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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/12
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through the tasks and texts in the order of the paper
- attempted all parts of all questions, paying attention to the marks allocated to help them to organise their response time efficiently
- followed task instructions carefully and based their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- responded appropriately to the command word(s) in the question
- focused on the particular evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each type of question
- avoided repetition of ideas
- did not offer their own unrelated opinion and/or invent material not tethered to the text
- used their own words carefully where appropriate
- avoided unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- planned the ideas they were intending to use in longer answers
- checked and edited their responses to correct any unforced errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated that they were familiar with the format of the Reading paper and the general demands of each of the three questions had largely been understood. There were some candidates who did not pay careful attention to command words, word guidance and/or the marks available in each question and missed opportunities to target higher marks as a consequence. A few candidates offered very limited evidence of their skills by simply playing back sections of text with little modification, diluting the evidence that they had understood what they had read. There were few instances where whole tasks had not been attempted, though on occasion answers to part questions were incomplete or missing and/or responses were uneven, limiting the possibility of scoring higher marks.

All three Reading texts were found to be equally accessible. Most candidates seemed to find the texts engaging and there were very few examples of significant misreading, though some missed details limiting the effectiveness of their response. There were some excellent answers to all three questions, with a number going beyond the demands of level 5 in **Questions 2(d)** and **3** especially, though candidates do need to ensure that they do not spend too long on one question at the expense of another. In some of the least successful answers, a failure to respond to all aspects of a task and/or a loss of focus on the rubric, negatively affected the evidence of understanding and skills offered. For example, a few candidates did not clearly identify the one example they were attempting to explain, or tried to discuss several examples, in **2(c)** (where there were just 3 marks available) at the expense of choices and explanation in **2(d)** (where there were up to 15 marks to be scored).

Most candidates had selected from the correct paragraphs in the language question (**2(d)**) and that relatively few had written more than the maximum of 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)**, though some had focused solely on word count at the expense of other aspects of their answer. Several candidates needed to plan more carefully to include a full range of ideas in their response to **1(f)**. Candidates are also reminded that the word guidance offered in **Question 2(d)** and **Question 3** is not a requirement of the task in itself – the guidance is offered to help candidates organise their time efficiently and offer sufficient evidence of their skills and understanding to target higher levels.

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In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in **Questions 1 (a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates were careful to follow the line or paragraph references in the questions to help them to move down **Text A** in order and the best had reworked material to show secure understanding of implicit as well as explicit ideas. Most candidates remembered that in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from **Text A** in order to evidence their Reading skills and are not based on their personal opinion, imagination or experience.

Less successful responses attempted to include extra guesses in response to **Questions 1(a)–(e)** taking up valuable examination time by doing so, as well as diluting evidence of understanding. Others simply copied out sections of text with limited modification – often negating any suggestion of understanding by doing so. Several candidates addressed only part of the question in their answer. Such responses provided limited evidence of understanding therefore and missed marks they might reasonably have expected to target – for example in **1(b)(i)** 'animal' was often repeated rather than explained. In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on the language of **Text B** and/or copied out chunks of text, limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result.

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

In **Question 3** most responses had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task, though a few candidates lost focus – for example, writing creatively about tracking and hunting wolves in the wild on a camping trip– ideas not suggested or rooted in the text. Most candidates had remembered to write from Stig's perspective, with the best concentrating on interpreting the evidence in the text from his standpoint. A few were less focused on task details and missed opportunities for relevant development – for example, speaking from the journalist's (narrator's) perspective and/or addressing their talk to a group of new recruits about to start work at Aurora Park. Responses across the cohort covered the full range of levels of achievement, with top level answers creating talks that incorporated a wide range of ideas, carefully interpreted and extended with detail from the text in support. Mid-range responses often missed opportunities because of uneven focus on the bullets of the question, a lack of planning beforehand and/or offering a narrow range of ideas from the text overall. Less successful responses either offered only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with limited or no modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text in order to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and should be avoided.

Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, though marks are available are for Writing in **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3.** In these questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity, organisation and register of their writing. It is advisable to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, errors that could impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Candidates should be aware that inaccurate writing where meaning becomes unclear is likely to limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to read back and correct responses is advisable.

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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 key ideas and details of **Text A**. More effective responses paid attention to the paragraph references and command words in the instructions to demonstrate efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong explanations of early questions at the expense of carefully explained answers to three mark **Questions 1(d)(ii)** and **1(e)**. Less successful responses often repeated the language of the text where own words were required and/or relied on copying longer sections of text with little or no modification to address the question as set.

Successful responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions to show what they could do and understand. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through **Text A** from the beginning, picking up on pointers where appropriate to help them to identify relevant material and infer ideas. Occasionally, opportunities to evidence understanding were missed where explanations offered were unclear or simply copied without taking account of the need to modify the original text – candidates are reminded that whilst Writing is not assessed in **Questions 1(a)–(e)**, answers do need to be sufficiently precise to communicate details from the text accurately.

(a) What inspired the story of Mowgli according to the text?

In **Question 1(a)**, most candidates recognised that the second sentence of the text referenced the inspiration for the story of Mowgli as being ancient Indian fable texts, though some read less carefully and offered incorrect answers such as 'Ramu's story', 'The Jungle Book' or 'It was an ancient Indian fable called The Tale of Mowgli'.

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:
(i) 'animal inhabitants' (line 2):
(ii) 'fantastic take' (line 4):

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)(i)** offering a meaning for 'inhabitants' only and repeating, rather than explaining, the word 'animal'. 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, offering straightforward synonyms for each word. In **1b(i)** successful answers often explained 'animal inhabitants' simply as meaning 'creatures which live there' and in **1b(ii)** had understood the implication that 'fantastic' in context was suggesting something of the unreal quality of the story (reading on to the end of the sentence to take account of 'wondering if there's any truth …') rather than meaning simply great or good. Occasionally, candidates had misinterpreted 'inhabitants' as meaning the creatures did not live there.

(c) Re-read paragraph 2, ('The movie's story … such tales?').
Give two examples of myths of children being raised by animals.

In **Question 1(c)** candidates re-reading paragraph 2 closely were able to identify the two distinct examples: the myth of Tarzan and that of Romulus and Remus. Some cited just one of Romulus and Remus which was sufficient for one mark for that example.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 3 and 4 ('Of other similar … in the wild.').

(i) Identify <u>two</u> facts that are known about the boy named Ramu.
(ii) Explain why some people might think that chimpanzees could adopt a human child.

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. Successful answers in **1d(i)** were able to give only facts as presented in relation to the boy Ramu and did not include the unsupported/disputed claim that he was raised by wolves. Careful answers made use of the two bullets in the response area as an efficient way to present their ideas and then check that their

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answers were distinct. Likewise in **1d(ii)**, candidates paying attention to the command word 'explain' used, rather than simply repeated, information from the text, reworking it to offer secure evidence of close reading and score the maximum 3 marks. On occasion, candidates diluted evidence of their understanding – for example, not reading back to check the full sense of their answer to the question or an idea as it was presented in the passage, so suggesting incorrectly that reasons could be that 'animals would want to protect someone who isn't one of their own' or 'they engage in violence to defend their territory'. Others missed opportunities by repeating different aspects of the same idea (such as the examples of social traits exhibited by chimps) rather than looking for three distinct reasons. Some candidates offered no evidence of understanding by copying out long sections of the specified paragraphs of text without any modification or recasting of the material, failing to take note of the instruction to 'explain why'.

(e) Re-read paragraphs 5 and 6 ('And there are … just yet.').
Using your own words, explain why most people are unlikely to believe that tales of animals adopting humans are true.

In **Question 1(e)** the most successful explanations reworked the relevant information only, using their own words as appropriate, to identify three distinct reasons in their explanation of why most people are unlikely to believe that tales of animals adopting humans are true. Many candidates identified that there was a lack of evidence to support these stories and/or instinctive adoption was more likely as it happened most often – though some who suggested that this was the only kind of adoption possible had misread the point. Some missed opportunities to target higher marks by not reworking the text to make understanding of implicit ideas and suggestions clear and explicit – for example, repeating the sentence 'Perhaps a young human could be adopted by a wild animal if they contributed something useful', without showing they had understood the implication here that this was unlikely to be the case for a 'resource-swilling human infant'. Others indicated less careful reading of the text by suggesting that 'less scepticism floating around the Internet than usual' was a reason for people being unlikely to believe the tales are true.

(f) According to Text B, why is the wolf not well understood by some people?

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, misreading and/or inclusion of extra 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 to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to their reader. Overview of the material 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. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

The most successful responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned the content of their answer before writing their response. Many had produced and followed a flow diagram or bullet point plan. There were some effective and well-crafted responses that demonstrated both concision and understanding of a wide range of relevant ideas.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible – without changing or blurring the original idea – though some lifted phrases and longer sections of text that might easily have been reworded for example, 'ridiculous tales' and 'ignoring evidence'. Others used own words, though overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task, with significant excess arising because of lengthy explanation. A few candidates wrote far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others adhered to the advised length of the response but took far too long to explain just a few ideas. Candidates

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producing effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a fairly wide range of relevant ideas, communicating these accurately and concisely in their own words.

The majority of candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to include only those ideas relevant to the focus of the question, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – such as the examples of different kinds of scientists, technology used to observe wolves and the intricate details of wolf parents feeding their pups. Where candidates had simply tried to paraphrase the text rather than select only those ideas necessary to answer the question, their responses often contained superfluous detail compromising both evidence of Reading (excess/indiscriminate selection) and Writing (lack of concision). More effective responses were not dependant on the structure or language of **Text B** to communicate their ideas and were consequently able to offer more concise explanations.

A small number of candidates added in extra detail from outside the text – such as other stories about wolves and werewolves, suggesting a lack of understanding of the summary task. The least effective responses were almost entirely reliant on the language of the original, providing little or no evidence of their own Reading or Writing skills and not addressing the requirements of the task.

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

- read the task instructions to identify the focus of the summary task then re-read **Text B** to identify just the relevant ideas for use in your answer
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan – check that they are distinct and complete
- check whether there are repeated ideas or examples which could be covered by one 'umbrella' point
- discard any ideas which are not relevant to the specific focus of the question
- return to the text to 'sense check' any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- organise 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 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 for concision.

Question 2

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

(i) When the writer first arrives at Aurora Park, he waits outside a small wooden building which has no lights on.
(ii) Before numbers started to increase again, wolves were almost non-existent.
(iii) Aurora Park's wolves are used to interacting with humans.
(iv) A stay at Wolf Lodge in Aurora Park comes at a particularly high price.

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 exact word or phrase only as their answer. Other responses added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire question in each case, substituting the word or phrase from the text and then bracketing or underlining the relevant section of their answer.

Marks were sometimes missed where answers were unfocused – for example, offering responses that covered only part of the meaning of the underlined phrase such as 'human contact' in **2a(iii)** without 'accustomed to' or adding in extra words from the text that went beyond the meaning of the underlined words. Very occasionally, candidates had misread the instruction to 'identify a word or phrase from the text' and tried to offer an explanation of meaning in their own words, or offered a word/phrase that did not match the meaning of the underlined words in the question (for example, 'ultra-exclusive' was offered by a few candidates as their answer to **part iv)**.

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(b) Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:
(i) extinguish
(ii) host
(iii) softly

In **Question 2(b)**, some answers offered just one carefully chosen word or phrase as their answer, whilst others offered evidence of understanding through longer explanations. Either approach could be creditworthy, though candidates should be careful not to dilute evidence of understanding by offering various suggestions and extra guesses of different meanings that are contradictory and/or not in line with the text. For example, extinguish in **2(b)(i)** referred to the car lights being switched off (not switched on as suggested by some candidates) and was not related to any flame being blown out. Answers that included other potential meanings and guesses that were not correct in context could not be credited. Successful answers had considered the precise meaning of each of the underlined words as they were used in the text. Several candidates were unsure of the meaning of 'host' – for example, suggesting variously that it meant an owner, guide or leader. Likewise, meanings of 'softly' connected specifically to kind or loving attention were not appropriate in this context, and suggestions of 'silently' as an explanation of softly indicated misreading.

(c) Use <u>one</u> example from the text below to explain how the website makes Aurora Park sound appealing.

Use your own words in your explanation.

I check the park's website on my phone: 'Experience Arctic nature up close. Live amongst our rare semi-wild wolves at the ultra-exclusive Wolf Lodge. Revel in the unique feeling of being watched by curious amber eyes; be part of a new story for these marvellous, mythical, misunderstood creatures …'

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

Successful answers included those which began with an explanation of the meaning of their example in context, ahead of going on to explain how that might appeal to readers of the website. A good number of responses often centred their answer around the triplet describing the enigmatic nature of the wolves and many were able to exploit this example to good effect, though others missed opportunities to evidence understanding by simply pointing out the 'use of alliteration', or 'a list of three', without considering what the three alliterative words actually meant or suggested, especially by being used together. Some chose potentially profitable examples such as 'watched by curious amber eyes' but had not read carefully and tried to explain the example as referring to interested humans observing the wolves. Those selecting 'revel in the unique feeling' sometimes missed opportunities to offer a comprehensive explanation and target full marks by not dealing with the word 'revel'. Some less successful answers chose to deal with 'rare semi-wild wolves' but only repeated words from the text or question to offer insecure, less convincing explanation – for example offering responses such as 'rare semi-wild wolves means they are appealing because they are unique and exclusive'.

The most successful responses had carefully noted the number of marks available, along with the instruction to use their own words, and focused on making 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. A few less effective responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted unwisely to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms.

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(d) Re-read paragraphs 9 and 10.

- **Paragraph 9 begins 'From inside …' and is about the first evening in the lodge.**
- **Paragraph 10 begins 'Next morning …' and is about meeting the wolves.**

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 and careful analysis of three relevant selections from each paragraph – often beginning by explaining literal meaning and then moving on to suggest effect. Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language through detailed discussion of focused choices centred around images, individual words or phrases. Where candidates had considered all the key words in slightly longer choices they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses and offer more secure evidence of understanding.

Some candidates used each of their choices as a sub-heading for their explanation and were often able to offer more focused explanations as a result, though some still repeated and relied on the language of the text within their explanations, missing opportunities to target higher marks. More effective responses considered words within their chosen phrases individually first, using their own words to explain meaning, as well as suggesting how the key words worked together within the longer phrase and/or in the context of the description as a whole. Rather than selecting the first three choices in each half they came across, or the most 'obvious' literary devices, successful responses set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain. Some of the most effective responses had identified choices in each half that worked well together, exploring how those judiciously selected choices both worked individually and combined to influence the reader's impression, building to an overview. Responses evidencing understanding at level 5 frequently showed imagination and precision when discussing language use and offered answers that were balanced across both parts of the question.

Choices from paragraph 9, often centred around the description of the night sky. Many answers identified the 'cosmic phantom' as a potentially interesting image to discuss, with most able to offer at least a basic explanation of its ethereal, awe-inspiring nature. Some of the best answers also explored description of its formation and movement as 'smudges that grow…' into something that 'flutters, swirls and moves mysteriously across the vast sky' recognising something of the artistry and natural imagery suggested. Many candidates identified 'flutters' as reminiscent of the delicate movement of a bird or butterfly, though often missed opportunities to consider 'swirls' separately and/or repeated 'mysteriously' in their explanation. Several candidates interpreted and successfully explored the artistic suggestion of 'smudge' likening it to the indistinct beginning of a painting on a canvas. Less successful responses offered plain, literal selections from paragraph 9 such as 'my eyes adjust to the dark' or 'I've been promised a view' that did not offer useful opportunities for analysis, and occasionally the factual description 'low snow-covered hill' from paragraph 10 suggested that candidates had lost sight of the focus of the question (meeting the wolves).

Some mid-range answers offered more careful selection and explanation in one half of their response than the other – with some indicating less secure understanding of events as described in paragraph 10, for example through references to Stig and the narrator 'loping eagerly' and 'jump[ing] up excitedly' rather than recognising these phrases as describing the actions of the wolves. Occasionally, candidates had misunderstood vocabulary in the text, resulting in some inappropriate or inaccurate explanations – for example, suggesting that 'emboldened by a hearty breakfast' indicated that Stig had prepared breakfast lovingly (from the heart). Meanwhile, limiting their comments to an explanation of just one word within longer choices meant other candidates offered partially effective explanations only – for example, not all considered the word 'emboldened' and what it suggested about the feelings of the narrator about both the breakfast and the upcoming encounter. Many less effective answers dealing with popular choices connected to the behaviour of the wolves did little more than repeat/replay the wording of the text (the wolves were variously and unhelpfully described by candidates as 'eager', 'curious' and 'excited'). A few selected 'loping' but offered an explanation that suggested misreading of the word as 'leaping'.

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Some more general initial comments around the scariness of the prospect of meeting wolves were occasionally supported to good effect later in the response in connection with the 'snarling stand-off' of the wolves. Often better answers had recognised and explored the contrasting/conflicting feelings of the narrator – noting the attempt to downplay the noisy fights of the wolves as 'a bit of a howl' and a 'wrestling contest', as well as the surprised tone suggested by 'remarkably non-threatening'. A number went on to select 'cute they may be, but cuddly toys they are not' as representing the contrast, though not all were able to find their own words to explain it.

Answers aiming at higher levels had often chosen to focus their response to bullet 2 on the dynamic nature of the encounter: noting the easy movement of the wolves and/or humans initially ('loping' and 'stroll' respectively) the deluge of the wolves' natural urge to hunt suggested by 'flooded' and the unexpected and unsettling switch in the wolves' attention when the narrator drops his phone and the wolves become 'instantly curious and pushy'. .

The least successful answers to **2(d)** offered generic empty comments such as 'This shows us what the narrator felt like' or 'the words in this paragraph describe the wolves and the way they act'. Comments like these are not helpful to candidates since they do not evidence understanding of how language is working in a particular given section of the text and can create a false sense of security, meaning candidates move on without saying anything more concrete. Satisfactory responses offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each example they had chosen, whilst more effective answers also identified effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images at different points in the encounter, using explanation of precise meaning/what you could 'see/hear happening' in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect. Less effective responses often only labelled devices (sometimes incorrectly – for example, suggesting that 'as my eyes adjust' was a simile).

In **Question 2(d)**, it is the quality of the analysis when considering how language is being used which attracts marks. Answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are unlikely to be useful and/or result in very thin general comments at best. Opportunities were missed in a small number of answers where choices were from one paragraph only or only three choices were offered overall. The most 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: do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- in each part of **2(a)** make sure that your selection is clearly identified – remember you are looking for just a word or phrase from **Text C** to precisely match the sense of the underlined words only in the question
- in **2(b)** be careful that your explanation is consistent with how the word is used in context (if unsure, try substituting your answer in the text to check it fits)
- in **2(c)** try to say three separate things about your one chosen example
- in **2(d)**, choose 3 examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (6 choices in total)
- only offer an overview in **2(d)** if you have spotted that there is a relevant connection between your chosen choices from a paragraph
- where you are trying to explain meaning, read your answer back to check that you have not repeated the words of the choice
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as 'the writer helps us to imagine the scene' – try to suggest exactly how each of the words used helps you to do that
- when you are unsure how to explain the effect, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) in the choice and work from there
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create (think about why they chose that particular word rather than any other word with a similar meaning)

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- 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 Stig Hansen. You have been invited to give a talk about Aurora Park and your work there. In your talk you should explain:

- **what your job involves and the skills and qualities you feel you need to do the job well**
- **what visitors enjoy about Aurora Park and the security measures you have in place**
- **why the work you and your team are doing at Aurora Park is important for both wolves and humans.**

Write the words of the talk.
Base your talk on what you have read in Text C, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with **Text C**, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to shift their perspective away from that of the journalist narrator to the viewpoint of Stig Hansen, Head Keeper at Aurora Park. The task guidance invited candidates to give a talk about the park and Stig's work there. Some candidates missed the opportunity to offer and develop a range of key ideas appropriately by opting instead to write an interview – often wasting valuable exam time by copying out each of the bullet prompts as the interviewer's questions and speculating about Stig's life and achievements before and after the events of the narrative. A few attempted to answer the question as the journalist narrator and limited the development they were able to offer as a result. On occasion, candidates invented/referred to scenarios outside the task as set – for example that the talk was for new recruits to Aurora Park, in response to an unfortunate event at the park or that Stig had written book about his work and was promoting it. Candidates are reminded that their response to **Question 3** needs to be relevant to the details of the text and task in hand in order to successfully evidence their Reading skills.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had understood both the narrative and task in at least general terms. Some in the mid-range though omitted potentially useful details and information in their explanation of Stig's work though – for example, by not referencing details of what his job involved in addition to looking after the wolves. Where candidates had planned their response beforehand they were often able to incorporate ideas from across the text to address this first bullet successfully, for example by referring to Stig preparing supper for the guests, reminding them of how to behave around wolves and even driving the snowplough to clear the track noting that he required and was drawing on a range of knowledge and skills. Most referred to his position as Head Keeper and noted his description as a 'devoted host' and 'wildlife expert' though fewer evaluated/developed that information relevantly to make explicit his desire to ensure guests were comfortable as well as safe and his confidence around wolves.

Candidates who had engaged with both task and text to offer competent or better responses, often took time to interpret details rather than simply repeat them. For example, in bullet two reference(s) to the Northern lights and/or Wolf Lodge were extended and developed by candidates reading closely, showing they had recognised how and why visitors might enjoy them based on the descriptions offered by the original narrator – the welcoming first impression and luxurious nature of the overnight accommodation and incredible views on offer were exploited to good effect in the best answers. Occasionally, in less successful answers, candidates who had been able to talk in some detail about the experience of seeing the Northern lights and meeting the wolves in their responses to **Question 2**, referenced neither in **Question 3**. Most responses referenced explicit security measures such as the tunnel and electrified fence, though some invented additional untethered details such as security guards, panic buttons, tranquiliser guns and surveillance cameras – ideas not supported by reading the text.

In bullet three, candidates responding to the text and task carefully were able to notice suggestions that there were environmental benefits to the team's work as well as opportunities to protect the future of the species and change attitudes in humans. The best answers often took the opportunity to invite the audience to visit for themselves, recognising and explaining that visits by fee-paying humans brought revenue as well as publicity to the project.

Some mid-range responses that relied on mechanically tracking back through the text and replaying the passage touched on ideas that were potentially relevant for bullet 3 – for example that the wolves at Aurora Park were 'accustomed to human contact'– but missed the opportunity to interpret and use ideas to target

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higher levels (for example, by showing they had recognised that this familiarity with humans was something that had been deliberately planned and engineered as part of the park's work to improve conditions for wolves in captivity). The least successful responses copied sections of text with minimal modification.

The best answers showed evidence that candidates had identified a good or wide range of relevant ideas and details from the text before writing, considering which bullet the information they had located best suited and how the perspective of experienced keeper Stig might differ from/add to that of the visiting journalist narrator. Occasionally, insecure responses strayed into speculation regarding wolf hunts at midnight and incidents of guests being fatally attacked – suggestions not supported by or rooted in the text.

Overall, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a talk/speech, and many were able to craft a response with a more effective sense of audience and developing the calm, reassuring style of Stig referenced in the text. Occasionally, over-reaching with vocabulary clouded meaning and/or resulted in some awkward expression in some responses, though generally writing was clear and sometimes effective indicating the potential to target higher marks. Candidates are advised to leave sufficient time to read back through their response to correct any mistakes or inconsistencies in their use of language – for example, to ensure that meaning is in no doubt, that the register sounds appropriate and that they have used their own words consistently. In the least effective answers, lifting in relation to all three bullets was an issue, with copying of whole sections of text common in these responses. This affected evidence of both Reading and Writing skills.

Advice to candidates on **Question 3**:

- remember to base your answer to **Question 3** on just the ideas and details you find in **Text C**
- pay attention to details of the task as set – for example, note the form of the response and the perspective/viewpoint you need to adopt
- 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 to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas you can use in your answer
- 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.

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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/22
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

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

To achieve higher marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form and style in both questions
- structure ideas and organise the response effectively to inform, persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand and employ the different kinds of content required for description and narration
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to create specific effects for the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required.

General comments

Examiners found that most responses showed a secure understanding was how marks were awarded for both tasks, Directed Writing and Composition. There were few very brief scripts, incomplete scripts or scripts in which the instructions regarding which questions to answer were not followed. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and then either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements seen. In **Question 1**, most responses were written, for the most part, in candidates' own words. There was a small number of responses which were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert, although some lifting of phrases or sentences was common. Where this lifting of material was more extensive, marks were inevitably limited for both Reading and Writing. In ***Section B***, most candidates understood how the content of descriptive and narrative writing differs, although there were stories submitted for the descriptive writing tasks which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure. In some cases, a more discursive approach was taken, usually in responses to **Question 4**, which made it difficult for Examiners to award high marks for Content and Structure because of a lack of clear narrative progression.

Examiners noted two main issues which affected candidates' achievement. Firstly, some responses used archaic and over-complicated language in both responses that the meaning was obscured and difficult to follow. While the Level 6 descriptors refer to 'a wide range of sophisticated vocabulary', for both questions the requirement for its precise use is also emphasised. Vocabulary, which is only rarely used in modern English, especially when used in excess within each sentence, is unlikely to score highly for Writing or Style and Accuracy. Where such usage made the response difficult to follow, it also affected the marks for Content and Structure.

Secondly, composition responses should be clearly relevant to the set question selected. In **Question 2**, for example, Examiners looked to reward responses which reflected a sense of the narrator being alone and of the place described being new to the narrator. In some responses, these were missing and there seemed to be more in the structure and content of the piece which reflected previous questions set in other series or perhaps pre-prepared responses which were not always well-adapted to the question.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of overthinking in the reading texts for **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a letter written to a friend of a similar age. The register required here was generally well understood, with some

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responses showing real subtlety in avoiding criticism of the recipient while at the same time offering careful suggestions about how the 'overthinker' in the partnership could work effectively with the writer.
Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently of the original texts, producing a coherent argument about how the strengths of the overthinker could be employed while mitigating against the potential weaknesses. Most responses included some opinion about the problems faced by overthinkers and their habitual focus on planning and detail. Comments made about how the pair could work together were usually rooted in the ideas given in the reading texts.

In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with an opinion given about some of the points made, with some beginning to evaluate. A substantial number of responses at this range made some comments about the ideas in the texts, though not always probing or offering judgements about them. In many cases, responses reflected the judgement made in the texts that the ability to foresee potential problems in planning the school event was useful, whereas the propensity to become paralysed by self-doubt and anxieties about the perceptions of others should be avoided. More effective evaluation tended to offer ideas about how tasks could be allocated for the school event to take account of such habits of thinking, rather than more simply reflecting the descriptions of overthinking shown in the texts.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. Some ideas were replicated from the texts in unhelpful ways, such as the implied criticism in Text A of people who say, '*Don't overthink it, just go with it*.' A dismissive stance was sometimes taken at this level.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. The allocation of tasks in organising the school event often reflected a practical evaluation of ideas in better responses, with many suggesting, for example, that the overthinker should leave the more public-facing roles to the writer to avoid the anxiety of scrutiny. Less effective responses sometimes gave a summary of the ideas in the texts and there were some less effective responses where a list of potential activities and stalls was given with limited reference to the problems and benefits of working with an overthinker. For Writing, some less effective responses showed limited adaptation of style for a letter to a familiar recipient. Overall, however, there was often a clear adaptation of style and register and at the highest level, the potential sensitivities of the recipient informed the style and tone of the letter. Introductions, conclusions and the structure and organisation of ideas required in a letter were well understood by most candidates.

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

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very effective and sustained. There were some highly imaginative evocations of new homes, streets and cities for **Question 2**. In some, the fears and sense of alienation, or sometimes the anticipation and optimism, experienced by the writer when trying to adapt to life away from home in a strange place were engagingly described. Less effective responses to this question tended to miss the sense of being alone and simply described a house or a shop or other location which was also not really 'new'. For the second question, a wide range of descriptions of scenarios which brought joy to the narrator was submitted with the most effective selecting details and images which were convincing and engaging. In the middle range, the specific focus on the 'moment of joy' was sometimes preceded by a largely narrative preamble to explain the scenario. Less effective responses sometimes included some rather cliched details of a natural landscape or explained the joy rather than describing it.

In the narratives, the first question elicited a wide range of sporting stories, the most effective of which were carefully structured to engage the reader, often providing moments of jeopardy or setbacks which were well realised and entertaining. Less effective responses were characterised by less accomplished use of such detail and diversion, often straightforward accounts of a race where the characters were named but not so successfully brought to life. Some more discursive, factual accounts of the careers of particular cricketers or footballers lacked the narrative shape and progression for an engaging story. The second question was a popular choice, and most responses used the quotation in the question to give structure and narrative purpose to the story. Across the mark range, Examiners noted that candidates often mistook the quotation marks in the set question for speech marks and this sometimes created a jarring effect where the quotation was used in dialogue and made the tenses awkward as a result.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

You and a friend have been asked to work together to organise an event in school or college. Your friend is an overthinker.

Write a letter to your friend, suggesting how you could work successfully together.
In your letter you should:

- **evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions given in the texts**
- **consider some of the ways that each of you could help to make the event a success.**

Base your letter 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.

For Reading, Examiners were able to award marks in Level 5 and above where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing or summarising of the points in the texts. Where the letter was also accurate and ambitious in vocabulary and style, with a clear understanding of the appropriate style and register for the specific task and audience, the highest marks for Writing could be awarded.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the specific ideas about overthinking in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which handled the different, often conflicting views with confidence and perceptive evaluation. The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were adapted and used to show how overthinking could benefit or detract from the planning of a school event tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement. These implicit ideas often involved the use of the overthinker's attention to detail and foresight to prevent setbacks and difficulties as well as the overthinker's habit of scrutinising other people which, as many candidates wrote, could be useful in gauging the kinds of activities those attending the event would be likely to enjoy. The balance between these useful skills and the tendency for overthinkers to become anxious and self-absorbed was noticed in some thoughtful responses, with some careful suggestions of how such self-defeating habits could be mitigated or avoided. The comment in Text B that overthinkers can become paralysed by anxiety about what others think of them, for example, was used sensitively by many candidates who reassured the letter's recipient that they would not be judged by the writer. Similarly, Text A's assertion that overthinkers sometimes '*end up doing other people's thinking or memory storage for them*' was used to show how tasks could be managed in a way which did not expose the overthinker to potential anxieties by over-reliance on their skills.

In some responses, the idea that decision-making, a vital part in the planning of an event, could become problematic for the overthinker was explored. In some evaluative approaches, it was suggested that having joint responsibility for making decisions could reduce the pressure on the overthinker while in others, limiting the number and range of specific decisions the overthinker would have to make could reduce the risks. As with a range of other points selected from the texts, the evaluation was found in the application of those ideas to the task in hand, the planning of the school event, rather than assertions that the overthinker should simply stop overthinking.

Most candidates argued that the harmful effects of overthinking could be mitigated while the skills of the overthinker could be identified and exploited in the planning of the event. In responses given marks in Level 6 for Reading, Examiners often rewarded some careful grasp of the specific implications suggested by the texts for the event being planned.

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Marks for reading

As always, the most effective responses adopted a consistently evaluative, critical stance and read effectively between the lines of the texts, drawing inferences and making judgements about how the overthinker and the writer could plan a successful school event.

Most responses reflected to some degree both Text A's enthusiasm for the overthinker's skills as well as Text B's description of the drawbacks and dangers of overthinking. More thoughtful responses focused on the skills and abilities necessary to create a successful event and how specific tasks could be apportioned between the two of them to take advantage of those. Some wrote about how the overthinker's ability to foresee pitfalls could be vital in '*coming up with a Plan B and even a Plan C to cater for every possible misstep*', as was said in one response. Others argued that the overthinker's ability, in the words of Text A, to '*take the emotional temperature of a room*' would prove invaluable in gauging whether attendees of the event were engaged in the activities provided or that the overthinker's close observation of others could be used in selecting teams of people to help stage the event.

Ways in which the letter writer could support the overthinker and avoid the pitfalls of overthinking were also often sources of evaluation which Examiners could reward for Reading, showing some thoughtful use of close reading of the texts. Taking timely decisions in different ways, as mentioned above, was often seen as crucial to staging a successful event and supporting the overthinker in different ways to avoid self-doubt and rumination often showed clear evaluation. One candidate wrote, '*Of course it matters what others think and say about our event and while your skills will help us plan it down to the last detail, there's no time for perfectionism. It's a school event, not the Olympics, and we can only do our very best in the time we have*.'

A common approach in responses in Level 5 and above was that the letter writer would need to shield the overthinker from tasks which might induce anxiety or self-doubt. Task-sharing in specific ways to this end often showed evaluation, as did discussion of what might be meant by 'straightforward discussion' in Text B. Removing the fear of judgement by reassuring the overthinker that their ideas would be appreciated rather than criticised was often suggested by candidates at this level, sometimes with some self-deprecating humour about the writer's own weaknesses. Allocating public-fronting roles to the writer rather than the overthinker also showed an understanding of the latter's fear of other people's judgement. In setting out these suggestions at the outset, as one candidate wrote, '*You'll know from the beginning that there's no need to be anxious about having to do things that start that spiral of overthinking, so hopefully you can speak more freely in our discussions*.'

Where some comment or opinion was offered, often without specific reference to particular points in the texts but generally relevant to the ideas in them, marks in Level 4 were usually awarded. These comments usually focused on how the writer could support the overthinker but in more general terms: '*Remember, if you start to feel anxious, you can just come and talk to me. I'll be here for you every step of the way*.' With respect to planning the event, the overthinker's skills in planning were recognised but the idea was not developed or applied specifically to the school event. This more general commentary often showed some clear understanding of the ideas in the texts but lacked a little of the focus on specific applications seen in Level 5 responses.

Examiners usually awarded marks in Level 3 for Reading where there was adequate breadth of coverage of the texts, and some selection of ideas from them, but without the more implicit meanings mentioned above or with less direct application of them to the school event. Often, there was a clear paraphrase of both texts but limited comment on the ideas in them: the skills and tendencies of overthinkers were described but not applied to the task in hand. Where there were some brief opinions, usually at the end of the response, they tended to be more general and not strongly anchored in the specific ideas in the texts. There was sometimes some misunderstanding of overthinkers becoming 'stuck in the past', where in some responses this was taken to mean that childhood events had prevented them from making progress. In many at this level, comments were assertive and sometimes hectoring, such as '*You need to stop this overthinking immediately or we won't be able to make this event a success*' or '*I know you can control your overthinking if you try*.' In some cases, the voice adopted by the candidate for the task was that of another overthinker and this tended to limit the use of a range of ideas from the texts.

Less effective responses tended to paraphrase and list ideas and many given marks in low Level 3 and below contained much copied material. Where a mark of 6 was awarded, some firmer roots in the passages were needed, whereas 5 was generally given for thin or mainly lifted responses in which there was some insecure grasp of the ideas in the passage. Fairly common at the lower end of the mark range for Reading was where only a brief reference was made to the ideas in the texts and the rest of the letter was a simple

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account of activities, timings, stalls and sponsors with very limited evidence of the ways in which the ideas in the texts were relevant to the response.

Marks for Writing

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

Style and audience

Candidates needed to adopt an appropriate style and register for a letter to a school peer, known to the writer. Most responses showed a clear understanding of this required register, even where technical writing skills were less effective, and this allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many letters attempted to engage the recipient with a light-hearted tone, especially in the introduction, assuming some shared ground with the recipient as a fellow student in the same school. Some high scoring responses used a more subtle tone, navigating skilfully between showing a ready appreciation of the overthinker's specific skills and offering a helpful but not condescending hand to support them through a potentially difficult process. At the highest level, the use of empathy, self-deprecating humour and encouragement helped to create some quite inspiring letters. One response, for example, closed with '*I don't think either of us could do a better job in this event without the other. With my reckless disregard for what other people think and my ill-founded self-confidence reined in by your caution and care for detail, I'll be able to build on solid foundations for a change. And you'll be the one to thank for that*.'

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage, reassure and encourage the recipient could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as inaccurate spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, some responses were generally accurate but were largely summaries of the reading material rather than letters with a specific purpose and audience. Sometimes, in reaching for a less formal register appropriate for the audience, overly colloquial expressions such as '*y'all*' or '*gonna*' were used.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent style. Where the reading material was heavily lifted or copied, there was often little of the candidate's own style for Examiners to reward, though these kinds of responses were quite rare.

Structure

Responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their ideas cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the texts, but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the lines of argument were set from the first paragraph and the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a whole. The opening and concluding sections of the most effective responses tended to introduce and sum up the main points, with the intervening sections arguing a coherent case. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts. The focus here was often on the event rather than the texts so that the strengths and weaknesses of overthinkers could be selected appropriately to make each point. Some arranged their letters chronologically, from first planning to the selection of teams and the hosting of the event, selecting evidence from the texts to support their ideas about the contributions of both participants.

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 is often avoided simply listing the benefits of overthinking from Text A, followed by the weaknesses in Text B. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

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

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Accuracy

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

Some complex sentences structures were chosen which helped to balance and weigh up contending views and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation within sentences.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. There were occasional lapses in the use of definite and indefinite articles (usually omission) and some grammatical misagreement, often between plurals and verb forms.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was very common, as were tense errors, and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was copied and responses where this occurred more substantially could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because both the content and the style of the response was not the candidate's own. There were also several responses which attempted to use vocabulary which was obtuse or archaic, often with multiple such words in each sentence. In extreme cases, the style was unintelligible because the vocabulary was used with limited precision or understanding.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

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

<u>Descriptive writing</u>

Describe being on your own in a new place.

Write a description with the title, 'A moment of joy'.

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and Examiners awarded a wide range of marks for these responses. Both questions were interpreted in a wide variety of ways which Examiners could reward appropriately. In the first task, the most effective responses focused on the thoughts and feelings of the narrator, as suggested by the task, as well as detailed description of the place itself. One common scenario used by candidates across the mark range was the narrator as a young person leaving their hometown, city or village for the first time. Opportunities for contrast and comparison afforded by such approaches often lent a poignancy to responses given higher marks for Content and Structure. The second question elicited responses with a wide range of reasons and occasions for 'the moment of joy', such as the birth of a child, the receipt of some happy news or a moment of appreciation in a beautiful landscape.

Responses, as is always the case, were more effective if they contained vivid and specific details rather than more general or stereotypical ideas and images. In the first question, less effective responses often did not really reflect the sense of being alone or the idea of the newness of the place described, with some responses describing houses belonging to relatives or shops which they stumbled upon in otherwise familiar places. These responses sometimes seemed to address previous questions and did not use the opportunities in the question to provide relevant, focused descriptions. Lower in the mark range, responses to both questions tended to be narrative in nature though Examiners rewarded description wherever such details appeared.

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Some effective responses to the first question described new homes in unfamiliar cities where the narrator's mixed feelings of anxiety and anticipation were foregrounded. Ideas and images of silent, empty apartments contrasting with hectic, busy streets outside sometimes helped to reflect a sense of alienation and the absence of family and friends was a feature which was vividly evoked in more effective responses: '*The blank walls stared back at me, disdainful and aloof as my imagination painted on them the images of my tearful mother and my sister's little hands being wrenched away from mine*.' In other effective responses, descriptions of intimidating cityscapes were sometimes enhanced by contrasting memories from a more secure, comforting past, details which highlighted the sense of alienation depicted: '*I could see the apartment block destined to be my home across the road but six hectic lanes of angry traffic had to be navigated first. I watched the deluge of people swarming towards me as the lights turned red, their faces oblivious to each other and their surroundings. In my village, a missed greeting when passing a neighbour in the street would be the cause of a reprimand from my mother*.'

In the second descriptive writing question, more effective responses were carefully managed to give the 'moment of joy' a real impact, usually with some relevant description of the build-up of tension or anticipation which led up to that moment. Avoiding narrative explanations of the scenario was managed well at the higher levels. Several responses depicted the process of childbirth, for example, with some highly effective description of the onset of labour which gave the moment the joy when the baby was placed in the mother's arms an extra impact: '*The flames which had engulfed my body and mind for so long were abruptly extinguished by the weak little cry emerging from the bundle of soft blankets carefully placed in my arms*.'

In some responses, cohesion and interest was created using mounting apprehension, released by the opening of a letter with joyful news or the arrival of a much-loved person. The receipt of news about successful examination results was a fairly common scenario with the most effective using unusual ideas and images to bring both the build-up of apprehension and the moment of triumph and relief alive for the reader: '*As my eyes scanned the words on the page, the expected whoops of joy refused to come. Instead, a huge wave of relief, the promise of calm and fulfilment radiated from my disbelieving eyes as my family jumped and cheered around me on my island of muted but deep, life-changing joy*.'

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

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but usually more predictable or lacking in specific relevance to the question. Selected scenes and details at this level tended to involve less striking images and more stereotypical ideas. In the first question, the description of buildings and houses included more prosaic, concrete details such as the colour of the furnishings or the size of the rooms, missing the implied focus in the question of the impact of the location and the situation on the narrator. In the second question, many Level 5 descriptions involved a natural landscape with sometimes slightly cliched images of streams and trees which lacked a sense of a specific place and its effect on the narrator. These were clear features but often lacked closely observed details and images to bring the description to life.

Level 4 descriptions for Content and Structure tended to become more narrative in intent, especially in the second question, or more cliched features appeared at this level. The reason for the 'moment of joy' tended to be explained rather than described or was narrated with limited focus on the moment itself. Winning important team games or races, intended as the 'moment of joy', became overwhelmed by narrative explanation. Conversely, attempts to describe the sensation of joy were difficult to sustain for many at this level and became repetitive and ineffective.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed. Other responses at this level became a series of events, often narratively recounted, of moving house for the first question and winning a race or a match for the second. In some responses to the first question, there was less narrative but often the description became a list of features which lacked organisation and paragraphs. Some lack of awareness of the essential elements of descriptive writing was evident in these Level 3 responses, although some were quite well-written and accurate.

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A different category of less effective responses was noted by Examiners, not usually seen in substantial numbers, were more frequent in this series: these were descriptions over-laden with complicated, imprecisely used vocabulary where there was insufficient clarity of meaning and coherence. One opening paragraph of a response began: '*Chastise, have borigus with creatures and even seeking help was blightful flapdoodle. Sluggardly clunging on to my fists, frail stick in hostile hands to suffice eschew to detoriate my tacitun benefit*.' It was difficult to award many marks for either Content and Structure or Style and Accuracy for these responses.

High marks for Style and Accuracy often reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, similar details were often included but better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to create specific effects. Highly effective responses showed a confident ability to use both simple and complex language, striking images and personification, as well as a range of sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision, sometimes very detrimentally as mentioned above. In these cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which might be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by its imprecise use and lack of clarity. Obscure, sometimes archaic language often revealed a lack of understanding of its meaning rather than a wide range of vocabulary.

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

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved

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

<u>Narrative writing</u>

Write a story in which a record is broken.

Write a story which includes the words, '… I had to say something …'.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses. Examiners sometimes saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title and which, on occasion, seemed more suited to titles set in previous examinations or were pre-prepared. In some cases, this lack of relevance affected the mark for Content and Structure. In the second question, many candidates misread the quotation marks in the question as speech marks and tried to include the quotation as part of the dialogue. This often led to some jarring of tenses and distortion of the characterisation since the words are more likely to be thought than spoken.

Effective responses were well organised and well-planned interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative and to produce moments of tension or drama, particularly when using the required quotation, and to vary the pace of the story were credited by Examiners as essential elements of narrative writing, as was the use of characterisation to create believable characters. In the first question, most stories involved reaching a goal or becoming the best in some sporting endeavour or sometimes achieving an academic goal. There were many narratives in which the protagonist, despite obstacles of poverty, lack of opportunity or some sort of opposition, managed to break a record in sport. More unusual examples included a Rubik's cube competition and an attempt by a bricklayer to break a world record.

There were some effective narratives involving physical records, such as one in which a grandmother's favourite record was accidentally broken and after much anxiety, the grandmother admitted that she had hated the record for decades but had felt obliged to keep it for sentimental reasons. Another response ended with the symbolic and deliberate breaking of a record which had been gifted to the protagonist to encourage

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them to learn the piano, a pursuit which had brought much humiliation and discomfort. In narrative responses given high marks for Content and Structure, the reader was drawn into the world of the protagonist by careful characterisation and scene-setting, adding credibility to stories which did not just depend on a series of events.

One approach, taken by a minority of candidates, tended to limit their ability to demonstrate their narrative writing skills. These usually involved the biographical account of a famous sportsperson who rose from obscurity to break various cricketing or footballing records. The accounts were largely factual in style and did not afford opportunities to develop characterisation, scene-setting and narrative shaping, features of narrative writing which Examiners look to reward in responses.

Less effective sporting stories in response to the first question were often adequately structured and clear but became simple accounts of various stages of a team competition and lacked focus on specific characters, their motives and back stories.

For the second question, there were many different plotlines, characters and events which allowed candidates to show their narrative writing ability. As always, most successful responses used the quotation in the question as a stimulus to provide a turning point in the story. One very effective response, for example, offered a convincing account of a funeral, exploring the contrast between the cynical, ignorant and unappreciative mourners and the narrator's own insightful perspective of the deceased man. Their inability or unwillingness to say something, for fear of causing a disrespectful scene, was very well-defined and the use of the quotation to create a tense and dramatic moment in the story was highly effective.

Many stories included the phrase in a way which gave the reader an insight into the thoughts and feelings of the narrator. In one response, a school student listening to a close friend plotting to cheat in an examination included some effective characterisation of both characters: '*She'd got it all planned out, she told me. I watched her with mounting panic as the whispered words tumbled out of her mouth, the nonsense about breaking into the principal's office and photographing tomorrow's paper. "Wouldn't it be easier to just do some revision tonight?" I asked, incredulous that my timid childhood friend had become so reckless, just so that she could go to some stupid party that evening*.'

A substantial number of responses to this question used the quotation in the question as part of a character's speech. This caused confusion with tenses and some loss of impact in the use of the set words: '*I said to her, "I had to say something," so I told her that she wasn't invited*.'

Examiners awarded marks in Level 6 for Content and Structure for narratives which created convincing, interesting scenarios and characters in responses to both questions. While the events in a story were important in creating such credibility, Level 6 responses paid attention to characterisation and how events were driven by character traits and choices. The ability to sustain the interest of the reader was often less reliant on the content of the story at this level but on the extent to which the characterisation drew the reader into a believable, engaging scenario.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but nonetheless cohesive and reasonably credible for the reader. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt create a developed story which was relevant to the task. Responses in this range were more usually chronological accounts, of record-breaking bids by sports teams for the first question, for example, but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some satisfying resolution. For the second narrative question, Level 5 responses often made good use of the required phrase as a turning point for the story, often involving a revelation by the narrator of something which changed the course of events. Whichever interpretation was given to the tasks, for Level 5 marks for Content and Structure stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of effective narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than ineffective organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were used as those in more effective narratives but at this level there was a tendency to say what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by shaping the narrative. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing characters as credible and rounded. While most less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative, and the reader was less engaged as a result. Some responses became confusing and

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muddled in attempting to control plots but more often, for the first question, the various rounds involved in reaching a final match or race became repetitive and a little mundane.

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 and where coupled with a sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary, the highest marks were given. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent while Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as insecure sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors.

Common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes over-ambitious vocabulary. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. A frequent reason for keeping an otherwise clearly written story out of Level 5 was insecure demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed. Though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing, these insecurities also limited the marks available in the narrative writing.

As in the descriptive writing, some responses showed that the use of obscure vocabulary, to reach for a sophisticated style, had overwhelmed the meaning of the language, limiting the marks Examiners could award for both Content and Structure and Style and Accuracy. In a response to **Question 5** entitled '*A mission to harness'*, for example, the narrative opened with '*In dystopia of post-apocalyptic incidents, this was aberration of anything but abysmal*.' The content of the story was never clear and the lack of precision in the use of language meant that although most complex words were correctly spelled, meaning was not conveyed with any clarity, limiting the marks for both elements of the assessment.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative**
- **consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account**
- **characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader; do not rely on events**
- **check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes**
- **use vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT

Paper 0500/03
Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and context for each of the three assignments
- read critically and thoroughly evaluated the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions, and attitudes they identified in a text
- supported their analysis, evaluation and comments with a detailed and specific selection of relevant ideas from a text
- assimilated ideas from a text to provide developed, thoughtful and sophisticated responses
- wrote original and interesting assignments which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of events and situations
- demonstrated a high level of accuracy in their writing
- wrote with confidence using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary with precision and for specific effect
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of argument, description, or narrative
- 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 used the new checklist to ensure that all instructions for submitting a coursework sample were followed carefully
- centres followed the guidelines and instructions set out in the Course Syllabus and the Coursework Handbook
- appropriate texts were used for **Assignment 1**, which were of an appropriate length and 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 but helpful advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- following feedback, candidates revised and edited their first drafts to improve their writing
- candidates checked, revised, and edited their final drafts to identify and correct errors
- teachers provided marks and summative comments at the end of the final draft of each assignment which clearly related to the appropriate mark level descriptors
- teachers indicated all errors in the final drafts of each completed assignment
- centres engaged in a process of internal moderation and clearly indicated any mark adjustments in the coursework portfolios, on the Individual Record Cards, and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms.

General comments

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

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Most centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. Some centres provided summative comments closely related to the mark schemes at the end of each completed assignment. These were usually 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.

A major concern in this session 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 usually 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 as well as all relevant documentation
- supplied marks and specific comments relating to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- accurately completed the Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC) and the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF), including any amendments made during internal moderation
- ensured that each coursework folder was securely stapled or tagged and attached to the Individual Candidate Record Card (ICRC)
- submitted their sample of coursework folders **without** using plastic or cardboard wallets.

Internal Moderation

Centres are expected to carry out internal moderation as directed in the Coursework Handbook. There was a general trend of greater accuracy of marking by centres where there was clear evidence of internal moderation than centres where no internal moderation process was evident on the coursework folders and documentation.

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

Using the coursework handbook

A cause of concern is that some moderation 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 following moderation:

1. Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment

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

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2. Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

- Some centres did not attach the portfolios of work to the ICRC in accordance with the instructions in the Coursework Handbook and point 4 on the electronic version of the ICRC.
- On some folders there were errors in the transcription of internally moderated mark changes, or it was unclear to the moderator 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

- Some 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 rough drafts contained more detailed annotations and specific feedback than permitted; 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.

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.

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 in which the writer expressed strong opinions; less successful texts were those which were of limited personal interest to the candidates, or those which were overly factual or informative. 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 evaluation, as required by the mark scheme. It is also crucial to select texts for their quality of written communication: some centres submitted responses to 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.

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

In this moderation session there was a significant trend for many centres to award marks for reading from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the middle-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 references to (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'.

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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 task was not clear. This made it difficult for the candidates to meet the highest-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments to writing marks for **Assignment 1**. Successful responses to **Assignment 1** tasks were those in which the writing was highly effective, almost always accurate, and consistent throughout in the application of form and style. Work which showed insecurity with form and style, such as the omission of an appropriate ending to a letter, a limited or inconsistent use of rhetorical devices for speeches, or lack of clarity of the intended audience, tended to meet the assessment criteria for Level 5 or below, Table A (writing). In this session 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. There was a tendency for centres to over-reward ambitious 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. There were a number of descriptive assignments which slipped into narrative accounts; this was sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set, such as describing an experience or holiday. This was quite often a reason for adjustment of marks from Table C (content and structure). Centres are reminded to set descriptive tasks and remind candidates to avoid using narrative writing techniques in their responses.

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those where the candidates had carefully selected vocabulary to create a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place or person, and which were well sequenced and carefully managed for deliberate effect. Successful responses included descriptions of festivals and celebrations, 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.

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 was highly ambitious, but which contained ineffective overuse of literary techniques and complex vocabulary; 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 of the use of language for specific effect. This is difficult for candidates to achieve if they over-use adjectives, include inappropriate

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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 centres awarded 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. 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.

In addition, the work of some candidates contained errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of the writing. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, tense inconsistencies, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and grammar errors. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as 'minor'. As mentioned earlier in this report, the absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult to determine whether errors had been considered when marks had been awarded; on some weaker assignments no errors had been annotated and the summative comment declared a high level of accuracy. Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which 'best fits' the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that errors are identified and indicated by the markers. Engaging in this process allows markers to effectively balance the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and apply marks that are most appropriate to the candidates' work.

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

Advice to candidates for Assignment 2:

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

Assignment 3 (narrative):

Much of the task setting for **Assignment 3** was generally appropriate and many candidates produced engaging and effective narratives which were well controlled and convincing. Successful narratives were those in which candidates created stories characterised by well-defined plots and those which incorporated 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. This sort of writing was often seen when candidates were writing in the genre of detective or fantasy stories. Stories such as these, although containing a clear 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).

Very accurate work containing precise well-chosen vocabulary, and which maintained a consistent register throughout, could be awarded marks from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D (style and accuracy). As with **Assignments 1** and **2**, there was 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.

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Advice to candidates for Assignment 3:

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

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SFIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/04
Speaking and Listening Test

Key messages

Centre administration was of a high standard with Submit for Assessment (SfA) working well and being used efficiently by centres.

There were relatively few issues reported with the general rank order of candidates within centres though the level of accuracy of the assessment was not always appropriate. Where recommendations of scaling were made it was usually because centres had not differentiated appropriately between different levels of attainment, particularly in ***Part 2*** and specifically between Level 4 and Level 5, or where tests did not follow the stipulated timings yet were still awarded very high marks.

Timing within the test remains an area of concern for some centres. ***Part 1*** should last for 3–4 minutes. A significantly short ***Part 1*** response should affect the mark awarded. A significantly overlong response to ***Part 1*** should also affect the mark awarded. ***Part 2*** should last for 7–8 minutes and it is the responsibility of the examiner to ensure the correct timing is adhered to. Conversations that run for significantly less than the minimum 7 minutes required do not allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available because certain descriptors in the higher levels cannot be met. Overlong ***Part 2*** responses do not affect the range of marks that can be awarded but they are unnecessary.

Part 2 should consist of a conversation between the candidate and the examiner. It follows that a ***Part 2*** that is in essence a series of (sometimes) unrelated questions is not an appropriate model to use for the most successful outcomes.

Changes in the direction of the conversation in ***Part 2*** do not necessitate the examiner introducing material that is unrelated to the topic chosen for the ***Part 1*** talk. It is rather a broadening out of the original ideas introduced by the candidate in ***Part 1*** and is included to test the candidate's understanding of a wider perspective pertaining to the chosen topic and to test the candidate's ability to further expand a conversation effectively.

Administration - General comments

For most centres, administration of the test was diligent, accurate and easy to follow. Summary forms were completed to a high degree of accuracy and samples uploaded to SfA were of a very good sound quality. From a moderating perspective, the introduction of SfA has been a very positive step forward and this seems to be reflected in the way centres have adapted to the system. It is hoped centres share moderators' enthusiasm for SfA as it does seem to make the whole process much more efficient.

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

- Each candidate's test requires a full formal introduction to be made prior to the beginning of ***Part 1***. This introduction should include the centre name and number, the candidate's full name and candidate number, the date on which the test is being recorded and the name of the examiner. This is important information for the moderator. The overwhelming majority of centres were compliant with this requirement and are to be congratulated for their diligence.

- Whilst it is perfectly acceptable for centres to create their own version of the Summary Form (the OESF), it is important that any such version includes all the same information required on the form provided by Cambridge. A form that does not have a full breakdown of the marks for each candidate in

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the cohort is not acceptable. All forms should have, therefore, a breakdown of the marks that includes a mark out of 20 for ***Part 1***, a mark out of 10 for ***Part 2*** Speaking, a mark out of 10 for ***Part 2*** Listening and a total mark out of 40. A form that truncates ***Part 2*** into one mark out of 20 is not acceptable for the moderator.

- It is the centre's responsibility to check the quality of the recordings being made, preferably as an ongoing process during each recording session, to ensure that the recordings are clearly audible and without interference. On a few occasions the examiner was clearly audible but the candidates were not, presumably because the examiner was closer to the microphone than the candidate. Any problems with the quality of recordings should be reported to Cambridge immediately so that candidates are not adversely affected by such issues.

Conduct of the test - General comments

Overall, the standard of examining was very good with candidates being given plenty of opportunities to express their ideas and demonstrate their range of oratory skills productively.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the examiner's formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing ***Part 1***, the Individual Talk. If an examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is done before the recording is started. Examiners formally starting the test then engaging in 'off topic' conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their ***Part 1*** task is strongly discouraged. Any pleasantries exchanged should be completed before the recording is started and the formal introduction is made.

- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in ***Part 2***, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met so that candidates are given the fullest opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills they possess.

- If a candidate has exceeded the maximum 4 minutes for ***Part 1*** the examiner should not compensate by shortening the time allowed for ***Part 2***. Candidates must be allowed the required 7–8 minutes to complete a full response to ***Part 2***, irrespective of the length of the talk in Part 1.

- It is also important that the conversations offer sufficient challenge to allow candidates to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Focused questioning and prompts are needed to move the conversation forward, together with an adaptability on the part of the examiner to absorb the candidate's previous comments and to extend the conversation as a result. A ***Part 2*** that is merely a question and answer session is not a natural conversation and as a consequence is limited in terms of the marks that should be awarded.

- Examiners who rely on a pre-determined set of questions disadvantage their candidates, in particular with regard to the mark for Speaking in ***Part 2***. A question from the examiner should lead to an answer from the candidate which then may lead to a comment or prompt from the examiner that is connected to the same content matter. This will in turn lead to another connected response from the candidate; and so the conversation develops naturally.

- Examiners who dominate conversations or who frequently interrupt candidates during the conversation do so to the disadvantage of those candidates. Good examiners prompt candidates then allow them the opportunity to respond in full and to develop their ideas before moving the conversation forwards again.

Comments on specific sections of the test

Part 1 – Individual Talk

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

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'Generally, t*opics were well chosen by the candidates. Clearly a huge amount of thought, time and effort had been expended to prepare interesting and engaging presentations.*

Higher level candidates were aware of a potential audience and used a wide range of effective language techniques.

Successful candidates chose topics of personal interest that they were able to expand upon in ***Part 2****. Less successful topics were normally those where the candidates tried to impress with their choices but did not really have an in-depth knowledge.*

Trying to present a speech having learnt it word for word is not always good practice if the candidate concentrates more on the subject matter than the need to perform using a range of language devices.'

Almost exclusively all the responses to ***Part 1*** were in the form of a presentation. This format remains a safe and acceptable one, particularly if an attempt to analyse and reflect on personal experiences is included. For many candidates this choice remains a safe and productive way to achieve a good mark in ***Part 1***, especially when well-timed and clearly structured. Less successful responses to ***Part 1*** tended to meander somewhat because a strong structure had not been created and time constraints had not been factored in. Largely narrative responses that follow a linear path, such as talking through the events of a holiday or simply restating facts about a topic choice, tend to be unimaginative and rarely achieve higher than Level 3.

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

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

- The Power of Music
- Is Stress the Killer of Creativity?
- Bladder Exstrophy – A Personal Journey
- Is Money Key to Happiness?
- Toxic Feminism
- AI and Its Effect on Art
- How Society Influences Choices
- Positive Representation – Body Types
- Are Books Becoming Obsolete?
- Poetry and its Devices

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

Pleasure of Shopping – topic limiting
Kobe Bryant – needed wider interpretation of topic
Kindness – Today's Generation – limited in ***Part 2***
Books – too generalised

Often these talks were poorly focused and lacked structure resulting in loss of interest for the audience and timing issues. Some less successful topics were chosen because of their perceived 'serious' nature by candidates who had limited interest in the actual issues involved. The resulting lack of knowledge was exposed in the ***Part 2*** conversation.

Part 2 – Conversation

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

'The most successful examiners conducted the conversations without bias and encouraged candidates to develop the topics through their responses.

Candidates who were hampered by their reliance on memorised talks in **Part 1** *were often stronger in* **Part 2** *when more natural, spontaneous speaking skills could be assessed.*

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Examiners who asked open questions based on the previous responses given by the candidates were more successful in creating natural conversations.

The use of pre-determined questions as the basis of the whole of **Part 2** *did not allow candidates to engage in conversation and limited their opportunities to gain higher marks.'*

Generally, the ***Part 2*** conversations were well conducted, and examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions which enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. After initial questioning to stimulate the conversation, the use of prompts, instead of a steady stream of further questioning, was often more effective in eliciting developed responses from candidates. Unlike in ***Part 1***, the examiner can influence the quality of the candidate's performance in ***Part 2***.

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

Some examiners struggled to inspire candidates with closed questioning and by offering too many of their own ideas during the conversations. Indeed, where a candidate was moved down a level during moderation, it was often due to a lack of detail, caused sometimes by uninspired questioning. The use of pre-determined questions or a perfunctory question and answer technique limits the candidate's ability to engage in a real conversation where responses are elicited by what is said immediately before.

In the most successful conversations the examiners were mindful of timing ensuring candidates were given the full 7–8 minutes without falling short of this requirement, or indeed exceeding it.

Advice to centres

- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful.
- Make sure candidates know the timings of the test. Ensure that their Individual Talk is 3–4 minutes long. You can help them in the test by interceding before 5 minutes and initiating the conversation.
- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test. At the planning stage a gentle suggestion to choose an alternative topic may be very beneficial in some cases.
- Try to dissuade candidates from simply reeling off a memorised talk in ***Part 1*** that may have artificial fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.
- Ensure a full 7-8 minutes is allowed for the conversation in ***Part 2***. The examiner can control the timing of this.
- Administering the conversation in ***Part 2*** can be quite challenging for examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the examiner but they should not be restrictive, and the candidate should have no prior knowledge of them.
- Scaffold questions strategically to encourage higher level responses. This will help candidates to access the higher mark ranges.
- Do not interrupt too keenly; another prompt given before the previous response is finished, or when the candidate pauses for thought, can affect the candidate adversely by limiting them from developing their ideas fully.
- Be careful not to make judgements based on personal interpretations of a comment made by a candidate. This is a test of speaking and listening not the perceived accuracy of what is said.

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Advice to candidates

- Choose a topic you are passionate about and one you can talk about for 3–4 minutes then discuss in even more detail for 7–8 minutes.
- Practise your presentation but do not learn it word for word.
- Have bullet point notes to help prompt you in ***Part 1*** but not the 'full speech'. You will be tempted to read it or, at the very least, deliver it without appropriate liveliness and intonation. 'Talk through' each bullet point in a confident and enthusiastic way.
- Structure your Individual Talk carefully, making sure that it develops points and stays within the 3–4 minutes allowed. Long talks do not earn more marks! On the contrary, an overlong talk will be regarded as not being 'well organised' (a bullet point required for Level 5 marks).
- Respond to the prompts and questions from the examiner in ***Part 2*** as fully as possible by developing your ideas, giving examples and leading off into other aspects of the topic if you can.
- Watch good examples of speeches/presentations/talks to learn how good speakers make their speeches engaging and interesting. Try to copy these techniques.
- Practise simulations of ***Part 2***. There are as many marks available for ***Part 2*** as for ***Part 1*** so treat each part as equally important.

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