

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/01

Reading Passage (Core)

## General comments

The paper was well received by candidates and the subject matter proved to be both accessible and interesting. Overall, the standard of performance was good, with a pleasing number of candidates producing responses of a very high standard. There was no evidence that candidates' work suffered from the time constraints imposed by an examination. The responses to the reading tasks in **Question 1** indicated that many candidates were taking care to read the questions carefully and were attempting to consider more than just the surface implications of those questions which carried more than one mark; this was especially evident in their responses to **Question 1(f)**. However, there was also evidence that precise understanding of some of the vocabulary used in the passage was beyond the appreciation of many candidates and, perhaps surprisingly, considering the general competence of this year's cohort, marks for the summary, **Question 1(h)**, were significantly lower than has been the case in previous years.

Nearly all candidates produced responses to the directed writing task which were of adequate length and most referred conscientiously to the required content points. As in previous years, Examiners continue to comment favourably on the standard of candidates' writing skills and there were indeed only a very small number of scripts where the English language skills were so limited that the reader had difficulty in deciphering the writer's intended meaning. The fact that Examiners were able to discriminate between candidates' performances by taking into account the appropriateness of the tone and register used by the writer is a clear indication of the quality of many of the responses submitted. The one consistent cause for concern which featured in the comments of all those who marked the paper was that the handwriting of candidates from some centres continues to cause serious problems. The failure to form individual letters clearly or correctly inevitably impedes the ease with which an Examiner can read and understand what has been written; in some cases, this may lead to a word being indicated as a spelling mistake which, in the overall assessment, may be of only minor significance. However, when a reader is confronted with a string of illegible words then understanding is seriously affected. It is in the candidate's interest to write as clearly as possible and Centres are encouraged to pass this message on to those who intend to take this examination in the future. It is also worth bearing in mind that the small amount of extra time taken in writing more carefully is likely to be beneficial to candidates since they will also be concentrating more fully on the content of what they are writing.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

As stated above, candidates performed well on this section as a whole although responses to some of the questions which tested their appreciation of vocabulary revealed some limitations in their appreciation of nuance and implication.

- (a) Most candidates easily identified a dhow as being a boat or sailing vessel; fewer, however, were as accurate in explaining what it was made of. Many candidates carelessly lifted the phrase *wood shavings* from the passage when a moment's thought would have led to them realising that such material would not be a suitable material from which to construct something which could safely be launched on the high seas. Possibly, this error was compounded by candidates not fully comprehending the statement that dhows were *born on* beds of wood shavings.
- (b) Most candidates successfully identified one correct phrase showing that dhows have been made for a very long time and many identified two such phrases. The acceptable answers were: *methods that have not changed in centuries; still built; now as then*.

- (c) This question proved very accessible and many candidates achieved all four marks available; however, some penalised themselves by failing to take into account the fact that some of the points relating to the *Tusitiri* were to do with its previous existence: it was not correct, for example, to claim that the craft 'is used to carry cargoes of cement and mangrove poles'; attention to such details is required to ensure achieving the maximum available marks. The acceptable points about the *Tusitiri* were:
- it is 65 ft long
  - its name means "Something to be Treasured"
  - it was based in Mombasa
  - it used to carry cargo
  - it changed hands 20 years ago
  - it is now refitted for the charter trade.
- (d) This question required candidates to explain what was meant by the phrase *conjure up* in relation to the crew of the dhow and the meals they produced. Answers which referred to the high quality of the food produced under limited conditions achieved one of the two available marks; those which, in addition to this, showed some awareness of the suggestions of there being something magical about the process (as suggested by the word *conjure*) gained the further mark.
- (e) This question proved to be quite challenging with only a minority of candidates achieving all three available marks. Many appeared to be confused by which qualities of the dhow were traditional and which were modern with the result that frequently the correct features were identified but were attributed to the incorrect section. The similarity between the *Tusitiri* and traditional dhows was its (giant) sail; the two differences were its navigation system (radar/depth-finder) and its (120 hp Ford Sabre) engine. Candidates who claimed that its similarity to traditional dhows lay in the fact that it contained a giant shark were not rewarded.
- (f) Candidates were asked to choose three words or phrases used by the writer to describe the calmness of the scenery and to explain how each of the choices created the effect. One mark was awarded for each acceptable word or phrase identified and a further mark was given for a convincing explanation of why the word(s) had been chosen. The intention of this question is, primarily, to test candidates' appreciation of the use of figurative language and, in response, they should, therefore, attempt to explain the associations of the words which they have selected. Many did this well, in particular explaining convincingly that words like *tip-toed* and a simile such as *drifting past like drowsy white moths* conveyed a sense of quiet/sleepiness/secrecy which showed a clear appreciation of the language. Other phrases led to a more practical explanation such as *waking only once to see stars glittering overhead* meaning that the night must have been calm as the writer only woke up once and all he was aware of were the stars shining in the sky. However, those candidates who did no more than repeat the question in each of their answers (*this phrase shows that the scenery was calm*) were not given reward for their attempt to explain; the key point to remember in answering a question of this type is that each explanation must refer to a specific word or phrase and, therefore, each explanation should be different. The most appropriate words and phrases which could have been chosen to answer this question were the following: *in a blue bay, opposite a crescent of coral sand; when the monsoon wind died; a huge African moon rose, beating a silver path; stars glittering overhead; green walls of mangroves tip-toed into the sea on spidery roots; drifting past like drowsy white moths.*
- (g) This question required candidates to explain the meaning of two phrases; two marks were available for each explanation and, although many candidates gained two marks overall, very few showed sufficient appreciation of the precise meaning of the words to be awarded the full four marks. The first phrase was *steeped in its oily smell*. Most candidates were aware that the boat smelt of oil (although a surprising number failed to appreciate the writer's tone and assumed that this must have been an unpleasant smell) but fewer made clear that the smell of oil was something that was so deeply engrained that the smell suffused the whole of the dhow. Explaining what was meant by *Kenya's most exclusive coastal hideaway* proved more difficult, with very few candidates achieving both available marks. Some stated that it was secluded or private and was a place to escape to but only a handful picked up on the suggestions of the expensiveness of the resort which was implied by the use of the word *exclusive*.

(h) Candidates were required to write a summary of what the writer found memorable about his time aboard the *Tusitiri*. As stated in the introductory comments to this report, candidates had some difficulty in identifying the seven specific details required to gain full marks for this question. Many took the approach of writing in general terms about the writer's experience which led to the same point being made more than once. The details which could have been mentioned were:

- (1) the rising/reflected moon/stars
- (2) the first supper/the food
- (3) sleeping on deck (under the stars)
- (4) the welcome aboard and the drink/sweetmeat
- (5) living the barefoot life
- (6) the views (of the mangroves)/scenery
- (7) the passing dhows
- (8) the smell of the oiled deck
- (9) the sail
- (10) the singing of the crew.

## Question 2

This question required candidates to take on the persona of the owner of the *Tusitiri* and to write an article for a holiday magazine, encouraging people aged between 30 and 50 to take a holiday cruise on his boat. In particular, they were required to describe the on-board facilities; explain why the voyage would be suitable for the stated age group and to give reassurance about any safety concerns that potential passengers might have. Most entered into the task with enthusiasm and a pleasing number of responses adopted a tone appropriate both to a magazine and to the character of the writer. The most successful responses effectively used details about the dhow which were contained in the original passage and then used these as a basis from which to develop points as to why the specified age group would find the voyage to their liking and why the boat was endowed with fully-functioning safety measures so that most Examiners felt that they too would be very keen on taking such a holiday. Slightly less successful responses tended to over-emphasise the imagined requirements of the age group, assuming that anyone over the age of 30 was invariably going to be geriatric and quite possibly senile and were likely to fear for their lives at even the slightest tremor felt while resting on the deck of the boat. Examiners were less convinced by such an approach. Other candidates found themselves somewhat carried away by their own imaginations and produced exciting descriptions of the *Tusitiri* with its luxurious state rooms, many restaurants and jacuzzis, apparently having forgotten that the boat was only 65 feet in length, that the crew conjured up meals in a limited space and that passengers slept on deck. Another slight misjudgement of approach came from those candidates who, having seen that the target audience was a particular age group, spent the bulk of their answer in finding reasons why those who did not fit into this age range should NOT be allowed on board the dhow. Although such misinterpretations excluded candidates from gaining the highest band for content, they did, nevertheless, achieve some credit for their ideas. A greater cause for concern was the minority of candidates who did little more than copy out details of the boat from the original passage without making any attempt to relate what they wrote to the requirements of the question.

Overall, the standard of candidates' written expression was at least satisfactory and at best, very good indeed. As previously mentioned, a good number of responses showed sufficient linguistic competence to write in an appropriate tone and to choose vocabulary aimed effectively at persuading. Technically, these scripts showed a variety of sentence structures and were secure in spelling and punctuation. Indeed, most candidates communicated their ideas with some clarity although errors of sentence separation and unsophisticated (or non-existent) paragraphing prevented many from achieving marks in the highest bands for writing.

In conclusion, the overall performance of candidates in this examination was pleasing and Centres should be congratulated both for the qualities shown in the answers produced and also for the obvious commitment to and interest in their work displayed by their candidates.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/02

Reading Passages (Extended)

## General comments

The three questions asked for very different responses, and the best candidates understood the type of thinking and language required for each. For example, **Question 3**, the summary, had to be written as information and not commentary. **Question 1**, on the other hand, needed a strong sense of audience, suitable for a newspaper story. Here it was appropriate to include writing to comment. Finally, the answer to **Question 2** was analytical and not descriptive. Candidates who understood the principles of the different purposes for writing were more secure in their answers. Some candidates had little idea and mixed up the different sorts of writing or chose the wrong ones for individual answers.

Most candidates had some idea of how to present a newspaper story, but others did little to adapt the content and commonly used too much detail, thus blurring the main events that needed emphasis. Some candidates did not read the questions very well and, for example, failed to take note of the words 'mixed emotions' in the rubric when answering **Question 2**. The summary, however, was answered well, and candidates read Passage B carefully and made few errors of understanding.

On the whole, candidates timed the paper well, although there were signs that some may have run short of time when summarising Passage A. Some candidates answered **Question 2** at great length, and are reminded that quality comes before quantity. It is not necessary in this question to deal with all the relevant words and phrases. Strong candidates received marks for their intelligent selection and grouping of examples.

Candidate should be reminded that they are expected to write neatly. There were some scripts that were only readable with effort. While Examiners were instructed to read all the script or to pass it on to a Team Leader, they sometimes found it difficult to read with any continuity, and this undoubtedly affected the candidates concerned.

## Comments on specific questions

### Part 1

**Question 1: Write a newspaper report using the headlines printed below. Base what you write closely on the reading material in Passage A.**

***Lost family found alive and well – hours from death.  
Dramatic rescue by fishermen.***

**Include the following in your report, in any order you wish: comments about the rescue made by some of the people involved; reference to what life on the Ednamair was like before the rescue took place; feelings experienced by the family and the Japanese crew.**

Most candidates had some idea of what a newspaper report is like and the language they might use. A few wrote inappropriately, for example, a narrative as of a short story, a repetition of the story as it appeared in the original, or a comprehension answer to the three bullets. However, Examiners had the impression that some candidates were a little unpractised in writing a journalistic answer.

The headline was in itself dramatic and used that word to describe the rescue. 'Hours from death' also invited a dramatic approach. Good candidates therefore used appropriate vocabulary to describe the family's plight. Very few picked up the potential danger of the rescue itself. A real newspaper reporter might have used the image of the ship 'towering' over the little dinghy, the choppy seas and the use of the turtle oil to try to steady the dinghy. Something might have been made out of the way the family was hauled over the

side. However, most candidates understood the desperate condition of the family and emphasised this, although not very many developed the ideas of the boils the family developed or the brown scurf on their skin. Candidates really needed to put themselves into the position of the newspaper reporter rather than the family and the crew.

On the whole, the extracts from the interviews with the character were done extremely well. A few candidates merely copied the words of the text, and should be advised that that sort of thing does not attract marks. Most candidates paraphrased, grouped ideas together, or better still, took their cue from the narrative and thought what they might have said. This meant that the 'quotations' really added something to the report. To do this was an example of creative thought. This question was not set for candidates to offer creative writing, which could not be marked reliably as a test of reading, but candidates were rewarded for using what was there in a creative way, and there were many examples of creative thinking.

The introduction to the report was often done well, but candidates had to remember their role as reporters. It was no good going straight into the story without using the brief introduction to explain the situation. Five lines into the report and the reader was sometimes left wondering what it was all about. The best candidates covered basic facts but tried to do so in arresting and interesting language, so that the reader's attention was grabbed. These candidates usually remembered to put an appropriate ending to the report. Some, who understood that this was a report, left their comments about endurance, human kindness and the power of a happy ending to their final paragraph. It was, of course, essential to write in paragraphs.

Centres are reminded that fifteen marks were available for the ways in which candidates demonstrated their understanding of the passage and adapted the content to this exercise. The five marks for writing rewarded candidates who presented their report as convincing pieces of journalism. No marks were available here for spelling, punctuation or grammar, although candidates were expected to communicate effectively.

A number of candidates confused *Ednamair* with the Japanese ship, the *Lucette* and various islands and pieces of the mainland. Examiners were instructed not to penalise for this misunderstanding unless it led to a string of confusion, which was comparatively rare.

**Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of:**

- (a) the mixed feelings of the writer and his family when they see the Japanese ship in paragraphs 1-4;**
- (b) the reactions of the writer and his family to the bath and the shower in paragraph 7.**

**Explain the effects the writer creates by using these descriptions. Support your answer by selecting words and phrases from these paragraphs.**

Centres are reminded of the importance of analysing the use of language in this question. Really good candidates identified words like 'surge of excitement' or 'ecstasy' as important to the passage as a whole, and explained their usage. They answered questions like 'why should tears be "stinging"?' or 'why should a voice be "hoarse with pain and excitement" at the same time?' They also commented on the effects of the colours of the ship and of the flare. Some strong candidates were able to suggest that the flare had a symbolic meaning.

Good candidates were able to classify the various emotions in the passage, and the best of these could see the extreme feelings experienced by the family. They were given marks for understanding why the 'memory of that terrible despondency' came back to the writer at the moment of great joy. They were able to identify phrases and sentences that contained contrasting emotions wrapped up in the same idea.

Average candidates made a sensible choice of some of the words and phrases and gave fairly accurate descriptions of the emotions that were illustrated. For example, when Lyn said 'Oh God, please let them see us', this showed her desperation and not, as weaker candidates suggested, that she was praying. These candidates either forgot that the question asked for 'mixed emotions' or at least failed to tackle the idea head on.

Weak candidates wrote a description of the descriptions and did not analyse the language used at all. They used very few quotations from the text and when they did, it was not easy to understand the priorities behind their choices.

There was a good deal of material that could be used in (a), and some candidates wrote at considerable length, sacrificing quality for quantity. Three or four good points, connected with appropriate quotations and explained with care, were potentially enough for full marks in each section.

Section (b) was often less well answered than (a). Few candidates picked up the contrast between the bathtub and the *Ednamair*, or the symbolic scrubbing away of the damaged skin, although this was not necessary for good marks. Very few candidates attempted explanations of 'lathering' or 'wallowing', although a large number picked out 'ecstasy' and some defined it. Candidates often appreciated the repetition of 'luxury', and most attempted some explanation of the family's newly found theory of 'simple joys'.

The following answer is considerably beyond the standard required for the full mark of ten. It is published here so that Centres may see the sorts of direction in which a high scoring answer might proceed. Although it is somewhat long, it would fit into a side and a half of average handwriting.

*To understand the descriptions of the sightings of the Japanese ship, the reader must remember how long the family had been adrift and the dreadful state they were in. In these circumstances the roller coaster of their emotions from elation to disbelief and despondency, become more real. At first the writer will not believe his eyes. 'Something that wasn't sea' emphasises the only views during the previous 37 days. 'Solid' contrasts with the liquid of the sea. Final proof that this is no hallucination is when the 'grey and white paint stood out against the dark cross swell', a simple effect of colour, shape and contrast.*

*The writer's excitement is described as a surge, like an overloading of electric current, something he would feel strongly, physically, inside him. Yet at that very moment the excitement is dampened by the memory of that 'terrible despondency'. Here the reader experiences the contrast of extremities. 'Despondency' is as low as you can get, and 'terrible' is beyond fear.*

*The real conflict is in individual phrases. You cry with distress, but the twins cried with happiness. Tears bring relief, but the writer's tears 'sting' his eyes. His voice is 'hoarse with pain and excitement', the pain that has almost gone, mixed with the joy to come.*

*What a contrast between life in the Ednamair and the bath in the four-foot tub! The dimensions suggest richness, but we are reminded of the little dinghy itself. Contrast the pain felt by the family with the ceremonial 'scrub' as they remove the damaged skin. Here all is 'luxury', used three times. The repeated 'and' hastens the rhythm until the reader feels the motions of the water and the lathering. 'Lathered' suggests the richness of the suds and 'wallowing' lying back and feeling the hot water surrounding and caressing you. As the boils and the 'brown scurf' disappear, so does the physical evidence of the immediate past. It is a moment of 'ecstasy' – as the family, transported almost to another world, comes to terms with the real experience of soap and water, 'surely one of the greatest luxuries of mankind'.*

## Part 2

### Question 3: Summarise:

- (a) what Ellen McArthur found difficult about her voyage (Passage B);  
(b) what the family found enjoyable when they had been rescued (Passage A).

Provided that candidates understood how to write a summary and were able to read the second passage with care and in detail, there were plenty of points available for them to identify. The mark scheme gave twenty-six possible answers, and candidates only had to find fifteen for full marks for content.

The question was answered well, and candidates were clearly interested in the story of one brave young woman's fight against the elements. Most summaries correctly used the candidates' own words wherever possible. There was little irrelevant material except for occasional references to Mark Gatehouse.

However, not everybody scored high marks. Some candidates answered the McArthur passage well but then failed to get much out of the other passage with which they had spent the most time. The commonest fault was still to insist on writing long explanations for each point when concision was required. There were many examples of two side summaries when one side was clearly all that was required.

A fault that was peculiar to Passage B was that of repetition. The original passage mentioned some features more than one, such as the changing of the sails, the winds and the waves. Some candidates were not wary of this and summarised these points every time they occurred.

Comparatively few candidates lapsed into commentary, but there were examples of commenting on how difficult Ellen McArthur must have found the experience rather than the facts that the question required.

As usual, the following is an exemplar answer that should make it quite clear what an answer to this question requires. It would take up less than a page of average handwriting.

*Ellen McArthur found the unrelenting storm with its powerful waves and strong winds extremely difficult. She had to hang on to the boat which pitched and tossed. Even then, she was thrown across the deck, hurting her head. Her hands were sore too as she struggled dangerously with changing the sails. She also had to cope with food which flew out of the lockers. All her strength left her and she could not sleep because of the cold. Freezing water attacked her too. No wonder she cried out in frustration and hated the smell of her survival suit.*

*The family enjoyed the feeling of safety when they were rescued. They received a great welcome from the crew who proceeded to look after them with great care. They were given orange juice and coffee and snacks, and later were treated to delicious meals. Best of all was the hot bath and the shower and they enjoyed the feel of clean, dry clothes. Later they enjoyed the sense of freedom to move around on deck. They were very grateful to the crew for entertaining the twins so well.*

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/03

Directed Writing and Composition

## General comments

Forty out of the fifty marks for this paper were for writing skills, but the ten marks for reading often meant the difference between one grade and another. Candidates should be reminded that they only score reading marks if what they write demonstrates that they have read and understood the passage. There are no marks available for making up content in **Question 1**.

On this occasion, candidates did not always work hard enough to deduce what would make a suitable junior leader from the text that was supplied, and often made do with accounts of family life and a list of the extra mural activities that they excelled in. Even these did not always fit the specific requirements of the organisers of the holiday activities. Examiners expected to see evidence of candidates' thinking beyond the straightforward information of their reading. Just as in Paper 1, where they had to adapt the reading material to a different genre, here they had to infer suitable content from the reading material.

Similarly, Examiners expected candidates to think before laying pen to paper in the composition section. Many answers were planned out. For example, good candidates thought their way through the essays and made sure that they had enough varied arguments to see them through two sides of writing. However, there were still far too many examples of writing that ran out of new things to say after just over one side. The result was repetition, weak argument and confusion. There were many good, mature stories where the candidates had made sure that there were no loose ends and that they led to an interesting and often unexpected finish. Nevertheless, Examiners also read through some very immature stories, and stories that confused the reader because the writer had not got a grip on the different characters and events. There was one such story that ended with the writer waking up from a dream. The good stories were ones with an elegant shape and which recognised the needs of the reader throughout. Finally, the descriptions continued to elicit some excellent writing, but again, candidates needed to plan their work.

Examiners were pleased that the standard of writing, in the broader sense, continues to improve and that there were ample signs that candidates had been taught the elements of different types of writing. Technically there were many examples of excellent, fluent English with few or no mistakes. Many candidates displayed a good range of language and sentence structure. Those who did not have enough language or who could not control it sufficiently made copious errors of tense, spelling and sentence separation.

Finally, although there was ample time to finish this work, some candidates ran into trouble because they wrote at too great a length. In answers to **Question 1**, there was no need to write more than between one and a half to two sides of average handwriting. It was very rare that candidates who exceeded this length added anything to their marks. They were often the candidates who drifted away from the text and indeed the intention of the letter. The problem with long compositions was slightly different. Here, candidates were very often able to maintain the quality of their writing, mostly in narratives, but often ran out of time on the last side, and it was the ending that suffered badly. Again, two sides were sufficient for a quality answer, and it was rare that any greater length added to the sum of the marks.

In summary:

- The reading marks must come from the reading passage and not the candidate's own thoughts.
- Candidates must plan their way through the paper.
- There is little point in writing answers of excessive length.

## Comments on specific questions

### Section 1: Directed Writing

#### Question 1

**A company has decided to set up activity days for local children in your town during the long school holiday. They are advertising for teenagers to work as junior leaders, to help with the children and the activities. Write the letter you would send to the organisers to persuade them that you would be a suitable junior leader. In your letter you should explain what you believe a junior leader's role to be and persuade the organisers that you have the necessary skills and qualities to make a good junior leader.**

Candidates were given a line with which to start their letter and were told to base their writing on ideas found in the printed promotional leaflet.

Candidates wrote their letters well. The structure was given clearly in the rubric of the question and nearly all answers started with a paragraph concerning the role. Good answers were centred around the need to help children to fit in, to encourage them to take up new activities and to explain to them things that they did not understand. These ideas were adapted from the middle column of the promotional leaflet. Some candidates had their own ideas and a few extended them so far that the reader lost sight of the intention of the letter.

The main part of the letter demonstrated the writer's views about suitability for the job. This was mainly about candidates' achievements in sports, the arts and cooking (as in the right hand column of the reading material). Some of these sections were developed at inordinate length and lost sight of important points such as the need for a qualification in water activities and two years' experience in sports. Many candidates wrote about their families and how good they were at settling disputes, or at baby-sitting. Many wrote about their understanding of the needs of children to feel comfortable and to fit in with others. Some candidates mentioned the need to be firm. Otherwise there was less about qualities of personality than the Examiners hoped for, and very few candidates responded to the needs to be there on time and to work longish days. Very few candidates mentioned training.

The marks for reading were awarded for writing about attitudes to children and achievements. These constituted the bedrock of the letter, and candidates who did these well scored five or six marks. The use of other parts of the leaflet then added to these marks up to a total of ten.

Most candidates structured their letters well and wrote in an appropriate voice. Some were rather boastful, a few very informal in tone, and there were rare examples of apologetic letters for things that the writer could not do very well. There were many examples of candidates who made only very rare, minor errors, probably because they felt secure in the style, content and structure they were using. Candidates scoring average marks for writing were generally mostly accurate, and used a plain but clear writing style.

### Section 2: Composition

#### Argumentative/discursive writing

#### Question 2

**(a) If you make your living by being a public figure such as a film star or musician, then you are public property and cannot expect privacy.' Do you agree?**

Most answers to this topic did not have enough content to cover two sides. A typical answer started well on the first side, but it was patently obvious on the second that the candidate no longer knew what to say. Those who responded well did so because they looked at the topic from both directions and used examples of real people from their own knowledge. There were some well-expressed comments about how, if you were a film star, you knew very well what to expect from the media, and some candidates wrote about how famous people courted the media. Sadly, the topic was rarely extended into a discussion of the role of the media, although there were some comments about the thirst of the general public for trivia.

**(b) 'The main function of a school should be to prepare students for life, not further study'. What do you think?**

This topic was not done very well. The problem here was not so much staying power as the limitation of candidates' thinking. For example, one essay put forward the argument that life was working for a living and you could not work without academic qualifications, therefore the two ideas were the same. This argument went round in distressing circles. In fact, very few candidates bothered to think about what constituted life. It was unfortunate that so many candidates who attempted this topic were inward looking in their approach.

Answers to **Question 2(a)** were written somewhat more clearly than those to **2(b)**, where the language was often more convoluted and confused, particularly when candidates wrote from an abstract point of view.

## Descriptive Writing

### Question 3

**(a) Children often keep a box of special things. Describe the contents of such a 'treasure box'.**

This topic was well answered. Occasional faults were to write an essay on why children keep special boxes and overlong introductions to the contents themselves. Generally some of the best writing was contained in a short narrative in which the finder went into the attic and learned more about the owner of the box, or a return to the 'treasure chest' after many years. There was a good deal of mature imagination. One candidate refused to tell the Examiner what one item was because she had sworn herself to secrecy all those years ago.

The best part was the description of the individual items, and here one suspected that the candidates were describing actual items from their memories. Much was made of shape and colour and the feelings that each item brought to life. Sometimes the writing was led to a tiny climax, perhaps with the description of a treasured photograph. Some candidates wrote about too many items so that the writing lost its shape.

**(b) You walk into a room and there is an atmosphere of anger and resentment. Describe the scene, paying particular attention to the ways in which the atmosphere is made obvious to you.**

Comparatively few candidates answered this topic, which was a shame since it encouraged some first class writing. Clearly the description of such an odd scene tested the imagination and candidates were tempted to provide an event to break the atmosphere at the end. In one answer, the Examiner was kept waiting for the reasons for the silence of the two people in the room until the very end. All that was known was that the writer was to blame. It was difficult to keep the tension going, but the writer had enough strategies to succeed.

## Narrative Writing

### Question 4

**(a) The Rescue. Write a story in which a rescue plays a central part.**

This was the most popular topic, and some candidates even tried to write their own versions of the passage set in Paper 2. This was not a good idea, but there were a number of different sea stories that were very good, mostly because of their descriptions of storms. There were also some very lifelike house fires and some military stories concerning rescues of hostages. Some of this writing was very exciting, with plenty but not too much event.

The secret here was to concentrate on say two exciting events, which could be described and set in their context. Candidates who wrote a series of events, each more unlikely than the last, did not perform well. The air crashes were not well handled, not for the reason given above, but because it was not convincing for the story teller to wake up on a sandy beach and apparently give up all hope of life since there was no hypermarket round the corner.

**(b) The central character in a story realises that he/she has lost something vital. Write the next part of the story in which a sense of panic builds up.**

This was rather less popular than the other narrative, but it was done refreshingly well. It did not matter whether the item was a key, grandmother's locket or (as often) an engagement ring. What counted here was being able to sustain the sense of panic, a technique similar to that needed to answer **Question 3(b)**. It was done extremely well, with characters madly retracing their steps as time ran out. One girl could not find her pills to prevent panic attacks and then got a real black one at the end. This was a classic example of a story

that did not need any ending. So the reader was left sharing the writer's panic as she was about to tell her fiancé the truth about the ring.

Examiners usually recommend topics to practise in the classroom. This time they suggest that all candidates would benefit by trying out the descriptions and the narratives. However, both the essays can be used to teach essay writing, but they do need some careful teacher guidance and at least pair discussion first. It did seem that some candidates were attempting these topics without really understanding how to go about them.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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**Paper 0500/04**  
**Coursework Portfolio**

## General comments

Writing coursework is a way of developing individual candidates as writers. It is for this reason that Moderators recommend that during the two years leading to the examination, candidates write a selection of pieces from which they choose the best three, according to the portfolio requirements. They also recommend that Centres make full use of drafts to edit and revise as well as to correct work.

The best portfolios were those that revealed a personal interest and enthusiasm by candidates for their writing. Such candidates wrote about issues that mattered to them and of which they had some experience; they wrote stories that were based on their own ideas and experiences; they argued from their own points of view with ideas expressed in articles chosen for Assignment 3.

Moderators had increasing doubts about the validity of the 'research essay', which involved trawling through various materials on the Internet. The result rarely appeared original, and it was unlikely that candidates used only their own words in their responses. At best there was a good deal of paraphrasing. Many of the results were uninspiring to read and had no personal liveliness that one would expect from IGCSE candidates. Imitating adult styles, some of them highly conventional and outdated, was not a good idea at this level. Attempts at literary criticism also sacrificed the personal response.

This report deals at some length with the selection of articles for Assignment 3. While the quality of writing for this assignment was often very high, very lively and very personal, candidates often limited themselves by using certain types of article that were not conducive to argument. Moderators suggest that teachers should monitor the originals very carefully when candidates are allowed to choose their own articles.

The marks for reading in Assignment 3 were often too high and bunched in the range of seven to ten. The commonest fault was giving high marks to candidates who merely repeated the ideas from the articles as they stood. The highest marks were legitimately given to candidates who genuinely considered and analysed the ideas and opinions that were expressed in the article. Candidates who merely summarised or repeated ideas and opinions could not achieve more than five or six marks. There were also some candidates who used the articles as stimulus material and did not apparently show any skills of reading. They were often correctly marked at about two marks. Rarely, candidates wrote parallel texts, which were very difficult to assess. High marks could only be given where the writing demonstrated understanding of the original. It was more likely that the link became more tenuous as the writing proceeded; hence the reading mark was low.

The marking of writing was generally correct. More Centres took care to avoid bunching of marks, and presented a good range. Internal Moderation was carried out well. One Centre obviously worked hard on a particular set that was initially wrongly marked, and the results were pleasing. Only one Centre failed to bring different teachers into line. Internal Moderation involves either one, or a pair, or a group of teachers confidently imposing the same standard on all the portfolios in their Centre. On occasion, this may mean that an individual teacher has to re-mark all the folders in the set, or have them re-marked by the group or Internal Moderator. Where the CIE Moderator finds a discrepancy, he/she can order a re-marking or devise an adjustment that will deal with the problem with the least amount of harm. Getting the Internal Moderation wrong can lead to more work for the Centre or some unfairness to individual candidates.

The inclusion of an early draft of one piece of work was required in the amended syllabus because Moderators wished to see how candidates carried out the process of writing, and to encourage editing, revising and correcting. Some Centres dealt with their drafts well. Teachers would comment on the general quality of writing (they were not allowed to correct spelling, punctuation and grammar) and make suggestions about improving, for example, the language, the balance of elements in the piece, and parts of the writing that did not work well. They could suggest to candidates how they might build up and manage a climax, or provide an ending that would interest a reader. Candidates would then indicate the changes they were

proposing. For the purpose of this exercise, Moderators preferred these changes to be clearly indicated in pen, and in another colour from the teacher's comments. This process indicated the thinking that went into improving a piece of work. Sadly, a number of candidates thought that another copy of the original was a draft, and there was no evidence of, for example, providing more striking vocabulary or of improvements in expression. Often the same glaring errors were carried forward from one draft to the final copy. One candidate whose first draft was written in pen, then word-processed the final version and made more mistakes than ever.

Centres are reminded that only one draft of one piece of work is required.

Once more, candidates often failed to proof read. Errors included faults of typing and poor use of the spell check. Sentences such as 'Abortion has become a growing tissue' did not give the Moderator confidence in the candidate's ability. Candidates should learn that proofreading is an essential part of the process, and that mistakes in this category are treated as errors and should be marked accordingly.

Most of the annotation of candidates' work was detailed and helpful to Moderators. Many Centres used their own forms where both teachers and candidates commented on how they viewed each assignment. At the other end of the scale, there were Centres where teachers did not indicate any errors on the scripts and did not make any marginal or terminal comments. As a result, Moderators had no idea why the marks had been given. This slowed up Moderation and made final decisions more difficult. There should be evidence of assessment on each piece of coursework.

Otherwise, the standard of the work was excellent. Moderators saw hardly any cases where the requirements of the examination had not been carried out effectively, and the general improvement in the standard of this component was again evident. Where Centres allow candidates to express their own thoughts and feelings through their writing and to treat it as a reflection of themselves as they mature, this component is a striking example of good educational practice as well as a reliable and valid way of assessing candidates.

### **Comments on specific assignments**

#### **Assignment 1**

There were still far too many essays on topics commonly used each year such as the death penalty, animal rights, abortion, smoking and euthanasia. These candidates repeated the same arguments that have been used for many years. It was not by any means clear where the information had come from, and Moderators suspected that a good deal of the wording was not the candidate's. While some of these topics were important to people of this age, they were not always the province of English lessons. They also led to some uninspired writing. This may have been the reason why some essays, although written in imposing language and structured quite soundly, were given slightly lower marks than they appeared to deserve. In such cases, teachers may have awarded lower marks where they suspected that the work was not wholly original.

It was therefore very refreshing to come across a piece called *Crocodile Hunter*, a candidate's reaction to the life and death of Steve Irwin. There was good piece on fast food, a topic that the candidate knew about without having to wade through extensive research. There was some excellent personal writing on topics such as *Africa*, *My home* and *My life as a foreigner*. Travel pieces were also popular.

Film reviews were often well written, particularly when they used the style of some of the more modern writers. There was some very fine work comparing the book of *Lord of the Flies* with the original black and white film.

Essays were often better when they were about local issues such as *Reform uniform!* One Centre had the excellent idea of getting candidates to pretend they were the new president of the country and to give an inaugural speech. A number of Centres wisely turned dull essay topics into lively speeches. These were better for the rhetorical gestures and also for the use of the first person.

Finally, there were again a number of examples of *A life in the day of...* Moderators mentioned that these worked well because candidates were not expected to write in the semi-spoken style of the original *Sunday Times* articles, but to use their own paragraphing and language.

There were, of course, other approaches to this assignment, but these examples show how Centres could escape from the rather outdated research essay.

## Assignment 2

For this assignment the topics were divided between autobiographical work and fiction. More stories came about because classes had studied elements of fiction. Stories tended to have unexpected or otherwise effective endings. Candidates showed some care over preparing for and managing climaxes. The autobiography consisted mostly of the retelling of individual events such as *I'll never forget the day* and *An unpleasant memory*. These events were embellished with descriptions, reactions, emotions and characterisations that made them acceptable to the reader. The writing in this assignment was generally very good.

## Assignment 3

Some Centres selected one article and every candidate responded to it. This meant that some quality control was available, so that the article was usually the right length (one to two sides of A4 paper) and had enough ideas and opinions for candidates to react to. In such cases it was important that the teacher did not prepare the candidates' answers. This exercise needed to be a free response that tested candidates' ability to read and think for themselves.

Other Centres allowed candidates to choose their own articles. Unfortunately, in any one set, the scope of the candidates' answers was determined by the suitability of their choice. For example, candidates who chose an article with only one main idea found it difficult to extract enough to gain high marks for reading. There was not much evidence that teachers had monitored their candidates' choice, and Moderators saw the possibility that some candidates would choose wrongly time and time again.

Centres are advised not to choose articles such as the following:

- Very long articles or sets of articles that confuse the candidate.
- Short newspaper stories that are only narrative and have no ideas and opinions.
- Largely statistical fact sheets from websites where few ideas are present or extended.
- Articles that do argue, but are so worthy that one can only agree.
- Articles where the thought and language are obviously too challenging for an IGCSE candidate.

One Centre used articles from *Time Magazine* where the thought and language were too difficult for most candidates. An article on the population of China was almost all factual, as was a list of *Seven Wonders of the World as voted today*. One Centre produced a whole pack on nuclear power, from which candidates chose brief quotations which did not fit into cohesive arguments. One Centre allowed candidates to write from a novel as a whole, so that the ideas that they analysed did not constitute a reading test but a general critique. One candidate chose a newspaper story about a man who beat his wife, but could only respond to the theme and not to any detail that tested his reading. An article on bullying was first class, but unfortunately, there was no way in which one could argue with any of its conclusions. None of these choices helped candidates to write a response that would score high marks for reading.

The best articles were those that were rather controversial, one person's opinions against the rest, for example:

- Was Diana murdered?
- An English footballer who has been out of form recently.
- Skinny scandal.
- Cell phones.
- Women should play mixed football with men.
- The use of live human organs for transplants.
- Racism.
- The Pope's views on motorists' behaviour.

Nearly all the tasks were appropriate. Generally they gave candidates a chance to respond directly to what the writer had to say, such as writing a letter to the writer or to a newspaper. This was not the only way of writing, but it was a safe, open task. Where the writer was recipient, the candidate could answer in a strong voice. No candidate used the script of a conversation, as of a radio interview, but this would be an interesting possibility.

It is important that candidates realise they are expected to tangle with the ideas and opinions expressed in the article. Failure to do this nearly always means that top marks cannot be awarded. Some candidates analysed the ideas and opinions as an objective exercise. Although the writing was not so lively, it was still personally biased, and top marks could be awarded.

It was not clear that all candidates understood what was expected of them, and Moderators recommend that they should be carefully prepared for this type of work in the following stages (much of which may be done orally):

Stage 1: Learn the difference between fact and opinion, bias and objectivity.

Stage 2: Examine, analyse and discuss extracts from websites, newspaper stories and discursive articles, to understand the difference.

Stage 3: Practise ways of arguing with ideas and opinions expressed in writing.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/05

Speaking and Listening

## General comments

This session administrative requirements were adhered to remarkably well by Centres. Moderators have no issues to raise relating to procedural matters.

## Comments on specific aspects of the Test

### **Part 1 - The Individual Task**

Moderators reported that the topics chosen still tend to be of two main types:

- The personal, perhaps anecdotal or autobiographical piece, and
- The informative, fact-based presentation.

Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches: monologues, dramatic performances, role play and media/news/documentary reports, these approaches are uncommon. There are, however, an increasing number of presentations of a literary nature, and this is to be welcomed.

Moderators would again like to emphasise the possibility of differentiating tasks according to the interests and abilities of candidates. For example, it is permissible for a weaker candidate to select a more straightforward topic and to aim for a safe, competent presentation, perhaps accepting a Band 3. It is advisable, on the other hand, for a stronger candidate to select a topic which is more complex and is likely to result in a more sophisticated level of discussion. More challenging topics will also require more advanced presentational skills and a wider deployment of language devices, which are needed if Band 1 is to be attained.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or an accepted or standard topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out to explore, to challenge, to be creative, etc. is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will usually result.

### **Part 2 - Discussion**

It was very pleasing to hear evidence that the majority of candidates were well prepared for this examination. Moderators are happy that in almost all cases, Examiners were very much part of the discussions, and that the discussions were generally productive extensions of the Individual Task. It was clear in many cases that candidates had anticipated Examiners' responses and had planned for focused discussion.

A small numbers of Centres are reminded that candidates must be allowed to complete **Part 1** of the test unaided and uninterrupted.

## **Assessment**

For **Part 1**, Centres are reminded that "lively delivery sustaining audience interest" is necessary, and that "a wide range of language devices" should be present for Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian informative talk, which is secure and safe, is likely to satisfy the criteria for Band 3. For higher reward, the candidate needs to be attempting something more challenging, more creative, more ambitious. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.

For **Part 2**, we are assessing listening skills using an independent set of descriptors. The essence of a good listener is that he/she will choose the right moment to respond and will respond accurately and in some depth, adding to the conversation. If a candidate responds to most of the Examiner's prompts soundly, this

is likely to result in a Band 2 mark (7-8). For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward. This involves the integration of speaking and listening skills.

Moderators noted that there is still some leniency in awarding Band 1 marks for **Part 1**. The highest marks should be reserved for those candidates who are providing stimulating talks/presentations.

### **Requests of Centres**

- As previously stated, most of the **Part 1** Individual Tasks were straightforward informative pieces. While this is acceptable (and in many cases done very well) Moderators would like to point out that a wider variety of approaches is encouraged. There is no restriction, for example, on the use of literature. Monologues in character, dramatic or poetic performances, **using original content**, etc. are acceptable. Indeed, this might offer useful integration with texts being read for IGCSE Literature, for example.
- In a very small number of cases, the interpretation of “postcard-sized cue card” was rather generous. Centres are reminded that candidates must not read from a script in **Part 1**. A few hand-written notes is what is intended here, written on a piece of paper about the size of a postcard.
- Moderators would like to receive an additional document from Centres if possible: a list of the topics that candidates have chosen for **Part 1**. This should be sent in with the sample recordings and other documents.

### **Final comments**

Moderators enjoyed listening to samples and recognise the amount of effort made by candidates and teachers at many Centres in presenting interesting and appropriate work.

Centres are invited again to be more creative and ambitious in the choice of topics in **Part 1**. Perhaps a way forward here is for candidates to attempt to deploy a wider range of presentational devices. This may help broaden the types of presentation given.