

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0990/12
Reading 12

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through the three texts and tasks in the order set
- attempted all parts of all questions
- followed task instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question to base their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- paid attention to introductions to texts where these were offered
- focused on the particular evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each of the three extended response questions
- considered the marks allocated to each question and targeted their response time accordingly
- paid attention to the guidance offered in tasks – for example, explaining three examples from each of the two paragraphs identified in **2(d)**, indicating clearly the one example from the text extract they were using in **2(c)** and identifying a word/phrase (not a sentence) in each part of **2(a)**
- identified and used relevant ideas, opinions and details from the text in the response to reading task rather than inventing untethered material
- used their own words where instructed to do so, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- planned both the ideas to be used and a logical route through before writing their answers to longer questions
- selected only the material that was most appropriate for the response to the question
- avoided repetition
- checked and edited their responses to correct any incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Most candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format of the Reading paper and understanding of the general demands of the three tasks, though there were candidates who did not pay attention to the guidance in the task instructions and missed opportunities to evidence skills and understanding. Instances where one or more tasks had not been attempted were rare, though there were occasions where responses to part questions were incomplete or missing, limiting opportunities to score higher marks.

Candidates appeared to find all three texts equally accessible and engaging. Occasionally, a failure to complete all aspects of a task and/or a loss of focus on the rubric limited the evidence of understanding and skills offered or resulted in redundant material. Similarly, there were some less well-focused responses from candidates who had scored well in smaller sub questions but missed opportunities to target higher marks in other higher tariff tasks – for example, by writing far more than the maximum of 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)**.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in **Questions 1 (a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates followed the line or paragraph references in the questions carefully to help them to move down **Text A** in order and to direct their attention, though some confused information from one design of bicycle with another. Most, but not all, remembered that in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from the text in order to evidence their Reading skills and not based on personal opinion or experience.

Less successful responses sometimes attempted to include extra guesses in response to **Questions 1(a)–(e)**, diluting evidence of understanding by doing so. Some offered circular answers, repeating the language

of the question where own words were specified as required. In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on the language of the text and/or copied, limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result.

In **Question 2** candidates needed first to identify **(2(a))** and explain **(2(b))** words and phrases from the text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. Stronger answers were careful to refer back to **Text C** to locate specific relevant choices and consider meaning in context. Opportunities for marks were missed by some candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify one example from the text selected to explain and in **Question 2(a)** by those who copied out sentences from the text rather than identifying the exact word/phrase that matched the sense of just the underlined word/phrase in the question. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should ensure that they explore and explain the meaning of each of the words chosen in some detail before moving on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most were able to suggest three potentially useful examples for analysis in each half of the **2(d)** task and offer basic effect / meaning in context, though some candidates were not sufficiently clear, careful or detailed in the examination of their choices. In less successful responses, generalised comment or labelling of devices without explanation of how these were working meant opportunities to target higher levels were missed. A small number of candidates offered few or no choices in **Question 2(d)**.

In **Question 3 most** responses attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task, though a few lost sight of the text – for example, writing creatively about their own experience of forests, picnics and strict training regimes which were not relevant. Most candidates had remembered to write from Sonny's perspective, with the best focused on interpreting the evidence in the text throughout. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities as a consequence of uneven focus and/or offering a narrow range of ideas from the text. Less successful responses either offered only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with minimal modification.

Whilst Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity and register of their writing. It is advisable to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Leaving sufficient time to edit and correct responses is also advisable.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Comprehension and summary task

Questions 1 – (a)–(e)

Short answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read and respond to Text A. Strong responses paid careful attention to the command words and paragraph references in the instructions to demonstrate effectively and efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong explanations, striving to offer own word answers where these were not needed and/or repeating language of the text where own words were required. Candidates should note that where use of own words is necessary to evidence understanding task guidance makes that clear. Less well focused answers on occasion clouded the evidence of understanding by including additional unnecessary material and/or extra guesses.

Successful responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through the text from the beginning, picking up on pointers where appropriate to help them to identify relevant material.

(a) Give two examples of early types of bicycle, according to the text.

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates working chronologically through the text and tasks recognised that line 1 offered three examples of early types of bicycle from which they simply selected two. Some candidates made use of the question stem to help focus their answer, whilst others simply wrote the key words of their answer alongside each bullet – either approach was acceptable. Some candidates added extra unnecessary challenge to this one-mark selection task by deciding to answer this question using material from later in the text. A small number of those overlooking line one and not reading with due care, made the mistake of offering just one example of a type of bicycle by giving alternative names for the same design – for example, Velocipede and Boneshaker.

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

(i) ‘curious transformations’ (lines 1 and 2):

(ii) ‘carefully straddled’ (line 5):

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where answers failed to score both marks it was sometimes the result of having explained just one aspect of the phrase, for example in **Question 1(b)(ii) attempting to** explain ‘straddled’ only and repeating all/part of the word ‘carefully’. More effective answers were able to indicate that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of the question in the context of the text – for example, in **1(b)(i)** that the ‘curious transformations’ of the bicycle meant the changes/different designs might be considered odd or interesting.

**(c) Re-read paragraph 3, (‘Pedals were introduced ... nickname, “Boneshaker”’).
Give two reasons why people may not have wanted to ride on the Velocipede.**

In **Question 1(c)** candidates re-reading paragraph 3 closely were able to identify two distinct reasons why people may not have wanted to ride the Velocipede – many had picked up on the hint in the text that riding on rail tracks might not have been a good idea, and likewise many noted the suggestion in the name ‘Boneshaker’ itself. A few candidates suggested that the introduction/novelty of pedals may also have been a factor – a reasonable inference that could be credited.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 4 and 5, (‘Fast-forward ... a design classic.’).

(i) Identify two main features of the Penny-farthing that made it look different from previous bicycles.

(ii) Explain why the Safety Bicycle was very popular in the 1890s.

Candidates who paid attention to command/key words in the question were best placed to offer creditworthy responses and make efficient use of their time. For example, in **part (i)** they were careful to offer two distinct features of the Penny-farthing that made it look different to what had gone before (identifying the wheels of differing sizes and the use of steel in the design). In **part (ii)** a few candidates did not remain focused on paragraphs 4 and 5, moving on instead to offer more general ideas about bicycles drawn from paragraphs 6 and 7. Successful answers in **part (ii)** made efficient use of time to offer just 3 of the 5 relevant ideas available.

(e) Re-read paragraphs 6 and 7, (‘So who needs ... two-wheeled favourite.’).

Using your own words, explain why you think the bicycle was voted the most significant innovation in technology.

In **Question 1(e)** the most successful explanations showed that candidates were able to derive three distinct reasons of the four available in the specified paragraphs. Candidates who recast the relevant information using their own words as instructed were best able to demonstrate that they had teased out and understood the separate aspects – with most successful answers focused on the appeal of the bicycle as related to health, relative cost and environmental concerns. Less well focused answers sometimes repeated the question instead of offering an explanation. Others

offered answers drawn from elsewhere in the text that were not connected to the listeners' vote, such as it has 'wheels that are broadly the same size'.

(f) According to Text B, what particular challenges has Denise faced as an elite-level cyclist?

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

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from Text B and some understanding of the requirements of the task. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea and/or misreading of details meant opportunities were missed by some candidates to target higher marks.

Where responses were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words and to keep explanations concise. Overview was evidenced in some of the most successful answers where relevant ideas had been carefully selected from different parts of the text and organised helpfully for their reader – for example, in terms of professional and personal challenges. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. The strongest responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned a route through the content of their answer before writing their response. There were some extremely effective and well-crafted responses that focused specifically on the challenges faced by Denise as presented by Text B.

Some candidates wrote far more than the maximum 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others adhered to the advised length of the response but took too long to explain just a few ideas. Candidates producing effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a range of relevant ideas, communicating these accurately and concisely in their own words.

Not all candidates were able to select ideas efficiently and ignore redundant material – for example, Denise's references to her love of her sport and how it energises her, along with the success she has experienced, and the sponsors now looking for her.

More effective responses were not dependant on the structure or language of Text B to communicate their ideas and were able to offer more concise explanations as a result. Less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text in the order it was presented. For example, less focused responses spent time unwisely citing separately the various details of the mountain tour and/or process of learning to ride the adapted bike. Many of these least effective responses also tended to have misread key details – for example, suggesting that Denise had lost one/both of her legs as an adult cyclist and was now returning to the sport. Paying attention to the information offered in the introduction to Text B might have helped to avoid such misreading. A small number of candidates suggested that Denise had taken up swimming and/or broken her teeth – misunderstanding the sense of 'swimming against the stream' and/or 'gritted my teeth'.

In low to mid-range answers, some candidates lifted phrases/longer sections of text without careful selection of a central idea indicating misreading – for example, by asserting that Denise was 'the first female' to complete the mountain tour.

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

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

- the selective summary task is based on Text B – where an introduction to Text B is provided, use this to help you check that you have understood the text accurately
- after reading the task instructions, re-read the text to identify just those potentially relevant ideas you can use in your answer

- identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question – for example, where a question asks you to focus only on the challenges you should not include more general ideas about feelings, thoughts or successes
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan, checking that they are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which might need further explanation
- return to the text to ‘sense check’ any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- organise and sequence your ideas to make them clear to your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the original text
- explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the text themselves would understand
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage
- check back to ensure that you have included all of the ideas you planned to
- though it is not necessary to count every word, you should keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ and aim to be concise.

Question 2

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

- (i) Sonny’s phone is sparkling in the sunshine.
(ii) The narrator expected his bike ride to be a new, exciting experience.
(iii) The narrator considers his fiftieth birthday to be a significant stage in his life.
(iv) Sonny plans to record the entire bicycle ride on his mobile phone.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified in each part the correct word or phrase from Text C to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example – simply and efficiently giving the word or phrase as their answer. Other responses added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire sentence in each case substituting the word or phrase and then bracketing or underlining their answer. Marks were sometimes missed where answers were incomplete (for example, giving ‘adventure’ without ‘novel’) or unfocused (for example, by copying out longer sections of text).

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

- (i) **increasing**
(ii) **notorious**
(iii) **dismayed**

In **Question 2(b)**, successful answers had considered carefully the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined, recognising for example that in this instance ‘increasing’ referred to a sensation/feeling building up, rather than additional numbers of something.

- (c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the father’s experiences and feelings as he starts the sharp incline on the hill.**

Use your own words in your explanation.

I can see my own contorted expression, looking out, gargoyle-like, over the bike handlebars, forming part of that ‘family entertainment’.

‘Dad, this is the forest, right?’

I nod and pant.

‘It’ll soon be ten per cent gradient, Dad.’

I change my gear, and my legs heave a sigh of relief.

In **Question 2(c)**, where candidates had focused clearly on using just one example taken from the text extract they were best placed to demonstrate their understanding – often beginning with an explanation of meaning in context, ahead of going on to explain what that suggested in relation to father’s feelings and experiences. Those making efficient use of time often identified their example, by underlining it in the text of the question or simply used it as a subheading for their explanation. Successful responses were often centred around the image of ‘gargoyle-like’ and were able to

exploit their chosen example to good effect to suggest something of the grotesque, stony faced determination of the father as he worked through the pain he was experiencing. Other strong responses focused on the pain suggested by examining ‘contorted expression’ or his ‘legs heaving a sigh of relief’. Many choosing the short sentence ‘I nod and pant.’ were able to comment usefully on the separate elements of it – ‘nod[ding]’ suggesting for some that he was unable even to speak and/or his acknowledgement of what lay ahead and grim determination to continue.

Most successful responses had carefully noted the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less successful responses often attempted to discuss more than one example – time that might have been more profitably spent in **Question 2(d)** where there were up to 15 marks available. Some weaker responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted unwisely to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms. On occasion, opportunities were missed to consider the father’s perspective – for example, by focusing on one of Sonny’s observations.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 2 and 13.

- **Paragraph 2 begins ‘Time for another ...’ and is about the father trying to drink some water.**
- **Paragraph 12 begins ‘The steep road ...’ and is about the father’s feelings about the road ahead.**

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

Successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of six relevant selections – three from each paragraph – often beginning by explaining literal meaning and then moving on to consider effect. Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language in each case through detailed discussion of sharply focused choices. Where candidates considered all of the key words in slightly longer choices, they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses. Candidates responding in note form and/or relying on repeating the language of the text within their explanation were less well placed to demonstrate understanding fully. Some of the strongest responses explored how their judiciously selected choices worked both individually and together to influence the reader’s impression, building to an overview. Responses at level 5 frequently showed imagination and precision when discussing images, for example in relation to the ‘greedy asphalt’ of the road and ‘the mocking gravelly promise of worse to come’.

In relation to paragraph 2, many answers had identified ‘crucial drop’ as a potentially interesting example to discuss, with most able to offer at least a basic explanation of the sense of importance it indicated and some going on to offer profitable comparison of ‘drop’ with the earlier ‘gulp’ and/or the ‘excess’ that had spilt. A number of answers missed opportunities to target higher marks by limiting their comments to an explanation of just one or two words within longer choices – for example, not all considered the word ‘shoots’ alongside ‘thick stream’ and many weaker answers dealing with this popular choice did little more than repeat the wording of the text to assert that the water shot out in the same way a stream or river did, or tried to link shoots to guns (largely unhelpful in this context). Some mid-range answers offered more careful selection and explanation in one half of the answer than the other – often repeating words such as ‘unforgiving’ and (un)‘kind’ when discussing paragraph 12 rather than finding synonyms to evidence understanding of meaning. Some more general comments around the challenging nature of the road ahead missed opportunities to consider the distinct meanings of ‘mocking’ and ‘promise’ separately. Many candidates were able to explain that ‘meanders’ referred to the bends in the road, whilst those offering evidence of understanding at higher levels were often able to go on to consider how ‘lazily’ added to the sense that the road was being deliberately unhelpful and/or working against the father’s efforts.

Some candidates reasonably selected words within longer choices separately – for example highlighting ‘whisps of warm exhaust fumes’ and ‘tickling’ as two choices – though not all explored or explained these separate elements fully. Some had misread ‘exhaust’ as exhausted and attempted to suggest this showed the father was tired out. The least successful answers to **2(d)**

offered inappropriate comments such as ‘The writer uses adjectives that help paint a picture and help hear some of the sounds. He explains everything in great detail.’ Satisfactory responses offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each example they had chosen, whilst stronger answers touched on effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, offering precise explanations of meaning.

Repetition of the vocabulary of the text to communicate ideas in the explanations offered was common in less effective responses – in particular, ‘too much’, ‘excess’ and ‘steep’ were often repeated. Candidates are reminded of the need to ensure that their explanations in **Question 2(d)** are in their own words and can be clearly understood. Candidates should proofread their explanations to check that what they have written is what they mean and evidences their understanding. For example, a number of candidates referred to the father ‘paddling’ rather than ‘pedalling’ and/or miscopied the word ‘crackled’ as ‘cackled’ or ‘cracked’.

In **Question 2(d)**, answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. It is the quality of analysis which attracts marks in a language question. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful and result in very thin general comments at best. Opportunities were missed in some answers where choices were from one paragraph only. Some of the least successful answers to **Question 2(d)** appeared to have been answered last and were very brief, generalised and/or incomplete. The most successful answers were often able to ‘talk their reader through’ their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, ahead of arriving at an understanding of how and why these particular words might have been used by the writer in this context.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- make sure that the quotations you select from the text are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the quotation
- in each part of **2(a)** make sure that your selection from the text is clearly identified – remember you are looking for a word or phrase, not a whole sentence
- in **2(d)**, choose three examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (six choices in total)
- where you are trying to explain meaning check that your explanation makes sense
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as ‘the writer helps us to imagine the scene’ – you need to say how your chosen example does this to show understanding
- make sure your explanations deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- when you are trying to suggest effect and are unsure, start by explaining the precise meaning of the word in context
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

Question 3

You are Sonny. Your father and the rest of the family have watched the video you made to record his fiftieth birthday bicycle ride. After the family have watched the video, you write your journal entry in which you:

- **describe your father’s plans and preparations for his birthday and how you felt about them**
- **explain the hardships and challenges your father faced on the journey up the hill and your thoughts as you watched him cycling**
- **describe your father’s reactions as he watched the finished birthday video of the whole ride.**

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with Text C, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to think their way into the attitude, opinions and memories of Sonny, as distinct from those of the father/narrator. Where candidates had chosen unwisely to attempt tasks out of order and begun with task 3, there were often frequent examples of misread details – for example, that

the father was involved in some kind of cycling race, that Sonny was also cycling or that it was Sonny's fifteenth birthday.

Some candidates chose to offer three separate journal entries – one for each bullet, scheduling the entries as 'before', 'during' and 'after' – others wrote just one on the evening after the video had been shown as suggested by the task. Though splitting up the entries still worked well for some candidates – especially where they remembered to reflect on events not just simply retell them – moving away from the guidance in the question increased the challenge for other candidates unhelpfully. Bullet three required candidates to draw on hints and details from the whole text in order to consider how the father was likely to have felt looking back at the experience (via the video). The three bullets in the question had been used by the majority of those candidates offering evidence of skills and understanding above level 2 to help them to identify relevant ideas in relation to the father's plans, challenges on the journey and general reaction to the video. Where candidates had not identified and planned ideas in advance, they often overlooked preparations – such as retrieving the bike from the shed and repairing it – with some candidates working through the text line by line misreading the chronology of events to suggest that the bicycle had broken down and needed to be repaired during the ride uphill.

Picking up on both explicit and implicit ideas to use in their answer, stronger answers to this question were able to show that candidates had read closely and understood. Most candidates were able to indicate that they had grasped the text and task in at least general terms. Many had engaged with the detail of both task and text to offer competent responses, evidencing some evaluation and interpretation of the experience from the perspective of Sonny, rather than simply repeating the narrative offered by his father. Where candidates had paid careful and equal attention to each of the questions, they were often able to extend ideas and attitudes suggested in the text to create a convincing voice for the character of Sonny. Some were kinder than others in the son's interpretation of his father's efforts, though almost all picked up on the concern in Sonny's voice in the text to ensure that any humour at the expense of his father was essentially good-natured and affectionate.

The least successful responses to **Question 3** copied sections of text with minimal modification and rarely addressed bullet three. The most convincing answers indicated that candidates had revisited the passage to examine carefully the details of the father's account of events and make judgements based on the evidence in the text about how the journey was likely to have ended. Recognising that Sonny's original quip about his father's age had at least in part prompted the ride in the first place, some candidates thinking their way into Sonny's character used details from the text to good effect to support a sense that his attitude had changed during the ride itself as he witnessed his father's effort and determination.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to revisit details in the text related to the father's plans and preparations, encouraging development of ideas in their journal entry with a reminder to include Sonny's feelings. Stronger answers combined material drawn from the whole text, providing an evaluation of the apparently limited preparation described – some for example, noted that the 'flat terrain' outside the house was unlikely to provide a similar challenge to the uphill route of the challenge itself and/or interpreted the 'king of the road' image as somewhat optimistic. Journal entries secure in their interpretation of Sonny often noted that Rob had only agreed to accompany his friend (Sonny's father) in his car, picking up helpfully on the word 'comfort' to suggest Rob would not have been keen and/or able to undertake the ride himself. Others inferred from Sonny's comments about the Boneshaker, that he felt his father's bicycle was not only old, but potentially dangerous. Responses that drifted from the evidence in the text to suggest that Sonny's father had undertaken a rigorous daily training routine ahead of the scheduled ride were missing opportunities to evidence close reading.

In relation to the second bullet, almost all answers were able to include some potentially relevant details, though in weaker responses this was sometimes only achieved through copying of sections of text. Mid-range answers usually referred to the physical strength required and/or Sonny's father's level of fitness (often through reference to the tension in his thighs) along with the difficult terrain, and Sonny's efforts to encourage his father on. Stronger answers often also included observations around the need to ration water and/or Sonny's amusement/embarrassment at his father's chosen outfit.

In dealing with ideas related to bullet three, most answers suggested that Sonny's father's reactions looking back at the whole experience were likely to be mixed – though fewer exploited that interpretation fully to explain and support suggested reactions using details from the text. Some became distracted with long technical explanations of how the video might have been edited, and/or created details of other friends and individual family members not detailed in the text whose reactions could not easily be supported to provide evidence of close reading. Some made inefficient use of time in the opening paragraphs of their entry, creating unnecessarily long and detailed scenarios for the morning of the ride which were outside of the text

– including for example, brushing teeth, Sonny’s mother packing a picnic for everyone and/or details of breakfast. Many were though able to offer convincing accounts, developing the hints and details offered in the text, having used the evidence to decide whether the full ride had been completed or not (either of these interpretations could be supported by careful reference, though candidates needed to decide the outcome ahead of writing in order to ensure consistency). Stronger answers were often able to extend their ideas based on an understanding of tone in the father’s description of his ‘contorted expression’ and ‘gargoyle-like’ form and his recognition of the challenge as a ‘mind-game’ which it would be ‘unthinkable’ to give up.

Most candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a journal entry and were guided by the task instructions to start at the point of having just watched the video, using that as a natural opportunity to reflect. Many candidates had fun with Sonny’s voice, and were able to construct texts that were fluent, reasonably accurate, and demonstrated some range in vocabulary. Stronger answers controlled the structure of their response carefully, often choosing to frame their answer, or begin, with bullet three ideas, confidently weaving in as appropriate evaluation of the challenge of the ride, preparations etc and integrating relevant details as Sonny remembered them. Careful planning beforehand, combined with efficient editing and correcting, allowed answers operating in level 5 to provide convincing evidence of both Reading and Writing skills. Where candidates relied too heavily on the structure and/or language of the original text to communicate their ideas, expression often became awkward and/or lost clarity. Some candidates producing answers in the mid-range showed some awareness of appropriate register and would have benefitted from checking back through their work to ensure that their meaning was clear throughout in order to offer more secure evidence of their Writing skills.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0990/22
Directed Writing and Composition 22

Key messages

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

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

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

General comments

Examiners found that most candidates understood what was required in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, although a few candidates only responded to one question on the paper. Some responses to descriptive questions, usually **Question 3**, wrote more narratively than descriptively and although examiners credited description wherever possible, centres should note that candidates need to demonstrate an awareness of the differences between descriptive and narrative writing. In **Question 1**, responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, but copying from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert should be avoided.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and some engagement with the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a speech given by a person in authority to a specific audience of new recruits. Most responses also demonstrated a sound grasp of the main ideas about multi-generational work teams given in the reading texts and the qualities and attributes which younger and older workers can bring to their workplace.

The majority of candidates approached the topic using their own words, although many included short phrases from the texts. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response which argued consistently throughout. Effective responses showed some ability to probe and challenge the views given in the texts, suggesting that older and younger generations had abilities which could complement each other.

In the mid-mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with a little personal opinion and evaluation. Many responses at this range made some reference to the ideas in the texts, though without addressing the specific attributes that different generations could contribute to their work teams.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side. Others produced summaries of each text but did not adapt the ideas in them into a speech given by a boss to newly recruited workers.

For the Writing mark, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register to reflect the speaker's priorities and attitudes. In most cases, some understanding was shown of how speeches are structured and presented and how rhetoric, persuasion and sometimes humour can be used to engage and

persuade readers. The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were lively but evaluative in style, using ideas from the texts to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices such as questions, exclamations and humour. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a straightforward style and there was less focus on evaluating the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the original texts without selecting relevant points and re-ordering them effectively.

In **Section B**, descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail. Many descriptive writing responses were very engaging and sustained, especially for the first question. The idea of a ‘wild place’ was interpreted in a variety of ways. Many successful responses described a natural setting, sometimes tranquil and beautiful and sometimes threatening. In the second task, ‘unexpected meetings’ were also varied in context, from chance encounters with old friends or enemies to tense meetings with bosses, head teachers or other figures of authority. Effective description of these scenes often focused on the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as well as details of the surroundings and the person encountered. Some less successful responses to this question were clearly intended as narratives rather than descriptions and examiners found only limited descriptive content to reward.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were well-prepared. Effective and engaging responses to the first question presented situations with some inherent jeopardy as implied by the quotation in the question, including terrible accidents which required the narrator to attempt resuscitation of another character, failures of mobile phones at critical moments and a range of stories based on family or friendship groups. Less effective responses focused on an ordinary series of events or mundane scenarios in which machines or cars broke down. The second narrative question elicited responses with many interpretations of a ‘right time’, from choosing the right moment for a proposal of marriage to realising that some suffering or difficulty had to be endured before the time was right for redemption or fulfilment. Less effective narratives tended to become a series of events which while relevant to the task were not developed, engaging narratives. Weaker responses to this question were more discursive than narrative, outlining some ways in which one needed to wait for the ‘right time’ before making a decision rather than creating characters and scenes to illustrate these ideas narratively.

In some narrative writing responses, several candidates used a prepared story which seemed imposed on the task and not always relevant to it.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Imagine you are the boss of a company that tries to recruit workers of different ages.

Write a speech to be given to new members of staff on their first day explaining how and why the company values workers of all ages.

In your speech you should:

- **evaluate the views given in both texts**
- **persuade your workers that the company’s approach is the right one for them and the company.**

Base your speech on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words.

Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

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

Marks for reading

The task required candidates to consider and evaluate the ideas in both texts and to convince the audience of new recruits that workers of all ages could, and should, work together. Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a reproduction of the points in the texts.

More effective responses focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which addressed and evaluated the most salient ideas about the qualities young and old could offer a workplace. Most also addressed the clichéd and stereotypical views about young and older workers which prevented them from co-operating with each other.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised determined the Level and mark awarded for Reading. In responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 for Reading, examiners often rewarded some thoughtful consideration of the harmful generalisations made about workers based on their age. In Text A, for example, the waste of talent, experience and skills implied by older workers' fears of appearing 'over-qualified' was often discussed at this level. In Text B, the different social conventions of young and old were explained as unnecessarily causing misunderstanding and hostility. Others focused on the blending of older workers' 'soft skills' with the enterprise and less risk-averse attitudes of the young, explaining that both skill sets were needed for a company to succeed.

The stereotypical views of older workers given in Text A also required some probing for responses to be awarded marks in Level 5 and 6. The assumptions and generalisations underpinning such views were sometimes interrogated thoughtfully in more effective responses, as was the notion that the generations were in competition with each other for status and security in the workplace. The labelling of older workers as 'technologically unsophisticated' was often challenged as no longer valid. For some candidates, technology skills were seen as over-rated by narrow-minded employers who, as one wrote, '*needed to look up from the keyboard to the real customers who wanted to be treated well by experienced people with good interpersonal skills.*' In other responses given marks in the higher levels, older workers were seen as repositories of business knowledge and experience which deserved respect, not discrimination.

In Text B, more effective responses challenged the prejudiced ideas about young people illustrated here. Some tackled the implication that young people's skills were more superficial because they read blogs rather than books and social media posts rather than newspapers, indicating that modern businesses often used social media to promote their products. Younger customers were considered to be vital for building a successful business, making young workers better equipped to understand and meet their needs. As one candidate wrote, '*Nostalgia about a golden past before technology has no place in the modern world.*'

The listed examples of prejudice against younger people given in Text B required some probing for marks in the higher Levels. For example, the bad manners supposedly displayed by the young worker on their phone came under some scrutiny with observations such as '*older people denigrate young people for being on their phones all the time and don't realise that our whole lives are contained on these devices.*' Others considered the case of a younger worker still considered inexperienced after eight years to be based unfairly on a youthful appearance, '*something older people hate when it's applied to them.*' The debt owed by the world to innovative young people, as discussed in Text B, was clearly understood in better responses. The creative co-operation, or sometimes creative tension, between generations was considered by many to be the key to a successful business venture, though also dependent on an exchange of skills and knowledge. Responses in which a range of such evaluations were made, or ideas in the texts were assimilated to create a highly evaluative critique were less common and there were few Level 6 responses for Reading.

Responses given marks in the middle range – in Level 4 and lower Level 5 - tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the unfairness of ageism against older workers in Text A and often some opinion about the treatment of younger workers in Text B. Marks in Level 5 were given where some comments amounted to '*some successful evaluation*'. Most common here were comments about the specific skills which different generations brought to the workplace which could be shared or taught. Technology skills lacking in older workers could be shared by the young or could complement the interpersonal skills more often seen older workers. In some responses, these kinds of comments were enough for examiners to award a mark in Level 5, providing there was some specificity.

Responses given marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the texts and often offered a summary while not examining those ideas more closely. In Text A, for example, some responses reflected the writer's assertion that multigenerational teams were more innovative and preferable to work in but without using the text to show why this might be the case. In Text B, there was some general illustration of prejudice against younger workers but less probing of the underlying assumptions about them reflected in the text. At this level there was less consideration of how and why multigenerational teams might work better.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the details for example, of Text B's wry assessment that every generation decried the one that came after it and failed to see the progress made by younger people. The sequence and organisation of ideas often reflected closely the order of ideas in the

texts and this sometimes resulted in contradictory or disconnected responses. Responses at this level used awkward references such as ‘Text A says that...’ which showed some lack of awareness of how speeches are constructed and how the audience addressed should be accommodated. Ideas were sometimes summarised with limited conclusions or comments on them.

A small number of weaker responses given marks below Level 4 were reliant on lifting or copying from the texts. Some misread the task and argued in favour of only employing younger workers. This limited opportunities to make use of both texts or to evaluate the ideas in them.

Marks for writing

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

Style and audience

Candidates could adopt a range of appropriate styles and registers for their speeches and could show their understanding of the intended audience in different ways. Across the ability range, an apt, conversational style of standard English allowed for examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a ‘sometimes effective style’ was required. Although not always sustained, many speeches began with a lively introduction which engaged the audience. In some, humour was used to good effect, often by depicting the speaker, the company boss, as a person in authority trying to put the audience at ease on their first day at work. Openings such as, ‘*Look around you. What do you notice about your fellow recruits here today?*’ were quite common and showed an appropriate grasp of how a boss in these circumstances, eager to establish a multigenerational team, would address a group of new employees.

Another technique successfully used by some candidates at Level 4 and above was to characterise the boss as someone who had themselves been subjected to workplace prejudice, usually as a younger person. As one wrote, ‘*Believe me, I know how you feel and how you younger people are frantically looking around for others who won’t judge you by your youthful looks.*’ In some, particular staff members were used as examples of the kinds of values and methods advocated by the boss: ‘*Bill and young Patrice here are the greatest of friends as well as colleagues, despite the decades between their ages. Between them, they’ve succeeded in doubling the productivity of their department. Well done!*’

In the middle range of marks, examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage the specific audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent speech.

Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts, but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a whole speech with a persuasive purpose rather than a summary of two different texts. The central debate about prejudice against workers based on their age was grasped from the start and the ideas in the texts were organised as arguments and counter-arguments in a coherent speech. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. Many used the bullet points in the question to help structure their responses, offering some comment on the ideas in each text before closing with some exhortation to work together for the good of the company. Some responses aimed for an inspirational, rhetorical ending which often worked well: ‘*I would say good luck to you, but here at this company you won’t need luck. You’ll just need each other.*’

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a writing mark in Level 6 for Writing. These responses were often engaging and showed a strong awareness of audience but were also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the contending views in the texts and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses were 'sometimes effective.' Although the style was simple, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of simple errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Common misspellings at this level included some words from the texts, such as 'agism' or 'prejudice', and the incorrect use of homophones.

Responses which were poorly expressed and used lifted material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Tense errors such as '*We had been a tech company*' and agreement errors such as '*this workers*' were more frequent at this level.

Advice to candidates:

- Be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation.
- Make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.
- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.
- Think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

Section B

Descriptive Writing

Question 2 – Describe a wild place.

Question 3 – Write a description with the title, 'An unexpected meeting'.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and were interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In the first task, many kinds of 'wild places' were included, from tranquil, natural settings in forests, mountains and coastlines to more threatening interpretations of 'wild' such as city streets or parties of young people or children. All of these interpretations were acceptable and valid, as long as there was a clear link with the question. Occasionally, the focus on travelling to a particular place tended to overshadow with narrative the description of the surroundings, but where the time scale was short and the focus on detail secure, examiners could, and did, award some very high marks.

This tendency to narrative and lack of specific detail was a more common weakness in the second question, although there were some effective responses which evoked the atmosphere of a chance encounter with a long-lost friend or relative, the tension before a meeting with a workplace boss or school principal. The inclusion of 'unexpected' in the question allowed for some interesting interpretations, such as an encounter with a wild animal or an unwelcome guest at a celebration. There was more of a tendency to narrate rather than focus on descriptive detail in these responses.

Some effective responses to the first question created an engaging atmosphere from the start as the narrator observed their surroundings. Natural settings were common, some evoking moments of transcendent peacefulness while other responses depicted nature as ugly and threatening. As so often in descriptive writing the choice of details and closely observed images helped to conjure a sense of place. In one effective

description, a forest clearing with a glimpse of a view to mountains beyond was described through the reactions and feelings of the narrator: *'I was stopped in my tracks as if to move through this magical place would break the spell it cast.'* Such places were often seen as restorative – *'My spirits soared and lifted me up beyond my petty worries'* and sometimes healing or mystical. In one such scene, a chance encounter with a deer had a profound effect on the narrator who gained a deep love of nature from the experience: *'Soundlessly, as if conjured up by the very spirit of the forest, the deer appeared before me and looked at me with no fear, just two creatures silently sharing the beauty and solace of the forest.'* In another, a similar encounter was more threatening: *'Through the gloom and tangle of the branches growing darker as the sun set, two glowing yellow eyes pierced mine, making my heart thump and my mind panic.'*

Other 'wild' settings also elicited some effective description. In one response, the chaos, noise and mess of a party which had gone out of control was evoked while another created a scene in a classroom of small children after a teacher had stepped out. Where the descriptive focus was sustained and the details given precise and concrete, examiners awarded high marks for Content and Structure.

There was a tendency in some responses for some slightly clichéd details, especially in descriptions of forests or natural landscapes. Some descriptions of the effect of such landscapes on the narrator relied on a narrower range of vocabulary – 'beautiful', 'peaceful', for example. The most effective descriptions avoided these more general ideas and focused closely on details and specific moments.

The second question was less popular than the first but, for some candidates, proved a good vehicle to show their skills. The range of different types of meetings and different participants for them was very wide. A chance encounter with an old friend on a train, a childhood friend with whom the narrator had lost touch many years before, was the subject of one effective description. The viewpoint of the narrator as a fellow passenger on a busy train allowed for some close observation which engaged and intrigued the reader. The slowly revealed mystery of why the person described seemed familiar was well controlled: *'She turned her face slightly and my breath caught in my throat as that little mole above her eye became visible. She glanced towards me, her eyes scanning leisurely around the carriage, that little smile flickering across her lips as she spotted a little girl playing with her doll.'*

Workplace settings provided the backdrop for some unexpected meetings. Being called into an impromptu meeting with a charismatic leader in one response allowed for some focus on both the character and the impact of the meeting on the narrator and others: *'The sliding door behind me made a gentle whoosh to announce the arrival of our great leader, the CEO. The nervous murmurings and shuffling of papers in the room stopped immediately, like a light switch going off.'* Similarly, being called out of class for a meeting with a school principal evoked a strong sense of foreboding in one response: *'I wondered if I should knock on the door or wait to be called. I wondered what I'd done that warranted such a meeting with a man I had only seen on a stage in front of the whole school. Maybe it was something I hadn't done but should have.'* Responses which focused on the impact of the meeting on the narrator as well as close details observed in the surroundings tended to be more effective.

Level 5 responses to both questions used a wide range of details and were well-constructed, although were less consistently effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but were usually a little more predictable or drifted into narrative.

For Content and Structure, responses given marks in Level 4 tended to become narrative quite quickly, especially in the second question. In some responses to both questions introductions often gave way to more specific description, though the description sometimes became a list of what was seen and heard.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given or were simple narratives about trips into forests or meetings with football coaches or talent spotters after a match.

Responses which had little descriptive content were more frequently submitted for the second question than the first and occasionally there was evidence that the difference between narrative and descriptive writing was not well understood.

High marks for Style and Accuracy reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used carefully to achieve specific effects, as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, highly rewarded responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to evoke atmosphere and engage the reader. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes

wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. Less adventurous vocabulary was often characteristic of Level 4 marks.

An inconsistent use of tenses and grammatical errors also affected marks given in the middle range. Lapses in grammar also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy.

Advice to candidates:

- Try to avoid predictable scenarios and consider a more original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.
- Keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.
- Write sentences accurately and do not switch tenses.
- Use vocabulary precisely: complex words used incorrectly do not help your style.

Narrative Writing

Question 4 – Write a story that includes the words, ‘... I realised it wasn’t working ...’.

Question 5 Write a story with the title, ‘The right time’.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plotlines, characters and scenarios in these responses. In **Question 5**, there were some examples of a more discursive approach to the idea of a ‘right time’ which discussed various circumstances in which decisions should be made but which lacked narrative shape and intent. This inevitably limited the marks examiners could award for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and often original interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative, to produce moments of tension or drama, to vary the pace of the story and create well-rounded characters were elements of the ‘features of fiction writing’ credited by examiners. In the first question, responses given higher marks for Content and Structure often revolved around a realisation of something which was not working which had an impact on characters. In many cases it was the failure of some device or vehicle that created this drama and addressed the question. A mobile phone with no battery at the scene of an accident or a car breaking down as the protagonist attempted to escape from some danger were fairly common, and often effective plotlines for **Question 4**. Other interesting narratives relied on relationships which were not working: relationships between a child and parent, romantic partners and, in one engaging response, between an employee and her boss. In this response, the narrator began to see the boss as a manipulative, greedy individual whose mentoring of his new employee was cynical and exploitative. At all levels of achievement, romantic partners experienced various breakdowns in their relationship, leading to painful separations or cancellations of weddings at the last minute. Stories with more concrete interpretations of the question included many in which some event or accident occurred, necessitating the use of a mobile phone to seek help. In the most effective of these scenarios, the scene was carefully set before this moment of drama. In one, an impatient, irritable father bickered with his son about his tardiness as they travelled to school and work by car. This effective characterisation made the outcome of the story more poignant as the son lost his life bravely attempting to rescue a stranger from a burning vehicle. Without this careful setting of the scene and the effective characterisation of the slightly bullying father and the shamed, timid son, the overall impact of the narrative would have been greatly reduced. In another response, the failure of the narrator’s mobile phone during a bank robbery led to similarly dramatic events.

There were also some very effective narratives to address the alternative narrative question. The idea of a ‘the right time’ was interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Frustrated attempts to be accepted into a particular college or to be given a place in a prestigious sports team often turned out to be timely and some important lesson was learned as a result. Initial failures sometimes resulted in a change of heart, or of direction, such as the child who focused exclusively on achieving academic success but neglected their family in need. In the end, the ‘right time’ to pursue individual success was after these family obligations had been addressed. Again, effective scene-setting and characterisation were crucial in giving the narrative credibility and shape.

For some candidates, the question title lent itself to a more complex narrative structure than a chronological account and resulted sometimes in a more engaging story. The sense of looking back at the arc of the story, realising after the event when the ‘right time’ occurred, gave some responses an interesting narrative structure. An old man looking back at his life, regretting some rushed and selfish decisions, formed the

structure of one effective narrative and other responses adopted this reflective approach with some success. More dramatic plotlines focused on the 'right time' to make critical decisions, such as, in one response, to leave an abusive household after a particularly harmful episode. The narrator's attempt to escape and find a safer place created a real sense of jeopardy and peril because of the opening which depicted the shocking incident, only revealing that the violence was instigated by family members later. This preparation made the ensuing events more effective and credible.

Responses given marks in Level 5 were usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution. There were many which involved mobile phones that did not work or cars that broke down and where credible characters and settings were created, examiners could award marks in Level 5. Effective characterisation of the protagonist or narrator was often a factor in examiners selecting a mark in Level 5 rather than Level 4, especially in responses to the second question where the response was paragraphed and organised but had more of a discursive rather than narrative shape and purpose.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of developed narrative writing. At this level, stories were often more dependent on a series of events, without the preparation of setting and character to engage the reader. Similar plots and scenarios were often used as those in more effective narratives, but the narratives were less effective in engaging the reader. For **Question 4**, accidents or breakdowns were just as common but at this level more time and focus were given to relating events than developing rounded characters. In the second question, simple stories focusing on sporting or academic success were common, but lacked development.

Responses given marks in Level 4 and lower were usually simple accounts of events and showed less awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing, such as a clear sense of structure and developed characters. Dialogue was either used sparingly or, occasionally, too much, with less successful storytelling to help the reader make sense of events. Occasionally, responses at this level were pre-prepared stories, or stories from revision websites which had limited relevance to the question set.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary allowed examiners to consider the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent whereas Level 4 responses were simpler in style and lacked some range and precision in vocabulary. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 marks, such as incorrect verb agreements and some awkward use of prepositions. There was, however, less evidence of over-ambitious, imprecise vocabulary than examiners noted in previous series. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did punctuation and grammar errors. Punctuation errors, misspellings and incorrectly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing, limiting the mark for Style and Accuracy. The use of commas where full stops were needed, was a weakness in Level 4/low Level 5 writing, though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing.

Advice to candidates:

- Think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.
- Consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.
- Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Don't rely on events.
- Check your writing for errors which will affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.
- Choose your vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0990/03
Coursework Portfolio 03

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

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

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

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

General comments

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

The majority of centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. The Moderation Team reported that many centres provided summative comments closely related to the mark schemes at the end of each completed assignment. These were extremely helpful in helping moderators to

understand how and why marks had been awarded and centres are thanked for following the process as instructed in the Coursework Handbook.

The major concern for all moderators was that some markers of the coursework portfolios did not indicate errors in the final draft of each assignment and/or provide a summative comment which referred to the marking level descriptors to justify the marks awarded. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for the adjustment of marks.

Administration

Successful administration was when centres:

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

Internal Moderation

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

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

Using the coursework handbook

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

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

1 Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment

- Some of the assignments showed little or no evidence of complying with the instruction in the Coursework Handbook that markers should indicate all errors in the final draft of each assignment. This process helps markers to effectively and accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work and to apply the most appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. If this process does not take place, it is difficult for markers to make a balanced judgement. In several centres there was evidence across all three assignments that markers had awarded marks from the higher levels of the assessment criteria, yet the assignments contained frequent and often serious errors that had not been annotated by the marker. This inevitably led to a downward adjustment of marks by the moderator. It is important for all who mark the coursework portfolios to fully understand the importance of indicating and considering all errors in the final draft of each assignment.

2 Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

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

3 Coursework portfolios

- A significant number of centres did not collate the individual assignments into complete coursework portfolios but instead placed loose pages of work into the grey plastic envelopes and despatched them to Cambridge; this caused moderators some difficulties when assembling the coursework folders and increased the risk of work becoming lost or mislaid. Centres should secure each individual coursework folder using tags or staples with the ICRC securely fastened as a cover sheet.
- Moderators reported that several centres used plastic wallets to present candidates' work as an alternative to securely attaching the individual assignments to the ICRC; this caused extra work for moderators and increased the risk of work being mislaid. Centres are requested not to place coursework folders into plastic or cardboard wallets.
- Some centres included more than one rough draft; this is unnecessary and can lead to confusion. Please ensure that the rough draft included is clearly labelled as a draft.
- Occasionally rough drafts contained annotations and specific feedback; centres are reminded that when markers offer feedback on a rough draft, it should be general advice. No errors should be indicated, and the marker should not offer corrections or improvements.
- Some centres included documentation not required for the moderation process; the only paperwork that should be included in the sample is clearly indicated in the Coursework Handbook.

Comments on specific assignments:

Assignment 1

Candidates were successful when:

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

Moderators commented that many candidates responded to texts which were of an appropriate length and challenge and which appealed to the interests of the candidates. Successful texts included articles exploring issues relevant to young people, for example, the growth of online learning during the Covid pandemic, feminism, social media, the pros and cons of having tattoos, national issues in the candidates' own countries, and environmental issues. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated or were of limited personal interest to the candidates. Texts selected for **Assignment 1** should be an appropriate length, explore ideas and offer opinions, and use rhetorical or literary devices designed to provoke or sustain the reader's interest to ensure that the text offers scope for candidates to fully engage and respond to it in a sustained piece of writing. Centres are encouraged to use a good range of relevant and up-to-date texts for **Assignment 1**. Other less successful texts were ones where the candidate fully endorsed the writer's views and opinions because they offered few opportunities for evaluating ideas and opinions, as required by the mark scheme. It is also crucial to select texts for their quality of written communication: moderators reported seeing a number of poorly written texts taken from a variety of websites. Many of these were too long and tended to be informative, offering very little scope for rigorous evaluation or analysis. Moderators also reported seeing texts which contained potentially offensive or disturbing material. This may indicate that candidates were allowed to make their own text choices, but centres are reminded that it is their

responsibility to ensure that all texts used for **Assignment 1** are fit for purpose, and this includes avoiding offensive or unsuitable material.

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

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

Reading

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

Writing

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

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

Advice to candidates for **Assignment 1**:

- thoroughly explore, challenge, and discuss the ideas in the text
- avoid making general comments about the topic or subject of the text, instead, ensure that comments are specifically related to the ideas, opinions or attitudes identified in the text
- look for, and use inferences made implicitly in the text
- look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the text and comment on them
- develop points to create a thorough, detailed, and clear line of argument or discussion
- make sure that the audience and purpose is clear and adapt the written style accordingly

- proof-read assignments to ensure punctuation, vocabulary choices and grammar are correct.

Assignment 2 (description):

The majority of tasks set for **Assignment 2** were appropriate and encouraged candidates to write in a descriptive style. Many students wrote engaging and vivid descriptions from experience or their imaginations, which were a pleasure to read. Moderators also noticed that there were fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions, but this is still a relatively common flaw in descriptive writing assignments, sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which invited candidates to describe a specific scene from a play, or chapter from a novel, which tended to lead to unoriginal responses, or tasks more suited to narrative writing.

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

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

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

In addition, the work of a significantly large number of candidates contained frequent and serious errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of the candidates' work. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, tense inconsistencies, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and grammar errors. Quite often, the meaning of sentences was blurred, or meaning was lost altogether. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as 'minor'. The absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult for the moderators to determine whether errors had been considered when marks had been awarded; moderators noted that on some weaker assignments no errors had been annotated and the summative comment declared a high level of accuracy. Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which 'best fits' the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that errors are identified and indicated by the markers.

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

Advice to candidates for *Assignment 2*:

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

Assignment 3 (narrative):

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

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

Advice to candidates for *Assignment 3*:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

<p>Paper 0990/04 Speaking and Listening Test 04</p>

Key messages

Generally, in this series, centre assessment was in line with the standard for moderation. Some centres were overly severe on potentially weaker candidates within their cohorts, perhaps in an effort to create differentiation through a range of marks where none effectively existed. Some other centres were overly lenient in the 33+ mark range and did not seek to differentiate when there was a need to. Usually, the range of marks existing within a centre's cohort will depend on the ability range within the cohort. However, centres should note that not all candidates who are successful in written examinations share that level of success when undertaking a speaking and listening test. The opposite can also be true with candidates excelling at speaking and listening but not being as proficient in written examinations.

The timings of the test are very important. Part 1 should consist of an individual talk, often a presentation of a chosen topic and should last between 3–4 minutes in length. A talk lasting less than 3 minutes will rarely meet the first descriptor for Level 5 that states the talk should consist of content that is 'full and well-organised'. Equally, a talk lasting considerably longer than 4 minutes also runs the risk of not meeting the same descriptor. Part 2 should consist of a conversation lasting for 7-8 minutes in length.

Candidates should choose topics that they are familiar with and should consider that unfamiliarity will be exposed in Part 2, no matter how well Part 1 has been prepared. Aiming to impress an examiner by selecting a topic which the candidate only has a superficial knowledge of will never be as successful as a topic chosen because the candidate genuinely has an interest in it.

General comments

Administration

As with previous series, centre administration was of a high standard. The following guidelines clarify administrative requirements:

- Every test should begin with a full introduction to include the date on which the candidate is being examined. Think in the same terms as for a written examination where each candidate would be expected to complete their own information at the beginning of the answer booklet. For Component 04 it is the examiner who should complete the introduction but the same principle of identifying key information on an individual basis is still relevant. Generic introductions for even a small cohort of candidates are not acceptable.
- Internal moderation is actively encouraged, particularly where multiple examiners are involved within a centre. Where only one examiner is involved, it may be possible to pair with another centre to discuss marking standards and to share good practice.
- Where internal moderation has taken place and adjustments to marks have been made it is helpful to the moderator if changes are indicated on the summary form.

Conduct of the test

Generally, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given productive opportunities to express their views and demonstrate their range of oratory skills.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- In some centres, examiners engaged in an ‘off topic’ conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their **Part 1** task. While this was aimed at putting candidates at ease before the test, it was not a necessary part of the process and is potentially distracting for candidates who want to focus on their prepared talks.
- It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the examiner’s formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the Individual Talk. If an examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is done before the recording is started.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner’s responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met and that the conversations offer sufficient challenge to allow candidates to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Focused questioning and prompts are needed to move the conversation forward, together with an adaptability on the part of the examiner to absorb the candidate’s previous comments and to extend the conversation as a result. Examiners who have a set of pre-determined questions and do not veer from these during the conversation do so at the candidate’s peril. A **Part 2** that is merely a question-and-answer session is not a natural conversation and is limited in terms of the marks that can be awarded as a consequence.

Comments on specific sections of the test

Part 1 – Individual Talk

Most of the **Part 1** talks were formal presentations of topics chosen by the candidates. There was a good range of interesting topics that had been thoroughly prepared and were delivered with genuine interest and enthusiasm by the candidates. Careful preparation and delivery of presentations is always recommended, but candidates should also be aware that both over-preparation and under-preparation (as well as imprudent topic choices) can be problematic for candidates. Presentations that are memorised and delivered by rote, for example, can be stilted and lack natural fluency so it is often more productive for candidates to use prompts from a cue card and have a generally good idea of what to say without worrying over their precise wording.

Prudent topic choice is vital in any successful speaking and listening test. Candidates should choose topics based on knowledge, understanding and interest rather than attempting to impress the moderator with a topic based on its supposed maturity or seriousness. When deciding on a topic for **Part 1**, candidates should understand that half the total marks for the test are awarded in **Part 2** so it is vital that candidates choose topics that they are confident they can converse on in depth and at length. Virtually any topic can be successful if the candidate has sufficient knowledge and interest, and if they are able to converse in appropriate depth and develop ideas beyond the superficial. Clearly some topics offer more opportunities for development and conversation than others. It is often the focus that is the deciding factor. One candidate’s version of ‘Da Vinci’s Paintings’ could be a simple catalogue of the artist’s works whilst another candidate could use the same topic to develop a more interesting talk on how Da Vinci was a visionary who has influenced the art world to lasting effect. This is the reason such topics as ‘Football’ and ‘Social Media’ are often unsuccessful because the depth and development is sadly lacking beyond a superficial knowledge of the rules and favourite players, or the dangers of a cited social media platform.

Presentations achieving a Level 5 in **Part 1** demonstrate use of a clear structure and appropriate timings. A clearly defined persuasive argument or a cyclical arrangement that brings the concluding statement back to the initial point often helps candidates to fulfil ‘the full and well-organised’ descriptor for Level 5. Less successful structures tend to meander from point to point without such a strong sense of purpose. While structure itself does not confirm a mark in Level 5, it does provide a strong basis for candidates to exhibit their linguistic and presentational skills. Talks awarded marks in Level 5 also consist of more than just linear narratives that describe one event after another. Self-reflection and analysis are important elements in moving a talk beyond the adequate.

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

- Covid and me
- Energy needs post fossil fuels
- Veganism
- Discrimination in films (movies)
- Problems in the NBA
- Smart phones and the illusion of need
- Male stereotypes
- My musical instrument
- The value of travel
- Left-handed people
- Evolution of media
- Gender equality
- Beauty standards
- My Music
- My love of dance

Some examples of less successful **Part 1** topics include:

- Football (needs more specific focus and lacks depth)
- Pollution (needs more specific focus and lacks depth)
- Social Media (too general and lacking scope for development)

Part 2 – Conversation

The role for examiners in **Part 2** is not to be the teacher but to be a sympathetic listener who does not monopolise the conversation. It is important that examiners listen empathetically, take an interest in the topics chosen and develop the conversation by using open questioning and subtle prompts. Generally, in this series, candidates were more successful in **Part 2** when they were not interrupted whilst responding to prompts and examiners were not judgemental when the candidates' responses could be interpreted as inaccurate or potentially controversial. Examiners do not always need to agree with the statements made by candidates but may seek to challenge the more able if they feel this will stimulate them to develop their ideas more fully. This is a judgement call for the examiner and should only be made if the examiner is certain the candidate will respond with greater focus or development in the exposition of their ideas.

The following advice is offered:

- The timing of **Part 2** is controlled by the examiner. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure **Part 2** lasts for at least 7 minutes in order to give the candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills and accrue marks.
- **Part 2** conversations solely conducted on a question and answer basis, where the series of questions is only loosely connected and responses from the candidate are then ignored in favour of the next question on the list, do not fulfil the descriptors in the higher levels.
- It is important that questions are open and not closed. Closed questions do not allow candidates to consistently answer in the necessary detail to move beyond adequate.
- Examiners must ensure the conversation is connected to the ideas presented in **Part 1** for the whole of **Part 2**. Veering into more generalised conversation does not help the candidate's performance.
- Allowing the conversations to progress beyond the maximum time allowed of 8 minutes is unnecessary and may become counter-productive. It is very doubtful whether any contribution made by a candidate after the 8 minutes have been exceeded will have any bearing on the mark being awarded for **Part 2**.

Advice to centres

- Keep preparing your candidates as you have for this series.
- Administering the conversation in **Part 2** can be quite challenging for examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the examiner but they should not be restrictive. The candidate should have no prior knowledge of any questions that the examiner is considering using.

- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test. A gentle suggestion to choose an alternative topic may be very beneficial in some cases.
- Try to dissuade candidates from delivering a memorised talk in **Part 1** that may have fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.
- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful.

Advice to candidates

- Practise your presentation but do not memorise it to deliver it by rote.
- Make sure your talk lasts between 3–4 minutes. Aim for 4 minutes rather than 3 minutes to allow for speaking more quickly under pressure in the actual test.
- Have bullet point notes on one side of a cue card to help prompt you in **Part 1**. These bullet points give structure to your talk. Be mindful that full sentences and detailed notes are not allowed.
- Develop each bullet point in a lively and enthusiastic way when delivering your talk.
- Prepare for **Part 2** by trying to predict the kind of questions you may well be asked but do not prepare memorised responses.
- Listen attentively to what the examiner is saying in **Part 2**. You are expected to offer detailed responses throughout the conversation.
- Do not be afraid to ask the examiner's opinion in **Part 2** or to ask a direct question related to your ongoing conversation as this demonstrates you leading the discussion in a positive way.
- If you do not understand a question then say so to the examiner who should then rephrase it. It is better to do this than give a response that is irrelevant or off topic. You will not be penalised for being honest.
- Approach the test as a challenge you are going to enjoy. It is one of the few times in examinations when you dictate the subject matter.