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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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In English Language (4EB0) Paper 1

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Introduction

The texts were accessible across the full range of abilities and enabled candidates to respond appropriately. Examiners commented on the candidates' engagement with the topic of being lost. Better candidates engaged fully with both texts and responded thoughtfully. In response to the writing tasks they produced lively and confident responses which were well controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

Most examiners commented that a significant number of candidates did not use their own words in the questions that asked for them. It is essential that candidates should try to use their own words in order to be successful in responding to these questions. Similarly, some candidates copied all or considerable parts of the passages in response to Question 11. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work. Some examiners observed that responses to Question 12b were prepared essays or re-worked plots from novels or films, poorly linked to the title. Candidates should be reminded that responses to Question 12 should be original and their own work.

Some responses to Question 11 and 12 lacked paragraphing. Candidates must understand that the lack of effective paragraphing will limit the success of the response.

There was some good evidence of teaching and learning in the responses to this exam and examiners commented that candidates seemed well prepared on the whole.

Section A (Questions 1-10)

This section consists of mainly short answer questions that require candidates to locate and retrieve relevant information. Some questions required candidates to use their own words. Question 10 is longer, requiring candidates to give a personal response and justify it with references to the text. There were some very good answers to questions 1-9 but many candidates continued to have difficulty with the requirement for own words, thus limiting their performance. A few candidates also ignored the line references in some questions.

Questions 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7 (where candidates did not have to use their own words) generally produced successful responses, although examiners did comment that some candidates lost marks by not reading Question 2 carefully enough, either missing or not understanding the reference to the word 'tools' in the question. Popular incorrect responses were 'food' and 'water'. Examiners commented that a number of candidates chose to use their own words in response to Question 5 which did not require candidates to use their own words and sometimes this led to candidates not making the points clearly enough. Responses to Question 6 were generally successful. The most common error was to state that 'Focusing on the book was difficult'. There were many successful responses to Question 7 although a

significant number of candidates identified 'wandering the streets', which was not an acceptable point. Examiners did point out that candidates who write lengthy own word responses to the basic retrieval questions are wasting valuable time which could be better spent on the own words questions and the responses to Section B and Section C.

Examiners commented that responses to questions requiring candidates to use their own words (3, 4 & 8) quite often had direct lifting from the texts. This seemed to be a more significant problem this series with some candidates using quotations from the texts in quotation marks. Examiners noted that this was most evident in responses to Question 8. Some examiners commented that candidates tended to use key words and phrases exactly as written in the extracts and sometimes simply paraphrased content or changed pronouns. Candidates should be advised that they must try to use their own words and not closely paraphrase the original texts. However some examiners commented positively on candidates' attempts to use their own words.

Question 3: Some examiners commented that candidates were generally successful in re-wording in this response. Other examiners commented that a significant number of candidates did not use their own words and often struggled to find alternatives to 'calm down', 'landmarks' and 'retrace'. Stronger responses often used the word 'relax' in place of 'calm down', and 'surroundings' in place of 'landmarks'.

Question 4: There was also evidence of candidates not attempting to use their own words but some examiners commented that candidates were able to re-word some points successfully. Candidates often lifted 'retrace your path'/'retrace your steps'. Some candidates were unable to find alternatives to 'leave obvious landmarks', 'start heading downhill', 'whistle loudly' and 'build an SOS'. Examiners did note that there was also some successful re-wording that showed the text had been fully understood e.g. 'go back the way you came' for 'retrace your path', 'leave spoor/a crumb trail/signs/markers' for 'Leave obvious landmarks', 'traverse to the lower section of mountainous terrain' instead of 'start heading downhill'.

Question 8: A significant number of candidates did not attempt to use their own words in responding to this question. There were many references to 'nightmare', 'in the rain with no umbrella', 'unable to communicate with anyone', 'angry and frustrated', 'invigorated' and 'made me feel alive'. Examiners commented that many candidates made only minor changes to the original text, leaving their response too close to the original to be rewarded. One clever re-wording of 'in the rain with no umbrella' was 'going along in the precipitation without any protection', although a much simpler expression would have been 'he got wet'. Most candidates identified that the writer was positive or smiling and most saw that getting angry was not helpful.

Question 9: A significant number of candidates did not use their own words for their points despite the rubric which meant they could not achieve any marks. Similarly a number of candidates produced paraphrases of their chosen support as their point – often too close to the text to be rewarded.

There was overuse of key words and phrases in the points, such as 'better story', 'incredible things', 'things don't go as planned', 'go with the flow'. However most candidates were able to identify relevant points and provide support for them. Popular points that candidates made were that you can have amazing experiences (point 1) and that you should enjoy the unexpected (point 4). Some candidates used the wrong section of the text in their responses.

Centres need to work with candidates to develop their vocabulary and ensure that candidates realise they must attempt to produce responses to these questions using their own words. Copying, close paraphrasing or quoting from the text will not be rewarded.

Question 10: Some examiners commented that the responses to this question have improved over recent series and there were successful responses to this question. There were some clear responses to this task, showing that candidates had been well prepared for this question and had a secure understanding of what is required. If candidates are able to offer two clear reasons why they have chosen a text and support them with two clear references (quotations or developed explanation) and a clear reason for not picking the other text with appropriate support, they will produce a successful response. Better responses had clearly identified reasons and appropriate support for their choices. Many candidates recognised that Text One offered advice and tips, whereas Text Two was an account of one person's actual experiences. Better responses also tended to make points about narrative form, such as first-person and second-person narrative style. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the extracts or summarise the content without picking out key differences. Some weaker candidates produced content-based responses, commenting on whether they thought it was believable to be lost in a city, for example. Weaker candidates found it easy to highlight which text they preferred but struggled to explain the reasons why and made generic comments such as 'it has better language' or 'it is difficult to understand', 'it is boring'.

There were a number of candidates who only responded on their chosen text which limited their achievement. Examiners also commented that a significant number of candidates gave reasons for their chosen text and for not choosing the other text but gave no support for these reasons, achieving only 3 marks, or gave two reasons and support for their chosen text and a reason for not choosing the other text without supporting it, achieving 5 marks. Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts.

Section B (Question 11)

There was evidence of good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning, which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet.

There were a number of lively, well written responses to this task. Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a talk to their peers. The most successful responses had a strong sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches and rhetorical language to engage the audience. Many candidates were able to adopt an appropriate register and there was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required, although some examiners commented that a number of candidates struggled to adopt an appropriate register. These responses tended to have a greeting and ending but nothing in the main body to suggest that it was a talk. Most candidates were able to include details about the experience and advice but examiners also commented that a significant number of candidates did not address the third bullet point (what can be learned). Examiners did comment that the second bullet point (advice) was often covered in more depth than the other two. Better responses covered all three bullets in depth and the very good responses showed a sophistication incorporating and developing ideas thoroughly and engaging with their audience. Many strong responses successfully used the bullet point structure (the experience, advice, what might be learnt) as a framework for their writing.

Some candidates successfully incorporated their own experiences of getting lost e.g. in supermarkets, on holiday, and kept focus on the task. Occasionally candidates interpreted getting lost as a psychological problem with varying success. Some candidates wrote a narrative about a time they got lost. These responses tended to miss the bullet points and quite often lost any sense of register. Most examiners commented on direct lifting of content from the original texts, which affected the overall quality of the response. This seemed to be greater than in previous series. Language controls were not always secure, especially grammar, and some responses lacked paragraphing. The three bullet points provide a rudimentary structure which should help candidates to use basic paragraphing. Centres need to remind candidates that lack of accurate paragraphing will limit their achievement.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts, using their own words, and how to write appropriately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 12)

12b was the most popular question. There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section. There was evidence of planning, which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets. Examiners, as always, commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 12a produced some well written responses with ambitious vocabulary and clear and developed arguments. There was evidence of engagement with the topic of reliance on technology in the responses. Most examiners commented that many candidates who chose this response knew

how to construct an argument and developed a range of ideas. Points made included: that technology was a good thing as long as it provided information; that technology obviously had a key part to play also in maintaining relationships. The overriding message was: yes it could and should be helpful to the individual but much depended on the circumstances in which it was used. Younger people in particular could become addicted to it. There were some responses that compared life before and after certain devices, which perhaps reflected the thoughts of more mature candidates. Weaker responses were rather pedestrian and sometimes simply listed the positives and negatives of technology. Weaker candidates had problems with both maintaining a clear argument and structuring their responses. Better responses were fully controlled with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, however the weaker responses had poor language controls and weak paragraphing. Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop their ideas effectively.

Question 12b: There was a wide range of interpretations of the title, 'The Right Choice', with many candidates choosing an imaginative response but some successfully produced extended anecdotal responses. Many candidates handled this task with enthusiasm. Examiners commented that candidates showed their ability to be imaginative and engaging. Better responses were able to create tension and use effective description and dialogue with good technical accuracy. Weaker responses lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative together with poor language controls. Some examiners commented that candidates sometimes seemed to use prepared essays and tried to adapt them (unsuccessfully) for the given title. The vast majority of candidates who attempted this question were able to produce a narrative with a reasonably clear plot. It was interesting to see the wide range of interpretations of 'The Right Choice': being pregnant, choices relating to jobs, relationships, choices made in a plane crash, where to place a penalty in a football match and turning off a life-support machine. Many responses created a fictional story, but many also based the writing seemingly upon a personal account of a 'right choice' they had made in their own lives. Some examiners commented that some of the ideas were a little far-fetched. Some candidates were too ambitious and used either too much information or an over-complicated plot. Weaker responses had a tendency to leave the key words of 'the right choice' until the final sentence. Such responses could work if the writing signposted this, but in weaker responses the 'right choice' seemed more as an afterthought.

A number of examiners observed that there was evidence of prepared essays or templates and also the use of films, games and books for plot lines. This seemed to be more of a problem this series. These responses are never successful and responses to this section should be original writing. Better responses were able to create tension and use effective description and dialogue with good technical accuracy. Better responses showed control of a variety of sentence types and paragraphing, with a range of short and long paragraphs and sentences used. Weaker responses lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative together with poor language controls. Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure

understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response.

Question 12c: Some examiners commented that this question produced some of the best responses to Section C. Examiners commented with enthusiasm about the quality of some of the responses. Better responses were detailed and lively with fully developed ideas. Popular choices were: early morning/sunrise; evening/sunset; night time; end of the school day. Some candidates chose rather a wide period of time (e.g. the school day) and this tended to lead towards a narrative rather than a descriptive approach. The best responses managed to evoke a strong sense of what importance a specific time of day holds in their lives. These responses included details to do with a particular view, the weather, birdsong or nature and an explanation of who the time was spent with (usually family). The most engaging utilised powerful descriptive techniques to evoke a sense of place and time and were able to use creative imagery and ambitious vocabulary for powerful effect. Some candidates produced responses that were somewhat 'over-written' and heavily loaded with flowery images at the expense of fluency. Weaker candidates tended to lose the focus on the descriptive nature of the task and lapse into narrative or produce responses that tended to be pedestrian and lacked detail. A small number of candidates misinterpreted the task and wrote about a favourite event or holiday. Occasionally responses appeared to be adapted from practices of past papers or prepared essays. Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing. Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary which they can use appropriately.

Quality of Written Communication (QWC)

This is assessed in Questions 11 and 12. Better responses were accurate, using a wide range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary. As in previous series, there was evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but most examiners commented on candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses, subject/verb agreement and sentence structure. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication.

Examiners also commented on incorrect use of capital letters, comma splicing, missing apostrophes and misspelling of common homophones. Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- selected relevant points, from the appropriate part of the text, in response to the reading questions
- used their own words in response to questions that required them
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- were able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 11
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Question 12)
- used accurate paragraphing and organised their responses effectively
- used ambitious vocabulary and an appropriate range of punctuation
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to find enough relevant points in response to the reading questions
- sometimes answered the questions using the wrong section of the texts
- did not attempt to use their own words in response to questions that required them
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 11
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 11
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 12)
- sometimes used prepared essays or copied plots from films, games and novels in response to Section C (Question 12)
- did not use paragraphs or organise their responses effectively
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

