rising' was a popular choice suggesting she is at the beach at the start of the day, an idea not in the passage. Similarly, there is no evidence that the story takes place in a 'tropical' location or that the weather conditions are 'tropical'. **Question 9(d)** was also generally well answered since by eliminating the alternatives which did not fit the context – to put it *instantly* or to put it *cheerfully* – candidates found it fairly easy to identify 'simply' as the correct answer: 'to put it *simply*'.

**Question 10** was the question dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft. Some candidates found this challenging and were unsure of what was being asked, often resorting to narrative details about the events in the passage. In both **Question 10(a)** and **Question 10(b)**, candidates were asked to give, first, the meaning of a phrase as used in the passage, and then to give the effect of that phrase. It is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question to ensure success. Too often, candidates offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa.

**Question 10(a)** directed candidates to the phrase 'the lazy sea shimmered' and the first task was to give the meaning of this phrase. Candidates had two words to focus on: 'lazy' and 'shimmered'. To gain the mark, an answer had to show understanding of the meaning of both words. For 'lazy', the meaning could be 'the sea was calm' or 'it was still'; 'there were no waves' was also correct. However, 'tired' or 'idle' failed to clearly explain a sea with little movement or small waves. For 'shimmered', correct answers included 'shone', 'glittered', 'sparkled'; 'it reflected the sun' was also creditworthy. For one mark, a correct answer might read 'the calm sea shone' or 'there were few waves and it glittered'. To perform well in these types of questions, attention should be given to all the words in the phrase. Many candidates only provided a meaning for one so their response was incomplete.

For effect, candidates have to ask: *What does the phrase suggest about the mood or atmosphere at the location?* or *What does the image created by the words make me feel?* A few candidates did this and identified that the scene was 'relaxing', 'soothing' or 'peaceful', or, responding to the *shimmering* light, they recognised that the sea was 'beautiful' or 'pretty'. However, many candidates repeated the meaning, 'the sea was calm', which could not score. Answers such as 'it was a nice day' or 'it was perfect weather' were too vague and general. Many incorrect responses focused on the events in the narrative – the girls could swim safely or the writer could read in the sun – which moves away from the effect of language which is what is being assessed here.

Candidates were more successful with **Question 10(b)** which directed them to the phrase 'I tore the child from Marisa's arms' and the first task was to give the meaning of this phrase. Attention had to be given to the word 'tore' – she took the child from Marisa, but how? This meant that it was not enough to only write 'she removed the child' or that 'she took Linda'. Correct answers had to recognise the degree of force and/or speed so creditworthy answers included verbs such as 'grabbed', 'pulled' or 'snatched', or the adverbs 'forcefully', 'instantly' or 'quickly'. Thus, a correct response might read 'she seized the child', 'she took her forcefully' or 'she took Linda immediately'.

The key to success in identifying the effect here is to ask: *What does the phrase tell us about the writer's feelings and/or her situation?* The candidates have to consider the situation from the writer's perspective and several correctly identified that she was 'worried' (presumably about both Linda and her job), 'anxious' or 'scared'. That she was 'angry' or 'annoyed' with Marisa were valid answers to explain the emotion behind her actions. Some responses stated that there was a sense of 'urgency' and 'panic' which was also correct. As with **Question 10(a)**, effect could not be explained by answering *what happened next?* A response such as the writer washed the child's face or tried to calm her down did not score.