

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/01

Paper 1

General comments

The paper was well received and it was pleasing to see that all the topics in **Part One** found favour with large numbers of candidates across the different geographical regions. Equally, **Part Two** posed no problems which were not of the candidates' own making. The performance overall was comparable to the standard of previous years. The assured expression and high interest level of the best scripts made them a pleasure to read. However, Examiners reported that there continued to be relatively few of these and that a disappointingly large number languished around the E8/U9 border. That said, very few scripts indeed failed to establish communication of some kind. In general, time was used sensibly, although Examiners doubt the wisdom of writing out a full draft of a composition before presenting a virtually identical copy as the neat version.

Linguistic problems remain the same as always: difficulty in selecting the correct verb form, tense usage and sequencing, the omission of articles and, increasingly, the misuse of the comma for the full stop. Failure to punctuate and paragraph direct speech often made it difficult for Examiners to follow what was happening in the narrative. While the great majority of candidates presented admirably neat and legible scripts, this year Examiners noted that a very small percentage were, at times, indecipherable. Candidates cannot gain credit for work which cannot be read.

Comments on specific questions

Part One

Question 1

Describe the scene and the people in the audience as they wait for a special event at your school or college.

Many candidates seemed to enjoy this descriptive topic, which was often well answered in terms of length, relevance and structure. The most popular events were school celebrations of various kinds, drama productions, musical events, either formal or, more informally, gigs, sports events, especially an important cricket match, or the visit of a local dignitary. There were some very lively answers which captured the atmosphere of the occasion very successfully through the eyes of both participants and audience and which ended, as required, as the event began. There were some well observed descriptions of proud parents anticipating a child's performance on stage and some even better of audiences growing restless in the heat as the event became more and more delayed by a series of unexpected problems: too many people turning up, non-arrival of an important guest, electrical failure or even too long a speech by the Headmaster. There were opportunities for humour too: 'The Headmaster finally stopped with an embarrassed smile when the Mayor snored.' There were some good descriptions of impatient and bored children and angry adults, both liable to behave badly. A number of candidates tried to gain immediacy by writing in the present tense but some found this hard to sustain consistently. A minority continued to cover the event itself, producing a narrative response which was not what the question intended.

Question 2

'Young people these days are less interested in studying than in earning money.' What is your opinion?

The discursive essay attracted a large number of candidates from all regions and elicited some of the most impressive responses and some of the weakest. Amongst all these candidates, the subject matter clearly struck a chord: 'I'm also one among them.' Most candidates agreed that this was how it was although it should not be so. There were some vigorous rebuttals from academically ambitious candidates who were

prepared to wait until they were as highly qualified as they could be before joining the workforce. Some candidates took an overview, challenging what they saw as an unfair generalisation and well-structured. They marshal a coherently developed argument, sometimes reinforcing it by reference to personal experience. While acknowledging the fecklessness and boredom of some of their peers, who were driven by short-term materialism, they also pointed out that some had no choice as poverty, family circumstances and parental attitudes often forced teenagers into the workplace earlier than some students would have wished. Job availability also played its part. In many areas, there was a steady demand for low paid labour, and once financial independence was tasted, it became difficult to resist. For teenagers struggling academically, it was suggested that work which provided both money and practical experience was a more sensible option. Some candidates lamented the long hours they worked trying to juggle a part-time job and their studies in an attempt to satisfy both needs. Less able candidates took a narrower view, usually chiding their friends for always wanting the latest electronic gadgets or newest fashion. Often these responses lapsed into lists of what teenagers wished to buy and, at this point, the answers became unstructured and repetitive. Tenses proved hard to handle, especially when writing about future problems. Also, there was considerable confusion as to the correct use of 'study', 'studies' and 'studying'.

Question 3

The Visitor.

This proved a very popular topic, and all sorts of visitors were included in the narratives, some of which were original, such as the malaria-bearing mosquito whose visit devastated a whole village, or very amusing, such as the deaf grandmother who misheard much that her family told her. The usual variety of murderers, thieves, aliens, ghosts and vampires made an unconvincing appearance but the best responses, which had pace, suspense and some characterisation, were more restrained and more credible. A number wrote entertainingly about the arrival of an unpopular and demanding relative and the general relief when the 'visitor' departed. In many, but by no means all, Centres, direct speech was handled confidently and correctly. Tense sequencing was reasonably successful. Some weaker candidates chose to interpret 'visitor' as 'tourist', often treated as a plural. This allowed them to cover very familiar ground as they described which places of interest they would recommend to the visitors to their country. Sometimes the candidate himself was a visitor to a new area either within or outside his own country.

Question 4

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'He never could resist temptation.'

This was also very popular and produced some fluent, well structured responses. The range of temptation was as great as the range of visitors in **Question 3**. Some temptations were predictable, of course, but there were also some more interesting accounts such as the diabetic who could not resist chocolate or the boy who could not resist high-risk sports. Better candidates made sure that temptation lay at the heart of their narrative, and the given sentence fitted in neatly, possibly at the end as a punch-line or, just as effectively, in the opening paragraph from which point the inevitable downfall was carefully charted. However, in many cases, there was insufficient preparation and the key words were inserted somewhat lamely into the candidate's story. Some candidates interpreted temptation as losing one's temper.

Question 5

'My relatives always have fascinating stories to tell about older members of my family and I especially like the one about...'. Continue.

This was probably the most popular question and certainly produced the most interesting answers even when the account was full of mechanical errors. Many candidates wrote with discernible pride of the exploits of their grandparents or great grandparents in recounting tales which were clearly part of family history. Such tales reflected war, political upheaval, criminality, battlefield derring-do, the first women in the family to be university-educated, as well as stories about those who struggled against tremendous odds to overcome poverty, discrimination and to be freed from arranged marriages. Candidates wrote with incredulity about wartime hardships and the primitive nature of their grandparents' lives. Stories about their parents' naughty childhood were also relished.

Linguistically, tenses needed careful handling and many candidates found it difficult to distinguish between the simple past and the pluperfect. Some gave up and slipped into a first person narrative in the middle of their composition. Some candidates wrote about the general character of their chosen relative rather than confine themselves to particular stories.

Part Two

The majority of candidates responded well to this task which dealt with a scenario which was within their experience. Most letters were clearly organised and informative with an appropriate register and a strong sense of audience. In most cases the length was appropriate. Some very long letters contained far too much unnecessary detail. Nearly all scored five content points. The locations, the details of decoration and the entertainment were many and varied. The teachers' roles were usually advisory or supervisory. It was pleasing to see that nearly all candidates realised that they had to say how the refreshments would be served rather than just giving a list of what they intended to provide. The point most likely to be lost was the first: 'when and where'. Candidates usually included the location but were not specific enough about 'when'. 'In the last week of term' was not helpful to the Principal who would surely have needed to seek clarification. A date was much better. Occasionally, it seemed that a candidate had just forgotten to include other required points.

There were several reasons why some candidates performed less well. One was clearly over-hasty reading of the task. A few did not realise they were required to write a letter and offered a report instead. Some candidates did not realise that they had already been asked by the Principal to organise a party for young children. Asking for permission to hold the party was, therefore, not relevant. Some did not realise that their letter should be addressed to the Principal. Candidates wrote variously to the children, their teachers, their parents and even to the owner of the restaurant. Others overlooked the fact that these were young children and suggested decorations, entertainment and refreshments more suitable for young adults. Tone was sometimes misjudged as candidates ranged from the peremptory 'Teachers must bring refreshments', or 'You must reply by tomorrow if you want me to do this', to the over-casual 'I want you guys to decorate the auditorium.'. A few opened their letter to the Principal inappropriately:

'Hello. How are you? I hope you and your family are well.'

Linguistically, the mark usually reflected the **Part One** performance, although, in some cases, where candidates had struggled with expression in **Question 2**, the mark in **Part Two** was higher. There was often inconsistency in the use of 'would' and 'will'. Some candidates who had paragraphed well in **Part One** forgot to paragraph their **Part Two** answer. The bullet points help to indicate paragraphs for those in doubt. Overall, those who took time to read the question carefully and managed to be courteous and persuasive would not only have gained their Principal's approval of their plans but also a higher mark from the Examiner.

Guidance for teachers preparing candidates for future examinations

It was rewarding to see less obvious rehearsed material. Examiners, however, did remark upon a number of candidates who inserted high-flown vocabulary without truly understanding its meaning or its correct usage. This was particularly true of descriptive language relating to both places and people. Similarly, idiomatic phrases need to be understood if the candidate is to gain credit. It would be helpful to candidates if they learned to distinguish between 'than' and 'then', 'said' and 'told', and 'their' and 'there'.

In some Centres, excessively long scripts presented a problem. The suggested length of 350 to 600 words is intended to allow candidates time to give some thought to planning their work and time to check what they have written for obvious errors. Those who persist in writing well over 1000 words are likely to write with increasing inaccuracy and, further, impair their performance in a rushed answer to **Part Two**.

Discursive essays are best suited to those with the necessary linguistic skills. Candidates embarking on such a piece of writing would be well advised to make a quick plan to ensure that they had sufficient ideas to meet the required essay length without resorting to repetition or lists.

Taxing language was used quite widely in some Centres, as was unacceptable slang which bordered on the offensive. Neither has a place in a formal English examination and candidates should be made aware of this.

This year, the **Part Two** exercise proved the need for candidates to put themselves very much in the place of both the writer and recipient and to ask themselves exactly what the recipient needed to know and in how much detail.

Finally...

Examiners commented on how much hard work had gone into preparing candidates for this paper and how much they found to interest them in the candidates' responses to these topics.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Papers 1115/02, 1120/02 and 1123/02

Paper 2

General comments

The topic of the passage seemed to be accessible to most candidates and possibly within their experience. General understanding of the narrative seemed to be present in all but the very weakest of candidates.

As usual, it was pleasing to see in the performance of candidates that they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper, although not all managed to offer both a rough draft and a fair copy of their response to the summary question. The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text and assessment of the ability to express these points fluently and in own words. The types of question giving most difficulty were the questions which required candidates to answer in their own words, although Examiners reported fewer candidates merely ignoring the rubric by lifting from the text. It seems that there is a growing awareness of the nature of own words questions, but many candidates find it very difficult to offer synonyms from their range of vocabulary.

In the summary question, **Question 11**, some candidates wrote in excess of the stipulated 160 words, including the opening ten words provided; numbers of words as high as 289 were reported, although such excess was extremely rare. Candidates must understand that any words past the 160 cut off point will not be credited, and that their own word count would be checked. However, Examiners reported that in general candidates are clearly being taught summary skills well.

A few candidates did not put their candidate number on the script, or used a wrong or illegible number. However, it has to be stressed that such problems were extremely isolated.

As is reported every year, concern was expressed by some Examiners about Centres which issue candidates with sixteen page booklets on which to write their answers, when a booklet half that size would be more than adequate and would be more cost effective in terms not only of paper but also of postage.

Comments on specific questions

As is customary, **Question 1** was designed to boost candidate confidence at the beginning of the examination with a fairly straightforward question. However, although intended as an easy opening question, it did bring about differentiation. The answer could be scored by lifting from the passage at lines 3-5, with the answer either that the letters danced before Joseph's eyes, or that he tried to recall the words of the story. The information that Joseph's mother had read to him or that he was studying the picture were considered as wrong but neutral answers; in other words they did not score the mark but they did not negate an otherwise correct answer. Many candidates scored the mark, but many lost the mark by offering one of the wrong but neutral answers. Looking at illustrations and listening to a reader are not signs of illiteracy. Some candidates gave the wrong answer that Joseph had not yet started school; this could not be accepted as a correct answer because it did not come from the stipulated paragraph 1.

The majority of candidates scored the two marks available for the answer to **Question 2(a)**, by writing that Joseph's mother bustled impatiently into the room and that she didn't wait for an answer when she spoke to Joseph. As with **Question 1**, the marks could be scored by lifting from the passage at line 6 and lines 7-8. Weak candidates failed to distil these answers and quoted excessively, or sought answers from lines 12-15 of the text, which was too far away from the context of the question. In any case, answers which stated that Joseph was propelled on to the pavement were incorrect because of the lack of precision in the agent.

Question 2(b) was also well answered by most candidates. Joseph's mother was worried in that she did not have enough money or, by implication, that she would not be able to buy Joseph's uniform. Most candidates probably understood that shortage of money was the problem, but spoiled their answer by writing that she was worried about the amount of money she had, which is ambiguous, or that she had no money, which is incorrect because she had 'contents' in her purse, which must have been money.

Question 3 was well answered, despite that fact that it required close reading of the entire paragraph to isolate the single word 'coaxed'. The most popular wrong answer here was probably 'reward'. A few candidates offered three words here, and were denied the mark, even if one of the words was 'coaxed', because that was an infringement of the rubric. Such candidates tended to be clustered in the same Centres, which might suggest they had been taught to do this.

Question 4 was the first of the three questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. The word 'as' at line 27 was intended to guide candidates to make the link between Joseph shuffling from foot to foot and the fact that he was able to wander off. Many candidates were able to isolate the key words to be re-cast here as 'respective' and 'accounts'. Most of those who succeeded in this stage of the answer made a fair attempt at 'accounts' by writing 'stories', 'experiences' or 'what had been happening'. Some wrote 'chatting' or 'having a conversation'; on their own these answers were inadequate as they did not bring out the biographical nature of the word 'accounts'. A few candidates wrongly inferred a financial reference here. Not so many candidates were able to bring out the mutuality of 'respective' as 'each other', 'shared' or 'exchanged'. Some wrote 'greeted each other', which was the wrong context and therefore could not score the mark for 'respective', attractive as that seemed as an answer. Perhaps some candidates confused the word 'respective' with the word 'respect', suggesting kind and respectful greetings. As is usual with own words questions, this proved to be fairly taxing question.

Question 5(a) required candidates to identify the word 'magnetic' and decode the simile focused on it, by giving responses which reflected the physical nature of magnetism, e.g. pulling or drawing, and the majority of candidates were able to do this. Likewise, in **Question 5(b)** most candidates scored the mark for writing that Joseph's favourite toys were the model trains; a few spoiled their answer by referring to the toy in the singular, or by referring also to furry bears, model cars or plastic dinosaurs. The mark for **Question 5(c)** could be scored by lifting at lines 38-39; Joseph set off for further exploration because he still thought of himself as the pirate king ashore. **Question 5(d)** required candidates to make the link between Joseph's disappearance and the crowd watching or listening to the salesman's demonstration of the kitchen knife. Most candidates managed to do this by writing that the crowd was listening to or watching the demonstration, or that the demonstration was fascinating. However, some failed to score the mark by merely lifting at lines 40-42; writing only that a crowd had gathered did not distil the answer required. Other candidates seemed bemused by the construction of lines 43-45 and lifted there. Nevertheless, good candidates were able to unravel this sentence's construction and this question proved to a useful discriminator.

The mark was given in **Question 6(a)** to candidates who were able to see that collecting coins was what characterised the link between the musicians and the beggar, and many scored the mark accordingly. However, the answer was denied to those candidates who used either of the verbs 'begging' or 'earning' (money). Each of these verbs belonged to separate agents and as such could not be accepted as an answer to a question asking for a common characteristic. Some candidates lost the mark here by writing that both the beggar and the musicians were sitting at the side of the road; this is incorrect and denied the mark in an otherwise correct answer. Other candidates made reference to the clothing of the musicians and beggar, which provided contrast rather than similarity. Others failed to score because they wrote that both musicians and beggar had cans of money. It is not clear in the text that the musicians had a can, although they might have done; but the correct focus here was on the collecting, not the mere possession, of the money.

Question 6(b) proved to be beyond the grasp of many candidates and proved to be a question which differentiated candidates. The mark for this inferential question was given to candidates who made the link between a dirty apron and food hygiene; they had to write that the situation was 'alarming' because the boy was handling, selling or dealing with food, or that his apron was unhygienic, or that he could cause his customers to be ill. Some candidates came very close to a correct answer by writing that the boy was a cook; this was insufficient because such candidates needed to distil the hygiene connection that was present in verbs like 'handling', 'selling' or 'dealing with' food. Some candidates thought that the answer hinged on either the age or the sex of the cook, by writing that he was too young to wear an apron or to cook, or that only girls and women wear aprons or cook.

In **Question 7(a)**, the second of the questions on the Paper requiring candidates to answer in their own words, the key words for re-casting in own words were 'thinly disguised' and 'terror'; candidates were directed towards these words by the stem of the question, involving the idea of Joseph's mother being noticed by the store assistant, which had then to be linked to the word 'noticed' in the text. Many candidates scored a mark here for offering correct synonyms for 'terror', such as 'fear' or 'panic'; words with less focus were denied the mark, such as 'worry' or 'anxiety'. As is usual in this type of question, it was not necessary for candidates to offer an exact synonym in the form of the same part of speech as the word to be re-cast, so that 'in a panic' or 'panicking' were equally acceptable, so long as meaning and understanding were clearly seen. The second mark was available for a correct re-casting of 'thinly disguised', e.g. 'barely hidden' or 'hardly concealed'. It was not necessary to show the force of 'barely', so that answers such as 'could be seen' or 'she looked' (afraid) were enough to score. Most candidates here at least seemed aware of the importance of identifying key words and substituting them with synonyms, so there was very little lifting of key words.

Question 7(b) was an inferential question which was well answered. Most candidates were able to make the link between Joseph's mother feeling guilty and the cause of her guilt being that she had been neglecting her son, or that she had been too busy chatting to her former neighbour.

Many candidates failed in **Question 8** to notice that Joseph's happiness was referred to in the question, to preclude it as an answer to the question. Candidates were to explain how Joseph was feeling apart from being happy. So the mark was awarded for answers like 'relieved' or 'he had been afraid' or 'he never wanted to be a pirate king again'. However, if candidates did write that Joseph was happy, it was regarded as a wrong but neutral answer and not as one which would deny an otherwise correct answer. Popular wrong answers here, apart from 'happy', were that Joseph felt ashamed, sorry or guilty.

Question 9(a) was the third of the questions on the Paper in which candidates were to write an answer in their own words. This was designed as a differentiating question, and so it turned out to be. Candidates were required to use the clue in line 85 at the word 'change' and link it to that word in the question, thus working backwards in the text to the key words 'uncharacteristically' and 'withdrawn'. Some of the acceptable synonyms for 'uncharacteristically' were 'unusually', 'abnormally' or 'unexpectedly'; the mark for re-casting 'withdrawn' could be gained by writing something like 'silent', 'subdued' or 'reserved'. Very many candidates failed to score at all in this question because they focused on an earlier section of the paragraph at line 85 by making reference to Joseph hanging up the clothes, or to line 84 by making reference to Joseph staying close to his mother. Such candidates had failed to make the correct link between text and question at the word 'change'.

There was reasonable success with the inferential **Question 9(b)** where the mark was gained by candidates who saw that Joseph was dissociating himself from the pirate king story. There were many acceptable ways of scoring the available mark, e.g. 'he had had a bad experience because of the book' or 'he didn't want to be a pirate king any more' or simply 'he no longer liked the book'.

Question 10 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. Very few candidates scored all five available marks. It was clear that many of them did have some idea of meaning, but were unable to choose synonyms with precisely the right nuance to score the marks. This offered a degree of discrimination between the best candidates and those with less refined language skills. Much success was gained by candidates who correctly offered 'gathered' or 'came together' for 'congregated', 'unwillingly' or 'not wanting to' for 'reluctantly', and 'fascinated' or 'enthralled' for 'enchanted'. The least popular choices were probably 'efficiency', meaning 'capability' or 'usefulness', and 'rational' where acceptable synonyms were 'reasonable' or 'thinking'. Many candidates offered 'practical' as a synonym here, perhaps because it occurred in the text, but this was incorrect. Many candidates offered 'hiding' or 'concealing' for 'suppressing', whereas the correct answer had to be something like 'holding back' or 'fighting'. There was much difficulty with 'firmly', with popular wrong answers being 'strongly', 'strictly' or 'smoothly' rather than an answer which reflected the determination of the action described, such as 'decisively' or 'assertively'. Many candidates successfully offered 'experienced' or 'she had done it before' for the idiomatic phrase 'with a practised eye'. Some Examiners reported that some candidates gave the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, and that some candidates offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. A small number attempted all eight options; in such cases, only the first five offered responses were marked.

As usual, the final question on the paper was the summary question, **Question 11**, carrying 10 marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise what Joseph did when he left his mother, the steps that were taken to find him, and how he was eventually re-united with his mother. As is not surprising, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on around half of the original text, expressing content as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were twenty four content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question, often with a rough draft and a fair draft. Some candidates forgot to cross out the first draft, leading to ambiguity as to which version was to be marked.

There were six content points available in paragraph five. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that Joseph moved towards the picture. He went into the toy department and looked at the toys. He then went off for further exploration, passing the salesman's demonstration unseen, and out into the street. There was much success in the identification of these points by candidates.

In paragraph six, another nine content points were available. Most candidates wrote, correctly, that Joseph saw the musicians and the beggar. In order to gain the marks available here, it was necessary to write that Joseph looked at, or saw, or was interested in the musicians and the beggar. This is because the rubric asked for Joseph's actions, and so an incidental reference to musicians or beggar did not comply with the rubric. Nor could the points be scored by writing that Joseph passed the musicians and beggar; he would have passed many people and things on the street but the focus here had to be on the engagement taking place, again in order to comply with the rubric. He squeezed through the crowd watching the musicians before he saw the beggar. There was some confusion with the sequence here; points which are made out of sequence are not awarded. Joseph listened to the conversation between the young cook and his customers, or the point could have been made by saying that Joseph loitered at a roadside stall. Again, writing that he merely passed the stall was insufficient. The focus here was on listening or loitering, not watching, and precision was required. Joseph looked at the fabrics in the shop. Many candidates merely made reference to the fabric but not to the fact that they were in a shop; such answers failed to score the mark. Some candidates lost the mark here by writing the word 'clothes' instead of 'cloth'; these candidates failed to score because the new word changed the meaning and could therefore not be allowed as a slip or a spelling error. Most candidates made the point that Joseph saw a boy accompanied by his mother, although some lost the mark by making an incidental reference to the boy and his mother, rather than focussing on the interaction with Joseph which the rubric demanded. Joseph realised he was lost; again, incidental references were not acceptable to score the mark, and the fact of Joseph's coming to realisation had to be made. Joseph looked for his mother, a point scored by very few candidates, and started to cry, a point made by the majority of candidates.

A further four marks were awarded in paragraph seven to candidates who wrote that Kim realised that her son was missing; as with the parallel point about Joseph, an incidental reference to Joseph being lost was not sufficient to score the mark. Kim went back to the children's clothes section and looked for Joseph there and in the changing rooms. Many candidates wasted words here by referring unnecessarily to Kim's panic, to her attempts to keep calm and to her feelings generally. This was not a legitimate response to the rubric which at this point was focused on the steps that were taken to find Joseph and not to emotional reactions, which were the distracters at this point of the text. The final point in this paragraph was the fact that Kim was helped by the store assistant, or that she was taken to the manager's office. Merely being noticed by the store assistant was insufficient to score the mark, again because the focus of the rubric was action, in steps that were taken to find Joseph.

The final paragraph of the passage for summary search was paragraph eight, where five content points could be scored. The manager sent staff out to look for Joseph and telephoned the police. Kim and the manager went to the store entrance, two female store assistants brought Joseph back and he and his mother were re-united. There was some confusion about agents here, with the manager being confused with Kim or with the original store assistant who had raised the alarm. Some candidates seemed to suggest that the store assistants had searched of their own initiative rather than at the instruction of the manager.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, which was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to break away from the words of the original text varied from candidate to candidate, even from Centre to Centre, but that there is a pleasing improvement year by year in candidates' ability to use their own words, and a general realisation that that is required by the rubric. There were very few candidates so weak that they lifted almost indiscriminately from the text and, although there were some other weaker candidates who played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, in so doing gaining several marks for content, Examiners reported fewer scripts like this than in previous years. Some candidates whose language skills are very weak might be better advised to opt for more lifting rather than risking making the kind of errors inevitably made by weaker writers of English, but that is a decision for candidates and their teachers. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentences, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Common errors reported were failures of agreement in singular and plural, misplaced or omitted prepositions, omission of definite and indefinite articles, and inconsistent and illogical verb tenses. The narrative nature of the text involved much use of pronouns and possessive adjectives, and Examiners reported a lot of confusion over the correct use of 'his' and 'hers' and 'he' and 'she'; perhaps the confusion arose over the need for the gender of the possessive adjective to be determined by the gender of the noun possessed rather than by the possessor. Spelling and punctuation were generally very good, and handwriting clear.